LIÈGE université Library

mathеO

https://lib.uliege.be

https://matheo.uliege.be

Trauma and Reconciliation in Gail Jones' Sorry

Auteur : Sembaeva, Hava
Promoteur(s) : Delrez, Marc
Faculté : Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres
Diplôme : Master en langues et lettres modernes, orientation générale, à finalité approfondie
Année académique : 2023-2024
URI/URL : http://hdl.handle.net/2268.2/20579

Avertissement à l'attention des usagers :

Tous les documents placés en accès ouvert sur le site le site MatheO sont protégés par le droit d'auteur. Conformément aux principes énoncés par la "Budapest Open Access Initiative"(BOAI, 2002), l'utilisateur du site peut lire, télécharger, copier, transmettre, imprimer, chercher ou faire un lien vers le texte intégral de ces documents, les disséquer pour les indexer, s'en servir de données pour un logiciel, ou s'en servir à toute autre fin légale (ou prévue par la réglementation relative au droit d'auteur). Toute utilisation du document à des fins commerciales est strictement interdite.

Par ailleurs, l'utilisateur s'engage à respecter les droits moraux de l'auteur, principalement le droit à l'intégrité de l'oeuvre et le droit de paternité et ce dans toute utilisation que l'utilisateur entreprend. Ainsi, à titre d'exemple, lorsqu'il reproduira un document par extrait ou dans son intégralité, l'utilisateur citera de manière complète les sources telles que mentionnées ci-dessus. Toute utilisation non explicitement autorisée ci-avant (telle que par exemple, la modification du document ou son résumé) nécessite l'autorisation préalable et expresse des auteurs ou de leurs ayants droit.

Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres

Trauma and Reconciliation in Gail Jones' *Sorry*

Mémoire présenté par Hava SEMBAEVA en vue de l'obtention du grade de Master en Langues et Lettres Modernes, orientation générale, à finalité approfondie

Promoteur : Prof. Marc DELREZ

Année académique 2023-2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION 3

2. EXPLORING TRAUMA: REPRESENTATION AND IMPACT IN LITERATURE........17

3. *SORRY* (2007) BY GAIL JONES 19

3.1 Synopsis 19

3.2. Title 21

4. TRAUMA IN GAIL JONES' *SORRY* 24

4.1 Gothic Atmosphere: Exploring Trauma Through Setting 24

4.2 Trauma in characters...28

5. THE REPRESENTATION OF ABORIGINES IN *SORRY* 44

6. SYMBOLISM AND METAPHOR IN *SORRY* 49

7. NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE, STRUCTURE 58

8. CONCLUSION 62

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY 69

1. Introduction

The history of Aboriginal trauma in Australia is a somber narrative that spans centuries, marked by the relentless onslaught of colonialism and the enduring legacy of systemic oppression. Australia's history is deeply intertwined with the narratives of Indigenous peoples who have inhabited the continent for over 65,000 years (National Museum of Australia), establishing sophisticated societies and profound connections to the land. However, with the arrival of European colonisers in the late 18th century, a significant shift occurred. From the outset, the doctrine of *terra nullius* (i.e., a land of no peoples) cast Indigenous peoples as invisible entities on their own ancestral lands. This blatant denial of humanity not only stripped Aboriginal communities of their inherent rights but also laid the foundation for a legacy of dispossession and marginalisation that has reverberated through generations. "This meant that from the very beginning, there was a denial by the white colonisers of the reality of Aboriginal peoples as human beings, and of their rights to the land they had inhabited for millennia" (Raphael, Swan & Martinek: 327). This concept of *terra nullius*, embedded within the legal and philosophical frameworks of European colonialism, served as the cornerstone of British colonisation in Australia, providing a justification for the assertion of sovereignty and the displacement of Indigenous peoples. By deeming the land as uninhabited, the colonisers sought to legitimise their expansion and exploitation without the need for negotiation or recognition of Aboriginal ownership. However, the reality was very different from this narrative of colonial narrative of emptiness. Australia was, and had been, home to hundreds of Indigenous nations, each with distinct languages, cultures, and custodial responsibilities over their ancestral territories.

The Mabo decision of 1992 emerged as a crucial moment in Australia's legal and social history, symbolising a significant step towards rectifying centuries of injustice faced by Indigenous peoples. "Aboriginal people were not given the right to vote until 1967, and it was only in June 1992 that the High Court in the Mabo decision acknowledged the land rights of Aboriginal peoples" (Raphael, Swan & Martinek: 328). The acknowledgment of Aboriginal land rights in the wake of the Mabo decision represented a long-overdue recognition of the profound injustices perpetuated by colonialism and dispossession. Prior to this landmark ruling, Aboriginal communities had endured systematic marginalisation and dispossession of their traditional lands, compounded by a lack of political representation and recognition of their rights within Australian society. The legal challenge led by Eddie Mabo and his supporters sought to challenge the *terra nullius* doctrine and assert Indigenous land rights based on traditional ownership and connection to the land. The High Court's recognition of native title

in the Mabo decision marked a departure from previous legal precedent and represented a significant acknowledgment of the ongoing relationship between Aboriginal peoples and their traditional lands. This acknowledgment not only challenged the historical narrative of *terra nullius* but also paved the way for broader discussions and legislative reforms aimed at promoting reconciliation and addressing historical injustices. Subsequent legislative measures, such as the "Native Title Act 1993" (refer to the complexities of the law below), provided a framework for the recognition and protection of native title rights, further "advancing" the cause of Indigenous rights and sovereignty in Australia.

However, the wounds inflicted by colonialism extend beyond mere land deprivation; they penetrate every facet of Aboriginal existence, inflicting trauma upon familial and cultural spheres. The systematic deprivation of human rights, intertwined with the degradation of Aboriginal identity, has left lasting psychological and emotional scars. To delve into the enduring impact of trauma on generations of Aboriginal individuals, I will lean on the significant insights provided by psychologists Beverley Raphael, Patricia Swan, and Nada Martinek. Their research sheds light on the profound repercussions stemming from historical injustices and ongoing systemic challenges faced by Aboriginal communities:

> The first pervasive and ongoing level of trauma experienced by Aboriginal peoples in Australia was dispossession and denial of their rights… A second component of this pervasive and ongoing traumatization related to a complete denial of the human rights of Aboriginal people, who were seen by the early colonists as "sub-human." This was associated also with a failure to recognize the family and kinship structure of Aboriginal life. Not surprisingly, there is also a history of repeated attempts to "wipe out" Aboriginal groups with massacres, poisoning of food and water supplies, and virtual annihilation in some states, such as Tasmania. Subjugation of surviving Aboriginal peoples and enforcement of non-Aboriginal language and culture led to a breakdown of traditional family life, which was essential to the passing on of Aboriginal ways of life, language, and cultural practice. Thus, active discrimination, denigration, the breaking down of culture, racism, and denial of the most basic rights added a second level of ongoing traumatic experience to the background of distress impacting on Aboriginal peoples. (328)

The excerpt demonstrates the multifaceted layers of trauma experienced by Aboriginal peoples in Australia, stemming from the systematic dispossession and denial of their rights by early colonists. The dehumanisation of Aboriginal individuals, coupled with the disregard for their familial and kinship structures, underscores the deeply ingrained racism and oppression embedded in colonial attitudes. Moreover, the harrowing accounts of massacres, poisoning, and attempts at annihilation highlight the extent of violence inflicted upon Indigenous communities.

Furthermore, the psychologists refer to the "Stolen Generations" (Read: 1981), characterised by the forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, communities, and cultural heritage by government authorities and welfare agencies. This egregious practice, which persisted for much of the 20th century, was rooted in the racist ideologies of the time:

> It was expected that the race would gradually fade out, as the circumstances of living of those left behind would lead to their extermination, and their offspring, reared among the whites, would gradually become more "white." … Those children taken away were reared for domestic work (girls) or farm labor (boys), or for adoption by white families. (328)

The underlying purpose of the forced removal policy was specifically designed to assimilate Indigenous children into mainstream white society, with the ultimate aim of completely eradicating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and identity. Removed children frequently endured harsh treatment and exploitation, with girls particularly relegated to domestic chores and boys to farm labor, or alternatively, they were placed for adoption by white families as mentioned above. This considered assignment to menial tasks perpetuated systemic injustice, denying children access to education and other vital opportunities for personal development. Moreover, adoption by white families not only severed familial ties but also strongly reinforced colonial power dynamics, significantly contributing to the gradual erosion of Indigenous cultures and identities. Additionally, the enforced imposition of non-Aboriginal language and culture, coupled with discriminatory practices, further exacerbated the trauma experienced by these generations, ultimately leading to the complete breakdown of traditional family structures and severely impeding the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous ways of life. This deeply ingrained history of discrimination and cultural suppression continues to profoundly impact Aboriginal communities to this day, perpetuating ongoing cycles of intergenerational trauma and socio-economic inequality.

The intergenerational trauma stemming from these atrocities is immeasurable, with over 100,000 individuals directly affected and profound repercussions felt by at least one in ten families (see Raphael, Swan & Martinek: 328). Moreover, the institutions entrusted with the care of stolen children became breeding grounds for further abuse and torment. As Raphael, Swan and Martinek emphasise, "many Aboriginal children were emotionally, physically, and sexually abused in the institutions or foster homes in which they were placed" (330). In his Bill Robinson Memorial Lecture, Ernest Hunter underscores the profound and immeasurable suffering inflicted by these events. Drawing from his experiences in an urban Aboriginal

community, he highlights that about half of his clients had experienced childhood separation, with approximately half of the female population having endured sexual abuse while in foster care (April 12, 1994). This evidence unequivocally demonstrates that Aboriginal girls endured an even greater degree of suffering. Approximately 60,000 individuals are believed to have survived institutional child sexual abuse in Australia. According to findings from private sessions conducted as part of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*, around 15% of these survivors identify as Aboriginal, indicating an estimated 9,000 Aboriginal survivors. Despite this, not all Aboriginal survivors will seek counseling for past traumas, because they view mainstream counseling as "inappropriate" or "insufficient". This is partly due to the fact that mainstream therapeutic services lack incorporation of Aboriginal knowledge and fail to address "the unique experiences of multiple layers of traumas, disconnection, loss and grief for Aboriginal peoples" (Black, Frederico, Bamblett: 2019).

