The Limitations and Possibilities of Identity and Form in Selected Recent Memoirs and Novels by White Female Zimbabwean Writers: Alexandra Fuller, Lauren Liebenberg, Bryony Rheam and Lauren St. John

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Abstract

This study examines selected works by four white female Zimbabwean writers: Alexandra Fuller, Lauren Liebenberg, Bryony Rheam and Lauren St John, in light of the controversy over the spate of white memoirs which followed the violent confiscation of white farms in Zimbabwe from 2000 onwards. The controversy hinges on the notion that white memoir writers exploit the perceived victimhood of white Zimbabweans in the international sphere, and nostalgically recall a time of belonging – as children in Rhodesia – which fails to address the fraught colonial history which is directly related to the current political climate of the country. I argue that such critiques are too generalised, and I regard the selected texts as primarily critical of the values and lifestyles of white Rhodesians/Zimbabweans. The texts I have selected include a range of autobiographical and fictional writing, or memoirs and pseudo-memoirs, and I focus on form as a medium enabling an exploration of identity. The ways in which these authors conform to and adapt particular narratives of becoming is examined in each chapter, with a particular focus on the transition from innocence to experience, the autobiography, and the *Bildungsroman*. Gender is a recurring point of interest: in each case the female selves/protagonists are situated in terms of the family, which, in reflecting social values, is a key site of conflict. In regard to trends in white African writing, I explore the white African (farm) childhood memoir and the confessional mode. Ultimately I maintain that while the texts may be classified as white writing, as they are fundamentally concerned with white identity, and therefore evince certain limitations of perspective and form, including clichéd tendencies, all the writers interrogate white identity and the fictional texts more self-reflexively deconstruct tropes of white writing.

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Introduction

(i) General Introduction

The selected texts studied in this thesis include two childhood farm narratives set during the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean civil war: Lauren St John's autobiographical *Rainbow's End: A Memoir of Childhood, War and an African Farm* (2007) and Lauren Liebenberg's fictional *The Voluptuous Delights of Peanut Butter and Jam* (2008); Alexandra Fuller's autobiographical trilogy, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood* (2002), *Scribbling the Cat*: *Travels with an African Soldier* (2004) and *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness* (2011); and Bryony Rheam's self-reflexive and genre-blurring novel set in post-independence Zimbabwe, *This September Sun* (2009).[1]

In each of these texts, I explore identity, form and the correlation between these. The authors are all white, female, displaced Zimbabweans and the texts, drawing from a range of narratives of becoming such as autobiography, confession and the *Bildungsroman*, scrutinise and re-write this identity position. Given the authors' embodied experience of white, Rhodesian/Zimbabwean femalehood, it is significant that, in the texts, the narrators/protagonists occupy this perspective in correlation with their authors. Significantly, too, all these authors are living and writing from the diaspora. I am interested in how authors negotiate the constrictions of form within which they write. In this chapter, I expand upon what is meant by the terms "form" and "identity" for the purposes of my thesis, by defining certain important genre distinctions, outlining significant historical, anthropological and literary contexts in regard to white Rhodesian/Zimbabwean identity and writing, and motivating the gender-oriented approach

[1] Fuller's debut, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* may be identified as the initiator of a series of interrogative white, female Zimbabwean memoirs, and quasi-autobiographical, retrospective novels which emerged in the 2000s. This sub-group of recent, white Zimbabwean narratives includes several texts in addition to those I discuss, such as Cathy Buckle's *African Tears* (2001) and *Beyond Tears* (2002), Wendy Kann's *Casting with a Fragile Thread: A Story of Sisters and Africa* (2006), Jennifer Armstrong's *Minus the Morning* (2009) and Andrea Eames' *The Cry of the Go-Away Bird* (2011). Peter Godwin's *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa* (1996) preceded Fuller's memoir, and Godwin and Fuller are regularly critiqued together (see Harris; Primorac; Da Silva) as internationally successful Zimbabwean white writers of the life-writing genre (a category from which fictional texts are excluded). Godwin has also published two subsequent books during the 2000s, and Douglas Rogers' *The Last Resort* (2009) is another example of a male-authored text in the life-writing category.

I have adopted in my selection of the texts. I then provide an overview of the concerns of each chapter.

(ii) **Genre Distinctions and Terminology**

Perhaps the most significant formal distinction to clarify is that between the autobiographical and fictional mode. Philippe Lejeune asserts that autobiography is defined by the "identity between the author, the narrator, and the protagonist" (qtd in Anderson 2), and Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir explores the "borderlines" (1) between autobiography and fiction while maintaining their distinction. According to Gudmundsdóttir, "fictionality . . . can denote not only conventions in creative writing but also conventions deployed in autobiographical writing" (5-6). The former refer to "structure, poetic or literary descriptions . . . ordering of events to create certain effects" (4), whereas the latter refer to concerns such as the problem of speaking about the past with authority, and therefore the "illusion" of the presence of the past in representations (6). Doris Lessing emphasises that the autobiographical process is necessarily fictional: "we make up our pasts. You can actually watch your mind doing it, taking a little fragment of fact and then spinning a tale out of it" (13), whilst Richard Coe states that, in autobiography, "the balance between literal and symbolic truth is shifted in the direction of the latter" (79). However, it is important to maintain the generic distinction between fiction and non-fiction despite their overlap, and I compare texts according to the different capacities of these two modes.

All the texts in this study are concerned with similar themes, and shaped by similar forms and tropes, and are therefore comparable in these regards. However, the fictional texts allow for more playfulness concerning form, because the investment in a rendition of personal identity is at a remove, granting more freedom to the writers. I refer to the fictional texts – Lauren Liebenberg's *The Voluptuous Delights of Peanut Butter and Jam* and Bryony Rheam's *This September Sun* – in both of which the narrators recall their pasts, interchangeably as novels, fictional memoirs and pseudo-memoirs. M.H. Abrams distinguishes autobiography from memoir: "Autobiography is a biography written by the subject about himself or herself", whereas in memoir "the emphasis is not on the author's developing self but on the people and events that the author has known or witnessed" (26). Lauren St John subtitles *Rainbow's End* "a *Memoir* of Childhood, War and an African Farm" and Alexandra Fuller subtitles *Don't Lets Go to the Dogs Tonight*, "An African *Childhood*" (my emphases). Both texts are concerned with a particular

historical period: the end of colonial Rhodesia, as well as the development of the self from childhood to maturity within this context, and thus it seems that they can be referred to loosely as either memoirs or autobiographies. In general, then, I refer to the non-fictional texts as memoirs and describe them as autobiographical to distinguish them from the fictional texts. How individual texts adopt and manipulate traditional forms is a point of interest throughout this thesis.

(iii) **The Rhodesian/Zimbabwean Civil War**[2]

This war features prominently in most of the texts and, as such, it seems necessary to provide a brief overview. The summary which follows covers a range of white and black perspectives on the political climate leading up to and the purpose of the war. In 1965, Ian Smith, Prime Minister of Rhodesia, in resistance to pressure from Britain to shift towards majority rule in order to gain independence from the metropole, in the period's spirit of decolonisation, signed the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), thus severing ties with Britain, a move which resulted in the imposing of international sanctions on the country (Mlambo110). During the period following UDI, Rhodesian white leaders' main purpose was to "ensure that the settler community remained comfortable" (Mtisi et al, "Social and Economic Developments" 121). Peter Godwin and Ian Hancock discuss the misconception that the Rhodesian white community was "monolithic", however, and claim that its members were neither socially nor ethnically homogenous: "A few could boast that they belonged to the third generation of Rhodesian-born; the overwhelming majority were either migrants or had been born in the country since the Second World War", and thus "national loyalty" had to be fostered (7). Depicting the range of political attitudes within the white community, Godwin and Hancock maintain that "about one-third of the Rhodesians believed Blacks would always be incapable of ruling the country and must, therefore, remain permanently under White rule within a tribal framework", that "A further quarter of the Whites supported African political advancement" and that this group was "At worst . . . prone to paternalism", and that "The remaining whites did not oppose African

[2] The war was framed by those fighting for freedom as the "Second *Chimurenga*", a term which placed it within a broader nationalist narrative of resistance to colonialism; the "First *Chimurenga*" refers to the Ndebele-Shona uprising against white settlers in 1896-7 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 39).

advancement but hoped to delay its passage" (46). However, a shared "Article of faith" was a "commitment to the '[white]Rhodesian way of life'", whether this meant "the climate or the education system, the medical services, the cost of living or the sense of self-importance, the pleasant urban amenities or the life of a small farming community" (8). Thus, the Rhodesian Front Government, headed by Smith, which subsequently led the white war effort from 1976-1979, was "an uneasy alliance of right-wing and moderate elements of white society" (Mtisi et al, "Social and Economic Developments" 123). Many white soldiers were conscripted into armed service, although there were also enthusiastic volunteers, including foreigners from abroad, especially for the prestigious special forces such as the Selous and Grey Scouts (Moorcraft and Mclaughlin 52; 53). Black Africans were liable for conscription from 1978 (57) but there were also volunteers, whose motivation can be explained by the advertising of official positions as prestigious, economically rewarding and 'manly' (Mtisi et al 126). As the war progressed, and the Rhodesian "way of life" was threatened, so the white emigration rate rose. There was also some opposition to the Rhodesian Front from a few outspoken individuals, and some members of the farming community, who were most vulnerable to attacks and struggling as a result of the impact of sanctions, also gradually reconfigured their political attitude, mainly for practical purposes ("Social and Economic Developments" 140; "War in Rhodesia" 144).

In terms of resistance to settler colonialism, the black middle class, had by the 1940s and 50s, "assumed leadership in the nationalist cause", and were vying for equal citizenship rights as the educated elite (Mtisi et al, "Social and Economic Developments" 124). However, according to Jocelyn Alexander et al, the rural population "redefine[d] issues of local concern within the framework of a nationalist project" (qtd in Mtisi et al 125). They desired to replace a "bad state" – that is, "one which removed people from a viable environment" into undesirable locations (so that whites could be settled on fertile land) – with a "good state", one that would "cease discrimination, provide services, restore markets and be accountable to them as citizens (qtd in Mtisi et al 125). Following UDI, settler rule was challenged by counter-insurgency from the late 1960s, in the form of sporadic incidents on white farms. The 1972 Pearce Commission, a referendum which tested the black population's acceptance of the Anglo-Rhodesian agreement for a very gradual transference of power to the majority, was rejected and urban demonstrations erupted expressing frustration with white rule (Mtisi et al "War in Rhodesia" 142). From 1972, a sustained guerilla offensive began, led by two nationalist armies: the Zimbabwe African National

Liberation Army (ZANLA), headed by Robert Mugabe, and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), headed by Joshua Nkomo. According to Mtisi et al, the rivalry between the political factions ZANU and ZAPU was related to the "personality, ideological and ethnic conflicts in the liberation armies" (152). They also maintain that a triumphantist nationalist reading of the armed struggle simplifies these internal struggles related to "gender, class, ethnicity and race", many of which continue to affect the dynamics of the post-independence period (151). Individual motivations for joining the war included the desire of rural dwellers to reacquire dispossessed land, disgruntlement over urban living conditions and limited opportunities for advancement, and the fundamental principle of self-sovereignty (153-4). The guerrilla operations consisted of a re-education of the black population concerning colonial representations of Zimbabwe's history (Frederikse 8), and an undermining of white farmers' positions through landmining roads and attacking homesteads (Godwin and Hancock 86). Peasants supported the guerillas, sometimes through coercion, by providing supplies and acting as informants (62), and they were also the targets of Rhodesian forces for this reason. The war extended beyond national borders: ZIPRA trained in Zambia (144) and ZANLA in Mozambique, and some of the most violent campaigns and atrocities carried out by the Rhodesian army occurred in these countries in the last phase of the war, in which civilians were also targeted for their support of the guerrillas (149). Rhodesia's foreign trade was redirected through South Africa, which thus played a key role in supporting the rebel state up until 1974, when this country's domestic interests saw a shift towards the preference for a settlement in Rhodesia (144-5).

The Cold War climate had a direct influence on the Rhodesian War. Guerillas received armed training and support from the Soviet Bloc and China in order to assist their fight for freedom, and the Rhodesian government was supported by the United States and its allies (Mtisi et al, "Social and Economic Developments" 119). Guerillas were referred to as "terrorists" by the government – a key word during the propaganda and military campaign, as apparent in the ominous sketching of these figures in the media as mere caricatures:

> communists, malcontents, and murdering thugs – as the Godless embodiment of evil – who made cowardly attacks on defenceless tribesmen and farmers' families, ran away from the Security Forces, and were interested only in personal power or in advancing the cause of Soviet or Chinese communism. (Godwin and Hancock 11)

By depicting the freedom fighters in such a manner – dislocated from the interests of the majority black population – the state represented itself as the bastion of 'democratic' and 'Christian' (morally upright) civilisation, standing for the interests of the majority of all Rhodesians, black and white (Frederikse 48-49). However, the persistence of the armed struggle gradually eroded this claim until it became untenable. The internal settlement proposal of 1978, which suggested a coalition government, with Abel Muzowera elected as black representative, was rejected by the guerillas, who intensified their activities at this point (Mtisi et al "War in Rhodesia" 163). In 1979, the Lancaster House conference brought an end to the war, signalling a general war-weariness (Mtisi et al 165). The peace agreement transferred power to the black majority in the form of elections, with concessions made to whites in the form of guaranteed parliamentary seats for seven years (165). The question of land redistribution was not adequately addressed by the insistence that land must be handled on a "willing-seller – willing-buyer" basis and a vague agreement that Britain and America would assist financially in this process (165). A tenuous settlement between nationalist political factions ZANU and ZAPU, in their union as the Patriotic Front during the negotiations, broke down after the negotiations when they split into PF ZAPU and ZANU (PF). The two parties fought the election separately, with ZANU PF winning 57 out of 100 seats (The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe xv) and heralding Robert Mugabe as the first Prime Minister of independent Zimbabwe in 1980 (Mtisi et al 165).

(iv) **The Zimbabwe Crisis**

The 'Crisis in Zimbabwe' refers to the political and economic decline in Zimbabwe in the period from the late 1990s onwards (Raftopoulos "The Crisis in Zimbabwe" 201). Brian Raftopoulos locates its origins in "the long-term structural, economic and political legacies of colonial rule as well as the political legacies of African nationalist politics" (201). A key factor is that the first genuine opposition threat to ZANU (PF) since the 1980s[3] emerged in the formation of the

[3] In the early 1980s, the Robert Mugabe-led, predominantly ZANU government indicated that they would not tolerate political opposition, by dealing with their then-political rivals, ZAPU, in a ruthless manner. Soon after Independence, Mugabe organized a hit squad, the "*Gukurahundi* Brigade", trained by North Koreans, ostensibly to deal with dissidents causing unrest, but also to destroy the support base of ZAPU (The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe 45). This brigade was deployed in ZAPU strongholds in the west of the country and

Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 2000, and elections in the 2000s have been marked by violence, intimidation and torture (215; 224). Raftopoulos describes the ideological contestation associated with the crisis as centred on:

> confrontations over the land and property rights; contestations over the history and meanings of nationalism and citizenship; the emergence of critical civil society groupings campaigning around trade union, human rights and constitutional questions; the restructuring of the state in more authoritarian forms; the broader pan-African and anti-imperialist meanings of the struggles in Zimbabwe; the cultural representations of the crisis in Zimbabwean literature; and the central role of Robert Mugabe. (202)

Raftopoulos perhaps refers to 'literature' here in the broadest sense, but he also includes, in his discussion, literary representations of the crisis. He mentions "a new genre of post-colonial 'white writing' that inscribed a new sense of victimhood on white identities" (216), in response to the fast-track land reformation programme, which, as P. Matondi records, saw the number of white farmers in the country decline from 4,500 in 2000 to 500 in 2008 (Raftopoulos 216). Here Raftopoulos draws on the ideological critique in literary criticism of white-authored texts published during this period, a critique to which Fuller and St John have been subjected, as shall be discussed further. He also specifically refers to Valerie Tagwira's novel, *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006), which poignantly depicts the life of an ordinary Zimbabwean; it is the story of Katy, a vegetable vendor who struggles against the erosion of normality in the harrowing and bizarre conditions in which she finds herself in Zimbabwe, especially "Operation *Murambatsvina*" (literally "clear out the filth"), which Raftopoulos describes as an "onslaught on the informal sector" in 2005 (226).

In economic and social terms, the Zimbabwe Crisis has been characterised by "steep declines in industrial and agricultural productivity; historic levels of hyperinflation; the informalisation of labour; the dollarisation of economic transactions; displacements[4] and a critical erosion of livelihoods" (202). The political deadlock between ZANU (PF) and the MDC was partially resolved in the political settlement of 2009 which led to the Government of National Unity (GNU), but this settlement is described by Raftopoulos as presenting "severe

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was responsible for thousands of civilian deaths, beatings and cases of loss of property (3). The Unity Accord of 1987 merged ZANU and ZAPU, bringing this era to an end (73).

[4] A report by the Solidarity Peace Trust, "Gone to Egoli", conservatively estimates the number of displaced Zimbabweans to be "15% of the population, or 1.5 to 2 million people" (6).

threats and opportunities, seemingly unresolvable contradictions, and a small opening for moving beyond the political impasse" (230). In a recent article, "SPT-Zimbabwe Update No.5. October 2012: Towards Another Stalemate in Zimbabwe?", Raftopoulos describes the current situation regarding the GNU:

> At almost every stage of the mediation from 2007 and the implementation of the GPA from February 2009, intense conflicts over the interpretation of the accord have left their debris on the political terrain, at the heart of which has been the struggle over the meaning of 'sovereignty'. Around this notion Zanu PF in particular has woven dense layers of political discourse combined with the coercive force of the state that it continues to control. (para 1)

The constitutional reform process that is a key element of the GNU threatened to reach an impasse in August 2012 when ZANU PF attempted to disregard the new draft constitution (7) and the situation continues to be mediated by SADC facilitation: the culmination of the negotiations which will be fresh elections, with the likely outcome of "another reconfigured inclusive government" (12).

(v) **White Rhodesian/ Zimbabwean Identity and White Writing**

White Zimbabwean identity has recently become a growing field of study, although there are still relatively few sources specifically concerned with this subject.[5] A particularly useful resource for its broad overview is an anthropological thesis by J.L Fisher entitled *Pioneers, Settlers, Aliens, Exiles*, examines Rhodesian/Zimbabwean identity and is premised on research conducted between 1980 and 1999. On Independence, an official reconciliatory approach to the white

[5] To mention a few that will not be addressed in any detail here: Karin Alexander's article, "Orphans of the Empire" (2004), is based on interviews with white Zimbabweans in 2001, and reveals a trend, not without nuances and contrasts, of white Zimbabweans continuing to primarily locate their national identity in racial terms, and perceiving themselves to be distinct through their supposed 'cultural' superiority and/or as a threatened minority (193-212). Ashleigh Harris, in her article "Writing Home: Inscriptions of Whiteness/ Descriptions of Belonging in White Zimbabwean Memoir-Autobiography" (2005), specifically critiques Peter Godwin's *Mukiwa* and Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Let's Go* in terms of white identity, and her analysis of the latter text is engaged with in Chapter Two of this thesis. Léa Kalaora's article "Madness, Corruption and Exile: On Zimbabwe's Remaining White Commercial Farmers" (2011) is based on anthropological fieldwork conducted by the author in 2007 and 2008 in Mashonaland, and explores how farm occupations have unsettled the custom of racialised spatial separation implemented by the white farming community. Those white farmers who are cooperating closely with black occupants, meeting their demands and merging their interests, are described by the broader white (ex-) farming community as "mad" or "corrupt" (749).

former oppressors was offered, on the basis that the latter should undertake personal change and contribute to national projects (30). Mugabe's gesture of racial reconciliation in the form of a "blanket pardon", which entailed "drawing a line through the past" in order to start anew, meant, however, that the past was not adequately addressed (50). Fisher makes the point that, while some whites welcomed Independence, in general there was an ambiguous silence from this group – at a point when, in hindsight, it was important to publicly reconcile (50).This silence reflected an uncertainty about how to belong to this new nation, as well as, for some, an unwillingness to belong. Fisher comments that her white informants' notions of "home and home country coalesced around issues of entitlement and familiarity" (199), and that the "re-inscribing of the national landscape" moved whites from "the known to an unfamiliar landscape" (66). After Independence, Rhodesian monuments were removed, place names and national commemoration days were changed, and history was re-written, in such a way that the colonial era was represented as "an aberration, a brief disruptive episode in a longer national narrative" in which whites were located as colonial oppressors (76). As discontent grew in Zimbabwe in the 1990s, with continuing social and economic hardships despite Independence, calls for black economic empowerment emerged from black Zimbabweans. Under threat from trade union pressure and the emergence of the MDC, Mugabe adopted the rhetoric of 'indigeneity' as a means of distinguishing 'true' Zimbabweans from alien others, including not only whites, but also members of the political opposition, the latter described as "stooges of Western Imperialists" (201-202). James Muzondidya describes how the strategic employment of indigeneity was specifically intended to dislodge white voting rights before the 2002 presidential elections; however, many minority groups have been disempowered by the Citizenship of Zimbabwe Amendment Act of 2001 which, in a complicated and expensive process, required Zimbabweans to renounce any foreign citizenship or entitlement to such citizenship in order to remain citizens of Zimbabwe (226). Thus, while official discourse utilised a white/black binary regarding rights and belonging, in fact many Zimbabweans were effectively excluded by the enforcement of ZANU PF's version of 'authentic' citizenship.

According to Fisher, a multi-culturalist approach to reconciliation (such as that South Africa has adopted in the 'Rainbow Nation' analogy), "provides recognition of the rightful place of all the various peoples who today make up the nation" (228). However, this is also a tenuous solution; various Third World scholars, as well as Zimbabwe's political leaders, "skeptically

question whether hybridity overturns colonial hierarchy, lessens the desire for retribution or establishes equality of cultures" (228). Colonial history continues to haunt the present of post-colonial nations and the place of whites in Southern Africa remains complex.

Author-critic J.M. Coetzee coined the term "white writing" in the South African context in his book: *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*,[6] a term he applies to literature which could be described as "generated by the concerns of people no longer European, not yet African" (11). According to Coetzee's definition, white writing is distinguished by evidence of an uneasy dualism, a tension between cultural inheritances from Europe, on the one hand, and, on the other, an ambivalent desire to belong in Africa. His qualification "not *yet* African" (my emphasis) suggests that white writing reflects a transitional stage of relations that should evolve. As will be discussed below, academics have argued that there is a notable trend in white Zimbabweans of a regression to (or failure to progress from) colonial attitudes, largely in response to the political climate of the land occupations and the surrounding discourse which excluded whites from belonging in the nation. My thesis explores and interrogates this generalisation.

Anthony Chennells' doctoral thesis, *Settler Myths and the Southern Rhodesian Novel* (1982), as the first study of white Rhodesian writing as a type, is a landmark. Chennells explores settler myths, and explains the importance, in early settler novels, of simplifying the representation of Rhodesia by resorting to "images and sets of perceptions that in their very familiarity would have limited the strangeness of the new land and given a security to those having to live through its uneasy political development" (xiii). However, "certain fixed perceptions" (xvii) continued to persist "regardless of [historical] situation" (xviii). For this reason, Chennells uses the term "myths" to describe these recurrent representations, and these myths include an "Africa untouched by the hand of man" (xviii); the perceived gulf between settlers and Blacks (xix); the "proto-myths" of the quest in imperial adventures and the notion of "Eden or the Golden Age" (xx); the "myths of Great Zimbabwe and the Ndebele" (xxii), and the "myth of the settlers as an heroic and sovereign people" (xxiii). The short history of Rhodesian settlers was therefore "raised to mythic status at a very early stage in Rhodesia's development" (xxi). Chennells describes how tenuous any notion of a coherent white Rhodesian identity was in

[6] I elaborate on Coetzee's ideas in Chapter One, in discussing the African pastoral tradition.

reality, thus the importance of "the myth that they were a people separate and distinct from other people [black people, South Africans, the British]": white Rhodesians defined themselves mainly in terms of who they were *not* (227). He makes the point that the white settler population was always in flux, with "an extraordinarily high rate of turnover", yet, apparently against all odds, "Rhodesians had created a sense of nationhood" (227). Chennells further suggests that the frequency of the assertion of myths in Rhodesian novels "gives a hollowness to those assertions" and implies doubt, but "few novelists confronted their doubts and it is for this reason that in most of the novels there is a complete absence of any sustained ironic vision of Rhodesia" (74). In a more recent article, "Self-Representation and National Memory: White Autobiographies in Zimbabwe" (2005), Chennells writes that "a historiography of either the white collective or the personal, which shows a triumphant Rhodesian ordering of black disorder, was impossible after 1979" (136). He thus emphasises that Independence marks a watershed in white mythology.

Ranka Primorac, however, in her paper entitled "Rhodesians Never Die? The Zimbabwean Crisis and the Revival of Rhodesian Discourse"[7] (2010), poses that Chennells' optimism regarding the end of white Rhodesian mythology was "premature" (207). She notes that, during the first two decades of Independence, "a whole new range of cultural symbols and modes of expression" emerged which challenged "old identity binaries"; however, since the land redistribution programme, "the nationalist cultural repertoires have been reworked and redeployed" (204). Moreover, she maintains,

> [T]he now-marginalised Rhodesian discourse has also been revisited and revived – in this case, by white-authored texts written in opposition to the violent social practices of the Mugabe regime, which I will call 'neo-Rhodesian', and which are often articulated from a position of exile. (204)

Primorac argues that the "violent, lawless and racist manner in which white-owned agricultural land was taken over in Zimbabwe at the beginning of the twenty-first century summons a memory of the worst settler fears from the war-torn 1970s" (203) and notes that white prejudicial déjà vu is paradoxically reinforced by the fact that the land programme was posited as "the

[7]The phrase "Rhodesians never die" is taken from a Rhodesian war jingle by Clem Tholet and Andy Dillon, and features in Fuller, St John and Liebenberg's narratives as a song which children were encouraged to sing during the war; the double irony of the phrase has ensured its frequent quotation – doubly ironic because, despite its hubris, it has proved to be rather too close to the truth, since the mentality it references survives, notably in the existence of nostalgic internet groups. The phrase also appears in the title of Godwin and Hancock's historical analysis of white Rhodesians, '*Rhodesians Never Die': The Impact of War and Political Change on White Rhodesia c.1970-1980*, cited earlier in this chapter.

closing stage of the 1970s liberation war"; indeed, it was named the Third *Chimurenga* (Mtisi et al 213). She then maintains that "the twenty-first century Zimbabwean 'patriotic' discourse[8] is both polemical and parasitic" in relation to Rhodesian discourse (203), and suggests that white writing perpetuates these polemics. Primorac nevertheless acknowledges that, although Godwin's *Mukiwa* and Fuller's *Don't Let's Go* "[bear] traces of the [Rhodesian] master fiction", they also "relate to it in complex and ambivalent ways": they may both be read as imperial romances according to the "spatial rhythm of journey, illumination and return" and the Rhodesian pastoral, but "both may also be read as parodies of those genres" (211). However, her main concern is that the success of Godwin's *Mukiwa* and Fuller's *Don't Let's Go* opened a space for the reiteration of colonial narratives, and she proceeds to examine white-authored texts published since the beginning of the Zimbabwean crisis in which the

> Rhodesian Master fiction is revived and used as a platform for a (more or less explicit) critique of Mugabe's regime. Because they revitalise aspects of a colonial discourse, the critique these narratives perform must be perceived as retroactive. This is to say that it relativises and undermines the value of the very concept of independence – not only for Zimbabwe, but, by implication, for Africa as a whole. (212)

The timing of an emergent trend of Zimbabwean white writing is crucial to Primorac's critique. The Zimbabwe crisis is the period from which Ellie, in *This September Sun*, narrates, and it is the period in which all of the selected texts were published. White memoirs of Rhodesia published in this period have been received with some cynicism by academics, who regard them as opportunistic and believe them to be taking advantage of the international sympathy engendered for white Zimbabweans during the violent land redistribution programme. Concluding her discussion, Primorac singles out *Voluptuous Delights* as an allegory for the "unmasking" of the 'civilised' face of colonialism to reveal its brutality, as well as the novel's "generic predecessors" (223), although her analysis is very brief. Developing Primorac's point, I argue that the two fictional texts, *Voluptuous Delights* and *This September Sun* are self-reflexive regarding white writing tropes.

Rory Pilossof has also been very critical of the Zimbabwean white writing that emerged in the 2000s, in terms of the colonial mythologies that he believes it perpetuates. One of Pilossof's main premises in his article "The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: Land, Race and

[8] See discussion of this term on page 12.

Belonging in the Memoirs of White Zimbabweans" (2009), is that the white writing that followed the land redistribution programme was initiated in 2000 which saw violence against white farmers dominating international headlines and that this writing exploits the "West's fascination with white experience and suffering in Africa" (623). Pilossof draws attention to the tendency of white writers to use facile references to 'Africans' and 'Africa' for the purposes of the international market, a habit which he identifies in Fuller's and St John's writing, with each of their childhood memoir subtitles referring to an 'African' childhood, a point with which I engage (631). The representation of 'Africa' in all of the selected texts in this thesis is addressed in my assessment of the evident inheritances of the tradition of 'white writing' (particularly in Chapter One), and the marketing value of white-authored stories of 'Africa' (particularly in Chapter Two). My principle reservation concerning Pilossof's approach is that he reduces a spectrum of writing to an essential and reiterated theme:

> These books by white Zimbabweans express a grief in not being able to return to the 'Africa' of their memories. The glorious, carefree lives they once led have gone, replaced by the ruination of 'black Africa'. This inability to return nullifies the space to remember or acknowledge how problematic that past was because, apart from being a futile exercise, they have conveniently chosen to forgive themselves and their forefathers for their actions and history in 'Africa'. (636)

My analyses of both Fuller's and St John's writing suggest that Pilossof's generalisation is simplistic, and while valid to a certain extent, not based on a careful reading of individual texts.

D.M. Hughes' book, *Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape, and the Problem of Belonging* (2010), develops a theme introduced in Coetzee's *White Writing*: that "white identification with nature, and its physical and discursive manipulation in order to claim belonging", operate to the exclusion of meaningful relations with black inhabitants (Hammar 219). Hughes' argument is specific to the Zimbabwean context and focuses on settler environmental and ecological activities, nature writing by white Rhodesians/Zimbabweans, and includes a topical assessment of white farmers' relations to land and belonging since the land occupations. Reviews of the text by Amanda Hammar and Dan Wylie, (both 2012) are contributions to white Zimbabwean studies. Both critics acknowledge the value of Hughes' research, but also query the generalising nature of his assertions about the Rhodesian/ Zimbabwean white community. Dan Wylie notes:

> While a certain historical lineage pertained, dating from Cecil John Rhodes' personalized imperial and settler project, the successive stages of Rhodesian history include important shifts in self-conception and senses of belonging which Hughes's habit of skipping across the decades and terrains of Rhodesia-Zimbabwe blurs, and tempts him towards a conceptualization of ''whiteness'' which is more essentializing than contextualized. (186)

Hammar identifies as problematic the manner in which Hughes interprets white farmers' renegotiations of belonging since the land occupations as "mostly instrumental rather than as genuine if messy struggles to make sense of and adjust to dramatically altered conditions, in a place to which they feel deeply connected and committed" (220). She poses that perhaps Hughes is short-sighted in his reluctance to perceive "postcolonial white Africans as never anything but 'Euros' of a kind" (220), and also makes the point that the "project and politics of belonging" has been and is a concern for a diverse group of Zimbabweans based on "political, economic and sometimes ethnic or regional rather than racial terms" (219).

Thus, there is a growing body of work on white Zimbabwean identity, evincing the need to examine problematic historical continuities from the colonial era within this group, as well as a call for a more nuanced approach to whites as a (non-monolithic and shifting) group that is not unique in facing a sense of exclusion from prevailing ideology. While I do not address a broad spectrum of recent white Zimbabwean writing, it seems from Primorac's and Pilossof's critiques that certain of these texts do deserve to be critiqued due to their authors' refusal to relinquish Rhodesian identities and their reiteration of colonial attitudes. However, while the texts I have selected for close analysis do, in certain respects, echo Rhodesian mythology, this evocation is challenged by irony, parody, and a conscious engagement with and reinterpretation of myths. Without wishing to perpetuate "ghettos" (Rushdie 63) in Zimbabwean literature, there is a need to engage with recent white-authored texts as 'white writing', in order to interrogate both the reversion from and progress towards a more inclusive literary field in Zimbabwe.

(vi) **Literary Solutions to Historical Exclusions**

Kizito Muchemwa, in his article "Some Thoughts on History, Memory, and Writing in Zimbabwe", expresses an appreciation of the autobiographical mode in Zimbabwean literature, which he interprets, in a broad sense, to include fictionalised autobiography. In response to

"archival practices which seek to capture and freeze the past through officially sanctioned discourses", autobiographical writing has offered a means of "countering false mediations and incomplete representations found in official historical narratives" (195). Terence Ranger terms the ZANU (PF)-controlled nationalist narrative "patriotic history", proponents of which who regard "as irrelevant any history which is not political" (220), and consider the role of history to be the rendering of "the revolutionary spirit" (235) – that is, they perpetually draw on liberation struggle ideology. One might thus interpret recent autobiographical white writing as constituting a supplementary narrative to patriotic history. Primorac's argument that many recent white memoirs are "neo-Rhodesian" suggests that they are part of a process of freezing the past; however, I regard all the writers I am concerned with, including Fuller and St John, as seriously interrogating white identity, and returning to the past as a necessary part of this process of renegotiation.

In his article "Longing, Belonging, and Self-Making in White Zimbabwean Life Writing", on the spate of recent white Zimbabwean memoirs (an analysis which includes Fuller, St John, Wendy Kann and others but focuses primarily on Godwin's *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun*), Tony Simoes Da Silva sceptically depicts the relationship of the publication industry to such texts. He poses:

> [T]hey [white memoirs] raise interesting questions about the role and function of such peculiarly personal narratives in the creation of a national discourse. Thus we might concern ourselves with the issue of why there are no black Zimbabwean life writing narratives on the shelves of bookshops near us . . . these [white] narratives, relatively rare and problematic as they are, now act as one of the central media through which Zimbabwean culture are accessed in the 'West'. (para 21)

I concur that that the reception of such texts as iconic of Zimbabwean society and experience is highly problematic, and that it is true that writers benefit personally from the popularity of the white African tale. However, Muchemwa notes that "Race, ethnicity, and gender have always marked the boundaries of memory and history in Zimbabwe" (201) and suggests further that, despite the fact that "black and white traditions in Zimbabwean literature rarely write to each other and often write across each other, their apparent ideological and stylistic isolation masks the sharing of common concerns", such as "a preoccupation with history and memory" (196). Thus, while white memoirs might be read as partial perspectives, they are nevertheless related to

those of others. Alexandra Fuller, perhaps sensitive to critiques such as Da Silva's, herself makes the point that "Others must write their stories. All the broken pieces together would make a beautiful mosaic" (Hinzen para).

Indeed, others *have* told their stories. While life writing seems to be more popular among white writers, there is a range of internationally acclaimed recent black writing (notably mostly short stories) depicting the textures of contemporary life in Zimbabwe: Brian Chikwava's short story "Seventh Street Alchemy", which won the Caine Prize in 2004, and his novel *Harare North* (2009), which was long-listed for the Orwell Prize for political writing; Valerie Tagwira's novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2007); NoViolet Bulawayo's 2011 Caine Prize-winning short story "Hitting Budapest"; and Petinah Gappah's short story collection *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009), which was was short-listed for the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award and won the Guardian First Book Award in 2009. Moreover, the numerous short story collections[9] published by Weaver Press and 'amabooks are multivocal. Nevertheless, as Da Silva argues, white African memoirs receive disproportionate attention:

> Whether they like it or not, the readership they reach and possibly target continues to see Africa as an exotic, mysterious *and dangerous* background for self narratives lived on the cusp of dramatic historical changes in which the narrator's skin colour simply cannot but be a central issue both to the telling of a personal story and to the experiences the narrative recounts. It is hard, if not impossible to write as a white person about and in contemporary Africa without immediately getting caught up in the web of previous discourses on the continent. In this sense, I am less interested in indicting this kind of narrative or their authors for engaging in the (re)narrativising of Africa that is inextricable from a European ideological framework than I am in examining the range of subject positions available to, and taken up by white African writers who adopt life writing as a form of expression.
>
> (para 34, emphasis in text)

Clearly, the politics of whiteness is unavoidable with regard to white life writing in an African context: as Da Silva suggests, writers in this field cannot help but become "caught up in the web of previous discourses". The question, then, that I am interested in answering, is how the authors I have selected locate themselves in the "range of subject positions available", that is, how these

[9] These include, published by 'amabooks, *Short Writings From Bulawayo* (2003); *Short Writings From Bulawayo II* (2005)*; Short Writings From Bulawayo* III (2006); *Long Time Coming: Short Writings From Zimbabwe* (2008); and, published by Weaver Press, *Writing Still* (2003); *Writing Now* (2005); *Laughing Now* (2007);*Women Writing Zimbabwe* (2008); *Mazambuko* (2011); *Writing Free* (2011).

writers shape their narratives in terms of the patterns of 'white writing' and, in particular, how autobiographical and fictional texts compare in this regard.

(vii) **Gender**

Very little work has been done specifically on Zimbabwean white women writers as a group (although there is an abundance of work on Doris Lessing). Marion Walton's Masters dissertation: *Empire, Nation, Gender and Romance: The Novels of Cynthia Stockley (1872-1936) and Gertrude Page (1873-1922)*, completed in 1997, examines the writing of popular Southern Rhodesian novelists Cynthia Stockley and Gertrude Page. She explores the "interrelations between discourses of imperialism, nationalism, gender and sexuality in the novels, as they gravitate towards and away from the domestic and heroic extremes of the [novel] genre" (55). Julie Cairnie's article "Women and the Literature of Settlement and Plunder: Toward an Understanding of the Zimbabwean Land Crisis" (2007) discusses the "highly contested and gendered ideological arena" of the home in Zimbabwe (166). The article is focused on "four white women writers' negotiations of the problematic of land, gender, race, and home over a hundred-year period", and traces the "formation and reformation of white women's claims to belong, to be at home, in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe" (166). The writers and texts Cairnie discusses are: Olive Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1896); Jeannie Boggie's *Experiences of Rhodesia's Pioneer Women* (1938); Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and *Under My Skin* (1994); and Cathy Buckle's *African Tears* (2001) and *Beyond Tears* (2002). Cairnie comments that both Buckle and Lessing "re-imagine the place of the white woman on the Zimbabwean landscape in innovative ways" (185) – Buckle, by staying on in Zimbabwe and adapting, and Lessing, by responding from afar to Zimbabwean crises, such as land redistribution and poverty, in a way that is not mediated by her white femininity (185). All of the texts I am concerned with are written from the perspective of women who have left Zimbabwe and they *are* mediated by white femininity. Moreover, they all present a longing for a stable sense of home. The fact that the authors live outside the country means that they are not involved in the process of renegotiating a life in Zimbabwe but rather they, to borrow Salman Rushdie's phrase, "re-imagine the homeland" from the diaspora, a phenomenon explored in Chapter 3, in regard to the protagonist of *This September Sun*.

The texts all grapple with the myths of the ideal home and nuclear family, especially in the historical contexts in which they are set or the periods in which they were written: the fallacies of white Rhodesia and the destabilizing impact of the Zimbabwe crisis. On reading the texts it is apparent that both historical events/settings and the narrated self/protagonist are located secondarily in relation to the nuclear family which forms the centre of the dramas. While a family focus is obviously not unique to female-authored texts – for instance, Peter Godwin also understands events through their impact on his family – these family narratives are gender-inflected due to the roles and relationships which are key to the self/protagonist as a female in the family and broader society. One of the features of all the female-authored texts in this study is that the narrated self/protagonist is always defined in relation to a significant other. For Fuller, this is her charismatic and mentally unstable mother; for St John, her once hero-worshipped but ultimately disappointing father; for Nyree in *Voluptuous Delights*, it is her beloved but prematurely deceased sister, Cia, and for Ellie, in *This September Sun*, it is her estranged and deceased grandmother, Evelyn. All the texts reveal traumatic stories of family tensions and losses, such as the death of siblings, divorce and mental illness. It seems that the family, more than the nation, is the problematic site in which the self is located. The fact that personal and family history are inseparable, in many ways, from the white Rhodesian lifestyle, sets up an uncomfortable position for the authors of the autobiographies to negotiate in challenging their pasts. To compromise the family by offering a political critique of their values is a subversion of the traditional female role of family protector, concerned with the maintenance of the domestic and private realm. To illustrate this point, Alexandra Fuller claims that her father refuses to read her account *Don't Lets Go to the Dogs Tonight*, due to what he describes as her "liberal, bra-burning, bean-eating politics" (Isaacson para 20). Fuller set an important precedent in writing an exposé of her own family's dysfunctional reality: the female-authored texts which followed her original memoir all reveal a concern with family dysfunction, especially in relation to wider social malaise. This pattern demands further investigation in order to fill a current gap in Zimbabwean literary studies, and gender and family concerns form a continual thread in the three chapters which follow, as outlined below.

(viii) **Overview of the Chapters**

While there are certain concepts that are relevant to all the texts, I have made a strategic choice to organise texts into chapters with distinct thematic focuses. Most obviously, the narrative device of childhood recollected is consistent across the selected texts, but it is introduced and given particular attention only in Chapter One, because the two texts in focus typify 'colonial pastoral childhoods' in significant respects. In this chapter, childhood is contextualised as a literary tradition in relation to the pastoral mode from which it originates. Further, the white African farm, colonial pastoral and the problematic notion of the ideal nuclear family are interrogated in this chapter. Chapter One thus performs a contextualising role for the chapters that follow; in the latter, however, there is some continuity with the themes explored in the first chapter: representations of childhood, the family, land and belonging, and nostalgic recollections of the past, but there are other more specific focuses in these chapters, as outlined below.

In Chapter One I offer a comparative analysis of two Rhodesian childhood farm narratives: Lauren St John's *Rainbow's End* and Lauren Liebenberg's *The Voluptuous Delights of Peanut Butter and Jam*. I explore these texts by interrogating the "paradise lost" motif they both display, and how this motif relates to their different capacities as autobiography and fiction, respectively. In addition, I discuss them in relation to previous criticism on representations of the colonial pastoral and colonial childhood in white writing in Southern Africa.

Chapter Two presents a stylistic examination of Alexandra Fuller's autobiographical trilogy*: Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, *Scribbling the Cat* and *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness*. I examine the confessional modes adopted by Fuller, and attempt to address the discrepancy which surfaces in the reception of this author's writing as both honest and dishonest. I regard the three texts, taken together, as drawing attention to autobiography as a necessarily incomplete process, and examine the contestation over family history which is particularly apparent in Fuller's third book.

Chapter Three explores Bryony Rheam's *This September Sun*, focusing on its deconstruction of form and identity. I discuss the author's self-reflexivity regarding the writing process, as reflected in the protagonist Ellie, who is a student of literature, and draw attention to the blurring of genre distinctions in the novel. I locate the novel ultimately as a female *Bildungsroman*, tracing Ellie's re-negotiation of personal and national identity from the diaspora,

and explore both the myth of authentic identity and the problem of needing to belong with people and to place. The Conclusion provides an overview of the full thesis, in which threads are gathered, some general conclusions are made, and the limitations of this particular study noted.

Chapter 1

(Anti) Pastoral Colonial Childhoods: A Comparative Analysis of Lauren St John's *Rainbow's End: A Memoir of Childhood, War and an African Farm* and Lauren Liebenberg's *The Voluptuous Delights of Peanut Butter and Jam*

1.1 Introduction

Rainbow's End and *Voluptuous Delights* are narratives of Rhodesian farm-based childhoods. In this chapter I discuss these texts in relation to the pastoral mode. Peter Marinelli identifies the contemporary pastoral rather broadly as a mode in which: "memory and imagination should conspire to render a not too distant past of comparative innocence as more pleasurable than a harsh present" (3), and suggests that its definitive characteristic is nostalgia. I trace the development and different trajectories of the pastoral from the Biblical myth of the Fall from Paradise, to the idealised representation of rural life, the childhood genre, and the colonial pastoral. While the pastoral is by definition idealistic, and there is a long tradition of critique of this aspect, the colonial setting makes particularly problematic an idealised literary representation of the 'pastoral childhood'. The pastoral mode in colonial representations of Africa has thus been criticised as an attempt to forge a sense of belonging in dubious circumstances (see J.M Coetzee *White Writing*; D.M. Hughes) and the colonial childhood novel/memoir has been similarly criticised as a means of projecting a position of innocence in relation to the social oppressions of colonialism (see Ashleigh Harris; Michiel Heyns). This chapter addresses these concerns. *Rainbow's End* and *Voluptuous Delights* employ a 'Paradise Lost' framework to structure, retrospectively, colonial childhoods and a fall from innocence – St John implicitly in her memoir and Liebenberg explicitly in her novel, which is a pseudo-memoir. The 'loss of innocence' narrative has been identified as clichéd in white Southern African memoirs (Heyns). However, Liedeke Plate describes myth as functioning on the principle of "repetition with a difference", adding that "This built-in reproduction mechanism makes that myth is never fixed but is in permanent flux, changeable and changing with every telling" (29). Thus, though both *Rainbow's End* and *Voluptuous Delights* borrow a well-worn trope, in certain respects each is unique.

1.1.1 **Paradise Lost: The Garden of Eden**

The Garden of Eden is *the* seminal Christian pastoral myth, and The Fall and banishment of Adam and Eve from Paradise is the archetypal Western narrative of mankind's tragic fallibility. This foundational myth of The Fall from Eden expresses a human nostalgia for an imaginary paradise, as if perfection once were known, but forfeited. Even projected utopias are, in a sense, nostalgic: heaven is a refracted image of Eden, and it represents compensation for the consequences of The Fall for humanity, that is, in John Milton's words, death and "all our woe" (Paradise Lost line 3). Joseph Campbell describes Eden as the "Garden of Timeless Unity" (56) and the apple as the "knowledge of opposites" (55) – of the dualities of man and woman, God and human, good and evil. The Fall thus depicts the transition from conjunction to disjunction. There has always been ambivalence in the ostensible moment of the human acquisition of knowledge. On the one hand, the serpent has been understood as Satan, the beguiler utilising "critical, negative Reason", in which case the eating of the fruit is associated with the human shame of sexuality and sin (Brunel 401). On the other, the story of Eden is sometimes interpreted as the "period of alienation" an interpretation initiated by Byron in *Cain*, in which case The Fall depicts the empowerment of humans, through knowledge, to exercise free will (394). Over the centuries, the serpent has developed clusters of characteristics: the rhetorician, the deceiver, the seducer, and the image of Eve has also evolved with changing cultural representations of women. She has been regarded as the epitome of woman: mother, victim of the serpent's guile, sexual object, and seducer, and has been depicted both lovingly and misogynistically – the latter since she is held responsible for the downfall of man(kind) (398-401).

A further comment ought to be made regarding Eden and the ideological representation of Africa. J.M. Coetzee, in *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South* Africa, argues that Africa as a site for colonisation was perceived not as a 'new world' but an 'old world'; the natives' "way of life occasioned curiosity or disgust but never admiration" (2). Thus, rather than a Garden of Eden, it threatened to be an "anti-Garden, a garden ruled over by the serpent, where the wilderness takes root once again in men's hearts" (3). In this regard, both St John and Liebenberg's texts describe irrational and ahistorical responses to Africa and Africans from whites.

1.1.2 **The Pastoral Mode**

Abrams defines the traditional pastoral as "A deliberately conventional poem expressing an urban poet's nostalgic image of the supposed peace and simplicity of the life of shepherds and other rural folk in an idealized natural setting" (240). This classical representation of rural life as a blessedly simple idyll has a long history of critique, subversion and adaptation from within the Western tradition – for example, John Gay's parody *Shepherd's Week* and Wordsworth's "Michael, A Pastoral Poem" (241) present a more realistic approach to rural life.

As regards the African colonial pastoral, Susan Smit-Marais and Marita Wendell describe several features of the South African farm novel or *plaasroman*[10]. The farm space is traditionally representative of "colonial and patriarchal power structures" (212), and the family nucleus upholds these structures. Nature "is usually associated with pureness, growth and life, but sometimes also with decline, destruction and death", and it is linked with a psychological landscape in order to capture the "symbiotic relationship between man and nature" (214). Another key feature is the representation (or non-representation) of labour (216). Coetzee describes how the pastoral was adapted to colonial circumstances in such a way as to elide black labourers, since representing their contribution would undermine the colonials' romanticised relationship to the land. Thus, in the colonial pastoral, the black man tends to be a mere "shadowy presence flitting across the stage now and then" (5).

Critiques of the colonial pastoral have understood it to be more complex than the idealisation of man's relation to nature that emerges in the Western tradition, since the colonial pastoral involves a process of symbolically laying claim to land historically stolen. Coetzee writes of the peculiar problems that colonials faced in their representations of the South[ern] African landscape. The cultural foreignness of the colonials to this landscape prevented a sense of natural belonging; the relief and climate did not accord with the European pastoral vision, but was massive in scale and often inhospitable to agrarian settlement (7). Coetzee notes the failure of the English language to adequately represent Africa, and draws on the idea that language representing place ought to be somehow "authentic", and to entail "a framework in which language, consciousness, and landscape are interrelated" (7). The romantic African colonial

[10] While the Afrikaans term *plaasroman* is specific to the South African context, the general characteristics that Smit-Marais and Wendell identify are applicable to the colonial Rhodesian farm novel.

pastoral tradition forges a sense of belonging to place, but represses the presence of black people, of those that did have the cultural consciousness to relate to the landscape. Coetzee perceives two conflicting "dream topograph[ies]" (6) in the South African pastoral: the domesticated landscape and Africa as "oldest of continents", resisting understanding (7). D.M. Hughes notes that in the African Savannah colonies, white writing is generally founded on "an environmentalist literature" and that, "by loving the land, settlers put out of their minds the social exile in which they lived. Colonial literature . . . promoted a selective assimilation to Africa" (4). Thus, according to this line of criticism, white writing, drawing on the African colonial pastoral, relates and creates a distorted sense of belonging in Africa.

1.1.3 **The Childhood Ideal**

Richard Coe argues that the principle motivation for writing about childhood is "the desire to recapture something of a paradise which has been lost", a claim which places the childhood genre in the pastoral tradition (62). The connection between childhood and the pastoral is "implicit from the first Idylls of Theocritus", due to the "supposed innocence" of the young (Marinelli 75). However, the imagined purity of both the shepherd and the child has frequently displayed a tendency towards "hedonistic and wanton innocence" (79), due to these figures' closeness to nature. Thus, while Christians adopted the pastoral in the Bible, in general pastoral innocence does not necessarily refer to 'purity' in a moral sense but to a lack of self-consciousness – a lack of 'civilised' restraint regarding instincts and impulses, a blissful freedom from societal controls.

The cultural ideal of childhood innocence has enabled irony and humour to emerge against this expectation, as, for example, in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and has also been thoroughly challenged by texts such as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (Marinelli 80-81), which represents children as capable of brutality. Just as the shepherd of the classic Pastoral has become outdated, so too has the simple ideal of the child:

> Whether modern psychology or simple experience have taught us better, we are no longer accustomed to see childhood as a rapturous and lyrical existence, and we are probably in a post-Arcadian phase of the pastoral of childhood. (81)

It is evident that the ideal of the innocent child lingers, however, in that depictions of children as ambiguous figures tend to provoke humour or shock, as is evident, for example, in responses to Joyce and Golding's novels, respectively.

Although childhood, retrospectively, may be accorded mythic qualities, the experience of youth may in reality involve genuine bliss. Children have the capacity to engage wholly with the present, and offer a contrast to the 'adult' world of dislocation. A capacity for the sensuous and imaginative, in contrast with the adult's necessarily more rational approach to the world, gains children easy access to rapture: "To the child, a stone or a shaft of sunlight may contain all the joy and mystery of a world new-created" (Coe 113). The impressionable child is less world-weary than the experienced adult. However, the nurturing and flourishing of the child's inherent capacity for vivacity is dependent on environment. The sentimentalisation of childhood in general is thus problematic, and it must be noted that the children in *Rainbow's End* and *Voluptuous Delights* are relatively privileged, at the expense of their black counterparts. The childhoods at issue are nostalgically represented, although this is undermined, to some extent, by the fact that the children are deliberately depicted, not simply as happy and innocent, but also as sensuously indulgent and ignorant.

The colonial childhood is a complex matter, because the notion of childhood 'innocence' comes into question when the child is inevitably inducted into the values and involved in the daily processes of a society underpinned by racism and inequality. A child is a naive participant, but a participant nonetheless. According to Ashleigh Harris, writing about Peter Godwin's *Mukiwa* and Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, the depiction of the white childhood self can be regarded as a device implemented to avoid grappling with the complexities of colonial historical culpability:

> Nostalgia for a Zimbabwean childhood allows the writer to imagine a space of political and racial innocence and naïveté; a prelapserian state of unquestioned belonging as a white child in Zimbabwe or Rhodesia. (108)

However, both *Rainbow's End* and *Voluptuous Delights* depict 'innocence' as an ambivalent attribute (as, indeed, does Fuller's *Don't Let's Go*, which I explore in Chapter Three), and this ambivalence will be a key element of this chapter's argument.

1.2 **The Memoir/Pseudo-Memoir Distinction**

Rainbow's End is a memoir, as indicated by its subtitle, whereas *Voluptuous Delights* is a *fictional* memoir, a significant difference with important consequences both in terms of how the texts were written and how they are read. Susannah Radstone discusses the defining features of the confession, a particular kind of autobiography, and a category within which *Rainbow's End* may be classified. She quotes E.L. Stelzig's reference to the split of the self into the narrator and protagonist in confessional texts as a "paradoxical one of identity and difference", and explains: "The narrator's confessions concern the activities, thoughts and feelings of a central protagonist who is separated from the narrator by time, age and experience – a separation between the narrated and narrating 'I' (171). The distance between these differently positioned selves may expand and contract:

> Thus while an ironic narrational tone implies distance between narrator and central protagonist, a more sympathetic tone implies closeness. A relationship of absolute identity between the two is unlikely, however, for a temporal difference must separate central protagonist and narrator in order for the narrator to confess earlier activities, thought and feelings.[11] (171)

Rainbow's End is written by the adult St John about her childhood. The author and the narrator can be located as the same voice, but there is a significant gap between the author/narrator and protagonist. The space between these selves shifts, as a result of either close identification of the narrator with the child protagonist, or ironic distance from her, the latter sometimes with humorous effect. St John at times provides overt commentary on the occurrences she relates, thus emphasising the gap between author and subject. In my analysis, I refer to the narrator as St John, but refer at times simply to "Lauren", the protagonist in the text, to avoid conflating the adult and authorial self with the younger, experiencing self. By contrast, *Voluptuous Delights*, as a fictional memoir, avoids the paradox of the split self because the author is distinct from the narrator and the protagonist. The prologue, which announces that the story to follow is retrospective, is narrated by the adult Nyree, but the narrative proper is focalised by the child

[11] This quality of temporal paradox is not unique to the confessional, and applies to the autobiographical format more generally. However, it is particularly pertinent to confessionals due to the centrality of the pivotal transition of the self in this subgenre, which is why Stelzig's quote is especially useful in relation to St John's text.

Nyree, thus avoiding an ambiguous concurrence of different 'selves' while foregrounding the retrospective sense elemental to memoir.

While the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is an important one, there is a blurred boundary between these modes, especially regarding the two texts in focus. In response to a question on this issue, in a personal email, Lauren St John emphasises the distinction between non-fiction and fiction in her writing, but acknowledges their overlap:

> As a journalist, I am very anti the blurring of fiction and non fiction when it comes to fact. Therefore I researched my own life as I would have researched a biography, double and triple checking events with the people involved to try to make sure it was as accurate and honest as possible. Stylistically, on the other hand, I'm a big fan of books like Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, which apply the techniques of fiction to non fiction to create suspense and colour, etc. So in that way there is a definite and intentional blurring of the lines between the two.

She explains here that, while she aimed for accuracy of content, the actual writing of her memoir borrowed techniques from fiction. On the one hand, St John consulted the significant people concerned before producing her memoir, and this not only suggests the imperative of non-fiction to uphold authenticity, but also draws attention to the fact that real people and events are represented and that there are stakes in their representation which might constrain the latter. On the other, the narrative of *Rainbow's End* traces a development in consciousness, in the literary pattern of a *bildung*: anecdotes are told, adventures are recounted, and tensions are built up, reach a climax, and are resolved. In Chapter Three, I explore the fact that the publication of Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Let's Go* put pressure on her familial relationships, especially with her mother, and these tensions resulted in her latter reconciliatory book, *Cocktail Hour*. The unease of relating and exposing the St John family's private life is also evident in *Rainbow's End*, whereas Liebenberg, writing in fictional mode, is free from such concerns.

In an interview, Liebenberg explains that, in writing her novel, she drew from her personal experience of living in Rhodesia (her family immigrated to South Africa during her late childhood), but to what extent we are uncertain. According to the author, *Voluptuous Delights* originated in her "memories, which gradually drifted into borrowed memories" (Van Eeden para 2), and she locates the family in her story in the lush Vumba area of the Eastern Highlands of the country, "a little wistfulness" on her part, she claims, considering that she grew up in "dusty mining towns" (para 2). Fantasies are often inspired by memories and, in contrast with St John,

Liebenberg is free to follow her whims, with no obligation towards truth-telling. Further, the allegorical nature of the story recounted is particularly suited to the parodist form and Liebenberg ironically represents colonial discourse and mythology, especially through the figure of Oupa, a caricature of colonial patriarchy. While there are significant differences between the two texts as non-fiction and fiction, both *Rainbow's End* and *Voluptuous Delights* are historically located in the last days of white Rhodesia, and can also be read as stories.

1.2.1 *Rainbow's End*: Memoir and Story

St John re-engages with her past as a child immersed in white Rhodesian society from a better-informed adult perspective. Historical references lace the narrative and provide a framework within which to organise individual memory. Maps of Rhodesia and the farm, Rainbow's End, precede the narrative, suggesting the careful mapping process of autobiographical research that St John describes in her comments quoted earlier. The prologue tells the story of the murders of several members of the Forrester family at the farm, by "terrorists or nationalists, depending on your point of view" (xiii), during the war of the 1970s. The Forrester story acts as representative of many other stories at the time, and encapsulates the deepest fears of whites during this war period, fears renewed at the time the text was published, that is, during the violent land redistribution campaign in the early 2000s. The tragedy of the Forrester murders is also intimately linked to St John's own past, as one of the boys killed was her classmate, and the Forresters were the previous occupants of Rainbow's End, before her family moved there. St John interviewed the wife/mother of the murder victims, Camilla, and thus the initial 'Rainbow's End' story we encounter in the prologue is based on someone else's traumatic memories. Following the prologue, St John begins her chronological story by relating how her own family: her parents and sister, Lisa, returned to Rhodesia in 1975: "Most people left Rhodesia to get away from the War. *We* came back for it" (3). This return followed a one-year attempt to settle in Cape Town in South Africa, and was prompted by the offering of a job to St John's father, as a commercial farm manager in Rhodesia (13). For him, returning was a relief, because he felt a duty to partake in the war, and he had felt a deep connection to the country and its "unshowy loveliness" ever since he was conscripted there in 1960, coming from the Eastern Cape in South Africa (4). St John's mother has pioneer roots in Rhodesia; her great-grandfather was an

associate of Cecil John Rhodes (3). But it was St John's father who was dedicated to the country, while her mother spent much of her time pining over Cape Town and, later, travelling the world. St John regards her father as her role model in this regard: "He thought of Rhodesia as the Promised Land and he'd brought me up to do the same" (4). On returning, the family spent from 1975-8 at Giant Estate in Gadzema, in what is described as a run-down farmhouse. In this section St John recounts the experience of boarding school, the intensification of the war, and with it, war propaganda. In 1978, the family moved to Rainbow's End, also in Gadzema, and were there until 1980, the end of the war, and the coming of Independence. For various reasons, this farm had a very significant impact on St John, as is reflected in the title of the text: "When I think of my life, it is as a life divided: before Rainbow's End and after" (107). Rainbow's End is described as a child's paradise, but the family's time there also marks the intensification of the war and danger for white farmers, and the last time the family is together as a unit.

1.2.2 *Voluptuous Delights*: a Pseudo-Memoir

Liebenberg, writing in fictional mode, is free to use allegory, metaphor and fantasy. However, her narrative is prefaced by a "Historical Note" summarising the political context of the Zimbabwean War for Independence, and the novel is inseparable from the time and place in which it is set: as with St John, a white family farm during the war. For the most part, Liebenberg is successful in incorporating historical and social commentary, despite the naive child narrator, by having her re-tell stories told by an adult figure, or relay overheard conversations and events observed from the sidelines. However, in an interview with Annete Bayne, Liebenberg foregrounds the fictionality of the story; she states that she is "hoping that the backdrop, integral as it is to the story, remains just another strain, albeit one that elevates the book above its domestic themes" (para 14).

Voluptuous Delights is focalised and narrated from a child's perspective, Nyree's, in the immediacy of the present tense, although, in the prologue, the story to follow is revealed as time past. In this prologue, the adult Nyree reflects back:

> It was raining, I remember, the day he came to the Vumba, the lush rain of Africa, winged ant hatchlings swarming from the steaming earth.
> Now, years later, the rain billows with my ghosts of shadow and light and sadness.

> It takes me back to my forest, to the clutches of golden orb spiderlings supping from their yolk sacs on a nest of silk, to the strictured breathing of the vines as they strangle one another, to the praying mantis that delicately, greedily, feasts upon her lover as they are gripped in coitus on dripping leaves.
> It was so long ago, though, and I was only a child. I wonder how much of what I remember is the truth. What I do remember is that once he came a kind of madness bloomed in our garden of innocence. (1)

The prologue is thus crucial in identifying the novel as a pseudo-memoir and it puts a nostalgic lens on the narrative that follows. It draws attention to the complexities and fallibilities of memory, and how recollected emotions can distort perceptions, for the narrator, Nyree – if not Liebenberg herself – seeks to recall her past.

The duration of the narrative proper is set on the farm where the inseparable sisters, Nyree (between eight and nine), and her little sister, Cia, (between seven and eight), have always lived. The land has been passed down through the generations. Nyree paraphrases her Oupa's version of this story, and Liebenberg in effect parodies colonial patriarchy:

> Great Grandfather had to toil for years to hew the farm from the savage African land. It was his blood, sweat and tears that watered the earth, and every generation since has borne his legacy. It is Cia's and my duty to bear Great-Grandfather's legacy too, when the time comes, although it is a crying shame we aren't sons. (8)

The fact that they are girls enables Nyree and Cia to be somewhat peripheral to the patriarchal colonial legacy, and positions the former as an observer. The girls explore the lush forest on the land, seek out adventure and magic, watch the activities of the farm workers, and sometimes play games with the labourers' children at the compound. The sisters go to a little farm school and occasionally make trips into town, where they are awed by its sophistication. Nyree and Cia's father is usually absent due to his involvement in the war, but comes home occasionally: "Dad is a hero and a stranger" (26). Although not often present in the story, it is apparent that he is an intransigent, who, towards the end of the war, when it is becoming clear to most that black rule is inevitable, joins the conservative Rhodesian Action Party (121). In his absence, the girls' mother is under considerable strain, trying to run both the farm and the family: "When he's home, I remember the mother she was – a shyer, gentler mother" (28).

A sense of imminent danger is introduced when, on a visit to Great Zimbabwe, Cia is warned by a n'anga:

> There is one who will come among you who will bring suffering, and the one will be the jackal. You, you, little one, must not fight the jackal. You are like the mouse – you must run from your enemy, little mouse, run, run for cover. (61)

Shortly thereafter, Ronin, their illegitimate cousin, comes to stay with them on the farm. We learn eventually that Ronin is the offspring of an extramarital affair: Angélique (Oupa's wife and the girls' grandmother) had an illegitimate daughter by Oupa's now dead and despised brother, Seamus, and Ronin is her son. Ronin, as predicted by the n'anga, proves to be a threat to the girls' well-being and, tragically, to Cia's life. He represents the inter-generational legacy of family sins, a more intimate counterpart to the theme of the inheritance of the wrongs of colonialism.

1.3 *Rainbow's End* and *Voluptuous Delights:* Colonial, Pastoral Childhoods

While the nostalgic childhood memoir can be regarded as a subset of the pastoral, in *Rainbow's End* and *Voluptuous Delights* the childhoods described are literally pastoral in the sense that they occur on farms. Richard Coe identifies a significant aspect of childhood as being that it occurs in a seemingly closed world, although there is a sense of the beyond, perhaps intimated by a road or river which leads elsewhere and which represents other, as-yet unrealised possibilities (205). In both Liebenberg and St John's texts, the farms are depicted as such large areas for a child to live in that the boundaries are indistinct: an environment of seemingly endless potential. St John describes Rainbow's End:

> If ever a paradise had been invented for a child, it was Rainbow's End . . . The garden alone was a feast of exotic fruit . . . The farm itself was a thousand acres . . . [with] miles of sandy roads to gallop along and dams to swim the horses in . . . The game gathered at the waterholes at sunrise and sunset . . . the river was a mesmerisingly beautiful and endlessly changing playground . . . For the first time in our lives we found ourselves in direct communion with nature. (116-7)

In a similar vein, in *Voluptuous Delights* the farm on which Nyree and Cia reside is described as expansive:

> Our days on the farm where we were both born have come to have a sameness about them, a metronome of ritual metring out the well-worn path of the sun across the faded blue sky. And there's nowhere but the farm . . . Dad says it's only twenty miles down the dirt road to Umtali, but twenty miles sure feels long when you're hanging on the back of the Landie. (4)

The scope of this natural space lends itself to adventure. Traditionally, in white African writing, the romantic vision of farm life has to account for the wildness of the landscape. In the short story "The Old Chief Mshlanga" (1951), Doris Lessing describes the 'dilemma' experienced by a white child growing up in the African bush:

> This child could not see a msasa tree, or the thorn, for what they were. Her books held tales of alien fairies, her rivers ran slow and peaceful, and she knew the names of the little creatures that lived in English streams, when the words 'the veld' meant strangeness, though she could remember nothing else . . . (49)

This comment accords with Coetzee's analysis of the schizophrenic nature of the white African's engagement with the land: imprinting a European mindscape onto the African context, in reality belonging to neither. Lessing, like Coetzee, draws attention to the problem of language here – that, for the African colonial child, there is a dissonance between the immediate environment and the language in which it is framed, such that the immediate environment is made foreign by European ideas. Children's story-books, imported from Europe, foster a European cultural repertoire even in a child born in Africa. This is a process encouraged by parents who continue to identify with European culture, especially because local languages and cultures are often ignored and/or denigrated in a colonial setting. In both *Rainbow's End* and *Voluptuous Delights*, the girl protagonists are influenced by the books they read, specifically in relation to how they imagine their surroundings. These imaginings of place will be explored below.

1.3.1 Landscape and Place in *Rainbow's End*

In *Rainbow's End*, Lauren anticipates her return to Rhodesia from Cape Town will provide an opportunity to experience adventures such as those she has read about:

> On my lap were my favourite books, their covers faded and scarred. A dozen times over the past year I'd pressed my palm against their pages and wished that the lives of the characters, the pea-soup fogs on smuggler-crowded moors, the starlit beds of heather and bracken, the wild gallops over mountains and deserts, would flow into my fingertips by osmosis. Now I would no longer have to. Now I had the promise of a horse of my own and life on a farm, all in the middle of a war with terrorists. (6)

The particular scenes described above are, on the whole, typically British, but they also suggest generic adventure tales in which the specificities of place are simply details extraneous to the fantastical plot. It is ironic that the marketing of *Rainbow's End* caters for a reception of the text in similar fashion. The cover of the edition I have includes a review comment: "*Rainbow's End* is a lyrical, haunting story of family, love and loss in a land as dangerous as it is beautiful" (Jeanette Walls). In Lauren's early adolescence, American country and western music similarly provides a background for a war she experiences as analogous to "the battleground of the old West, where lone ranchers defended themselves against shadowy but well-armed assassins" (132). It is not only children that fantasise in this way, however. Lauren's mother is determined to give her children what she has projected as the ideal English childhood, *despite* their African context. The move to the luxuriant setting of Rainbow's End, after the dilapidated house at Giant Estate, where she was miserable, thus seems to open a paradise for the whole family: "Rainbow's End was going to be the fulfilment of the fantasy that Lis and I grow up in an Enid Blyton idyll of niceness" (119). The pleasures of life at Rainbow's End, as will be explored later, do echo Enid Blyton's adventure stories, featuring fun and delectable food, but are eerily shadowed by the historical context of colonialism and the war which retrospectively palls such pleasures.

Unlike her mother, Lauren is portrayed as loving the bush, and she is equally at home exploring the farm on horseback or on foot. In this regard, her father is her role model; as a farmer and cavalry soldier he is dedicated to his duties. In their comfortable sense of belonging, both Lauren and her father are depicted as spiritually at home in the environment. St John recalls how, at Rainbow's End,

> the bush turned a deep, dense black long before the sky ever did and the silhouettes of the acacias became gilt-edged or shot through with scarlet . . . how the aromatic smell of the vegetation turned cool and sweet at dusk. (115)

She describes this as the beginning of "really noticing Africa", although at this point it is clear that 'Africa' refers primarily to landscape. Later, after Independence, Lauren acknowledges the political and social ignorance of her younger self, and she embarks on a concerted effort to 'let Africa in' in a way that includes African people and culture (212).

St John describes the petty racisms she is constantly exposed to, such as anecdotes and jokes, and the racist derision she witnesses among the adults around her, including a mental list

she accumulates of "Accepted facts about Africans", such as "If you spoiled them, they got cheeky" and "They were good at singing and dancing" (23). Farm workers and servants are the only black people present in the daily social and domestic life of the family, and relationships with domestic servants St John recalls as complex. Lauren engages in rudimentary friendly conversation with the workers on the farm in the pidgin language of Chilapalapa (or Fanagalo). Maud, the family maid, is described by St John as her little sister Lisa's and her "second mother" (17). However, this bond is undermined by the colonial race and class system. Anne McClintock outlines the complex but significant place of the African woman as domestic worker in the colonial family:

> The power of black women is a colonial secret. White domestic life enfolds itself about this secret, as its dreaded, inner shape. Displaced and denied, its pressure is nonetheless felt everywhere, managed by multiple rituals of negation and abasement, suffused with unease. The invisible strength of black women presses everywhere on white life so that the energy required to deny it takes the shape of neurosis. Laboring by day to uphold the white cult of domesticity, black women are shunted by night to tiny backyard *khaya's* (homes) without water, sanitation, heat or light. The furtive intimacies between black women and their white charges; the forbidden liaisons between black women and their white male employers; the fraught relations of acrimony, strained intimacy, mistrust, condescension, occasional friendships and coerced subservience that shape relations between African women and their white mistresses ensure that the colonial home is a contest zone of acute ambivalence. (271)

St John intimates some of this ambivalence when she describes Maud preparing to leave work, at night-time:

> Maud padded through with her Bata takkies and stopped by the dining-room table. She clasped her hands in front of her apron. 'Good night, *bas*.'
> 'Night, Maud.' A muscle of dislike twitched in Dad's jaw. He turned around, but not really.
> 'Night, Madam.'
> 'Goodnight, Maudie, thank you,' my mother said vaguely. (120)

Maud's body language towards her employers connotes servility, and the response from St John's father is hostile whilst her mother is somewhat patronising and indifferent. However, the girls share a more intimate communication with her:

> Over their heads, I caught Maud's eye and grinned. She was trying not to laugh. Every evening we went through the same routine and every evening we both tried

> not to laugh. She gave me a funny little wave. I waved back surreptitiously. Lisa giggled. (120)

The sense that the familiarity of Maud's small gesture is 'inappropriate' in an environment where the "*bas*" is authoritatively present creates nervous laughter, which itself serves to undermine the oppressive restrictions of colonial ideology which circumscribe the nature of the domestic worker's relationship with the family with whom she spends most of her time. However, ultimately the relationship and rapport Lauren shares with black workers on the farm and in the house is limited by the colonial context.

In general, servants appear in the text as benevolent, semi-invisible, or ambiguous presences who support the lifestyle of white families. On the nearby farm of a wildlife artist, for example, St John describes a scene underpinned by pastoral bliss:

> After a tour of her studio, we'd sit out on the terrace watching hoopoe birds nod across the lawn like brown-crested pharaohs. A servant would deliver a coffee-and-walnut sponge or scones dripping with jam and cream to a table draped with a starched white cloth . . . As the afternoon wore on, shadows deepened the blue-green hue of the wheat and the sprays created pockets of mist. Puffs of smoke from the compound fires floated above the violet backdrop of the distant kopjes. It was a scene surpassing tranquillity and it gave the illusion that all was right with the world. That we hadn't just massacred 1200 terrorists at a training camp in Mozambique. That we weren't in the middle of a war. (83)

The above passage illustrates a scene of fragile peace amidst a brutal war. The romantic pastoral vision is depicted as illusory, hiding the social inequities which sustain the illusion and the current violence which has erupted as a result of these inequities. The peaceful and pleasurable colonial lifestyle is in tension with the underlying threat of its eradication during the war. In this regard, it is significant that St John distinguishes between the experiences of day and night on the farm. Conscious of the very real threat of violence at night time, a vague menace is felt, not least because the native presence is not one signalling servility and availability, but invisibility and uncontrollability:

> Whooping of women in the far-off compound, which was half African lullaby, half infinitely threatening, like some war dance of savages. On that first night at Rainbow's End, I fell into sleep feeling fear and elation simultaneously. (115)

Unconsciously, Lauren intertwines an irrational fear of 'primordial Africa' with the fear of terrorists/freedom fighters with a political agenda. Her simultaneous elation references the excitement of the war as it existed in her imagination, blurring fantasy with reality.

In summary, Lauren is described as thriving on farm life, imagining her own version of place, and benefiting fully from the colonial social system. Apart from servants, the broader black population is barely apparent. Indeed, despite the farm-oriented violence of the time, the remoteness of farm life provides a haven of ignorance for the young Lauren, who has not yet experienced the pivotal transformation that is key to a confessional narrative. Radstone explains that:

> At the heart of the diegetic movement of the confession is a subject on his or her way, a subject 'becoming', a subject characterised, indeed, by this forward movement towards becoming someone identical with yet markedly different from his or her former self. (171)

The naivety of her younger self is yet to be realised by the protagonist, and the text reinscribes this naivety which will later need to be 're-read' by St John and the reader. Lauren is still in the process of "becoming": thus, at this stage, there exists an uneasy dualism of identification with and separation between narrator and protagonist.

1.3.2 Landscape and Place in *Voluptuous Delights*

In *Voluptuous Delights*, Nyree, the narrator, and her sister, Cia, experience their farm landscape directly through their vivid imaginations. Liebenberg, as stated earlier, consciously chooses a lush forest landscape in the Vumba Mountains (on the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border) as the setting for the farm on which the sisters grow up. It is significant that the forest, where the sisters play, has already been nicknamed "Paradise Lost" by their Oupa (9). The forest is not a prelapsarian Eden, but a place where "the living prey upon the dead" (9), a metaphorical allusion to the fact that the paradise of the colonial dream is already a fallen one, as it is corrupted by the reality of oppression that subtends it. In addition to drawing on the association of Africa as "oldest of continents", resisting understanding, Liebenberg incorporates the domesticated landscape, thus including both of the dream topographies of the South African pastoral that Coetzee identifies (6-7). The incongruity of the colonial fantasy is captured in the imagery of gardening in Africa:

> . . . ripe mangoes burst, their fermenting guts gorged out by fat fruit-flies who die drunk, bloated and addled in the sun.
> 'It's what happens when you try to foist England on savagery,' Oupa mutters darkly. 'Gets all corrupted like – rank and fetid. But will that mam of yours, nostalgic for something she's never known, ever see past her quaint, too-garish flowerbeds to the stink of corruption underneath? Will she buggery! (Liebenberg 8-9)

This description recalls Coetzee's discussion of the "anti-garden" of Africa, an idea which locates Africa itself as a source seeding evil, but parodied here by Liebenberg. The 'civilised' act of gardening, of planting flower beds in order to domesticate the wilderness, is mocked by Oupa in the extract above. His speech almost appears as a critique of colonialism; the fruit flies symbolic of languorous colonials. However, the emphasis lies on Africa as the source of tainting, since Oupa here and elsewhere reiterates the corrupting quality of Africa in the way he depicts the continent, as opposed to the corruption of those who have benefited from its resources illegitimately: "Pestilence and disease afflicting the human is everywhere on this God-forsaken continent" (48). The landscape of the rainforest suits this imagery of luxuriant rotting, of a Paradise Lost which is the *already fallen* state of nature and man. The retrospective tense of the Prologue (quoted in full earlier), sets up the nostalgic perspective which adds another layer to the concept of a fallen nature – the fallen childhood.

As a child, Nyree believes the forest is "Cia's and mine" (9), and this child-like fantasy allows the girls to experience the forest as enchanted:

> The forest is a shadowy otherworld of whispering and secrets. Actually, Cia and I possess the uncommon power to live in two worlds at once – the world you can see, and the other, the one you can feel. It's always around us, beating its feathery wings just below. (18)

However, this does not shield them from an instinctual fear of the forest at night:

> As we enter the forest, fear caresses me. Everything seems somehow transformed: shapes have shifted, there are strange sounds, and I feel an invisible presence that has never been here before. It is far more frightening out here alone in the darkness . . . (21)

Nyree is emboldened by the presence of her younger sibling, who is in awe of her. On this occasion, to try to enable Cia to take a flight to fairyland, the girls are performing a ritual in the forest at night. By entering the forest at night they break the protective boundaries that their parents have attempted to set up around them: "What with the Terrs and hyena, we are never

allowed to wander beyond the Terr fence after dark" (20). The "Terrs" (terrorists) occupy a vague mental space for the girls, like the fairies and ancestors they seek in the forest, yet they also represent the genuine danger that can lurk in that locale. Nyree says:

> I reckon a Terr is about eight feet tall, he slobbers and his toenails are long, ragged and filthy. . . But actually I know that Terr is short for 'terrorist' and Dad's always been fighting them because there's always been the War. (26)

Nyree's understanding of the word 'terrorists' reveals a sense of the epic, with the girls' father as a hero in a drama of endless battles. Her belief that the war has "always been" present suggests the mythic. If, as Liedeke Plate claims, myth is "a non-linear mode of understanding liquid time" (29), young children are particularly susceptible to the mythic imagination, as they tend to live in the eternal present, rather than linear time.

The ritual the sisters perform in the forest reveals a hybrid cultural repertoire of Grimm's fairytales, Christian terminology and what they have picked up of Ndebele folklore and religion by "spying on the Af's ancestral ceremonies" (22). This "spying", as opposed to 'sharing', emphasises the social distinctions that prohibit white children from exploring local culture. It also expresses both a desire to be included and hostility since, by derogatively referring to black people as "Afs", disrespect is apparent. The girls share many conversations with Jobe, the "house boy", with whom they are involved in a mutually caring relationship which is also ambivalent in the context of colonial hierarchy. He tells them stories about his life, including his time in Johannesburg working as a miner, and teaches them a little about Ndebele customs and history. Nyree reveals her exposure to a blend of linguistic and cultural references:

> I assume the role of chief *n'anga* chanting an invocation that is part African shaman, part recital from our book by the Brothers Grimm, while Cia plays the supporting cast, ululating, swaying and beating on an imaginary drum.
> '*Bayede Nkosi*!'
> 'Boom ba-ba boom ba-ba boom!'
> . . . 'Abracadabra!'
> . . . 'Amen . . . Peace be with you'. (22)

Indeed, while Nyree is socialised into a sense of white superiority and a privileging of European culture, multiple cultural and historical references reveal the indigenous and colonial palimpsests of settlement on the land. Nyree recycles what her elders, particularly Oupa, have told the sisters about their family's relationship with the land, a relationship which embodies the colonial claim to *terra nullius*: "It was Great-Grandfather who first staked the surrounding land in the shadow

of the Vumba mountains" (7). Nyree's reverential tone is undermined by irony, however. After a similar statement, for example, a bracketed after-thought refutes Oupa's high claims to industriousness: "(although Cia and I, having discussed this in private, suspect that it was probably more like Great-Grandfather supervising the Afs toiling)" (13). There is a family graveyard on the farm, a testament to the family's colonial legacy on this land, but the grave of Grandmother Angelique, in particular, comes to accrue symbolic significance as the locus of the burial of family secrets – namely her affair with Seamus and the resultant line of illegitimate progeny, Ronin's mother and Ronin himself.

There are also Ndebele ancestral graves in the Vumba hills which, the girls overhear from the *umkhulus* on the farm, "when the rains come, sometimes wash away, unearthing the skeletons, angering the ancestors. The earth is cursed because of this desecration" (175). Nyree, Cia, and their friends, Jeremiah and Dell, discover skulls in an old n'anga's cave when it is exposed behind a dried up waterfall during a drought. Nyree surmises that the n'anga gathered the skulls in order to create a burial chamber and thus "restore their sacredness" (175). Believing that "The Afs will reckon that this lifts the curse" (177), the sisters tell Jobe, who is impressed by this information. However, the following day a "party of *umkhulus*" (179) locate the burial chamber, only to find the site desecrated. It is apparent to Nyree that Ronin must have returned to the cave and smashed the skulls, an act of profanity which reflects a pattern of a general disrespect for the indigenous sacred in the family's history of occupation on this land.

1.3.3 Thunder in Paradise

The blissful aspects of the childhoods described in *Rainbow's End* and *Voluptuous Delights* could be any fortunate child's lot. However, because of the period in the country's history in which they are set, they take on especially controversial connotations. Both *Rainbow's End* and *Voluptuous Delights* highlight sensuous indulgence – in food, in particular. The pleasures that the girls in both texts enjoy seem heightened, in hindsight, by the imminent end of this indulgent way of life, and the particular foods mentioned draw on a culturally-specific repertoire which white Rhodesians of that generation would recall. St John depicts the joy of waking up as a child on the farm, to experience a pampered lifestyle:

> Each day came washed clean by the night before. When the laundered smell of morning mingled with the lure of frying bacon, I'd jump out of bed, wash my face and go to the dining room, where sliced pawpaw and a box of cerelac, creamy flakes of milky vanilla bliss, waited on the table under the fly net. (128)

At the breakfast buffet, the cook, Madala, "was available to take orders" (128); indeed, servants facilitate the pleasant lifestyles the children in both texts enjoy. St John recalls revelling in the comforts and activities that Rainbow's End has to offer with her friends: riding, fishing, exploring, and eating and drinking treats prepared by domestic servants. On one occasion, she and her friend Merina are caught in a rainstorm:

> We filled the tub in the pawpaw bathroom and peeled off our filthy clothes. Underneath, our skin was goosebump-rough and so white with cold that, as we sank beneath the bubbles, the water had a peppery scald to it. We wallowed in it like scrawny mermaids and warmed our bones with steamy mugs of malty Milo. We felt invincible. (177)

Similarly, in *Voluptuous Delights*, Nyree and Cia regularly enjoy peanut butter and jam sandwiches, made by Jobe, in a ritual of peeling, licking and squashing the filling, whilst sitting on the steps outside the kitchen door. On one occasion, Liebenberg describes Nyree and Cia's indulgence in snacks on a family car trip:

> The graze doesn't end with the *koeksusters* either. Back in the car, slicked to the seat, even though we already have a whole coolbox of *padkos*, we are still allowed to guzzle bottles of cream soda and frozen penny cools and chocolate Fredo Frogs at every jacaranda-and flame-tree-lined town from Gatooma to Que Que to Gwelo until my stomach queases, and Cia's queases so bad she reckons she's gonna honk and our eyes are sugared glitter balls. (120)

The girls in both texts are thus depicted as slightly debauched in their sensuous indulgences. On another occasion, for example, Nyree relates:

> We slip into the languor of high summer. We spend the days crocodiling through the waterhole that Dad built for us . . . slathering, half-submerged, over hairy mangoes, basking like bloated hippos on the rocks . . . (118)

The parallels between the two texts are remarkably similar, and the childhoods depicted set up the stakes to be fought over in the war which is their backdrop.

In the chapter on "The Liberation War" in his thesis, Chennells examines literature that emerged during the war itself, and notes how poorly the war and the motivations of black nationalists were understood by most white Rhodesians:

> This absence of understanding of what was happening around them was wholly predictable. Victims as they were of their own myths about Africans that had been fostered over the years, kept ignorant by the press about changing attitudes among the Nationalists, the settlers and their novelists had few means of correctly analyzing the situation in which they found themselves. . . Instead of discarding the myths as inappropriate to the new reality, they shaped the reality to accommodate the myths. The Blacks are consequently the comic buffoons, the
>
> savages or the men with a veneer of civilization liable to lapse back into savagery. (421-422)

In war-time white Rhodesian literature, in general, black nationalists are depicted under the generic rubric of 'terrorists', with writers displaying ignorance about the political factions within the broad movement and these factions' distinct motivations. The girls in both texts listen to and sing war songs, (St John 190; Liebenberg 120). In *Rainbow's End*, Lauren believes the government agenda that they are fighting against 'communism', and is intensely engaged with the war in her imagination. In *Voluptuous Delights*, Nyree is more peripherally aware of the war, but her childish fantasies reflect propagandistic representations of terrorists as inhuman and she views her own father as a war hero. Thus, while both texts represent the wilful ignorance that Chennells describes, they deconstruct the mythology of the war, St John by retrospectively denouncing such beliefs and Liebenberg through consistent parody, as explored previously.

The circumstances which enable St John's family to live at Rainbow's End are sinister: the murders of some of their predecessors. As the war intensifies, this fearful shadow moves to the forefront. A threatening anonymous phone call warns Lauren's mother to leave the farm, and reminds her of the fate of the previous family who lived there. Despite this, the St John family refuse to leave:

> [W]e stayed knowing that there were only four things between us and the men who would do to us in a heartbeat what they had done to the family before us: our dogs, our guns, our security fence and our Agricalert. (164)

More than once the family awaken in the middle of the night, suspecting an ambush, and St John recalls: "Sometimes the terror I felt at a single threatening growl was so intense that it hit me in the solar plexus like a physical blow and left me gasping and nauseous" (165). Nevertheless, the author also admits to the fact that she *enjoyed* the war, at least from an imaginary perspective. She recalls that, when she and her mother were randomly selected by a BBC reporter and asked to comment on the war, she wanted to tell him "how much I loved the War, the constant, heart-

stopping adrenalin of it. That I was prepared to die for my country, even though I might be frightened to death doing it" (169).

In *Voluptuous Delights*, Nyree is aware of the threat to their way of life of which the adults around her speak. When a fire devastates the farm, it is assumed to have been started by terrorists, and the girls' father exclaims, on seeing the damage: "They'd destroy bloody Paradise itself if they were let in, the god-damned savages" (155). The genuine, but melodramatic, fear of white people, particularly towards the end of the war, is expressed in Oupa's attitude:

> we must be deaf as well as blind if we can't hear the strains of the infernal savages' victory dance in the night . . . the infernal savages are sharpening their pangas for a spot of murungu blood-letting. (121)

In depicting black Africans as savage and violent, Oupa identifies whites as civilised and restrained. For the girls in both texts, the crucial but suppressed knowledge – that is, the metaphorical apple in paradise that has yet to be eaten – is that the violence and threat is located much closer to home: in their way of life, their family and themselves.

1.3.4 The Symbolic Significance of Animals

Smit-Marais and Wendell cite animals as important components of the pastoral genre, and point to the symbolic resonance of animals in the relationship of man to nature (214). In *Rainbow's End*, Lauren collects a large array of interesting animals which she rears, often after they have been injured or orphaned. And, in *Voluptuous Delights*, Nyree and Cia adopt the pathetic puppy which clambers into their car after they have broken down on a remote road, and name him "Moosejaw". In both texts mambas symbolically represent evil and are viewed as the opposite of dogs, who are associated with faithfulness to humans. However, Liebenberg consciously designs her text to include such resonating symbols, whereas St John simply exploits the cultural associations attached to both animals. St John's father, for example, is reduced to tears when his fiercely loyal dog, Jock, of similar stature and tenacity to his namesake in Percy Fitzpatrick's *Jock of the Bushveldt* (65), is killed by a black mamba.

The violent death of animals is pivotal in the loss of innocence of the girls in both texts, and both Lauren and Nyree show a deep fondness for pets. On one occasion, in a bid to participate in some of the war heroism she perceives around her, Lauren takes it upon herself to

save the farm animals from a menacing wild cat she has convinced herself is "a threat to man and livestock"(50). She gallops off to summon help, which comes in the form of neighbour, Thomas Beattie, with his gun. As she secretly has suspected, however, the cat poses no real threat, but it is too late to retract her exaggeration:

> I wanted to beg him to stop, to remind him that I was only a child and probably a stupid one at that, but nothing in my life had equipped me to halt a man of Thomas's forceful charisma in a course of action I had initiated and so I stood cold as a winter morning at his side, accessory to a senseless murder . . . A sickness far beyond nausea, born out of the most hideous shame, seized my throat and left me wordless. (51)

In *Voluptuous Delights*, Nyree and Cia indulge in the morbid pleasure of watching the slaughtering of chickens at the workers' compound:

> Over and over we watch, stricken, as a chicken, dead but still alive, dances for us. It is late afternoon by the time we head wearily back along the winding track towards the farmhouse, our shadows grotesque by the time it comes into view. I am shadowed, too, by foreboding . . . (7)

Nyree here intuits a sense of complicity in the cycle of death that sustains life, as well as a morbid human propensity to be fascinated by the spectacle of death.

The motif of snakes takes an interesting direction in *Rainbow's End*. St John early identifies mambas' with evil and death:

> In Gadzema people always said that you could tell a black mamba because its head is shaped like the coffin most of its victims end up in, but to me they were identifiable purely by their aura of evil . . . their eyes . . . set up a childhood conviction in me that the mamba was the original snake in the Garden of Eden. (66)

She describes herself as being fascinated by snakes as a child, and she handles a python with a sense of awe (97). However, after a series of traumatic changes in her life, as a result of which she feels "Nothing was stable anymore", she develops a phobia for snakes, and has recurring nightmares about them: "It didn't help that in daylight the nightmares constantly threatened to become reality . . . an unnatural number of snakes were hell-bent on getting into the house" (253). It seems that her ophiophobia marks the sudden, uncontrolled release of repressed fears, and these fears are mirrored by the "unnatural" presence of snakes in the external world – although it is possible that Lauren, with her heightened sensitivity, simply starts noticing snakes

more. Her sense of instability relates to the discovery of her father's infidelity, the coming of Independence, and also to her repressed sexuality, since she begins to have "vivid erotic dreams" about girls: "it was just one more thing to process and not something I was prepared to deal with then" (252). The snakes thus take on a myriad of possible symbolic references, from the fear of the wrath of black Africans to the phallus, both of which threaten her 'innocence' or the self-protection that she wishes to preserve.

In Liebenberg's novel, Moosejaw protects Nyree and Cia from a black mamba by killing it. Significantly, this occurs at the site of the grave of Angelique, who was herself killed by a mamba (135). Her grave reads "Beloved wife and mother" (132), but the presence of the serpent at her resting place suggests she is also the Eve of sexual betrayal, as she was unfaithful to her husband, Oupa, who is still embittered by this memory. Ronin is the offspring of her transgression, and it is his arrival that is alluded to in the prologue: he is the "madness" that "blooms" or the serpent in the "garden of innocence" (1). The reason he comes to be at the farm is that he has been abandoned by his mother, an abandonment which echoes his mother's rejection by Oupa, and that will have serious consequences for the younger generation. His appearance on the farm begins a warped fairytale. Despite his "Prince Charming" (66) looks, Ronin is really a 'serpent in disguise': he embodies the reality of evil in the world, in the form of intentional harm, and, while the girls initially try to incorporate him in their daily routines, he remains slippery, undomesticated, beyond their control. The threat he embodies is foretold by the n'anga at Great Zimbabwe, who warned Cia about impending danger in the form of a "jackal", a term later echoed by Jobe in alluding to Ronin (190). He is described by Nyree as like a changeling in a Grimms' fairytale: "In the instant when one mask falls away and before he's moulded the next, I sometimes see his face, and it is utterly blank", which suggests that he is without empathy (168). Intimidated by Ronin, the girls twice attempt to use magic in the form of spells and incantations to try to resolve the disorder that he has created in their lives, but without success. Ultimately, he will destroy both their happiness and that of their family unit.

Ronin's execution of Moosejaw, with Nyree and Cia as his forced audience, is a culmination of less visible acts of cruelty he has engaged in, such as secretly trapping small animals in jars under his bed, which the girls find with their contents dead. It appears that, in killing the beloved pet of his cousins, Ronin is exacting revenge for his own sense of being wished dead by his grandfather. Oupa directs insults in Moosejaw's direction, calling him "A

disgusting little rotter . . . Grovelling is a shameful thing and O' Callohans are not known for shamefulness" (182). This is a dig at Ronin, whom Oupa has deemed a parasite and made feel unwelcome since his arrival. The former's obsequious behaviour is not appreciated by Oupa: Ronin becomes a symbol representing the sexual betrayal of Angelique's affair, and a recipient of Oupa's "invective" (181) for deeds for which he is not himself responsible. It is this poison which he then spews at others more vulnerable than himself. His deliberate killing of Moosejaw shatters Nyree and Cia:

> At that moment I hear a strangled cry from Cia. She wrenches away from me, and runs backwards down the mountain slope. . . She is retching and then vomiting into the dirt . . . (186)

After this trauma, the girls reach a plateau of melancholy, and Nyree is deeply wary of Ronin, who has enshrouded them in secrecy and fear.

Similarly, in *Rainbow's End*, the mutilation of an animal is used by others as a threat. Lauren's father is involved in a confrontation when his cattle wander into a black township and a group of armed people stand protecting their crops. Initially they refuse to return the cattle, but he fires shots in the air and then reclaims the animals by force. After this incident, a sinister message is conveyed to the household. Snowy, the family's hand-raised orphan lamb, is found

> behind a garden storeroom. Her stomach was distended, her wool matted, and her grey tongue curled from her mouth. She'd been killed elsewhere and delivered to us like a message.
> Like a sign of some kind.
> Like revenge. (102)

The violation of Snowy has an obvious cultural resonance, given the lamb's association with the pastoral and its Biblical connotations of innocence. The incident is thus read as a cryptic sign, and the word "revenge" suggests that, on an unconscious level, Lauren is aware that she is complicit in colonial violence, but she has yet to acknowledge this, and remains naïve, on the whole.

1.4 **The End of Childhood: Rainbow's End**

St John describes her youthful world as having collapsed as a result of two related events: the revelation of her father's affairs and the discovery, at the inauguration of Zimbabwe in 1980 that

she, her family, and the white Rhodesian community at large, had been on the wrong side of the war for Independence. A "before" and an "after" can be identified here: "*Before I knew the truth about my father. Before I knew the truth about the War*" (229). These 'truths' are concurrent, and show St John that her erstwhile paradise had been "a fool's paradise" (196). She recognises that the two mythologies that had defined her childhood, the 'perfect' family and the fantasy of Rhodesia, were illusory.

The simple ideal, in Lauren's mind, that hers is just "an ordinary family that loved each other" (200) is maintained by occasions when everyone is together – in 'perfect moments'. She recalls, for example, her ninth birthday as feeling like the happiest day of her life:

> I blew out the candles and wished to be a famous rider when I grew up. Then I relocated to the sofa, where I had my new books fanned out around me like lives waiting to be lived. Lisa was on the sofa beside me, Dad was smiling up at Mom, and I was between them all with a mouthful of warm chocolate sponge, secure in the force-field of their love. (46)

She recognises retrospectively, however, that the war had placed an inevitable strain on her family:

> [Dad] rebelled against the shackles of domesticity after the hard-drinking, death-dicing, macho extremes of the army, and the warning call from the terrorists had taken its toll on my mother . . . [they] began to fight. (179)

It is on the day that Lauren's mother tells her that her father has been a sexual philanderer for many years that "paradise as I knew it ended" (198). Her father has been the strongest role model in Lauren's life, and this disclosure of his infidelity destroys her fantasy of a stable nuclear family: "one by one, the building blocks of my life were taken apart" (199). The knowledge of her father's adultery is perceived as an enormous betrayal by Lauren. It is, however, St John's mother who is blamed for the failure of the marriage in the community, a censure which reflects a deeply chauvinistic society. Her mother, with her bouts of travelling and stylish apparel, has accrued a 'loose' reputation:

> Mom, who'd blatantly 'dolled herself up' and sat with the men at the bar [instead of the wives and children on the verandah], who'd unapologetically left her own husband and children year after year to go globe-trotting, faced a gradual closing of ranks. (204)

Lauren envisions the woman with whom her father has most recently had an affair, "Betty B" (whom she has previously known only as his tennis partner), as a femme fatale. One day, while sitting in the car waiting for her father, she notices a woman whom she recognises as Betty B:

> her tennis tan was more maroon than ever and the sun was blazing down on her henna-tinted perm like her head was on fire . . . I wanted to rush over to her and scream: 'Why did you have to destroy our family? *Our perfect life*?' Even though I knew that, if our life had been so perfect, nothing and no one could have destroyed it. (260, emphasis in original)

However, Lauren does not confront her. Instead, she recalls, "I just sat there with a paralysing poison chugging through my veins". This reference, together with her comment that Betty's car is within "spitting distance", again suggests the serpentine (260-261). Lauren describes living with rage against her father for some time but, when he tries to make peace with her and reminds her how he cared for her as a child, as her mother was often ill, the positive feelings she associates with him begin to return. It is in noticing that she has the same hands as her father, "the realization of our mutual flesh and bone", that she feels "the first glimmer of forgiveness in my heart". She then acknowledges that "He was stubborn and he was flawed but he'd done the best he could with what he had. At any hour, on any day, he would have taken a bullet for us" (263). She thus relinquishes the ideal for the reality.

Domestic life is, inevitably, much more prominent in the life of a child than public events; St John recalls that "With all of this [family instability] going on, it was hard to take in the seismic shifts in the political landscape" (182). But, at Independence, with the lowering of the Rhodesian flag, the changes affecting white Rhodesians' everyday life are profoundly felt by Lauren: "It was like going to sleep in Jamaica and waking up in the pages of Orwell's *1984*" (191). The end of war signals a difficult transition, one which requires Lauren to reassess her position entirely:

> But it was the euphoria [at Independence] that told me that the war of freedom which, in my childish innocence, I had believed we were fighting against communism, had turned out to be someone else's war of freedom. *We* were the terrorists . . . I felt as if an earthquake had taken place in my head. (193)

With this revelation comes the retrospective acceptance of personal responsibility, despite the fact that she was a child at the time of the war:

> But in life, as in law, ignorance is no excuse and in that I saw that I, too, was culpable. We'd been sold a dream that was especially seductive because it came with a whole lifestyle. It was an exclusive club. It even had its own language. But I should have been capable of seeing beyond that. Should have known that any club that relies for its existence on the denial of the needs and feelings of others is not a club to which any just person should want to belong. (263)

Lauren was raised in a distinctly propagandistic and nationalistic white Rhodesian cultural milieu: she owned a "Rhodesia is Super" T-shirt (128), she sang war songs and she enjoyed the lifestyle and, in her ignorance, the war itself, which framed this lifestyle. Subsequently, however, St John begins to atone by adopting a new responsiveness to diversity in the country, a diversity apparent in the post-Independence shifting of the political and cultural landscape. She remarks, for example, on the sudden surge in the presence of black people and culture at Independence:

> I thought incredulously, where have all these people been? These dynamic businessmen and their head-turning partners, these artists and writers, these accomplished lawyers, journalists and politicians. It was almost as if they'd been waiting in the wings of some vast, discriminatory theatre production. But I wasn't able to allow the thought to become fully formed, because it was too much to take in: that we, the white Rhodesians, might in some way have been responsible for their non-appearance on stage. (192)

St John's theatrical metaphor, here, draws a parallel between art and reality and, perhaps unintentionally, offers a reflexive comment which evokes the pointed absence of black people in white writing, an elision that the book itself has re-staged up to this point.

However, the new dispensation also brings with it a new "fear", since stories of the atrocities of *Gukurahundi* travel "on the wind", rather than the "state-controlled media" (243), and there are rumours about political assassinations, and the infiltration of Central Intelligence Organisation spies into public spaces to ferret out disparaging remarks about Mugabe and the new government. Such fears are partly founded, but also partly tainted with conspiracy theories, bolstered by many years of propaganda, about the threat of black rule. At the same time, war atrocities are being revealed, and Lauren realises that "Evil deeds had . . . been carried out by men we knew" (248). She anguishes over her own position:

> So where did this all leave me? Was my love of the land any less valid because of the actions of my forefathers, my government, my father or, even, in my ignorance, myself? In Britain and the United States, people were accepted as British or American from the moment of their birth or the day they were granted citizenship; yet in Zimbabwe, black people were Africans, Indians were Indians

> and whites were regularly labelled Europeans. My family had been in Africa for four generations. Why wasn't I African? Why? (249)

As cited in my introductory chapter, Fisher notes that white Zimbabweans' sense of belonging "coalesced around issues of entitlement and familiarity" (199), and that the "re-inscribing of the national landscape" moved whites from "the known to an unfamiliar landscape" (66). St John's sense of exile in independent Zimbabwe reflects this difficult transition for whites into the new political climate, due to the conditional terms on which they could belong – that is, of accepting a new nationalist narrative which derided colonial history (Fisher 76). St John, in order to gain some perspective on the past, leaves both the farm and the country:

> I left Rainbow's End as fast as I could because there is no other way to leave a place that has come to embody all your childish dreams and many of your nightmares – or a country where most of your truths have been shown to be lies. (107)

Like the fictional Ellie in Rheam's *This September Sun*, St John, on leaving school, exits Zimbabwe to escape a burdensome history based on fantasies and lies. After a very briefly described year in England as a veterinary nurse, she returns to a "mostly black" Polytechnic in Harare to study journalism: there, she reflects, "in the *unlikeliest* of places, I'd begin to find myself" (266, my emphasis). St John here seems paradoxically *surprised* to discover a sense of belonging in a mostly black environment in Zimbabwe.[12] Indeed, her comment reflects the reasons she did not feel a similar sense after early Independence – that is, because of the residual or lingering colonial myth of "the perceived gulf between settlers and Blacks" (Chennells xix). It is at the Polytechnic that she befriends both Zimbabwean and South African black activists, such as Emelia, niece of Ndabiningi Sithole, the founder of ZANU, and she comments that, in this environment, she and her colleagues "spent most of our time talking life, love and politics in the sunshine or eating sadza and goat curry on spurious rural reporting assignments" (266). St John also recalls that, around this time, her mother, sister and herself holiday with Maud in Malawi: in a twist of circumstances, Maud's uncle has become mayor of Blantyre and she stays in "the mayoral mansion", while St John and her family stay in "cut-price holiday villas" (267). At this point, one recalls the earlier descriptions of Maud's place in the St John family home with a sense of retrospective irony.

[12] The author currently resides in England and therefore did ultimately choose to emigrate from Zimbabwe.

St John ends her memoir, however, on the last night of her stay at Rainbow's End, at a point when the family unit is split and her parents have gone their separate ways (that is, at a time prior to her leaving the country and subsequent return) – and on a note appropriate to the adolescent tale of becoming it recounts. She describes herself wishing on a star: "I wished that somehow, some way, I'd return to Rainbow's End. And I understood then that all I had to do was be patient (269). It seems, then, that this patience is, in a sense, rewarded, since the memoir itself offers St John a chance to return to Rainbow's End, but with the perspective of hindsight: experience has replaced innocence, and nostalgia is both tainted or bitter *and* sweet.

1.5 **The End of Childhood: *Voluptuous Delights***

It is the death of Nyree's beloved sister, Cia, that finally ends the relative security of the childhood depicted in *Voluptuous Delights*. The nature of Cia's death itself is shocking and causes recurring nightmares for Nyree. The sisters prepare for a *murombo* ceremony, which Ronin is unwisely asked to attend, in order to appease Moosejaw's spirit. The trope of paradise is re-introduced in this scene, since at the grove where Moosejaw had been shot and buried, and where the *murombo* takes place, the msasa trees are described as shading "a garden of Eden" (206). This image relates to the preservation of Cia's innocence by premature and sacrificial death near this site. To "persuade" Ronin to apologise, Cia taunts him by dancing around him with a photograph of his grandfather, Seamus, and mother. However, this "dance" at a certain point devolves into a chase, with Cia being pursued by Ronin: "the angel and her hunter" (209). The ceremony is thus abruptly suspended. Later, at the quarry, Ronin corners Cia on the rockface and she falls to her death in the stream below. This event is not only prefigured by the n'anga, but also by sensations of foreboding in Nyree: "I have a bad feeling about the *murombo* and I wish we don't ever have to do it." (204) Cia's death thus seems to have been preordained, and the cousins, Ronin and Cia, are fated to clash and to play out their colonial and familial ancestral inheritance of betrayal, conflict and violence. Ronin thus embodies the colonial disregard for others' humanity, as well as familial betrayal and abandonment, and Cia takes on the qualities of a martyr. Nyree draws both on family history and on Christian imagery in her description of Cia's death: Cia is envisaged as an angel on a moral crusade, and is compared to Jan Christiaan,

Angelique's cruel missionary father, for the religious fervour Nyree ascribes to her at this moment:

> A celestial light is all around her – she is lit from within. In her veins pumps the blood of Jan Christiaan – he, too, was lit from within by the fires of a holy mission. I know that this is what she needed. (209)

Cia's memory is preserved in a pristine state of angelic innocence through her premature death. Her death, however, also leads to family misery. There are screaming arguments between Nyree's parents, Ronin is sent away in shame, and Oupa slides into a final decline. Oupa seems to take responsibility for his part in the damage, blaming himself for Cia's death and regretting that he made Angelique give up her baby, Ronin's mother, who in turn abandoned *him* (221). Although *Voluptuous Delights* is fictional, it reveals many realistic aspects of the time period it captures, and the intense pressure impacting on domestic and family lives. The regular absence of the girls' father on soldiering duty contributes to this underlying tension and exacerbates the trauma of losing a child. Nyree's parents mutually blame one another, while they both really blame themselves. One day Nyree finds her mother both crying and smiling over photographs of Cia, an unbearably painful resurrection of memories which first angers and then softens her father. This seems to be a turning-point in their response to their grief, and they put the photograph of Cia with a chameleon on her shoulder on the mantelpiece, below Great-grandfather's portrait. The photograph is particularly significant, because it was taken on the day that Cia nearly fell to her death in a rock slide. Nyree recalls: "it was death-defying, her feat, and she laughed in death's face" (202). She then describes the end of that day's outing:

> We are riding home into the last rays of the setting sun, burned and tired and content. The day has a sort of glow about the edges. Perfect. I feel it searing on to my brain the way something does when you know you'll always remember it. (202)

Nyree's sensation recalls Coe's description of the child's special capacity for joy, related to the ability to live in the moment. One can interpret this experience/memory as both 'real' and idealised by adult Nyree's nostalgic recollection. The placing of Cia's photograph under Great-grandfather's portrait, the latter symbolising patriarchal and colonial power, suggests that her life is a sacrifice for the sins of her forefathers. In this sense, Cia transcends her death.

The loss of Cia, however, signals the end of enchantment for Nyree, in that paradise is no longer an experience, but a recollection intermingled with loss:

> Some of the magic is gone, though. The fairies have withered and died, their wings crunchy like dragonflies. Now glow-worms are just glow-worms glowing faintly under bushes at night. (229)

Cia's death is compounded by even more losses, until finally Nyree comments: "And now we have lost it all" (231), where "all" is the war, the country, and the farm. The family's burning of the Rhodesian flag and discarding of Rhodesian memorabilia, to avoid confrontation with the new government, symbolically marks the moment of the ending of a way of life. The farm is signed over as a result of an expropriation order: "In the end none of us has to bear Great-grandfather's legacy – Cia is dead and now his legacy too, has died, after it fell on us to pay for his ill-gotten gains" (233). Great-grandfather's legacy, then, is the war, the loss of Cia, and the farm. Oupa dies "shrivelled" and senile on the farm before the family leave (236). The novel closes with Nyree eating a peanut butter and jam sandwich, and having a vision of Cia rejoining her as a physical presence: "The memory of that Cheshire-cat smile, having taken so long to find, inflicts an intimate pain. I close my eyes against it and feel Cia's hot, sticky hand in mine" (238). The corporeality of Nyree's vision of Cia is both comforting and sore, and, in contrast to their usual ritual, marks the transition from a childhood paradise of "voluptuous delights" to a present and future that will be haunted by the past.

1.6 **Rainbows and Peanut Butter: A Conclusion**

The titles of St John and Liebenberg's texts convey what is revealed to be a deceptive sense of happy innocence. The title *Rainbow's End* suggests peace and a fairytale ending. The end of the rainbow, according to Irish legend, leads to a pot of gold, which is the literal and metaphorical reference of the name of the farm, Rainbow's End. It was originally marked off and named by a gold prospector in 1923, in order to gain access to the weir on the land and therefore to the water needed to run the mines in the region, which contained a rich gold seam (144). St John does not herself comment on the implications of this colonial usurpation of resources, but the irony in the name implicitly references this colonial history. The memoir is primarily named after the farm since it marked a significant place in and period of St John's life. The illusory quality of the rainbow is what ultimately resonates most strongly in her text: the fantasy of white-ruled Rhodesia and vision of the ideal nuclear family. *Rainbow's End* is prefaced with a quote from

Olive Schreiner's classic African "anti-pastoral" novel (Coetzee 4), *The Story of an African Farm*:

> The barb in the arrow of childhood's suffering is this:
> Its intense loneliness, its intense ignorance.

While Lauren, as a child, ironically enjoyed the war and, in some regards, Rainbow's End did seem idyllic to her, the "suffering" and "loneliness" she experiences refers to the period of transition from simplicity and innocence to a shameful confrontation with her own "intense ignorance". The title of Liebenberg's novel, *The Voluptuous Delights of Peanut Butter and Jam*, too suggests a story of the 'ideal' childhood – carefree and pleasurable, but it also evokes the indulgence and ignorance of childhood. The title takes on complex resonances after one has read the text, primarily a story recalling the loss of a beloved sister. "Peanut butter and jam" recalls the sisters' shared ritual of enjoying sandwiches together, a simple act which only retrospectively takes on the mythic quality of perfect bliss but which, as the final sentence of the novel reveals, also accrues an acute poignancy, in retrospect.

While I have argued that these texts problematise the literary conventions of pastoral romanticism and childhood innocence, these mythic constructions have always had the potential to be complex and ironic. The traditional colonial pastoral/childhood represses the distortions of the relationship of person to place and other people. *Rainbow's End* and *Voluptuous Delights* reveal distorted paradises: a fool's paradise and a lost paradise, respectively. The pleasures of colonial childhoods are thus represented as deeply ambivalent. The children are indulgent and indulged, and caught up in fantasies, yet they are also subconsciously aware of a violence peripheral to their own daily existence. Up to a certain point, they manage to integrate these fears into their imaginary worlds. Yet, they witness human cruelty and death intrudes into their lives, and this exposure initiates rites of passage to maturity and the loss of innocence. The adult world of sex and betrayal invades the children's family life, in *Voluptuous Delights*, through multiple generations, and results in damage. In *Rainbow's End*, the effects of adultery result in divorce. To some extent, then, both texts tell archetypal stories of human frailty. References to the Edenic myth emphasise this archetypal aspect; one which raises the narratives above both historical context and the personal. The historical context, the loss of the Rhodesian fantasy of white minority rule in a black country, is presented as a positive transition. The gaining of

knowledge, of perspective on this past, is necessary, such that the loss of naivety, though difficult, ends what is a “period of alienation”: a fool’s paradise.

Chapter 2

Telling, Not Telling, and Re-Telling: Alexandra Fuller's Trio of Autobiographical Narratives

2.1 **Introduction**

In this chapter I examine Fuller's three autobiographical narratives: in order of publication, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood* (2002), a childhood account of growing up white in Rhodesia during the civil war; *Scribbling the Cat: Travels with an African Soldier* (2004), a record of Fuller's journey to Mozambique with an ex-Rhodesian combatant to re-trace his war experiences; and *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness* (2011), an extension of the biographies of Fuller's parents, her mother in particular, both of whom were introduced in the original memoir. I engage with the conversations that have taken place around the texts – in reviews, academic articles and interviews with the author. The descriptive captions "telling" and "not telling" in this chapter's title refer to Fuller's narrative style as well as its apparently contradictory reception as both honest and dishonest. Further, I am concerned with the relationship between all three of Fuller's personal narratives: the ways in which they are both similar and vary in terms of form and stylistics, and how, taken together, they depict the ongoing process of writing the self, that is, the incompleteness and temporality of any autobiography and hence the urge to re-tell versions of one's life.

2.2 **Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight**

Don't Let's Go is a controversial text, due to the fact that, throughout the memoir, Fuller recounts offensive white Rhodesian discourse unapologetically, although, as I will argue, she does this strategically as a function of irony, rather than of endorsement. About the war she writes:

> The whites didn't call it Chimurenga. They called it 'the troubles', 'this bloody nonsense'. And sometimes 'the war'. A war instigated by 'uppity blacks', 'cheeky kaffirs', 'bolshy muntus', 'restless natives', 'the houts'. (25)

Generally, reviewers of *Don't Let's Go* comment on the refreshing honesty with which Fuller writes. For example, Sandra Will entitles her review of the book, "Telling it as it was", and writes:

> The beauty of *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* is in the integrity with which it is written. There is nothing politically correct about Fuller's recollections, no justifications or rationalisations or adjustments to appease proponents of the prevailing political orthodoxy. (86)

However, not all reviewers agreed. Ranka Primorac critiques Fuller's apparent reluctance to condemn racism: "[Fuller] (pointedly?) refuses to apologise for the stark racism of the settler milieu she describes – even though most of her story takes place after independence" (211). Maureen Isaacson questions Fuller's narrative stance, claiming that "An objective refusal to take sides in a book that reaches for 'absolute honesty' weakens its impact. And anyway, what's the secret? Will her silence stay accusations of complicity?"(18). Both Primorac and Isaacson query the silences in Fuller's narrative, feeling that the subject matter in focus requires a clear moral response, the appropriate one being condemnation. Fuller herself, however, justifies her "refusal to take sides" on the basis that "It is too easy to sit back from my now-comfortable liberal point of view and pronounce. I want the readers to work out for themselves what is going on" (18). Fuller's ironic style creates narrative dualities of frankness and reticence, playfulness and seriousness: a continuous thread of ambiguity is formed, provoking questions regarding the role of a writer in positioning herself when the subject matter is of political significance. An analysis of the title of Fuller's first memoir conveys the multi-layered nature of her narrative.

The origins of the title become apparent in the text when Fuller's father, Tim, picks up a cheerful Australian hitch-hiker, outside of Mutare, who claims she is going "Wherever you're going, mister". To this he responds:

> "Hell, you don't want to know where we're going."
> "Where's that?"
> "To the dogs," says Dad, "to the bloody dogs." (193)

The timing of Tim Fuller's comment is significant: Zimbabwean Independence has just been achieved, and his comment is aligned with a common attitude among whites – a cynicism about the capacity of a black government to rule, which is related to the unease occasioned by the knowledge that whites have lost their previously privileged status. Fuller's title thus

encapsulates, with ironic intent, this prevalent attitude amongst whites: that after the demise of white rule, they and the country were "going to the dogs".

On a more personal level, however, Tim Fuller's comment relates to the state of his family. At Independence, their farm, Robandi, which was situated in the border region between Zimbabwe and Mozambique, a war-time guerilla zone, was put up for mandatory auction under the Zimbabwean land redistribution policy. The Fullers then moved to Devuli ranch, where Tim was temporarily employed to retrieve stray cattle for the ranch owners, and this is where they are based when the hitch-hiker meets Tim and his two daughters. The Fullers, in fact, move numerous times out of necessity (after Devuli to Malawi and then Zambia, the latter where Fuller's parents now live), and Ashleigh Harris describes them as "interact[ing] with the land that they farm more as *bywoners* than as land owners" (115). Primorac corroborates this view:

> *Don't Let's Go* also evokes Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* in that its ruthless description of 'poor white' life on the land demolishes the myths of the African pastoral and of 'land' or 'nature' as a source of stable identities or harmonious domesticity. (211)

While Fuller's text might be nostalgic in the way that childhood narratives tend to be, it is also an anti-pastoral account of farm-life. For example, the first farm on which the Fullers live is situated in Karoi, in the North West of the country, and the land is described as "low and hot, barely undulating" (40); shortly after they move to Robandi, in the Burma Valley, it becomes a dangerous zone as a result of potential landmines and ambushes; and Devuli is isolated.

At the point when Tim makes his sardonic comment to the hitch-hiker about "going to the dogs", his wife, Nicola, is in hospital, having been recommended bed-rest for the remainder of her pregnancy. The ill-health which she displays here attests to the stress of losing the war and the farm (173), and her baby, when it arrives, will live no more than a few hours. This is the third baby that the Fullers lose. Alexandra Fuller (or Bobo, as she is called by her family – a diminutive of *bobbejaan* or baboon in Afrikaans) has an older sister, Vanessa, her parents' first-born. The second child, Adrian, died from meningitis; Bobo is the third; and the fourth, Olivia, drowns in a shallow pond at a friend's house, a tragedy for which Fuller herself feels responsible, since she was asked to watch over her little sister. As in *Rainbow's End* and *Voluptuous Delights*, a pivotal moment of childhood is defined by a specific loss: "The first half is the happy years, before Olivia dies" (95). The second half occurs after Olivia dies, when "Mum and Dad's

joyful careless embrace of life is sucked away, like water swirling down a drain" (96). When the fifth baby, Richard, dies, Nicola descends into a steady and deep depression, bordering on madness:

> Mum is living with the ghosts of her dead children. She begins to look ghostly herself . . . Her green eyes go so pale they look yellow. . . Her sentences and thoughts are interrupted by the cries of her dead babies. (217)

Bobo, alarmed by her parents' deep grief after Richard's death, approaches her sister in bewildered tears: "What's going on, man? . . . Why is everyone so crazy?" (220-221).
The title of Fuller's memoir, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, thus also has an earnest application as an expression of her child-self's wish to preserve a sense of familial normality; that is, it has both an ironic and a serious intent.

Perhaps the most pertinent interpretation of the title, however, should be taken from Fuller's epigraph to the text, which reads: "Don't let's go to the dogs tonight, / For mother will be there". These lines are derived from a poem by the English humourist A.P. Herbert and grant a rather different meaning to the phrase than the idiomatic one which Tim invokes when he quotes it. The poem humorously describes a girl's resistance to going dancing at the pub, "The Dogs", because all her older relatives, aunts, uncles, and her mother will out-do the youth with their excessive and embarrassing merriment: as a result, she would rather stay at home. The epigraph is significant, because *Don't Let's Go* focuses on the larger-than-life character of Fuller's mother who, for example, would regularly dance and sing on bar tables: "Olé, I'm a Bandit" (15). Fuller describes her mother's standard, alcohol-induced conversations with guests as a "stuck record, *Tragedies of Our Lives*", which comprises four chapters: "The War"; "Dead Children"; "Insanity"; and "Being Nicola Fuller of Central Africa" (20). The response from those on the receiving end is described as: "Delight"; "Mild Intoxication Coupled with Growing Disbelief"; "Extreme Intoxication Coupled with Growing Panic"; "Lack of Consciousness" (21). Nicola Fuller is thus depicted by her daughter as sociable and charming, but also as manic and bordering on narcissistic.

Evidently, Nicola is a difficult person, particularly as a mother, with whom to come to terms – as is apparent in the fact that Fuller has written two books largely centred on her mother. This reflects an interesting parallel between mother and daughter: the obsession with telling and re-telling stories of the family's past. Fuller's descriptions of Nicola, in which the author utilises

humour to create a light-hearted effect, betray a sense of tedium in accommodating her mother's repetitious stories and the views they display, such as her fight to "keep *one* country in Africa white-run" (17). However, in certain instances, such as when Fuller describes her mother's aggression towards the squatters that settle on Robandi before the Fullers must officially leave, she abandons humour:

> Mum charges at the squatters repeatedly, kicking Caesar fiercely and running indiscriminately at the women, the children, the men. And then she turns her horse onto the freshly planted maize field and begins tearing through it, between the still-bleeding stumps of the newly cut msasa trees. "You fucking kaffirs!" She screams, "Fucking, fucking kaffirs." (159).

This description is stark rather than ironic – as Will phrases it, Fuller is "telling it as it was". This excerpt takes the form of an exposé of her mother, and, by association, herself, as she was a reluctant participant, by virtue of her presence, during this incident.

Don't Let's Go is both confessional and ironic, at times simultaneously; are the two modes compatible or counter-active? At surface level, confession reveals and irony conceals; however, both modes are equally capable of expressing significant truths and liable to prevarication. Jo Gill traces the origins of the confessional mode from a religious to a secular and in particular, modern context. The incorporation of Catholic confessional rituals into the Christian church developed an "understanding of penance as both palliative and reformative" (5). Subsequently, out of the Protestant tradition of critical self-examination grew what Lawrence Stone terms "a literature of self-exploration" (qtd in Gill 5) from which modern confessional writing is derived. While there is a continuing perception of "confession as therapeutic, or cathartic, or as a form of 'healing'", Gill notes that "strategies of evasion, displacement and obfuscation" (7) are consistent features of confessional writing. She argues, however, that there is a trend in which modern writers accommodate the problems of the confessional by acknowledging them, and she then maintains that "modern confessional writing's acute awareness of the volatility of its (necessary) audience generates a profound scepticism about the likelihood of forgiveness or reintegration" (7). In other words, irony is indeed, if paradoxically, compatible with confession because "the practice itself, as conventionally perceived, seems inadequate and in need of radical revision" (8).

Tony Simoes Da Silva interprets Fuller's implementation of irony as effective as a form of exposition:

> Fuller's self-aware use of racist language and imagery offers a direct challenge to the reader to disagree with her playful references to the inferiority of Black people, or Africa's inability to look after its own affairs. Fuller avoids the bathos that so often marks the desire to authentically represent experience in life-writing accounts by deploying a self-knowing irony that denies readers the safe subject positions of the consumer of personal trauma. ("Narrating a White Africa" 473-4)

However, as mentioned earlier, not all critics are satisfied with Fuller's use of irony to assert a critical distance from racist representations (and, as will be discussed later, neither, ultimately, is Da Silva). Linda Hutcheon notes that the "dissembling Greek *eiron* figure", from which the term irony originates, is regarded by many as a "cynical and hypocritical one" (224). Irony relies on the interpreter to perceive the stated in terms opposite to its appearance. What is to be understood is unstated, and thus irony can "be seen as a deliberate evasion of responsibility" (224). Hutcheon suggests, however, that irony be conceived as comprised of both the "spoken *and* the unspoken", based on the "semantic space . . . in between" these, and, further, that such a space contains "an evaluative 'edge'" (220). In her terms, "In spite of certain structural similarities, irony would not be the same as metaphor, allegory, or even lying, and one major difference would be this critical edge" (220).

Both confession and irony rely on the reader in quite particular ways. Confession is necessarily performative and requires an audience: "It is generated and sustained not by the troubled subject/confessant, but by the discursive relationship between speaker and reader (confessant and confessor)" (Gill 4). Irony requires a 'knowing' interpreter to infer the ironist's intention (Hutcheon 220). One might purport that Fuller writes for two broad audiences: an international market and an African market. As an American citizen, she directs her narrative to an American and wider audience, including those largely ignorant about the continent of Africa, who will receive her books as exotic adventure stories. Closer to the place(s) where her books are set, her writing is popular amongst *white* Southern Africans. White ex-Rhodesian readers, particularly of Fuller's generation, *might* relate to the minutiae of her recollections and understand the conversational lingo, including racist terminology, from a familiar and shared cultural milieu: they can be termed readers 'in-the-know' with the author. Deborah Seddon, for example, writes, of *Don't Let's Go*:

> Three years younger than Fuller, I grew up in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe at the same time. Her first book proved to be a painful but rewarding return to the interior landscapes of my own childhood. This candid portrayal of the madness that

> shaped the story of white Rhodesia tells the truth of the place through the intimate particularity of its people. (91)

In contrast, however, she presents a vehement critique of *Scribbling the Cat*, which she views as a fundamentally dishonest book. Of Fuller's first memoir, Da Silva states: "Fuller continually turns the cards on her reader, especially one fed on an Africa created out of the semiotics of Eurocentric discourses" (474), a statement which implies that a reader might initially digest Fuller's account a little too comfortably, as the onus is on him/her to take up the critical edge of the "in between". *Don't Let's Go* is also particularly liable to alienate a black African readership that is painfully aware of white racism from its exclusionary end, and for whom Fuller's brand of irony would undoubtedly be offensive; indeed it seems unlikely that the author imagines this population to comprise her readers. On the other hand, *Don't Let's Go* scrutinises colonial society by presenting the author's memories of the lifestyle and social discourse she was raised within and it challenges white readers to acknowledge this society's malaise.

Fuller tells of her socialisation into white, war-time Rhodesian society without passing judgment, but her technique of exposition via stark and satirical descriptions implicitly passes the task of critical interrogation on to the reader. While critics have seized on such authorial ambiguity as ethically questionable, a more straight-forward moral condemnation of a society would be less engaging and prone to the bathos that Da Silva, above, associates with confessional life writing. Fuller's often light-hearted tone re-enacts her child-self's naivety, overlaying content which is often, in contradistinction, disturbing. The cheerful narration also displays the mundane casualness of racism in the everyday context. Thus, although Fuller's style raises concerns, its multi-layered quality creates a richness in the reading experience that might be lost if the author made it her priority to take a clear political and moral stand.

Responses to Fuller's book, as with white writing generally, regard the question of representing belonging in relation to African land as a point of controversy. Primorac argues that the timing of the publication of *Don't Let's Go*, after the start of the land redistribution programme in Zimbabwe in 2000, creates a problematic subtext: "there is a strong sense in [Fuller's] text that the injustice of this process gave her license to tell a story which could not be previously told, because the story itself contains a similar injustice" – that is, the reallocation of Robandi (212). She adds, "It is as if the 'obviousness' of this injustice [the recent land

redistribution programme] removes the previously assumed political incorrectness of a neo-Rhodesian story" (212). In a similar vein, Ashleigh Harris argues that:

> The identity of the 'exile' and the 'refugee' is one deeply entwined with the loss of land, or belonging in/on the land of one's nation of origin. This has allowed white Zimbabwean (ex)landowners to shed, along with their land, the identity of 'settler' . . . Ironically, then, in the loss of ownership of land the somewhat tenuous relationship between self and land implied by the word 'settler' is replaced by a seemingly authentic claim to the land as the place of origin. (106)

Primorac and Harris read the subtext of Fuller's narrative to be that her family were *victims* of the new regime's land reallocation policy, and Harris further argues that Fuller utilises a "discourse of victimhood" (117) to inscribe herself as belonging to the Zimbabwean homeland, the "identification" of the latter which she views to be the "metaphoric destination" (108) of the narrative.

It seems questionable that *Don't Let's Go* is a victim-narrative, particularly as it is not written with self-pity but, rather, self-scrutiny in mind. Fuller makes strong claims for belonging to place, such as her metaphoric description that the land itself raised her: "In Rhodesia, we are born and then the umbilical cord of each child is sewn straight from the mother onto the ground, where it takes root and grows" (153). However, she does convey an ambivalence and uncertainty regarding the right to own land, in general, but especially for the white African, in this particular context. For example, she describes land as indifferent to the passionate human battles fought over it. Concerning the historical procession of claims to the land that was Rhodesia and is now Zimbabwe, for example, she states: "The land itself, of course, was careless of its name . . . it will absorb white man's blood and the blood of African men . . . with equal thirst. It doesn't care" (26). Later, she emphasises the fact that the real owner of Robandi is the mortgage company (165). Moreover, by describing her mother's violently racist attack of the squatters on the farm, she exposes the power dynamics underpinning race and land ownership.

Yet there is a broader concern about Fuller's debut, which Da Silva raises; he ultimately resists *Don't Let's Go* in terms of its privileging of white experience:

> As I struggled to reconcile the text's success and my own resistance to it, I came to think that my reaction was less a consequence of the fact that I *could* not empathise with Fuller's story and more of a feeling that I *should* not, given her whiteness and the African setting of the narrative . . . In Fuller's work . . . the messy political and social situation in Zimbabwe is framed by a personal

> discourse of trauma, dispossession and exile in which the White person's story acquires significance well beyond its place in contemporary Africa. (475-476)

The argument that white stories receive privileged attention is a powerful and concerning one, especially considering the veritable flow of white Zimbabwean narratives since Fuller's publication. Critics suggest that the story of *Don't Let's Go* is an inappropriate one to tell, largely for what they perceive as its invitation to the reader to empathise with a (racist) white African family, through whose experiences the liberation war and the topics of land ownership and national belonging is mediated. However, if the text has attracted much attention, Fuller does not seem to seek empathy or redemption. Her parents are not portrayed from a sympathetic angle, apart from their personal tragedies in the loss of three children. She depicts herself as a child with a sense of racial entitlement, as when she says to her black nanny "I can fire you if I like. Anytime I want, I can fire you" (140), and she does not describe a pivotal transformation, in contrast with St John. In Gill's terms, she displays "a profound scepticism" about the confessional mode.

Self-evidently, then, *Don't Let's Go* is a contentious publication. It is striking that the dialogue about this book focuses largely on the issue of 'telling' and 'not telling': that, on the one hand, Fuller should be commended for 'telling all' and that her narrative is effective as a function of her use of irony, or that, on the other, she perhaps ought not to have told this story at all, especially at this time, and that her holding back of moral comment is ethically questionable. Da Silva expresses "a distaste for [the text's] overt recycling of racist views of Africa and of Africans" (472), and yet also notes that Fuller is "adept at evading the all too easy labelling of her work as recycling Eurocentric narratives of Africa" (475). He thus terms Fuller "a smart and rather slippery storyteller" (475). It is difficult to make a final pronouncement on this text, which is a troubling one and which has caused offense. Personally, and perhaps crucially, as a white Zimbabwean, I found some aspects of Fuller's descriptions of growing up in Zimbabwe to be relatable and also her descriptions of white society to be recognizable in some negative and disturbing regards; I thus responded to Fuller's ironic representations with the necessary mixture of identification and distance, in a way that I understand those that simply feel alienated by her descriptions would not.

2.3 ***Scribbling the Cat***

Scribbling is premised on the claim that, in pursuing the story it recounts, Fuller was *too* curious and that the experience "bloody nearly killed [her]" (6), in line with the adage "curiosity killed the cat". This implies that the story to follow will be revelatory. The title adapts the aforementioned idiomatic expression, which refers to the proverbial cat that succumbed to the dangers of unnecessary prying, to idiosyncratic white Rhodesian war lingo in which "scribbling" means killing. However, the word further suggests the act of writing the book itself and therefore that this task might be hazardous or destructive. The casualness of the term for killing expresses the dehumanisition of war and introduces the book's focus, the walking war-wounded:

> Anyone who has existed on the soil on which a war is fought knows the look of the returned soldier – the haunted look of someone who has seen more than his fair share of horror. People who have inflicted pain, who have destroyed, who have been in pain and been destroyed. (38)

Scribbling is centred on one such figure, whom Fuller calls "K" to protect his identity, although in many respects the story is about herself, as she identifies herself as war-damaged; she is drawn to K for this reason. K is a banana farmer who lives near her parents in Zambia and who was part of the Rhodesian Light Infantry (RLI): "highly trained white boys whose 'kill ratio' and violent reputation were a source of pride for most white Rhodesians" (25-6). On first meeting K in the early 2000s, on a visit to her parents from Wyoming where she now lives, Fuller is aware that he is deeply troubled by his war memories. She offers to travel with him to Mozambique in order to re-trace the places where his involvement in the war occurred, and suggests that this journey will be a healing process for him and provide a writing project for herself. It is through K, and on this trip, that Fuller meets several other ex-combatants, and it becomes apparent to her that they are all damaged, perpetually trapped in an out-dated ideology and on the verge of madness. She becomes more involved with these individuals than she had originally intended. Unlike *Don't Let's Go*, *Scribbling* delves into the possibility of confession as atonement for historical culpability, and Fuller acts as both witness and confessor in this regard. In addition she consciously displays, as well as less consciously reveals, personal shortcomings relating to the process of researching and writing the book itself.

Seddon, argues, in direct contradiction to the author herself, that Fuller is "not curious enough" (95), due to her limiting of her exploration of the war to a "clutch of white ex-soldiers

who live out in the middle of nowhere" (94). One of these soldiers, Mapenga (whose nickname appropriately denotes madness in Shona), employs a Frelimo ex-combatant, Andrew, as a domestic worker. Seddon comments that Andrew, in contrast to the white ex-combatants on whom Fuller focuses, is "gentle, courteous, and very much sane" (95), and yet Fuller's conversation with him is brief and concerns Mapenga; she thus misses an opportunity to learn about the other side of the Chimurenga. Seddon also remarks that, in the journey Fuller describes through Zambia to Mozambique, via Zimbabwe, the "landscape and its people remain nothing more than a backdrop to her story" (94). To a certain extent, however, Fuller exempts herself from a multifaceted and comprehensive representation of the long-term effects of the war. In her Author's Note, she declares:

> This is a true story about a man and about the journey that I took with that man. It is a story about the continuing relationship that grew between the man and me and it is a story about the land over which we journeyed. But it is only my story; a slither of a slither of a much greater story. It is not supposed to be an historic document of fact.

Seddon notes that by using the word "true" here, Fuller claims to be representing something "essential to the reality of the situation" (88), but argues that "to return to the same ground and recount the past, the civil war, from an adult perspective requires a certain responsibility that I am no longer convinced Fuller is willing to take" (95). In other words, Fuller evades truly engaging with the events and implications of the war by delineating her project in a one-sided manner, and by focusing on intransigent white ex-combatants with whom she empathises. She does sketch the historical background to the Chimurenga as well as Mozambique's wars, but her focal interest is K and a sample of other special force soldiers, in other words, those that are regarded as the worst perpetrators during the war. With Seddon's argument in mind, *does* Fuller encounter and reveal certain truths worth sharing, or does the book simply fail? The author reveals the devastating impact that war has had on the ex-combatants and K, specifically; she gains certain insights into the nature of the war, insights which she has previously repressed; and she displays the pitfalls of attempting to write another's story when the boundaries are blurred between the self and this other.

Seddon is critical of what she terms Fuller's "secret stealing" of K's and others' stories (91).While researchers are generally required to obtain permission to use personal data from respondents in their research findings, Fuller excuses herself from this obligation with a

disclaimer in her Author's Note. Here she states that she has broken the pact of secrecy that applies to soldiers: "What goes on tour stays on tour". Evidently the trust between the men and herself is based on her camouflage of belonging to the group. When one of the men, St Medard, on meeting Fuller, probes her bona fides, she misidentifies herself and does not divulge that she is indeed treating the interaction as material for a book, and not merely as an opportunity to socialise:

> "You're not one of those nosy journalist types, are you?"
> "No," I lied. (203)

In one particular incident, near the end of the journey, Fuller crosses a boundary: she kisses Mapenga, the man who, by reputation, no woman has ever refused. This constitutes a transgression on Fuller's part, as she is a married woman, and it also brings the discrepancy between her own and K's view of their relationship to crisis point. There is a fundamental misunderstanding between Fuller and K regarding the nature of this relationship: K is romantically interested in her, whereas she "believed that [she] wanted to write him into dry pages" (238), that is, to pursue and write his story. However, the word "believed" implies that she actually sought something more or different to the writing project. As will be explored below, she is drawn to K himself, and she is thus involved in deceiving not only K, but herself. After she kisses Mapenga, out of jealousy and rage K rummages through Fuller's records, intending to destroy them, and then retracts his permission for her to tell his story (237). While K does eventually grant this permission, in an email that comprises the post-script of the book, this turn-about occurred after the book's completion and shortly before its publication (251). Thus, Fuller intended to publish this story with, or without K's permission.

Seddon argues that, while Fuller is "sometimes disarmingly candid about her own questionable motives in tracking K's story, she is often reticent about her own understandings", and that this creates a sense of her "evasive unreliability as narrator" (93). In an interview with Penguin Group USA, Fuller explains why she deliberately does not disguise her own failings and inconsistencies in the narrative of *Scribbling* itself:

> the book was *my* interpretation of a story and a man and a time. I needed to find the courage to write it so that "the writer" was as problematic a character as the central character was. I didn't want the reader to have a restful read or a "safe" character to identify with – after all – what part of war, or the repercussions of war, are restful or safe or unequivocal? (para 13)

However, her ambiguous and inconsistently objective/subjective position creates a problem of interpretation. As narrator, Fuller displays a certain level of self-reflexive awareness of the limitations of her probings. Thus, when she questions the workers on K's banana farm in Zambia, who claim that "working for Bwana K was very good", she notes that they may simply be attempting, via her, to appease their employer: "For all they knew, I was spying on K's behalf" (123). But, in a similar vein to *Don't Let's Go*, she relays racist talk without comment. For example, when K tells her of his loneliness on the farm and the rare occasions that he talks about the war, he says:

> I don't have anyone *to* talk to except the *gondies* [farm workers and residents] . . . And you know how it is to talk to these guys? I love these *munts*, I really do, but . . . I don't really talk to them . . . about my life. (65)

While she initially seems to over-identify with K, towards the end of the narrative Fuller rapidly disentangles herself. She clarifies this withdrawal in her interview with Penguin Group: "As K took more and more control over the trip, and as his demons became more and more out of control, I found myself feeling less and less capable of holding onto the remote spectator, woman-in-control role I had set up for myself" (para 9). However, in the beginning Fuller is deeply affected and attracted by K, as her description of her first impression him reveals:

> Even at first glance, K was more than ordinarily beautiful, but in a careless, superior way, like a dominant lion or an ancient fortress . . . He looked bulletproof and he looked as if he was here on *purpose*, which is a difficult trick to pull off in this woolly climate. He looked like he was his own self-sufficient, debt-free, little nation – a living, walking, African Vatican City. As if he owned the ground beneath his feet, and as if the sky balanced with ease on his shoulders. He looked cathedral. (20)

Her hyperbolic language here in essence depicts K's 'Africanness' and conveys a sense of his groundedness and authority which is also apparent when she later compares him to Mwetsi, the first man in Shona mythology. The latter comparison grants him the qualities of ancient belonging – surely a misplaced claim for a white African. As Primorac argues, Fuller's depiction of K as "organically connected to the land" draws on a romantic and problematic colonial literary/mythic tradition (217) and her description of K as "cathedral" and the allusion to the Vatican in the citation above, not only links K to foreignness and Europe, but also to "mastery of the African space that surrounds him" (217). Located in Wyoming, and therefore at

some distance from her African roots, it is perhaps not a coincidence that Fuller imagines K, in contrast to herself, to be firmly located in the African environment.

During her first conversation with him, she makes a remark about the kill ratio of the RLI and he breaks into tears. It is this contradiction between apparent strength and actual vulnerability which first makes a compelling impression on Fuller. Although one could easily conclude from *Scribbling* itself that Fuller was sexually attracted to K, and that this is an aspect of their relationship that she fails fully to acknowledge, in an interview with Graham Boynton she denies that this is so:

> here was an extraordinary human being. He is inconvenient, he is not pleasant to be around, and I wanted to understand him. It wasn't that I was in love with him… it was never physical. It was that I was utterly obsessed with the amount of pain he carried around with him. (para 7)

From the above it is apparent that K holds powerful symbolic value for Fuller, largely due to her own sense of implication in the Rhodesian war and the resonance of this trauma. After spending time with K and returning to America, she struggles to settle into her normal routine in Wyoming and feels alienated. K evokes her sense of 'otherness' as a damaged individual, especially as a foreigner in an America that she describes as a "fat, sweet country" (6). The latter problematic description of what is, in reality, an unequal and complex society, nevertheless perhaps captures her own comfortable, middle-class existence in Wyoming.

Once at home, in order to excuse herself from the New Year's festivities, she feigns malaria for a week, an illness signaling her African self and granting her legitimate exclusion from American social expectations. Only gradually is she able to return to a sense of normality, and this process she describes as a shedding of her African self: "[I] disentangled myself from my [African] history, one sticky thread at a time, until I was completely, happily reestablished as a Wyoming mother. I started to take the ease for granted" (73). However, this placidity is disturbed by the recurrence of a once-familiar nightmare, described earlier in the book:

> When I was a little girl, spinning around in the cycle of violence that I understood, only very vaguely, as Rhodesia's war of independence, I used to have a recurring dream that I was being abducted by a massive crow; it scooped me up from the garden where I had been playing and flew with me to Mozambique, where it dropped me on a land mine. (30)

Fuller's *Don't Let's Go* depicts the stress of a child growing up in a war environment; despite the experiencing self's political naivety, the sense of imminent danger is pervasive and destabilizing. In *Scribbling*, the dream re-evokes this sense. It is also both prophetic and retrospective, as Fuller will engage with her suppressed knowledge of the violence of the war whilst travelling in Mozambique. Significantly, in contrast to the control implied by *feigning* malaria, this dream erupts from her unconscious, disturbing her. She describes how she wakes at

> The hour when regret and fear overwhelm hope and courage and when all that is ugly in us is magnified and when we are most panic-stricken by what we have lost, and what we have almost lost, and what we might lose. (74)

Fuller aligns this feeling with war-time Rhodesia, and the presence of K in her subconscious seems to have provoked this remembered dream-scape and sense of terror. K prompts her to engage with the war that half of her would prefer to forget, and this is ostensibly the motivation behind her proposal to venture to Mozambique with him.

Antje Rauwerda describes Fuller's project as the "opposite of nostalgic", in the sense that it expresses a desire to shed history (61). This desire to avoid the past must, however, be seen in tension with the urge to confront history that initiates Fuller's journey. These opposite inclinations – towards and against the past – both spring from a yearning for a sense of a stable identity, and are best exemplified in the duality Fuller experiences as both African and American. Her parents and sister live in Zambia, and she experiences a continuation of her African identity through visiting them. Notably, however, she does not want her children to visit (14); presumably she wishes to keep them removed from her past, although she does not clarify this. K disturbs the secure distinction that Fuller has set up between her two lives. Rauwerda notes that it is in Mozambique that "Fuller confronts the contrast between her American and African lives most openly" (59). Once there, she reflects on the absurd circumstances she finds herself in, and more than once refers to her "real life" in America and longs for her domestic routine. Nevertheless, while she yearns for stability, instability is more familiar and compelling to her. This is why she is initially drawn to K, until later she rejects him and where he has led her:

> I wanted to get off the island and wash their words and their war and their hatred from my head and I wanted to be incurious and content and conventional. (237)

Her historically-inspired trip with K is not ultimately what she expects it to be: a journey which will end with a sense of resolution of the past. In many ways, therefore, *Scribbling* is about denial rather than truth.

Indeed, Fuller traces war denialism throughout the book, beginning with her own father who, when prompted by her to speak of his experiences, rebuts her: "Nothing to talk about" (34). It is he who also warns her that "Curiosity scribbled the cat" (45) when she expresses an interest in K. There is a wall of silence among the ex-combatants Fuller encounters; for example, in Zimbabwe, en route to Mozambique, she asks K's friend, Riley, if he regretted the war. She then relates:

> [he] blinked at me, as if I had said something blasphemous …"I've been a soldier most of my life and it didn't mess me up." He coughed his metallic-coffin laugh again. "We were dropped out of airplanes, did the job, and then they pulled us out. When it got stressful . . . well, yes: it got stressful when there were three or four contacts a day. That's how it was." (131)

His choice of euphemistic diction such as "stressful" and "the job" unwittingly reveals that he is indeed emotionally damaged, and the description of his grotesque laugh suggests that he is haunted by memories he would rather forget. Fuller refers to a "certain breed of ex-soldier", recognisable "for how their lives have unravelled", and then explains:

> There are the tattoos, the shaggy beards . . . the cigarettes, the drinking, the bluster. If you sleep in the same house or camp with them, you will hear their spooks. They shout their ghosts away all night . . . There are the multi-marriages . . . There is the history of violence: the brawls, the destroyed bars, the nights in jail. And then, when everything else has peeled away from them, there is God. (128)

The bravado and machismo associated with combat provides a means of professing strength, bolstered by camaraderie, despite shattered lives. K's transition from infamous drunk and fist-fighter to a born-again Christian teetotaller (the latter being the reformed state in which Fuller meets him) reveals his inner instability. K describes himself as having been possessed by Satan at one point – a means of making sense of post-traumatic stress (139). His schizophrenic oscillations between dejection and faith, self-loathing and self-assertion, fascinate Fuller, who refers to herself as a "Disbelieving Thomas" (90). The fact that K is religious suggests that he is capable of finding a sense of redemption through faith that is not accessible from a secular perspective, although he seems unable to reach closure.

The climax of the story is K's confession of a war crime against a civilian girl of about sixteen, a visceral and deeply disturbing account which is triggered by his reconnection with the Mozambican landscape and the memories it evokes. Fuller is invited to witness K's confession; he informs her "you're the only person I would ever trust with this story" (148). However, she divulges, "My heart plunged. I wanted his story, but I didn't want his trust" (148). Her motivation is self-interested:

> "You don't have to tell me," but I was lying. I felt somehow that if I knew this one secret about K – this one, great, untold story – then everything else about him would become clear and I could label him and write him into coherence. And then I would know what I was doing here and how I had arrived here and I'd know more about who *I* was. (147-148)

K's confession is about his responsibility, as commander of a small unit, for the torture of a young Shona woman in a rural village. The event has obviously haunted K, who begins his account with "Better I die [than what followed]" (152). His confession itself is undermined by the fact that it is riddled with racist attitudes. For example, he clarifies the purpose of the torture 'drowning technique' to Fuller: "you know, a *munt* doesn't like water" (150). He describes how he tortured the young woman by beating, "drowning" and finally shoving a spoonful of hot sadza "into her . . . you know?" (152). The particularly intimate and horrifying nature of the latter violation results in her death by infection two weeks later (152).

Fuller responds to K's confession vicariously – as if it were her own:

> I thought I *own* this now. This was *my* war too. I had been a small, smug white girl shouting, "We are all Rhodesians and we'll fight through *thickanthin*." I was every bit that woman's murderer. (152)

At this point it becomes evident that she seeks personal atonement for her own juvenile support for combatants in the Rhodesian war, and that her role has shifted from that of witness to confessor. Susannah Radstone distinguishes between confession and testimony:

> In confession it is the self that is scrutinised and implicated – the self that is the subject and object of confession. Witness testimony's object, on the other hand, is always an event or an other that is external to the witness. (169)

Further, both confession and testimony are 'impossible' for different reasons:

> Whereas confession's 'impossibilities' are primarily associated with the tensions of intra-subjectivity, testimony's impossibilities are linked with the struggles of inter-subjectivity. Theories of testimony dwell on the difficulties attendant upon

> transforming the registration of significant events of suffering or shock into meaningful experience that can be communicated to others. (175)

Fuller compromises her role as witness, firstly, by admitting that she has a personal motive in hearing K's story, and then by assimilating it as her own confession, without respecting its inaccessibility to her as K's traumatic memory. Claiming K's confession as her own is also a means for Fuller to deal with her betrayal of K's trust in confiding in her. However, she is also acknowledging that historical culpability for war and colonial violence is a shared burden, and thus, in an important sense, her recognition that "This was *my* war too" represents a moment of shared ethical responsibility. Seddon suggests that it is unlikely that this is Fuller's first encounter with a story as disturbing as K's about the war, and that her response is therefore "self-indulgent" and "only half-believable" (94). However, Fuller registers that the novelty of this acceptance of culpability is only a half-truth. She says to K "I had no idea. . . .", but then adds:

> But I did. I knew, without really being told out loud, what happened in the war and I knew it was as brutal and indefensible as what I had just heard from K. I just hadn't wanted to know. (152)

Fuller's initial acknowledgment of her own implicatedness in war atrocities is thus framed by yet another confession, which relativises the first. Coetzee, in his essay "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky", maintains that "Because the basic movement of self-reflexiveness is a doubting and questioning movement, it is in the nature of the truth told to itself by the reflecting self not to be final" – that is, that the confession, on further thought, gives way to another confession, and so on ad infinitum (263). He also notes that "Confession is one component in a sequence of transgression, confession, penitence, and absolution" (251). However, since there is potentially no closure or point of final truth in secular confession, given that divine absolution is irrelevant, this poses a problem in defining an end to confession:

> The possibility we face is of a confession made via a process of relentless self-unmasking which might yet be not the truth but a self-serving fiction, because behind the unexamined, unexaminable principle may be not a desire for the truth but a desire to *be a particular way*. (280, emphasis in original)

Coetzee, drawing on the writing of Tolstoy, identifies "sincerity" as an important aspect of secular confession, that is, an attitude rather than an end, which may be measured by "the single-mindedness of the quest for the truth" (262). However, throughout *Scribbling* Fuller attests to a

reluctance to explore the truth, and thus her openly expressed doubt, while honest in the sense of disclosure, compromises a sincere seeking of 'truth'. Before K tells her of his most disturbing war atrocity, for instance, she admits:

> I could tell that K's story wasn't something I wanted to carry with me back into my other life. Into the life-as-mother, life-as-wife. The insistently bright, loudly optimistic life that was my *real* life. (148)

Fuller's reference to her "real" life as her domestic setting in Wyoming stands in contrast with her sense of the ethereal quality of her middle-class existence there, which she experienced when returning after meeting K in Zambia. This contradictory or alternating response to place suggests her inclination both towards and against her past, and her ambivalence in facing the impact of the war in which she is implicated. Further, K's confession is surely what she has been hoping for, as material for her book, and yet she claims that at the moment preceding its occurrence she wished not to hear it.

K's confession offers her a glimpse into the truth of the horror of the war and a felt sense of her own culpability, and is thus an important symbolic moment of revelation and acknowledgment. After his confession, both K and Fuller weep, but neither is granted catharsis: Fuller, because of the doubt she reveals both as authentic witness and as confessor, and K because of his inability either to disentangle himself from war ideology or to forgive himself. As Coetzee states, "Self-forgiveness means the closing of the chapter" (290). After K has stopped weeping and is about to refuel the car, he remarks despairingly: "I should just swallow this [fuel] . . . Then there'd be one less arsehole in the world" (157). Later, following the rupture in their relationship towards the end of the trip and a tense reconciliation, K remarks that, although he has thought about "giving up" or committing suicide, he "'remember[s] that no one is given a burden too heavy for them to carry . . . I carry on, because I can'" (249). His religion offers him palliative support, but not redemption.

At the end of the journey, and after her breach with Mapenga and her fall-out with K and his destruction of her records, Fuller experiences an epiphany:

> I didn't care about any of it, because putting their story into words and onto film and tapes had changed nothing. Nothing K and Mapenga had told me, or shown me – and nothing I could ever write about them – could undo the pain of their having been on the planet. Neither could I undo what I had wrought. (258)

Here she appears to renounce her project as a failure. Earlier she admits that her intention to "write [K] into dry pages" was "an idea based on a lie" (238), the lie being the misunderstanding in how each viewed the relationship (the true nature of which she perhaps never offers full disclosure). And yet, in her Author's Note, she asserts that "what is important is the story". Considering her admission that the journey was a failure, Fuller's motive in affirming the story as "important" is not self-evident. In the Penguin Group interview, she describes the discrepancy between her expectations and the reality of the journey and the book:

> K had been told, and had believed, the "old lie" expressed in Wilfred Owens's First World War poem "Dulce et Decorum Est pro Patria Mori": "It is sweet and right to die for your country." . . . I thought the outcome of our trip would be – a clear, simple, antiwar book. Of course, in planning the trip, I also thought that I would maintain a kind of pristine, sterile distance from everything and that my story would be an objective antiwar lesson (perhaps that idea of objectivity in writing is another kind of "old lie"). Instead, the insanity of the idea that you can really know someone without getting under their skin and the insanity of an old war made the whole journey far more potent and morally difficult than I had intended or than I could manage. (para 3-4)

Scribbling is an anti-war book in the sense that Fuller captures the damage war inflicts upon a "certain breed of ex-soldier", those who are both perpetrators and victims of the social-political system which bred them. In spending time with such men, Fuller herself loses her bearings and is overwhelmed by their trauma (128). Her book is thus ultimately about the dilemma of being entangled in and trying to disentangle the past, and a messy relationship. As both testimony and confession, of necessity, it fails. Furthermore, *Scribbling* falls short of Coetzee's criterion of sincerity as the alternative to redemption, and therefore it is not exemplary regarding how best to deal with complicity in a violent past. Rather, it reads as a cautionary tale about personal and, more generally, human shortcomings when faced with such a responsibility.

2.4 **Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness**

Cocktail Hour is both a sequel and prequel to *Don't Let's Go*, and exemplifies the authorial process of "re-telling". Fuller, as narrator, re-tells her mother's versions of stories and also re-tells her own childhood, thus revisiting the terrain of her first memoir. She describes her third memoir's origins as lying in her mother's response to her first publication, which the latter referred to as "The Awful Book", and explains, in an interview with Nikki Temkin, that her mother's "response to the first book was 'you don't know me'" and that she wanted "to know this incredible, dynamic, glamorous woman in her entirety" (6). *Cocktail Hour* therefore shifts towards biography although, because of its family focus and tracing of ancestry, it is also an extension of Fuller's autobiography. Apparently, her mother "accepts this [book]" (para 5). Parul Kapur Hinzen states that, in *Cocktail Hour*, "Fuller tries to make nice with her mother, losing the frank tone and vivid child's-eye revelations that made *Dogs* so compelling" (para 3). To a certain extent, I agree with Hinzen. While *Don't Let's Go* stands as a societal exposé of white Rhodesia, despite its family focus, *Cocktail Hour* draws on the popularity and publishing success of the Fuller family story in the first memoir and has less impact, not least due to the fact that, after a certain point, the narrative covers the same ground as its predecessor. While Fuller herself describes *Cocktail Hour* as a conciliatory gesture towards her mother, she continues to depict the latter ironically for the most part, and comments on Nicola's stories with daughterly humour and scepticism, as well as empathy. In this section, I explore the act of re-writing, specifically, and what that process suggests about the incompleteness and temporality of autobiography.

In *Cocktail Hour*, Fuller introduces herself as purportedly performing the role of "reasonably pliable witness as scribe" (4) for her mother, who "has always wanted a writer in the family . . . because she loves books and has therefore always wanted to appear in them (the way she likes large, expensive hats, and likes to appear in them)" (3-4). Fuller's appeasement of her mother is both serious, in that she claims "I've worked hard to get to a place of acceptance and forgiveness of self and others" (Temkin para 13), and tongue-in-cheek. *Cocktail Hour* is comically presented as a drama: there is an introductory reference to the "Cast of Main Characters" (xi), and a "soundtrack" to Nicola Fuller's life is listed in the appendix (229) – a soundtrack which comprises the songs which appear throughout the narrative in Nicola's musical

renditions. The chapter headings also reference key moments in Nicola's life in mock-heroic style; for example, the opening chapter is entitled "Nicola Fuller of Central Africa Learns to Fly". Fuller thus parodies her mother's self-image as a romantic African heroine in the mould of Karen Blixen in Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa* (6).

Nicola, in fact, was raised in Kenya, and Fuller recalls the stories of that country that her mother told her as a child:

> Mum presented Kenya to me as a place of such forbidding perfection that its flawlessness shattered in the telling and what I was left holding on to were shards of equatorial light. Even the hinted-at, subsurface revolutionary tactics of the Mau-Mau fighters, who were agitating for independence from British rule, were part of the romance. Kenya, in Mum's telling, was a land of such sepia loveliness, such fecundity, such fulfilment that it was worth dying for if you were white (if you were black and you wanted to die for Kenya, that was another matter altogether. Then you were an unpleasant, uppity Kikuyu anarchist). (63)

Cocktail Hour makes apparent that familial history repeats itself; despite growing up in circumstances and a country in which colonialism was being fiercely resisted, Nicola settles her own young family in Rhodesia, choosing to live in Africa after a brief spell in England. Fuller adds to her mother's version of events by pointing out a meaningful aporia:

> What Mum doesn't say but what she means is that she wanted to stay in White-ruled Africa. In some ways she doesn't need to say it. Most white Africans either left the countries or receded farther and farther south as African countries in the north gained their independence. (131)

There is therefore an ironic contestation between Nicola and Alexandra Fuller's representations of familial history. Fuller's writing is an antidote to her mother's romantic misrepresentations: if she is a "scribe" for her mother, she certainly is not a dutiful one. Despite Nicola's self-adopted title, "Nicola Fuller of Central Africa", she was born in Scotland and has a maternal Scottish ancestry. She describes herself as "one million percent Highland Scottish" and, "as if to prove this", breaks into tears whenever she hears the bagpipes (15). Fuller positions herself against her mother, declaring "I am not tribal. I have no patience with nostalgia" (16). Her comment, in the citation above, that her mother's stories "shatter in the telling", due to their idealisation of the colonial lifestyle, draws attention to Fuller's own tendency to foreground the faultlines of narratives. Rather than simply re-telling her mother's versions of events, she focuses on the elisions and the falsities which break through their surfaces.

Fuller's research for this book, which entailed trips to significant family locations, also took her to the maternal Scottish family estate, Waternish. Her Scottish family's lore includes the story of a Captain Allan Macdonald who, on his return home after sailing one of the last convict ships to Tasmania in the 1840s, brought with him two Palawa Aborigines who lived on the family estate. But, Fuller writes, in photographs

> the Palawa are ghosts, appearing nowhere. I have no way of knowing, even, what gender or age they were. So in the absence of any evidence I picture two homesick, middle-aged men sitting in the rain-lashed garden under a tree from South America, with [the estate's pet] a blind deer, driven to distraction by ill-tempered and unpredictable terriers. (20)

The erasure of this early encounter with 'the other' in colonial family history places the Palawa within the realm of the largely forgotten – there are no marked graves for the "heathens" who, Nicola surmises, would more likely than not have been buried with the pets (20). Fuller also discovers a letter addressed to her maternal grandfather, during the Second World War, by one of his Nigerian soldiers, "whose obviously warm relationship with [her] grandfather" surprises her (49). This letter constitutes unexpected evidence of her maternal family's colonial relations, and reveals something of her grandfather's role and relationships during the war – experiences which he has spoken about only in "disconnected snatches" (46). Fuller draws attention, then, to the gaps in records and the gradual and sometimes accidental way in which information about a family's past enters into its members' consciousness.

Having related earlier ancestral and parental history, the narrative provides an account of the author's personal memories of her childhood. As such, it presents a re-telling of *Don't Let's Go* in both senses that the term suggests, that is, a recapitulation and a revision. The family stories are developed in more detail, partly due to the fact that Fuller has requested her mother to recount particular episodes. For example, Fuller is forty years old when her mother speaks of the death of her second-born for the first time in a sober and coherent manner. The author remarks that, as she hears the story, "I realize that I can't remember a time when I did not know about Adrian, as if knowledge of him crossed the placenta and went directly into my own cells" (141). She also notes that this is the first time she has heard a "relentlessly clear" account of the experience (141). In fact, in *Don't Let's Go*, Fuller *does* recall the moment her mother first told her about Adrian's death (31). However, the tragic impact of the event is pervasive in the family, thus motivating her sense, in the latter memoir, that she has 'always known'.

In the chapter "Nicola Fuller and the End of Rhodesia" in *Cocktail Hour*, Fuller in effect summarises the essence of *Don't Let's Go* in a paragraph:

> So the truth is this: it's towards the end of the war (fin de everything) and our collective thinking has been so shaken up by the hallucinatory, seductive violence of it all that we can't see our way even to a safer address somewhere else in Rhodesia, let alone to leave the country. In any case, it doesn't occur to us to leave. We see our lives as fraught and exciting, terrible and blessed, wild and ensnaring. We see our lives as Rhodesian, and it's not easy to leave a life as arduously rich and difficult as all that. (185)

It is here that it becomes apparent that the narrative style of Fuller's debut, in which she reveals rather than describes and explains, is the more effective. Hinzen entitles his interview with Fuller and critical review of *Cocktail Hour* "Dangerously Honest: Alexandra Fuller's *Cocktail Hour* lacks bite of her *Dogs*". In this interview Fuller describes herself as "a dangerously honest person". However, Hinzen re-appropriates this phrase to suggest the opposite of what Fuller herself implies – in other words, that *Cocktail Hour* loses the authenticity of her first memoir, which was founded on brutally frank representations, whilst, in the latter book, she explains too much. In contrast with Hinzen, however, Temkin writes that Fuller's third work is "still fearless", ascribing this quality to Fuller's "ability to write without self-censorship", and adds that "It's almost as if she can't help but fashion the truth as she sees it – without frills, artifice or embellishment" (para 14). This contestation over how best to tell 'the truth' exists both within and in responses to Fuller's texts. Fuller's style in *Cocktail Hour* shows traces of *Don't Let's Go* in its irony, humour and willingness to expose others and self, but it also reflects a new and adult perspective – a wish to locate her memories in a wider context, and present her mother from a more sympathetic angle reflecting a maturation in their relationship.

It is pertinent that a book about family memories refers to "forgetfulness" in its title. As Sigmund Freud asserted, memory and forgetting are inextricable: "the memory exercises a certain selection among the impressions at its disposal" (57). Apart from the inevitable gaps and disagreements about the past which surface in *Cocktail Hour*, there is a particular application of the term "forgetfulness" in regard to Nicola Fuller, since it is beside the "tree of forgetfulness" that Nicola chooses to locate her and her husband's most recent dwelling. Tim Fuller negotiates with a Zambian chief to lease some land near the Zambezi River in order to set up a fish farm, and offers training and employment to the people of the district (211). Nicola is drawn to a

particular tree on the plot, but does not know its name until Mr. Zulu, who was previously employed as the Fuller's cattle manager and has chosen to move with the couple, explains:

> All the headmen here plant one of these trees in their village . . . They say ancestors stay inside it. If there is some sickness or if you are troubled by spirits, then you sit under the Tree of Forgetfulness and your ancestors will assist you with whatever is wrong . . . It is true – all your troubles and arguments will be resolved. (215)

It is notable that forgetting is associated here with healing and finding a resolution to "troubles and arguments" – with finding peace and relief. Nevertheless, several intense and unresolved conversations which are related in the book take place under this tree, which has been incorporated into the Fullers' home.

"Forgetfulness" also refers both to Nicola's mental instability and to the suggestion that she ultimately achieves a sense of equilibrium. The title of the book's final section echoes that of the book itself, and the section begins with Fuller's account of Nicola's descent into psychic disarray:

> If I had to put a date on the moment Mum began to swim away from us, I would say it was after Richard died, because for years after that she was like someone whose refuge was a remote subaqua world. (199)

She subsequently describes how her mother gradually recovered, with the aid of rest, medication, a psychiatrist and, most especially, willpower. Fuller asserts that this process entailed her mother learning to forgive both herself and humankind, and great fortitude:

> She forgave the world and her mind returned. She gave herself amnesty and her soul had a home again. The forgiveness took years and it took this farm and the Tree of Forgetfulness. It took all of that, but above all it took the one thing grief could never steal from my mother: her courage. (204)

While Nicola's embellished version of her early life and of the Rhodesian war is contested by her daughter, Fuller pays tribute to her mother's current pragmatism and resourcefulness: "Much better to face the truth, pull up your socks and get on with whatever comes next" (185). In this sense 'truth' refers to a common-sense acknowledgement of the past, without delving too far into its greater significance.

In *Don't Let's Go*, Fuller comments: "My soul has no home. I am neither African nor English nor am I of the sea" (35). Writing this memoir from her new home in Wyoming, her

sense of the double dislocation of the white African emigrant – displaced from both Europe and Africa – is evident. The implication of the description, in *Cocktail Hour*, of her mother's process of recovery, is that one can extend what Fuller says of her mother to herself: that by forgiving both herself and her mother, Fuller has also found healing. Indeed, she suggests as much in her interview with Temkin, quoted earlier: "I've worked hard to get to a place of acceptance and forgiveness of self and others". Thus if, as Coetzee suggests, "Self-forgiveness means the closing of the chapter" (290), we might expect that this will be the last we will hear of the Fuller family.

2.5 **Conclusion**

While *Don't Let's Go* is a controversial text, critics such as Seddon and Hinzen suggest that it is an affecting and resonating book, and that *Scribbling the Cat* and *Cocktail Hour*, respectively, are less honest accounts. I concur that the first memoir is the best, and perhaps Fuller ought to have stopped writing about her past at this point. A cynic might suggest that the latter two texts are simply the result of the success of the first, and that the publishing industry is eager to keep publishing an author guaranteed to sell well. While acknowledging this aspect, I believe that the texts also relate to one another and together reveal some interesting continuations and variances. Read in conjunction they represent the urge and the necessity to re-tell the past.

Don't Let's Go tapers off with brief accounts of Fuller and her sister, Vanessa's weddings. However, the traditional neatness of this felicitous ending is disturbed by the failure of Vanessa's first marriage and her subsequent re-marriage. Fuller finishes the book with the comment: "This is not a full circle. It's life carrying on. It's the next breath we all take. It's the choice we make to get on with it" (310). This truism about life suggests that the only course of action is to get on with life, a sentiment similar to Fuller's mother's "pull up your socks" attitude, as described in *Cocktail Hour*. Nevertheless, the two books published subsequent to *Don't Let's Go* reveal that, in fact, Fuller was not finished processing the past. *Scribbling* marks an attempt to move beyond her personal story and grapple with the war through following one of its perpetrators and living casualties, K, but it is also ultimately an autobiographical text. It ends by emphasising that K and she had "inflamed [each other's] existing wounds" (251), and denies

a sense of catharsis. Thus, it is significant that *Cocktail Hour* seems to mark the reconciliation of Fuller and her mother, and suggests a sense of closure for the Fuller family.

However, interviews with Fuller about *Cocktail Hour* reveal an author that insists that her books continue to resist easy resolutions. In the interview with Temkin, Fuller states: "Catharsis is indulgence. Every book kills you. Writing gets rid of the fiction of you" (para 19). Fuller's self-narratives do not trace the process of 'becoming' traditional in autobiography, but rather scrutinise or un-mask the self. In her interview with Hinzen, for example, she describes the aftermath of publishing such revelatory family accounts:

> I think you don't know until you've done it [published a book] what it feels like to have public scrutiny and public ownership of the story. I'm grateful I didn't know. . . People will ask, "What caused you to strip so naked?" The truthful answer is, it was a mistake. But then I came to like the feeling of being naked. (para 6)

She here points to the vulnerability of exposing herself and her family, as well as a certain degree of masochistic pleasure. In *Cocktail Hour* Fuller comments that her mother refers to her dismissively as "my *American* daughter", a distancing mechanism which is related to Fuller's publication of the "Awful Book, like on the *Jerry Springer Show*" (16). The latter simile depicts a generational and cultural gap between Fuller, the writer who draws on popular American metaphors of healing, and her mother, who prefers an attitude of private fortitude. Nicola, in comparing her daughter's book with a vulgar reality television programme, expresses a distaste for modern confessional culture, which Bran Nicol describes as:

> An impulse within contemporary media-saturated culture – one exhibited most readily in 'reality television' – for habits, fantasies and self-impressions which normally remain private to be placed on full display. (100)

While, on the one hand, Fuller may be seen as indulging in this popular and narcissistic confessional mode, on the other, her willingness to expose intimate life to public scrutiny is also courageous and, as can be seen in the other texts examined in this thesis, has set an important precedent for the breaking of silences about the domain of white, female experience in the context of the family and Rhodesian/Zimbabwean life.

Chapter 3

Authorship and the Search for Authenticity in Bryony Rheam's *This September Sun*

3.1 **Introduction**

The metafictional purpose of Rheam's *This September Sun* is crucial to an analysis of its form. Abrams describes metafictional novels as those "which depart from realism and foreground the role of the author and reader in inventing and receiving fiction" (232). Ellie, the narrator/protagonist in the novel is a "student of literature" (189) and self-reflexively aware of narrative constructions. She has a personal urge to write in order to make sense of her life, but the form and content of this writing elude her, and her attention keeps shifting, from personal ponderings to an academic article which threatens to become autobiographical, suggesting that Ellie could be the pseudo-author of the novel itself. The latter resists generic classification; it is described, in a reviewer's blurb on the back cover, as encompassing the genres of the "Epistolary, the Bildungsroman, Romance and Mystery" (John Eppel). Ellie discovers her murdered grandmother, Evelyn's diaries, which reveal Evelyn's long-term clandestine love affair and hence the double-life that she led. The diaries, together with the letters and recalled conversations between Ellie and Evelyn, create a dialogic exchange between grandmother and granddaughter, even beyond Evelyn's death. The real mystery explored in the novel, however, is not Evelyn's death, which is apparently random, but the elusiveness of identity that she represents for her granddaughter. In Ellie's obsession to understand her late grandmother, her own story is subsumed by Evelyn's, shrouded as the latter is in mystery and romance. In this regard, the novel is a stifled *Bildungsroman*. *This September Sun* traces Ellie's struggle for a sense of personal identity, in relation to significant others, especially Evelyn and romantic partners Mark and Tony, and in relation to place, as she negotiates her sense of (un)belonging in Bulawayo/Zimbabwe/Africa and London/England/Europe.

3.2 **Authorship**

3.2.1 The Author as Detective

The initial mystery apparent in the novel is the murder of Ellie's grandmother, Evelyn, in Bulawayo, when Ellie is working as a young adult in England. However, the murder itself is not presented as a problem requiring investigation: "The police described it as 'cut and dry'. It was an obvious case of a burglary gone wrong" (185). Evelyn's murder offers a metafictional commentary, regarding the relationship between art and life, as one of the interests that Ellie shares with her is the love of mystery and crime novels. What they enjoy as fiction becomes their reality, and is very different from the typical murder mystery tale, as Evelyn's murder is apparently unmotivated. However, it is implied that there is more to the case than accidental or unpremeditated murder. The police report claims "He [the murderer] was frightened and had hit her. He hadn't meant to kill her". Yet we are informed by Ellie that she was "hit fifteen times about the head with the butt of an AK-47. There was nothing left of her face" (185). This seems to suggest at least the possibility of intentional harm. The dire economic situation in Zimbabwe in the early 2000s, the period in which the murder occurs, provides a possible motive for both the burglary and murder. In this regard, Ellie wonders, "In times of hunger and poverty, can we blame someone for taking their life into their own hands and fighting for survival?" and agrees with the police that "It was not a politically motivated murder". Nevertheless, it is not as simple as that, as she notes:

> The man who killed her was unemployed; he had been for several months. He used to sell curios at the market outside City Hall until the tourists stopped coming. The tourists stopped coming because of the violence they saw on their televisions in Britain, America, Europe, wherever. The violence they saw was against white farmers by their government. Perhaps they stopped coming because they thought it was only whites who were being targeted. Many black people had also died, but word of their deaths didn't always reach international news desks. (185)

Ellie here questions the disproportionate attention that violence against whites receives in the international media and suggests a racialised reading of the murder. The broader political context of the white farm invasions, including racially-motivated murders, thus provides an important background to Evelyn's murder, which nevertheless has been distinguished from the latter as merely opportunistic, crime-related and 'accidental'. However, even if arbitrary and

unpremeditated, the murder, as an eruption of violence, signifies the racial tensions and social conditions prevalent in the Zimbabwe of that period. Ellie's description of the news coverage of the prosecution of the attacker evokes pathos, and reveals a situation that threatens to collapse into the absurd:

> The local newspaper had a picture of him on the front page. He was handcuffed and being led to the cells by two officers. He had on a pair of trousers and a T-shirt with *Mickey Mouse* on the front. Amongst the objects he had stolen were a tub of margarine, a bag of sugar and a jar of *Cashel Valley* plum jam. The police omitted to hand these back. (186)

Further, the man had turned himself in, with the abject apology "I am sorry" (186). Ostensibly, then, Evelyn dies for a few grocery items, and the perpetrator kills for them, ultimately sacrificing his own and his family's welfare in this very act. The *Mickey Mouse* shirt suggests both the farcical and the poignant in the applications of 'justice' to this cycle of chronic destitution and violence. Thus, despite its apparently arbitrary nature, the murder is laden with contextual resonance, and is implicated in matters reaching far beyond the event itself: it is both 'already solved' and 'unsolvable'. It is Ellie's discovery of Evelyn's diaries, revealing that the latter led a double-life, in a clandestine and long-standing love affair with the man hitherto known by her as 'Uncle' Wally (the affair is over by the time Ellie first meets him), that present Evelyn herself as a mystery and place Ellie in the role of reader-detective.

In *City of Glass*, Paul Auster's narrator, Daniel Quinn, likens the role of both writer and reader to that of a detective:

> The detective is the one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them. In effect, the writer and the detective are inter-changeable. The reader sees the world through the detective's eye, experiencing the proliferation of its details as if for the first time. He has become awake to the things around him, as if they might speak to him, as if, because of the attentiveness he now brings to them, they might begin to carry a meaning other than the simple fact of their existence. (8)

As Quinn suggests, writing is itself a process of discovery and meaning is created in this process, rather than recorded after it has been 'discovered'. *This September Sun* similarly highlights the processes of reading and writing and may be understood in terms of Mark Currie's description of postmodern writing:

> the postmodern context is not one divided neatly between fictional texts and their critical readings, but a monistic world of representations in which the boundaries between art and life, language and metalanguage, and fiction and criticism are under philosophical attack. (18)

The novel blurs boundaries between art and life. Ellie is narrator, protagonist and potentially the pseudo-author of the novel, as is suggested by the fact that small excerpts of her writing are occasionally included in the text excerpts, which tend to reflect on the difficulty of writing. Rheam, through the character of literary Ellie, presents a self-reflexivity about the complexities of language and tenuousness of narratives. During the course of the novel, Ellie is trapped in both wanting to understand her life and remaining sceptical about the fictive nature of the autobiographical impulse and narrative coherence. She reflects: "Where do you start to put a life together . . . How do you record all those unrecorded moments?" (3). She refers to an academic article she is working on, entitled "The Rise and Fall of White Zimbabwe". While discussing the rise of the "new white elite" (34) who remained in the country after Independence, and whose "children were my classmates", for example, she reconsiders her commentary:

> I delete the last line. It's too personal and I don't want to be included in this history. I want distance. Distance is safety and that's what I need. But I can't write anymore. I make myself some tea and move to the settee near the window. Will I ever finish this piece? I can't seem to finish anything. I look out of the window again. (34)

Writing is depicted here as a struggle and not a seamless process. Apart from feeling unable to complete her writing projects, Ellie resists definite narrative endings and beginnings, a resistance premised on her informed literary perspective. Twice Ellie is urged, by the two men who comprise her possible romantic options, Mark and Tony, to tell 'her story', and when she asks where she should begin, is told "the beginning" (189; 268). When Mark prompts her, she recalls T.S Eliot's inversion of Mary, Queen of Scots' words in his poem "East Coker": "In my beginning is my end", and the Biblical quote from Revelations 22.13: "I am the beginning and the end" (189). The former suggests determinism and the latter eternal recurrence, but both comment on the paradoxical nature of beginnings and endings as deeply intertwined. Ellie's narrative of her own life shifts chronology, and events are re-visited, echoing the disjunctive way in which Evelyn's story unfolds as Ellie reads the journals and remembers her. In her retrospective narration, she re-reads and re-writes events in Evelyn's and her own life in her effort to locate a meaning which eludes her.

Given that the novel draws attention to the multiplicity of possible beginnings and endings, the actual beginning of the novel is itself significant. The narrative opens with Ellie recalling how Evelyn came to leave her husband, and the home where the couple lived with Ellie's parents, coincidentally not only on the day which marked Zimbabwean Independence, but also Ellie's birthday. The political event sparked a confrontation between Ellie's grandparents, the subtext of which Ellie is only able to comprehend years later, on reading her grandmother's journals. She recounts her memory of that day:

> On the 18th April 1980, my grandfather burnt the British flag. I remember because it was my sixth birthday and he ruined it. . . Then he let out a long deep mournful cry of sorrow that sounded like the very call of death and sent a chill through us all . . . I see my grandmother run out of the house and over to our macabre entertainer, screaming at him, her voice like hot oil, hissing and spitting and boiling, "I hate you! I hate you!" As she reached him, he threw back the burning flag and it fell on to her. (2)

This incident leaves Evelyn with a scar on the underside of her arm which resembles a teapot, and which is also likened by Ellie to "the shape of Zimbabwe" (2). Ellie states: "I think Gran was always a little proud of the mark, a symbol of the price she paid for freedom" (2), and it is notable here that Evelyn's escape from an unhappy marriage is conflated with Zimbabwean Independence, as if she embraces the spirit of the moment. In this respect she is unlike many white Rhodesians (as Leonard, Ellie's grandfather, demonstrates) for whom, in reality, the victory of the black majority represented a moment of loss with which it was difficult to reconcile. The violence of her grandparents' interaction is, however, bewildering to young Ellie, who digs her nails into her palms "in fright" (2). It is only on perusing Evelyn's journals, that she – and, by implication, the reader – understands this initial scene. For Leonard, The 'betrayal' of the British in 'abandoning' white Rhodesians reinscribes the bitterness of their son, Jeremy's suicide as a traumatized soldier and, in recalling his futile death, presumably also provokes memories of Evelyn's infidelity with Wally. Moreover, Evelyn reveals in a diary entry that Jeremy was in fact Wally's son (225). Long years of entrapment in an unhappy marriage thus finally erupt in this explosive scene of rage.

While Ellie's recollection of this particular day illustrates that she admires her grandmother, it is also significant that the dramatic event places Ellie herself in a subsidiary role; her birthday is forgotten, and from this point she is decentred from the main events and the narrative focus shifts to Evelyn. Indeed, Evelyn experiences a kind of 're-birth' on this day, and

subsequently embarks on an independent lifestyle to which Ellie bears witness. Ellie becomes a 'tag-along' or chaperone for her grandmother when she begins dating Miles Trevellyan. Her presence necessitates that a level of propriety be maintained when Evelyn and Miles are together, and also attenuates the difficulties of embarking on a new relationship with a man Evelyn barely knows. From the first day that Evelyn takes her granddaughter to the Naval Club to meet him, Ellie and Miles instantaneously dislike each other, since each represents an obstacle to the other's intimacy with Evelyn. There is no benefit for Ellie in this triad (one of several triangular relationships in the novel) and Ellie perceives Miles to be unsophisticated and below her grandmother. Ellie thus early in life becomes an observer, a role directly related to her current one as writer/detective.

3.2.2 Female Authorship

Susan Fraiman, in the introductory chapter to *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development*, poses the question, "is there a female *Bildungsroman*?" In tracing the establishment of the genre, she notes that many of its acknowledged tenets are problematic in their application to the story of a woman's life. While "wilful self-making" marks the male hero, Fraiman observes that heroines struggle with a "sense that formation is foisted upon them, that they are largely what other people, what the world, will make of them" and that the "typical girl also has problems with mentors" (6). This latter point relates to the traditional interpretation of the *Bildung* as the journey of a male apprentice to mastery in a chosen field, with mentors to guide the young man through this process (6). In *This September Sun*, however, Evelyn is both mentor to Ellie, and her female double or other, since the latter defines herself in relation to her grandmother. Evelyn is thus both a positive symbol of mutuality and a negative one of disempowerment. While it is significant that the texts Fraiman analyses are eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fictions, her points remain valid for contemporary fictional works. She is interested in the politics of genre and gender, and interrogates the ways in which female self-narratives interact with and subvert the classic *Bildungsroman*, which was established as a male-oriented genre. Fraiman notes, for example,

> A crude picture of the genre shows an especially rugged or especially sensitive young man, at leisure to mull over some life choices, not so much connected to people or the landscape as encountering or passing through them as "options" or "experiences" en route to a better place. Travel is key . . . for though the story

> pulls toward settling the youth – its telos is repose – what it actually recounts is his relentless advance. (126)

While eighteenth- and nineteenth-century females had major restrictions placed on their mobility, both physical and social, Ellie is herself free to travel as a single young woman to England and to advance her opportunities through study, thanks to funding from Evelyn, (unbeknown to Ellie, the money was originally a gift to Evelyn from Wally). However, her experience of travel is deeply ambivalent; although physically 'free' to explore, she remains claustrophobically introverted and thus attains only limited agency.

The expansion of the *Bildungsroman* to include female-authored novels, Fraiman maintains, evidenced the adoption of alternative structural tenets more suitable to the description of the growth of a young woman, and inscribed "a young woman's formation as a process of exchange, an ongoing debate, a social relationship" (139). Despite the temporal disparity, Fraiman's claim is particularly apt in the case of *This September Sun*, since letter and journal writing and reading mark a dialogic exchange between Ellie and Evelyn, even after the latter's death. As loving grandmother and female mentor, Evelyn passes on to Ellie a respect for the rituals of tea-drinking, and a pleasure in reading and, later, gardening. Ellie, isolated as a student in the England in which she imagined herself flourishing, looks to the past and her foundations, to Evelyn in particular, to retain a sense of 'self'; corresponding with her grandmother in Zimbabwe is described by Ellie as a crucial bridge between her new life in England and her old life: "[Her letters] connected me across continents and mountains and rivers. They connected me through space and time; a link to my old life, my real life, perhaps, my self" (127). However, Ellie also comes to realise that her relationship with Evelyn is problematic and that the latter has never been as accessible as she has imagined. On reading her grandmother's diaries, Ellie laments, regarding her bewilderment over Evelyn's impenetrability, "And I think: you were never mine, never ours. None of us knew you at all" (219). The latter comment alludes to several other people from whom Evelyn has hidden aspects of herself: Leonard, Jeremy, Ellie's mother, and even Miles. Particularly troubling is the fact that Evelyn threatens Ellie's perception of herself. Evelyn to some extent challenges Ellie's version of her grandmother's relationship with Miles, in a rare but direct reference to her granddaughter in her diaries: "Ellie could never love someone who loved me; she is too jealous, she wants me to herself entirely" (272). Her comment forces Ellie at this point to acknowledge that her own perceptions of events and

feelings are one-sided. Reading Evelyn's view of her in this journal entry estranges Ellie, and this is painful: "I skipped ahead, looking, searching, for important dates, wanting somewhere to find myself *as I thought I was*" (273, emphasis added). Ellie's sense of self is over-invested in Evelyn's regard for her, and uncertainty about the latter translates into self-doubt.

Carolyn Heilbrun writes, in relation to female autobiography, that "Identity is grounded through relation to the chosen other. Without such relation, women do not feel able to write openly about themselves; even with it, they do not feel entitled to take credit for their own accomplishment, spiritual or not" (24). For Ellie, Evelyn holds a tenuous and ambivalent position, especially in relation to conventional and condoned female social roles. Evelyn is both a traditional female role model – a creative nurturer, and a transgressor of social restrictions – a self-assertive pursuer of her sexual desires. This latter quality is troubling to Evelyn herself, and she compensates for her affair through secretive behaviour and by leading a double existence. The quotation which forms the epigraph of the novel relates to the passionate affair between Evelyn and Wally, and reads as follows:

> We love but once, for once only are we perfectly equipped for loving: we may appear to ourselves to be as much in love at other times - so will a day in early September, though it be six hours shorter, seem as hot as one in June. And on how that first true love-affair will shape depends the pattern of our lives. (Palinurus, *The Unquiet Grave*)

This extract refers to an ideal love, which can only be achieved once, and which becomes the touch-stone for subsequent loves. It is also the source of the novel's title. Evelyn's love for Wally shadows her relationships with Leonard and Miles, resulting in pain for all involved. There is a refrain others associate with Evelyn, a quote derived from Oscar Wilde, which is recalled by both Miles and Ellie's mother: "Each man kills the thing he loves" (148; 224). The refrain resonates with many of the other characters' bonds, too. The problem seems to lie with the power that love confers to induce pain in others. Sexual love threatens familial love and lovers betray one another, by loving too little or loving so much that stifling occurs. Overall, the novel exposes the notion of perfect love as a myth. For example, Evelyn's relationship with Wally is always fraught with the guilt of infidelity, the fear of potential exposure, and pursued in erratic, stolen moments. Ellie's ultimate decision to be with Miles's nephew, Tony, is a practical one.

When Miles's nephew, Tony, shows Ellie a photograph of her with her late grandmother, standing by the latter's car (by which Evelyn was recognized all over town), she scans it looking for 'love', uncertain as to what this word actually connotes: "Love. What an inadequate word" (305). 'Love' is an inadequate word, insofar as it connotes an ideal. The term needs to be redefined to include lapses and imperfections, and to accommodate many different forms, so that the failure of perfect love is not the total failure of 'love'. Ellie needs to recognise Evelyn as both affectionate mentor and fallible human in order to be able to make decisions concerning her own love life.

3.3 **The Search for Authenticity**

3.3.1 (Un)Belonging and Re-imagining the Homeland from the Diaspora

Ellie describes herself as often ill at ease in her social environment, and as solemn and reticent. For example, of herself as a teenager, she says: "I didn't know how to be chatty, to talk brightly about nothing" (95). The young Ellie believes she is unable to relate to most white Zimbabweans because they are 'Rhodies', a derogatory term which implies white settler parochialism, though the possibility of identifying or associating with black Zimbabweans does not occur to her – even though this is an option which would expand her social possibilities. This oversight is a fair representation of how, post-Independence, Zimbabweans have tended to continue to stratify along 'racial' lines due to the long racialised history of the country. Ellie's parents, however, distinguish themselves from 'Rhodies': "Mom said fishing was no way to spend Christmas: only Rhodies did that. Come rain or 35C sunshine we had a big roast turkey, pudding and carols around the tree" (69). The incongruous cultural allegiance to European customs here takes on a classist dimension, since it is a strategy to uphold an imagined level of 'refinement'. As she ends her school years, Ellie bewails the limited possibilities she sees for herself in Zimbabwe:

> Gran, I want to *live*, not just exist. I want to go to theatres and concerts and meet *people*, people who have something to say for themselves, who can talk about something more than … drinking and parties. I'll die, Gran, if I stay here. I'll shrivel up and die. (117)

The country is projected here as a cultural desert, and Ellie believes she requires- even deserves- more sophisticated stimulation, which she associates with Europe. As a teenager, she fantasises:

> [O]ne day I would meet a poet or artist and we would spend all our time together saying deep and meaningful things to each other. He definitely wasn't Zimbabwean and often had a French accent, although it sometimes varied and sounded Eastern European. At those times he was a refugee, on the run from a cruel regime. (95)

The 'bohemian' and 'radical' nature of this (immature) vision is apparent, marking the desire for a less stifling social group. Stuart Hall states, in relation to "cultural positionality", that:

> Identity is, for me, the point of suture between the social and the psychic. Identity is the sum of the (temporary) positions offered by a social discourse in which you are willing for the moment to invest. It is where the psyche is able to invest in a public space, to locate itself in a public discourse, and from there, act and speak. (Osborne 401)

Ellie, by refusing to participate actively in what white society in Zimbabwe seems to offer, is disinvesting in the "public discourse" available to her. Apart from her parents, her best friend, Mandy, and Evelyn seem to be the only people close to Ellie, and both of the latter are better socially-equipped than she. In Hall's terms, Ellie lacks a community and the self-definition that this affords, and so she struggles with the condition of alienation. When she is introduced to "Kerouac, Heller, Burgess" (98) by Jason, a tenant of Evelyn's and Ellie's first (disappointed) crush, the theme of literature as a means of making sense of life is reiterated:

> The literature answered something inside of me, for it seemed to explain something I couldn't quite define: a sense of separation from the world, a feeling, not only of not belonging, but of not knowing how. (100)

After high school, Ellie's move to England, sponsored by Evelyn, in order to pursue her literary studies, marks her attempt to realise her fantasies and discover an 'authentic' sense of self. However, the way in which one relates to, or fails to relate to, one's place of birth and home community profoundly affects the experience of settling elsewhere, as Ellie is to discover once she arrives in England.

In Ellie's early recollections of England, it is apparent that experience of place is relative to state of mind. On arrival she is intoxicated with the novelty of living her fantasy, and feels empowered in a setting in which she believes she can thrive:

> It was here that I found a voice I had never had before. I felt as though I had spent my whole life on stage and yet had never managed to stand in the spotlight . . . Now it stopped and held me in its glow and I, in turn, basked in its warmth and grew in its gaze.

> Here was everything I had ever dreamed of. England was a melting pot of people. It had absorbing culture, it had art and, above all, it had books. There was no pressure to conform, no need to be anyone but myself. (121)

It is significant here that Ellie refers to a sense of an 'authentic self' that has, at last, been allowed simply to 'be' and to express itself. At this stage she is working in a bookshop, and her feelings of social approbation are clearly related to her own identification with her environment; there is nothing, however, to suggest she is particularly admired or welcomed by those with whom she interacts. Interestingly, this living in one's head or 'intellect', as Georg Simmel notes, is a tenet of the large city, and this interior existence grants a paradoxical freedom to the individual:

> [M]etropolitan man is 'free' in a spiritualized and refined sense, in contrast to the pettiness and prejudices which hem in the small-town man. For the reciprocal reserve and indifference and the intellectual life conditions of large circles are never felt more strongly by the individual in their impact upon his independence than in the thickest crowd of the big city. This is because bodily proximity and narrowness of space makes the mental distance only the more visible. It is obviously only the obverse of this freedom, if under certain circumstances, one nowhere feels as lonely and lost as in the metropolitan crowd. For here as elsewhere it is by no means necessary that the freedom of man be reflected in his emotional life as comfort. (181)

Ellie herself retrospectively notes: "It is strange now to realise that freedom, or an idea of it, is something that exists in one's mind. The England of my arrival was the same England as fourteen years later, yet by then it had become a prison"(121). Her self-confidence is gradually undermined, and a renewed sense of being out-of-place arises – the major catalyst of which is her move to university:

> Whereas life in London had made me more outgoing as I was one among millions, at university I became self-conscious again. The light that fell on me was not the enchanted limelight of the stage; it was the bright overhead light of the operating theatre. Here my life was open to scrutiny and dissection. (127)

The metaphor of flattering stage-light implies a performance and raises the question as to whether Ellie is fulfilling a 'role' in life, or donning a mask, whereas the operating theatre suggests scientific investigation, and exposure of the 'real'. However, the shame of feeling uncovered and 'discovered' at university is, like enchantment, a state of mind.

It is important at this stage to scrutinize the notion of an authentic self. Hall emphasises in his comment referenced above, that an individual adopts *temporary* positions available to her/him from which to "act and speak" in the social milieu. There is an element of performance already inherent in this notion – a reference to the tendency of humans to don roles which shift according to context and over time. The wearing of masks is the ordinary state of being, and there is no 'one true self' beneath. However, the distinction between internal recognition of a role, as opposed to mere outward conformity, is the difference between an authentic and inauthentic position.

Simmel writes that "The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life" (174-5). Ellie finds that, rather than 'being home' in England – that is, feeling she belongs – she is self-conscious that she is a foreigner. Moreover, the fact that she has never felt a sense of social belonging in Zimbabwe means that she struggles to assert her cultural identity amidst the crowd:

> Having no base, no bedrock, no roots, I floundered in the freedom of England. I was soon lost, soon overwhelmed, like a tent in a storm, whose guy rope comes loose and leaves it to flap and blow in the unrelenting wind. (127)

She thus finds it difficult to relate both to the English and to the Zimbabweans who form enclaves in England and who romanticize their 'roots' and shared experiences. In her interactions with local English students, Ellie tries to conceal her difference: "I felt awkward, clumsy, afraid sometimes to open my mouth lest my accent gave me away" (126), and she engages in conversation as a contrived performance:

> I answered all the patronising questions about Africa, about droughts and cannibals, lions and giraffes. I tried to ask about Chelmsford, Cambridge, the M1, but it was so trapped, so constricted a conversation that beat against the walls of its prison, but remained what it was, empty. It resounded with a painful hollowness in nightmares I had, nightmares of walls crumbling inwards whilst I slept, of the collapsing roof that sheltered me from the cold wind of England. (126-127)

Ironically, the 'topics' Ellie raises about England both directly oppose and parallel, in their limitedness, the stereotypical associations of Africa, depicting her participation in reductive conversation rather than enabling meaningful communication.

From the time that Ellie disassociates herself from 'Africa'/Zimbabwe in favour of 'Europe', and later, more specifically, England, she begins a process of negotiating between these places in order to forge an identity. However, the facile representation of whole continents as places one can 'relate to' emerges not only in her youthful projections of Europe, but also in her later romanticisation of Africa. Thus, in England, alienation as a foreigner leads Ellie to a reimagining of the continent with rose-tinted spectacles:

> I often thought of Africa when I left. She lay as a huge expanse of silence and solitude between my two lives. I reached out for her sometimes in the early mornings and expected to feel the warmth of her sun across my legs. I imagined the coolness of dawn to be around me, thought I could hear the sounds of a house waking up, the gentle calls of early risers to each other. I could never get over how real the sensations seemed and my eyes would open only to be met by the cold emptiness of my English room. (128)

Ellie draws stereotypes of Africa as female, warm and community-centred as an imaginative contrast with the present cold reality of England. When she does return to Bulawayo, however, she is rudely awakened from this fantasy of home:

> Africa spread itself warm and brown beneath me as I stared out of the window of the plane. I began to feel nervous and claustrophobic. How many times had I longed for the warm brown earth and star crowded sky of Africa? Hadn't I cried myself to sleep, night after night sometimes, consumed with homesickness and longing? Now here I was. Home. A cold wave of reality washed over me that seemed to change the colour of the sky and the bush. The landscape looked empty, rather than spacious. It was deserted, unloved. The trees, the rocks, even the buildings looked ridiculous, as though someone had desperately tried to fill the landscape with things, but they lay unfinished, half built. I saw all the flaws of a country I had coloured in brilliant shades of orange, red, brown, deep green and blue. And now it lay before me, a pale watercolour, a land faded by the sun. Reality. (145)

The term 'reality' is interesting because it marks the end of a daydream, but not necessarily the awakening to truth. Once again, Ellie's response to place is tinted by an internal landscape; in this case her vision is tainted by some kind of associative dread. The dread is real enough – landing in Bulawayo reminds her of many negative experiences she has perhaps suppressed, in order to nourish her idealised version of 'home' as a source of strength in a foreign place. Later, when she again returns to Bulawayo to attend Evelyn's funeral, and is dealing with her grief and grappling with the contents of the journals, she yearns for her life in England:

> England. How I longed for it now; the banality of life there, the protection one felt from the world - double glazing, *Yale* locks, central heating, the News. If only I were there now, I wouldn't have to watch the sunset, those awful dying rays, and the dusk. (231)

Ellie's chronic dissatisfaction is treated with some humour by Rheam, but she is undoubtedly faced with the very real dislocations of diasporic experience. Salman Rushdie, in his famous chapter "Imaginary Homelands", captures the permanent dislocation experienced by the emigrant writer: "we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost. . . we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands" (10). The discontinuity heralded by emigrating shifts the place of origin to a more imaginary, less 'real' dimension. However, concurrently, dual or multiple citizenship bestows a hybrid identity which allows insight(s) into places through contrast and distance – in some ways a clearer, broader vision:

> Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles. (15)

Distance, physical and temporal between Zimbabwe and England and between past and present, gradually assists Ellie towards achieving certain insights into the composite, hybrid make-up of her identity. People also come to play a crucial role in this negotiating process, specifically Evelyn and Ellie's romantic partners, the English Mark and the Zimbabwean Tony.

3.3.2 Mark

Mark is Ellie's first experience of a relationship and the closest she comes to an intoxicating romance:

> In my teenage fantasies about the Russian artist on the run, I imagined us meeting and falling in love immediately. One look in each other's eyes would be enough to seal our fate forever. Meeting Mark was the closest I ever got to experiencing that in real life. From the moment I saw him I knew we would be together. (135)

She describes their early relationship in idealistic terms, falling prone to the same romantic dream that Evelyn invested in with Wally:

> We'd do things like have picnics in Hyde Park, go boating on the lake, watch black and white movies in dingy arty theatres, and write each other long, witty emails. This is it, I thought. This is what I have looked for and now I've found it. (136)

However, after she moves in with him, with Ellie embarking on a doctoral degree in literature as a result of Mark's encouragement, their relationships reaches a stasis. From the beginning of their cohabitation, Ellie has an uneasy sense: "I was arranging my life around someone else's" (137), an early warning sign that she will not be empowered in this relationship. Ellie recounts Mark mentioning a colleague, Moira Sharp, and sensing that she is threatening: "As soon as I heard her name, I knew that she was the woman that Mark would leave me for . . . If she were a character in a book, I would underline it [her name] in pencil" (137). This suspicion is confirmed when Ellie sees an intimate glance exchanged between the two at a function. As Ellie leaves this function, and the relationship, slipping away without a word of confrontation, she acknowledges "I should have tried to patch things up a long time ago, but I hadn't really wanted to" (138) and this passivity regarding the relationship is related to advice that Evelyn has passed down to her. Before Ellie had moved in with Mark, Evelyn had warned her:

> Go for it, Ellie, be free. Love Mark with all your life, but always hold something back. Never give a man everything, Ellie, for when they have everything of yours, you will have nothing but the memory of it. (67)

This advice will come to have an ambivalent significance for Ellie, who seems to have held back from Mark. As a result, she is somewhat protected from heart-break; she is saddened but not devastated by the end of the relationship. She seems to have sensed a genuine incompatibility between Mark and herself, which could account for her choosing to let the relationship deteriorate. However, later she will blame Evelyn for teaching her to withhold emotion:

> She had taught me that love and trust are two separate entities, that real love must be hidden and coveted secretly, that the face you show to those you love is the same face you wear as you pour tea and pass around the biscuits. So I had always held life at a distance, like a lantern held at arm's length, and, while I had watched others flicker and dart at the yellow light, wings outspread, heads thrown back, sometimes falling, sometimes dying, yet ever eager, I had gathered my wings around me, afraid of singeing them. (233)

Ellie suffers from a crisis of faith regarding love after her first break-up with Mark , coming to the "cynical conclusion" that "people are singular, separate, and that any act of union is an insult

to nature" (240). The saga with Mark does not end here however, as Ellie returns to him at a later point.

3.3.3 Communion with Evelyn

Evelyn is something of a spiritual mentor to her granddaughter. As a member of the Spiritualist church, where regular "séances" occur, Evelyn sometimes takes her granddaughter to services there as a child, unbeknownst to Ellie's mother, hoping to commune with her dead son. After Evelyn's death, Ellie attempts to connect with Evelyn by attending services in England; "I wait for the messages. There are none for me" (20). However, Evelyn leaves a posthumous message for Ellie, in a twist of fate. Shortly before her death, Evelyn is called upon by Ellie to guide her. After her break-up with her Mark, Ellie has a dream:

> I was lying in a bath tub that was balanced precariously on the top ledge of the steel fire escape that ran up the outside of the flat. I was afraid that someone would walk out there and find me there, naked, but, at the same time, I wasn't trying to get out. Instead, I was looking down at myself, through the water. For some reason, and dreams have no logic, I decided not to use soap to wash myself and to merely rinse my body with water. Along the sides of the tub, ran a thin brown line of dirt. (139)

She later recounts the dream to Evelyn in a letter, who phones her, concerned about her well-being. Evelyn notes that the nudity and the precarious position of the tub in the dream signify embarrassment and vulnerability, and comments further:

> "You're not dealing with something. You're sitting in clear water and deliberately not using soap? . . . Well, then you can't be clean . . . Clear water always has connotations of baptism and rebirth, but that is being undermined by the dirty ring around the tub." (140)

Much earlier in the novel, the letter which Evelyn wrote following this telephonic conversation and which only arrived after her death is reproduced in the text:

> *My Dearest Ellie,*
>
> *You are so much in my thoughts recently that I feel I have to write to you and let you know what I am thinking. I feel you are desperately unhappy, so unhappy*

> *that you have forgotten what happiness is and you accept this state as 'normal'. I think you'd take yourself by surprise if you were to suddenly find something funny and laugh. I do not feel your smile any more in our conversations, what few of them we have, and even your letters lack their old joie de vivre. And then your dream. That's why I had to phone you last week. Something is wrong and somewhere, somewhere in your consciousness you acknowledge this, but the thinking, rationalising Ellie won't do this. The ring around the bath - it's a warning. Of what, Ellie? You must think.* (21)

As Ellie's spiritual guide, Evelyn is urging her here to acknowledge her troubled unconscious. Her assessment of the dream is perceptive of Ellie's social neuroses, and Evelyn takes the dream's contents seriously as a "warning", or a symptom. The symbolic significance of bathing, with its associations with cleansing and rebirth, raises the issue of the struggle of the emergent self, a typical *Bildung* element, and the shame of exposure is antagonistic to this process. As Evelyn intimates, the dream seems unconsciously to reveal that Ellie's life has reached a point of paralysis: she simulates normalcy, but secretly and shamefully represses certain disagreeable elements in herself which she has yet to acknowledge. This is the last correspondence that Ellie receives from Evelyn, and thus it has a particular resonance. A parting message from her mentor, the letter admonishes Ellie to take care of herself and to locate the source of her unease.

3.3.4 Tony

Tony is Miles's nephew, which predisposes Ellie to dismiss him. She first meets him in Bulawayo when she is there to attend Evelyn's funeral. When he invites Ellie to supper, shortly after Evelyn's funeral, she is quick to identify his limitations, as she is prone to do with most people. Her initial assessment of him, for example, draws attention to her over-critical, disparaging tendencies:

> Good looking? Yes, in a conventional way. A Nice Person. Likes to tell jokes, not dirty ones, but likes to be thought funny. A Funny Guy. Aish, how he made me laugh! Sensitive. The kind of guy a girl can talk to, watch the odd soppy film with, depend on for deliveries of flowers, especially on Valentine's Day. The New Man, Zimbabwean style. (230)

Ellie mocks the role she imagines Tony attempts to fulfil: "The New Man, Zimbabwean style". Despite her misgivings about him, however, she appreciates that there is an intuitive link between them: "what brought us together was our loneliness, our aloneness" (231). They are

connected through Evelyn and Miles, and the latter is one of Tony's only living relatives, so that he refers to Ellie and himself as "almost related" (226). He is also, like Ellie, searching for something: "I felt he wanted something from me, some sort of answer, that maybe I would solve something for him" (231). Tony is drawn to Ellie and he seeks her out on several occasions whilst she is in Bulawayo. On this particular evening, Tony gives Ellie the photograph of Evelyn and herself that she will later scan, looking for 'love'. Ellie who, ironically, does not "want . . . assumptions made" (228) about herself and does not talk much to Tony, assumes a great deal about him:

> He was doing all the talking, as lonely people often do. I think that's what it was; he found an audience in me; other people brushed him off. I liked that, being privy to the thoughts of others. And he did interest me, I'd give him that. I was afraid though, of the time when I would be called upon to talk. I lived so near the surface of my emotions that sometimes I felt their proximity as a physical ache. I appeared calm, but was bubbling away inside. (231)

The quote above reveals how the opposing qualities of each may allow for compatibility. Tony needs an audience and Ellie prefers to listen. Ellie's account here also recalls her dream and her fear of exposure. She is semi-conscious of her voyeuristic position, of holding the power of listening without talking; however this is simultaneously disempowering. She is bound in an uncomfortably duality: of outward calmness, an external show of power, to hide overwhelming inner conflict. Tony brings Ellie's own prejudices and doubts to the surface, challenging her; and, by the end of the evening, Ellie yearns for England, a sign that she is wearied by the effect that Tony has had on her wishes to escape confrontation with herself.

When Ellie accidentally encounters Tony in town, and he invites her for a drink at his home again, she resists at the time but then finds herself going, purportedly because he may be able to "shed some light" on who Evelyn "really was" (266). It is already apparent that she is drawn to Tony, but she quickly retracts from her inclination to confide in him, "He wasn't the right person to speak to" (267). During the evening Tony challenges Ellie's silence:

> 'I don't know what to say to you, Ellie,' he said. I felt a sharp pain travel up my chest from the echo of the words.
> 'What do you mean?'
> 'I mean I want to get to know you, but there's this six foot wall around you.'
> I stared ahead. I was a little surprised at his forwardness.
> 'With barbed wire along the top,' he half laughed, making a circular movement with his right index finger.

> ‘You’re not the first person to say that.’ Inside I was thinking, he means nothing to you. He can’t hurt you.
> ‘I want to help,’ he continued, ‘but I can’t if you won’t let me.’(267)

The physical pain that Ellie feels reveals that Tony has probed a very sensitive issue. However, by direct confrontation he seems to break through some of Ellie’s reserve and the ensuing conversation is a ‘real’ one. For example, Tony asks her “‘What do you want in life?’” and she replies “‘I don’t want any more unhappy endings’”, a desire which is acted upon in her decision at the end of the novel, that is, to join Tony in Southern Africa (267). It is during this evening that Tony asks her to tell him about herself and to “‘Begin at the beginning’”, but she prefers to begin with the present (268). He asks her about her PhD and she tells him it is about ‘Postcolonial Literature’, as she inexpertly exhales a cigarette.

> ‘Really?’ said Tony, obviously surprised. He paused and then, ‘Post-colonial-literature.’ He said it slowly and then sighed. The noise made me laugh and he started laughing too. Soon we were giggling uncontrollably. (268)

Ellie’s intellectual poise is broken by Tony’s honest response and her consensual amusement. Tony, while uninformed in this particular area, is interested in what she has to say: “‘What’s *post*colonial literature?’” In a cynical mood, she wonders “Who the hell really cared anyway?” (268) but then formulates an answer: “‘It’s about longing for an ideal, some idea of perfection. The past, when everything was well and good’” (268). Ellie’s flippancy can be traced to two sources, her sense of betrayal in reading Evelyn’s diaries, revealing that perceptions of ‘the past’ are conflicted and can be illusory, and the current context of the Zimbabwean crisis. She attempts to explain the concept of postcolonial literary studies, by referring to the condition of colonised nations/peoples: “Some feel they can’t even speak their own language anymore because it’s been corrupted by English”, but then adds, “[t]he irony is, would they really like to be living a life without all the advantages of colonialism, unaware they could actually write at all?’ (268) She digresses from the topic of literature to a more general political commentary, located in Zimbabwe:

> ‘It’s a bit like the government here,’ I continued. ‘They go on about colonialism, imperialism and any other ‘ism’, as though they really don’t want to be driving a Mercedes Benz or living in a home built like the White House or even . . . even going overseas on foreign spending sprees. All they actually long for is a hut

> somewhere without any modern conveniences and absolutely no modern transport.' (268)

Peck and Coyle write of the subject Ellie is attempting to explain:

> If there is one theme that could be said to dominate postcolonial literature it is perhaps the meeting of two cultures, and in particular, the way in which an indigenous order has been usurped by alien and intrusive values. (11)

Ellie's definition shows an understanding of the issues at hand in the literature of once-colonised nations. However, she implies that she believes the wholesale rejection of colonialism is both disingenuous and pointless. Literary paradigms are resisted throughout the novel, and the case of postcolonial literary studies here, is another instance. Indeed, even Tony's bewilderment undermines the coherence of the somewhat paradoxical term '*post*colonial'. The subtext of this conversation between Ellie and Tony is a critique of ZANU PF's rhetoric of indigenization in the early 2000s (discussed in the Introductory chapter), which distinguished 'true' Zimbabweans from aliens, including whites and the political opposition, who were described as "stooges of Western Imperialists" (Fisher 202).

Ellie and Tony enter a dialogue about the national belonging from which they have been officially excluded as white Zimbabweans. Tony makes a broad political statement:

> 'We both want to be in control', said Tony, 'both black and white. The problem with Zimbabwe is that whites want to live first world lives in a third world country and can't understand when it doesn't work out like that. The problem with blacks is that they want to do things their way, but it's never really their idea. Their *own* idea. Democracy, for example. It's somebody else's invention. They talk of colonialism and the need of an African culture, but they wouldn't swap any of the benefits of colonialism for the chance to have their old way of life back.' (269)

He then draws attention to the internal contradiction of resisting colonialism on ideological grounds, but working within Western ideological structures. The essentialism and simplification of this argument is highly problematic; however, both Ellie and Tony perceive the 'solution' to this political conundrum to lie in resisting essentialism and separatism and in this way the interchange contains the seeds of its own critique. Ellie ponders:

> 'What do you think it means, Tony, to have an identity? For anyone anywhere at this particular point in time, what do you think it means to say: "I am this" or "I am that"? The answer eludes us all.' (269)

To which Tony responds:

> 'Instead of leaning on each other for support [black and white] and acknowledging that we both need each other, we bring each other down, trample each other under foot. We both lose, Ellie. We're both losers. We've both lost.' (269)

Tony's comment here on the need for national unity doubles as a message to Ellie about how the two of them could become a couple. It takes Ellie some time and some dabbling in English life with Mark once again, before she can clearly perceive the benefits that a relationship with Tony holds. It is notable that the conversation they have emphasises some shared perceptions due to their common origin, despite their differences. Moreover, the significance of the conversation discussed above pertains to its commentary on national and racial identities. The search for a stable identity, anchored in place, is questioned by Ellie, and yet it is something she persistently yearns for and is arguably something she seems set to achieve, albeit in a modified form, at the novel's end.

3.4 **The Return to England**

When Ellie returns to England, after the period in Bulawayo following Evelyn's death, there are some key events which ensue. She finds out that Wally is hospitalized in a location within easy travelling distance and visits him on his death bed. In the conversation they share when he is briefly conscious, Ellie confronts him: "She [Evelyn] loved you. She loved you her whole life through" (296). In response, Wally softly sings Nat King Cole's song "You made me love you". That night he dies. Evelyn herself has been dead for three months, something which Wally claims he had "felt". Ellie thus helps bridge the gap of time and space between Evelyn and Wally, bringing closure to their affair.

Miles also dies in England, and Tony appears at Ellie's door, asking her to attend his uncle's funeral with him, which she is reluctant to agree to: "He didn't like me. I didn't like him" (305). Yet she does go and is one of only four present: Tony, the priest, and one sleeping man – a pathetic end, marked by another musical rendition when Tony plays "The Last Post", a tribute to Miles's World War Two service. By paying her last respects to Miles, Ellie is closing

another rift, offering some resolution to the long-term tension between them. After the funeral, Tony and Ellie have lunch together, and then on the beach promenade, Tony makes Ellie a proposition:

> 'Come to Moz with me. We'll be there a few weeks doing the sourcing, all that sort of thing, and then we can go back to Bullies. We can start the restaurant. Your Gran's old place. A fish restaurant in Bulawayo. I can cook and you can take orders' – I pulled a face- 'or write a book, look after the garden, whatever, teach postcolonial literature at the university . . . whatever! Just come. Come with me'. (307)

Ellie acknowledges "It was one of those life-changing moments that I held in my hand and I felt dizzy as I looked over the railing into the rollicking sea beneath me" (307). At this stage she is living with Mark for the second time, and Ellie raises this as an objection, refusing to answer Tony's query as to whether she loves Mark. Tony asks her whether she imagines herself returning to Zimbabwe to live, to which she replies, "'No'", explaining:

> 'I had a childhood that was riddled with lies and secrets. No one moved on. That's how people are in Zim. Either they are immersed in the past and can't move out of it, or else they pretend it never happened. And us – we're the lost generation, growing up on snippets of lies, stories, anecdotes, jokes. It's not enough to live on what your parents told you. At the end of the day we need more. We have to stop making the same mistakes. We're stuck in a cycle of lies and secrets, lies and secrets'. (308)

She then claims that: "'The only way I can live in the present is to live here. This is the present'" and further, "'Africa is not my home anymore. This' – I waved a weak arc in the air encompassing the grey frothing sea and half the pier – 'this is me.'" (308). Ellie is here defining herself against her Zimbabwean past, and her Zimbabwean identity is perceived by her to be insubstantial and false. However, her body language, the "weak arc" waved at the grey sea-scape, suggests that she is not being fully honest with herself when she claims the English scene for her own. Tony challenges Ellie:

> 'I don't believe you.'
> 'It's true Tony. I never belonged. I never will.'
> 'You mean to say in the whole continent there's nothing for you? Everyone else is the same and you are different?'
> 'I . . .' I began but he stopped me dead.
> 'Oh, forget it. I give up. Stay here, marry your boyfriend, read books, hide yourself away for the rest of your life. I just *give up*.' (308)

At this stage Tony understands her better than she does herself. He suggests that Ellie is misrepresenting the possibilities of 'Africa' and over-estimating herself as "different". He outlines what the reader expects to be a possible outcome of the novel, that she will choose to stay with Mark in England, the direction she is currently headed, and which is predicted by Tony to be a life half-lived. Ellie later recalls how Tony had urged her on this day to "'[w]rite a different story, Ellie . . . [a] different ending at least'" (358).

3.5 **Performing Identity**

Benedict Anderson describes the nation as "an imagined political community" and thus "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (15). National identity is therefore maintained by a performance of belonging. At the point when she is preparing to settle down in England, Ellie rids herself of Zimbabwean paraphernalia in a purgation ritual:

> I set about cementing my life in Britain and breaking off the pieces of my old life that still clung to me. I threw away all the postcards I kept on the fridge that were from Zimbabwe – pictures of Victoria Falls and African curios and waterfalls of the Eastern Highlands. I took down a watercolour I had in the lounge of the Matopos and even a pair of wooden salad spoons with carved giraffe handles found their way to the nearest charity shop. (309)

These cultural representations – tourist postcards and curios – are utilised by Ellie as symbols of her Zimbabwean identity, and by discarding them she is signifying the severance of this connection.

In renouncing her past, Ellie is seeking to establish herself in England, a process which is initiated by the re-establishment of her relationship with Mark. Recalling Evelyn's advice that cooking is the way to a man's heart (321), she applies herself to this feminine role. Playing spouse and hostess, she urges Mark to invite a colleague and his wife for dinner, and prepares a three-course meal. However, she becomes increasingly infuriated by the conversation, so that she serves her guests with anger and resentment rather than graciousness. Mark speaks for her and the conversation moves towards platitudes about Zimbabwe and Africa that irritate Ellie:

> 'Pity about Zimbabwe,' said Simon, chasing a crouton around his soup with his spoon. 'I hear it used to be a beautiful country.'
> 'It is. It still is,' I started to say, but Mark cut me up again.
> 'It's the way of all tin-pot democracies,' he said with finality.
> 'Do you think it will get as bad as Rwanda?' asked Simon. 'I watched a film once . . .'
> 'I stood up and scraped my chair back. Everyone looked up in surprise. Simon hadn't finished talking.
> 'More anyone?' I asked, at the same time reaching over for all the empty bowls and stacking them one on top of each other. (323)

This recalls Ellie's feeling of entrapment in banale conversation as a young student, and highlights the fact that she is not English, and that the matters being discussed in this 'small talk' are matters that she realizes she has a (currently uncertain) stake in and knows more about than the others. The "finality" with which Mark speaks, after interrupting Ellie, shows that he does not acknowledge this about her and the latter's body language declares her resistance to any further show of harmony that evening.

As a result of this incident, and the estrangement Ellie feels from Mark and perhaps, by extension, her idea of an 'ordinary English life', the following night, avoiding a cosy evening with Mark at home, she contacts her old school friend, Mandy, and goes out with her and a group of other Zimbabweans to a bar, where they perform their 'Zimbabweanness'. She recalls how, on this occasion,

> Things that didn't mean anything throughout one's life in Africa become invested with a particular air of geniality. Bottles of *Zambezi* and *Castle* produce a sense of pride in the person drinking them; the eating of biltong is accompanied by shouts of joy and relief. A sip of beer transports one back to Harare or Bulawayo or the River and one almost expects to feel the sun on one's face. *This was made in Africa. I am touching Africa*. It's the closest one can get. I hated it and yet I drank. I hated it yet I laughed at all the jokes and bought another round. I hated myself because I gave in. I stopped swimming against the tide and let the water close in above me. (339)

The displaced products are invested with meanings and offer a means of performing Zimbabwean national identity in England. Ellie's description evokes Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation: "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (1732). In a world bombarded by signs of obfuscated and abstract origins due to globalisation and mass-production,

'seeming' is not easily distinguishable from 'being' – indeed the notion of authenticity becomes elusive as the concept of 'reality' is eroded by prolific representations.

The contrived performance around dislocated cultural products serves a social purpose to which Ellie finally relents. She performs in order to belong, letting go of her critical resistance to others, but she does so in a desperate attempt to curb loneliness on the point of despair. Her increasing intoxication during this episode ultimately leads to her vomiting, which is represented as a climax to her misery and a corporeal and emotional purgation: "Was this what I was filled with? All my hate and loathing spewed next to me and on me. Would I drown in a sea of sick?" (340). In throwing up in the bed she has been placed in, in a friend's home, all her defence mechanisms collapse. On a visceral level, her nausea refers to her self-directed disgust, given her usual disparaging judgment of others: she is tired of her biting criticism of all and sundry, which, though self-serving, ultimately leave her lonely. In this scene Ellie confronts the problem that Evelyn suggested her dream exposed – that she is not dealing with "something [that] is wrong", and must acknowledge her misery and find its source. Not only her unconscious, in the form of the earlier dream, but now also her body, are "warning" her.

3.6 **Resolution**

Throughout the novel, Ellie describes how she has, since Evelyn's death, sensed the latter's spiritual presence in moments that recall her and in songs and scents. In the final chapter she comes to believe that Evelyn has been trying to send her a message, and admits "I wasn't *listening*" (357). Just as Evelyn used to make Ellie re-read a story until she understood it, the latter needs to re-asses events from a different perspective to perceive their significance. She experiences an illumination, recalling the conversation that ensued with Tony after Miles's funeral. He had argued:

> 'You know what the problem is with all of you ex-Zimbos who live here [England] . . . 'You all live in some . . . some . . . *fantasy* land[. . .]You're [Ellie is] just like those post-colonial writers you told me about. You want everything to be perfect, to be whole, to be . . . in some original state of happiness because you can't stand reality . . . See Zimbabwe for what it is, not as some failed annex of 1950s Britain. People carry on living. . . You only see what's missing, not what's there. If only you did it the other way round, you'd be surprised with little pools of happiness. (358)

Tony here draws attention to the fact that Ellie should know better than to expect 'wholeness' in her life because, on an academic level, she has already acknowledged the tenuousness of such a wish. His comment also emphasises the necessity of letting go of certain expectations of living in Africa that might be legacies of a colonial attitude of entitlement. She agrees that Tony is correct in claiming "There was so much more to Zimbabwe than made the headlines", but she also terms it "a land of sorrow" (359). On thinking more about Tony's words, she decides "it was time to put my life in perspective" (359). Realising that, by staying in England, she paradoxically risks living in the Zimbabwean past, in a warped "fantasy land", she decides rather to live in the Zimbabwean present, in order to start a new life with Tony. True to the deconstructive approach of the author, Ellie's story ends on the brink of a "new beginning", a moment which is also a return, "Back to the beginning" (360).

Eleanor Venables, in an anthropological thesis drawing on her own experience as a Rhodesian immigrant to Australia, discusses the "myth of eternal return", which encapsulates the reification of the homeland by immigrants. She makes the point that "Returning home for the immigrant is, of necessity, a return doomed to failure" (205), for even in the event that the most familiar associations of place have not changed over time, the immigrant herself has. In deciding to take up Tony's offer to join him in running a restaurant in Bulawayo, notably with Evelyn's house as the venue, Ellie intimates a sense of continuity, a return to a pattern, but with the acceptance of relinquishing her onerous obsession with the past:

> For the first time in a long time, my thoughts are on the future, not the past. I see the clear blue water of the Mozambique Channel, I see the fish restaurant in Bulawayo, Gran's house with the garden full of flowers, the wide open sky stretching on and on and on. I will learn which flowers to plant when, how to read the vagaries of each season's passing and, who knows, I may even learn to dive. (360)

In giving her, as a legacy, the house (which Wally had left her) *and its contents*, which include the diaries, Ellie believes Evelyn is offering her full disclosure. This proves true when Ellie reads, in one of Evelyn's final entries, "I'd like to tell Ellie the truth" (278). In the final pages of the novel, Ellie seems to have obtained a sense of closure in relation to Evelyn: "One day I couldn't feel her anymore and I knew what to do. I had to leave my little hole where I had hidden away" (360). She decides: "The answer was not in the Spiritualist Church, nor was it in my academic article on 'The Rise and Fall of White Zimbabwe'. The answer was in life, in living" (360). The Spiritualist Church and its preoccupation with death is a diversion from

sensuous and social life. Academic writing on identity is trapped forever in discourse. Ellie effectively renounces the text itself, after it has served its purpose as a means of re-processing her experiences: "I don't want to write the memoirs of my African childhood. I don't want to live in the past" (359). This statement also suggests that the novel is not to be classified as a nostalgic memoir and demonstrates an awareness of the tedium that might be associated with the idyllic childhood retrospective. Indeed, *This September Sun* is a genre-blurring and self-reflexive novel: it straddles several genres and the narrative convention of plot is deconstructed, with much attention drawn to writing as a process and an attempt to create patterns in a disorderly world.

Ellie's reference to diving in the long quote above recalls that she has a phobia of diving, caused by forced swimming practices at school (37). The symbolism of water, as representing the emotional unconscious and re-birth, bestows significance on this closing comment from Ellie – and provides an intimation of freedom from the self-restraint she has lived with for so long. Recounting her fear of school swimming, near the beginning of the novel, Ellie also recalls a recurring dream during her childhood, in which she would be sailing down the Zambezi river on a canoe, and would realise she was gathering speed and nearing the edge of the Victoria Falls. She would wake up just as she could see "the boiling pot beneath" and was "beginning to feel the drag of the boat downwards" (37). Never having been to the Falls, Ellie imagines the origin of her dream is the Thomas Baines paintings in the library:

> In one, he sits in a canoe going down the Zambezi with a black man steering him. He looks uncomfortable in his safari suit and anxious for the safety of his belongings. He looks as if, should they flip, he would sink, his clothes heavy with the dark, muddy water. But the other man, the man who wears a loin cloth and necklace, he will float, no, he will swim. His powerful arms will take him to the shore.
>
> In the other picture, a herd of buffalo is being driven to the edge of one of the cataracts by a herdsman. The terror in their eyes is what I can't forget. There is no way for them to turn around; no way to fight their destiny. (38-39)

The first painting, by emphasising the awkwardness of Baines and the practicality of the boatman, suggests the white man to be ill-adapted to and as essentially not belonging in an African landscape. The sense of impending disaster associated with colonialism that the paintings evoke is poignant; the first suggests African resilience, but the latter, the facing of an abyss and large-scale loss. The archetypal symbols of falling and drowning have a specific

historical resonance which the young Ellie can only intimate, but which perhaps form one aspect of the sense of fear and dread that emerge in her dream – an implication in a complex history. Ellie's plan to return to Zimbabwe prompts the idea of learning "to dive" – the competent alternative to falling or drowning. She is ready to confront the ambivalent image of the white man in the canoe; instead of worrying about how she might not belong, she simply means to return. Ellie is poised for re-birth.

Conclusion

The Limitations and Possibilities of Identity and Form

In my Introduction, I argued that a study of selected white, female, Zimbabwean writers is valuable at this particular point in time, because race is topical in Zimbabwean studies and there has been a dearth of research specifically on Zimbabwean white women writers. Generally, academics have expressed suspicion of the trend of recent white Zimbabwean memoirs, including those of Fuller and St John, in terms of what has been regarded as their opportunistic timing, that is, following the violent land redistribution programme (see Da Silva, Harris, Pilossof, Primorac). While I do not dispute that the timing of these publications is directly related to the political climate of Zimbabwe in the early 2000s, I believe there is a less cynical interpretation to be made of this convergence than as the manifesting of victimhood for a sympathetic international market. While I acknowledge that the popularity and prevalence of white Zimbabwean personal narratives is problematic (see Da Silva), the texts that I have isolated for detailed study reveal writers who critically engage with white colonial culture and its legacy. Drawing on Muchemwa's argument, in the context of contemporary Zimbabwe, where minorities are excluded from belonging in official representations of the imagined nation, creative and autobiographical writing forms an important supplement. The selected texts explore and interrogate white, female, Zimbabwean identity, and each text is focalised from this particular perspective through the narrator/protagonist. I have highlighted race, gender and nationality as they have arisen as sites of interest in each text, and explored how the authors negotiate restrictions of genre, conforming to and adapting certain narratives of becoming – in particular, the white African childhood farm novel, autobiography, confession, and the *Bildungsroman*. All the writers explore identity crises related to race crises, which are difficult to resolve, and the narrative form of each text offers an attempt to do so. I have been particularly interested in how the fictional texts selected compare with the more controversial memoirs proper, in this regard.

Chennells describes how a white Rhodesian mythology emerged, as is apparent in literary representations, despite or because of the tenuousness of this group's identity. Not only do white Zimbabweans hold a precarious place in the nation as projected by the Mugabe regime – a position for which this group is also responsible (see Fisher), but the selected writers are

displaced Zimbabweans. Critics have suggested that a sense of exile has been a key component of the problematic nostalgia for 'belonging' associated with recent Zimbabwean white writing. As previously cited, Pilossof argues that:

> These books by white Zimbabweans express a grief in not being able to return to the 'Africa' of their memories. The glorious, carefree lives they once led have gone, replaced by the ruination of 'black Africa'. This inability to return nullifies the space to remember or acknowledge how problematic that past was because, apart from being a futile exercise, they have conveniently chosen to forgive themselves and their forefathers for their actions and history in 'Africa'. (636)

On balance, however, the selected authors re-imagine the homeland in an anti-nostalgic manner. Historical culpability for the violence of colonialism is a key concern in these texts, and the past is recalled with deep ambivalence in light of this. Indeed, the insubstantiality of white identity, because of the false mythologies on which it was premised, nullifies the ability to 'return' to a 'before' when white identity was supposedly more stable. Pilossof raises the issue of forgiveness, a key concern in confessional narratives, and I have regarded St John's and Fuller's writing, in particular, as confessional, and explored how each engages with culpability.

The Rhodesian/Zimbabwean Civil War is a key focus in most of the texts. The war, which formed a backdrop to the protagonists' childhoods, infiltrates the domestic sphere, affecting family dynamics. As adults, the narrators are therefore concerned with engaging with a war that was only vaguely understood during childhood. The war is a particularly prominent point of reference, not only due to the threat of violence on farms and the reality of fathers on call-up, but also due to the fact that it produced a climax of colonial fervour preceding the transition into the new nation of Zimbabwe, and was thus symbolically significant. Fuller and St John suggest that living with the knowledge, in hindsight, that in their lifestyle and their support of the war each was complicit in a colonial system of oppression has preoccupied them, and one might tentatively extend this to Liebenberg, who channels her concerns through fiction. The narrative of *This September Sun* begins in 1980, but the theme of the past haunting the present is prevalent, notably in the ways that the suicide of Ellie's uncle, Jeremy, as a traumatised soldier has deeply affected Evelyn and Ellie's mother.

The family is at the centre of conflict in all the texts and I have regarded the gender of the authors/protagonists as significant in this respect. In *Rainbow's End*, Lauren's father proves to be a disappointing role model; however it is her mother who attains the reputation of a femme

fatale, as does Angelique in *Voluptuous Delights*, due to social prejudice against women. In the latter text, the fact that Nyree and Cia are girls frees them to a certain extent from their Oupa's tutelage, as it is not their responsibility to continue the patriarchal legacy. Fuller's fraught relationship with her mother is a central aspect of her autobiographical trilogy, and Ellie struggles with female authorship and is initially overshadowed by Evelyn in *This September Sun*. Considering the family focus, there are particular stakes in autobiographical writing and associated responsibilities: others are implicated in what is disclosed. Both Fuller and St John reveal intimate family history and jeopardise the reputation of a parent: Fuller in her depiction of her mother as crudely racist, alcoholic and mentally unstable, and St John in her account of her father's serial adultery. While St John textually resolves her relationship with her father towards the end of the memoir, Fuller only describes her reconciliation with her mother towards the end of her third family memoir, after years of conflict following the publication of *Don't Let's Go*.

In Chapter One, I compared Lauren St John's *Rainbow's End* and Lauren Liebenberg's *The Voluptuous Delights of Peanut Butter and Jam*. While traditionally the colonial pastoral represses the paradox of representing colonial belonging and proprietorship of what is stolen land and elides the presence of indigenous labourers, both *Rainbow's End* and *Voluptuous Delights* expose this contradiction. While both texts are 'loss of innocence' narratives, innocence is represented as akin to ignorance, and not guiltlessness. St John's *Rainbow's End* is the most conventional in form of all the selected texts, and offers a resolution of crises. The substitution of the myths of the Rhodesian homeland and the perfect nuclear family for a more inclusive and realistic understanding of nation and family is the necessary pivotal transition in this confessional, 'before' and 'after' narrative. In *Voluptuous Delights*, colonial mythology and the ideal of childhood are ironically represented from the outset. Indeed, the novel is both of the same subgenre summarised in the subtitle of *Rainbow's End*: "A Story of Childhood, War and an African Farm" and a parody of this form: it is both a tragic and satirical account of a white child raised in a farming family during the war.

In Chapter Two, I posed that Fuller's trilogy depicts the perpetual nature of becoming and the difficulty of resolving one's relation to a troubled history, and may be termed deconstructive autobiography for its tendency to unmask the self. Fuller presents, on the one hand, a compulsion to confess and on the other, a scepticism about the confessional. In *Don't Let's* Go, she forecloses on the possibility of personal redemption by not staging a

transformation, or writing an apology, but exposing her family and self. In *Scribbling the Cat*, she engages with the possibility of confession as redemption at the moment of K's confession, which she assimilates as her own. However, the overriding impression, to which she admits, is that she was reluctant to truly face the past and its present implications. *Cocktail Hour* satirises the human tendency to forget or misremember, but the reader is ultimately left with the paradoxical message that forgetting is both a pathological symptom and a means of healing. Reviewers and critics have had mixed responses to this best-selling author. While some are sceptical about *Don't Let's Go*, others regard the first book as authentic and the latter two as less so, a position with which, overall, I concur. However, as a trilogy, the texts raise interesting questions regarding what telling 'the truth' might look like. Fuller seems to be conscious that, as Coetzee puts it, the sincerity of confession is uncertain when it "might yet be not the truth but a self-serving fiction" (67). She therefore resists the more conventional confessionals typical of white narratives in post-colonies – those which regard themselves uncritically as exculpations.

In Chapter Three, I argued that Rheam's *This September* Sun, rather than tracing challenges successfully overcome – as is traditional in the *Bildungsroman*, explores a young woman's struggle to emerge from sublimation in her inner turmoil. However, Ellie is empowered by her ability to re-read and re-write, therefore making enough sense of her experiences to ultimately find a point of equilibrium, with the assistance of the mentors Evelyn and Tony. As a metafictional text, *This September Sun* creates an awareness of narrative conventions such as plot, and circumvents generic expectations, such as the mystery, romance and *Bildungsroman*. It is not Evelyn's murder which is a mystery worth 'solving' but rather the mysteries of the everyday, such as the problem of identity: the difficulty of knowing another and even the self. Moreover, the meaning of national identity and how race relates to this is problematised. The disconnection with place that occurs on migrating reveals that national identity is not essential, but neither is it insubstantial. Ellie's attitude to the prospect of returning to Zimbabwe shows that belonging requires an adjustment of expectations and the relinquishment of a sense of entitlement.

In conclusion, all the selected texts interrogate white Zimbabwean identity, and in particular hold the family under scrutiny. Each writer traces a narrative of a woman's "(un)becoming" (see Fraiman). While all the texts dissect race and national identity, the fictional texts reflect on white writing itself – Liebenberg, via parody, and Rheam, by offering a self-

reflexive awareness of 'memoirs of an African childhood' as a type and deliberately circumventing its conventions. While St John offers an apparently sincere confession, in the form of a transition narrative, Fuller's *Don't Let's Go* expresses doubt about the confessional, and in a more original but also more controversial manner, passes the ethical responsibility of making a moral judgment against a racist white society, on to the reader.

As a coda, I would like to draw attention to the limitations of this study. It is unfortunate that, as Muchemwa, quoted earlier, puts it, "black and white traditions in Zimbabwean literature rarely write to each other and often write across each other" (196). In light of the controversy around post land-reform Zimbabwean white writing, it has been worthwhile to explore this topic, especially considering the lack of material on Zimbabwean white women's writing. This study has established that while there is a resurgence of Zimbabwean white writing, within this broad category, identity and form are being deconstructed in various ways by different authors. The broad category is therefore by no means as homogeneous as might initially seem to be the case, or as certain of its critics maintain. However, one would hope for a future in which Zimbabwean literature is not bifurcated in terms of race or ethnicity. Indeed, the short story collections by 'amabooks and Weaver Press are positive examples of multivocality in Zimbabwean literature and have set a precedent for a more inclusive and representative sense of the range of contemporary writing emanating from that country.

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