

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**Trespassing: Reading Three White Women's Representations of Identity in Narratives
with South African Settings**

Rosemary Ann Symonds

Pietermaritzburg
Department of English Studies
Supervisor: Professor Cheryl Stobie
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Declaration

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Graduate Programme in English Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

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Rosemary Ann Symonds
962691012
Student Name

Signature

9 June 2021

Date

Professor Cheryl Stobie
Name of Supervisor

Signature
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Abstract

The stimulus for this study is a photo exhibition *Seeing White* (2003) in which Michelle Booth invites white subjects to view themselves as the objectified ‘other’. Her exhibition is related to the growing field of whiteness studies which informs my reading of representations of identity in autobiographical novels by three white women writers: *Small Moving Parts* (2010) by Sally-Ann Murray, *False River* (2013) by Dominique Botha and *In the Garden of the Fugitives* (2018) by Ceridwen Dovey. All three novels contain South African settings. While I position Murray, Botha and Dovey as writers in a contemporary post-apartheid context, I also consider their positionality within a broader postcolonial frame, particularly Dovey, whose novel I analyse as a transnational text which is relevant to both South African and global audiences. Their precariousness within these contexts is implied in the word “Trespassing” which prefaces the title of this dissertation. My interpretation of the three postcolonial texts by Murray, Botha and Dovey engages with discourses of whiteness, feminism, autobiography and the critical approach of symptomatic and reparative analysis. All three writers present versions of pasts which are marked by racial division. In this study, Sarah Nuttall’s theory of entanglement thus provides a useful counter discourse to the metanarrative of apartheid. Murray and Botha respond to registers of reconciliation following the TRC’s call for healing, and their narratives reframe their apartheid childhood as ordinary lives. Dovey’s allegorical representation of complicity exposes issues of power and oppression which underly colonial and gender ideology. The inclusion of Dovey’s transnational novel highlights that South Africa’s literary and social landscape is not only defined by local responses, but also by British and North American publishers and readers. By engaging with notions of ‘trespassing’ in both reparative and symptomatic readings of the

novels, I argue that the representation of fractured selfhood in the three autobiographical novels resists the privileging of race as the central determinant of identity.

Introduction: Background to Study

In my reading of *Small Moving Parts* (2010) by Sally-Ann Murray, *False River* (2013) by Dominique Botha and *In the Garden of the Fugitives* (2018) by Ceridwen Dovey, I will focus on the three autobiographical novels as postcolonial post-apartheid texts. In referring to these texts as both postcolonial and post-apartheid, I bring attention to these terms as linked but also differential. While I am aware that the post-apartheid context is a “complex territory”, (Garman, 2013:1) in which there are many tensions around white identity and its constructions, it is also important to recognise that it is situated in a field of overarching postcolonial discourses. My intention is to analyse how the three white women writers in this study are precariously situated and to argue that their narrativisation of self works strategically and productively within post-apartheid discourses. By viewing difference through the optics of class, culture and textuality, and not only race, the writers shift registers of whiteness in a postcolonial, post-apartheid context of writing.

The word “trespassing” in the title of this study evokes the unease with which white subjects, such as the authors and I, may likely enter the arena of postcolonial post-apartheid identity politics. There are questions of authenticity, authority and belonging associated with identities previously based on privilege and domination. The notion of trespassing therefore draws attention to the precariousness of Murray and Botha whose autobiographical texts span the apartheid years, as well as myself, a white researcher who grew up in the apartheid era. In Dovey’s autobiography, the theme of trespassing is explicit in her representation of a conflicted white identity that is associated with South Africa’s racial past. The theme of trespassing is also relevant to a genderised reading of the autobiographical texts in which the three women writers appropriate a genre which is dominated by patriarchal discourses. Their concept of

trespassing applies on many levels and its implications will be explored in the analysis of each text.

The autobiographical process is viewed as a form of identity construction embedded in a specific cultural-historical milieu (Brockmeier, 2000:70). In writing life stories, shaped by an apartheid past, Murray, Botha are particularly aware that their interpretations of identity can contribute to the cultural stories of an emerging nationhood. Given the trajectory of South Africa's racial history, described by Jacques Derrida as "this concentration of world history" (1985:297), their cultural production has an important role in shaping the new democracy. Ceridwen Dovey interrogates postcolonial identity more problematically when describing her feelings at the outset of writing *In the Garden of the Fugitives* (2018): "When you take up your pen as an author, you're taking up a position of power, so you have to be extremely careful how you use it" (Heinrich, 2018:2). For convenience, I refer to contemporary South Africa as "post-apartheid", based on the first democratic election in 1994 that marks the official and legal end of the apartheid era.

This event set into motion ongoing debates about the political, social and cultural identity of a new or future nationhood. It involved critical debates about the identity or even existence of South African literature (De Kock, 2009:19) and whether South Africa should be defined as post-apartheid or post-transitional (Chapman and Lenta, 2011; Frenkel and Mackenzie, 2010; Brown, 2014). There are also arguments about which genres are most contemporary or pertinent: fiction, literary fiction or creative non-fiction (Brown and Krog, 2011; Scott, 2018).

A common thread in these debates is the belief in the collective value of change and instability, viewed as a moment that allows people from a divided past to speak to one another, and

marginalised voices to be heard. Despite contentions of a conservative “official culture” which has emerged during the third decade of democracy (Bystrom and Nuttall, 2013:326), this belief is still prevalent.

South Africa is not exceptional in seeking to address issues of power and dominance and core narratives that centre on race and difference. This is highlighted in Ronit Frenkel and Craig MacKenzie’s essay “Conceptualising ‘post-transitional’ South African literature in English”:

South Africa is a place marked by the over-determination of racial taxonomies and a history of racial oppression, yet it is also a space that is iconic in what Leon de Kock calls the ‘global imaginary’, of how oppression can be overcome and difference bridged. Burdened then by both a history of violence and repression, and as an arbitrator of justice in the global imaginary, South Africa as a signifier moves between these polarities of thought. (2010:5)

Concepts of seams, folded-togetherness and entanglement have been proposed by literary critics who seek to define a new cultural nationhood. Johan Jacobs argues that these concepts are positive steps in providing alternatives to binary notions of identity which entrench separatist discourses like apartheid (2016:2).

In this literary project I will draw from these debates in my reading of white women’s representations of identity in three contemporary self-narratives with South African settings. In studying the subjectivities of Murray, Botha and Dovey, I cannot ignore the added dimension of feminism which the three women writers bring to my analysis of their narratives. I will, therefore, consider how both feminist and post-apartheid discourses frame their identities.

Feminist critics such as Sidonie Smith believe that women's autobiographies should challenge the phallogentric conventions of the Western autobiographical 'master narrative' which "serves as one of those generic contracts that reproduces the patrilineage and its ideologies of gender" (1987:45). She also argues that "[u]ltimately, every woman who writes autobiography ends up interrogating the prevailing ideology of gender" (175). In this study, I thus argue that Murray, Botha and Dovey are white postcolonial writers who interrogate identities implicated in the gender and racist ideology of past South Africa.

In the light of what is viewed as a disgraced past, these writers walk a fine line to ensure there is no perceived re-centring of white power or privilege. A burgeoning area of critical study called 'whiteness' or 'white studies' has been developed specially to address this issue. This idea is a scholarly archive that began in North America during the 1940s and has more recently been adapted and developed in South Africa. Whiteness critics use Marxist and post-structuralist theory to deconstruct texts that normalise the privilege and power of white Western subjects. Ruth Frankenberg's landmark American study on the social construction of whiteness (1993) proposes that whiteness is a "set of locations that are historically, socially, politically and culturally produced" (6) and that racism functions as a "system that shapes our daily experiences and sense of self" and insinuates itself "intimately and organically" into those who, even like Frankenberg, are anti-racist feminists.

In Mary West's critical text, *White Women Writing White* (2009), she interrogates how writers are unconsciously implicated in racialised attitudes:

How have white [South African] women writers negotiated their empowering whiteness and their less empowered womanhood in relation to post-colonial realities?

Who amongst them has offered the most powerful challenge to these dynamics that compromise, inhabit and simultaneously empower white South African women? (37)

West explains that her intention is “to pay attention to the moments in which the implied ideological preoccupations of the writer are revealed” (16) and to show that “women’s writing in post-apartheid South Africa [...] *undoes*, at worst, inadvertently and crassly [...] the very project of ‘reconciling’ races and celebrating multi-culturalism” (3).

West’s approach to racial ideology in South Africa seems more narrow-focused than that of Frankenberg who, in her study of racially structured North American society (1993), seeks to “document the traces of colonial discourses in white women’s thinking” (17). She outlines three movements of racial thinking in North America: essentialist racism; equality and cultural convergence; race cognisance and a desire for autonomy (14). While West speaks to post-apartheid orthodoxy with discursive repertoires of “project”, “reconciling”, and “celebrating multiculturalism”, Frankenberg’s carefully grounded research is more cautious: she notes the limited success of inscribing popular discourses around multiculturalism which “are not yet a part of most people’s daily thoughts or practice” (23).

This project is not a study of whiteness, although it is informed by such studies. My intention is to analyse representations of identity in the autobiographical narratives of Murray, Botha and Dovey and speculate how their subjectivities align with or interrogate a new South African imaginary. In her essay on the subjectivities of whiteness Sarah Nuttall describes her approach as an examination “of the ways in which people referred to as whites, and who understand themselves as such, account for this in a specific set of texts” (2001:116). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (1996–1998) is an event marked by those who voiced their personal experiences and histories. Nuttall believes that the ethical relations of self to other

which it propagated, has enabled new registers of whiteness to emerge (2009). Moreover, the TRC has given impetus to studies which aim to recognise the variability and “difference within” of whiteness (De Kock, 2006:183). With these challenges in mind, the subjectivity and expressions of identity that emerge in the contemporary narratives of the white writers gain further cultural significance in this study.

Nuttall suggests another challenge to white writers: “What, then, is left to the white voice in this new context?” (2001:133) where, in contrast to writers during apartheid, the “white voice” is no longer required to see and speak on behalf of a racial ‘other’. She proposes that:

[p]erhaps what is left is the capacity or the responsibility to write within and not beyond whiteness, to remain within the terms of the only claim that it ultimately can make: to speak or to write as itself, that is the voice of a white person, with the possibilities and limitations inherent in it. (133)

Murray, Botha and Dovey are white voices who can give expression to subjectivities that are no longer required to speak on behalf of a racial ‘other’ in a democratic situation. My intention is, therefore, to focus on constructions of identity in the three narratives taking into account the new expressions of whiteness framed by a post-apartheid context.

Nuttall’s essay, “Subjectivities of Whiteness” (2001) examines autobiographical texts that include Ruth First’s (1965) and Antjie Krog’s (1998). She proposes that their dramatisations of selfhood and racial identity offer registers of whiteness to those most interested in changing registers. This is a perspective which adds analytical scope to my discussion of the subjectivities represented by Murray, Botha and Dovey. According to Nuttall, the constructions of whiteness by authors like First and Krog “will [also] be of particular interest in the post-apartheid context, which itself situates the production of whiteness in new registers”. However,

she reminds readers that the temporality of texts means that they also stand in intimate relation to “the changing registers of how blacks see whites, and of blackness itself” (117) – yet another precarious factor for the three women who write their white identities. Perhaps the factors described so far can be summed up in Frantz Fanon’s famous quote if the exclamation “Look a White!” is used to replace the first words:

“Look a Negro! [...] Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened [...] I could no longer laugh, because I already knew there were legends, stories, history and above all *historicity* [...] I was responsible for my body, for my race, for my ancestors.”
(Bhabha, 1986: xvii)

Substituting the object of fear in the child’s exclamation evokes a sense of the discomfoting counter-gaze faced by whiteness in an environment of postcolonial change.

The discomfoting effects of this counter-gaze became evident in Michelle Booth’s photographic exhibition *Seeing White* in 2003. Her photographs depicted white South Africans in scenes from everyday life, randomly captured with a Brownie camera. By confronting white visitors with these images she aimed “to turn the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject”, and provoke white people’s awareness of “their (mostly unaware) complicity in perpetuating ‘embedded’ racism” (Lesuthu, 2004:1). The photos of her white subjects were overlaid with text that emphasised this purpose. What ensued were angry responses from many white art-goers, to whom Booth apparently later offered counselling at CARAS (Centre for Anti-Racism and Anti-Sexism).

However, Thuthu Lesuthu’s opinion is that Booth’s exhibits do not measure up as fine art because her subjects are stereotyped as signifiers of white people. By photographing them without their knowledge or agency Booth has disregarded their individuality and humanity. He

also asserts that Booth's ahistorical treatment of black and white relationships compromises Booth's artistic integrity. Nonetheless, she is praised for the ideal towards which she works: ensuring progress towards a more unified South Africa by exposing entrenched white racism.

During this time, Melissa Steyn had recently published a leading social study of whiteness in South Africa, *Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used to Be* (2001). In discussions which followed, Leon de Kock, a literary critic, states that while it is essential to unmask the rhetoric of whiteness which seeks to uphold "political, economic and cultural hegemony" (2006:181), post-apartheid discourses must also counter homogenised, unproblematic views of whiteness. Dominic Griffiths and Maria Prozesky state that "At the centre of its classification system, apartheid institutionalised *whiteness* as a racial and political construct" and that "the apartheid system desired unambiguous racial classification" (2010:24). It was a contradiction because:

[i]n reality, the uniform category of 'white' in South Africa was a racial construct. None of the varied differences of language, religion, or cultural heritage found among the white population was reflected in this classification. (2010:25)

Yet, while some consider it essential to examine the institutionalised nature of whiteness in South Africa, there are others who are dismissive. At a conference titled 'Whitewash' (2013), the controversy which emerged is described in Anthea Garman's article "Whitewash backwash: a response to the 'unbearable boringness of the whiteness debate'" (2013:1). Garman reveals that Ferial Haffajee took exception to the subject matter, arguing that the conference was a waste of time and money. Haffajee criticised it for being almost all-white, re-centring whiteness and lacking "current high-news political issues" like rape, violence and Marikana (1). However, it is surprising that Haffajee, a leading journalist, is apparently out of step with current discourses on racialism. Her proposal that a better topic would have been

“non-racialism” contradicts arguments that it is a concept which essentialises race and reinforces stereotypes.

In reply to Haffajee’s responses, Garman argues that whiteness studies have far-reaching value because they focus on underlying issues of power and oppression:

My take on it is that the researchers are trying to unpick and understand how this particular form of racialised privilege operates and dominates our world. Very often the intention is a critical and radical transformatory one: if we can see clearly the workings of this complex human behaviour, we can start to figure out different configurations of relation. (2013:2)

From these encounters at the ‘Whitewash’ conference it appears that privilege has become a dominant signifier of whiteness in post-apartheid discourse. This is underscored by differences between Helen Zille, a controversial political voice, and Thuli Madonsela, a former Public Protector, which became public when Madonsela disputed Zille’s viewpoint that it is unacceptable to generalise about privilege. In her follow-up article Zille invites Madonsela to a high tea debate (Zille, 2019:1). This ‘*High Noon*’ showdown, though somewhat elegant, indicates the “complex territory” in which the autobiographical novels of my study are situated.

The choice of autobiographical works by Murray, Botha and Dovey could thus be regarded as contentious. Autobiography is regarded as the post-1994 genre du jour, which as a literary mode that combines elements of both fiction and non-fiction, challenges white readers to negotiate the difficulties of “complicity and belonging in a rapidly changing social setting” in contemporary South Africa (Scott, 2018:130). In Scott’s discourse on literary non-fiction such as journalism, she includes autobiography in this hybrid genre. Readers’ attitudes towards journalists are similar to their expectations of autobiographers: they will “say it like it is” (28).

However flawed this assumption might be, this reality factor assists readers to identify with the writer as “he or she works through the challenges of being a South African in South Africa at this particular time” (36).

Contemporary autobiographical texts thus interest critics. Wamuwi Mbafo, for example, comments on the significance that the “performance of autobiography” by white writers has become a “much plied” trade (2010:64). He notes that there are core tropes of memory and belonging in a South African literature which tries to make sense of a damaged past and “restore the personal narrative to some form of authority” (63). Nuttall, however, emphasises the significance of autobiography by proposing that it is only by revisiting the past that one can gain a vision of the future (Nuttall, 2009:4). Patricia Davison makes this point, too, in reflecting on historical revisionism in national museums: “like memory, [museums] mediate the past, present, and future” (1998:145). These various insights are significant to my analysis of the three autobiographical narratives spanning the apartheid years of the 1960s to the post-apartheid present.

The intimate portrayals of selfhood in the narratives of Murray, Botha and Dovey can be explored as literary texts but also as “autobiographical acts” where the “individual in this [post-apartheid] context, emerges as a key, newly legitimised concept” (Nuttall and Michael, 1999:298). Within the post-apartheid context these texts potentially deconstruct the economy of meaning given to ‘whiteness’. John Haritigan (1999) posits that “[a]bstract racial figures dominate our thinking, each condensing the specificities of people’s lives into strictly delimited categories – ‘whites and blacks’ to name the most obvious” (cited in Nuttall, 2009:10). The three autobiographical narratives present subject formations or different registers of whiteness which can become part of the “pluralizing project of democracy itself”

(Nuttall and Michael, 1999: 298). My study proposes that both an aesthetic and ideological reading of the narratives are necessary to explore the dramas of identity in the texts of Murray, Botha and Dovey where intersecting issues of gender, class, ethnicity and politics conflict with their selfhood.

Theoretical Framework

My critical approach is based on the postcolonial and post-structuralist theories of whiteness studies and reparative reading. I believe that it is necessary to apply the analytics of reparative reading as a counterbalance to the symptomatic approach of whiteness studies, which is drawn from Marxist and Freudian psychoanalytical theory. The theory of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1997) and other reparative critics advocates a reading that seeks to ‘love’ the subject of a text and be attentive and susceptible to its ‘surface’. I believe that a reparative reading allows each writer’s subjectivity to be explored with a particularity that engages with the social narratives of a South African imaginary.

Whiteness studies and theories have become influential in contemporary postcolonial discourse. They are not confined to the literary field, but include many other fields such as art, law and history. It remains a controversial field, consisting of a wide a range of theories, but I shall highlight the whiteness studies in America and South Africa that have most bearing on the interpretation of white writing in my project. This, of course, includes studies which focus on feminist issues.

Andrew Hartman’s essay (2004) provides some background on the development of white theory in America. He explains that “the study of whiteness as a socially constructed

phenomenon should be traced back to W.E.B. Du Bois” (23). William Du Bois was a sociologist who travelled America in the 1940s recording the disillusionment of slaves following their emancipation after the American Civil War in 1865. According to Hartman, Du Bois “elevated the concept of ‘whiteness’ as an analytical problem in determinations of class and stratification” and he theorised that “white privilege validated, and was validated by, racism” (23). Hartmann adds that the concept of race itself was being challenged and that scientifically it was no longer accepted as a biological reality (24).

American scholars have since explored a diversity of racial issues in America. Alexander Saxton’s (1990) focus on the role of class relations in the social construction of whiteness became the starting point of David R. Roediger’s (1995) study of the white working class in the United States who after the abolition of slavery “came to define themselves by what they were not: slaves and black” (cited in Kolchin, 2009:3). It was the vulnerability of the Irish immigrants too, who facing “such extreme prejudice”, were determined to “differentiate themselves from black slaves, establish their own whiteness, and thereby prove their Americanness” (3). Hartman (2004:30) believes that Saxton’s analysis of the ambivalent status of white workers in a racist society was a ground-breaking work on race and racism in America. The assumptions which Hartman ascribes to Saxton’s study resonate with South African racial and social history: “first, that white supremacy originated as a rationalisation and justification of the slave trade, slavery and theft of land from non-whites. Second, white supremacy continued as a theory, pivotal to syntheses of ideas that legitimised the rule of dominant groups in fluctuating class coalitions”. Hartman notes Saxton’s acknowledgement that “whiteness varied according to region and class” (30).

Another influential work is an anthology, *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (2001)

by Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica and Matt Wray that was published following a Californian university conference. It consists of a number of essays reflecting diverse perspectives of whiteness. In her review Debbie Storrs describes the first section of articles as examining “the psychic and emotional cost of whiteness without falling prey to self-indulgence” (2002:571). However, her comments on the second section are especially significant to this project:

[What] is evident is the authors’ resolute attempts to acknowledge the heterogeneity of whiteness. The attention to the variations of whiteness is explored in terms of sexuality, region, class, and nation. [They attend] to the complexity of whiteness by moving beyond the simplistic notion that whiteness is simply defined by privilege. (571)

This view is definitely in contrast with those of Noel Ignatiev, co-founder of the New Abolitionist Society, who is regarded as one of the most radical whiteness theorists in contemporary America. He believes that “The key to solving the social problems of our age is to abolish the white race – in other words, to abolish the privileges of the white skin” (Kay, 2006:1)

Critics such as Barbara Kay (2006) and David Horowitz (2007) are completely opposed to whiteness studies. This is reflected in Horowitz’s controversial Academic Bill of Rights which is aimed at what he calls the Left’s war against academic freedom (Horowitz, 2007). Darryl Fears draws attention to Horowitz’s statement that “Blackness studies celebrate blackness, Chicano studies celebrate Chicanos, women’s studies celebrates women, and white studies attacks white people as evil” (2003:1) This is not a singular view. Robyn Wiegman comments that whiteness studies is a “new humanities subfield” that is “profoundly divided by the need to destroy its object of study – whiteness” (1999:123).

American literature has been discussed in detail because it reflects a body of work established over a longer period of time than South African whiteness studies. The discourse on whiteness in South Africa, therefore, mirrors many of the viewpoints in American whiteness literature. However, there is a key difference which Jessica Draper highlights in her essay on the issues facing South African artists:

Ideological whiteness has been differently framed in a South African context largely because it is a minority-white society. In contrast to majority-white societies where ideologies of whiteness exist for the most part unconsciously, the apartheid regime in South Africa ensured that everyone was acutely aware of whiteness via mechanisms such as ‘whites only’ signage. If whiteness has generally been confronted and subverted by being made explicit, then what would it mean to go about exposing something that is already so categorically present? (2014:1)

According to Draper this presents artists with an ethical impasse: making whiteness visible “reaffirms racial difference rather than opposing it”; “ignoring whiteness perpetuates invisible advantage, and acknowledging it reifies a claim to apartheid’s visible advantage” (1). This impasse describes the conditions in which the three texts in this study can be produced and received, a place where ‘trespassing’ is uncertain and ambiguous.

Melissa Steyn’s research focuses on the need to target the unconscious attitudes of white privilege. She believes that significant truths about the nature of power and privilege can emerge if whiteness is “investigated, analysed, punctured, and probed” (2001: xxvi). However, in a later article Steyn’s stance seems ameliorated “as the postcolonial moment deepens...”. Like Draper, she claims:

White people's racialisation was not as distant from consciousness as described in the mainstream whiteness literature (Steyn, 1998). What certainly was taken for granted, however, was entitlement to the privileges of white supremacy. (2007:422)

Steyn's research takes into consideration the important variables of class, ethnicity and social history. Like many American scholars, she wants to examine the complex nature of whiteness rather than render it as a uniform, monolithic construct.

The most extreme whiteness critics in South Africa are those who, like Samantha Vice, believe that whites can contribute nothing to a post-apartheid narrative (2010). The title of her article "How do I live in this strange place?" has a refrain which Jordan Stier uses for his article's title, "How do I write in this strange place? The treatment of shame and whiteness in contemporary white South African post-apartheid literature" (2018). 'Whiteness' is a conceit articulated by Marilyn Frye (1992) which Stier explains is a reference to the "sub/un conscious articulation of and predisposition for whiteness" (2018:58).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990), a feminist postcolonial critic, perhaps answers these dilemmas when she asks, "Why not develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced?" She questions self-limiting assumptions such as "since my skin colour is this, since my sex is that" (cited in Introduction, Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean, 1996:5). The choice of Murray, Botha and Dovey to not be silenced by the 'abject script' of an apartheid past, therefore, raises interesting questions for this project: What is at risk? How do these writers negotiate the "paradox of postcolonial authorship" which Jane Poyner (2009:2) describes as the "risk of re-imposing" the authority of the colonial voice? The feminist ideas of Simone de Beauvoir on the politics of privilege are also worth noting. Sonia Kruks (2005) discusses De Beauvoir's firm belief that by

acknowledging and deploying her privilege she achieved far more. According to De Beauvoir, one's identity cannot be simply shed: gender, class, and race are "inescapably given to one and yet also self-produced" (187). They are instantiated from birth and become an integral part of one's sense of selfhood (187).

In this project it is difficult to pin down exact meanings of subjectivity, self, and identity, and generally I do not make any distinctions. However, at times I will refer to specific psychoanalytical or poststructuralist theories of postmodern literary criticism. Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (2000) makes an interesting distinction between the meaning of self, selfhood and identity relying on the distinctive approaches of Freud, Lacan and Judith Butler. She notes that it is customary in most cultural theory to distinguish between identity and identification as social and psychical phenomena respectively (2000:133). Freud's explanation of gender identification which is quintessentially Oedipal, is regarded as contentious, especially by feminists (134). Seshadri-Crooks notes that although 'identifications' constitute identities in psychoanalysis, the concept of identity as such is not much developed in that discourse. Her conclusion is that identity seems to reference a social or political entity which ultimately seeks representation, whereas 'the subject' seems to refer more adequately to the effects and existence of the unconscious. Identity can thus be viewed as a social inevitability and subjectivity as an unconscious formation. (135). Seshadri-Crooks also outlines the poststructuralist approach of Judith Butler for whom identity is a product of ideology, and gender is a "tendentious cultural inscription upon the natural sex of a woman" (135). The various distinctions between selfhood and identity help to refine my interpretations of identity in the three texts which I analyse in this study.

The purpose of this study is to apply the analytics of reparative readings as a counterpoint to whiteness studies. Sedgwick's theory of reparative writing offers critical perspectives which go beyond whiteness studies. She developed her theory in reaction to critical writing described by Paul Ricoeur as a "hermeneutics of suspicion", and elaborated by Rita Felski (2012). Ricoeur suggests a hermeneutics of trust to counter the influences of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche on modern forms of interpretation which mainly seek to expose ideological bias. He argues that by ignoring obvious meanings and avoiding affective engagement, a hermeneutics of suspicion appears more rigorous and sophisticated. However, according to Felski, Ricoeur does not reject the role of a hermeneutics of suspicion but advocates a "dance of interpretation" because both interpretative methods are incisive. The 'dance' he envisages suggests that critical argument can be affective as well as analytical and that traditional critical language can work alongside the language of post-structuralism (Felski, 2012:8).

