Complicity and Empathy in Kate Grenville's Trilogy in the Light of the Australian Reconciliation Movement

An Analysis of the Novels The Secret River, The Lieutenant and Sarah Thornhill in the Light of the National Apology Towards the Aboriginals
Acknowledgements

I would like to express a word of thanks to prof. dr. Stef Craps for assisting me with this dissertation. He has provided an enormous amount of literary resources and offered detailed feedback. I would also like to thank him for providing me with the sufficient confidence to bring this dissertation to a good end.

I would also like to express a special thanks to my husband who has supported me through this difficult task. It has not been easy for him to have a wife who was always busy on the computer writing some or other part of a dissertation. In times of stress he was the person who kept me motivated, for which I am eternally grateful.
Abstract

This dissertation sets out to explore how Kate Grenville’s trilogy *The Secret River* (2005), *The Lieutenant* (2008) and *Sarah Thornhill* (2011) fits in the reconciliation movement that is presently reigning Australia’s society. More specifically I have researched how Grenville works with complicity and empathy in her novels. In order to provide sufficient background in the matter of Australia’s past, a survey of the events leading to the Australian national apology of 2008 are analysed. Since present generations in Australia have inherited the traumatic memories created by the first white colonizers, the dissertation also treats the concept of postmemory. As having ancestors among the first Australian settlers who unlawfully took up land, Grenville is part of this postmemory landscape. Furthermore this dissertation deals with the residual shame that lingers in the contemporary Australian society and shows that this shame is externalized through historical fiction. Reconciliation in Australia is a work in progress with several organisations watching over its advancement. Important steps in the process of reconciliation are: awareness raising, acknowledgement of past wrongdoings and dealing with the residual responsibility and shame. An outline of the political and cultural acts involved in reconciliation is portrayed with specific attention to literature where the reconciliation movement generated a new genre ‘The Sorry Novel’. Rebecca Weaver-Hightower states this genre “expresses a complicated reaction to apology, to accusation of communal responsibility and to attempts at reparation” (131-132). These novels fit in the recent turn to the perpetrator, of which Grenville’s trilogy is part. Through the creation of an empathetic bond with the perpetrator in *The Secret River* and *The Lieutenant*, I argue that Grenville is able to access the first two steps of reconciliation: awareness raising and acknowledgment. *Sarah Thornhill*, the third novel, deviates from the turn to the perpetrator and focuses on what Michael Rothberg coined as the implicated subject. This novel deals with the final step in reconciliation, baring the shame of a traumatic past and the empathic unsettlement originating in both the protagonist, reader and the author herself. In conclusion, going through the reading and writing process of these novels is exactly the same as going through the different steps leading to reconciliation. For Grenville the creation of the trilogy be can be viewed as an individual apology for past wrongdoings and for the reader, the act of reading can achieve that same goal.

*Key words: Australia, complicity, empathy, empathic unsettlement, implicated subject, Kate Grenville, national apology, reconciliation, Sorry Novel*
List of Tables

Table 1  Non-exhaustive list of national apologies (Dodds)  14
# Table of Contents

**Introduction** ......................................................................................................................... 1

**Part 1 Australia’s Apology and the Reconciliation Process** ................................................. 4

Chapter 1  **A National Apology** ............................................................................................... 5  
  1.1 National Apologies around the world ................................................................................. 5  
  1.2 The Australian National Apology ....................................................................................... 6

Chapter 2  **A Case of Postmemory** ....................................................................................... 11

Chapter 3  **Steps Towards Reconciliation** ............................................................................ 14  
  3.1 Guilt and shame .................................................................................................................. 14  
  3.2 Kate Grenville’s Trilogy and the Sorry Novels ................................................................. 16

Chapter 4  **Australia’s Reconciliation Process** .................................................................... 19  
  4.1 The Reconciliation Process: its politics ........................................................................... 19  
  4.2 Public and Cultural Acts of Reconciliation in Australia ................................................... 23  
  4.2.1 Public Acts and the Visual Arts ..................................................................................... 23  
  4.2.2 Literature....................................................................................................................... 25

**Part 2 Kate Grenville’s Trilogy: Complicity, Empathy and Reconciliation** ......................... 27

Chapter 1  **Complicity in Action** ............................................................................................ 28  
  1.1 The Turn to the Perpetrator and the Implicated Subject .................................................... 28  
  1.2 Complicity and the Implicated Subject in Kate Grenville’s Trilogy .................................... 29  
  1.2.1 The Secret River ............................................................................................................ 30  
  1.2.2 The Lieutenant ............................................................................................................. 35  
  1.2.3 Sarah Thornhill ............................................................................................................ 40

Chapter 2  **The Empathetic Bond** ......................................................................................... 45  
  2.1 The empathetic Bond .......................................................................................................... 45  
  2.2 Creating Empathy in Kate Grenville’s Trilogy .................................................................. 47  
  2.3 Empathic Unsettlement ...................................................................................................... 51

Chapter 3  **The Trilogy: A Mirror of the Reconciliation Process** ......................................... 53

**Conclusion** ............................................................................................................................. 56

**Works Cited** ............................................................................................................................. 59

Word count: 27143
Introduction

Two comments from the ‘Sorry Books’:

[name withheld]“To be Australian is not to deny our history, which has shaped our Nation. To be Australian is to accept what has happened in the past and to learn from past events, in an effort to grow and develop our nation. I am extremely ashamed and sorry for the mistreatment of Aboriginal people and I would not only like to express my shame but also my hope that such events will never again occur.”

[name withheld]“I shouldn’t have to say sorry. I am not personally responsible for these tragedies. It was many years ago. Let’s just get on with our lives and live peacefully together – all as Australians.”

(qtd. in Weaver-Hightower 129-130)

As a post-settler nation Australia is still struggling with its violent settler past. In recent decades Australia has known a rise in reconciliation initiatives supporting the reconciliation movement that is keeping Australia in its grip. It was especially the ‘Bringing Them Home Report’ which brought the traumatic past back to life. A number of public initiatives, such as the Sorry Books, have been founded to give a platform to those who want to reconcile with the past. In these books people are invited to put their signatures underneath the apology stated at the first pages. If one desires, one can also write a personal statement in the Sorry Books, as the quotes above show. Although the government’s policy is aimed at reconciliation, proof of which is the official apology issued in 2008, not every white Australian sees the need to apologize. This ambivalence in dealing with its traumatic past, provides an interesting angle for research in how fiction explores this same ambivalence towards saying sorry. In this dissertation, the trilogy written by Kate Grenville will be analysed in that light. The three books, *The Secret River* (2005), *Sarah Thornhill* (2011), and *The Lieutenant* (2008) will be closely examined in order to answer the question how these books fit in the reconciliation movement. Specific attention will be paid to the analysis of complicity and empathy applied by Kate Grenville.

In order to fully understand the debate concerning reconciliation a study of the events leading up to the national Australian apology and the reconciliation movement must be held. Therefore in a first part, a general discussion of national apologies is portrayed, followed by a survey of the events, national inquiries and official government reports leading to the Australian apology. In a second part, the concept of postmemory is discussed. This term was coined by Marianne Hirsch and deals
with memories transferred from one generation to another. In dealing with a traumatic past, the trauma does not stay in the past but leaves its traces in the present as well. When dealing with Kate Grenville’s trilogy one cannot but tap into this concept to fully analyze the novels. Kate Grenville admitted that the writing of the trilogy was triggered when she was participating in the Corroboree Bridge Walk in Sydney in the year 2000. At that moment she crossed eyes with an Indigenous woman and she realized that both ancestors must have lived in the same period, they might have even met. This realization encouraged her to track down her own settler history and inevitably confronted her with settler violence against Indigenous people. The continuous struggle with the settler past also leads to an investigation of the concepts of guilt and shame. Rebecca Weaver-Hightower who executed research on fiction dealing with the Australian apology states that “Sorry books provide a fascinating window into an important postcolonial cultural moment, one in which a post-settler colony-through texts – examines its own sense of contemporary guilt for past colonial behaviors” (131). It is important to examine what she means when she uses the concept of guilt and why shame might be a more appropriate concept to work with in this dissertation when dealing with present-day Australia. Ruth Leys’s theory will be incredibly helpful in distinguishing guilt and shame and establishing the necessary characteristics.

In the following part the focus shifts towards the reconciliation process in Australia. Firstly the reconciliation movement in Australia is discussed, putting forward reports and inquiries instigated by the government and by public services which show the different steps Australia has undertaken to get closer to reconciliation. Secondly the private initiatives that keep the reconciliation movement alive are portrayed together with the cultural acts commemorating Australia’s traumatic past. In this part films, documentaries and fiction involved with reconciliation and saying sorry are discussed. The preceding parts are all necessary to have a full understanding of the impact of the novels discussed in the second part of this dissertation. A first chapter deals with the author’s choice to write her novels from the perspective of the perpetrator, in this case the white Australian settler. Her choice fits in a general turn towards the perpetrator, a trend on which Richard Crownshaw executed relevant research. When dealing with perpetration, one also needs to mention the concept of complicity. For each novel of Grenville’s trilogy the perpetrator and its complicity in violent acts will be analyzed. Recent studies performed by Michael Rothberg bring some nuances to the clear-cut distinction between perpetrator and victim. Although there is no denying that in each novel, Grenville clearly deals with perpetrators and victims, there are also characters which simultaneously adhere to both categories. Because of these blurred lines, a new concept of implicated subjects was coined by Rothberg, these implicated subjects, are “neither simply perpetrators nor victims, though potentially either or both at other moments, implicated subjects are participants in and beneficiaries of a system that generates dispersed and uneven experiences of trauma and well-being simultaneously”(Rothberg “Trauma Theory”). When stepping away from the
books, the category of implicated subject can be expanded to include the author herself. In trying to understand the books, one cannot overlook the author’s intention and inspiration for writing these books. When participating in the Corroboree Bridge Walk, Grenville is forced to reevaluate her own ancestral past. Her ancestor and early colonizer Solomon Wiseman, took up land in order to settle down and make a living. The taking up of land, can be understood quite literally. The land was stolen from the original population, rendering her ancestor a perpetrator and Grenville the implicated subject since she still feels responsible for her ancestor’s past actions. A second section in the analysis of the novels are the narrative techniques and plot twists used to create on the one hand an empathetic bond and on the other an empathic unsettlement.

By linking the political, historical background of Australia with the analysis of the trilogy, it is possible to discuss how these books deal with complicity and empathy and if they can be read as part of the reconciliation process.
Part 1 Australia’s Apology and the Reconciliation Process
Chapter 1 A National Apology

1.1 National Apologies around the world

Before arriving at a detailed description of the origins of the Australian Apology in order to investigate Kate Grenville’s trilogy, it is necessary to sketch a broader view on national apologies. Australia is not the first and only nation to have apologised for past wrongdoings. As Martha Augoustinos and Amanda Lecouteur put in their research on collective guilt, a “new international morality” has been established in recent decades (236). In what follows the grounds providing the national need of apologizing will be established together with the influence such an apology can have on the nation. It might be helpful to start with a general definition of what a national apology entails in order to further investigate it. Drawing upon Eneko Sanz and his research on national apologies, a national apology is “a phenomenon which can loosely be defined as a collective, political, intra-state apology issued from one group to another through the use of appropriate representation (1)”. Aaron Lazare states that one of the first people to study the national apology was Nicholas Tavuchs. As early as in the nineties this sociologist made the following statement: “... apologies may loom even larger than they have in the past as voluntary and humane means for reconciling personal and collective differences” (qtd. in Lazare 6). According to Damien Short

apologies, and national remembrance initiatives more broadly, are politically important for a number of reasons: the way the past is represented conveys information about present relations; apologies define victims and perpetrators, and demarcate lines of acceptable conduct; and these in turn send signals about future behavior. Through official acts of remembrance, such as apologies, national government can influence the way society remembers the past, which in turn has implications for present and future public policy (296).

In what follows the claims made in this statement will be discussed. Usually precursors leading up to a national apology are reports, truth commissions and trials established by the nations’ governments. These reports, commissions and trials were called for because the society was questioning past wrongdoings. Examples of these dating from the recent decades are the cases of the Japanese Americans who underwent internment in World War II, the Nuremberg Trial, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa dealing with the responsibilities in Apartheid, the very recent polemic and investigations concerning the Abu Ghraib prison and the Human Rights
and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC) dealing with the ‘Stolen Generation’ in Australia. The value of these cases is that they create “a public representation of the collectivity’s moral self-image” (Tavuchs, qtd. in Battistella 116). And from that moral questioning results a moral duty to apologize for past wrongdoings. Tavuchs further states when talking about moral duty that “to apologize is to declare voluntarily that one has no excuse, defence, justification, or explanation for an action (or inaction)” (qtd in Short 297). Danielle Celermajer, who investigated the national apology in Australia, also offers general features of what a national apology should involve. National apologies first of all draw on the collective and step away from the individual perpetrators. Secondly she mentions that collective apologies should be seen as “more sophisticated forms of justice,”(154) and thirdly it needs to be understood that “the paradigmatic apology is an individual act where the words of apology represent an internal state of regret for wrongdoing and are offered as a form of compensation or way of making up for that wrong” (154). Aaron Lazare’s description of apology, which will form a large stepping stone to further research, adds another dimension to the debate mostly because it involves both the offended and the offender. According to him a national apology has “the power to heal humiliations and grudges, remove desire for vengeance, and generate forgiveness on the part of the offended parties. For the offender, they can diminish the fear of retaliation and relieve the guilt and shame that can grip the mind with a persistence and tenacity that are hard to ignore.” (1) What is of great value in Lazare’s description is firstly that he names both parties involved in an apology. Secondly he indicates what the effects can be of such an apology on both sides. It are especially the consequences of a national apology on the offender’s side that will be of great interest in this dissertation. It is the offender’s side that Kate Grenville explores in her trilogy. By analysing the concept of complicity, it will become clear how the novels relate to the national apology.

1.2 The Australian National Apology

Having established in the previous part a definition of what a national apology contains, it is time to focus on the Australian case. In this part of the research, the precursors of the national apology will be discussed, followed by a description of the actual apology and finally the effect of this apology on the Australian society will be touched upon.

In April 1997 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (hereafter mentioned as HREOC) issued ‘The Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families’. A push for a national inquiry into the forcible removal of Indigenous children from their families was already felt in the mid-eighties by Indigenous
individuals and organisations who accused the inhumane work modus of the government. In December 1992 the issue was addressed by the former Prime Minister Paul Keating in his speech at Redfern Park, Sydney where he stated “we took the children from their families” (qtd in Buti introduction). Two years later an Indigenous female by the name of Joy Williams undertook legal action in the Supreme Court of New South Wales addressing the forcible removal. In that same year 1994, The Going Home Conference was organised in Darwin. Its purpose was to unite people, largely form the Northern Territory, who had suffered the forcible removal policy of the government. This gathering led to the installation of the Stolen Generation Litigation Unit within the North Australian Aboriginal Legal Service. It was this organisation (i.e. The Stolen Generation Litigation Unit) which supported the High Court cases of Kruger vs Commonwealth and Bray vs Commonwealth. Both court cases challenged the validity of the ‘Aboriginal Ordinance’ law of 1918 providing the legal grounds for the forcible removal. Both cases had an unsuccessful outcome as the judges ruled that the removal policy was not unconstitutional. A final benchmark in the build-up towards the HREOC report of April 1997 was a project undertaken by the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia (Inc.). They started interviewing people who had been removed from their Indigenous families. When they issued their first report in June 1995 called ‘Telling Our Story’, they had gathered over 600 testimonies. These testimonies were used as evidence in the ‘The Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families’ published in 1997. This report is also known as the ‘Bringing them Home Report’, the name used by the Australian people and also the one I will be using throughout this research. The inquiry leading to the publication of the report was organised in May 1995 by Attorney-General Hon. Michael Lavarch. The inquiry was asked to

- examine the past and continuing effects of separation of individuals, families and communities
- identify what should be done in response, which could entail recommendations to change laws, policies and practices, to re-unite families and otherwise deal with losses caused by separation
- find justification for, and nature of, any compensation for those affected by separation and
- look at current laws, policies and practices affecting the placement and care of Indigenous children. (Daw appendix 1)

The ‘Bringing them Home Report’ contains “a mixture of personal histories, historical documentation, statistical information, a discussion and analysis on reparation, delivery of services for ‘those affected’, Indigenous child welfare and Indigenous juvenile justice” (Buti, introduction to Wilson Report). One of the most important and equally controversial aspect of the report is the assertion that the forcible removal can be considered as genocide. This assertion led to unseen
public and media attention and established society’s focus on the recommendations it made. In general the report recommended “acknowledgement, apology, guarantees against repetition, measures of restitution, measures of rehabilitation and monetary compensation” (Buti, section on reparation). Most important to my research is the conclusion of the report that stated “that all Australian parliaments... negotiate with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission a form of words for official apologies to Indigenous individuals, families and communities and extend those apologies with wide and culturally appropriate publicity” (Augoustinos and LeCouteur 238).