Raphael, Swan and Michalek further argue that in investigations of non-Aboriginal societies, the profound impacts of traumatic events such as separation, loss, abuse, displacement, and dehumanisation are typically only comparable to those witnessed in populations subjected to systematic torture, genocide, concentration camps, or instances of urban or familial violence. Insights gleaned from such populations offer a framework for understanding how these experiences may have affected Aboriginal communities and the potential intergenerational consequences they carry (see 330). In the same research, they refer to another study by Leo Eitinger and Axel Strom, who observe that the consequences of such trauma include a shortened lifespan, with survivors often experiencing various illnesses throughout their lives. The two analysts further pinpoint elevated death rates from diseases such as tuberculosis, lung cancer, coronary heart disease, and many other diseases, particularly in the initial decade post-trauma (see 330).

Hunter, in the previously mentioned lecture, sheds light on the distinct impacts experienced by males, particularly influenced by the loss of fathers due to separations and involvement in the criminal justice system. He emphasises the consequential absence of positive male role models and the challenges in initiating young men into mature masculinity. Hunter underscores this contrast with women's predominant roles in domestic and child-rearing settings, as well as their relatively greater financial stability through welfare payments. Specifically, he highlights how these dynamics manifest in remote communities, where paternal roles are further compromised by various societal changes, including dislocation, integration into the cash economy, unemployment, and the consequences of heavy drinking, which became prevalent after the repeal of prohibition legislation, uniquely applicable to Aboriginal people in

Australia. Hunter elaborates on the disproportionate impacts on males, stating that "early mortality and excess morbidity from alcohol-related causes, enormous rates of arrest and detention, absence from communities and families in pursuit of alcohol, and the dysfunctionality of intoxication, all disproportionately impact the availability of males as parents" (April 12, 1994). In this context, Maggie Brady explores the vulnerability to drug and alcohol abuse among Aboriginal people, attributing negative perceptions of state welfare authorities to traumatic past experiences, including forced family separations (1995). Drawing attention to the disproportionately high number of Aboriginal individuals who died in police custody after experiencing childhood separation, Brady highlights the lasting impacts of state interventions. Additionally, she cites statistics from the *Australian Bureau of Statistics* showing that a notable proportion of Aboriginal individuals aged over 25 had experienced separation from their biological parents. Although establishing precise correlations with substance abuse issues is difficult, compelling evidence indicates a connection between childhood separation and susceptibility to substance abuse.

Moreover, Aboriginal people experience disproportionate rates of incarceration. Indigenous Australians are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, facing higher rates of arrest, imprisonment, and deaths in custody. The complex interplay of historical factors, systemic biases, and socio-economic disadvantage contributes to this overrepresentation, reflecting a profound failure in addressing the root causes of Indigenous disadvantage. Systemic bias further compounds these challenges that manifest in various forms, including racial profiling. Researchers Daryl Higgins and Kristen Davis highlighted that despite numerous policy and practice reforms initiated after the Royal Commission, the troubling over-representation of Indigenous young people in the juvenile criminal justice system persists (3). "Notwithstanding the 339 [Royal Commission] recommendations to reduce the high incarceration rates of young First Nations peoples in Australia, the disturbing reality is that over-policing, police profiling and incarceration is a daily experience for many young First Nations peoples, particularly young males" (O'Brien: 5). Moreover, Sue Helme argues that "today, Indigenous people are the poorest, sickest, least educated group in Australian society" (257). She also states that there is a stark socioeconomic inequality faced by Indigenous Australians:

> There are multiple connections between socioeconomic status, health and educational engagement. Health has a major impact on educational participation and outcomes, and the poorer health of Indigenous people has a significant impact on educational engagement and outcomes. Indigenous children are sick more often than non-Indigenous children, and

> experience higher rates of hearing loss, poor nutrition and intellectual disability … Hearing loss caused by middle ear infections is a particular problem in Indigenous communities, with Indigenous children about three times more likely than non-Indigenous children to experience ear/hearing problems … (Helme: 258)

This quote demonstrates the profound impact of health disparities on educational engagement, with Indigenous children facing higher rates of illness and health challenges compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. These health challenges not only directly impede their ability to engage effectively in education but also create additional barriers to learning and academic success. Helme further investigates the underlying causes of educational inequality experienced by Aboriginal communities:

> Efforts at educational provision for Indigenous students stretch back to the early 1800s, when colonial governments, and later Christian missionaries, attempted to "civilise" the Indigenous population. These early efforts reflected prevailing racial theories that Indigenous populations were naturally inferior to the technically more advanced dominant group, and that "full bloods" would eventually die out due to their inability to withstand the impact of "civilisation". Such views justified government policies and practices that provided minimal schooling for the growing numbers of mixed descent and detribalised Indigenous peoples who were thought to be capable of nothing more than the lowliest positions in white society. (259)

These dehumanising views justified the implementation of government policies that offered only minimal education, reflecting a profound disregard for Indigenous cultures and capabilities. This systemic approach set the stage for ongoing educational disparities and cultural erasure that Indigenous communities continue to contend with today.

According to Helme, by the late 1850s, government schools for Indigenous children were non-existent across Australia, leading to the transfer of responsibility for the "protection" of Indigenous people to churches and other organisations. Over the following century, Indigenous missions and reserves were established to provide this "protection" to Indigenous families who had been dispossessed. However, the reality was often starkly different, as many Indigenous individuals were compelled to reside in camps situated on the outskirts of towns. These camps were characterised by appalling living conditions, contributing to a cycle of entrenched poverty and dependency. Today, several of these camps persist, marked by a myriad of social issues such as domestic violence, child abuse, and substance abuse (see 259).

In the face of these complex societal issues, Australia is presently engaged in an ongoing process of reconciliation: officially, this is known as the Australian Reconciliation. The Australian Reconciliation supposedly aims to confront historical injustices and promote

healing and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It recognises the imperative of addressing the legacy of colonialism, including the trauma endured by Aboriginal communities, while striving for a more equitable and inclusive society. Central to this reconciliation is the acknowledgment of and respect for Aboriginal cultures, histories, and rights, alongside efforts to bridge social, economic, and political disparities. The call for Reconciliation gained prominence in the latter half of the 20th century, leading to the establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in 1991. A crucial moment in this journey was the release of the "Bringing Them Home" report in 1997. Commissioned by the Keating government and disclosed under the Howard government, this comprehensive report aimed to uncover the systematic removal of Indigenous children from their families and homes. The report's title reflects its central goal of bringing the stories and experiences of the Stolen Generations to public attention, containing numerous testimonies, personal narratives, and revelations about the policies that sanctioned these removals, thus documenting the trauma and lasting impact on individuals and communities while seeking acknowledgment, accountability, and reconciliation.

One of the report's key recommendations was the issuing of a national apology to the victims of the Stolen Generations. It called for a collective acknowledgment of the historical wrongs committed against Indigenous families, emphasising the need for healing and restitution. The report underscored the importance of recognising the profound intergenerational trauma inflicted upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities due to these forced separations. Despite the report's significance and its potential to pave the way for reconciliation, the anticipated national apology did not materialise immediately. Prime Minister John Howard, in office at the time of the report's release, refrained from offering a formal apology. His position and denial of the findings during the Convention of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in May 1997 exacerbated the pain for many survivors who had bravely shared their stories.

The report sparked a broader national conversation about Australia's history, challenging prevailing narratives and what the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner called, the "Great Australian Silence" surrounding the mistreatment of Indigenous populations. This pervasive phenomenon encompasses the systematic marginalisation, trivialisation, and omission of the Indigenous experience, perpetuating a distorted depiction of Australian history. Originating from the colonial era, European settlers crafted a narrative to justify their presence, utilising concepts like *terra nullius* to erase Indigenous perspectives. This historical oversight has not only shaped national consciousness but also perpetuated stereotypes and misconceptions,

hindering reconciliation efforts and obscuring the true depth of Indigenous heritage and resilience. The consequences of this silence have been far-reaching, fostering a limited and distorted understanding of Australia's past among generations of Australians. The "Bringing Them Home" report thus played a crucial role in unveiling distorted and idealised versions of the past, prompting Australians to confront uncomfortable truths. Over time, subsequent governments have taken steps toward reconciliation, including symbolic gestures and official apologies. In 2008, a year after the publication of Gail Jones' *Sorry*, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered a historic apology to the Stolen Generations, acknowledging the pain, suffering, and trauma inflicted upon Indigenous communities. The apology marked a crucial step in the reconciliation process, signalling a commitment to addressing historical injustices.

To bring about significant change for the next generation of young First Nations peoples, it is, nevertheless, imperative to address federal, state, and territory government policies that perpetuate social and economic disadvantages. The persistence of discriminatory practices perpetuates a cycle of disadvantage and impedes the creation of a truly inclusive and equitable society. This involves implementing policies and initiatives that actively work towards reducing socioeconomic disparities, reforming the criminal justice system to address overrepresentation, and dismantling systemic discrimination in all its forms. Therefore, meaningful engagement with Indigenous voices is essential for crafting effective solutions to address the numerous challenges confronting Indigenous communities. In this context, centralising Indigenous perspectives in policy-making processes ensures sensitivity, respect, and responsiveness to their unique needs and aspirations, fostering agency and self-determination among Indigenous Australians. While there are Indigenous politicians and lawmakers contributing to these discussions, "they are often marginalized from environmental decision-making processes or are assigned roles in governance that are less than meaningful and fail to create outcomes that reflect traditional, cultural or spiritual values" (Zurba, Papadopoulos: 85). Authentic representation from Indigenous leaders brings first-hand experience and understanding of community issues, guiding the formulation of policies and decisions with authentic insight into Aboriginal aspirations. This culturally attuned approach to governance should integrate Indigenous wisdom, customs, and values into legislative frameworks, honouring Aboriginal culture and heritage.