The above arguments are subsumed in Sedgwick's paper on paranoid and reparative reading positions in which she counterargues that paranoia is the overriding feature of a hermeneutics of suspicion (1997). Applying the concepts of Melanie Klein, Sedgwick argues that paranoia is a form of love that expects less from its object because it blocks what it fears and cannot engage affectively. Following on from this argument, she postulates that restorative (reparative) reading is like a trusting act of love which seeks more from its object. Sedgwick developed these allegorical notions of reading based on Klein's psychoanalytic theory which proposes that for an infant to move forwards and towards pleasure there is a need to overcome self-limiting experiences of the paranoid/schizoid position. The depressive position is reparative because it enables the child to view the other as vulnerable and requiring love. The relationship between these cognitive/affective states illustrates Sedgwick's arguments that paranoid and reparative reading positions are interdependent and mutually enhancing.

Sedgwick's stance that the dominant methodological assumptions of paranoid readings are impoverishing "the gene pool of literary-critical perspectives and skills" (19) resonates with other calls for a more immersive and aesthetic interpretation of texts.

In the following section I will outline the theories presented by critics who, following Ricoeur and Sedgwick's line of thought on reparative reading, have interpreted and developed theories from which I hope to draw an analytical framework. I elaborate the theories of Rita Felski (2011), Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus (2009), and Nuttall (2014) and include Elleke Boehmer's recent theory of a postcolonial poetics (2018) in which she advocates principles very similar to those of reparative reading. Without going into the deep argument of each article, I will outline their interpretations of reparative theory which suggest the broadest and most local possibilities of its application.

All the articles are explicit in their definition and criticism of a hermeneutics of suspicion. Felski's paper, deliberately entitled "Context stinks!", is aimed at provoking a reaction to "the inescapable impact of social and ideological forces" upheld by symptomatic reading, where context trumps text (576). Using the metaphor of a "box", Felski constructs a forceful argument:

One of the main obstacles lies in the prevailing picture of context as a kind of box or container in which individual texts are encased and held fast. The critic assigns to this box a list of attributes – economic structure, political ideology, cultural mentality – in order to finesse the details of how these attributes are echoed, modified or undermined by a specific work of art [...] [T]he individual text, as a micro-unit encased within a larger whole, can only react or respond to these pre-established conditions. (2011:577)

She writes that as a consequence of this, “texts we study are permanently engaged in coercing, mystifying, and hoodwinking their readers. [...] A novel is charged and found guilty of manufacturing docile bourgeois subjects” (589). Felski argues that by evoking fictional or imaginative worlds, texts allow readers more agency in making sense of their lives. Stating that “what counts and serves as text is more mutable and fluid” than critics realise, Felski claims that texts are not just texts-as-objects but provide “reference points and guides to interpretation” in unpredictable ways (587). Felski emphasises the unpredictability of texts in two further respects: first, in the emotions they can elicit, the perceptual changes they can trigger, and the affective bonds they can randomly promote (585); secondly, texts gain “strength and vitality” from their sociability within contexts as co-actors in “numerous networks” (589).

Drawing from the theory of Bruno Latour (2005), Felski argues for more cross-temporal, poly-temporal and trans-temporal notions of history: “Instead of absolute temporal difference and distance, we have a messy hotchpotch and rich confusion, a spillage across period boundaries in which we are thoroughly implicated in the historical phenomena we describe” (579). She also makes reference to Michel Serres (1995) who encourages readers to think of time as a “crumpled handkerchief” (576). These notions are relevant to my discussion of autobiography and have interesting links with Nuttall’s theory of entanglement which I discuss later.

In the light of her claims, texts cannot be viewed as immobile, frozen objects in time and space where they are enclosed within an “all-determining contextual frame” (590). Texts can, thus, be appealing in any era of history and cross boundaries of time. Yet when Felski makes an appeal that modern readers “forge a language of attachment as intellectually robust and refined as our rhetoric of detachment” (585), she does not advocate an immersive reading which develops into a type of retrograde “aesthetic idealism” (583). There is a neat summary of

Felski's stance when she asks the following question about texts: "How can we do justice to both their singularity and their worldliness?" (576).

In their introduction of a special edition journal, Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus (2009) preview a range of interpretative methods which contributors provide as a supplement to symptomatic reading described as "a mode of interpretation that assumes that a text's truest meaning lies in what it does not say, describes textual surfaces as superfluous, and seeks to unmask hidden meanings" (1). Best and Marcus, however, focus on surface reading as a central site of truth bearing and accentuate the need for interpretative activities which analyse the "complexity of literary surfaces – surfaces that have been rendered invisible by symptomatic reading" (1). Like other critics who have reacted against "ideological demystification", Best and Marcus believe that Marxism and Psychoanalysis have become a dominating critical metalanguage since the 1970s (1).

According to Best and Marcus, Fredric Jameson's theory of the "political unconscious" (1981) has also strongly influenced the practices of symptomatic reading. Referring to Jameson's view that "what a text means lies in what it does not say" (3), they describe symptomatic reading in terms of three oppositions: "present/absent, manifest/latent and surface/depth" (4). They state that there is an emphasis on absences, gaps and silences and incongruities of style, images and tone. In contrast to Louis Althusser's idea of making "lacunae perceptible" (1968), Jameson observes only one absent cause – a repressed history, which the critic restores to the surface (5). These views are especially pertinent to whiteness studies which form part of the theoretical framework in this project.

However, with regard to strategies of reparative reading, it is the surface/depth distinction that Best and Marcus find most relevant. To support their arguments for surface reading they refer to the theories of Christopher Nealon (2009):

If other theorists see politics as external to poetry, the depth that only the critic can bring to the surface, for Nealon the poem itself is where the politics surface. The surface of the poem can thus contain its own hermeneutic; hermeneutics is not what critics do to the poem, since interpretation is already happening in the poem. (8)

Accordingly, the literary critic does not need to add theory to the text: it is sufficient to simply discover what the text itself is saying.

As reparative reading is proposed as a necessary corrective of symptomatic reading in this dissertation, it is important to consider the practical strategies suggested by Best and Marcus. They define surface reading as follows:

[W]e take surface to mean what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding [...] A surface is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*. (9)

In their proposal of surface reading they suggest principles which I find helpful as a rubric for this method of reading. First, close reading is necessary to unravel the “linguistic density” and “verbal complexity” of literary texts. This principle is derived from understanding that the meaning of a text lies within the text itself and its formal properties. The second principle is to appreciate texts with an immediacy that is sensuous and affective in contrast with symptomatic reading which dismisses surfaces as “inessential and deceptive” (10). This ethical stance resonates well with Sedgwick’s notions of reparative reading. Best and Marcus express their third principle of surface

reading plainly: the purpose of criticism is “to indicate what a text says about itself” (11) based on the following assumptions:

[T]hat texts can reveal their own truths because texts mediate themselves; what we think theory brings to texts (form, structure, meaning) is already present in them. [There is] no need to translate the text into a theoretical or historical metalanguage in order to make the text meaningful. (11)

To illustrate this point, they refer to Shakespearean sonnets which demonstrate that “the traditional questions *for* criticism are already *in* the sonnets themselves” (11).

Best and Marcus, thus view surface reading as a “freedom in attentiveness” and base their arguments on the theory of New Formalists. It is an emerging field of critical theory which distances itself from New Historicism and believes in artworks or texts as sovereign objects that struggle with their own “historical conditions and limits” (14). Theodore Adorno (1962) is seen to offer a more cautious view of this struggle, but he affirms that:

the very bid to escape from empirical reality, no matter how inevitably incomplete, makes the form of art inseparable for a dream of freedom in which the artwork’s authors and critics can participate. (14)

Best and Marcus provide direction in reparative reading strategies. In a similar vein to Ricoeur and Sedgwick, they are not dismissive of ideological critique because it shares a common desire: the attainment of a more composite view of reality. Their argument is that in order to challenge orthodoxy and disrupt ideology there is also the need to produce “undistorted, complete descriptions of the [texts we study]” (18).

Nuttall (2014) and Anne Anlin Cheng (2009) are two critics who also support the trend in reparative reading, exploring themes of surface and depth, the visible and the hidden, exterior and interior. Nuttall seeks “to undercut an over-emphasis on symptomatic reading in an attempt to find a language both accessible and newly receptive to the surface” (2009:154) and links her notions of surface reading to Cheng’s proposals of a reading that is attentive and susceptible. Nuttall explains that: “Such ways of looking/reading allow us to loosen textual excesses of an overloaded, overworked past and lets that past reappear in other guises and vocabularies” (2014:161).

She demonstrates her theory of surface reading with reference to two artworks where the portrayal of skin surfaces challenges conventional or “stable signifiers of social identity” (164). She compares the shiny skin surface on the “Sophie” models created by Mary Sibande with Josephine Baker’s black, airbrushed skin in photographs celebrating her career during the 1920s as an exotic dancer in Paris. Invoking Cheng’s argument that these images enact “a different kind of bodily thing and a different inscription on the skin” (168) Nuttall observes that the typology of ‘wounded flesh’, usually associated with black racialised colonial identity, has been subverted by images of sealed black skin surfaces. By attending to the complexity of surfaces, readers can discover a site from which to “imagine the emergent edges of a contemporary post-colonialism” (173).

According to Cheng, symptomatic reading stems from intellectual traditions that perceive the visual as deceptive and suspicious (99) and is a critical practice aimed at exposing the usual ideological suspects: imperialism, colonial culpability, white racism and chauvinism (100). In her study Cheng focuses on Primitivist Modernism, an early 20th century art movement, discussing Josephine Baker’s iconic role. She highlights paradoxes underlying “the negrophilia that swept Europe in the 1920s” during Modernism (101), and suggests that the representation of Baker “invites a reading [that] is not [about] colonial ideology’s repressed content but its *expressiveness*”

(101). Cheng enjoys the irony of Baker's luminous self-representations that present the racist, colonial imagination with a crisis of "*how to see*" (111). She discusses Baker's iconography and ends with a striking comment: "Re-approaching Baker has thus dictated what I called a hermeneutics of susceptibility" (115). Her "hermeneutics of susceptibility" adds another conceptual category to the rubric of surface reading which hopefully shapes a 'poetics of reparative reading' that may be applied in this study.

Nuttall's theory of surface reading has been discussed, but her theory of entanglement can also be related to a hermeneutics of reparative reading. It is a theory which engages with notions of 'seams', 'complicity' and 'entanglement' that, by resisting the metanarrative of apartheid, lead to the creation of unexpected insights (2009:19). She applies this theory in her analysis of autobiographies where well-known figures demonstrate registers of whiteness that contradict perceived norms of whiteness. Nuttall's defamiliarising treatment of whiteness in these autobiographies problematises notions of a uniform, coherent white identity by revealing "unexpected angles" in their subjectivities (75).

Nuttall explains her genesis of entanglement:

Entanglement offers, for me, a rubric in terms of which we can begin to meet the challenge of the 'after-apartheid'. It is a means by which to draw into our analyses those sites in which what was once thought of as separate – identities, spaces, histories – come together or find points of intersection in unexpected ways. (2009:11)

Nuttall's theory resonates with the principles of reparative reading and with my study of autobiographies. In the essay with Kerry Bystrom (2013), she stresses the need for a new critical language to interpret the work of "intimate exposure" precipitated by the TRC hearings. In their eyes there is a critical project of desegregation, and autobiographical writing can be viewed as a

form of writing that not only participates in the public-private sphere, but also “forges forms of citizenship” (307). She describes the “public private sphere” as a space that has been shaped since the end of apartheid by the stagings of intimate lives and vulnerabilities where “conflicts play out, unforeseen dialogues are created, and prior states of ‘entanglement’ are revealed that may allow us to re-imagine the social” (326).

Elleke Boehmer (2018) is an international critic whose views not only provide the necessary background for my analysis of Dovey’s transnational novel, but give context to South Africa in the global imaginary. Boehmer has recently published her work on postcolonial poetics in which she advocates principles of ‘attentiveness’ which I have outlined in theories of reparative reading. Her theory has emerged from her study of colonial and postcolonial literature. She defines postcolonial literary studies as a field which developed out of the historical optimism that marked the final decade of last century following events which removed barriers or tensions such as the Cold War, the Berlin wall and the end of apartheid in South Africa (43). There are the contesting theories within the field, but generally it is accepted that literary visions should continue to resist cultural hegemony at linguistic and textual levels (44). She also cites Robert Young’s definition (2003) that postcolonialism is “a politics and philosophy of activism that contests disparity, and so continues in a new way the anti-colonial struggles of the past.” (49) According to Boehmer postcolonial writing carries forward “people’s ongoing quest to become meaningful to themselves” and literary criticism therefore “joins forces in shedding light on that inwardness”.

As a postcolonial literary critic, she feels that until recently poetics was considered secondary to urgent ‘real world’ issues (1). In contrast to this, she calls for a renewed postcolonial poetic that “does not only engage with literature as an instrument of social change” (2). Postcolonial writing, like all art, “seeks to know something better and communicate that knowledge to a reader”.

Therefore, in reading a text, the focus is not only on the representation of a refugee crisis, the “world beyond the page”, but on how the text elicits a “sympathetic identification” (10). The postcolonial poetics she describes aligns with those of reparative reading:

[we] must attend first and foremost to how the text communicates, to the detonation and implications it puts in motion. Our task, in effect, is to follow the text’s inferential processes, guided by its poetics, or what Ben Etherington calls ‘the internal logic’ of the artistic material. (8-9)

Boehmer’s poetic thus emphasises that readers who engage in a sympathetic reading do not only view texts as representing “contentious issues such as race, migration or othering”, but as “a mode of reflecting creatively and critically upon them” (10). I have described the background of postcolonial writing and the critical theory which arose because it is relevant to my discussion of South Africa’s post-apartheid environment. Boehmer’s poetic lends credence to my proposal that reparative reading is a necessary corrective reading in this study.

Her perspective is therefore significant, but is interesting to note the differences between critical approaches of international and local South African postcolonial critics. Nuttall’s theory of entanglement engages with concepts of ‘seams’ and ‘complicity’ which counter the metanarrative of apartheid. However, Nuttall states that the perceptions of many literary scholars of South Africa currently in Britain or the United States are influenced by a “politics of loss, or melancholia” based on the ongoing problems in South Africa. She believes that this limits analysis of the complex changes in contemporary South Africa (2006:272). This claim is arguably substantiated with regard to Boehmer’s views of South African literature. Boehmer, an influential critic in the international field of postcolonial literature, claims that South African literature is characterised by a repetitive poetics of crisis that privileges the writing of pain over the writing of everyday life (Boehmer, 2018:88). She argues that “writer and critics grow fixated on crisis” in the “empire of

trauma that South Africa inhabits” (the HIV/AIDS epidemic; the escalation of rape and crime; violent labour disputes; Marikana and xenophobia) (97).

Yet there are confusing anomalies in her arguments. While Boehmer argues that this representation of pain has lucrative appeal in world literary markets, she states that “it was perhaps grossly optimistic for South African writers and critics in the mid-1990s to have begun to contemplate writing about other-than-traumatic situations” (95). She highlights recurring themes of “risk-taking, endangerment, and death defiance” in novels, stating that:

Post-2000 South Africa as an entity or body of work in these ways resembled a traumatised subject experiencing systemic disorders as repeated negative affect, vulnerable to repetitive compulsions that could not, it appeared, be smoothly processed into a renewed imaginary. (95)

The debates between South African and international critics suggest the complex politics of post-apartheid writing. The novels of Murray, Botha and Dovey are thus precariously situated within this spectrum of viewpoints.

In the study of three work of autobiographical fiction, theories of memory and remembering also need to be considered. Among the most prevalent theories are those which recognise the relationship between memory, narrative and identity, with constructions of identity embedded in a particular historical and social context (Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001:15). Narrative theories of remembering use concepts such as emphasis, selection, foregrounding and arrangement (Murray, 2014:74), blurring the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. This complicates the ‘autobiographical pact’ conceived by Philippe Lejeune (1989). His famous theory states that autobiography is first, a view taken from a retrospective vantage; secondly, a focus on the lived life of an individual; and thirdly, it is concerned with his or her own existence

(cited in Brockmeier, 2001:254). The three writers, Murray, Botha and Dovey, have chosen a 'novelistic' form for their life stories which is why it is not necessary to state in my title that I am studying representation of self-identity rather than representation of 'identity'.

Murray explains that the traditional expectations of autobiography are too risky, and that she prefers the method of 'autobiographics'. She describes this as "a consciously mediated mode of writing concerned with interruptions and eruptions, with the resistances and contradictions of self-representation" (Gilmore 1998, quoted in Murray, 2014:74). By thus allowing memory and imagination more free play, Murray employs techniques of auto-fiction; Dovey references fractured writing; and Botha enacts subtle and subversive gestures. A reparative reading of their texts is a lens through which to explore these carefully constructed subjectivities.

In her book *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* Sidonie Smith (1987) discusses the generic conventions of this genre as well as the gender issues associated with them within Anglo-American culture. She draws attention to the problematics in a genre with androcentric origins which not only privileges male individuality and subjectivity, but conflates it with human identity. Nonetheless, she affirms that, "[f]rom their position of marginality, women have spoken" (51). Yet when a woman writer "constitutes herself discursively as female subject" (47) she cannot write autobiography with the same attitude as men, who conflate their subjectivity with humanity. Smith elaborates the contradictory "rhetorical postures" in which a woman writer is involved:

[W]omens' autobiography, therefore, is a kind of double helix of the imagination that leads to a double-voiced structuring of content and rhetoric. [...] Those tensions play themselves out differently depending on [the creative skills] of the individual autobiographer and on her degree of self-consciousness about her place in patriarchal culture. (51)

Self-reflexivity is, thus, a key component of autobiography, especially for women who write their life stories within patriarchal culture. Smith is critical of women who “do not challenge gender ideologies and the boundaries they place around women’s proper life script: textual inscription and the speaking voice do not write autobiography” (44).

Smith interrogates the dominant patriarchal discourse in which women are positioned as “interlopers” (51). A woman might transgress the conventions of this genre but “the story of man is not exactly her story; and so, her relationship to the empowering figure of male selfhood is problematic” (50). Moreover, ideologies of race or class, or nation intersect with gender and determine constructions of identity and difference (51). These complex interactions are examined in each of the three narratives.

The autobiographical subjects of Murray’s and Dovey’s texts are presented in the third person. “Autobiography” is a concept which has gained interest since the publication of J.M. Coetzee’s autobiographical novels in the last decades. Margaret Lenta (2003) comments on the “delicate strategies of distancing” (157) achieved by writing in the third person and appraises Coetzee’s use of free indirect discourse and “the immanent voice” which create multi-perspectival and poly-vocal effects (164). Coetzee’s famous insight that “All autobiography is storytelling, all writing is autobiography” (Attwell, 1993:391), contains valuable, multilayered truths about the relationship between literary writing and the autobiographical process. Attwell refers to these blurred boundaries when he states that “Coetzee’s writing is a huge existential enterprise, grounded in fictionalized autobiography” (2016:26). His appreciation of Coetzee’s self-reflexivity and its role in addressing issues of positionality and power is a significant insight for this project, especially in the reading of Dovey’s novel.

In this section I have covered a range of theories that give particular focus to the analytics of whiteness studies and reparative reading. These theories frame my critical approach to the theme of trespassing in the representations of identity by three white women writers in a post-apartheid context.

Research Problems and Aims

The research problems and aims are presented as five question-and-answer responses. I will include a brief discussion of the background regarding each question.

First, what elements of ideological bias need to be identified when interpreting representations of identity in the novels written by Murray, Botha and Dovey? As outlined in the background on post-apartheid South Africa which I have provided, white identity is precariously situated because of its association with a racist past which favoured whites and entrenched their privilege. This highlights the predicament faced by white writers who must assure critics that there are no underhand intentions to re-centre ideologies of whiteness whilst they explore topics questioning the nature of its privilege. This double bind is highlighted in a discussion of South African artists by Draper (2014:1).

The individuality of each writer must also be taken into account in interpreting ideological bias. Murray, Botha and Dovey bring different socio-economic and cultural influences to their writing. For example, Murray and Dovey are from an urban, English-speaking culture, while Botha's background is traditional, Afrikaans and rural. In an analysis of their texts I will study registers of whiteness embodied in their representations of identity which dislodge or disrupt notions of whiteness textually. Ideologies of gender, class and nation must also be taken into

account. Each woman writer expresses her subjectivity within a postcolonial context where white identity is precariously situated.

Secondly, what strategies can be employed as a form of reparative reading and are they a necessary corrective of whiteness studies? Before addressing the issue of reparative reading as a necessary corrective, it is necessary to refer to the strategies of whiteness studies.

Sedgwick's belief that "the gene pool of literary-critical perspectives and skills" is being impoverished by "the dominant methodological assumptions of paranoid readings" (2003:19) led to her proposal of reparative reading. My main concern in this project is to address whiteness studies which rely on symptomatic reading by giving attention to strategies of reparative reading. Postcolonial criticism, with its focus on exposing the privileged space of white Western subjects, limits the capacity to respond to texts affectively. A reparative reading allows a more emotionally engaged relationship with the text and its characters. A balanced critical approach is vital to my intention in this project: to argue that there are complex discursive and literary manoeuvres required by Murray, Botha and Dovey to represent white subjectivities in a post-apartheid context.

To devise a provisional strategy for reparative reading, in my earlier discussion I suggested a rubric that outlines a 'poetics' of reparative reading. It is based on the hermeneutics of attentiveness, susceptibility and entanglement advanced by several critics who call for a more immersive and aesthetic appreciation of texts. This rubric is applied in my reading of the texts to explore the effectiveness of reparative reading as a corrective measure.

The third question asks how whiteness as a marker is differentiated in South African and international whiteness studies. North American studies place the emphasis on the invisibility and normalisation of whiteness. The critical agenda is then to expose and, therefore, dismantle this power which is marked by privilege, domination of ‘the other’ and exploitation. Australian studies share this pursuit with North Americans because in both countries their white populations are a majority who are “comfortably in the majority, demographically, economically and politically” (Steyn, 2007:421). For this reason, Steyn refers to these countries as the “heartlands of whiteness”. In contrast, South African white people are a minority who are very aware of their whiteness and the privileges associated with this (Steyn, 2001:163). Steyn argues that the previous taken-for-granted sense of entitlement of South African whites is now marked by their sense of displacement:

The power relations that supported the old social identities have been profoundly troubled. White South Africans cannot assume the same privileges with such ease when state power is overtly committed to breaking down racial privilege – though [...] they are certainly trying to prolong its shelf life. (Steyn, 2007:422)

Some of the answers which emerge from South African whiteness studies reveal that contemporary markers are now vulnerability, feelings of displacement, victimisation and the desire to escape (Steyn, 2007:422). Nuttall highlights the challenges for South African whites, who since the TRC have had to move from “a register of conquest to a register of negotiation” (2001:118). As settlers who “came from elsewhere”, unlike colonials in North America and Australia, their claims of belonging are no longer legitimised by the “logic of conquest” (118), and white South Africans are confronted with the reality that belonging cannot be assumed:

Deprived of the archaic identity of settler, it conceivably deprived them of citizenship in the present. It presented them the spectre of privilege without belonging and hence with the task of inventing or negotiating new forms of whiteness. (118)

The last two questions can be answered simultaneously because they relate to the choice of genre and its effectiveness: How do the three novelists manipulate conventions of autobiographical writing to suit their purposes and to what the extent do their novels merit consideration as works of South African literature? As background to these questions, it is useful to make connections between autobiographical writing and Patricia Davison's thesis on the reshaping of memory in South African museums (1998). Like autobiography, museums involve memory, narrative and identity that are socio-historically situated. The diorama of /Xam and other Khoisan people arranged in a natural history display illustrates this analogy more closely. Davison observes that despite their new setting in the 1950s the figures still represented stereotyped versions of otherness, reminiscent of the public displays where Saartjie Baartman was presented as an exotic object in Europe during the 1800s.

Davison's perceptions of the display are a sharp reminder of the "theoretical concepts that shape both knowledge and memory" (144). When recalling their past lives, not only do Murray, Botha and Dovey have to imagine their experiences authentically, they have to re-imagine and deconstruct the apartheid ideology in which these experiences were embedded. The autobiographies are coming of age stories, where the younger person's point of view is mediated by the adult voice. This acts as a valuable "double filter" for the writers who must confront youthful selves shaped by an apartheid past; it this self-reflexivity which necessitates the manipulation of literary techniques, such as narrative structure and voice, to create re-imagined selves in the postcolonial moment.

The writers have also chosen autobiography as a medium in which to represent white identities. It is a form of writing which blurs genres of fiction and non-fiction in a form of “creative non-fiction”. According to Duncan Brown and Antjie Krog, it is a form which appeals to readers in a postcolonial context because it is suitable, “in particular for negotiating/narrating complexities of post-apartheid identities [...] as well as the ways in which the expectations and conventions of the genre(s) may ‘position’ the author and reader” (2011:57). This allows further creative possibilities for Murray, Botha and Dovey to exploit the three devices which, according to Brown and Krog, characterise literary non-fiction: firstly, an engrossing storyline; secondly, imaginative language to capture the “in-capture-able” in real life situations; and thirdly, the use of the pronoun “I” which draws the reader into a paradoxical non-fictional ‘reality’ (58). This emerging genre of literary non-fiction at an “unstable fault-line” (Scott, 2018) enables the authors and readers of the three self-narratives to engage realistically and imaginatively in the constructions of identity in a post-apartheid present.

Methodology

In this section I shall explain how I will go about answering the main research questions and my approach. My methodology will be a textual analysis of the three narratives. Catherine Belsey (2005) believes textual analysis is a valid research tool, and her explication of its principles informs my methodological approach. She views it as an ongoing interplay between the text and reader and claims that “textual analysis is in the end empirical” (161) and an indispensable research tool within the field of cultural criticism (161).

Textual analysis is a suitable method for my dissertation which focuses on literary representations of identity in a South African cultural context. My critical analysis will include theories that allow both a symptomatic and reparative reading of the texts.

Symptomatic forms of reading include postcolonial theory which examines ideological discourses of power and domination and post-structuralism where one looks beyond the surface meanings, viewing texts as tissues of signification with rich intertextuality (168). My research will involve “tracing these inter-texts, and reading them attentively too, to establish the specificity of the text in question” (168). This is very relevant to my project which situates the novels within South African post-apartheid discourses. Theories which support immersive, surface reading of the texts inform a reparative reading of the autobiographical narratives. According to Sedgwick’s theory, it is a form of reading which is subjective and immediate. From this I infer a reader-response method where meaning is produced or created individually in the analysis of the narrator, plot, characters, style and structure of a work (Abrams, 1981:150). Overall, I will follow the beliefs of Sedgwick, Best and Marcus, as well as Felski’s belief that immersive reading based on traditional critical language can work alongside that of post-structuralism. My rubric of reparative reading will also incorporate Nuttall’s theory of entanglement. It is a theory motivated by Nuttall’s desire for interpretations that challenge and destabilise metanarratives of apartheid that constrain visions of a collective future.

Roland Barthes claims that the reader is the “destination” of the text and that interpretation itself will bear traces of every reader’s specific historical, cultural, political and social context. A text’s “meaning” is, therefore, derived from a reciprocal relationship with it (Belsey:163). I will need to be self-reflexive in my interpretations of white identity in the narratives, acknowledging the role of my cultural and ethnic background as a white researcher.

Maintaining the integrity in a relationship of reciprocity with the text seems essential if I am to engage reliably with the narratives which I am studying and to which I am adding extra-textual knowledge.

Belsey emphasises that the reader should allow the text to set its own agenda, which is achieved by engaging with questions posed by representations in the text (171). Belsey reminds researchers that questioning minute, sometimes obscure detail is a form of rigour that yields interesting results (173). In my study, I have extrapolated my proposed reparative rubric from the studies of Sedgwick, and Best and Marcus. Felski and Nuttall bring rigour to my textual analysis. Their emphasis on attentiveness, susceptibility and entanglement offers a more fruitful reading of identity in the constructions by Murray, Botha and Dovey.

Belsey states that the aim of research is to contribute to knowledge, to uncover something new though it does not have to be original. It is accepted that no text can be free of reference to any other source (163). Instead, a researcher asserts her independence by means of re-configuring ideas. There is also no need to shift paradigms (163). This means that I should be precise in my thesis statement and seek theories and a methodology which enable me to interrogate texts productively. I see reparative reading as a means to achieve this in my study of the three narratives.

Belsey views interrogation as a key method of textual analysis and makes helpful suggestions referring to the questioning techniques favoured by psychoanalysts (173). By assuming there is a problem to be addressed, psychoanalysts ask questions which will unmask surprises and differences. An example of such a problem is the possibility that I might be limited by critical whiteness theory in my analysis of representations of white identity in the three narratives. I

would, therefore, like to contemplate a different relationship to my objects of study, like a psychoanalyst who seeks better engagement with a patient. A reparative reading offers me this possibility because it supports Ellis Hanson's view that "our world is damaged and dangerous, but instead of repeating the bad news it seeks to build or rebuild some more sustaining relations to the objects in our world" (Wiegman, 2014:11). Nuttall's theory of entanglement opens further questions to explore because it looks for "intricate overlaps that mark the present and at times [...] the past, as well" (Nuttall, 2009:1). A reparative reading underscored by the theme of entanglement will, therefore, be used to analyse the three narratives as texts which can be seen to re-imagine identities.

Chapter Plan

In this introductory chapter I have outlined my thesis statement, methodology and theoretical framework, including the structure that this chapter and the dissertation as a whole will follow. I have discussed my critical approach and main theories related to the following: whiteness studies, entanglement, reparative reading and autobiographical writing.

In the first chapter I discuss *Small Moving Parts* (2010) by Sally-Ann Murray. In a reparative reading engaged with terms of entanglement, I also draw attention to her creative and rich engagement with the history of a marginalised white community. My discussion will include whiteness and feminist studies, and reparative notions such as "feeling backwards" (Wiegman, 2014:14) will be included as a way of engaging affectively with the social history in this novel. Consideration will also be given to the significance of the novel's award as a prize-winning work of fiction, ensuring that it forms part of the cultural memory of a South African imaginary. I argue that in foregrounding the precarity of white identity in a struggling post-World War

Two culture, Murray subverts various stereotypes of whiteness studies and highlights the intersectionality of race and class during apartheid.

In the second chapter I discuss *False River* (2013) by Dominique Botha. In Botha's representations of Afrikaner white identity, she retrieves memories of her late brother Paul set in apartheid history. I draw attention to possible criticisms of Botha as a writer steeped in Afrikaner tradition with atavistic inclinations to inscribe Afrikaner cultural myths in her dense descriptive detail. When considering the novel reparatively, I take into account the contradictions and complexity of gender prejudices in a liberal Afrikaner family who are themselves marginalised in a conservative Afrikaner community. The theme of entanglement is explored in Botha's conflicted relationship with her brother, where she is torn between feelings of love and fear. In her depiction of Paul there are tropes of redemption which may be interrogated by whiteness critics, particularly in the light of Melissa Steyn's concept of a 'disgraced' Afrikaner identity (2004). However, I argue that Botha's novel both draws on and subverts the literary traditions of the *plaasroman* to create an artistic work that does not recentre a traditionalist Afrikaner culture but conveys an empowering view of its regenerative possibilities.

In the third chapter I examine Ceridwen Dovey's *In the Garden of the Fugitives* (2018), which has been included as a transnational novel. I wish to take account of South Africa's status in the global imaginary. Her novel is presented as the narrative therapy which Vita, the main character completes in order to heal herself from the overwhelming feelings of guilt she feels as a person who benefitted from her apartheid childhood before emigrating. In my discussion, I analyse Dovey's poststructuralist approach to the deconstruction of white liberal identity which is allegorically represented in the conflicting relationship between Vita and Royce her

benefactor. My analysis focuses on the significance of Vita's performance of white shame and guilt and the distancing effects of Dovey's textual strategies, such as metafiction, in her representation of identity.

In the concluding chapter I reflect on each novel's time, place and cultural context in the framing of identity, evaluating autobiographical strategies as well as the analytical approaches of reparative and symptomatic reading. I provide an overview of the representations of identity in the texts summing up what they collectively reveal of white female selfhood. Referring to the theme of trespassing, I finally comment on the overall significance of these representations in a postcolonial, post-apartheid context of instability and change.

Chapter 1: The Littoral and the Literary: Class and Identity in Sally-Ann Murray's *Small Moving Parts*.

Small Moving Parts is the story of a young girl, Halley Murphy, growing up in a working-class area of Durban during the 1960s. The protagonist, Halley, is a vulnerable child raised in a single-parent, white working-class family. Murray states that her intention in *Small Moving Parts* is to create a narrative which reworks race through gender and class (Govender, 2010:1). She therefore aims to re-work registers of whiteness which disrupt the metanarrative of apartheid. My thesis in this chapter focuses on whether Murray evokes a convincing sense of vulnerability in her representation of a white family living on a low-income housing estate during the apartheid era. In a reparative reading of the text, I argue that Murray's construction of Halley's working-class identity addresses issues of precarity which challenge the stereotype of white South African privilege and domination. To address perceptions of trespassing in a post-apartheid literary culture, however, I balance this immersive reading of the novel's dense textual features with a symptomatic reading of ideological lacunae in the novel.

In the first section of this chapter I focus on Murray's portrayal of the hardships faced by her mother, Nora Murphy, which conveys registers of precarity in her representation of whiteness. Secondly, I focus on the representation of Halley's white female identity, drawing from Murray's discourse on feminism (Murray, 2014) to highlight complex, vulnerable but resilient qualities in her characterisation. In these two sections I engage in a reparative reading to do justice to the hardship reflected in Nora Murphy's struggles as well as the vulnerability to which Halley and her sister are exposed. The last section concludes with an overview of the text noting "gaps" and "absences" in a mainly symptomatic reading of the text that pays attention to critiques of whiteness studies which may apply. Throughout the chapter I discuss

the effectiveness of Murray's narrative techniques, especially the ways in which they position readers in a postcolonial post-apartheid context.

Although the cover does not state that Murray's narrative is an autobiography (and can, therefore, be called a novel), in her essay and interviews she acknowledges that it is largely based on her life and that readers are teased by the homophony in her name and that of her protagonist: Sally-Ann Murray and Halley Murphy (Murray, 2014: 76). However, she feels cautious about presenting her book as an autobiography because there are fictional elements that undermine the "autobiographical pact" which, in her view, might carry legal implications (2014:77). In this chapter I therefore, refer to her work as a novel or an autobiographical novel/narrative. It has also been recognised as a *Bildungsroman* because it charts the life of a young person's journey to adulthood.

Much of the novel focuses on Halley's childhood years in Durban, where she lives with her divorced mother and younger sister, Jennie, in Kenneth Gardens – "corporation flats" for struggling working-class families. The narrator describes it as "a welcome home bouquet for the ex-servicemen" that was designed in the 1930s to be homely and attractive for those who fought in the great wars. However, when the Murphys move in, its landscape is evoked in depressing, skeletal terms: the "gardens are long gone, it's the wash-lines which dominate" (19). Although she spends her early childhood here, when her mother's financial situation improves, she and her sister briefly spend time at Oakford Priory, a boarding school near Verulam which is close to Durban.

As a reader I find it easy to identify with the city Halley explores with her mother, since it is so central to my own Durban childhood. In addition, I discover that Halley attends the same

high school and university as I did, and follows a similar study path. However, Murray invites a unique imaginative engagement with Durban in her portrayal of Halley, whose identity is deeply inscribed by its port and beaches. Her pre-natal consciousness is captured in intrauterine images of a sea voyage, “the busy cells burgeoned forth to some lost port of call” (Murray, 2009:59). According to Meg Samuelson, “the beach is experienced as a space of mutation and perpetual motion; of fluidity and flux”; “it is a locale that brings binaries into crisis and breaches boundaries” (2015:1). These littoral qualities define Halley’s precariously situated life on the fringes of a white society caught up in the turbulence of apartheid and resistance to it. At the same time, the notions of “mutation” and “fluidity” convey Halley’s creative ability to transform herself. It is thus significant that the beach, which is “usually relegated to the margins of the national story” (ibid), is an integral part of Murray’s representation of South African identity in *Small Moving Parts*.

Murray’s work won several awards amongst nominees such as J.M. Coetzee and Imran Coovadia after its publication (Murray, 2014:83). In her analysis of her semi-autobiography, Murray speaks of the influence of Ivan Vladislavić’s *Portrait with Keys* (2006), which is an “artfully self-effacing (auto)biographical account of living in Johannesburg” (74). Murray has analysed this work in an essay where she joins Vladislavić “On the street” (Murray, 2011:73). Vladislavić is perceived as a melancholy writer who struggles to identify with his beloved old-new city (72). It is Murray’s notion of a ‘doppelganger’ reader which I find striking:

Vladislavić assumes readers’ mutual interest, crediting their intelligence and imagination as implied interlocutors somehow conversant with his invisible city. He has written, indeed, as if through a wishful longing for an ideal reader, possibly a virtual double of his own education and ‘Afro-European’ intellectual curiosity. (74)

This is the doppelganger relationship with which I can easily identify, but it is precisely this close identification with the writer that raises my concerns about her narrative. Has she not, I ask, crossed one bridge too far in occluding apartheid in her childhood story? If so, what questions might be asked about the principles informing contemporary South African literature?

In the first chapter, “Rule of three”, Halley Murphy outlines her family and their relationships in a portrait which reveals many of her clever attributes, not least the power of her imagination. It also reflects many elements of the author’s narrative voice:

Wherever she began, numbers were stories. A man was 1. Which meant In the Beginning. It meant The One and Only. And One of a Kind. She was always looking out for Number One, a slight but important figure, scarce as a matchstick in an overgrown field.

A woman was 3. Curved. Curvaceous. But in Halley’s family, their mother became The One, through slow excoriation taking away her rounded self almost completely to provide for her two little girls. The one raised finger and only firm footing.

In between were the children, 2. Halley and Jen.

Daddy was gone, so he was 0. But even nought was something, not nothing. Not a big loser. O 0 O was part of a keyhole.

Like escutcheon, which was another part. Her mother said a child was never too young to start learning [...]

Escutcheon, Halley said, fingering the beaten brass on the old kist [...] But the big word only snagged in her throat and exploded her palate, a poor rabbit caught by its back legs in a terrible trap. (Murray, 2009:7)

Her family is also the framework within which Halley's subjectivity is constructed. It is an unusual description and readers feel as if they have stepped into *Alice in Wonderland*, or perhaps it is Peter Rabbit from Beatrix Potter's tales who is trapped on the page. Nevertheless, the "poor rabbit", "key holes", "gone" and the defamiliarised "escutcheon" signal a rabbit hole down which one can enter Halley Murphy's imaginarium.

Despite the inviting Lacanian pun in Halley's subversive depiction of her father as a signifier of lack, and lacking in her family, I first need to re-clarify how I engage with Murray's representation of white identity. My overall intention in this study is to argue that white writing, even if it is feminist, is precariously situated within post-apartheid discourses. According to my earlier outline, the symptomatic approaches in whiteness studies will be countered with reparative reading that is attentive to the text's surface, susceptible to its aesthetics and open to notions of entanglement. A hermeneutic of reparative reading is based on the belief that a text reveals its own deeper meaning. This wider reading lens enables me to examine whether Murray's narrativisation of self via Halley's characterisation works strategically and productively within post-apartheid discourses. Furthermore, there are questions about whether the registers of whiteness that she represents can contribute to a South African social imaginary.

As tempting as it is to dive into this "treasury of the vernacular of a particular class and place, recorded with a poet's ear and novelist's eye" (Heyns, 2009:1), Murray's silent treatment of apartheid history in *Small Moving Parts* speaks to the ideological concerns of whiteness studies. Murray's text is framed within a postcolonial context but many critics feel that her narrative ignores the racist issues of apartheid history. Jacobs comments that: "From time to time the reader is brought to the edge of this political terrain which the narrative indicates, but does not enter" (2010:38). Poyner points out the "exacting" task of postcolonial authorship: no

matter how much it brings “the stories of the marginal and oppressed to light”, postcolonial writers risk “re-imposing the very authority they seek to challenge” because they are already imbued with power, mastery and colonisation” (Poyner, 2009:2). She describes this as “the paradox of postcolonial authorship”. Therefore, while Murray states that her intention is to write the story of a struggling white family “that reworked race through gender and class” it is necessary in my project to evaluate to what degree she successfully achieves these intentions.

Critics have remarked on the marginalisation of apartheid history in Murray’s life narrative. Jacobs writes:

The larger history of South Africa is notably absent from Halley’s personal coming-of-age story and remains peripheral to the close mapping of the “Small Moving Parts” in the narrative. The injustices of the 50s and 60s are a social given and the Murphys, like other whites of their class, caught up in their personal stories, feel that “history was only a way of passing time and of “[t]ime passing”. (2010:37)

Michiel Heyns makes a similar comment: “The political sub-text is very much there, but subordinated, as it would have been in the consciousness of a child, to the drudgery and delights of daily life” (2009:1). Although Sharon Dell excuses this as a blind-spot typical of white South Africans in the sixties, she remarks that “[i]t’s injustices creep through, however, towards the end of the novel – timed to coincide with Halley’s growing consciousness” (2009:1). This is an important insight which I take up later.

Yet Murray’s representation of apartheid history is neither a ‘silence’ nor an ‘absence’. There are references to political conflict and upheaval throughout Halley’s personal history. Sharpeville marks Halley’s year of conception (Murray, 2009:50). Jacobs provides a useful synopsis of the events which occur in the life of the Murphy family:

[T]he April 1960 protest march by thousands of black workers into central Durban; the uneasiness over communism throughout the next few decades; increased conscription and military service; the ugliness of public racial conflict and oppression; and later the international sports boycott against South Africa. (2010:38)

Listing and checking the recording of apartheid history in Murray's novel would not be relevant to the topic of this project. I wish to analyse whether the author's intention to rework race through gender and class would pass muster when viewed against dominant postcolonial theories. In other words, Murray's suppression of racist history might be regarded suspiciously as an attempt to re-centre whiteness; her construction of a figure representing precarious white identity might be regarded as positing the trope of victimhood – a trope presented in theories of displaced whiteness and how it seeks to efface guilt and gain access to “more democratic and self-respecting subject positions” (Steyn, 2001:146). However, in her interview with Omeshnie Naidoo, Murray states there is a creative purpose underlying her representation of a struggling white family during apartheid (Naidoo, 2009:7). Murray states:

“Instead of insisting on this ossified idea of ‘whiteness’, I wanted to use words to enliven this white world, to create a sense of ‘othered’ lives being lived in such an extraordinary richness of words that language both escaped official discourse and enabled the characters, to some extent, to escape the labels placed upon them”.

This is realised in Murray's construction of Halley as a character whose imaginative freedom helps her to elude prescriptions of social, political or racial identity.

A reparative reading comprises attentiveness to detail and technique that allows the text to ‘speak for itself’. This means that while a symptomatic reading seeks to bring concealed ideology to the surface, a reparative reading believes that a text's surface is expressive of its

ideology. In the following section I refer to excerpts from the novel describing Mark and Nora's relationship. I analyse the parallels Murray draws between the political instability of apartheid years and the volatile marriage of Halley's father and mother. Each extracts highlights Murray's treatment of the "naïve simplicity" (Heyns, 2009:1) and complacency of whites during the 1960s and 70s.

In the following extract Murray's autobiographical narrative is interwoven with apartheid history. Halley's conception in the coastal city of Durban is conveyed against a backdrop of the political struggles taking place in South Africa:

So yes, it was early 1960, and a child was conceived in the after-shadow of Sharpeville. Tumbled in the wake of the flood, the turn of the rising tide.

Deep and wide, they sang in church, Deep and wide, There's a fountain flowing deep and wide. Plunge right in, Cleanse my sins, There's a fountain deep and wide.

Sharpeville, she later supposes, is one conceivable marker, though it glanced past some windows unnoticed, misapprehended by those who took it for a passing effect of the weather, an inland pressure front curving towards the coast. (Murray, 2009:50)

The intertextual strands and religious symbolism of water weave a complex relationship between the personal and the political in the description of Halley's conception and Murray poetic artistry and wit shines through. Halley, metaphorically "tumbled" in "the wake of the flood", is portrayed as a helpless, small moving part in the context of history. There is an allusion to the Biblical "flood" signifying death and redemption, but "The Wake of Flood" is also the song title of a famous American rock band embodying the anti-establishment fervour of the 1960s. Halley is thus linked to the cultural upheavals of post-World War Two as well as the Sharpeville uprising. The growing resistance to apartheid is represented in a metaphor of

the sea, “the turn of the rising tide” and the gospel chant that follows, “Plunge right in, Cleanse my sins” alludes to the rites of baptism required for transformation. These religious references are part of the Christian iconography informing Murray’s autobiographical narrative. On a primal level, the rhythmic energy, diction and fountain imagery in these lines of this extract also evoke the sexual act by which a new life is brought into being. Clearly, Murray is identifying Halley as part of the era of political change associated with Sharpeville. But the parents who conceive her, and for most of the South African white population, the uprising goes “unnoticed”, “misapprehended” and “glanced past” with an obtuse indifference: “a passing effect of the weather, an inland pressure front curving towards the coast”. Through an immersed, engaged reading of this extract, I have demonstrated that a text’s surface can be expressive of its ideology and that a symptomatic reading is not always essential.

The youthful Mark and Nora, her parents, are portrayed as brash stereotypes of upbeat post-war culture. They fit the profile of the growing consumerism of that era and Murray describes their individuality, ironically, in the form of brands: with Mark Murphy it is Charles Bronson, Brigitte Bardot, Herb Alpert and Texan cigarettes; Nora’s tastes are Bing Crosby, Audrey Hepburn, Chanel N° 5 and Ransom 20 Special Filter Mild. Although her tastes are somewhat less brash than Mark’s, he is a musician who is open-minded about the local music of Sophiatown and “Lemmy Mabaso kwela” (51-52). Their upbeat lifestyle is in sharp contrast to the haphazard features of the crowd who are described participating in the Cato Manor protests of 1960:

Figures in classic khaki gardeners’ outfits and floppy hats [...]. Other protesters wear nothing but long-sleeved shirts, as if they have freshly fallen from an old-fashioned bed [...]. Women in mismatched, make-do tops [...]. (52)

The narrator's comments emphasise the indifference of the newlywed couple to such events: "had they looked outside themselves, behind them or in front [...]" (52). However, in the following remark, the narrator implies that it is their flippant racism which really blinds them:

Yet even had Mark and Nora seen the crowd, or heard the strident voices, would they have understood, noticed the little leaves gathering force on a growing stream? Lilliesleaf was one thing but they both laughed about how the natives were revolting. (53)

They seem aware that Lilliesleaf farm is a place of unified resistance although they don't yet realise that the "one thing" about Lilliesleaf was David Motsamayi, the false alias of Nelson Mandela given refuge there in order to organise the struggle. Mark and Norah's crudeness attitude is mirrored in their careless laugh and pun: "but how they laughed about how the natives were revolting". Later in the novel, the reference to a "white, sleeping world" continues the theme of white apathy:

Rubbish collection at the flats is always noisy. The truck comes early in the morning with no concession to a white, sleeping world, and the diesel engine snorts and shudders to stop-start halt, idling while the boys set to work. One jumps off the back and shouts to the others this side and their big boots clatter that side and even with all that racket and the banging lids, only the rotten stink louder than the sounds, still the Murphys in Number 4 can hear that in Number 6, one upstairs, rubbish day at the Halter household is a noisy affair. The careless glass clinks and tinkles as the full bins are shouldered, and after a brief, almost soundless fling, the empties give in, crashing into the dump truck. (323)

There is a contrast between the hungover, "rotten stink" of poor whites living at Kenneth Gardens and the black workers whom they ironically call "boys". Murray conveys the racial

disparities through these textual strategies; she does not marginalise the realities of apartheid but embeds them in the detail.

Nora is a small moving part caught up in the history of a bad marriage. The shock of Mark's philandering triggers the sudden birth of her second daughter, Jennie. During this episode in her life Nora realises:

that this is all you have, how history is all you get to live in, the hard times and missed places. A big box of small moving parts which is hard enough for anyone to carry, and certainly ought not to be handed out without warning. Would it help, she wonders, to have a label that says This is not a toy – it can kill you? (81)

The novel's theme is introduced through Nora's intense disillusionment. In *Small Moving Parts* Nora is represented as the pivot of Halley's life and her early development.

The narrative mode with which Murray constructs the subjectivity of Halley is central to my interpretation of white identity in *Small Moving Parts*. It is, therefore, important to discuss the elements of Murray's style that affect readers' impressions of Halley and her world. Murray's choice of third person invites a more ambiguous reading of her autobiographical narrative. Autobiographical fiction has become accepted as no longer breaking the autobiographical pact.

Lenta (2003) provides a comprehensive analysis of these techniques in her discussion of Coetzee's *Boyhood* (1997). The main distinction, which probably suits Murray, is that by utilising third person both the writer and reader can relate to the protagonist as a biographical rather than autobiographical subject. Third person provides a wider lens through which the writer can modulate the distance between his or her autobiographical protagonist. Third person helps the writer to create an objective distance. Lenta quotes Christopher Isherwood (2000):

“Because the ‘I’ of this period is twenty years out of date, I shall write about him in the third person [...] this helps me to overcome my inhibitions, avoid self-excuses, and regard my past behaviour more objectively”. (2003:159)

Thus, the writer and readers can share similar emotions and responses towards a protagonist and the writer can regard the protagonist’s behaviour more objectively. Coetzee’s statement, “All autobiography is storytelling, all writing is autobiography” (1992:391) is now famous in debates about truth in autobiography. However, he does qualify this by stating that a writer has licence to select but not falsify personal history. This highlights a critical aspect of an author’s representation of their life, especially if it is set in an apartheid past: it is important to distinguish the extent to which authors present the facts of their lives or choose to write an interpretation of the facts that suits the purpose of their thesis. In Murray’s work this is critically related to the topic of how contemporary white writers negotiate their precarious space within a post-apartheid context.

Murray explains her intentions most fully in her interview with Govender (2010:1). She explains that she wanted to write a novel that filled a void in literature about white working-class families in Durban. As a child who grew up on a municipal estate, it suited her to write a fictionalised autobiography that at the same time challenges white stereotypes by reworking race through gender and class. There is a more academic account of this in her critical essay on her novel:

There is a familiar marker of the late-and post-apartheid literary scene: giving voice to the voiceless, the telling of untold stories. Historical recovery and democratising desires to affirm social diversity have meant a surge in forms of life narration that investigate ‘self’ with/in context. (2014:74)

Murray's definition of post-apartheid literature gives special weight to "democratising desires" and "forms of life narration that investigate 'self' with/in context". Although she is aware of important postcolonial discourses, as a poet she is drawn toward existential themes. She reveals that in her characterisation of Halley she explores "the inevitable melancholy in being human" (Govender, 2010:2)

The child, Halley, is human. [...] She has lost so much and there remains so much to lose. There's an existential undercurrent in the story, as the child must find a way between joy and sadness. (2)

In her interview with Govender, Murray states that although she wants to write about whiteness "through the filter of a white mother who is battling to raise her daughters pretty much alone", she is not interested in "some heavy ideological exercise" but wants the reader "caught up in the impossibility of trying to isolate, separate out, ordinary feelings like love, blame, anger, insight" (1). As a postcolonial writer however, Murray needs to balance these existential undercurrents which are criticised in whiteness studies as universalising themes of hegemonic Western culture.

Yet Murray does reveal her concerns with gender ideology in her interview with Govender. When discussing her representation of mothers and family structure in the novel, she acknowledges that although apartheid labour laws caused fathers, and often, mothers to be absent in black families, it would have been a stigma for a white family in those days (2). It is clear that the author wishes to valorise mothers such as Nora who are extraordinary in the sacrifices they make for their children. This is supported in Murray's following comments:

I have found myself thinking about how many women's stories have been ignored, how their lives and commitments have been invisible because the focus has been on the more

dramatic, public expanse of historical time and event rather than the day-to-day of mothering and working and getting things done. (3)

In *Small Moving Parts* Murray highlights feminist as well as class issues which have been dimmed by metanarratives of apartheid.

If Murray's narrative is to perform whiteness in registers which disrupt the metanarrative of apartheid, then casting her protagonist as a vulnerable girl growing up in a single-parent, white working-class family will ostensibly accomplish this. A sociological study of Kenneth Gardens provides details of the estate's origin, case histories of residents and discusses the factors which make it a place of resilience, past and present. The housing estate was established in the 1940s as a solution to the "poor white problem" (Marks, Erwin and Fleetwood, 2018:ix). However, from the start Kenneth Gardens represented an anomaly: it was perceived as a "segregated and privileged white space, but it was also perceived as a blemish on the white urban landscape because of its underclass status" (ix). If Murray's intention is to highlight the precarity of a white family in her autobiographical narrative, she needs to take into account that those who lived in Kenneth Gardens "occupied the ambiguous position of simultaneously being the privileged poor and being socially stigmatised" (12). Moreover, her precarious position as a white writer in post-apartheid discourse must also be kept in mind.