Even before the Bringing Them Home Report critical academic voices had claimed that Australia’s traumatic settler past was being ignored and silenced. Stanner at the end of the sixties called this the “cult of forgetfulness” or even “the Great Australian Silence” (qtd in Short 297). This “Great Australian Silence” was prolonged when in 1998 Prime Minister John Howard refused to publicly apologize on behalf of the state Australia. His argument was that “present generations should not have to accept responsibility for practices of past generations” (Augustinos and LeCouteur 238). This refusal only amplified the split in Australian society between those opposed and those in favour of the apology. In their section in Collective Guilt: International Perspectives which is called On Whether to Apologize to Indigenous Australians: The Denial of White Guilt, Augoustinos and Lecouteur, both professors of Psychology at the University of Adelaide take a closer look at the public debate. Those opposed wanted to stress that the Australian society should live in the present and should not turn backwards but keep an eye on the future. For them, apologizing would be acknowledging individual responsibility and guilt. Those in favour take a completely opposite stand; for them “a national apology [is a ] prerequisite for reconciliation and national unity” (244). The act of apologizing serves “an important social function – such as acknowledging past wrong and expressing sympathy and understanding but not accepting responsibility, blame, or guilt” (247). Saying sorry is just a “humanitarian convention that expresses empathy and concern” (248). They even add that it can function as the “therapeutic metaphor for healing.” (248). In a critical note Augoustinos and Lecouteur mention that they would have concerns about a national apology where guilt would be the central theme. In their opinion, to have a real and lasting effect on society, one must put forward “sympathy and moral outrage” (258) to mobilize political action towards reconciliation.

In the year leading up to the national apology and the re-election of a new government; one can argue that “sympathy and moral outrage” certainly left their mark on the Australian society. One year after the publication of the ‘Bringing Them Home Report’, May 26 1998 was to be known in the future as ‘National Sorry Day’, 26 May 1997 being the date the report was tabled in Federal Parliament in Australia. The establishment of a ‘National Sorry Day’ was also one of the recommendations the ‘Bringing Them Home Report’. The year 2000 was the “highpoint of the reconciliation movement” (Komesaroff xv) a year during which a lot of attention was paid to the
Indigenous matter. First there was Cathy Freeman, of Indigenous origin, taking centre stage in the Sydney Olympics, next the Corroboree 2000 Bridge Walk was organised. This event invited everyone, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to walk together across the Sydney Harbour Bridge as a way to raise awareness for reconciliation. The word Corroboree comes from the Darug Bridge as a way to raise awareness for reconciliation. The word Corroboree comes from the Darug language, an Indigenous group from the Sydney region and signifies “a group of ceremonies, including public performance of songs and dances, covering the whole of social, economic, legal, political, religious and cultural life of the Darug people” (“Corroboree 2000”). This bridge walk was followed by the handing over of the final report of the ‘Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation’ to the Commonwealth Parliament and the Prime Minister. This report which the Australian government called for, laid the foundation for the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act in 1991. After nine years of research the council handed over their final recommendations concerning reconciliation. This was done in an official ceremony during the Corroboree Bridge Walk of 2000.

As a new government was elected in 2007, a favourable position towards a national apology was adopted. Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister at that time, made a commitment to deliver an official public apology to the ‘Stolen Generations’ as early as possible. And then finally on February 13 2008 Kevin Rudd delivered on his promise and issued an official apology which was streamed live throughout the whole nation. Together with the apology Australia also opened up extra budgets to provide funding for family reunion services and the ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation.’ Here it is necessary to treat the apology’s content in depth as understanding what is being apologized for is quite critical in the reconciliation process. When one takes a closer look at what Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologized for, one sees that the emphasis lies on the ‘Stolen Generation’. In a critical analysis of the apology Denise Cuthbert and Marian Quartly argue firstly that the ‘Stolen Generations’ have become symbolic for all wrongdoings committed in the past, but they also argue that due to the focus on the traumas of the innocent children, other pressing Indigenous issues such as land ownership are being side-lined (182, 184). They also explain why the government might have preferred the ‘Stolen Generations’ rather than the problem concerning land rights as being the centre of the apology. According to Cuthbert and Quartly, the suffering of innocent children is the only wrongdoing that would create such a large “public attention and outrage” (185), which would be favourable for electoral purposes. The legislative battle concerning monetary compensation and land rights are not matters of general public interest. When innocence of children is being threatened, society is more prone to take a stance and to not remain indifferent.

When referring back to the term “the Great Australian Silence” (Stanner qtd in Short 297), one can add another critical note concerning the apology of 2008. Although the 'Bringing Them Home

---

1 ‘the Stolen Generations’ are all people considered to be affected by the Australian government’s policy to forcibly remove Indigenous children from their families so that they could be assimilated to Australian culture.
Report’ shows that colonial Australia was accountable for genocide, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd never once mentioned this term in his speech, which could reflect back to the silencing and not completely owning up to the whole truth of the traumatic past. In the words of Tony Barta, “[it] buried a history of genocide” (qtd. in Short 299). It might also be interesting to ponder for a moment on how the apology was received by the Indigenous community since the focus of this research will especially lie on how white Australians deal with the traumatic past. However in order to have a broad view on the matter of the apology, one needs to look at the offended’s side as well. According to Short (298), we can distinguish between the Indigenous communities three ways of dealing with the apology. A first group welcomed the apology without reserves, accepting the acknowledgement of complicity as a sign for eventual forgiveness. A second group also welcomed the apology, but they considered it a very late admittance of acknowledgement, and this group assumed that material compensation (i.e. monetary compensation and land ownership) was logically to follow. A third group held a negative attitude towards it and found it a hollow gesture without sufficient compensation.

Whether the apology and the compensatory measures have managed to reconcile Australia’s inhabitants remains to be seen. The reconciliation process in Australia’s society will be discussed in a later chapter. The provided information concerning the Australian apology is needed to be able to closely read Kate Grenville’s trilogy as a mirror of the public debate concerning the traumatic past and the apology.
Chapter 2 A Case of Postmemory

Since the traumatic past of the Australian nation forms the basis for the national apology, it is necessary to research how the past wrongdoings committed by previous generation can still have their effect on present generations. Marianne Hirsch executed significant research on this matter and coined the term ‘postmemory’. In her own words

“Postmemory” describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present.

Another authority in trauma studies is Dominic Lacapra, in his History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory defines postmemory as follows:

[it is] the acquired memory of those not directly experiencing an event such as the holocaust or slavery, and the intergenerational transmission of trauma refers to the way those not directly living through even may nonetheless experience and manifest its posttraumatic symptoms, something especially prominent in the children or intimates of survivors or at times perpetrators who are possessed of and even by the past and tend to relive what others have lived.

Hirsch also underlines “postmemory’s connection to the past [that] is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (4). This statement is important for this dissertation since it establishes a link between memory and literature and other forms of artistic expression by commenting that “postmemory’s connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation” (4). In this way “postmemorial work strives to reactivate and re-embody more distant social / national and archival / cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression” (111). This aesthetic expression is more than evident in Kate Grenville’s case. It was the personal history of one of her ancestors that enticed her to start writing
Van Daele 12

her historical fiction trilogy. When Grenville comments on her book *Searching for the Secret River* (2006), an account of her extensive study into Australian history and of the several steps in writing *The Secret River* (2005), Grenville says

The whole thing started innocently enough, as a search into some family history. My mother had told me stories about the first of our family to come to Australia - my great-great-grandfather, Solomon Wiseman was a lighterman on the Thames, pinched a load of timber and was transported for the term of his natural life. Within 6 years of arriving here, he'd become a free man and “taken up land” on the banks of the Hawkesbury River. He went on to make buckets of money, built a fine stone house, and was buried – so the story goes – in top hat and tails, with a box of sovereigns at his feet. (Unfortunately for his great-great-granddaughter, the next generation proceeded to lose the lot.) (Grenville, *The Search for the Secret River*)

Grenville’s ancestor Salomon Wiseman took up land as a settler in the freshly annexed colony of Australia and thereby stepped onto the path of the perpetrator. Grenville, a strong advocate of the national apology, proof of which is to be found in her active participation in the Sydney Harbour Bridge Walk, crossed the eyes of an Indigenous woman on that same bridge walk and suddenly realized that both their great grandparents had lived in the same era and that maybe they had even met each other. Grenville comments on this:

It was all interesting enough, but my imagination wasn’t stirred by any of it – until the day of the “Walk for Reconciliation” across the Harbour Bridge in June 2000. This was a gathering of a couple of hundred thousand people to acknowledge the wrongs that had been done to the Aboriginal people in the past - part of a national movement called “Sorry Day”.

Near the end of the walk I met the eye of an Aboriginal woman watching the march, and we exchanged smiles. It was a warm moment.

But that moment opened a door I’d never known was there. As our eyes met, I thought, ‘Her great-great-great-grandfather was here when mine was. They might even have met.’ That led to the next thought: ‘What kind of meeting would it have been? Would they have smiled at each other, the way we just did?’”

I thought that wasn’t very likely, and suddenly that bland phrase in the family story - “he took up land” - started to split open. He didn’t just “take up” land, he actually “took” land, from people who’d been living on it for forty thousand years. What had happened when he did that? (Grenville, *The Search for the Secret River*)

This eye-opening moment, as it were, brought the traumatic past back to life even if Kate had never been involved in the first settler violence and the wrongdoings in the more recent past. To put it in the words of Lacapbra Grenville is “possessed of the past” (108). Grenville acknowledges this:
I’ve always been sceptical when writers spoke about stories “taking them over”, but I’m hereby prepared to eat my words. The Secret River took me over entirely for the five years of its writing – to the point where my children threatened to leave home if they heard the word “history” one more time. Searching for the Secret River, a memoir about the writing of that book, took me over in a more personal way – it brought me face-to-face with myself. (Grenville, The Search for the Secret River)
Chapter 3  
Steps Towards Reconciliation

3.1 Guilt and shame

Apologizing is a way of acknowledging past wrongdoings, implying that the self is in some way complicit in those actions. A recent wave of national apologies goes hand in glove with “shame’s rise to prominence” (Leys 123), which is a relatively recent phenomenon. When browsing through the list of national apologies provided by Graham G. Dodds, candidate in political science at the University of Pennsylvania, one notices a strong growth of the number of national apologies starting from the nineties onwards. In the following table, backing up the statement of the recent wave of national apologies, some of the recent national apologies will be provided. These examples have been selected because of the global attention they received and to show that national apologies are not limited to the Australian nation.

Table 1  Non-exhaustive list of national apologies (Dodds)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 13, 1990</td>
<td>The New East German parliament issues an apology for Nazi crimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 29, 1993</td>
<td>South African President F.W. de Klerk apologises for apartheid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 13, 1993</td>
<td>Russian President Boris Yeltsin apologizes for the internment of 600,000 Japanese POWs in Siberia after World War II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July, 1995</td>
<td>On the 53rd anniversary of the roundup of 13,000 Parisian Jews, French President Jacques Chirac apologizes for the help the Vichy government gave the Nazis in deporting 320,000 French Jews to death camps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November, 1995</td>
<td>Queen Elizabeth II approves legislation which &quot;apologizes unreservedly&quot; to New Zealand Maori for taking their land in 1863.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 A fairly comprehensive list, up until 2003 is provided by Ph.D Graham G. Dodds, adhering University of Pennsylvania. The list can be consulted at the following web address http://www.upenn.edu/pnc/politicalapologies.html
The French Roman Catholic Church apologizes for its role during the Holocaust and its silence during the 1940 Vichy regime.

The Canadian government formally apologizes for its historic mistreatment of indigenous peoples.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair apologizes for the 1972 "Bloody Sunday" massacre of 19 civilians in Northern Ireland.

According to Ruth Leys two reasons why the concept of shame has been revaluated can be pinned down. Firstly “shame is more productive than guilt ... Feelings of shame concern aspects of self-hood that are imagined to be amenable to correction or change” (124). Secondly “shame is a privileged operator not only for various psychological-psychotherapeutic projects but also for diverse kinds of theoretical-interpretative undertakings” (124).

Previously shame and guilt were not distinguished from one another. Ruth Leys, however, in her 2007 book From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After, makes a clear cut distinction between the two concepts. For her the term guilt is associated with negativity from which there is no positive outcome. It refers to one’s actions and implies that these actions and their ramifications are irreversible. Shame on the other hand is the positive counterpart of guilt in that it can be seen “as potentially positive, as potentially healing” (Leys 124). Shame focuses on the self and puts it in question. Sara Ahmed, quoted by Leys, researched the concept of national shame, which is of high importance when dealing with the Australian matter. Sara Ahmed uses the Australian apology as one of her case studies. For her “national shame works as a narrative of reproduction”(108). She further adds that shame can adhere a nation in two ways.

Firstly shame may be ‘brought onto’ the nation by illegitimate others, or asylum seekers. Such others are shaming by proxy; they do not approximate the form of good citizen ... they cannot reproduce the national ideal. Secondly the nation may bring shame ‘on itself’ by its treatment of others, for example it may be exposed as ‘failing’ a multicultural ideal in perpetuating forms of racism. When these actions get transferred to the national subject it becomes shamed by itself. In this instance, the nation may even express shame about its treatment of others whom in the past were read as the origin of shame. (108)

Ahmed continues that “shame requires a witness” (108). This implicates that “an individual may also take on the failure of the nation to live up to an ideal as a mode of identification with the nation” (108). Leys agrees with the identification process and adds that “by identifying with the aggressor, the survivor fantasmically participates in violence directed against others and consequently suffers from self-reproach” (131).
3.2 Kate Grenville’s Trilogy and the Sorry Novels

This ‘trick’ of identification mentioned in the above section is what empathy brings along in literature when it is narrated from the point of view of the perpetrator. The reader is tricked into feeling responsible for another person’s actions or failure to act, even when this reader thinks himself an innocent subject. In each of Grenville’s book treated in this research, i.e. *the Secret River, Sarah Thornhill* and *The Lieutenant*, the reader is invited to read about the lives of the white Australian settler in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. It is interesting to take a look at why Kate chose to write from the perpetrator’s point of view and if she, as an author, is also influenced by the concept of national shame. Firstly it is in the eye-opening moment on the Sydney Harbour Bridge that Kate fully understands the meaning of a settler ‘taking up’ land in Australia. It is claiming what does not belong to you, it is an act of stealing. Since it is one of her ancestors who ‘took on’ land, she as an individual feels responsible for this deviation of the ideal image of a citizen and therefore must feel a sense of shame. Secondly when researching historical data and talking to Indigenous people, Kate is confronted with other violent acts from the past, acts where she as an individual cannot take responsibility since there is no family connection. However because these acts reflect the Australian nation, she - as an individual and being an Australian citizen - is bearing witness to past wrongdoings and she then “may feel shame [then] as an Australian for the failure of Australia to live up to the national ideal” (Ahmed 108). In writing and so giving a fictional account of the wrongdoings and shameful past, Grenville wants to heave over the sense of shame in order to act upon it so that the nation can start striving for an ideal again. This sense of being complicit by shame, goes hand in glove with empathy in order for the reader to assume responsibility because complicity cannot go without being acknowledged. In analysing the trilogy on the subject of complicity and empathy, the shame felt by Grenville and her manner of dealing with this will be interpreted.

