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1. Introduction

In an age in which strict demarcations between disciplines and clear boundaries of single academic fields can no longer be upheld, trauma theory is a field of study that has profited from the postmodern “erosion of barriers between the humanities disciplines” (Brown 93) which has led to a more and more interdisciplinary approach (180). In her investigation into the origins of trauma theory as applied in an academic context, Susannah Radstone (2007) compiles a concise list of concepts as well as of disciplines which aided in its shaping. Her enumeration features “deconstruction, post-structuralism and psychoanalysis [as well as] clinical work [and] contributions by neuro-scientists [as well as] literary theorists” (10). Vice versa, the humanities also profited from the insights obtained by trauma theory as it offers a new perspective the “theoretical impasses” (11) regarding the “relation between representation and ‘actuality’” (12). Since trauma theory is predominantly concerned with an individual’s testimony of traumatic events that occurred in the past, its objects of study, more often than not, consist of textual sources. Thus, it hardly needs mentioning that trauma theory has become a fruitful tool in literary studies for analysing both fictional and non-fictional accounts of trauma.

With regard to genre, it can be said that the trauma novel has raised considerably scholarly interest; as it represents an example of trauma fiction it is not an “unmediated, direct testimony of trauma” (Mengel 145). Instead, the “highly complex aesthetic structures” (ibid.) that these novels exhibit once again point to the tension between representation and reality; both on the level of content and on the level of form (ibid.). This tension is intensified when it comes to the genre of non-fiction since works thus categorised are met with the expectation of containing the truth on the one hand; on the other hand, it is not possible to dismiss the fact that the stories contained in such works are inevitably shaped in the very act of their being told. It is precisely this contradiction inherent in personal narratives of non-fiction, such as the memoir, that makes them prone for an analysis of how a traumatic incident of the past is represented and recreated in writing. Moreover, to come to terms with one’s past trauma is of paramount importance for the individual as it is a prerequisite for overcoming one’s traumatic experience and for envisaging the possibility of a future that is not haunted by past inflictions.

The savageries of the 20th century, as for example the two World Wars and the Holocaust, have proven that trauma is not solely an event-centred incidence that

may befall the individual. On the contrary, the atrocities committed in the name of a country's regime have demonstrated that there is indeed such a thing as a traumatised collective or a collective trauma. What is more, South Africa during apartheid has illustrated that trauma can be an institutionalised condition sanctioned and perpetuated by those in power, so to speak. It is therefore no surprise that the vast amount of South African trauma memoirs adverts to the need of a nation to re-visit and re-examine its own past.¹ In many of these memoirs personal instances of trauma and national trauma are inseparable. What remains open for discussion is the question how identity is negotiated, as well as represented, in such highly personal testimonies of trauma; in other words, it would be instructive to examine the relationship between the experiencing self and the narrating self. On the basis of these considerations, it would be valid to address the following questions: Does the preoccupation with the past create an impasse for the author or does it enable him or her to make meaning of it? Is the memoir an adequate form for working through trauma by narration? How do individual trauma and collective trauma influence each other?

Based on these questions, this thesis will analyse three selected trauma memoirs by white African writers. It will be postulated that the private and personal trauma experienced by the respective protagonists is presented against the backdrop of a wider political as well as national trauma. It will be examined how the three selected texts – J. M. Coetzee's *Boyhood* (1998), Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Let's Go To The Dogs Tonight* (2003), and Donald McRae's *Under Our Skin* (2012) – represent this correlation of the aforementioned instances of trauma through a close-reading. Furthermore, it will be explored if a clear dividing line between "private" and "national" trauma does, in fact, stand up to scrutiny. Moreover, the narration of trauma in the context of a memoir will be viewed as a re-visitation of the traumatising events and, simultaneously, as an attempt of working through the infliction. Thus, it will be essential to investigate to what extent the narration of trauma, in general and with regard to the aforementioned texts, may serve as a means of overcoming one's trauma by incorporating it into one's life story.

In order to achieve these aims, the first part of this thesis will trace the history of trauma theory from its beginnings in the 19th century to the current debates. In the course of this, key concepts by Cathy Caruth, Bessel van der Kolk, Dominick

¹ See chapter on "Trauma, Memory and History" in *Trauma, memory and narrative in the contemporary South African novel: essays*. ed. Ewald Mengel. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012. 283-379.

LaCapra, and Ruth Leys will be critically discussed and assessed. Moreover, a brief introduction to narrative psychology and the concept of PTG, posttraumatic growth, as put forward by Tedeschi and Calhoun will be supplied. Finally, with the aid of research by David Carr, Jefferson A. Singer, and Leigh Gilmore, the importance of life stories and memoirs will be elaborated.

The second part of this thesis will consist of an in-depth analysis of the above cited memoirs which have been chosen since all of them are concerned with childhood memories. Thus, the time interval between the actual experiences and their narration is extensive enough to consider the texts in question as reconstructions as well as rewritings of the past. Moreover, although each of them foregrounds a different aspect in their respective representations of trauma, they all demonstrate the influence between the sociopolitical and sociocultural conditions of South Africa and the private, everyday life of the protagonists. Therefore, identity, personal trauma, and historical trauma will be the main categories of assessment.

2. Trauma Theory

2.1. Origins

It is only logical that a discussion of the origins of trauma theory should address the question how a concept borrowed from the field of emergency surgery has come to denote a psychological ailment of unforeseen dimensions. Ruth Leys not only considers this question in her book *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2003) but she sets out to answer it as well. She does so by delineating a conceptual history of the term “trauma” that ranges from the earliest description of so-called “traumatic neuroses” (3) to a brief assessment of Cathy Caruth’s influential work on traumatic memory.

It can be argued that the current interdisciplinary debates in the field of trauma theory are foreshadowed by the very denomination of the term “trauma” and its twofold, physical as well as psychological, connotation. Ruth Leys certainly argues convincingly for such a view of the subject matter. Thus, without meaning to provide a mere summary of Ley’s work, I would nevertheless like to take up some of her points and discuss them in more detail.

It is striking how the history of the theoretical preoccupation with trauma is itself characterised by suppression, absence, and resurfacing; terms usually employed to define the singular phases of traumatic memory. The suppression of the engagement with trauma occurred soon after its discovery by John Erichsen, who treated victims of railway accidents suffering from excessive fear (3). The “traumatic neurosis” (3), a term employed first by the German neurologist Paul Oppenheim, did not fail to raise interest in the physicians of the latter half of the 19th century; however, these physicians did fail to make a connection between the physiological shock and the mental suffering of their patients; thus, trauma was attributed to physical yet untraceable cerebral alterations (3).

It was only when the physicians of the *Hôpital Salpêtrière* drew an analogy between what they knew about traumatic neuroses and what they witnessed themselves in the behaviour of, largely, female patients that the discovery was made that “the wounding of the *mind* brought about by sudden, unexpected, emotional shock” [original emphasis] could bring about a state of complete dissociation (4). The men around J. M. Charcot, eminent figures such as “Pierre Janet, Alfred Binet, Morton Prince, Josef Breuer [and] Sigmund Freud” (3-4), initially resorted to hypnosis to uncover the hidden, suppressed, and dissociated memories of their patients.

Having discovered the mechanism that a traumatised psyche may revert to, the collective of physicians became divided over the further course of action. While Charcot perpetuated his hypnotic treatment, Freud began to speculate about the causes of “hysteria” (4) in the female patients. He soon arrived at a theoretical impasse when he situated the origin of hysteria in the “unconscious, repressed memories of sexual trauma” (ibid.) at first, but then rejected this theory in favour of his theory of drives in which he postulated that “repressed erotic infantile wishes and fantasies” play a crucial role in the occurrence of trauma (ibid.).

This is to say that by a shift in interest towards the psychosexual development of the individual, Freud “den[ied] the significance of actual trauma on the individual psyche” (ibid.). Thereby, he simultaneously emphasised the individual’s capacity for interpretation as well as the influence of what he termed “*Nachträglichkeit*, or deferred action” (20) as Leys points out, as it is

[n]ot the experience itself which acted traumatically, but its delayed revival as a memory [...]. Trauma was constituted by a relationship between two events or experiences [...] neither of which was intrinsically traumatic, and a temporal delay or latency through which the past was available only by a deferred act of understanding and interpretation (20).

Freud’s contemporaries were more than reluctant to embrace his theories about the connection between trauma and infantile sexuality. Furthermore, the turn of the century saw a substantial decline in popularity of hypnosis as a method for unearthing repressed trauma (ibid.). This is mainly due to accusations that were held against practitioners of hypnosis, namely that they influenced their patients in such a way that “the ‘fabrication’ of more or less false memories” (299) was commonplace.

Before I turn to the phase of absence in the history of trauma, I would like to point out that Leys situates the current conflicts in trauma theory at precisely this moment of its development (8-12). She stresses that the question whether the victim of trauma is initially aware of the traumatic event or not is trauma theory’s fork in the road. She goes on to denominate the two opposing positions that arise from how theorists position themselves vis-à-vis this question as “mimetic theory” (298) and “antimimetic theory” (299). Leys holds that the adherents of the mimetic theory view the impact of trauma as shattering to a degree which “preclude[es] the kind of specular distance necessary for cognitive knowledge of what had happened” (9). In opposition to this view, antimimetic theorists regard trauma as a violent outer force

threatening to dismantle the individual's protective shields yet, all the while "the subject is essentially aloof from the traumatic experience, in the sense that she [...] can therefore see and represent [it] to herself and others" (299).

Given the prevailing dichotomies in trauma theory, such as representation versus the unrepresentability of trauma, the narration of the traumatic experience versus the unsuitability of language to do so, or repetition-compulsion versus post-traumatic growth, to name but a few, I would agree with Leys that the initial inquiry into the nature of trauma has left a legacy of unresolved questions to be answered by current researchers.

I will now proceed with discussing the phase of absence in the history of trauma theory. This phase is not so much characterised by a waning in interest in trauma as by a methodological helplessness in the face of mass trauma brought about by two succeeding world wars.

Surgeons working in the trenches during World War I were mainly concerned with patching soldiers up in order to "get the men back to the trenches as quickly as possible" as medical historian Julie Anderson demonstrates in her online article for the British Library. Initially, psychological symptoms which would constitute the category of "shell shock" were treated with suspicion; and so were men displaying them as many physicians saw nothing else than cases of malingering in the soldiers' suffering.

However, in an attempt to tackle the tenacious mental symptoms, a small number of doctors remembered and reinstated Freud's talking cure which eventually led to a shift in the discussion of trauma. The concern lay now with discovering what it was that rendered the talking cure effective, and no longer with the nature of the traumatic experience itself. To use Leys' words, it was hotly debated

[a]mong British physicians William Brown, William McDougall [and] Charles S. Myers [...] whether the therapeutic success of catharsis, if any, depended on the cognitive recovery and integration of traumatic memories or on the emotional intensity of the cathartic discharge, or abreaction (12).

The debate instigated during World War I continued in much the same manner during World War II without rendering any new clues as to what it was that brought about relief:

When barbiturates were introduced as new forms of medical treatment, their effects on the patients saw the same question resurfacing that had already troubled physicians during the First World War: Was it the conscious involvement with their trauma that had a positive effect on the victims or was it the release of pent-in emotions (14)? In other words, was it necessary for the patient to remember the actual trauma and to access it in all its details or did it suffice if the drug-therapy “induc[ed] actings-out that might faithfully represent the origin but might just as well take the form of fictive-suggestive performances” (303)? This oscillation between two opposite positions is reminiscent of the general opposition between mimetic and antimimetic theories of trauma as Ruth Leys indicates (302-304).

On top of this, she asserts that the issue at stake is nothing less than the individual’s position towards his or her own trauma. Implied here are also the individual’s capacity for remembering and the role of memory in general.

The latter point is curiously echoed in trauma history. Leys observes that after 1945, the discussions about the effective treatment of war neuroses as well as the occupation with trauma came to an abrupt halt (5). This is insofar a source of astonishment as the post-World War II period abounded with testimonies of trauma, be it on the side of veterans, on the side of civilians, or on the side of Holocaust survivors. However, as Leys concedes, not only was there a neglect in merging the literature on Holocaust survivors with the accounts of veterans and civilians, but psychiatry failed to foresee the negative long-term effects the survivors’ experiences would generate (15). I would like to add another possible reason for the disregard of trauma after World War II as put forward by Jolande Withuis (2010) who suggests that the “post-war reconstruction era” (309) was, in fact, a “culture of silence” (ibid.) in which war-time memories were either repressed or silenced. All of these factors contribute to what I see as a phase of absence within trauma history. This absence is characterised by the obvious presence of trauma in society on the one hand, but also by an effort, conscious or not, to refrain from acknowledging its presence on the other hand. Thus, societal trauma is linked to individual trauma on the level of finding ways of accessing it. This is a point that I will take up later in my analysis of the selected memoirs.

In accordance with my view is what Withuis declares for the 1970s and 1980s, namely that these decades witnessed an important transformation which converted post-war “culture of silence” (ibid.) into a modern “culture of speaking out” (ibid.) in which “emotions were expressed instead of repressed” (ibid.). Moreover, she states that the possibility of expression of trauma within society paved the way for “today’s trauma culture” (309). Indeed, this pointed statement sums up the processes which led to the inclusion of the category of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III, 1980)* of the American Psychiatric Association (APA). Leys adds that the official acknowledgement of traumatic symptoms was an “essentially political struggle by psychiatrists, social workers, activists, and others” (5) who were confronted with traumatised Vietnam veterans on a daily basis. Needless to say, the support from a powerful official side such as the APA marked a milestone in the history of trauma; and it enabled victims and survivors of traumatic events to openly request the assistance they needed.

Yet, today’s assessment of PTSD as a valid diagnostic category is less enthusiastic. This is mainly due to the fact that PTSD is, like many other attempts at categorisation, “far from being a timeless entity with an intrinsic unity [but] a historical construct” (Leys 6). Thus, more than thirty years after its establishment, its universal validity is indeed questionable. More importantly, “the very terms in which PTSD is described tend to produce controversy” (ibid.). That is to say, even its historical coming-into-being is problematic. The main problem lies in the conflation of several quite diverse traumata into a single category with a fixed set of criteria as well as in the blurring of “a wide diversity of opinion about the nature of trauma” (ibid.). It also needs mentioning that the criteria resemble a check-list on the basis of which the attending psychiatrist decides whether or not a patient suffers from PTSD or any other mental disorder. This set-up is historically attributable to the task that psychiatric medical personnel was charged with, namely to discern whether or not a war veteran fitted the diagnosis and was thus entitled to receive monetary compensation (Edkins 47).

Another problematic aspect is the fact that the list of criteria comprises symptoms largely derived from the reactions of traumatised soldiers. Nevertheless, it has become the guideline for diagnosing and treating all sorts of traumatic

experiences such as sexual abuse, near-death experiences, or surviving natural catastrophes.

This initial crux in the diagnostic conventions has given rise to two specific further issues: Firstly, the standardised delineation of PTSD made it difficult for people whose symptoms differed from it to be taken seriously. Likewise, the predefined range of symptoms allowed for a feigning of the condition (McNally 276). Secondly, two particular features, one of which was first mentioned in the revision of the *DSM-III*, the *DSM-III-R* of 1987, occasioned the notion that “the victim [of trauma] is unable to process the traumatic experience in a normal way” (Leys 7). These features are, even in their description, closely tied to memory: On the one hand, the victim is marked as someone who loses control over his or her cognitive abilities because of a “sudden acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring (including ‘flashback’ or dissociative episodes)” as the *DSM-III* phrases it (McNally 8); on the other hand, for the first time, the victim is presented as someone whose recollections are no longer his or her own because of the “inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma (psychogenic amnesia)” (10) in the wording of the *DSM-III-R*.

As this thesis is focuses on the question of recalling trauma and working through it with the help of the literary form of the memoir, I will dedicate the next chapter to the exploration of the interplay between trauma and memory. Thus, I will now conclude this section in which I have provided a brief survey of the history of trauma theory with the assistance of Ruth Leys’ work.

2. 2. Trauma Theory and Memory

As stated above, this section will be concerned with the well-contested question of how trauma influences memory. In order to do so, a scrutiny of Cathy Caruth’s work as well as Bessel van der Kolk’s studies is necessary as both have shaped the perceptions about traumatic memory functions and both continue to exert influence on today’s trauma studies. Moreover, both were among the pioneers of trauma theory in the 1980s and both relied heavily on the APA’s codification of PTSD. Above all, both hold the opinion that trauma as an experience lies beyond representation and that it is except from the ordinary workings of memory. To further demonstrate the stark dichotomy generated by the questions regarding traumatic memory, I will briefly sketch what has come to be known as “Memory Wars” (Lackhurst 32) between

adherents of *Recovered Memory Therapy (RMT)* (31) and proponents of *False Memory Syndrome* (32).

2.2.1. Van der Kolk

I will begin by examining van der Kolk's research as he provided the neuroscientific-empirical foundation on which his as well as Caruth's notions of trauma's workings on memory are built. Van der Kolk is very open in his praise of the category of PTSD as can be observed in the following quote:

The acceptance of the formal category of PTSD was a critical first step in making possible to name the effects of overwhelming experiences on soma and psyche, and thus to open the systematic investigation of how people come to be overwhelmed (4).

It is, of course, undeniable that trauma has overpowering effects on the mental as well as physical capacities of an individual; however, it needs to be taken into account what van der Kolk has in mind when he talks about "overwhelming experiences" (4), which is, in fact, a position very much along the lines of the two features of the PTSD category that I presented earlier: "[I]t is the persistence of intrusive and distressing recollections, and not the direct experience of the traumatic event itself" (6) which is responsible for traumatic repercussions in which "the sensations and emotions belonging to the event start leading a life of their own" (8). In other words, for van der Kolk, the most troubling traumatic symptoms are intrusions, which may occur in the form of flashbacks and dreams, and which lie beyond the control of the individual who experiences them. This impotency in the aftermath of a traumatic event is based on the assumption that

[o]wing to the emotions of terror and surprise caused by certain events, the mind is split or dissociated: it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed. As a result, the victim is unable to recollect and integrate the hurtful experience in normal consciousness; instead, she is haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories (Leys 2).

This quote illustrates what lies behind the *DSM-III* criteria as well as van der Kolk's approach, namely the premise that the individual is, due to being overwrought by shock, fundamentally absent while the trauma is happening; yet, subsequently a

belated reprocessing, of which the affected person is once more not in control, sets in. The traumatic past is thus turned into a perpetual “traumatic present” (2) by intrusions, flashbacks, and re-enactments as Leys indicates.

This emphasis on traumatic symptoms has further implications. The most controversial one is van der Kolk’s idea that trauma is quite literally “‘etched’ on the mind and brain with timeless accuracy [...] because it is encoded [...] in a different way from ordinary memory” (Leys 239). This is to say that trauma becomes a recorded and isolated entity “in a special traumatic memory system” (204). At the same time, the traumatic symptoms are turned into “literal replicas or repetitions of the trauma” (229). On top of that, both the recorded memory and the symptoms are said to be beyond representation (*ibid.*).

Van der Kolk rests his claims on the neurobiological observation that severe stress, such as trauma, causes an anomalous release of the neurotransmitter norepinephrine (256). This in turn affects the limbic system which adjusts a person’s emotional reactions. Van der Kolk and his colleagues speculate that the recurrent release of high levels of norepinephrine instigates a change in the chemical environment that eventually leads to the manifestation of PTSD in a patient (Leys 256-257). In addition, van der Kolk claims that traumatic memory “*may* have no verbal (explicit) component whatsoever” [*emphasis added*] (van der Kolk 287) due to decreased action in Broca’s area, the brain’s language centre, during the controlled triggering of traumatic memories. Van der Kolk’s hesitant wording of his assumptions is quite revealing:

[V]ery high levels of emotional arousal *may* prevent the proper evaluation and categorization of experience by interfering with hippocampal function. One can *hypothesize* that when this occurs, sensory inprints of experience are stored in memory; however, because the hippocampus is prevented from fulfilling its integrative function, these various inprints are not organized into a unified whole. The experience is laid down, and later retrieved, as isolated images, bodily sensations, smells, and sounds that feel alien and separate from other life experiences [...] these fragments continue to lead an isolated existence. Traumatic memories are timeless and ego-alien [*emphasis added*] (295).

As a result of the isolated and non-verbal status of traumatic memory, van der Kolk concludes that every attempt at narrating trauma must inevitably fail as a transfer from traumatic to “ordinary memory” (296) is subject to distortions.

Initially hailed as a break-through in the neurobiological trauma research, van der Kolk's approach has been heavily criticised by fellow researchers and trauma theorists alike. The criticism concerns van der Kolk's methods as well as his hypotheses. Regarding methodology, Leys cites Allan Young who has demonstrated that van der Kolk's scientific evidence is based on a study in which "the predicted outcome failed to occur" (257). Thus, his claim that the traumatic event is preserved and reproduced in traumatic symptoms like a "pristine and timeless historical truth undistorted or uncontaminated by subjective meaning" (7) is questionable.

Moreover, Leys finds fault with van der Kolk's narrowly conceived subject. According to him, the individual's reaction to trauma becomes a matter of a neurochemical cause-and-effect chain which completely disregards the "personal cognitive schemes, psychosocial factors, or unconscious symbolic elaboration" (7) of the person affected. To put it differently, van der Kolk's insistence on the literal nature of traumatic symptoms rests on the presupposition of a subject reduced to physiological mechanisms as such a subject would indeed be helplessly governed by neurochemical impulses.

I would like to remark that a sceptical approach towards van der Kolk's theory of the exact representation of trauma in traumatic symptoms does not entail a questioning of these symptoms as such. Traumatic symptoms are a well-documented and a valid issue in the psychotherapeutic treatment of trauma victims. Rather, what I am challenging is the proposition that trauma is an external event which befalls the individual and which elicits a series of neurobiological responses while it simultaneously eludes all attempts at representation.