Building genuine reconciliation necessitates trust-building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous representation in politics and lawmaking serves as a cornerstone in this process, demonstrating a commitment to listening to Indigenous voices and collaboratively addressing past injustices. In essence, the presence of Indigenous leaders

focussed on community concerns underscores the ongoing journey toward true recognition and respect for the voices of Australia's First Nations people in positions of influence. Despite the imperative to have more Aboriginal representation in politics, "Australians have resoundingly rejected a proposal to recognise Aboriginal people in the country's constitution and establish a body to advise parliament on Indigenous issues" (Visontay: 2023). "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice," better known simply as "the Voice," is a proposed institution intended to provide advice to Australia's Parliament regarding issues concerning its Indigenous population. "Opponents of the Voice argued that having a separate advisory body would be divisive and bureaucratic" (De Guzman: 2023). De Guzman continues:

> The referendum, which advocates hoped would unify Australians, appeared instead to bring out a racist underbelly—from the burning of indigenous flags to the attacking of Yes campaigners with slurs to the spreading of racist disinformation. A groundswell of opposition formed in the lead-up to the vote, turning what was once generally positive public sentiment for the Voice against it. (2023)

Similarly, historical instances reveal a recurring pattern where efforts toward Reconciliation and acknowledgment of Indigenous rights have been met with resistance and disbelief, mirroring the challenges faced after the publication of the "Bringing Them Home" report. Despite its intention of fostering understanding and reconciliation, some segments of the white Australian population resisted accepting its findings, for they were unwilling to confront the painful truths it exposed.

Furthermore, parallels can be drawn to the contentious reactions surrounding the Mabo decision, which recognised native title rights for Indigenous Australians. This landmark legal ruling challenged the long-standing concept of terra nullius, sparking fear and resistance among certain segments of society. Some Australians felt threatened by the prospect of Indigenous land claims, leading to vehement opposition and attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the decision. One notable example is former Prime Minister John Howard. Howard was critical of the Mabo decision and the Native Title system it established. He argued that it created uncertainty over land ownership and could lead to legal disputes and economic instability, particularly in rural and resource-rich areas. Howard's government introduced amendments to the "Native Title Act" in 1998, known as the "Wik 10-Point Plan," which aimed to restrict native title claims and provide more certainty for landowners and industries. In this context, in September 1997, John Howard appeared on the ABC's "7.30 Report" where he displayed a map of Australia, alleging that "the Labour Party and the Democrats are effectively

saying that the Aboriginal people of Australia should have the potential right of veto over further development of 78 per cent of the landmass of Australia" (ABC, 1997). Therefore, in both cases, the underlying theme persists: a reluctance among some to acknowledge historical injustices and Indigenous rights, often driven by fear, prejudice, and a desire to maintain the status quo.

In other words, as stated by Haydie Gooder and Jane M. Jacobs, while Reconciliation was introduced as an official strategy aimed at fostering a sense of belonging for all Australians, including both Indigenous peoples who had been dispossessed and settlers, rather than fostering feelings of belonging, it has frequently been marked by feelings of *alienation* for both Indigenous Australians and settlers (234). In their article, they state that the era of Reconciliation in Australia has coincided with a backlash against "Native Title", particularly from influential sectors such as the mining lobby. This backlash emerged in response to the rejection of the doctrine of *terra nullius* and the legal recognition of native title rights. The government, sensitive to the electoral and economic ramifications of this backlash, has responded by cutting funding to key indigenous organisations and undermining the progress made through the "Native Title Act" and subsequent legal decisions. As a result, Indigenous Australians have observed minimal enhancement in their living conditions throughout this period (see Gooder & Jacobs: 234). Similarly, non-indigenous Australians have encountered a feeling of discomfort, described by Gooder and Jacobs as "unsettlement," amid the reconciliation era (see 234). The backlash against native title and the government's stance on perceived "privileges" for minority groups have fueled suspicions that indigenous Australians tend to receive undue benefits. Gooder and Jacobs continue:

> The native title backlash and the conservative government's hard line on the excessive 'privileges' that minority groups are seen to receive has consolidated the suspicions of some that Indigenous Australians have had access to 'too much' (a view which is counter to all existing figures on Indigenous health, housing, and socioeconomic status). Indeed, some settler Australians have come to imagine that it is they who are disempowered, marginal and without privilege, that they are deprived in relation to Indigenous Australians. Such sentiments have included an acute intensification of racism against Indigenous Australians and the transformation of the logic of this racism from one built on presumptions of superiority to one built around resentment. (234-235)

It is quite absurd that despite continually benefiting from white privilege, certain white Australians are now experiencing a sense of threat and marginalisation at the mere notion of Aboriginal Australians potentially acquiring rights for the first time. The truth is that Aboriginal

communities still suffer from deep injustices and systemic disadvantages, facing severe limitations in accessing basic rights and services, as previously mentioned. Therefore, the idea that Aboriginal Australians have received "too much" is not only baseless but also disregards the ongoing inequalities and hardships they endure.

Gooder and Jacobs discuss how settler Australians are grappling with a new understanding of their nation, one that replaces narratives of settler heroism with acknowledgments of colonial brutalities and injustices. They argue that this transition has given rise to what can be termed a Nietzschean "bad conscience." According to Gooder and Jacobs, some settlers criticise the emergence of what they call "black arm-band history" and, like the Prime Minister, refuse to accept responsibility for past injustices. However, for other settlers, this sense of "bad conscience" evolves into full-fledged guilt about the past, leading them to question their legitimacy on the Australian continent after all these years. Gooder and Jacobs note that among settlers, whether skeptics or sympathisers, there is a sense of strangeness at the thought that the nation is no longer what it once was (see 235). For those promoting racist ideologies, such as members of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, the idea of a united nation has been lost. Conversely, sympathetic settlers, moved by guilt, feel a loss of a properly constituted national identity. In both cases, Gooder and Jacobs argue that a sense of loss is experienced. "Not only has there been an apparently irreparable rupture in the settler's sense of belonging in the nation but, for some, the legitimacy of the very nation itself has been called into question" (Gooder & Jacobs: 235).

Gooder and Jacobs also discuss how the settler who experiences guilt embodies the kind of melancholia described by Judith Butler concerning the psychological impact of power dynamics in processes of subjugation. According to Gooder and Jacobs, Butler's insights on bad conscience and self-reproach are useful in understanding processes of subjugation within disempowered or marginalised groups. While many settler Australians may not exhibit these tendencies towards Indigenous Australians due to the history of colonisation, Gooder and Jacobs argue that some settlers, in the process of reshaping the nation's identity, come to feel they are "illegitimate" in relation to Indigenous Australians (see 235). They may perceive themselves as lacking in comparison to Indigenous positivity, whether in terms of tradition, authenticity, or continuity of occupation. Gooder and Jacobs point out that Anthony Moran (1998) suggests that the overt spirit of reconciliation involves a shared understanding between mutually recognised and respected groups, but the underlying spirit of reconciliation may actually be a "form of envy" (Gooder & Jacobs: 236).

Gooder and Jacobs further suggest that this settler envy can persist even when Indigenous groups attempting to reclaim their lands through legal avenues "often fail to meet the legal requirements for proving traditional ownership or continued association" (236). This legal framework, known as the "Native Title Act" is therefore quite problematic. While this legislation had four main goals—recognising and safeguarding native title, setting procedures and standards for future dealings, establishing a mechanism for resolving claims, and validating past acts affected by native title— "the requirements for proof are significant and burdensome" (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander). Indeed, Indigenous groups are often required to provide extensive evidence to support their claims, including historical documentation, oral histories, and cultural practices demonstrating their ongoing connection to the land. Obtaining evidence can be particularly difficult for Indigenous communities that have experienced forced removal from their traditional lands, cultural disruption, and loss of historical records due to colonial practices. Therefore, Gooder and Jacobs argue that this fantasy can thrive even when settlers realise that actual Indigeneity, even under postcolonial conditions, does not guarantee access to traditional lands or a secure place in the reshaping nation (see 235-236). Despite the symbolic gestures made in the form of official apologies, laws, and acknowledgments of historical wrongs, substantive reconciliation in Australia remains elusive due to persistent challenges, because "for Indigenous Australians the era of reconciliation has meant little in material terms" (Gooder & Jacobs: 234).

The road to reconciliation, therefore, remains complex, requiring ongoing dialogue, understanding, and a collective commitment to address the historical legacies that continue to shape the present. It is essential to first "heal the traumas of settler colonialism; advance truth and reconciliation between the groups; deepen cooperation to address structural oppression and social injustice; and create progressive, emancipatory ideas and actions for the sake of liberation" (Clarke & Bird: 59). It therefore involves bypassing not only the injustices of the past but also addressing the contemporary challenges faced by Indigenous Australians, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable future for all. As Kris Clarke and Michael Yellow Bird continue, "when trauma is a collective experience and is denied by the dominant narrative of national identity, then reconciliation and healing become even more difficult, if not impossible" (59).

The debates engendered by the Reconciliation in Australian society have spurred the emergence of a significant literary genre known as "Reconciliation literature," which serves as a vehicle for understandings, reflections, and dialogues surrounding the complexities of reconciling Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. At the heart of this literature are "sorry books," a term derived from the landmark national apology issued by the Australian

government in 2008, commonly referred to as the "Sorry Speech." However, it can be argued that "sorry literature" mostly predates this landmark moment, as its production derived from a sense of frustration that that the conservative Howard government was refusing to issue an official apology. The "sorry literature" is a formal acknowledgment of the historical injustices inflicted upon Indigenous Australians, particularly through policies such as the forced removal of children from their families. These books often represent attempts by white authors to apologise to Aboriginal peoples, offering insights, reflections, and narratives that confront Australia's colonial legacy and its ongoing impact on Indigenous communities. Through "sorry books," white Australian authors engage in introspection, acknowledging historical injustices and expressing a commitment to reconciliation. While it is argued that these literary works are intended to foster empathy and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, contributing to the ongoing process of healing and reconciliation in Australia, it is essential to remember that they have rather little direct impact or assistance for Indigenous peoples in practical terms. Instead, they might primarily serve to provide a sense of contribution and assistance for white authors.

Despite the well-intentioned efforts of "sorry books" aimed at apologising to Aboriginal communities, a significant portion of Aboriginal individuals are unable to engage with them due to low literacy levels (or of course, because they want a more effective form of reparation). This underscores the urgent need to address literacy disparities among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults, a challenge currently being confronted by organisations such as *The Literacy for Life Foundation*. Established with the specific goal of combating low literacy rates within these communities, the foundation's research has uncovered alarming statistics: between 40% and 65% of Aboriginal adults struggle with functional illiteracy in English. This issue not only affects individuals but also has wider implications, as children of parents with low literacy levels often face academic difficulties. Additionally, the foundation has identified a troubling correlation between poor literacy rates and broader social challenges, indicating that addressing literacy is not only about individual empowerment but also about tackling systemic issues within these communities (retrieved from "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literacy"). This underscores the importance of comprehensive literacy initiatives that go beyond individual literacy skills to address the root causes of low literacy rates and their impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as a whole.

Therefore, in light of these efforts, there is a need for a critical examination of whether initiatives like Reconciliation literature genuinely prioritise benefiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or if they primarily serve as a means for white authors to preserve

their reputation and uphold a positive public image. While the intentions behind Reconciliation literature may be generous, it is essential to scrutinise the underlying motivations and impacts. True reconciliation requires more than symbolic gestures or tokenistic efforts; it necessitates genuine engagement, understanding, and a commitment to addressing systemic injustices and empowering Indigenous voices. Therefore, it is imperative for one to assess whether Reconciliation literature authentically amplifies Indigenous perspectives, fosters meaningful dialogue, and contributes to positive social change or if it inadvertently perpetuates colonial power dynamics and reinforces existing inequalities.

Considering that not all authors of “sorry” literature may seek *genuine* reconciliation; some may use it as a means to assuage guilt and sugar-coat the actions of their ancestors. Although supposedly written as a form of apology to Aborigines, these books are written by, and are narrated through the settlers’ perspectives. This raises the question of whether a bias toward the settlers is present in this narrative, not only eliciting antagonistic feelings such as shame and guilt but also fostering optimistic sentiments like pride and admiration for their ancestors’ actions. In this regard, the renowned Reconciliation author Kate Grenville has faced criticism for her novel *The Secret River*. In her attempt to shift the focus away from their ancestors’ misdeeds, Grenville portrays more positive traits in the settlers and victimises their settler-protagonists to evoke pity in the readers.

However, within the field of Reconciliation literature that have garnered attention for their significant contributions, Gail Jones’ *Sorry* (2007) offers a nuanced examination of intergenerational trauma, responsibility, and the ongoing pursuit of Reconciliation post-colonialism. Through its narrative, the novel intricately intertwines individual experiences with the broader historical context of Australia’s colonial legacy and its impacts on Indigenous communities. This novel, which Janet Wilson considers as a “narrative of trauma” (297), has been praised for its ability to stimulate scholarly discourse and provoke critical engagement with the complexities inherent in Reconciliation efforts within contemporary Australian society.

In my thesis, I will argue that Gail Jones’ *Sorry* (2007) stands as a powerful example of reconciliation literature, exploring trauma’s profound impact on characters’ lives within the broader context of Reconciliation in Australia. Through the perspective of Perdita, a young white girl, Jones offers a nuanced portrayal of trauma, respectfully navigating the experiences without appropriating the pain endured by Indigenous peoples, thus fostering empathy and understanding across cultural divides. By analysing the novel’s themes, symbolism, setting, characters, and narrative techniques, my thesis aims to deepen our understanding of trauma’s enduring impact and its role in the process of healing and reconciliation in Australia.

2. Exploring Trauma: Representation and Impact in Literature

Trauma is a deeply ingrained aspect of the human experience, a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that transcends mere psychological distress. At its core, trauma refers to the emotional, psychological, and sometimes physical consequences of an intensely distressing event. These events, often beyond an individual's control, have the power to overwhelm their ability to cope, leaving a lasting imprint on their mental and emotional well-being (see Eekhoff: 2021). The concept of trauma has evolved over time, with its roots in medical and psychological discourse. The term itself originates from the Greek word "traūma," meaning wound, reflecting the early focus on physical injuries (*Merriam Webster*). However, as our understanding of human psychology expanded, so did the understanding of trauma, encompassing not only bodily harm but also the profound impact of emotionally distressing experiences. In this context, one of the pioneering figures in trauma research is of course the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. Freud's work laid the groundwork for comprehending how traumatic experiences could linger in the unconscious mind, influencing behavior and mental health.

Trauma takes various forms, ranging from individual incidents to prolonged, systemic injustices (see Gerber & Gerber: 17). Historical events like the Holocaust stand as stark examples of *collective trauma*, affecting not just those who directly experienced the atrocities but echoing through subsequent generations. Collective trauma, as described, denotes the psychological responses experienced by an entire society following such traumatic events. It extends beyond merely recalling a historical event and involves its representation within the collective memory of the group. Like individual memory, collective trauma entails ongoing efforts to reconstruct the trauma in order to comprehend its significance (see Hirschberger: 1). Similarly, the mistreatment and dispossession of Indigenous peoples in Australia, represent a profound and ongoing trauma that permeates both individual and collective psyches as demonstrated earlier.

The Australian Reconciliation serves as a contemporary example of how an entire society may be affected, in this case by collective trauma inflicted upon the Indigenous populations in this country. The historical mistreatment, dispossession, and cultural erasure inflicted on the natives have left enduring scars on the Aboriginal communities. In the broader context, this trauma not only affects the current generation but also resonates through future ones. For example, in 1966, Canadian psychiatrist Vivian M. Rakoff initiated a study to explore the heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress among the descendants of Holocaust survivors. This study highlighted that the effects of the traumatic event persisted

in subsequent generations, even among those who did not directly experience it. The concept of intergenerational trauma therefore recognises that psychological wounds from past traumas can be inherited by future generations, impacting their mental health and overall well-being.

Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) explores the intersection of trauma and literature, particularly focusing on how traumatic events are represented and processed in narrative forms. Caruth argues that trauma is characterised by a delayed, involuntary response that disrupts conventional understanding and representation. The book delves into various works, including those of Freud, Kant, and literary texts like Marguerite Duras' *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, to examine how trauma manifests in language and narrative. Caruth suggests that traumatic events resist straightforward representation and often emerge indirectly in language, creating a complex relationship between experience and expression. The book also considers the ethical and political implications of representing trauma and emphasises the importance of acknowledging and understanding the unique challenges posed by traumatic experiences. Through a careful examination of psychoanalytic theory, literature, and cultural narratives, Caruth offers insights into the nature of trauma, its effects on memory and language, and the ways in which literature becomes a crucial site for engaging with the unrepresentable aspects of traumatic events. One of the key elements of this work is the role of memory in trauma. Caruth investigates the intricate relationship between trauma and memory. She explores how traumatic events are often remembered in fragmented, non-linear ways and the challenges survivors face in constructing a coherent narrative of their experiences. According to Rosanne Kennedy, "it is a commonplace of trauma theory that the bewildering effect of trauma is best registered through literary devices such as flashback, nonlinear structure, ellipses in language, and uncertainty about whether events occur in the register of the real or the imaginary" (349-350). In another of her influential books, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth provides an explanation of the nature of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):

> There is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (4)

Caruth further elaborates that the enduring impact of trauma lies in its unassimilated nature, where the event was not fully acknowledged or experienced in the moment, and this lack of processing later resurfaces to haunt the survivor (see 4-10). Jones uses precisely those literary techniques in *Sorry*, as will be shown below.

Now that we have explored both the history of Australia and trauma theory, in the next chapter I will discuss Gail Jones' novel *Sorry*, and how Jones intricately connects both elements to create a novel focused on reconciliation in Australia.

3. *Sorry* (2007) by Gail Jones

3.1 Synopsis

Set in the first half of the 20th century, predominantly in World War II, *Sorry* narrates the story of Perdita, a daughter of British settlers, Nicholas and Stella Keene who move to Australia in 1930 to pursue Nicholas' career path in anthropology. The couple's loveless marriage becomes more strained with Stella's accidental pregnancy with Perdita. This development exacerbates Nicholas' abusive behavior, contributing to Stella's deteriorating mental health, making both parents incapable of giving affection and attention to their child. Named after a character from Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale* due to her mother's fascination with the playwright, Perdita, therefore, finds solace in being raised by Aboriginal women in the neighborhood, forming a deep connection with them and their culture. Nicholas, her war-obsessed father, embodies an unsettling blend of abuse and negligence, possibly fueled by the scars of his traumatic experiences in the Great War and the frustration of an unsuccessful career in anthropology. Stella, her mother, grapples with her own mental health challenges, eventually leading to her confinement in a mental asylum.

To assist with domestic tasks when Stella is confined in hospital, Nicholas introduces Mary, a "half-caste" girl from a convent, into their household. This marks the beginning of a profound connection between Mary, Perdita, and their mute neighbour Billy Trevor. Mary assumes a sisterly role in Perdita's life, imparting valuable lessons about her culture, traditions, and narratives. Through Mary, Perdita gains insights into the profound injustice of the government intervention that separated Mary from her mother during childhood due to her mixed-race heritage, making her a part of the "Stolen Generations." These authorities placed her in a Christian orphanage, where she was subjected to a coercive assimilation into Christian and European cultural norms. Any expression of her Aboriginal heritage was met with punishments, intensifying her sense of cultural displacement. Mary's life takes an even more tragic turn when she is brought into the Keenes' household to take care of the family. It is at this household, that Mary endures relentless abuse at the hands of Nicholas: her life becomes a haunting cycle of torment, with both sexual and physical abuse.

Although the details are left unclear at first, at some stage in that period after Mary's arrival into the family, Perdita suffers a traumatic event that leaves her with a speech

impediment and partial amnesia for years. Having witnessed the death of her father, she indeed develops a stutter and a selective memory loss as a response to this psychological trauma. The plot of the story thus traces her attempts to regain her memories of that traumatic event. The novel is structured in a way which makes the reader believe that Mary murdered Nicholas because she is imprisoned for the crime. It is only at the end of the story that the truth is uncovered: Perdita herself murdered her own father out of anger because the latter was forcing himself onto Mary. However, Mary accepts responsibility and is deemed culpable for the offense, leading to her placement in a reform school in Perth.

Following Nicholas' demise, and the Japanese bombing of Dutch refugees near Brome on March 3, 1942, Stella and Perdita are compelled to leave the North-West and relocate to Perth. Initially, they seek refuge at a convent, where they stay for a few days. However, they soon move to a small but comfortable place, where Stella finds a job at a florist shop. Settling into their new residence, Perdita becomes intrigued by an Aboriginal family nearby. Her curiosity about Mary's whereabouts leads her to inquire with the neighbours, who suggest that Mary might be in a juvenile prison called Greensleeves. Subsequently, Perdita, accompanied by Billy, starts visiting Mary at the institution.

Unfortunately, Stella's health deteriorates rapidly, rendering her too ill to even eat let alone take care of her daughter. Concerned about her absence from work, Stella's employer begins searching for her and discovers the severity of her condition. This prompts the authorities to intervene, ultimately leading to Perdita being temporarily adopted by the Ramsays—Ted and Flora. Concerned about Perdita's stutter, Flora takes her to see a speech therapist, Dr. Oblov, for treatment, while also offering her a notebook as a space to pen down her thoughts in an effort to promote her ability to communicate more openly. During these medical sessions, an intriguing revelation surfaces: despite her speech impediment, Perdita can flawlessly recite Shakespeare's works from memory. The turning point occurs when she recites a line from "Macbeth" that triggers the recollection of a forgotten memory. Unravelling the layers of her past, Perdita remembers the traumatic event when her mother was reciting the same line: she killed her father to protect Mary from his sexual assault. With the recovery of this repressed memory, her stutter miraculously disappears.

After finally learning the truth, Perdita visits Mary in prison, seeking to understand why her friend took the blame for a crime she did not commit. Mary, wanting to be a saint, and also believing that nobody would believe a black person, has admitted to the murder of Nicholas essentially to protect Perdita. With guidance from the doctor, Perdita discovers the possibility of securing Mary's release by having Stella testify as a witness. Despite this chance for

redemption, Stella declines, convinced as she is that the past cannot be undone. Subsequently, Stella's health deteriorates even further, leading to the onset of dementia and further diminishing any prospect of Mary retrieving her freedom.

Perdita, along with Billy and Pearl, Billy's non-verbal wife, continue their visits to Mary in juvenile detention, relying on sign language for communication. However, when Mary turns 20 and is transferred to an adult prison, their ability to visit her is abruptly halted, as only biological family members are granted access. Perdita, facing financial constraints that hinder her pursuit of a university education, embarks on a path as a trainee librarian. At the age of 20, she assumes the role of a godmother to Alison and Catherine, the twin daughters of Billy and Pearl, by whom she is endearingly referred to as Auntie Deeta.

One day, a letter arrives from Sister Perpetua, who had been at the convent where Perdita and her mother stayed during the bombing of Broome a few years back. The letter bears the sad news of Mary's passing from appendicitis, accompanied by a book that she owned, *The Lives of the Saints*. Overwhelmed with emotion, Perdita weeps, haunted by the realisation that she has never apologised to Mary for her role in the events that led to her imprisonment. In this moment, she reflects on the injustices inflicted upon Mary since her abduction from her mother as a baby and regrets having been unable to say "sorry," echoing the title of the book.

3.2. Title

Jones' *Sorry* is a touching novel which delves into the complexities of reconciliation and the unspoken apologies owed to the Indigenous peoples of Australia. The title itself carries a weighty significance, embodying the broader themes of remorse, acknowledgment, and the persistent struggle for understanding between settler communities and the Aboriginal population. At the heart of the novel is the exploration of historical injustices and the profound impact of these wrongs on individuals and communities. *Sorry* is therefore not merely a title; it serves as a symbolic expression of the author's desire to extend an apology, on behalf of the settlers, to the Aboriginal people for the historical crimes committed against them for centuries.

According to Catherine Schwerin, the term "sorry" is commonly used in mainstream Australian society, much like in other variations of standard English, often as a superficial gesture aimed at smoothing over social interactions or avoiding conflict, like accidentally bumping into someone (see 37). However, she states that its usage can also present challenges, especially when individuals struggle to genuinely acknowledge their own culpability or feel deep shame (see Schwerin: 37). Nevertheless, within Aboriginal culture, "sorry" holds a distinct significance that goes beyond a simple apology. She continues that the word is closely

intertwined with the concept of "sorrow" and is embedded in phrases like "sorry business," which encompass themes of death, grief, and mourning, along with their associated rituals (see Schwerin: 38). Therefore, within Indigenous contexts, "sorry" holds deeper emotional significance, emphasising a profound communal sense of loss. This nuanced interpretation highlights the word's crucial role in addressing themes of guilt, shame, and the quest for reconciliation (see Schwerin: 37-38). Thus, while "sorry" may be an overused and often hollow term in standard English, its resonance within Aboriginal culture makes it a potent symbol of acknowledgment, healing, and reconciliation: "the 'Sorry' of the title alludes to the shame and blame, regret and sorrow of a nation. Not just for this, but for the whole issue of White intervention in Aboriginal lives" (Schwerin: 38).

While some authors choose to narrate the lives of minority characters through their own perspectives such as *The Help* (2009) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) to name a couple, *Sorry* takes a different approach. As Schwerin states, Jones "does not presume to artificially construct an Aboriginal voice. The narrative is told from the perspective of Perdita Keene, a white woman" (38). Therefore, while Jones claims that *Sorry* has "a political-allegorical aspect, as one would expect, claiming such a title" but that "it is not centrally concerned with representing the Stolen Generations", because as a settler herself, "it would be presumptuous to do so and it would risk appropriation of others' painful experience" (Jones, 2008: 84). Jones is therefore careful not to appropriate black people's trauma, or to speak on their behalf. Instead, she approaches history as "a complicated process of repressions and revelations" (Block: 2008), recognising her responsibility as an author to uncover and narrate suppressed narratives through the lens of justice.

According to Jones, "the wish for justice to prevail is linked with time past and time future, with imagining reparation for wrongs and the instauration of rights" (Jones 2008: 80). In her opinion, "writerly elaboration – *naming* the past, speaking of it, offering an account – is one of our forms of negotiation" (2008: 80, author's emphasis). Nevertheless, the author must refrain from "succumb[ing] to luxurious – that is to say, debilitating – melancholy", which, in her opinion, is "too close to political quiescence" (2008: 80). Instead, she advocates for a creative and intrinsically resistant approach to entertaining darkness, emphasising the importance of affirming commentary, statement, symbol, and voice in imagining alternative perspectives. In this context, the insistence on these elements is considered fundamental to envisioning a different narrative. Ultimately, Jones suggests that the speaking of shadows is the continual shaping of meaning in the face of senseless annihilation (see Jones 2008: 83).

Jones continues by saying that her novel "deals with culpability and the refusal to say 'sorry', the characteristics, as we now know, of a certain type of (persisting) dispossession" (Jones 2008: 84). The white protagonist Perdita's inability to apologise, to say "sorry" to her Aboriginal friend Mary, is therefore, reminiscent of Australian history. More precisely, during John Howard's tenure as Prime Minister from 1996 to 2007, his refusal to issue a formal apology to the Stolen Generations stirred significant controversy, as explored previously. This refusal became a focal point in the broader discussions surrounding Reconciliation efforts.

Perdita, therefore, emerges as a central figure whose journey epitomises the challenges and complexities of reconciliation. Born in 1930, Perdita represents the generation of white settlers who, knowingly or unknowingly, inherited the legacy of dispossession and the cultural erasure perpetrated against the Aboriginal communities. Raised in an environment amidst prejudice, Perdita confronts with her own complicity in the systemic mistreatment of the Indigenous people. However, the narrative takes an unexpected turn as it is revealed that Perdita, not Mary, was the one who committed the fatal act. This revelation becomes a crucial turning point in the story, unraveling layers of deceit, denial, and the corrosive effects of guilt on the human psyche. The inability of Perdita to apologise to Mary becomes a reflection of the broader societal dynamics at play, as will be explored below. It symbolises the systemic challenges in acknowledging and rectifying historical wrongs. Perdita's struggle to utter a simple "sorry" encapsulates the deep-seated resistance within settler communities to confront the uncomfortable truths of the past. The novel can therefore "be read as an 'allegory about cultural forgetting'" (Jones qtd. in Kossew 2013: 179).

Perdita's failure to apologise to Mary may be a reflection of the lingering unresolved tensions within Australian society, particularly concerning the treatment of Indigenous communities. Perdita's realisation of the importance of apologising to Mary comes too late: "*I should have said sorry to my sister, Mary. Sorry, my sister, oh my sister, sorry*" (211: author's emphasis). "This instance then allegorically mirrors Jones's wish for white Australia to finally acknowledge and apologise to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, but it also echoes her view of reading as a place of ethical listening and empathetic imagination" (Belleflamme, 2015: 18).

However, this failure may also serve as a sobering reminder of the harsh realities faced by Indigenous communities in contemporary Australia. This is why Russell West-Pavlov argues that "the fact that Perdita fails to say sorry, except in a very indirect manner cast in a form of interior monologue (Jones 2008: 204, 211), implies that history cannot be resolved or suffering healed or brought to redemptive closure within fiction" (399). By portraying Perdita's

struggle to articulate her remorse directly, the novel acknowledges the complexity and depth of historical suffering, suggesting that mere words or fictional narratives cannot fully address or heal the wounds of the past.

Instead, it implies that the process of reconciliation and healing extends beyond the confines of fiction and requires real-world acknowledgment, understanding, and collective action to address historical injustices and their ongoing impacts on individuals and communities. If Perdita had succeeded in apologising to Mary, it would have represented a fairy-tale ending, suggesting a resolution filled with closure and reconciliation.

However, the novel's refusal to provide this resolution reflects its commitment to portraying the complexities of reality. By withholding Perdita's apology, the narrative remains grounded, offering a more authentic depiction of the challenges inherent in reconciliation. The absence of Perdita's apology serves as a reminder that reconciliation is not a straightforward journey with a predetermined happy ending. Instead, it is a messy and ongoing process fraught with obstacles and setbacks. In this way, *Sorry* emerges as an exemplary reconciliation novel precisely because it refuses to offer easy answers or simplistic resolutions. Instead, it challenges readers to confront the uncomfortable realities of Australia's colonial past and present, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities of reconciliation.

4. Trauma in Gail Jones' *Sorry*

4.1 Gothic Atmosphere: Exploring Trauma Through Setting

"[A]s often occurs in trauma narratives, the settings are characterized by a gothic atmosphere that helps defamiliarize the familiar and highlights the inexorability of the characters' trauma" (Herrero: 288). This manipulation of setting is a common feature across many literary works, where the environment serves as a potent tool for conveying the psychological distress experienced by the characters. It creates a sense of unease and disorientation, mirroring the internal turmoil of the protagonists as they struggle with their traumatic experiences. Several reconciliation novels, including *The White Earth* by Andrew McGahan, Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*, and this thesis' focal novel *Sorry*, incorporate gothic elements and unfold within gothic settings.

Rosalind Moran contends that despite Australia's apparent "lack of gothic hallmarks such as medieval ruins, decaying mansions, and frozen winters calling for dramatic haberdashery," "the Australian Gothic genre forms a complex, thriving tradition within Australian storytelling," one "that continues to evolve and challenge readers" (Moran: 2021). Moran continues that even before the British colonisation of Australia, myths surrounding the

unexplored Antipodean world were already prevalent in the European imagination. Dating back to antiquity, the idea of a great southern land captivated the minds of Europeans, especially as sea exploration expanded in the 17th and 18th centuries. According to her, these tales entrenched the belief that any uncharted land in the southern hemisphere would likely be eerie and bizarre (see Moran: 2021). With the onset of British colonisation in 1788, their perceptions of Australia's environment only reinforced these biased views. Moran states that the unfamiliar plant life, reversed seasons, and the presence of black swans, contrasting with the white ones in Europe, were seen as deviations from the European norm (see Moran: 2021). Consequently, colonisers not only viewed Australia as a mysterious and harsh landscape but also as a godless and morally corrupt realm (see Moran: 2021). "Gothic motifs include psychological drama, supernatural threat, mystery, haunting, and wild, destabilising settings. These were motifs Europeans historically associated with Australia, and to some extent still do" (Moran: 2021). Therefore, the enduring legacy of these biased perceptions and colonial attitudes towards Australia's landscape and Indigenous peoples laid the groundwork for the emergence of the Australian gothic genre. In this respect, a number of Australian gothic novels, therefore, "us[e] the gothic as a vehicle to explore past wrongs and present injustices" (Moran: 2021). This may be why Jones utilises a gothic setting in her novel, as it provides a rich backdrop for exploring themes of trauma, guilt, and reconciliation within the context of Australia's colonial history and its lingering effects on contemporary society.

Furthermore, the Gothic genre's prevalence in traumatic scenarios can be attributed to its inherent exploration of disjunction and fragmentation within the self (see Miles: 2-3). This introspective exploration may offer insights into the profound loss of "a properly constituted national selfhood" as discussed earlier (see Delrez, 2011: 196). Delrez argues that the belated realisation that Australia's foundation coincided with dispossession and genocide has led to a traumatic sense of disconnection from a cohesive national identity among the descendants of settlers (see 2011: 196). While Delrez does not explicitly label Australia's experience as gothic, Dolores Herrero posits that the themes of anxiety and dread, inherent in the gothic genre, are particularly apt in the Australian scenario:

> In the specific Australian context, gothic themes of anxiety and dread, provoked by a real or imagined sense of unhomeliness, seem particularly appropriate to the literature written at a time when, as I have already argued, Australian national myths are suddenly crumbling, thus arousing a powerful sense of guilt and uncertainty among the settler population. (289)

In connection with Jones' *Sorry*, Herrero delves into the nuanced relationship between the characters and their environment, particularly focusing on the settler characters' struggle to reconcile with the harsh Australian landscape. Herrero highlights the significance of the landscape in reflecting the characters' internal conflicts. The settler characters' inability to find solace in the hostile environment mirrors their own tormented souls and troubled past. In Stella's case, it is the recurring snow dream she frequently has (see Jones, 2007: 19-20):

> In her new country Stella would dream this dream many times. It was always the same. There was always the stepping through a doorway, a sense of keen disconnection, of indefinable loss, and then of the air filled with delicate, illogical presences. She loved to tell it; her snow dream. She told it to anybody who would listen. She must have told me her snow dream ten or twenty times.

This snow dream is a prominent motif in the novel. In fact, Herrero suggests it may serve as an illustration of Stella's profound sense of *alienation* in the unfamiliar antipodean setting (see Herrero: 289). Through this analysis, we come to understand how the gothic elements in *Sorry* contribute to the portrayal of trauma and displacement experienced by the characters.

The focal point of the story is the Keenes' residence, a rundown shack that sits at the center of the narrative. This dilapidated shack, where Perdita grows up, holds significant importance. It stands as a stark contrast to its surroundings, emanating an unsettling aura that catches the attention of their neighbour, Vera Trevor:

> When Mrs. Trevor appeared in the doorway, Perdita and Mary were both reading. Both were otherworldly and somewhere else. It startled them, seeing Mrs. Trevor, and she too was startled. They could see a kind of flinch in her body and her high hair quaking … In the granular light of the shack, penetrated more by shadow than by light, they sat quietly together reading [...] (Jones: 67-68)

Mrs. Trevor feels that "[t]here was something about the shack that chilled and disturbed her, something murky, unnatural, a zone of the abnormal" (68). She senses that her son, Billy, shares her apprehension towards the house, particularly due to the violent imagery from WWII newspapers adorning the walls: "[H]is teary gaze fixed resolutely on the floor. Vera could tell he was afraid of the newspaper images tacked to the wall because he began to flap his hands in agitation whenever he caught sight of them" (67-68). In fact, Billy refuses to enter their home on a few occasions:

> One day Billy put his face in the doorway and his eyes grew large. Perdita saw at once how very unusual their little dwelling had become, all books, all symbolic strife, the missing mother, the

> remote father. Billy would not enter the room but simply stood there, staring, his eyes scanning the Blitz photographs as they trembled in a slight breeze, his expression baffled. His large hands began slowly to bat the air. (63)

Following Nicholas' demise, Stella and Perdita reach a pivotal decision to seek a fresh start elsewhere. Yet, their intentions encounter an unexpected obstacle upon discovering a four-day delay for the ship they planned to board. This unexpected delay prompts them to find temporary shelter at a nearby convent, where the imposing architecture and somber ambiance create an unmistakable gothic atmosphere in their temporary home. Diane Hoeveler, in her analysis of the gothic genre, examines how it emerged from historical events and cultural contexts characterised by anti-Catholic sentiments (see 2). She argues that the Protestant Reformation, along with Tudor and Stuart dynastic disputes in England, fueled distrust and fear of Catholicism in Europe. Then, the French Revolution and the expulsion of the Jesuits in France further contributed to a broader skepticism toward Catholic institutions (see Hoeveler: 3). In the context of the gothic genre, Hoeveler highlights how these anti-Catholic sentiments are reflected in the portrayal of Catholic institutions, such as convents and monasteries, as sites of corruption and moral decay (see Hoeveler: 2-10). She notes that gothic literature often depicts members of the Catholic clergy as sinister figures, engaging in nefarious activities and exploiting their power for personal gain. Similarly, nuns are frequently depicted as victims of abuse or agents of dark forces (see Hoeveler: 2).

Applying Hoeveler's analysis to this reconciliation novel, we can see how the novel engages with these gothic tropes. The convent in *Sorry* serves as a symbol of repression and psychological turmoil, echoing the gothic tradition's portrayal of Catholic institutions. Firstly, the convent invokes a sense of antiquity and mystery. The austere furnishings of the room, with its "single bed, a crucifix, and a high square window" (Jones, 2008: 118), contribute to the sense of confinement and isolation often present in gothic settings. The narrow, austere chamber creates a feeling of claustrophobia, enhancing the overall sense of unease and tension. This confinement mirrors the psychological and emotional constraints experienced by the characters, particularly Perdita, as they grapple with their traumatic pasts.

Moreover, the presence of the nuns in the convent adds to the gothic atmosphere. In traditional Gothic literature, as stated by Hoeveler, nuns are often depicted as victims of abuse or as agents of darkness (see 10). While the nuns in *Sorry* may not engage in sinister activities, their presence contributes to the sense of foreboding and mystery surrounding the convent. For example, on the first night at the convent, Perdita hears

> the footfall of a nun somewhere in the wooden building. And she heard her own shadowy fears begin to stir: that like a figure in a fairytale her speech would be forever cursed; that she would move through the world fundamentally incapacitated, never able to express a single coherent thought. (122)

The setting described here exhibits several elements characteristic of the gothic genre. Firstly, the "wooden building" evokes a sense of antiquity and decay, something prone to creaking. The setting is likely old and possibly in disrepair, contributing to an atmosphere of gloom and mystery. Perdita's fear is evident in her reaction to the nun's footsteps, which stir up her own "shadowy fears." She begins to fear that her speech will be forever cursed, highlighting her sense of vulnerability and isolation within the convent's walls. This fear adds to the Gothic atmosphere, as it underscores the psychological turmoil and uncertainty that pervades the setting.

According to David B. Morris, in gothic literature, "the past interpenetrates the present time, as if events were never entirely the unique and unrepeated product of human choices, but rather the replication of an unknown or buried pattern" (Morris: 304). The repetition of the past is a recurring element in *Sorry* as well. Perdita's flashbacks of her father's death and her guilt over her role in Mary's wrongful imprisonment, align with the psychological complexities often depicted in this quote: the past haunts her.

Together, these Gothic settings within the novel not only enhance the atmospheric tone of the story but also deepen the exploration of trauma and its psychological impact on the characters. By weaving elements of Gothic literature into the narrative, Jones adds layers of complexity and tension, underscoring the emotional and psychological struggles faced by Perdita and others. Through the Gothic lens, authors like Jones can delve into themes of colonial history, trauma, and reconciliation, offering profound insights into the Australian experience.

4.2 Trauma in characters

Trauma, as theorist Cathy Caruth defines it in simpler terms, is "response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (91). In the light of this definition, it can be argued that Gail Jones' reconciliation novel qualifies as a trauma narrative. In the novel, the protagonist, Perdita, grapples with profound trauma stemming from the traumatic event of witnessing her father's death, an event in which she is also implicated. The narrative unfolds as Perdita experiences recurrent flashbacks throughout the entire novel, indicating the haunting presence of unresolved trauma in her psyche. These intrusive memories

serve as manifestations of Caruth's definition of trauma, where the initial overwhelming event resurfaces later in fragmented and distressing recollections, evoking the profound impact of unresolved trauma on individual consciousness.

Furthermore, Perdita's coping mechanisms align with Caruth's understanding of trauma. Her development of a stutter and selective memory loss can be interpreted as adaptive responses to the overwhelming nature of her experiences. The stutter and memory loss serve as psychological defenses, enabling Perdita to navigate the unbearable weight of her trauma by suppressing or distorting certain aspects of her past, including her own role in her father's death. According to Labao Wang, her father's death

> becomes a nightmare that keeps coming back to haunt her. She feels frightened by what has happened, and she is confused when the police take Mary away instead of herself. She is filled with guilt because she realises what a big debt she would owe for allowing the police to think that Mary had killed her father. In her confusion, she lost her memory and developed a terrible stutter ([Jones:] 151). Perdita felt traumatized by her own act of murder and bound by its consequences. (121)

Therefore, the central plot of the story revolves around Perdita's quest to recover her memories of the traumatic incident that initially caused her stutter and in doing so, hopefully cure it. This non-linear structure serves as a reflection of how trauma survivors often recall memories, as will be explained more in depth in a later chapter. In a way, it "does not immediately reveal Perdita's complicity in her father's death and Mary's incarceration… rather, the narrative mimics the structure of trauma as a belated memory that is not directly accessible to consciousness" (Kennedy: 349). This belated memory that Perdita finally recovers from her unconscious mind at the end of the novel, is indicative of the trauma she experienced due to her father's death/patricide. Regarding this delay in memory retrieval in traumatised individuals, in *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth offers an explanation using Freud's theory as follows:

> At the heart of Freud's writing on trauma, both in what it says and in the stories it unwittingly tells, is that trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its *belated address*, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (4, emphasis added)

In other words, Freud's exploration of trauma delves into the profound depths of human experience, revealing trauma as more than just a psychological wound. Rather, it emerges as a narrative, a story of a wound that yearns to convey a truth that remains elusive through

conventional means. As the passage implies, trauma acts as a conduit for the unconscious, a vehicle through which repressed aspects of our experiences find expression. In the case of Perdita, this hidden truth manifests in the buried memory of her father's murder, a memory that seeks acknowledgment amidst the fog of her amnesia. The notion of trauma as a "wound that cries out" resonates deeply with Perdita's journey in the novel. Her struggle to unearth the truth surrounding her father's death parallels Freud's conception of trauma as an insistent narrative seeking acknowledgment. However, the intensity of the trauma she endured renders her memories inaccessible, hiding the truth behind a fog of amnesia. This delayed retrieval of memories reflects the belated address characteristic of trauma, where the full extent of the experience only surfaces after a prolonged period of suppression.

Herrero draws upon Dominick LaCapra's theory of trauma studies to argue that "Perdita must overcome her initial response to trauma, namely the *denial* imposed by amnesia and the *acting out* or compulsive re-enactment of her traumatic experience, so as to be able eventually to *work through* her trauma and overcome its paralysing symptoms" (285, emphasis in original). According to LaCapra, one can go back to a normal life, by working through the traumatic experience:

> Working through is an articulatory practice: to the extent one works through trauma […] one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one (or one's people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future. (LaCapra: 21–22)

In a nutshell, Herrero states that Perdita constantly struggles to confront and process the trauma she has experienced. The recurring attempts to break free from denial and impulsive behaviours indicate her ongoing efforts to come to terms with the emotional weight of her past. However, Herrero continues, each effort is met with a formidable numbness, a psychological barrier that prevents her from engaging in the necessary and often painful process of working through her feelings and memories. Perdita's desire to vanish, as expressed in her act of hiding inside an old boab tree with a hollow bottle belly (see Jones, 2008: 123-124), therefore, serves as a poignant metaphor for her intense anxiety and the overwhelming nature of her emotions. The image of her squeezing herself inside and finding solace in being enclosed suggests a longing for escape and temporary relief from the distressing aspects of her experiences. In that fleeting moment within the tree, she entertains the fantasy of staying hidden, evading any possibility of being found, expressing a deep yearning to be free from the burdens of her past. The repetition of "never to be found, never-ever, never-ever" (123-124) underscores the profound extent of

Perdita's emotional turmoil and her desperate wish for a permanent escape from the painful realities that haunt her (see Herrero: 285).

As already mentioned, it is only at the story's conclusion that the truth is unveiled: Perdita, driven by anger, had actually killed her father to protect Mary from him. The revelation of Perdita's culpability in her father's death serves as a pivotal moment in the narrative, shedding light on the complexity of trauma and its lasting effects. Despite being physically unharmed during the traumatic event, Perdita's psyche bears the burden of her actions, resulting in constant flashbacks that permeate the entirety of the novel. This phenomenon is explored by Freud in *Moses and Monotheism*:

> It may happen that someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident– for instance, a collision of trains. But in the course of the following weeks, he develops a series of grave psychological and motor symptoms that can only be a result of his shock. . . He has developed a "traumatic neurosis." (109)

This passage can be related to Perdita, as she also leaves the traumatic scene completely unharmed, yet gradually develops symptoms of trauma, like flashbacks and memory loss due to the shock of the violence witnessed, even years later. The traumatic scene "returns and returns, unsettled, mutable, fraught with the abstraction of trauma and the shattering of time" (Jones: 124). The flashbacks of the disturbing event occur unpredictably and against her wishes, almost haunting her.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud argues that patients who suffer with "traumatic neurosis" do not try to think of their accident and are rather "more concerned with *not* thinking of it" (7, emphasis in original). In this respect, Perdita, similarly to Freud's patients, tries not to think about the incident, and therefore, in the process, unconsciously suppresses most of the memories, and develops a speech impediment, until she gets psychological help from Dr. Oblov, who helps her cure her stutter, and therefore, at the same time, retrieve all her repressed memories.

Moreover, Nicholas Keene, Perdita's father, emerges as a character deeply impacted by the psychological scars of war. Nicholas, a former captain in the First World War, finds himself incapacitated due to a back injury, preventing him from further military service, including participation in World War II. This physical limitation triggers a profound sense of emasculation and shame, making him "intent on proving his manhood" (Jones, 2008: 4), and hence his decision to migrate to Australia, which helped him feel "once again heroic . . . a frontiersman, white, filled with colonial aspiration… [He] felt expanded, as if on a mission"

(15). The Great War not only brought immense shame upon Nicholas but also led to the development of a common post-traumatic stress disorder among soldiers, referred to as "war neurosis" by Freud. Despite being the son of a successful store owner, Nicholas adamantly refuses to engage in work or inherit the family store due to his profound aversion to the presence of mannequins within the shop. The sight of these lifeless figures evokes within him a deep sense of unease, described as "a dull quiver of morbid trepidation" (5):

> The garments hanging on lifeless bodies reminded him of the war. He saw before him again the ghastly carnage of 1918, the ruin of mud-caked men, discoloured khaki with death, lying there, gone. His own surprised aliveness had made him feel special, one of the elect, a *survivor*, a lucky man, even when he was blasted from behind and found his back torn open. He could not have stood behind a counter, dealing with body-shapes of clothing, the arms flapping loose on coat-hangers, the slack torso of any shirt. An anguish he did not recognise made him think of this often – bodies blown to kingdom come, the muck of it, the flesh. He would spend his life negotiating a dangerous contradiction, wanting both to remember and to forget the war. (5, emphasis added)

Nicholas' fear of inanimate objects stems from his harrowing experiences witnessing soldiers being torn apart during the war. His survival of the war created what Caruth calls an "oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life" (7). Nicholas is then, a complex character with a troubling, traumatic past. His involvement in World War I left profound scars on his mental health, transforming him into a tormented and violent figure. His tendency for for violence, exemplified in instances of domestic abuse and heinous acts like the rape of Mary and other Aboriginal servants, can be traced, in part, to the psychological scars inflicted by his wartime traumas.

The atrocities of the Great War irrevocably reshape Nicholas, propelling him towards a path fraught with inner turmoil, emotional instability, and self-destruction. Nicholas' incessant recollection of the war not only contributes to his descent into becoming a perpetrator himself but also culminates in his death. As Caruth continues in *Unclaimed Experience*, "the survival of trauma is not the fortunate passage beyond a violent event, a passage that is accidentally interrupted by reminders of it, but rather the endless inherent necessity of repetition, which ultimately may lead to *destruction*" (62-63, emphasis added). Nicholas' story, therefore, reveals the persistent pattern of trauma, where the lasting effects of past violence contribute to his tragic end. His experience serves as a clear example of how trauma can deeply affect the human psyche over time, emphasising the significant consequences of its repetitive nature.

One of the numerous victims of Nicholas' cruelty and misogyny is his own wife, Stella. She is initially depicted as a frail yet strict woman, later descending into mental derangement under the weight of his abuse. A big admirer of Shakespeare, she had great hopes for her future until it was shattered the moment that she married Nicholas. Like many women in the early 20th century, Stella lacks a voice and influence in family decisions, such as the decision to migrate to Australia. Trapped in an unhappy and abusive marriage, far from her family, especially her beloved sister Margaret, Stella's mental health deteriorates in this foreign land. Nicholas, driven by a desire for control, believes that the move to Australia will make Stella more compliant. Nicholas believed that moving to Australia, to the "dark other-side of the planet" (9) would grant him greater control over his wife as "she would be well-behaved" (13). Nicholas "enforced his authority through the double force of fatherhood and physical violence. He struck his wife whenever he lost control of his temper …" (Wang: 120). An instance of domestic abuse is illustrated on the page 79. As Stella immerses herself in the role of a great tragic Moor in Shakespeare's *Othello*, Nicholas laughs at her performance. This mockery wounds Stella, prompting her to retaliate by tearing down his cherished newspaper cuttings. In a fit of rage, Nicholas violently reacts to Stella's defiance, striking her without hesitation, "sending her flying backwards so that she toppled a stack of books" (79). This aggressive outburst not only underscores Nicholas' dominance within the household but also highlights his readiness to assert control through physical force. Additionally, Mary is also a victim of domestic violence, experiencing the fury of Nicholas' abuse when she confronts him about his mistreatment of Stella. These instances of violence emphasise Nicholas' utter disregard for the well-being of those around him, as he seeks to maintain dominance through intimidation and force. The toxic atmosphere in the household, characterised by violence, leaves Perdita and Mary both "motionless with fear" (79).

Consequently, Nicholas' persistent verbal and physical abuse inflicted upon Stella leads her to the brink of madness, as already mentioned. Even after witnessing Perdita murder Nicholas, Stella does not intervene, instead reciting "an emphatic speech of triumph" from *Macbeth* (194). Stella's recitation of *Macbeth*'s triumphant speech amidst the murder of her husband suggests a disconnect from the reality of the situation and a detachment from the moral implications of the act. By reciting this speech with such emphasis and apparent glee, she seems to be celebrating the outcome, showing a lack of empathy and remorse for the violent crime unfolding before her. Her "gloating", described as "ruthless" and "cruel," by Perdita further suggests a detachment from the gravity of the situation and pleasure from it (194). Stella's standing "beside the door with an air of grave formality, as if she spoke as an actor from the

centre of a stage" reinforces the notion that Stella is viewing the event as an entertaining spectacle rather than a crime (194). This indicates a deeper psychological state, such as denial or dissociation, wherein Stella is unable or unwilling to confront the reality of the violence occurring in her own home. Her lack of concern or remorse following her daughter's actions suggests a sense of detachment from the tumultuous past she shared with Nicholas, indicating a newfound sense of liberation from their troubled history and an indifference to the tragic consequences. Later, even Perdita's stutter irritates the mother, as she thinks it is "to *dramatise* [Perdita's] father's death in the very chamber of [her] mouth (100, emphasis added), meaning that the death of her husband was *that* insignificant to her.

While white characters also contend with trauma throughout the narrative, it is the Aboriginal people, especially women, who emerge as the primary victims of trauma stemming from racism. Although not much is known about Mary's parents, in a passage of the book Mary mentions that her "mother was Dootharra and her father was a white stockman, a *kartiya*, no name", who "buggered off, somewheres, long time, nobody knows, somewheres, longaway" (55, emphasis in original). This sentence suggests that Mary's mother was presumably a victim of rape by a white settler resulting in her giving birth to a "half-caste" daughter. Dootharra's story is perhaps one of the most tragic in the entire book, because not only was she a victim of sexual abuse, but this abuse also led to another horrible consequence: the government's forceful removal of her child, due to her being interracial. We readers learn that, when Mary was 6 years old,

> someone from the Government, seeing her pale skin, seized her from her mother and took her to Balgo Mission… Mission fellas noticed that she was unusually smart, so later, two years later, she was sent down south, to an orphanage in the city called Sister Clare's. To learn to be a whitefella, she said, to learn all them whitefella ways" (55-56).

These forced policies involved the unethical removal of indigenous children from their families and communities in order to assimilate Aboriginal children into European Australian culture, stripping them of their indigenous identity, language, and cultural connections. As we have already seen, many Indigenous children, like Mary in this novel, were taken from their families in real life, and placed in institutions or foster care, where they were subjected to cultural erasure and abuse. Jones sheds light on these institutions and their cruel ways of integrating black people into their European systems and the result of such practices.

In fact, the traumatic experience of having her daughter forcefully taken away from her, leads to Dootharra's ultimate suicide. It is revealed that Dootharra lets fire consume her because

of her grief: "Dootharra had rolled into a campfire one night and was too tired, or too sad, maybe, to roll out again. Her skin was burned, she was lost, she was a dark, dark shade" (56). In a similar way to Dootharra, according to Caruth, traumatised individuals, once they are liberated or free, sometimes commit suicide:

> The repetition of the traumatic experience in the flashback can itself be retraumatizing; if not life-threatening, it is at least threatening to the chemical structure of the brain and can ultimately lead to deterioration. And this would also seem to explain the high suicide rate of survivors, for example, survivors of Vietnam or of concentration camps, who commit suicide only after they have found themselves completely in safety. As a paradigm for the human experience that governs history, then, traumatic disorder is indeed the apparent struggle to *die*. (63, emphasis added)

While it remains unclear whether the mother was physically injured during the forced removal of her child, she survives. However, the profound trauma of losing her child and the subsequent distress she experiences during the forced removal contribute to her decision to take her own life, mirroring the experiences of survivors of Vietnam and the Holocaust.

Mary is arguably the character who undergoes the most traumatic events. At a very young age, Mary's life took a drastic turn when she was forcefully separated from her family by the Australian authorities. Placed in an orphanage, and later in a nunnery, Mary was thrust into an environment vastly different from her own, where she was expected to adopt the customs, language, and beliefs of the dominant culture. For Mary, the experience of being taken from her family meant more than just the loss of innocence; it was a rupture of familial bonds and the imposition of a foreign cultural identity. The nunnery, where she was placed, became not only a site of physical confinement but also a place of psychological captivity. Upon learning of her mother's passing, Mary tried to express grief in a traditional Aboriginal way: "Mary found a rock and struck at her head until it bled, to show in the Walmajarri way her grieving for her mother, to feel it truly and painfully" (56). When the nuns saw her, they punished her, claiming that "her behaviour was unchristian," leaving Mary "look[ing] down at the blood-drops on the earth and want[ing]her own death" (56). Therefore, as a result of her mother's passing, Mary faces additional punishment from the nuns, compounding her suffering and exacerbating the cycle of trauma, leading her to develop suicidal thoughts.

However, despite the challenges faced at the nunnery, Mary's experiences at the Keenes' household prove to be even more difficult. It is in this environment that she constantly endures sexual and physical abuse inflicted by Nicholas. Despite enduring the trauma of rape, the innocent Mary further suffers by taking the blame for Nicholas' murder, resulting in her

imprisonment and further victimisation. When later questioned by Perdita, who finally recollects her memories, about why she protected her and confessed to her crime, Mary states: "No one will believe the word of a bush blackfella. Unless … they're confessing a crime" (Jones, 2008: 203). This acknowledgment serves as a reflection of the systemic injustice and prejudice that Indigenous individuals, particularly during the first half of the 20th century, were forced to confront. In a society permeated by racial bias, their voices were routinely dismissed or disbelieved, perpetuating a cycle of marginalisation and oppression.

When Perdita reveals the possibility of Mary's liberation from prison if Stella testifies, Mary expresses skepticism towards Stella: "I understood this long time … That Stella, that one Stella, she would never help me" (204). Mary, acknowledging the systemic prejudice against Indigenous people, understands that their efforts may be futile in a society where their voices are often disregarded. Perdita, however, is determined to seek justice and clear Mary's name. Despite Perdita's insistence on revealing the truth, Mary emphasises that the authorities are unlikely to listen, stating that the officials "won't want to know" (203). Therefore, despite enduring unimaginable trauma and injustice, Mary's experiences reflect the broader struggles of Indigenous communities to have their voices heard and their rights acknowledged. Perdita's determination to seek justice symbolises a glimmer of hope amidst this pervasive injustice, yet Mary's sobering realisation serves as a reminder of the significant obstacles faced by Indigenous individuals in their quest for recognition and equality.

Mary's life is therefore marked by a constant lack of freedom, as she remains confined in oppressive environments from the nunnery to the Keene household, and later to the reformatory and prison. Remarkably, even within the confines of prison, Mary finds a sense of comfort and purpose. In this reformatory, she discovers a newfound freedom in the ability to teach reading and writing to fellow inmates. Despite the societal constraints and physical barriers imposed upon her, Mary, finds an unexpected sense of belonging and contentment within the confines of the prison walls. Ironically, she refers to the prison as "[her] place," signifying a deep connection and comfort in this seemingly restrictive setting (Jones: 203). Central to Mary's sense of belonging within the prison is the presence of friendship and camaraderie, as evidenced by her mention of having friends within the space. The implication that Mary finds solace and connection through these relationships suggests a bond forged through shared experiences of adversity. It is conceivable that among Mary's fellow inmates are individuals from her own Aboriginal community, offering a sense of familiarity and solidarity in an otherwise alienating environment. