WHITE BODIES AND COLONIAL HISTORY:
SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN KATE GRENVILLE'S *LILIAN'S STORY*
AND MARK BEHR'S *THE SMELL OF APPLES*

by

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B.A., The University of Cape Town, 1996

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of English)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September 1999

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Date 7 October 1999
ABSTRACT

In this thesis I explore the significance of sexual violence in colonial Australia and apartheid South Africa through analyses of Kate Grenville’s *Lilian’s Story* (1985) and Mark Behr’s *The Smell of Apples* (1995). The explicit focus of the thesis is on the sexual violence enacted by white men on white children and the relation between this form of violence and the practices of white racism. I argue that both texts confront instances of sexual violence that have been made unspeakable in colonial history. In the concluding chapter of the thesis I attempt to formulate how it might be possible to represent the violence of the past in an ethical way.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee, Sneja Gunew, Mike Zeitlin and Margery Fee for their comments and support. Special thanks to Margery for her encouragement and for believing that the project would actually come to an end. Thanks to my family and friends without whom I would not be where I am. Joan for the magic of words; Jaqueline for teaching me to be strong; Sasha for more than I can say here; and Jo, Frankie, Kathy, Hymie and my Gran, Stella, who have all given me support in different ways. For their friendship, support, hours of discussion and for reading the thesis I am indebted to Andrea, Joanna, Steve and Debora.

For Gibson, who has shaped this project and my life in many ways and who keeps me thinking and hoping.

For Jared, for being here with me and for helping me keep perspective.

For Gord, for surviving this with me.

For my mother, Sandy, for everything.
INTRODUCTION

“The body is not outside of history, for it is produced through and in history.”

— Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies (148)

In the following chapters I consider acts of violence that emerge in contexts dominated by hetero-patriarchal power relations and marked by the practice of particularly virulent forms of racism. Through readings of Kate Grenville’s Lilian’s Story (1985) and Mark Behr’s The Smell of Apples (1995), I seek to trace some of the shifting positions sexual violence has occupied in relation to other forms of colonial violence. I attempt to draw connections and to differentiate between sexual violence and violence that is motivated by racial hatred in order to understand the complex workings of power in colonial Australia and apartheid South Africa. An analysis of violence is at the same time an analysis of the bodies that enact and register the effects of that violence and through these critical readings of Lilian’s Story and The Smell of Apples I consider the ways in which bodies marked by histories of violence come to be inscribed in the present. I focus in particular on the way in which white bodies are represented in both texts because I argue that it is in rendering white bodies visible that it becomes possible to confront the white violence that marks colonial Australia and apartheid South Africa.

Feminist, post-colonial and cultural critics from a broad range of disciplines have been concerned with a reconsideration and a rewriting of those histories which attempt to erase bodies and the meanings produced by them. In theorizing gender, critics like Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz and others have engaged in a project of re-thinking sexuality and the body and draw on the writings of Michel Foucault to explore how the body is produced by culture. In theorizing race, post-colonial critics have necessarily considered the body and the way in which regimes of power are encoded upon it and resisted through it. In this
consideration of the body and violence in colonial spaces I draw from these writings which insist on the presence of the body in history in order to analyse white bodies engaged in and subject to sexual violence.

The explicit focus of the thesis is on the sexual violence enacted by white men on white children and the relation between this form of violence and the practices of white racism. In both novels sexual abuse is used as a trope to signify the pathology of the places they describe and the rape of children is used to signify the diseased nature of colonial and apartheid societies. Within the colonial setting patriarchal power and gender oppression, colonial power and the violence that accompanies it, intersect and this intersection is made visible through the bodies of both the colonizers and the colonized. In the first section of this introductory chapter I consider the ways in which race and sexuality are mutually constituted. I then consider the place of sexual violence in colonial contexts in order to foreground the argument I make in the following chapters that the acts of sexual violence described in The Smell of Apples and in Lilian's Story do not occur only as a result of patriarchal or colonial power but emerge through their convergence.

In the second section of the introduction I focus on theorizing whiteness and on the ways in which white bodies are represented in Lilian's Story and in The Smell of Apples. I argue that it is not possible to think whiteness outside of the bodies which are traversed by the signs of whiteness, nor is it possible to consider the bodies of white men and women who perform and transgress whiteness without examining whiteness itself. Analyses of whiteness are beginning to emerge, as too are analyses of gendered and raced bodies, but white bodies, and more particularly, white male bodies, remain relatively undertheorized. I argue that both Grenville and Behr undertake, in different ways and to different ends, to explore the nature of white violence and to inscribe white bodies into the histories of Australia and South Africa. In this way both texts can be said to be concerned with interrogating the historical construction of white identities and with challenging the dominant myths of what the practice of whiteness entails. While the violent practices of white men have been made unspeakable
within colonial histories, in their exploration of white violence both novels represent what
Toni Morrison in her afterword to her novel, *The Bluest Eye*, terms "something more than a
secret shared, a silence broken, a void filled, an unspeakable thing spoken at last." 4

THEORIZING RACE AND SEXUALITY

The history of human civilization shows beyond any doubt that there is an intimate
connection between cruelty and the sexual instinct; but nothing has been done
towards explaining the connection, apart from laying emphasis on the aggressive
factor in the libido.

— Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on Sexuality* (72)

In order to understand systems of power that lock those within it into a cycle of violence,
racial hatred and misogyny, both political and historical events and what Judith Butler terms,
"the psychic life of power" need to be interrogated. When considered in conjunction with
one another, the writings of Sigmund Freud and of Frantz Fanon can be used to cast light on
the psychological effects of the conditions of colonization on colonial subjects. Freud’s
analysis of incest and the desires that structure parent-child relations can be brought to bear
on postcolonial contexts if we acknowledge, as Frantz Fanon does in *Black Skin, White
Masks* (1967), that “[b]eside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny” (11). In her
argument for the place of psychoanalysis within post-colonial theory, Anne McClintock
claims that psychoanalysis and historical materialism should be employed together in order
to “comprise both a decolonizing of psychoanalysis and a psychoanalyzing of colonialism”
(*Imperial Leather*, 1995, 74). It is here that the work of Fanon can be situated as his work
exposes the resistances psychoanalysis encounters and the ways in which it is necessarily re-
shaped in colonial contexts. In the final chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) Fanon
examines the ways in which the structures of colonial domination erupt into both psychic and physical violence and he suggests that the effects of the colonial regime of violence extend beyond the political and into the psychic realm. In an essay entitled “A Question of Survival: Nations and Psychic States” (1991), Homi Bhabha writes that Fanon “suggests that the native wears his psychic wounds on the surface of his skin like an open sore—an eyesore to the colonizer” (102). For Fanon, as for Foucault, it is through the body that the psychic effects of violence are made manifest.

In *The History of Sexuality Volume One* (1978), Foucault maps out the “explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” in the Victorian era, which he argues marks the beginning of an era of “bio-power” (140). The political technology of bio-power inaugurates a “new mode of relation between history and life” in which the body is situated “at the same time outside history, in its biological environment, and inside human historicity, penetrated by the latter’s techniques of knowledge and power” (143). Foucault links the history of sexuality to the history of race but does not consider in any great depth the historical reasons for their conjunction, nor does he turn his attention to the application and effects of the discourses of race and sex in the second half of the nineteenth century. Fanon’s analysis of the psychological disorders produced by colonial violence complicates Foucault’s conception of the history of sexuality for in Fanon’s analysis, all bodies are marked by both sex and race. Like Foucault, Judith Butler, in her book *Bodies That Matter* (1993), identifies the body as produced through cultural practices, inscriptions and representations. Yet like Fanon, Butler’s formulation of the body significantly extends and complicates Foucault’s analysis in that she argues for an understanding of the body as sexually, racially and culturally specific and she claims argues that “[i]t seems crucial to resist the model of power that would set up racism and homophobia and misogyny as parallel or analogical relations” (18):

...though there are clearly good historical reasons for keeping “race” and “sexuality” and “sexual difference” as separate analytic spheres, there are also quite pressing and
historical reasons for asking how and where we might read not only their convergence, but the sites at which the one cannot be constituted save through the other. This is something other than juxtaposing distinct spheres of power, subordination, agency, historicity, and something other than a list of attributes separated by those proverbial commas (gender, sexuality, race, class), that usually mean that we have not yet figured out how to think the relations we seek to mark.

(168)

The insights Butler offers into the importance of considering the ways in which race and sexuality are mutually constituted provide a particularly useful point of entry into analysing the violent operations of racist patriarchy in colonial contexts. Following her argument, I argue here that sexual violence in colonial contexts can be understood as produced by regimes of power that are founded on both racial and sexual axes which are set in motion through and across one another.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND COLONIAL VIOLENCE

In both Lilian's Story and in The Smell of Apples sexual violence within the family is revealed to be linked to the racist and misogynist practices that structured colonial Australian and apartheid South African societies. Colonial discourse, which reduces and describes the world through binary oppositions, elides the complex relations not only between colonizer and colonized but also between white women and white men and black men and black women. The ways in which colonial relations are sexualised along these binary lines has been most famously explored by Fanon in Black Skin, White Masks where he considers the ways in which race and sexuality intersect in relations between white men and black women and black men and white women. Fanon's analysis casts light on the way in which sexualised and racialised bodies experience the world and his writings probe the implications of this experience. Writing after Fanon, post-colonial theorists have explored the multiple
significances of cross-racial desire and colonial anxieties about miscegenation but far less attention has been paid to the ways in which both race and gender have affected relations between black women and black men, white women and white men. The violence of white men against white women is generally considered to be outside of the terms of colonial power—this violence is commonly theorised as a result of hetero-patriarchy and the ‘natural’ order of gender relations. In a similar way, the violence black women endured at the hands of black men is seen to be the result of gender inequity which existed prior to and apart from racial systems of domination and oppression.

The violence directed by white men towards white women within the colonial context remains relatively untheorised partly because we have not entirely escaped the terms of colonial discourse which situates relations between white men and white women outside of the larger history of colonialism. Within colonial discourse the sexuality of white women is often used to signify the purity of the white race and serves to justify violence directed against colonized men who were believed to pose a threat not only towards white women but towards the white race as a whole. White men are represented as the protectors of white female purity and white male power is secured through the constructed threat colonized peoples (particularly colonized men) are imagined to pose towards white women. The threat that white men pose towards white women as a result of the power they hold through white women remains undertheorised partly because white men, as the protectors of white women, could not simultaneously be defined as a sexual threat towards them.

Because sexual violence figures with disturbing frequency within colonial discourse, rape can be identified as a trope through which a number of colonial anxieties about sexuality and race emerge. Given that colonial discourse reveals far more about the colonizers than about the colonized subjects it purports to describe, the colonial fascination with sexual violence and rape indicates that sexuality was one of the key sites through which white male power was played out. Within the terms of colonial discourse, rape is defined as a crime committed by colonized men upon the colonizer’s women. The rape of a black woman by a
white man was not considered rape and in the same way, but for different reasons, when a
white man raped a white woman, that too was not considered rape. Writing of the way in
which black communities in the Southern states of America were terrorized by "the
manipulation of both black male and female and white female sexuality" (336), Hazel Carby
argues that "[B]lack women were relegated to a place outside the ideological construction of
'womanhood'." That term included only white women; therefore the rape of a black woman
was of no consequence outside the black community" (336). Ann Laura Stoler makes a
similar point in relation to colonial Rhodesia, Kenya and New Guinea that "rape laws were
race specific; sexual abuse of black women was not classified as rape and therefore was not
legally actionable, nor did rapes committed by white men lead to prosecution" (353).7 As I
argue in the following chapter on Lilian's Story, incestuous rape by a white father of his
white daughter also lies outside of the terms of colonial discourse and seems to remain
beyond the bounds of post-colonial theorising. In a similar way the description in The Smell
of Apples of the rape of a white boy by a white man in apartheid South Africa operates
outside of the clearly delineated terms of racial violence. Like Chandra Talpade Mohanty
who argues that "[M]ale violence must be theorized and interpreted within specific societies
in order to understand it better and to organize effectively to change it" (260), I argue that
sexual violence performed by white men in colonial contexts needs to be theorized within the
socio-historical frameworks of colonialism.8

If we read the way in which black men were represented as a sexual threat to white
women as symptomatic of the anxieties, fantasies and fears of the colonizers over
miscegenation, racial purity and white male virility, the sexuality of black men and women
and of white women emerge as mediating sites of white male violence. Through the complex
mapping and the intensity of focus on the sexuality of black men and women and white
women within colonial discourse, the bodies of white men and the sexual violence they enact
falls under erasure. White violence has been effaced in the discursive construction of
whiteness and in the production of 'white histories' of colonialism. In the following section I
argue that contemporary analyses of whiteness fail to account for the way in which whiteness and the practices of white racism and violence have been disavowed. I then turn to a consideration of the way in which white bodies are represented in Grenville and Behr’s texts.

THEORIZING WHITENESS

"Don’t struggle with the problem of racism like algebra"

— Chrystos, “Maybe We Shouldn’t Meet if There are No Third World Women Here” (13).

What can I tell you about racism that you don’t already know? you who knew the white skin to be a disease at first sight how does it help for me to diagnose whiteness as sick as sickening maybe I just want to say I know these leper bodies too white as leukemia white as death I cannot shed this skin but whiteness is not skin deep it lives inside a burrowing worm I am hooking it out I am using your words to dissect my body this is not a charitable act of self mutilation as my mother always says saying sorry is not enough.
I am trying to write this by listening. I am listening to Chrystos who tells me “Don’t look at me with guilt Don’t apologize Don’t struggle /with the problem of racism like algebra/ Don’t write a paper on it for me to read”. I am listening to Audre Lorde who tells me to move “history beyond nightmare into structures for the future”. I hope I can meet them with words as I struggle through my own dark places confronting white racism and the ways in which it has marked me and the ways in which I, as a white woman, have marked others.

How to write a paper that does not read like theoretical algebra? For one thing I need to acknowledge that the problem of whiteness is not discrete but that it is bound up with many other things and it cannot be theorised alone. Also that it is not a problem that can be solved in the space of an essay—these words are an exploration not only of abstract philosophical ideas but of life as it is lived and of racism as it is experienced. I argue here that language and the ways in which it is used shapes the world we inhabit but I keep in mind Ailbhe Smyth’s statement that “The world is not, after all, reducible to a text, is not a matter of rhetoric” (173). Besides this, I know that each individual reads the world in a different way depending on how they are situated by others and how they choose to situate themselves. For these reasons I have attempted to explore my own knowing of whiteness before I turn to an analysis of the way in which whiteness is represented in *The Smell of Apples* and in *Lilian’s Story*.

I was born in Zimbabwe, then known as Rhodesia, but I grew up in white suburbia in South Africa. When I think about what it means to have grown up white in South Africa I think about my relationship with Gibson March Mbelenga, the black man who has lived with and worked for my family longer than I’ve been alive. My relationship with Gibson is one that haunts me and I think its probably the main reason why I am conscious of myself as white. There are a lot of other reasons too but I think that knowing, or rather not knowing Gibson is the biggest one of all. Gibson is Malawian but he moved to Rhodesia as a young man seeking work and found employment with my grandfather. He worked in the garden and
as a ‘house-boy’ for my grandparents from the time my mother was about nine years old in
the 1950’s. When my grandparents moved to South Africa Gibson moved with them. A few
years after my grandfather died my mother married my stepfather, a wealthy, Jewish, white
lawyer, and we moved into a house with him. Gibson came to live with us in 1980 when I
was four years old and he has lived with my family ever since. Its frightening how we have
always lived so close to each other without really knowing each other.

I’ll begin at the beginning because even in the beginning Gibson was there. When I
was little he took a bee sting out of my foot. He knew how to write with icing on the
tops of cakes. He learned to write at a mission school in Malawi and my mother says
that its because he’s mission educated that he never drinks.

Does that mean he would have drunk had he not been at the mission?

Gibson was there even before my beginning. When my mother was little and at
school in Rhodesia Gibson made her sandwiches and she had the same thing on them
every day and that’s why she never eats peanut butter anymore. He loved Elvis and
my mother remembers when they first got television and they would call Gibson
inside to see Elvis singing ‘I just want to be your teddy bear.’

He has spent all his life living in small rooms in the backyards of white people’s
houses. No I mean the backyards of my family’s houses. They had to call him inside
because he lived in their backyard.

I know he has two sons although I have never seen them. I suppose we might meet
when he dies.
I'm afraid he'll die before I return home. I'm afraid no one will tell me. It's a selfish fear because I don't want to carry the weight of so many words unsaid. I don't want to carry the shame of the ways in which he has been wronged. I wish to make things right somehow but I know when I go back things will be the same and I still will not have found a way to speak.

