Reclaiming the 'Self': Self-Objectification and Victim-Survivors' Bodies in Margie Orford's *The Eye of the Beholder* and Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater*

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Abstract

Self-objectification is conventionally viewed by objectification theorists as a negative process that is pursued by victims as a result of experiencing sexual violence. What makes self-objectification particularly negative is that it confirms that the victim feels alienated from their body following their harrowing experience. In this thesis, I argue that Margie Orford and Akwaeke Emezi depart from this view of self-objectification. Instead, through the protagonists in their respective novels, *The Eye of the Beholder* and *Freshwater*, Orford and Emezi offer a positive revision of self-objectification by articulating it as a necessary process in a victim's journey toward reclaiming their body and, with it, their concept of 'self'. To make this argument, I begin by drawing on Western existential phenomenology and African ontology to develop what is referred to as the basic relational view of the 'self' which understands the 'self' as the connection point between one's body and one's subjecthood. Applying this understanding of the 'self' to the selected texts, I show that it is the connection between each protagonist's body and spirit that is disturbed by their experience of sexual violence. Initially aligning with the negative view of self-objectification, Orford and Emezi confirm this disturbance through their protagonists' pursuits of self-objectifying behaviours. However, using Elaine Scarry's artist–artifact model and Russel W. Belk's articulation of the 'extended self', I demonstrate that it is by means of self-objectification that the protagonists are presented as able to reestablish a meaningful connection to their violated bodies and thereby reclaim their disrupted concepts of 'self' as they journey towards survivorhood. In this way, through the victim–survivor journeys of their respective protagonists in *The Eye of the Beholder* and *Freshwater*, Orford and Emezi inscribe the process of self-objectification with an unorthodox duality where it is not a wholly negative process, but rather one that is pivotal to a victim's survival. Thus, I conclude in this thesis, Orford and Emezi offer a positive revision of self-objectification, a revision that has not yet been studied in the scholarship on the selected primary texts.

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Note to Reader

This thesis and the bibliography have been formatted according to the Rhodes University Literary Studies in English “Style Sheet for Writers of MA and PhD Theses 2024”. This document is accessible under the section titled “Courses” at https://www.ru.ac.za/english/. Moreover, I have used UK English as the proofing language while retaining any US English spellings in direct quotations.

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Introduction

Admittedly, even though Margie Orford's *The Eye of the Beholder* (2022) and Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater* (2018) are the focus of my project, the origin of this thesis does not solely lie with these authors or their texts. Instead, it is owed to critically acclaimed Spanish screenwriter and director, Pedro Almodóvar. Anyone who has ventured to watch Almodóvar's films will attest to finding themselves embroiled in a state of moral conflict and discomfort as they reckon with narratives that frequently treat both the theme of sexual violence and the victim of sexual violence ambivalently. This was indeed my experience as I sat in my Philosophy of Film class watching *Talk to Her* (2002).

One of the main narrative threads Almodóvar develops in *Talk to Her* follows the relationship between a nurse named Benigno and his comatose patient, Alicia. Almodóvar's orchestration of the first half of the film lulls the audience into harbouring positive feelings towards Benigno who, though odd, is seemingly as benign as his name suggests. Notably, Benigno's attention and kindness to Alicia *appear* exquisite. Unlike the other characters in the film who view Alicia as an object owing to her vegetative state, Almodóvar frames Benigno as recognising Alicia's personhood through his actions, which include maintaining her hair and nails; painstakingly ensuring that her muscles do not atrophy; and, most importantly, talking to her as though she is indeed listening.

The audience's rose-tinted glasses are then suddenly removed as the film takes a sinister turn: a still comatose Alicia is found to be pregnant, and her rapist is revealed to be none other than Begnino. With this revelation, Benigno's seeming restoration of Alicia's personhood is reframed as the most abhorrent sexual violation. Yet, as A. W. Eaton notes, even as the audience realises the horror of the crime committed, Almodóvar manages to "shap[e] our perception of Benigno's act so that it seems beautiful, benevolent, and *almost* mutual" (17). This is largely the effect of Almodóvar concealing the scene involving Alicia's rape in what critics view as a humorous erotic short film, "The Shrinking Lover" – the events of which overlap with that of *Talk to Her* – thereby working to mute the violence of Begnino's abuse. Even when Alicia wakes up from her coma, Almodóvar keeps his focus on Benigno, trying to inject the audience with sympathy for this allegedly good-hearted man who made an unfortunate mistake about what he thought of as 'love'. In this this way, Almodóvar approaches the theme of sexual violence and Alicia's sexual victimisation with ambivalence, leaving his audience morally queasy.

At the time I encountered *Talk to Her*, I was a Philosophy Honours student with a foot in the Literary Studies Department and with a keen phenomenological interest in how the sense of 'self' of a victim of sexual violence is impacted by, and recovered from, this violence that is so expressly directed at the body. Almodóvar's artistic choice to gloss over Alicia's violation struck me as disregarding these phenomenological elements of her reality as a victim of sexual-abuse and was, in truth, reminiscent of the scholarship I had read earlier that year on Emezi's haunting novel, *Freshwater*. A central plot point in *Freshwater* is that the protagonist, Ada, is sexually violated. Emezi, by exploring an alternative way of being that is rooted in Igbo tradition, offers the reader an unusually intimate, internal perspective of how this traumatic experience, among others, leaves Ada fighting to regain a sense of control over her body and her sense of 'self'. Yet, few scholars explicitly focus on Ada as a sexual violence victim and consequently fail to engage with that aspect of her lived experience. Instead, as is shown in Chapter 1, most scholars oscillate between the transnational, queer, and psychopathological elements of the novel, completely bypassing Ada's sexual victimisation and Emezi's deeply affective portrayal of the character's complex journey towards becoming a survivor.

It was with this glaring gap in the scholarship on *Freshwater* at the front of my mind thanks to Almodóvar's *Talk to Her* that I found myself reading Orford's newly minted crime novel, *The Eye of the Beholder*. Immediately, the similarities between Orford and Emezi's texts were striking. Like Emezi's *Freshwater*, Orford's novel centres on protagonists, Cora and Angel, who are sexually violated and find themselves wrestling with the ghosts of their violators to recover ownership of their bodies and their 'selves' even years after they were harmed. Inspired by "[t]he idea of a crime that never stops" (Orford, *Love and Fury* 229), Orford's *The Eye of the Beholder* stays with the tormented victim to examine the "complexity of what we think of as a victim and how women survive" (Orford qtd. in Boikanyo par. 6). As will be discussed in Chapter 1, Orford's decision to follow the victim in this way dramatically departs from the conventional crime-fiction narrative, which frequently leaves the victim simply as one who bears this status, treating the figure as a device in the service to the more prominent figures of the detective and the criminal. In this way Orford's novel not only reveals a lacuna in mainstream crime fiction, which makes it rich ground for research, but also fills that gap as she uses her novel's female protagonists to powerfully excavate 'the victim' from such a moribund status by intimately focusing on their experiences as victims who are on the journey to becoming survivors.

In both novels following the victim–survivor journey, what becomes clear is that Orford's *The Eye of the Beholder* and Emezi's *Freshwater* each deal with two questions that, for me, Almodóvar's *Talk to Her* failed to even ask: (1) How does sexual violence impact on the victim and on their concept of 'self'? (2) What does it take for the victim to reclaim their 'self' from their violator and, so, survive[1] in the aftermath of sexual violence? It is their engagement with these two questions that has informed my decision to focus on the two selected texts. Moreover, these questions underpin the structure of my thesis and its overall argument. Specifically, my intention in this thesis is to investigate and expand upon the intricacies of how Orford and Emezi's novels engage with these questions of sexual violence and the victim-survivor's 'self'.

To even begin this investigation requires that this thesis proceed from a basic understanding of what constitutes the 'self'. This is no simple task as the novels in question belong to distinct genres and extend from different global and historical traditions: *The Eye of the Beholder* is a crime fiction novel that presents a Western worldview while Igbo cosmology-based *Freshwater* is a magical realist text depicting a particular understanding of African reality. Any appropriate concept of 'self' applied to both texts must be sensitive to this dissimilitude. Fortunately, there are parallels between Western phenomenological interpretations of the 'self,' developed by the likes of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and African ontological views of the 'self', championed by philosophers such as Augustine Nwoye and Kwame Gyeke. I examine these parallels in Chapter 1 to derive a basic concept of 'self' that might be applied to both novels, before determining in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 how Orford and Emezi each complicate this concept through their protagonists and their depiction of the disturbing impact that sexual violence has on these characters' senses of 'self'.

Notably, in following Cora, Angel, and Ada's victim–survivor journeys, one thing becomes frighteningly clear: the disturbing impact of sexual violence manifests in self-objectification as all three characters self-objectify after being violated. Commonly, self-objectification, as coined by objectification theorists Tomi-Anne Roberts and Barbara L. Fredrickson, is understood as a negative outcome of sexual violence, one that reflects and confirms that the victim's experience of bodily violation has fundamentally and indelibly harmed them. In Chapter 2 and Chapter 3's exploration of how the authors engage with question one, I seek to show that this is the case for the protagonists under examination.

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[1] In this thesis, 'surviving' is understood as recovering one's sense or concept of 'self' rather than simply 'not dying'. The notion of 'surviving' is expanded upon and further complicated in Chapter 4.

Yet, in engaging with question two in their novels, Orford and Emezi also seem to suggest that, for the victim, there is more to this process than meets the eye. Specifically, the various motivations they portray as undergirding their protagonists' pursuits of self-objectification allow one to infer that the process might play a positive and productive role in a victim's journey towards reclaiming control over their body and, with it, their sense of 'self'. This is a highly controversial articulation of self-objectification. By applying what I term Elaine Scarry's 'artist–artifact model' to the selected texts, my goal in Chapter 4 is to foreground Orford and Emezi's unorthodox articulation of self-objectification before consolidating my findings through a comparison of the novels in Chapter 5. Ultimately, my motivation in pursuing the indicated intentions and goals in this thesis is to determine whether Orford and Emezi *do* offer a positive revision of self-objectification through the protagonists' victim–survivor journeys, as this kind of revision, to my knowledge, has not yet been examined in the scholarship on *Beholder* and *Freshwater*.

Chapter 1

Laying the Foundation

1. Introduction

To quote Jeffrey R. Di Leo and Sophia A. McClennon: "Violence is everywhere" (241). Sexual violence, in particular, has the added complexity of moving from the insidious to the blatant in its various manifestations. Drawing on a history of feminist scholarship, Liz Kelly argues this point by proposing that sexual violence exists on a continuum (Preface xviii). The one end of the continuum is populated by seemingly inconsequential behaviour, such as an inappropriately intimate look directed at one person by another in a public space. In contrast, the other end of the continuum involves explicitly violent acts, like rape, that are deemed punishable by law and society. For Kelly, both ends of the continuum constitute violence as they are marked by an unwanted intrusion that a victim experiences through, or in relation to, their body. However, it is the former that makes sexual violence particularly insidious as violations of this form exist in everyday, mundane interactions between people and are characterised by implicit intrusions, which – to borrow Rob Nixon's term – makes this form of violence a "slow violence" or "an attritional violence that is not seen as violence at all" (2). Essentially, the damaging impact of sexual violence that is fully realised when a perpetrator rapes their victim begins with seemingly invisible daily intrusions. Hence, beyond being everywhere, the manifestations of sexual violence extend perniciously from everyday insidious forms of violence to commonly recognised, brazen forms.

It is the damaging outcome of sexual violence for victims that is of particular interest in this thesis due to the respective protagonists in *The Eye of the Beholder* and *Freshwater* experiencing and attempting to reconcile themselves with this outcome. Just as Kelly points out that an unwanted intrusion marks sexual violence, for victims, the outcome may be marked by a concomitant estrangement – the estrangement that a victim feels towards their body.

In her book, *Aftermath,* Susan J. Brison highlights the estranged relationship between a sexual violence victim and their body when she writes the following of her own brutal experience:

> I was jumped from behind, beaten, raped, strangled, and left for dead in a ravine. The pleasures of embodiment were suddenly replaced by the pain and terror to which being

> embodied makes one prey […]. My body was now perceived as an enemy, […] as a site of increased vulnerability. (44)

Here, Brison's personal insight illustrates how, following violation, the body seems to be its own entity that exists separately from whatever the victim views as constituting themselves. Furthermore, in the preface of her book, Brison asserts that, in the period following her assault, she had to stop herself from saying, "'I was murdered in France last summer'" (xi). Upon reading this, one is prompted to ask what the 'I' is that Brison desired to convey had been murdered through the violation of her body. At once, Brison's descriptions suggest that the sexual violence victim is something beyond their body, as they become estranged from their body, and yet the notion of an 'I' dying upon being assaulted suggests that the victim had *been* their body – or, at least, that the integration that the victim had with their body prior to being assaulted had been what they perceived as their 'self', as their 'I'. What then is ruptured when a victim is assaulted? What causes the loss of this 'self'? What is the 'self'? And, what – if anything – might it take for the victim of sexual violence to regain what has been lost and thereby move from being a victim to being a survivor? Is this even possible? These are the key questions that this thesis intends to engage with in relation to Orford's *The Eye of the Beholder* and Emezi's *Freshwater* – which, as indicated above, are both concerned with the effects of sexual violence on victims and with the victims' attempts to reconcile with themselves in relation to their harrowing experiences as they strive toward survival on what becomes their victim–survivor journey.

In this chapter, I begin interacting with these key questions by providing the core argument of the thesis. Following the core argument, a description of the authors and the primary texts is offered to demonstrate why and how the questions apply to each text and to provide a rationale for the selection of these primary texts for comparison. The primary texts are then placed within their academic contexts to demonstrate the relevance of this project. Thereafter, the project's theoretical framework is developed, and an overview of the methodology is provided to briefly explain how the theoretical framework is applied to the primary texts analysed in this thesis. Finally, I conclude the chapter by offering a brief overview of the structure of the project. In achieving the above, Chapter 1 provides the foundation of this thesis.

2. Core Argument

Margie Orford's *The Eye of the Beholder* and Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater* are both thematically concerned with the bodily violation of the sexual violence victim and that victim's consequent self-objectification. Here, I use the term 'bodily violation' deliberately as it is initially upon the body, and through the body, that the protagonists experience sexual violence and come to self-objectify. In line with this common theme, I compare the two novels in this thesis in order to examine how they articulate the idea that self-objectification may be a necessary process in a sexual violence victim's journey to reclaiming their 'self' through their body, and thereby becoming a survivor. The texts do not present this victim–survivor journey[2] as a simple or linear process; rather, it as an agonising, arduous, and multi-directional one that nevertheless holds the potential for a positive outcome. Considering this articulation in the two novels, I propose through this thesis that Orford and Emezi offer a positive revision of self-objectification as it concerns victims of sexual violence.

3. Description of Authors and Primary Texts

Orford and Emezi are both critically acclaimed African authors whose literary works have been praised for pursuing issues centred on the body and the 'self'. Indeed, this thread of similarity connects, and has motivated the selection of, Orford's *The Eye of the Beholder* and Emezi's *Freshwater* as the primary texts under study in this thesis.

Orford, in particular, is a South African journalist, activist, film director, and an author of both fiction and non-fiction, who now resides in London. Dubbed "the queen of South African crime thriller writers" (De Waal 7), Orford is renowned for her crime fiction series[3], which follows female detective figure Clare Hart as she sleuths the city of Cape Town in a fight against femicide. Orford's crime fiction collection is primarily influenced by her work and experience as an activist and journalist, domains in which she developed a desire to understand what motivates the harrowing violence that she saw permeating the apartheid and post-apartheid South African milieus (Orford, "The Grammar of Violence" 221). In an interview with Katie Reid from *Africa in Words*, Orford states that she had been particularly struck by how the public violence of the apartheid era became "sublimated into the intimate spheres, into the body, in extreme assaults against women and children" (par. 12) in the period following the 1994 democratic elections. It is in this light that Orford's fictional work demonstrates her keen interest in understanding and speaking out against the causes and consequences of gender-based violence as it relates to the social structures of society and the body. Consequently, the themes that are prevalent in her work involve crime, political issues, and gender-based violence. These themes extend to her most recently published novel, *The Eye of the Beholder* (hereafter *Beholder*).

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[2] A refined and detailed explanation of this journey is developed in Chapter 4.

[3] Orford's Clare Hart series consists of five novels: *Like Clockwork* (2006), *Blood Rose* (2006), *Daddy's Girl* (2009), *Gallows Hill* (2011), and *Water Music* (2013).

Fitting thematically with Orford's earlier works, *Beholder* engages with the social structures underpinning gender-based violence through its two female protagonists, Cora and Angel. However, what distinguishes *Beholder* from Orford's Clare Hart series is that the novel's protagonists are both direct victims of sexual violence. Moreover, Cora and Angel's active navigation of the trauma they have suffered is made *Beholder*'s core focus, rather than it being peripheral or secondary to the narrative as is conventional in crime fiction. Orford explains to the editor of *The Johannesburg Review of Books*, Jennifer Malec, that the novel's creation was motivated by the universal moment of shame and loss of 'self' that women experience when, at the end of their childhood, they recognise that people are chiefly "noticing [them as] a sexual being" (par. 48). *Beholder* captures this moment and its ramifications through Cora and Angel, whilst also using these characters to express the various ways in which women might come to terms with, or fight against, the undoing vulnerability imposed on them by society via their bodies. Orford suggests that the novel is essentially about a woman's "battle of how to be human" ("Margie Orford Talks to Jennifer Malec" par. 16), rather than being someone else's sexualised object. Thus, while the novel is a work of crime fiction and has a central crime – namely, the investigation of missing sexually abusive art critic Yves Fournier – this crime primarily acts as the entry point to the novel's deeper concern, which centres on sexual violence committed against women by the objectifying gaze that permeates society. In service to this concern, the central crime specifically becomes a connecting device between the two narrative threads that, respectively, follow Cora and Angel's experiences of dehumanising sexual abuse *as well as* their journeys towards recovering from that abuse, in the course of which they attempt to reclaim their sense of 'self', their humanness.

Emezi similarly draws from their own experiences in the creation of their work. Emezi is a non-binary, transgender writer, videographer, visual artist, and musician whose artistic and literary pieces have been praised for being "*visionary, radical* and *innovative*" (Anderson par. 17). Drawing on their father's Nigerian-Igbo heritage, Emezi identifies themselves as existing between the physical and spiritual realms by virtue of being *ọgbanje*. In Igbo cosmology, being *ọgbanje* entails being a "gender-ambiguous spirit [child] that arrives from outside the [family] lineage and inhabits a body" (Mitter par. 20), engaging in a repeated cycle of being born and dying young to the same mother (Bastian 59). Emezi's cultural identity is further complicated because their mother is Malaysian-Tamil. Moreover, they were born and spent their formative years in Nigeria before going to the United States of America for the duration of their tertiary education. Owing to the multiplicity of their heritage, and their fluid experience of identity and culture, Emezi has sought to emphasise alternative ontologies in their work. They have done so to defy what they deem the historical "invalidat[ion] of non-Western schools of thought" (Emezi "In Conversation" par. 9), while also encouraging their audience to critically engage with the boundaries of body and being. Consequently, their collection of work deals with themes centred on liminality, identity, Afro-indigenous ontology, sexuality, and gender fluidity. Indeed, these themes occupy the narrative centre of Emezi's critically acclaimed debut novel, *Freshwater*.

Like *Beholder*, *Freshwater* is a narrative concerned with the trauma of being embodied. However, in *Freshwater*, this concern is processed through a metaphysical lens that is influenced by Afro-indigenous ontology and "plunges the reader into the mysteries of the self" (*Akwaeke Emezi* par. 2). Drawing from Emezi's own life, *Freshwater* follows *ọgbanje*-born Ada from her birth in Nigeria to her tertiary education and adulthood in the United States of America. However, what is unusual about Ada's case is that, beyond being a spirit-child herself, she shares her body with a collection of other spirits through whom Emezi lyrically narrates two parts of the three-part narrative. Referred to as the collective 'We', this collection of spirits is in constant conflict with being confined to Ada's body and being subsidiary to Ada-as-spirit. Eventually, however, Ada's experience of gender-based violence in the form of rape results in Ada-as-spirit receding from her body to escape her trauma and simultaneously launches the spirit-collective into a dominant internal position. Thereafter, Ada's narrative follows a trajectory of sexual violence, self-harm, and gender dysmorphia, all caused by her decentred internal plurality. Ultimately, the core issue of *Freshwater*, as Emezi emphasises in an interview with Arielle Gray, is that "[Ada is] embodied" ("'Freshwater' Writer" par. 2). Ada's embodiment not only makes her a victim of society's gendered power relations that result in an initial disturbance of her 'self', as is the case for the protagonists in *Beholder*, but the very fact that she is multiply inhabited makes her vulnerable to an internally motivated destabilisation of 'self' too. Thus, *Freshwater* complicates the notions of victimisation and what constitutes the 'self' in a way that is distinctly different to what is found in *Beholder*.

In describing the authors and the primary texts, this section has sought to show that Orford and Emezi write about the body and the 'self' in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*, respectively. Despite this similarity, the authors approach these themes in notably different ways through the subject-matter of their novels. These similarities and differences relating to the ‘self’ and the body are what form the basis of comparison between the novels in this thesis.

4. Academic Context

4.1 *The Eye of the Beholder*

Owing to its recent publication, there is no literary criticism of *Beholder*. For this reason, this sub-section contextualises the novel in terms of literary criticism relating to the conventions of the crime fiction genre and Orford’s earlier crime fiction novels, the Clare Hart series. Importantly, because this thesis focuses on victim-survivors and their bodies in *Beholder*, I specifically contextualise the novel in terms of the conventions that pertain to the figure of the victim in crime fiction in this sub-section.

Historically, the victim has occupied a paradoxical position within the conventional crime fiction novel. In her book, *Twentieth Century Crime Fiction,* Gill Plain notes that the victim’s *body*, both alive and dead, is the core component of any crime novel’s narrative exposition (12). This is because, within a conventional crime fiction novel, the victim’s body generally serves as the “corporeal landscape” (5) upon which the genre’s authors write both the violent crimes of their novels and the resultant investigations. Often positioned at the beginning of the narrative, victims, Plain posits, essentially function as the “instigators of narrative causality” (31). This function, as Kathleen Gregory Klein elaborates in her work, serves purely to connect the detective figure to the criminal figure and, furthermore, to foreground the cat-and-mouse game between these figures. Essentially, there is no crime fiction without a victim, just as there is no crime fiction without a detective and criminal pitted against each other. But, as the crime functions as the catalyst within the genre, the figure of the victim is central.

Yet the functional role attributed to the victim works to reduce the figure of the victim to a mere literary device wielded by crime authors. The consequence of such a treatment is that the victim is prominent but is not represented as having agency in the way that other characters like the detective or criminal are. Owing to this, the victim often becomes obscured or, to use Klein’s phrase, “fad[es] into irrelevance” (174), as the narrative of detection becomes the core focus of the crime novel. Plain deems this the “deep structural irony” (12) of the conventional crime fiction narrative. Sabine Binder captures the issue recognised by both Plain and Klein succinctly when she writes, “[c]losely looked at but not seen, the victim is both the spectacular beginning of the crime novel and its invisible centre” (24). Hence, by virtue of being crucial to the conventional crime fiction narrative, and yet rendered invisible by that very same narrative, the figure of the victim historically occupies a paradoxical position within the conventions of crime fiction.

Standing out within the crime fiction genre, Orford has been praised by scholars for drawing the victim, and their body, out of the aforementioned obscurity in her earlier Clare Hart series. Elizabeth Fletcher notes that, in her work, Orford began this process by "focus[ing] on the body to evoke the experience and the consequences of abuse" (205). Orford achieves this by presenting the reader with figures like Pearl de Wet and Clare's twin sister, Constance, both of whom share their stories of abuse through the scars that mark their living bodies as the bodies of victims. Specifically, these figures are victims that are able to assist Clare's investigations and thereby "play an active role in their [own] survival" (53), which offers them an agency in Orford's narratives that is not possible for the dead victim in the conventional crime fiction novel. In this way, Orford writes the victims of her novels as agential characters rather than mere literary devices. This thesis shows that this is especially true for *Beholder*; here, the victims in the novel *are* the protagonists.

Moreover, Caitlin Lisa Martin points out that Orford makes the concerted effort to name almost all the victims in the Clare Hart series. In so doing, Martin argues, Orford brings even dead victims in her novels to "imaginative life as personalised beings" (40), imbuing them with a history and a sense of significance. The effect of this choice is that Orford's writing extricates the victim from conventional anonymity thereby making them visible to the characters in her novels as well as to the reader. This is important as it is a component of what predicates the reader coming to identify a shared humanity between themselves and the victim. That is, Orford facilitates the reader's recognition of the victim as a person, one worthy of a name and an acknowledged identity, rather than merely as a device or instrument. By making some of the victims in her novels active characters and choosing to personalise the rest by naming them – rather than rendering them obscure, invisible, or purely instrumental – Orford's Clare Hart series stands out within the crime fiction genre.

Binder too acknowledges that Orford draws the victims of her novels out of the obscurity they might otherwise inhabit. However, she criticises Orford's representation of the victim in these earlier novels for often "focusing on the traumatic moment [and] fix[ing] them not only in victimhood, but in that moment in time" (53). In this way, Binder argues, Orford rarely permits the victims in her texts to move beyond their victimhood. This undermines Orford's "awareness of victims' ability to 'move on' after trauma in real life" (Binder 58). Binder goes so far as to say that Orford's choice to suspend her victims in a state of victimhood is tantamount to making them "function as sacrificial outcasts, hovering in a zone that is neither life nor death" (55). Essentially, Binder questions the effectiveness with which Orford draws the victim into visibility in her Clare Hart series by suggesting that the author's treatment of the victim remains primarily instrumental.

In this thesis, I argue that *Beholder* is exceptional within the crime fiction genre, and Orford's Clare Hart series, in genuinely drawing the victim out of obscurity and into visibility and agency as the narrative of crime and investigation progresses. *Beholder* does so by focusing on the *living* victims, the protagonists of the novel, as they negotiate an unimaginable disturbance in their selfhoods, a disturbance that results from experiencing sexual violence – this is explored in Chapter 2. The novel also does so by following the protagonists as they navigate the path of survival and potential healing – which is examined in Chapter 4 and 5. With such issues in the spotlight in this work, this project contributes both to scholarship on crime fiction generally and to that on Orford's previously published body of crime fiction work.

4.2 *Freshwater*

Unlike what is the case with *Beholder*, there *is* much literary criticism of *Freshwater*. Given this, an imbalance in the contextualisation of the two texts is unavoidable. In the literature on *Freshwater*, most scholars focus on the implications of Ada's liminality and internal plurality rather than on her status as a victim and survivor of sexual violence. In this sub-section, I illuminate this gap by situating this thesis within the context of literary criticism of *Freshwater*.

To begin, scholars such as Tomitope Ogundare, Faiza Moulay Omar, and Jessica Newgas have approached *Freshwater* from a psychological perspective. Ogundare, in particular, views Ada's experience of being *ọgbanje* and being multiply inhabited by the spirit-collective as depicting the "natural history of mental illness" (1). Drawing on the work of Ernest Hartmann, Ogundare reads the Ada as having what Hartmann would term a "thin boundary" (1) between the different aspects of her mind and between herself and the outside world. He suggests that Ada's experience of being inhabited by multiple spirit-beings, in conjunction with her various psychological 'breaks', ought to be read as a narrative of mental illness that has been framed in cultural terms by means of Igbo cosmology. Ogundare's view that *Freshwater* is chiefly a narrative about mental illness is shared by Tariro Mzezewa, who writes that it "is an unflinching account of the way mental illness can grow, transform and destroy not just relationships, but one's sense of self as well" (par. 4). Despite seeming to dismiss the cultural explanation for Ada's condition, Ogundare does acknowledge that this explanation is beneficial to Ada because it is what allows her to come to terms with her lived experience and thereby "gai[n] true emotional insight" (1).

Like Ogundare, Omar too approaches *Freshwater* from a psychological perspective. She bases the validity of her interpretation on the premise that Emezi "does not deny the psychological dimension of the story" (47). However, she does not view Ada's condition as one of mental illness. Instead, she approaches Ada's plurality through a Jungian lens. In Omar's view, the plurality of characters that inhabit Ada's body are metaphorical representations of the Jungian model of psychology, which posits that every person's psyche consists of a persona, an ego, and sub-personalities that include a shadow and an animus (51). Omar offers a compelling argument for how the various characters inhabiting Ada's body articulate this model. She points out that Ada constitutes the persona as it is her body and her face through which the internal plurality accesses the world (51–52). The collective 'we', Omar claims, represents Ada's ego because they dominate the narrative in being constantly aware of themselves whilst also wielding the capacity to repress and manipulate Ada's memories (49). Asụghara, or the *beastself*, is the shadow of Ada because she exemplifies behaviours that are directly in opposition to Ada, such as being sexually expressive, whilst Ada attempts to escape her sexuality (52). Finally, Snt Vincent is the animus because he exists within Ada as the "contra-sexual sub-personality" (53). Thus, Omar concludes that Ada, as a plural being, is a "combination of a number of variants [which are] comprehended in accordance to [*sic*] the Jungian model of the psyche" (56).

Unlike Ogundare and Omar, Newgas frames her psychological approach to *Freshwater* differently, arguing that Ada's multiplicity and her liminality, her being between the spiritual and natural world, serve as an analogy for the diasporic experience and ancestral trauma. Newgas considers *Freshwater* to be imbued with ancestral trauma by virtue of Ada being *ọgbanje*. She points out that, because, according to Igbo cosmology, an *ọgbanje* spirit-child is meant to be born and to die multiple times within the same family, Ada being *ọgbanje* is inherently a symbol of ancestral trauma in the novel (1). Moreover, this repeated cycle of life and death on the part of the spirit-child results from the child understanding their position as a mere visitor to the natural world and consequently experiencing the insistent feeling of being pulled back to the spiritual realm, which is deemed their rightful home within Igbo cosmology. Certainly, Ada does experience this pull in *Freshwater*. For Newgas, the effect of the pull on Ada emulates the diasporic desire to return home (1). It is Ada's desire to return to the spiritual realm – to return home – that has the potential to cause harm within her family. Hence, Newgas concludes that "migration […] may be a cause of ancestral trauma" (1) and that the desire to return home is the consequence of this trauma. In this sense, *Freshwater* serves as an analogy for the diasporic experience and ancestral trauma.

Ogundare, Omar, and Newgas' varying psychological interpretations of *Freshwater* are similar in that all three scholars filter Ada's lived experience through a Western lens by seeing her *ọgbanje* status as metaphorical rather than *real*. As a result, these scholars fail to take seriously the possibility that Emezi is offering, through Ada's cosmological status, an alternative ontological perspective steeped in Igbo tradition. In so doing, Ogundare, Omar, and Newgas overlook the idea that Emezi is challenging Western understandings of being as well as Western understandings of how violence, specifically sexual violence, impacts on the 'self'. This thesis aims to heed Emezi's challenge by adopting a magical realist lens to interpret *Freshwater*. Chapter 3 demonstrates that adopting such a lens requires treating Ada's nuanced internal plurality as *real*. In this way, the argument in this thesis veers away from a psychological interpretation of *Freshwater* and involves reading the novel ontologically to understand how sexual violence impacts on Ada's *ọgbanje* 'self'. Part of this endeavour requires that this thesis, unlike the work of Ogundare, Omar, and Newgas, engages with Ada as a sexual violence victim and survivor explicitly, rather than doing so implicitly by treating her as a patient or psychological study.

Standing out among the scholars who approach *Freshwater* from a psychological perspective, Jacob Allan Crystal is one of the few scholars who gets close to acknowledging Ada as a sexual violence victim in the way this thesis does. Like Newgas, he also recognises the theme of trauma in *Freshwater*. However, unlike Newgas, Crystal proposes that, through Ada, Emezi is offering a social critique of trauma. Crystal argues that Ada's internal plurality is born out of, and responds, to her traumatic experiences exclusively as an adult in America. Of interest to Crystal is that this plurality at times presents as distinct spirits with different genders. For example, Asụghara is written as a female spirit, while Snt Vincent is written as a male one. For Crystal, the internal plurality is metonymic of society. On this matter, Crystal writes, "Emezi is indeed using Ada's trauma as a wider critique, a critique of how men, and women, treat feminine trauma" (68). Crystal's view is that the internal spirits play a significant role in Ada's suffering, and yet they do not take responsibility for their part in her trauma (72–73). Thus, instead of changing their behaviour to stop the pain that they inflict on Ada, the spirits who inhabit her continue to act as though Ada is inherently damaged through no fault of their own. For Crystal, this abuse perpetuates Ada's trauma in a way that reflects the perpetuation of feminine trauma by society within society (74). Consequently, according to Crystal, *Freshwater* acts as a social critique of trauma. Here again, Ada's *ọgbanje* status is treated metaphorically. Thus, while Crystal is closer to acknowledging Ada as a sexual violence victim, he too does not take seriously that Emezi is offering an African based, non-Western ontological view of how sexual violence impacts on the victim's 'self'. As a result, his psychological approach to *Freshwater* presents a gap similar to that perceivable in the work of Ogundare, Omar, and Newgas.

Completely deviating from Ogundare, Omar, Newgas, and Crystal in their analysis of *Freshwater*, Tina Magaqa and Rodwell Makombe argue that Ada's liminality and plurality, which stems from her being born *ọgbanje,* situates gender fluidity in African cosmology and, thus, Emezi's novel serves to decolonise queer sexuality. These authors point out that African societies consider queer sexuality a product of Western modernity and thus not something that is of, or can fit into, African ways of being (24). Turning to *Freshwate*r, Magaqa and Makombe posit that, as a result of being *ọgbanje*, "Ada inhabits (and is inhabited by) different identities and sexualities" (32). Rather than deem this plurality of genders metonymic of society as Crystal does, Magaqa and Makombe see this as making Ada, herself, a fluid being. As a result of her inner fluidity, Ada undergoes gender-reassignment surgery to neutralise the sexuality of her body as a means of combatting the gendered boundaries which her body imposes on the collective 'we' that inhabits her. For Magaqa and Makombe, by virtue of Ada's non-conforming, queer sexuality being presented within *Freshwater* as a consequence of her being born *ọgbanje*, Emezi essentially situates queer sexuality within Igbo cosmology and, thus, African ontology. Doing so, in turn, demonstrates that there is a space for queer sexuality in an African way of being. Magaqa and Makombe therefore conclude that *Freshwater* can be read as a decolonisation of queer sexuality.

What is concerning in Magaqa and Makombe's analysis of *Freshwater* is that they do not acknowledge that Ada's awareness of her gender fluidity and queer sexuality is presented by the narrative as the product of sexual violence. The spirit-collective specifically tells the reader:

> Asụghara could not be left alone; that would be unnatural. When something stands, something else stands beside it. […] His name was Snt Vincent, because when he sloughed off Asụghara's side, he fell with holiness on his hands. […] He was strange; we could never quite place him, where his parts came from. He was not expected to come through the window, but he did and so he was born in a portal, a son of flux space.
>
> (Emezi 121)

Here, of importance is that Asụghara's spiritual individuation within Ada's body is born of Ada's harrowing experience of rape in the narrative. Snt Vincent, as the male and masculine spirit that stands beside the female and feminine Asụghara, and has “sloughed off” Asụghara’s side, is then positioned as a by-product of sexual violence too. The inference is that Ada’s gender fluidity and queer sexuality in Emezi’s text is realised by the character as a trauma response to sexual assault, which is a narrative that the queer community vehemently rejects. This puts Magaqa and Makombe’s thesis into question because it seems that Emezi’s narrative posits queer sexuality and gender fluidity as emerging as a negative element of Ada’s identity and so as something that does not harmoniously fit within African ontology – which further raises questions as to whether *Freshwater* should indeed be read as a decolonisation of queer sexuality.

Melissa E. Schindler, too, challenges Magaqa and Makombe’s interpretation, albeit on different grounds. She points out that, historically, within Igbo cosmology, *ọgbanje* children were perceived as evil owing to the harm that they caused the families they were born into. She questions whether one should view Ada as a positive integration of gender fluidity into African ways of being if the very nature of her existence is one that has historically been deemed evil for Igbo communities. Schindler does not limit her criticism to Magaqa and Makombe’s interpretation, but is also sceptical about interpreting *Freshwater* as Ogundare, Omar, Newgas, and Crystal have. She states that it is “paramount to read Emezi’s work as a reflection of *ọgbanje* not as a statement about mental illness, a metaphor or as an embrace of human queerness” (235). For Schindler, to read the work as the other scholars have is to present *Freshwater* and analyse Ada according to “human identity categories”, which “detracts from the main conflict of the novel, which is about a spirit embodying human flesh” (235).

Schindler believes that *Freshwater* should rather be read as presenting the folding and unfolding of metaphysical realities because, indeed, Ada’s multiplicity acts a testament to such folding and unfolding (243–245). For Schindler, to read the novel in this manner would be to take Ada and Emezi seriously, or on their own terms: as being *ọgbanje* and existing in a plural reality. Essentially, Schindler seems to be arguing that literature should be read and interpreted as the author intended it to be. Yet, if we are to take Schindler seriously as regards her statement that “ọgbanje are neither human nor reincarnated spirit. They are ‘part-human and part-spirit beings whose existences are confounded’” (233), then the very humanness of Ada does put her in the position to be identified according to human categories, while her spirit-ness allows for a questioning of those categories.

While the arguments are compelling and point to the implicit victimhood of Ada, these scholars, including Schindler, all ultimately fail to acknowledge that Ada is also explicitly a victim and survivor of sexual violence. Sexual violence, specifically, seems to influence and affect Ada from childhood through to her adult life. As mentioned above, by situating *Freshwater* within the magical realist genre, which is expanded upon at a later stage, Chapter 3 of this thesis aims to fill the gap identified in the scholarship by investigating how the sexual abuse experienced by Ada violates her sense of selfhood in a way that is different from and, yet, fundamentally like the violation of selfhood experienced by the protagonists in *Beholder*. Thereafter, Chapter 5 examines whether Ada is able to regain a sense of selfhood.

5. Theoretical Framework

5.1. Delineating and Developing a Concept of 'Self'

Part of the aim of this thesis is to investigate how the concepts of 'self' and 'selfhood' are represented and understood in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*. Doing so requires a background understanding of what might constitute the 'self'. While a highly elusive and complex term, the 'self' has been conceived of by African ontological philosophers and existential phenomenologists alike as being fundamentally relational. In this sub-section, I seek to delineate this concept of 'self' and 'selfhood' in two ways: first, I briefly situate the relational view of the 'self' in the context of other philosophical understandings of the 'self.' Thereafter, I engage with what the relational view of the 'self' entails within Western existential phenomenology and African ontology. In delineating the 'self' in this way in this thesis, I aim to demonstrates how violence directed at the body is able to access and disturb a victim's concept of 'self'.

Historically, philosophers have hesitated to identify the 'self' with the body in any meaningful way. The reason for this hesitation has been that they believe the 'self', or that which constitutes an 'I', ought to persist beyond changes in the body. They hold this belief because a person often remains identifiable even when their body has been altered physically by the ageing process or, more horrifically, by various forms of physical violence, including sexual violence. This view, which has its roots in Plato's *Phaedo*, is championed by René Descartes in the first and second meditations of his book, *Meditations on First Philosophy*. In these meditations, Descartes argues that the world consists of a dualism of substances. These are, specifically, physical substances – such as the body – which undergo changes, and non-physical substances that persist through those changes. He argues for this dualism of substances by employing what has been termed the 'melting wax' thought experiment.

In this thought experiment, Descartes asserts that there is an essence that exists in all things which persists through change and gives the thing in question its identity. He uses the image of a candle to illustrate what he means by this assertion. Descartes points out that, when looking at unused candle, one initially observes that the candle has recognisable physical attributes (8). Upon lighting the candle, however, all these observed physical attributes begin to change. Yet, one can ascertain that the molten candle that remains is the very candle that was initially observed. For Descartes, if the candle were purely a physical thing, then the alteration of its physical attributes would entail that the candle initially observed and the molten candle are, in fact, different (8). Yet, this is not so. Consequently, Descartes' view is that the candle, and thus the world, must consist of a dualism of substances: physical substances that change, and non-physical substances that persist beyond the changes undergone in the physical substances. More significantly, the non-physical substances constitute the Platonic essences or the identities that make physical things recognisable. Owing to this, Descartes' view is that what makes a person who they are is a non-physical essence – rather than the body – and it is this non-physical essence that constitutes the 'self' that is observed as persisting beyond changes in the body wrought through ageing or violence. But what exactly constitutes this non-physical essence or 'self'?

This 'self', Descartes claims, is the mind. He further posits that the mind can exist beyond the physical body and is thus independent of the physical body. He argues this point by using the 'malicious demon' thought experiment in what has become his famous method of doubt. In this thought experiment, Descartes entreats his reader to imagine that there is an all-powerful demon whose only objective is to deceive him (5). This demon is so powerful that it can deceive Descartes into holding all his fundamental beliefs, which include seemingly indubitable universal truths – such as the belief that there is a physical world. By the end of the thought experiment, Descartes is left with no option but to conclude that nothing is certain except for one thing: For the malicious demon to deceive him, there must be something to be deceived. That something ought to exist beyond all else that is dubitable, and this thing can thus neither be dependent on nor be of the physical world. For Descartes, that something is his mind, and it is the essence of who and what he is. Hence, he claims, "I am, I exist – that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking" (6). Beyond proving to Descartes that he does in fact exist in an indubitable way, the conclusion of the thought experiment illustrates that the mind is the 'self' and that the 'self' can exist independently of the body. Descartes' understanding of the of the 'self' as persisting through change and existing independently of, or beyond, the body has come to be known as the Cartesian view of the 'self' in modern philosophy.

Yet, one must ask, if the ‘self’ is not found in the changing body, as the Cartesian view suggests, then why is it that sexual violence victims like Brison and, as the chapters to follow argue, the protagonists of *Beholder* and *Freshwater* both feel and behave as though their very ‘self’ *has* been fundamentally impacted on by the violence directed at their bodies. Similar questions have been raised by Western existential phenomenologists (henceforth, phenomenologists) such as Sartre, who keenly observed a dual influence between the external physical world of the body and the internal experience of the individual (Sartre “Intentionality” 4). It is based on these observations that such phenomenologists have rejected Descartes’ notion that the ‘self’ is independent of the body and not influenced by changes experienced through the body. Instead, they argue that the ‘self’ exists at the point of intersection between the mind and the body and is, therefore, fundamentally relational.

Phenomenologists begin by qualifying Cartesian dualism with reference to humans as they view the human being as a special kind of duality, one that comprises objecthood and subjecthood. The body exists as the objecthood of the human as it, like all other objects in the world, is a physical thing. The mind, on the other hand, constitutes the subjecthood of the human because it is that which animates the body and thereby distinguishes the human being from other objects. Importantly, for phenomenologists, the existence of the mind, as the subjecthood of the human, is indicated by consciousness. Moreover, it is consciousness that indicates the existence of a ‘self’, where a ‘self’ is a conscious being. In other words, while subjecthood distinguishes the human being from other objects, consciousness is what makes the human discernible to others as living or animated and thereby a ‘self,’ rather than a mere body or object. This becomes important in analysing the protagonists’ violent experiences in *Beholder* and *Freshwater* because, as I argue in the next sub-section, in the context of sexual violence, victims are treated as mere objects rather than as bearers of subjecthood and consciousness.

Regarding the nature of this consciousness, Sartre asserts that this phenomenon “has no ‘inside’” (5). In other words, consciousness cannot be chalked up to pure subjecthood. Rather, it is the relation point between subject and object because to be conscious requires a “consciousness of something” (Sartre 5). The first point of consciousness, then, is the interaction or relation between the subject and their body because the subject comes to consciousness through being conscious of their body. Consequently, consciousness requires that the subject be embodied. Moreover, if the ‘self’ is consciousness, then the ‘self’ is fundamentally relational and cannot exist purely as a subjecthood independent of the body. In other words, it is through the body that the ‘self’ even exists as *a ‘self’* and, moreover, the body, as Jean Améry writes, is the "boundar[y] of [the] self" (126). This kind of phenomenological understanding of the 'self' begins to account for how violence afflicted against the body, such as the sexual violence directed at the protagonists' bodies in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*, is experienced by victims as harm afflicted against their very concept of 'self'.

Notably, the phenomenological view of the 'self' is shared by African philosophers, specifically those who specialise in African ontology. The African ontological perspective views the world as consisting of "two interdependent, interpenetrating, and complementary planes: […] the material and the spiritual" (Nwoye, "An Africentric Theory" 46). Like the view held by the phenomenologists, within African ontology the concept of 'self' or 'selfhood' refers to the inextricable combination of the body as object and the spirit, or that which animates the body, as subject. Nwoye defines this concept of self succinctly as an "embodied subjectivity" ("Remapping the Fabric" 122). Nwoye's definition, and indeed the view held by phenomenologists, is immediately reminiscent of Susan Bordo's claim that the body is "no mere physical entity but a self embodied, or […] a body suffused with subjectivity" (76). The key difference, however, is that the claim that Nwoye and phenomenologists are making is much stronger than that of Bordo.

Bordo's claim suggests that the 'self' and subjectivity are synonymous. This is reflective of the Cartesian tradition, which views subjectivity as separable from the body and thus the 'self' as separable from the body. Nwoye's definition, on the other hand, suggests that the fusion or unification of body and subjectivity is necessary for the existence of the 'self'. Gyekye terms this African mode of existence and concept of 'self' "amphibious" (31). Both Nwoye and Gyekye's articulations of the concept of 'self' within African ontology point to the 'self' being, as the phenomenologists suggest, a consciousness.

Moreover, just as phenomenologists point to the necessity of the body in the existence of a 'self', so too does an African-based ontological perspective. In fact, so fused is one's body to one's subjectivity from an African ontological perspective of 'self', that for another person to possess any physical property of one's body, such as one's fingernails, is symbolic of that person possessing one's spirit and thus one's 'self' (Nwoye "Remapping the Fabric" 122). Here, the African ontological perspective adds a level of complexity to the concept of 'self' as the 'self' is posited to extend from the body into external objects related to the body. Chapter 4 of this thesis illustrates that Scarry holds a similar view of the 'self'. In fact, through her artist–artifact model, it is argued, Scarry presents the ability for the spirit to extend through the body and into the external world where objects can be created as being paramount to what constitutes the 'self', and an essential part of how the 'self' might recovered after violence.

Moreover, Chapter 5 expands on the notion that the 'self' extends from the body using Russel W. Belk's articulation of the "extended self" (140). Belk argues that people's possessions can be understood as extensions of their very 'self', extensions that, psychoanalysts posit, through transitional objects in particular, record and allow for the tracing of changes within a person's 'self'. Belk's understanding of the 'self', I illustrate in this thesis, is useful for following Cora, Angel, and Ada's respective victim–survivor journeys through the symbolism of their transitional objects in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*.

To return to the African ontological view that possessing a physical attribute of a person's body is tantamount to possessing that person's 'self': this leads Nwoye, in particular, to conclude that "in Africa, an essential aspect of the self is the one that sees it as *the body am I*" (122). This somewhat mirrors phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty's assertion that "I am not in front of my body, I am in it, or rather I am it" (173). Essentially, for phenomenologists and African philosophers, this means that the body is the physical boundary of 'self' within the world. The role of the body as the boundary of the 'self' has important ramifications as it implies the 'self' is a 'self' extended into a context, for the body cannot exist without existing in a context.

The ramification of the 'self' existing in a context within African ontology is that the concept of 'self' cannot be divorced from the African ontological concept of 'personhood' because it is through one's 'personhood', which is community-based, that one's 'self' is deemed to be fully realised. Drawing on the tradition of his predecessors such as Ifeanyi A. Menkiti, Nwoye explains the concept of 'personhood' through the Nguni proverb "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (often translated as 'a person is a person through other persons')" ("An Africentric Theory" 44). This proverb points to the role of the community in the development of the individual as a 'person' – an individual who is seen as valuable in and of themselves and is worthy of respect – and consequently as a fully actualised 'self'. The basic idea is that, if the 'self' is a 'self' extended into a context, then that context is one's community or society. The community influences both how one navigates the world and one's perceptions of oneself by placing the individual in the context of culture, law, and tradition. In so doing, the community influences the nature of subjectivity through the body and thus the nature of the 'self' or one's identity as it is constituted through embodied subjectivity within the community context.

The view that the 'self' is so heavily influenced by the community, or society, from an African ontological perspective emphasises the importance of interpersonal relationships for the constitution of the 'self'. Essentially, to treat an individual as lacking value and not being worthy of respect, which includes disrespecting one's bodily integrity or the boundary of the ‘self’, as is the case with both insidious and blatant forms sexual violence, is to deny the individual their ‘personhood’ and thus the possibility of their being a fully actualised ‘self’. For one to have ‘selfhood’ within an African ontology, then, is for one’s body, as fused with subjectivity, to be respected and valued as such by others, and thereby recognised as a ‘self’ imbued with personhood. Thus, the concepts of ‘self’ and ‘selfhood’ are fundamentally relational not only in terms of the relation between one’s subjectivity and body, as is the case in phenomenology, but also in terms extending into and being influenced by the external world, which is informed by one’s social or community context, as is the case within African ontology.

To summarise and conclude this section, the subject and the body are each a necessary component of the ‘self’. Furthermore, they must be interconnected for there to be a ‘self’ at all because it is *through* the body that the subject relates to the world and to others, and it is by virtue of there being a subject that the body is viewed as alive and thereby occupying the space of a ‘self’ in the world. The body, then, serves as the boundary of the ‘self’; it positions the ‘self’ in context. This entails that if the body of an embodied subjectivity or ‘self’ is violated or rejected by others, then so too is the embodied subjectivity’s whole ‘self’. This view of the ‘self’ is extended and complicated in the analysis of *Beholder* and *Freshwater* throughout this thesis. For the moment, however, understanding the ‘self’ as fundamentally relational in this basic way assists in making sense of how the sexual objectification of a sexual violence victim’s body might lead to the fracturing of their concept of ‘self’. Moreover, this view of the ‘self’ also helps in demonstrating how the self-objectification that results from sexual violence acts as confirmation that the victim’s ‘self’ has been disturbed by their experience of assault. These concerns are addressed in the sub-section that follows.

5.2. Sexual Violence: Objectification, Self-Objectification, and the Victim’s Concept of ‘Self’

The protagonists in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*, respectively, experience objectification in the course of the sexual violence of which they are the victims and consequently come to self-objectify. This sub-section aims to lay the foundation for examining how this process occurs within each text. To achieve this, in this the sub-section I explicate what is meant by ‘objectification’ before discussing how objectification relates to sexual violence. Thereafter, I offer a view of how objectification might fracture or disturb a sexual violence victim’s concept of ‘self,’ provided that the understanding of the ‘self’ developed thus far is seen as fundamentally relational. Finally, I consider how objectification via sexual violence leads to the victim's self-objectification, with this self-objectification confirming that the sexual violence victim's concept of 'self' has indeed been disturbed by their experience of sexual assault.

Objectification has its roots in Emmanual Kant's ethical philosophy. In his *Lectures on Ethics,* Kant frames objectification as the immoral treatment of others that is chiefly experienced when sexual relations occur outside of monogamous marriage. Of course, Kant's view on marriage and intimacy is exceptionally regressive in the context of contemporary society. As Raja Halwani rightly asserts, "[o]utside rape, it is rare to treat our sexual partners as objects: not only are we aware of their humanity, we are also mindful of it" (193). However, as he is the acknowledged originator of the concept of objectification, it is useful to understand Kant's position.

For Kant, to treat someone morally entails treating them "as an end and not a means" (120). What is meant by this is that one should always endeavour to treat others in a way that acknowledges that they are rational beings who have the capacity to make rational choices for themselves in pursuit of their own ends. To do so, Kant believes, is to treat a person in a way that acknowledges their inner, or self-contained, worth rather than treating them as having merely relative worth (120). This, for Kant, is the moral way to treat people because it imbues them with humanity and thus dignity. Of sexual relations outside of marriage, Kant writes:

> Human love is good-will, affection, promoting the happiness of others and finding joy in their happiness. […] Sexual love makes of the loved person an Object of appetite; as soon as the appetite has been stilled, the person is cast aside [...]. Sexual love […] taken by itself and for itself, is nothing more than appetite. Taken by itself, it is a degradation of human nature; for as soon as a person becomes an Object of appetite for another, all motives of moral relationship cease to function, because as an Object of appetite for another, a person becomes a thing and can be treated and used as such by everyone. (163)

Essentially, Kant's view is that without the commitment of marriage, one's engagement in sexual relations with another necessarily involves the pursuit of one's own end in the form of pleasure. This, he thinks, is to treat the other as the means to achieving this end of one's own rather than as an end in themselves. Consequently, the other becomes an object because, like an object, they are treated as having relative worth, which entails that their humanity is removed. Thus, for Kant, treating a person as an object is to treat that person in a morally objectionable way.

To reiterate, Kant's view that objectification occurs whenever sexual relations happen outside of marriage is extremely retrograde. Moreover, it ignores the possibility of objectification within marriage. Despite this, Kant's view has influenced feminist scholarship on objectification; here, the negative notion of objectification is applied – more appropriately – to contexts of sexual violence. Kelly defines sexual violence as follows:

> Any physical, visual, verbal or sexual act that is experienced by [a] woman or girl at the time or later as a threat, invasion or assault that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to control intimate contact.
>
> (*Surviving Sexual Violence* 7)

Kelly developed this definition of sexual violence in the course of her study of female victims of sexual violence. This makes her definition particularly applicable to *Beholder* and *Freshwater* as both novels follow female protagonists who are sexually abused. Notably, there are strong parallels between Kelly' definition of sexual violence and Kant's explanation of objectification. Specifically, according to Kelly's definition, the harm of sexual violence is situated in its inherent removal of the victim's autonomy as regards sexual intimacy. This removal of autonomy is harmful as it is felt by the victim, at the time it occurs or in retrospect, as being a reduction or degradation of what Kant might call their humanity. In other words, sexual violence *is* a form of objectification that specifically aims to remove the sexual autonomy of the victim, either implicitly or explicitly, and which might be recognised as such by the victim at the time it occurs or only in retrospect. Chapters 2 and 3 show this to be true for the protagonists in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*, all of whom are sexually violated and display an immediate, and retain a retrospective, recognition of their objectifying violation, a recognition that is often captured by the authors using memory and flashback.

The issue of objectification raised by Kant and, indeed, Kelly's definition of sexual violence is aptly summarised by feminist scholar, Martha C. Nussbaum. Nussbaum asserts that "[i]n all cases of objectification what is at issue is a question of treating one thing as another: one is treating *as an object* what is really not an object, what is, in fact, a human being" (249). Put in terms of the phenomenological and African ontological definitions of the 'self' so far developed, Nussbaum is saying that objectification occurs when one 'self' treats another 'self' as a mere object rather than a human being in unique possession of subjecthood, consciousness, and autonomy. Nussbaum claims the most dangerous form of objectification is instrumentality, which is when the objectifying 'self' treats the objectified individual as an instrument or tool to serve their own ends. This is the form of objectification Kant problematises in his original explication and, for Nussbaum, it is often the form of objectification imposed upon victims of sexual violence.

The problem with instrumentality is that it creates an asymmetrical relationship between the objectifying 'self' and the objectified individual, one which necessarily victimises the objectified. Andrew Karmen offers a broad but useful definition of what constitutes a victim. He defines a victim as one "who suffer[s] injuries, losses or hardships for any reason", before noting that, "crime victims are [specifically] harmed by illegal acts" (2). He further defines victimisation as "an asymmetrical interpersonal relationship that is abusive, painful, destructive, parasitical, and unfair" (2). To objectify by instrumentalising an individual, as Kant points out, is to treat that individual as something different from oneself and thereby cultivate an asymmetrical interpersonal relationship with the objectified person, which – when undertaken with the intention of causing harm, as Kelly posits is the case in sexual violence – establishes objectification as a form of victimisation. This holds significance for feminist scholars because, as Kelly Oliver rightfully states, "[s]ome bodies are more vulnerable than others" (481). Specifically, such scholars note that the feminine body exists in a perpetual state of potential sexual objectification – and thus potential victimhood – in relation to what is termed the 'male gaze'. This recognition sparked the development of 'objectification theory', as pioneered by Fredrickson and Roberts.

Fredrickson and Roberts observe that the 'male gaze' is a sexualising gaze, and thus an objectifying gaze, that is instated and perpetuated by pervasive masculine social structures that result from a history of patriarchy. Fredrickson and Roberts illustrate this by contending that a woman's beauty constitutes her trump card for acquiring power; they state that, in order to attain "social and economic power, a woman's beauty must appeal to the tastes of dominant (White male) culture" (178). This statement positions the one who takes up the role of the observer, or gazer, as masculine and white by virtue of the dominant culture being male and white. By contrast, the role of the observed is inherently feminine as it is female, or woman's, beauty that is traded as a commodity to attain social power. With the move to greater gender equality in recent decades, scholars have questioned whether the role of observer is still masculine and whether that of the observed remains feminine. The analysis of *Beholder* in Chapter 2, which expands on the concept of the 'male gaze', as coined by Laura Mulvey, suggests that the gendered dynamics between observer and observed *do* persist within today's society because of how deeply rooted the historical patriarchal structures referenced by Fredrickson and Roberts are within society's unconscious.

Returning to Frederikson and Roberts, beyond observing that the 'male gaze' is entrenched in the patriarchal masculine structure, the scholars turn to language to clarify the connection between the objectifying 'male gaze' and sexual violence. They state that "language provides specific verbs to connote men's staring at women's bodies, such as 'ogle' and 'leer', underscoring not only that this sexualized gazing occurs, but also that it is disquieting for women" (176). Here, Frederickson and Roberts highlight that, implicit in the 'male gaze' and the language surrounding it, is the threatening potential for its sexualisation to be acted upon via what is often a brazen and violent sexual crime, like rape. Fredrickson and Roberts capture the implications of Kelly's continuum of sexual violence when they state that violent sexual crime is catalysed by this pervasive and seemingly invisible 'male gaze'. Indeed, to commit such a sexually objectifying act entails that the perpetrator must first *view* the victim of their violence purely as an object before using that victim as a means of their achieving either sexual gratification or power (Fredrickson and Roberts 182). It is in light of such considerations that Fredrickson and Roberts state that "sexual objectification", which begins with the 'male gaze', "is a key component of sexual violence" (183).

Importantly, the objectifying nature of sexual violence has specific negative ramifications for the sexual violence victim's concept of 'self', particularly when the form of sexual violence is blatant. This is especially true given the concept of the 'self' that has been developed, which sees the 'self' as fundamentally relational. In blatant forms of sexual violence, such as the experiences of rape suffered by the protagonists in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*, the instrumentalisation of the victim requires that the perpetrator reduce the victim to their objecthood, or body. To achieve this, the perpetrator must deny their victim's subjecthood. In denying their victim's subjecthood through their violent act, the perpetrator of sexual violence fractures the fundamental relation between the victim's subjecthood and objecthood, which denies the victim their phenomenological consciousness and, with it, their 'selfhood'. Thus, sexual violence has specific negative ramifications for the victim's concept of 'self' as it involves the perpetrator's active disturbance of the victim's 'self' through sexual objectification.

Of grave concern, Fredrickson and Roberts assert, is that victims of sexual violence often come to internalise the objectifying 'male gaze' of the perpetrator after they have been physically assaulted. It is this internalisation that objectification theorists claim spurs the victim to engage in what they call the negative process of self-objectification (Fredrickson and Roberts 173). Self-objectification manifests when sexual violence victims come to treat their body as if it were purely an object in which they are trapped. The process of victim's internalising of their abuser's 'male gaze' makes them hyper-aware that their body is the site of their vulnerability to objectification and thus to sexual violence (Brison 44). As a result, the victim often perceives their body as something that ought to be surveyed and minimised so that they may escape any further violation (Fredrickson and Roberts 190–191). In this way, self-objectification is "fundamentally disruptive to the self–body relationship" (Calogero 575). As it is a disruptive process, what self-objectification reveals is that the victim no longer feels integrated with their body, as their body has been rendered 'foreign' and an 'enemy' to their subjecthood through their experience of sexual violence. In this way, the process of self-objectification is a conventionally viewed as wholly negative as it confirms that the victim's concept of 'self' has indeed been fractured by sexual violence. The relevance of these observations to this study is demonstrated in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3: the protagonists in *Beholder* and *Freshwater* each engage in different forms of self-objectification after they experience sexual violence. The argument there is that these forms of self-objectification confirm that the protagonists' concepts of 'self' have been disturbed through the violation of the body each of them experiences.

Despite objectification theorists positing self-objectification as a negative process, it is not always viewed that way. In fact, Scarry suggests that self-objectification might be a positive recovery process for victims of violence. She does so through her artist–artifact model or relation, asserting that "the made object is simply the made locus across which the power of creation is magnified and redirected back onto its human agents who are now caught up in a cascade of self-revision they themselves have authored" (323). What Scarry means by this is that when an artist creates an object, the creation of the object acts as a means for the artist to fill a lack which they see in themselves. Essentially, the artist's making of an object "remakes the human site that is [the artist's] actual object" (307). This, for Scarry, is an act of self-objectification as the artist must examine and treat themselves as an object that is lacking in order to create an artifact to fulfil that lack. Yet, this process of self-objectification is positive as, for the artists, it possesses a capacity to heal. Scarry applies this model to torture victims to argue that it is primarily through the self-objectifying creation process that the victim is able to recover their 'self' and survive. Scarry's model is developed in further detail in Chapter 4 before being applied to the protagonists in *Beholder* and *Freshwater* in order to investigate whether Orford and Emezi, too, present self-objectification as necessary step in the sexual violence victim's journey to reclaiming their 'self' and becoming survivors.

To conclude this sub-section, objectification is a fundamental component of sexual violence because to engage in sexually violent acts entails that the perpetrator treats their victim instrumentally, which reduces the victim to the status of a mere object. The victim's experience of objectification through sexual violence often leads the victim to self-objectify. Through the objectification of the victim via sexual violence, the victim's concept of 'self' is disturbed because the fundamental relation between the victim's subjecthood and objecthood is fractured. This disturbance of the 'self' is often confirmed by the victim engaging in self-objectification following the violation. As self-objectification is a negative outcome of sexual violence, objectification theorists conventionally consider it to be a negative process. However, Scarry's artist–artifact model challenges this view by suggesting that self-objectification may play a productive and positive role in a victim's recovery of their 'self'. As has been indicated above, this thesis shows that the protagonists in Orford's *Beholder* and Emezi's *Freshwater* engage in various forms of self-objectification after they are assaulted – in Emezi's novel, there is a slight variance however, as Ada engages in two categories of self-objectification: one occurring before she is violated and the other occurring after. In Chapter 3, I will elaborate on this and argue that Emezi uses the juxtaposition between the two categories of self-objectification to emphasise and confirm the disturbing effect of sexual violence. Thereafter, I investigate whether the protagonists' processes of self-objectification, as presented in both texts, are as negative as objectification theorists posit or whether, as Scarry suggests, they have the potential to be positive.

6. Methodology

This thesis analyses *Beholder* and *Freshwater* using both the relational concept of the 'self', which has been developed by examining the similarities between Western existential phenomenological theories of the 'self' and African ontological theories of the 'self', *and* objectification theory, which draws on feminist theories to clarify the links between sexual violence, self-objectification, and the 'self'. Specifically, the thesis examines how the relational view of the 'self' is presented and complicated by the genre of each novel. For *Beholder*, the 'self' presented is examined using the motif of the beautiful female murder victim that is found in crime fiction, while, for *Freshwater*, the 'self' presented is examined through a magical realist lens. The thesis then endeavours to develop an understanding of how the complication of the 'self' in each novel influences the complexity of the protagonists' experience of objectification and self-objectification, both of which result from experiences of sexual violation that disturb their concepts of 'self'. Thereafter, the thesis applies Scarry's more complex articulation of the 'self' and her artist–artifact model to each novel as part the investigation into whether the protagonists in *Beholder* and *Freshwater* do indeed come to reclaim themselves, and whether that reclamation may be a positive consequence of self-objectification. The findings resulting from these steps are then be consolidated by means of a comparison of *Beholder* and *Freshwater*. This comparison draws on Belk's notion of the 'extended self' and its relation to transitional objects to trace the victim–survivor journeys of the protagonists through the symbolism of their respective transitional objects within the narratives. Finally, on the basis of these findings, the thesis presents a conclusion regarding whether Orford and Emezi, through their protagonists, do indeed offer a positive revision of self-objectification in relation to victims of sexual violence.

7. Conclusion: Structural Outline of the Thesis

Applying the theoretical framework according to the methodology outlined in this chapter, I argue in this thesis that, through *Beholder* and *Freshwater*'s protagonists, Orford and Emezi offer a positive revision of self-objectification by articulating it as a necessary process in a sexual violence victim's journey to reclaiming their body and thus their 'self' – and thereby becoming a survivor. To make this argument, the rest of the thesis is structured as indicated below.

Chapter 2 begins by expanding on Laura Mulvey's concept of the 'male gaze' to examine how the 'self' and self-objectification manifest in *Beholder*. Following this, the chapter examines how the 'male gaze' has surfaced in the crime fiction genre through the motif of the beautiful murder victim before investigating how the motif features symbolically in Orford's *Beholder*. Orford's writing the motif into the narrative symbolically through Cora's painted '*Forbidden Fruit*' series is argued to reveal both the concept of 'self' at play in the novel as well as how sexual violence, which begins with the objectifying 'male gaze', disrupts that conceptualisation. This is shown to be true for both the painted figure in Cora's artworks and for the protagonists in the narrative. Finally, the chapter illustrates that the disruption of the protagonists' respective senses of 'self' is confirmed through their engagement in self-objectification, which results from their experiences of sexual assault. Through this articulation of self-objectification as initially negative, Orford is shown to demonstrate how sexual violence impacts on the victim and their concept of 'self'.

Chapter 3 adopts a magical realist lens to examine how the 'self' and self-objectification manifest in *Freshwater*. This chapter first illustrates that, in analysing Emezi's *Freshwater* using such a lens, one must treat Ada's *ọgbanje* condition as real rather than as a metaphor for mental illness. Doing so, the chapter argues, results in a richer understanding of Ada's 'self', which is liminal and comprises an internal spiritual hierarchy, of which Ada-as-spirit is the head owing to her acute integration with her body. The chapter then examines how Emezi presents Ada's internal spiritual hierarchy as being disrupted by sexual violence. Finally, the chapter shows that this disruption results in, and is confirmed by, Ada's engagement in self-objectification – specifically the self-objectification Ada pursues after she is violated. This self-objectification is argued to be exceptionally complex owing to the layered complexity of Ada's 'self'. In this way, the chapter shows that, like Orford, Emezi demonstrates how sexual violence impacts on the victim's 'self' through an initial articulation of Ada's self-objectification as a negative outcome of her experience of sexual assault.

Chapter 4 focuses on how Orford and Emezi, in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*, respectively, articulate the 'self' as being reclaimed via self-objectification. The chapter begins by elaborating on Scarry's argument that self-objectification may play a positive role in a victim's self-reclamation by considering her articulation of the 'self' and her artist–artifact model. While Scarry's model is shown to fit *Beholder'*s Cora, it is modified slightly in being applied to *Beholder*'s Angel and *Freshwater*'s Ada, both of whom, in their self-objectification, treat their bodies as direct artifacts. In applying Scarry's artist–artifact model to the protagonists and their self-objectification processes, the chapter demonstrates how Orford and Emezi each articulate self-objectification as an integral part of the protagonists' survival – the process is one of transformative repair through which Cora, Angel, and Ada each reclaim their violated body and 'self' from their abusers. In this manner, the chapter argues that Orford and Emezi offer a positive revision of self-objectification.

Chapter 5 consolidates and compares the findings of Chapters 2, 3, and 4 by tracing Cora, Angel, and Ada's victim–survivor journeys through the symbolism of the transitional objects they each possess at the time of their experiences of sexual violence. The tracing of the victim-survivor journeys of the protagonists in this way is premised both on Belk's notion that possessions are symbolic extensions of their owner's 'self' and on the psychoanalytic position that, because objects form the extended 'self', transitional objects, particularly, are useful for tracing changes within the 'self'. The chapter demonstrates that this is indeed the case for the protagonists in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*, whose transitional objects symbolically reveal how the protagonists' senses of 'self' are disturbed by sexual violence and how their resultant self-objectification compensates for that disturbance by enabling the protagonists to reclaim their bodies and their senses of 'self'. In this way, the chapter posits, the symbolism of the protagonists' transitional objects further illustrates that Orford and Emezi ascribe an unorthodox duality to self-objectification in that they positively revise the process through their protagonists' victim–survivor journeys.

Finally, reflecting on the chapters outlined in this thesis, I conclude by considering how Orford's *Beholder* and Emezi's *Freshwater* engage with the two questions outlined in the introduction: (1) How does sexual violence impact on the victim and their concept of 'self'? (2) What does it take for the victim of sexual violence to reclaim their 'self' from their violator and, so, survive in the aftermath of violence. Worth noting is that, in engaging with these two questions, Chapter 2 and 3 will refer to the protagonists chiefly as 'victims' while Chapter 4 and 5 will begin discussing the protagonists as 'survivors'. In reflecting on the findings of the chapters in this thesis, the conclusion determines whether, in their texts, Orford and Emezi *do* in fact offer a positive revision of self-objectification by articulating it as a necessary process in a victim's arduous journey to survival.

Chapter 2

The Problem of Being Seen in Orford's *Beholder*

1. Introduction

In *No Exit* by Sartre, Garcin famously exclaims: "Hell is – other people!" (26). Garcin's exclamation is provoked by the overwhelming realisation that others are observing him and that the gaze of the other is always projecting meaning onto him. He despairs that he can neither escape the gaze nor control the meaning it projects. Thus, the gaze of the other becomes Garcin's hell. Garcin's exclamation relates directly to the problem of being seen. In *Beholder*, Orford is concerned with precisely this problem. In her novel's various narrative threads, she specifically engages with the issue of being seen by the 'male gaze'.

In this chapter, I turn my attention to Orford's concern by arguing that the protagonists in *Beholder* engage in self-objectification as a direct result of the victimising objectification that they experience through sexual violence, which begins with the notorious 'male gaze'. I further argue that this self-objectification confirms for the reader that the concept of 'self' of each of the protagonists has been fractured through the violation of their bodies. It follows that, in *Beholder*, the 'male gaze' plays a crucial role in the disturbance of the victim's 'self' as it is the catalyst for their self-objectification. In light of this, Orford is shown to symbolically extend the motif of the beautiful female murder victim to her novel's living protagonists, characters whose self-objectification shows that they have suffered a symbolic 'death' as a result of the disturbance that their respective concepts of 'self' have been subjected to owing to sexual violence initiated by the 'male gaze'.

2. Starting with the Front Cover: *Beholder*'s Title and the Relevance of the 'Male Gaze'

Before the reader even opens the book, Orford calls attention to the concept of the 'male gaze' through her novel's title, *The Eye of the Beholder*. Maria Brincker explains that, historically, "the verb 'to behold' […] means 'to keep' (German 'behalten')"; in a metaphorical sense, beholding involves the "'take-in' of what is perceived" (128). In other words, beholding is an active process that involves possession. Here, the possessive aspect of beholding is significant, for to have possession of something is to have power, control and, thus, authority over that thing. To be the eye that beholds, then, is to actively and authoritatively perceive and hold an object or person in one's gaze. Conversely, the beheld assumes a passive position in which it, or they, are perceived and possessed by the beholder's gaze. Immediately, the reader is provoked to ask: Who is this beholder to which *The Eye of the Beholder* refers? And what is being beheld? Both the beholder and the beheld are implied in the novel's title. To expose them, however, requires understanding the nature of the authority associated with the gaze being alluded to.

The phrase 'the eye of the beholder' harks back to the age-old maxim: 'beauty lies in the eye of the beholder'. Usually used in romantic or artistic contexts, this maxim asserts that beauty is not an objective quality of a thing but is instead determined by whoever *gazes* upon that thing. As Morris B. Holbrook contends, the phrase puts forth the view that beauty is "an entirely subjective aspect of experience" (36). The subjectivity of beauty illuminates a vital element of the gaze, which is that, while perceiving, it also projects meaning onto what it perceives. The ability to project meaning onto something is part of the authority of the gaze because it asserts the existence of qualities, like beauty, and assigns these to the beheld, thereby governing the parameters according to which the beheld is understood.

Furthermore, the term 'beauty' in the maxim alluded to is particularly telling because, within Western thought, beauty is often associated with the feminine, where the feminine is conventionally symbolised by women and the female body. In contrast, judgement of what constitutes the beautiful is associated with the masculine, where the masculine is usually symbolised by men and the male body. Originally, beauty, as an objective concept studied by ancient philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, was neither masculine nor feminine but rather a transcendent virtue. However, in recent history, beauty has been made immanent because it has been drawn from the transcendent into nature and the body owing to its association with subjective perception. More specifically, as Peg Zeglin Brand helpfully points out, since the eighteenth century, "philosophers have primarily used women's bodies in their theories [of beauty]" (9–10). In so doing, these philosophers have developed a tradition that associates beauty with the feminine. Conversely, as Brand mentions earlier in her introduction to *Beauty Matters,* it is "men [who] have a long-established history of appreciating beauty in nature, art and women" (2). Thus, the masculine is associated with judging what is beautiful and thereby, in the maxim, occupies the authoritative position in relation to the gaze, that of the beholder.

The maxim, 'beauty lies in the eye of the beholder', then, might be interpreted as saying that the meaning of the feminine lies in the gaze of the masculine – which, in the section to follow, is revealed to be a key tenet of Mulvey's conceptual development of the 'male gaze'.

Beholder's allusion to this maxim thus suggests to the reader that the beholder in the narrative *might* be masculine, while the implied beheld *might* be feminine. I use 'might' deliberately here, as it cannot be ignored that Orford has intentionally chosen to elide the first part of the maxim in the novel's title. For now, however, Orford's selection of the diction and phrasing of *Beholder*'s title both calls attention to and pre-emptively establishes the relevance of the 'male gaze' to the novel, thereby making understanding the implications of this concept a worthwhile pursuit for this chapter.

3. The 'Male Gaze' and Sexual Violence

In her investigation of how sexual violence is a product of misogyny in post-apartheid South Africa, Helen Moffet asseverates:

> Counselling women of all races and religions and classes brought home to me the truisms of sexual violence: rape, like most crimes is intra-communal (that is, it is usually committed by 'insiders', not 'outsiders'); women are far more likely than men to be raped; and women are invariably raped by men. In other words, sexual violence is an instrument of gender domination […]. (134)

Since Moffet articulated the above, there has been a rise in research on what Rebecca Twinley calls "woman-to-woman rape" (508), which looks at sexual abuse within LGBTQ+ communities. Such research calls into question Moffet's strong claim that "women are invariably raped by men" (134). Nevertheless, the solemn reality Moffet reveals cannot be disregarded. Indeed, according to the World Health Organization, worldwide statistics for 2024 continue to show that "[i]ntimate partner violence and sexual violence are mostly committed by men against women" (par. 6). Orford's *Beholder* is a good case in point of this reality as the female protagonists are sexually assaulted by men who are considered 'insiders', as Moffet might call them. Specifically, Angel is raped by her stepfather, while Cora is molested by her teacher. These are men that the characters should feel safe with. Yet, as the narrative reveals, they are not. Consequently, though women might not be invariably raped by men, the World Health Organization 2024 statistics and Orford's novel suggest it is certainly still the case that women are commonly the victims, and survivors, of sexual violence committed by men – men who are often intimately known to the victim–survivors. Thus, sexual violence remains an instrument of gender domination and, so, a tool of misogyny which itself contributes to upholding patriarchal ideology. Yet one must ask: What underpins sexual violence? In other words, what are the mechanisms that feed this instrument of misogyny and patriarchy? Mulvey provides one kind of answer to these questions in her seminal article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in which she claims that illuminating the mechanisms that maintain and facilitate patriarchy will get women "closer to the root of [their] oppression" (58).

Mulvey's answer to these questions can be found in what she terms the 'male gaze', which can be understood as a scopophilic gaze as it is driven by a "scopophilic instinct" (67). Scopophilia refers to the notion that "looking itself is a source of pleasure" (59). Mulvey explains that, in drawing from examples replete with voyeurism, Sigmund Freud "associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, [and] subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (59). Patricia Stefanovic and Ana Gruić Parać point out that, as a result, scopophilia is an "active rather than passive state of looking" (348). Importantly, the voyeurism often associated with scopophilia is fundamental as it reveals that this way of seeing does not simply derive pleasure from objectifying another person; rather, and more deeply, it locates pleasure in viewing that person as "an object of sexual stimulation," or, "as an erotic object" (Mulvey 61, 67). Scopophilia, then, is an extension of the libido, which Freud believed to be "invariably and necessarily of a masculine nature" (219). In this respect, scopophilia, and its entailed acquisition of pleasure through sexual objectification, are attributed to the masculine. Thus, for Mulvey, the scopophilic gaze *is* the 'male gaze'.

Moreover, in its being the scopophilic gaze, Mulvey posits that the 'male gaze' is always directed at a feminine object. To illustrate her point, Mulvey uses films produced by men during the Golden Age of Hollywood cinema. She explains that the 'male gaze' emerges in these films through their framing devices, which have historically presented the film narrative from a male protagonist's perspective. From the outset, then, the meaning of such a film's world is mediated and controlled from a masculine position. This is critical because part of what is mediated and controlled in the film's world are the female characters who, Mulvey notes, are conventionally reduced to eroticised body parts and are thereby presented and represented as passive sexual objects in service to the male protagonist's scopophilic instinct, rather than as active subjects with a sense of self-awareness and agency (62–63). Mulvey further asserts that, in such films, male characters "cannot bear the [same] burden of sexual objectification", as the female characters because the male protagonist "is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like" (63). Accordingly, this fixes the female characters, their bodies, and the feminine as the objects of the 'male gaze'. In other words, the meaning of the feminine, in these films, lies in the gaze of the masculine. Here, the significance of Mulvey's discussion of film is that she contends that film reflects the unconscious ideologies of society – in the case of films from the Golden Age of Hollywood cinema, this would be patriarchal society. Therefore, the fixing of female body, and, by symbolic association, the feminine, as the recipient of the 'male gaze' in film illustrates that women are the sole recipients of the 'male gaze' in patriarchal society.

Of course, with the rise of feminism and the increased appearance of films that are led by female protagonists and employ framing devices that at times sexualise the male body, scholars like Jade Bitomsky have questioned whether the gaze *is* necessarily male (3). In other words, has a 'female gaze' developed to counter the 'male gaze'? E. Ann Kaplan thinks this is not the case. She argues that, owing to the patriarchally ordered dominant–submissive structures that have heretofore pervaded the social sphere, any instantiation of what might be called a 'female gaze' is necessarily passive and so cannot match or surpass the 'male gaze'. With regards to contemporary films, Kaplan explains that what happens

> when the man[/male character] steps out of his traditional role as the one who controls the whole action, [is that] the woman[/female character] then takes on the masculine role as bearer of the gaze and initiator of the action. (215)

Put differently, to even assert the gaze, the female character must depart from her feminine role. At the same time, to receive the gaze, the male character must step away from his masculine role. This means that what appears to be a 'female gaze' directed at a masculine object is in fact a disguised form of the 'male gaze' that remains directed at a feminine object. What can be gleaned from this, Kaplan concludes, is that "[t]he gaze is not necessarily male (literally), but to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the masculine position" (216). Thus, the gaze is as Jessica Murray says Mulvey regards it, "intrinsically male" (89). This, of course, requires the small qualification: with the use of the term 'male', here, what is meant is that the gaze is always gendered 'masculine' regardless of the sex of the beholder.

Importantly, it is this 'male gaze' that facilitates sexual violence. To reiterate Fredrickson and Roberts' dictum: "sexual objectification is a key component of sexual violence" (183). Sexual objectification, as Mulvey argues, is engrained in the functioning of the 'male gaze'. Specifically, as discussed, the presence of the 'male gaze' entails that the feminine is being sexually objectified by the masculine. The 'male gaze', then, is the starting point of gender domination. If sexual violence is an instrument of gender domination, as Moffet claims, then the 'male gaze' is the beginning of sexual violence. Moreover, in being the beginning of sexual violence, the 'male gaze' *is* a form of slow sexual violence that facilitates more blatant forms of sexual abuse such as rape. It is the connection between the 'male gaze' and sexual violence, as well as its impact on the 'self' and its role in self-objectification, that Orford spotlights through her protagonists' experiences of abuse in *Beholder*. However, understanding how Orford achieves this in her crime fiction novel requires a brief segue into how the 'male gaze' surfaces in mainstream crime fiction more generally.

4. The 'Male Gaze' and the Motif of the Beautiful Female Murder Victim in Mainstream Crime Fiction

In mainstream crime fiction, the 'male gaze' surfaces through the motif of "the beautiful female murder victim" (Cohen 277). In Chapter 1, I mentioned that crime fiction traditionally hinges upon the – often dead – body of the victim, for it is on their body that both the crime and the investigation are written. Notably, as Sabine Binder observes, "the role of victim is [traditionally] ascribed to women" (23). In fact, Kathleen Gregory Klein is famously quoted for stating that "the victim – or […] 'the body' inside the library – is, despite its biology, always female" (173). Though Binder uses the label 'women' and Klein employs the word 'female', in both cases the term 'feminine' is more apt because, as Elisabeth Bronfen powerfully asserts regarding crime fiction, "death and femininity [are] metonymies for each other" (293). Bronfen's assertion is particularly fitting because, historically, whenever the feminine has featured within the genre, it has usually taken the form of the dead victim who is unfailingly reduced to the passive, and therefore feminine, position of object through their death. Death and femininity thus become substitutes for each other and are aligned with the figure of the victim, regardless of the victim's sex. Here, the significance of Binder, Klein, and Bronfen's respective claims is that, provided one allows that the 'male gaze' takes the feminine as its object, the mere presence of the victim's body reflects the result of the 'male gaze' in mainstream crime fiction.

Indeed, within the genre, the 'male gaze' is fully realised in the way that the victim's body, especially the *female* victim's body, is erotically staged and posed for what Sam Naidu calls "the reader's pleasurable consumption" (72). This is achieved by the form of the narrative itself, which, like in films from the Golden Age of Hollywood cinema, is often written from the active perspective of a male protagonist who doubles as the narrative's detective and, to borrow and adapt Mulvey's phrase, the reader's "[narrative] surrogate" (63). It is from this male protagonist's perspective that the genre notoriously presents the conventionally female victim in a way that initially focuses the reader's attention on the erotic beauty of her resting corpse before juxtaposing it with the gruesome mutilation of her body's flesh. One such instance can be found at the beginning of Andrew Brown's novel, *Coldsleep Lullaby*.

In *Coldsleep Lullaby*, the reader's first encounter with the female victim is with her body floating down the river; she appears peaceful, with "her breasts, pale in contrast to the darkened colours surrounding her, mov[ing] almost imperceptibly with the slight current, her nipples smoothed against the areola" (3). This initial description immediately eroticises the victim by focusing on her sexual attributes. She is then observed by Constable Philander, the first officer on the crime scene, as having "[s]mooth brown skin" (5), and a tan line with the strings of her bikini bottom "wrapping around her waist and disappearing evocatively between her buttocks, slinking unseen towards her anus" (4). Philander's response to the victim's body is one of sexual attraction – which is evoked by his visual focus on her body's erogenous zones. His sexual attraction is confirmed when the narrator tells the reader that Philander "flushed with boyish excitement as he edged nearer [to her body]" (5). This excitement, however, is almost immediately disrupted when he turns her over and sees the mutilation of her flesh in the form of "[a]n open wound – a deep, purple slash with raised edges – [which] crossed her forehead" (6).

The effect of this juxtaposition in Brown's novel, and in mainstream crime fiction more generally, is that the narrative prioritises the beauty and sexual objectification of the female victim's body over an understanding that the "aesthetical corpse exists as a consequence of violence" (Peeters 52). Hence, the motif of the beautiful female murder victim emerges within the genre when the female victim becomes the *beautiful* female victim through the erotic descriptions of her murdered body. Here, what is important about the motif is that it implies that the *female* body, in its violated state, primarily exists in the genre for the visual pleasure of the detective figure and, by textual mediation, the reader, both of whom gaze upon it. The result is that the gaze adopted by the detective figure and reader alike is necessarily the 'male gaze' by virtue of it being a scopophilic gaze that derives pleasure – sometimes voluntarily; sometimes involuntarily – from the sexual objectification of the victim's body. Thus, the 'male gaze' is inscribed and surfaces in crime fiction through the motif of the beautiful female murder victim. Furthermore, the motif itself emphasises the correlation between the 'male gaze' and violence within the genre. In *Beholder*, as the section to follow elaborates, Orford specifically writes in the connection between the 'male gaze' and violence, as the 'male gaze' is shown to play a crucial role in the sexual abuse directed at the victim and the consequent disturbance of the victim's concept of 'self'.

5. The Motif of the Beautiful Female Murder Victim in *Beholder*: Revealing a Concept of 'Self'

As indicated in Chapter 1, *Beholder* is a crime fiction novel. This, paired with the implication of the 'male gaze' in the novel's title, might lead one to expect that *Beholder*'s narrative follows the conventions of mainstream crime fiction and explicitly features the motif of the beautiful female murder victim. Part of what makes Orford's novel striking is that this is not the case. In fact, the motif of the beautiful female murder victim appears to be absent from the *Beholder*'s narrative altogether because the novel follows living victims, Angel and Cora. This absence, however, is only superficial as Orford expertly weaves the motif into her novel's narrative symbolically through the eyes of the painted female figure in Cora's '*Forbidden Fruit*' series – a series that depicts the continuum of sexual violence. It is by means of the symbolism of this figure's eyes, eyes which progress from displaying a sense of liveliness to an empty deadness, that Orford reveals both the concept of 'self' at play within *Beholder* and brings to the surface the disturbing effect that that sexual violence wreaks on the victim's 'self'. It is important to note here that the painted figure is represented to be understood as very much alive, like Cora and Angel. It is only her eyes that are depicted as dead while her body lives through her harrowing experience of sexual violence. In this way, Orford can be understood as offering a broader comment in her text, one that suggests that even her novel's living victims, like the painted figure, have suffered a symbolic 'death' with the disturbance of their 'self' that results from their respective experiences of sexual abuse.

The '*Forbidden Fruit*' series is a collection of postcard-sized, provocative self-portraits that Cora paints of her young, adolescent self. Cora's motivation for the repeated depiction of her figure in the paintings varies. At first, she attempts to capture the instance in which a young girl is on the cusp of adolescence, "that moment a girl stands on the threshold" (149), just before she becomes aware that she is vulnerable to the sexually charged 'male gaze' that will make her "visible to herself" (149). Cora captures this moment in the first painting of the series, 'THE GIRL', by depicting herself as a "beautiful child" (Orford 148) of about eleven or twelve "sitting cross-legged on a vivid green lawn. Her top […] askew, revealing one swollen pink nipple [… t]he light […] a blade in her eyes" (114). In this description of the painting, the childlikeness of the girl is reflected in the way that she sits cross-legged, with her eyes alive with light. Her yet untainted innocence can be gleaned from the indication that, despite one of her budding breasts being exposed, the girl does not attempt to conceal her body. Instead, she sits cross-legged, which is a posture that suggests that she is both comfortable and open in a way that is not yet self-conscious. This is confirmed when Cora reminisces that, in creating the first painting of the series, she had "distilled the moment of protest against the loss of innocence that drives a girl to cover up her body" (205). The rest of the '*Forbidden Fruit'* series, however, documents the loss of the innocence captured in that first painting as the paintings proceed "in a sequence – from oblivious child to bruised conquest" (176).

Importantly, the continuation of the '*Forbidden Fruit'* series is driven by Cora's desire to confront the violating 'male gaze'. Cora is motivated to do so when Yves – renowned art critic, and Cora' abusive lover – tells her that he has been accused of being in possession of child pornography. Yves is elusive regarding the details of the charges against him. This drives Cora to distress and shame as she tries to reconcile how Yves, an upstanding man whom she loves and admires, could engage in the repulsive actions of a man who would gaze upon children, seeing them through a lens of sexual desire. Cora's visceral reaction to Yves' consumption of child pornography is not unusual. In fact, Susan M. Shaw notes, in her study of women's reactions to seeing their partners' pornography collections – where the pornography was deemed particularly violent and included bondage and child pornography – that "words such as 'terrified', 'scared' or 'disgusted' were used to describe their feelings when looking at them" (203). It is in trying to cope with her distress and shame at finding out this horrifying information about Yves that Cora paints the '*Forbidden Fruit*' series, and she does so with what Orford describes as a "voyeuristic precision" (19).

Orford's use of "voyeuristic precision" to describe Cora's painting technique positions Cora as having taken on, or deployed, the 'male gaze' during her artistic process. This is owed to voyeurism being foundational to the 'male gaze'. Cora's aim in inhabiting this position, Orford reveals through the De Villiers art gallery manager, Lucian, is "to disrupt how we – how men – look at things" (19). Her paintings achieve this disruption by making public the conventionally "private and forbidden" (Mulvey 59), pleasurable object of the 'male gaze' – it is for this reason that Cora titles her paintings '*Forbidden Fruit*'. In this way, Cora conversely makes the secretive voyeurism of the 'male gaze' public too. This is significant because, as Luis F. López González notes, "Sartre posits that being observed, even if only imagined, while gazing provokes a sense of shame" (89). Cora, by making the 'male gaze' so blatantly observable through her artworks, seeks to induce precisely a Sartrean sense of shame within those complicit in the harm of the 'male gaze'. This is affirmed when she emphatically pleads with the press to recognise that "the obscenity [of the girl in her paintings] comes via the eye of the beholder. It is nothing the girl does" (Orford 175). Consequently, as Edward Snow says of Monet's *Olympia,* which similarly surfaces the voyeurism of the 'male gaze', Cora's artworks “seve[r] [the ‘male gaze’s’] cathexis with the object and turns [its] pleasure into discomfiture” (34). In this way, Cora confronts the ‘male gaze’ of her artworks’ assumed viewer by deploying the gaze in the process of creating her ‘*Forbidden Fruit*’ series.

More than simply confronting the ‘male gaze’ through her artworks, the compositions of Cora’s paintings illustrate an active relationship between the ‘male gaze’ and sexual violence. Of these compositions, Cora recalls:

> The images she made of herself were overlaid with her imaginings of the spectral children on the dark web, stripped and captured on camera with their limbs in lewd tangles, their eyes dead […] unable to shield themselves from view. The combination became the works that she had called *Forbidden Fruit.* (Orford 197)

In this description of the paintings, the reader is not explicitly told what the paintings depict. Instead, they are informed that, after ‘THE GIRL’, the female figure in the rest of ‘*Forbidden Fruit*’ reflects, and is overlaid with, what Cora imagines a child being filmed for pornography might look like and might display emotionally. As a result, the reader is led to assume that the figure in the paintings, like children filmed for pornography, is depicted as “stripped”, “captured [as if] on camera,” with her “limbs in lewd tangles,” “eyes dead,” and “unable to shield [herself]” (197). Only later is the reader provided another important detail through Angel’s observation of the paintings, which is that, by the end of the collection of artworks, the painted figure’s eyes are hidden behind “heart-shaped red sunglasses” (251).

Working from the assumption invoked by Cora’s abovementioned recollection of her composition process, it is undeniable that sexual violence is brought to the fore in Cora’s artworks as the female figure assumes the sexually objectified poses of a child being filmed for pornography. The fact that the figure in the paintings is herself a child means that she is not of an age at which she can consent to the sexually explicit poses suggested by her limbs being in “lewd tangles” (197). As a result, the erotic staging of her body in the paintings is fraught with force and violence. Of importance is that this erotic staging, like in pornography, seeks to evoke sexual pleasure in those looking at the figure of the girl from what would be the camera’s viewpoint. Put differently, the eroticisation of the girl’s body aims to appeal to a scopophilic urge which, as Andrea Dworkin posits regarding its presence in pornography, is “inextricably tied to victimising, hurting, and exploiting” (69). The compositions of Cora’s paintings thus not only further confirm for the reader that the gaze assumed to be observing the painted figure *and* calling for her sexual violation is the ‘male gaze’, but also reveal that the ‘male gaze’ plays an active role in sexual violence.

Furthermore, the figure of the girl in Cora's paintings spotlights the effect that the violating 'male gaze' has on the concept of 'self' in *Beholder*. In contrast to that in the first painting, the female figure in the rest of '*Forbidden Fruit*' has lost her innocence because it is suggested that her body language displays an awareness that she is exposed and being watched. This is made clear by her inability "to shield [herself] from view" (197). The phrasing here implies that the figure displays a desire to cover her body but does not have the power to do so because she is fixed in the violence of her sexual objectification by the 'male gaze' deployed by Cora in composing the artworks. The figure's fixity is reified by the suggestion that her "eyes [are] dead" (197).

The suggested deadness in the painted figure's eyes is specifically what brings to the surface the concept of 'self' in *Beholder.* As has been indicated above, as self-portraits of a living Cora, the female figure in the paintings is not an artistic representation of a corpse. Yet, her eyes are described as dead, which indicates that, while she might not be physically dead, Cora is trying to communicate to her audience that something in the painted girl *is* 'dead'. In discussing eye symbolism in literature, Robert P. Newton asserts that "we mainly find the eye representing the spirit" (105). To put Newton's assertion in phenomenological terms, the eye represents the subjecthood of a person. Newton also notes a significant interaction between light and the eye. Specifically, "[e]ntering the eye, light brings knowledge; exiting as a directed gleam, it projects the power of the spirit's intention (Newton 102). Here, he points to the light in an individual's eye having a twofold purpose: On one hand, light entering the eye allows an individual to perceive and take in information about the world beyond the body. On the other hand, when light is reflected from an individual's eye, it reveals the individual's spirit and agency because this reflected light displays something in the body that has intentionality. Through the eye, then, an individual's body and the spirit – or objecthood and subjecthood – are visibly integrated. Drawing on the discussion of the 'self' in Chapter 1, the integration of spirit and body is the point where the relational 'self' exists. Thus, the light in an individual's eyes symbolises the presence of a 'self'.

It follows then that, being 'dead', the eyes of the figure in the rest of the '*Forbidden Fruit*' series present no light. This is especially reinforced when the figure is painted wearing red sunglasses, as sunglasses prevent light from visibly reflecting from the eye. As a result, the painted figure's eyes can be interpreted as symbolising the 'death' of the girl's spirit and, thus, the fracturing of her body and subjecthood. This fracturing further entails that the 'death' in the painted figure's eyes symbolises the 'death' of her 'self'. Hence, the suggested 'death' in the eyes of the painted figure of the female child comes to surface the concept of 'self' in *Beholder* and to align it with the basic relational view of 'self' developed in Chapter 1.

Importantly, considering the sequence of Cora's paintings, the symbolic 'death' of the painted figure's concept of 'self' can be attributed to the sexual violence that she experiences because of the 'male gaze'. In the description of the first painting, the reader is told that the figure of the female child – with her innocence and lack of awareness of the 'male gaze' – has light in her eyes (Orford 114). This light symbolises that, prior to her body being sexually objectified and violated, the girl's concept of 'self' had been intact. However, in the paintings that follow, once her body has been sexually violated by the 'male gaze', the light fades or dies. The absence of light in her eyes demonstrates to the reader that the girl's bodily violation by the 'male gaze' has resulted in her eyes symbolically reflecting the 'death' of her concept of 'self'. Through Cora's artworks, Orford, therefore, implicates the 'male gaze', and its active role in sexual violence, in the symbolic murder of the girl's 'self'.

The effect of this implication is threefold: First, Orford weaves the motif of the beautiful female murder victim into the narrative of *Beholder* symbolically by relegating the painted figure of the girl in the '*Forbidden Fruit*' series to the position of a symbolic beautiful female murder victim. Second, with the symbolic murder of the painted figure's 'self', Orford pieces together the relationship between the 'male gaze', sexual violence, and the 'self' by demonstrating how the 'male gaze', with its active role in sexual violence, leads to the fracturing of the victim's spirit and their body, which results in the victim experiencing a disturbance, or 'death', within their 'self'. Third, as the painting is of a living victim, Orford offers the broader suggestion that her protagonists, who are also living victims of sexual violence that is catalysed by the 'male gaze', equally experience a symbolic 'death' of the 'self' through the disturbing effects of sexual violence. It is this final point that forms the focus of the section that follows.

6. Extending the Motif to the Protagonists: The 'Male Gaze', Sexual Violence, and Self-Objectification in *Beholder*

In *Beholder*, Cora and Angel are victims of sexual violence. Both characters initially experience sexual violence at the hands of men they know intimately. Cora is first violated by her art teacher, Mr du Preez, while Angel is first assaulted by her stepfather. In the case of both protagonists, their experiences of physical-contact sexual abuse are catalysed by the 'male gaze'. This section shows that, importantly, like the painted figure, the protagonists suffer a disturbance within their respective concepts of ‘self’ as a consequence of being sexually violated, and this disturbance, I argue, is confirmed by their pursuit of self-objectification following the violation. By presenting her protagonists concepts of ‘self’ as disturbed by sexual violence, Orford suggests that her novel’s living victims, like the figure in the Cora’s paintings, have suffered a symbolic ‘death’ of the ‘self’. In this way, Orford comes to extend the motif of the beautiful female murder victim to her novel’s living protagonists in a symbolical manner, while also demonstrating that the ‘male gaze’ plays a crucial role in the disturbance of the sexual violence victim’s concept of ‘self’.

Orford writes Cora and Angel as both becoming explicitly aware of the sexually objectifying ‘male gaze’ for the first time as they enter adolescence at the age of twelve. This is not an unusual time for girl children to grow into an awareness of the ‘male gaze’ – into an awareness that they are being observed in a sexually objectifying manner. As Ndumiso Daluxolo Ngidi notes, socio-culturally, “[a]dolescence is a developmental stage that is particularly challenging for girls as they tend to be sexualised, and as a result, encounter sexual victimisation as they begin to physically mature and start assuming sexual identities” (40). Ngidi is pointing out that adolescence is when young girls, particularly, become perceived as sexual beings socially. This is the result of what Ngidi calls society’s “heteropatriarchal gender norms” (40), which, as feminist scholars point out, are upheld by the ‘male gaze’. Owing to this, it is not unusual for a girl, like Cora or Angel, to become aware of the ‘male gaze’ in adolescence as it is during this time that society’s sexualisation of her body makes her, as Cora aptly phrases it, sexually “visible to herself” (Orford 149).

Of significance within *Beholder* is that Cora and Angel become aware of the threat underlying the ‘male gaze’ in vastly different ways. When Angel first encounters the ‘male gaze’ through the lodger, who later becomes her stepfather and guardian in the narrative, she intuitively recognises it as a directly violating threat to her young, feminine body. Orford reveals Angel’s intuitive knowledge through a recollection. Angel recalls that, when she was twelve, the lodger had “watched [her] all the time […] Angel had felt it. His eyes on her had made her shiver as if he was brushing his fingertips over her skin” (131). Here, Angel’s memory demonstrates that she experiences the ‘male gaze’ of the lodger viscerally through its being directed at her body, the boundary of her ‘self’. In particular, his gaze intrudes upon her body to the extent that she articulates its impact on her as being tantamount to a sexually charged physical touch. For Angel, the lodger’s gaze implicitly communicates to her, as Rosa Walling-Wefelmeyer says participants in her study on men’s intrusions put it, “‘I’m going to assault you with my eyes and make you damn well aware of what I'm doing'" (4), even when Angel cannot see it.

Cora, by contrast, does not intuit the sexually violent threat that the 'male gaze' poses to her feminine body when she is first made aware of it. Instead, Orford positions her as initially coming to understand indirectly that the 'male gaze' is fraught with violence through the repercussions it has for her young, coloured friend, Dawid, who is presumed to look at her topless body leeringly when they are swimming on her parents' farm, Eden. After having been caught swimming topless, Cora's mother, Eva, admonishes her by pulling her in front of a mirror where she directs her gaze at Cora's "brown chest where her nipples had begun to bud" before saying to Cora, "[y]ou're not a child. You are not to swim naked again like a savage. Not with that boy. Imagine how it makes him feel. Imagine what it does to him" (Orford 55). Here, Eva inhabits the position of the 'male gaze' to make Cora aware that her changing adolescent body makes her vulnerable to being seen as a sexual being. In so doing, Eva is chiefly trying to protect Cora. However, she does so in a way that lays the blame on Cora, making her feel "[s]hame" and that it is her body that is at fault for the 'male gaze', when she asks her to imagine how swimming topless "makes [Dawid] feel" (55). Following this reprimand, Cora witnesses Dawid being lashed for allegedly looking at her body with the 'male gaze'.

Dawid's beating, occurring in the context of apartheid South Africa, is racially charged. Eva's notion that Cora must "no longer swim naked like a savage" (Orford 55), implies that her swimming partner, Dawid, is a savage. This, paired with the unfounded assumption that Dawid gazed upon Cora's body in a sexually charged way, positions Dawid's punishment as revealing, what Moffet calls in her study, "the apartheid narrativ[e] of sexual violence that demonise[s] black men as incontinent savages, lusting after forbidden white flesh" (135). Witnessing her father as he "brought down the whip on Dawid's back again and again" (Orford 57), Cora realises that the 'male gaze', which her parents presume to be held by Dawid, is connected to violence. Yet, owing to her mother framing the blame for the 'male gaze' as lying with her young body, Cora does not recognise the apartheid narrative underlying her father's beating of Dawid. Consequently, she misrecognises the violence of the 'male gaze' as being one suffered by the body of the gazer rather than as a sexually violent threat directed at her feminine body.

Orford reveals Cora's misrecognition of the violence attributed to the 'male gaze' when Cora misinterprets her art teacher's sexual objectification of her body as admiration of her artistic skill. Through a flashback of Cora as an art student at Sacred Heart, Orford tells the reader of Cora's misinterpretation:

> Cora was both with Yves in that deceptive bed and she was again the twelve-year-old in the empty art room at her new boarding school. Her drawing of a rose done *to perfection*, her art teacher had said the first time she handed in her homework. *Which is why you must stay after the others have left. You will be my muse*. […] She had done exactly as he had told her, he was her art teacher and she had loved him because he saw how good she was. (164)

In this passage, Cora assumes that Mr du Preez has taken an interest in her because of how artistically gifted she is. Yet, his terming her his "*muse*" (164) reveals that his admiration for Cora is nothing more than sexual objectification stemming from a 'male gaze'. Brittany Giroux claims that a 'muse' refers to a "unattainable ideal or sexual object" (2). Mary J. Carruthers notes that the "muse is traditionally female," and that the artist "addresses her in terms of sexual rapture desiring to be possessed in order to possess" (294). What both scholars show is that the term 'muse' is steeped in the sexual objectification and violation of the female body. Mr du Preez calling for Cora to be his 'muse', then, is a call for her to be his sexual object, or possession – which demonstrates that his view of Cora, and indeed her young body, is steeped in the sexually objectifying violence of the 'male gaze'.

The sexually objectifying violence implicit in Mr du Preez' call for Cora to be his muse is only fully understood by Cora when his 'male gaze' culminates in the molestation of her adolescent body. Of this scene, the reader is told that Mr du Preez approached Cora from behind and grabbed her, "[h]is knees parting hers as he pinned her to the wall. Fingers inside her, burning shame into the recesses of her being" (Orford 165). Important here is that the sexual violation of Cora's body disturbs her concept of 'self', her "being" (165). Orford exposes this disturbance through Mr du Preez' view that by means of his violating acts, he "had made her into clay and moulded her into his own creature" (215). Catherine A. MacKinnon discusses sexual objectification as occurring when women are "dehumanized into sexual objects, things, or commodities" (*Feminism Unmodified* 176). With his metaphor, Mr du Preez acknowledges his actions as having dehumanized and instrumentalised Cora, turning her into an object, his malleable "clay" (Orford 165). Cora's dehumanisation via sexual violence is further inscribed in his description of her as a "creature" (165), which tells the reader that he views his sexually objectifying actions as having made Cora sub-human. In this manner, Mr du Preez openly indicates that he has denied Cora her subjecthood and, with it, her consciousness by rendering her a sub-human object via sexual violence. The denial is visually presented as he attacks her from behind, hiding her eyes from his view and so rejecting her subjecthood in the moment of his harming her body. In this way, Mr du Preez' sexual violation of Cora's adolescent body, which starts with his lecherous 'male gaze', disrupts Cora's concept of 'self' within the narrative.

Orford confirms the disruption of Cora's 'self' in *Beholder* through the form of self-objectification Cora pursues as a consequence of her experience of sexual violence. Cora self-objectifies by painting her violated adolescent body into her artworks, the most notable of which are her '*Forbidden Fruit*' paintings. Chris Vanderwees, in discussing self-portraiture via photography, claims that in "a self-portrait, the subject becomes an object to its own self. The subject self-objectifies in the act of mediating its own body's image in the photograph" (115). This is precisely what occurs with Cora and her painted self-portraits. Cora self-objectifies through her paintings as she mediates her violated adolescent body by internalising the 'male gaze' of her perpetrator in creating representations of her violated body. Her aim: to "fi[x] the past in the frames of her paintings. That is how she split off the things that hurt" (Orford 58). Here, Cora's motivation for painting her self-portraits is to separate herself from her violated adolescent body by treating it as an object shunned from herself. In so doing, Cora creates a dynamic in which her body is an object artistically separate from her subjecthood. Consequently, Cora's self-objectifying paintings reflect the fact that there is a fracture or "split" (58) between her subjecthood and objecthood after she is sexually violated by Mr du Preez. Thus, through Cora's self-objectification, Orford confirms that Cora's 'self' has been disturbed by sexual violence. Orford therefore extends the motif of the beautiful murder victim to the protagonist because Cora, like the figure in her paintings, has suffered a symbolic 'death' with the disturbance of her 'self' wrought through sexual violence, violence which began with the 'male gaze'.

Like Cora, Angel's encounter with the 'male gaze' transforms into a brazen form of sexual violence that proves her intuition correct. Following her mother's death, Angel's stepfather exploits Angel's body in his creation of child pornography. Dworkin writes of pornography that it is about "male power" (24). Commenting on Dworkin, MacKinnon elaborates that "[w]omen are in pornography to be violated and taken, men to violate and take them, either on screen or by camera or pen, or on behalf of the viewer" ("Sexuality" 328). Angel's exploitation reflects what Dworkin and MacKinnon claim about pornography as she recalls that her stepfather would rape her in creating "'hotel special[s]'," during which "he did to her what the men watching asked for" (220, 221). His depravity also went a step further as the narrative reveals that he coerced Angel into sexually violating her own body in front of the camera under the instruction and control of anonymous "internet men" (221). Essentially, for her stepfather, Angel exists as a sexual commodity, a dehumanised object to violate for his own gratification and on behalf of the 'male gaze' projected by the men shrouded behind the anonymity of the camera and internet. Through Angel and the theme of child pornography, Orford demonstrates that the 'male gaze' *is* sexual violence, as it is the 'male gaze', represented by camera, that literally controls the nature of Angel's sexual violation.

Notably, like Cora, Angel's experience of sexual violation disturbs her concept of 'self'. The reader is informed that, as part of her pornographic sexual objectification, Angel always performed in front of the camera "with a black cat's-eye mask on her face, so no one would know who she was" (219). The image evoked by Angel being described as wearing the cat's-eye mask is that of a 'sex kitten', which *Merriam-Webster* defines as a "young woman with conspicuous sex appeal" ("Sex Kitten"). The effect of this image is twofold: the cat's-eye mask further establishes Angel as a sex object for the 'male gaze', and it emphasises her objecthood by eliminating her identity and making her nameless, "just a sweetie or a darling or a dirty little slut" (Orford 135). The function of her wearing a mask in front of the camera is to conceal Angel's subjectivity on behalf of the 'male gaze' so that the viewer does not feel her looking back. This is reminiscent of Cora's painted figure whose eyes are concealed by red sunglasses. Thus, during her experience of sexual violation by 'male gaze', Angel is completely reduced to her body, which fractures her objecthood from her subjecthood. Through the image of Angel wearing the black cat's-eye mask, Orford demonstrates that sexual violence, governed by the 'male gaze', disturbs Angel's concept of 'self'.

Once again, as with Cora, Orford confirms that Angel's 'self' has been disturbed by sexual violence when she depicts Angel as attempting to escape her body by pursuing self-objectification. After she is sexually assaulted, Angel has a despairing relationship with her body. This is made clear when Angel brushes sugar "off her chest, which no amount of starving herself ever got rid of" (Orford 12). Here, Angel is described as desiring to shrink her breasts. In her discussion on anorexia as a form of bodily resistance, Bordo posits that, for the female anorectic, the breasts "represent the bovine, unconscious, vulnerable side of the self" (163). These elements are associated with the femininity of the female body. Fredrickson and Roberts share Bordo's view: their explication of objectification and self-objectification proposes that eating disorders aimed at manipulating the female body act as "a protest against patriarchy" (191) by distancing the female body from femininity. Angel's desire to reduce her breast size – and, indeed, her other forms of self-objectification through body modifications, such as cropping her hair and hiding her eyes behind "dull brown contacts" (Orford 26) – can be understood as her attempt to escape the vulnerability of her feminine, violated body by distancing it from its feminine characteristics following the violation. In this manner, Angel's self-objectification reveals that she has internalised the 'male gaze' as this self-objectification renders her feminine body an enemy fractured from her subjecthood, which is further indicated by her self-cutting behaviour. These forms of self-objectification thus confirm that Angel's concept of 'self' has been disturbed by sexual violence. Through this confirmation, Orford extends the motif of the beautiful murder victim symbolically to Angel too, because, like the figure in Cora's artworks and Cora herself, Angel is presented as having suffered a symbolic 'death' as a result of the sexual violence of the 'male gaze' that disturbs her 'self'.

7. Conclusion

Orford calls her reader's attention to the 'male gaze' from the point at which the title on the front cover of *Beholder* is read. The 'male gaze', a sexually violent and objectifying gaze, plays a crucial role in the novel as it is the form of sexual violence that culminates in physical sexual violence against the protagonists' adolescent bodies in the narrative. Angel is intuitively aware of the threat that the 'male gaze' poses to her young, budding feminine body, and her intuitions are correct as the 'male gaze' that initially makes her shiver becomes the gaze that literally commands and controls the nature of the sexual assault on her within the child pornography industry. Cora, by contrast, does not initially understand that the violence of the 'male gaze' is directed at *her* body and so mistakes its presence for admiration until, as in Angel's case, it becomes a physical sexual attack on her body when her art teacher rapes her. For both protagonists, the sexual violence directed at their bodies, as objectification theorists claim, reduces them to their objecthood and so has the impact of fracturing and weakening the connection their subjecthood has with their body. In this manner, sexual violence disturbs the protagonists' respective concepts of 'self'.

Orford confirms this disturbance in the novel through her protagonists' pursuits of self-objectification following their being violated. The activities in which they engage indicate that they have internalised the very gaze that catalysed the violation of their bodies. In Cora's case, her self-objectification manifests in self-portraits that artistically split her violated adolescent body from herself. In Angel's case, her self-objectification takes the form of body manipulation and modification which has the purpose of reducing her violated body's feminine attributes, attributes that made her vulnerable to sexual violence in the first place. In both cases, the protagonists' self-objectification reveals that they are each estranged from their body after it was assaulted and so confirms that sexual violence, which starts with the 'male gaze', has disturbed their concepts of ‘self’. In this way, the ‘male gaze’ plays a crucial role in the disturbance of the victim’s ‘self’ as it can be seen as the catalyst for their self-objectification. Orford, therefore, extends the motif of the beautiful female murder victim symbolically to her novel’s living protagonists whose self-objectification shows that, like the painted figure in Cora’s paintings, they have suffered a symbolic ‘death’ through the disturbance of their concepts of ‘self’ because of sexual violence, which starts with the ‘male gaze’.

Chapter 3

“You’re not yours to give”: The ‘Self’, Sexual Violence, and Self-Objectification in *Freshwater*

1. Introduction

In adopting a magical realist lens to analyse *Freshwater* in this chapter, I argue that Emezi offers an internal perspective of how a sexual violence victim’s concept of ‘self’ is fractured by their experience of bodily violation, which the narrative suggests both leads to and is confirmed by the victim’s engagement in self-objectification. Initially, I explore how Emezi employs the magical realist mode in *Freshwater* to offer a unique perspective of reality, one which they develop through the novel’s *ọgbanje*-born protagonist, Ada. Part of this exploration involves dealing with Emezi’s contention that the novel is not a magical realist text. I propose, however, that it is precisely reading *Freshwater* through a magical realist lens that best captures Emezi’ intent in employing the autobiographical novel form. Once this contention has been tempered, I adopt the magical realist lens to show that Ada’s plural internality results in her being a liminal ‘self’ with an internal spiritual hierarchy, of which Ada-as-spirit is the head. It is through the disruption in the spiritual hierarchy of Ada’s ‘self’, I further argue, that Emezi articulates the instrumental role sexual violence plays in the disturbance of the victim’s ‘self’ following their violation. This disturbance, I conclude in my argument in this chapter, is marked in *Freshwater* by Ada’s pursuit of self-objectification, specifically the self-objectification that she engages in after her violation.

2. Reading *Freshwater* as Magical Realism

2.1 “I wanted readers to be sure that it was not magical realism”: Emezi’s Distance from the Magical Realist Genre

Viewing *Freshwater* as a magical realist text is contentious because Emezi has expressly distanced their novel from the genre. This is made clear when they tell *The Guardian*’s Arifa Akbar that

> [*Freshwater* is] an autobiographical novel – a breath away from being a memoir. There are chapters in there that are my journal entries which I copied and pasted. There are a couple of things about writing it this way: first, the things that people think are

> fictionalised are not fictionalised. Second, I wanted to make clear it was autobiography, otherwise it would be considered to be very fantastical. I wanted readers to be sure that it was not magical realism or speculative fiction. It's what has actually happened! I'm using fiction as a filter for it. (Emezi "'I'd read everything'" par. 7)

Here, Emezi reveals that, though they employ the autobiographical novel as a literary mode to mediate the events of *Freshwater*, they do not want their readership to interpret the Igbo-based cosmological reality in the text as fiction. Instead, they want their readership to take Ada's *ọgbanje* status as being real because the character is Emezi's fictional surrogate whose lived experience and reality is an autobiographical account of Emezi's. Consequently, Emezi distances *Freshwater* from the magical realist genre as they believe that approaching the novel as magical realist will lead their audience to misinterpret their use of the fictional mode in the text.

Emezi is not alone in wanting to distance themselves and their work from the magical realist genre. Other African authors, too, reject the genre on political grounds; this has become a core debate on magical realism. Like Emezi, Ben Okri – who is acclaimed as an African magical realist writer – expresses hesitation about his works being interpreted as magical realist. Okri specifically denounces the genre owing to its historical association with Latin American literature. Okri shared his uncompromising views on the genre with Jean W. Ross during an interview on *The Famished Road.* He explains:

> The difference is this: the Latin American writers – let's be quite honest – are largely European Latin American writers. Their [magical realist] writing has, as it were, come through the journey of symbolism, surrealism, and then come right round to the reality of that particular place. That's very different from what I'm saying […]. I'm looking at the world in *The Famished Road* from inside of the African world view, but without it being codified as such. This is just the way the world is seen: the dead are not actually dead, the ancestors are still part of the living community and there are innumerable gradations of reality. […] I'm treating it naturally. It's a kind of realism, but a realism with many more dimensions. (Okri 337–338)

Here, Okri balks at the possibility of his works being seen as derivatives of Latin American writing via a magical realist lens. His concern is that, despite what Latin American magical realist writers might posit, the supernatural or magical elements of their texts cannot be seen as truly real owing to the European "symbol[ic and] surrealist" (337) influences that mark their literature's conceptual groundwork. This contrasts with his works, which convey an African worldview mediated through a Yoruba perspective, one in which the natural and supernatural realms are both viewed as completely real despite their seeming disparity because, as Zakes Mda poignantly puts it, "[t]he unreal happens as part of reality [and t]he supernatural is presented without judgement” (281). For Okri, because of this true ontological equivalence between the realms, Latin American magical realist texts are not comparable to the African worldview that his novels articulate. Okri is essentially saying that, unlike in Latin American magical realism, there is no space to see the supernatural element of his text as metaphorical because these elements stem from a culture that sees them as truly real and thus not reducible to another explanation. Hence, Okri denounces his works being classified as magical realist by scholars. To leave Okri’s rejection of the genre here, however, would be an oversight as there is an additional layer involved in his disapproval of the genre’s application to his work.

Implicit in Okri’s rejection of magical realism, as it relates to Latin American literature, is an objection to the implied hierarchy present in the distinction between the terms ‘magical’ and ‘real’ in the paradoxical phrase ‘magical realism’. Maggie Ann Bowers addresses this concern in reference to the works of Amaryll Chanady, Alejo Carpentier, and Isabel Allende. She explains that the genre is frequently criticised for “relying on a European viewpoint that assumes that magic and the irrational often belong to indigenous and non-European[/non-Western] cultures, whereas rationality and a true sense of reality belong to a European[/Western] perspective” (84). Here, Bowers’ explanation echoes Okri’s critique and also reveals that the individual terms in the genre’s title appear to instate, and perpetuate, a hierarchical binary historically introduced by colonialism. Within this binary, non-Western ontological viewpoints that take the supernatural as real are considered ‘magical’, less real and less relevant, and thus inferior to Western ontological viewpoints encapsulated in the term ‘realism’. Essentially, the hierarchy implicit in the juxtaposition of the individual terms in ‘magical realism’ is what erases the reality of the supernatural world associated with the non-Western viewpoint which, in turn, decentres and ultimately dismisses the non-Western viewpoint – of which the African worldview is a part – within a literary context. Thus, the very name of the genre undermines the reality of the African worldview by forcing the supernatural to be seen as either metaphorical and reducible to the natural and ‘real’ realm championed by the Western viewpoint or as simply as unreal and ‘magical’. This is not only a key part of what underlies Okri’s sentiment in objecting to the magical realist genre, but it also seems to encompass Emezi’s concerns with magical realism.

Like Okri, Emezi writes *Freshwater*, in part, from within an African worldview by basing the reality presented in the novel on Igbo cosmology through the novel’s *ọgbanje*-born protagonist, Ada. Worth noting is that – similarly to the Yoruba perspective employed by Okri in *The Famished Road* – the Igbo cosmological view of reality understands the natural and supernatural realms as both being real. Beyond proclaiming that the novel is autobiographical in order to encourage readers to view these realms as equally real, Emezi writes the equal existence of the natural and supernatural realms into *Freshwater* through their choice of narrative situation.

Emezi reflects the equal reality of the natural and supernatural realms by choosing to narrate almost the entirety of *Freshwater*'s four parts from the perspective of the novel's supernatural or spiritual elements rather than its natural element. Indeed, eleven of the twenty-two chapters in *Freshwater* are narrated in the first person by a poly-vocal narrator known as 'We'. This 'We' constitutes the *ọgbanje* spirit-collective that inhabits Ada's body from birth. Moreover, from Part Two, seven chapters of the novel are narrated in the first person by Asụghara, an individuated spirit that breaks off from the spirit-collective after Ada is raped by her college boyfriend, Soren. Finally, interspersed among the chapters narrated from the supernatural elements, 'We' and Asụghara, Ada only narrates four chapters. Using this kind of narrative situation, Emezi writes *Freshwater* from the perspective of Ada's internal plurality, rather than simply from that of Ada. Emezi's choice is curious, however, as it is Ada's more 'human' voice that, in terms of convention, would be the expected and more 'natural' and 'real' narrator – especially since the novel recounts Ada's life and reality from birth to adulthood. Yet, as has been indicated, very little of the narrative is told from her human perspective. Thus, by means of this particular narrative situation, Emezi chooses to tell much of the novel from point of view of the supernatural element, the spirits, rather than that of the natural element, Ada.

Emezi's choice of narrative situation is important for two reasons: First, by narrating most of the novel from the perspective of the spirits contained within Ada, Emezi draws the supernatural realm to the forefront of the novel. Second, in offering the spirits narrative authority in eighteen of the novel's twenty-two chapters, Emezi allows the supernatural or spiritual elements to declare the reality of their own existence while destabilising the authority and realness of the natural realm. This challenge against the natural is solidified when Ada narrates her first chapter in the novel and avows, "[i]n many ways, I am not even real. I am not even here" (94). As the 'natural' element among the various narrators, Ada's doubt concerning her existence unexpectedly throws into question the reality of the natural realm in the novel. Essentially, through Ada's doubt, Emezi challenges the – presumably Western – reader to see the natural realm as being as uncertain as the spiritual realm; while, through the narrative situation, they simultaneously posit that the supernatural realm is as certainly real as the natural realm. Thus, the reality and authority of both the natural and supernatural realms are placed on equal footing in the text. In this way, Emezi structures *Freshwater* to reflect Okri's 'African viewpoint' through the novel's non-Western, Igbo centre, which embraces an ambiguous and liminal version of reality that is simultaneously natural and supernatural.

Thus, Emezi, like Okri, writes from an African viewpoint and reflects the reality of what they claim is autobiographical in the very narrative situation that they employ in the *Freshwater*'s construction. Consequently, if magical realism, as a genre, dismisses as magical the supernatural elements that are so fundamental to this African viewpoint, then it makes sense that these authors attempt to distance themselves and their works from magical realist interpretations. As regards *Freshwater* especially, this understanding of the magical realist genre would undermine Emezi's autobiographical intent in employing the autobiographical novel as it fails to take seriously the equality of Ada's natural and supernatural realities as they are reflected through the novel's narrative situation. Bowers suggests, however, that there is reason to be sceptical about interpreting the genre based on the connotations associated with the terms 'magical' and 'real' because doing so ignores what postcolonial scholars claim the genre seeks to do.

2.2 The Postcolonial Interpretation of Magical Realism

Pointing to an alternative, postcolonial interpretation of the name of the genre, Bowers asserts that the "oxymoron 'magical realism' reveals that the categories of the magical and the real are brought into question" (67). By bringing these categories into question, the oxymoron also brings into question the historical approval of the Western ontological viewpoint as 'real', and the historical dismissal of the non-Western ontological viewpoint as 'magical' within a literary context. This questioning of the two categories in the name of the genre uncovers the genre's aim, which, as Ato Quayson puts it, is to "establish equivalence between them [the 'magical' and the 'real'; the non-Western and the Western]" (169). Drawing on Lois Zamora and Wendy B. Faris' work, Bowers acknowledges that:

> [Inherent in this aim is the] conjunction or amalgamation of these two worlds [which] creates a mixture of these apposing cultures, and a third space which is constituted from neither one nor the other of the opposing world views but from the creation of a third that gives equal credence to the influence of the other two (83).

The magical realist genre as defined by postcolonial scholars, then, is progressive as it seeks to equalise the 'magical' or supernatural world of the non-Western viewpoint and the 'real' or natural world of the Western viewpoint as both being real and thereby embraces the ambiguity of a world constituted by seemingly disparate ontological modes and cultures. In this understanding, the genre is also transgressive as it blurs the boundaries between the 'magical' and 'real' by seeing both as real. This makes the magical realist project a revisionist one that encourages the – presumably Western – reader to discard and revise what they ontologically understand as 'real' when encountering magical realist texts. Put differently, magical realist texts with a clear political agenda to centre on non-Western worldviews ask the Western reader to take the supernatural realm on its own terms, as truly real, without attempting to reduce it to the more familiar natural realm through metaphor or any other means. Thus, rather than perpetuating the historical dismissal and decentring of non-Western, indigenous viewpoints – as Okri implies in his rejection of the genre – magical realism acts as a space of revival where the supernatural realm, the 'magic' of the non-Western ontological viewpoint, can be recentred and articulated as real and thus valid. Moreover, in this understanding, the distinction in the terms of the genre's name can be read positively – as emphasising that an alternative view of reality is being recentred. Hence, the 'magical' becomes realist when the aim of the magical realist genre is achieved.

Understanding the magical realist genre in terms of its aim demonstrates that it does not inherently undermine the reality of the supernatural realm or the non-Western, indigenous perspective. Indeed, in this postcolonial understanding, the genre's aim aligns with what Okri posits about the African worldview, in that the genre itself presents "a kind of realism, but a realism with more dimensions" (338). Provided that the magical realist genre's aim is to present and understand the supernatural and natural, or 'magical' and 'real', realms as having equal credence, it follows that interpreting *Freshwater* as magical realist respectfully aligns with what Emezi intends in employing the autobiographical form in the novel. Moreover, it is the postcolonial magical realist mode that Emezi uses to present Ada's Igbo cosmology-based perspective of reality, which stems from her internal plurality. This is clear from *Freshwater*'s narrative situation, which reflects the aims of postcolonial magical realism by placing the supernatural world of the spirits inhabiting Ada alongside the natural world that Ada inhabits to create, in their interaction, a liminal view of reality in which neither is more real or unreal than the other. Therefore, interpreting or analysing *Freshwater* via a magical realist lens aligns with the narrative situation of the novel and affirms Emezi's intention in employing the autobiographical form as *Freshwater*'s literary mode.

The upshot of interpreting *Freshwater* as magical realism is that if one takes the supernatural, 'magical' realm on its own terms, as real and not reducible, then one cannot interpret Ada's condition as a metaphor for mental illness. Instead, Ada's *ọgbanje* status must be taken for what it is: a spiritual condition in which the spirit-collective comprises literal spirits within Ada's body and, more importantly, a condition which has a plethora of consequences for the host. Thus, analysing *Freshwater* via a magical realist lens encourages a richer reading of Ada's 'self' – a reading, it is argued, that acknowledges her liminal state, especially in terms of her relationship with the *ọgbanje* spirits that inhabit her body. In the next section, I adopt this magical realist approach to *Freshwater* to determine the structure of Ada's 'self', as presented by Emezi's writing her as being born *ọgbanje*.

3. The Curious Case of Ada: A Complex Liminal 'Self' with an Internal Spiritual Hierarchy

Emezi describes Ada as a "singular collective and a plural individual" ("'I'd read everything'" par. 3). With this description, they capture the core difficulty in understanding Ada's 'self' in *Freshwater*. Namely, this difficulty is that Ada's 'self' is entirely ambiguous: she is at once human and, so, distinct from the spirit-collective of *ọgbanje* "brothersisters" (179) that inhabit her body, and yet she is also part of these 'brothersisters' because, like them, she is a god in a human body – she is the daughter of Ala, "the Igbo goddess of earth and the ruler of the afterworld" (Ait Abbou 16). In this section, I argue that one way of understanding Ada's 'self', without undermining Emezi's description of her, is by looking at Ada as a liminal being and at her plurally inhabited internality as a spiritual hierarchy – one headed by Ada-as-spirit owing to her-as-spirit being most intimately connected with her body, a body which hosts the spirit-collective.

The ambiguity of Ada's 'self' begins with a spiritual complication at birth. This complication occurs partly because Ada is simultaneously affiliated with life and death. As indicated, Ada is Ala's daughter. The reader is informed of Ada's godly lineage through her name. The spirit collective explains that 'Ada' "mean[s], in its truest form, the egg of a python […and] the egg of a python is the child of Ala" (Emezi 9). Ada's godly lineage is significant within Emezi's narrative because, in Igbo cosmology, Ala "stands for fertility and things that generate life" (Ojiaku 13). Ala, then, is a deity connected to the production of the natural realm or world. Thus, Ada, as Ala's daughter, is spiritually affiliated with life and the natural, human realm.

Yet, owing to the *ọgbanje* spirits that inhabit her body, as is revealed by the narrative, Ada is also born *ọgbanje*. Emmanual Ojiaku states that, in Igbo cosmology, an "*ọgbanje* is a reincarnating evil spirit that […] deliberately plague[s] a family with misfortune" (11). He further explains that *ọgbanje* are malevolent spirit-children who, "upon being born by the mother, […] deliberately die after a certain amount of time (usually before puberty) and then come back and repeat the cycle (11), plaguing the family with grief. Ojiaku's explanation reveals that *ọgbanje* are drawn to death and thus are connected to death and, by extension, the supernatural realm or world in Igbo cosmology. As a result of being born *ọgbanje,* Ada is also affiliated with death and the supernatural, spiritual realm. In this way, Emezi inscribes Ada's being with ambiguity as, spiritually, she is simultaneously associated with life and the natural, human realm by being the daughter of Ala born into a human body and associated with death and the supernatural, spiritual realm by being born inhabited by the *ọgbanje* spirit-collective. This ambiguity renders Ada a liminal being whose spiritual composition emphatically suspends her between realms.

Of further importance is that Emezi writes Ada's *ọgbanje* status as not being wholly conventional because Ada is initially distinct from the self-proclaimed *ọgbanje* spirit-collective inhabiting her body. Emezi exposes this abnormality through spirit-collective's reflection on Ada's birth into the natural realm. Of Ada's birth, the spirit collective recalls:

> [T]he gates were left open. We should have been anchored inside her by then, asleep inside her membranes and synched with her mind. […] But since the gates were open, not closed against remembrance, we became confused. We were at once old and newborn. We were her and yet not. We were not conscious but we were alive – in fact, the main problem was that we were a distinct *we* instead of being fully just *her*.
> (Emezi 5)

In this passage, the gates referred to divide the natural, human world that Ada is born into from the supernatural, spirit world from which the spirit-collective comes. The spirit-collective suggests that the purpose of the gates opening is to allow spirits to enter bodies, while the closing of the gates during birth works to "ancho[r]" (5) or fuse the spirits to their bodies. This is reminiscent of the concept of 'self' developed in Chapter 1, where the 'self' is articulated as the integration point between objecthood and subjecthood, or body and spirit. That the gates are left open, then, is an unusual occurrence, which the spirit-collective implicitly blames for preventing them from fusing with Ada, who, as a conscious being, is presented in the narrative as an acutely integrated body and spirit, or 'self'. In other words, owing to the unconventional spiritual complication involved in Ada's birth, as Yasmine Ait Abbou suggests, Ada's "personal identity [or 'self'] is left distinct from that of the ogbanje" (17).

Yet Emezi complicates this concept of 'self' because, while Ada *is* initially distinct from the spirit-collective, she is also spiritually affiliated with them, which draws them into her 'self'. Ada's affiliation to the spirit-collective stems from her being the daughter of Ala. As such, she is a god despite her human form, which means that the spirit aspect of Ada's 'self', Ada-as-spirit, is a godly spirit. The *ọgbanje* spirit-collective are also "gods", and they too refer to Ala as "our mother, Ala" (Emezi 36). In this sense, Ada-as-spirit is a sister spirit to the *ọgbanje* spirit-collective of 'brothersisters' that inhabit her body, even though she-as-spirit is not *ọgbanje* herself. Concerning the African ontological perspective of 'self', Chuka A. Okoye asserts, that in Igbo tradition, "the self cannot be explained independent from his community", as the community forms a "common spirit" (64). As Ada's spiritual siblings with Ala as their mother, and cohabiting Ada's body, the spirit-collective forms part of Ada's direct internal spiritual community. Accordingly, they are united with Ada-as-spirit and, by proxy, with her body, thereby forming part of her 'self'. Ada's concept of 'self' is therefore a more relationally complex entity than was developed in Chapter 1 and is seen in *Beholder* as her 'self' is a relation between her body and Ada-as-spirit, as well as between Ada-as-spirit and the spirit-collective. Magaqa and Makombe aptly summarise this complex relation by arguing that Ada's identity can be understood "as a human with a spiritual connection and as a spirit with a human connection" (28). In this way, Ada is presented by Emezi as a complex liminal 'self' with an internal spiritual plurality.

Additionally, owing to the connection between Ada-as-spirit and her body, Emezi develops Ada's complex 'self' within *Freshwater* as comprising an internal spiritual hierarchy, wherein Ada-as-spirit heads the spirit-collective that inhabits her. Emezi develops this hierarchy within Ada's 'self' through Ada's ability to write, an ability that stems from her intimate body–spirit connection. In writing about them and naming them in journals that she receives from her mother, Ada is credited for awakening the spirit-collective. Of this naming process, or "second birth" (Emezi 42), as the spirit-collective terms it, the reader is told:

> It was in them that she named us, titling us for the first time. Our forms were young and indistinct, but this naming was a second birth, it sorted us into something she could see. The first of us, Smoke, […t]he second of us, Shadow […]. The Ada made us (Emezi 42).

Attention must be brought to the final sentence: "The Ada made us" (42). This is not to say that the spirit-collective did not exist prior to Ada naming them. Indeed, they do, as is conveyed through Emezi's narrative situation, which, as previously mentioned, allows the spirits to assert their own existence. Instead, as Eugenia Ossana puts forward, Ada 'makes' them as she "gives the *ọgbanje* agency [within her body] by providing them with a name" (84). In so doing, Ada draws the spirit-collective more acutely into her 'self' because, in giving them a sense of agency within her body, she reduces the distance between the spirit-collective and the natural, human realm of her body. This is confirmed when the spirit-collective warmly assert, "[a]fter she named us in that second birth, we felt even closer to the Ada" (Emezi 43). It must be emphasised here that, in this event, Emezi imbues Ada with authority because it is Ada that has the power to give the spirit-collective agency, albeit limited agency, to influence her from within her body, by her naming of them using her body–spirit connection. This situates Ada-as-spirit as ranking higher than the spirit-collective because of her body–spirit connection. Thus, Emezi complicates Ada's 'self' even more by presenting Ada's internal spiritual plurality as hierarchical, with Ada-as-spirit at its head.

Yet it cannot be ignored that Emezi's narrative appears to undermine Ada's position as the head of the spirits inhabiting her because, at times, the spirit-collective appears to exert authority over Ada-as-spirit by requiring blood sacrifices of her. These blood sacrifices take the form of Ada cutting herself to the point of bleeding. The spirit-collective tells the reader, "Ada begun the sacrifices that were necessary to keep us quiet" (40) because, in response to being pulled towards death on the other side of the open gates, they would "scream, and [they would] batte[r] against the marble of Ada's mind until she fed [them] with that thick red offering" (42). Here, the selection of the terms "sacrifice" (42) and "offering" (42) present Ada's actions as a kind of worship to the spirit-collective because, as John Sarauta Kenan writes, within African traditional religious practices, including those found in Nigeria, "worship consists of sacrifice, offerings, prayer, place and occasion" (44). Frederick Choo observes, in discussing the theological concept of worship, that theologians generally take it that the worship-worthy being is viewed as "much more powerful, and vastly greater than oneself" (81). In light of Kenan's claim and Choo's observation, Ada's actions suggest that the spirit-collective are, in fact, in a position of authority over Ada-as-spirit because she is the one who worships them through self-harm through her body–spirit connection.

However, the spirit-collective's suggested authority is debunked later in the novel when they avow that they always thought of "the body as truly belonging to Ada, as something [they] were only guests in" (Emezi 187). In avowing this, the spirit-collective acknowledges that Ada-as- spirit is the one that that *owns* her body, and thereby has authority over it. Here, the intimate connection between Ada-as-spirit and her body is affirmed. Ada hosts the spirit-collective's presence within her and facilitates their connection to the natural realm because she draws them closer to the natural realm and into a more agential state – a state in which they can require sacrifices of her – by naming them. Moreover, it is only through Ada-as-spirit that the spirit-collective can access her body, which is reflected in their having to agitate her to the point of self-harm. Ergo, the hierarchical spiritual structure is maintained within Ada as she-as-spirit holds authority over the spirit-collective by mediating their connection to her body and the natural world even in her seeming worship of them. In this way, Emezi not only presents Ada as a complex liminal 'self' with a spiritual plurality, but further develops the complexity of Ada's 'self' by characterising it as consisting of an internal spiritual hierarchy, where the hierarchy is simply Ada-as-spirit over the rest of the spirit-collective without other distinctions – at least, before she is raped. Put together, in the curious case of Ada, the complication of her birth results in a complex liminal 'self' consisting of an internal spiritual hierarchy that is headed by Ada-as-spirit; this distinguishes Ada's particular relational 'self' from the more basic form that occurs in Orford's *Beholder*.

4. Girl Disturbed: Sexual Violence and Ada's 'Self'

Like the protagonists in *Beholder*, Ada's 'self' is disturbed by sexual violence. However, unlike Orford who implies this disturbance through metaphor and symbolism, Emezi's use of the magical realist mode offers the reader a direct and intimate internal view of the harmful impact that sexual assault has on Ada's 'self'. In this section, I argue that Emezi specifically articulates the sexual objectification of Ada's body as resulting in a fracture of protagonist's body–spirit connection, which has the effect of Ada-as-spirit losing control of her body to Asụghara, a spirit that individuates from the *ọgbanje* spirit-collective within Ada. Ada-as-spirit's loss of primary authority over her body owing to sexual violence, I further argue, indicates that Ada's position as the head of her internal spiritual hierarchy is destabilised and, with that destabilisation, her complex 'self' is disturbed. In this way, Emezi's magical realist novel illustrates, through Ada, how sexual violence disturbs the victim's 'self'.

Emezi's account of Ada's assault contrasts the explicit description of the violations in *Beholder*. This is the case because the author implies Ada's rape through her reaction, introducing the event after it occurs. Indeed, when Ada is raped by her college boyfriend, Soren, she only realises it when Soren tells her "[y]ou need to get birth control pills" (57). In response, the spirit-collective discloses:

> [Ada] couldn't remember any of it and she couldn't remember saying yes because she couldn't remember being asked.
>
> She was confused. There had been so many refusals in the weeks before […] enough to hold him away because he knew, he knew, he knew she didn't want to.
>
> (Emezi 57–58)

Nothing in the above passage explicitly tells the reader that Ada is raped. However, Ada's confusion and insistent past refusals, which are emphasised by the repetition of "he knew" (57), notify the reader of the sexually objectifying violence of the event. Specifically, these reveal that Ada did not consent to having sexual relations with Soren: "she couldn't remember [even] being asked" (57). This further implies that Soren had rejected Ada's subjecthood and consciousness, treating her only as a sexual object for his own pleasure and power because he "takes ownership of Ada's body" (72), as Crystal puts it, by disregarding her past refusals. Thus, Emezi exposes Ada's rape through implication via Ada's reaction to the event.

By implying Ada's rape though her reaction, Emezi effectively focuses the reader's attention on the impact that the sexual violence has on Ada's internality. Specifically, Emezi shows that Soren's rejection of Ada's subjecthood through rape causes a fracture between Ada's spirit and her body, or her subjecthood and objecthood. Emezi reflects this fracture in Ada through Asụghara, a female *ọgbanje* spirit that individuates from the spirit-collective within Ada when she is raped. As Asụghara puts it, "I came into the world the way I did because of Soren […] I was a child of trauma; my birth was on top of a scream and I was baptized in blood" (Emezi 73). Asụghara explains that, upon materialising as an individual spirit in the room of Ada's mind, she "looked around the marble for Ada and there she was, a shred in the corner" (61). Asụghara's explanation is the first instance that the reader encounters Ada-as-spirit, internally separated from her body. Moreover, Asụghara's observation that Ada is a "shred" (61) in the marble room of Ada's mind emphasises that this is an unusual separation as the synecdoche suggests that Ada-as-spirit is a piece of what was once whole. The reader can infer form this that Asụghara is referring to Ada's body–spirit connection as being fractured as Ada-as-spirit's intimate connection to her body is what premised the 'wholeness' of her unusual 'self'.

Emezi confirms this fracture in Ada's body–spirit connection through Asụghara's ability to control Ada's body upon materialising in Ada's mind. Asụghara narrates: "I sank my roots into her body, finding my grip in her capillaries and organs. I already knew that Ada was mine: mine to move and take and save. I stood her body up" (61–62). Here, Asụghara integrates intimately into the fibres of Ada's body as she takes control of it. Her ability to fill Ada's body in this way points to the displacement of Ada-as-spirit from her body after rape. Asụghara's ability points to this as it exceeds the abilities of the spirit-collective whose access to Ada's body was, before Ada's violation, mediated by Ada-as-spirit. Crystal observes the same point, noting that even though "Ada was already possessed[/inhabited] before her traumatic experience, […] the spirit[-collective] never fully takes control of Ada's body until afterward" (69). Asụghara's appearance and actions confirm that there is a fissure of space between Ada-as-spirit and her body through which Asụghara accesses and operates Ada's body after she is violated. In all, Emezi's magical realist narrative situation reveals that Soren's sexual objectification of Ada's body causes a fracture between Ada's body and spirit, between her objecthood and subjecthood. In this way, Emezi explicitly illustrates how sexual violence disturbs a victim's 'self' by compromising the fundamental body–spirit relation.

Importantly, with Soren's sexual violation of Ada's body causing the fracture between Ada-as-spirit and her body, Emezi articulates this event as destabilising the protagonist's internal spiritual hierarchy and thereby disturbing the very structure that characterises her complex 'self'. This destabilisation is fashioned by means of Asụghara's descriptions of what occurs when she takes control of Ada's body. Asụghara describes this as involving the moments when "[she] came in front" (Emezi 70). By this Asụghara means that she comes 'in front' of Ada-as-spirit within Ada's body. In doing so, Asụghara displaces Ada-as-spirit from control of her body. That is, at these times, Ada is no longer at the head of her internal spiritual hierarchy as she has neither the control associated with that position nor the 'front' position itself. For this reason, Asụghara employs possessive and authoritative language when she states that she knew, upon seeing Ada's spirit in the corner of the marble room, that "Ada was [hers]: [hers] to move and take and save" (61–62). It is the pairing of these description that indicates Ada's internal spiritual hierarchy is destabilised upon Asụghara materialising in Ada's mind and taking control of Ada's body after her body–spirit connection is fractured when Soren sexually violates her.

Using a magical realist mode to write from the perspective of Ada's internality in *Freshwater*, Emezi explicitly demonstrates that the sexual objectification of Ada's body disturbs every aspect of her complex relational self. The consequence of the fracture caused by Soren's rejection of her subjecthood through his violation of her body is that Ada's internal spiritual hierarchy, that which characterises and distinguishes her particular 'self' from the 'self' developed in Chapter 1 and that found in *Beholder*, is destabilised. Emezi, like Orford, thus foregrounds the impact of sexual violence on the victim: a severe disruption of the concept of 'self'. In the next section, I argue that Emezi goes on to emphasise this in the course of the narrative by juxtaposing Ada's engagement in of self-objectification before she is raped with that which she pursues after the assault.

5. Ada's 'Self' and Self-Objectification

Just as Ada's 'self' is a particularly complex 'self', Emezi presents Ada as having an equally complex relationship with self-objectification. Ada engages in two catergories of self-objectification that take multiple forms. The first occurs before she is raped and is pursued in response to being multiply inhabited by the *ọgbanje* spirit-collective. This category of self-objectification is argued to maintain Ada's body–spirit connection and, in so doing, begins illuminating Emezi's inscription within the narrative of the positive potential of self-objectification. The second category of self-objectification Ada pursues is catalysed by her experience of sexual assault. This version is argued to confirm that Ada's 'self' has indeed been disturbed by her experience of sexual violence. In juxtaposing the two categories of self-objectification in this way, Emezi further foregrounds the disturbing impact that sexual violence has on a victim's 'self'.

Ada's pursuit of self-objectification is, throughout the narrative, a response to being objectified. Katelyn Harlin propounds that "[f]rom the very beginning [of the novel], Ada is objectified in the literal sense of being possessed (both haunted and owned), vesselized [*sic*], and instrumentalised" (166). Here, Harlin speaks poignantly to the way the *ọgbanje* spirit-collective treat Ada in an objectifying manner as they respond to their confinement and inability to directly control her body while situated, distinct from her body, within her. The spirit-collective's earliest form of objectification is found in their placement of their *iyi-uwa*. Drawing on Ojiaku, Yasmine Ait Abbou explains that the *iyi-uwa* "is a stone that is used by the [*ọgbanje*] to come back into the human world again and again," as it is through this stone that "*ọgbanje* tormen[t] the same family" (14). Elizbeth Onyewuchi Ben-Iheanacho offers an alternative explanation of the *iyi-uwa* when she writes that it is "the covenant stone that binds [the *ọgbanje*] to their 'brothersisters' in the spirit realm" (21). For Abbou, the *iyi-uwa* maintains the *ọgbanje*'s tie to the natural realm, while, for Ben-Iheanacho, it maintains the *ọgbanje*'s tie to the supernatural realm. Both interpretations are helpful as they illustrate that the *iyi-uwa* is a spiritual object that acts as a bridge between the natural and the supernatural realms.

This combined understanding of the *iyu-uwa* reveals the *ọgbanje* spirit-collective's decision to bury their *iyu-uwa* inside Ada's body renders her an object to them, though they cannot directly control her body. Of the burying, the spirit-collective tells the reader:

> We are not like other ogbanje. We did not hide [the *iyi-uwa*] inside a tree or inside a river […]. No [… w]e took it apart and we decimated it. The Ada came with bones anyway – who would notice the odd fragments woven in? We hid igneous rock in the pit of her stomach […]. We put the velveteen inside the walls of her vagina and spat on the human hide […]. We stretched it from one shoulder blade to the other, draping it over her back, stitching it to her other skin. (Emezi 15)

Here, the spirit-collective weaves their *iyi-uwa* throughout Ada's body: into her bones, her reproductive organs, her stomach, and even into her skin. In so doing, they transform every aspect of Ada into a spiritual object that tethers them simultaneously to the natural and supernatural realms. Ada thus becomes objectified or, as Harlin puts it, a "material resource [to them]" (166). This idea is further solidified in the narrative by the spirit-collective asserting that to be embodied within Ada is to be "the alter, the flesh and the knife" (Emezi 38), while her body is their "cage" (53).

The spirit-collective being called back to the supernatural realm by their 'brothersisters' because of their *iyi-uwa* is precisely what leads to Ada's first form of self-objectification: cutting herself. The call of the 'brothersisters' causes the *ọgbanje* spirit-collective to batter against Ada's mind. The way Ada quietens them is by cutting herself and thereby offering the spirit-collective blood sacrifices. The religious connotations of Ada's body being an "altar" (38) and her self-harm being a "sacrifice" (42) mean that Ada's cutting can be understood a kind of self-flagellation. This is noteworthy because Scarry writes of self-flagellation that "it is not […] an act of denying the body, but a way of so emphasising the body that the contents of the world are cancelled" (34). What Scarry means is that the pain induced by self-flagellation anchors the experiencer in their body by drawing their attention away from the external world. Ada's self-objectification through cutting does precisely this.

By drawing Ada's attention into her body, and the natural realm, the self-inflicted pain prevents her from being pulled to the supernatural realm as it quells the restlessness induced by the *ọgbanje* spirit-collective's *iyi-uwa*. Specifically, the pain stops the spirit-collective from trying to return to the spirit world and thereby causing Ada's death. In preventing this return to the spirit-world, Ada's initial form of self-objectification, which is a response to the spirit-collective objectifying her through the *iyi-uwa*, retains Ada's connection to her body and to the natural world by anchoring her in her body via pain. Thus, this first form of self-objectification maintains Ada's 'self' by assuring her body–spirit connection, which itself ensures that she-as-spirit remains at the head of her internal spiritual hierarchy and is the means by which *ọgbanje* spirit-collective's access to her body and the natural realm is limited.

In contrast, Ada's second form of self-objectification exhibits the disturbance of Ada's 'self' as it indicates that her spirit has become cleft from her body and that, as a result, her internal spiritual hierarchy is unstable. This form of self-objectification develops in the aftermath of Soren's sexual assault, and Emezi first makes it visible in the relationship that Ada has with Asụghara. After Ada is raped, Ada-as-spirit is unable to be in control of her body during sexual intercourse. Indeed, as Asụghara reflects, when Soren tries to have intercourse with Ada again:

> Ada wasn't even there anymore. At all, at all. She wasn't even a small thing curled up in the corner of her marble. There was only me. I expanded against the walls, filling it up and blocking her out completely. She was gone. She might as well have been dead.
> (Emezi 64)

Here, Asụghara's claim that Ada-as-spirit is so detached and absent from her body that "[s]he might as well have been dead" (64) recalls Brison's statement, presented in Chapter 1, that, after being raped, she had to stop herself from saying, "I was murdered in France last summer" (xi). When Brison makes this statement, she does so to illustrate the effect of sexual trauma on the 'self': it invariably causes the loss of something integral to the 'self'. In Ada's case, her spirit's absence shows that her violation has disturbed the stable integration of her body and her spirit, and this allows Asụghara to step in and take charge of Ada's body, to "expand against the walls, filling it up and blocking her out" (Emezi 64) during these sexual interactions.

Ada's absence, however, is not an involuntary response. Emezi exposes this when Asụghara states that "[she] could almost see [Ada] standing aside as [she] used her body" (74). The implication of Ada's "standing aside" is that Ada-as-spirit chooses to distance herself from her body during coital interactions, which resemble her sexual assault. Stephanie C. Lichiello notes that after sexual abuse women are prone to self-objectify by "disassociat[ing] as a way of escaping their body, a disconnection that has been referred to as body alienation" (9). Ada-as-spirit's standing aside for Asụghara to use her body is an act of spiritual disassociation, an act of escape through body alienation. Ada thus self-objectifies through her relationship with Asụghara because, by choosing to distance herself-as-spirit from her body, she voluntarily relinquishes her body, having it assume the status of an 'object' that can be controlled and thereby "used" (Emezi 74) by Asụghara. This form of self-objectification confirms that Ada-as-spirit is fractured from her body after she is sexually assaulted.

Worth noting is that Emezi positions Asụghara as having a dual role in her relationship with Ada. First, Asụghara is objectified by Ada-as-spirit, who treats her as a coping mechanism. As indicated above, Asụghara's materialised presence within Ada 's mind is what enables Ada to voluntarily self-objectify and thereby avoid being conscious of sexual interactions. At times, Asụghara describes herself as being a "a shell [Ada] could drag over her[self], whether [she, Asụghara,] was asleep or not" (158) within Ada. Here, Asụghara reveals that there is a palimpsest element to Ada's self-objectification as she, a part of Ada's complex internal spiritual plurality and 'self', too, is objectified in her relationship with Ada-as-spirit: she becomes an object that Ada-as-spirit uses to self-objectify in an attempt to escape interactions resembling sexual assault. Thus, Asụghara's position as an objectified coping mechanism within Ada shows that Ada-as-spirit and Asụghara's relationship, a relationship built on self-objectifying behaviour that foregrounds Ada's fractured connection to her body, is a consequence of sexual violence.

Asụghara's presence also represents the persistence of sexual trauma through time. This becomes apparent in Ada's marriage to Ewan. During her marriage, Ada desires to give her whole 'self' over to Ewan because she loves him, and he has expressed that "[h]e wants them to be equal" (158) in giving themselves entirely to each other. Yet Ada's splintered connection from her body owing to her having been raped means that her 'self' is not 'whole'. Asụghara gently reminds Ada of this, saying: "Look, you can't give yourself to him because you're not yours to give" (160). Asụghara clarifies what she means for the reader by disclosing that "[t]he only thing that would have saved [their marriage] was if I had never existed, if Ada had not been divided the way that she was" (161). Put differently, Ada would have been 'whole' had she not been raped, 'whole' in the sense that she-as-spirit would have still been closely connected to her body and her internal spiritual hierarchy would have remained intact, with her-as-spirit as its head, which would have left her in a possession of authority over her 'self'. Asụghara's birth after Ada's rape, however, marks Ada's body as shared owing to their relationship that involves self-objectification. Consequently, Ada-as-spirit is no longer her own to give. The notion that Ada is not hers to give because of Asụghara's existence shows two things: First, that Asụghara's existence illustrates that sexual violence affects the victim's relationships long after they are violated; that is, that the impact persists over time. Second, it establishes that Ada is no longer in charge of her internal spiritual hierarchy or her body after she is violated. In this way, Ada's second form of self-objectification, again, confirms and emphasises that her 'self' has been disturbed by sexual violence.

Emezi takes the destabilisation of Ada's internal spiritual hierarchy a step further when Ada's second form of self-objectification culminates in Ada's gender reassignment surgery. During this form of self-objectification, Ada-as-spirit is displaced from her body not only by Asụghara but by the entire *ọgbanje* spirit-collective within her. This is confirmed by Emezi when the spirit-collective, which claims, after Asụghara failed to convince Ada to kill herself, that "it was time to accept that [Ada's] body was [theirs] too […] and [they] wanted to reflect that, to change the Ada into [them]" (187). Part of this changing involves getting Ada to undergo gender reassignment surgery as the spirit-collective, which includes the masculine spirit, Snt Vincent, and the feminine spirit, Asụghara, does not conform to binary gender identities. This, while Ada-as-spirit, who is associated with the female body, conforms to the feminine which is indicated by the spirit-collective's reference to Ada in terms of the feminine pronouns 'she' and 'her' throughout the novel. The spirit-collective express their non-conformity by stating: "[w]e have understood what we are, the places we are suspended in, between the inaccurate concepts of male and female" (193). Karolína Zlámalová notes that Ada's gender reassignment surgery reflects "a growing influence of the spirits inside Ada" (36). This is visible in the text as the spirit-collective asserts their control in the process of Ada's reconfiguring when they add that "by then[,] it was too late for Ada to do anything except try to keep up with us" (Emezi 193).

Ada's gender reassignment surgery is a form of self-objectification. The spirit-collective is part of Ada's complex 'self'. This means that their treatment of Ada's body as a malleable object that can be manipulated and re-shaped equates to self-objectification. The significance of this self-objectification is that, in re-shaping Ada's body to better reflect themselves externally, the spirit-collective emphasises that Ada-as-spirit is no longer in control of her body. Indeed, once Ada's body is re-shaped, the spirit-collective is deftly able to anchor themselves in it. The spirit-collective expresses this anchorage when they authoritatively assert, following the surgery: "This was our body and it would become what we wanted, now that the reconfiguring was done" (192). The re-shaping of Ada's body further distances Ada-as-spirit from any connection with her body, further alienating her from it. The spirit-collective reveals Ada's alienation by describing her spirit as "hiding in a great shadow" (215) within herself. Essentially, Ada's self-objectification through gender reassignment surgery reflects a reassigning of the power locus of her internality: it has shifted from her-as-spirit to the entire spirit-collective. Thus, the culmination of Ada's second category of self-objectification makes visible on her body the destabilising of her original internal spiritual hierarchy, indicating that she is no longer integrated into her body following the violation. Through the culmination of this second category of self-objectification, which is juxtaposed with the first category, Emezi reaffirms and emphasises, within their magical realist narrative, that Ada's 'self' has been disrupted by the sexual violence that catalysed the fracturing of her body–spirit connection and, thereby, caused the disturbance of her internal spiritual hierarchy.

6. Conclusion

While Emezi distances *Freshwater* from the magical realist genre, in this chapter, I show that it is precisely by approaching the novel using a magical realist lens that Emezi's use of narrative situation and their intent in employing the autobiographical form to construct their narrative can be adequately understood. Indeed, it is a magical realist approach to *Freshwater* that encourages the reader to take Ada’s *ọgbanje* status on its own terms and thereby derive a richer understanding of the ‘self’ developed by Emezi through the novel’s *ọgbanje*-born, internally plural protagonist. Adopting such a lens, I argued that Ada’s ‘self’ can be understood as a complex liminal one that is characterised by an internal spiritual hierarchy of which Ada-as-spirit is the head. This is crucial as it is Ada’s internal spiritual hierarchy that is disrupted when her-as-spirit is cleft from her body owing to her experience of sexual violence. Emezi confirms this disturbance within Ada’s ‘self’ through the protagonist’s complex relationship with self-objectification, and especially the forms of self-objectification that the protagonist pursues after being sexually violated. Ada’s self-objectification makes clear the long-term effects of sexual trauma on the ‘self’ and thereby demonstrates the instrumental role that sexual violence plays in the harming of the victim’s ‘self’. Thus, through Ada’s complex ‘self’ and her pursuit of self-objectification after experiencing sexual violence, Emezi’s magical realist novel offers a unique internal perspective on how a sexual violence victim’s concept of ‘self’ is impacted on by their experience of bodily violation. In this way, Emezi’s novel, like Orford’s, reflects the negative understanding of self-objectification. Admittedly, however, through what was called Ada’s first category of self-objectification, Emezi does not limit self-objectification to being a marker of disturbance within the ‘self’. Rather, they suggest that self-objectification, the very thing that, when engaged in after sexual violence, indicates the fracturing of the ‘self’, might also be the means by which the ‘self’ is healed and a more enriched version attained. This positive view of self-objectification is examined in more detail in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Open Wound and Healing Balm: The Duality of Self-Objectification in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*

1. Introduction

The sexual violence victim's reclamation of their 'self' is a complex journey towards repair. Importantly, rather than being a journey of restorative repair, it is one of transformative, *kintsugi*-like repair marked by self-objectification. *Kintsugi* is an age-old Japanese ceramic craft that is admired not only for its use in repairing broken ceramics but also for making visible the points of damage by coating the glue on those points in gold powder. The use of gold on the glue aims to highlight, and thereby celebrate, the fact that the item has undergone a journey of harm *and* repair and has consequently transformed into something that is again complete though different from what it had been (Keulemans 22). *Kintsugi* thus emphasises the duality of the glue's presence between the ceramic's broken edges: it is at once representative of the item's fracture, or metaphorical wounds, and the means by which the item is repaired or healed and transformed into a new kind of whole.

Much like the gold-covered glue in *kintsugi*, the sexual violence victim's self-objectification too has a dual role in their journey of transformative repair. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 demonstrated that a victim's self-objectification results from their experience of sexual violence and indicates that their 'self' has been disturbed or wounded. So far, then, the victim's self-objectification has been a negative outcome of sexual violence. However, in this chapter, I adopt a different stance by turning to the work of Scarry to argue that, in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*, Orford and Emezi, respectively, suggest that self-objectification also acts as a healing balm for the victim's wounded 'self' because it plays the mending role in their journey toward remaking, and thus reclaiming their 'self'. In so doing, the authors offer a positive revision of self-objectification in their novels.

2. Unmaking and Remaking: The 'Victim–Survivor' Relationship and Scarry

2.1The 'Victim–Survivor' Relationship

Up to this point in the project, the relationship between perpetrator and victim has been central to my analysis of *Beholder* and *Freshwater*. I have specifically focused on the disturbing effect that the various perpetrators' sexually objectifying, and often physically harmful, behaviours have had on their victims' concepts of 'self'. Now, however, turning to Cora, Angel, and Ada's respective journeys toward self-reclamation and repair, a different kind of relationship requires attention. This is the relationship between the identities of 'victim' and 'survivor' within each character. Indeed, in the case of each of the protagonists, the journey to reclaiming the 'self' can be understood as one that occurs between these identities. To this end, the victim–survivor relationship is significant to the core argument of this thesis, which posits that Orford and Emezi articulate self-objectification as necessary for the victim of sexual violence to reclaim their body and thus their selfhood, thereby becoming a survivor.

Over the last fifty years or so, feminist scholars like Kathleen Barry have come to view the term 'victim' as pejorative, and so prefer using the term 'survivor' when discussing those who have experienced sexual violence. Heralded as one of the first theorists to apply the term 'survivor' to female victims of sexual abuse, Barry employs this term to resist the observable problem of fixity and continued objectification implicit in what she terms 'victimism'. Victimism is a social phenomenon that arises when those who have experienced sexual abuse are afforded social currency or understanding only insofar as they wholeheartedly adopt the role and status of 'the victim' (45). Key to this phenomenon is that it presents itself as validating the victim's experience of abuse. Unfortunately, however, it also perpetuates the abuser's dehumanisation of the victim by fixing the victim in a status that constantly identifies them as the abuser's passive recipient of violence – even once the violation has ceased. For this reason, Barry repudiates victimism, holding instead that, "more than [being] victims, women who have been raped or sexually enslaved are *survivors* [because s]urviving is the other side of being a victim [and it] involves will, action, [and] initiative on the victim's part" (46–47). For Barry, the use of 'survivor' as an alternative to 'victim' restores the sexual violence survivor's humanity because it acknowledges that, despite their abuser's objectification, the survivor *is* agential, and their identity evolves beyond their abuser and their experience of harm. Thus, identifying female victims of sexual violence as 'survivors' and ultimately more than mere victims overcomes the problems that Barry views as being associated with the concept of victimism.

Barry's introduction of the term 'survivor' into victim discourse has been met with varying opinions regarding how the identities of 'victim' and 'survivor' might relate to each other. Some scholars, for example, interpret the victim–survivor relationship as a linear process undertaken by the victim. This interpretation often results from the opposing characteristics that the terms 'victim' and 'survivor', respectively, connote. In her study on victim recovery after rape, Monica Thompson notes of these connotations that a 'victim' is frequently "viewed negatively and ascribed characteristics such as being weak, powerless, vulnerable and still affected by the rape" (328). By contrast, a 'survivor' is ascribed characteristics that are "perceived as positive, such as strength, recovery and [they are seen as someone] who [is] 'over' the rape" (328). Stacy L. Young and Katheryn C. Maguire express a similar understanding of the terms when they observe that "the term survivor seems more akin to someone who lived through the aftermath, rather than someone who just made it through the attack" (49). Read together, these scholars indicate that the opposing connotations of the terms and their relation to the victim as 'still affected by rape' or 'over the rape' position victimhood and survivorhood as discrete, oppositional ends of a unidirectional, linear trajectory that makes up the victim's journey.

Unsurprisingly, this neat and linear interpretation of the victim–survivor relationship is not without criticism. In fact, other scholars believe that it is an essentialist view that fails to understand the nuance of "how victims survive" (Jordan 48). Jan Jordan stresses this point in his study of victims of New Zealand's infamous serial rapist, Malcolm Rewa. Jordan reports some victims as testifying that, while physically in a position of powerlessness and vulnerability, their best defence was psychological as they felt that they were able to limit their attacker's control by dissociating from the event (50). The reader may observe similar occurrences in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*. In *Beholder,* Angel dissociates by "shut[ting] her mind down" (Orford 222) during webcam sessions in which she is forced to provide sexual performances for anonymous viewers. In *Freshwater*, Ada dissociates during her assault by separating herself-as-spirit from her body and hiding in the marble room of her mind. Jordan's report reveals that Rewa's victims engage in what Barry might call "will, action [and] initiative," insofar as they are able to by "mak[ing] moment-by-moment decisions about their survival" (7). For Jordan, this illustrates that sexual violence victims experience victimisation and engage in survival simultaneously, inhabiting both identities during their assault.

More than occurring simultaneously, Jordan's study also shows that the movement between 'victim' and 'survivor' identities can be multidirectional. According to Jordan's report, Rewa's victims expressed that there were certain circumstances, such as having to testify in court, which had the effect of transferring them back to the moment of their violation and to the feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability associated with it, even though they had thought themselves to be 'over' the rape (Jordan 51–52). Again, the reader may observe that the protagonists in *Beholder* and *Freshwater* undergo experiences much like that articulated by Rewa's victims. In *Beholder*, for instance, Angel feels her mind begin to dissociate when she sees Cora's provocative painting, 'THE GIRL', in Fournier's cabin because it reminds her of the extended sexual assault she lived through as a child. Similarly, in *Freshwater,* Ada continues to spiritually dissociate whenever she is about to engage in sexual intercourse because the act of intercourse is reminiscent of her assault. For Jordan, Rewa's victims show that sexual violence victims ebb and flow between identities of 'victim' and 'survivor' long after their traumatic experience. For this reason, he concludes that victimisation and survival can occur concurrently *and* that victims of sexual abuse can oscillate between categories during and following their violation. Based on this interpretation, the victim-survivor relationship is complex and the journey between identities is multidirectional rather than being a neat, linear progression from 'victim' to 'survivor'.

Indeed, as is illustrated above, the concurrent existence and oscillation between 'victim' and 'survivor' is what the reader witnesses at play within the victims-survivors in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*. This is significant because the victim's oscillation between these identities means that their journey to reclaiming the 'self' is, admittedly, without a definite end as there is no point at which the victim *is* a 'survivor' in an absolute or teleological sense. Instead, the victim undergoes periods of self-reclamation when, during their complex journey, they move from the identity of 'victim' to that of 'survivor'. Consequently, the more important questions for this thesis, and this chapter's specific concern with the sexual abuse victim's journey of self-reclamation, are: What does transforming from 'victim' to 'survivor' entail? What role does self-objectification play in the journey? Here, Scarry's work, *The Body in Pain*, offers one kind of answer to these questions through her articulation of the relationship between artist and artifact in the remaking of an individual following harm.

2.2 Scarry and the Artist–Artifact Model: The Relationship between Artist and Artifact

In *The Body in Pain*, Scarry uses the context of torture to argue that immense pain wrought through violence destroys a person's 'self' by reducing the individual and their entire world to their body. Scarry begins by establishing the 'self' as the extension of sentience or spirit through the body into the external world. She proceeds to claim that the created external world exists as a reflection of the body – and it is the reflection occurring between body and world that shows the progressive expansion of human sentience beyond the limits of the body, thus indicating the existence of the 'self' (39–42). Scarry illustrates her claim using the example of a room. She explains that when one is in a room, the walls are akin to the body's skin and, much like the skin does for the spirit, they act as a boundary of protection between the individual and the outside world. Here, Scarry elucidates the 'self' as an amalgam of body and spirit – a conceptualisation that chimes well with the basic definition of the 'self' developed in Chapter 1.

In the event of torture, Scarry continues, the external world is weaponised against the body in a way that transforms the body into a weapon against the victim's spirit. Returning to the example of the room, the torturer might use the walls of the room as the means to inflict pain upon their victim's body. The walls, then, become the boundary preventing the victim's escape from pain and thus act as the locus of violence rather than safety. Similarly, the body as the sufferer of pain becomes a weapon that the abuser uses against their victim's sentience because, as Steven D Brown puts it, "the body-in-pain knows no other object other than its own agonizing corporeality" (443). The body then becomes the cage entrapping the victim in a state of intense pain, much like the walls of the room trap the victim's body. Thus, the victim's spirit can no longer extend through the body into the external world, confining the victim to their body such that the body itself becomes their entire world. Hence, Scarry asserts that in the context of torture:

> It is the intense pain that destroys a person's self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe to the immediate vicinity of the body or as body swelling to fill the entire universe. (35)

Scarry's findings regarding the objectifying impact of intense pain on the torture victim is not unlike what is experienced by sexual violence victims when they are abused, as was discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

Some scholars take issue with Scarry's argument for framing pain as necessarily aversive. Michael McIntyre, for instance, points out that there are common human activities such as exercise and body modification in which pain is viewed as desirable and, in fact, pleasurable in its outcome. He, however, discounts the pleasurable outcome by alleging that "[i]n many of these practices, pain is not merely endured as a regrettable but necessary side-effect on the road to some valued goal; pain is cultivated as an intrinsic part of the activity" (385). Essentially, McIntyre is asking: What happens when pain is pleasurable and the reduction of one's world through pain is voluntary? Is pain, then, necessarily bad? He is not alone in this line of questioning; Amy Danziger Ross, too, raises this concern, this in reference to consensual masochism, where pain is intrinsic to the pleasure of the sexual practice.

What both scholars fail to recognise is that, in these examples, the voluntary reduction of one's world through pain is not the goal of pursuing the activity. Instead, each activity seeks to further extend the sentience of the individual experiencing the pain: in the case of exercise and body modification, the pain leads to a change in the body that allows the individual access to different social environments. With consensual masochism, the pain seeks to dismantle the self and its world to further one's self-discovery (Ross 231). The pleasurable outcome of each activity is that it extends the sentience of the individual beyond what it had been. In a very Aristotelian sense, without the promise of such a pleasurable outcome, the pain itself would not be pursued. When pain is inflicted for its own purpose on a victim, as Scarry shows happens with torture – and is also the case with sexual violence, as is implied when *Beholder*'s Mr du Preez describes his abusive actions as making Cora into "clay" (Orford 215) – the aim of the pain *is* to reduce the individual to their body, non-consensually, and thereby destroy their world and agency through objectification. Thus, Scarry's framing of pain as necessarily aversive is not unfounded.

In later parts of her book, Scarry suggests that overcoming the destruction of the 'self' that is invoked through intense pain to become a 'survivor' requires that the victim's sentience be re-extended into the world through the body. This, she believes is to be accomplished through the making of artifacts. For Scarry, an artist's making of an artifact has the reciprocal effect of remaking the artist because the artist endeavours to create an artifact to recover a lack that they perceive in themselves. For example, the wounded torture victim might fashion a bandage that acts as a second skin to replace the lack of skin over the wounded area. The creation of the bandage, then, duplicates and recovers the protection of the skin lost through the harm that resulted in the victim's vulnerability to pain. Of importance to Scarry is that what the artist seeks to recover through the artifact is not always a direct body part. Rather, what is sought might be a higher-order attribute, such as feelings of safety and control, which, while seated in the body, are linked to sentience. For this reason, she points out, "we routinely speak of certain artifacts as 'expressing the human *spirit*'" (283).

The effect of the created object on the victim-as-artist is twofold for Scarry: First, it requires the victim's active extension of their sentience past the pain and into the external world for the creative process to even take place through the body. The victim, then, must reject the objectification of the pain inflicted on them by shifting it from its bodily locus to the artifact in an act of self-objectification. In so doing, the victim-as-artist re-inhabits their position as active agent, or 'survivor' in the aftermath of violence. Second, the recovery of the perceived lack works to reduce the pain experienced in the body, which allows the victim's further expansion into the world beyond the created object, resulting in a greater recovery of the ‘self’. Put differently, the relationship between the victim-as-artist and the artifact is one of transformational repair as the created object transforms the victim from someone in a state of disconnecting lack to someone in a state of connecting wholeness. In so doing, the artist–artifact relationship shifts the victim from the identity of ‘victim’ whose world has been unmade by the objectifying harm of their abuser to that of ‘survivor’ whose world is remade as they reclaim their agency, and thus their ‘self’, through self-objectification. Hence, the artist–artifact relation in Scarry’s argument plays a crucial role in a victim’s journey to self-reclamation.

Of significance is that Scarry repeatedly describes the connection between artist and artifact as being between the body as artist and external objects as artifacts. Implicit in this is that the disconnection caused by violence is always between the victim *cum* body and the outside world. But what if the lack is in the connection between the victim’s body and their spirit, as is the case with the sexual violence victims in *Beholder* and *Freshwater* whose concepts of ‘self’ have been disturbed? This is an important question, especially when the starting point of the ‘self’ is the suture between body and spirit, as was established in Chapter 1.

My view is that Scarry’s artist–artifact model and its role in the victim’s self-reclamation remains useful for understanding how self-objectification might enable a victim of sexual violence to become survivor. However, the relationship requires a shift in its application, one in which the spirit becomes the artist and the body itself is the artifact. This is not to imply that the spirit has agency while the body is purely a passive object. Rather, because the body–spirit connection is compromised by sexual violence, the spirit must reach *through* the body towards the body itself to recreate the body, such that a more robust connection between body and spirit is recovered, and the ‘self’ is thus reclaimed. Hence, the spirit becomes the artist working through the body while the body becomes the artifact in this shifted application of Scarry’s artist–artifact model. In the sections that follow, I argue and demonstrate that the application of Scarry’s artist–artifact model – sometimes modified, sometimes unmodified – makes it clear how the protagonists in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*, respectively, reclaim their ‘self’ through self-objectification.

3. Remaking and Reclaiming the ‘Self’ in *Beholder*

In Orford’s *Beholder*, Cora and Angel engage in self-objectification after they are sexually violated. However, as Chapter 2 demonstrated, their respective forms of self-objectification are notably different. Cora externalises her damaged adolescent body by painting it into her artworks, while Angel resorts to body modifications and self-harm. In this section, I argue that, in the course of their respective forms of self-objectification, each protagonist occupies the role of artist with their body forming their artifact. The difference is that while Cora's body-as-artifact is represented artistically in literal artworks, and so fits Scarry's artist–artifact model without modification, Angel's requires the shifted application mentioned in Section 2.2 as it is her physical body that becomes her artifact. Despite this difference, in both cases, the self-objectified body is the means of self-alteration through which each protagonist remakes and mends their body–spirit connection. In so doing, Cora and Angel traverse from 'victim' to 'survivor' and thereby engage in self-reclamation via self-objectification. Thus, as is shown in what follows, Orford offers a positive revision of self-objectification through her novel's protagonists.

Orford shows that Cora, like Scarry, believes that the creative process plays a crucial role in victim recovery through the Perseus and Madusa speech she delivers at an 'Art for Justice' fundraising event in Serbia. During the speech, Cora movingly tells her audience that:

> Art […] is like the legendary mirror that Perseus used so he could look at the Gorgon and survive it. Art – making things – is a way to look at horror and survive. That's what artists do. We make things that can be viewed, when looking at the original would turn us to stone. That original is all around us – the violent get away with things because they are prepared to hurt and kill. […] But art reminds us – and warns them – that some of us do live to tell the tale.
>
> (122)

In this passage, Cora's comparison of art to Perseus' mythical mirror presents art as a means of therapeutic resistance and, more importantly, survival against the objectifying impact of violence, which is ironically represented by the female Gorgon's gaze in the metaphor. In the Greek myth, Perseus' mirror reveals to him what cannot be looked upon by his naked eye. In Cora's metaphor, art too makes visible the unseen – specifically the unseen wounds of victims afflicted by violence. It follows then that, for Cora, art becomes what Barabara Ann Baker calls "an avenue to facilitate the documentation of the [victim's] experience," and thereby, "serves as a voice for what cannot be said in words" (187).

Here, art's ability to voice what cannot be said is significant as studies of victim recovery suggest that, while silence reifies a victim's lack of agency – and so too, their objectification – the act of sharing traumatic experiences does the opposite for victims and is important for healing (Delker, Salton and McLean 247). In light of this, the documenting effect of art becomes both therapeutic and healing as it allows the victim an opportunity to externalise their traumatic experience and thereby effectively connect with others in the outside world. In a Scarry-like sense, then, this passage implores the reader, as much as Cora's audience, to recognise art as a symbol of recovered agency that signals to the world that victims are resisting the objectifying silence of the violence inflicted on them, and are instead "liv[ing] to tell the tale" (Orford 122) through their art. Thus, art and the creative process become a means of therapeutic resistance against objectifying violence and enable victims, as Cora emphatically puts it, to "survive" (122). In this way, through Cora's speech, Orford illustrates that art plays a vital role in victim recovery and survival for the protagonist.

Admittedly, Orford's writing Cora as using the Perseus myth to illustrate the healing effect of art is slightly discomforting because Medusa, the Gorgon, has, in recent decades, come to be viewed by feminist scholars as an icon of female agency regained from the sexually violating 'male gaze'. This is especially discomforting considering that, like the women who have inspired Cora's speech, Medusa is a sexual violence victim whose own objectifying victimisation stems from the 'male gaze'. In the Medusa myth, Susan R. Bowers explains, Medusa is famed for her feminine beauty, which catches the eye of Poseidon, who proceeds to rape her on Athena's shrine (222). As punishment, Athena modifies Medusa's body by changing her hair into snakes and cursing her with a petrifying gaze (222). In the myth, the sexual violence inflicted against Medusa's body has the consequence of physically changing her body from that of a human to that of a monster. In this way, the myth reflects, through Medusa's modified physicality, the disruption of her 'self' as her human subjectivity becomes entrapped in a body that is viewed as sub-human. This is reminiscent of Mr du Preez referring to his sexual objectification of Cora as having "moulded her to be his own creature" (Orford 215). Like Medusa, Cora is seen as sub-human after she is violated. Historically, Medusa's petrifying gaze has been viewed as a warning against feminine beauty. Indeed, John Frecerro writes of the Dantean interpretation of Medusa and her gaze as representing "a sensual fascination and potential entrapment, precluding all further progress" (39) of men who lay eyes on her. Needless to say, such a view is heavily steeped in misogyny.

More recently, feminist scholars such as Hélène Cixous (1976), Judith Butler (1999), Gillian M.E. Alban (2017), and Alma Ali (2024) have subverted the patriarchal understanding of the myth by interpreting Medusa's petrifying gaze as her chief resource to "revert the [male] gaze apotropaically onto the gazer, redeeming herself from the objectification that often destroys women" (Alban 6). Medusa's gaze then, in turning those who look at her as a sexual object into stone, becomes an icon of regained female agency as she confronts the perpetrators of violence with the objectification of their own gaze. Perseus, however, enacts the greatest form of violence and objectification against Medusa by slaying her and wielding her decapitated head with its terrifying gaze as a weapon against his enemies. Consequently, his myth stands as the ultimate removal of female agency under patriarchal power. Thus, Orford's selection of the Perseus myth is peculiar and ironic in the context in which Cora's speech is given. Despite this, the Perseus metaphor is effective in articulating how art reveals the invisible effects of violence on victims and thereby contributes to their healing. Moreover, through the metaphor, Orford pithily offers the reader insight into the motivations underlying Cora's own creative processes throughout the novel.

Indeed, Cora reflects her belief that art plays a significant role in one's recovery when she self-objectifies by painting her own body into the '*Forbidden Fruit*' series to try and regain elements of herself that had been lost through sexual violence. The '*Forbidden Fruit*' series imaginatively depicts Cora as a child progressively losing her childlike innocence, as her body is positioned increasingly more sensually in each of the sequence of thirteen paintings. That is, Cora self-objectifies by painting her childhood body onto canvas in order for it to be observed as an object. Built into this self-objectification is the idea that these paintings, these representations of her adolescent body, symbolise the externalisation of Cora's damaged inner child, an inner child that is in a state of lack, as they unearth her experience of abuse and sexual objectification at the hands of her art teacher.

What becomes clear is that, through Cora's artistic expression in the '*Forbidden Fruit*' series, "fractured parts of the 'self' are brought to the surface to be observed and evaluated for change" (Baker 184). This is made explicit when Cora recalls telling Freya that, in painting the provocative series of her own body as a child, "she had been trying to retrieve something that had once been part of her that was now broken. Something that had been stolen from her" (Orford 87). Here, Cora is referring to how sexual violence divested her of her childhood innocence, a divesting which marked the fracturing of her 'self'. The externalisation of her damaged childhood body, then, becomes Cora's way of returning to the period of harm to recover both her innocence and her childhood 'self' from her violator. Thus, in line with Scarry's artist-artifact model, Cora's self-objectification, or creative representation of her body in artwork, comes to recreate Cora herself as the artifact; this is how she, as artist, reclaims the lost fragments of her 'self' and thereby moves from 'victim' to 'survivor'.

Worth mentioning here is that Orford underscores Cora's journey of self-reclamation through art with a layer of poetic irony. From the start, art is associated with Cora's sexual objectification, violation, and lost agency because, as indicated, it is her art teacher who first violates her. Moreover, Cora's self-objectification through art shows the disturbance of her 'self' as it makes visible the weakened connection between her body and spirit, as was argued in Chapter 2. That Cora's art is the means of her healing is then the ultimate demonstration of regained agency because the practice that is associated with her harm becomes the practice that she invests in for healing. Thus, Cora's self-objectification through art acts like the gold-dusted glue between the broken pieces of ceramic in *kintsugi*: it shows that she has been harmed and yet is a marker of her survival and transformative repair.

Like Cora, Angel too engages in self-objectification to recreate herself in what becomes her own process of transformative repair. One form of Angel's self-objectification manifests as self-harm through self-cutting. Though distinctly different from Cora's self-objectification through art, Angel and Cora's forms of self-objectification are analogous in their implicit aims, especially when viewed through the lens of Scarry's artist–artifact model. Anna Motz explains that "[f]or self-harmers the scars caused by cutting symbolize their psychic pain to the outside world. Self-harm makes public this private pain and expresses what cannot be spoken or even thought about" (82). Even when the self-harmer chooses to cut areas of their body that are not visible to the world, the act continues to be a way for them to make public their psychic wounds, even if only to themselves. This is largely owed to the externalising power of self-cutting. As Zoi Simopoulou and Amy Chandler posit, the wounds and scars of self-harmers act as a visible "memory, a record or a marking of surviving an experience. The scar, by means of its indelibility, marks the personal experience rendering it valid, real, concrete, seen" (117). In this regard, Angel's self-harm does precisely what Cora claims art does in the Perseus and Medusa speech as it too becomes a way of making visible the invisible wounds that were inflicted upon her. Moreover, as Cora says of art, Angel's "years of healed scars" (Orford 42) reflect her survival. Angel's self-harm, then, becomes a second form of art in *Beholder*, her body becoming equivalent to Cora's canvas.

More than being a means of making visible her internal wounds, Angel's cutting becomes symbolic of control as it prevents her from dissociating by helping her resituate herself in her body. In a study of self-cutting practices pursued by young women, Armando R. Favazza observes that "self-cutting represent[s] the epitome of freedom by which [young women can] reassure themselves that they have mastery over their fate" (232). Angel displays what Favazza observes when she turns to cutting after remembering the first time her stepfather raped her. The reader is told:

> Angel's hands were shaking when she reached into her sleeve and unstrapped the hidden razor blade and unwrapped it with care […]. She pushed up her sleeve until there was enough new skin exposed. The slender scars were beautiful in the dim light – delicate as lace on the inside of her arm. It was a long time since she had done this. She selected the place carefully and pressed down. A perfect bead of blood welled. […] The physical pain relieved the pressure in her head. The crimson inking on her skin calmed her enough to breathe. (Orford 134)

Not only is Angel's cutting replete with artistic fervour, implicit in the description of her scars as "beautiful" lace-like slivers on her skin and of her blood as a "perfect" "crimson inking" (134), but there is also an astute level of artistic control in her self-cutting. It is worth noting that Angel is particularly skilled at cutting or butchering because, at the wolf sanctuary where she works, she frequently dismembers "carcasses with a practised ease that she had learned at the Girl's Progressive Reform Institute" (8) after stabbing her abusive stepfather to death. Consequently, it is no surprise that she displays such artistic control wielding her blade during her self-cutting practice, deliberately selecting the place of wounding with care.

The significance of Angel's control in the above passage is that it is instated in response to a memory of an event in which she was bereft of that control over her body and its boundaries because of her stepfather's objectifying sexual abuse. The practice of self-cutting, then, becomes Angel's way of retrieving the control lost during the rape she remembers, while the actual pain of the incisions free her from the memory by drawing her subjecthood back into her body, restoring her consciousness, and reminding her of her body's boundaries. Essentially, in a shifted application of Scarry's artist–artifact model, Angel, as the artist of her self-cutting practice, recreates her body, which is the artifact, by altering its surface through a blade. In so doing, she recreates a sense of control or mastery over her body and fate while freeing herself from her abuser's objectification. Essentially, as Simopoulou and Chandler observe in their study of self-harm as self-care, Angel's "self-injury [is] an act of agency" (114). In this manner, Angel's self-cutting is symbolic of control and becomes an act of self-reclamation that shifts her from 'victim' to 'survivor'.

Moreover, as with Cora, there is an irony at play in Orford's selection of Angel's form of self-objectification. Angel's objectifying violation, like that of most sexual violence victims, is wrought through the penetration of her body's boundaries by the perpetrator. This penetration ruptures her body–spirit connection, as was argued in Chapter 2. Angel's cutting mirrors that violation as it too is a penetration of her body's boundary. However, rather than rupturing her body–spirit connection by causing her to dissociate in the way that the sexual abuse did in her childhood, self-cutting tethers her spirit to her body or, as she puts it, “return[s] her to her body” (Orford 65). For Angel, as Motz says of self-harmers who have been sexually violated, “[t]he body is used as an object unto which the […] divided self can express [itself], as both aggressor and healer, in service of the final aim of reintegration and creation of a coherent sense of self” (83). In a *kintsugi*-like way, penetration of the body is at once that which has wounded Angel’s ‘self’ and how she learns to survive and, in the process, heal her ‘self’. Thus, like Cora, Angel’s self-objectification becomes a form of transformative repair in her journey of self-reclamation.

To conclude this section, in *Beholder*, Orford, like Scarry, reveals art as playing a crucial role in a victim’s recovery. Orford reflects this view through Angel and Cora’s respective forms of self-objectification as both protagonists occupy the role of artist, and their self-objectified bodies become their artifacts. In Cora’s case, her violated adolescent body is painted onto canvas, fitting Scarry’s artist-artifact model. The act of representing her youthful body in this way is what enables Cora to reclaim the innocence she lost when she was sexually abused by her art teacher as a prepubescent. In Angel’s case, her physical body acts as a canvas for her self-cutting and so requires the shift in Scarry’s artist-artifact model, as was indicated in Section 2.2. Angel’s deliberate penetration of her body’s boundary through cutting becomes the means for her to reclaim control over herself following the violating sexual penetration by her abuser. With both protagonists, the forms of self-objectification employed are linked to their initial experience of sexual violence that mark the disturbance of each protagonist’s ‘self’. Ironically, in a manner reminiscent of *kintsugi*, that same self-objectification transforms into precisely what paves the way for Angel and Cora’s healing and their consequent movement from the identity of ‘victim’ to that of ‘survivor’. Put differently, in *Beholder*, self-objectification not only indicates that the protagonists’ ‘selves’ have been fractured but is also the salve by means of which they are able to remake and thereby reclaim their respective selfhoods. It is in this way that, through her novel’s protagonists, Orford offers a positive revision of self-objectification by articulating it as a necessary process in sexual violence victim’s journey towards reclaiming their ‘self’ through their body and thereby becoming a survivor.

4. Remaking and Reclaiming the ‘Self’ in *Freshwater*

In *Freshwater*, Ada engages in self-objectification in response to objectification. Chapter 3 covered how, after she is sexually assaulted, Ada’s forms of self-objectification evolve from the voluntary retraction of Ada-as-spirit from her own body to the more potent pursuit of gender reassignment surgery. There is, however, a final shift in her self-objectification that is the focus of this section: a shift to self-objectifying through the art of tattooing. Ada's getting tattoos becomes a way for her to transform her understanding of her relationship to the spirit-collective as her tattoos reflect that she is grappling with the destabilisation of her internal spiritual hierarchy and has slowly come to recognise and accept her rightful position at its head. Simultaneously, the state of being tattooed acts as a way of anchoring Ada-as-spirit to her body and the natural world. In this regard, Emezi writes self-objectification as being the platform that allows Ada to reclaim her 'self'. Thus, Emezi too offers a positive revision of self-objectification in *Freshwater*.

The tattooing that Ada undergoes following her gender reassignment surgery is a form of self-objectification because it both replaces her self-cutting and, like self-cutting, renders her body an artifact. Based on the findings of their study of the correlation between self-injury and body modification, which includes tattooing and piercing, Aglaja Stirn and Andreas Hinz state that "[t]he fact that some self-cutters stopped this practice after having undergone BMs [body modifications,] supports the hypothesis that they used [body modifications] as a substitute for their auto-aggressive behaviour" (331). Paulo Daniel Matos, too, speculates that "tattoos and piercings may serve similar roles as cutting and burning" (13). This is indeed the case for Ada, as the spirit-collective informs the reader:

> [T]he Ada started marking her skin in new ways, to remind herself of her past versions, tattooing her arms and wrists and legs. We accepted this because it was a worthy sacrifice; there is little difference between using a blade and this alternative, this ripping through the skin with multiple needles, injecting ink until the flesh swells and leaks and bleeds. She had a thick sleeve of black ink tattooed down her left forearm, where she usually did the blood offerings, and she never cut herself again after that. (Emezi 210)

This passage confirms that, for Ada, getting tattoos is a substitute for cutting as it replaces all the aspects of cutting by similarly violating the integrity of the skin's surface via the "ripping" of "multiple needles", leading to the letting of blood. There is, however, a key difference between the two: cutting is self-inflicted while tattooing is done to one by another. Sheila Jeffreys addresses this issue, claiming that when body modification is actively pursued by the mutilated, it becomes "self-mutilation by proxy" (414) because the pursuit is underscored by the desire to find something that evokes the precisely same experiences and effects as self-harm. This, as the above-quoted passage shows by terming her tattoos a "worthy sacrifice" (Emezi 210), is the motivation for Ada's pursuit of tattoos. Moreover, Ada's choice to tattoo her body is a voluntary submission of her body as a canvas onto which art is inked, making her body an art-piece or artifact. Thus, tattooing becomes Ada's 'self-mutilation by proxy' and constitutes an alternative form of self-objectification that renders her-as-spirit the artist and her body the artifact, which fits the modified version of Scarry's artist–artifact model.

Much like cutting does for the self-harmer, tattooing reimbues Ada with a sense of control and power over her body as the practice re-tethers her-as-spirit to her body owing to the pain it inflicts. When Ada is sexually assaulted, her body-spirit connection is fractured by her experience of objectification. This fracturing leads to the disruption of her internal spiritual hierarchy because Ada-as-spirit loses control over her body, leaving it vulnerable to the whims of Asụghara and the spirit-collective. Ada's loss of control is followed by various forms of self-objectification, the most potent of which are body modifications. In the case of tattooing, however, Stirn and Hinz note that "[p]articipants claimed to experience power during [body modifications] and to require them in order to recover physical sensations of the body" (332). Ada having her body tattooed, too, offers her a sense of power because, like cutting, it is a controlled practice that reminds her of where her body's boundaries lie, where the boundaries of her 'self' lie. Tattooing, then, becomes an act of agency over her body that overcomes the objectification inflicted by her experience of assault. Simultaneously, the pain of "multiple needles, injecting ink until the skin swells" (Emezi 210), in a Scarry-like sense resituates Ada-as-spirit in her body, allowing her to experience the recovery of "the physical sensations of the body" (Strin and Hinz 332) noted by Stirm and Hinz's participants. Thus, self-objectification via tattooing re-tethers Ada-as-spirit to her body, reimbuing her with control and power over it.

The effect of Ada-as-spirit becoming re-tethered to her body by way of tattooing is that the power and control she reclaims over it becomes a reflection of her regaining an awareness of her position at the head of her internal spiritual hierarchy. This is symbolised by the positioning of Ada and the spirit-collective in the image she has tattooed on her left arm, which also reveals her internal plurality to the outside world. Of this tattoo, the reader is gleefully told by the spirit-collective:

> [Ada] even put a portrait of us on the high of her left arm, of herself staring straight out, of us peering over her shoulder with our mouth fastened to the junction of neck and trapezius, a phantom arm wrapping around her, a ring suspended in blankness. All these things she was doing to her skin made her closer to us; it was like an advertisement, a timeline of sections, who she was on the inside being revealed on the outside.
> (Emezi 210)

In the tattoo, Ada is positioned in the foreground of the composition while the spirit collective, in "peering over her shoulder" (210), lingers in the background. Chapter 3 showed that references to being 'in front' in *Freshwater* entail being in control of Ada's body – the phrasing was used by Asụghara to explain the moments that she integrated into Ada's body while Ada-as-spirit was displaced. Ada's curation of a composition that positions her at the front, then, suggests that she is becoming aware that she is the rightful leader of her internal spiritual hierarchy. This version of Ada is a far-cry from the broken Ada the reader first meets in the narrative, who, after she is raped, weakly claims, "I am not even real" (95). Ada's positioning of herself at the head of her internal spiritual hierarchy is further inscribed in the tattoo as the spirit-collective is fastened to the "junction of her neck and trapezius" (210). Here, the composition of the tattoo implies that Ada also understands that the spirit-collective draws sustenance for their existence in the natural realm from her, almost parasitically, and not vice versa. Thus, Ada acknowledges herself as the head of her internal spiritual hierarchy through the tattoo on her left arm that exposes her internal plurality to the world.

Ada's tattoo's composition positioning her at the head of her internal spiritual hierarchy demonstrates she is reclaiming her 'self'. What characterises Ada's 'self', in this thesis, is that it comprises this hierarchy and, furthermore, that Ada-as-spirit heads the hierarchy by virtue of being intimately tethered to her body. The tattoo reflecting Ada as heading the spirit-collective and as the source of their existence suggests that her internal spiritual hierarchy, which was disrupted by sexual violence, is being reorganised and restored. This is especially the case because the tattoo, as the spirit-collective puts it, is the way that "who [Ada is] on the inside [is] being revealed on the outside" (210). Consequently, Ada's recreation of her body through the representational art of tattooing not only establishes the re-tethering of her body–spirit connection, but also illustrates that, in the event, Ada is aware of her rightful place at the head of her internal spiritual hierarchy and that her awareness is reclaiming that hierarchy from its disturbed state. In this fashion, Ada's tattooing, in a shifted application of Scarry's artist–artifact model, is how the recreation of the body by the spirit is a recreation of the 'self'. In this manner, Ada's self-objectification becomes an act of self-reclamation that begins shifting her from the position of 'victim' to that of 'survivor'.

Here, I use the term 'begins' very deliberately as Ada's tattoo also reveals that, while she is in the process of reclaiming her 'self', the process is not entirely achieved through her tattooing. The spirit-collective claims that, in the tattoo, they have a "phantom arm wrapping around her" (210), despite lingering sinisterly in the background. The restraining posture of this phantom arm suggests that, though Ada understands that she heads her internal spiritual hierarchy, she also knows that she is not yet entirely in control of her body or her ‘self’. Indeed, the spirit-collective’s arm, paired with the permanence of the tattoo, indicates that Ada’s relationship to the spirit-collective is perpetual, and so too is her need to balance and maintain her internal spiritual hierarchy as it remains vulnerable to destabilisation in the aftermath of her violation. Hence, in the composition of her tattoo, Ada reveals that she is in the process of reclaiming her ‘self’. In this regard, Ada’s victim–survivor relationship is made complex by the composition of the tattoo because, while Ada is moving from ‘victim’ to ‘survivor’ when she self-objectifies through tattooing, she also simultaneously occupies and oscillates between the ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ identities in that complex and multidirectional process, which is reflective of Jordan’s view of the victim-survivor journey.

Ada’s self-reclamation is only fully achieved when she shares her internal reality with Lẹshi, a priest who sees her for what she is: a plural individual. In a project considering the effectiveness of *Sawubona* healing circles – group sharing therapy circles developed for victims of racial violence to come to terms with their experiences – Evan Auguste et al. draw on Orlando Bishop’s *Global Oneness Project* interview to suggest that “‘[s]eing is a dialogue’ in which individuals can establish the phenomenon of another individual’s personhood” (2). As was established in Chapter 1, personhood can be understood as one ‘self’ recognising the ‘selfhood’ of another. What Auguste et al. mean by their assertion is that the act of being seen by another’s non-violent gaze has the effect of validating the ‘self’. This is not unlike the healing effect of sharing one’s traumatic experiences with others, as observed by Delker, Salton and Mclean (247), because being seen in this way implies that one has successfully expanded through one’s body and that one’s sentience or subjecthood has reconnected with the external world. Lẹshi does this for Ada as he recognises the spirit-collective within her, who then instruct the reader: “Understand this if you understand nothing, it is a powerful thing to be seen” (Emezi 213). It is in seeing Ada’s plurality that Lẹshi can reach into her and “pul[l] the Ada out into the light” (215), helping her to “take her own front” (216), by “mo[ving] out of [the spirit-collective’s shadow] and into her body” (216). In this way, what is revealed by the composition of Ada’s tattoo on the outside of her body comes to reflect the renewal of the spiritual hierarchy within Ada. In so doing, Ada’s ‘self’ is reclaimed as she is both fully tethered to her body and repositioned at the head of her internal spiritual hierarchy through the process of being seen: a process that is initiated when she tattoos the image of her internal plurality on her upper left arm, the tattooing making her internal reality visible to the outside world.

To conclude this section, Ada’s self-objectification by means of tattooing achieves three things in *Freshwater*: First, tattooing, like self-cutting, re-tethers Ada-as-spirit to her body through pain. This renews and strengthens Ada's body–spirit connection, a connection that was tragically disrupted by her rapist. Second, the composition of the tattoo on her upper left arm demonstrates to the reader that Ada is beginning to recover her position at the head of her internal spiritual hierarchy and is thereby beginning to reclaim her 'self'. Unfortunately, however, this process is not clear cut, which is symbolised in the tattoo by the spirit-collective's possessive arm around her body and its parasitic attachment to her jugular. This shows that Ada is simultaneously in the 'victim' and 'survivor' identity when she gets her tattoo. That said, the tattoo on her left arm finally makes visible her internal plurality. It is this visibility that leads to Ada's reclamation of 'self' when she is seen, in all her plural reality, by Lẹshi. Important here is that Ada's self-objectification paves the way for Lẹshi to *see* her. Ergo, Ada's self-objectification not only indicates the fracturing of her 'self', but also allows for her reclamation of her 'self'. In this way, Emezi presents self-objectification as having a dual role in the sexual violence victim's journey between 'victimhood' to 'survivorhood'. In *Freshwater*, they therefore offer a positive revision of self-objectification.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that employing Scarry's artist–artifact relationship is useful in understanding the victim's journey to self-reclamation and survivorhood. However, in the case of Angel and Ada, the artist-artifact model required a shift in its application, in the sense that it is the protagonists' respective spirits that become the artists while their bodies form the artifact. With Cora, however, no shift in Scarry's model was required. As a result of the application of Scarry's artist-artifact model to each protagonist in the novels, what the reader may observe is that the victim's representation or alteration of their body through self-objectification recreates and transforms their 'self'. These representations and alterations achieve this by reimbuing the victim's body with qualities that have been lost through their bodily violation: In *Beholder*, Cora is able access the innocence lost through her experience of sexual violation in her childhood by externally representing her adolescent body through painting. Angel's self-harm, on the other hand, reinvigorates her with a sense of control over her body, redeeming the agency of her body from the hands of her abuser. In *Freshwater*, Ada's self-objectification, which manifests as the externalisation of her internal reality onto the surface of her body via tattooing, contributes to re-establishing her as the head of her internal spiritual hierarchy. In each case, the victim's self-objectification allows the reclaiming of the qualities that were lost when their body was sexually violated. In presenting the process as they do, Orford and Emezi articulate that self-objectification not only marks the ‘self’ as disturbed but that it is also this process that mends the fractured connection between each victim’s body and spirit, leading to the victim’s reclamation of their consciousness and ‘self’. In other words, self-objectification not only shows the open wound of the ‘self’ after the occurrence of sexual violence, but also acts as its healing balm. Hence, there is a duality to self-objectification: in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*, it shifts the sexual violence victim from ‘victim’ to ‘survivor’ during the process of transformative repair. Though the process is not presented as simple or easy, Orford and Emezi articulate self-objectification as a necessary step in a sexual violence victim’s journey to reclaiming their ‘self’ through their body and thereby becoming a survivor. The authors therefore offer a positive revision of self-objectification through their protagonists’ arduous victim–survivor journeys.

Chapter 5

The Extended 'Self': Transitional Objects and the Victim–Survivor Journey in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*

1. Introduction

In Chapter 4, Elaine Scarry's theory of the artist–artifact model introduced objects as playing a vital role in the construction of a person's 'self'. According to Scarry's argument, one's creation of an object reflexively recreates oneself. Proceeding from Scarry's theorisation of the artist–artifact relation, that chapter argued that Orford and Emezi offer a positive revision of self-objectification by articulating the creation of the self-as-object as an essential step in a victim's journey toward reclaiming their 'self' and becoming a survivor.

In this chapter, the focus remains on objects and their association with the survivor's 'self'. Utilising the concept of transitional objects, I argue and illustrate that, in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*, the protagonists' victim–survivor journeys can be traced through the objects they each possess during their experiences of sexual violence, as these objects form part of each protagonist's extended 'self'. Following this argument, the chapter segues into a brief consideration of whether Orford and Emezi present the aftermath of self-reclamation as being as positive as the act of self-reclamation. On this matter, too, the protagonists' respective transitional objects are shown to offer the reader valuable insight – insight which I suggest presents the aftermath of self-reclamation as equivocal.

2. Objects, Transitional Objects, and the Extended 'Self'

There exists between people and objects an undeniably intimate connection. This connection has been observed across domains and disciplines. Of particular interest is the intimacy shared between people and the objects they deem personal, such as clothing, jewellery, and diaries, and the like. Humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan believes this intimacy emerges from the deep-seated need people feel to immortalise their existence. In his words, "[i]t is an essential characteristic of being human that we feel the urge to reify experience, to give those fleeting moments of pleasure and pain narrative outline and visual shape" (462). One way of concretising experience is through verbal storytelling; another is through the creation and ownership of objects. A cursory glance at archaeological records reveals that these two methods are frequently fused when story is turned into artifact through writing or, more symbolically, through artwork. On this point, Belk, a leading researcher on consumer culture, appears to concur with Tuan as he, too, suggests that the everyday, ordinary possessions of people record the story of their existence and become the artifacts of their lives.

Belk's argument is somewhat stronger, however, as he puts forward that in the process of reifying their experience through their personal effects, people come to extend their very concept of 'self' through those objects. For Belk, possessions act as symbolic mirrors of their owner's 'self' (144). Possessions inhabit this role because – to borrow Stephan Orgel's explanation of symbols – they "function as summations and confirmations, they tell us what we already know" (24). Essentially, such objects are how a person records their history and is thereby able to construct a personal narrative that explains the progressive development of their identity. In this regard, the symbolic capacity of personal possessions affirms for their owner the existence of the owner's 'self' in the world, where "to exist," as Georges Poulet puts it, "is to be one's present, one's past and one's recollections" (24). For this reason, Belk posits, scholars such as Eugene Rochberg-Halton and Grant McCracken have suggested that personal effects "are instrumental to the development of the self [… and] to [the] maintenance of [one's] self-concept" (141). Belk's take is that the views of these scholars are corroborated by people's tendency to feel a "diminished sense of self when possessions are unintentionally lost or stolen" (139). In light of this, he asserts that personal effects indubitably form what he terms "the extended self" (140). Objects, then, not only appeal to the human need to reify experience but, in that process, also play an integral role in the development and maintenance of the 'self' by symbolically reflecting and therefore extending their owner's 'self' into the world.

Psychoanalysts similarly consider personal objects to be important to self-development insofar as they are symbolic extensions of the 'self'. It is on the basis of this premise that they aver that objects become a useful means of tracing alterations within a person's 'self'. The most important objects for this purpose are ones that psychoanalysts term 'transitional objects'. Broadly speaking, transitional objects are those objects that people attach to during periods of notable change throughout their lifetime (Levis 21–22). First coined by Donald W. Winnicott, the term 'transitional object' was initially limited in its application to infant–object relations. Specifically, Winnicott describes the transitional object as the first "not-me" (91) possession acquired during infancy. Often, this object takes the form of a security blanket or stuffed toy; it emerges at that pivotal moment when a child starts becoming independent of their primary caregiver (91).

A key characteristic of the transitional object is that one's interactions with it indicate metamorphoses, or transformations, within one's 'self'. In the case of Winnicott's infant, the security blanket is seen by the child to represent the safety and warmth of the caregiver when that caregiver is absent. In this sense, the transitional object first symbolises the infant's 'self' as still merged with the caregiver (Schnur 3). With time, however, the security blanket symbolises the emerging independent 'self' of the child. This is reflected in the way the child's treatment of the transitional object becomes a projection of how the child is treated in their newfound independence. Phyllis Greenacre notes it is not unusual for "[t]he transitional object [to] absor[b] neglect and even abuse as well as the most loving kindness" (146) at the hands of its infant owner. This is especially the case when the infant receives such treatment in their direct environment. In this regard, the transitional object is an extension of the infant's 'self' and so reveals the development of the infant's 'self' and allows it to be traced.

Following Winnicott's first theorisation of the transitional object, scholars such as Christopher Bollas have argued that rather than belonging purely to childhood, the transitional object features throughout a person's life whenever changes within the environment lead to shifts within the 'self'. As an example, Bollas notes that in adulthood, often in moments that transform the 'self', "an individual feels a deep subjective rapport with an object […] and experiences an uncanny fusion with [that] object, an event that re-evokes an ego state that prevailed during early psychic life" (5). Consequently, the individual clings to the object in much the same way that a child clings to their first not-me object.

It would be an oversight not to acknowledge that Bollas curiously refers to this object as a transformational object. Later, however, he acknowledges that the transformational object *is* the same as a transitional object. In his conclusion, he notes that the shift in the name is negligible as it serves only to emphasise that such objects are identified with, and symbolically reflect, transformative processes within the 'self' (13). Ultimately, for Bollas, events occurring in adulthood make it clear that the presence of transitional objects continues beyond childhood. Transitional objects, therefore, remain a useful means of tracing changes within the 'self' at different stages in a person's life cycle.

So far then, the intimate connection between people and their personal objects can be summarised as follows: objects reify and record experience. Part of their ability to do so resides in the fact that they constitute a person's extended 'self' in their symbolic capacity. Consequently, not only do objects record experience but, more importantly, they facilitate and reflect the construction of the 'self' and thereby record the actual 'self'. Owing to this latter ability, the symbolism of objects – specifically, transitional objects – becomes a useful means of tracing shifts within the ‘self’.

Such an understanding of how objects are engaged in recording the ‘self’ offers an important point of comparison between *Beholder* and *Freshwater* as each protagonist has an object that is notably connected to their life-altering experience of sexual violence. These objects constitute transitional objects, and it is through them that the transformation of the protagonists’ selves can be symbolically traced from the point at which the ‘self’ is disturbed by sexual violence to that where the ‘self’ is reclaimed. Based on this premise, in the rest of the chapter, I use this theorisation of such objects to trace and compare the victim–survivor journeys of Angel, Ada, and Cora.

3. Transitional Objects and Sexual Violence in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*

Transitional objects are a prominent feature in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*. The most significant of these transitional objects are the ones that are present when Angel, Ada, and Cora are sexually violated in their respective narratives. As extensions of the ‘self’ of each of the protagonists, these objects symbolically reveal how sexual harm disturbs the ‘self’. More specifically, what happens to the transitional object corresponds, almost directly, to the nature of the disturbance each protagonist’s ‘self’ suffers.

When *Beholder*’s Angel and *Freshwater*’s Ada are placed side-by-side, the first resemblance one might notice is their age: Angel is approaching her twenties and, for most of *Freshwater*’s narrative, Ada is in her late teens and her early twenties. A closer examination reveals further similarities: their first penetrative sexual experience is a violent one. Moreover, associated with that experience is the same object: a teddy bear. In *Beholder*, Angel’s teddy bear – a last gift from her deceased mother – is described as her “companion and only witness” (Orford 131) during her ordeal. In *Freshwater*, Ada’s teddy bear – affectionately named “Hershey” (Emezi 66) – is said to be “stolen” (67) by her abuser.

In associating these characters’ teddy bears with their experience of sexual abuse, both Orford and Emezi masterfully develop the teddy bear into a transitional object that symbolically indicates precisely which elements of Angel and Ada’s ‘selves’ are disturbed by sexual violence. Teddy bears, Olga Nieuwenhuys explains, are commonly viewed as “belong[ing] to the realm of innocence and morality” (415). Deriving a similar understanding of the stuffed toy from Stephen Kline’s work, Matt Briggs asserts that “[b]ecause of this, they have become a standard gift given upon the birth of a child” (512). Briggs’ assertion reminds one of Winnicott’s discussion of the stuffed toy as one of the original kinds of transitional objects that acts as both the first source of security outside the primary caregiver and the first symbol of an independent ‘self’. Given Belk’s thesis that personal objects are the extended ‘self’, the symbolism of the teddy bear presents each of Ada and Angel’s unviolated ‘self’ as retaining some of the innocence and sense of safety or security associated with childhood.

The novels’ juxtapositions of teddy bears and violence, however, implies that these elements of childhood innocence and safety within the ‘self’ of the protagonists are forcibly disturbed when the characters are sexually abused. Ted Hondereich defines violence as the “use of force to effect decisions against the desires of others” (48). Accordingly, all forms of violence oppose both innocence and security in the sense that violence aggressively seeks to remove freedom from the violated. Orford and Emezi’s placement of a teddy bear in the context of their protagonists’ sexual violation, then, alters its symbolic power. The alteration occurs because, instead of representing the innocence and sense of safety of Ada and Angel, the teddy bears come to emphasise and earmark the very disruption of those elements within the characters. In so doing, Angel and Ada’s teddy bears record a significant change within the ‘self’ of each character during their violation. Consequently, the stuffed toys become transitional objects for the protagonists and symbolically expose precisely what parts of the ‘self’ are harmed by sexual violence.

Ada and Angel are not the only two who share similarities. Indeed, in *Beholder,* Cora’s first penetrative sexual experience is also against her will. Moreover, she too has an object that is associated with that experience. Cora’s object is not a teddy bear; rather, it is a “butterfly pendant, an heirloom her mother had given her, when she was twelve” (Orford 128). Notably, Cora’s age and the circumstances surrounding her receiving the butterfly pendant or butterfly necklace – as it is sometimes referred to in the novel – make it a transitional object from the instant it is gifted to her. At twelve, Cora is on the cusp of adolescence. Cornelia P. Porter describes adolescence as “the time when gender (socially ascribed behaviours) becomes entangled with sexual development in many ways” (403). Porter explains that this is especially true for young girls because the changes in their physical appearance, brought on by the advent of puberty, result in a change of their social roles. No longer do pubescent girls enter social spaces as neutral children. Instead, with the onset of adolescence, they become “sexual beings” (403).

The social shift Porter outlines in her theory becomes evident in *Beholder* when Cora is reprimanded by her mother, Eva, for swimming topless with her male childhood friend, Dawid. Eva reproves Cora by standing her in front of a mirror and gazing “at Cora’s brown chest where her nipples had begun to bud" (Orford 55). In this moment, Cora reacts with shame because her mother's action makes her see herself as a sexual being for the first time. Cora's awareness of this pivotal change in her body and, consequently, in her 'self' is immediately reinforced by Eva emphatically stating: "You're not a child anymore" (55). Orford writes this event between Cora and her mother as happening when Cora is twelve, thereby confirming that Cora has entered the transitional period between childhood and adulthood that is engendered by her adolescent sexual development, as is revealed by Eva's stern and disapproving gaze. Eva's decision to give Cora the heirloom at the age of twelve years old is then a rite of passage signalling Cora's transition and, with it, the waning of her childhood qualities. Thus, the butterfly pendant is a transitional object from the moment Cora receives it.

As with Angel and Ada's teddy bears as transitional objects, the symbolism of Cora's butterfly pendant reveals how sexual abuse disturbs her concept of 'self'. While Cora's pendant initially represents her 'self' as one who is changing from girl to woman, Orford suggests through Freya, Cora's daughter, that the necklace is also symbolic of Cora's sense of safety. When Freya is twelve, Cora follows in her mother's footsteps and gives Freya an exact replica of her butterfly pendant. Freya recalls that "Cora had given it to her when she'd gotten her first period [as] a talisman that would protect her" (277). If Cora's intention in giving Freya the butterfly pendant during such a significant life event is to protect her, then the implication is that Cora views her own pendant as a symbol of safety.

Cora's correlation between butterflies and safety is not unusual. In fact, in his study of the butterfly symbol in Western art, Ronald Anthony Gagliardi expounds that the butterfly represents protection because of its metamorphosis involving a cocoon. When a caterpillar is ready to metamorphose, it builds a cocoon, which "is the protective covering that will provide refuge for the changeling" (Gagliardi 100). Once the changeling emerges from the safety of the cocoon, however, its brightly coloured, hypervisible body is vulnerable owing to its "thin wings[,] antennae, [and] powdered colour that [easily] comes off" (Gagliardi 56). This is not unlike Cora's adolescent 'self' who is emerging from the safe invisibility of childhood to the vulnerable visibility of adulthood, where she is seen as a sexual being. In this respect, the butterfly pendant becomes a complex symbol in *Beholder* because it fittingly represents the liminal position of Cora's 'self' as she transitions from childhood to adulthood and further symbolises the duality of that position as being both safe and vulnerable. It is the safety of Cora's 'self' that is effaced when her young, changing body is molested by her art teacher, Mr du Preez.

The effacement of Cora’s safety is powerfully encapsulated by the image of the butterfly pendant being ripped from her neck as she pushes her art teacher to his death to escape the threat that “he would find her wherever she went, because she was his” (215). Mr du Preez is the first person to fully objectify Cora through sexual violence when she is twelve. His violating actions reduce Cora from an autonomous ‘self’ composed of a complex body–spirit connection to a mere *body* at the mercy of his sexual whims – an object that is “his” (215). In rejecting Cora’s selfhood, Mr du Preez essentially turns Cora’s body into a site of violence against her very ‘self’, which fractures her body–spirit connection. In doing so, his molestations remove any semblance of safety that Cora might feel within her body and, consequently, her ‘self’.

Even when Cora escapes Mr du Preez by pushing him into the well, he retains her necklace – her symbol of protection and the extension of her ‘self. The image suggests that, like her snapped pendant, the sense of safety of Cora’s ‘self’ is broken, while her vulnerability is emphasised by the violence of her attacker’s hands. Moreover, much like the pendent is broken and absent, Cora’s sense of safety remains broken, and her vulnerability remains conspicuous to her even when Mr du Preez cannot continue his abuse. Consequently, Cora’s ‘self’ is indelibly disturbed by sexual violence and is, in a sense, interred with her abuser’s body. Thus, what happens to her transitional object in the context of violence symbolically corresponds to, and makes visible, the nature of the disturbance suffered by Cora’s ‘self’ owing to the object being an extension of her ‘self’.

The loss of the transitional object at the hands of the perpetrator is not an experience limited to Cora, because Ada, too, has her teddy bear taken from her by her rapist. Unlike with Cora, however, Ada’s teddy bear is not explicitly ripped from her. Rather, it is surreptitiously stolen. This is an important detail because, though one might hesitate to say so, Ada’s rape can also be described as a surreptitious act on Soren’s part. As Faith Chiazor notes, Ada’s experience of rape is one “she cannot remember” (27). Tasmiyah Oumar corroborates Chiazor’s observation by pointing out that “Ada is doubtful whether this was the ‘the first time’ Soren raped her, or the ‘the fifth’, suggesting a possibility that he could have been repeatedly raping her” (27). Ada’s doubt and haziness is a common trauma response found among sexual assault victims because, as Amy Hardy, Kerry Young, and Emily A. Holmes explain, during traumatic events like rape, “individuals experience peri-traumatic dissociation (i.e., transient changes in sensory-perceptual experience such as confusion and time distortion)” (784). Thus, Ada being initially unaware of her assault suggests Soren’s abuse of her body is – much like his theft of her teddy bear – covert.

Asụghara notes Soren's theft of Ada's transitional object. Asụghara recalls that at the end of the May term, the term Ada is raped, "Soren flew to Denmark, but he took [Ada's] teddy bear, Hershey, with him" (Emezi 66). Later, Asụghara bitterly states that "Ada never got her teddy bear back", and claims that this confirms her accusation that "[Soren] was a thief" (67). One might be tempted to gloss over Asụghara's comments about Soren and Ada's teddy bear, as they appear insignificant and fleeting in the narrative. Indeed, scholars who have written on *Freshwater* so far have not paid much heed to these words. Yet, here, Asụghara presents the reader with an apt analogy for the impact of Soren's violation on Ada's 'self'.

In Asụghara's analogy Hershey stands for Ada and elements of her 'self' as the teddy bear is, symbolically, her extended self. The theft represents Soren's rape because both are non-consensual actions taken against Ada. Collated, the analogy might be read as follows: just as Soren steals the teddy bear, so, too, does his molestation of her body steal from Ada all the parts of her 'self' that the teddy bear symbolises – namely, her childhood innocence and sense of safety. Indeed, Ada's self-objectification confirms the disturbance of these elements within her 'self', as is discussed in the section to follow. For now, however, it is worth noting that Asụghara's analogy demonstrates that, as with Cora, what happens to Ada's transitional object reveals and parallels the nature of the disturbance that her 'self' suffers through sexual violence.

While Cora and Ada lose their transitional objects to their rapists, Angel retains hers after the period of abuse she suffers. Angel also stands out because she is the only one who actively alters her transitional object in a way that visually imitates the violation she endures. In a flashback spurred by Angel looking at her teddy bear, the reader is told that after three years of being constantly violated by her stepfather, Angel fashioned "a weapon from a strip of metal that she had worked loose from the bedsprings" (Orford 222). Angel's intention in creating the weapon, which is as "sharp as a fillet knife" (222), is to kill her stepfather. To conceal the knife, she "insert[s] it into her teddy bear" (222). The precise location: in a "hole between its legs" (223), such that her teddy sat "ramrod straight" (222). Petro Denysko points out that, according to Freud, "the penis […] is symbolically represented by long, up-standing, injurious objects" (92). Angel's knife, being a long, up-standing, injurious object, then, is a phallic symbol. Its status as a phallic symbol is further instated by her inserting the knife between the teddy bear's legs because, as Denysko continues "female genitals find symbolic substitutes in containers with a hole" (92). Given this, one cannot but draw a parallel between the sexual image created by Angel's modification of the teddy bear and her own experience of penetrative rape. That is, Angel's penetration of her transitional object symbolically imitates the violation she endures.

Moreover, penetrating the teddy bear with a knife ultimately changes its symbolic meaning, which serves to reflect how sexual violence has altered Angel's 'self'. Commonly, when brandished with the wrong intentions, knives are harmful. Angel's intention to use the knife for murder makes the knife a symbol of immorality. When the knife is inserted between the teddy bear's legs, it turns the teddy bear into a weapon, which is a function antithetical to the safety usually attributed to the softness of the stuffed toy. This is significant as the very weaponisation of the teddy bear removes it from the realm of innocence mentioned by Nieuwenhuys. In so doing, the penetration of the knife shifts the symbolism of the teddy bear by nullifying its association with childhood innocence and feelings of security. The parallel between Angel's violation and the sexual image provoked by her modification of the teddy bear, paired with the notion that the teddy bear is an extension of Angel's 'self', leads to the inference that it is the innocence and sense of safety in Angel's 'self' that are disturbed by sexual violence. Thus, as with Cora and Ada, what happens to Angel's transitional object in the context of sexual violence both corresponds to and lays bare the nature of the disturbance suffered by her 'self' as a result of that violence.

To conclude this section, the significance of the transitional objects that are present during Cora, Ada, and Angel's respective experiences of sexual abuse cannot be overlooked. First, as extensions of the protagonists, the symbolism underlying the kinds of objects they possess when sexually abused offers the reader much insight regarding the 'self' of each of them before their violation. In Ada and Angel's case, their teddy bears present them each as a 'self' that retains some of the innocence and sense of safety associated with childhood before they are harmed. With Cora, the butterfly pendant gifted to her when she is on the cusp of adolescence reveals a 'self' that, while as yet being physically untouched by sexual violence, feels safe, even as she transitions from girlhood to womanhood.

Second, the symbolism of the transitional objects also lays bare how sexual violence impacts on the protagonists by virtue of what happens to the objects in the context of sexual violence. Cora's necklace is ripped from her neck by her abuser, symbolising how his sexual intrusion on her changing body strips it and, by extension, her 'self' of its safety. Ada's teddy bear is stolen by her rapist, implying that his molestations of her body steal from her the elements of her 'self' that the teddy bear represents. Finally, Angel modifies her teddy bear by pushing a knife into its groin to hide the weapon so that she can use it later against her stepfather. In so doing, she strips the teddy bear of its original symbolism, which leads to the inference that the penetration of her body when she is sexually violated, much like the penetration of the toy, divests her 'self' of the innocence and feelings of safety connected with childhood.

It follows, then, that what happens to the transitional objects in the context of the violence experienced by Cora, Ada, and Angel corresponds to the nature of the disturbance each protagonist's 'self' suffers. The symbolism of the transitional objects thus allows the reader to trace precisely how sexual violence impacts on the 'self' of each of the protagonists, making the objects important features of the narratives of *Beholder* and *Freshwater*.

4. Transitional Objects, Self-Objectification, and Self-Reclamation in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*

The significance of the transitional objects in *Beholder* and *Freshwater* goes beyond symbolically revealing how each protagonist's 'self' is disturbed by sexual violence: these objects also relate to Angel, Ada, and Cora's respective forms of self-objectification *and* their journeys towards self-reclamation through that self-objectification. As the texts progress, what becomes increasingly evident is that the relationship each character has to their transitional object when assaulted manifests in the forms of self-objectification they pursue after the abuse. More importantly, this relationship also manifests in how that self-objectification becomes the means by which they are able to reclaim their 'selfhood'. In a way, the self-objectification reflects and then compensates for what happens to the transitional object in the context of violence; this is part of how the self-objectification assists the protagonists in their journeys of self-reclamation towards survivorhood.

After experiencing sexual violence, Angel and Ada both alter the physical appearance of their respective bodies to distance themselves from what they perceive as *the body* that made them vulnerable to harmful sexualisation. For both characters, these alterations range from the benign changing of hairstyles to more serious instances of self-harm. Mathias Hirsch proposes that self-reconfiguration via self-harming behaviour renders the body a transitional object because, in the course of self-harm, the body replicates the functions of Winnicott's childhood transitional object (79). It is so because the act of self-harming signals that the body is being "experienced as external and not-me" (80). In being experienced as not-me, the body is essentially self-objectified as it is treated as an object that can be distanced from the 'self', thereby spotlighting a disturbance in the 'self'. This is indeed the case for both characters, albeit in different ways.

Angel's aim in self-objectifying is concealment. She seeks to make the femininity of her body inconspicuous so that she will no longer be vulnerable to the threat of sexual violence directed at the feminine body. When the reader meets Angel, years after her ordeal, she is described as follows:

> Hair cropped short as an army recruit's, shadows under her eyes, [a] wiry body, [and] eyes not the pretty hazel – *Tiger's Eyes*, her mother had called them – that Angel had hidden behind the dull brown contacts she ordered off the internet for five dollars a pack. (Orford 26)

Before this physical description, the reader is told that Angel had also starved herself with the intent of diminishing the appearance of her breasts (11). Francisco A. Marcos-Marín notes that historically, ideal feminine features have included "long […] soft hair", "clear eyes", and "beautiful breasts, firm […] and round" (27). Angel's short hair, her concealment of the colour of her eyes behind contact lenses, and her attempted diminishment of her breasts through starvation, then, are all modifications that distance her body from traits conventionally associated with the feminine.

Angel's suppression of her feminine traits is not surprising. Louise H. du Toit explains that rape reduces women and their bodies "to the anonymous feminine" (97): victims often attempt to escape the vulnerability they perceive to be associated with their femininity by reducing or ridding themselves of those bodily features they deem feminine. This rejection of the body's femininity becomes a rejection of the body itself, which relegates the body to the status of 'not-me' for the female victim. Thus, Angel's self-objectifying behaviour, which includes body modification and self-harm via starvation, is an attempt to evade the vulnerability of her feminine body by concealing its femininity. In effecting this, Angel renders her body 'not-me' thereby transforming her body into Hirsch's transitional object.

The significance of Angel rendering her body a transitional object in this way is that the concealment of her femininity through her modification thereof imitates her modification of the teddy bear's body to conceal the knife, leading to a recognisable mirroring in the treatment of her old and her new transitional objects. To elucidate how the two processes parallel each other, another dimension of the symbolism of Angel's penetration of the teddy bear with a knife requires understanding. The knife, in being a phallic symbol, embodies the threat of feminine vulnerability as it is the phallus that renders the rape victim "the anonymous feminine" (du Toit 97). By hiding the knife in the teddy bear, Angel symbolically conceals that threat. The modification of the teddy bear's body hides the threat to feminine vulnerability; in the same way, Angel's body modifications disguise the threat of feminine vulnerability inherent in her body's feminine features. In this way, what happens to her original transitional object, and her relationship to what happens to it, manifest in Angel's forms of self-objectification.

As with Angel, Ada's relationship to her transitional object manifests in the forms of self-objectification she pursues. Moreover, like Angel, initially, Ada's self-objectification turns her body into a transitional object as it signals her body as 'not-me'. At the end of the May term, Ada flies to Georgia, where, in a hair salon, she requests that her "long […], thick […], straight hair" (Emezi 66), be cut off and "for her eyebrows to be waxed" (67). Following these cosmetic changes which, as with Angel, begin suppressing the features of Ada's violated body, a pleased Asụghara states: "[Ada] walked out of the salon, looking more like me" (67). Ada's haircut and eyebrow wax are revealed in Asụghara's appreciation to be the first instance of Ada physically distancing herself from her abused body – and, so, are an instance of self-objectification. In its being made to look more like Asụghara – the *ọgbanje* spirit that individuates from the spirit-collective when Ada is raped – Ada's body is no longer fully hers, which indicates both a loss of authority within her body *and* that her body has become a transitional object. This initial treatment of the body as 'not-me' confirms that Soren's sexual violation of Ada has disturbed her 'self', a complex 'self' characterised by an internal spiritual hierarchy over which she-as-spirit is supposed to have authority by virtue of having the most control over her body.

Ada's diminished authority within her 'self' is further revealed by Asụghara's weaponisation of Ada's body. Rocío Cobo-Piñero points out that Asụghara "determines that the best way to avenge the wrongs done to Ada is, paradoxically, to destroy her" (290). In her effecting precisely this, Cobo-Piñero explains that "Asụghara takes over Ada's body, as she hunts, seduces, and has casual sex with men" (290). In her hunting, Asụghara treats Ada's body just as the spirit-collective claims it is meant to be treated: "[as] nothing more than a weapon" (Emezi 43). Specifically, she uses Ada's body as a sexual device to harm all the men she encounters to indirectly 'even the score' against Soren for sexually abusing Ada. While Asụghara's intentions in wielding Ada's body in this way are not altogether malicious, her methods are nothing short of destructive to Ada as they often leave Ada's body "in bruises" (141). Asụghara does not care though, because she reasons that the body "wasn't [her] body" (76). Yet, as she is part of Ada's complex 'self', Asụghara's weaponising actions are a form of self-objectification that reaffirms Ada's body is being treated as 'not me'. When Ada desperately asks why she does not spare these men, Asụghara retorts: "Were *we* not innocent enough to be spared?! […] No? Okay then, so tell me *why I should spare them*?" (145). Asụghara's question confirms that Soren's molestation has removed Ada's innocence.

Moreover, Asụghara’s harmful use of Ada’s body for her own carnal desires – often against Ada-as-spirit’s will – further distances Ada’s ‘self’ from her childhood innocence, while also revealing that Ada has an increasingly diminished sense of authority over her body and, so, her ‘self’.

More than merely diminished, Ada’s authority over her ‘self’ is lost in a way that replicates the loss of her possession of her teddy bear when she self-objectifies through breast reduction surgery. The spirit-collective informs the reader that Ada undergoes top-surgery so that, within her body, they could “feel reverted to a time when [they] weren’t capable of biological things, when [they] were neutral like [they] should have been” (190). With the “carving up [of] her chest” (210), the spirit-collective essentially seeks to return Ada’s body to pre-pubescence. Like Asụghara, the rest of the spirit-collective is part of Ada’s complex ‘self’, making the surgery an extreme form of self-objectification that treats Ada’s body as an entirely malleable object. Ultimately, Ada’s breast reduction achieves the spirit-collective’s end because, as in Angel’s case, this self-objectification suppresses Ada’s sexuality by removing her body’s prominent feminine attributes. With Ada’s body being carved in this way, the spirit-collective further renders it ‘not-me’ to Ada-as-spirit, as her body comes to be “[their] body” (192), rather than hers. In becoming ‘their body’ to possess and use, Ada’s self-objectified body signals that, much like the loss of her teddy bear, she has lost all authority over her body and its internal spiritual hierarchy. Thus, the outcome of Ada’s self-objectification embodies the relationship she shares with her transitional object following her violation.

Much like Angel and Ada, Cora uses self-objectification to distance herself from her vulnerable body, and her method of self-objectification, too, mirrors her relationship to her transitional object after her ordeal. However, unlike the other protagonists, Cora’s way of distancing herself from her vulnerable body is not achieved via physical body alterations. Instead, her self-objectification develops through her artistic practice. Specifically, Cora paints her adolescent body – the body that was violated – in her artworks. About her paintings and their relation to the violence she experienced during her adolescence, Cora reflects that “she had simply buried what happened there, fixing the past in the frames of her paintings. That was how she split off the things that hurt […] – [she] bur[ied] what she could not bear" (Orford 58).

Cora’s reflection points to her violated adolescent body being one of the things that she cannot bear and, so, she paints to protect herself from it. This is confirmed when, looking at a painting of her adolescent self, Cora acknowledges that she feels “a helpless rage at her body [because] it is her body that draws the [male] gaze” (124). Here, as George Hagman says artists are inclined to do when seeing their body in their work, Cora “recognises it as [her] own (of

[her] own flesh if you will), but it is also other, apart from the self' (171). In this regard, her viewing the act of painting herself as splitting off the parts of her she cannot bear entails that Cora's self-objectifying artistic process is one that distances her from her sexually vulnerable and violated adolescent body and, so, is a practice that treats that body as 'not me'. In this manner, Cora's self-objectification turns her paintings into new transitional objects. Notably, these new transitional objects mirror her original one because, like the broken butterfly pendant, the paintings symbolise Cora's vulnerability, protection, and the fracturing of her 'self'. Thus, as with Angel and Ada, Cora's self-objectification in the aftermath of sexual violence is both her way of distancing herself from her vulnerable body *and* a manifestation of the broken relationship she has with her original transitional object when it is torn from her neck.

Cora's self-objectification through art is, however, not merely a means of distancing herself from her violated body; it is also an attempt to reclaim her violated 'self'. Arthur Robbins notes that, in art therapy, art plays an integral role in a "patient's search for a cohesive self" (5). Art does so because it helps a "patient confront the split off parts of [their] self" (8). In *Beholder*, this is precisely the case with Cora and her art. The explanation Cora puts forward for creating the artworks featuring her adolescent 'self' is that she "was trying to fix something" (Orford 260), to "retrieve something that had once been part of her that was now broken. Something that was stolen from her" (87). Cora's attempt to fix something within herself is symbolised by her artistic choice to paint "[a] necklace with a butterfly around the neck of the girl in each painting" (251).

Cora's artistic restoration of her original transitional object, whole and around her neck in the paintings, presents her adolescent 'self' as mended and protected once more by her own creative hand. Cora's hands stand in stark contrast to those of Mr du Preez. In this respect, Cora rewrites the power dynamic between herself and Mr du Preez, as the retaining of the necklace by her adolescent 'self' in the painting sends the message: "*You did not destroy beauty: that thing in me, in all of us that makes us human*" (122). In sending this message, Cora rejects Mr du Preez' objectification of her body through her own self-objectification, thereby reclaiming her 'self'. This self-reclamation is confirmed when Cora goes to collect her self-portraits from the art dealer and tells him: "I'm taking these home. Her home, me home" (19). Here, Cora's relationship to the paintings of her young 'self' evolves from her seeing them and the figure in the paintings as recognisably part of her 'self', yet *out there*, to seeing the figure as integrated into "me" (19). This line is powerful as it illustrates that Cora has taken possession of her 'self' and has mended what the experience of sexual violence had broken in her. Cora's self-reclamation via her self-objectification is ultimately, and ironically, a fixing of the broken. In this way, Cora's self-objectification compensates for what happens to her 'self' and her transitional object in the context of sexual violence.

Similarly to Cora, Ada reclaims her 'self' through art. Specifically, Ada does so through her final form of self-objectification – tattooing, which replaces her self-cutting and carving. The most prominent of her tattoos is a self-portrait that depicts Ada with the spirit-collective "peering over her shoulder[, their] mouth fastened to her neck" (Emezi 210). The spirit-collective says of Ada's tattooing that it, paired with all her other forms of self-objectification, "made her feel close to [them]; it was like an advertisement, a timeline of sections, who she was on the inside being revealed on the outside" (210). As with Cora's painting, Ada's self-portrait externalises her 'self' in a way that allows her to confront it. Indeed, Ada's self-portrait is the first instance in which she acknowledges both the spirit-collective as part of her 'self' *and* her 'self' as plural, conditions which are invoked by the image of the spirit-collective being "fastened to her neck" (210). Despite the portrait's allusion to vampirism, Ada's active portrayal of her internal reality upon her body indicates that "she is no longer passive host upon which the gods [the spirit-collective] attach themselves" (Ben-Iheancho 26). In placing the portrait of her internality upon her body, Ada essentially stamps her body with a mark indicating that it belongs to her, and her foregrounded position in the tattoo marks her as the centre of her internal plurality. The design and placement of her tattoo signal to the reader that she is reclaiming authority within her 'self' by asserting authority over her body. In this way, Ada's self-objectification through tattooing involves her rejecting her passivity and is a means of self-reclamation.

Importantly, like Cora, Ada's self-reclamation through art compensates for what happens to her transitional object in the context of sexual violence. By referring to Ada's tattooing and self-harming behaviour as "a timeline of sections" (210), the spirit-collective reveals Ada's body to be palimpsest, its transformations through self-harm and tattooing visibly recording the transitions within her 'self'. As a palimpsest, Ada's body becomes a transitional object, a matter that is made clear to the reader through the spirit-collective's gleeful recognition of her self-objectification. Ada's body consequently replaces her teddy bear as her transitional object after her violation, compensating for its loss to Soren. This compensation is fully realised as Ada reclaims her 'self' through her body in the process of self-objectification.

Ada and Cora are not alone in compensating for what happens to the transitional object along their journey to self-reclamation via self-objectification. Angel does the same thing, though not by means of fine art. Like Ada, Angel's self-objectification is a weaponisation of her body. In contrast, however, Angel's weaponisation of her body is her means of self-reclamation, as it offers her a renewed sense of control over her body and its vulnerability. Part of what motivates Angel's body modification, and the concealment of her body's femininity, is that she wants to be "able to explain everything with her fists" (Orford 12). In other words, Angel takes the body that her violator made into a weapon against her 'self' through sexual abuse, and, by modifying that body through self-objectification, redeems it as her *own* weapon to be used against perpetrators of sexual violence. This is made clear because, like Asụghara, Angel claims she is "hunting down" (280) those who harmed her. Except, here, her revenge is limited to a list of the paedophiles who watched her stepfather ravage her body and disturb her 'self', rather than being directed at the general male population.

Sung Hee Kim and Richard H. Smith note that "[r]evenge can invalidate and change the wrongdoer's contemptuous opinion of the victim made evident by the harmful action" (40). Here, Kim and Smith speak to the positive value of revenge. Angel's stepfather's deplorable abuse of her body demonstrates that he viewed her as nothing more than a powerless object to be used for his sexual gratification and for generating an income via webcam work. Angel's weaponising self-objectification, pursued in her desire for revenge against her violators, works to invalidate her stepfather's view of her body by renewing her body with power and her 'self' with agency. As a result, the self-harming behaviour that marked Angel's body as 'not-me' by distancing her from her feminine vulnerability comes to "provide for its rescue" (Hirsch 80). Terming Angel's self-objectification 'self-harm', then, involves a misnomer as the process of self-objectification is an act of self-healing. In this regard, Angel's self-objectification is her means of self-reclamation, while the hunting of the paedophiles complicit in her violation acts as a symbolic reclamation of her violated child 'self' from their preying eyes.

Moreover, Angel's self-reclamation through the weaponising self-objectification of her body reflects what happens to her teddy bear, her extended 'self', while also compensating for that happening. Put differently, just as Angel's alteration of her teddy bear's body changes it into a weapon, so too does Angel's modification of her own body turn her body into a weapon. By choosing to turn her body into a weapon, Angel ultimately endeavours to reclaim her child 'self' from the hands, and eyes, of her violators. To this end, Angel's self-objectification is, so to speak, a means of symbolically transferring the knife from the teddy bear's body to her own body. In this way, her self-objectification enables her self-reclamation from her sexual violators, which makes her a survivor, while the symbolic transferral of the knife that allows for her revenge represents a restoration of her teddy bear's symbolism insofar as it is her child 'self' that she is reclaiming through her vengeful actions. Thus, like with Cora and Ada, the role Angel's self-objectification plays in her self-reclamation journey compensates for what happens to her transitional object in the context of violence.

To conclude this section, the protagonist's transitional objects continue to be significant to their victim–survivor journey. Specifically, Cora, Angel, and Ada's respective forms of self-objectification reflect what happens to their transitional objects in the context of sexual violence they suffer, while simultaneously compensating for the damage suffered by those transitional objects and, by extension, the 'self' of each of the protagonists as a result of that violence. Hence, as extensions of each protagonist's 'self', the transitional objects present during Cora, Angel, and Ada's experiences of sexual violence play an integral role in their self-development from victimhood to survivorship and are a useful means of tracing the entirety of each protagonist's victim–survivor journey in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*.

5. Self-Reclamation: The Aftermath

As Chapter 5 comes to its end and, indeed, the project approaches its close, it would be an oversight not to consider, however briefly, the aftermath of the protagonist's self-reclamation. Here, once more, Angel, Cora, and Ada's transitional objects are connected, at least peripherally, insofar as they play an integral role in the protagonists' journeys toward self-reclamation. Admittedly, determining whether the outcome of self-reclamation is entirely positive or not is difficult. In what follows, I suggest that the aftermath of self-reclamation might be considered ambiguous based on what becomes of Angel, Cora, and Ada by the end of their respective narratives.

As indicated, part of what motivates Angel's alteration of her teddy bear and, later, her own body, is her desire to enact revenge against her abusers. Angel's revenge is integral to her self-reclamation journey because, through retributive vigilante justice, she feels that she is both redeeming her child 'self' and protecting others like her from her violators. The aftermath of this process is a string of potential murder victims because, as the reader discovers, Angel "ha[s] a list of names" (98) of the men she intends to hunt. Essentially, Orford sets Angel up as an emerging serial killer in *Beholder*. In so doing, she leaves her reader in a moral quandary: Should one see Angel's revenge as justified and positive? Or should one view her actions in the same light as those of the men who harmed her and, therefore, negative?

The reader's decision hinges on the form of justice to which they subscribe. Those who advocate retributive forms of justice, which are premised on the principle that "those who commit certain kinds of acts, paradigmatically serious crimes [like rape or murder], morally deserve to suffer a proportionate punishment" (Walen 1), may feel that Angel *is* justified. This view would be warranted by claiming that Angel suffers a kind of 'death' when her 'self' is disturbed by sexual violence. However, one must question whether murder and rape *are* proportionate to each other, and this is a matter that inevitably sparks debate.

Others who advocate systems of restorative justice might argue that "using the suffering of others to satisfy oneself means that wrongdoers are treated as a means only, failing to respect their human worth and dignity" (Van Stokkom 6). In this view, revenge denies the perpetrator's 'self'. This means that Angel's pursuit or revenge involves rejecting the 'selfhood' of her abusers, just as they denied her 'selfhood' through sexual violence. She is therefore not justified because she would become as bad as the criminals she is trying to eradicate. Ultimately, *Beholder* leaves the decision to the reader to contemplate, which results in an ambiguous outcome to Angel's self-reclamation.

The reader experiences a similar ambiguity with Cora's self-reclamation process. Even though Cora engages in self-objectification with the intention of reclaiming her 'self', she questions the effectiveness of her own process. In a text message regarding the position of art in healing during her *Art for Justice* project, Cora states that she is moved by the survivors she works with, by "*[t]heir faith in a process [she] do[es not] believe in any more*" (Orford 120). This casts doubt on whether reclamation is to be found in the creation of art. Cora's doubt is further instated at the novel's end when, in an endeavour to reclaim herself from harm once more by creating an art piece to 'bury' her abusive relationship with Yves Fournier, Cora falls from a ladder and ends up in a hospital bed like "a broken doll" (278). Her attempt to escape her most recent violation through art leaves her trapped, unable to see, in a broken body. For Cora, this is an ultimate loss of her 'self' – she keeps asking Freya: "[w]hat will I be if I can't see" (256). This implies that the outcome of the self-reclamation process is negatively marred for Cora, despite being objectively positive.

Of the three protagonists, the aftermath of Ada's self-reclamation process is the most positive. By the end of *Freshwater*, Ada has accepted her internal plurality and regained authority over her 'self'. This is made evident through Ada's final statement in the novel:

> With each step, I am less afraid. I am the brothersister who remained. I am a village full of faces and a compound full of bones, translucent thousands. Why should I be afraid? I am the source of the spring.
>
> All freshwater comes out of my mouth. (Emezi 226)

Here, the authority invested in Ada's 'I am' statements deeply contrast the almost non-existent Ada first encountered by the reader after she is raped. Indeed, these final statements are almost an exact inverse of her first statements, in which her narrative voice weakly tells the reader, "I don't even have a mouth to tell this story" (93), before concluding, "[i]n many ways, I am not even real" (94). Through the undeniable contrast between the Ada first met and the Ada to whom the reader bids *adieu*, Emezi reveals the outcome of Ada's reclamation process as a positive one. Here, there is little room for ambiguity.

Ultimately, however, when the novels are read together, the variance in the outcomes of the protagonists' journeys reveal that the aftermath of self-reclamation may often be ambiguous. In some respects, it can be positive when the survivor experiences a renewed unification of the 'self', as is the case with Emezi's Ada. However, when that unification leads to the potential for murderous actions, as with Orford's Angel, then the aftermath of self-reclamation may be considered tainted. In this regard, though self-reclamation is itself positive, the outcome of self-reclamation might not be.

6. Conclusion

Chapter 5 has focused on the importance of the transitional objects present during Cora, Angel, Ada's experiences of sexual violence. These transitional objects, symbolic of the each of the characters' extended 'self', have been shown to reveal the areas of the victim's 'self' that are disturbed by this experience. More than this, what happens to the objects in the context of sexual violence is reflected in the forms of self-objectification that each protagonist pursues. Simultaneously, the way in which each protagonist's self-objectification allows for their self-reclamation in their journey toward survivorship compensates for what happens to the transitional object in the context of violence. Thus, the protagonists' respective victim-survivor journeys, and the positive role that self-objectification plays in that journey towards self-reclamation can be traced through Cora, Angel, and Ada's respective transitional objects in *Beholder* and *Freshwater*.

On a final note, in this chapter, I have also considered whether the *aftermath* of self-reclamation is as positive as the act of self-reclamation. To this end, I conclude that while the authors offer a positive revision of self-objectification based on its role in the process of the survivor's self-reclamation, the aftermath of the consequent self-reclamation itself may be ambiguous or equivocal.

Conclusion

As I sit down to conclude this thesis, I cannot help but be overwhelmed by some of the more recent global headlines, headlines which include: "Over 79 million girls and women in sub-Saharan Africa subjected to rape or sexual assault as children" (Vigneault-Dubois and Alhattab), "Accused men confronted with abuse videos in French mass rape trial" (Harding), and "Why Pakistan's female doctors don't feel safe" (Javed). Such headlines foreground the grave reality feminist scholars such as Fredrickson and Roberts, Mulvey, Kelly and others have argued is faced by women globally. This reality is one where women of all ages and socio-political backgrounds continue to deal with the very real threat of sexual abuse directed at their bodies. It is a reality in which women live with an understanding, conscious and unconscious, that the need to survive this threat lurks in every corner and space, regardless of whether it is public or private. Such headlines can be found in the news daily and are constant reminders that we live in a world deeply marred by sexual violence.

Yet at the same time, the very presence of these headlines signals a victory of sorts for women. This is the case because they also reflect that our current cultural and political moment is one in which these issues *are* vocalised and acknowledged in the global public sphere. This contrasts with a history in which violence against women has been brushed aside with impunity due to patriarchal hegemony. This is the material reality that has led to the growing emergence of literary works such as Orford's *Beholder* and Emezi's *Freshwater*, both of which grittily engage with themes of gender-based violence and deviate from their antecedents that have historically ignored the plight of women as victims of sexual violence or, as is the case with Almodóvar's *Talk to Her*, have treated the experience of such victims with disconcerting ambivalence. Considering this, *Beholder* and *Freshwater* might be described as what Edward Said would term "cultural object[s]" (148) which reflect and speak to the socio-political *milieu* in which they are written. Indeed, I have examined them as such in this thesis by investigating the way that Orford and Emezi, through their respective female protagonists, have thematically focused on how sexual violence impacts on the victim's concept of 'self' – and the means by which victims survive that violence.

In this thesis, I have specifically drawn on Western existential phenomenology and African ontology to derive a concept of 'self' that can be applied with sensitivity to both novels as *Beholder* and *Freshwater* belong to distinct genres that extend from different cultural traditions. In examining the parallels between these two schools of thought in Chapter 1, I determined that, at its most basic level, the ‘self’ could be understood as the point of relation between a person’s body and spirit, between their objecthood and subjecthood. Orford’s depiction of the ‘self’ has been shown to align with the concept of ‘self’ developed in Chapter 1. This was revealed by her symbolically extending the motif of the beautiful female murder victim commonly found in mainstream crime fiction to *Beholder*’s protagonists, Cora and Angel. By contrast, in my adopting a magical realist interpretation of *Freshwater*, Emezi’s depiction of the ‘self’ was uncovered as being more relationally complex as Ada’s *ọgbanje* status made her ‘self’ a liminal one composed of an internal spiritual hierarchy headed by Ada-as-spirit. Despite this variance between the concepts of ‘self’ in the texts, one thing remained clear: Orford and Emezi similarly express the relation between their protagonists’ bodies and spirits as being fractured by sexual violence. The authors have been shown to confirm this disturbance within their protagonists’ concepts of ‘self’ by developing the protagonists’ narrative arcs as ones where the characters cope with the violation of their bodily integrity by engaging in self-objectifying behaviours.

It is Orford and Emezi’s controversial articulations of self-objectification that makes their novels particularly striking. Specifically, I have demonstrated that they both inscribe the process with an unorthodox duality. Initially, through the protagonists, self-objectification is presented as confirming that a victim’s concept of ‘self’ has been disturbed by sexual violence – as mentioned above. This reflects the accepted, negative view of self-objectification held by objectification theorists who understand the process to be a tell-tale sign that a sexual violence victim’s ‘self’ has been fundamentally altered by the harm they experienced. The authors then expose a peculiar alternative dimension to self-objectification as Cora, Angel, and Ada’s complex engagements with the process show it to be how victims mend their fractured body–spirit relation. Applying Scarry’s artist–artifact model to the protagonists, I illustrated that Orford and Emezi present this process as allowing a victim’s spirit to reach through their body, to their body, to reestablish and strengthen the connection between these components of the ‘self’. In so doing, self-objectification is demonstrated to facilitate the victim’s self-reclamation and is articulated as an essential part of what it takes for a victim to become a survivor. In this way, the authors challenge their readers to see that self-objectification is not a wholly negative process, but one that has the potential for a positive outcome.

As a student with a background in philosophy, who has read philosophy mediated through the literary mode, such as is found in Sartre’s novels and plays, it has always seemed to me that the potency of literature is to be found in its communicative and revolutionary ability to reveal and *challenge* its readers with alternative truths about the reality from which it emerges. *Beholder* and *Freshwater* are exemplary in this regard as they emerge from a world, and reflect a phenomenological reality, in which women are blighted by sexual violence – and they call on the reader to understand how those women, those victims, survive *through* self-objectification, which then becomes a mode of transformative repair rather than an indicator of victimhood. It is for this reason that my methodology in this thesis has focused to a greater extent on the materiality of the novels, their content. It is by understanding the novels as cultural objects, ones that present socio-political commentary through their content, instead of employing a methodology that focuses predominantly on their formal elements – as is the more conventional approach of literary analysis – that Orford and Emezi's positive revision of self-objectification is laid bare. To my knowledge, this kind of study has not previously been undertaken in the scholarship on either novel.

Of course, this thesis has the potential for extension in the future. In Chapter 3, I briefly touched on how Emezi's *Freshwater* is semi-autobiographical. The parallels are hard to ignore when one reads *Freshwater* in conjunction with Emezi's memoir, *Dear Senthuran: A Black Spirit Memoir* (2021). There is a similar occurrence in relation to Orford. Orford has recently released her own memoir, *Love and Fury: A Memoir* (2024). When read alongside *Beholder*, it becomes evident that what makes the latter so chillingly personal is that the novel's events parallel some of Orford's own life-experiences. By investigating the common threads between the authors' memoirs and the selected texts, and by comparing those findings, a future project could more deftly connect the content of the narratives studied in this thesis with the reality from which they emerge. This would strengthen the overall phenomenological argument presented in this thesis while also adding a rich, meta-textual element to the project.

Finally, what cannot be overlooked is that the outcome of self-reclamation, by means of self-objectification, might not be positive. I briefly considered this at the end of Chapter 5. However, such a discussion warrants further study because some might feel that it is the overall outcome of the self-reclamation journey which ought to determine whether the steps of the process are positive. This is one way that this project might be challenged. For now, however, the findings of this thesis lead me to conclude that, in *Beholder* and *Freshwater* respectively, Orford and Emezi do offer a positive revision of self-objectification. They do so by presenting it as integral to how, after having experienced sexual abuse, a victim grapples with feelings of alienation from their body and comes to reclaim their concept of 'self' in the course of what is often an arduous multi-directional journey towards survivorhood. These literary presentations of survivorhood serve to empathetically enlighten readers to some aspects of the global crisis of sexual violence, while also leaving us with a sense that there is hope for transformative repair in its aftermath.

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