2. 2. 2. Caruth

The theory-laden poststructuralist side of the same coin is represented by Cathy Caruth's work as the underlying assumptions about the nature of traumatic memory are identical. In conformity with van der Kolk, Caruth positions trauma and the individual at opposite ends of the scale. Moreover, she holds that the impact of trauma is severe to such an extent that it brings about the very opposite of representation which is imagined as a gaping hole or a wound (Leys 249). Yet, very much in line with van der Kolk's theories, Caruth's wound has a pivotal function since it is the single entity which can testify to the actual trauma (ibid.). Thus, the wound as such transcends the capabilities of the traumatised individual; for the victim is

reduced to a state of ignorance as he or she “cannot witness or testify to the trauma in the sense of narrate and represent it to themselves and others” (252) as Leys summarises Caruth’s ideas. However, what the victim is granted, is an acting-out or a re-enactment of the traumatic experience “as if it were literally happening all over again” (ibid.). This last point echoes van der Kolk’s claim that traumatic symptoms are the only direct access to underlying trauma. Consequently, Caruth opines that every attempt at representation, as for example in narration, distorts the original traumatic event. In examining Caruth’s assumptions, Leys raises an important issue when she argues that

[T]he subject’s not-knowing of the trauma – his inability to speak or represent his experience – is what *guarantees* the return of the truth in the patient’s traumatic repetitions. From this perspective, the concept of trauma as literal provides an essentially *ethical* solution to the crisis of representation [...] As such a solution, trauma in its literality, muteness, and unavailability for representation becomes a sacred object or “icon” that it would be a “sacrilege” to misappropriate or tamper with in any way [original emphasis] (252-253).

Trauma as a manifestation of the sublime or as an object of worship for the individual or for a whole community will be central to my discussion of Dominick LaCapra’s work on traumatic history further on in this paper. For now, it will suffice to illustrate how Caruth paves the way for such an unequivocal idolisation in her argumentation. In essence, Caruth re-interprets Tasso’s allegory *Tancred and Clorinda* which Freud employs in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) to demonstrate that people are prone to repeat unpleasant experiences; like Tancred who kills his disguised beloved by mistake and subsequently wounds her again when he uses his sword to strike at a tree in which Clorinda’s soul is trapped. Clorinda’s voice issues from the tree to tell Tancred that he has hurt her yet again.

Leys aptly elaborates on the various flaws in Caruth’s reading (292-297). Thus, I would like to focus on what I perceive to be the issue at stake in Caruth’s version. Her most original deviation lies in making Tancred the victim of the story by postulating that he is caught up in a trauma of which he has no knowledge. As Leys points out, Caruth simply ignores the fact that Tancred is well aware of his deed and bemoans his beloved; for she is trying to reconcile the story with her own “performative theory of trauma” (293). Accordingly, Tancred’s murder of Clorinda becomes the epitome of trauma itself, as Caruth sees it, namely an event which “is

experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness” (Caruth 4). Additionally, Caruth believes that the truth of the traumatic experience reveals itself solely in traumatic intrusions (ibid.). Consequently, Tancred’s second wounding of Clorinda is seen as an example of the range of “repetitive actions of the survivor” (ibid.) since he has no conscious knowledge of the initial trauma. Naturally, Tancred’s status as victim calls for a re-interpretation of Clorinda’s role. As trauma is “always the story of a wound that cries out” (ibid.) and it is, in fact, Clorinda who cries out, she comes “to represent the other within the self” (9). That is to say, Clorinda *is* Tancred. On top of that, Caruth uses the topos of “the other within the self” to make her ultimate claim:

But we can also read the address of the voice here, not as the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past, but as the story of the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound (8).

By marking the individual person as unable to register his or her own trauma or to testify to it, Caruth presents the role of the individual in relation to trauma, in general, as negligible. Such a stance has serious repercussions. The severest being that a traumatised individual, in the Caruthian sense, is deprived of coming to terms with his or her trauma. This is to say that Caruth denies the individual the possibility of working through trauma and, consequently, of achieving post-traumatic growth. Instead, Caruth’s trauma victim is forever trapped in re-enactments and intrusions, waiting for an empathic listener to make sense of it all. The parallels between Caruth’s compulsive trauma victim and van der Kolk’s neurochemically governed one are striking. Thus, it can be argued that for both Caruth and van der Kolk the crucial characteristic of a traumatised individual is the complete lack of autonomy. Moreover, it should be noted that both their theories are “designed to preserve the truth of the trauma as the failure of representation” (Leys 253).

In order to demonstrate the dimensions that the discussions about the nature of traumatic memory had reached at some point, I will interpolate a chapter about the so-called “Memory Wars” (Lackhurst 32) at this stage of my paper, as I deem them to be symptomatic of the theoretical discord that permeates trauma theory in general.

2. 2. 3. Memory Wars

The causes for the eruption of such a war on memory are attributable to a curious concurrence of various facets of the Zeitgeist of the late 1980s and the 1990s. With the aid of prominent theorists such as Judith Herman and founding texts such as Ellen Bass and Laura Davis' *The Courage to Heal* (1988) "readers/patients were encouraged to keep searching their recall memory for chinks or gaps, time-slips or anomalous details" (ibid.); for the then current assumption was that trauma is constituted by what has been forgotten and that healing is only possible through the recovery of the forgotten memories. Accordingly, both therapists and patients were in quest of clues that pointed to forgotten childhood memories of physical and sexual abuse. Moreover, therapists insisted that the therapeutic setting is absolutely essential for bringing to the surface that which has been preserved by memory. This is to say, therapists strayed from their neutral position and aligned themselves with the survivors of trauma against the alleged perpetrators. In order to facilitate the recovery of memories of abuse controversial as well as highly suggestive methods, such as hypnosis, trance, or hypno-therapy, were employed which not only led to an unprecedented amount "of accusations of intrafamilial abuse" (ibid.) but also to the alleged discovery of an internationally operating satanic cult which systematically exploits and brainwashes children (ibid.).

Since "most of these memories have surfaced with the help of mental health professionals" (229), as Richard J. McNally (2005) puts it, their authenticity was soon doubted. Furthermore, the content of these memories usually featured "sexual torture, ritual murder, cannibalism, and mind control-programming" (244), none of which could ever be verified. What is more, instead of getting better through the recovery of their forgotten memories, these patients "became suicidal and their mental health declined" (234-235) rapidly, so that soon "[t]heir mental status was congruent with the horrors reported" (235).

It was not long before a crosscurrent surfaced that questioned the findings of *Recovered Memory Theory*. Above all, the relocation of "the problem of trauma from hypermnesia to amnesia" (ibid.) was strongly contested by the supporters of *False Memory Syndrome*. Researchers who insisted that the amnesia-theory of *Recovered Memory Theory* presents no more than a hazardous distortion of the workings of memory dedicated their time to the refutation of *RMT's* claims. McNally's comprehensive presentation of these studies illustrates that the amnesia theory as

put forward by *RMT* is untenable (209). First of all, “classic psychogenic amnesia” (189) usually concerns a person’s whole identity, not merely an isolated event, and the return of the memories hardly ever demands therapeutic aid (*ibid.*). Furthermore, the wish not to think about a traumatic experience does not point to traumatic amnesia but to a “reluctance to disclose” (208) one’s trauma. Likewise, the inability to remember every detail about the event is not an evidence for amnesia but for ordinary memory processes; as “incomplete encoding” (195) of any memory will lead to an “incomplete recall” (*ibid.*) of the same memory. Most importantly, McNally dispels what he terms “a piece of psychiatric folklore devoid of convincing empirical support” (275), namely “the notion that the mind protects itself by repressing or dissociating memories of trauma, [thus] rendering them inaccessible to awareness” (*ibid.*). Quite the contrary seems to be the case: Heavy emotional as well as psychological strain during a traumatic event “enhance explicit, declarative memory for the trauma itself; they do not impair it” (276). McNally cites a representative study on traumatic memory of Holocaust survivors carried out by Mark Pendergrast (1999) that stresses

[t]he vividness of their horrific memories. Hypermnnesia – extreme memory vividness – has been routinely reported in these studies. This, of course, is entirely consistent with laboratory studies showing that high emotional arousal makes for vivid, detailed memories (211).

McNally also addresses another disputed issue that revolves around the question whether the content of flashbacks and of nightmares represents the literal replication of the traumatic experience. He makes the point that such views present a logical fallacy as they exempt the traumatic dream or nightmare from the rules that apply for regular dreams (110). Dreams are prone to distortion just as memory recollection is prone to processes of reconstruction (*ibid.*). McNally emphasises the fact that there is no evidence for a “quasi-photographic mechanism that faithfully preserves the sensory details of the trauma on a mental videotape” (*ibid.*); for only such a mechanism would guarantee a literal replication of the traumatic event during sleep. Moreover, he considers the interpretation of traumatic intrusions, whether they be nightmares or flashbacks, as “a symbolic evidence of repressed memories [as] a seriously flawed enterprise” (112). This is due to the fact that such an interpretation rests on the implicit presupposition that these intrusions are the only valid access to

the memory of trauma (ibid.). For McNally, “this flies in the face of everything known about how people remember trauma – or anything else, for that matter” (ibid.). He refers to “daytime intrusive recollection” (ibid.) as being the most frequent phenomenon of re-experience. Hence people who experience traumatic nightmares “will surely remember the trauma all too easily while awake” (ibid.).

This brief sketch of the “Memory Wars” was meant to highlight what an ideological minefield the question of the nature of traumatic memory had become. It goes without saying that some of the recovered memories of sexual abuse were true and could be verified; however, the point is that these memories were never inaccessible for the patient. In fact, as McNally’s extensive case analyses have shown, these memories were there all along. Consequently, it can be argued that the true achievement of *Recovered Memory Therapy* lies in asking unpleasant questions that enabled people to disclose their experiences for the first time.

It is conspicuous that the discussions between *Recovered Memory Therapy* and *False Memory Syndrome* involved the selfsame positions that Ruth Leys charts as the two historically opposing theoretical tendencies in trauma theory in general. *Recovered Memory Theory* believes in the literal truth of unearthed memories just as van der Kolk and Caruth believe in the literal replay of a traumatic event in PTSD symptoms such as nightmares and flashbacks. Thus, it can be argued that *Recovered Memory Therapy*, van der Kolk, and Caruth belong to the tradition that denies people’s ability to act as agents in the face of their own trauma. The dissociation of a person from his or her trauma and its accompanying symptoms entails nothing less than the loss of individual trauma or the loss of the individuality of someone’s trauma. A further implication of such a loss is that “victimhood [becomes] unlocatable in any particular person or place” (Leys 296); thus, it may “migrate or spread contagiously to others” (ibid). This becomes most obvious in Caruth’s understanding of trauma as an infection that may befall non-involved bystanders which, in turn, paves the way for the absorption of trauma by whole groups, which may or may not be entitled to it. This brings me on to the next chapter in which I will examine the relationship between trauma and history on a larger scale.

3. Trauma and History

LaCapra's introduction to *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001) can be read as a direct criticism of Caruth's paradigm. In it, he not only questions the obsession with "enacting or acting out post-traumatic symptoms" (xi) but he also cautions against "the overall conflation of history or culture with trauma" (ibid.). Moreover, in said work he advocates the importance of working through trauma, with the help of the respective means, and he illustrates how the continued existence of a shared history shattered by trauma can be achieved. LaCapra's reflections provide the theoretical basis for what can be found in the three memoirs that this thesis seeks to analyse. In all of them, a permeation of the wider historical circumstances into the private lives of individuals generates a traumatic conflict that has to be resolved. Therefore, I will take up, what I deem, LaCapra's most crucial thoughts.

Initially, LaCapra notes that through the impact of trauma time is overturned so that past and present blend into one (21). This is most obvious in the traumatised individual's re-enactment or "acting out" (ibid.) through which "any duality [...] of time (past and present or future) is experientially collapsed or productive only of aporias and double binds" (ibid.). For LaCapra, these aporias and double binds characterise a trauma that has not been dealt with. Consequently, he proposes that dealing with trauma has to counteract these characteristic conditions to such an extent that "one is able to distinguish between past and present" (21-22) once again. Moreover, what is to be desired from working through trauma is the reclaiming of the "memory that something happened to one (or one's people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now" (ibid.). LaCapra suggests that coming to terms with trauma is best achieved by "articulatory practice" (21), "mourning and modes of critical thought and practice" (22). I will address the issue of working through trauma in more detail further on in this paper with reference to post-traumatic growth.

For now, I will focus on what LaCapra sees as hindrance to successfully working through trauma. Above all, the failure to make a distinction between absence and loss in a wider historico-political context is the principal reason for a lingering of trauma (44). LaCapra uses the example of the South African Apartheid regime to point out the pitfalls in dealing with victims as well as perpetrators of a traumatic past. He states that

[i]ndeed, the problem for beneficiaries of earlier oppression [...] is how to recognize and mourn losses of former victims and simultaneously to find a legitimate way to represent and mourn for their own losses without having a self-directed process occlude victims' losses or enter into an objectionable balancing of accounts (44-45).

Thus, he proposes that opposing groups should mourn their respective losses without endeavouring to evoke transcendental pathos. He emphasises that "losses are specific and involve particular events, such as the death of loved ones" (49), hence they are "situated on a historical level" (64). Quite the opposite is true for absence which can only be understood in a "transhistorical sense" (49) and which is involved in the creation of myths as well as in the embedding of essentialist notions within a society. *Paradise Lost* or the Promised Land are typical examples of absence, according to LaCapra (50). I would argue that racist ideas like white supremacy or quasi-mythical founding ideas like the Great Trek South Africa fall into the same category since they have long transcended their historical origin. Despite the fact that absence as well as loss are inherent features of the conception of history, LaCapra advises to keep these two concepts apart. An indiscriminate merging of absence and loss would either create "misplaced nostalgia or utopian politics in quest of a new totality or fully unified community" (46) or an "impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia in which any process of working through the past [...] is foreclosed or prematurely aborted" (46). Moreover, such a conflation would give rise to a large-scale over-identification with people who have experienced losses. Aside from questionable tendencies like "vicarious victimhood" (47), as LaCapra calls it, a downright "appropriation of particular traumas by those who did not experience them" (64-65) might be the consequence of merging absence with loss. A further consequence is the rise of "the dubious ideas that everyone [...] is a victim, that all history is trauma, or that we all share a pathological public sphere or a 'wound culture'" (64). In other words, a culture or society preoccupied with its trauma falls victim to the same traumatic symptoms as an individual person does; most obviously to a complete stagnation caused by melancholia or to repetition-compulsion with regard to violence (66). As stated above, in LaCapra's view, a conscious form of mourning is one possible countermeasure against these tendencies. Another one lies in the creation of "certain forms of nontotalizing narrative and critical, as well as self-critical, thought and practice" (67); examples of such a narrative can be found in the Beckettian oeuvre. Highly important

for both mourning and narration is the observance of a critical distance as well as the emergence of empathy with regards to the victim instead of identification (70-78). LaCapra's emphasis on mourning and narration, which present two possible forms of representation, positions him diametrically opposed to Caruth's and Van der Kolk's ideas. Accordingly, LaCapra criticises both their assumptions as well as the general theoretical notion of viewing traumatic experience as "an unrepresentable excess" (91). As regards Caruth, he demonstrates that she stands very much in the tradition of "the de Manian variant of deconstruction" (107) which leads her to equate the traumatic event with the Lacanian real (ibid.). Thus, her version of trauma theory is constructed on the presupposition that every attempt at representation must inevitably fail or end in distortion due to an endless deferral of signifiers (ibid.). Regarding van der Kolk's neuroscientific speculations, LaCapra questions the significance of an approach that does not take "unconscious processes such as repression" (108) into account.

The postulation of trauma as an unrepresentable experience entails a digression "from what may indeed be represented or reconstructed with respect to traumatizing limit events, and should be, as accurately as possible" (92) in order to enable the onset of working through the experience. Furthermore, it generates "an insufficiently differentiated, rashly generalized, hyperbolic aesthetic of the sublime or even a (positive or negative) sacralisation of the event" (93). That is to say, trauma is transformed into an untouchable object of worship; as such it "may prompt a foreclosure, denigration, or inadequate account not only of representation but of the difficult issue of ethically responsible agency both then and now" (93). Indeed, trauma transformed into a fetishised sublime object may provoke infinite re-visitations and re-evocations that culminate in a constant state of melancholia, in the Freudian sense, which corresponds to

an arrested process in which the depressed, self-berating, and traumatized self, locked in compulsive repetition, is possessed by the past, faces a future of impasses, and remains narcissistically identified with the lost object (65-66).

At worst, this would mean a state of total paralysis in which the individual is trapped in traumatic repetitions and is holding on to them at one and the same time. The consequences for a whole community would be similarly devastating since the communal bond would depend on trauma worship, thus creating a culture of suffering

and lamentation. LaCapra proposes an approach to resolving such states of melancholic compulsion that is mindful of the specific workings and repercussions of trauma. Hence, it refrains from postulating the absolute mastering of it as the only possible expedient. Instead, his approach relies on the assumption that working through trauma is inevitably accompanied by setbacks and by certain forms of re-visitations. However, he asserts that these “failures” (148) are part of a process that “is not linear, teleological, or straightforward” (ibid.) to begin with. It applies to the individual person as well as the collectivity of a nation state that such “memory work” (95) can be viewed as a development that “requires going back to problems, working them over, and perhaps transforming the understanding of them” (ibid.). It can be said that such a process consists of temporarily achieved outcomes that may call for renewed attention again and again (148-149). In this sense, working through trauma bears resemblance to historiography as both depend on and are subject to conscious effort and processes of meaning-making that defy final closure.

LaCapra’s notion of “memory work” has a decidedly literary focus, with narration at its core. As mentioned previously, Samuel Beckett’s work epitomises a form of narration that knowingly foregoes closure, and thereby opens up new dialogic space. Yet, creating such a space is not limited to avant-garde literature; it can also be found in writing that endeavours to articulate the past and that attempts an analysis of traumatic events without resorting to tropes of redemption (186). LaCapra makes an important point when he asserts that “writing trauma is a metaphor in that writing indicates some distance from trauma (even when the experience of writing is itself intimately bound up with trauma)” (186). I agree with LaCapra on this point and I would like to add that I view “writing trauma” as a re-visitation of trauma in the process of working through it; especially with regard to the three memoirs that are to be discussed further on. Thus, the next chapter will focus on narration as a means of working through trauma.

4. Trauma and Narration

4.1. Healing through Narration

I have implied earlier that contemporary trauma theory is, in essence, an example of joint work as it benefits from the insights and approaches of various diverse disciplines. In a more problem-oriented phrasing that echoes the initial remark of this thesis, one could say that “trauma presents an acute instance of [...] a cross-disciplinary problem [...] and how one should approach it in a given genre or discipline is an essentially contested question” (LaCapra 204-205). LaCapra’s statement points to the inevitable differences in opinion that arise from cross- and inter-disciplinary conditions. In discussing Ruth Leys’ work I have delineated that a crucial dividing line lies in whether one asserts that the individual has knowledge of his or her trauma and is thus able to represent it via narration or whether one holds that there is a lack of knowledge and thus a proneness to compulsive re-enactments which preclude conscious representation.

However, it needs to be stressed that consenses do exist. A prime example is the assumption that the initial impact of trauma is so severe that it shatters the meaning-making abilities of those affected. Thus, the prime task of trauma victims is to regain that ability in order to integrate the traumatic experience into their life story. Consequently, the prime task of psychologists and trauma theorists is to facilitate this Herculean task by exploring what such a loss of meaning entails. Therefore, it will not do to dismiss the effort of trauma victims by postulating that trauma is a priori unknowable as well as unrepresentable, as Caruth and van der Kolk do.

Chris van der Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizel (2007) provide an insightful account of the corroding aftereffects of trauma as well as of narration as a point of departure for posttraumatic healing. At the core of their work lies the conviction that narration is an intrinsically human need not only in times of crisis but on a regular, day to day basis (1-2).

Their understanding of the significance of narration links them to Michele L. Crossley’s (2003) research in which she argues against the postmodern social constructionist assumption that the individual consists of fleeting, incoherent moments and for a “narrative psychology” (287) that acknowledges that story-telling is key to human experience as it induces the construction of the self (290). For Crossley, a narrative “constitutes an ‘organising principle’ for human action and life” (291). She refers to Sarbin (1986) who cites psychological experiments which have

shown that people feel the need to combine single elements, such as phrases and pictures, into coherent stories with the help of an underlying plot (291). Ensuing from the findings of these experiments, Crossley draws attention to the fact that the same is true for

[a]ny slice of everyday life, however mundane. Our hopes, dreams, fears, fantasies, plannings, memories, loves, hates, the basic rituals of daily life (such as sitting down to eat a meal with the family), or the pompous pageantry of rites of passage (such as marriages, christenings, funerals) – all of these are guided by narrative plots and are organised to tell the stories of the individuals involved. Storytelling is a pervasive activity (ibid).

While the everyday aspect of narration might be confined to connecting trivial daily matters that are recounted to oneself or an interlocutor in the form of an end of day review, the narrative principle operates on a much larger scale and involves an aligning of past, present, and future moments which eventually add up to a life story. Crossley likens this process to the creation of an autobiography since both “attempt to envisage the coherence of a life through selection, organisation and presentation of its component parts” (294). However, it should be noted that a life story is always a work-in-progress which is actively constructed by looking back in time and by anticipating future occurrences while the present unfolds. I will discuss the differences between being a narrator who is enmeshed in his or her life story and being an autobiographer who looks back on his or her story further on in the context of the memoir as genre for trauma narration.

For now, I will return to my initial comments about the disrupting force of trauma. It is safe to assume “that human beings are not necessarily consciously aware of the way in which they routinely orient towards the past and future” (ibid.) until their “taken-for-granted assumptions about and towards time” (ibid.) are severely challenged by traumatic circumstances or experiences. Crossley notes that her insights are based on conversations with terminally ill HIV and cancer patients who “felt ‘robbed’ of their future” (294). She adds that her research led to the realisation that

[i]t is in the face of the disruption and incoherence introduced by serious illness that people frequently experience a renewed need to rebuild and restructure their worlds – and they tend to do this through the use of stories (295).

It can be said that this “narrational need” applies to trauma in general since “trauma is a loss of control, a loss of understanding, a loss of identity” (27) as van der Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizel argue. Trauma not only disables meaning-making but also inhibits the capacity to look for clues in the past and to project oneself into the future; thus, it renders narration impossible, or in van der Merwe’s words: “The traumatised person has ‘lost the plot’” (6). In its essence, trauma is an absolute breach. Nevertheless, it bears the potential for renewal as van der Merwe emphasises with reference to Viktor Frankl’s logotherapy (13-15). In accordance with Frankl, van der Merwe highlights the role of language and narration in the recovery of a traumatised person’s life story. Indeed, van der Merwe posits that a traumatised individuals need to regain their authorship; because only then will it be possible to undertake a “rewriting of one’s life narrative [that] incorporate[s] the traumatic loss in the new narrative” (6).

However, given the sheer overpowering forces of trauma as well as of posttraumatic issues, this is not a simple endeavour. Even more so as language, the tool for recovery, seems inadequate for conveying the hardships that victims have experienced (25-26). Van der Merwe observes that coping with trauma is a renewed struggle for the victim as he or she oscillates between utter silence and attempts at narration (26). Lacking a “reference point in terms of one’s former experience” (ibid.), traumatised people’s silence “is more than a lack of words; it is a lack of understanding what has happened to them” (ibid.). Moreover, the representation of trauma through narration provokes an anxiety in victims which revolves around the idea that they might thus belittle their traumatic experiences. Yet, this anxiety concurs with the need to express and to represent what seems to be inexpressible and unrepresentable. Taking up a thought by Judith Herman (1992) about the twofold dimensions of trauma, van der Merwe points to the reason why trauma victims tend to overcome their anxiety: “To remember, to narrate trauma [...] means to honour one’s own memory” (32). That is to say, speaking out is a way of testifying to one’s own story. Moreover, an active engagement with the breach of meaning that trauma has created may lead to the realisation that a recovery of a sense of self is within one’s means. On top of that, the discovery of narration as a tool may restore a renewed sense of self-empowerment to victims and may furnish them with “a moderate degree of ‘ontological security’” (Crossley 2000: 541) once again. Ultimately, it can be said that narration is a means of orientation as well as

reconfiguration in the aftermath of trauma. To put it in another way, “more important than the fact that we suffer, is the way in which we respond to suffering” (van der Merwe 13); such a stance finds support from clinical psychology, most prominently, from Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun and their work on *posttraumatic growth (PTG)*. I will briefly explore the notion of PTG and its implications for trauma studies in the next section.

4. 2. Narration and Posttraumatic Growth

Posttraumatic growth is a concept that is in many ways closer to the reality of trauma as encountered by actual victims. This is mainly due to a shift in focus: Whereas in other approaches trauma is at the centre of attention, as is, for example, the case in Caruth’s as well as van der Kolk’s respective theories, posttraumatic growth focuses on the individual and his or her coping strategies. As a consequence, trauma is stripped of its quasi-sublime status as the unrepresentable *per se*; instead it becomes an exceptionally forceful breach in the individual’s self-understanding, thus leaving room for recovery and healing. In her essay on “Trauma in the Postcolony” (2012) Michela Borzaga aptly expresses the pitfalls of understanding trauma as detached from the individual who experiences it:

[T]he fact remains that it has become fashionable to speak about trauma in a *reified* manner and that, increasingly, to speak about trauma no longer means to investigate subjectivities and their mutual, shaping relationship with the socio-cultural context in which they are embedded, but only to speak about ‘events’, ‘stressors’, ‘accidents’ [...] Such an approach [...] does not leave space for a principle of transformation and change. Needless to say, used in this manner, ‘trauma’ becomes more of a *barrier* than a fruitful epistemological tool [original emphasis] (68).

This is to say that the discussions about trauma are in need of an approach that looks beyond the initial impact of the traumatic event so that the “black hole of trauma” (van der Kolk 3) does not become the be-all and end-all of trauma studies. I would suggest that the concept of posttraumatic growth offers such an approach.

Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) define posttraumatic growth as a “positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances” (1). Despite the fact that they are focusing on “truly traumatic circumstances rather than everyday stressors” (2), they caution against the fallacy of assuming that growth is followed suit by trauma or, vice versa, that trauma is a

prerequisite for growth (ibid). Similarly, they point out that traumas do not necessarily entail psychopathological issues (ibid.). However, what they do assert is that trauma presents a violent breach to an individual's basic assumptions about the world and his or her place in it, thus altering the psychic apparatus to a certain degree (5). Consequently, the individual is required to adapt to these changes which, in turn, may pose new difficulties. Moreover, such initial adaptations may manifest themselves in the form of coping strategies which can be part of the general process of posttraumatic growth. Nevertheless, Tedeschi and Calhoun emphasise that posttraumatic growth is not simply a coping strategy, nor is it a return to "the previous status quo" (4) since the changes for the individual are usually profound (ibid.). Rather, it enhances an individual's adaptive abilities. For this reason, Tedeschi and Calhoun describe posttraumatic growth as possessing "a quality of transformation, or a qualitative change in functioning" (ibid.). What they deem imperative for the onset of posttraumatic growth, is "the struggle with trauma" (ibid.). More precisely, the conscious act of rebuilding one's life in the posttraumatic environment and adapting psychologically to this environment will initiate the onset. Tedeschi and Calhoun employ the metaphor of an earthquake and the rebuilding that takes place in the aftermath of such a catastrophe in order to illustrate the dynamics of posttraumatic growth. In their own words:

[C]ognitive processing and restructuring may be comparable to the physical rebuilding that occurs after an earthquake. The physical structures can be designed to be more resistant to shocks in the future [...]. Cognitive rebuilding that takes into account the changed reality of one's life after trauma produces schemas that incorporate the trauma and possible events in the future, and that are more resistant to being shattered. These results are experienced as growth (5).

This telling delineation has two implications: First, even in the aftermath of trauma, the actual trauma is still present and its effects are perceptible. Unlike Caruth and van der Kolk, Tedeschi and Calhoun have not found that trauma creates a hole which engulfs all memory of it and reduces the victim to a pathological automaton who is caught in a loop of obsessive-compulsive behaviour. On the contrary, they have found that trauma has "a highly emotional element" (5) to it that furthers the formation of new abilities "so that the lessons learned are not merely intellectual reflections" (ibid.). Secondly, Tedeschi and Calhoun note that posttraumatic growth and

posttraumatic repercussions are not mutually exclusive. What is more, even in the aftermath of trauma, the endured traumatic event is still perceived as an agonising experience. This being the case, it is self-evident that posttraumatic growth “can coexist with the residual distress of trauma” (ibid.). According to Tedeschi and Calhoun, posttraumatic growth involves five areas in which changes in people’s lives are discernible. These are

[a]n increased appreciation for life in general [and] a radically changed sense of priorities [...]. Closer, more intimate, and more meaningful relationships with other people [...]. A general sense of increased personal strength [which] is often correlated, almost paradoxically, with an increased sense of being vulnerable. [T]he individual’s identification of new possibilities for one’s life [and] growth in the domain of spiritual and existential matters (6).

Since not every individual is susceptible to benefitting from posttraumatic growth, Tedeschi and Calhoun have examined the correlation between PTG and certain personality traits. Their results indicate that extraverted people are more likely to experience posttraumatic growth than others (8). Interestingly, it was also found that negative emotions which may occur in the wake of trauma do not diminish the overall growth (ibid.). Included in the category of negative emotions are intrusive thoughts and images; they are seen as normal reactions to the initial impact of trauma and not as indication for the unrepresentability of the traumatic event (ibid.). In fact, negative emotions which are accompanied by high stress levels seem to ensure the proper integration of the traumatic experience as the “cognitive processing” (ibid.) is kept active. In people who undergo posttraumatic growth, this cognitive processing will eventually lead from a renouncing of former beliefs and attitudes towards “an attempt at building new schemas, goals, and meanings” (9).

Such an extensive re-building finds its way into the life stories of people. Tedeschi and Calhoun observe that trauma victims tend to categorise their lives in terms of before and after the trauma (12). The ability to name one’s trauma, to situate it on one’s timeline, and to transform it into one part of one’s life story is seen as beneficial for the development of posttraumatic growth (ibid.). As a conclusion, Tedeschi and Calhoun remark that sustained posttraumatic growth needs renewed attention, time and time again. This may provoke “emotional reminders that are not pleasant, of what has been lost, but paradoxically, also of what has been gained” (13).

The concept of posttraumatic growth illustrates that trauma contains the potential for a form of renewal that empowers the victim to a certain degree. The transformation of trauma into novel ways of adapting to a perceived change in one's environment is key to an individual's potential growth. At the same time, however, trauma should not become subject to repression or forgetting. Rather, it should be integrated into a person's life story. Thus, posttraumatic growth ties in with van der Merwe's and Gobodo-Madikizel's ideas on healing through narration as well as with Crossley's theory about the narrational urge in times of crisis.

I will now turn to a brief discussion of the significance of narration in life stories.

4. 3. Narration and Life Stories

The suitability of narration as a means of coming to terms with one's trauma has demonstrated that narrating one's story is an essential part of being human; even more so in times of crisis. I will now shift the focus from singular traumatic experience to the series of events that eventually amount to a person's life story. By and large, the difference lies in the task that the individual has to perform:

While a traumatised person's priority is the regaining of individual authorship, the creation of a life story calls for a narrator who is able to recognise the general theme that unites the separately unfolding events. This may not cause too much of a problem for a third person omniscient narrator, however, what has to be kept in mind is that we are seldom "seated around the fire as it were, tell[ing] about what we have done, thereby creating something entirely new thanks to a new perspective" (61) as Carr (1986) puts it. On the contrary, we are, as a rule, deeply enmeshed in our life narratives while they are unfolding. To put it trenchantly: Most of the time, we are unreliable first person narrators grasping at straws.

Moreover, Carr explicates that we tend to occupy several distinct positions at once, namely, that of the chronicler, that of the storyteller, and that of the audience (61). Whereas the chronicler merely registers events as they come to pass, the storyteller sees the bigger, more coherent, picture as well as the causal relationships between the isolated events (*ibid.*). Consequently, Carr argues that that "we are constantly striving, with more or less success, to occupy the storyteller's position with respect to our own actions" (*ibid.*). Carr's wording intimates the struggle that arises from an entanglement in the ongoing events of one's life on the one hand, and the endeavour to reach a narratological bird's eye perspective of that very life on the

other hand. This is the very reason why “autobiographical reflection [is] conducted in the present and [is] entirely directed toward the past” (75). Looking back at bygone events grants an individual more interpretative authority than having to make sense of one’s current situation.

Nevertheless, people do, of course, feel the need to interpret their individual here and now. For that reason, “we sometimes assume, in a sense, the point of view of the audience to whom the story is told” (61). Carr’s formulation is slightly guarded, thus, I would like to emphasise precisely this point: Narration is not confined to a verbal performance for the sake of an audience that consists of other people. It is just as much an inner guiding principle as it is an outer means of communication. Carr hypothesises that outer and inner audience may indeed serve the same purpose:

Yet it could also be said that when I do give an account of myself to others, my ultimate purpose is to remind myself, convince myself, justify myself to myself, rather than to others. Perhaps it is the others who are the stand-ins and who simply play the role of sounding-board for what is essentially a self-reflective operation (63).

The self-referential activities listed in the above quote amount to the “self-reflective operation” (ibid.) par excellence, which is “maintain[ing] a sense of self-continuity (i.e., the perception of ownership of one’s past and stake in one’s future [...])” (235) throughout one’s life span, as William L. Dunlop and Lawrence J. Walker (2013) describe the purpose of the life story in a nutshell.

This is to say that the prime objective of narration, with regard to the life story, lies not in the actual telling of one’s story to others but, first and foremost, in attaining a coherent version of one’s life events for one’s own sake. Furthermore, Dunlop and Walker elucidate that coherence in an individual’s life story has a further function besides providing a person with a golden thread which connects distinct experiences. This function concerns the consolidation of an individual’s identity which is achieved through the description and understanding of “both personal consistency and developmental change” (235). At the same time, a life story aids in the mitigation of “discrepancies and inconsistencies among self-aspects” (ibid.). Ultimately, a life story “can serve to unify contextual and diachronic elements of the self, while also distinguishing this self from others” (ibid.).

Both the establishment of coherence and the stabilisation of identity equip an individual with the ability to learn from experiences as well as to judge novel situations based on knowledge deduced from the individual's life story. Thus, it becomes an instrument for interpreting the past and navigating the future. Or to put it in Jefferson A. Singer's (2004) words:

Once we have filtered life experiences through the narrative lens, we can make use of the narratives we have created. We can employ stories to raise our spirits, guide our actions, or influence others as a tool of persuasion or rhetoric. We can draw inferences from stories with particular self-relevance in order to gain insight into our own nature, values, and goals. The accumulating knowledge that emerges from reasoning about our narrative memories yields a life story schema that provides causal, temporal, and thematic coherence to an overall sense of identity (442).

Researchers distinguish between two fields of insight gained through "autobiographical reasoning" (Dunlop and Walker 237). The first concerns knowledge about one's own personal characteristics, hence it is referred to as "self-event connection" (ibid.). It encompasses events that either confirm or enhance a person's self-image in a positive or negative way. Typical narrations regarding this type of autobiographical reasoning concern events which are attributed to a certain character trait, as for example: "...they knew I was good at hockey, so they asked me to come with them on the trip" (238); or events which caused the emergence of a hitherto unknown trait, as for example: "...just being in that environment, I realized that I had a real wild side" (ibid.). The second field in which autobiographical reasoning operates exceeds personal traits. It involves general assumptions about the world as well as a person's belief system. This "meaning-making" category (ibid.) features "lessons learned" (ibid.) and, what could be described as, commonplaces that furnish an individual with a certain sense of secureness. Examples such as, "It just goes to show, you can't base your self-worth on financial success alone" (ibid.) and "Having that conversation really shook things up for me – appearances can be deceiving" (ibid.) illustrate the potential for a positively reinforced learning effect.

Singer et al. (2013) found a correlation between the number of positive meaning-making utterances of individuals and their "psychological health, well-being and capacity for growth" (575) when they tested for autobiographical reasoning in life stories. Correspondingly, the experiment also points to the concurrence between impaired meaning-making abilities and psychological disorders like depression and

bipolar disorder. In discussing a compilation of studies on the subject of “narrative identity and meaning making” (437), Singer (2004) concludes that the ability to make sense of one’s life through the narration of a coherent life story does not guarantee a happy life as such. Rather, he argues,

[t]o draw lessons and wisdom from one’s narratives reflects ego development, personal adjustment, stress-related growth, and maturity, but not necessarily an immediate sense of subjective well-being. To learn and grow may involve acknowledging what has been lost or what will never be, but this acceptance may allow for better long-term adjustment and more judicious life choices that lead to greater happiness in the long run (446).

With Singer’s statement, my discussion of the significance of narration for individual human life has come full circle. At this point, it is noteworthy to mention some of the considerable congruencies between life stories and posttraumatic narration. First and foremost, regardless of whether one’s life is strained by the impact of trauma or whether one’s life story has gone astray, it is of utmost importance to reclaim the narrator’s position to an extent that will allow renewed meaning-making. For posttraumatic narration, this implies an integration of the traumatic events; for the life story in general, this encompasses the search for coherence. In both cases, a successful engagement with one’s tribulations will lead to a greater sense of self-empowerment and will present an apt tool for posttraumatic growth.

This brings me on to the final section of the theoretical part of my thesis in which I will briefly explore the benefits of merging trauma theory with theories of life narration when it comes to the analysis of texts which fall under the category of memoirs.

4. 4. Narration and Memoirs

Independently of each other scholars like Roger Luckhurst (2003) and Leigh Gilmore (2001) have diagnosed a prevalent interest in highly personal life stories that feature a traumatic event at their core. Luckhurst ascribes this tendency to both the “liberal journalism” (29) of the 1990s as well as the British art scene of that decade through which “the adoption of the ‘traumatised’ personae” (ibid.) became fashionable. Gilmore holds that the reason for this trend lies in the interplay of “social and political movements” (16), “‘real life’ media” (ibid.), and “the literary market” (ibid.) of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Indeed, what both scholars describe points to a novel understanding of self-representation in a public sphere in which the former private is transformed into the new public. Luckhurst cites the journalists Oscar Moore and Ruth Picardie as examples who both used their columns in renowned newspapers to talk about their respective terminal illnesses, thus opening up a new public space for certain, more often than not, sidelined issues (37-38). Gilmore assesses a similar form of opening up through the representation of hitherto marginalised groups, such as “women, people of color, gay men and lesbians, the disabled, and survivors of violence” (16), on the one hand. On the other hand, she credits the popularity of public confessions in emerging talk show media formats for directing attention to “a person [who is simply] telling his or her story” (17). Lackhurst and Gilmore agree that the literary market was exceedingly fast in taking up this new trend which manifested itself in explicit “marketing practices such as subtitling an author’s first book ‘a memoir’ when in previous years it might have been classified as fiction” (Gilmore 17) but also in the general selection as well as publication of texts which “would not have previously been expected to appeal to a so-called general audience” (ibid.). Lackhurst stresses this sudden desire for memoirs which centred around conflicts and hardships when he refers to “that strange but symptomatic explosion of a genre of memoirs of illness and trauma now termed ‘pathography’” (29). Such a “writing of illness” (37) is a clear deviation from the established rules of autobiographical writing, according to Gilmore (2-3). Even more so if the presented trauma does not find a clear resolution as the conventional structure of the genre would demand it (ibid.).

Gilmore traces the origins of the established set of rules for autobiographical writing back to the Enlightenment in which a unified “rational and representative ‘I’” (2) became mandatory. However, she points out that “the tradition was never as coherent as it could be made to appear, its canonical texts formally unstable and decidedly multivoiced” (2); not least because the task of narrating one’s story inevitably engages multiple selves and multiple point of views all at once (36). This “paradox of representativeness” (19) can pose a challenge for an author and be enabling at one and the same time. Gilmore argues that authors can either reclaim their experiences and “emerge through writing as an agent of self-representation” (9) by “describe[ing] their lives and their thoughts about it; [and by] offer[ing], in some cases, corrective readings” (ibid.); or, they can address issues concerning the “constitutive vagaries of autobiography” (9) and “question whether and how ‘I’ can be

‘here’ or ‘there’, what the self is that it could be the subject of its own representation” (ibid.). In any case, they will have to contemplate questions regarding the embeddedness of the self in larger contexts as well as the boundaries of that self. Gilmore elaborates on these two points when she states that an autobiography “is also an assembly of theories of the self and self-representation; of personal identity and one’s relation to a family, a region, a nation; and of citizenship” (12). Consequently, it is necessary to endeavour to answer the “question of how selves and milieus ought to be understood *in relation to each other*” (ibid.). What ties in with this, are questions about “the interpenetration of the private and the public” (13) and how the autobiographical self is affected by it. Based on these deliberations, Gilmore doubts that the boundaries that are meant to separate autobiographical from fictional texts can be observed (14-15). She argues that this holds even more true for autobiographies that deal with trauma:

Texts that are concerned with self-representation and trauma offer a strong case for seeing that in the very condition of autobiography [...] there is no transparent language of identity despite the demand to produce one. As controversial as any evidence of shaping may be in a trauma text – and what text is not shaped? – part of what we must call healing lies in the assertion of creativity (24).

Gilmore’s argument corresponds to my approach of viewing trauma memoirs as re-visitations of trauma that are simultaneously reconstructions as well as representations of past traumatic events. While some authors deliberately demonstrate that creative shaping processes are part of their work, Coetzee’s *Boyhood* as a “novelized memoir” (Attwell 288) is a case in point, others incorporate factual material, for example, in order to assert their (self-) representative claims.

In any case, autobiographical writing presents a sphere in which identities and truth claims are (re-)negotiated. It can be argued that this is most obvious in the autobiographical form of the memoir since memoirs, as Ewald Mengel (2012) argues,

[a]re subjective narrative constructions of one’s own life, stories based on facts written from some vantage point in the future and looking back on decisive events in the past. In comparison to autobiographies, which tell a person’s life from the his/her birth to a point in the present, they may be less comprehensive, based more on fleeting moments in time, anecdotes, and subjective recollections (154).

In other words, memoirs are less totalising in their claims since the challenge to present a grand narrative is less pressing. Simultaneously, this allows for an openness of the genre that makes it suitable for the representation of trauma. This holds particularly true for the three memoirs that I have chosen to analyse as all of them reflect said openness in presenting trauma as a fragmentation. To put it differently, trauma in *Don't let's go to the Dogs tonight*, *Under our Skin*, and *Boyhood* features as constant undercurrent and emerges episodically through the specific constellations of several factors. Questions of national belonging, of historical specificities, and of family conflicts play an important role as they all point towards latent issues of identity that, in turn, are inextricably linked with the origination of trauma.

5. Analysis

Questions of identity and belonging are, generally speaking, a central aspect of autobiographical writing and they are often re-negotiated and reinterpreted in such writing. Looking back at certain defining, and possibly traumatic, episodes in a life story, enables an author to become aware of the wider context of his or her personal experiences; and thus allows him or her to place them within the larger context of his or her life story. In effect, questions as well as problems regarding identity are inseparable from the context in which they arise by which I mean the personal, familial, socio-cultural, and historico-political environment of an individual.

With reference to the three memoirs that I am analysing, I would argue that each of these components holds the potential for trauma; especially, if they are associated with an unresolved conflict or with profound anxiety. Accordingly, I will deviate from the more common approach that looks for a single traumatic event. Instead, I will view trauma as an ongoing condition that requires the interplay of several factors. Thus, I will focus my analysis on the following three large categories that correspond to the above mentioned components: Identity, historical trauma, and personal or familial trauma. Concerning identity, I will pay special attention to identity formation processes such as the endeavour to model one's identity according to that of a parent or the search for clues in the transmitted family history. I will explicate how trauma arises from a failure at developing a firm sense of belonging to one's immediate environment. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how specific historical circumstances, such as the institutionalised racism in South Africa or civil war, create a traumatising ambience. Last but not least, I will illustrate how instances of personal trauma may be connected to the former two categories.

5. 1. Don't Let's go to the Dogs Tonight

The way Alexandra Fuller presents her family's story in her first book *Don't Let's go to the Dogs Tonight* (2001) puts the above remarks about the openness of the memoir into practice. Although the reader is provided with some landmark dates as well as geographical points of reference, Fuller's memoir ultimately consists of loosely chained, yet carefully selected, episodes that occurred over a ten year period. This timespan corresponds to Fuller's own coming of age and her family's coming to a sort of rest after periods of erratic journeys and overcome calamities.

Fuller's use of present tense throughout the text conveys the impression of immediacy and helps to engage the reader in her narrative. Furthermore, Fuller uses her narrative voice to guide her readers through the fragments of her family's past in a way that combines the unabashed and naïve view of her early self with the ironic and informed view of her narrating adult self. Through doubling herself, so to speak, and the ironic distance that is thus created, Fuller is able to portray scenes in all their intensity. Moreover, the reciprocally dependent narrations create the effect of a voice-over which lends an additional palpable depth to her account. Another result of Fuller's ironic double-voiced discourse is the disclosure of seeming frictions that point to an undercurrent of contradictions in her story which are intimately linked to her family's identity. To be more precise and to use an example: The subtitle of Fuller's book, which reads *An African Childhood*, already foreshadows a central issue of her memoir, namely the question who they are as a family and what it means to consider oneself a white African.

5. 1. 1. Identity

A few pages into her narrative, Fuller recounts that after the independence of Zimbabwe her school, which was hitherto reserved for white children only, has to admit coloured and black children. The direct comparison between their stripped bodies in the locker room after P.E. classes and the mocking comments of the black children arouse the following sentiments in the eleven-year-old:

My God, I am the wrong colour. The way I am burned by the sun [...] the way my skin erupts in miniature volcanoes of protest in the presence of tsetse flies [...] the way I stand out against the khaki bush like a large marshmallow [...] White. African. White African (8).

Fuller admits that representing herself as white African only generates further questions such as "But what are you" (ibid.) or "Where are you from originally" (ibid.). These questions invite two possible interpretations: Either Fuller's own understanding of her identity as a white South African is questioned since she was born of English parents in England, or the very possibility of there being such a thing as white South Africanness is doubted. However, Fuller does not linger over these challenges to her identity or address them directly. Instead, she circumvents them in a way that is, in its idiosyncrasy, characteristic of the Fuller family's self-conception:

On the one hand, she playfully admits to being a foreigner in Africa because of her whiteness and her English ways, on the other hand, she repeatedly intimates that her family's story is generic for White Africanness in general.

Fuller's description of her mother's eccentricities provides a vivid example for this technique. Still questioning her proper identity, Fuller looks to her mother for clues only to find that "mum doesn't know who she is either" (ibid.). What follows is a brief rendition of an afternoon in which her mother insisted on "wrapping thirty feet of electric wire around trees in the garden so that she could pick up the World Service of BBC" (10). The incoming Scottish music as well as the RP accent of the radio host is enough to incite feelings of homesickness in Fuller's intoxicated mother, whereupon Fuller reminds her that Africa is her home and that she hates Scotland just as much as England (8). In between the ensuing repartee, Fuller goes out of her way to make the reader understand that her mother's objectless nostalgia is solely based on drunken sentimentality and, if anything, a sign of her African identity: "Mum has lived in Africa all but three years of her life" (ibid.).

To make this even more explicit she goes on to sketch her parents' short-time existence in England as being nothing but an interlude to their final emigration to Africa. Having returned to England after the death of their only son, her parents move from a lower middle class neighbourhood to a run-down farm where they soon realise that they do not intend "to rot to death under a dripping English sky" (37). Moreover, she uses her parents' oscillating between two continents to provide herself with her very own origin story. Accordingly, she resorts to a quasi-epic style of narration:

I am conceived in the hotel [...] next to the thundering roar of the place where the Zambezi River plunges a hundred metres into a black-sided gorge. The following March, I am born into the tame, drizzling English town of Glossop. The plunging roar of the Zambezi in my ears at conception. Incongruous, contradictory in Derbyshire at birth (33).

The last two phrases echo her initial remark about her identity: "White. African. White African" (8). In creating her own literary genesis, Fuller exploits the conflicting, incompatible aspects of her identity to her advantage by turning them into a unique constellation which allows her to state that "I am neither African nor English nor am I of the sea" (35), and to imply that she is all of that and more. Likewise, Fuller rewrites her family's history after her parents decide to try their luck once more in Rhodesia

with their two small children. The journey to Cape Town by ship “past the welcoming, waving beaches of the tropics” (37) is transformed into a homecoming to a country in which the raw, sensual aspects function as homely signals. Fuller revels in her mother’s taking in of “the spicy, woody scent of Africa [...]. She smelled the people: raw onions and salt, the smell of people who are not afraid to eat meat” (38). Enraptured by the odour-intense atmosphere, her mother lifts her up and whispers “Smell that [...] ‘that’s home’” (ibid.). Yet, Fuller’s first contact with the African atmosphere has her falling into a fever. In her version, this acute illness is transformed into a rite of passage. She presents different African voices which comment on possible interpretations of and remedies for her predicament. First, the supernatural and superstitious account is considered: “Some Africans would say, ‘The child is possessed [...] And there are various magics you can perform’” (38). Next, practicality is heard: “Some Africans would say, ‘What a load of rubbish [...] wrap the child in vinegar paper’” (ibid.). Then, contemptuous cynicism has a say: “Some Africans would say, ‘Good, let her die. Who needs another white baby, to grow into a bossy, hands-on-hips, white madam?’” (ibid.).

Fuller makes an unexpected full recovery. Looking back at the event, she invokes her contradictory identity once again: “Although I had been conceived in Africa, I had been started in urban England [...]. I had the constitution of a missionary” (38-39). Here, her twofold origins become mutually dependent. Ironically, being English becomes a prerequisite for attempts at living in Africa which are, however, foredoomed to fail. Fuller reinforces this ironic stance with a tongue-in-cheek reference to British colonialism when she describes her family’s arrival at the terminal of their journey into Africa, Rhodesia, in the following manner: “This was where Cecil John Rhodes had intended for we British to go. From Cape to Cairo had been his dream [...] He himself [...] made it only as far as Rhodesia” (39). The Fuller’s settle for an existence in the very country named after “the great white bald-headed one” (ibid.). Fuller insinuates that history does in fact repeat itself as they choose the Burma valley as their place of residence; a geographic spot that is infamous for having a negative impact on all its inhabitants: “Here, horses hang thin in the thick, wet heat [...] children are elbow-knee wormy and hollow-orange [...] dogs have scabs from putzi flies” (46). The repercussions for foreign settlers are rendered in Conradian terms:

The valley represented the insanity of the tropics so precarious for the fragile European psyche. The valley could send you into a spiral of madness overnight if you were white and highly strung. Which we were (47).

In creating a contrast between the somatic symptoms of the native population and the supposed psychic effect the valley has on Europeans, Fuller draws attention to the various facets that her as well as her family's identity comprises. In her account, positions that are seemingly mutually exclusive, as for example being white Europeans but also Africans or being destined for a life in Africa but also rather unfit for such a life, are presented as two sides of the same coin. Fuller's blurring of these lines enables her to present her memoir from diverse vantage points which adopting a definite stance would not. This is to say that she is able to switch back and forth between the voice of a white African and that of a former European which, in turn, creates a unique go-between voice. What has to be taken into account is that this balancing voice is constructed in retrospect for the purpose of narration. Thus, it glosses over the fact that conflicting subject positions are hardly ever as easily resolved as Fuller makes them out to be.

However, it is exactly this go-between voice that allows Fuller to revisit the contradicting elements of her as well as her family's identity and to reconcile them by giving voice to them and, subsequently, by interpreting them. What is more, Fuller's use of voice-over to create irony signals a high degree of self-awareness as she deploys it to make the seams of her narrative visible. That is to say, Fuller is aware that she shapes and moulds her text for the sake of herself as well as for her audience and she is far from being self-conscious about it. Thus, Fuller's endeavour is fundamentally self-reflexive and an attempt to openly negotiate her identity through narration.

5. 1. 2. Personal Trauma

This self-reflexive, interpreting, and ironic voice is increasingly used when it comes to the family's private traumas. In Fuller's presentation trauma is intimately connected with her mother who has been unable to cope with the loss of three of her children in any other way than drinking. Fuller uses the visitation of an Englishman to contrast the insider position that the family has with that of an unsuspecting outsider. The effect that is thus created is simultaneously comic and tragic as the following excerpt shows:

Fuller's mother surprises her guest by announcing that "we fought to keep one country in Africa white-run [...] Thirteen thousand Kenyans and a hundred white settlers died [...] A hundred...of us" (17-18). Fuller's voice-over comments on the scene in the following way: "I can tell that the visitor doesn't know if he should look impressed or distressed" (18); and further on: "I can tell he's thinking, *Oh my God, they'll never believe this when I tell them back home*" (ibid.). However, Fuller signals to the reader that the family members are so accustomed to her mother's erratic behaviour that they have found a system of classification for it which is referred to as "Tragedies of Our Lives" (20). According to Fuller, it encompasses four chapters: "The War, Dead Children, Insanity, Being Nicola Fuller of Central Africa" (ibid.). Therefore, Fuller is able to make the following remark: "What the patient, nice Englishman does not know, which Dad and I both know, is that Mum is only Chapter One" (ibid.). After a while, Fuller and her father excuse themselves and leave "the unfortunate captive guest" (21), who is too drunk to find his way back to the city, with Mrs. Fuller. This is described as their standard practice since "guests trapped by Mum have chapters of their own: Delight, Mild Intoxication Coupled with Growing Disbelief, Extreme Intoxication Coupled with Growing Panic, Lack of Consciousness" (ibid.). Fuller's description ends with the morning after: "Mum is Chapter Four, smiling idiotically to herself, a warm, flat beer propped between her thighs [...] the guest is chapter four too, lying greyly on the lawn" (23). Her final comment points to the stark contrast between the family's assessment of the situation and an outsider's perspective: "Kelvin has brought the tea and is laying the table for breakfast. As If Everything Were Normal. Which it is. For us" (ibid.).

Fuller never uses the word "alcoholism" to describe her mother's habit; yet it becomes clear that the family is affected by it in the way they use language to describe Mrs. Fuller's states: "Her eyes are half-mast. That's what my sister and I call it when Mum is drunk and her eyelids droop" (9); or "she's throwing what Dad calls a wobbly" (11). The seeming normality of having an alcoholic family member finds its way into several comic anecdotes that, in fact, help to emphasise the singularity of their experiences.

The following longer quote is a vivid example of the regular madness that the Fullers are accustomed to. Fuller remembers a car journey to boarding school which requires boarder control with her mother being still drunk from the night before and somewhat disorderly:

Mum has sung 'Olé, I am a Bandit' at every bar under the southern African sun into which she has ever stepped. 'Shut your mother up, will you?' says Dad [...] I've been shot at before because of Mum and her singing. She made me drive her to our neighbours' once at two in the morning to sing them 'Olé, I am a Bandit', and he pulled a rifle on us and fired. He's Yugoslav [...] The customs official comes out to inspect our vehicle [...] He swings his AK 47 around like a tennis racquet [...] Mum appears from under the drapes of the tarpaulin again. Her half-mast eyes light up '*Muli bwanje?*' she says elaborately: How are you?. The customs official blinks at her in surprise. He lets his gun relax against his hip [...] '*Kodi ndipite ndi taxi?*' she asks. Should I take a taxi? The customs official leans against his gun for support [...] and laughs, throwing back his head. Mum laughs too. Like a small hyena [...] 'Where is my gift?' He turns to me. 'Little sister?' [...] Mum says, 'You can have her, if you like' and disappears under her tarpaulin (15-16).

After they have bribed the customs official they are allowed to pass. Fuller ends her anecdote with the following words: "Mum has reemerged from the tarpaulin to sing, 'Happy, happy Africa'. If I weren't going back to school, I would be in heaven" (16). With the help of narrated memories such as this one, Fuller creates a double perspective through which she can give voice to her child-self who has no other reference point than the immediate experience, on the one hand; on the other hand, she can survey the scene from the informed position of the adult writer who might assess the situation differently. To put it another way, by opting for this narrational middle-ground, Fuller leaves room to re-examine her memories without having to rectify them. Moreover, it is precisely this comic effect generated by her way of narration that also opens up a space for the reader to compare and contrast the inside with the outside perspective. Witnessing the attitude of Fuller's self as a child in combination with the ironic narrational frame, allows the reader to draw his or her own conclusions. Fuller intensifies this effect when she revisits past occurrences that are directly linked to a traumatic event.

One such example is provided by her account of the sexual molestation, and implied rape, that both Fuller and her older sister fell victim to. Fuller introduces the subject by letting her child-self speak: "Anyways, Vanessa will save us if we ever get attacked [...] some old men try to kiss her and ask about her boobs and one of them did to her what Fanie Voster did to me, only it was worse" (72). What it was that he did to her is never explicitly stated. However, Fuller lets the reader know elsewhere that Fanie Voster is a man who traps children "in his spare bedroom and pin[s] them to the single bed with his fat grey-hair-sprouting belly while mums and dads drank

coffee in the kitchen with [...] his wife" (57). Fuller resorts to the same technique of not providing an unambiguous depiction or a full disclosure of the events in her sister's case. Instead, she details the circumstances that facilitated their occurrence, starting with a brief sketch of the morning on which the two girls were dropped off at a neighbour's house where they experienced an ordeal. Fuller maintains the childlike vantage point in her description of what she had to endure: "Roly was drunk before lunch, and he started to follow Vanessa and me around the house and he kissed me" (72). When Vanessa tries to protect her sister, he focuses on her. Confused and scared, Fuller describes what she had to observe: "He was laughing although the look on his face was not happy and he was doing something under Vanessa's skirt which made her face go red" (73). The neighbour drags Fuller's sister into a separate room while she remains behind, puzzled by the noises she hears, until her sister reappears "her hair untidy and her clothes in disarray" (ibid.). The two girls flee to the nearest house that they can find and wait for their parents to return. As soon as they arrive the sisters "cre[ep] over to their car [...] keeping our heads down – as if we were under attack – so that Roly wouldn't see us" (ibid.). In the ensuing section, Fuller laces the child's descriptive account with her subtle adult-narrator commentary. In doing so, the hurt and confusion inflicted by the experience emerge clearly and distinctly:

Mum and Dad were talking to Roly in brightly natural voices as if Everything Was Normal even though Roly had to say that we had run next door and Everything Wasn't Normal. But he didn't say why we had run away. 'Ah,' said Dad, when he saw us suddenly appear in the car, 'there you are.' There we were. There was a bad taste in my mouth and a sick feeling in my stomach. We climbed into the car, we sullied goods, and Mum and Dad drove stiffly away, grinning at Roly like skeletons. Vanessa tried to tell Mum and Dad what had happened and they said, 'Don't exaggerate.' (73-74).

What is more, the merging of the two perspectives creates a contrast between the child's intuitive knowledge that something has happened that was not right without being able to name it and the adult's reluctance to name the misdeed despite full understanding of it. What emerges from this contrast is a subliminal critique of the parents' reaction as well as an open exposure of their inability to protect their children, on the one side. On the other side, by illustrating the way her parents choose to act as if nothing has happened, the child's bewilderment about the course of events is emphasised. Along with her parents' final remark about the affair, this

indicates that the two girls were essentially left alone with coming to terms with their experiences.

Fuller's way of representing this distinct traumatic event is not only an attempt to approach it personally but also to make it known publically and to do justice to herself as well as to her sister who had no one to advocate for them. Her decision to foreground the point of view of her child-self is in accordance with these efforts as it is her child-self who is the chief-witness and who needed to be heard. On top of that, I would argue that showing the preconditions that lead up to the trauma as well as the immediate aftermath of it instead of simply naming it, is a way of protecting her sister; just as Fuller's decision to make no categorical statements about her experience with Fanie Voster is a way of protecting herself. In any case, Fuller has found a way to expose the hurt and the neglect inflicted on her without having to expose her trauma in a voyeuristic manner. Therefore, I would argue that the potential for the integration of this trauma lies precisely in selecting which defining moments to narrate and where to draw the line. The traumatic experience in itself may remain horrendous, whether it is directly addressed or not. Yet, to acknowledge these moments as part of one's own story and to recount them with one's own voice means to gain mastery over hitherto externally inflicted and hostile events.

The most far-reaching and violent break for the Fuller's is the death of Olivia, the youngest of the three Fuller girls, who drowned in a pond while being left in the care of acquaintances. Particular attention should be paid to the fact that the author was the only one present at the scene as the rest of her family was busy in town. Fuller opens the scene by describing how she is busy greedily eyeing the goods at "Aunty Rena's store" when her mother tells her to look out for her little sister while they are gone (87). Following this, is a text passage in which the daily dealings of the store are portrayed. Seemingly in passing it is mentioned that "Olivia must have tottered out of the store and wandered out the back" (88). The scenic description is continued until it comes to an abrupt halt: "It is almost lunch before anyone notices Olivia is missing. She is floating face down in the pond" (*ibid.*). This sudden turn in the narration is unforeseeable for the reader. The reader's expectation to learn more about the little kiosk, kindled by the lengthy introduction to it, is forcefully rebuffed. The two sentences that signal that the narration is about to alter its course dramatically are kept curt and plain to such an extent that one is likely to miss the enormity of their content. It can be reasonably assumed that Fuller's intent to lead

her readers astray and to have them stumble over and reread these two sentences serves a distinct purpose. I would argue that Fuller's stylistic approach is meant to imitate the immediacy of the traumatic impact itself. To put it differently, by shattering the reader's expectations and by creating a break in her text, Fuller mimics the shattering force of the trauma itself. This reading finds support in Fuller's method of drawing the readers even closer to the traumatic event by providing them with a threefold angle of it which relies heavily on mimetic representation.

First, Fuller zooms in on the scene by making the reader see what her six-year-old self witnesses. Drained colours and graphic details generate a strong sense of plasticity: "Her cheeks are grey-white" (ibid.), "Aunty Rena [...] pumps duck shit out of her lungs. The green slop is pumped up onto the grey concrete" (ibid.), "she has been pressing soft-dead, green water from Olivia's mouth" (89). Secondly, in order to reinforce this effect, Fuller deploys direct speech. Thus, the reader is made privy to snippets of dialogue in which Fuller's child-self refuses to accept the finality of death: "Now she says, 'Olivia's dead.' [...] I say, 'Please do something, Aunty Rena. Aunty Rena, please.'" (ibid.); and further on: "'She's dead,' says Aunty Rena [...] I say, 'Let me feel.' I press my finger against Olivia's wrist, as I have seen Aunty Rena do [...] 'I think I feel something,' I say hopefully." (90); and still further on when she is taken to the room of the owner's son: "'I just want Olivia back.' He says, 'She's dead.' 'I want her back,' I insist [...] I say, 'Maybe she'll get better.' 'You don't get better from being dead.'" (ibid.). Thirdly, Fuller draws the readers' attention away from the outside world and directs it to the inner state of her emotions. The destitution that she feels descending upon her is likened to a death of some sort. While she stares at her sister's body and the pond that is full of her sister's "last breaths" (88), she experiences a sensation as if the "whole happy world spins away from me – I feel it leaving, like something warm and comfortable leaving in hot breath" (89). In its place "a chill settles onto the top of my stomach. Even my skin has gone cold with shock. I will never know peace again" (ibid.).

It is not only the forceful breach of her little sister's death that shatters Fuller's world. To make matters worse, Fuller feels responsible for what has happened since she did not follow her mother's instructions. Accordingly, when she is told that her family has arrived, she suffers from feelings of shame and of fear as the following exchange shows: "I shrink my head into my chin. 'They're going to kill me,' I say. 'What? They won't kill you.' I nod and start crying again. 'I let Olivia drown.'" (91).

Through Fuller's choice of words, the scene of a family overwhelmed and exhausted by mourning is conveyed powerfully: "I listen to Mum's soft, drugged sobs [...] Dad is a hump in the dark, perched up against the wall [...] Vanessa is very quiet next to me on the floor" (93). Just as the individual family members are isolated rather than united in their grief, the wider community of white farmers is delineated as heterogeneous body that is characterised by awkward social behaviour and that is even at loss with regard to ritualised customs such as a funeral:

[A]fter Olivia is buried, we drive to the nearest house [...] and we drink sweet milky tea until someone finds a bottle of brandy and some beers and starts to hand those around. Which gives us the courage to have a small church service in the only way we know how as a community: drunk and maudlin (94).

The period after the funeral is marked by Fuller's parents' succumbing to grief. Their drastic behavioural changes result in a tense atmosphere which is likened to a irreparable rupture: "My life is sliced in half" (95) is the first sentence of a chapter entitled "Afterwards". In it, Fuller narrates of how she came to understand her life as consisting of two diametrically opposed parts that have little, if anything, in common. In the first half, "the happy years, before Olivia dies" (ibid.) her parents exhibit a "joyful careless embrace of life" (96). In the second half, after Olivia's death, this exuberance "is sucked away [...] the joy is gone. The love has trickled out" (ibid.).

Fuller lets her child-self take over the narration; thereby revealing the enormity of her parents' actions through the purposefully naïve comments that are used to outline them. As can be seen in the following examples in which the daily routine of the family is recounted that revolves around bars where her "Mum and Dad drink until they can hardly open the car door" (96-97). Meanwhile, Fuller and her sister are left to themselves "sunburned and thirsty, bored" (97) and feeding on "coke'n'chips" (ibid.). The mood is tense and uncertain. Fuller captures her child-self's incomprehension of what is happening around her by admitting that "sometimes Mum and Dad are terrifying now. They don't seem to see Vanessa and me in the backseat" (96). For the same purpose, she identifies the deviations in her parents' conduct that bother her the most: "We are not supposed to drive after dark – there is a curfew – but the war and mosquitos and land mines and ambushes don't seem to matter to Mum and Dad after Olivia dies" (ibid.). With statements like these presented from the point of view of her child-self, Fuller zooms in on her disrupted existence. Simultaneously, the reader is made to share this perspective which

creates an intimate resonance of the child's anxious confusion. The only instance Fuller's writer's voice interrupts these impressions concerns the explicit naming of what seems to underlie her parents' rash and reckless actions, namely a death wish: "Dad drives wildly [...] this is the way a man drives when he hopes he will slam into a tree and there will be silence afterward and he won't have to think anymore" (98). Fuller's insight that clearly belongs to the sphere of knowledge of an adult is contrasted with the interpretation that her child-self arrives at: "If we crash and all of us die it will be my fault because Olivia died and that made Mum and Dad crazy" (99). Fear, guilt, shame, and lack of comprehension combine to engender an oppressiveness in which the effect of trauma becomes apparent: The Fuller's find themselves confronted with an unbridgeable divide that separates their lives before-trauma from their lives after-trauma. Since going back is impossible, living in the "afterwards" is, in fact, the only option.

This state of affairs is further intensified when, shortly after, Fuller's mother becomes pregnant again and loses the baby during preterm delivery. Fuller is too young to understand why her mother returns home without her new sibling; in order to display the immediacy of the pain that overwhelms her once she is told, Fuller portrays the scene largely in direct speech: "'But where's Richard?' 'Who?' 'The baby.' 'He's not here ... he went away.' 'Where?' Mum shrugs helplessly [...] I say, 'What happened?' Vanessa [...] says, 'He's dead, Bobo.'" (200). Only then does she comment: "The sob that comes out of me is racking, like vomiting. I feel my face and hands and the skin on my arms go cold" (ibid.). Fuller wonders why there was no funeral, yet once again she is left to herself with her confusion, her unvoiced questions, and her emotions.

The family's focus is clearly on Mrs. Fuller who has fallen into a sort of limbo and who spends her days drugged out on medication and alcohol singing Roger Whittaker songs in nothing but a towel. Initially, Fuller finds her mother's new antics funny, as for example, when "the towel gapes open in the rear and exposes her naked bum I point and giggle" (202). However, when her older sister points out that their mother is in fact having "a nervous breakdown" (ibid.), Fuller concludes that she is not meant to be entertained by her mother's strange behaviour, although she is not familiar with the concept. Therefore, she takes to watching her mother's every move "like one of the dogs, trying to read her mood" (224). In doing so, she witnesses things that she cannot grasp, as for example her mother's crying over her

“full-of-milk breasts” (218) in the bathroom while she “squeeze[es] them empty” (ibid.), or her mother’s “blood-smeared thighs” (ibid.). Here, Fuller’s authorial voice takes over and acknowledges her own memories as well as her mother’s suffering by reframing what she has seen: “She seems to be grieving for the loss of this new baby in every way a body can grieve; with her mind (which is unhinged) and her body (which is alarming and leaking)” (ibid.).

When one of their farm workers is attacked and two of their dogs die within a short time, Mrs. Fuller, in a fit of paranoia, is convinced that the farm managers are after her life. Unable to ascribe the paranoia to her mother’s unstable mental state, Fuller takes it all at face value. This has the effect that to her, the world has become an unsafe, unpredictable place:

[I]t starts to get hard for me to know where Mum’s madness ends and the world’s madness begins. It’s like being on a roundabout, spinning too fast. If I look inward, at my feet, or at my hands clutching the re-painted bar, I can see clearly if narrowly, where I am in spite of a sick feeling in my stomach and a fear of looking up. But when I pluck up the courage to look up, the world is a terrifying, unhinged blur and I cannot determine whether it is me, or the world, that has come off its axis (203-204).

The atmosphere of uncertainty and calamity that has settled on the Fuller’s since the tragic death of Olivia has culminated in a permanent state of exception with no reference point in terms of former experience for any of the family members; least of all for Fuller herself who is the youngest. Fuller’s choice of recreating the above discussed scenes from the point of view of her child-self enables her to give room to the negative emotions associated with them from a safe distance and to explore them retrospectively. Furthermore, it is consistent with her intent to convey the tremendousness of her family’s traumas as forthright as possible. Since a large part of the traumas that Fuller refers to centre around the physical bodies of family members which are, in some way or another, assaulted, damaged, or broken, the voice of her child-self achieves a maximal effect of immediacy through the innocence and the perplexity with which the child attempts to, quite literally, assess the dimensions of the injuries inflicted. Fuller’s interspersed authorial comments help to reinforce this effect by deliberately drawing attention to the gap of knowledge that exists between the child and the adult. Thus, it can be argued that trauma in *Don’t Let’s go to the Dogs Tonight* is also intimately linked with levels of what-is-known and

levels of what-cannot-be-known; especially with regard to Fuller's hold of both the experiencing as well as the narrating position. More generally speaking, exposure to a high degree of unfiltered and unmediated experience coupled with a lack of tools of representation paves the way for trauma to gain firm ground. It can be argued that it is the re-visitation of trauma from a certain – spatial and temporal – distance along with attempts at representation that foster the integration of it, as Fuller's narrative shows.

5. 1. 3. Historical Trauma

As I have shown, identity as a source of trauma in Fuller's memoir is concerned with competing subject positions which the author chose to reconcile by creating a mediative voice. Family trauma operates on a very physical level and revolves around the aftermath of several event-related traumatic impacts. Compared to these two areas, historical trauma is much more pervasive and wide-spread. This becomes immediately clear on the very first page of *Don't Let's go to the Dogs Tonight* from which the reader is able to deduce that the Fuller family abides by its own rules: Fuller echoes her mother's instruction that she and her sister are not to enter their parents' bedroom at night as they "sleep with loaded guns beside them on the bedside" (1). "We might shoot you' [...] 'By mistake'" (ibid.), is the matter-of-fact explanation.

This puzzling opening is the prelude to a variety of scenes which delineate the historico-political *zeitgeist* of 1970s Rhodesia as viewed from the white, farm-owning Fuller's. One such scene follows suit and illuminates the opening sequence: The reader learns that the scary stories which the Fuller sisters tell each other do not concern the monster-under-the-bed; instead they tease each other with the terrorist-under-the-bed (5). War-torn Rhodesia constitutes the context of Fuller's childhood and war-time peculiarities are inseparably bound up with her memories of it. This being the case, it is hardly surprising that the majority of them are far from any ordinary childhood recollections. To her, however, they are the only ones available. It is precisely the ordinariness with which these memories are described in combination with their rather exceptional content that gives rise to an intermediate narrative level that reveals the traumatising momentum of her experiences.

Retrospectively, Fuller assesses her parents' choice of residence in the following way: "We have moved, mother and father with two children [...] right into

the middle, the very birthplace and epicentre, of the civil war in Rhodesia" (53). The implications of this statement become evident in Fuller's description of a trip to town: Since the access roads to the valley are unpaved and riddled with land mines, the Fullers have to travel in a convoy that includes "two or three long crocodile-looking lorries, which are spiky with Rhodesian soldiers, their FN rifles poking out of the sides of the vehicle" (55). The convoy is headed by a mine-detecting vehicle which they call "Pookie" (55). Their own "mineproofed Land Rover, complete with siren" (54) is called Lucy, "Lucy for Luck" (*ibid.*). For good measure, every civilian car driving with the convoy is equipped with "guns poking from windows". The Fullers are wearing their Sunday best in case they are "killed in an ambush or blown up on a mine" (55). At night, the family sits together and listens for "the faint, stomach-echoing thump of a mine detonating" (*ibid.*). They cheer whenever they hear it, since it is "either an African [i.e. a terrorist] or a baboon" (*ibid.*) that has been killed.

However, a war is hardly something that can be made appropriate for children. Fuller is confronted with the harsh reality of it when a bus full of people is blown up right before the family's eyes. Fuller obeys her mother's instruction not to look, yet her sister does not; secretly, the girls whisper about "bits and pieces of Africans [...] hanging from the trees and bushes like black and red Christmas decorations" (57-58). This ghastly mental picture brings back memories of another encounter with the actuality of death: "Once [...] I saw the army guys unload bodies in black plastic body bags [...] and I heard the damp-dead sound of the heavy flesh hitting the ground" (58). When Fuller tries to talk to her mother about what she has seen, she is told not to make a fuss about it since it was only body bags and not actual bodies. Left to herself with these images, they occupy her mind and leave a lasting impression on her: "That's how I think of bodies, as things in long black bags, the ends neatly tied off. And I think of dead bodies as strips of meat hanging land-mine-blown from trees" (58).

Fuller's parents take an active part in the war and they pride themselves with it; they fight to ensure that they can "live in a country where white men still rule" (23). For these ends, both join the reservists to do their duty as Rhodesians (60). Fuller associates her parents' conscientiousness with uniforms and dress-up. She is aware that as soon as her father puts on his camouflage uniform, he will have to leave the family "to go out into the bush on patrol for ten days at a time and find terrorists and fight them" (60). Despite this child-friendly euphemism, Fuller is uneasy about her

father's going. When she wants to know why he paints his face and arms black, he tells her that it will make him invisible to the terrorists. Fuller is far from being convinced and her uneasiness increases: "I want to warn him that I can see him the whole way down the driveway, that he doesn't blend in at all. The terrors will easily see him and shoot him" (61).

While her father is gone, Fuller accompanies her mother to a police station where the female reservists perform their task. Fuller admires her mother's uniform although she is puzzled by the letters "BSAP", an acronym for "British South African Police" (ibid.) emblazoned on it (62). Fuller notices "a map of Manicaland with lots of tiny lights dotted here and there" (63). When she is told that the lights show farms owned by white Rhodesians and that they will go off when the farmer presses the emergency alert in case of an attack, she keeps her eyes glued to the map. By the end of the day she is disappointed that none of the lights went off.

Fuller's parents transfer their understanding of resilience in times of adversity onto their children. Fuller and her sister are made familiar with cleaning, loading, and shooting a gun, despite their young age. While her sister is reluctant to handle the various rifles, Fuller is eager "to be like an army guy" (74) and enjoys the shooting lessons held by her father. They practice on "an enormous cardboard cutout of a crouched, running terrorist" (76) in the garden behind the farm. Fuller's child-self describes the resonance of a gunshot in the following way: "The sound of the gun cracks the air and hits me above the belly. That's where gun sounds go, thumping the air out of you with their shout" (ibid.).

In addition to their shooting lessons, the girls have to take Red Cross first-aid classes in case they have to administer help (123). Fuller's list of procedures that she is able to perform resembles the daily duties of a nurse working in a field hospital:

I can stabilize a broken limb or a broken neck and bandage a sprain. I can dress a bullet wound. I can make hospital corners on a bed. I know how to find a vein and administer a drip, but I am only allowed to do this if All the Grown-ups Are Dead. I can do mouth-to-mouth and CPR, and I have practised on the kids at school who are also signed up for the Red Cross class (ibid.).

Although each member of the Fuller family is preparing themselves to fend off a terrorist attack if need be, it is a case of petty theft that demands their skills. When they return from visiting a neighbour they find that a large proportion of their personal

property has been taken; shortly afterwards, they discover that Violet, their maid, has been attacked and severely wounded. It is soon discovered that their cook is responsible for the havoc. While her father is gathering men around him to hunt the culprit down and her mother is busy with keeping the critically wounded woman alive, Fuller takes in the whole scene. She wants to see how her mother is going to help Violet whose body is “viscous and shiny with blood, as if someone has poured oil on her, or wrapped her tightly in black plastic” (122). She watches as her mother cuts open the maid’s dress and witnesses the mutilated body of the woman “sliced, like rashers of bacon, all the way up her thighs, across her belly, her arms, her face” (124). Once Fuller’s mother has stabilised the victim, she calls for medical backup. Immediately, the question is asked if they have been attacked by terrorist; when Fuller’s mother calls the incident “domestic in nature” (125), Fuller senses “a hissing pause of disappointment” (ibid.) from the other end of the radio. Meanwhile Fuller’s father has returned with “‘the boys’ [who] are Dad’s most loyal labourers” (125) and the fugitive. Fuller’s father commands his men to “deal with him” (131) whereupon they beat the already bruised and battered man until Fuller can hear his ribs “cracking like the branches of the frangipani tree. His skin splits open like a ripe papaya” (ibid.). Afterwards he is handed to the militia who bundle him into a van. When he tries to flee, he is tied with a rope to the vehicle. Fuller watches how he tries to run, “his legs spinning like an egg whisk, until he is jerked off his feet and then he is pulled twisting behind vehicle until it reaches the end of the driveway. After that [...] he does not try to jump out again” (132).

For a family like the Fuller’s, white and adamantly believing in the status quo, independence comes as a shock. Fuller is amazed at the sudden changes that take place seemingly overnight: Rhodesia has turned into Zimbabwe and a black man named Robert Gabriel Mugabe has risen to power (148). Moreover, she finds that matters at her school are just as rapidly modified in accordance with Zimbabwe’s newly found independence. She watches how, day by day, Afrikaner parents collect their children with “a sense of history in their carriage; *we’ve done this before and we’ll do it again*. We have learned about the Great Trek in school [...] *So, now the Little Trek*” (148-149). She is slightly worried when “some of the English Rhodesians” (149) leave next. She is outright terrified when she learns that black and coloured children will be allowed to enter her school: “Tomorrow, children who have never been to school, never used a flush toilet, never eaten with a knife and fork, will arrive

[...]. Tomorrow, child soldiers will arrive" (ibid.). She is surprised to find that the African children "have full names" (150) too and that they display "perfect European manners" (151). After one term, the white children are the minority; a state that calls Fuller's worldview into question: "We are among two hundred children who speak to another in Shona, [...] who play games that exclude us, who don't have to listen to a word we say" (ibid.). Fuller's ingrained notions about racial differences are eventually shaken to the very foundations when she has to reuse the bathwater of black children due to a water shortage:

We have to share bathwater. I am reluctant. Then the new, black matron says, 'Come on, stop this silly nonsense. Skin is skin. In you get.' While our new matron watches, I climb into the bathwater, lukewarm with the floating skin cells of Margaret and Mary Zvogbo. Nothing happens. I bathe, I dry myself. I do not break out in spots or a rash. I do not turn black (152).

However, Fuller's parents are less inclined to renounce their convictions. Accordingly, they see their farm as a last sanctuary of resistance against the latest developments where they can still sing "we're all Rhodesians and we'll fight through thickanthin" (96) and where they can mock the new government's programme of peace and reconciliation by referring to it as "piss and reconciliation" (155).

Consequently, when their farm is auctioned off due to the new policy of "land redistribution" (ibid.) and the first squatters appear unannounced on the premises, they are unwilling to accept their fate. Especially Mrs. Fuller has made up her mind to "not letting it go without a fight" (156). As an act of retaliation she closes down the little school as well as the clinic on her farm and she refuses to offer help or succour to anyone passing through the land. As a result, "the sick, the swollen-bellied, the bleeding, the malarial all [...] wait for a lift into town, where they will wait hours, maybe days, for the suddenly flooded, socialized health care system to take care of them" (157). Fuller is disconcerted by her mother's increasing anger which erupts one morning when they discover an assembly of huts sprung up overnight on the farm. In a fit of rage she "charges at the squatters repeatedly [...] running indiscriminately at the women, the children, the men [...] she screams, 'Fucking, fucking kaffirs.'" (159).

The behaviour of Fuller's mother does not go unnoticed. The very same day, the family is visited by a group of soldiers who are described as "the new Zimbabwean army, fresh out of guerrilla groups [...] still war-minded [...] still war-

trigger-happy" (163). Despite the soldiers' threatening presence, Fuller's father stands his ground by demanding that they either shoot him or put their guns down to talk like civilised people (ibid.). In the end, the Fullers are let off with a warning; they are told that "this is Zimbabwe now. You can't just do as you please from now. From now it is we who are in charge." (164). Nevertheless, their resistance proves to be futile when their farm is sold after all. In a final statement Fuller attempts to do justice to the opposing sides in the struggle for land while also sketching the bigger, historical and economical, picture:

Robandi [i.e. the farm] is put up for mandatory auction [...]. It is sold, in the loosest sense of the word, to a black Zimbabwean. The money that changes hands in this exchange doesn't even touch the sides of our pockets. Everything from the farm is given to the Farmer's Co-op, from which we had borrowed money to buy the farm in the first place. Robandi never belonged to us, and it doesn't belong to the new Zimbabwean farmer. It belongs to the mortgage company. They, alone of everyone, seem unmoved by the fierce fight for land through which we have just come (165).

The "fight for land" as well as the civil war in Rhodesia constitute the two subjects for which Fuller chose to endow the reader with detailed historical background information. The former issue is made accessible through an almost full-page list of the most crucial land acts in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe (154). Thus, the reader is able to trace the forced land alienation from its beginnings in the 19th century when it concerned the native African population to its reversal in the late 20th century when the white population was predominantly affected.

The second issue is treated in an interpolated chapter entitled "Chimurenga: The Beginning" (24). In it, Fuller reviews the historical preconditions for the civil war in Rhodesia from the point of view of the native population. She explains that the word 'Chimurenga' is "a poetic Shona way of saying 'war of liberation' (ibid.). She states that the onset of the first Chimurenga was due to the Africans realising that the white settlers who had only just arrived in their country "were the kind of guests who slept with your wife, enslaved your children, and stole your cattle" (25). She refers to the activities of white settlers as "taking? Stealing? Settling? Homesteading? Appropriating? [...] what word can I use? I suppose it depends on who you are" (ibid.). She elaborates on the brutality with which the uprisings of the Ndebeles and the Shonas were quelled by military troops from England and South Africa; a slaughter of their ancestors that was not forgotten by the Africans. Nor did

they “forget their heroes from this first struggle for independence” (28). In Fuller’s account, the Second Chimurenga is a logical consequence of this first effort to assert Africa’s freedom and independence. Moreover, she wonders if there is anything for white Africans to claim at all: “[H]ow can we, who shed our ancestry the way a snake sheds skin in winter, hope to win against this history? We white Africans of shrugged-off English, Scottish, Dutch origin” (ibid.).

Historical trauma in Fuller’s memoir is the setting for personal trauma as well as identity conflicts in so far as the historical specifics, such as time and place, shape Fuller’s personal history to a high degree and her private history is only fully graspable with the historical context in mind. Fuller emphasises this correlation by depicting historical circumstances from the very personal and idiosyncratic perspective of a white young child who happens to grow up in war-torn Rhodesia. In this way, her account is simultaneously particular as well as generic. The particularity stems from the individuality of her voice, since there is only one Alexandra Fuller who can tell her story; the generic element arises from Fuller’s belonging to a certain identifiable ethnical as well as social group within the African context, which is being white and being of English background.

Again, Fuller relies on her double-voiced narrative style to fully convey the traumatic momentum of her memories. By creating a salient discrepancy between the form of the narration, a naïve matter-of-fact portrayal of events provided by her child-self, and its dark and sinister content, she manages to convey that the real trauma of her experiences lies in having perceived them as normal. The fear of terrorists, the ever-present civil war as well as the lurking presence of death that comes with it, foster an environment that is characterised by a lack of normality or even by a corrupted, perverted form of normality that generates anxiety instead of secureness and a profound mistrust instead of a sense of basic trust.

Moreover, it is crucial to examine the different levels of knowledge and understanding that separate Fuller’s child-narrator from the adult author. While the child is primarily exposed to isolated experiences and uninterpretable emotions in a precarious environment, the adult benefits from the distance to this environment that allows her to safely re-examine and to interpret the past experiences and emotions. The consequential insights gained from such a re-visitation facilitate the integration of these hitherto incoherent fragments.

Furthermore, as an adult, Fuller is endowed with the capacity for abstract thinking which, in turn, has two effects: On the one hand, there is the full impact of unpleasant knowledge that has to be dealt with, as for example the blatant racism of Fuller's parents, or the privileged and questionable role of the Fuller's as white farm-owners in Rhodesia; on the other hand, it is these painful discoveries through which the bigger picture, so to speak, is generated that enables Fuller to transcend the boundaries of a strictly personal account. In effect, Fuller's memoir puts into practice what LaCapra considers as imperative for a successful approach to past history, namely both the "reconstruction of [...]" and a dialogic exchange with it [...] wherein knowledge involves not only the processing of information but also affect, empathy, and questions of value" (35). This is inferable from how Fuller approaches the episodes she chose to narrate. No matter how painful or disturbing the content may be, her narrative voice remains benign and her critique is apparent yet lenient. Thus, it is arguable that in Fuller's narrative, the reconciliation with past experiences that is necessary for healing from trauma commences with extending empathy towards one's own past and, likewise, towards the people and circumstances constituting one's past. Fuller practices this empathic poise towards her parents as well as her younger self; yet, in adding the interpolations that I have discussed earlier, she acknowledges that the historical particularities, which are inseparable from her life story, demand similar attention. In touching upon the history of oppression and dispossession of the African native population, Fuller enters the realm of LaCapra's historical trauma and historical losses. Since neither the trauma nor the losses are hers, she does not endeavour to speak for the victims or to appropriate their experiences. Instead, she merely points to the trauma of another, or others in this case, thus making it salient through which she becomes what LaCapra refers to as "attentive secondary witness" (78) who "recogniz[es] the difference" (ibid.) and does not take "the other's place" (ibid.).

5. 1. 4. “An African Childhood”

Don't Let's go to the Dogs Tonight illustrates that the reality of trauma unfolds beyond discussions about impact and representation. In Fuller's memoir, it is as much ingrained in her family history as it is intruding from the outside world. Comparable to an overarching theme, it pervades the text and connects the three different categories that I have presented above. In tracing the various traumatic conflicts, Fuller suggests a way of successfully working through past inflictions. Crucial to such an endeavour is Fuller's use of what I termed a “go-between voice” which allows her to speak from an indeterminable subject position that is neither quite African nor fully English but rather transnational. With the help of this go-between voice, Fuller carves out her very own subject position, thus counteracting the feeling of being devoid of any proper identity. Instead of being an Other in a country in which otherness works as ontological demarcation line, she creates her own voice through addressing the conflicting and contradicting elements of her identity.

Likewise, depending on the traumatic occurrence within the family, the author foregrounds distinct modes of representing it. While she resorts to a technique of cutting irony and prattling naivety for portraying her mother's drinking habits, she relies on omission and vagueness when it comes to addressing the sexual assaults she and her sister had to suffer. In both cases it becomes clear that the author is attempting to gain mastery over conditions to which she was once helplessly exposed. This is most obvious in Fuller's depiction of her little sister's death which is portrayed exclusively through the eyes of her child-self. Additionally, the use of a mimetic narrative mode is conducive to endowing her account with a high degree of immediacy. The desire to represent the shattering impact of trauma faithfully through narration can be read as a belated appropriation of it which, in turn, renders the integration of Fuller's traumas into her life story possible.

The same applies to Fuller's representation of historical trauma which pervades her entire childhood in a way that makes it more of a perpetual condition than an actual array of events. The precarious living space that is thus evoked is characterised by violence and alert. Moreover, the retrospective view at her childhood adds another layer to the dimensions of historical trauma as past and present perceptions must inevitably collide. Fuller resolves this clash both by extending empathy to the chief protagonists of her own past, i. e. her parents, on the

one hand; on the other hand, she does so by calling attention to the colonial as well as to the postcolonial trauma suffered by native Africans.

In conclusion, the recreation of the past through one's own words may facilitate the acceptance of it; it is as much a process of absorption as it is one of self-realisation and self-empowerment. In other words, in rewriting her childhood experiences, Fuller literally becomes the author of her story. Figuratively speaking, one could say that Fuller takes her child-self by the hand and together they re-visit and re-examine places and moments of hitherto unmentioned and unmentionable hurt and confusion; and thus they regain control over what Fuller subtitles "An African Childhood".

5. 2. Under Our Skin

Donald McRae's 2012 memoir *Under Our Skin* is a valuable document of growing up in "the empire of trauma" (Boehmer 36) that South Africa had become during the heydays of apartheid. Of particular interest is McRae's intention to contrast the slowly awakening conscience of his youthful and apolitical self in the face of the apartheid with the inhumane dealings of the regime. McRae illustrates how identity and family sentiment may be affected by the traumatising political environment to such a degree that they start to fall apart. Since McRae's father was an influential figure in South Africa, commonplace generational conflicts become inevitably politically charged and political agendas become a matter of taking a clear stance within the family. As McRae's narrative progresses, the opposing positions are firmly entrenched until they come to a veritable deadlock. The only way out of it is a drastic change; this applies not only to the private affairs of the McRae's but also to the social and political climate of South Africa as the author shows. Thus, McRae's memoir is particularly suitable for the analysis of the interacting influence of historical conditions and private matters.

However, McRae's engagement with the traumas of the past is, at the same time, a way of righting perceived wrongs by deliberately commenting on the different levels of knowledge that lie between the actual events and the re-writing of them in retrospect as I will demonstrate. Therefore, coming to terms with trauma in *Under Our Skin* is achieved through the creation of a narrative that considers the past always in connection with the presence, thus enabling an overarching coherence that exceeds the memoir as such as it becomes an integral part of McRae's life story.

Moreover, McRae's extensive preoccupation with the fates of several members of the resistance provides a prime example of representing the trauma of others without "making oneself a surrogate victim who has a right to the victim's voice or subject position" (LaCapra 78). McRae dedicates a whole part of his memoir to the presentation of their respective fates in which the first-person narration is abandoned in favour of an omniscient narration that allows him to relate "stories [...] far more significant than mine" (409). Therefore, McRae's handling of what is now a part of South Africa's recent past can be seen as a contribution to what LaCapra terms "memory work", as I will argue.

5. 2. 1. Identity

Since trauma in McRae's memoir is largely a result of identity issues, I will first examine more closely how identity is constructed and represented in the text. The first part of *Under Our Skin* is entitled "A Small White Boy"; clearly, the emphasis is on "white" which quickly becomes obvious through McRae's description of how his younger self conceives of the world around him and of his place in it. Living in the white suburbs of Witbank, he is surrounded by black "boys" and "girls" doing their chores unquestioningly. Even as a five-year-old he is well aware of the stark contrast that exists between the black and the white population: "Their houses were tiny and made out of corrugated iron. They could not catch the same trains or buses as us [...]. They could not sit on a bench in the park or swim in a pool" (6). When he hears about Dimitri Tsafendas who was of mixed origin but who wanted to be classified as non-white despite his "being light enough to be white" (ibid.) he wonders why anyone would want to be anything other than white as "white people were happy" (ibid.).

A petty incident reveals the degree to which these attitudes are internalised by the five-year-old; when the gardener laughs at his dog, he is infuriated by the audacity: "I was white. He was just a native. He was a boy and I was the *baasie* [i.e. the little master]. Shandy was my dog and he was laughing at her" (11). In order to put the man in his place, he insults him and threatens to tell his father of the incident. He has more sympathy for Maggie, the McRae's maid, who he considers to be part of his family "even if she was not allowed to use our cups and plates [...] and slept in a brick room away from the house [...]. She still belonged to us. Maggie was our girl" (15). As set in their – South African – ways as the family seems to be, there is a part of their identity that connects them to a different time and a different continent. The grandparents on both sides had emigrated from Scotland to South Africa after the First World War. Still alive and well, their Scottish accents and customs make them "different from most white South Africans" (71). This sense of being different seeps into the subconscious mind of young McRae when he absentmindedly watches the black garden worker who holds "his black thumb aloft" (12) and compares it to his own thumb which "look[s] small and pale in the African sun" (ibid.). The inclination to uphold traditions is most obvious in McRae's description of the family's Christmas celebration:

In mid-summer, our skins were darker than the light brown berries covering the ground around our garden swing. Yet Heather and I were besotted with snowy

white images of Christmas. Our sunny lounge was filled with cards of snowmen and candle-lit scenes of life from a wintry European town. Rosy-cheeked children sledged down Alpine mountains while a beaming Santa skated across a frozen lake. We even had an old ceramic snowman that we stuck on top of an artificial pine tree dad brought up from the cupboard below the stairs. It was as if, being so white in an African country, we needed to imagine what might have been if my grandparents had never moved continents (26).

The perpetuation of European customs and imagery serves not only as a reminder of what could have been but simultaneously as a silent evidence of what is obvious: “Being so white in an African country” (ibid.) raises questions of the position of White Africanness in general which touch upon issues like colonisation, alienation, and belonging. This feeling of living in an artificially constructed space that can never be truly one’s home is intensified by the racial as well as ethnic segregation. While the first is obvious and a largely unquestioned part of the everyday life in South Africa, the second is more a matter of deliberately demonstrating one’s cultural heritage. Being of British descent, McRae and his sister look to Great Britain for the latest in music and fashion. They listen to forbidden Stones and Beatles records, they read the *New Musical Express*, and they use cockney rhyming slang when they talk to their classmates of same origin (36-37). Most importantly, they “despise Afrikaners” (43-44) and everything connected to the Afrikaner way of life. To him, “English and Afrikaans-speakers lived such separate lives that [...] the ‘bloody Dutchmen’ were as alien as most black South Africans” (165-166). Another example of McRae’s rejection can be found in his comment on the Voortrekker Monument that he sees for the first time while journeying to Pretoria with his family:

That monument to Afrikaner suffering consisted of a huge slab of cold granite perched on a hill on the southern fringes of Pretoria. Inside, the images of ox-wagons and determined Afrikaners were eerie and scary, as if reminding us that we were ruled by a crazy *volk* [people] (50).

However, McRae’s scorn for Afrikaners is not primarily based on his aesthetic sensibility; rather, it stems from the inescapable influence that the apartheid system exerts on his life. For one, as an English-speaking boy who is going to an English-speaking school with an emblem that displays “a cricket bat criss-crossed with a tennis racquet, [a] football and a smaller tennis ball [and] a logo of ‘Play The Game’ emblazoned across the bottom” (53), the exclusion of the South African cricket team

due to the politics of apartheid comes as a shock: “The bloody Afrikaners had turned the whole world against us” (54).

As severe as McRae perceives the ban instigated by the international sports community to be, the internal regulations of the apartheid regime prove to be far more momentous for his personal life as well as for the dynamics within his family. The major problem is a regulation that requires “every white boy to go into the army once he finished school” (36). The idea alone of being “hollered at by an Afrikaner sergeant for a year or more” (72) is enough to make the ten-year-old feel as if his future was clouded by an ever-approaching threat. McRae’s introduction of this issue marks the moment in the memoir in which the narrative becomes fraught with tension as his identity begins to slowly acquire a new meaning that is imposed from without.

5. 2. 2. Personal Trauma

Although personal trauma in McRae’s memoir arises from South Africa’s political system and the resulting civic duties, it is predominantly played out within the private realm of the family. From a very early age on McRae watches his older cousins and is thus able to study the procedure of being drafted and going through basic training. He hears about the brutal physical as well as psychological treatment of the conscripts, of sadistic sergeants, and of attempted suicides. He registers how one cousin loses a toe (72) and how another sinks more and more into depression (82). He even devises a countdown based on the age gap between himself and his cousins: “Malcolm and Kevin would soon follow Brian into the army. Brian’s brother, Alan, would be next. And then it would be my turn” (50). The anxiety McRae describes has several stages; each coupled with a certain phase of his coming of age as well as with a growing awareness of what the political system in South Africa entails.

Barely ten years old, he confides in his grandfather who had wanted to become a soldier in World War One but who was assigned to work in the shipyards. Knowing that his other grandfather lied about his age in order to be sent to the front, McRae has the impression that he is betraying the family tradition as “the McRae [...] were fighting men” (90). However, his grandfather points out the difference since they “knew who they were fighting” (73) whereas McRae is “less certain about the

identity of our enemy. It couldn't be the natives because they already worked for us. So why did all the white boys have to go into the army?" (ibid.).

McRae's question remains unanswered; yet when he turns fourteen the socio-political dimension of his predicament begins to dawn on him as he has to join "Youth Preparedness" (100), a weekly-held drill course at school. He describes it as follows:

We were meant to be preparing ourselves for the onslaught of communist forces intent on overthrowing apartheid and white South African civilization. The army uniforms, and the chaotic marching drills we did at school, were supposed to steel us for military conscription. And so [...] we had begun to sour a little on South African life. If upholding apartheid meant enduring Y.P., some of us were no longer so sure we lived in the greatest country in the world (ibid.).

Although McRae's initial doubts about apartheid are predominately self-interested rather than utilitarian, they nevertheless mark the onset of his practice to challenge the expectations of the society he lives in as well as those of his family. McRae's attitude is reinforced by two events of the year 1976; a personal one and one that should go down in history. The first one is a week-long trip to Schoemansdal Veld School which is, in effect, a militarised form of a summer camp with "a heady dose of political and [...] partisan indoctrination and paramilitary discipline" (Grundy 59). McRae describes it as "a prison camp" (126) complete "with an iron gate and barbed wire fencing" (ibid.) where "our innocence ended" (125). Upon returning home after a week of physical drill, prayer, and anti-communist propaganda, he declares to his parents for the first time that he is not going to do his military service.

The end of innocence also applies to the second event, although it concerns the country at large. On the 16th June 1976 black students had taken to the streets to protest against a new education resolution. When riots ensued, the police opened fire at the protesting children which generated a two-day state of emergency later known as Soweto uprising. Although the South African government endeavours to censor reports about the incidents, the McRae's utilise the newly-permitted technology of television to tune into pirate broadcasting stations which cover the riots in all their gruesomeness. McRae characterises what he sees as a kind of terrible awakening experience: "The pictures on our television screens ripped away the layers of blindness from my eyes. I stared at the nightly news footage as armed white men, in police and army uniforms, cut down children" (150). Due to these

pictures, he begins to realise the true significance of the discrepancy between white South Africans and black South Africans. In an instant, his childhood beliefs are called into question and his own position in a system that thrives on the discrimination against and dehumanisation of the majority of the population becomes obvious to him:

It became harder to skip easily over the 'Whites Only' signs that surrounded us. It seemed as if there was nothing I did which did not involve remaining on the white side of life. We were on one side of a pane of glass; on the other side, smudged and blurred, the rest of South Africa remained. We kept going to our white schools and offices, our white shops and stadiums [...] all the while a black community burned (ibid.).

Furthermore, he eventually comes to understand that the limitation of his personal freedom through mandatory military service and the oppression of the black population are inextricably linked with each other as both serve as cornerstones of the apartheid regime. By subjecting his life to critical scrutiny, McRae detects the workings of the system in the smallest of things as for example, in their "white by night" (65) neighbourhood, in the way they summon their maid with a bell (79), or in their annual family holiday in East London where they mix and mingle with other white families from all over South Africa while they are being served and waited on by an all-black staff (43). Thus, McRae's newly found critical conscience enables him to see that life in South Africa is played out within very narrowly set boundaries in which the freedom of choice is nothing more than an illusion. It could be argued that McRae's experience allows him to gain insight into the mechanisms of what Charles Taylor termed "the social imaginary" which is

the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations (qtd. in Griffiths and Prozesky 29).

McRae's revelation does not remain without consequences. He begins to side with his older sister against his parents. Together they challenge their parents' conservative expectations. While McRae's sister wants to escape from South Africa in order to live "a life of freedom in Italy, Germany or Sweden" (119), he discovers his love for books and words which makes him want "to be a writer rather than an

engineer [and] to escape rather than accept the army" (116). Most of all, he is unwilling to follow the family tradition of joining Eskom.

What starts as a trial of strength between parents and their rebelling teenage children, turns into a veritable running battle in which every utterance and every action become charged with political and ideological significance. The "generational conflict" (164), which Mengel established as a reason for the bildungsroman structure in many contemporary South African trauma novels, in which "the family acts as a microcosm which symbolically represents the macrocosm of South Africa" (ibid.) is very much at work at this point in McRae's memoir. An example of this heightened tension within the family can be found in McRae's reaction to his father's work. Once proud that his father made it from fitter to General Manager, McRae begins to view the position as a sign of compliance with South Africa's apartheid regime. Moreover, he accuses his father of hypocrisy with regard to his attitude towards the native population as McRae senior praises the spirit and endurance of Eskom's unskilled manual labourers while he simultaneously accepts their exploitation and perpetuates the cliché of the happy, child-like native. McRae finds this morale reflected in his father's stories about native workmen: "Everyone called him 'Dummy' because he was deaf and dumb [...] 'But Dummy was always smiling,' dad said in amazement [and] made it sound as if a deaf and dumb native was one of the most special people he had ever met" (78).

Another point of contention that proves to be more disconcerting than the benign racism of McRae's father is the compulsory military service. The relationship between father and son further deteriorates when both voice their final opinion on the subject matter: 'I'm not going' [...]. 'You're going,' dad said firmly. 'You've got no choice.'" (181). The seven years between the first intra-familial tensions and McRae's leaving South Africa for England are marked by the slow estrangement of the individual family members from one another and a lack of understanding for each other.

When the government introduces an amendment that allows for the two-year imprisonment of any draft dodger and McRae gives fleeing the country serious consideration, his parents force him to see various psychiatrists (312-313). Due to his erratic behaviour during the sessions electroshock therapy is advised: "The doctors believed [...] they might have to shock some sense into me. It was one possible treatment for a white boy who refused to serve in the South African army"

(315). When his parents spare him this ordeal, McRae feels that he needs to demonstrate that he does not lack the courage of his convictions; in order to emphasise that he “believes “in a different country to the one [dad] and mum had lived in” (354), he volunteers to teach at a school in Soweto, “The Murder Capitol of the World”” (340).

After a final dispute McRae’s parents relent. In 1984, aged 23, McRae leaves South Africa. Although there is hardly an alternative, this step marks a moment in the personal history of the McRae’s that is perceived as “failure as a family and as South Africans” (372). On the day of his departure McRae feels anything but euphoric about leaving his family and his country behind. Mainly because the prospect of ever returning is more than uncertain: “Apartheid seemed so embedded that it would take decades before we were free from it, if ever” (ibid.). Moreover, he begins to acknowledge the sacrifice his parents make by choosing to remain in South Africa (ibid.). As an attempt to cheer his son up, McRae’s father tells him that by going to England he “would complete the circle” (373) of both his grandfathers’ emigration; thus upholding the family tradition in one way or another. Yet to McRae “the circle [...] felt broken” (ibid.).

McRae’s account of personal and family trauma differs from other trauma narratives in its focus on slowly unfolding conditions, which arise from certain circumstances, rather than an event-centred presentation. To put it another way, since there is no event-related epicentre of trauma, the effects of the traumatic impact are less clearly identifiable as well as less traceable. Leigh Gilmore has found the following words to describe the representation of trauma as it is to be found in McRae’s work: “[T]he trauma is not necessarily documented [...], the boundaries of trauma are not limited to an act or event. Rather, they grow to indicate how those boundaries reveal and restructure other boundaries and limits” (43). In McRae trauma grows and expands as his memoir progresses. Furthermore, it encroaches upon separate areas of life until each of them becomes equally absorbed by it. In fact, the boundaries of these areas are restructured to such an extent that they are virtually dissolved. This is most obvious when McRae is no longer able to distinguish between the tumults that concern his family and the turmoil of society at a certain point; accordingly, he speaks of “the anguish that now defined both South Africa and our family” (304).

However, what can be viewed as traumatic point of departure, so to speak, is the sudden reality check that calls into question all assumptions that McRae has made about the world, and his place in it, as well as everything that he has been told about it. What would be described as a crisis of faith in religious terms could be termed a crisis of basic trust in a more secular phrasing. Naturally, it amounts to the same thing; namely, a deep-seated mistrust in one's environment coupled with a sense of having lost the thread regarding the cornerstones of one's own identity; it is no coincidence that both these factors are held to be pivotal for the onset of trauma.

In McRae the interplay between family expectations or handed down family traditions and the pressure of societal norms and civic duties leads to the first cracks in the surface of his idyllic white middle-class upbringing. Initially, his uneasiness revolves around his personal shortcomings as a member of the military-trained McRae clan and as a South African citizen. Soon, however, McRae opts for questioning the demands to which he is unwilling to conform to. The above intimated disintegration of boundaries occurs when a socio-historical event, i.e. the Soweto uprising, puts McRae's existence into perspective. His own privileged status as well as the country's black and -white divide now seem to him like traits of a Kafkaesque system of injustice (313-314). Yet, as the boundaries dissolve, McRae's first reaction is to turn against his father who has told him, time and time again, that they "lived in the most beautiful country in the world" (4). In addition to whitewashing, he accuses his father of being a benefactor of and a silent accomplice to an inhumane regime. Furthermore, McRae's refusal to serve in the army takes on political overtones. As the private becomes political and vice versa, McRae drifts increasingly into a position of isolation. At the end of this process of estrangement, he realises that his existence as a white South African in South Africa is a form of indirect compliance with apartheid; consequently, he distances himself, both spatially and emotionally, from this subject position.

5. 2. 3. Rewriting the Past

McRae's memoir differs not solely in its representation of trauma but also in the understanding of its function. The author is very clear about his intentions not to simply tell his story and thus, inevitably, create a rewriting of it; instead, he repeatedly points out that he desires to present a rectification that unifies past events with his present-day insights into them. Regarding the conflicts that have a hold on the family

for almost a decade, McRae takes pains to include his parents' point of view alongside that of his younger self. In doing so, he demonstrates how one story, and one's own story for that matter, is shaped by and an expression of a plethora of relations, as Gilmore has argued (12). Moreover, by including these various angles he paints a vivid picture of how the family is affected by the strain put on them. Above all, McRae's rewriting is a way of doing justice to his parents' actions which is something that he was not able to do while in the midst of his own struggles.

This becomes most obvious in his reassessment of his parents' attitude towards apartheid. As a teenager he is convinced that they comply with the regime in order to remain undisturbed in their pleasant white way of life. However, in his rewriting he also includes memories that convey a different impression. When he recounts the "Eskom's annual Tribal Dancing competition" (83), he describes the benevolence, openness, and tolerance with which his father meets the indigenous dancers. Additionally, he echoes his father's speech in which he talks "about the family of Eskom and how we formed a crucial part of the company whether we were Zulu or Sotho, English or Afrikaans" (86). To emphasise that his father's attitude is not standard practice, he informs the reader that at the same time the government enforced the homeland policy which would see a large majority of the black population forcefully relocated to "the most remote sections of the country" (83).

As the rewriting progresses, McRae comments in a more direct fashion on the change in the estimation of his father's actions, as the following quote illustrates:

Dad increasingly believed it was morally wrong to endorse government policy. In his own way, he began to think like a revolutionary. My sister and I, being teenagers, did not realize the significance, but dad planned a radical departure from normal business practice in South Africa in 1976. He began to consider how he might train black workers for skilled roles which were reserved exclusively for white South Africans (153).

Yet, the affirmative action McRae's father is able to assert because of his powerful position at South Africa's major electricity public utility company is completely lost on McRae's teenage self; if anything, he finds fault with his father's conduct and he interprets it as evidence of complicity. This clashing of perspectives is dissected in McRae's retrospection as the following example shows in which several points of view come together: First, his father's motivation and McRae's own behaviour are characterised in hindsight, "I knew little, then, of dad's work. And he told me less and

less because [...] he knew I had already gone to war against him" (199). Then, the author's youthful spite is exposed, "I accused him of being in cahoots with the government. My father, I complained bitterly, was turning into a fascist" (ibid.).

In writing his memoir, McRae does not merely endeavour to recreate the past as he remembers it. He also includes other people's memories about incidents that he was unaware of. Thereby, he demonstrates that the past is essentially a varying tale that depends very much on whoever narrates it. One example of this is McRae's mother's meaningful gesture of publicly kissing a black woman on the cheek at an Eskom gathering. McRae admits that it was only years later that he heard of this incident while being completely "unaware of the uproar my mother had caused" (307) as it took place. Another, quite significant, example is the author's decision to provide the reader with a chronicle of what his parents achieved after he left the country. In approximately twenty pages McRae details how his parents managed to provide the townships with electricity and thus circumvented apartheid (378-395).

For the purpose of emphasising his position as absentee, on the one hand and as chronicler, on the other hand, McRae transforms his first-person narrative into a third-person narrative. As a result, he becomes a minor character in the story as the focus shifts from his perspective to that of his parents as the following quote shows: "Ian McRae's son did not really know the impact of the work he had done in Soweto, and across the whole of the country [...] It was only years later that Ian told his son and daughter the full story" (395-396). McRae's final sentence on the matter concerns the reconciliation of a family through joint efforts at working through a difficult past. This private version of memory work is seen as pivotal to their identity as a family: "We had our memories, and proof of how they had shaped us [and] had made us who we were" (399). McRae extends his understanding of the importance of working through the past to the public realm as well. Similar to the way McRae chronicles his parents' endeavours, he provides a detailed account of Neil Aggett, Liz Floyd, Barbara Hogan, and Aurret van Heerden, four apartheid opponents whose fate gained sad notoriety. The next chapter will focus on McRae's representation of the traumatic experiences of others as well as historical trauma.

5. 2. 4. Historical Trauma / Interpolation

In 1977 the opposition against apartheid is given a face. It is that of Steve Biko who died in detention and whose friends, the newspaper editor Donald Woods and future

politician Helen Zille, were intent on making his story public. The McRae's follow the daily news until the editor is suspended and the case is closed by a court ruling which states that third-party responsibility cannot be determined (185-190). This piece of news leaves a lasting impression on McRae: "Steve Biko was dead, and there was no-one to blame" (190). When a friend suggests to him that, as an aspiring writer, he should "just write honestly about the country" (207) that they live in since "one day, no-one will remember how we all feel right now" (ibid.), McRae dismisses the idea secretly as he feels "too young, and too frightened [...] to explain how I felt at the bottom of South Africa" (ibid.). McRae's feeling of inadequacy intensifies when he hears about the arrests of van Heerden, Hogan, Floyd, and Aggett, through acquaintances who actively take part in the resistance against apartheid (216). After Aggett's death, he has the following thoughts: "I did not even know what he [i.e. Aggett] looked like before his bearded face appeared on posters demanding his release [...] I did not share Pete's personal grief or rage. I was just shaken that a white man had died in detention" (279). Nevertheless, he tags along to watch the speech of just released Liz Floyd; an experience which he finds deeply impressive:

As they entered the hall together, slipping through a side door near the stage, it seemed as if the roof might lift and expose us all to the bright blue sky [...]. I did not raise my fist in the air, like many around me, because I felt more like an observer than an activist. I was not 'one of the people' so disenfranchised by apartheid, and yet I felt proud as I looked up at the seven young detainees (295).

Neil Aggett's death comes at a time when McRae has already gone into what could be described as an inner emigration in the sense that he takes the tumultuous events as confirmation for his desire to leave the country; especially, since he is "suddenly confronted with a new reality of apartheid: it could extinguish the life of a compassionate white doctor" (280). Drawing parallels, McRae wonders what might happen to a potential draft dodger like himself. Once the pressure of this question is made obsolete by his escape to England, the singularity of Aggett's story and its meaning for South Africa dawns on him. Being exiled from his country, McRae begins to realise in what ways growing up in South Africa's apartheid days has not only shaped his personal story but also those of his fellow citizens. Thus, it is from a distance in time and space that he begins to think "about people whose stories are far more significant than mine" (409) which develops into a plan of bringing together his personal "little tale" (ibid.) and the "epic saga" (ibid.) of a country that has

perpetuated traumatising conditions and that has generated countless traumatic stories.

Above all, it is the story of the four detainees that intrigues him the most and that he feels compelled to tell. McRae dedicates two entirely self-contained chapters to the story of Aggett and his fellow campaigners. They are entitled “Detained” and “Cell 209” respectively and belong to “Part III: The Detainees”. They are situated between two pieces of news that already point to a story that is no longer McRae’s; the first concerns Neil Aggett’s arrest and the second his death. However, by placing the chapters thus, McRae intimates that their story had a considerable impact on his own. In fact, the extent to which McRae is affected by it can be estimated from the intent to pause his own story completely. He does so in a twofold way: For one, McRae is sent to travel Europe for a couple of months, after hearing about the arrest, since his father hopes that “a harsh European winter would persuade me to shelve my plans to leave South Africa for good” (215). Due to the fact that McRae does not elaborate on his time in Europe, the impression is created that he exits the stage, so to speak; for another, just as with the re-writing of his parents’ story, McRae’s autobiographical first person narrative is replaced by an auctorial mode of narration. Thus, McRae puts a double emphasis on not being part of the story that he is about to recount. Instead, he directs the focus on the four detainees who become the main characters in something that reads as if it could be a part of a crime novel. By introducing an abrupt change in style, McRae throws the reader out of his or her rhythm which is yet another way of setting the two chapters apart from the rest of McRae’s memoir. The way McRae opens the first chapter provides an example of his technique:

They had been eerily calm as they sat on the old double bed. Facing each other, knee touching knee, their fingers laced around two mugs of tea, Neil Aggett and Liz Floyd felt a fleeting surge of power. Just before 3 a.m. on Friday, 27 November, 1981, as light rain fell across Johannesburg, they were locked in their own world. They ignored the sweating and swearing security policemen who tore the house apart (221).

Clearly, McRae aims for a novelised manner of reporting the events as can be seen from his handling of facts and literary presentation, i. e. the arrest and the description of it. Generally speaking, it can be said that instead of merely stating the hard facts, he opts for a multi-layered narrative style that incorporates personal background

information on the detainees, excerpts of protocols, and eyewitness accounts. In this way, a three-dimensional image of the situation as well as the people concerned is generated that facilitates the reader's development of an emotional interest in the detainees' story. However, far from being a ploy to arouse sentimentality, this strategy serves the purpose of attuning the reader to a story that he or she did not expect to be confronted with. Moreover, since McRae is well-aware of the traumatic content of the story that he chooses to recount, he is careful to present it in a way that forecloses over-identification with the protagonists as well as voyeurism.

I have chosen two longer quotes that I believe to be prime examples for McRae's technique and I will discuss them in more detail below. The first quote exhibits how McRae draws a picture of Neil Aggett's reasons to become involved in the organisation of trade unions for black labourers which reads as follows:

On an ordinary Friday night he was up to his arms in blood and gore at Baragwanath, the Soweto hospital [...] He was good at staunching and stitching, at staving off exhaustions and saving lives as a procession of wounded bodies was wheeled his way [...] But what was the point when the reasons for the violence that split them open were found in apartheid? The people he treated were casualties of the very system which denied them education and work and electricity and housing [in order] to control eighty-five per cent of the population for the comfort of the remaining fifteen per cent who happened to be white (233-234).

By linking the work of a young doctor in the notorious township of Soweto to the bigger picture of South Africa's political reality, i. e. the disastrous repercussions that apartheid has for the majority of the population, McRae demonstrates how the private may influence the political and vice versa. To be more specific, a vivid picture is created that conveys how the daily horrendous effects of apartheid have come to appal a white young doctor to such an extent that he is willing to sacrifice his own safety for a greater cause. Furthermore, McRae does not shy away from depicting what this ultimately means. The second quote covers the terrific torture that both Aurret van Heerden and Neil Aggett had to suffer:

Aurret had endured seventy hours without sleep when they walked in with a hood. They pulled it roughly over his head and tightened it with such ferocity that he almost gagged as he inadvertently sucked the coarse cloth into his mouth [...]. It was a technique of torture about which he had been warned by previous detainees. He had been expecting the hood. But, out of nowhere, they shocked him [...]. He had been too busy concentrating on not panicking as he battled to breath. The electricity hit him then. It lit him up with such horrendous force that he

could not stop screaming. As his body twitched with the current, his scream dragged the wet bag deeper into his mouth [...]. This, he thought, is death (237-238).

The graphic details as well as the vividness of imagery may come as a surprise given the subject. However, McRae's eschewal of any form of euphemism becomes more comprehensible when one takes LaCapra's words about the dynamics of "memory work" (95) into consideration: "Memory that confronts the traumatic dimensions of history, is ethically desirable in coming to terms with the past both for the individual and for the collectivity" (ibid.). I would argue that the desired effect of such a confrontation is only achieved if the private traumatic memories that have come to denote a nation's history are given full acknowledgement in a public sphere. This was certainly the idea behind the introduction of an official institution such as the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, which undoubtedly has furthered that very process.

Yet, there are, of course, more ways than one to arrive at the same end. One such way can be found in McRae's engagement in the traumatic memories that are not his own. Through transforming them into a story, i.e. into narrative memory, he bears witness to someone else's trauma, he becomes an "attentive secondary witness" (LaCapra 78), and most importantly, he contributes to the healing process of a nation. The last point may seem hyperbolic; yet it has to be kept in mind that South Africa's apartheid regime was decisively involved in the creation of and the maintenance of a traumatising environment; therefore, every endeavour to give voice to any of the traumata thus inflicted is a step towards recovery.

5. 2. 5. "Under Our Skin, We're all the same"

Under our Skin represents an instance of a trauma memoir that is less concerned with the event-related depiction of trauma than with exhibiting that slowly unfolding and uncontrollable processes may have a comparably disturbing impact on someone's life. The subtitle of Donald McRae's memoir "A White Family's Journey through South Africa's Darkest Years" already anticipates the inextricable link between the private realm of the family and the public realm of the nation state. In McRae's case, this connection becomes problematic when the two spheres begin to blur into one another. On the one hand, this is due to state interference in the form of compulsory military service; on the other hand, McRae's father's rise to a prominent role within the system of apartheid threatens the familial cohesion.

As the memoir progresses, the reader is made a witness to how the initial blissful existence of a young white South African boy plunges into disarray. Questions of identity, heritage, and belonging are radically politicised when McRae realises that his existence as a white South African is inseparably connected with the exploitation of the black majority of the population. Fittingly, it is a political event, which would go down in history, that enables the onset of a series of insights; the violence that is used to quell the Soweto uprising shatters McRae's "social imaginary" (Griffiths and Prozesky 23), i.e. the belief in the consistency of his world and his place in it. Coupled with a sense of identity loss, this deprivation of "ontological security" (Bilton 665) results in a state of traumatic anxiety that manifests itself in McRae's profound mistrust in his environment which leads him to eventually go into exile.

McRae challenges the conventional practice of presenting a one-dimensional authoritative version of hardships overcome by providing the reader with a multi-layered account of the past. Thus, he is able to incorporate different voices and various perspectives into his memoir which provide an insight into the process of revisiting and of reconstructing the past. This desire to closely (re-)examine the past, and maybe even to do justice to it, is likewise observable in McRae's engagement with the trauma of others. It is safe to say that the parallels between his story and that of the detainees invite such an engagement. To be more precise, both stories contain the blurring of the boundaries between private and political as well as the element of being confronted with the decision between passive compliance and active change; notwithstanding the different conditions, of course.

In the end, McRae's narration of his own traumatic past and that of others can be seen as "memory work" in both the private and the public realm as it is "bound up with one's self-understanding and with the nature of a public sphere" (La Capra 95). Moreover, since "narrative memory is [...] a social act, [that] tak[es] into account the listener or audience" (Whitehead 141), *Under our Skin* is a valuable example of how traumatic experiences can not only be represented retrospectively but also shared without exploiting or appropriating them.

5. 3. Boyhood

Coetzee's *Boyhood*, which appeared in 1997 and which was followed by *Youth* in 2002 and *Summertime* in 2009 to complete the trilogy of "autobiographical fiction" (Lenta 157), is a paragon of what Gilmore terms "limit-cases" (43) of autobiographical writing because it eschews precise categorisation and plays with genre conventions; thereby, it allows for an insight into "the very condition of autobiography" (24). Moreover, it is, in itself, a contribution to and an engagement with the discussions about the literary form of life narratives, as well as their limits, as it demonstrates that the boundaries between fact and fiction are neither static nor set in stone. It is therefore no coincidence that *Boyhood* is the final object of analysis of this thesis as it puts into practise the theoretical considerations that I have addressed so far. This does not only apply to the subject matter of autobiographical writing but likewise to the representation of trauma that emerges from a crisis of identity which, in turn, is attributable to the intra-familial background on the one hand; on the other hand, the socio-political conditions of early 1950s South Africa provoke such a crisis, as I will argue.

First, however, I will briefly discuss the narrative mode of *Boyhood* which has caused considerable commotion at the time of its publication (Lenta 158). Coetzee's decision to employ a third-person narrator, which is a common marker of fiction and which implies a certain distance "between protagonist, narrator and author" (Klopper 22), while he simultaneously names his protagonist "John Coetzee" has generated discussions whether the work in question is a slightly fictionalised memoir or an autobiographically tinged novel (ibid.). Although critics have pointed out that "the use of third person for the protagonist in an autobiographical work is [...] by no means new" (ibid.), the reservations regarding the categorisation of said work have not entirely subsided. Another reason for this might be Coetzee's use of voice. Whereas the third-person narration "draw[s] attention to the split between narrator and protagonist [...] the gap between narrator and protagonist is narrowed by the use of free indirect speech" (Klopper 24). Klopper elaborates on the effect of free indirect speech in both *Boyhood* and *Youth*:

The narrator projects the consciousness of each of his protagonists, their intimate thought patterns and characteristic vocabulary and phrasing, by deploying a linguistic style and register appropriate to the pre-adolescent and young adult respectively. With few instances of reported speech, the world is apprehended almost exclusively through their interior discourse. This impression of immediacy,

of having access to the mind itself, to its moods and private reflections at the very moment of occurrence, is heightened through the use of simple-present tense (ibid.).

Due to parallels in content and the similar use of voice, both *Boyhood* and *Youth* have been compared to James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) (Lenta 161); yet without dispute, Joyce's work is considered a bildungsroman or a Künstlerroman, thus belonging to the category of fiction. The difference between Joyce and Coetzee lies in the way they approach their own works respectively. While Joyce distracts attention away from the autobiographical elements in his work by turning "his young self" (Lenta 160) into the fictionalised character Stephen Daedalus and by referring to it as novel, Coetzee does not provide the reader with an unambiguous instruction on how *Boyhood* and *Youth* are to be read, let alone, how they are to be understood (ibid.). Lenta quotes Lejeune on the importance of the "autobiographical pact" (161) that is established between author and reader in order to rule out any misunderstandings about truth claims in the first place. Regarding Joyce, the need for such a pact is obsolete, since his work is categorised as a work of fiction. By contrast, Coetzee does not engage in such a pact.

Therefore, it is to be assumed that there is a purpose behind the author's deliberation "to weaken the autobiographical pact with the reader, who is, like the author, to regard the protagonist's behaviour more objectively than the reader of a first-person autobiography is intended to" (ibid.). This is in line with Leigh Gilmore's assertion that some writers embrace this pact as well as "autobiography's domain of first-person particularities" (9), while others "are more interested in the constitutive vagaries of autobiography" (ibid.) as for example in questions like "what the self is that it could be the subject of its own representation, what the truth is that one person could tell it, and what the past is that anyone could discharge its debt in reporting it" (9). Moreover, to abandon the autobiographical I, allows an author to escape the "compulsory inflation of the self to stand for others" (5); simultaneously, this generates "an autobiographical subject who both is and is not present, who is portrayed vividly [...] as consciousness, but is located elsewhere, as an imaginary and an imaginative construct" (Klopper 24).

Coetzee's design to create a work that bears a remarkable resemblance to an autobiography, or a memoir in the case of *Boyhood*, without the presence of a clearly discernible autobiographical subject points to the author's interest in far more

than stretching the genre limits and “preserv[ing] the ‘everyman’ quality present in *Boyhood and Youth*” (Lenta 163). The fact that Coetzee coined the term “autobiography” (qtd. in Kloppe 25) for writing about the self as if it was another or for writing “the self as other” (Kloppe 24) spells out that the actual issue relevant in *Boyhood* is the representation of the self in retrospect as well as the construction of one’s identity through the act of writing within the constraints determined by the parameters of one’s past (Lenta 161). To use Coetzee’s own words: “Perhaps the best you can hope for will not be the history of yourself but a story about yourself, a story that will not be the truth but may have some truth value” (qtd. in Kossew 366). Ultimately, the reconstruction of one’s past-self, or “versions of the self” (qtd. in Lenta 161), requires closeness as well as distance and an amalgam of both fictitious and factual elements since the representation of identity is hardly a matter of either-or. However, since autobiographical writing is certainly “an assembly of theories of the self” (Whitehead 12), the approach laid down in *Boyhood* demonstrates that the self is a creation that depends on the repetition of stories about it.

5. 3. 1. Identity

The beginning of *Boyhood* introduces the reader to household chores and petty domestic worries in an estate of terraced houses on the outskirts of a small town named Worcester. What starts as a dreary yet generic prelude to a suburban tale set in the 1950s is met by a notable change in tone once the narration is concerned with the relationship between the members of the previously described household, i.e. John, the young protagonist, his brother, and his parents.

It is soon made obvious that the protagonist’s remarkable power of observation, especially with regard to his parents, coupled with his unwillingness to voice his sentiments puts him into a position of isolation that points to a deeper-seated and more complex issue. To use an example: The initial pride that the protagonist experiences at his mother’s decision to acquire a bike for herself is turned into unease when he witnesses how his father mocks her aspirations (3). Despite the knowledge that he is doing wrong “he joins in with his father’s jeering. He is well aware what a betrayal it is. Now his mother is all alone” (ibid.). When his mother relinquishes the cycling, the protagonist has no doubts about her reasons: “He knows she has been defeated, put in her place, and knows that he must bear part of the blame. I will make it up to her one day, he promises himself” (4). He

adamantly keeps all his thoughts to himself, whilst battling feelings of remorse: “He does not often gang up with his father against her: his whole inclination is to gang up with her against his father. But in this case he belongs with the men” (ibid.).

The anguish John experiences in being torn between feelings of affection and feelings of aversion sometimes concerning only one parent at a time, sometimes concerning both parents is reflected in the way he assesses his family as a whole. His greatest concern is the conviction that they, as a family, are not normal. This is attributed to the reversal of roles in the family hierarchy:

He has never worked out the position of his father in the household. In fact, it is not obvious to him by what right his father is there at all. In a normal household, he is prepared to accept, the father stands at the head: the house belongs to him, the wife and the children live under his sway. But in their own case, and in the households of his mother’s two sisters as well, it is the mother and children who make up the core, while the husband is no more than an appendage (12).

The weak father figure, as a reference to Freud, paves the way for the presentation of the protagonist as riddled with contradicting and opposing attitudes, as a subject that is split, so to speak, between endorsing either the part of his identity symbolised by his father or the other part symbolised by the mother. The impossibility of a consolidation of these two parts is vividly depicted in his deliberations about the consequences for his existence should he succumb to either of them. Blaming his mother for not “making them live a normal life” (8), John looks to his father for guidance: “His father, if his father were to take control, would turn them into a normal family. His father is normal in every way” (ibid.). Nevertheless, in the same breath he admits that “he is grateful to his mother for protecting him from his father’s normality” (ibid.). Further on, he contemplates the life he would have to lead “if his father ran the household. [A] life of dull, stupid formulas, of being like everyone else. His mother is the only one who stands between him and an existence he could not endure” (79). However, this affection is far from unproblematic for the protagonist. Despite his gratefulness for being able to hold on to his mother “as his only protector” (ibid.), John detests his mother’s “blinding, overwhelming, self-sacrificial love [and] wishes she did not love him so much” (47). The fear of not being able “to pay back all the love she pours out upon him [...] of a lifetime bowed under a debt of love baffles and infuriates him” (ibid.).

Closely linked to this is the protagonist's quest for his sociocultural identity, i.e. whether he belongs to the Afrikaner or the English side of life. In "the early and doctrinaire days of apartheid" (Lenta 165) of 1950s South Africa this question is not just a formality; on the contrary, to signal one's group affiliation is mandatory (ibid.). Yet, even John's only certitude proves to be more of a fallacy:

They are of course South Africans, but even South Africanness is faintly embarrassing, and therefore not talked about, since not everyone who lives in South Africa is a South African, or not a proper South African (18).

In an environment that is defined by membership or exclusion, depending on one's cultural heritage, the inability to provide unambiguous evidence of one's belonging can only be detrimental. Although John searches for clues, his family's status remains a mystery since everything he finds only adds to his bafflement. He knows that there are "two farms behind him" (22) through which he feels "rooted in the past" (ibid.) and through which "he has substance" (ibid.); however, since neither of them belongs to his family, he cannot lay a claim to them on behalf of his identity.

Another factor that puzzles him is his family's language proficiency. Brought up to speak English as his first language, he is amazed at his mother's "faultless" (106) English and he wonders how she came to be "at home in [a] language" (ibid.) with her family history, which he retraces through old photo albums, containing "not a drop of English blood" (ibid.). However, "he thanks God that his mother speaks English. But he remains mistrustful of his father" (126). Although "his father's English is nearly as good" (106), he is suspicious of the motives behind "his father's effort to be English here in Worcester, where it would be so easy for him to slide back into being Afrikaans" (126), since "in Worcester the English are a minority" (67).

The implications of being a minority in the political climate of the 1950s are conjured up vividly: As a supporter of the United Party, John's father lost his position in Cape Town after the Nationalist Party's victory (ibid.). Moreover, one of the two English boys is subjugated to physical punishment at school by a teacher who comes from a family of staunch Nationalists because the boy's father was an active member of the United Party (ibid.). The protagonist notes his father's critique that "something would have been done about a teacher who brought politics into school" (ibid.) in former times.

John compensates his own undefined status as “English only in a way” (ibid.) with a great passion for England and all things English: “He stands to attention when *God Save the King* is played” (128); to him, “England is doing one’s duty and accepting one’s fate in a quiet, unfussy way [and] there is the English language, which he commands with ease” (128-129). Most importantly, as it is his first language and the one that is spoken at home, “he thinks of himself as English” (124). Nevertheless, John is well aware that he is adorning himself with borrowed plumes. When he watches the “proper English boys” (129) at his school, he realises that there is more to being “truly English: tests to face, some of which he knows he will not pass” (ibid.). Compared to English legends about Richard the Lionheart and Robin Hood, he finds Afrikaner cultural heritage dull and uninspiring (128) and the heroes of Afrikaner history “angry and obdurate and full of menaces and talk about God” (66). However, worse than the textbook stories are his brushes with the real-life representatives of Afrikanerdom: “What he hates most about Worcester [...] is the rage and resentment that he senses crackling through the Afrikaans boys. He fears and loathes the hulking, barefoot Afrikaans boys” (69). His own Afrikaans surname is a troublesome reminder of the fate he could have met because of it; for example, when he listens to his father’s and uncles’ reminiscing about their childhood, he shudders as it

[s]trikes him as no different from an Afrikaans life in Worcester. It centres just as much on being beaten and on nakedness, on body functions performed in front of other boys, on an animal indifference to privacy. The thought of being turned into an Afrikaans boy, with shaven head and no shoes, makes him quail. It is like being sent to prison, to a life without privacy (126).

Despite the protagonist’s eagerness to deny as much of his Afrikaner heritage as possible, for fear of being forced into a way of life that he could not stand, there is one thing that he feels attached to, namely, the Afrikaans language. Although “he mocks the circumlocutions that the Afrikaners are driven to” (Jacobs 44), he senses in himself a “natural affinity” (ibid.) for their language: “When he speaks Afrikaans all the complications of life seem suddenly to fall away” (125); indeed, he becomes “at once another person, simpler, gayer, lighter in his head” (ibid.). As a consequence, he treats the language with affection which sets him apart from the English-speaking community as they treat it with contempt by pronouncing it as erroneous as possible (ibid.). He makes a point of “bring[ing] out the Afrikaans words as they ought to be

brought out, with all their hard consonants and difficult vowels” (ibid.) until he is able to speak without an accent (124); at the same time he knows that even with his mastery of Afrikaans “he could not pass for a moment as an Afrikaner” (ibid.).

John’s search for an identity that he can accept and embrace in its entirety leads him to fluctuate between “identification and rejection” (Jacobs 44). This applies as much to the relationship with either of his parents as to his attitude towards his immediate sociocultural environment. The protagonist’s inability to find his own self reflected in the conventional set-pieces of possible South African identities compels him “to define himself by difference” (Lenta 165). It is never too long before John realises that he cannot pass as a genuine member of any of the groups that tickle his fancy. His sole certainty is derived from the things that he is not: He is not English, he is not an Afrikaner but “an outsider to all groups” (ibid.). However, it has to be noted that the protagonist takes this as a sign for his being “different, special” (108). Indeed, it is because of his status as outsider that he learns to keep most of his inner life to himself. This is accompanied by the endeavour not to be conspicuous regarding his affinities. An example of this is John’s claim to be Catholic which he makes out of sheer panic when he is pressured by a teacher to state his religious affiliation at his new school; since he is well-aware that his “family ‘is’ nothing” (18), i.e. not practicing, which is not a thing to say out loud in his opinion (ibid.), he decides to be Roman Catholic, mainly because he is reminded of a story about Horatius bravely guarding Rome (20). When he later discovers that “a Roman Catholic has nothing to do with Rome” (ibid.), he does not mind since his choice has yielded free periods that he is allowed to spend separated from the majority of “the Christians” (19), i.e. Protestants, with his two new Jewish friends.

It is telling that the protagonist opts to be part of a religious minority group and that he befriends students from another minority instead of aligning himself with the majority’s identity. While he enjoys his new-found place and the company of his Jewish friends, he keeps both things to himself. The pragmatic explanation regarding his religious identity reads as follows: “Being Catholic is a part of his life reserved for school” (26); yet the concealment of his friend’s background is a direct cause of the protagonist’s assessment of his family’s attitudes. Especially his mother’s relations are full of stories about Jewish characters who are “comic, sly, but also cunning and heartless, like jackals” (22). John’s habit of always choosing the side that is frowned upon as well as his penchant for eccentricities are further traits that set him apart

from others: “Whatever he wants, whatever he likes, has sooner or later to be turned into a secret” (28). The fact that he prefers the Russians over the Americans, that he plays cricket all by himself, or that he likes thinking makes him “think of himself as one of those spiders that live in a hole in the ground with a trapdoor. Always the spider has to be scuttling back into its hole [...] shutting out the world, hiding” (ibid.).

John’s sole untainted and unambiguous affection is reserved for Voëlfontein, the farm on his father’s side of the family in the Karoo. All the contradictions that he encounters regarding his identity and his affectations are nullified on the farm. English and Afrikaans are turned into “a happy slapdash mixture” (81) and John finds a confidante in his cousin who gives him a “sense of being understood at last, of not having to pretend” (95). Moreover, the farm in its entity is as much a very physical space with “murmuring” (80) trees in a “landscape of ochre and grey” (90), as it is a space constructed by verbal memory, i.e. nostalgia. While John listens to stories about the past, he is overcome by a yearning to go back to a time that he never experienced himself; he longs for “everything to be as it was in the past” (82). At the same time, there is the painful awareness that “the Coetzees [...] are like swallows, seasonal, here today, gone tomorrow” (87) and that “Voëlfontein belongs to no one. The farm is greater than any of them” (96). Therefore, while it is located in space, the protagonist can nevertheless claim that “the farm exists from eternity to eternity” (96).

It is certainly no coincidence that the one place for which John dares to use “the secret and sacred word [...] *belong*” (95) is unobtainable for him. What is more, Voëlfontein is presented as a place that is free from the constraints of South African society, a place where different ways of life and different backgrounds do not provoke hostility and where dealings between white and coloured people can be “correct and formal” (84) instead of exploitative and domineering. Thus, it is arguable that the farm is one of Foucault’s heterotopias (see Mengel 157) as it is “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault 25). Nevertheless, in the South African context, there is always a dark undercurrent when it comes to the essence of a farm, with Voëlfontein being no exception as van der Merwe argues:

The devotion of the young Coetzee [...] to a farm that is only notionally ancestral is both passionate yet guilt-ridden, an unqualified surrender to its timeless verities yet a haunted conception of its illegitimate occupation and imminent loss (22).

Klopper suggests that it is “the idea of the farm that the boy cherishes, what it represents in terms of human relationships and relationships with the land” (27). Klopper’s argument is in line with the element of nostalgia that is prevalent in the account about Voëlfontein. Thus, it can be argued that it is John’s fervent desire to belong, to be in possession of an identity that is unproblematic and uncompromised that is projected onto the farm. However, since the promise of belonging cannot be fulfilled by the farm, as Klopper points out (*ibid.*), what remains is a “longing for permanence in a radically disrupted childhood” (van der Merwe 22).

Coetzee constructs his protagonist’s identity as consisting of contradictory parts, as essentially fractured, without the possibility of reconciliation. Thereby, he renders the conflict potential within one and the same subject visible. His refusal to furnish the reader with a coherent autobiographical subject can be read as challenge to the idea that the retrospective view of the autobiographer must inevitably contain the distilled, truthful, and authorised essence of an individual. Moreover, regarding the struggle of having to fashion an identity *ex nihilo*, Coetzee’s fractured subject is nothing other than an individual uprooted by trauma. Therefore, it is safe to say that the way Coetzee presents his protagonist is also a valuable approximation to the representation of the effects of trauma on the individual.

5. 3. 2. Socio-historical Implications

The uneasiness Coetzee’s protagonist exhibits with regard to his identity as well as the longing for a farm to which he can never belong, or which can never truly belong to him, does invite a reading that focuses on the socio-political reality of 1950s South Africa. Throughout *Boyhood* Coetzee creates scenes that reveal the dimensions of the gulf between the different ethnic groups of South Africa. Likewise, these scenes hint at John’s own attitude towards the “culturally and racially conflicted society” (Jacobs 43) that provides the backdrop to his childhood. An example for this can be found in the description of his mother’s benevolent prejudices: Instead of calling a craftsman for repair work, “she calls in a Coloured man off the street, any man, a passer-by” (36-37) because she is convinced that “they know how things in the real world work” (37) since “they have no book-learning” (*ibid.*). Coetzee does not only describe her actions, he also comments on them and interprets them. The “exasperation” (*ibid.*) that John feels because of his mother’s unrelenting “faith in

Coloured people”, even when they “reveal that they have no idea of how to fix a tap or repair a stove” (ibid.), is met by a sense of appreciation for his mother’s “eccentric” (ibid.) believes: “Despite himself he finds it endearing. He would rather that his mother expected wonders of Coloured people than expect nothing of them at all” (ibid.). However, looking to his mother for clues about how to interpret the world around him, John is soon at his wit’s end, so to speak. While “he is always trying to make sense of his mother [...] he cannot understand how she can hold so many contradictory beliefs at the same time” (ibid.). The way she talks about “Coloured people [as] the salt of the earth” (ibid.) one day, yet gossips about the “pretend-whites with secret Coloured backgrounds” (ibid.) is enough to send the protagonist into despair and he wishes she would “not change her mind from day to day” (76).

Accordingly, he is relieved when his mother uses the word “wise” (65) to describe a native old man. He interprets it as follows: “It is possible to respect Natives – that is what she is saying. It is a great relief to hear that, to have it confirmed” (ibid.). However, John’s relieve is short-lived as he begins to comprehend the impact of South Africa’s racial hierarchy and his own place in it. Thenceforward, he is unable to escape a certain sense of guilt that revolves around white privilege. One example is the boyish prank John and his brother play on their neighbours by throwing eggs at their house. Despite all the pleasure he feels for doing something forbidden, he cannot deny that “his pleasure is tinged with guilt. He cannot forget that it is food they are playing with” (64). He imagines how the native grocery-delivery boy would be disgusted at his behaviour and scold him for it: “‘How can you do that when children are hungry?’ he would say in his bad Afrikaans; and there would be no answer. Perhaps elsewhere in the world one can throw eggs [but] in this country one cannot be thoughtless about food” (ibid.).

In her article “On White Shame and Vulnerability” (2011) Alison Bailey distinguishes between guilt and shame by linking the former to behaviour and the latter to identity: “People feel guilty for *what they have done*, but feel shame for *who they are* either as individuals or as group members” (474). Thus, the above is clearly an example of the guilt John feels for what he has done. A less straightforward matter is the account of John’s birthday celebration which he spends at a café with three of his friends. Paying for their sweet treats, he “feels princely, dispensing pleasure like this” (72). However, his exaltation is soon “spoiled by the ragged Coloured children standing at the window looking in on them” (ibid.). Looking back at

them, John expects to find traces of envy and hate in their faces; he is quite surprised when, contrary to expectations, “he sees none of the hatred which, he is prepared to acknowledge, he and his friends deserve for having so much money while they are penniless” (ibid.). Yet what he sees disturbs and upsets him more than their hatred could have done: “They are like children at the circus, drinking in the sight, utterly absorbed, missing nothing [...] it hurts my heart to see them” (72-73). For that reason, he does not ask the owner of the café to chase them away. The guilt of being able to publicly display one’s wealth, so to speak, makes way for a feeling of having been deeply shamed: “Whether they are chased away or not, it is too late, his heart is already hurt” (73). This instance displays how the protagonist moves from feeling slightly guilty for what he is doing, i.e. celebrating his birthday in public, to feeling ashamed for what he is, namely a white boy which is, in effect, the only albeit fundamental difference that separates him from the children at the other side of the window.

The third example illustrates the deep-seatedness of John’s shame which is directly linked to his being. While he watches the carefree physical movements of a boy his age whose body he perceives as “perfect and unspoiled” (60), he feels an inkling of an erotic sensation which convinces him that he is “ruled by [...] dark desires” (ibid.). Yet, the worst thing for John is that “the one who brings the accusation to bear on him today is not only light as a deer and innocent while he is dark and heavy and guilty: he is also Coloured” (61). This young coloured boy becomes what Bailey, in quoting a concept by Maria Lugones (2003), refers to as “disagreeable mirror” (478) which casts back an image to John that he is not prepared to encounter. Furthermore, John’s shame is attributable to his knowledge of the South African system of discrimination as the following quote reveals:

So this boy who has unreflectingly kept all his life to the path of nature and innocence, who is poor and therefore good [...], who is slim as an eel and quick as a hare and would defeat him with ease in any contest of swiftness of foot or skill of hand – this boy, who is a living reproof to him, is nevertheless subjected to him in ways that embarrass him so much that he squirms and wriggles his shoulders and does not want to look at him any longer, despite his beauty (61).

John’s reflections epitomise the true nature of apartheid: It does not matter whether he is good or evil in nature or whether he is, in fact, racist or not; the sole criterion by which he is measured is his skin colour. Thus, he will always come first and others,

less fortunate people, like the coloured boy, will have no choice but to accept their place submissively. Moreover, the above quote vividly depicts the essence of white shame which is to be “aware of [one’s] whiteness and [to] understand [oneself] as the problem” (Bailey 473). Such an awareness is nothing short of traumatic. To be white in South Africa’s apartheid days means to be subject to a perverted form of ideological kin liability since one has no choice but to be a beneficiary of an exploitative machinery. John’s embarrassment stands as reminder that “to invent a South African sense of self” (Jacobs 43), and I would like to add the word “unproblematic” to Jacobs’ phrase, is an enterprise doomed to failure as any *white* South African identity will be affected by this double bind.

5. 3. 3. “The story of himself”

Coetzee’s *Boyhood* is situated on the verges between fiction and autobiography, i.e. between telling a story and recounting the facts of one’s life. Moreover, its third person narrator and the use of free indirect speech create a unique mood that comprises both intimacy and distance. Thus it opens up an intermediary space that allows for an investigation into the conditions of writing about oneself or the self, as it were, in retrospect. Therefore, it can be argued that it is the question of how one can narrate and represent the past as well as one’s past self, that lies at the centre of *Boyhood*. Needless to say, such a question entails a whole string of related issues such as the engagement with certain circumstances that shaped one’s past, as for example, the relationship with one’s parents and with one’s environment.

Boyhood depicts how all these matters point to identity as key factor in such a progress. Coetzee presents his protagonist’s identity as negatively defined; since John cannot pinpoint what he is in terms of sociocultural affiliation or religion and since he has the feeling that his family deviates from the standard South African way of life, he endeavours to carve out his own position. However, as he constantly oscillates between embracing and rejecting different subject positions, his attempts at endowing himself with an identity of his own design, in the circumstances and in the environment that he cannot escape, are doomed to fail. Thus, John’s longing to belong is projected onto a different time and a different place. The nostalgic yearning for the farm as an ideal place where he belongs can never be truly fulfilled but likewise it can never be actually rejected.

John's unstable, fractured identity and his alienation are closely connected to the shame that he feels about the one undeniable part of his identity which is his being white. In other words, John's condition is characterised by the highest degree of insecurity imaginable as he either feels constantly out of place or ashamed of his being in the world at all. All of this testifies to a traumatic existence full of contradictions but devoid of consistency. His tumultuous inner life and his failed attempts at finding a place to belong are reminiscent of LaCapra's assertion about the effects of trauma on the individual: "One disorientingly feels what one cannot represent; one numbingly represents what one cannot feel" (42). Cast into hostile, indifferent surroundings, John's isolation and his burdensome reclusion only add to his trauma of not-belonging. In telling John's story, which is not as instructive or as uplifting as the tradition of autobiographical writing would demand, Coetzee pursues a new way of recreating one's past: Instead of doubling himself, he fictionalises himself. Thus, he avoids the pitfalls of autobiography, such as the "representative 'I'" (Gilmore 2) or the "inflation of the self" (5), while he is simultaneously able to emphasise "one of the constitutive dimensions of self-representation: a person's writing and a person's living contribute, in a sense, different legacies" (36). In the end, the difference between foregrounding the presentation of factual events and foregrounding the importance of narration is neglectible as Coetzee's John intimates: "The sky opens, he sees the world as it is, the sky closes and he is himself again, living the only story he will admit, the story of himself" (161).

6. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to examine how various dimensions of trauma may be represented in the literary form of the memoir. The reasons for the preoccupation with this subject-matter can be found in the two questions that stood at the beginning of this thesis: What does the representation of one's past self entail and how does one incorporate trauma into one's life story? The three texts that serve as objects of study, J. M. Coetzee's *Boyhood* (1998), Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Let's Go To The Dogs Tonight* (2003), and Donald McRae's *Under Our Skin* (2012), point to the precise focus of research, namely white trauma in the context of South Africa. The memoirs in question were chosen because they deviate from the impact- and event-centred presentation of trauma narrations; instead, they delineate trauma as condition that stems from the interplay of several factors that I identified as "identity", "private/familial trauma", and "historical/national trauma". Moreover, the fact that each memoir was penned by a well-known writer makes it worthwhile to investigate the tensions between the genre's supposed truth claims and the inevitably literary construction of the actual texts.

Despite their being quite diverse regarding structure, narrative style, and content, all three memoirs display a causal relationship between identity issues and trauma. To be more precise, the inability to pinpoint who one is or to signal membership and group affiliation causes a feeling of mistrust in one's environment as well as a sense of not belonging which leads to a loss of "ontological security" (Bilton 665). This, in turn, is a pivotal factor for the onset of trauma. In each memoir, this crisis of identity is the basic problem on which the other two, above-mentioned, factors entrench themselves. However, within each text, the narration of this issue as well as the ramifications differ considerably in form; thus, I will briefly summarise my findings for each

In Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, it is the protagonist's undefined status as neither really European nor properly African that causes this crisis. Furthermore, the familial tragedies as well as Rhodesia's civil war create an ambiance in which the boundaries between private and national trauma blur into one. Trauma is the all-pervading theme that characterises *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*; yet in narrating her story, Fuller simultaneously offers a way of representing it. The heavy use of her child-self's perspective as well as her go-between is a sign of the belated appropriation of her childhood traumata through the

act of narration. Although *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* foregrounds intra-familial trauma, Fuller nevertheless incorporates a chapter into her memoir in which she draws attention to the suffering of the native population. Thus, she acknowledges the far-reaching dimensions of historical trauma and becomes, in LaCapra's words, an "attentive secondary witness" (78).

This tendency is intensified in Donald McRae's *Under Our Skin* which depicts how the careless existence of a white South African teenager is shattered by the traumatic realisation that his well-being rests on the exploitation of the country's black and coloured population. McRae's memoir traces the alienation thus provoked from his early rebellious teenage days to the fall out with his family right up to his decision to go into exile. Thereby, he reveals the slowly unfolding and intrusive quality of trauma. Nevertheless, McRae exhibits how a multi-dimensional narrative that includes the voices of others may serve as a counterforce to the disintegrating force of trauma. Above all, it is the endeavour to tell the stories of others' whose lives were forever altered by the concurrence of the private and the political realm. In the end, McRae's memoir can be seen as an instance of "memory work" (LaCapra 95). Thus, it is also an example of how to look back on past traumas and how to live in the aftermath of them.

The imperative to find a way to narrate the story that one feels compelled to narrate is at the centre of Coetzee's *Boyhood*. Moreover, its narrative style offers a glimpse into the space that exists between mere fact and pure fiction. Simultaneously, it addresses question regarding the representation of one's past self in autobiographical writing; and it raises questions concerning an individual's sense of belonging to a greater entity, such as a family, a sociocultural group, or a country. Coetzee demonstrates how his protagonist's longing to belong is forever unfulfilled as the undefined status of his identity does not permit his integration into any of the possible moulds of South African society. In *Boyhood* identity is understood as something that is broken and unmendable right from the start; especially in a traumatising and hostile environment like 1950s South Africa. Nevertheless, Coetzee hints at a remedy for this predicament, namely, becoming the author, narrator, and protagonist of one's own story.

The analysis of these three memoirs has shown that trauma and identity are inextricably linked since a shattered sense of one's self is a prerequisite for trauma to take a firm grip on an individual. Moreover, the correlation between private and

historical/national trauma in the three texts cannot be denied. Considering the way the dynamics between family and nation are presented in the memoirs, I would even argue that both instances of trauma are conditional upon each other. Furthermore, the re-visitation of these traumata and the subsequent narration of them is a valid way to integrate them into one's life story. The ability to represent traumata of the past through the help of narration is the key factor in overcoming them as "it is the past that seems to hold the key to the understanding of the present" (Mengel 147). In this sense, it can be said that the open, empathic, and tentative approach towards trauma as proposed in these memoirs might point the way to a life in the aftermath.

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8. Appendix

8. 1. German Abstract

Die vorliegende literaturwissenschaftliche Forschungsarbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Frage, wie erlebte Traumata in der spezifischen literarischen Form des Memoirs repräsentiert und dadurch, gegebenfalls, verarbeitet werden. Weiters werden die drei ausgewählten Werke – J. M. Coetzee's *Boyhood* (1998), Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Let's Go To The Dogs Tonight* (2003), and Donald McRae's *Under Our Skin* (2012) – auf eine Korrelation zwischen dem was man als persönliches Trauma und dem was man als historisches Trauma bezeichnen würde hin untersucht. Da die drei Werke im südafrikanischen Kontext angesiedelt sind, wird sich die Arbeit mit den dadurch spezifischen Gegebenheiten auseinandersetzen. Besonderes Augenmerk wird vor allem auf den Auswirkungen des Apartheid Regimes liegen. Die zu überprüfende Hypothese lautet, dass durch den traumatisierenden historio-politischen Kontext, die strikte Trennung von „privat/familiärem“ und „politisch/historischem“ Trauma nicht aufrechterhalten werden kann. Darüber hinaus wird der Frage nachgegangen, inwiefern die Rückkehr zu erlebten Traumata, in Form der Erzählung, gleichzeitig als unumgängliche Voraussetzung zur Verarbeitung selbiger gesehen werden kann. Um dies beurteilen zu können, wird Tedeschi und Calhouns Konzept des „PTG – Posttraumatic Growth“ Verwendung finden. Auch wird die Rolle der Narration in Verbindung mit der eigenen Lebensgeschichte beurteilt werden.

Um diesen Anliegen gerecht zu werden, wird zunächst ein kurzer theoretischer Abriss zur Entwicklung der „trauma studies“, seit dem Aufkommen des eigentlichen Begriffs im 19. Jahrhundert, bis hin zu aktuellen Debatten, präsentiert. Schlüsselkonzepte von namhaften Vertretern der „trauma studies“, wie Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dominick LaCapra und Ruth Leys, werden dabei kritisch beurteilt. Zusätzlich wird eine theoretische Übersicht zur Thematik der „life narratives“, mit besonderer Beachtung verschiedener Konzepte der narrativen Psychologie, inkludiert.

8. 2. Curriculum Vitae

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