Grenville is not alone in undertaking this task. Kate Grenville’s trilogy is part of a genre called ‘the Sorry Novels’. Rebecca Weaver-Hightower provides definition which is according to me partially adequate: “the post-settler colony –through text – examines its own sense of contemporary guilt for past colonial behaviors” (131). She also adds that the ’Sorry Novel’ “expresses a complicated reaction to apology, to accusation of communal responsibility and to attempts at reparation” (Weaver-Hightower 131-132). 3 Addressing my statement that Weaver-Hightower only provides a

---

Van Daele

partially adequate definition, I would argue that she is faulty in using the term guilt. Using Leys’ discussion I would argue that these authors do not explore their sense of guilt but their sense of contemporary shame. Shame implies a positive attitude towards the future and that is what the authors want to achieve, a positive step towards reconciliation.

The authors cannot be held responsible (in spite of them maybe feeling responsible) for the actions of their ancestors, but they are able to own up to the past and transform it into a positive striving to a new national ideal. Michael Rothberg coined the term “implicated subjects”, which is applicable to Kate Grenville and other authors of the ‘Sorry Novels’. According to Rothberg “the category victim - perpetrator is inadequate as there are now people belonging to none of these categories who still feel responsible for past actions.” (Rothberg “On Being a Descendant”). Rothberg draws heavily on Hirsch’s research in postmemory and adds that “the question of responsibility of descendants of perpetrators is controversial” (“On Being a Descendant”). Since the binary category of victim and perpetrator is no longer sustainable in a postmemory landscape, a new category of the “implicated subject” has arisen. According to Rothberg this category includes forms of participation in relation to injustice that are indirect and covers axis of both spatial and temporal distance from traumatic events. In other words, the implicated subject serves as an umbrella concept and incorporates both modes of complicity i.e. how we are implicated in injustices unfolding in the present tense and modes of transgenerational transmission i.e. how we are implicated in past injustices that we could not have lived through as mature, responsible subjects. (“On Being a Descendant”)

By the terms of this definition Kate Grenville can be seen as an implicated subject. She is a descendant of the perpetrators, but the temporal distance of a few centuries make it impossible for her to have lived through the traumatic past. It is this sense of implication and shame that urged Grenville to act upon, to write about and to share with her reading audience.

Timothy Bewes, in his work The Event of Postcolonial Shame, analyses the feeling of shame and how it is linked to form. He devotes a complete chapter to the genre of the novel, which for this research is immensely important. He argues that “shame is not an emotion that is covered up by writing, but a complex that arises precisely with the writing itself” (41). This supports the thesis that Kate Grenville uses the novel to externalize her sense of shame for the injustices towards the Aboriginals in the past. According to Bewes, an author feels the need to write, but is also confronted with the impossibility of doing so innocently, and it is in this contradiction that shame arises. J.M. Coetzee is one of the authors discussed in Bewes’ book. Bewes states that shame in this writer “is the experience of a situation in which the ethical (or aesthetic) obligation to write and the aesthetic (or ethical) impossibility of writing are equally irrefutable” (43). Bewes also makes a link between shame and complicity, a term which is discussed further on in this dissertation. He says that “shame itself is ensnared in complication” (12). Using Rothberg’s term of implicated subjects, authors who
suffer from transgenerational transmission of complicity also suffer from the shame this traumatic past has brought along. Kate Grenville is an implicated subject, since she is a descendant from the first settlers who violently took land from the Indigenous people, although there is an enormous temporal distance between the traumatic past actions and Kate’s life, she still feels ensnared in complicity which manifests in a certain sense of shame. Timothy Bewes elaborates on the shame issue by adding that “shame is understood as compensatory: a kind of ethical bad conscience that is oblivious, ultimately to the degree to which it too has facilitated injustice” (36-37). This thesis would explain why Grenville puts her novels in the past and does not write about the present-day consequences of the traumatic colonization. Critical voices have accused her that by setting the stories in the past she has been denying or transferring the responsibilities for the present-day generation to acknowledge the wrongdoings of the past. However, I will argue in the second part of this dissertation that Kate Grenville does not shy away to comment on the present-day situation, although it needs to be admitted that it is only in the coda of Sarah Thornhill that the reader gets the impression that Grenville is stating her actual message to the present-day society.
Chapter 4  Australia’s Reconciliation Process

Born in the heart,
reconciliation is nurtured by
an appreciation of history and culture,
guided by goodwill and trust,
and ultimately achieved through mutual
respect and understanding.
(Calma and Silento)

4.1 The Reconciliation Process: its politics

The term reconciliation has been mentioned on several occasions in the previous chapters and it is an important aspect of the present-day Australian society. Reconciliation implies a complex challenge for any nation involved. Christine Nicholls attempts to define Australia’s reconciliation process in her own words:

Reconciliation is a policy which intends to bring the nation into contact with the ghosts of its past, restructuring the nation’s sense of itself by returning the grim truth of colonisation to the story of Australia’s being-in-the-world. But it is not surprising that, rather than laying things to rest, these ghosts (and the past is always ghostly here) in fact set a whole range of things into motion: arguments over land, debates over the ‘proper’ history for Australia, the bother about compensation and saying sorry…(75)

Remembering this ghostly past “is a personal and embodied experience” (Gibson qtd. in Kennedy and Radstone 241) and has an influence on the construction of identity of the present-day Australian society. Restoring the traumatic past is an important step in Australia’s attempt to establish a new identity for their citizens, one in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are equals. As Ann Rigney states in her introduction to a special issue of the journal of Memory Studies on the topic of Reconciliation and Remembering: (how) does it work? , having “future peace and stability depends crucially on finding ways of ‘coming to terms’ with past violence” (250). Rigney also perceives a “turn to a more ‘performative’ mnemonics” (252) in which public apologies and symbolic gestures play a central part. She also warns of the impossibility of reconciliation, especially concerning “societies of long colonial inequalities” (253), which is the case in Australia. Rigney also puts forward a term borrowed from Graham Dawson which applies to Australia’s situation:
“reparative remembering” (Rigney 253). This is a very slow process which enables “the opening up of the past to a new future” (Dawson qtd in Rigney 253) by acknowledging the traumatic events.

Reconciliation and the appropriate steps to achieve this can be divided into two parts. On the one hand there is the Australian political side, where the Australian government organises inquiries and issues reports. And the other hand there is the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, supported by the Indigenous people. When the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act was voted in 1991 it led to the organisation of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (further mentioned as CAR). This council’s goals was to stipulate ways to come to some sort of reconciliation. One important factor of this council was its aim to work closely with the Australian government.

as part of the reconciliation process, the Commonwealth will seek an ongoing national commitment from governments at all levels to cooperate and to coordinate with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission as appropriate to address progressively Aboriginal disadvantage and aspirations in relation to land, housing, law and justice, cultural heritage, education, employment, health, infrastructure, economic development and any other relevant matters in the decade leading to the centenary of Federation, 2001. (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation)

The CAR defined eight key issues to the process of reconciliation in its first strategic plan:

- a greater understanding of the importance of land and sea in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies;
- better relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community;
- recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage are a valued part of the Australian heritage;
- a sense for all Australians of a shared ownership of our history;
- a greater awareness of the causes of disadvantage that prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from achieving fair and proper standards in health, housing, employment and education;
- a greater community response to addressing the underlying causes of the unacceptably high levels of custody for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- greater opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to control their destinies;
- agreement on whether the process of reconciliation would be advanced by a document or documents of reconciliation (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation)
After a decade of the CAR executing its task, they have published a report with fifty-nine conclusion. Most important is the acknowledgement that large steps forward have been taken but that there is still a long road ahead for Australia’s nation to reconcile. The CAR also acknowledges that discriminatory measures against Indigenous people still exist and they are aware that, although the largest part of the Australian society agrees with the reconciliation process, there are reservations from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous side as to the effectiveness of this reconciliation process. The final recommendations of the CAR were presented in two documents of reconciliation *The Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation* and the *Roadmap for Reconciliation*. It were these two documents that had been officially handed over to the Australian government in the 2000 Corroboree Bridge Walk in Sydney. Its main issues are firstly a close cooperation between the Australian government and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island community, secondly an acknowledgement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were the first people of Australia and thirdly that the government provides resources for reconciliation and public awareness rising. When the CAR ended its work in 2000, Reconciliation Australia was founded to continue the previous group’s work. Reconciliation Australia is an independent, national, not-for-profit organisation focusing on the ongoing process of reconciliation in Australia. They give training, organise events and workshops in order to establish reconciliation within the whole of the Australian nation.

A political move towards reconciliation started slowly with the 1967 referendum held to remove discriminatory clauses in the Constitution directed against Indigenous people. Ninety percent of the Australian population voted in favour, the result being that for the first time in Australia’s history Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders were also counted as full citizens of the country. From 1997 onwards the Reconciliation process has been accelerated when the ‘Bringing Them Home Report’ was tabled in Parliament. The report made fifty-four recommendations of which the key recommendation was that reparation should be offered to those Indigenous people affected by Australia’s policy of forced child removal. This reparation should address an acknowledgement of responsibility and an apology from all parties involved in the policy of the forcible removal of Indigenous children. Secondly it should state guarantees against repetition and should offer restitution, rehabilitation and monetary compensation. The ‘Bringing Them Home Report’ specified that the content of the apology should be negotiated with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Commission before being released. In December 1997 in a formal response for the government to the ‘Bringing Them Home Report’, the government issued a monetary compensation of 63 million AUS spread over four years and to be divided among those affected by the government’s forcible

---

4 Extra information on the activities, training and teacher kits they provide can be found on the following website http://www.reconciliation.org.au/about/
removal policy. In November 1999 the Senate asked the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee to research the implementation of recommendations displayed in ‘the Bringing Them Home report’. This inquiry was finalised in November 2000 and led to the publication of the report ‘Healing: A Legacy of Generations’ which recommended a decent follow-up of the recommendations made by the first report and emphasised again the need for a formal state apology. The 2008 apology was another huge step into the reconciliation process and it was followed in 2012 by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act.

As for the status of reconciliation today, in the year 2014, Reconciliation Australia’s Annual Review 2012 gives an overview as to where Australia stands. Reconciliation Australia shows that there is a positive evolution in the process of reconciliation. They find proof in the record number of people attending the National Reconciliation Week activities and the rise in signing Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP). RAP enable organisations to develop business plans and state what they can do within their own limits to improve reconciliation. The initiative was started in 2006 and continues to know a great success. The RAP Impact Measurement Report published by Reconciliation Australia shows that there is less prejudice towards the Indigenous people and that the Indigenous people take greater pride in their own cultures. A second report published by Reconciliation Australia is the Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2012, it is ”a biennial national research study that measures the progress of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians” (Auspoll Pty Ltd) In a graph showing the perception of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Auspoll Pty Ltd 6), one observes that two groups of people are aware of their relationship and have given it a considerate amount of thought. They acknowledge the existing prejudices. A partial explanation for the high number of prejudice can be found in the limited direct contact between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous part of society. Their understanding of each other is based on second sources which generally create an unbalanced and sometimes stereotype image. The overall key findings of the three surveys remains the same over the years. Australians believe that the relationship between the two groups is important but they also agree that this relationship in not good. Australians also acknowledge the fact that they would like to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and traditions.

In another graph offered by the Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2012, a closer and more accurate view is shown on the 2012 situation of Reconciliation in Australia (Auspoll Pty Ltd. 18). There still is a large gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people when looking at opportunities provided for both of them. CAR and Reconciliation Australia have managed by way of their activities and their inquiries in how the people perceive their nation, to achieve an enhanced sense of awareness into the unequal treatment of the two population groups. Australia is heading in the right direction but there still is a long way to go the to establish an overall good relationship between the two communities.
4.2 Public and Cultural Acts of Reconciliation in Australia

4.2.1 Public Acts and the Visual Arts

In the chapter on postmemory, I already argued that the traumatic past haunts the Australian population. The national apology of 2008 and the controversy leading up to it certainly increased the public's awareness of this traumatic past and the need for reconciliation. One of the first public acts displaying the Australia’s involvement in a demand for reconciliation and acknowledgement of past wrongdoings was organised in 1967. As previously mentioned, in that year a referendum was held to remove discriminatory clauses in the Constitution directed against Indigenous people. Ninety percent of the Australian population voted in favour, the result being that for the first time in Australia’s history Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders were also counted as full citizens of the country. To make sure people voted in favour, Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitants joined ranks and fought to ensure a good outcome, clearly proving that steps towards reconciliation were set in motion. These public acts of people joining forces form a large part of the public debate and the awareness-raising in Australia and continue to find their way in culture in the form of theatre, film, literature, art, etc.

First some of the public events for awareness-raising will be discussed, followed by the more artistic mediation of reconciliation. Danielle Celermajer in The Apology in Australia: Re-covenanting the National Imagery cites ‘The Sea of Hands’ in October 12, 1997 as being one of the most gripping moments of the Australian acknowledgement of past wrongdoings. This is how she describes and lived the ‘The Sea of Hands’: “several thousand red, yellow, blue, green, black and white, plastic oversized hands. Fingers reaching up to the sky, each signalled the virtual presence of the Australian, woman, child, or man who had sponsored and planted a hand to mark their recognition of violations committed against Indigenous Australians, and specifically the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families” (Celermajer 153). In 1998 followed the official National Sorry Day and the creation of the ‘Sorry Books’. In these books with blank pages, except for the first page which contains an apology, Australian are able to write down their own apology for past wrongdoings or they can just sign their name equally expressing their apology. Each ‘Sorry Book’ contains the following apology:

By signing our name to this book we are recording our regret for the injustice suffered by Indigenous Australians as a result of European settlement; In particular the effect of government policy on the human dignity and spirit of Indigenous Australians
We are recording our desire for reconciliation and for a better future for all our peoples.
By signing this book we are demonstrating a commitment to a united Australia, which values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and provides justice and equity for all.

(Australia)

The ‘Sorry Books’ were an initiative of the group, Australians for Native Title (ANT), which was formed in June 1997 as a reaction to the Australian Government’s refusal to formally apologize for the traumatic past. Approximately 1000 books were distributed throughout Australia, giving each Australian the opportunity to personally apologize to the Aboriginals and thus offering a way out for those dealing with some form of moral responsibility, which is explained by “le devoir de mémoire” (Hirsch 111), where people feel “an individual and social responsibility toward a persistent and traumatic past” (Hirsch 111). Rebecca Weaver Hightower comments on these ‘Sorry Books’ and sees them as an “attempt at apology and expressions of ambivalence provide a fascinating window into an important postcolonial cultural moment ...” (Weaver-Hightower 131).

Next, in 2000, as previously mentioned, the “highpoint” of the reconciliation process, the Corroboree 2000 Bridge Walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge, was organized, in which more than 250,000 people participated. One of the participants was Kate Grenville for whom the Walk was the source of inspiration for the entire trilogy about Australia’s colonial past.

Before discussing some of the literary texts produced in the light of the national apology, I will treat the visual arts and more specifically theatre productions. One that certainly catches the eye is Stolen, directed by Wesley Enoch. Susan Bradley Smith in her article for Australian Playwrights states that “not only had thousands of people signed a ‘sorry book’ after seeing the play in Australia, but 3 people suffered heart attacks” (206). Stolen—the theatrical adaptation of the novel of the same name by Jane Harrison—deals with five Aboriginal children who are forcibly removed from their families to be brought up in a repressive children’s home. There they are trained to work as domestic servants or to perform other menial services. The story follows their journey home after they have been released. This play and novel were conceived to raise awareness for the wrongs done to the Aborigines, and judging by the effect of the play, it has certainly succeeded in doing so.

Pursuing the same goal, I would like to draw attention to another theatrical production, Cloudstreet by Nick Enright and Justin Monjo in which two families living in the same old building in Perth are put into contrast with one another. The Lamb family is large and religious, while the Pickles represent Australia’s working class. Both families, although very different in composition and opinion, suffer from the same ghost that is haunting the house. The spectre is that of a dead Aboriginal girl who was once cruelly abused by her protector, the white woman who ran a home for the stolen Aboriginal children. Films such as Rabbit Proof Fence (Noyce 2002) and Radiance (Perkins

---

5 People interested in reading some of the apologies can browse through the following website http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/collections/exhibitions/sorrybooks/selections.html
1998) also deal with the theme of the ‘Stolen Generations’. Not only fictional films but also documentaries have tapped into the source of the ‘Stolen Generations.’ One that certainly needs to be mentioned is *Land of the Little Kings* (Kootji Raymond 2000). In this documentary Archie Road travels through Australia to find Aboriginal children who were removed by the Australian government and he offers them a platform to give an accurate account of how they experienced this event and what its effect on their lives had been. This documentary lays bare the importance of reconciliation and the government’s promise to budget money for family reunion services.

### 4.2.2 Literature

A fair amount of literary production has been devoted to the ‘Stolen Generations’, Australia’s violent settler past and the need for reconciliation. In some cases this literature also doubled as a re-establishing of the Indigenous identity, especially for authors of mixed origin such as Keri Hulme, Sally Morgan and Kim Scott. As Christine Nicholls puts it in *The Pain of Unbelonging: Alienation and Identity*, “the redemptive sense of belonging expressed in their writing is dis/re-covered exclusively through identification with their indigenous antecedents” (Nicholls xxxix). For white authors the texts they produce lay bare their struggle with the ghostly colonial past. In a way they have composed these novels as another form of apology and hope to advance as such the reconciliation process by owning up to this past. Novels such as David Malouf’s *Remembering Babylon*, Peter Carey’s *Oscar and Lucinda*, Greg Matthew’s *Wisdom of Stones*, Gail Jones’ *Sorry*, and Kate Grenville’s trilogy *The Secret River*, *The Lieutenant* and *Sarah Thornhill* can all be put in the same category of what are called the ‘Sorry Novels’. A common denominator tying these authors together is the choice to write from the viewpoint of the colonizer, the perpetrator. *The Pain of Unbelonging: Alienation and Identity* tries to offer some form of explanation on how to interpret the motivation of the first settlers to commit violent acts and destroy large parts of the original landscape. The settlers underwent a geographical and cultural deracination and entered an unfamiliar world. In reaction to this “existential homelessness” (Nicholls xv), they adopted a destructive relationship with the physical surroundings, and it was this deracination that “drove [the settler’s] genocidal fantasies about the indigenous population” (Nicholls xv). This train of thought was further supported by the Government’s declaration of Australia as a ‘terra nullius,’ stating that “land was legally available and ripe for colonisation and that Indigenous Australians had no legal rights to it” (Weaver-Hightower 130). In an effort to overcome their fear of the unknown, settlers tried to reshape Australia into a copy of their homeland, England. They went as far as importing fauna and flora from the homeland and destroying natural landscapes for the construction of pastures for their cattle. David Malouf makes allusions to this behaviour when he makes Reverend Frazer confess in his field notebook that they made a mistake in trying to reshape
the landscape: “it is habitable already [...] We must rub our eyes and look again, clear our minds of what we are looking for to see what is there” (Nicholls xvi).

As honourable as the author’s intentions might be, Rebecca Weaver-Hightower puts forward a critical note which I would like to share and add some modifications to. In her opinion, these ‘Sorry Novels’ each contain plot elements that deny collective guilt. She argues that because these novels are all set in the colonial past, in “times of exploration, conquest and struggle for White Supremacy” (138), the guilt is safely displaced onto one’s ancestors. For Weaver-Hightower this encourages denial of what happened in the past. I would argue that none of these authors tries to deny the past; on the contrary, they have made efforts to make the readers aware of the past wrongdoings. When discussing the guilt aspect, it seems as if Weaver-Hightower blames the ‘Sorry Novel’ authors for putting the guilt upon their ancestors. However, when taking into account Leys’s theory on guilt and shame, the authors are quite right in putting the guilt onto their ancestors, because it were these violent actions of the ancestors that led to the traumatic past. Hence the protagonists in the novel suffer from guilt. With their narratives, the authors hope to establish a possible healing, a step towards reconciliation. As Leys puts it “shame begins where guilt leaves off because of an impossibility of action” (132). Changing the past is impossible, but these authors, especially Kate Grenville, are committed to changing the future. Grenville’s elaborate research in her own history and extensive background as to why she started writing her novels are all focused to raise awareness amongst her readers to the past wrongdoings and the need for present-day reconciliation.
Part 2 Kate Grenville’s Trilogy: Complicity, Empathy and Reconciliation
Chapter 1  Complicity in Action

1.1  The Turn to the Perpetrator and the Implicated Subject

In talking about ‘the turn to the perpetrator’ it needs to be investigated why in recent decades there has been a shift from victim-centred fiction towards a perpetrator-centred fiction when dealing with historical fiction. Richard Crownshaw coins the concept of “turn to the perpetrator” (75) in fiction and backs this up by analysing the fictional stories generated by Bernhard Schlink The Reader, Jonathan Littell The Kindly Ones, Valerie Martin Property, Edward Jones The Known World, Toni Morrisson A Mercy, and Sherman Alexie Flight, all novels written from the viewpoint of the perpetrator. Generally speaking, the most important past event triggering this turn to the perpetrator’s perspective; is the Holocaust and the greater attention paid to the perpetrator and descendants of the perpetrators in this matter. Richard Crownshaw in his article “Perpetrator Fictions and Transcultural Memory” points out that people should step away from the comfortable position of the victim’s viewpoint. Susanne Radstone states in Crownshaw’s article that “remembering the suffering of others ought not to be separated from the difficult acknowledgement of testimonial witnessing’s darker side” (76). In stating this Radstone acknowledges that one also needs to investigate the turn to the perpetrator in fiction and look at the perpetrator’s side to understand a nation’s traumatic past and to eventually try to reconcile with this past or erase any residual inequalities still existing in present day society. For Crownshaw the perpetrator may be a new figure around which “cultural memory can be conducted and by which transcultural, comparative work might take place – a node around which productive tensions and asymmetries between the remembrances of past events can be generated.” (75)

However there is not always a clear-cut distinction between perpetrator and victim. Primo Levi in his collection of essays The Drowned and the Saved (1986) discussed the term “the grey zone”, a zone in which people can both be victim and perpetrator at the same time. These blurred lines have caught the attention of the academic world as well. Especially Michael Rothberg focused his research on the difficult distinction between perpetrator and victim. These categories, as discussed in a previous chapter, are difficult to maintain and the need for a new category imposed itself. It is Rothberg who coined the term of the implicated subject. Important is that he links the traumatic past with present day society. He recognizes the influence the past has on present day subjects even if that past seems to be very far off. Implicated subjects
are subjects who enable and benefit from traumatic violence without taking part in it directly... The category of implicated subjects emerges in relation to both historical and contemporary scenarios of violence: that is, it describes the indirect responsibility of subjects situated at temporal or geographic distance from the production of social suffering. It helps direct our attention to the conditions of possibility of violence as well as its lingering impact and suggests new routes of opposition (Rothberg “Trauma Theory”)

1.2 Complicity and the Implicated Subject in Kate Grenville’s Trilogy

In this part of the dissertation I will be linking the theory of Crownshaw and Rothberg to the three novels written by Kate Grenville, *The Secret River* (2005), *The Lieutenant* (2008) and, *Sarah Thornhill* (2011). I will investigate how Kate Grenville looks at the perpetrator’s perspective in order to deal with her individual and the nation’s traumatic past. In exploring this perpetrator’s viewpoint, Grenville undertakes to reconcile with the nation’s traumatic past. In each novel the categories of victim and perpetrator will be explored together with the notion of the implicated subject. While analysing the novels one will notice a rising complexity when dealing with these categories. *The Secret River*, Grenville’s first novel already challenges the reader. Although there is no denying that the protagonist William Thornhill is a perpetrator, he is clearly traumatized by the violent act he performed. Grenville continues to explore this in her third novel, *Sarah Thornhill* which is considered to be the sequel to *The Secret River*. The lines between victim and perpetrator only get more blurred when dealing with the other novels in the trilogy. Protagonists have to deal with difficult choices which will influence the future, not only for themselves but also for their family. *The Secret River* is situated at the start of the nineteenth century, the second novel *The Lieutenant* precedes this period and is dated in the late eighteenth century and deals with Daniel Rooke, an astronomer enlisted in the British navy. He is fascinated by the Indigenous people but circumstances lead him to making a choice which will register him as a perpetrator. In the final novel, *Sarah Thornhill*, the reader is taken back to the Thornhill family. William Thornhill is now an established man, still carrying in silence the burden of his own atrocity. The focus here is shifted towards his youngest daughter, Sarah Thornhill. She is an open-minded young lady who does not care for racial differences, but when she falls in love with a half-blood, the past is back to haunt her. She is not involved with complicity herself, but still experiences the consequences of the past, transforming her into an implicated subject. Sarah Thornhill fits Rothberg’s theory perfectly, she “enable[s] and benefit[s] from traumatic violence without taking part in it directly” (Rothberg “Trauma Theory”). Not only does Sara Thornhill fit the bill of the implicated subject, I will also argue that the author herself, Kate Grenville belongs to the category of these implicated subjects. The term of “existential
homelessness” coined by Nicholls (xv) will also be applied to each of the novels as to indicate how motivated the protagonists in participating in complicity.

1.2.1 **The Secret River**

**The Perpetrator’s Perspective**

In *The Secret River* the protagonist is William Thornhill, a British convict who has been offered the deal to serve his sentence in Australia instead of undergoing the death penalty in England. In the book William will be portrayed as victim as well as perpetrator. Grenville deliberately plays with these categories in order to make the reader confused. This confusion will lead the reader to realize that Australia’s past can never be seen as a clear cut case of victims and perpetrators, there is – to use Primo Levi’s term- a complete grey zone situated in between. The most important instances where Thornhill is portrayed as perpetrator and victim will be analysed in the following part. Grenville makes sure that the knot around William’s neck is slowly tightening until there is no way back and he needs to acknowledge that he has been transformed into a perpetrator. I will also argue that Grenville plays with an increasing presence of violence in order to make the reader aware of Australia’s traumatic past. Secondly Grenville increases the impact of the atrocities by making William realise that the Indigenous people are not that different from him. Grenville does not allow William to see the Indigenous people as ‘the other’ against whom it is easy to engage in violence.

William Thornhill is sent to Australia, together with his wife Sal. After having served his time Thornhill gets his pardon and takes up land along the Hawkesbury river where he tries to make a living for himself as a boatman. In the prologue of the novel the author introduces a flash forward which creates unease in the reader. In this flash forward Grenville offers the reader a depiction of the first meeting between William and an Indigenous man. This meeting is perceived as a very threatening situation by both William and the reader. The Indigenous man is described as almost the opposite of the white man, almost as something coming from a man’s imagination. “His skin swallowed the light and made him not quite real, something only imagined” (5). The spear that the black man is carrying with him “was part of him, an extension of the arm” (5). Extra emphasis is put on the spear when its qualities are described: “it would not go through a man neat as a needle. It would rip its way in. Pulling it out would rip all over again” (5-6). It is this haunting image that announces the traumatic experiences still about to happen. After the meeting with the Indigenous man, Thornhill goes back to his hut “but every muscle was tense, anticipating the shock in his neck

---

---

6 All lines cited in this part come from Kate Grenville, *The Secret River*. 2005. Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd, 2001. Print. If this is not the case, the correct author will be cited.
or his belly, his hand going to the place, the cold moment of finding that unforgiving thing in his flesh” (6).

Part one of the novel deals with William’s life in London, it is in this part that Grenville creates an empathetic bond with the perpetrator, which will be discussed in the following chapter. In the second part of the novel the Thornhill family has arrived in Sydney. Sydney is a safe enclosure where no confrontations with Indigenous people are recorded. Grenville does, on several occasions, interrupt this period of stability by short instances where people testify to what the Indigenous savages have done. In doing so she creates unease and transforms the Indigenous people in an always present absence. The Indigenous presence enters the novel by way of warnings uttered by other settlers, “Look out for the poxy savages, matey... They’s partial to a tasty bit of victuals like your boy here” (81). “Tales came back of men speared, their huts robbed, their fields burned” (98). Violence is always present at the background and Grenville moves it to the foreground when Thornhill starts his job as a boatman on the Hawkesbury river. Some important events will envelop William deeper and deeper into complicity. When William meets Smasher Sullivan, another white settler, on his travels along the river, William is directly confronted with the atrocities performed by the white settler. He discovers that as a retaliation for stealing, Smasher hanged one of the Aboriginals and cut off his hands. Grenville does not shy away from using expressive language: “The burden hanging there was not a scarecrow or a hog, but the body of a black man. Puffy flesh bulged around the rope under his armpits, the head lolled” (107). In his decision not to react against it and not to tell it to his wife, Thornhill transforms himself into an accomplice by passivity. If Grenville wants to make the reader aware of the violent past, she owes it to the reader to show the atrocities in all their ugliness.

Once William has taken up his plot of land along the river, the Indigenous presence is increasingly noticeable. From the very beginning William understands that the land does not belong to him, but he tries to rationalise his own act of stealing by stating that “there were no signs that the blacks felt the place belonged to them. They had no fences that said this is mine. No house that said, this is our home. There were no fields or flocks that said, we have put the labour of our hands into this place” (96). Gradually the Indigenous intrusions increase, spears are planted around William’s hut, they start stealing from his crops and even partially burn his crops. The longer he resides on his patch of land, the more he realises that this land never really belonged to him. “It took him some time to admit to himself that his hundred acres no longer felt quite his own.” (204). He notices signs which prove that the Aboriginals have lived there long before he ever existed.

“It came to him that this might look an empty place, but a man who had walked the length of that fish, seen the tiller and sail of the Hope laid down in stone, had to recognise otherwise. This place was no more empty than a parlour in London, from which the master of the house had just stepped into the bedroom. He might not be seen, but he was there” (160).
The more the story continues the more William is confronted with violent acts committed by the white settlers. William does everything in his power not to be involved in complicity, but his own love for his plot of land and his protective feelings for his family push him into committing mass slaughter. Gradually Thornhill learns to appreciate the ways of the Indigenous people. He watches how they live and realises that they have less hardship to deal with and that life for them seems almost effortless. “... they [the Aboriginals] did not seem to have to work to come by the little they needed. They spent time every day filing their dishes and catching the creatures that hung from their belts. But afterwards they seemed to have plenty of time left for sitting by their fires talking and laughing and stroking the chubby limbs of their babies” (237). His son, Dick engages in friendship with the Aboriginal children and when William finds him playing with other Aboriginal children, he understands that these two people are not all that different.

He had seen Dick there on a spit of sand, playing with the native children, all bony legs and skinny arms shiny like insects, running in and out of the water. Dick was stripped off as they were, to nothing but skin. His was white and theirs was black, but shining in the sun and glittering with river-water it was hard to tell the difference. He ran and called and laughed with them, and he could have been their pale cousin. (218).

In admitting their similarities, the Aboriginals are no longer seen as the other: “... Thornhill saw that their skins were not black, no more than his own was white. They were simply skins, with the same pores and hairs, the same shadings of colour as his own” (221). This understanding only aggravates the violence committed to them.

As mentioned before, Grenville increases the instances where atrocities are reported to William and the reader. A first instance where Thornhill is confronted with horrific behaviour of the white settler is when Thornhill discovers that Smasher has chained an Indigenous woman to his cabin, “he saw that it was a person crouching with a stripe of sunlight zigzagging down its body: a black woman, cringing against the wall, panting so he could see the teeth gleaming in her pained mouth, and the sores where the chain had chafed, red jewels against her black skin” (262). Smasher only adds to the barbarity of the situation by saying: “She done it with me and Sagitty, he whispered. Back and front like a couple of spoons” (263). Again William’s reaction is an attempt at not getting involved, at remaining passive and denying the evil he witnessed. At this point Grenville gives the reader insight into William’s thoughts in order to let the reader have some understanding as to why Thornhill remains passive, “It was bad enough to carry the picture in his memory. Thinking the words, saying the words, would make him the same as Smasher [...] He had done nothing to help her. Now the evil of it was part of him” (264). Grenville shares a second instance of utter violence with the reader when William discovers that Sagitty is responsible for the poisoning of a complete Indigenous family. William is shocked by what he sees: “he saw that the shadows were a man and a woman, and they were dead [...]. Beyond the humpy were more bodies: another man, and a woman
with a dead child still in the crook of her dead arm” (288). For the first time Thornhill decides to act and to not completely lock this trauma away. When Thornhill arrives at the scene, there is one boy still alive: “Thornhill knelt beside him. Was surprised at the softness of that black hair. Under it he felt the shape of his skull, the same as his own” (289). Although Thornhill chooses to show his compassionate side, he still refuses to share the atrocities in an attempt to deny it ever happened. “He knew he would never share with Sal the picture of this boy. That was another thing he was going to lock away in the closed room in his memory, where he could pretend it did not exist” (290).

William hopes that by denying what he has seen, by locking it away, he will not have to deal with the cruelty. Grenville succeeds marvellously in burdening the reader with the same struggle William is experiencing by constantly contrasting the atrocities with William’s thoughts and realisations. The reader too has been witness of the atrocities and they too know what is at stake for Thornhill if he decides not to ignore the recent events. These events are little nudges that cause the knot around Thornhill’s neck to tighten until it reaches one final event that will hang him and burden him indefinitely. Two precursor of this final event can be identified. The first one is the official statement of the government declaring that “On occasion of any native coming armed, or in a hostile manner without arms, or in unarmed parties exceeding six in number, to any farm belonging to British subjects, such natives are first to be desired in a civil manner to depart from the said farm […] And if they persist in remaining thereon, they are then to be driven away by force of arms by the settlers themselves” (277-278). The second precursor is the brutal murder of Sagitty by the Aboriginals. When Sagitty is found, he is barely alive and in a final attempt to save him, William brings him to Sydney by boat only to hear him die in excruciating agony. After the incident the men gather in a bar to discuss their plan of retaliation. It is Smasher who takes control of the conversation and steers it into a direction from where there is no turning back. Smasher says “We got to deal with them, he said. His voice had not changed, was still reedy with effort. Get them before they get us […] We can get there tonight, Smasher said. Settle the lot of them by breakfast” (310). “Sterminate them, Smasher said, No one going to come straight out and say it but ain’t it the only way?” (311). William tries to make himself invisible, wishes he was not there because he knows that at this very moment he will be asked to make a choice: to step away from it all and lose any hope of being able to survive in this rugged country or to participate and fully play the part of the perpetrator. Pressure is high: “The men closed in around him and there was a sound of agreement from many throats. It was not the voice of any one man but the voice of the group, faceless and powerful” (311). And then Smasher delivers the final blow: “When Thornhill glanced up he found that Smasher was watching him, and the others were looking where Smasher was looking. Smasher enjoyed the moment. Then he said, as if it were the least important thing in the world, Only thing is we got to have the Hope to get us up there” (311). Thornhill caves in under the pressure. Before, he was able to lock away the atrocities, to project them onto the others but with this event he fully acknowledges his involvement in complicity. Grenville ensures that this
acknowledgement is stated in the novel, since acknowledging the traumatic past is a first step towards reconciliation. The next quotations display the acknowledgment of Thornhill’s part in the trauma: “And yet their lives, like his, had somehow brought them to this: waiting for the tide to turn, so they could go and do what only the worst of men would do” (313). “The William Thornhill who had woken up that morning would not be the same William Thornhill who went to bed tomorrow night” (314). In the midst of the mass-killing of the Aboriginal community, Thornhill is forced to use his gun and shoots an aboriginal man that he has named Whisker Harry, leaving him feeling inhuman. “Like the old man on his knees he felt he might become something other than a human, something that did not do things in this sticky clearing that could never be undone” (321).

The epilogue of the story fasts forward to about ten years later. William Thornhill is an established man, has a prosperous business and a magnificent estate. The blacks have not troubled him ever since the fatal event. Thornhill has accomplished everything he ever dreamt of and beyond, but Grenville does not allow him to feel pleased. His dream came at a cost, William will deal with the several repercussions. Firstly, his own son Dick will never be able to forgive him and cuts all ties with the family. Secondly William will suffer a lifelong burden of guilt. It is this feeling of guilt that lingers at the end of the narrative. When Thornhill has done his tasks for the day, he sits on his veranda on a specific bench “the bench he sat on here felt at times like a punishment” (348). “This bench, here, where he could overlook all his wealth and take his ease, should have been the reward. He could not understand why it did not feel like triumph” (349).

The Concept of Home

In what has been discussed above concerning the analysis of The Secret River, I have only touched upon the feelings of guilt and complicity. To fully understand why he eventually caves in under peer pressure, one also needs to explore the concept of “existential homelessness” (Nicholls xv). William has grown up in an environment of poverty, keeping himself and his family alive was probably the only aspiration he had when residing in Great Britain. But this changes when he is offered a chance to escape the death penalty by sailing to Australia. For William this is the land of opportunities, he can earn his pardon and he can do something that no one would had ever dreamt of: he is in the possibility of owning a plot of land. While Sal, William’s wife, only longs to go back home, William gradually progressing in seeing Australia as his home. Upon arriving in Australia William is as shocked as his wife when he first meets the rugged and strange landscape: “It all had an odd unattached look, the bits of ground cut up into squares in this big loose landscape, a broken –off chip of England on the surface of the place” (82). He further adds “How could air, water, dirt and rocks fashion themselves to become so outlandish? This place was like nothing he had ever seen” (82). But then his eagerness to discover this new world takes over, “He was discovering in himself a
passion to see this place, this Hawkesbury that everyone spoke about but few had seen” (101). When William sails along the Hawkesbury river together with Blackwood, he spots a plot of land and literally falls in love with it, “No one had ever spoken to him of how a man might fall in love with a piece of ground” (110). From this moment on, it is his dream to own this plot of land and he is willing to do whatever it takes to make sure this dream comes through. No one will be able to stop him, “It was a piercing hunger in his guts: to own it. To say mine, in a way he had never been able to say mine of anything at all. He had not known until this minute that it was something he wanted so much” (110). From that moment on Thornhill steps onto a path from where there is no returning, every action, every choice he will be making in the future will be one in the best interest of protecting his plot of land, his home.

1.2.2 The Lieutenant

In The Lieutenant Grenville puts forward Daniel Rooke as the protagonist of the novel. The story is now set at the end of the eighteenth century. A first part of this analysis will deal with the events leading to Rooke’s full participation in complicity. In the second part, as has been done above, the concept of home as a motivation to engage with complicity will be discussed.

The Perpetrator’s Perspective

Where in The Secret River it is family, peer pressure and the dream of landownership that motivate William in choosing to step onto the perpetrator’s path, in The Lieutenant it is duty. “Like everyone else, he had taken the oath. It was easy to raise his right hand and swear that he would serve and obey. It was nothing but words” (27). These three sentences, and especially the last one are an omen for the bad things to come. This feeling of unease is then reinforced by Grenville through the subsequently adding of what happens when one disobeys and does not follow the oath. Disobedience equalled the death penalty. “A man was obliged to become part of the might imperial machine. To refuse was to become inhuman in another way: either a bag of meat or a walking dead man” (29). This thought is haunting Rooke for the rest of the novel.

In The Lieutenant Grenville does not display a complete array of atrocities. The novel is set at the very start of the colonisation process in Australia, so there has not been enough time to establish a violent history. Kate Grenville only offers some hints that touch brutality but never really elaborates on them. This is because this novel does not aim at raising awareness for the traumatic past, but it

Van Daele 36

aims at acknowledging responsibility and acting upon this sense of responsibility. The exploration of complicity starts when Rooke is offered a place on an expedition to New South Wales. Rooke doubles as a soldier and an astronomer. His ultimate goal is to make them forget he is an actual soldier so that he can dedicate his time to tracking the skies and the constellations. The first meeting with the Aboriginals is quite different from what Grenville portrays in *The Secret River*. Whereas in *The Secret River* William envisions the Aboriginal man as the threatening other, Rooke and his companions walk up to them with an attitude of superiority. Rooke, unlike the others, is not driven by power and superiority. As a scientist he is excited about the meeting and wishes to understand more about the way they live. Rooke sees the Aboriginals for what they are: different but “men, like himself in essence, the same shoulders and knees and private parts” (52). As mentioned above, Grenville does not display atrocities but she does manage to set the scene right from the first moment. The condescending language that is used, as if talking to animals portrays how the settlers perceive the inferiority of the Aboriginal people. A few examples: “By Jove they are cautious, Barton, look at them like a cat that wants the cream but fears the milkmaid!” and “Yes, that’s the way, Mister Darkie, come, come!” (53).

After the arrival in New South Wales, Rooke is allowed to take up a spot of headland where he can practice his astronomical skills. An official statement from the governor is issued that “The natives are on all occasions to be treated with amity and kindness” (61). The colonisation seems to start off in all friendliness. Rooke starts having repeated contact with the Aboriginal people. One native girl in particular, Tagaran, is eager to get to know Rook and gradually he understands their culture. A friendship, mutual respect and trust are established. At this point Grenville creates a bubble of naivety around Rooke. Rooke does not perceive himself as a settler, but as a scientist discovering a new people and language. Isolated on his headland he seems to live outside reality and is able to deny the actual purpose of what the British army is doing in New South Wales. Just as in *The Secret River* Grenville gradually builds up the suspense and breaks down Rooke’s isolation and naivety. Several events lead Rooke into realising the actual goal of his being there and lead him to the path of the perpetrator. A first event that lays bare the actual purpose of colonisation (i.e. the conquering of land that does not legally belong to a nation) is the announcement that food supplies in the settlement are running short. To solve the problem, a first expedition is set up to look for fertile soil. Rooke volunteers to accompany and in the midst of the expedition, Brugden, the gamekeeper is attacked. “But a short time later there was a tremendous crashing down the hillside and Brugden burst out of the bushes [...] The buggers stoned me [...]”(100). This act of violence on the side of the Indigenous people is not immediately retaliated, on the contrary. The governor states that “The survival of this settlement, and of all its members, depends in large degree on maintaining cordial relations with the natives” (101). This reaction only reinforces Rooke’s beliefs that colonisation is a peaceful process. A large blow to Rooke’s beliefs is received by Gardiner’s
confession to Rooke. Gardiner is a fellow soldier who was ordered to bring some of the natives in. “It was not well done, Rooke [...] It was a shocking bad thing to do” (109). Gardiner has trouble dealing with his part in complicity and is overwhelmed by guilt: “They may be savages, we call them savages. But their feelings are no different from ours” (111). Although Rooke is taken aback by this confession, he reacts “You did your duty, that was all” (111). From this moment on Rooke’s naivety starts to break down and the confession triggers in Rooke a search for his own conscience. “And I? Have I ever been given an order that would shake me, shame me? (112). And just one page later: “There was a question forming in the back of his mind, which he did not want to hear. It was: What would I have done in the same place?” (113) Rooke uses the same technique as William Thornhill, if he just continues to deny and lock these events away in the back of his mind, would they not just disappear? Is he not able to ignore the signs of distress in his perfect paradise? Different from The Secret River is that in rephrasing these thoughts as questions and not as statement, Grenville addresses the reader quite directly: what would you do if you were in this position? Moreover, the present-day white Australian finds himself in that exact same position. Due to the reconciliation movement, the white Australians of today cannot ignore the traumatic settler past, it is impossible to look beyond the mass of information provided by the government and private organisations. This is what Grenville tries to achieve: what would you do, what are you going to do about the situation? She is not an advocate for taking the blame and rubbing off guilty feelings, but she wants to raise awareness in order to make people acknowledge the past so that everyone can work together to establish a mutual bright future.

For the first time Rooke has witnessed that the colonization process is not as innocent as he thought it was. Soon after the first settlers die of starvation and whatever is left of the vegetable patches is robbed by the natives, Rooke starts to feel the tension rise. With every following event, Rooke is pushed deeper and deeper in the role of the perpetrator even when he is not actively participating in violent acts. When Warungin an Indigenous man who visits the settlement occasionally is witness to a settler being flogged for stealing food, Warungin is unable to place this harshness towards one of their own kind. Rooke is also a witness of this flogging and when his eyes meet Warungin’s, Warungin is unable to understand why Rooke does not react. Rooke admits his cowardness: “He had looked away when Warungin called to him. Chosen to look away. He had made that choice, because he was a lieutenant in His Majesty’s Marine Force” (198-199). In being a passive bystander, he admits his complicity, “he was as much a part of that cruelty as the man who had wielded the whip” (199). Later on when Taragan asks Rooke for help because one of the native children was hit by a settler, Rooke again denies responsibility. Up until now, Rooke has been repeatedly been trying to keep his naivety intact. He still wants to believe in the innocence of colonisation, but the events all lead him to one realisation: he, as being part of the Imperial Machine, is as complicit as those who actually perform atrocities towards the Indigenous people.
Van Daele 38

Grenville puts this realisation to words: “They all knew what he had turned his face away from: like it or not, he was Berewalgal. He wore the red coat. He carried the musket when he was told to. He stood by while a man was flogged. He would not confront a white man who had beaten his friends” (218). And then the final event takes place which confronts Daniel Rooke with the full impact of complicity. Grenville actually signals to the reader that the novel reaches its climax: “Something had ended and something else was beginning” (240). The foundation for the cataclysmic event is Brugden’s brutal murder by the natives. The Governor sets up a “punitive expedition” (243), of which Silk is the leader. Rook tries to resist participation and informs Silk that he has friends among the natives. Silke refuses to listen, he rebukes “But Rooke, think: this is not a request, it is an order” [emphasis added] (246). Furthermore Silk falsely reassures him that this expedition will almost certainly fail since the natives are masters at remaining hidden in the bushes. For the first time in the novel, Rooke sees the reality of the circumstances and refuses to be a passive perpetrator so he sets out to warn the natives. When the expedition party finally takes off in the rugged country, Rooke tries to convince himself that they will be unable to capture anyone and still naively believes that he can wash his hands in innocence as long as this remains the case. When after the first day, the expedition party has been unable to capture any natives, Rooke’s mind is at ease “There would be time now, all the time in the world, all the time in a life. [...] He would go on talking with Tagaran and the others” (270). Rooke is truly convinced that the expedition stops there, but the discovery the second morning erases all the crumbs of naivety that were still left. Silk’s bag contains a hatchet and six canvas bags, in just a few moments Rooke realises the full purpose of the expedition: carry back the heads of six natives. Rooke immediately calls Silk to account about these items. Silke replies “‘Well, Rooke, natives were by preference to be captured and brought in’, Silk said. ‘But if that did not prove practicable, then my orders were that six be slain’.” (273). Upon understanding the full complicity of his participation in the punitive expedition, Rooke is literally sick. Grenville makes a point of her protagonist owning up to his complicity and admitting his naivety:

He had persuaded himself that, as long as the expedition failed, there was no harm in being part of it. He thought he had been so clever in warning Tagaran. He had cranked the handle of his stratagem, had smirked to see the gears mesh, the wheels begin to turn in the machine that would let him obey while keeping his hands clean. What he could see now was that he was exactly as guilty as the governor and as Silk. Like them, he had allowed self-interest to blind him.

He heard himself groan, a heavy inarticulate ‘Oh’.

It was the simplest thing in the world. If an action was wrong, it did not matter whether it succeeded or not, or how many clever steps you took to make sure it failed. If you were part of such an act, you were part of its wrong. You did not have to take up the hatchet or even to walk along with the expedition.

If you were part of that machine, you were part of its evil (279-280).
It is with the words “I cannot be part of this” (282), that Rooke takes the decision to leave the expedition, no matter what the consequences will be for him. For Grenville it is of utmost importance that she makes Rooke acknowledge his mistake in front of others. Rooke goes back to the settlement and communicates to the governor that “[he] would not for any reason ever again obey a similar order” (285). He has been blinded by duty and his own scientific interest. In wanting to learn about their culture and language, he forgot the real reason he was there, it was to colonize and dominate another people, people who were not longer strangers, but his friends.

The Concept of Home

Daniel Rooke is brought up in a middle-class family but develops an extraordinary talent for mathematics. This is picked up by his primary school teacher and Rooke is offered a scholarship to study at Portsmouth Naval Academy. Throughout Rooke’s long biography, Grenville refers on various occasions to Rooke’s feeling of unbelonging to and an awkwardness in this world. Grenville, just as in The Secret River is playing the “existential homelessness” (Nicholls xv) card which will be of huge motivation for Rooke’s involvement with complicity. Very early on in the novel, Grenville mentions “whether it was because he was stupid, or clever, it added up to the same thing: the misery of being out of step with the world” (5). Grenville also portrays his awkwardness in the world of Great Britain “He yearned to be a more ordinary sort of good fellow, but was helpless to be other than he was “ (8). Grenville also shares with the reader Rooke’s eagerness to escape Great Britain in order to find a place where he truly belongs, “He had no evidence, but doggedly believed that there would one day be a place, somewhere in the world, for the person he was” (15). When enlisted in the British Navy, Rooke meets Silk, who is to become his best friend. For Rooke, Silk is the living example of how one sociably interacts with other people, “With Silk beside him as a model of how it was done, Rooke worked at inventing an acceptable version of himself for use in the rough camaraderie of the officer’s mess” (22). When Rooke is offered a chance to partake in an expedition for New South Wales, he does not hesitate and enlists. Upon arrival, Rooke – for the first time in his life – finally finds a place which he can call home. “[...] the thought came to him: There is nowhere in the world that I would rather be” (97). For the first time in his life, he feels he belongs in this place and is convinced that “everything in his life had been leading there” (152). It is this feeling of belonging, of finally discovering the purpose of his life which will partially make him blind for the complicity he is involved with.
1.2.3 Sarah Thornhill

In Sarah Thornhill Grenville takes a different approach in the matter of complicity. The reader is not faced with the actual perpetrator anymore, instead he is faced with a descendant, i.e. Sarah Thornhill. Since Sarah Thornhill is dealing with the repercussions of a complicit ancestor, I would argue that Sarah is the representation of the implicated subject, a term coined by Rothberg. In what follows I will analyse the different steps in Sarah’s search for the past, how this perpetrator past influences her own life and how she deals with the shame brought upon her by her father’s complicity. In this novel Grenville also investigates the importance of knowing one’s own history, one’s own roots. She does so in two ways: firstly Sarah digs into the family’s history to find out what dark secret it is hiding and secondly the exploration of roots is undertaken by means of Rachel, Sarah’s niece who is ripped away from her New Zealand culture. It is exactly this knowing of one’s own history that enticed Kate Grenville to explore the missing parts of her own ancestral through the means of a fictionalised account. In this novel Grenville does not only touch upon the subject of the settler past, she also incorporates a plot twist concerning Rachel which can be linked to Australia’s Stolen Generation.

The Implicated Subject

Sarah has grown up in a different Australia as to what William Thornhill knew. Some sort of relative peace subsists between the Indigenous people and the settlers, a peace in which the settlers dominate the Indigenous people. Aboriginals are either living in far-off places or they are employed by the settlers. No extremely violent actions towards the Aboriginals are mentioned during the novel, although racism and the condescending attitude from the white settler is very much present. Sarah’s stepmom acknowledges this: “I got nothing against the blacks. I pity them, truly I do, hardly better than beasts of the field. God in his wisdom put us above them” (19). Sarah sets out on an adventure to uncover her family’s past. This process was triggered by the confession of William Thornhill that Sarah actually has four instead of three brother. Sarah is further encourages by seeking the truth when she witness that her father is handing out food to a group of Aboriginals living on the outskirts of their property. When she questions her father about this, he tells her that he made a promise to her mother to care for these people. In that same conversation, William offers a piece of information that puzzles Sarah even more. He utters the words “… I wish that day back again, and have it come out different” (29). For readers of the Secret River it is all but too clear that he

---

is referring to the tragic day where he participated in the mass-slaughter of an Aboriginal community. For Sarah it is a secret that still needs discovering.

When Sarah falls in love with Jack, the plot accelerates. Jack sails the seas together with Sarah’s brother Will in order to retrieve seal fur. The reader is informed that Jack’s mother is of Indigenous origin and that his father a white settler, Mr. Langland. Jack has been adopted by the Langland family but has to struggle against race prejudice: “Called Mrs Langland Ma, but she had no warmth for him, and there was no love lost between Jack and his half-brothers and sisters. Didn’t know them that well, because he’d been away on the ships since he was a lad, didn’t have the easy life they’d had” (35). In between the sea voyages Sarah and Jack spend a romantic, carefree time. Jack and Sarah are blissfully unaware of the past, but when they announce to the Thornhill family their wedding plans, their romantic bubble bursts. A first incident leading to the bursting of the bubble is the drowning of Will and the discovery that he has a little daughter in New Zealand. William Thornhill - out of protection for his family - sends Jack after the little girl. He is convinced he is doing the right thing by letting her “Grow up white” (106) . For William it is his chance of doing things differently, of dealing with his guilt from the past and this is what he tells Sarah “What’s done is done, Pa said. But you get a chance, do things, different, you’re a lucky man” (115). Again Sarah is left behind puzzled, what is her father talking about? William’s answer to this question is “Pray God you never have to know” (115). Grenville makes sure that William openly admits his guilt, something he did not do in the first novel. But William’s motivation to make sure the girl grows up white is again faulty. He seems not to have learnt from his previous mistake. In ripping the girl away from her own family, tradition and culture, William leads her to her downfall. Contrary to William, Jack immediately realises his mistake in denying the girl’s roots. He knows that belonging to a family, knowing one’s own family history is important since he needs to deal with the exact same issue. He neither belongs to the whites, nor to the blacks and has been dealing with racial inequality his whole life.

Throughout the novel there is nowhere for Sarah to hide to not be confronted with the secrets of the past. The second incident leading to the climax of the novel is the conversation Jack and Mrs. Thornhill have upon the announcement of the wedding plans. It will take years for Sarah to figure out what her stepmother told Jack in order to chase him away. In those years, Sarah marries John Daunt and moves to the outback. There she is more openly in contact with the Indigenous people, learns to see them as a peaceful folk but also receives information about what the white settlers do to the Indigenous people “Teach them a lesson... Clear them off the place” (214). This instance of reported violence makes her rethink Australia’s past. “Once upon a time Thornhill’s Point would have been like the country past Limit of Location, wild and empty but for the blacks wandering over it. Somewhere along the line someone took it over. One acre at a time” (218). Grenville literally addresses the reader and invites them to think along: how did it come to this unequal situation?
What atrocities have led to the dominance of the white settler? Sarah breaks her head in thinking: “How could you make it right?” (219).

When Sarah’s father becomes terminally ill, he confesses that Dick Blackwood is her fourth brother. Sarah is asked to convince Dick to come to his father one last time, so that William can ask his forgiveness for his part in the brutal murder on an Aboriginal community. Dick refuses to see his father, but tells Sarah everything about the mass-slaughter her father was involved in. He also informs her that Jack’s family was killed there, that William Thornhill - her father - was an active participant in the slaughter of Jack’s family. Sarah’s first reaction is denial, but when she puts together all the pieces of the puzzle, she sees her father for what he is: a perpetrator. In that moment she also realises that his blood is running through her veins as well. Although she has not been actively involved in complicity, she feels she bares the responsibility. She has been benefitting from her dad’s actions, she has been eating the good food, “Slept in the soft beds. Sat in the parlour, never known a day’s hunger or cold, never asked where any of it came from” (255). In admitting and realising this, Sarah Thornhill functions as an implicated subject and in doing so she is representative for the present-day Australian post-settler. Sarah cannot be directly held accountable for the traumatic past, but she is a beneficiary of it, just as the Australians today are beneficiaries of the traumatic wrongdoings of the past. Grenville ponders quite a long time about the effects of being a descendant of a perpetrator and really tries to get to the core of it:

Watching my brothers and sister, I knew why he’d done it that way, said without saying. How could you find the words? How could you drop this thing into lives where people fiddled with their watches … How would you ever come together with them again, the shame between you like an unwanted guest that never left?

I knew why he hadn’t spoken because I couldn’t either… But more it was the shame, that I couldn’t bear to hold up to the light. This was how Pa must of felt, all those years. I was drawn into the same dirty secret he’d lived with for so long.

It would be with me now till the day I died. Once you knew, there was no way to not know.

... You had to live with it, and your children too. And their children, down the line. Whether they knew it or not, they lived in its shadow” (259-260).

In stepping away from the perpetrator’s perspective Grenville undertakes a difficult journey, an own soul-searching as it may. How can she, Kate Grenville, as a descendant of a perpetrator deal with this black page in her own history. Shame is a feeling that is touched upon on several occasion in the novel. It is shame that will keep Sarah quiet about what happened. Her penance is providing a black family with food, in a way she is continuing what her father did to deal with guilt, “I was ashamed every time I handed over the things. The women didn’t thank, and for that I was grateful” (268). The coda, which covers page 303 and 304 is slightly confusing. Throughout the whole novel, it
is Sarah who narrates about what happens, but in the coda the reader gets the impression that Kate Grenville is directly addressing the reader. She ponders about how she will get the story across, how she will be able to let generation after generation know what happened in the Australia’s settler past. “If there was anything I could do to mend things, I’d to them” (304) and “But of all the crimes done, the worst would be to let the story slip away” (304). Kate Grenville’s solution is to write about that past, so that everyone knows what happened and that no one is able to deny Australia’s traumatic past. When this job is done, future generations can move forward and learn from their mistakes.

Grenville not only touches the consequences of the atrocities performed against the Indigenous people. She also touches upon the problem of the Stolen Generation and the people of mixed blood in this novel. The unlawful abduction of Rachel, Will’s daughter, from her own culture and roots reflect the trauma the children of the Stolen Generation had to deal with. This is the first time that Kate refers to the Stolen Generations. One could argue that, since this is the last novel, written after the official apology of Australia, that she felt the need to address this theme as well. Jack, who plays a key role in the development of the plot, is the embodiment of the people of mixed roots. Like Jack, they don’t feel they belong to the Indigenous population nor to the non-Indigenous population. And like in Jack’s case, people know of his mixed roots but they don’t talk about it. Better is to keep the past in the past, even better is to hide it. This process of hiding the past is a process which many of the present-day Australians are still confronted with, Grenville included. On her own website, where she gives background to how she conceived the stories, she informs the reader that yet again it was her own family history which led to the final part in the trilogy. Kate Grenville was told that her ancestor Solomon Wiseman had a daughter who got pregnant from the riding master and was thrown out of the house. Grenville was also told that both she and the baby died. When she dug into the matter she discovered that this was not the truth. Solomon’s son had a Maori wife, just like in the novel. Both drowned but they left behind two daughters, Sophia and Maryanne. It is Grenville’s need to share this story that led to the writing of Sarah Thornhill. After having covered the violent settler history of Australia, she found the need to address the personal history of the settler families which were soaked in dark legacies. Grenville’s way of dealing with the past is writing about it, so that it would not be forgotten, so that the present-day Australian society can move towards reconciliation and step out of hiding.

**The Concept of Home**

Envisioned as a sequel of *The Secret River*, the story takes place at about halfway the nineteenth century. William Thornhill’s youngest daughter, Sarah is the protagonist of this story. On the very first page Grenville signals to the reader that she will investigate the influence of the past on the present. When Sarah is introduced to us, she talks about the Hawkesbury river and how people can
just “pick out a bit if ground, get a hut up, never look back. You heard that a lot. Never looked back” (3). Sarah finds herself in a unique position. Born and raised along the Hawkesbury river, she has never seen England, she has only heard stories about it. She is the very first generation who will have Australia as her birthplace and who will not have known any other home. For her it is as if the country has no past, “a place with no grannies and no grandpas. No aunties, no uncles. No past” (4). But it is this so called non-existing past that Sarah will have to carry the consequences off. Gradually Sarah spots things about the past that do not add up. She discovers that she actually has four brothers instead of the three she has always known. It is William Thornhill who informs her that there used to be a brother called Dick, but that he had gone away for a while. Sarah is a wilful person and heads out to investigate the case of the missing brother. On every occasion, she needs to deal with the same evasive answers: better not to look back, better to leave the past alone. From an early age on Sarah realises this is the way of life on the Hawkesbury “everything hidden away”, nevertheless she seeks to “get a clear look at all the things people knew but wouldn’t say” (17). With this the tone is set for the rest of the novel. Sarah will dig her away into the family’s darkest secrets and this knowledge will ruin her life as she had envisioned it.
Chapter 2  The Empathetic Bond

2.1  The empathetic Bond

Acknowledging, accepting responsibility for what happened in Australia’s past can only occur when the white reader can identify with the protagonist, in this case the perpetrator of the story. In order to research the empathetic bond established with the perpetrator in Kate Grenville’s trilogy, one first needs to look at some of the authorities in the field who researched the connection between empathy and perpetrator. Crownshaw, Lacapra and Weaver-Hightower offer interesting theories which can be applied to Grenville’s novels. These theories will be discussed first, followed by their implementation in Grenville’s trilogy.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Crownshaw cites a number of novels backing up his claim that there is a turn to the perpetrator in historical novels. According to Richard Crownshaw “this turn has rendered the figure the perpetrator in empathetic terms, or rather raised the possibility, for the reader, of an empathetic or at least an affective relation to the perpetrator (75)”. He also critiques memory studies for having spent too much time on universalizing the victim’s identity because for him the perpetrator’s point of view may offer new ways of working through cultural memory. One of the reasons why the ‘turn to the perpetrator’ has only emerged in the last few decades is probably fear of recognition. Gillian Rose critiques the postmodern, post-Holocaust philosophy which is afraid to show both sides of the story and only centres on the victim because when looking at it from the perpetrator’s viewpoint it might mean “to mystify something we dare not understand because we fear it may be all too understandable, all too continuous with what we are – human, all too human” (qtd in Crownshaw 77). Rose has executed research on perpetrator fiction, especially concerning the Holocaust. Her focus point was the way the empathic liaison is rendered. She imagines “the possibility of something like a Nazi Bildungsroman in which the future allegiances of the protagonist are unknown to the reader, and by the time they are known, the reader has already empathized. A crisis in the reader would signify that empathetic bond” (qtd in Crownshaw 77). Crownshaw by means of Dean Franco and his interpretation of the novel Beloved (Toni Morrison) also pays attention to how this perpetrator fiction is and should be received by its reading audience. Franco argues that “if the text is to be read in reparative term, by which past injuries are redressed by their narrativisation and the consumption of that narrative, reparation must be conceptualized psychically and materially” (in Crownshaw 79). He also adds that “narrative depiction of trauma by no means guarantees social justice” (in Crownshaw 79). To really have an
effect on society, social justice can only be achieved when someone is really speaking for the traumatized part of society and when that society’s government is pushed away from a system of oppression.

Another term which needs mentioning because of its importance when working with perpetrator fiction is ‘Empathic unsettlement’. LaCapra coined this term in his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. When dealing with historical fiction involved with trauma LaCapra argues that for the reader of this historical fiction “desirably empathy involves not full identification but what might be termed empathic unsettlement in the face of traumatic limit events, their perpetrators and their victims” (102). This sense of unsettlement will differ from individual to individual. LaCapra connects empathic unsettlement with a traumatic past, for him “empathy is bound up with a transferential relation to the past, and it is arguably an affective aspect of understanding which both limits objectification and exposed the self-involved or implication in the past, its actors, and victims” (*Writing History* 102). When dealing with traumatic events, the largest pitfall is to only look at the victim's side and identifying with him or her through an empathetic bond that is established. It is more difficult for the reader to feel empathy for a perpetrator in a story. LaCapra elaborates on this and states that “with respect to perpetrators, one may justifiably resist empathy in the sense of feeling or understanding that may serve to validate or excuse certain acts” (*Writing History* 104). Still Lacapra acknowledges that “certain forms of behaviour (that of the Einsatzgruppen or of camp guards, for example) may be possible for one self in certain circumstance, however much the events in question beggar the imagination” (*Writing History* 104).

Perpetrators are human and when humans are put in extreme circumstances one never knows how he or she might react. There is a possibility that one might act exactly the same as the perpetrator in the fictional story. This crisis of identification sets in motion a thought process in the reader questioning the traumatic past and its consequences in present-day society. Not only is the reader of fictional accounts submerged in empathic unsettlement, the author of these accounts in turn senses this unsettlement when executing research in his or her own traumatic past. The composition of the fictional account is then a way of dealing with the trauma, as theory surrounding Hirsch’s postmemory already suggested. The reader in its turn is then witness to the unsettlement of the author, this reaction to the unsettlement of the author “can never be entirely under control” (LaCapra *Writing History* 103).

Rebecca Weaver-Hightower introduces an interesting theory on how this liaison with the perpetrator can be established. It deals specifically with narratives concerning colonial settler times, which will be of high interest for the discussion of Kate Grenville’s novels. Rebecca Weaver-Hightower examined the plots of several ‘Sorry Novels’ evolving around the perpetrator’s point of view and found that most Sorry Novels use similar techniques in dealing with the traumatic settler past (Weaver-Hightower 139-146). In a first instance, the authors create an empathic liaison by
typecasting their perpetrator as the ‘good coloniser’ opposed to those others, the ‘bad colonisers’. The ‘good coloniser’ is a hard-working man who focuses on the good that comes from the colonization and the taking up of land. Usually the reader also receives insight into the past of this character, which is generally filled with misery and misfortune, thus creating a sense of compassion from which the reader is able to understand some of his actions in the colonial world, although this is actually violent behaviour. Furthermore it is essential for the author to contrast these ‘good colonisers’ with the bad seeds of the colonizing lot, who wilfully mistreat and violate the Indigenous people and their natural environment. Again, in the reader, it creates a sense of understanding for the ‘good coloniser’, although in the complete scheme of colonization he still is a perpetrator. Rebecca Weaver-Hightower furthermore borrows from Anna Freud’s psychoanalysis. Freud shows how individuals try to defend themselves against anxieties. In doing so they use certain mechanisms. According to Freud there are the primary defence mechanisms which “prevent unacceptable ideas or impulses from entering the conscience” (Weaver-Hightower 134) and the secondary mechanisms which grow out of the primary. Freud coins these mechanisms as “identification, projection, sublimation and rationalization” (Weaver-Hightower 139), whereas projection externalizes violence by literally putting it onto someone else, in this case the ‘bad colonizer’. A third technique used by authors of Sorry Novels is putting the narrative in a historical setting. According to Rebecca Weaver-Hightower this “can be a mechanism of denial of contemporary racial struggles” (139). Another similarity between the Sorry Novels is their “inspection of the fantasy that non-Indigenous Australians have a relationship with the Australian landscape that mirrors or perhaps supplants the Indigenous relationship” (143). This fantasy refers to the spiritual connection the Indigenous people have with their land. In claiming that the settler feels an equal connection with that land, the settler tries to legitimize his ownership of that same land. It are these four techniques that will be incorporated in the analysis of trilogy when researching the creation of the empathetic bond.

2.2 Creating Empathy in Kate Grenville’s Trilogy

As mentioned in the above section of this dissertation, a creation of an empathetic bond is based on four pillars. It are these pillars which will create “the crisis in the reader” (Rose qtd in Crownshaw 77), because in this crisis the reader might want to refuse engaging in this empathetic bond because it might signify and understanding of the side of the perpetrator (Lacapra, Writing History 104). These four pillars together with their establishment of the empathetic bond will be discussed in the following analysis. The four pillars will especially be present in The Secret River and The Lieutenant
since these two novels are written from the perpetrator’s perspective. In _Sarah Thornhill_ the matter is somewhat more complicated since Grenville is not directly dealing with the perpetrator but with a descendant. This means that the pillars of creating empathy with the perpetrator will not be clearly present, instead Grenville is aiming more at establishing an empathic unsettlement, which will be discussed in a second part. Lastly, Franco’s statement about the consumption of a narrative as a means of reparation (Franco qtd in Crownshaw 79) will be examined.

The technique of the ‘bad’ versus ‘good’ colonizer is dominantly used in both _the Secret River_ as in _the Lieutenant_. William Thornhill is classified as the good colonizer. Grenville has a number of ways to portray this to the reader. Firstly she ensures that the reader is well informed about William’s life before arriving in Australia. William’s life is filled with hardship. His young life spent in poverty, always being hungry, being taught to steal in order to survive. Both parents die and William needs to provide for the large family. There is one lucky break for William, he can earn a living as a boatman on the river Thames. He can work his way up from apprentice to being a fellow boatman and gets to marry the love of his life. But yet again, all goes wrong for the protagonist, he loses everything and in a desperate measure to survive, William steals timber. The long biography of William Thornhill makes the reader empathise with him. As a reader you cannot but understand the reasons that drive him into crime. At this point Grenville has already achieved her goal, the reader is now too closely wrapped up in William’s tragic life to remain objective. She appeals to the reader because one is more than capable of imagining that he or she would do exactly the same in order to survive. So when William is offered the chance to be shipped to Australia to serve his time there, the reader is able to understand why William is so adamant in protecting and providing for his family. An empathetic bond has been created and it is impossible to break this down. Even when William is in Australia, Grenville continues to use the same tactics. Each time William is depicted as the hard-working colonizer. The reader is witness to every step he takes in providing for a better life. The hard work as a boatman on the Hawkesbury river, the sweat perspired when clearing the bushes to build his hut, the enormous amount of work invested in growing his own crops. These actions all qualify him as the good, hard-working colonizer that he is. Grenville makes sure that the reader is even willing to forgive William for not reacting against the atrocities he witnesses. It is too easy to empathize and to identify with his needs and motivations. The goodness of William is even more emphasized by contrasting it with the immorality of colonizers as Smasher Sullivan and Sagitty. On numerous occasions Grenville describes the acts of violence committed by them: the hanging of an Indigenous man, the hacking off of hands, the imprisonment of an Indigenous woman so that she can be used as a sex slave and the wilful poisoning of a complete Indigenous family. By contrasting them, Grenville portrays William as almost an innocent bystander. However, no empathetic bond in the world will strip William of complicity when partaking in the mass murder of an Indigenous community.
The same contrast between good and bad is used in *The Lieutenant* but this time Grenville goes about it in a more refined manner although she uses the same technique of presenting the reader with an extended biography in order to reach the empathetic bond. Daniel Rooke an extremely intelligent child is offered a scholarship in a renowned college. Although he belongs to the middle-class, his fellow students adhere the higher classes, which leads to bullying, e.g. “Lancelot Percival lay in wait for Rooke and usually managed to give him a punch in passing, or spill ink on his precious linen shirt” (*The Lieutenant* 9). Rooke enlists in the army, hoping this will provide him with a promising future since his astronomer’s career is going nowhere. Rooke is an awkward fellow who doesn’t really know how to handle himself in a group of people. On several occasions Grenville mentions that Rooke feels as if he does not belong in this world. The reader sees this person, capable of greatness, being limited by the class system. Grenville completes the process of the creation of the empathetic bond by letting Rooke get injured in a sea battle. Grenville passes Daniel Rooke as a naïve, innocent scientist. Upon arriving in New South Wales, he sets out to study the stars and learns the language of the natives. Never in any way does the reader question his good intentions. Grenville plays her cards right, because even the protagonist is not aware of the grand scheme of things. He thrives on the excitement of studying this other people and befriending them. It is only when being part of the punitive expedition that he fully realises what they, as colonizers, are doing to the country and its inhabitants. The bad colonizer, i.e. Silk and the complete British army, in *The Lieutenant* is not that easily identifiable in the beginning of the novel. The reader is under the impression that Silk, Rooke’s best friend, is as naive as Rooke. He too believes that he will have a bright future as a storyteller or author. Before Rooke realises it, Silk betrays him. Silk knows how to push Rooke’s buttons and has a way of finding out things that are secret. Silk threatens his friend in accompanying him on the punitive expedition and does not shy away from violence if this will help his case. Silk does not actually proceed in performing violent acts, but his wilfulness in taking a hatch and canvas bags to retrieve the heads of Indigenous people reveals his true colours. Apart from Silk, the governor and the Imperial machine of the colonization are also portrayed as the bad colonizer since their only goal is to conquer land that belongs to another people.

The second technique in establishing an empathetic bond is the use of identification and projection. Due to the extensive biography of both protagonists and the creation of circumstances that are within the boundaries of the extreme, it is easy for the reader to identify with the main characters. Grenville carefully stages these circumstances so that they can be recognised by a wide audience. In William’s case, when a family is in dire straits, one can accept this criminal act of stealing timber. No one is actually harmed and it will save a family from starvation. One can easily put oneself in that same position and when pondering about it, one would probably do the same. For Rooke, it is easy for the reader to understand that he wants to achieve something with his intelligence, the reader easily believes in the naïvety of Rooke because Grenville has sketched us his
Van Daele

50

background in which he is constantly portrayed as the naive type of person. Again, the reader can probably recall numerous occasions where he or she has been tricked into believing something only to realise later on how gullible they had been. For the reader it is more difficult to identify with someone who committing extreme acts of violence. That is why Grenville opts not to let her protagonists be fully involved in violent acts. Even when William Thornhill participates in the mass slaughter, Grenville manages to paint a picture of someone who seems to witness the aggression instead of being actively involved, proof of this is the elaborate use of verbs that signify ‘to see, to witness’. The complete scene is described as if witnessed from a distance. Only on one occasion does Grenville admit William’s full complicity and that is when William fires the gun that badly wounds Whisker Harry. Most atrocities are projected onto the other, the bad colonizer. For the reader it is more comfortable to deal with aggression when it originates in the other and not in the self. Smasher Sullivan, Sagitty, Silk and the Imperial British army represent this other and when these can be identified as the other, the reader finds it less hard to deal with the extreme acts of violence. In playing with the good versus bad colonizer and the concepts of identification and projection, Grenville is able to create a crisis of identification in the reader. It is this crisis that leads to the establishment of the empathetic bond with the perpetrator. Lacapra commented on this empathetic bond in stating that sometimes reader resist the establishment because in doing so they would admit a sense of understanding the violent acts (Writing History 104). Although this is certainly Grenville’s goal, one needs to elaborate on what this understanding entails for Grenville. In making the empathetic bond through means of identification, she enables the reader to live through the trauma in an acceptable way. If the protagonist were to commit extreme violent acts, no identification would be possible. It is with this identification that Grenville involves the reader with Australia’s traumatic past. By creating this bond, it is more difficult if not impossible for the reader to deny Australia’s past and it is equally impossible not to reflect about the present-day repercussions of that past.

The third pillar is the historical setting of each of the novels, here I can also include Sarah Thornhill. According to Rebecca Weaver-Hightower this “can be a mechanism of denial of contemporary racial struggles” (139). It is true that all novels play in the eighteenth and nineteenth century thereby avoiding touching upon a narrative about the situation of the present-day Australia. But I would argue that Kate Grenville is not living in denial of the present-day problematic situation. To be able to paint a picture of the contemporary society, one needs to dig into the past of Australia and that is exactly what Grenville does. In the first two novels, The Secret River and The Lieutenant Grenville shows the reader the ugly truth. Early settlers have unrightfully taken up land and driven away the original population. Kate Grenville does not shy away from showing the violence as it was, in all its brutality. Making the contemporary society aware of the traumatic past of Australia is only one of the goals Kate Grenville wants to achieve. A second goal that she achieves
especially in *The Lieutenant* is the acknowledgement of guilt in the case of Daniel Rooke and responsibility in the case of present-day society. The novel *Sarah Thornhill*, although also situated in the nineteenth century, treats the situation of the contemporary Australian society. In this novel Grenville questions how a society deals with the consequences of a traumatic past and more specifically how descendants of perpetrators deal with their own complicit past and the possible residual shame. The main message of this book is to bring the stories of the past into the open, which is directly opposed to what Rebecca Weaver-Hightower claims. Furthermore, when looking at Grenville's personal position, she is the leading example of bringing Australia's past under the attention of the public. She has found inspiration in her own ancestral history and found it necessary to bring this theme under the attention of the general public.

The fourth pillar is the exploration of the fantasy that the settler can generate a spiritual relation with the country that is equal to that of the original inhabitants. Grenville plays with this concept in the three novels. In *the Secret River*, Williams literally falls in love with his plot of land and convinces himself that he is the legitimate owner since he does everything in his power to work the land so that it produces crops. In the absence of huts, crops growing and fences built, William sees the signal that he land does not belong to the original population. For the first time in William's life he feels that he fits there, that this new country can be his new home filled with opportunities he never could have dreamt of. In *The Lieutenant* it is not exactly the landownership that drives Daniel Rooke. For him it is an actual spiritual relation with the country. His whole life he has been convinced that there is a specific goal to be achieved and when he arrives in New South Wales, he feels as if he has come home. In Rooke's words "New South Wales was part of a man's destiny" (*The Lieutenant* 66) and "... nowhere on the world's surface had ever meant as much to him" (*The Lieutenant* 78). For *Sarah Thornhill* the situation is different, she is born and raised in Australia. It is the only home she has ever known and she has trouble coming to terms with the fact that this new country seems to have no past - no white past that is -because, as the novel continues, Sarah gradually realises that in order for them to be able to live here, a whole population has been robbed of the land that was rightfully theirs. Sarah understands the unequal balance that exists between the two people and she equally understands that she is benefitting from the unlawful possession of land.

### 2.3 Empathic Unsettlement

The empathic unsettlement generated in the three novels works in three ways. First there is the empathic unsettlement for the reader, who confronted with the atrocities in the narrative cannot but emotionally triggered. As hard as the reader might want to resist empathising with the
perpetrator of the story, he never fully succeeds. Due to Grenville's humane depiction of the perpetrator and the extensive background she provides, one understands the motives and circumstances that made the protagonist involved in complicity. This crises of identification generates a thought process in the reader in which the reader questions how he or she would act in similar circumstances. Although every reader is affected in a different way, they are still affected by reading the narrative. For Grenville this empathic unsettlement is needed, because it is only by addressing the reader on a personal level, that this reader will be able to understand the message Grenville is trying to portray: acknowledging responsibility for a traumatic past and progressing towards a better future where racial injustice can be banned.

Secondly Sarah Thornhill, the protagonist, deals with the empathic unsettlement when she is made part of the dark secret that plays in her family. Her life is quite careless, she has never been hungry and her father provides her with everything she needs. Her life without worries ends when she discovers the dark secret of her father's involvement in mass murder. This knowledge affects her whole being. For the first time in her life, she is able to look at Australia's case from a perspective. She sees the world for what it is, a world dominated by the white settler. Never again will she be able to return to her innocent state in which she is able to deny any rumours of unequal treatment of Indigenous people, never again will she be able to walk around without the shame imposed on her by her father.

A third manner in which empathic unsettlement plays is when one looks at the author of the novels. While digging into her own past, she is witness to her own unsettling ancestral past. Again this triggers a thought process. Grenville is forced to rethink her own family history. When digging further and further she realises that her ancestor was far from innocent. He too was guilty of taking up land without having legal rights to it. The search into her own history has affected Kate Grenville to such an extent that she felt the need to produce a book on the search into her own history. Furthermore the search into her own history led to the discovery of well hidden family secrets. Grenville discovers that some facts do not add up and when exploring the archives, she finds out that some family stories have been wrongly passed down the line. She discovers two ancestors, Sophie and Maryanne of which she did not know. Affected by this story, she fictionalizes the discovery and start thinking about how it must have been like, how did this story develop in the nineteenth century and why did these two ancestors disappear during history.
Chapter 3  The Trilogy: A Mirror of the Reconciliation Process

In this last chapter, the evolution of the novels will be discussed. If one puts them in chronological order according to temporal setting, meaning The Lieutenant, The Secret River, Sarah Thornhill, one sees a reflection of the complexity of the concept of complicity that is ruling Australia’s society. It is the awareness raising of this settler complicity in the past that raises acknowledgement of the trauma in the present. In Sarah Thornhill, the white Australian can find an exemplary figure of the implicated subject. It is this awareness raising that will enable reconciliation in Australia. In this part I will also argue that going through the process of reading the novels can be seen as a reparation (Franco qtd in Crownshaw 79) and that they reflect the steps in the reconciliation process. In a final instance I take a step back from the novels and look at the author and how she qualifies as an implicated subject in the history of Australia and if the trilogy can be seen as more than a way of dealing with residual shame on the side of the author.

There is a large difference in handling complicity and guilt in the two novels, The Secret River and The Lieutenant. Where in The Secret River William Thornhill admits his complicity only to himself and tries to lock every memory of it away, Rooke the protagonist of The Lieutenant goes out of his way to acknowledge his complicity and to act upon it by literally admitting his guilt and expressing his refusal to be part of it. Nowhere in the novel The Secret River is William able to react against the atrocities performed. Before the cataclysmic event, he is witness to a number of traumatic events but never shares this with anyone else, not even his wife. Not only does he not communicate about the events, he is passive about them and tries to ignore they ever happened. This reaction makes him even more complicit (if it is possible to speak about degrees of complicity). His participation in the final event, the mass murder of an aboriginal community, makes of Thornhill a full perpetrator. He is not the passive bystander any longer, he is an active perpetrator. Although he has learnt to respect the Aboriginals and has admitted that they have right to this land, his hunger for landownership, richness and the eventual peer pressure blind his sense of judgement. The feelings of remorse and guilt largely come afterwards, William is not able to deny what has happened, he now needs to live with the consequence of being a perpetrator. This burden of guilt will last him a lifetime and will inevitably influence future generations which Grenville displays in Sarah Thornhill.
In this novel, Grenville steps away from guilt and complicity and portrays the next generation who needs to deal with the shame of the previous generation. In stepping away from the category of the perpetrator, she enters the category of the implicated subject. In doing so, she equally progresses from the past into the present.

Looking at the complete trilogy, *The Secret River* can be qualify as the first step in the reconciliation process. This novel is about making the reader aware that Australia is a society scarred by its traumatic past. Some of the Australian inhabitants might be willing to ignore and deny it, just as William Thornhill, but in their heart and in their minds they know what atrocities brought their society into being. This making aware and accepting that traumatic past is a very important step into reconciliation process, without it, no process can be begun.

*The Lieutenant* is then a second step toward reconciliation. While with William Thornhill the novel is very much focused on making the reader aware of the atrocities from the past, with Rooke Grenville tries to speak to the reader’s conscience. There are a few instances in the novel where the reader gets the impression that he is called out: what would you do in these circumstances? The awareness raising has been completed by the first novel and in *The Lieutenant* Grenville searches for acknowledgment of these wrongdoings. Daniel Rooke, as innocent a scientist he might seem, has never been fully innocent since he voluntarily sets out on an expedition to colonize another people. At the beginning it is just an opportunity to study these magnificent people. For most of the time, Rooke lives in his bubble of naivety, developing a close friendship with the natives. He hopes he can continue to live outside reality but in the back of his mind he understands that sooner or later this reality will catch up with him and when it does, it hits him hard. During the punitive expedition he realises what he has known all along: just being part of the expedition - without actually having executed any violence – is enough to make him a perpetrator. Grenville spends about half a page on making Rooke aware of this and making him acknowledge his complicity. This acknowledging of the wrongs he committed is literally put into words in the novel, reflecting the importance for the author. Besides the openly acknowledging of complicity, which is absent in *The Secret River*, it is equally important that this time the main character undertakes action in order to end his complicity. Rooke steps away from the expedition, no matter what the consequences are. In stepping away, he disobeys direct orders but for him it is worth it, as long as he can end his part in complicity. Grenville shows the reader that after the first step of awareness raising, the second step of acknowledgement needs to be taken. And ideally with this acknowledgement, a person must understand the need to act upon it. In Rooke’s case, it a putting an end to his participation in the traumatic events. For the present-day reader this action can be extrapolated to showing an active interest in the Indigenous culture. It is what the inquiry of the Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2012 has shown, that people both agree that they do not know enough of the Indigenous culture and actively want to invest in knowing more of it. This action can also take the form of protesting.
against contemporary racism in Australia, it can take the form of founding an organisation that is committed in working with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. And it can certainly take the form of apologising towards the Indigenous community to make clear that you have acknowledged the past wrongdoings and that you will see to it that similar wrongdoings do not occur again.

The last novel *Sarah Thornhill* does not specifically deal with the concept of complicity, but more precisely with the future generation of the perpetrator. Grenville undertakes to question how past wrongdoings influence the lives of the next generation. After having presented the awareness raising and the acknowledgement, *Sarah Thornhill* deals with the shame that is left in the present-day society. Shame is attributed positive qualities by Leys, from shame one can move forward. Once the white Australian post-settler has gone through these stages, he is ready to work towards a society which can claim a new identity, one where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are treated equally.

The question how do you right the wrongs of the past is what occupied Grenville and from that question she conceived her colonial trilogy. The reconciliation process is in the writing and reading of her novels. As she lets her protagonist express “… how words written down made something last. Written down, it was there for all time, never forgotten” (*Sarah Thornhill* 234). For the author, going through the process of writing qualified as progressing through the several stages in achieving reconciliation. For the reader it is the reading the achieves a similar goal. This trilogy qualifies as an individual apology, it expresses regret for wrongdoings, tries to relieve the shame that was brought onto the contemporary society and strongly advocates steps towards reconciliation.
Conclusion

This dissertation aimed at examining how Kate Grenville’s trilogy fits in the reconciliation movement of Australia’s contemporary society and how it relates to the national apology that was issued in 2008. More specifically I intended to investigate the tension between complicity and empathy established during the course of the three novels *The Secret River*, *The Lieutenant*, and *Sarah Thornhill*. In order to provide sufficient background, a study of what a national apology should contain was needed. Especially Aaron Lazare’s research into national apologies proved to be valuable. In his research he describes a national apology as having “the power to heal humiliations and grudges, remove desire for vengeance, and generate forgiveness on the part of the offended parties. For the offender, they can diminish the fear of retaliation and relieve the guilt and shame that can grip the mind with a persistence and tenacity that are hard to ignore.” (1). Interesting for this dissertation is that he paid attention to the perpetrator’s side of trauma as well. A next step in this research was zooming in on Australia’s national apology of 2008 and the events that led to this saying sorry. The making of the apology dealt with a number of controversies, amongst others the refusal of the 1998 government to apologize, but the ‘Bringing Them Home Report’ which centred on the investigation of the ‘Stolen Generation’ recommended that the Australian society needed an apology in order to develop a new identity where there would be equal treatment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Furthermore it also recommended the foundation of a National Sorry Day. These recommendations led to a vast growth of the reconciliation movement in Australia, for which the year 2000 was “the highpoint” (Komesaroff xv). Although the expression of the national apology is applauded, Barta in a critical note condemns the absence of an acknowledgment of genocide (qtd in Short 299). A criminal act which was clearly stated in the ‘Bringing Them Home Report’.

A second step in approaching Kate Grenville’s trilogy called for an investigation of the concept of postmemory. This concept was first coined by Marianne Hirsch. It is used to describe “the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (4). Kate Grenville is a member of a postmemory generation. Grenville’s own ancestors were partially responsible for Australia’s traumatic past since they were amongst the first settlers of Australia. She grew up hearing the stories of her ancestors, but large parts of this went missing. In the process of piecing it back together, she conceived the idea to - by means of historical fiction - investigate Australia’s traumatic past.

In a discussion about the Australian apology, Augoustinos and Lecouteur already touched upon the aspect of shame that is related to expressing an apology. From this grew the need to
examine what the concept of shame exactly contains. For this I drew on Leys’ theory concerning
guilt and shame. According to Leys “shame is more productive than guilt” (124). Sarah Ahmed
elaborates on the theme of national shame, according to her “shame requires a witness” (108) and it
is possible for an individual “to take on the failure of a nation” and so identify with that nation
(108). This theory is applied to Kate Grenville’s case. Identification is a concept that appeared on
several occasions during this dissertation. To establish an empathetic bond with the protagonist of
the story, identification is required. Grenville chose to write about Australia's violent settler past
and this from the perpetrator’s viewpoint. She is not alone in undertaking this task. Her novel fits in
what are called ‘The Sorry Novels’. Rebecca Weaver-Hightower examined these novels and
concluded that a Sorry Novel “expresses a complicated reaction to apology, to accusation of
communal responsibility and to attempts at reparation” (131-132). On one point I do not agree with
her theory and this is her use of the concept of guilt to discuss the contemporary Australian
situation. As mentioned above, I opt to use the term shame when discussing present-day
consequences of the nation’s traumatic past. The Sorry Novels investigate the category of the
perpetrator, but today’s inhabitants cannot be held accountable for past wrongdoings. Rothberg
realised that, in this postmemory landscape a new concept is called for: the implicated subject.

Before proceeding to an analysis of the three novels, one final look needed to be taken at
Australia and the reconciliation process. The reconciliation movement works on two levels:
politically and culturally. On the political level, the organ of the Council for Aboriginal
Reconciliation was brought to life with the purpose of making recommendations as to how
reconciliation can be established. When this organ finished her work, a new organ Reconciliation
Australia was founded with the sole purpose of guarding the process of reconciliation in Australia.
In a biennial report ‘The Australian Reconciliation Barometer’ they report on the progress Australia
is making in achieving reconciliation. On the cultural level, a large number of manifestations have
been (and will be) organised to raise awareness for the traumatic past and to undertake steps
towards reconciliation, the ‘Sorry Books’ and the 2000 Corroboree Bridge Walk being examples of
this. Next to the manifestations, the reconciliation movement also found its way in numerous films,
theatre productions and books. A large number of historical novels was produced involving
Australia’s colonial past and the Stolen Generation. It was especially the colonial past, seen through
the eyes of the perpetrator that held the attention. Nicholls, by means of the concept “existential
homelessness” (xv) explains how the early settlers are able to commit such atrocities towards the
Indigenous people.

The last part of this dissertation dealt with the actual trilogy and incorporated the theoretical
ideas stated in the previous chapters. Complicity and the concept of the implicated subject were
analysed together with the empathetic bond created between the reader and the perpetrator and
resulted in an analysis of how the perpetrator was portrayed by Grenville. The most important
findings are that in creating a crisis of identification between reader and perpetrator, she establishes an empathetic bond. The empathetic bond in *The Secret River* and *The Lieutenant* is firstly forged through the survey of an extended biography of the perpetrator, rendering him human and easily recognisable. Secondly this perpetrator is portrayed as the good colonizer as opposed to the bad colonizer who commits the extreme acts of violence. In creating this empathetic bond, the reader is indirectly involved in the past making it difficult for him to ignore or deny this traumatic past. In *Sarah Thornhill* Grenville tackles the implicated subject as she deals with the generation after the trauma and the shame they need to bear. It is with the novel *Sarah Thornhill* that Grenville also explores empathic unsettlement and this on three levels: Sarah is unsettled as being a witness of the atrocities performed by her father, the reader is unsettled by reading about the atrocities and finally the author is unsettled because she has been faced with her own ancestral complicit history. As mentioned before, Nicholls coined the concept of “existential homelessness” (xv) in dealing with settler violence. For each novel the concept of home has been a deciding factor in participating in complicity.

Finally, in considering the complete trilogy I argue that they mirror the reconciliation process of Australia. In both writing as reading the three novels, the different steps towards reconciliation are achieved. The first novel *The Secret River* aims both at raising awareness of the violent settler past and at condemning the denial of that past. The high number of violent acts present in the book are proof of the former and William Thornhill’s attempt at denying the atrocities are proof of the latter. In *The Lieutenant* Grenville focuses on the acknowledgment of responsibility and explores the sense of guilt in the perpetrator. Proof is the absence of extreme violent acts and the presence of the self-questioning of the perpetrator. *Sarah Thornhill*, the last part of the trilogy, deals with the residual shame present in the future generations. As an implicated subject, it is hard to benefit from the wrongdoings of - in this case - her father. It is especially the coda of this novel that supports the general message Grenville wants to share with the reader: let the stories of the past not be forgotten because Australia’s society needs them to move on and progress towards reconciliation.

It should now be clear that Kate Grenville’s trilogy fits in the reconciliation movement of Australia since the three novels reflect the different steps in that process. Not only has the writing process enabled Grenville as an implicated subject to deal with the residual shame of the past, she has also managed to offer the reader this same goal. For Grenville personally these novels act as an apology for the wrongdoings committed by her own ancestors. For the reader, just as by signing the ‘Sorry Books’, the reading of these novels can be viewed as an apology since it made the reader aware of the traumatic past and advocates reconciliation. Grenville’s novels are part of what Rigney coined “reparative remembering” (253), a very slow process which enables “the opening up of the past to a new future” (Dawson qtd in Rigney 253).
**Works Cited**