I remember trying to take a photograph of Gibson and how I caught him just as he was moving away so the photograph is partly blurred. And that seems right somehow, that I couldn't take a clear picture because I know that I can't see him clearly.

i hated him mowing the grass in the mornings
sometimes i would stand naked at the window
i was so sure he would never raise his head

I wish there was not so much silence between us. A silence of years. I think sometimes of learning his language but in some ways I think that would be a terrible intrusion into his world. Perhaps he has no desire to know me in a different way. I suppose that is the power he has over me. It's that he can see me in ways that I can never know.

you are a dark shape in the garden in the shadow of the jacaranda tree
your hands are papery dry almost clumsy or nervous always moving
when i see you again i think you will have receded even further away

i am not sure its because you have grown older or whether i am less like a child
that the words between us are few
i sometimes feel you are frightened of me or maybe i am frightened of you knowing
how little i really know

when i return you clasp my hand between both of yours and don’t let go for a long time

you in your white uniform
on the religious holidays when you carry out the dishes
and wash them once they’re emptied
why after all these years do you still have to eat what is left after everyone else has been served

when i am older i want to have a feast in your honour
although i imagine you will stand to the side your head bent
thinking me a fool

i can’t undo these generations of submission or your fierce dignity
in spite of everything

sometimes letters arrive for him. i’m not sure who they are from. i know he is divorced. i’m not sure what he believes in. all that i don’t know is what marks me as white.

i think sometimes he can’t see past my whiteness which forces me to confront how i can’t see past his blackness.

All of my knowing is tangled up in my unknowing. I think it is towards confronting this unknowing that all of this work is directed.
In her book *White Women, Race Matters* (1993), Ruth Frankenberg argues that "Naming ‘whiteness’ displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance" (6). In his study on the representation of whiteness in Western culture entitled *White* (1997), Richard Dyer claims that "The invisibility of whiteness as a racial position in white (which is to say dominant) discourse is of a piece with its ubiquity" and that "[A]t the level of racial representation, . . . whites are not of a certain race, they’re just the human race" (3). Like Frankenberg and Dyer, many other theorists of whiteness focus on the United States and extrapolate from the specifics of the North American context outwards and consider whiteness to operate as a neutral term, unacknowledged by those who are marked by it. While these theorists seek to interrogate whiteness, they simultaneously represent whiteness as universal and as having operated in the same ways in different contexts. Against these views, I argue that whiteness must be understood in the context in which it is situated and that while white domination and the privileges it affords to white people may be increasingly unmarked in contemporary North America, whiteness is never neutral, neither to those who are oppressed by it nor to those who benefit from it. In their study *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue that “[r]ace is indeed a pre-eminently sociohistorical concept. Racial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded. Racial meanings have varied tremendously over time and between different societies” (1986:60). If as Omi and Winant argue, racial identities are always “subject to challenge over their definition and meaning” (64), rather than attempting to formulate a hegemonic notion of what whiteness is, white identities need to be understood as identities ‘in formation’. If whiteness is formed through continually changing practices by which those who are white secure and sometimes, contest, their positions of privilege in racially structured societies and define themselves in opposition to those who are not white, whiteness cannot be an unmarked category, neither for those who are not white nor for those who are.
Against the theories which understand whiteness to be an unmarked category I argue that whiteness operates through a process of disavowal by which I mean that white people are conscious of their whiteness but disavow their own knowing of what whiteness means. I argue this in order to show that while white people do not suffer from the effects of white domination in the ways that people of colour do, white people are conscious of their own privilege and the oppression that results from it but live in spite of that knowing. In her essay entitled “What Should White People Do?” Linda Martin Alcoff explores the significance of the contexts in which whiteness is acknowledged as ‘a substantive racial identity’ to the analysis of whiteness. She writes:

The conclusions of Ruth Frankenberg’s ethnographic study of white women suggest that whiteness is an invisible racial identity to whites (Frankenberg 1993). Katz similarly argues that the first task of antiracism is for whites to come to understand that they are white. But where I grew up, whiteness was a substantive racial identity whose political privileges were well known and mostly considered justified (1998:21).

In contexts like apartheid South Africa, colonial Australia, the American South, and colonial contexts more generally, the heightened awareness of race and of racial domination prevents a reading of whiteness as an invisible or neutral term. The enactment of a white identity is the result of a process of recognition and acknowledgement and the perpetual erasure or silencing of that recognition.11 Whiteness is not rendered invisible by the process of silencing but rather is marked by this process; it is caught in the act of making itself appear invisible and that desire for the status of the invisible serves to expose that which it would conceal. As men are aware that society is gendered and that they themselves carry the markers of masculinity and live with its privileges, I argue that white people know the position they occupy and the privileges that they are afforded by virtue of their race. The argument that whiteness is an invisible category needs to be supplemented with the argument that while the effects of whiteness are disavowed by white people, whiteness is not that which has no name.
Rather, whiteness has been *mis*-named and the project of contemporary theorists of whiteness to map out ‘the social construction of whiteness’ should perhaps more properly entail the deconstruction of whiteness.

I argue that the mis-naming of whiteness by white people does not amount to the same thing as not naming it at all and that it is in precisely this mis-naming that the power invested in whiteness lies. As Audre Lorde claims in her essay entitled “Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference”:

> Certainly there are very real differences among us of race, age and sex. But it is not those differences that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences and to examine the distortions that result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behaviour and expectation (1984: 375).

According to colonial racial categories, whiteness is considered to be the antithesis of blackness and signifies intellectual superiority, rationality, biological (genetic) purity, and as the archetype and embodiment of all that is thought to be civilized. What remains unmarked in the imperial racial hierarchy in which both blackness and whiteness are misnamed is the injustice that is implicit in the formation of these racial categories and the violence that results from their practice. This is not to argue that there are ‘true’ or a ‘real’ forms of whiteness or of blackness that exist beyond the racial categories of colonialism but that the meanings of racial domination and oppression are elided and erased by those categories which profess to name them. The argument I am making about the disavowal of the knowledge of whiteness is similar to Foucault’s claim in *The History of Sexuality* that sexuality is not an unmarked term but one that has a history that can be mapped in time and space. According to Foucault, the proliferation of medical and popular discourses about sexuality in the nineteenth century signify a ‘will to know’ but also attest to what he terms “a stubborn will to nonknowledge”:

> This much is undeniable: the learned discourse on sex that was pronounced in the nineteenth century was imbued with age-old delusions, but also with systematic
blindnesses: a refusal to see and understand; but further—and this is the crucial point—a refusal concerning the very thing that was brought to light and whose formulation was urgently solicited. For there can be no misunderstanding that is not based on a fundamental relation to truth. Evading this truth, barring access to it, masking it: these were so many local tactics which, as if by superimposition and through a last-minute detour, gave a paradoxical form to a fundamental petition to know. Choosing not to recognize was yet another vagary of the will to truth (1978:55).

Whiteness does not fail to represent itself or to make itself visible but whiteness strives to fail to recognize itself. It becomes possible to construct a genealogy of whiteness and to map out the visibility of whiteness in history if whiteness is understood not as an unmarked term but as a social construction which operates by continually effacing itself. To argue that whiteness is an unmarked term is both dangerous and seductive: the invisibility of whiteness provides an excuse for white people to claim that they are unconscious of the injustice implicit in the positions they hold. Arguing that whiteness has long been rendered invisible allows those who benefited from the practice of white domination a rather too dignified escape. The practice of whiteness is not an empty category, inherently blind to itself, rather whiteness can be perceived as a form of purposeful myopia. Understanding the ways in which whiteness works to conceal itself becomes particularly important when considering the material effects of white domination. Whiteness, then, is that which must necessarily be interrogated and renamed.

In “Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness”, her introduction to the essay collection significantly entitled Displacing Whiteness (1997), Frankenberg argues that the essays contained in that volume represent “an attempt to deconstruct and fragment the notion of whiteness” (4). Frankenberg revises the position she held in White Woman, Race Matters and writes that
The more one scrutinizes it, the more the notion of whiteness as unmarked norm is revealed to be a mirage, or at least a phenomenon delimited in time and space. For I suggest that it is only in those times and places where white supremacism has achieved hegemony that whiteness attains (usually unstable) unmarkedness. (5)

While I agree with the notion that whiteness may be marked to a greater or lesser extent depending on the context in which it is situated, I argue that whiteness does not attain unmarkedness in white supremacist contexts. Rather it is in those contexts that whiteness and the practices of white racism are most contested, defended and visible and as I argue in the chapters on *Lilian’s Story* and *The Smell of Apples*, most violent. As most contemporary analyses of whiteness still begin with the premise that whiteness is unmarked there is still a great deal of work to be done in accounting for how whiteness operates in different contexts. It seems most crucial to interrogate the workings of whiteness in those contexts where whiteness and the effects of white domination are most visible. For while, as Frankenberg has shown, white people who are unconscious of the privileges afforded to them as a result of their racial identities practice an insidious form of racism, but once they become aware of the significance of their racial identities they often attempt to ‘unlearn’ their race privilege and prejudices. 12 In other contexts where whiteness is proudly asserted and used as a justification to enact violence, becoming conscious of the ways in which whiteness operates may not be particularly useful in dismantling the practices of white racism. It is in these contexts that Alcoff’s question as to what white people should do has the greatest import. I suggest here that in their explorations of white subjectivity and its relation to the violence of colonial history, Grenville’s and Behr’s novels move towards formulating an answer to the question Alcoff poses. Both texts confront the ways in which the settler colonies of South Africa and Australia are marked by histories of colonial violence and in this sense both writers attempt to come to terms with the violence that is implicit in the formation of colonial white identities.
The social and psychological effects of living within racially structured societies which grant white men positions of power are explored in both Behr's and Grenville's novels through the family nexus, particularly through the relationships between fathers and their children. Grenville’s portrait of a white Australian colonial family in Lilian's Story reveals that if colonial violence is to be interrogated, the incestuous rape by a white man of his white daughter cannot be thought outside of the violence that is enacted beyond the family in the wider social whole. In this text the white bodies of both men and women are exposed and inscribed in colonial Australia and colonization is revealed to be bound to violence, sexual abuse and incest. The articulation of the ‘unspeakable’ in Lilian’s Story through the inscription of the suffering body makes the horror of the colonial past visible and prevents that horror from being dissolved in the distance of the past.

Critical readings of Lilian’s Story have tended to focus on Lilian’s position as a woman in a heteropatriarchal society and consider her relationship to her father and the significance of her body without paying attention to the colonial context or to Grenville’s depiction of whiteness. In her essay entitled “Fatalism and Feminism in the Fiction of Kate Grenville” (1991), Roslynn Haynes considers gender stereotyping and the way in which it is deconstructed in Lilian’s Story. Haynes argues that “Like most feminist writers Grenville is intent upon challenging the limited number and scope of the roles assigned to women within the existing social structures and examining the reasons for their apparent powerlessness to change their situation” (61). Haynes does not differentiate between groups of women nor does she specify that the women and men who are the subjects of Grenville’s text are white. Other critical essays on Lilian’s Story elide the significance of race in the text and neglect to consider the way in which whiteness operates both in the text and in the context of colonial Australia. These analyses perpetuate the misconception of whiteness as neutral in Australia: Lilian’s father, Albion, does not represent universal ‘man’ but is a white Australian colonialist and Lilian is a woman whose body is marked not only by femininity but a particular colonial version of femininity which is also, importantly, coded as white. These
readings of Lilian’s body also indicate that race is not a critical issue for these white feminist critics and expose their belief that white women’s bodies are marked by gender but not by race. It is interesting to note that far more attention is paid to the significance of race and the inscription of whiteness in essays which consider texts drawn from the South African context, like Behr’s *The Smell of Apples*, although whiteness is no more or less neutralised in Behr’s text than it is in Grenville’s. Rather, the lack of attention paid to whiteness in considerations of Grenville’s novel seems to indicate that in certain places whiteness has more significance than in others and while it remains necessary to consider whiteness in South Africa, Australia is sufficiently ‘post’ colonial not to have to engage with issues about race, particularly not whiteness.¹⁴ Grenville’s text attempts to combat the historical amnesia that surrounds the issues of race and gender in Australia while critical readings of her text serve to perpetuate it. Lilian’s obesity would not signify the same thing if she was a black woman nor would it signify the same thing if she did not live in colonial Australia.

In order to read the very particular meanings of Lilian’s individual body it is necessary to attempt to disentangle how those meanings come to be made. The body is a site but it is also always situated in the larger space of social signification and the meanings produced by the body have to be read in the context in which they are produced. In neglecting to consider the significance of race feminist analyses of Lilian’s body fail to make sense of Lilian’s transgressive body: race is not that which can simply be added to these analyses because in order to understand the way in which Lilian’s body is gendered it is also necessary to understand the way in which gender itself is constituted through race. The way in which gender and race are mutually constructed is made clear through the way in which Lilian’s obese body is read as a threat to both patriarchal power and the colonial order. As a white woman within the colonial order Lilian’s obese body is frightening and threatening because her individual body can be understood as signifying that larger body, the body politic. Lilian claims the transgressive aspects of her obese body and her fat represents a kind of violence against the social norm. Fat signifies nothing in itself but has come to be loaded
with significance; particularly in a context like the colonial one in which the order and control of the body (both the individual body and the body politic) are valorised and the disorder of the body is denigrated. In my reading of Grenville’s novel I argue that Albion’s rape of his daughter Lilian can be understood as an act born of Albion’s fear of the body of his daughter. Albion’s terror of women’s bodies is read as a symptom of his fear of his own body and of the threat the instability his own body poses towards him. Albion’s body is the uncertain signifier of his own whiteness and masculinity which he feels perpetually unsure of and as a result, always in need of affirming. Albion attempts to affirm his own white manhood by the violent obliteration of his fear made flesh; his daughter’s body. While my focus centres on the significance of Lilian’s obese body, I situate her white body in colonial space in order to consider the ways in which the colonial context affects feminist analyses of women in heteropatriarchal systems. In my analysis of Lilian’s Story I consider how Lilian’s obese, white, female body can be understood as both colonized and as a space of resistance in the context of colonial Australia.

In the first chapter I consider some of the ways in which Lilian resists the violence both her father and her society enact on her body. In the second chapter I turn to an analysis of Mark Behr’s The Smell of Apples and I explore the way in which the violence of the father is used as a justification for the moral failure of the son to resist both the father’s violence and the violence of the apartheid regime. Through the use of the central image of the smell of apples Behr weaves together the colonization of South Africa and the formation of the apartheid state to the corrupt power and sexual violence of the father (the smell of apples is associated at first with the father’s claim to the land and then to the smell of his semen after he has committed rape). In my reading of Behr’s text I problematise the equation of the father with the state and I argue that Behr uses this collapse strategically to allow white men to evade responsibility for apartheid. Marnus’ acceptance of the violence of white masculinity serves to make him part of a conspiracy of silence which, I argue, protects both his father and himself.
In *The Smell of Apples* white sons in the apartheid order are depicted as trapped in a more extreme way than daughters because of the complicated ways in which masculinity is constructed through white identity and Afrikaner machismo is inscribed into apartheid ideology. Importantly Behr does not depict resistance as impossible but in *The Smell of Apples* the only evidence of resistance on the part of white Afrikaners is shown through Ilse, Marnus’ sister and Tannie Karla, Marnus’ aunt. The gendered dimension of resistance to apartheid is taken up by Michiel Heyns in his essay entitled “Fathers and Sons: Structures of Erotic Patriarchy in Afrikaans Writing of the Emergency” (1996) in which he explores the relationship between fathers and sons in three texts by young male Afrikaners. As Heyns argues, the father son nexus forms a particularly intense node in the exchange of apartheid ideology. In his analysis of Behr’s text Heyns argues that the perversion of the father’s tenderness into violence is one of the reasons Marnus cannot resist the ideology of his father/land. While Behr’s depiction of what Heyns terms ‘the structures of erotic patriarchy’ is deeply disturbing, ultimately the argument that the sons of apartheid cannot exercise their moral sense because of the way they are trapped by their fathers has consequences that exceed the bounds of familial structures. As I argue in the chapter on *The Smell of Apples*, Behr’s depiction of white male identities as an inescapable trap renders ethical choice impossible for white men.

Grenville’s analysis of white male subjectivity in the novel she wrote almost ten years after *Lilian’s Story* was published provides a useful counternarrative to Behr’s account of the way in which racism and patriarchy render white men incapable of resisting the position allocated to them in colonial contexts. In this novel, published as *Dark Places* in Australia and as *Albion’s Story* (1994), in North America, Grenville retells the events of *Lilian’s Story* from Albion’s perspective. Grenville’s text confronts that which Behr attempts to deny; that agency is always at work in the exercise of power and in resistance to it. Grenville undertakes to understand how masculinity comes to be culturally constructed and in *Albion’s Story* she portrays white masculinity as formed through racism and misogyny. While Grenville does
not neglect to show how societal pressures make resistance to assuming a white male identity difficult, her text ultimately depicts Albion as responsible for the racism and misogyny he practices. The way in which Behr denies the moral agency and responsibility of white men for the practices of racist patriarchy is the central difference between Grenville and Behr's understanding of white male identity formation.

In my analysis of Behr's text I argue that the disavowal of the violence enacted by white men under apartheid by white South Africans needs to be interrogated. An argument that is often both made and contested about both Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa is that the majority of those who were not themselves subject to the violence of those regimes simply did not know what was happening around them, or at least were not aware of the extent of the violence. While this claim to non-knowledge in Nazi Germany has largely been refuted by scholars and survivors of the Holocaust, in post-apartheid South Africa many white South Africans continue to claim that had they been aware of how terrible apartheid was they would not have joined the army or supported the National Party but that they would have done something (without specifying quite what this would have been) to resist apartheid. While it can be argued that not all whites in South Africa knew of police brutality or detention without trial almost every white South African family employed at least one black or coloured woman to clean their home and one black or coloured male to take care of their garden. Every white person in South Africa can be said to have been intimate with the structures of apartheid and the practices of everyday racism as their own positions of privilege were dependent on those practices. Knowing whether people did or did not know what was going on under apartheid seems less urgent since apartheid is officially over and South Africans (especially white South Africans) are eager to leave the ugliness of the apartheid past behind them. Yet coming to an understanding of the disavowal of violence remains pertinent not in order to ascribe blame but in order to prevent the violence of the past from being repeated in the present and in the future. In the chapter on Behr's novel I argue that a purposeful refusal to know represents an active choice and it is this peculiarly
inhumane choice that I interrogate in order to reach an understanding of the psychic mechanisms that allowed white people to turn a blind eye to the violence and suffering that surrounded them. In the last section of the chapter I consider some of the ethical implications of Marnus’ failure to resist the regime of violence into which he is inducted.

In the concluding chapter of the thesis entitled ‘Moving Beyond Denial’ I continue to examine ethics and history and their place within fictional texts. My readings of both Lilian’s Story and The Smell of Apples suggest that if white Australians and white South Africans are to engage with and transform the weight of the histories they carry, it is crucial to consider how whiteness is invented and practiced and the ways in which it is inscribed in cultural memory. The construction of history in literary texts opens the space for contesting narratives of the past to be spoken. These multiple and conflicting versions of the past often work to subvert official history and have the potential to transform both history and the way we live in the present. The work we do in writing and reading about the past is crucial to the way in which we shape the present and I draw on the writings of theorists who are engaged in mapping cultural memory and whose work points towards an ethics of reading and writing. In this last section I attempt to formulate my own answer to Alcoff’s question as to what white people should do. I draw on the work of Julia Kristeva, Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler and Gail Weiss in order to theorise whiteness and abjection and the connections between white subjectivity and what I term ‘abjected histories’. As I argue in that chapter, formulating history within the terms of abjection implies that history is never that which we have moved beyond but rather history is in part what constitutes us as subjects. Recognising ourselves within those abjected histories and the abject histories within ourselves points towards an ethics of memory and an ethical relation to the histories of colonial violence we would rather forget.
MONSTROUS FATHERS, MONSTROUS DAUGHTERS:
READING THE BODY IN KATE GRENVILLE’S LILIAN’S STORY

“History is not the past, but the present made flesh.”

— Lilian’s Story (205)

Kate Grenville’s Lilian’s Story is a powerful text of resistance against the dominant cultural narratives that render the experience of the body invisible. Lilian’s Story can be understood as belonging to the category of texts which feminist literary theorist Christine Froula argues “exemplif[ies] the breaking of women’s forbidden stories into literary history”, and as an act of defiance against what Froula terms “the hysterical cultural script”:

the cultural text that dictates to males and females alike the necessity of silencing woman’s speech when it threatens the father’s power. This silencing ensures that the cultural daughter remains a daughter, her power suppressed and muted; while the father, his power protected, makes culture and history in his own image (1986:623).

Lilian’s Story deliberately transgresses the conventions of the white patriarchal ‘cultural text’ of colonial history and can be understood as both a feminist revision which transforms colonial history into ‘her-story’, and as the telling of a history of sexual violence that has been made unspeakable. Grenville’s novel confronts the sexual violence that is elided in officially sanctioned versions of Australian colonial history through an exploration of the life of Lilian, an obese child who grows to be a woman who is larger than life, at least larger than the restrictive space allotted to her by late nineteenth century Australian colonial mores. Lilian exceeds the categories of colonial white femininity and her body serves as the central marker of her disruptive presence. Through an analysis of Lilian’s body I explore the ways in which colonial and heteropatriarchal norms are inscribed upon her flesh and I consider the ways in which Lilian’s obesity can be read as a form of resistance.
Lilian's obesity can be read as an attempt to resist the cultural script which is to be inscribed and read off her flesh—in making her body huge Lilian distorts the message inscribed upon her, like an overblown balloon her oversized body stretches the confines of the white feminine body, and reconfigures the meanings written on her flesh. When Lilian's friend Ursula says "You do not have to be the way you are" Lilian attempts to explain how her body, monstrous to Ursula, represents her choice to live beyond the bounds of the white, feminine identity prescribed for her by repressive colonial culture:

Clothed in my bulk, I was free to try for other kinds of admiration and other kinds of attention. You are a good friend, I said finally, and touched Ursula's arm, where the skin was so softly downy. You are a good friend, but this is what I have chosen. Ursula did not understand, but touched my hand as if she liked to feel our skins together, and I tried to explain. I would be a mediocre pretty girl, I said. And I am too arrogant to be mediocre. (80-81)

While Ursula can perceive and acknowledge the difference that is Lilian's body, she cannot understand the significance of this otherness nor can she grasp the potential for transgression that Lilian's obesity represents. For Ursula difference is that which must be made 'normal', it is an aberration that can and must be rectified. Ursula does not seem to understand Lilian's difference to be threatening other than to Lilian herself and in a sense Ursula's reading of Lilian's body is correct: while Lilian claims the 'arrogance' of her body, its quality of excess, her experiences of discrimination and cruel treatment occur because of the society she inhabits which names her body as other. The docile, feminine bodies of Ursula and of Norah, Lilian's mother, serve to contrast with Lilian's 'volatile' body. Lilian's body is highly visible whereas the bodies of Ursula and Norah, in their obedience to the heteropatriarchal norm, are made invisible. Lilian's obese body is an expression of protest against the feminine role she is expected to play and in her refusal to look the part, Lilian also refuses to play the part. Her body becomes the medium for the expression of self and while she is constantly chastised, punished and even locked away, Lilian is unceasing in her desire to resist the
'mediocre’ life she is expected to live as a woman. While Lilian’s obese body can be read as a triumphant sign of resistance against the father(s) who seek to constrain her, the signifying practices of the body cannot be unambiguously celebrated. Claiming the body unambiguously as a site of resistance may also serve to elide the ways in which the body can be claimed unambiguously as a site for the exercise of power, of one person’s will over another, as it is in Lilian’s Story when Lilian’s body is claimed and marked by her father.

The threat of violence and more specifically, sexual violence, underlies the entire text but it is the act of rape that forms its ‘heart of darkness’. Sex and violence are not equivalent but they come to be bound together through the act of rape where sex is made a means to exercise control over the bodies of those who would resist it. In the colonial context, sexual violence, because of the ways in which it is connected to other mechanisms of power in colonial society, cannot be thought as working through patriarchy alone. The patriarchal power that Albion, Lilian’s father, wields over his family is intensified through the position that he, as a white man, occupies as a result of the racial hierarchy that structured colonial Australian society. I argue here that as long as the sexual violence that marks colonial contexts is theorised as a transhistorical constant neither specific to nor definitive of the colonial experience, part of the workings of colonial violence remain invisible. We cannot understand colonialism without an understanding of the acts of violence by which it was constituted and without interrogating the mechanisms of power that held it in place. Violence can be defined as the unlawful exercise of physical force, yet violence can also be said to define the processes of colonisation, itself defined as a process of control. If both violence and colonisation are constantly at work together, what emerges is a system that depends on violence in order to operate— thus a systemic destruction, a seeming contradiction in terms.

In an essay entitled “Eroticism, Colonialism, and Violence” (1997), Ali Behdad notes the paradoxical violence of colonisation and writes:

If we agree with Bataille and Freud that “violence is what the world of work excludes with its taboos,” then the project of colonialism offers a disturbing attempt to
reconcile the opposing poles of this binary. Colonialism works through violence and violation. (202)

Colonialism was concerned with the regulation of violence and in the colonial context of routinely extreme violence, certain measures of violence were considered necessary to the colonial project. Sexual violence can be understood as simultaneously within and outside of colonial power relations; while sexual violence was not overtly condoned by the colonial order, the power that white men held over both black men and women and white women served to keep unequal power relations intact. For this reason, I argue that sexual violence did not fall out of the bounds of the colonising intent, but that acts of sexual violence in the colonial context were intimately connected to the systems within which they emerged and of which they formed part. In her influential study entitled Father-Daughter Incest (1981), Judith Herman argues that in heteropatriarchal societies, “male supremacy creates the conditions that favor the development of father-daughter incest” (62). The profoundly patriarchal structure of colonial Australia clearly follows the model that Herman identifies as most susceptible to violations of the incest taboo: “[i]n any culture, the greater the degree of male supremacy and the more rigid the sexual division of labor, the more frequently one might expect the taboo on father-daughter incest to be violated” (62).

In Lilian’s Story Lilian’s body becomes a battleground upon which Lilian attempts to assert her autonomy and her father attempts to assert his rights over her as a white man. Albion’s power over his daughter is secured not only through patriarchal law which defines the bodies of daughters to be the property of their fathers until they are married when they become the possessions of their husbands, but also through the colonial racial hierarchy which grants white men access to the bodies of women of all races for the purposes of labour and sex. In colonial contexts the state played a part in all aspects of life and all subjects of the colonial regime were subject to surveillance and systems of power whose purpose was to ‘discipline and punish.’ In these contexts the family served as one such node in the larger network of power relations—an antechamber of the panopticon of imperialism. Foucault’s
analysis of Bentham’s panopticon finds a sinister parallel in Lilian’s Story when Lilian’s father, Albion, has all the doors removed from their house except the door to his own study. All of the occupants of the house know themselves to be under surveillance and the father has access to all the rooms, and by extension, to everyone within them.

Lilian’s Story begins with the birth of Lilian and Albion’s disappointment at having fathered a girl child and his subsequent attempts to conceive a son. Lilian lies awake at night and describes the sounds she hears emerging from her parents’ bedroom where her mother is “stopped in the middle of saying, No” (12). The repeated rape of Norah, Lilian’s mother, is echoed later in the text when Lilian herself is raped by her father and is effectively rendered mute. Lilian’s Story is marked throughout by violence: physical violence emerges through the beatings Lilian receives from her father and when Lilian is raped by Albion, but the threat of violence is omnipresent and violence is carried out through language itself. The punishment Albion metes out to his wife and children takes the form of words—the dining table is always a space of confrontation and both Lilian and her brother, John, are verbally attacked by their father at every meal. Education and punishment cannot be unbound in the cruel game Albion practices on his children in which he spews endless lists of facts and asks them questions they cannot answer—a sinister abuse of power in which Albion always emerges triumphant and his children are belittled to the point that John alternately feigns deafness or wishes himself dead and subsists purely on carrots and celery to block out the sound of his father’s voice. Lilian’s response is to eat and eat and in this way her mouth is perpetually full so as to avoid speech and her huge body forms a protective armour in order to shield her from her father’s assault of words. While both John and Lilian attempt to use food as a form of resistance the power to speak and to silence is Albion’s alone. While his family eats Albion is portrayed as consuming them—Albion is repeatedly described as cutting through meat and tearing at it with his teeth. Albion’s abuse of Lilian at the dinner table and the image of the cannibalistic father consuming his family is a sinister foreshadowing of Albion’s rape of his daughter. Albion attempts to ‘eat’ Lilian by raping her,
by making her ‘flesh of his flesh’.

Albion’s violence is unleashed on his daughter when she asserts her sexual independence; it is this form of resistance to her father’s power that threatens Albion most of all. Albion is threatened by Lilian’s growing independence and it is significant that he rapes her when he finds her masturbating and looking at her own naked body. His inability to control the body of his daughter poses a threat to his own position within the white masculinist culture he inhabits. Albion’s rape of Lilian can be read as a form of punishment directed towards her for a lesson ill-learned—a lesson that Lilian can only properly learn after she is raped—that the father’s power is immutable and cannot be spoken against. Through the act of rape the body of the father becomes a weapon through which power speaks. Albion cannot tolerate Lilian experiencing sexual pleasure on her own and he rapes her in order to repossess her and to reinforce that pleasure is the right of men alone. For Albion, Lilian’s untamed sexual desire is far worse than the crime of incest, which to his mind serves to reinforce the heterosexual norm and secures his own power over the body of his daughter.

When Albion takes John to an animal fair, Lilian hides herself in the garden and is left behind. After she is certain that she is alone, Lilian ventures back into her father’s house and as she moves around the different rooms in the house she finds she has to “still the frightened air that thundered in [her] ears by breathing long loud breaths that began to sound like groans” (123). Even the absence of her father is a presence; Albion leaves a note promising punishment on his return and although Lilian tries to make the note small, she does not destroy it but hides it away and tries to ignore it. In her mother’s room Lilian finds her mother’s corset which she hangs around her neck and over her chest ‘like a carapace’. She approaches her father’s room donning her mother’s underwear like armour in order to protect herself from what she might find there:

In this room I could not touch anything, and barely breathed. I had almost left when I remembered boldness, and strode to the wardrobe to jerk it open. Father’s suits swung
together in the disturbance and tried to frighten me by being alive, but I stared them
down until they subsided. Their pockets were slippery and secretive when I slid my
hand in. I could not breathe, and the air in the room roared at me, but I felt in every
pocket, coming across handkerchiefs and coins, until I was sure those pockets were
nothing but cloth. I was becoming reckless and breathing again, feeling Mother’s
corset swing on my chest as I bent and reached, when in the last pocket of a coat
Father never wore I found a photograph. I stared at my own face, which smiled in a
dazed way at the camera, caught for once in a moment of brief beauty. (123-124)

Up until this point in the novel Albion has been keeping Lilian inside his pocket, securely in
his control. Now, as Lilian says herself, she has grown too large for him and there is no place
for a woman who will not be controlled. Lilian’s passage around the house ‘penetrating
secrets’ ominously foreshadows her father’s return and his violent penetration of her body. It
is through raping Lilian that Albion exposes his desire to make her small again, to return her
to the realm of his control. Sex, for Albion, represents a powerful means of exerting his will
over those who will not obey him. Through raping his daughter Albion attempts to reduce
Lilian to ‘woman’, a sexual object that can be controlled. The act of rape serves to silence
Lilian more effectively than if she were to be locked away for it is through raping her that
Albion symbolically returns Lilian to the confines of her gendered identity in which, as
‘woman’, she is rendered mute. The language of violence and sex is used throughout this
section in which Lilian is described as attempting to violate and penetrate ‘the stiff silence’ of
her father’s house. Ultimately she cannot enter her father’s study and witness what she terms
“Father’s secrets” (124). Lilian is glad not to have to penetrate her father’s study, tantamount
to penetrating her father himself:

At last I had penetrated every room except Father’s study, which I left to last,
wondering if the thoughts of violating it would be less frightening if I waited. I
studied the door without touching it, standing in the hall, hearing a despairing fly
buzz at a window. I could not imagine examining Father’s secrets. My palms grew
Lilian is denied access to her father's secrets, the door is locked against her and her father remains impenetrable in a way that, for all her flesh, Lilian cannot be. It is her body that she cannot fly free of when her father comes in upon her naked and masturbating in the bathroom and it is through her body that her father silences her. Albion denies Lilian the right to witness and experience sexual pleasure and he forbids her from possessing herself. As before, when Albion forces Lilian to eat his facts, here he forces her to know his secrets, his body, that which she has no desire to know. Through raping his daughter Albion attempts to regain his hold on her and attempts to make her part of his own monstrosity.

In Lilian's Story, a densely descriptive and poetic text, the act of rape is described in seventeen lines and Lilian's body is absent except for her voice which is reduced to "a thin reedy cry" (125). Both Lilian and Albion are disembodied and become sound and silence. We might want to argue that the power of Grenville's description lies in its spareness, that in leaving an emptiness around this act Grenville forces the reader to become Lilian, to inhabit her body as it is raped. Or perhaps we could argue that Lilian's body is raped out of existence, that rape is a form of death, the ultimate denial of self and free will. And while it is true that the self is negated in this act it is also an act of affirmation of the body, an act impossible without the presence of the body. While rape can be understood as operating metaphorically to signify the violence of Albion that runs throughout the text so that the violation of Lilian is unceasing, the physical rape of Lilian's body signifies something more. Albion's power is made manifest through the act of rape and is inscribed on Lilian's body in order to silence her:

In every room of the house, the air that I had stilled fled, and was replaced by trembling and fearful vibrations. I could hear my voice, a thin reedy cry like something choking and not being rescued. Father said nothing at all, but the sound of his breathing was like a thudding machine in the silence. All around us the house...
stood shocked, repelling the sounds we made. My cries carried no further than the carpet of the stairway. The silent rooms would take no part in my struggle, but swallowed the sounds indifferently. No! I heard myself cry with a feeble piping sound. No! No! The house gave back only silence, and the panting of the desperate machine that was Father (125).

In the act of rape Lilian is reduced to an animal, a body that can make only ‘feeble’ sounds, while Albion himself is transformed into a ‘desperate machine.’ What Albion believes to be his highly regulated, rigidly controlled body stands in stark opposition to the body of his daughter with its overwhelming flesh and body fluids which cannot be contained. Lilian’s obese body, like the black body of Sartje Baartman, the ‘Hottentot Venus’, is read by her father as a signifier of her fecundity, as a sign of fertility that is dangerous and threatening to white male power. Lilian’s obese body can no longer solely signify her resistance to her father’s tyranny but comes to represent his own power over her: her body speaks the tyranny of her father as much as it signifies her own resistance to that tyranny. In one sense Lilian’s body speaks the violence her father has enacted upon her, but in another way she does not choose to speak the violence of her father through her body but it is spoken through her. By claiming his daughter’s body Albion negates Lilian’s agency, her ability to signify her own meanings through her body. Lilian’s obesity represents a powerful strategy of resistance, a speaking against the father, but it also invokes the presence of the father and affirms his agency even as it attempts to resist his control. All productions of meaning invoke an ‘other’, the presence of that beyond the self towards which the signification is directed. But not all productions of meaning erase the presence of the signifying agent. Rape can be understood as the writing of one on another, serving to erase the body that is inscribed upon. The raped body is thus both a presence and an absence, a body that must necessarily be there but a body in the process of violent erasure. Rape, like murder, is an act of extreme negation, signifying the death of the body while paradoxically affirming the existence of that body.
Once the power of her body has been taken from her and harnessed by her father, Lilian literally loses her ability to speak. In her introduction to a collection of essays entitled *Minding The Body* (1995), Patricia Foster argues that “control of one’s body cannot be isolated from having a voice in the world” (7). When Lilian attempts to tell her mother that she has been raped by her father she finds herself alienated from herself and unable to articulate her pain:

I could not start the sentence that would tell her what had happened. My mouth and tongue were someone else’s now and even the words that rose in my mind had nothing to do with me. Whatever had happened—and I would not ask myself just what that had been—had happened to a mass of flesh called Lilian, not to me. (126)

Grenville’s exploration of sexual violence through her inscription of Lilian’s body indicates that the body can speak when language is prohibited. Yet after she is raped Lilian is violently dissociated from her own body and she can no longer voice her protest either through language or through her body. Lilian is effectively silenced by the violence of her father and even when she recovers her ability to speak, Albion’s violence remains unspeakable. The prohibition against using language should not be conflated with a failure of language: in *Lilian’s Story* it is not only that Lilian cannot speak the experience of rape but that she is prevented from speaking it by a culture which desires, indeed demands, her silence. This is a crucial distinction because it means that it is not language that cannot contain experiences of pain, but that certain forms of pain are forbidden expression in language. In her essay entitled “Writing on the Body?” (1996), Caroline J. Howlett argues against Elaine Scarry’s thesis in her book, *The Body in Pain* (1985), in which Scarry argues that pain is resistant to representation in language. Howlett claims “that it is not that pain is resistant to representation, but that representation is resistant to pain” (4). Following Howlett’s argument I argue that the difficulty of rendering the experience of rape into language lies not in rape itself but in a discourse of power that would keep sexual violence unspeakable. Lilian’s inability to speak the experience of rape is not inherent to the experience of sexual violence
itself nor is it language that must be reconfigured so that pain can be inscribed and made audible within it, but rather it is the cultural system which limits the uses to which language may be put that must be transgressed and overturned.

Lilian’s body strains against the threshold of social codes but she cannot transgress those bounds completely for while she convinces herself that she is too much flesh for her father she remains trapped in that flesh which, no matter how disfigured or transfigured, will always signify female. This is part of the reason why the rape of Lilian’s body is so horrific; her identity lies in the body she has made for herself, her large, powerful presence is simultaneously her weakness, the point at which her father can gain access to her. In her study on the meanings of the starving body entitled *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing and Imprisonment* (1993), Maud Ellmann writes that “It is true that hunger depends on its context for its meaning, but it is also true that self-inflicted hunger is a struggle to release the body from all its contexts, even from the context of embodiment itself” (14). In *Lilian’s Story* Lilian attempts to make her body larger than a body, she attempts to “release the body from all its contexts” not through self-starvation but by transforming her body into that which exceeds the ‘normal.’ Lilian’s retreat into the massive bulk of her body can be read as a form of disembodiment as Lilian understands her body to be the space between herself and that which lies beyond herself and the larger she makes the space of her body the greater the distance between herself and the world. The larger her body becomes the less she can feel the beatings her father inflicts on her and the greater the symbolic distance between her father and herself. Lilian’s obesity is the voice of her protest and before she is raped her fat is a protective layer that allows her literally to speak. She does not fear the punishment she will receive as a result of speaking aloud because she tells herself “it is just skin” (19) and she believes herself to be insulated by her flesh from the outside. Lilian does not understand herself to be her body but she perceives herself to be inside her body. In the act of rape her father is literally no longer outside of her body and Lilian cannot take shelter inside her body. The boundaries of inside and outside are collapsed and Lilian’s fat body can no longer...
represent a shell inside of which she can be safe.

After Lilian has been raped by her father, she goes ‘walkabout’—she tries to escape from her father’s house by entering the wilderness that lies beyond it. The notion of ‘going bush’ in order to find oneself is a familiar theme of white Australian literature but Grenville subverts the conventions of the genre when Lilian is depicted swimming naked in a creek while a crowd of white boys gather to watch and throw stones at her. In Women and the Bush (1988), Kay Schaffer explores the significance of the bush in the dominant cultural imaginary of [white] Australia and argues that “the bush is the site of otherness through which a precarious masculine identity is established and maintained. The bush is signified as both ‘no place for a woman’ and the place of Woman” (102). Lilian is forced to acknowledge that she cannot escape into the wilderness and Grenville suggests that while white Australian men may have found comfort in the outback there is ‘no place for a woman’ who has transgressed the social codes of colonial rule. While Lilian does not become suddenly adept at didgeridoo she does find a way of speaking and claims the right to speak when she returns to the claustrophobic house of her father:

You are no daughter of mine, Father shouted when I came back, thinner and browner from so much bush tucker and tramping over stones. No daughter of mine. So many kookaburras so early every morning had taught me how to laugh, so many nights under stars that became familiar as wallpaper had emboldened me. Then you are a cuckold, I told Father, and laughed. And Mother is a whore. It was not a word I had ever said, and it did not sound quite right as I said it, but I did not care. Father’s study was very quiet when I had spoken. (132-133)

Disowned by her father, Lilian is finally able to speak back. Before her father speaks in response to her words he arms himself physically against her and although Lilian is a woman now, she is to be punished in the same way she was punished as a child:

Father picked up that belt of Mother’s which had not been used for years, and smacked it lightly on his palm. You are a disgrace to me, he said, and to your sex. He
stammered on the last word and repeated it in a loud clear way, *Sex, sex*. The belt flapped against his trousers as he tried to make it snap like a whip. *There is sand on your skin,* he said, and raised the belt suddenly as if to strike my face. When his arm was raised, and his cheeks were flushed with rage, it was suddenly clear that he was on tiptoe to reach me. *You are reprehensible,* he said, making me sound like a reptile, but his words did not conceal his fear. *Bend over, Lilian,* he said quickly, as if afraid of changing his mind. (133)

It is disturbing that the belt, which can clearly be read as a phallic symbol, belongs not to Lilian’s father but to her mother. Albion implicates Norah in his punishment of Lilian and in the words he uses he emphasises the fact that his abuse of Lilian is sanctioned, or at least not prohibited, by his wife and the society at large. Albion describes Lilian as a disgrace not only to him, but to her sex; other women and specifically, her mother. At a later point in the text Albion explicitly invokes the theories of social Darwinism and eugenics which were in common currency in the early part of the nineteenth century and refers to his daughter as ‘an example of the degeneracy of the white races’ and states “You are sterile and degenerate, and as corrupt as a snake” (178-79). Her transgression is a crime not only against her father but against the social whole; Lilian has defied both the rule of her father and the codes which stipulate what it is to be a white woman in colonial Australia. In this scene it becomes clear that Albion sees the power he exercises over women and his children as his social right; as a white man his role is to enforce the norms of the society, which he himself can disregard and transgress. Those who transgress the social codes are punished and it is Albion who has the power to punish and this power is something Lilian cannot claim. Even in this scene in which Lilian seems to have refused her father’s judgement and Albion is portrayed straining on tiptoe in order to assault her, Lilian has not escaped her father’s reach. Albion is afraid of Lilian but his fear does not serve to paralyse him; instead his fear incites his violent response to her protest. Although she perceives her father’s fear Lilian has been made far more afraid of her father than he ever will be of her:
Days of watching the sun melt along horizons as it rose, flattening through the atmosphere before it pulled itself up and burst free, made it hard to move quickly, and I did not move quickly, but was gathering myself to move when Father startled me by bringing the belt down between us. Intolerable, he shouted. Vile, Vile! I was turning in my slow way to present my behind to Father at last, planting my fat legs apart to balance, when I saw that he had left the room. The belt lay on the floor in a great silence. (133)

Albion’s own penis is a whip with which to punish both his wife and his daughter and Albion’s fear of women and of his own impotence is made clear when the belt, signifier of phallic power, fails him and refuses to be turned into a whip. Earlier in the text Albion had attempted to make the belt ‘snap like a whip’ but it only ‘flapped against his trousers’. While at first it seems as if Lilian is going to resist her father she is in fact ‘turning in [her] slow way to present [her] behind to Father at last’. Lilian ‘plant[s] her fat legs apart to balance’—in this horrific moment she opens her legs to her father only to notice he is no longer present and only the belt remains on the floor. In her poem entitled “Skin-Teeth” Grace Nichols writes of the way in which compliance can at times signify resistance:

Not every skin-teeth/is a smile ‘Massa’/ if you see me smiling when you pass/ if you see me bending when you ask/ know that I smile/ know that I bend/ only the better/ to rise and strike/again. (125)

Although Albion is symbolically castrated when he leaves the belt on the ground and leaves the room without it, Lilian bends to her father not in order to resist him but in obedience to his will. After her father’s death Lilian is forced to confront the ways in which she is bound to her father and when her brother tells her that he has ‘wished him dead for years’ Lilian says:

I had never been so brave, for all my bombast and noise, and even now I was tied to Father in a way I could not change. He hated me, I said, but John laughed his sudden hard laugh. He did not hate you, John said, wiser than me after so long. He just
thought you did not matter. (184)

It is through her body as the essence of ‘matter’ that Lilian asserts her own right to matter, her own right to selfhood that her father negates. Lilian is raped by her father precisely because she did matter both to her father and to colonial society as a whole. Lilian’s transgressive body can be read as an attempt to claim her right as a person in the face of the annihilating presence of her father whose own position within the colonial hierarchy depends on the submission of his daughter. Lilian’s body sabotages the silencing her father and her society attempted to impose upon her. Her body is not only a resisting/resistant body but a body marked by violence that would otherwise be unspoken and invisible.
WHITENESS, VIOLENCE AND DENIAL: 
MARK BEHR'S *THE SMELL OF APPLES*

The story of apartheid became adept at self-denial.

— Njabulo Ndebele, “Memory, metaphor and the triumph of narrative” (22)

Dad always says the things you remember from your childhood are your most precious memories. You never forget the things you were taught or the things that happened to you as a child. Those things make up your foundation for the future ...

...Dad says, just like Sanna Koerant became such a bitter old woman because of her drunk father, so children that come from stable Christian homes will end up being stable Christian grown-ups. The dreams of the parents will become the dreams of the children.

— Mark Behr, *The Smell of Apples* (184-185)

Mark Behr’s novel, *The Smell of Apples* (1995), was published to critical acclaim in South Africa and at the time seemed to indicate the new path white South Africans were to follow towards self-analysis, confession and change.¹ A year after the book was published Behr confessed to having been a spy for the apartheid government and his novel has been subsequently re-read as a strategic attempt to provide justification and evade responsibility for his wrong-doings.² In this chapter I explore some of the disturbing problems posed by Behr’s text concerning the complex relation between memory and history and the ways in which the past is reconstructed through narrative. While the recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in South Africa presupposed that generations of indoctrination and lies would be shed like so much old skin, Behr’s novel serves as a disturbing reminder that all
truths are only partial and that not all white South Africans would be prepared to tell the truth or for that matter, that they would know how to. The controversy surrounding the novel highlights the problematics of ‘truth’ and truth telling in South Africa after apartheid and serves as a way to consider the points of intersection between the construction of fiction and responsibility to history.

Told in the voice of Marnus, the eleven-year-old son of the youngest general in the South African defence force, *The Smell of Apples* explores the heteropatriarchal structure of what might be considered a typical upper-middle-class white Afrikaans family in 1970s apartheid South Africa. Beneath the carefully depicted veneer of white South African life runs a current of violence and brutality simultaneously horrifying and normalised. *The Smell of Apples* lends itself well to an analysis of the ways in which violence and the inability to tell the truth are bound to one another. In this chapter I explore the ways in which language is employed to justify extreme brutality and is used to create a kind of immunity among white South Africans to the violence of apartheid. Behr’s text exposes the ways in which the practices of everyday racism in South Africa were intimately connected to the violence of the apartheid state and reveals that the lies that white people told themselves and others under apartheid served to rationalise violence and allowed it to continue.

I read Behr’s novel as a text of strategic confession; a text that claims to be telling the whole story but that works to conceal its political function. Most of the novel is narrated in the sing-song voice of a child who seems to be unselfconscious and who repeats the words of his parents without always understanding what they mean. The use of a child narrator artfully evades the valences of the history of apartheid and serves to naturalise this history by reducing it to a family saga. It is this articulation of a carefully constructed political naivete that I want to call into question here. While *The Smell of Apples* is fascinating in its exploration of the formation of white Afrikaner subjectivities, there are a number of problems implicit in Behr’s approach. Behr’s novel exposes the violence of white South Africa at the same time as it reads as a plea for forgiveness which articulates this violence as inevitable, as
an inescapable social disposition passed down from one generation of white men to another.

The novel probes the relationship between Marnus and his father and in so doing exposes the ways in which the practices of white racism and heteropatriarchal normativity are passed on from father to son. Behr’s desire in this text is paradoxical; it is at once to condemn the father/land and to forgive the father in order to find a way to escape responsibility himself. The text reads in a similar way to Behr’s confession of his activities as a spy for the apartheid regime: on the one hand he feels terribly sorry and ashamed but on the other he claims his innocence and expects forgiveness. It is this process of denial or disavowal that is most fascinating about the text because it points to how the kinds of violence that occurred under apartheid were made possible. In his attempt to convince his readers that white South African boys were trapped in a heteropatriarchal stranglehold with their fathers slung like albatrosses around their necks, Behr erases the agency that white boys and men could and did wield in their attempts to resist the fathers that would constrain them. Behr uses the father-son relationship to metaphorically signify the relationship between the white male subject (the son) and the apartheid state (the father) and in this way Marnus is depicted as equally powerless before the state as an adult as he is as a child before his father. The conflation between the father and the state is one of the rhetorical strategies Behr employs in order to obtain forgiveness and evade responsibility for the role played by white men, and more particularly, white sons, in the apartheid order. By collapsing the distinction between the father and the state and through his use of the voice of a child, Behr attempts to lay claim to a kind of moral immunity. Just as Marnus was coerced into secrecy by his father as a child, so too as an adult he is shown to be unable to resist the orders of his father/land. The way in which Behr attributes Marnus’ ethical immaturity to the manipulative power of his father is troubling for the way in which it simultaneously constructs white subjects under apartheid as incapable of moral thinking in the face of the totalising apartheid regime.

In this analysis of Behr’s text I consider three instances of overt violence which I understand to be interconnected but importantly distinct from one another. I focus on the
torture of Little-Neville, the black child of Doreen, the domestic worker who works in Marnus’ home; the rape, by Marnus’ father, of Frikkie, Marnus’ white friend, and the slide-show that Marnus’ father displays of the torture and murder of black ‘terrorists.’ I attempt to distinguish between different forms of violence in order to interrogate Behr’s problematic juxtaposition of the suffering and torture of black people under apartheid with the rape of a white child. I argue here that the structure of the text equates white on white violence with white on black violence strategically in order to arouse sympathy for white South Africans. By drawing a parallel between the suffering of black and white people in South Africa, Behr’s text does expose the systemic violence of the apartheid regime, yet the rhetorical effect of this works to exempt white South Africans from taking responsibility for apartheid. That all South Africans suffered in some way under apartheid, whether psychologically or physically may well be true, but all people certainly did not suffer in the same way and while all acts of violence that occurred within South Africa under apartheid were produced through the sociopolitical context of apartheid they do not all signify equally. Behr fails to distinguish between the violence endured by blacks and whites in South Africa and in so doing he undermines the suffering of black people in apartheid South Africa.

WHITE LIES

Miss Engelbrecht kept quiet for a while and when Frikkie didn’t speak she turned her head to me: ‘Marnus, look me in the eyes and tell me whether Frikkie has copied from you?’ She spoke so sweetly that I had to say something, I couldn’t just stand there looking at her like I’d lost my voice. ‘Miss, Frikkie would never ever copy from me. Really Miss.’ The words came out of my mouth as though I’d practiced to lie like that a hundred times. (6-7)

The ‘white’ lies Marnus tells in the beginning of The Smell of Apples when he and his friend are caught for cheating at school serve as a starting point for an exploration of the ‘white lies’
that are used to provide the elaborate justifications for white racial domination and violence that mark the text as a whole. I use the term ‘white lies’ to indicate the lies that are told by white South Africans in order to normalise the brutal violence of the apartheid regime. While the lies Marnus tells at school may be harmless, his inability to tell the truth is shown to be connected to the wider social context of the culture of untruth in apartheid South Africa where a single truth was manufactured by the government and opposing truths were silenced by censorship and violence. Marnus learns the ideology of apartheid through indoctrination both at home from his racist, conservative parents and at school through the apartheid school system known as Christian National Education. Marnus is taught to be both racist and religious and the paradoxical way in which Christianity (and thus a moral sense) is used to justify the immorality of racism emerges in a horrifying way through the description of the torture of Little-Neville, the son of Doreen Malan, the Coloured domestic worker who works for the Erasmus family.

Little-Neville is expected to arrive in Cape Town by train to visit his mother but when he does not arrive Doreen goes to look for him. When she returns the Erasmus family discovers that Little-Neville had been caught stealing coal from a railway yard by white men who rubbed lard over his body and roasted him in front of a locomotive engine. Marnus’ mother tries to downplay the significance of the torture and the way in which she uses religion to explain away the atrocities of apartheid is particularly telling:

Mum says we must remember that life isn’t always easy. The Lord may cross our paths with hardship at times, but it’s at times like these that we should always remember Job. It’s also not our place to ask why these things happen to us. It’s all the Lord’s will, and the best thing we can do is pray for Little-Neville to be healed. (138)

Marnus’ mother’s words erase the fact that the violence to which Little-Neville was subjected was motivated by racist hatred and that ‘these things’ do not happen to white South Africans but that it is white South Africans who are responsible for them. Her words mirror the reasoning employed by the apartheid government which made use of the rhetoric of divine
will to justify white domination. When Ilse, Marnus’ sister says, “what makes it all worse is the fact that it was three white men that did it to him” (138), Marnus is surprised and asks his mother whether it is true that Little-Neville was tortured by white men. Again Marnus’ mother deflects the question of racist violence by stating “Yes, my son. But that still won’t heal Little-Neville—and it probably wasn’t right of him to steal charcoal” (138). Even in the context of brutal violence routinely made mundane, Marnus struggles to understand why Little-Neville, a small boy a year younger than himself, was made to suffer so much pain. The answers Marnus’ mother is quick to provide to her son’s questions are disturbing—she claims that Little-Neville got what was coming to him and that he received the punishment he deserved for stealing coal. Marnus asks his mother whether the men who tortured Little-Neville will go to jail and he speculates that they may be incarcerated on Robben Island (the maximum security prison off the coast of Cape Town that was reserved for black and Coloured prisoners) or that they may be hanged. His mother can offer no reply as she knows that because the men are white they will go unpunished. When Marnus persists in his questioning his mother reveals her own discomfort with her inadequate explanations and puts an end to the discussion. The burning of Little-Neville is reduced to the level of educative allegory—boys who play with fire wet their beds, if you are bad you will be punished, stealing is a sin and white men exercise the will of God on earth. Although she is unable to adequately convince either her children or herself that the torture of a small child was indeed God’s will, she refuses to admit this to herself. Marnus is confused by his mother’s response and reveals his dissatisfaction with her justification:

I wonder what Mum’s thinking and why she doesn’t say anything more. Even if Little-Neville did steal charcoal, I still don’t think it’s right for someone to fry him in front of a locomotive engine. Whether Little-Neville’s a Coloured or not, it doesn’t matter, you shouldn’t do things like that to someone, specially not to a child. (138)

The conflict between Christian values and the racist ideology of apartheid emerges clearly through Marnus’ confusion about Little-Neville. Later in the text Marnus’ wavering moral
sense is effectively overcome by racism when he relates what happened to Little-Neville to his friend Frikkie and they wonder, "whether it smells the same when coloured and white flesh burns" and they surmise that "It might be different because our blood's so different" (161). While earlier Marnus was conscious of Little-Neville's humanity and was concerned about the fact that Little-Neville is so close in age to himself, in the context of the school yard he is aware only of racial difference. The dehumanising effects of racism are made clear when Marnus, his mother and sister visit Little-Neville in hospital. Marnus' mother refers to the torture of Little-Neville as an "accident" (188) and gives Doreen advice as to how she should deal with the burning of Little-Neville:

Mum asks Doreen how she's feeling, and she answers that she has cried out all her tears and now she's just accepting that it happened and nothing can be done to change it. Mum says that's really the only way to deal with such a terrible tragedy. As long as Doreen remains strong in her faith, and as long as she knows that everything happens for some greater reason, it will be easier to cope with the pain. Mum says that Doreen must just always remember the bitter trials of Job and how he always kept his faith in the will of God. (189)

While words of advice that recommend recourse to faith in a God that sets trials for all on earth and that those who suffer should be patient in their suffering may bring comfort in contexts other than that of apartheid South Africa, from a white South African to a Coloured South African these words are extremely offensive and betray not ignorance but cruelty. The irony of these words lies in the fact that they ascribe the torture Little-Neville has endured not to the white men that tortured him but to the will of God. Marnus's mother claims that Doreen should have faith that 'everything happens for some greater reason' but the reason is never made apparent because the cause of Little-Neville's suffering is that which Marnus's mother cannot admit to herself. Even in the face of the obvious racial oppression that is made manifest through Little-Neville, Marnus' mother refuses to acknowledge how she herself is complicit in the violence that results from racism.
In his essay collection entitled, *Doubling the Point*, J.M Coetzee writes of what he terms the ‘undeniable’ power of the suffering body:

Let me put it baldly: in South Africa it is not possible to deny the authority of suffering and therefore of the body. It is not possible, not for logical reasons, not for ethical reasons (I would assert the ethical superiority of pain over pleasure) but for political reasons, for reasons of power. And let me again be unambiguous: it is not that one grants the authority of the suffering body: the body takes this authority: that is its power. To use other words: its power is undeniable. (248)

Coetzee argues that to deny the suffering of the body is to reach a place devoid of ethics and the effects of this ethical failure are made clear through Behr’s exploration of the practices of white racism in apartheid South Africa. In his depiction of the responses of white people to the tortured body of Little-Neville, Behr exposes the psychic mechanisms that enabled so many white South Africans to live unquestioningly under apartheid in spite of the suffering and violence that went on around them. As Coetzee claims, the suffering of Little-Neville is undeniable and the very presence of his tortured body speaks against the silence that Marnus’ mother and white South Africans more generally would impose on it. Yet while the body itself cannot be rendered mute, for even the dead body signifies, Behr’s novel reveals the frightening ways in which the messages the body transmits can be deflected. *The Smell of Apples* exposes the paradoxical processes of knowing and simultaneous denial through which the practices of white racism in South Africa were made tenable. It is the inability to come to terms with this denial of knowing that haunts Behr’s text and that has led to a myriad of forms of white guilt and anxiety among white South Africans, particularly in the light of the TRC hearings. As Behr’s text illustrates, the question of ethics in post-apartheid South Africa is a crucial one. For if, as in *The Smell of Apples*, an act of terrible cruelty, like the burning of Little-Neville, can be reduced through the language of apartheid to a just penalty for theft, this same language can reduce the violence of apartheid to a spectre of history. In the presence of the body of a burned child it takes a great measure of what can only be
understood as a purposeful myopia to convince oneself that the burned body is not what it appears. It is this same denial of the suffering of the body that Marnus enacts when he actively shuts his eyes and turns away from Little-Neville. Standing before Little-Neville’s body, Marnus sees and simultaneously does not see:

He’s completely naked and his arms are tied to the bed with strips of plastic to stop him from scratching the burns. His legs are drawn wide apart so that they won’t rub together. Between his thighs, across his bum and all over his back it looks like a big piece of raw liver. The medicines and the ointments and everything smell too terrible, and I put my hand over my nose. I don’t want to see anymore. I move away to look out of the window. The sun has set and the Cape Flats are covered in a red glow. There are red clouds across the whole sky up to the Hottentots-Hollands, and it’s as if there’s a fire burning in heaven. It looks like the night Dad and I were at the top of Sir Lowry’s Pass. (189)

What is disturbing about this passage is not only Marnus’ desire to shut his eyes to the horror of Little-Neville’s burned flesh but also the memory he recalls which allows the tortured body of Little-Neville to be read as a necessary casualty in the struggle to preserve white domination in South Africa. The ‘red glow’ of the land and the image of the ‘fire burning in heaven’ reflect both the way in which Little-Neville was tortured and the vow Marnus’ father made at Sir Lowry’s Pass. In the context of the grand narrative of apartheid the burning of Little-Neville takes on the quality of biblical sacrifice and the violence of the white regime is again inscribed as the will of God:

When Dad and I got out of the car to look at the sunset, the whole sky was turning dark red. The bay was as flat as a mirror, with Table Mountain pitch-black above the city lights in the distance. We stood there, looking down on it, and Dad said there’s nothing more beautiful in the world than what we were seeing in front of us. He said nothing and no one could ever take it from us. All of us, specially the Afrikaners who lost everything in Tanganyika, had suffered enough. (122)
The distorted history of colonialism Marnus’ father goes on to narrate is informed by religious righteousness and invokes the myth of South Africa as the ‘promised land’ of the Afrikaner people. The fact that Marnus recalls his father’s words after witnessing the burned body of Little-Neville indicates that Marnus perceives that the torture of Little-Neville is connected to the history of white domination in South Africa. Marnus’ slanted understanding of this history provides a justification for the torture Little-Neville has endured and reduces the corporeal suffering of Little-Neville to allegory. In this way Marnus is able to distance himself from the suffering of the body that is undeniable and yet is denied. The suffering of Little-Neville is eclipsed by the epic narrative of the suffering of the Afrikaner people where the torture of black and Coloured South Africans is rationalised as part of ‘the cost’ of protecting the Afrikaners God-given right to the land:

“ And this country was empty before our people arrived. Everything, everything you see, we built up from nothing. This is our place, given to us by God and we will look after it. Whatever the cost.”

When we got back into the car, you could smell the apples everywhere. I turned round to look at the crates on the back seat, but it was already too dark to see them.

“Dad, do you smell the apples?” I asked in the dark.

“Ja, Marnus,” Dad answered as he turned the Volvo back on to the road. “Even the apples we brought to this country.” (124)

Marnus’ father’s words serve as a structuring device for the remainder of the novel and they are recalled first at Little-Neville’s bedside and again after Frikkie is raped when the smell of apples comes to be associated with the smell of semen. Marnus’ father is associated through the trope of the smell of apples with all the acts of violence in the text and the violence of the father comes to represent the violence of the apartheid regime as a whole.

As I have argued above, the conflation between the father and the state is problematic in that it homogenizes power and prevents acts of violence from being understood in their specificity. While the acts of violence described in *The Smell of Apples* are clearly part of the
systemic violence of the apartheid regime, the ethical implications of collapsing them into one another are far-reaching. Behr’s text enters this problematic territory through the way in which he constructs the violence of apartheid as a monolithic force that caused harm to black, Coloured and white South Africans alike. The text is structured so that the torture of black and Coloured bodies foreshadow the rape of a white child by a white man. The effects of this structure are apparent in critical readings of *The Smell of Apples* which neglect to mention the torture of Little-Neville or the slides that Marnus’ father shows. While these readings centre their attention on the moment of the rape and consider the other acts of violence in the text as tangential to the ‘structures of erotic patriarchy’ that Behr describes, I argue here that it is the descriptions of torture that lend the rape its power. The juxtaposition of the torture of Little-Neville and the images of the torture of soldiers with the rape of Frikkie by Marnus’ father give primacy to the experience of white on white violence. The events of the text culminate in the act of rape and it is this act which comes to be understood as the ultimate form of the father’s perverse abuse of power. The fact that the torture of black and Coloured South Africans is subordinated to the violence of the rape of a white South African raises questions about the ethical implications of Behr’s representation of violence under apartheid. In the following section of this chapter I explore how the kind of violence that led to the torture of Little-Neville can be distinguished from the way in which Frikkie is abused. I attempt to unravel the different ways in which the violence that occurs in the text is made unspeakable and I consider the effects of Marnus’ silence in each case. Finally I turn to what I understand to be some of the implications of Behr’s attempt to draw a parallel between different forms of violence under apartheid in the post-apartheid context.

**TORTURE AS SPECTACLE: THE STRUCTURES OF DENIAL**

On the same night that Marnus is witness to the rape of his friend Frikkie, Marnus’ father puts on a slide show for the visiting General from Chile who is staying at the Erasmus home.
The family gather to watch the slides and Marnus notes that his father “was mostly in the front lines during the war, so he couldn’t take many photographs” (167) and that “taking photographs in a war is really a luxury. Mostly you only do it when you have time or when something happens that you really want to remember” (167). The images of torture Marnus’ father displays are interspersed with family photographs and slides of Marnus’ grandfather hunting elephants in Tanganyika and in this way the torture of human bodies is equated with the slaughter of animals. The images of hunting which depict “Oupa [grandfather] standing between hundreds of elephant tusks” and an elephant’s intestines “bubbling out of its stomach across the ground like red and pink balloons” (170) are linked to the ‘hunting’ of black soldiers in colonial Rhodesia in the Independence War:

The slide shows four naked terrorists standing in a clearing. Their hands are tied above their heads and a soldier’s holding a bayonet against the one’s chest. You can see the white of his eyes in his black face. It could be that he’s crying, because his face is pulled like he’s screaming. . . . Now the four terrorists are lying in a heap and you can see they’ve been shot. Their bodies are covered in blood. The one who was standing in the front on the previous slide has his legs stretched open towards the camera and his black thing hangs almost to the ground (171).

Marnus describes the flesh and blood of the tortured bodies displayed before him in intimate detail and notes the man whose legs are open towards the camera and refers to his penis as a ‘black thing’ which ‘hangs almost to the ground’. It is significant that all the acts of violence in the text depict the body naked and exposed to those who are witness to its suffering. Yet in his description of the images of torture Marnus replaces the personal pronoun ‘I’ with ‘you’, stating ‘you can see’ instead of ‘I can see’ and uses language which objectifies the bodies displayed before him. As before, at the bedside of Little-Neville, Marnus both sees and does not see. Marnus must necessarily see and know in order to narrate but even as he records what is before him he denies that which he witnesses. Torture and violence are both rationalised and made commonplace in the Erasmus family and although Marnus covers his
eyes when his father displays a slide of “a soldier holding up a black arm with pink meat hanging out where it was cut from the body” (172), he has already witnessed what he does not desire to see. The implications of turning away from what has already been seen entail the processes of knowing and denial that structure the events of the text, and as I have argued, is symptomatic of the practices of white racism in South Africa.

In her analysis of torture in *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry writes of the way in which pain of the body in torture is both “incontestably present in the external as well as the internal world, and yet is simultaneously categorically denied” (56). The effect of this denial, Scarry argues, is “the conversion of the enlarged map of human suffering into an emblem of the regime’s strength” (56). She argues that in torture “pain is denied as pain and read as power” (28) through what she terms, “the act of disclaiming” (57):

He[the torturer] first inflicts pain, then objectifies pain, then denies the pain—and only this final act of self-blinding permits the shift back to the first step, the inflicting of still more pain, for to allow the reality of the other’s suffering to enter his own consciousness would immediately compel him to stop the torture. But the bond between the blindness and the power goes far beyond the practical circles of self-amplification. It is not merely that his power makes him blind, nor that his power is accompanied by blindness, nor even that his power requires blindness; it is, instead, quite simply that his blindness, his willed amorality, is his power, or a large part of it. (57)

In *The Smell of Apples* the narrative Marnus’ father imposes on the events of war represents a radical denial of the reality of the slides he displays. Marnus’ father twists the acts of brutal violence for which he is responsible into the fault of his enemy when he claims that “[e]very atrocity committed by those guerillas is imprinted on your brain, just like the faces of your wife and children on the photographs you carry in your inside pocket” (167). The ‘willed amorality’ and the self-imposed blindness of Marnus’ father allows him both to commit atrocities and to construct the way in which those atrocities will be understood. In other
words, Marnus’ father is not merely a deluded man but a man who is capable of inverting the relationship between delusion and reality and enforcing his delusion as the real. Marnus’ father substitutes the reality of pain for what Scarry terms “the insignia of power” (56). In Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1977), Michel Foucault analyses the ritualistic nature of torture and writes that “public torture and execution must be spectacular, it must be seen by all almost as its [the law’s] triumph”:

The very excess of the violence employed is one of the elements of its glory: the fact that the guilty man should moan and cry out under the blows is not a shameful side-effect, it is the very ceremonial of justice being expressed in all its force. Hence no doubt those tortures that take place even after death: corpses burnt, ashes thrown to the winds, bodies dragged on hurdles and exhibited at the roadside. Justice pursues the body beyond all possible pain (34).

The torture of black bodies in The Smell of Apples is staged as spectacle—as that which is socially sanctioned and designed to be looked upon. The spectacle of torture is repeated endlessly through the images which depict the carefully staged scenes of naked black bodies before and after being massacred. The fact that the whole family is gathered together to look upon the images of the father’s violence indicates that the scenes of torture are considered to have an educative function and even an entertainment value. The images of the spectacle of sexualised torture immediately precede the rape of Frikkie and in this way the torture Marnus’ father performed on the black bodies of the ‘terrorists’ is linked to the violence he enacts on Frikkie’s white body. Yet Marnus’ response to the rape of Frikkie indicates that this act carries a significance that the other acts of extreme violence described in the text do not hold. The public display of the images of torture mark the torture of black bodies as violence that is ‘proper’ and necessary and the proper violence of racial hatred stands in marked opposition to the improper violence of the rape.
WHITE VIOLENCE AS UNSPEAKABLE

Marnus is taught that the violence committed by white men can be justified through the way in which his own family attempts to diminish the horror of the burning of Little-Neville and through the way in which the torture of the terrorists is reinscribed as the enactment of justice. These acts of white violence are transformed through the rhetoric of racial hatred, and more overtly through the nationalist rhetoric of white racial superiority, and serve to affirm, rather than condemn, white domination. Acts of white violence against black and Coloured bodies are permitted entry into the realm of language and as such are placed in opposition to the unspeakable violence of the rape of Frikkie by Marnus’ father. Little-Neville and the tortured men bear the marks of torture on their bodies and the acts of violence committed against them are intended to be made visible for they represent the power of white men over the bodies of those who are considered the legitimate targets of violent attack. Foucault writes that torture “must mark the victim”:

it[torture] is intended, either by the scar it leaves on the body, or by the spectacle that accompanies it, to brand the victim with infamy; even if its function is to ‘purge’ the crime, torture does not reconcile; it traces around or, rather, on the very body of the condemned man signs that must not be effaced; in any case, men will remember public exhibition, the pillory, torture and pain duly observed. (Discipline and Punish, 34)

While the horror of the visible acts of violence committed against black people can be rationalised by the white people who are witness to it, it is the rape of a white boy by a white man that remains inexplicable and unspeakable in the violent order the text describes. The rape signifies the unbearable and undeniable truth of the violence of the father. The rape is depicted as the most horrifying act of violence in the text because it is marked as shameful and therefore as morally wrong in a way that the torture of black bodies is not.

When Marnus wakes up and realises that Frikkie is not in his bed he looks down into
the guest-room through the holes in the pine floor-boards of his bedroom. At first, Marnus finds it difficult to see but as it gets lighter he sees Frikkie being sexually assaulted by a man who he thinks is the visiting Chilean general. Marnus is frightened and his immediate response is to look for his father in order to help Frikkie. He creeps across the house to his parents’ bedroom but finds his mother alone in bed. Marnus realises that it must be his father in the room with Frikkie and returns to his room to make certain what he already knows to be true:

It’s almost completely light now. Frikkie’s lying on his stomach. His head is covered with the pillow. The General is bent over him and his pyjama-pants are lying on the floor, but he’s still wearing his pyjama-top. I’m looking down on to his head, and his face is turned away from the window into the dark. He pulls Frikkie’s legs apart and it looks like he’s rubbing something into Frikkie’s bum. . . . With all the moving around, the pyjama-shirt is pushing up. It seems as though the sun is about to come up, because downstairs the room is turning pink. Even before the pyjama-shirt has moved halfway up, I can see: the scar is gone from the General’s back (176-177).

After he has observed the rape Marnus feels ashamed because he acknowledges his own act of witnessing as an illicit act. Marnus knows he has witnessed something that he was not intended to see and comes to understand the rape as that which can never be spoken. The rape must remain unspeakable because if it were to be spoken Marnus would be forced to confront the unjust violence of the father that he, his family and society perpetually repress. Marnus’ attempt to transfer the violence of his father to the visiting General from Chile is not born solely out of shock but is a conditioned response to both acknowledge and then disavow the knowledge of the brutality of the father. Marnus knows his father to be a violent man, not because his father abuses him but because his father is a General in the South African army and Marnus has been witness to scenes of torture and has heard of the violent acts his father has performed. Thus even before he is witness to the rape Marnus has been a witness who chooses not to see.
The rape of Frikkie signifies the moment when the father's violence is completely exposed and yet Marnus' silence in the face of what he has witnessed makes the rape the point at which the father's power is most closely secured. Although Marnus is shocked by the events he has witnessed, he turns away when he hears Frikkie’s footsteps and pretends to be asleep. In choosing to remain silent about the rape Marnus becomes complicit in the violence of his father. Marnus chooses to conceal his knowledge of his father’s violence and thus his knowledge of the rape symbolically functions both as an induction into the racist, patriarchal order of white male violence and as the seal of silence against the other acts of violence his father commits. The sense of shame Marnus feels becomes a secret that binds him to his father and ultimately he comes to understand the rape of Frikkie as part of the secret life his father leads, a life in which violence is considered necessary and must always be concealed. The rape also serves to secure the bond between Frikkie and Marnus, at least in Marnus' mind because he feels confident that Frikkie will keep the secret as securely as he himself will: “Then, it’s as if I suddenly know: it’s better that Frikkie didn’t tell me this morning. . . . If he didn’t want to tell me about Dad, then he’ll never tell anyone. And it’s right that way. Between us the secret will always be safe” (199).

The cost of keeping the secret of the father’s violence safe is exacted only through further violence. In the schema of the text Marnus continues the cycle of violence in order to protect the position of power his father holds, and thus the rape comes to serve as the reason why it is impossible for Marnus to speak against the violence of his father or against the regime with which the father is made synonymous. The fact that it was difficult for Marnus to speak against his father as a child, particularly given his knowledge of his father's violence, is clear but the way in which Behr attempts to use the violence of the father to provide justification for the violence Marnus enacts as an adult when he enlists as a soldier for the apartheid state is highly problematic.
THE DENIAL OF SUFFERING AND THE SUFFERING OF DENIAL

While I do not wish to undermine the horror of the violence of the rape of a child I argue here that if the rape is read as Marnus reads it, as the ultimate signifier of the brutality of the father, the widescale violence of the apartheid regime is overshadowed. While Marnus understands the rape of Frikkie to be morally wrong, the representations of torture are positioned outside of the realm of ethics and are immune to moral judgement. According to this logic, Marnus’ father may be condemned for the perverse violence he enacts on his son’s innocent friend but he cannot be held accountable for the crimes against humanity committed under apartheid. In contrast to the tortured bodies of Little-Neville and the soldiers, the pain that Frikkie suffers when he is raped by Marnus’ father cannot be observed on his skin. Yet it is significant that unlike the other representations of violence in the text where the bodies of white men are absent from the depiction of the violence they have performed, in the rape scene the father’s body is an undeniable presence. Marnus witnesses the rape as it is happening and as a result, he cannot sever his father from the violent act he performs. It is in recognising the father’s body that the rape becomes unspeakable because the father’s responsibility for the violent act of rape is undeniable.

The question I have been exploring in this chapter is that of the ethical responsibility to resist the inversion of pain and power and recognize the suffering of the other. I have argued that the different ways in which Marnus responds to witnessing the images of explicit torture, the burnt body of Little-Neville and the rape of Frikkie reflect the meanings that each of these acts of violence holds in the context of the extreme racism of both Marnus’ family and society. Under apartheid all of these acts were reduced to silence in different ways and resistance against the violent mechanisms the state employed to ensure silence was often at the risk of imprisonment, torture and death. While some white South Africans entered the struggle against apartheid, on the whole violence did not lead to moral outrage among the white communities. Through his depiction of white responses to acts of extremely brutal
violence, Behr exposes the psychic mechanisms that enabled so many white South Africans
to live unquestioningly under apartheid in spite of the suffering and violence that went on
around them. The state of denial was not the only choice for white South Africans but as
Behr’s text shows, it was easier than confronting the truth. Yet there were those who did
resist the apartheid regime despite the personal risks involved, perhaps because those who
resisted were aware that remaining silent would not only lead others to suffer but would be a
death of another kind: the death of ethics. I argue here that the choice to remain silent in the
face of brutal violence represents a failure of ethics which results in an unforgivable refusal
to recognize the pain of another individual.

The implications of Marnus’ silence are far-reaching for the majority of South
Africans who unlike Marnus were not ‘forced’ to enact violence but were forcibly subjected
to it. If a choice existed between the two positions there is little doubt as to which the
enviable one would be. Behr asks us to sympathise with Marnus whom he depicts as trapped
in a regime of untruth from which he cannot escape. Marnus suffers because he denies what
he knows while black South Africans suffered because their suffering was denied. While
Behr tries to argue that the power of the father/land in apartheid South Africa was impossible
to resist, his text contains the unmaking of this argument. In the dream that Marnus recounts
just before the end of the text, the guilt of his knowledge of his father’s violence and his own
complicity in that violence comes to haunt him:

And for the first time, I dream the dream of me and Frikkie galloping along
Muizenberg beach. We’re in uniform and the horses are right up against the water. It
sounds as if somewhere a woman is singing. In the distance I can see someone
running from the horses. ... Through the mist I can see it’s someone wearing a hat,
and when she turns around and screams, it’s Zelda Kemp. She tries to get away, but
the horses are almost on top of her. When she sees we’re going to catch her, she runs
up the beach towards the dunes. I laugh and turn to look at Frikkie. But it’s not
Frikkie on the horse next to me. It’s Little-Neville. And all I hear is the voice of the
woman singing. (199)

In the dream Marnus envisions himself on horseback dressed in a soldier's uniform like his father and like his father he possesses the power to commit violence. When Marnus laughs when he sees how frightened Zelda is he re-enacts the callous cruelty of his father who is seemingly oblivious to the suffering of those he has harmed. Yet at the same instant that Marnus laughs and seems to turn to Frikkie for affirmation, Frikkie is transformed into Little-Neville and the memory Marnus has tried to repress resurfaces.10 The fact that Marnus states that this is the first time he has the dream indicates that he is to have it over and over again.

In her essay entitled Traumatic Awakenings Cathy Caruth explores the psychoanalytic concept of trauma and argues that it presents a "fundamental enigma concerning the psyche's relation to reality" (208):

In its general definition, trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena. Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it, that immediacy, paradoxically may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event—which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight—thus suggest a larger relation to the event, which extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing. (208)

I suggest that what lies at the heart of Marnus' repetitive seeing are his feelings of guilt at his own repressed knowing. The ethical implications of repressing the knowledge of violence that affects the lives of others prevent Marnus from ever moving beyond the space of guilt he occupies. While Marnus is haunted by the nightmare of history in which he is shown to be trapped, his silence is also his power. In an essay entitled "How to Avoid Speaking" (1989),
Jacques Derrida explores the power that secret knowledge can afford:

A conscious being is a being capable of lying, of not presenting in speech that of which it yet has an articulated representation: a being that can avoid speaking. But in order to be able to lie, a second and already mediated possibility, it is first and more essentially necessary to be able to keep for (and say to) oneself what one already knows. To keep something to oneself is the most incredible and thought-provoking power. (17-18)

It is in keeping the knowledge of the violence of his father and of the apartheid regime to himself that Marnus is made both powerful and powerless. His silence affirms the power of his father and of the state and secures his own position of power within the apartheid order. In a series of flash-forward accounts that punctuate the narrative of childhood, Marnus relates his experiences as a lieutenant in the South African Defence Force fighting in Mozambique. In the final segment it is clear that although Marnus has attempted to deny his knowledge and has lived his life in spite of this knowing, he has not escaped from the weight of the history he carries:

*The black section-leader’s face is beside me. He asks whether I have any feeling in my legs. He tells me I will be fine. I try to shake my head, to warn him. I try to speak to him, to tell him I knew all along, just like all the others.*

*But I am dumb.*

*I feel Dad’s face against my chest and my arms around his head, and I feel safe. But now it is a different safety. Death brings its own freedom, and it is for the living that the dead should mourn, for in life there is no escape from history.* (198)

Even at this moment, just as he is about to die, Marnus is unable to speak the truth. He tries to confess to the black section-leader that he has known “all along, just like all the others” (198) but he is unable to speak. In his depiction of Marnus’ inability to confess to his own complicity in the apartheid regime, Behr’s text falls uncomfortably between what J.M. Coetzee, in his essay on confession, terms the confessional and apologetic modes. Coetzee
writes that "we can demarcate a mode of autobiographical writing that we can call the
confession, as distinct from the memoir and the apology, on the basis of an underlying motive
to tell an essential truth about the self" (252). Coetzee draws on the definitions of Francis R.
Hart who:

    describes confession as "personal history that seeks to communicate or express the
essential nature, the truth of the self," apology as "personal history that seeks to
demonstrate or realize the integrity of the self," and memoir as "personal history that
seeks to articulate or repossess the historicity of the self." Thus confession is
ontological; apology ethical; memoir historical or cultural. (419)

As Foucault has argued, the production of truth through confession is "thoroughly imbued
with relations of power":

    one has to have an inverted image of power in order to believe that all these voices
which have spoken so long in our civilization—repeating the formidable injunction to
tell what one is and what one does, what one recollects and what one has forgotten,
what one is thinking and what one thinks he is not thinking—are speaking to us of
freedom. (History of Sexuality: 60)

The tragedy of Marnus' failure to confess lies not in the fact that he prevents his own
liberation through truth, which as Foucault claims is not possible, but in the failure of
conscience that his silence represents. As Sarah Nuttall, writing on Behr's confession to
having been a spy for the apartheid government argues, Behr "disavow[s] the possibility of
truth where 'truth' matters—'truth' in the sense of which story you tell, or who you make
your apologies to" (87). In post-apartheid South Africa the movement towards a culture of
human rights through shedding light on the atrocities of the past have imbued the politics of
'truth' and 'truth telling' with a significance that extends beyond the bounds of the personal.
Behr's representation of Marnus' inability to speak the truth matters in this context where
Nelson Mandela has said "it is my hope that, in facing up to our past, we can ensure that
never again will South Africa's children have to remain content with accounts of our country
that are known to be false” (Foreword, Reconciliation Through Truth).

In post-apartheid South Africa the significances of white South African complicity with the apartheid regime are beginning to emerge in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In their examination of what they term “the politics of memory and oblivion” (133), Luis Roniger and Mario Sznajder consider the effects of the disclosure of human rights violations in Uruguay and Argentina. They argue that confessions of past violations by members of the armed forces “triggered an intense public debate that ensured public awareness” (141) and in a similar way to the TRC hearings in South Africa:

not only called into question the previous positions of substantial sectors of civil society who, either out of fear or because of patriotic identification with their country, had kept silent or disavowed earlier criticisms of their society and of government policies, but also urged a national soul-searching. (141)

In the post-apartheid context white South Africans are forced to confront the ways in which they are implicated in the atrocities of the past. But as Roniger and Sznajder note, “[t]he disclosure and institutional treatment of past human rights violations did not mean that the former repressors acknowledged responsibility. Nor did it generate an interpretation of past deeds shared by both victims and victimizers” (140). Now that the apartheid government no longer has a monopoly on truth it has become possible to construct the past and the future differently. Behr’s text indicates that as long as the processes of confronting and accepting responsibility for the past remain infinitely deferred, white South Africans will be unable to contribute to the reconstruction of that past in order to move into the future. If white South Africans are to be part of the process of national reconciliation it will be necessary for them to forge new and ethical ways of speaking and being. In the post-apartheid context the way in which acts of violence and human rights abuses come to be remembered is of crucial importance. The dead have no voices but for those we give them and for that reason it is essential that the stories through which we construct the past are told as truthfully as we can tell them.
MOVING BEYOND DENIAL

in Your silence
we were ravaged

— Claire Harris, “Translation into Fiction” (56)

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.

— Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality Vol. 1. (100-101)

In this concluding chapter I turn to a consideration of history and the way in which it comes to be inscribed within fictional texts. I argue that fictional accounts of the past represent “point[s] of resistance” to monolithic accounts of history which construct the past as that which is safely behind us. I make use of Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection in order to understand history itself as that which is abjected. I argue that it is in recognising ourselves within those abjected histories that it becomes possible to transform not only the past but also the present and the future. The ways in which we read constructions of the past are as important as the ways in which we write about the past. Just as there are ethical implications to the ways in which we inscribe the past in writing, so too there is an ethics of reading and listening. It is towards formulating a way to listen to the silences that form part of the telling
of the past that this exploration is directed.

In her book entitled *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (1999), feminist philosopher Gail Weiss analyses Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection and considers the ways in which it has been applied and extended by Elizabeth Grosz and Judith Butler in their writings on the body. Weiss notes the dilemma we confront when we come to recognize that it is through the process of abjection that we construct the boundaries between ourselves and all that which is not ourselves, that it is through the process of abjection that Kristeva describes as an act of expulsion of both the abject (food, body fluids, other abject objects) and of the self, “I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*” (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 1982:3). Weiss writes:

Despite their helpful analyses of the phenomenon of abjection and the role both the abject other and abjection play in the processes of identity formation, Kristeva, Butler and Grosz all seem to leave us with an “unlivable” dilemma that we nonetheless continue to live out from one moment to the next. We cannot dispense with the abject without dispensing with our own identities since the latter are founded upon the former. On the other hand, we can hardly “embrace” the abject without its ceasing to be the abject, a process which will, inevitably, it seems, force the creation of a new abject object to take the place of the old one. The refusal of identity is not an option either, since the refusal of identity is itself the taking up of an identity position, and, in either case, we will always find identities (and abject objects) projected upon us regardless of our wishes, needs or desires. (96)

Unlike Kristeva, who Weiss argues “seems to be advocating that we embrace the abject precisely because of its subversive potential to disrupt the hegemony of the Symbolic order” (186), Butler understands abjection to be part of the process of subject formation whereby the subject is formed through subjection. In *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997), Butler defines subjection as “the making of a subject, the principle of regulation
according to which a subject is formulated or produced” (84) and like Foucault she argues that “resistance appears as the effect of power, as a part of power, its self-subversion” (93). For Butler, as for Foucault, the subject is formed always in relation to power and paradoxically the conditions of subjection are also the very conditions for being. Butler draws on Althusser’s theory of interpellation which accounts for the way in which the social subject is discursively produced in order to argue that we exist in relation to the social only and always as subjects. In order to be intelligible the subject must enter into the social, or in Lacanian terms, the symbolic order, and the subject is thus dependent on subjection for intelligibility. Given that power is that which is exerted on the subject and is that which simultaneously forms the subject, Butler interrogates the subject’s attachment to power and attempts to formulate a way “to take an oppositional relation to power that is, admittedly, implicated in the very power one opposes” (17).

In her book entitled *Unbearable Weight* Susan Bordo critiques what she defines as the prematurely celebratory tone of postmodern feminists and post-structuralist theorists who, she argues, do not pay sufficient attention to the cultural and historical locations in which the body is situated. She claims that Butler’s analysis of the subversive and transgressive ways in which gendered identities can function is too abstract and de-historicised. While Bordo claims to agree with Foucault that resistance is everywhere she seems to miss the point that Butler so succinctly makes in both *Bodies That Matter* and in *The Psychic Life of Power* that resistance is inextricably bound to subjection. Far from claiming an open terrain for resistance free from the workings of power Butler strives towards articulating the possibility for political agency within the field of power relations:

If the subject is *neither* fully determined by power *nor* fully determining of power (but significantly and partially both), the subject exceeds the logic of noncontradiction, is an excrescence of logic, as it were. To claim that the subject exceeds either/or is not to claim that it lives in some zone of its own making. Exceeding is not escaping, and the subject exceeds precisely that to which it is bound.
In this sense, the subject cannot quell the ambivalence by which it is constituted. Painful, dynamic, and promising, this vacillation between the already-there and the yet-to-come is a crossroads that rejoins every step by which it is traversed, a reiterated ambivalence at the heart of agency. (*Psychic Life of Power*, 18)

The subject’s potential resistance arises because the subject is formed in and through the reiteration of power. For Foucault, the body itself is one such site of the repeated inscription of power which is endlessly repeated but never in a mechanical or completely predictable way. The body disrupts the regulatory mechanisms of power even as it is subjected to them—"the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjective body" (*Discipline and Punish*, 26) and as Butler argues:

> The Foucaultian subject is never fully constituted in subjection, then; it is repeatedly constituted in subjection, and it is in the possibility of a repetition that repeats against its origin that subjection might be understood to draw its inadvertently enabling power. From a psychoanalytic perspective, however, we might ask whether this possibility of resistance to a constituting or subjectivating power can be derived from what is "in" or "of" discourse. What can we make of the way in which discourses not only constitute the domains of the speakable, but are themselves bounded through the production of a constitutive outside: the unspeakable, the unsignifiable? (*Psychic Life of Power*, 94)

The notion of abjection is again useful here because it makes it clear that there is no natural inside and outside but that there exists that which we position beyond the realm of the speakable. For Butler there exists no beyond outside of the processes of subjection yet she argues that it is in acknowledging the space of the abject that we begin to move towards an understanding of the psychic life of power and its effects on the formation of subjectivity. In her analysis of the ‘unlivable dilemma’ that the connection between abjection and subject formation poses, Weiss articulates Butler’s ‘political strategy’ as that which “involves becoming aware of the exclusions we are performing in order to be sure that we know what is
at stake in basing our identity upon them" (187). While this consciousness of the structures of subject formation does not signify the end of the practices of exclusion it does point towards a more ethical way of being.

It is this problematic of the ways in which abjection is bound to the formation of the subject that I wish to consider in relation to white subjectivity. The theorization of abjection by Kristeva, Butler, Grosz and Weiss offers two central insights that are extremely useful to the theorization of whiteness. One of these insights is that the process of abjection has had decidedly real consequences for those who are constituted as the abject other. The process of abjection produces what Butler terms “a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet “subjects” but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject” (92-93). In these ‘unlivable’ zones which, Butler argues, “are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject” (93) the abject other suffers the effects of exclusion. The history of apartheid in South Africa provides a striking example of the way in which the process of abjection takes material form in the spatial segregation of raced bodies. Following Butler, Weiss argues that

[through these forces of abjection and exclusion, the abject is provided with a concrete identity and occupies a place, whether that place be a prison, a refugee center, a ghetto, a concentration camp, or another yet to be constructed “zone of uninhabitability”; in short, a place where society can dispose of its “excrement”. (95)

While the process of abjection leads to the construction of boundaries between the self and the other because of the fear of contamination by the abject other, the second crucial insight an analysis of abjection provides is that the abject other is that which is always partially inside the self that would expel it. In her essay on Kristeva, Elizabeth Gross offers a definition of the abject as “an impossible object, still part of the subject; an object the subject strives to expel but which is ineliminable” (“Julia Kristeva” 1992:198). The process of abjection reveals the construction of an identity uncontaminated by the abject other to be impossible because the other is always that which the self attempts to expel; the other is that
which is then necessarily partially within the self. Abjection allows us to understand the anxieties that surround the contamination and defilement of racial purity but simultaneously points to the impossibility of a pure, undefiled identity. If white identities are understood to be formed through the process of abjection the discourse of white racial purity is shown to be untenable, for as Grosz argues, "[T]he abject demonstrates the impossibility of clear-cut borders, lines of demarcation, divisions between the clean and the unclean, the proper and the improper, order and disorder" (qtd. in Weiss, 92). While the histories of colonial domination and the holocaust testify to the fact that terrible violence has occurred in the name of the naturalness of the boundaries between pure and impure, Grosz’s insight is valuable in that it indicates the need to acknowledge that social being is bound up with the processes of abjection and exclusion.

Like Butler’s understanding of the paradoxical way in which subjects are formed in subjection and are bound to that subjection which they simultaneously oppose, there appears to be no way out of the processes of abjection through which both the self and the abject other are formed. Yet I would argue that understanding the abject as always partially within the self offers a way to reconceptualise racialised subjectivity. In recognising the process of abjection we are forced to recognise our very dependence on the other for the constitution of ourselves. I think the question that needs to be posed is what might our debt be to the other through which we ourselves are formed? How might we conceptualise our responsibility to the other? In *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) Kristeva writes:

Living with the other, with the foreigner, confronts us with the possibility, or not, of being an other. It is not simply—humanistically—a matter of being able to accept the other but of being in his place, and this means to imagine and make oneself other for oneself.

The recognition of the other in ourselves cannot eliminate the process of abjection (abjection itself resists being abjected) but this recognition seems to open the potential to transform the too ‘densely populated’ zone of the abject. It is this formulation of ‘becoming other to
ourselves' that seems to offer a way to move 'history beyond nightmare into structures for the future.'

WRITING AGAINST FORGETTING

Thus, fear having been bracketed, discourse will seem tenable only if it ceaselessly confront that otherness, a burden both repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate: the abject.

— Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (6)

If, as Daniel Maximin claims, “The present always invents a past for itself out of its own desire” when we write a history of the past we are really engaged in mapping a history of the present (Maximin qtd in Lionnet, 1992). The past then, is not that which is behind us but rather, paradoxically, is that which is, in Kristeva’s words, “unapproachable and intimate”. Formulating an understanding of history within the terms of abjection implies that history is in part what constitutes us as subjects. Recognising history as that which is both within and outside of us leads us to acknowledge that we cannot turn away from history in a futile attempt to forget. Yet it seems that in post-colonial Australia, post-apartheid South Africa and in other places at other historical junctures it is the past itself that is abjected by those who wish to deny their own positions within it. Writing after the holocaust many theorists have argued that while many people wish to forget the violence of the past in order ‘to move beyond it’ the past cannot be forgotten because the past continues to exist in the present. In his famous essay entitled “The Hollow Miracle” (1959), George Steiner reflects on the state of the German language and on literature written in German after the holocaust. He argues that “the post-war history of the German language has been one of dissimulation and deliberate forgetting. The remembrance of horrors of the past has been largely uprooted. But
at a high cost. And German literature is paying it right now" (109). Steiner was later to reconsider the position he took in his essay due to the increasing body of German literary works concerned with confronting the Nazi past, but his central points remain. In a note to the republication of his essay in his collection Language and Silence, Steiner writes:

If I republish “The Hollow Miracle” in this book, it is because I believe that the matter of the relations between language and inhumanity is a crucial one; and because I believe that it can be seen with specific and tragic urgency in respect to the uses of German in the Nazi period and in the acrobatics of oblivion which followed on the fall of Nazism. De Maistre and George Orwell have written of the politics of language, of how the word may lose its humane meanings under the pressure of political bestiality and falsehood. We have scarcely begun, as yet, to apply their insights to the actual history of language and feeling. Here almost everything remains to be done (95).

Steiner’s work compels us to examine the relations between language, the carrier of memory, and its relation to ‘oblivion’, the inhumanity of forgetting. Steiner’s analysis of the politics of memory in post-war Germany draws attention to the way in which the horrors of the past can be abjected and subsumed in the nation’s remodelling of itself. Steiner argues that in order to resist the collective disavowal of the ugliness of the past and the formation of a hegemonic version of history in which brutality is reinscribed as a source of national pride, it is crucial to retain a sense of the past in the present:

That, surely, is the point: to discover the relations between those done to death and those alive then, and the relations of both to us; to locate, as exactly as record and imagination are able, the measure of unknowing, indifference, complicity, commission which relates the contemporary or survivor to the slain (157).

It is through writing that the atrocities of the past can be translated into the present and communicated to those who, as Steiner suggests, carry the burden of those histories just as do the survivors of the camps. Yet Steiner argues that “The world of Auschwitz lies outside
speech as it lies outside reason. To speak of the unspeakable is to risk the survivance of language as creator and bearer of humane, rational truth" (3). Like Theodor Adorno who famously argued that “[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,” Steiner questions whether the transformation of the unspeakable into the aesthetic can be considered ethical.\(^1\) Ultimately, as Lawrence Langer writes in his introduction to concentration camp survivor Charlotte Delbo’s trilogy entitled *Auschwitz and After* (1995), “Adorno retracted that statement, faced as he was by the growing body of artistic work we now label Holocaust literature” (xvi). Langer writes that “the ruling principle” of Delbo’s art is enshrined in the expression “Il faut donner à voir, which we might translate as ‘they must be made to see’” (x). Delbo’s writings suggest that it is not only those who lived through the experience of the camps but also those who did not who must attempt to engage with the horror of the holocaust. While Delbo acknowledges that it is difficult for those who lived through the holocaust to communicate the enormity of their suffering and that it is difficult for those who were not present in the camps to relate to the experiences of the survivors she repeatedly instructs us, “Try to look. Just try to see” (84, 85, 86).

Delbo struggles to articulate her experience of the camps and makes use of the words of others who survived the camps with her as if reaching through their language towards expressing her own inexpressible thoughts. Mado, a friend Delbo interviewed years after their return from the camps, states that “[t]o live in the past is not to live. It is to cut oneself off from the living. But what shall we do to cross over to their shore, to stop remaining paralyzed on the other side?” (264). For Delbo the difficulty in expressing that which she has witnessed lies not only in the experience of suffering but in making that suffering heard: “Whether you return from war or from elsewhere/ when it’s an elsewhere/ where you have conversed with death/ it is hard to come back/ and speak again to the living” (256). Delbo is aware that if she is to “cross over to the shore of the living” those who inhabit that shore must be willing to acknowledge her presence among them. A number of times in her book Delbo refers herself as a ghost, as a person who is not in the present but remains trapped in
Auschwitz, unable to return. At the end of her text Delbo includes this poem which indicates that it is through us, those who read her story of suffering, that she is able to conceive of a future “I do not know /if you can still/ make something of me/ If you have the courage to try...” Delbo’s words alert us to the responsibility we bear to recognize the suffering to which we are witness for if we fail to ‘try to see’ the experience of suffering is made unspeakable.

Delbo’s text, like the writings of Primo Levi and of other survivors of the concentration camps testify to the ways in which the experience of the holocaust continues to haunt the present. Holocaust literature and the criticism which has emerged surrounding memory and trauma have created a vocabulary for articulating the experiences of historical trauma in other locations. In The Feminization of Famine (1997), Margaret Kelleher focuses on the Irish Famine but she argues that “the issues raised by Holocaust writers, in particular concerning the ethics and potential of representation, have significant implications for famine literature” (3). In a similar way, in her introduction to Acts of Memory (1999), Mieke Bal argues for the usefulness of “Holocaust related issues, insights, critical vocabularies and therapeutic paradigms to other, related, historical contexts” including “such instances as sexual violence and child abuse” (xi). I would like to connect the writings of Delbo and other survivors of the Holocaust who call us to bear witness to the traumatic memory of the Holocaust to a discussion of the making of cultural memory in post-apartheid South Africa. I conclude by considering the different ways in which Grenville and Behr meet the challenges of representing the past in the present.
I am not sure what poetry is. I am not sure what the aesthetic is. Perhaps the aesthetic should be defined in opposition to anaesthetic. Art is the struggle to stay awake. Which makes amnesia the true target and proper subject of poetry.

— Jeremy Cronin, “Even the Dead” (25)

Perhaps Jeremy Cronin’s insight that the task of poetry is to prevent amnesia is nowhere more true than in South Africa today where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has recently completed its hearings. The commission has published a five volume document of its findings that runs to hundreds of pages in length and the entire document can be downloaded from the official TRC web-site. The commission’s book of truth contains the testimony of those who were witness or subject to human rights violations and those who were involved in the apartheid government, the SADF or the SAP and is perhaps the most comprehensive narrative account of the apartheid era. But the TRC report is just one version of the many truths of apartheid that will be kept alive in the minds of the majority of South Africans for whom forgetting is impossible, through the spoken word, visual representation and through the poems and stories by which a culture constitutes itself.

Part of the struggle that writers and artists in contemporary South Africa face today is not whether apartheid will be remembered but how it will be remembered. Many South African writers and artists have begun to consider how the past is to be inscribed in the present both so that the past will not be forgotten and in order to transform the future. In a note to his poem entitled “Brother, Who Will Bury Me?” Rustum Kozain writes:
South African society is becoming more and more amnesiac as our activities as political citizens become a spectacle made for television. Forgetting, of course, serves certain interests, and we need not look far to see whose interests forgetting serves. But even when we do remember, our acts of remembering are staged and paraded as television spectacle. In literature, we may reconstruct our memories in more complex, nuanced ways. And we need this memory; we need to remember our recent pasts.

In similar ways to Kozain, both Njabulo Ndebele and Andre Brink articulate literature as a productive site for the reimagination of the past. Ndebele describes the enduring gift of the stories offered as testimony at the TRC hearings as “the restoration of narrative” (27) which he argues will enable South Africans to “go beyond the giving of testimony, towards creating new thoughts and new worlds” (28). In his essay entitled “Stories of history: reimagining the past in post-apartheid narrative”, Brink argues for “an imagined rewriting of history or, more precisely, of the role of the imagination in the dialectic between past and present, individual and society” (37). Now that South Africans are free to speak their own truths it seems that writers and artists have just cause for celebration. In order to understand quite how revolutionary ‘the restoration of narrative’ is in post-apartheid South Africa it is necessary to consider what Ndebele terms “the moral and intellectual desert” (22) that was South Africa under apartheid. The master narrative of apartheid worked to silence other conflicting narratives through censorship and those who spoke against it were silenced by imprisonment, torture and death. In the new South Africa Ndebele writes that:

freedom has given authority and legitimacy to previously silenced voices. It has lifted the veil of secrecy and state-induced blindness. Where the state sought to hide what it did, it compelled those who were able to see what was happening not to admit the testimony of their own eyes. In this connection, the stories of the TRC represent a ritualistic lifting of the veil and the validation of what was actually seen. They are an additional confirmation of the movement of our society from repression to
expression. Where in the past the state attempted to compel the oppressed to deny the testimony of their own experience, today that experience is one of the essential conditions for the emergence of a new national consciousness (20).

Both Ndebele and Brink understand narrative to be the carrier of memory and celebrate the transformative capacity of storytelling. Yet the power of narrative to transform the past can be used to serve ends other than those celebrated by Brink and Ndebele in their essays. Ndebele astutely points to "the tragic failure of social conscience" (24) of both white Afrikaners and white English speaking South Africans and consequently argues for the "rediscovery of social morality" (24). While Ndebele is quick to point out the work of Afrikaner novelists who have begun to confront their own pasts and describes Mark Behr's novel, *The Smell of Apples*, as part of what he terms "an informal truth and reconciliation process under way amongst the Afrikaners" (24), the question of how white South Africans will respond to the challenges of the post-apartheid present remains complicated. As I have argued in my chapter on *The Smell of Apples*, Behr's novel represents a troubling case in point of the way in which reconstructing the apartheid past can be strategically employed to evade responsibility for that past.

In the chapter on *Lilian's Story* I argued that the body can be understood as a text but that all too often the messages it transmits are ignored, silenced and erased. In contrast to the way in which bodies are represented in *The Smell of Apples*, in such a way so that the violence by which they are marked is simultaneously neutralised, Grenville's text prevents the reader from turning away from the violence which marks Lilian's body. In *The Feminization of Famine*, Kelleher makes an important distinction between the 'unspeakable' and the 'unspoken' and she argues that the work of Toni Morrison both "highlight[s] the sense of 'an unspeakable' in the history of slavery, most often associated with women's experience" and "reveals the ways in which this may cover over the 'unspoken', that which needs to be spoken, to be remembered and retold" (7). I have argued that if colonial violence is to be interrogated and understood, the silence that surrounds the violation of the body must
be spoken. In *Lilian's Story* the monstrosity of the father is transferred onto the body of the
daughter who is subsequently read as monstrous in body and by the logic of colonial social
norms, monstrous in mind. As the daughter of Albion, Lilian’s body is made to bear the
burden of colonial history and is inscribed by colonial violence. It is this history which
inscribes Lilian as deviant and Albion as the archetype of the civilised that *Lilian's Story*
rewrites in order to expose the monstrous violence of the white fathers of the colonial order.

Grenville’s text, like texts by contemporary Koori writers like Ruby Langford, demands that the shadow side of Australian history be acknowledged and represents a powerful refusal of the cultural imperatives that work to silence those stories society does not wish to hear. It is significant that *Lilian's Story* begins in 1886, the year of Lilian’s birth and the year of federation in Australia and Grenville’s text can be read as telling the untold story (by white Australians) both of an individual life and of a nation: the repressed story of Lilian’s life is also part of the story of the repressed and perpetually denied national past of Australia. Grenville’s strategic blurring of the boundaries between history and fiction follows Linda Hutcheon’s argument that “[p]ostmodern texts consistently use and abuse actual historical documents in such a way as to stress both the discursive nature of those representations of the past and the narrativized form in which we read them” (*The Politics of Postmodernism*, 1989:87). In her construction of historical fiction Grenville alerts us to the fact that we live through the narratives we have of our pasts and our identities are formed through the stories we tell. The history Grenville offers through *Lilian's Story* reveals the past not as static, not as that which we must necessarily move beyond but as that which continues to shape our knowledge of the present and as that which can aid our shaping of the future.

To be conscious of the ways in which we invent the past in the present is to be aware of the ethical weight of representation. Once the truth of history is acknowledged as an invention of memory, a reinvention of the past through language, the questions of how it might be possible to occupy an ethical position in relation to the past and of how the past can
be represented responsibly remains. In her essay entitled “The Politics of Reparation”, Francoise Verges raises the notion of “our debt to the past” (271) and draws on the work of “philosopher Fabien Eboussi-Boulaga who proposed an “ethical identity” whereby the sufferings of the ancestors are incorporated into one’s construction of identity. It is not about carrying a moral burden, making one’s own the crimes or sins of the ancestors, but recognizing one’s debts” (271). Through these readings of *Lilian's Story* and *Smell of Apples* I have argued for the need for ‘ethical identities’ which involve our recognition of our debts to the past and our responsibility to and for that past in the present. My readings of the constructions of history in *The Smell of Apples* and *Lilian’s Story* indicate that post-colonial subjectivities are formed not through a forgetting of the colonial past but an active engagement with history in order to transform the present. *Lilian’s Story* confronts the unspoken sexual violence elided by colonial history and fractures the monolith of white masculinist history which continues to erase its own violence in the present. Behr’s text too, engages with the violent history of South Africa under apartheid and indicates the need to bring the violence of white racism into the realm of the speakable. Both Grenville and Behr draw attention to the gaps and silences in our knowledge of colonial Australia and apartheid South Africa and both texts indicate that for every story told there are those which remain unspoken.
INTRODUCTION: WHITE BODIES AND COLONIAL HISTORY: SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN LILIAN'S STORY AND THE SMELL OF APPLES

In Unbearable Weight Susan Bordo traces the ways in which feminist scholarship on the body has radically disrupted the traditional conception of the body as ‘natural’. In reconceptualizing the body as culturally constructed, feminist theorizing intersects with post-structuralism which posits the body as inscribed by cultural practices. Understanding the body as produced in and through history allows the body to be understood as a site through which the effects of specific historical practices can be read. See Bordo, Unbearable Weight. See also: Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter; Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality Volume One; and Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism.

2 See Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks. See also Margaret Homans’ essay entitled “‘Racial Composition’: Metaphor and the Body in the Writing of Race”.

3 For essays that consider masculinity see Peter F. Murphy, ed., Fictions of Masculinity: Crossing. See also Kaja Silverman’s Male Subjectivity at the Margins. David Wellman’s essay “Minstrel Shows” examines whiteness and masculinity in the United States. For an analysis of masculinity and violence in South Africa see Keith Breckenridge, “The Allure of Violence”.


5 For analyses of white women and their positions within the sexual and racial hierarchy in colonial contexts see Ann Laura Stoler, Race and the Education of Desire, and her numerous essays on the subject particularly “Rethinking Colonial Categories” and “Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers”. See also Anne McClintock’s Imperial Leather.

6 See Jenny Sharpe’s essay “The Unspeakable Limits of Rape”. See also Monique Y.
Tschofen “Post-Colonial Allegory and the Empire of Rape”.

7 Hazel V. Carby, “‘On the Threshold of Woman’s Era’: Lynching, Empire, and Sexuality in Black Feminist Theory”.

8 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes”.

9 Ailbhe Smyth, “A (Political) Postcard”.

10 See Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, eds., Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror. This book is a veritable compendium of whiteness studies and contains 114 essays many of which refer to the unmarked status of whiteness as an identity construct. See for example, Peggy McIntosh “White Privilege and Male Privilege” and Stephanie M. Wildman and Adrienne D. Davis “Making Systems of Privilege Visible”.

11 Omi and Winants’ notion of ‘racial formation’ as defined in Racial Formation in the United States offers a useful theoretical framework for understanding racialization as a “sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed” (55).


13 See Ruth Barcan, “Mobility is the Key” and Roslynn D. Haynes “Fatalism and Feminism”. In her essay “You Are What You Eat” Veronica Thompson’s brief analysis of Lilian’s Story draws attention to the Australian colonial context but does not explore the significance of whiteness. In “‘The Ultimate Oppression’: Discourse Politics in Kate Grenville’s Fiction” Gerry Turcotte seems to argue that white Australian men are the colonizers and white Australian women the colonized (80-81). Turcotte writes that Grenville’s text offers “a hopeful vision predicated upon the precondition that individuals recognize the need to tell their stories, and that authority figures recognize that the marginalized must ‘take back the centre’” (81). Turcotte’s analysis, in its focus on patriarchal
power overlooks the larger context of white colonization of Australia in which white women, although differently from white men, certainly played a part. For an analysis of the problematics of ‘universal women’s oppression’ and the need to carefully distinguish between different experiences of oppression among women see Chandra Talpade Mohanty et al., eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*.

14 For an analysis of the politics of race and white identities in Australia see Jon Stratton, *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis*. See also Kate Darian Smith et al., eds., *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia*. In their introduction to *Text, Theory, Space* Darian Smith et al. argue that “Space—and place—in South Africa and Australia were, and are, not only racialized, but also gendered” (16) and they draw attention to the connections between Australia and South Africa including “their similar latitudes, their arid, fragile interiors, and their shared settler myths of the ‘empty land’ and policies of white racial domination” (1).

15 In *The Body & Society*, Bryan Turner writes that “[T]he unrestrained body is a statement or a language about unrestrained morality. To control women’s bodies is to control their personalities, and represents an act of authority over the body in the interests of public order organized around male values of what is rational” (190). See also Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, particularly Chapter IV “Cultivating Bourgeois Bodies and Racial Selves” and her essay “Making Empire Respectable”.

16 See *The Smell of Apples* (105-11) for the description of Marnus’ aunt, Tannie Karla who is described as “mixed up with the Liberals” (105). Karla sends a letter to Marnus’ mother, from London where she is presumably in self-imposed exile, in which she expresses her views against racial domination in South Africa. Marnus’ mother returns the letter unopened but Ilse, Marnus’ sister and Marnus read the letter in secret. Karla’s letter inspires Ilse to rebel against her position as the ‘good white daughter’. After she is elected head girl at her conservative Afrikaans school Ilse plays the piano accompaniment to “Die Stem”, the
then South African National Anthem which celebrates the history of the Afrikaner people, and she purposely plays the score incorrectly, pounding the keys and repeating verse after verse. After the ceremony her mother warns: “My dear Ilse. You’re going to have to think about what’s going on with you. All these talents God has blessed you with—they’ll all be wasted if you can’t learn to do what society expects from you[...] Once you’ve become unpopular, you might as well forget about ever getting into another leadership position”. Her mother states that “being unpopular can be hell” and Ilse responds by saying “Like it must be for Tannie Karla”. “Ilse’ says Mum, and I can hear that she’s getting mad, ‘are you trying to be clever with me? Before you know it, you might end up being just like her!’ ‘And then? Will you ban me from home too? Ilse asks softly” (149). While the personal consequences of resistance to apartheid are shown to be dire for Afrikaner women who risk being estranged from their families and white society in general. Their resistance of Afrikaner women in spite of these risks seems to discredit Behr’s representation of white men as inescapably trapped and incapable of resistance because of the consequences they faced.

17 In the South African context see Kader Asmal et al., *Reconciliation Through Truth*, who write that “Privileged South Africans under apartheid lived less under a regime of ignorance than of carefully calculated avoidance” (144) and argue that “the cultivated blindness” of white South Africans “can only have been partial at best” (145). In the context of Nazi Germany on the issue of the German population’s knowledge of the death camps and wide-scale murder of the Jews see Steiner, *Language and Silence* (156-9). See also John. W. Boyer and Michael Geyer, eds., *Resistance Against the Third Reich: 1933-1990*.

18 See the fascinating ‘Register of Reconciliation’, a collection of hundreds of ‘confessions’ largely written by white South Africans pledging their support to a democratic South Africa and apologising for their complicity with the apartheid state and their apathy in the past on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s official website, <http://www.truth.org.za>.

19 These words from Nelson Mandela’s foreword to Asmal et al., *Reconciliation*
Through Truth seem pertinent here: “I am often asked how it is I emerged without bitterness from so long a time spent in prison. This question is intended as a compliment, and I can appreciate the motives of those who ask it. Nevertheless, it must be said that millions of South Africa’s people spent an even longer time in the prison of apartheid. Some were imprisoned by the apartheid laws in a condition of homelessness and near-despair. Others were imprisoned in the racism of the mind. These are places where some still languish. In such circumstances, personal bitterness is irrelevant. It is a luxury that we, as individuals and as a country, simply cannot afford, any more than we can afford to listen to special pleading from the privileged. Instead we must insist with quiet resolve on a firm policy of undoing the continuing effects of the past.”

CHAPTER ONE: MONSTROUS FATHERS, MONSTROUS DAUGHTERS: INCEST IN LILIAN’S STORY

1 Through Lilian’s Story Grenville revives the memory of Bea Miles, the Sydney eccentric on whose life Lilian’s character is loosely based who like Lilian, existed in and through the stories she told and the stories told about her. See Rose Ellis “For We Are Young and Free: The Writings of Bee Miles”. Ellis cites an excerpt from Miles’ Advance Australia Fair, written while she was incarcerated in a mental institution in which the connections between the plot of Lilian’s Story and the life of Miles are clear: “[f]or years he[Miles’ father, W.J. Miles] had been beating me brutally and he feared mother would consult the police or a doctor on account of his incestuous behaviour towards me” (unpublished manuscript in the Frank Johnson papers as cited in Ellis, 47). Ellis refers to Miles as ‘Bee’, “because this was the form Bee Miles preferred for her own signature” (53).

2 While my focus centres on ‘white on white’ violence I do not wish to overshadow the centuries of violence endured by the Aboriginal (Koori) people in Australia. For an analysis of the violence suffered by Aboriginal women see Audrey Bolger, Aboriginal
Women and Violence. For an analysis of the ‘otherness’ of obesity in contemporary Western society see Susan Bordo’s Unbearable Weight where she writes: “[i]f cultural attitudes toward the anorectic are ambivalent, however, reactions to the obese are not. As Marcia Millman documents in Such a Pretty Face, the obese elicit blinding rage and disgust in our culture and are often viewed in terms that suggest an infant sucking hungrily, unconsciously at its mother’s breast: greedy, self-absorbed, lazy, without self-control or willpower” (202).

3 See Stoler, Race and the Education of Desire.

4 See Foucault, Discipline and Punish (195-231).

5 For another instance where violence and eating are conflated see Albion’s Story where after having beaten Lilian, Albion states: “I thrust her away. ‘Get away from me, Lilian,’ I cried. ‘I am engorged with you!’—meaning of course, that I was enraged with her” (217).

6 See McClintock, Imperial Leather (42).

7 See Jon Stratton Race Daze (49-50) on how the discourses of Social Darwinism and scientific racism have informed “the assumed superiority of Anglo-Celtic-Australian culture” (50). On eugenics see Jeffrey Weeks Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800.

CHAPTER TWO: WHITENESS, VIOLENCE AND DENIAL IN MARK BEHR’S THE SMELL OF APPLES

1 Behr’s The Smell of Apples was awarded the R50 000 Betty Trask Debut Award, the CNA Debut Award, the Eugene Marais Prize, the MNET fiction prize, was nominated for the Guardian and Steinbeck literary prize and was forwarded by British Publishers, Little Brown, for the Booker Prize. For laudatory reviews on The Smell of Apples see Charlotte Bauer, “Blinding Sunset for the Erasmus Family”; Tracey Melass, “Behr grasps Afrikaner

2 At a writers’ conference entitled “Faultlines—Enquiries Around Truth and Reconciliation” held in South Africa in 1996 Behr confessed to spying for the apartheid regime from 1986 to 1990. See “The Behr Truth, in His Own Words” an edited version of the speech Behr made at the Faultlines Conference. See also Justin Pearce, “How Author was Forced to Confess”; Charl De Villiers, “Top Author Admits he was a Rotten Apple”; Maureen Isaacson, “Living with the Consequences of a Fictional Life”.

3 See Mark Behr, “The Behr Truth, in His Own Words”.

4 On Coloured identity in South Africa see Zoe Wicomb, “Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa”. See also: Kerry Ward and Nigel Worden, “Commemorating, Suppressing and Invoking Cape Slavery”.

5 For an analysis of the religious rhetoric employed by the South African government to justify white domination and the policies of apartheid see Allister Sparks, The Mind of South Africa.

6 The practices of white racism did not exist purely as a result of the process of disavowal. Racial hatred, dehumanization of all who were not white, Afrikaner nationalism and the inherent belief in the superiority of the white race all played a role. But I am trying to account for the collective moral failure of almost the entire white population of apartheid South Africa. I argue that on a day-to-day basis it was through the process of disavowal that white South Africans made apartheid bearable to themselves.

7 For further analysis of the myth of South Africa as ‘the promised land’ of the Afrikaner people see Allister Sparks, The Mind of South Africa. See also: Elmar Lehmann


10 In this scene where Frikkie is transformed into Little-Neville Behr collapses the different forms of violence suffered by white and black South Africans and seems to be arguing that they are interchangeable.

CONCLUSION: MOVING BEYOND DENIAL

1 Theodor Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society”.

2 In his introduction to *Auschwitz and After*, Langer writes that “Delbo must have realized[...] that the challenge to future readers would be how to remember those years whose ‘unthinkable’ incidents no one really wished to reawaken from the slumber of forgetfulness” (xi). One of Charlotte’s fellow survivors makes the following statement about the necessity of making her experiences of suffering known: “I think people should know. They’ve got to know. Why would we have made this great effort to return if it’s all for nothing, if we remain silent, if we don’t say what it was like?” (344). Delbo responds by saying, “What good does it do to say it?” (344). In the second volume of her trilogy entitled *Useless Knowledge* Delbo writes “As far as I’m concerned/ I’m still there/ dying there/ a little more each day/ dying over again/ the death of those who died” (224). As I have argued, it is in listening to the ‘unspeakable’ that we are able to recognize the knowledge of suffering not as ‘useless’ but
as essential to an ethical way of being in the world.

3 For an analysis of the debate on the ‘uniqueness’ of the Holocaust see Gavriel D.
Rosenfeld, “The Politics of Uniqueness”.

4 See the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s official website,

5 Njabulo Ndebele, “Memory, metaphor and the triumph of narrative”.

6 Ruby Langford, Don’t Take Your Love to Town.

7 For analyses of Australian history and the ways in which it is being rewritten in the
present see Geoffrey Bolton and Wayne Hudson, eds., Creating Australia: Changing
Australian History.

8 For a consideration of ethics and literature see Jane Adamson et al., eds.,
Renegotiating Ethics in Literature, Philosophy, and Theory. See also Cathy Caruth and
Deborah Esch, eds., Critical Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive
Writing.
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