There is little doubt that a reparative reading will do more than justice to the hardship reflected in Nora Murphy's struggle to provide for herself and her daughters. If it can be argued that theirs is a life of precarity, then it is likely to be expressed in terms of the deprivation and attrition on Nora's body especially in her early days of single motherhood. There is reference to this "slow excoriation" (Murray, 2009:7) that happens to Nora after her marriage fails and she is left alone and barely supported by Mark. In the introduction to which I alluded earlier,

she is reduced from the figure “3” to “The One” with “one raised finger and the only firm footing” (7). This is a darkly comic portrait of an iron-willed mother who is prepared to almost sacrifice herself for her children. These themes are continued in the chapters which follow and although Nora’s wit, imagination and love create much joy for her children, her determination to raise her children with respectability is a constant thorn in their side.

The argument about whether Murray conveys a register of precarity in her representation of whiteness, therefore, rests largely on her portrayal of Nora’s hardship. Murray acknowledges in her interview with Govender that she “wanted to write about whiteness through the filter of a white mother who is battling to raise her daughters pretty much alone” (2010:1). Born into a family of thirteen children, Nora grew up in state care in Durban and then Bloemfontein after she and her siblings had been removed from their parental home. After obtaining Matric – Nora’s orphanage was “sponsored by church and state” – she then did a short milliner’s course for a “socially useful skill” because for a “poor female at that time”, Matric was regarded as “exceptional enough” (Murray, 2009:86). In the extract below, Murray conveys Nora’s determination to survive:

Yet despite all Nora’s efforts, here she is, living in Kenneth Gardens. By now, really, she had expected to come much further [...].

The boys went who knows where; the girls were kept together in a convenient handful, a short while in the Durban Children’s Home, and then shipped off to St Faith’s, an orphanage in Bloemfontein.

Where you had to have it, and keep it, faith, but it was damn hard, that hard home of your childhood. Though Nora is still on the right side of thirty, and has spent her whole life trying to improve on her bad start, things have not really panned out, yet, her plans, and surely she has grounds for complaint. But she doesn’t complain, not often, or at

least not outside her head. She just keeps at it. For now, Ixia Court is the best she can do, so she does it. (11)

Murray is aware of the contradictions in describing a white mother in Kenneth Gardens who is in the ambiguous position of being both one of the “privileged poor” and “socially stigmatised” (Marks, Erwin and Fleetwood, 2018:12). This has prompted her to adopt a narrative mode of shifting viewpoints which portray Nora’s bitter struggle without sentimentality. Through the use of free indirect discourse, Murray’s polyphonic narration builds a complex picture of Nora as a strong-minded woman who defies the norms of being a white working-class mother. By using free indirect speech, a writer/narrator can simultaneously access the perceptions and reactions of his/her protagonist, summarise experiences or incorporate the other voices or discourses (Lenta, 2003:164). It acts as a distancing strategy that is more objective, permitting the reader, narrator and writer to share similar views. Thus, Murray has much more control in the representations of whiteness in a postcolonial space.

Nora works two jobs, walks instead of paying for transport, even goes to the market in town for fresh produce on Saturday mornings. This is stated as matter-of-fact and normal in their lives. It is the narrator’s depiction of Nora’s psychological struggle with her resentment that makes her human, and wins our respect. The narrator conveys her irritation in staccato phrases: “things have not really panned out, yet, her plans, and surely she has grounds for complaint. But she doesn’t complain, not often, or at least not outside her head ”(Murray, 2009:11). In the above extract there is vocabulary which does not sound like a child’s but suggests Nora’s offhand way of telling the children her history: “[t]he boys went who knows where”; and the girls were later “shipped off” from Durban Children’s Home. It probably suited her to add “but it was damn hard” in case her daughters feel self-pitying about themselves. The observation that it was “that hard home of your childhood” is that of an omniscient narrator and the

oxymoron hints that it might be the writer's voice. Amongst her other worries, Nora also has concerns about her age: "Nora is still on the right side of thirty" seems to be what she might have overheard. Such comments reflect the sexualised gender discourses of the 50s defining a woman's identity: 'looks', age and attractiveness were the means to achieving self-affirmation in marriage. The quote below evokes Nora's perverse commitment to the ideology of domesticity:

Faced with her little family, she makes a home. She becomes unbelievably resourceful, industrious to the point that her voluptuous, womanly body pares down. Not to the bone, at first, but to a lean muscularity.

And even after that she had a way to go, and off she went. (11)

The last line seems to be the conversational voice of an older Halley, narrator or Murray, ironically conveying the patronising tone of grown-up children towards their parents.

Yet it is class distinction which is the bane of Nora's life. Her starving figure seems to be less problematic to her than keeping up appearances. It is through Nora's sense of degradation that Murray seeks to "rework race through class". Nora is Murray's embodiment of the paradoxical nature of white identity in Natal during the 1960s, a province which was dominated by English colonial notions of respectability and class. As an author aware of wider dimensions of suffering during apartheid, Murray realises that a mother who suffers from class distinction may seem incongruous.

Tom Lodge's history of black politics (1990) provides interesting insights into class aspirations that fuelled political resistance in South Africa. He records the anxiety of a small educated

group of “petty bourgeoisie” who felt that the colonial laws would drive them back into “the ranks of the urban and rural poor”. These are the words of John Makoe in 1904:

There is no decent black man that can manage to exist on 8 pounds a month, pay all the taxes, and the upkeep of his house in the proper manner – I mean a civilised native. I do not mean the raw man who comes from the kraals... now we are all blacks and measured by the same measure... I am measured with the same measure as the man who cannot look after himself and who is not in the same position as I am. (2)

Similar sentiments are presented by D. Jabavu in 1920, when he speaks out about the exclusion of African railway passengers from first class carriages:

[Railway] waiting rooms are made to accommodate the rawest blanketed heathen; and the more decent native has either to use them and annex vermin or to do without shelter in biting wintry weather. (2-3)

On the other side of the spectrum, the poet Mafika Gwala’s anti-class feelings are revealed in a critical discussion of his 1977 poetry:

He engages with the hassled lives of communities like Clermont, and argues despairingly with the soul of the urban streets of tin, of clocks and machines, of black struggle but also of class struggle – where middle class “non-whites” have become a “fuck-burden” to blacks. (Langa and Sitas, 2016:13)

One therefore, realises that class is as much a vector of social identity as race.

In her interview with Naidoo (2009:7), Murray asks, “What is this ‘white’ thing?” referring to the stifling nature of class distinction. Nora Murphy is determined that her children and she be identified as middle class rather than working class and she prescribes a set of rules which are

intended to separate them from others. She drills her list of coarse language and behaviour into the minds of her girls. Yet, in the eyes of the omniscient narrator:

most of these fine distinctions are not merely of Nora's making; they're run of the mill, for in keeping with the times, many tenants work hard to set up and maintain complex minor machineries of human differentiation which correspond to the big engines that keep the country running, regardless of what unhappy life gets crunched in the works. (Murray, 2009:30)

In an ironic 'wheels within wheels' motif, Murray paints a class-conscious engine of "small moving parts" mindlessly inflicting its own misery.

The narrator, however, adds a satirical note to Nora's snobbery: while Halley and her sister vie for the creamy topping of a milk bottle in front of their starving mother, the comment that "Cream always rises to the top" paints a grim picture (141). It is a measure of Nora's determination to achieve the social success for her daughters which has eluded her.

For Nora Murphy, the other tenants in Kenneth Gardens bring white poor perilously close to poor white, which is much too close to the bone. It's a stigma that has been sniffing around her impolitely from the day they moved in, indolently lifting its leg whenever and wherever it will. (11)

Nora's fears and sense of degradation convey the dehumanising effects of class distinction. She is determined to ensure that her children attend good schools from nursery to high school and successfully gets an administrative post at the local university which enables Halley to obtain a fee-reduced university education. There are moments, however, when Halley has to tell people where she lives and then "people will know exactly who she is" (10). They are challenging moments for a child whose mother's snobbery has come full circle. But the

statement that “Though they do not become her single definition, the flats in Durban define her girlhood” (10) shows Nora aspirations for her daughter, Halley, have not gone amiss.

In Pat Schwartz’s critical review of the novel, she writes she “couldn’t stop reading it” despite the book feeling “too long, too detailed, too much” (2010:1). There is a sophisticated edginess in Murray’s style that holds one’s interest, especially her ability to combine pathos with humour. Murray dramatises one of the lowest points in Nora’s life by placing her in a dentist’s chair. Still in her early twenties when the precarity of her white existence becomes fully exposed, Nora has to endure physical pain, humiliation and the attrition of her youthful glamour when her teeth fail her. It is the “maternal maramus” (2009:147) that brings about the extraction of all her teeth. The dentist is merciful, however, in sparing Nora embarrassing questions about her malnutrition and offers her a cheaper rate in his chair for the necessary surgery.

The shattering impact of Nora’s tooth loss is conveyed as loss of her identity as a young, attractive, “decent” white woman. In the episode called “Toothless cavity”, Nora’s dental extraction is a burlesque horror event, narrated in bizarre, graphic detail. The dentist room becomes a cast of characters in a David Lynch spectacle of the mundane and the macabre: a doctor, nurse and patient come together with deadly purpose and after several hours they are “all reddened with blood” (78). Afterwards Nora catches the bus home and gradually reconciles herself to her humiliation and loss. The bathos of this episode underlines Nora’s precarity: the loss of her teeth represents Nora’s loss of self-worth as an attractive, respectable member of the white society. Judith Butler’s theory of precarity helps to clarify this sense of vulnerability:

Performativity has everything to do with “who” can become produced as a recognizable subject, a subject who is living, whose life is worth sheltering and whose life, when

lost, would be worth mourning [...] In this way precarity is a rubric that brings together women, queers, transgender people, the poor, and the stateless. (2004xiii)

At Nora's low point of her life she is starving, unsupported by the father of her children or any family network, and forced to provide for her children. The domestic duties expected of Nora are impossible when she cannot rely on her husband to support her financially. The maintenance court is unable to enforce payments on him either. In sharp contrast to Nora, Mark Murphy is independent and free after their divorce. He is the "recognizable subject" whose masculine rights are privileged in a strengthened patriarchal system following the end of the last World War in 1945 (Greenbank, 1995).

The chapter titled "Legless Wonder" captures Mark's performance of masculinity in front of Nora and his daughters:

He is demonstrating how he can walk using the crutches. *Only* the crutches. No feet. From the concrete strip which leads past Jasmine all the way to the steps of Ixia. Which, sjoe, it's damn far.

[...]

Judging from the children's faces, you would think Mark a man walking on water. Certainly beyond even stunned amazement, it is an extraordinary excess of love that uplifts Halley. (Murray, 2009:103)

Mark has come to fetch his daughters for the weekend but has decided to give "the old stamping ground a quick one-man show (102). In an acrobatic display, with *two* broken legs and crutches" and his pregnant new girlfriend anxiously waiting nearby, Mark entertains the crowd at Kenneth Gardens with heroic feats – his broken legs a result of a drunken evening when he

threw money out of a flat window which he subsequently sought to retrieve (Murray, 2009: 107).

Near the end of his performance, Mark looks up at Nora and attempts a mocking bow with the “vailing [of] an imaginary plume” as if he were “Walter Raleigh” before his queen (104). Her ex-husband not only mocks her romantic dreams but enjoys the knowledge that he can destroy them. It is an humiliating tableau watched by his admiring daughters who are ironically unaware how it reinforces their mother’s precarity. According to Butler:

“precarity” designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. Such populations are at heightened risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection. (2009:ii)

There is arguably a thin line between her folly and her pride that prevents Nora from seeking financial relief from welfare aid.

Murray’s richly detailed locations enhance her characterisation of the Murphy females. Heyns views her text as “a treasury of the vernacular of a particular class and place”:

[W]e are given a set of brilliant snapshots of an era and a class, indeed of a whole social history of fashions and products, of beliefs and prejudices, of warped values and warped lives. (2009:1)

As an exercise in discourse analysis, I coded details into categories consisting of gender, culture, language, religion, parents, race, ethnicity, class, characterisation, relationships, politics, intertextuality, code-switching, nature, machinery and philosophy. I discovered that

cultural references exceeded all others, ranging from Weetbix, *Scope* magazine, Parker ink pens, the Cuban Hat road café, to the Alhambra theatre and Coca Cola. *Small Moving Parts* is redolent with experiences of white middle-class life in the 1960s and 70s. Betty Govinden comments that in Ravi Govender's biographical articles of "old" Durban his vibrant journalism is "not condoning apartheid, but suggests that life under apartheid was not a vast moral and social desert" and the people in his stories represent "different ways to engage in the humanising process, in the face of the dehumanising of apartheid" (2011:2). The dense cultural detail in Murray's narrative suggests that white working-class families such as the Murphys also depended on these humanising processes. Murray explains:

The families in *Small Moving Parts* may be white, benefitting from Apartheid's racial privilege, but they are also hard-up battlers, and it is the women in particular who are left to muddle through, the children following in their wake. (2014:75)

While Halley and Nora Murphy are seldom seen to locate themselves in the community of Kenneth Gardens, they definitely take ownership of the streets and other sites of Durban.

The extensive narrative mapping is a feature of the novel and serves three main concerns identified in postcolonial writing: memory, belonging and identity. The detailed mapping not only inscribes the working class identity of Halley and her family but is built intimately into Halley's sense of self:

The world just beyond Kenneth Gardens is very familiar. About midway along, for instance, Queen Mary Avenue is punctuated by a traffic circle. Not a full stop, but a poetic navel.

Halley loves the pleasing shape of the circle, and within it the bold black-on-yellow chevron that signals a sharp curve. She takes the circle as a centre from which her life, like that of others, has begun slowly to emerge. (2009:16)

Critics such as Jacobs have foregrounded the importance of narrative mapping in literary works. He supports the view that it creates a geographical verisimilitude that connects literary texts to a “specific historical and geographical time” (2010:26). In *Small Moving Parts* the richly mapped cityscape of Durban and the beaches also suits the purpose of Murray to suggest the “individual mobility” of female identities represented in the novel (Murray, 2014:82). Nora and her daughters undertake many journeys on foot between Umbilo and the city; the sights, sounds, tastes and textures of an era, place and culture are richly evoked and transfigured in the world of Halley’s imagination, becoming “a place of liberating irreverence outside home” (Murray, 2009:25). Murray’s representation of the spatial freedom which Nora and her daughters enjoy also counters a monological view of working class life.

It is interesting to note that Murray’s autobiographical narrative is not mediated by any male presence (as in the other two novels in this study) but by the mother, who is a central figure. Thus it has been necessary to focus on the representation of white identity embodied in Murray’s characterisation of Nora. I have explored questions of precarity in order to evaluate whether there are registers of whiteness that achieve Murray’s aim to “rework race through gender and class”. In the following section I focus on the representation of Halley’s white female identity, analysing its significance to this study. Murray views her positionality as that of a “postcolonial woman writer interested in questions of self in relation to forms of community” and she privileges home as the microcosm where “small moving parts” play out the cultural conflicts of the larger society (Murray, 2009:77). It is for this reason that I argue that Murray’s representation of female identity in her “self/life/writing” (77) is to resist the

over-determination of apartheid narratives of white identity. Her wish that the reader be entangled in “ordinary feelings like love, blame, anger, insight” (Govender, 2010:1) in the novel suggests her desire for a broader context of engagement. In my discussion of Halley, I refer to Murray’s explication of the discourses of female subjectivity which inform her novel.

Murray is praised for her innovative interpretation of the *Bildungsroman* form by De Kock, one of the judges of her award-winning work (2011:44). Halley introduces her family in a numerically encrypted portrait, thus establishing our first impressions of the young protagonist whom Schwartz describes as “the book’s strange, unlovely and unlovable protagonist” (2010:1). Murray herself states that “[t]here is no single ‘good girl’ or ‘bad girl’” in her article on her book because she seeks to “enable contradictory investigations of femaleness” (2014:79). According to Sidonie Smith’s poetics of women’s autobiography, the creative skills of an individual’s autobiography will depend on “her degree of self-consciousness about her place in patriarchal culture” (1987:51). In her essay on her work, Murray affirms this viewpoint:

I did not wish to write what might be recognized and received as a straight-up autobiography. Perhaps, to be frank, I also held in some vestigial way to the misapprehension that ‘real’ autobiographies are for important lives, and mine, well, it was honestly of little consequence. But even this admission speaks to the continuing difficulty, for your average woman writer, of claiming the autobiographical space [...]. (2014:77)

In the light of this, she supports Leigh Gilmore’s (1994) description of women’s autobiography as a means to “prompt a profound renegotiation of the terms and forms of self-representation” (77).

Murray states her preference for an “open-endedness” in her writing and, in the same way that she destabilises conventions of autobiography, subjects gender to an “instability and incoherence rather than assuming it to be easily consolidated under a given name” (2014:73). She feels that this uncertainty is “an enabling factor leading to transformative possibilities in the gendered subject” (73). This correlates with notions of postcolonial contexts as moments of indeterminacy and reimagining (Scott, 2018). This is reflected in Murray’s interest in creating an “unsettled” text which destabilises conventions of content and form in order to reconceptualise female identity. Her text, thus, deconstructs traditional forms of autobiography and the bildungsroman.

First, Murray emphasises the particularity of Halley’s white working-class identity:

[I]t is white working class female bodies which become the metanarrative terrain of the text, allowing the author to perform some of the challenges associated with living in a female body. (2014:76)

Halley’s occupying of a marginalised white identity in fact allows the author to amplify a universal concern with the vulnerabilities of the female body. As a white woman writer she, thus, addresses transnational gender issues that also align with her purpose to re-work race through gender and class.

Halley’s articulate, confident voice at the start of the novel would surprise some readers’ expectations of working-class identity, albeit white. Murray explains her intention to raise “nuanced questions” about meaning systems like gender, class and race which define identity “in terms of norms and conventions” (82). The author’s claim that language “*performs* meaning rather than gives it directly” suggests its empowering role. Halley’s interrogation of language enables her to shape her identity. Murray’s concerns with textuality and identity were expressed

in an earlier quote from her interview with Naidoo (2009:7). This is reflected in her characterisation of both Halley and her mother whose linguistic skills elude working class labels. Halley's constant linguistic and imaginative manipulation of her world is evidence that "she is engaged in constructing her own life as independently as possible" (Kearney, 2013:53). The author, however, reminds the reader that language constrains as well as liberates Halley's self-construction: she has to contend with external labels such as "girl", "white", "lower class", "clever", "ugly", "forward" (Murray, 2014:81).

In Murray's autobiographical narrative, Halley's subjectivity is represented as an existential journey of confusion and success. Charting her growth is not straightforward, however. The author explains that it is not her intention to write a conventional *Bildungsroman* which portrays a male hero achieving a "unified and autonomous self" (79). Instead, Murray adopts the hybrid model of Toni Morrison where restless pairings such as mother/daughter, wife/mother, enable her to interrogate contradictory concepts of femaleness. This is the reason that Murray also deflects monochromatic "good girl" or "bad girl" images (79).

In the novel, Halley's transgressive spirit is often made apparent in her challenge of norms and setting her own rules in the family and community. The narrator ensures that there are many glimpses of these tendencies, from terrorising insects in front of a "scabby audience" in Kenneth Gardens (2009:23), to hacking the rotting body of a "skunk" which she impetuously whirls in front of her terrified sister (252). Halley betrays her mother/daughter relationship many times: secretly idolising her errant father in her obsession with the sea and machinery; lying about the sexual activities in Uncle Zach's flat and being complicit in her mother's boyfriend's sexual perversions.

There is also a vulnerable side to Halley's nature. Her sense of alienation is portrayed from an early age in her musings about the wash-lines at the centre of Kenneth Gardens:

So sometimes, when she looks at everyone's clothes on the lines – there's Uncle Zach, there's ... there's *me*! Halley understands the idea of emptiness, of herself as inside out.
(20)

Very often, her need for affirmation is expressed in an anxious desire to please, which she later realises makes her easy prey for older men whose seductions feed her the “crumbs” she craves. Yet despite her precarious life, Halley is represented as being the agent of her own identity, gaining independence and moving away from Kenneth Gardens. This is an empowering view of female subjectivity that speaks to a post-apartheid context where the majority of women are emerging from political as well as cultural domination.

In the introduction to this chapter I expressed caution about following the “rabbit” into Murray's 1960s wonderland in *Small Moving Parts*. There is also a sense that I might be walking through a looking glass that distorts and obscures. “Where is the Nanny?” is a natural question to ask in any white household of that time. Many white South Africans were able to take advantage of cheap domestic help. The obvious answer, in the case of Nora's family, is that it was simply unaffordable for a struggling working-class family on a housing estate. However, one discovers this is not the case.

In her oral history forming the collection of a study on Kenneth Gardens, Sally-Ann Murray introduces the story of “Joanna”:

Here we were, a battling family. But somehow as low as we were in that hierarchy, we still had a domestic worker once a week for the ironing and to help with the housework

[...] So we had Joanna one day a week. I try to rationalise it. Even when things got terrible, Joanna used to come. She bought us madumbis [African potatoes], mielies, when times were hard. And before I know it, memory flings me back further to Regina, when I was very, very small. (Marks, Erwin et al, 2018:54)

Murray also reflects on the unusual interactions between the children at Kenneth Gardens and the servants. In collusion with each other, the children would “spy when the servants were showering”. She muses on this intrusion of privacy: “Why we did that I have no idea, but we did. [...] Kids playing out the barriers and intimacies of apartheid. With the other” (54-55). The psychological splitting which children experienced at that time, is suggested in Murray’s reflections on the children’s incongruous detachment from people who frequent their homes. When questioned by the researchers, the author admits that she is vague about who lived in the outbuilding, “it never crossed my mind. That is how perverse this idea of ‘separate development’ was” (55).

Yet in her autobiographical novel, Murray does not include any mention of the kindness of Joanna and Regina, or the role any black woman played in Nora’s story of survival. Murray’s novel does not seek to be confessional but it is interesting to note Georgine Horrell’s thesis in “White lies, White truth” (2009) which argues that black women play an iconic role in the confessional writing of English-speaking white women:

It is to this figure that the narrator returns in order to construct a moment of confession and reparation. Indeed, the tale of the maid becomes the key to the narrator’s liberal stance, and ultimately crucial to a post-apartheid white identity. (59)

In her representation of the struggling Murphy family, Murray does not wish to divert attention from the theme of precarity by addressing their status as beneficiaries of apartheid. This type

of lacuna is discussed by Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith (2006) in their criticism of the TRC's lack of beneficiary identification in its prescriptions:

Providing no justiciary position that acknowledges the beneficiary's relation to structural violence, the TRC could not relate in its protocols, scenes of witnessing, and judgements those who benefitted from structural violence. (1578)

Horrell points out that:

Cheap black labour, particularly that of black women, in fact signified potential liberation for white women [...] they were free to pursue their careers. There is a case for arguing that white women's liberations within employment in southern Africa was certainly aided, if not bought, by black women's pain. (2009:63)

Thus within apartheid law, white employers remained the "primary beneficiaries" of a black woman worker in their homes. Nora does have domestic help, and after her hard work pays off Nora progresses to a better position at the nearby university; this in turn, helps Halley to gain a university education and elevate herself socially. If Murray intends her work to be one of historical recovery, or a history-from-below investigating "'self' *with/in* context" (2014:74), these lacunae need to be recognised.

Brian Fourie's witness testimony, situated before the last chapter of the book, perhaps signals a redemptive hope. Halley's cousin tells of the victimisation of a small black child whose defiant gesture led to his being swooped into an army Ratel patrolling a township. The child's beating and 'dumping' which he witnessed in the army vehicle led to his having a nervous breakdown. Brian's TRC intervention throws ironic light on Halley's judgement of the 'neurotic' cousin, whose masculinity she queried, when he refused her sexual advances during a holiday. In her eyes "[h]e wasn't even a real man" (2009:297).

Horrell also refers to Njabulo Ndebele's observations (1998) that English-speaking South Africans seem to feel that they are less guilty for apartheid than Afrikaners, and had no need to play a part in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2009:60). From this corrupt representation of Afrikaans identity, readers may perhaps infer that Murray is reinforcing cultural perceptions that Afrikaners are more responsible for apartheid than English-speaking South Africans, an observation made by Horrell (2009:60).

There is a significant incident in *Small Moving Parts* where Nora experiences sudden flashes of Jan Van Riebeeck's image after the children return from an afternoon in Uncle Zach's flat. The narrator reveals that as the dashing images of Jan van Riebeeck start to fade from Nora's mind, she becomes aware of the tarnished buckles on his shoes. She simultaneously notices that he is commandeering a group of "small brown people" who stare at the new arrivals. These images course through her head after Halley and Jennie lie about their afternoon activities, saying that they were shown films of Amsterdam and Uncle Zach's relatives (Murray, 2009:204). In her discourse on *Small Moving Parts*, Murray explains that although it is tempting to expose figures who are guilty of abuse she scrupulously avoids doing so (2014:78). It is, therefore, doubtful that if there was an actual paedophile such as Uncle Zach, she would make his identity so obviously Dutch and related to Afrikaner culture. Nora's confused vision of Jan van Riebeeck, which occurs after her daughters return from Uncle Zach's upstairs flat, links these two figures. The writer, thus, creates an association between a sexual predator and van Riebeeck, a revered figure regarded as the founding father of Afrikanerdom.

Murray's situates her text as in the post-apartheid context of where "historical recovery and democratising desires to affirm social diversity have meant a surge in forms of life narration that investigate 'self' with/in context" (2014:74). In her review of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

(1987), Linda Krumholz analyses the representation of historical recovery in Morrison's novel which "constructs a parallel between the individual processes of psychological recovery and a historical or national process" (395). She quotes W.E.B. Du Bois's words (1903) that "[a]dmitting and exploring the reality of slavery is necessarily painful for a Black American, but only by doing so can he or she begin to understand himself or herself and American and Afro-American culture in general" (395). Murray (2014) acknowledges that when writing *Small Moving Parts* she was influenced by Lepore's notions of 'history-from-below' (2001), which focuses on the stories of the marginalised, and that she also had in mind Ronnie Govender's *At the edge' and other Cato Manor stories* (1996). These stories interest Murray because they not only represent ways of 'writing lives' that capture the "naturalised ordinariness" of the everyday life, but they represent "life writing" in which their writers' concerns are a "distinctive locating of selves in community" (74). However, it is not clear though how she can draw a parallel between the Murphys and the displaced communities whose stories are acts of 'rememory' to heal an undignified and torn history. The Murphys, after all, dissociated themselves from the community of lower-income groups living in Kenneth Gardens.

I would argue instead that the process of 'rememory' in Murray's novel focuses on the childhood of a white English child in a colonial environment, growing up in the aftermath of World War 2 and waning British imperialism. When soldiers returned from the war after 1945, they found it difficult to adjust to the social and political upheavals that had taken place in their absence. The black population, which provided labour, played a greater role in the economy during the absence of white soldiers in the World Wars, and during the 1960s and 70s their demands for political freedom grew. This, alongside the political ascendance of Afrikaners, created social and political turbulence. The marginalised white English population, mostly

liberal, retracted into a close-knit class system – the effects of which were sorely felt by Nora Murphy living in Kenneth Gardens. Yet the economy flourished and most white South Africans could enjoy a relatively comfortable and secure lifestyle.

To a reader like myself, who shares that history, Murray's narrative is a chance to escape through a bolt hole of nostalgia – sing along with Jeremy Taylor's "Ag Pleez Daddy" and enjoy the brilliant concatenation of memorabilia. Yet Murray states that her novel is forward looking, not merely reminiscence: "The writing is not some nostalgic past-orientated project endorsing 'white' South Africa or sentimentalising 'girlhood'. Rather it is an agenda directed at futurity. Nora's disappearance obliges her daughters "to grow into their own historically new versions of female subjectivity that yet drag behind them intransigent, inherited gender patterns" (Murray, 2014:75).

Nora's disappearance symbolises the loss of the cultural framework which undergirds the white middle-class values of Nora and her daughters. The country's post-apartheid democracy brings a new collective in which her daughters' 'respectable' white identity, for which Nora strived so hard, has lost meaning. In the last pages of the book Halley maps her changed city, walking from town to the waterfront and stopping at Addington Children's Hospital, their angel of mercy that rescued Jennie's diseased foot. In the debris of its postcolonial neglect, Halley views the sick hospital:

She sees rack and ruin, the transitoriness of all things, life slipping away... or wait, life welling up into a strange, long-suffering beauty.

I could be underwater, this wall, the land reclaimed by waves' own thoughtless responsibility, and she an emptied shell like any other. (Murray, 2009:404)

In this scene, Murray's experience of dislocation is profound and sincere. I discover that I can forget the ideological 'absence' and 'gaps' in her representation of identity and engage reparatively with her. I appreciate the softer tones of the narrator's voice and find it significant that this is one of the few times Halley expresses herself in the first person "I". It brings a closer awareness of a vulnerability that is often masked in the sophisticated polyvocality of the narrator. It strikes me, too, that Murray's title, *Small Moving Parts*, differs from Nora's pronouncement that history is a "big box of small moving parts" (81). Nora's kist symbolises the rigid values which define her; Jennie's rebelliousness is symbolised in the triumphant shattering of her own marriage kist (368). The last chapter reveals that Halley is thinking "out the box", a well-worn cliché for sure, but in terms of the title of Murray's autobiographical novel, it is the realisation that the box is an illusion, only a shell from which identities can be uncovered and reconstituted as "small moving parts" within fresh postcolonial possibility.

Chapter 2: Realising the Self through Plaasroman to Künstlerroman: Culture and Identity in Dominique Botha's *False River*

False River (2013) by Dominique Botha is an autobiographical novel that presents the opportunity to study representations of white Afrikaner identity in post-apartheid South Africa. Although the focaliser is Dominique Botha, her central interest is her brother, Paul, with whom she shared her childhood years on the family farm in Northern Free State during the 1970s and 80s. Writing creatively of the tragic loss of her brother enables Botha to express her grief but, at the same time, come to terms with her dysfunctional identity within a rigid cultural system. This chapter thus presents a reparative as well as a symptomatic reading of the text, following the author's strategies to re-write or rework the plaasroman. I argue that by transforming many of the conventions of the farm novel, the author negotiates the socio-political undercurrents of post-apartheid that challenge Afrikaner identity.

In the first section of this chapter, I present the background to my reparative and symptomatic reading of Botha's novel and define its autobiographical elements. I then focus on Botha's reconstruction of her family's traditional life, and Dominique's relationships. Their traditional life is illustrated in the continuing reciprocity between the two farms, Wolwefontein, the original Botha homestead, and their later family farm, Reitman. In her poetic but also naturalistic evocation of farm life, Botha reworks the plaasroman into a text that restores Afrikaner traditions that are not nationalistic. In the next section, I trace the portrayal of Paul's identity, as well as Dominique's submissive role, in a family culture which enforces a harsh masculine orthodoxy. These oppressive strands also occur in the Botha's relationships with their local Afrikaner community, where they are "othered" because of their liberal beliefs. At the end of the chapter I analyse the elegy that concludes the novel, discussing how it reveals a bildungsroman subtext which transforms the meaning of the novel.

In this chapter the gender issues that are raised, as well as the precarious conditions relating to Afrikaans white writing in the post-apartheid context, are explored in a symptomatic and reparative reading of the text. When considering the novel reparatively, I need to take into account the contradictions and complexity of male and female gender representations in a liberal but conservative Afrikaner family. In the writer's depiction of Paul there are tropes of redemption which are interrogated with reference to recent literary discourses on South African literature, particularly in the light of Melissa Steyn's controversial concept of a 'disgraced' Afrikaner identity (2004). Analysing a text written by a white Afrikaner author in the post-apartheid era, I am also aware of the need to draw attention to possible criticisms of Botha. As a writer steeped in Afrikaner tradition, she might be viewed as inscribing cultural myths of white Afrikaner culture in her densely textured novel. I also need to evaluate whether her novel endorses or reworks the conventions of the *plaasroman* which have traditionally underpinned Afrikaner nationalistic ideology, taking into account the strong gothic elements which reinforce notions of insecurity in transitional societies.

With the preface clearly indicating that the novel is based on true events, it is therefore acceptable to refer to it as a fictionalised memoir. In her University of Johannesburg acceptance speech (2014), the author explains that she wrote *False River* with the intention of remembering her brother Paul, with whom she had very close ties, and she wanted to honour her brother's memory. Her artistic impulse to recover her brother from a double loss, in life as well as through memory, means that Botha's representation of identity is mediated through the male figure of her brother.

Botha's English edition in 2013, together with the Afrikaans one that followed (*Valsrivier*) made an impact on the South African literary scene, winning a number of awards that include

the University of Johannesburg's Debut Prize and its Afrikaans Prize for creative writing. The novel has also been translated into French: *Rivière fantôme* (2016). Botha's acceptance speech at her award ceremony is informative and a useful background to the study of the novel. Like Sally-Ann Murray, she expresses her concerns about the ethics of the autobiographical 'pact' and, thus, she also prefers to call her text a novel. The writer draws attention to the tricky nature of textuality and her endeavour to bind her brother Paul with words "to our place of origin" felt like a "slippery handrail" (2014:1). Although her intention was to pay "a personal tribute of love", she discovered that she could not disengage from history. As she reconstructed past events, she soon learnt that history is the "brick and mortar, and fiction the water" (1). The speech on the novel thus reveals interesting subtexts. She speaks of re-capturing the "spirit of place" (2) of their home origins and expresses her gratitude that writing was a means of regaining her mother tongue. The writer makes a strong claim about the role of language forming "cultural memory" which "carries the conjugations of history like a stain and a garland" (2). One realises the salience of this claim for any Afrikaans writer who realises that in the present democratic climate, Afrikaner identity is inscribed with apartheid. The recurring thread in her speech, though, is the topos of loss, and Botha notates this on both a personal and ideological level:

Grief needs a bandage. Like scar tissue prose and poetry grow over festering memories. One could stretch the metaphor of injury to the notion that our national consciousness remains wounded in the firing line of clashing histories, and continues to serve as a muse for the production of clashing histories, at times mumbling and at times tormented. And there is more than just the consolation in the tracing up of absence.

Because in time, or en route, I realised that fiction is what makes an approach to the truth possible. (2)

Yet she draws the audience back to the spotlight of a sister mourning her brother at the end of her speech, lending the weight of finality to her personal loss. When Botha represents herself as a writer whose “single naked voice” hopes to express “our common human condition and its search for meaning” (3), her appeal to the discourse of universality overrides her discourse of cultural ideology. It would be pertinent to evaluate how critics respond to Botha’s positionality as a writer, by referring to reviews, interviews and critical studies available for this very current work. In my analysis of the novel, I shall refer to the protagonist as Dominique and the author as Botha.

Michiel Heyns’s (2013) analysis provides an overview of the direction of content presented in most of the critical resources. The unique qualities of the white liberal Botha family, who choose to be outsiders that defy the political and social norms of Afrikaner apartheid, are the generally recognised features of the family. Heyns comments that instead of enjoying a prosperous life and the prestige of Voortrekker lineage in the community, they are treated as misfits. He notes that the protagonist’s “growth to womanhood, learning to lead her own life” is implicated in “bearing witness to and being a participant in her brother’s troubled career” (1). He praises the self-restraint that prevents Botha overdramatising her talented brother’s descent into drug addiction and believes that “she doesn’t emote and she doesn’t judge” (3).

Yet despite this, according to Heyns, Botha’s text is uplifted by the humour implied in the narration as well as descriptions of the family’s reactions to the absurdities of apartheid. Heyns notes her use of both poetic and prose modes of writing and finds her realism particularly effective, as well as her ability to sustain “both a naïve narrative and a mature angle of vision”

(3). Critics highlight similar areas in their discussions, with varying emphases. There seems to be consensus about Dominique's problematic docility and acquiescence. Heyns refers to the litany of "Pa said" and "Ma said" spoken by the young Dominique, suggesting that they are represented as sources of largely "unquestioned authority" (3). The "absence" of a subjectivity defining Dominique's identity is iterated in most responses to Botha's novel, with female critics expressing particular concern about Dominique's female shame and its implication in her anorexia.

The title of the novel refers to the False River. It has acquired this name because it is a seasonal river that flows alongside Wolwefontein, the original homestead of the Botha family. Dominique's father farms on Reitman, but there is constant reciprocity between the two farms, especially during winter when a mass of cattle is herded to pastures of Wolwefontein once the feed at Rietpan runs low. Botha provides dense, poetic descriptions throughout the novel and she is especially responsive to the natural landscape and its creatures. The river is given a looming presence seen from the perspective of Wolwefontein's garden: "On the horizon the ground fell into a canyon that carried the False River away" (2013:48). Readers hear more of the river when the family visit Antjie Krog who lives four farms beyond Rietpan, along the False River (83). Ma has made an appointment with the famous poet to view Paul's poetry after he won the Poetry Prize at Hilton College. Krog enigmatically tells Paul: "'Never forget, Paul,' Antjie called as we drove away, 'a writer writes'" (84). While Dominique waits, she recalls Old Vytjie from Wolwefontein talking about the river which "was a giant snake that grew fat in summer and moulted in winter". Dominique visualises the "cracked mud scales of shucked skin" on the river banks in winter before the returning water in spring (84). On a figurative

level, the associations between writing and water are thematically developed in the visit to Antjie Krog.

At a later stage, Paul persuades Dominique to have a naked swim in the river's dangerous waters. "Let's go to Wolwefontein. The river is in flood" he announces (145), and after driving to the river in his father's prized American vintage truck he dives under the water "with tree trunks turning like giant tumbleweeds in the bloated river's flow" (148).

I waded in deeper and Paul pulled me towards him. The current dragged us and then slung us into its vortex. I tried to swim towards the bank but it was futile. Paul held my arms down and shouted, "Stay calm. Just stay calm." The river chucked us onto the other bank much further down and we scrambled onto the sandy verge. (148)

It is not difficult to recognise, here, overtones of the wild freedom that Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff enjoyed on the moors in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Like the moors, False River is full of menace, but it holds the allure of escaping from stifling environments into a liberating and boundary-free zone. It is Paul in particular who identifies with the exciting unruliness of nature, free from narrow Afrikaner orthodoxies at school and at home, as well as the system of racial oppression against which he has rebelled. He has also just been reprieved from compulsory national military service because of his suicide attempts. Dominique, the sister, experiences a release from the confines of domesticity and conformity to the paternalistic authority which informs her gendered identity.

False River also shares parallels with many of the gothic elements in Brontë's novel. Gerald Gaylard's paper (2008) draws attention to the postcolonial gothic in Southern African literature. He suggests some of the iconography associated with the gothic:

Typically, death, violence, evil (metaphysical or actual), madness, enclosure, doubling, dangerous sexuality, incest, archaism, ruins, haunting, monsters, bats, rats, cats, eschatological religiosity and hyperbolically tawdry dark aesthetics come to mind when the word “Gothic” is used. (1)

One can identify most of these features throughout the novel. The first chapter of the book is replete with images of death, violence and the supernatural. While the children play in the dry mud of the pan they see a “dead carp”, and Paul’s first words are to caution Dominique about the “barbels in the mud. They will wake up if you step on them” and at night “they crawl up to the house on their shoulders to graze on the lawn”. There are vicious leguaans around the pan which “whip off your feet with their tails” (7). In a narrative foreshadowing of Paul’s death, he leads his sister to the family cemetery where he lies on the grave of their great-grandfather, Paul Michiel Botha. Dominique lingers next to the gatepost though, saying “[y]ou shouldn’t do that” (8): a phrase which she repeats many times later as her brother’s problems spiral.

There are portraits of dead forebears at Rietpan where the children observe “[u]nsmiling portraits of the dead people from the graveyard hung along the walls of the passage. Some of them climbed out of the picture frames and knocked on my bedroom door at night” (15). At Wolwefontein Dominique feels that the “graveyard was too close to the opstal” and feels haunted at night by the noises of wind, frost cracking, and moths fluttering against the old sash windows (48). Paul simply states that he finds the ancestors “incredibly ugly” (47). Nevertheless, it can be argued that the portraits and gravestones narratively represent “a hauntology of the future” promoting an ethical relation to the past (Worby and Ally, 2013:467). Like the mythology of the plaasromans, they sacralise the farm by reminding the family of their duty to honour the blood and bones of their ancestors.

Theories of a Southern African gothic are relevant to my interpretation of Botha's treatment of the plaasroman and the representation of identity which it reflects. The plaasroman has interpellated Afrikaner identity at key points of its cultural history, especially as Afrikaners became increasingly landless during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. According to Nicole Devarenne, the plaasroman "lent credibility to a story of Afrikaners' rural origins that provided an illusion of continuity in South African history and a description of an unchanging Afrikaner identity" (2009:627). Post-apartheid discourses about land rights and social identity are now central to the imaginary national collective. In her discussion of the plaasroman tradition and the challenge of land reform, Jennifer Wenzel claims that the present crisis involving white South African farms is "a transition from the pastoral promise (the return *to* the land) to the political imperative (the return *of* the land)" (2000:96). In view of the deterministic relationship between the plaasroman and Afrikaner identity, it is worth examining how *False River* reflects experiences of nationalism, as well as gender and racial difference, within the new dispensation.

Rebecca Duncan's (2018) and Gaylard's (2008) study of gothic literary conventions provides useful background to arguments concerning the gothic in postcolonial literature. The term "gothic" characterises European culture after the invasion of Goths during the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. The cultural influence of the tribes who signified the "uncivilized, barbarian or ignorant" (cited in Gaylard, 2008) became appropriated and transmuted into the grotesque and supernatural in literature from the 1700s (Duncan, 6). Thus gothic literature registers fear of the unknown. Duncan outlines her thesis linking the gothic ethos to postcolonial South African literature:

It is on this inherent instability, this sensitivity to a disordered world, that I will argue post-apartheid writers capitalize in their engagement of gothic forms. Gothic is deployed in late

twentieth and early twenty-first century fiction to register sites of anxiety that emerge over the transition to democracy, but where the disorder of such sites is refused by earlier writers, it is emphasised in later texts, which mobilise gothic's apprehension of a world resistant to organization to challenge organizing efforts underway at different moments in South Africa's recent history – or to imagine beyond these. (5)

The gothic elements in Botha's *plaasroman*, thus, reflects the anxiety and ideological pressures faced in a time of postcolonial transition. However, Gaylard also states that in the gothic, "there is also an element of the burlesque about it, an element of self-satire that prompts self-reflexive freedom" (2008:6).

False River is the central motif representing the personal, social and political currents faced not only by the Botha family and each of their members during a time of upheaval, but on a broader front, Afrikaner culture and the national identity. This duality is poignantly expressed by Finuala Dowling (2013) who states that "*False River* is a work of profound psychological expiation: not just a sister's mourning or a sister's tribute, but a delicate tracing of the community and genealogical dynamics that can turn any loss, however personal, into a political parable, a national elegy" (2).

In interviews with the author, she consistently claims that while the novel is linked to her grief for an older brother whose talent and charisma made her feel "overshadowed", she also had a compulsion to write because "few things grow in the shade" (Amid, 2014:1). In the interview she states that in writing about the loss of her brother, she is also writing a history in which her grief becomes entangled with a sense of "loss and longing" for a threatened white Afrikaner past (1). The writer frequently refers to the idea of "curatorship" in her interviews showing that she not only wants to honour her brother's memory but create an archive that conserves Afrikaner traditions; hence, the densely woven tapestry of the domestic, farm and natural life which she captures in her narrative.

However, in her recovery of the past Botha has to be aware of the extent to which her nostalgia is expressible in a context where white Afrikaners bear the brunt of blame for the realities of apartheid (Schaffer and Smith, 2006). These are the risky currents which Botha symbolically has to confront in her text, including the postcolonial critiques of privileging whiteness. They are the currents of the False River into which Paul Botha, but not his sister, unhesitatingly leaps, mirroring many of his transgressive acts in the text. This chapter will, thus, present a reparative as well as a symptomatic reading of the text, following the author's strategies to re-write or rework the plaasroman. I argue that by transforming many of the conventions of the farm novel, the author negotiates the socio-political undercurrents of post-apartheid.

Her mission is not to "rescue" Afrikaner culture but to resist the homogenisation of white Afrikaner identity through upholding valuable aspects of its heritage. Through her invocation of the traditions, rituals and natural life of the farm, Botha creates a rich, textured vision of a group of people whose culture is rooted in the history of the country, for better or worse. It is on this basis that Karen Scherzinger states that "trees provide the dominant trope of the novel", reminding her audience of the novel's thematic epigraph:

As trees are the remembered bones of departed flesh, so the spirit imparts its own epitaph. (2014:4).

Botha's text invites readers to appreciate the entanglement of South African culture that is prefigured in Dominique's swim back to the Wolwefontein side of the river with her brother Paul. He again prompts her to jump into the river when she does not want to walk back to the farm naked. In the river, he teaches her that survival depends on merging with, rather than resisting the swirling currents of the swollen river:

He held the flask in one hand and dragged me into the water. I closed my eyes and clung to him. We were spat near the southern boundary that Wolwefontein shared with Uitkyk. We ran along the river's edge, laughing to ward off the cold. (2013:148)

This chapter cannot do justice to all the conventions of the plaasroman. However, I focus on the role of Dominique who, as daughter, sister and narrator, is placed at the cross section of the intersecting sites of tension and conflict in the novel. I will argue that Botha references key elements of plaasroman tradition to enhance her interpretation of contemporary white Afrikaner society.

Since the author's clear intention is to embody memories of her brother Paul, it is Dominique's representation of his complex, individualised identity in conflict with the "the tradition and ideological burden" of succession (Olivier, 2012:318) that reveals Botha's reworking of the plaasroman. The story of her brother describes the "familial, political, sexual" environment (Heyns, 2013:3) that failed to live up to his expectations. There is, of course, the reversal, where the family expectations of Paul, oldest son, brother and successor of the family farm are not met either. From the outset Paul is marked as different and it is not difficult to engage in a close, reparative reading of his characterisation. The following cameo by Rebecca Davis (2013) conveys a sense of his portrayal in the novel:

Paul is the character at the centre of the book: an individual seemingly born to be immortalised in literature. He is brilliant, handsome and rebellious, and from the outset his light shines with such manic brightness that one suspects it may burn out.

"Paul was crying now," she writes early on, describing the aftermath of a beating for misbehaviour. "In the end he always cried more than me."

In this manner Botha foreshadows the increasingly inevitable tragedy that has left an indelible stamp on the family. (2)

The light “which burns with such manic brightness” leads him into early clashes with his authoritarian father, and the strict orthodoxies of his Nationalistic school education at Viljoenskroon. In the light of Davis’s comment above, it is ironic that in the first chapter Paul declares, “For my birthday, I would like to burn the school down” (Botha, 2013:13). By the fourth chapter he tells Vusi and his sister that he hates Mr Kruger the headmaster, and “Sometimes I hate Pa” (49). These chapters span his childhood years between ten and twelve, before he leaves for “an English boarding school in Johannesburg”, on the recommendations of a doctor following an assault by the headmaster at school on account of the time he took to “writ[e] too slowly and not between the lines” (46). This is obviously symbolic of his inability to conform.

However, Paul’s intellectual brilliance is also apparent from the start of the novel. He reads books avidly and is often taken to task for it at school and at home, particularly by his father. In the following scene “Pa” is noticeably angered by Paul’s indifference in comparison to his daughter who jumps at his bidding:

I put down his plate with scrambled eggs and chops. “Get me the Worcester sauce,” he said. [...]

Paul started reading again and Pa buttered his toast. The butter curls leisurely unmoulded on the hot bread.

Pa said, “What’s so bloody interesting that you can’t talk to us about? Hey?” He took the book from Paul’s lap and jammed it between his gymnastic trophies on the sideboard. (57)

Through her subtle details and juxtaposition of events, Dominique demonstrates that Pa's physicality lends a menacing power to his authority over Paul.

Pa's physicality is emphasised at the beginning of the novel. Paul and Dominique wait in the guest bedroom for a hiding from Pa because of the eggs they stole for mud cakes. The hiding is prefaced by: "Pa's footsteps thudded up the teak staircase. Pa had been a gymnast at university and always ran upstairs" (16). After Paul has fetched the leather belt, they are given their hidings:

"Get up, Paul," he said, as he came into the room. He turned Paul by the shoulder to make him face the wall. He hit him first and harder because he was a boy. Four times. I closed my eyes. "Please Papa, please stop." I was crying loudly now. Pa grabbed me by the collar. "Be quiet."

I held my hands behind me. The leather strap burnt my fingers three times. I rubbed my hands together and kissed my fingers to release the sting of the belt.

Pa sat down on the bed.

"It is my duty to teach you the difference between right and wrong," he said, pushing his hands through his short, brown hair. Paul looked at the wall and said nothing. Then he wiped his face on his arm. (17)

The number of strikes that each sibling has to endure inscribes the gender differences between the young brother and sister. The fact that it is Dominique who suggested that they steal the eggs thus casts a questionable light on the self-righteous moral injunctions of their father. It may also suggest what lies behind Paul's political, social and sexual alterity later in his life.

During the Christmas celebrations that follow, Kobus and Johnny, two “much” older boys whom Ma helps to foster, spend Christmas with the family. Despite their lewd remarks to Dominique, and having burnt a hole in the silk eiderdown with their secret smoking, they are tolerated (21). Dominique’s statement that “[w]e were awed by the vastness of their misfortunes”, is ironically contrasted with their servant Selina’s comment: “Dis weggooi-boertjies daai” (18). After the Christmas Eve dinner Dominique hides under the riempies bench so that she can spot Father Christmas. What she innocently observes has an ominous ring:

I heard footsteps. My heart pounded against the frame of the bench. It was not Father Christmas. It was Kobus. The riempies bench stood between my room and Paul’s room. I could see Kobus in the dark open my door without even knocking. Then he went into Paul’s room, even though Kobus and Johnny were supposed to sleep in the art room, where Ma had made beds for them. (26)

Here, Father Christmas becomes the gothic spectre of bedevilment. In Ma’s good-heartedness she protectively helps the less privileged, despite her fetish of looking like a “poor white” (19). Dominique’s earlier remark that “Ma always frowned, because she was short-sighted” (15) implies that her blindsided nature has unforeseen consequences. It is not surprising, therefore, that after the doctor’s phone call about Paul’s problems, Ma announces “[a]lso, I must tell you that Kobus and Johnny won’t be coming for holidays anymore,” and she gives the plausible reason of Kobus’s mother’s re-appearance.

While these familial experiences convey a sense of Paul’s traumatised masculinity, it is obvious that he, along with the family, are caught up in the turbulent social and political events of the macro-environment. During the tensions caused by increasing political resistance in the 1980s, the Bothas are treated as pariahs in their Afrikaans community, which labels them “commies”. They are white Afrikaners who are “othered” by their own people. Dominique reflects the

measure of this social pressure when she suppresses her wish to tell to Dr Cohen: “I wished that Ma and Pa would vote for the National Party and go to the Dutch Reformed church. I wished we could be the same as everybody else” (43). It is not straightforward either for the Botha children to integrate at the private English boarding schools to which they are sent. Their parents still carry festering memories of the Anglo-Boer War in 1902, the death of thousands of Afrikaners in English concentration camps it inflicted, leading to the humiliating defeat of the Afrikaner Boers. Yet the fractured identities which the family experience are represented lyrically by Paul in his twenties:

There is so much value in being a liminal person. Especially here where so many distinct historical and linguistic fantasies are imprinted on the same physical space. That is the pain and the privilege of the outsider perspective. You see the worlds clash up against each other and shatter and jostle for primacy. (179)

At the same time as he delivers this eloquent discourse, however, his life is mired in drugs and squalor. He breaks the long line of people who have honoured farm tradition, “betraying its soil” (Olivier, 2012:319) for an urbanised existence.

The point at which Paul’s life collapses is mirrored by the violent storm which tears the farm apart. The opening scene in Chapter Nine begins abruptly with this turning point:

The day after Paul slit his wrists, the drought broke. Rain came as if seeking absolution. Lightning struck at the foundations of the house. Wind tore roofing off the shed. Felled cattle and blue gums lay in its wake. At first hardened earth resists the hammering rain but the bare veld is defenceless and starts bleeding between remaining clumps of rooigras. (133)

The elemental and human correspondences work paradoxically on many levels in this violent description, the heavy rains representing both life and death. Paul has finally been broken by the political “hammering” of his society; his “bleeding” is like that of the bare veld. In the same way that the rain beats on the “hardened earth”, the hardened hearts of the family are softened and their son is granted absolution by the shedding of his blood. His redemption is portrayed in an extremely moving scene where Pa lovingly bathes his injured son on his return home. However, this is soon followed by the overwhelming chaos in Paul’s life that strikes the heart of the family. In the next bath scene Dominique meets him lying in a dilapidated Victorian tub in his Johannesburg backyard. There are opiate drips in his arms supplied free by a doctor “friend” (152). Amidst this grotesquerie, Paul appears to have symbolically renounced the ideals of his heritage, and he jokingly tells Dominique, “You look like a porcelain doll on a rubbish heap” (154).

Although she might seem a “porcelain doll” in the eyes of her brother, Dominique occupies a powerful role as the narrator of his life story. An analysis of her narrative identity and voice, especially within the conventions of the *plaasroman*, therefore highlights important ideological perspectives in a reparative and symptomatic reading of the novel. At the simplest level, the narrative voice can be defined as partly that of a young Dominique, over whose shoulder an older self adds enriching detail and mature insights at times. This child’s innocent point of view is viewed by Scherzinger as “the vehicle for much of the novel’s piercing irony” as well as its characterisation (2014:2) and she comments also on Botha’s effective use of free indirect discourse in her representation of all the main characters, particularly her irascible but astute Pa (3). However, in the two main academic articles on her novel she is perceived as an elusive and obscure narrator whose “absence” is more real than her presence (Murray, 2016; Visser, 2014).

It seems that readers enter the deep, mysterious waters of a “false” river when trying to gain a sense of the narrator’s identity. Dominique hints at her secrecy: “where the mice, and shrews lurked [in the grass]. Like thoughts. Like secrets” (183). She also has a diary that seldom shares her thoughts with the reader, representing her hidden nature. Very often young Dominique describes herself as being concealed “under” furniture. Lisa Visser criticises Dominique’s elusiveness and finds her an “unreliable narrator” with a “derivative” identity:

In a disquieting moment in the novel, it is Dominique herself who effaces her own agency and individuality when she is asked by Paul’s beatnik friend Lew how she would describe herself and her reply is, “[p]robably as Paul’s sister, I suppose”, after envisioning “[h]er years stacked up like an anaemic résumé of conformity in [her] mind” (Botha, *FR* 113). (2013:29)

Visser argues that “Dominique’s own trauma and battles are allowed to withdraw to the protection of authorial distance” and the silences around her own experiences result in a lack of interiority which prevents readers identifying with her (29). Visser further avers that Dominique’s physical (or psychological) illness is presented as an “invisible scourge” and indirectly conveyed through the perspectives of others (30). Moreover, her self-perceptions are constantly mediated by the masculine voices of Pa or Paul (32).

However, these perceptions of the secondary status assumed by Dominique are also tempered by Visser’s sensitivity to the discursive conditions of Botha’s writing. She endorses the author’s courageousness given “the assumed or (mis)perceived custom of silence and secrecy within conservative Afrikaner culture” and that to “speak up, or speak out against would be deemed a violation of codes of decency and respect for privacy that are socially specific” (29). Although Visser perceives the construction of “feminine counter-sphere” embodying “mystically, perceptive agency” she is nonetheless sceptical of the passivity that it implies (43).

However, I argue that Dominique's "docile" female identity is as a subtle foil to the masculinist Afrikaner culture which Botha deconstructs in her narrative.

It is important to question the construction of Dominique's subjectivity (or lack) thereof in the novel, as it reflects whether female identity is positioned critically or affirmatively in the patriarchal conventions inscribing Afrikaner culture in the *plaasroman*. It would be a gesture of solidarity to affirm an unchanging identity of white Afrikaner women usually depicted as "volksmoeders" or mothers of the nation:

Marlene van Niekerk describes its characteristics as including a sense of religion, bravery, a love of freedom, the spirit of sacrifice, self-reliance, housewifeliness, integrity, virtue and the setting of an example to others. (Devarenne, 2009:632)

It is difficult to argue that Dominique's identity does not fulfil many of the ideals of the volksmoeder in Botha's autobiographical narrative. During her adolescence, the farm becomes her retreat, a haven of domesticity where she cooks, bakes and conserves, participating in the many rituals of food preparation. She calls the kitchen door the "happy door" (58), the nickname given to it by Ma, and loves waiting on her father. But this does not diminish her underlying trouble with depression and eating. Critics such as Murray (2016), have interpreted Dominique's repressed identity and sense of bodily shame as a manifestation of Afrikaner hetero-patriarchal culture. Clearly Botha represents her protagonist with a nervous disposition, at times ill at ease with her environment.

Yet Dominique also becomes the recorder of all forms of life on and around the farm, evoking the "smells, sights and tastes of rural life" (Brown, 2014:1), its seasonal cycles and the devoted skilled black farm people whom her father praises. Botha's wish to capture "the spirit of place"

(Botha, 2014:2) in order to actualise her brother's memory also performs a restitution of Afrikaner cultural identity. Botha's intention is nostalgic but she is not reasserting Afrikaner culture uncritically in her novel. As discussed earlier, Botha wants to curate the originality of her culture. In her acceptance speech she expresses her passionate feelings about this:

I wrote in English about experiences that were laid down and salted in Afrikaans. I am grateful to have regained my mother tongue. It is a source of origin and therefore originality. A language truly is more than a sum of its parts. Language is cultural memory, and carries the conjugations of history, like a stain and a garland. (Botha, 2014:2)

Botha believes that making languages more accessible through translation is enriching and "gets to the heart of our ability to misunderstand each other":

We need to INVEST in translation, we need to wake up and realise that a mother tongue is so much more than just a language, it is the carrier of history, of generational thought, a magic carpet actually. (3)

Botha's linguistic beliefs in cross-cultural engagement speaks to a national imaginary. *False River* too, seems a response to the remark that "a broader treatment of the farm novel would have to encompass SA writing in English as well" (Olivier, 2012:321).

Nonetheless, with the author's focus on an Afrikaner family, a symptomatic analysis of her representation of the Bothas is needed to evaluate her discourse of Afrikaner identity. Throughout the novel, Botha carefully ensures that Dominique's family are not represented as typical Afrikaners. Although living in the rural Afrikaner heartland, their liberalism paints them as outsiders. Thus, while *False River* emphasises the family's rejection of Afrikaner Nationalism, it celebrates the aspects of an Afrikaner upbringing that sustain Dominique. This

incongruity relates to the ethics of nostalgia proposed by Eric Worby and Shirleen Ally whose arguments provide a broader perspective to Botha's project of cultural reclamation. Firstly, they acknowledge that "[a]rticulating and remembering an ethical relation to the past through nostalgic longing is perhaps more complicated for Afrikaners who leveraged advantage from the apartheid order (whether actively or as an ineluctable outcome of racially structured privilege)" (2013:469). Referring to Ross Truscott they outline present policies:

"The commandment of the post-apartheid nation, in other words, is to live against, be affectively opposed to apartheid. Thus, an anti-apartheid disposition, functioning as a principle of authentication for subjects of an emerging national community, has constituted a post-apartheid national biopolitics of the heart." (Truscott, 2011 cited in Worby and Ally, 2013:469)

Worby and Ally, therefore, claim that "[t]he consequence is a collective melancholia, wherein Afrikaners are unable to openly acknowledge what it is precisely that has been lost, even to themselves" (469). Yet they argue that authentic nostalgia should not be discredited. Focusing on the past should not be viewed as mere sentimental indulgence, but as a longing for what might have been. Worby and Ally's main tenet is that it serves a regenerative purpose:

Does nostalgia's hetero-temporal *form* – its capacity, that is, to juxtapose one experience of time against another – flourish in the ether of hope and fear, pride and shame, that saturates the early postcolonial (or post-apartheid) period? Or might that very same form hold open the prospect for creatively reimagining the future? (471)

The issues raised by these writers lend substance to Botha's nostalgic engagements with Afrikaner identity in *False River*. Their article reinforces arguments that the nurturing aspects of Afrikaner culture which Botha represents in her novel might also be valuable "public memory-work" that helps shape a collective future (471).

The main impulse informing Botha's memoir, however, is to remember a deeply-loved brother. In contradiction to notions of a disgraced Afrikaner identity, Botha wants to honour her brother in the narrative. Referring to Njabulo Ndebele (1997), Heyns (2000) highlights his observations about Afrikaans literature:

[T]here may be an informal truth and reconciliation process under way among the Afrikaners [...] The ordinary Afrikaner family, lost in the illusion of the historic heroism of the group, has to find its moral identity within a national community in which it is freed from the burden of being special. (49)

Heyns proposes that subsequent to the TRC, there are two types of narrative fiction which followed: confessional fiction and heroic romance (48). The latter is usually characterised by a white person who is the "exception" and who "opposes the regime" (49). The plot devices are a "farm background, the black playmate, the racist father, the generational divide, the conservative community, the rebellious daughter, the choice between duty to Afrikanerdom and the sexual allure of the young black revolutionary". The heroic mode also "tries to find in the spirit of an individual a redemptive resistance to the malaise of the nation" (49).

Yet it can also be argued that confessional literature has "an ulterior motive", seeking to contextualise the "essential truth" so that there is absolution or less personal blame. Heyns argues that representing a child's voice in a rite of passage novel presupposes an innocence from complicity which, thus, achieves a claim of absolution (50). When weighing these characteristics against those of *False River*, there are many similarities. If one treats Paul Botha as a hero figure, taking into account the beguiling voice of young Dominique, it would be difficult not to argue cynically that Botha's novel melds the two genres. As if to endorse the heroic stereotype, the preface introduces Paul as a political refugee who "flees the oppression of South Africa, only to meet his death in London" (Botha, 2013).

Nonetheless, in response to Heyns's notion of the stereotypical heroic figure, the reader may find romantic allure in identifying Paul as the redemptive motif in *False River*, the tragic individual who resists "the malaise of the nation" (Heyns, 2013:49). Botha's representation of Paul is a counter-image of the brutal Afrikaner identity implied by Krog, who dedicates *Country of My Skull* to "every victim who had an Afrikaner surname on her lips" (Nuttall and Michael, 1999:313). The poem that is written as a conclusion following Paul's burial on the farm, is a significant metafictional device. It reveals that the novel is in fact a bildungsroman in which Dominique's rite of passage symbolises the reclamation of Botha's identity. A discussion of the life and death motifs in Paul's elegy highlights this subtext in Botha's autobiographical narrative.

The elegy begins metaphorically with reference to the "turning of the season" in everyone's lives:

Outside small cloud shoals were forming. The season was turning. (Botha, 2013:196)

Gothic imagery contextualises the burial of Paul, who is likened to "*a lamed angel in the time of bloodwood*" (196): there is "*blood*" on the sleeves of Christiaan's shirt as he scrapes the road for the funeral as well as surreal details of décor where "*worn arum lilies*" adorn a table with "*lime water for mourners*" which is "*fished clean of drowned bats*" (197). After the funeral Dominique attempts to sleep on Paul's grave where Dudu, Paul's beloved, holds her hand. The scene is almost a parody of the wretched damsels of gothic romance. Rain, mirroring her tears, forces Dominique to leave his grave, undertaking a metaphysical journey "into the dank descent of night" (198) of her depression and grief.

A year follows before the grave's headstone is ready, during which time the family and farm seem to be suspended in time. Unlike *Funeral Blues* by W.H. Auden, where the poet's call to "Stop all the clocks!" goes unheeded, in Paul's elegy "the hallway clocks" do stop (198). The subsequent section of the poem is the part which reveals the subtext of Dominique's/Botha's identity in the novel:

*Along a windswept peninsular
Behind towers whiter than fresh chalk
is a witch with a soul inventory
a man with a chisel
flayed me
gutted like a live fish
the witch shook my scarred arms
her eyes wide and auguring
like a deer in a book
she said let him go
(I looked for you in the wrong places)*

here is a map (198-199)

Visser states that the poem is "densely encoded: at times almost indecipherable in its symbolism" (2014:36). This is particularly true of this section where the imagery is charged with violent intensity. There is a curious mix of Christianity and pagan mysticism which contrasts with the realism in most of the text. The "*windswept peninsular*" and towers "*whiter than fresh chalk*" evoke a cold Northern hemisphere, with associations of "white" witchery that connotes good rather than evil. The witch's "soul inventory" is a mirror held up to Dominique forcing her to self-examine her soul in an excruciating "soul-cleansing" process. The witch has become a popular symbol of feminist empowerment, who over centuries has represented a challenge to patriarchal narratives (Quaglia, 2019:1). It thus becomes necessary for Dominique

to interrogate her complicity in the dominating patriarchal structure of her cultural life. It is her rite of passage in achieving her self-identity.

The “*man with a chisel*” who “*flayed me*” is symbolic on multiple levels. The “chisel” refers to the tools of Paul’s carpentry work, and we are reminded of his suicide. Visser suggests that these images represent a “narrative collapse” of Dominique’s own experience and Paul’s, as she searches for the “intimacy of their bond” (2014:36). This could be related to her deep anxiety about complicity in her brother’s death (a frequent reaction to human tragedy). Biblically, the chisel is related to Jesus, a carpenter, whose afflictions signify redemption from sin. In a complex sense, Paul becomes emblematic of Dominique’s salvation. However, it is a witch who shakes her out of her depression, with eyes like a “*deer*”, a spiritual symbol of healing and gentleness (again a Christ-like allusion). The witch is compelling Dominique to “let him go” psychologically to heal herself. Thus Dominique’s realisation, “(*I looked for you in the wrong places*)” (199) is her epiphany that creativity is her salvation.

In the last section of the poem she describes her longing to “bind” him with words, to “*begin again/with a sentry against fate on a different road*” and to alter the past which led to his death. She indirectly alludes to this in her discourse on *False River*:

I agonised about the ethics of my undertaking but eventually the act of writing superseded the impetus to memorialise. To retrieve a memory is to commit a first act of fiction. To remember – to re-member – is to give hands and feet to crippled emotions and allow them to dance into metaphor. (2014:2)

However, the painful telling of his story is the vehicle through which she can reclaim her voice and identity. The poem then becomes a lyrical map invoking the embodiment of Paul in the natural landscape of the farm. Dominique hopes that this will end the “*recurring dreams*” of

loss and decay that haunt her. In restoring Paul's spirit to the farm there is a doubling of their spirits, he is the Waldo to her Lyndall.

Dominique's characterisation as a passive narrator who is a sad trapped damsel in the tower is a superficial representation of the protagonist/author. She is not rescued by a knight but by overcoming the limitations of an identity which she imposes on herself. Botha's apparently docile protagonist is able to be a neutral witness to the events shaping her brother's tragedy whilst conforming to her role as a female member of her family. The novel reflects the entanglement which makes it impossible to blame either an authoritarian father, a misguided altruistic mother who believes that by suppressing her tears Paul will be proud of her, or a nervous, confused sister. Dominique's rite of passage is thus the bildungsroman subtext of *False River* and whilst the novel endorses many of the conventions of a plaasroman, it emerges as a powerful feminist narrative of white Afrikaner identity in a paternalistic culture.

In my analysis of Botha's novel, I have applied reparative and symptomatic readings of the text to evaluate representations of identity within post-apartheid literary discourse. In Visser's study of the novel she argues that "despite the historically liberal slant of the novel, black as well as feminine agency and subjectivity remain a troubling vacancy" (2014:2). In contrast to my emphasis on the feminist motifs in the novel, Visser concludes that there is a "troubling vacancy". Although Visser discerns no racial "othering", she is bothered by an absence of black "agency and subjectivity". Ironically, Visser's criticism of this absence might well apply to a similar absence of this discourse in the analytical framework of my study of the novel. My view is that the critical theory underlying notions of "black agency and subjectivity" in white writing, has not been fully addressed in post-apartheid literary discourses, and might possibly be regarded as a form of cultural appropriation.

The last line of the novel evokes Dominique's habit of walking behind Paul during their childhood. Dominique's final tribute to her brother is an open-endedness and enigmatic statement:

you always walked ahead (2013:202)

As part of her journey Botha has re-created her brother in a novel. He is her creative muse, and the image of Paul as a forward-moving figure captures the original 'trek' spirit of their ancestors, thus transforming him into a regenerative symbol of Afrikaner culture in a new social imaginary.

Chapter 3: Interrogating the Self: Colonialism and Female Identity in Ceridwen Dovey's *In the Garden of the Fugitives*

Ceridwen Dovey's transnational novel drew my interest because it is a text that moves my project's focus beyond the borders of South Africa's introspective identity politics. Transnational writing is regarded as part of South Africa's post-apartheid cultural and literary landscape since it has been allowed to rejoin the global community.

In the Garden of the Fugitives is an autobiographical narrative which is set across America, South Africa, Australia and Italy. Dovey, who was born in South Africa, emigrated to Australia with her parents in 1995. Her protagonist, Vita, expresses how she is blocked by her guilt as a beneficiary of apartheid and in a series of confessional letters between herself and Royce, she maps her journey to selfhood. As a beneficiary of Royce's powerful and wealthy patronage, their relationship mirrors her view of herself as a beneficiary of apartheid. Royce and Vita thus represent the conflicting dualities of Vita's white female subjectivity and I interpret the relationship between Royce and Vita as an allegorical representation of white postcolonial identity. In her narrative where she confronts her complicity with Royce, Vita allegorically seeks to overcome her feelings of complicity in an inhuman racial system. However, Vita's feelings mirror those of the writer, who reveals that she also felt creatively blocked by her apartheid past. At the end of the novel, Vita's narrative is exposed as an autobiographical metafiction. In my analysis of *In the Garden of the Fugitives*, I therefore argue that Dovey's deconstruction of gender and colonial ideology addresses issues of guilt, complicity and entanglement which are relevant to South Africa as well as other postcolonial contexts.

Before presenting a close analysis of the relationship between Vita and Royce I first outline the concepts of complicity, confession and metafiction as a background to my analysis of the

novel. I also emphasise that Dovey is a postcolonial writer who is interested in de-centring relationships of power embedded in the master narrative of liberal humanism. I am therefore aware that a symptomatic reading of white identity is problematic in a novel which deconstructs its cultural ideology. As an introduction to my analysis of the novel, I present two reviews that are representative of the novel's reception and also provide an overview of the novel's plot. In a poststructuralist analysis of identity, I then trace the psychosexual maze in which Vita emerges as the victor by outmanoeuvring Royce's masculine need to dominate his female Other. In the last sections of the chapter, I discuss the weaknesses in the characterisation of Magdalene, Vita's young black therapist, as an exotic other. I also engage in a reparative reading of Dovey's submerged relationship with her mother, referring to her essay on J.M. Coetzee and her mother's role as his critic. I conclude the chapter by expressing my view that the novel's significance is undermined by the author's detached, poststructuralist representation of identity.

Complicity, confession and metafiction are key concepts in my discussion of Dovey's deconstruction of colonial and gender ideology. On the surface, *In the Garden of the Fugitives* (2018a) is the narrative written by Vita who obeys her therapist's injunction that to overcome her deep sense of guilt, she needs to turn to writing:

'This can be someone real or imagined,' she said. 'Or you can take elements from different people, augment and distort them. As long as there's tension there, somebody with whom you butt heads. Somebody who will challenge your ideas about yourself, even pose some kind of threat.' [...] 'In this way you will re-author yourself,' she said. 'If it helps, think of it as splitting yourself in two.' [...] 'The critical eye required for this phase of crafting is what will allow you to excavate your new self.' ... 'Art's

psychotherapeutic power comes from pouring cement into the well of your own past’
[...] ‘Once you can inspect your own history like an artifact, you’re a step closer to
liberating yourself from it.’ (278-280)

Magdalene tells her to create a counter-voice, an antagonist, who will challenge her ideas of herself, “even pose some kind of threat” (Dovey, 2018a:279) and this person can be “real or imagined”. Her language ties in with the richly iconic Pompeii setting in the novel and there are allusions to the body casts in the fugitives’ garden in her psychological references to “excavating your new self” and “pouring cement into the well of your own past” (279). Magdalene’s words to Vita that she avoid “a fantasy of victimhood”, is suggestive of complicity:

‘The point of the antagonist is not to let you indulge a fantasy of victimhood but to provide the scaffolding for your narrative fictions about yourself, which will be too weak to stand alone. They need to be firmed up, and for that you need to be writing *against* something or someone.’ (279)

On many levels, Vita’s conflicted identity as a beneficiary of apartheid mirrors that of Antjie Krog’s in her famous novel on the TRC, *Country of My Skull* (1998).

Dovey’s autobiographical novel taps into confessional writing in the wake of the TRC hearings which focused on witnessing and guilt. Kerry Bystrom and Sarah Nuttall (2013:307) refer to the “new dramas of secrecy, confession and exposure” that emerged following this. Rita Barnard’s article on Oprah Winfrey (2010: 10) reveals that the 1990s was also a time in which global discourses of “suffering and psychic pain” emerged (2006:10). In their introduction to

Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel, Ewald Mengel and Michela Borzaga observe that,

[w]hen Archbishop Desmond Tutu claimed, in his opening address to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on 16 December 1995, that “every South African has to some extent or other been traumatised. We are a wounded people ... we all stand in need of healing” he was trying to put into words his feelings about the state of the nation five years after the fall of apartheid and one year after the first democratic elections. The phrase “every South African” deliberately includes the white population in his analysis, and “we” emphasizes the commonality of the traumatizing experience. (2012:vii)

One of the main criticisms of the TRC at the time was that “those who benefitted from the everyday policies and practices of the apartheid regime were neither identified as complicit in perpetuating systemic violence nor called to account” (Schaffer and Smith, 2006:1577). Vita’s guilt, which arises from her complicity as an apartheid beneficiary, represents the subjectivity of a woman who is positioned in, and feels complicit with, the discourses of a colonising white culture. Dovey’s concerns as a postcolonial writer are expressed in Vita’s psychic struggle against the dominant voice of a masculinised Western ideology. In postcolonial terminology it is expressed as a master narrative of colonial and genderised relations of power. Dovey’s text presents Vita’s attempt to reconcile herself with the discourses of liberal humanism as a psychodrama, a contest between herself and Royce, a powerful but corrupt figure of enlightenment.

The implied author constructs Vita's subjectivity as counter-voices within herself, with Royce as her Other. The symbolism of this split self is contextualised in a critique of Krog's novel by Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith (2006). According to the authors, Krog presents herself as a white Afrikaner beneficiary of apartheid, searching for the right subject position in a post-apartheid South Africa "that is becoming" (1579). Her psychic conflict is between herself and an "other".

Ethically, Krog claims the beneficiary position, but that claim conflicts with the psychic, affective, and familial challenge of distancing herself from the figure of the perpetrator that lies too close for comfort – the Afrikaner, who both is and is not part of Krog's narrative identity. [...] Further, she struggles textually with self-other identifications as her Afrikaner self becomes identified with Boer perpetrators whose testimony reminds her of actions and attitudes witnessed within her own family. Afrikaner perpetrators become the abjected "other" in Krog herself [...] while also allowing some discomfiting slippage to manifest itself in the partially acknowledged complicity between the Afrikaner perpetrator and beneficiary stances. (1580)

However, as a writer who is familiar with postcolonial theory, Dovey realises that she needs to go beyond binary categories, which was part of apartheid's divisive apparatus. In Achille Mbembe's characterisation of the post-colony (2001), a society emerging from colonisation and violence, he states:

to account for both the mind-set and effectiveness of postcolonial relations of power, we need to go beyond binary categories used in standard interpretations of domination, such as resistance vs. passivity, autonomy vs. subjugation [...]. (cited in Frenkel and MacKenzie, 2010:5)

Dovey's portrayal of Vita's struggle with guilt does go "beyond binary categories" by revealing the complicitous nature of her relationship with Royce.

The theme of confession and guilt are interwoven in the novel. Confession is always a topic in Dovey's discourses on *In the Garden of the Fugitives*. There is very little critical material on her novel since its publication, and I have had to rely on book reviews and interviews in written form or in podcast recordings of the conversations at book festivals in Australia, which I have transcribed. The narrative development of Vita's guilt is central to the novel. Her time in America as a student at a university in Boston is marked by feelings of negativity and unease, socially and academically.

Throughout *In the Garden of the Fugitives* Vita portrays herself as a frustrated individual who is creatively blocked. Gradually she links this to her guilt as a white South African, even though she constantly interrogates it:

Every human on earth has inherited privilege and inherited pain, I knew. But I seemed to have something wrong with me. I wasn't proud of the guilt-wallowing, I didn't want to be fixated on the ledger of rights and wrongs chalked up by my family, by previous generations. I didn't like the way I sometimes felt as if I had some sixth sense, as if I could see the ghosts around as individual, a degenerate halo of wrongdoing. That was arrogance, exceptionalism. I had read Primo Levi on Kafka and recognized an aspect of myself in Kafka's simultaneous fear of and desire for punishment, which Levi characterised as a sickness. (117)

This is interspersed with experiences that convey her sense of dislocation. It becomes apparent in her professor's critique of the "dissociation" in her footage:

'You're originally South African but your family moved to Australia, is that right? Why don't you tell *your* story, your family's story?'

I felt the old vortex of lethargy suck at my soul at being asked to account for myself, my life, with the meaningless markers of dates and geography. How to explain why my

parents had moved between the two countries five times in seven years when I was a child. There were political reasons – oh yes, all the right ones [...]. (70)

Vita admits her circular blame is self-defeating: “In order to confess, one must have sinned – but I am unsure which of that country’s multiple sins are to be placed directly at my feet” (69). Even her parents feel her “self-scourging was overblown. In their eyes I had been too young to know what was happening under apartheid, let alone be responsible for it” (115). Royce too, questions her self-blame, asking at one point, “Is it presumptuous of me, Vita, to suspect you’re starting to enjoy this process?” (121). It is a question that many readers would ask.

However, in conversations with Dovey she appears to be ambivalent on the topic of Vita’s guilt and her words out of place with the register of *In the Garden of the Fugitives*, a novel that conveys a tone of high seriousness in its discourses on history, truth and art. Her tone here is amused and ironic when she discusses Vita’s guilt-ridden white South African identity:

“The weirdest part of the book is the weird form of therapy that happens – [I] have been asked whether the therapy for white guilt exists? No! No! You have to get rid of racism first! For me, [I] was trying to find a vocabulary for some of these feelings, when we think of white guilt – often we shut down straight away, white guilt, OO God! Awful, uncomfortable, move on! But I wanted to dig beneath that just as we understand all the different qualities of what it is to be suffering or victimized in a situation, what does it feel like to feel guilty?” (Byron Writer’s Festival, 2018)

She also adds that she finds it very gratifying that Vita is perceived as “the whiniest, most narcissistic character on page”. Dovey frequently refers to Vita’s story as “the performance of guilt”.

In her podcast with John Purcell, her comments offer clues to this irony:

“So much of what I’m processing in this book comes from J.M. Coetzee. I’m working on a book about him, your perspective as a writer, not a critical tome. It’s about heritage for me, so thinking a lot about him, Mom, steeped in her readings of his work, in a postcolonial context [...] that sense of an intellectual heritage that’s passed between a mother and daughter, I haven’t seen much of that in the writing I’ve read [...], not just bodies shared, but ideas transmuted between us.”

[...]

“Now Coetzee is another generation, but [he’s engendered] a sense of a real suspicion of what happens when you’re confessing something. [In the] letters [between Vita and Royce] over time [you] start to realise it’s a performance of some kind of confession, and when she speaks about white guilt in her capacity as a South African, she’s referencing a rich history in South African literature of autobiographical abjection. Coetzee [was] on to this long before others. He had a complicated relationship with Nadine Gordimer who was champion of social realism, engaged writing. He is different – he asks: What kind of self are you taking as that white confessor? Writers like Breytenbach, poetic confessions of a white terrorist, Rian Malan, Alan Paton, a lot of writers known to Australian readers.”

[...]

“Coetzee asks: “What position are you taking when you are making a confession of guilt? I’m interested in all these things, for me it’s the middle category, the class of beneficiaries, that’s massive in any system of abuse. That’s where I like to sit and wallow: what does it mean to be complicit?” (The Booktopia Books Podcasts, 2018)

In Dovey’s construction of Vita’s guilty identity, she alludes to J.M.Coetzee’s attitude to the liberals and their confessional texts. The characterisation of Vita as “whiny” and “narcissistic” is reminiscent of the liberalism which Coetzee parodied in his novels during apartheid South Africa. In a closer analysis of the novel, I argue that Vita’s confessions may indeed, be a performance of guilt to deceive Royce. Dovey has recently written an essay on Coetzee for the *Writers on Writers* (2018b) series, which is sometimes titled, *My Mother and Me (and J.M.*

Coetzee) or *On J.M. Coetzee*. It coincides with the publication of *In the Garden of the Fugitives* and it is therefore, not surprising, that his writing is a strong intertextual feature.

It is also apparent in her discussion of *In the Garden of the Fugitives* that Coetzee has influenced the connections it makes between psychotherapy, autobiography and confession.

“There’s a psychotherapeutic form that this book is very much sitting in, the link between literature and forms of psychotherapy, they are very similar: the working medium is language, both attempt to shape raw experiences of our lives and have a kind of cathartic effect in doing that – Arabella Kurtz and J.M. Coetzee ask these questions in *The Good Story*: Where do they come together? What is this weird thing they do to us, that by awakening counter-voices within ourselves, we’re able to not just narrate experience, but actually author it? Both [processes are] about releasing our autobiographical imagination, we invent our pasts, invent them every day, and then expand this out in the book to a deeper question around whole nations, civilisations, so tracking from the personal to a much wider sense of countries”. (The Booktopia Books Podcasts, 2018)

The autobiographical construction of white guilt and confession are, thus, a platform for exploring a “deeper question around whole nations, civilizations,” so tracking discourses of power and domination from the personal to a much broader context. The motif of confession works powerfully as a signifier of postcolonial identity, emphasising the notion of “trespassing” in this project’s topic.

In Dovey’s autobiographical narrative the issue of positionality is very significant. Her novel has a complex structure which is composed of a frame narrative, multiple chronotopes, as well as a recursive mirroring effect of *mise en abyme*. All these techniques add to the impact of Dovey’s metafictional twist at the end of her novel: Vita’s fiction is in your hands composed by an implied author, who has created a fiction loosely based on her life. Dovey’s life story is

delivered as a metafiction which is encoded in the decentred language of poststructuralism. These are intentional effects allowing Dovey, the author, to efface herself from her writing where she neither reinforces masculinist traditions in autobiography nor assumes a dominant position. In her novel, Dovey therefore subverts the traditions of the autobiographical contract in her textual representation of postcolonial identity.

She is explicit about her concerns as a postcolonial writer, stating: “When you take up the pen, you’re taking up a position of power” (Heinrich, 2018:2). Regarded in this light, Dovey’s qualms about autobiographical writing become more understandable: as a postmodern, postcolonial author, she is interested in de-centring power relationships embedded in a master narrative “present in the myths of Europe’s role in world relations, long before the colonial conquest” (Steyn, 2001:3). In his analysis of Coetzee’s work, Jean-Philippe Wade discusses the “deeper discursive structures” inscribing his character’s identities (1994:203):

The colonial/western protagonists ... are caught within totalizing “western structures” which they are both complicit with and resistant to, or, to put it another way, their resistance is always limited by their inability to transcend a structure to which they are bound (for their survival, for their identity: the self is constituted by the Other).

This corresponds with the poststructuralist theory that there is no essential, autonomous “self” or “I”.

Judith Lütge Coullie’s notes on poststructuralism are also useful in clarifying Dovey’s approach to autobiographical writing:

The author can no longer be conceived as the autonomous creator of her or his own identity or text, but as someone who is interpellated into available subject positions.

Language and culture determine the range of subject positions available to the author in her or his life experiences, as well as the composition of textual identity (1991:3).

[I]t is the complex discursive system which provides subject positions for speakers and writers; and it is within these available subject positions that identity is constituted (8).

According to Coullie, the discourse of racism “is inescapable” in contemporary South Africa and social formations do not allow writers positions from which they can be oblivious of their whiteness (8). For Vita – and Dovey – who profess a South African identity, the discourse of racism, therefore, cannot be escaped.

In my close reading of the novel which follows, the question which needs to be asked is whether “a symptomatic reading can be imposed on what is already a symptomatically sensitive discourse”. It is a repetition of David Attwell’s question in his study on Coetzee’s novels (1993:23). Attwell explains this conundrum by referring to Teresa Dovey (the mother of Ceridwen Dovey) whose critical study of Coetzee in 1988 was groundbreaking:

In her relocation of the novels in a field designated “criticism-as-fiction, or fiction-as-criticism” (9), Dovey was able to make the startling but justifiable claim that the novels possessed a preemptive theoretical sophistication that disarmed the critics in advance. After Dovey’s intervention it is no longer possible to ignore the novel’s discursive complexity and self-consciousness. (2)

One of my main intentions in this study is to approach the texts both symptomatically and reparatively. Despite its “complexity and self-consciousness”, there are ideological slippages that I find in my reading of *In the Garden of the Fugitives*. If I undertake a reparative reading, it is perhaps by applying J. M. Coetzee’s maxim that “the only sure truth in autobiography is

that one's self-interest will be located at one's blind spot" (Coetzee and Attwell, 1992: 39). It is therefore in the gaps and silences rendered by a symptomatic reading of Dovey's autobiography text that I might reparatively address Dovey's "blind spot". It thus unsettles the symptomatic/reparative dichotomy at the core of this project.

Dovey is reluctant to identify her novel as an autobiographical piece. According to her, the central figure in the novel, Vita, embodies "strands" of her own South African identity (Byron Writers' Festival, 2018). There are many similarities between Vita and Dovey. While growing up, Dovey moved back and forth between South Africa and Australia with her parents. Similarly, after finishing high school in Sydney, and graduating from Harvard University in North America, the author returned for a short time to study in Cape Town. Both Vita's and Dovey's parents oppose apartheid and are liberal in their views. Yet in conversation with Michaela Kalowski, Dovey carefully explains that none of the characters is based on real people and the only person she "was prepared to put a version of on the page" was herself:

"So the only person I am harming in that process is me. There are obviously amalgams of experiences and bits and pieces but nothing anyone could pinpoint as themselves although I did ask my father for permission. Also when I had finished a draft I asked him to read it because the father character in the book draws on a little bit of his family's history in South Africa. But yes I was very careful of that". (UNSW Writing Podcast, 2018)

Dovey underplays autobiographical elements here, mindful of how she positions others. However, there are other interviews where Dovey is more overt about autobiographical strands. She tells Lou Heinrich, for example: "When I'm writing fiction, I'm writing to and from myself" (1).

In the Garden of the Fugitives has not received much critical interest since its publication. Despite the reviews and interviews at various book festivals in Australia, Dovey's work has, as yet, received no critical attention or literary awards in South Africa, her country of birth, or in America and Australia which are countries that feature in the novel. This seems unusual for an author whose first two publications received immediate acclaim. Her novel *Blood Kin* (2007) was shortlisted for a number of prestigious Commonwealth awards while her collection of short stories, *Only the Animals* (2014), won four Australian awards. In my research for *In the Garden of the Fugitives* I have relied on critical theorists and writers who bring a global perspective to post-apartheid literature: Elleke Boehmer, Meg Samuelson, Rita Barnard, Louise Bethlehem, Andrew van der Vlies and David Attwell, who focus on transnational writers such as Zoë Wicomb, Lauren Beukes, Zakes Mda and J.M. Coetzee.

As an introduction to a close analysis of the novel, I present two reviews that are representative of the novel's reception in Australia and that provide an overview of the novel's plot. In Geordie Williamson's article there is a synopsis of the plot:

The narrative set-up is straightforward enough. Royce is an east coast American of the old school, scion of a wealthy family - rich enough to generously endow the college he once attended. [...] Vita is a woman in early middle age, Australian by residence but South African by birth and upbringing, who attended that same college 20 years ago. Back then, Vita, ambitious and promising, attracted Royce's attention. He helped her gain a lucrative ongoing career support grant from the endowment he established, but there were strings attached.

When the novel opens, the two have been estranged for years. Royce emails Vita to tell her that he is dying. Intimations of mortality have inspired in him a nostalgia for the past, along with a desire to clear the decks. Life circumstance has also made Vita open to his entreaty. She is entering her 40s bereft of the ambition and also, perhaps, the sexual clout her youth afforded her: a command she once mistook for feminist

empowerment. She replies, albeit coolly, and the pair begin sketching out what was shared in their past and what has occurred while they were apart.

[...] Yet this correspondence is anything but simple. This is a two-hander the way Mamet or Pinter would play it on the stage: filled with slippages in character and narrative instabilities that manipulate our sympathies and our sense of who holds the upper hand now and who held it in the past. (2018:6)

Williamson, like fellow Australian critics (Hay, 2018; Heinrich, 2018;), draws attention mainly to Dovey's South African identity and the burden of guilt expressed in her novel. They observe the complexity of her novel and the rich symbolism of Pompeii and its excavation: a Freudian metaphor for the human psyche and repression. Kit Eastwood (2018), the English critic for *The Spectator*, shares less enthusiastic views in an article which he titles, "A cold archaeological gaze". He states that the story "adopts [a] cold, archaeological gaze, pitched throughout at an odd emotional remove from the characters and action it narrates" (1). He adds:

Royce and Vita narrate their own histories over the course of an email correspondence, creating an awkward epistolary novel. [...] Both stories act as a process of recovering and dusting off the past, like an archaeological dig, and Royce opens his first email with: 'I have begun excavating my memories.' It is hard to feel impassioned, however, by what does feel like a 300-page excavation. (1-2)

Eastwood's article is a reminder of the slow pace created by the novel's epistolary form, that the intrigue between an ageing American lothario and his protégée might seem stereotyped and that the apartheid guilt of a person who left South Africa in 1995 at the age of fifteen, might seem over-dramatic.

It is the dramatic twist at the end of the novel which makes it exciting. The structure of the frame narrative becomes apparent: the exchange of letters between Royce and Vita is an

exercise in narrative therapy by the protagonist that mirrors the author's life. Like Vita, Dovey the author has created an artifact, her self-history in *In the Garden of the Fugitives* and is, therefore, "a step closer to liberating [herself] from it" (2018a:280). Vita is introduced to Magdalene Mbuso at a house party in Cape Town, where she initiates a group therapy session. She describes her background as a psychotherapist trained in Germany where she learned to incorporate alternative methods into her therapy, and was now specialising in "working with white South Africans struggling with extreme feelings of guilt for what happened in the country" (236).

I thus interpret Vita's search for identity in a poststructuralist analysis of the relationship between Vita and Royce examining Dovey's claim that the book explores "a deeper question around whole nations, civilisations, so tracking from the personal to a much wider sense of countries" (The Booktopia Books Podcasts, 2018). A closer analysis of the relationship between Vita and Royce is therefore essential in exploring "these deeper questions". Dovey invites the reader to find a reading which appeals to them:

"[The book] is a tricky one, [it] can be read at two levels: psychological thriller or intellectual thriller (the publisher has told me never to say that, it sounds awful!). It has a logic, murder mystery and disappearance, there are clues and there are various ways of reading it – but back to the theme of psychotherapy: what is the therapeutic effect of using language and making sense of something explicit from your own experiences? You can read it as narrative therapy, artistic block dissolved (resolved) because the book is in your hands. But in a scene three-quarters through the book, readers can question just how unreliable or reliable these narrators are." (Byron Writer's Festival, 2018)

Whilst some are invited to enjoy her book as psychological thriller, she adds a mischievous tone when she speaks of *In the Garden of the Fugitives* as an "intellectual thriller": the publisher

has told her “never to say that” because it “sounds awful!”. This is clever footwork on Dovey’s part: she acknowledges the need for popular appeal, but wants an intellectual reading.

Their emails, which Royce describes as their “narrative connivance” (Dovey, 2018a:292), begin when he decides on a rapprochement after seventeen years of silence:

Given our history, Vita, I’m aware you may decide not to read this. ... For me this long-anticipated leap year (MMXX, as the Romans would have written it) has brought unwelcome news. The rest of mankind advances bravely towards its future while I stew in sickness, and in my own nostalgia, as everyone warned would happen at this time of life. It’s the craven need for absolution that has taken me by surprise. My thoughts are turned ever more to Kitty and to you. I am not a religious man, yet here I am, stuck in religious mode, coming to you as a suppliant. (1)

His utterances of “absolution” and “suppliant” resonate with themes of guilt and confession which he links to his memories of Kitty and Vita. His allusion to the “long-anticipated” leap year is a sly innuendo, one of many. Vita’s reply is thus cautious:

My last voluntary contact with you, seventeen years ago – you could not have forgotten – was a letter saying I never wanted to hear from you again. A request you chose to ignore. I could not offer to vanish entirely, and risk losing those bonus cheques with your spidery signature that arrived every two years like clockwork. (4)

She is unsentimental in her reply, but willing to participate in a confessional alliance for reasons known only to herself.

I understand what you’re asking of me. Mutual confession, the inside view.
I’m open to the idea, but for reasons of my own. (5)

Dovey thus sets up the dual counter-voices that will process Vita's identity, the metafictional identity of the implied author of *In the Garden of the Fugitives*.

The age difference between Royce and Vita means that their histories differ. When they begin writing to each other, it is 2020. Royce is seventy and knows he is dying. Vita is forty and lives on an Australian farm in Mudgee, New South Wales, where she hosts oil tastings on an olive farm. Royce's student life spans the early 1970s, whilst Dovey is at the same university in Boston in the early years of the new millennium. The dual confessional strands follow Royce's life in Pompeii with Kitty during the 1970s, and the events in Vita's life after her graduation in 2001.

Vita's attempt to free herself from racial guilt is allegorically represented by her confrontation with Royce. In the same way that she feels compromised as his beneficiary, she feels complicit as a beneficiary of the colonial ideology which he represents. In their confessions to each other, Royce and Vita touch on issues of power, oppression and guilt with Pompeii as a central symbol of history, violence and art. They are like the fugitives in the garden at Pompeii, sheltering from the eruption of Vesuvius, a symbol of the unintended social or political consequences of human actions like Royce's lust, or human systems such as colonialism and apartheid. In her discussions of the novel, Dovey states she does not want to convey a monological view of perpetrator and victim in the relationship between Royce and Vita:

“[I’m] creating these two antagonists and [it’s] not sure who’s manipulating who. [I] did not want to create a female victim not understanding all the levels [from which] she’s benefitted and played that system”. (Adelaide Festival, 2019)

Their relationship becomes a psychosexual maze in which Vita, at last, emerges as the victor by outmanoeuvring Royce's need to dominate his female Other.

Judith Butler's notes on Simone de Beauvoir are helpful in interpreting the symbolism:

I read Beauvoir who explained that to be a woman within the terms of a masculinist culture is to be a source of mystery and unknowability for men, and this seemed confirmed when I read Sartre for whom all desire, problematically presumed to be heterosexual and masculine, was defined as *trouble*. For that masculine subject of desire, trouble became a scandal with the sudden intrusion, the unanticipated agency, of a female "object" who inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculine position. The radical dependency of the masculine subject on the female "Other" suddenly exposes his autonomy as illusory. [...] Power seemed to be more than an exchange between subject or a relation of constant inversion between subject and an Other; indeed power appeared to operate in that very binary frame for thinking about gender. (1990xxx)

Vita's strategy is to deceive Royce by not appearing to contest his authority and, thus, conforming to Royce's ideal. Butler's statement that power appears in the "very binary frame for thinking about gender" is also pertinent.

Royce's Lushington Foundation for "Extraordinary Women" represents his power and serves as a honey trap for his predations (Dovey, 2018a:22). When Kitty speaks to Royce about the status of women in Pompeii, her words unconsciously highlight Royce's subterfuge. He quotes her words in a letter to Vita:

"[U]nder Roman law, women were discouraged from making economic decisions without a male guardian's consent, freewomen or slaves – due to the belief that they had "lightness of mind". (Dovey, 2018a:287)

Royce prides himself on choosing female acolytes whom he sees as “keepers of the light” (22), yet it is only his light that is allowed to shine, and the women need his permission to hold the torch. His “all-access” digital card to the female section on campus implies an ownership (23). However, he prides himself on being a prejudice-free man of the 1970s who definitely does not believe that women have a “lightness of mind”. Despite his advocacy of female empowerment, he is ruthless in asserting his power. Kitty rejects his love and mysteriously falls into the volcanic mouth of Mt Vesuvius on the eve of her marriage to Ettore Sogliano.

Royce is associated with images of death or destruction throughout the novel. This is reinforced by references to numerous cults and the skeletons and bone motifs of Pompeii, where he spends most of his time with Kitty. These themes are evident in his discussion of Kitty:

My yearning wasn't only sexual in nature. It felt classical, ancient, as if I'd been waiting for Kitty my whole young life. As if she were my soul mate. [...] The frustration I felt for her friendly indifference to my passion, is difficult to describe. Sometimes it made me want to kill myself [...] Sometimes it made me want to kill her. (31)

The colour red is a constant topos of passion and violence in the novel, referencing the primal father in Freud's mythology whose death resulted from his obsession with “hoarding women, wealth and power” (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000:108). Royce discusses the pigment of houses in Pompeii that have turned scarlet, a “Pompeiiian red” (Dovey, 2018a:153), and his main interest when he spied Kitty at her graduation was the red shoes her mother had borrowed from her (148). Tragically, the flowers in Kitty's hair, the day before her mysterious disappearance, are Pompeii's signature red valerians.

Royce describes his mother's grotesque death at the Eiger, where she attempted to be the first woman mountaineer to scale the mountain. After his mother's death while so young, Royce is forbidden to mention the name of his mother or express any feelings. His traumatised father had,

“watched helplessly through a window cut into the rock of the railway station on the Kleine Scheidegg as his wife froze on the slope on the face of the mountain, within sight but out of his reach. I must have repressed the memory (a small mercy). (21)

In line with Freud's theory of sexual development, his masculine identity is formed by the repression of his maternal bonds. The shrine he creates in her memory has associations with Lacan's Imaginary.

I created a secret shrine to her memory, hiding the few items of hers I'd salvaged in a box under my bed. I used to kneel beside it at night. Worshiping her. She was the original idol for me. (21).

Dovey's psychoanalytical construction of Royce's masculinity becomes comedic in his plaintive confession that “Without Kitty, I would hardly exist” (217). It is not beyond readers to imagine that Kitty Lushington's nomenclature is a pun on the name of Ian Fleming's heroine in *Goldfinger*.

Royce's visit to an old Southern plantation in Charleston is laden with transgressive Freudian symbolism. Royce's visit to the city over Halloween is lurid, and his encounter with Kitty's mother disrupts the primary taboo regulating society, that of incest. In Freud's theory of the structure of the psyche, he uses the Oedipal complex to explain why a boy must renounce his mother and identify with his father. Butler elaborates:

Regardless of the reason for the boy's repudiation of the mother [...], the repudiation becomes the founding moment of what Freud calls gender "consolidation". Forfeiting the mother as the object of desire, the boy either internalizes the loss through identification with her, or displaces his heterosexual attachment, in which case he fortifies his attachment to his father and thereby "consolidates" his masculinity. (1990:81)

The transgressive moment is deepened further by the inversion of Royce's desire, where Zelda replaces Kitty as the object of his fancy. The last time he had seen Zelda was in Kitty's hospital room after her skating accident. After his stroll through the Biblical Garden, a place connoting the original sin, he heads towards the cypress swamp where he sees her appear as "an apparition from the past, a woman wearing colonial garb, her long dress brushing the boards, it was clear she had no idea who I was." This time he finds her nose "no longer had the reddish tint of an alcoholic and there was shape to her" (Dovey, 2018a: 268).

There is an immediate change in atmosphere as Royce enters the swamp. The "symmetrical beauty" of the landscaped Biblical Garden transitions into the wildness of a swamp. Atamasco lilies, symbolising rebirth in Native American mythology, grow alongside a statue of a wooden nymph at the water's edge. Dovey employs the conventions described as a "weird aesthetic" in which the southern imaginary is represented as an "irrational space", that conveys "aberrance or cosmic otherness" (Rozier, 2015:1). Royce's transgression is staged in a setting which evokes the southern imaginary: a place of "horror and alterity" (Rozier, 2015:1).

After asking him for cash Zelda leads him to a cabin papered with "yellowed newsprint" dating from 1926 on the wall. Royce is puzzled by the content: "a headline about the first woman to swim the English Channel" and "an advertisement for a tonic for tired mothers, a cartoon that

made no sense” (Dovey, 2018a :268). Zelda Lushington, seen first as a ghostly female in colonial garb by Royce, is the maternal settler figure of the southern imaginary. However, that her dipsomania as well as her name, evoke an image of Zelda Fitzgerald, the scandalous wife of F. Scott Fitzgerald, adds a burlesque touch to the evocation of incestual sin in the Garden of Eden. However, Royce sublimates his desire in philosophical musing:

The plantations had tapped rather profitably into an unending pit of desire. The same desire that Pompeii conjured in most men who stepped within its walls, tempted by the lasciviousness of the art and the louche secret gardens and inner courtyards, all shadowed spaces hidden from view. Why else is the Lupanar, a brothel with rooms as small as prison cells, the most visited site of all of Pompeii? We long to lift the skirts of history, to enter into the past, to make ourselves master of it. (269)

He sums up his discourse with a platitude that carries no hint of self-irony: “Each gorgeous age is built around some core of rottenness” (270) and the chapter ends symbolically with Royce noticing the “smell of apricots everywhere in that town” (270), which he tells Vita is the actual “apple” of sin (267).

Ironically, while he manipulates the lives of Kitty and Vita, he is able to be objective about the role of male dominance in Kitty and Rebecca Birken’s work at Pompeii. Rebecca is the young British researcher who had made “the dramatic discovery and plaster-castings only a few years earlier of a group of thirteen ancient bodies” (88). Her rivalry for Ettore’s affections enables Royce to set up a web of intrigue that ultimately leads to Kitty’s death.

I felt for Rebecca, for Kitty, for their predicament as female researchers in a male-dominated field. They constantly had to prove their seriousness, keeping as far from magical thinking as possible. [...] The women had to be coldly objective just to stay in the game. (172)

His words highlight the logocentric discourse of masculinity positioning men in a master narrative of individualism and dominance. Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith explain the specific notions of selfhood created by the Enlightenment:

[A]ll “I’s” are rational, agentive, unitary. Thus the “I” becomes “Man”, putatively a marker of the universal human subject whose essence remains outside the vagaries of history, effectually what Spivak has termed the “straight white Christian man of property” whose identity is deeply embedded in a specific history of privilege. (1992:xvii)

Dovey has captured this in her representation of Royce. He is a member of an elite American East Coast society, assured by the privileges of wealth and his patriarchal power. As a man, true to his time, he can signify his enlightenment by fostering women who seek their independence.

It is Vita, a millennial, who cracks the gender codes informing her identity. It is possible to plot each of the women’s stories in the novel against the timeline of female emancipation: Royce’s mother, Kitty, Vita and Rebecca. Royce mournfully tells Vita, “It is hard to find the right words [for his mother], the ones what won’t reduce her to a tragic outlier” (Dovey, 2018a:20). Later he confesses, “You might even say that I killed her” because he had been conceived on his parent’s honeymoon. His birth delayed her climb of the Eiger which meant she was no longer in the “fullest flush of youth and fitness” (51). However, Royce’s words, that he did not “reduce her to a tragic outlier”, imply her folly rather than his pride. In his relationship with Kitty, she supplants Royce’s maternal shrine and his worship of Kitty is driven by his need for affirmation as a masculine subject. Kitty is represented as a woman of the 1970s who believes that she can empower herself, but her death symbolises her inability to escape from patriarchal networks of power. She invites Royce to her wedding, imagining that he has overcome his obsession.

However, his desire is an imperative of his masculine identity: it is his radical dependence on a female Other. Thus, Royce's declaration that, "Without Kitty, I would hardly exist" is simply literal (217).

Dovey, too, is a woman of her time and Vita's story speaks to the present day #metoo movement. Angela Ledgerwood's interview with Dovey is titled "Ceridwen Dovey on the Privilege and Vulnerability of Being a Young Woman". She remarks that the novel's themes of obsession, guilt and power seem "incredibly timely" even though the novel was being written years before the "whole #me too explosion". Ledgerwood highlights Royce's entitlement and how he exploits the powerful financial keys he holds to a woman's success (Lit Up, 2019). Yet Dovey's representation of Vita emphasises complicity in her relationship with Royce. Complicity is a frequent subject of postcolonial discourse. Achille Mbembe argues that it is difficult to argue for essentialism, especially in the domain of language:

If you research how many languages people speak every day, they shift constantly, and in the process are messing up with all of them, enriching them, carrying with them bits and pieces and creating a linguistic imagination [...] I'm suggesting there is a mother tongue but only so far as the mother tongue is inhabited by many other tongues. The question of the deborderisation of language is central to other policies of decolonisation. (Theory from the Margins, 2020)

In Vita's conflicted duality represented by Royce and a female self, Vita is not presented as a female victim. From the outset Vita has fun exposing Royce's ploys. In her letters she taunts his fantasies: "The eunuch wizard in a coven of clever witches", "Eliza to your Henry" (Dovey, 2018a:14); "a king with a hundred daughters [but searching] for Cordelia" (27). Royce's self-aggrandising language, therefore, appears absurd to her when he likens himself to a "wizard" or refers to alchemy (3). There are Biblical terms in his vision in that his protégées "will inherit

the earth” (24). Vita tells Royce, “Nobody has ever been so invested in me making good whatever raw talent I once possessed – not even my parents, for their love was always unconditional. Yours came with strings attached” (2). Unlike Kitty, Vita is aware of the risks in engaging with Royce’s patriarchal gambits and realises that they are sinister. Her first warning to him is when he spies on her during the nude “Primal Scream” run before graduation. After she reluctantly succumbs to his dinner invite to celebrate her Lushington fellowship award, she accepts his offer for a nightcap:

I went looking for a bathroom and found myself in your bedroom. I’m not sure why I used your en suite. Some impulse towards desecration? Back in the bedroom, I discovered the door was closed, and it would not open. Tipsy as I was, I did not feel alarmed at first; I thought it was stuck. But then I realized it was locked from the other side. (146)

This causes her final break with him and after she receives his unrepentant email the next day, she writes him a “chilly reply”, saying that he should never contact her again “except for official fellowship matters” (147). However, reflecting on this from a more mature perspective, and having experienced passion, she grants him grace: “How hard it must have been for you to let me go untouched back out into the cold night air” (49).

Dovey’s conversation with Ledgerwood about the #metoo movement raises contemporary feminist issues of complicity. Vita is always aware of the dangerous dance of patronage. After an encounter with a wealthy South African man which becomes too intimate, she escapes “shaking and laughing all the way to the subway, feeling like Bluebeard’s final, cleverest wife” (164). Vita keeps herself ahead of the game, and like her college mates, is confident of her sexuality. Ledgerwood, however, gives particular focus to Dovey’s novel as a #metoo text that highlights the ongoing vulnerability of women. Dovey reminds her of Jia Tolentino’s article

which speaks powerfully to young ambitious women who do not realise their vulnerability.

According to Toletino:

The allegations against Harvey Weinstein are a reminder that, when a young woman is treated like an object, she is placed within an old and sickening script, one that is incredibly difficult to escape. (2017:1)

Her article emphasises the trauma which is caused:

The Weinstein case has reminded me of how hard, maybe impossible, it is to separate yourself from all the things that have been forced on you – an encounter, a body, a sense of complicity, or simply the banal old scripts that make it all seem so sickeningly predictable. You were young and he was powerful; the story writes itself. (3)

Ledgerwood's feminist interest focuses on the gender issues faced by Kitty and Vita. This is easy to overlook when reading *In the Garden of the Fugitives* as a postcolonial text that depicts relationships of dominance and power. 1

In her discussions with Royce, Vita's repeated feelings of guilt and its crippling effects raise Royce's suspicions. In questioning her sincerity Dovey is warning readers not to trust Vita's outpouring of a narrativized true self, that it may be a confessional performance of white guilt enacting an empowering fiction of herself. This can also be interpreted as a self-reflexive gesture of the implied author, or Dovey herself, examining what truths are actually revealed in autobiography.

Vita shows that she is master of the mind games between herself and Royce by feeding his ego. She appeases his notions of transforming her into an art piece of his liking, one that flatters his

liberal sensibilities. Vita projects an innocence which fulfils his illusions. She does warn him, however, that she is not all she seems:

To my own banquet I wore a long-sleeved velvet dress, borrowed from one of my roommates, that made me feel a character in an Austen novel [...].

[The other girls] did not know there was a secret society out there of men like you. Men who congratulated themselves on seeing something in me that they believed nobody else could. [...] They saw my face as a blankness onto which they could project whatever they wanted.

(26)

Jane Austen's women are symbolic on many levels, but the material vulnerability they imply is relevant here, as well as her challenge to gender discourses. Royce does not disappoint – in his letters, he speaks of his pride but is not aware of his prejudice:

[Y]ou're right about me priding myself on seeing in certain young women things to which others might be blind. Not in terms of physical attractiveness, which is irrelevant. I am an angel investor of a kind; the product I buy into is the person, the mind. The bragging rights come later, when the ones chosen mention me in their origin stories.

(111)

Royce's vocabulary is a caricature of male egocentricity: his self-image is one of an "investor" in a female "product".

In the last pages of the novel it is, therefore, a relief to find that Vita has not been his conquest. She begins, "In ancient times, was it not often the master who was illiterate, and the slave, who could read and write? Who corresponded on his master's behalf, speaking not only of him but for him?" (300).

Here, Dovey references a master-slave dialectic in Vita's victory statement. Her inversion of patriarchal power can be framed in Lacanian terms:

The masculine subject only appears to originate meanings and thereby signify. His seemingly self-grounded autonomy attempts to conceal the repression which is both its ground and the perpetual possibility of its own ungrounding. But that process of meaning-constitution requires that women reflect that masculine power and everywhere reassure that power of the reality of its illusory autonomy. (Butler, 1990:61)

In an ironic twist, it is Vita who is smugly in his comfortable Beacon Hill home, drinking his vintage Sauternes wine from his cellar. She has beguiled him into leaving her his money and tauntingly echoes his own words (Dovey, 2018:214):

On the wall opposite your bed is the black-and-white aerial photograph of the Garden of the Fugitives, the one Kitty gave to you all those years ago.

It is the first thing I see in the morning and the last thing I see at night [...]. (301)

It is an opportunity for Vita to mock his fantasies:

If I am sorry for anything it's for making you into my plaything, the accessory of my recovery. But I don't think you would have wanted me to apologise, Royce. You would be proud of me, my ruthlessness in getting what I want, glad to know I have created *something*, even if that creation has also destroyed you. (300)

Vita achieves victory, not by masquerading her female desire (which she frequently displays to him), but by appearing less powerful than him. Her narrative is one of weakness, unfulfillment and ineffectuality. He clearly did not believe her earlier warning that they seemed "to be on parallel tracks, like the nocturnal journey of predator and prey" (103). Unfortunately, Vita's triumphalism echoes that of the oppressor. Vita's struggle to liberate herself from guilt,

which is depicted in her narrative of Royce, is a dialogic engagement with the oppressive ideology that interpellates her. There are metaphysical implications here about the dialectics of power that invite a more extended discussion.

However, in relation to the autobiographical concerns of the novel, Vita's narrative metaphorically conveys the power of art, or "the autobiographical imagination" to express identity (Coetzee and Kurtz, 2015:3). In conversations, Dovey often claims that *In the Garden of the Fugitives* is her therapy and Vita's narrative therapy thus represents the author's interrogation of her own westernised white female identity. Dovey's deconstruction of gender ideology through the dialogic relationship of Royce and Vita, represents the author's engagement with liberal discourses shaping her identity. Vita means "life" in Latin and her character thus symbolizes Dovey's regeneration. It is worth noting however, that Royce is not represented unsympathetically by Vita or Dovey, despite their irony. The refined tastes and classical interests of his liberal persona enrich the novel. Dovey's comments on deconstruction reinforce this view:

Deconstruction, Spivak believed, was never intended to be a means to pull things apart. In a recent interview about her long career, she said that deconstruction is 'not just destruction. It's also construction. It's critical intimacy, not critical distance. So you actually speak from inside.' She tells the story of her teacher Paul de Man once saying to another critic, Fredric Jameson, 'Fred, you can only deconstruct what you love.' It was Derrida's take on deconstruction, Spivak says, that led her to become one of the founders of postcolonial studies, or at least, it was 'that part of deconstruction which said that you do not accuse what you are deconstructing. You enter it.' (Dovey, 2018b:11)

Dovey, like Vita, realises that they have to become part of what they seek to deconstruct.

The discourses of guilt and confession in *In the Garden of the Fugitives* link Dovey's novel to *Disgrace* (1999) which is interpreted as Coetzee's response to the TRC's climate of confession. David Lurie, a lecturer, is implicated in a sexual scandal with his young student, Melanie Isaacs, and is judged at a hearing. There are many layers of meaning in its theme of disgrace, one of which relates to David's daughter Lucy, who is sexually assaulted. One of the concerns that feminists have with the novel is Coetzee's attitude to the representation of Lucy's lesbianism. Perhaps Dovey wishes to address this in Vita's homoerotic encounter with her therapist, Magdalene. I have not discussed Magdalene's role or her polemic on guilt. Neither have I analysed Vita's time in Cape Town where her guilt drives her to the brink of nervous collapse. I have also not included her relationship with Deon and his family who represent for Vita, an enlightened form of liberalism that contrasts with her "bleeding heart" parents (227). Altogether, her sojourn in Cape Town is a very dysfunctional time for Vita and, unfortunately, for the novel as a whole.

Sheila Kirk Walsh sums up the impression created by Vita's therapy:

Unfortunately, the narrative flattens when Vita decides to see a therapist upon her post-collegiate return to Cape Town. Given the static nature of real-life therapy sessions, these types of scenes are difficult to realise in fiction. Dovey ups the ante, challenge-wise, as her character practices unorthodox techniques of self-discovery with the therapist doing much of the talking. What results are dissertation-like monologues where the reader is schooled on the intricacies of white guilt as it relates to oppressive cultures. The magic and deftness of Dovey's prose swiftly dissipates and the scenes resemble something out of an academic text.

(Kirk Walsh, 2018:3)

The novel's representation of Magdalene is a confused and disturbing one. She is presented in images of an exotic Other and her therapy described in terms of exorcism. Vita's response to

Magdalene is visceral, focusing on “her towering red heels” (249) and her signature “burgundy” (258). She observes how Magdalene “blows” on clients at the end of sessions:

When she blew over me to signal the end of the session, I could smell the cherry scent of her lipstick. I opened my eyes, feeling refreshed at a cellular level, as if I had been asleep for a thousand year (251).

During a treatment session with Magdalene, Vita’s “whole body began to anticipate her touch” (258) and at the end of one session Vita “could hear a roaring sound, a seashell effect. She stood there for an eternity” (263). Magdalene is cast as an ancient goddess and Vita is left “in a trance” (275). Vita’s father expresses views on therapy that underscore the superficiality of Magdalene’s treatment methods:

He didn’t believe in therapy, even of the non-experimental, traditional kind. His take was that you couldn’t fix a person without engaging with their wider context, which was why his own work focused on education and social policy. [...] In his view, white guilt was not something that should or could be ‘cured’ at an individual level. Whites would only be free of it once the underlying enablers of their domination had been dismantled. (Dovey, 2018a:245)

Vita’s narrative does, in fact, follow her father’s dictums in examining the “underlying enablers” of white domination in Dovey’s deconstructive engagement with “deeper” questions about countries, nations and civilisations.

Vita’s last moments in therapy with Magdalene are conveyed in fantastical and phantasmagoric imagery: Magdalene emits “sparks of electricity exploding around her body”, it was as “if she was on fire”. In her office, however, “the spell had been broken”, and the incense burned down to “a sad stub” (280). She tells Vita that she wants to leave, that she loved Germany because it enabled her to relate to people “without always being held to my own history” and that “she

feels stuck in a moralising identity here, like a school prefect” (281). Before leaving, in another ironical twist, she tells Vita that she has a white grandmother, that her name is actually Magdalene and that she had lied about her Xhosa name at school. Vita follows Magdalene to Mudjee but she mysteriously disappears, like Kitty. It is a hurried section of the novel which does not fit with the careful construction of Vita and Royce’s relationship.

In order to read Dovey’s text reparatively, I paradoxically have to read the gaps and silences of its autobiographical spaces – in particular, her silence about Vita’s fictional mother. Although Vita compares the disparate socio-economic backgrounds of her parents, it is only once that her mother’s voice is heard:

My mother, who hated mawkishness in all things, tried to put a positive spin on my people-less imagery. ‘I like that you’re not taking any position on the past,’ she said, her glasses slipping down her nose. Her hair was streaked with grey that she refused to colour. (115)

Her father’s affection is given more emphasis and she identifies with his values in the narrative: “[H]e seemed content that I’d inherited some of his ardent feelings about the place. He gave me a lot of hugs, his tall, thin frame matching my own” (115). Dovey affirms that she asked her father for his permission to represent him in the novel.

However, in every interview, and in her biographical essay on Coetzee, Dovey places her mother at the centre of her writing identity. Her essay on Coetzee is also a homage to her mother, Teresa Dovey, who pioneered criticism of Coetzee’s deconstructive, postcolonial texts:

In 1988, she published the first book on his work, *The Novels of J.M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories*. The cover image is a watercolour of Coetzee’s eyes and a hermit crab

emerging – a bit creepily, Silence of the Lambs-style – from his mouth, against a violet background. The illustrator based it on my mother’s own paintings of hermit crabs.

The book is long, and dense with passages of quoted theory. As an adult, I’ve tried often to read it, each time hoping that I might finally be worthy of understanding – and each time coming away defeated by its sharp-edged brilliance. My mother wryly says that it’s unreadable, that she was badly served by her publisher and had no useful input from an editor to make it more accessible to non-specialist readers. She still feels affectionately about it, though, because it represents the journey she took all those years ago, following Coetzee’s lead, into realms of theory and philosophy that she might never otherwise have encountered.

Holding her book in my hands sometimes saddens me. It is a material reminder that intellectual passion ebbs and flows; that women’s careers are always vulnerable to being truncated, subsumed by family responsibilities; that daughters grow up and mothers grow old. It is the first book she wrote on his work, and it is also her last. (Dovey, 2018b:13)

Dovey’s veneration of the two most important influences on her writing is perhaps reflected in Royce’s description of a floor in Pompeii:

In the twilight, the whitish pieces of bone and shell stood out against the dark background of the tarpaulin on which they’d been laid. It made me think of a picture Kitty had shown me in one of her books, of a mosaic excavated from the dining room of a villa on the Aventine in Rome. The mosaic was in a decorative style, popular at the time, known as the ‘unswept floor.’ It was filled with images of discarded shells and bones, seeds and pits, fish bones, lobster claws, wishbones – designed to look like the real-life debris of a feast thrown to the ground around a triclinium, as was the ancient custom. (Dovey, 2018a:208)

Royce explains that the strange mosaic is a *carpe diem* motif: to the ancients, “a banquet is a life in miniature” and “[a]ll feasts, all lives must come to an end” (220). However, Dovey also

signifies that the discarded shells are the traces of Coetzee and her mother that she has embedded in her novel. It is a gesture of humility, but perhaps relief: having honoured them, she can release herself from an overbearing tradition that has weighed on her identity. She confesses as much to an interviewer:

“There are many versions of our past [...] there’s no one past and literature and the novel lets you invent a past and “play” with it and by making it outside your head and crafting it you can look at it in a new light, as something you can let go of. It was very helpful to write the book, I’ll never write about South Africa again. With absolute certainty, something in writing this book has made me let that go, the moral neediness of having to always foreground that I’m a white South African when actually that’s not really my identity anymore. I’m Australian, I have a history here. The book is a form of empowerment after years of silencing myself.” (Lit Up, 2019)

In exploring issues of complicity and entanglement in the representation of postcolonial relationships, *In the Garden of the Fugitives* is a transnational text which speaks to both local and international audience. In her representation of Vita’s guilt, Dovey addresses the “underlying enablers” which inscribe relationships of dominance in postcolonial identity. A question that needs to be asked is why *In the Garden of the Fugitives* has received no formal attention. I have found no evidence of awards or critical writing in America, Australia or South Africa, the countries that feature as settings in her narrative. In arguing its significance as a postcolonial text, I have focused on textual strategies rather than techniques of realism in the novel. However, the allegorical and metafictional devices which allow Dovey to obscure her subject position, also make it difficult for readers to identify with her protagonist. Furthermore, if the effects of mise en abyme and parody are taken into consideration, it can be argued that Dovey’s textual strategies deter a serious reading of her content. There is, however, an argument for the writer’s negative culpability. It would, therefore, be good to find a critical

study interested in evaluating Dovey's text as an insightful and rewarding interpretation of postcolonial identity.

Conclusion

Magdalene, Vita's therapist in Dovey's novel *In the Garden of the Fugitives*, asks her audience to tell her about their first experience of "sensing racial difference" (237). Another question which could also be asked is when they "sensed that they were part of a postcolonial society". An answer relevant to this project would be: it was when they heard Nelson Mandela's inaugural speech in 1994, when he quoted Ingrid Jonker's poem, "The Child." Much has been written of his inclusion of a poet who represents the voice of the oppressor. It was a reconciliatory gesture in which he highlighted the dissident voice of a woman who opposed her culture's ideology. It was also an announcement of an intention to set down principles of inclusivity and democracy, ones that address postcolonial issues of "cultural differences and identity" (Boehmer, 2018:21).

In my reading of *Small Moving Parts* (2010) by Sally-Ann Murray, *False River* (2013) by Dominique Botha and *In the Garden of the Fugitives* (2018) by Ceridwen Dovey, I have focused on the three autobiographical novels as postcolonial post-apartheid texts. I refer to these texts as both postcolonial and post-apartheid as a reminder that these terms are linked but also differential. Both terms refer to contexts of social and political change. The post-apartheid context is regarded as "complex territory" (Garman, 2013:1) but it nonetheless needs to be regarded as part of the postcolonial framework. My main intention has been to analyse the representations of identity by three writers whose life stories contain South African settings, and who are conscious of the many tensions surrounding white identity and its constructions. I have therefore applied a broad critical focus in my analysis of their texts, giving particular attention to their cultural and political contexts of production and reception. Their precariousness within these contexts is the subject of my topic, implied in the word "Trespassing". My main argument is that each writer's narrativisation of self is a strategic and productive response to her complex situation.

The interpretation of the three postcolonial texts by Murray, Botha and Dovey engages with discourses of whiteness, feminism and autobiography, and employs symptomatic and reparative analysis. All three writers in this project present versions of pasts which are marked by racial division. I have argued that Murray and Botha are writers who reframe their apartheid childhood as ordinary lives. Their novels appeal to those who are invested in re-envisioning the past and listening to “heretical conversations” which defamiliarise conceptions of white apartheid identity (Nuttall, 2009:12). In Dovey’s transnational novel, *In the Garden of the Fugitives*, her representation of identity is not related to the ideology of emerging nationhood. Vita, her protagonist, is tormented by her identity as a white beneficiary of apartheid and it becomes apparent that South Africa’s racial history is an intertext for Dovey’s deconstruction of colonial ideology and its master narrative of liberal humanism. Her narrative of self is an answer to white studies’ symptomatic reading of itself. However, its dark humour is inflected with the self-irony reminiscent of J.M. Coetzee, her literary idol, who parodied white liberal guilt in his representations of identity. Although I have yoked the three novels together, I shall review them separately within their contexts of interpretation.

Small Moving Parts (2010) and *False River* (2013) are considered as post-apartheid literary works. They are significant not only as post-anti-apartheid writing, but are important as narratives for the “coming into being of a ‘new’ nation like South Africa” (Green, 1999:121). Yet, this moment is an uncertain one because with so few markers of nationhood, South Africa’s narration into new beginnings is complicated, and “can be nothing if not naked in its constructedness” (Green, 1999:122). In the early time in which they write, Murray and Botha respond to registers of reconciliation following the TRC’s call for healing, as well as literary voices such as Nadine Gordimer’s, who states that it is a time to “offer one’s self (Gordimer, 1982, cited by Attwell, 1993). It was a literary climate that felt “newly invigorated with a different relationship to the past

[...] and willing to take risks (both ethically and formally)” (Frenkel and MacKenzie, 2010:4). According to Mbembe (2001), “The postcolonial relationship is one of ‘conviviality’ in South Africa’s case, where victim and oppressor have to share the same living space” (cited by Frenkel and MacKenzie, 2010:6).

There have been some who contested this: Samantha Vice, for example, advocates that South African whites should eradicate their cultural identification (2010:323), and she believes that white voices should be silenced. Against this, Nuttall argues that theorising South Africa in a “lens of ‘difference’” is retrogressive and embeds the country in the apartheid past (2004:732). For this reason, I found it necessary to rely on a poetic of entanglement, using a lens of reparative reading to counterbalance the symptomatic reading of whiteness studies. The narratives of Murray and Botha written within the post-apartheid context, are therefore carefully considered under the rubric of ‘trespassing’.

Recalling their childhood past is a doubling-back for Murray and Botha as they re-imagine and deconstruct the ideology of apartheid, which essentialises race. In the analysis of Murray’s autobiographical narrative, the precarity of a white working-class childhood is emphasised to debunk stereotypical notions of white privilege. Her feminist bildungsroman is an empowering story that speaks to the gender discourses of overcoming vulnerability. Murray manipulates autobiographical conventions to build a nuanced sense of female subjectivity. Her imaginative focaliser, Halley, is filtered from a mature perspective so that she self-reflexively narrates Murray’s re-imagined self into the postcolonial present. A reparative reading of her novel felt purposeful in response to the author’s poetic evocation of an innocent but shadowed past. While Murray humorously exposes the class prejudices of English colonial culture which her mother has

internalised, the author's silence about the domestic helpers who feature significantly in her life are dishearteningly symptomatic of her own blind spots.

Botha's *False River* is a very personal story of love and sorrow embedded in the traditions of Afrikaner culture. In Dominique's life story, Botha contradicts monolithic perceptions of whiteness by depicting discrimination against a liberal Afrikaner family by a conservative Afrikaner community in which they are othered. Dominique and her brother Paul are also both caught up in oppressive gender structures within their own family. Botha's representation of her sexuality, like that of Murray, is complicated by feelings of shame and guilt that are symptomatic of internalised repression. While Paul confronts the restrictions of his environment, Dominique quietly conforms to her family's social pressures and conceals her feelings. Botha's representation of female identity has therefore drawn negative criticism. However, I argue in my analysis that this is a narrative strategy: at the end of her autobiographical novel, Botha reveals that it is a metafiction in which she deconstructs repressive aspects of Afrikaner ideology. Dominique is a mask for Botha, allowing her to be more discreet about her personal family. Her novel is a feminist text which inscribes her brother's heterodoxy into a vision of a regenerated Afrikaner identity within a South African social imaginary. Botha's novel also transforms the traditions of the *plaasroman* so that it becomes a *künstlerroman* symbolising her growth as an artist. I did not find a symptomatic approach a necessary corrective in my approach to Botha's novel.

Dovey's transnational novel, *In the Garden of the Fugitives*, was incorporated in my project to broaden its focus. Although it is only partly set in South Africa, her novel allows me to explore South Africa's orientation within a global context. According to Emily Davis (2013), "in post-apartheid South Africa, South African writers must contend not just with a transformed political and social landscape but also with an international readership trained to expect certain kinds of

stories from the apartheid era” (799). Davis claims that in South Africa the literary is not only defined by local response, but by complex, often inconsistent and self-interested, British and North American fields of publishers, reviewers and readers (799).

My engagement with Dovey’s transactional novel has exposed key theoretical differences between local and international South African postcolonial critics: Nuttall’s observation that literary scholars of South Africa currently in Britain or the United States are influenced by a “politics of loss, or melancholia” (2006:272) is affirmed by Boehmer’s claim that South African literature is characterised by a repetitive poetics of crisis that privileges the writing of pain over the writing of everyday life (Boehmer, 2018:88). In contradiction to motifs of ‘seams’, ‘complicities’ and ‘entanglements’ which are highlighted by South African critics, Boehmer argues that “writer and critics grow fixated on crisis” in the “empire of trauma that South Africa inhabits” (the HIV/AIDS epidemic; the escalation of rape and crime; violent labour disputes; Marikana and xenophobia) (97). Furthermore, Boehmer argues that this representation of pain is lucrative because it appeals to the world literary market. In the light of Boehmer’s comments, I understand that Dovey’s representation of Vita’s obsessive white guilt is influenced by perceptions of an overseas market. Boehmer implies, however, that literature on trauma has become predictable and formulaic.

I thus examine Ceridwen Dovey’s *In the Garden of the Fugitives* (2018), viewing it as a work of transnational fiction. Vita’s performance of white shame and guilt is addressed to a global audience which perceives South Africa’s apartheid history as an almost timeless symbol of iniquity (Barnard, 2006:7). Dovey thus taps into South Africa’s iconic status in the “globalisation of suffering” which Barnard identifies as the cultural capital of Oprah Winfrey (7). This

signification becomes Dovey's intertext for her characterisation of Vita, whose journey from crippling guilt becomes the script for *In the Garden of the Fugitives*.

Dovey's allegorical representation of complicity in the relationship between Royce and Vita exposes issues of power and oppression that deconstruct colonial and gender ideology. Dovey's poststructuralist approach, and the metafictional twist at the end of her novel, bring decentred notions of self to her autobiographical text. Dovey's representation of identity seems generic, and Magdalene, Vita's young black therapist, is instantiated with images of alienating exoticism. In a mainly symptomatic reading of her text, I argue that although its feminist insights and microscopic portrayal of complicity have relevance in post-apartheid South Africa, Dovey's postmodern approach has an impersonal, distancing effect. Therefore, like Duncan Brown (2014:1120), I question the doubleness of a national/transnational South African literature. Brown endorses Chapman's (2011) claim that there "remains a historical need to anchor literatures" (Brown, 2014:1121).

My main concern in this project has been to address whiteness studies, which rely on symptomatic reading. By giving attention to strategies of reparative reading, postcolonial criticism, with its focus on exposing the privileged space of white Western subjects, limits the capacity to respond to texts affectively. However, I have found the theoretical disparity between global and South African postcolonial writing and criticism has the capacity to influence South Africa's self-image: in reinforcing an image of South Africa's exceptionalism in the global imaginary, external critics undermine the modernity and enlightened values for which the majority struggle (Barnard, 2011:215). The disjunctions between South Africa in the global imaginary and in South Africa's social imaginary have had a significant influence in shaping my interpretation of identity in the

three texts of this study. However, I have found reparative theory has energised my reading of postcolonial literature and would recommend it as rewarding area for future research.

Writing in a postcolonial space, the three women in this study realise that their entanglement with a disgraced past implies notions of trespassing. Murray and Botha resist this pressure by representing individuals whose subjectivities are in conflict with their cultural identities, whether race, class, politics or gender. In *Small Moving Parts*, Murray, constructs the vibrant subjectivity of young girl who experiences the instability of poverty and apartheid. In *False River*, Dominique's subjectivity is dominated by the oppressive orthodoxies of her Afrikaner community and she experiences displacement in an English colonial-style boarding school in Natal. Dovey's novel, *In the Garden of the Fugitives*, offers a different perspective of postcolonial identity and female subjectivity. Her characterisation of Vita's female identity depicts an allegorical contest between Vita and liberal masculinist discourses constituting her identity. Dovey's representation of female identity, which is abstract and universalising, correlates with her diasporic experiences as a cosmopolitan, migrant individual. Nevertheless, the feelings of vulnerability and displacement Vita experiences reflect the dislocation and uncertainty of postcolonial conditions.

All three authors represent fractured subjectivities that are compromised by oppressive racial, social and political practices, yet also reflect their entanglement with them. Their richly-imagined narratives of white identity might appear to be trespassing. However, from both a post-apartheid and postcolonial perspective, they also resist the closure of creative spaces during a time of change and uncertainty, in which futures are dreamed and human concerns can be shared.

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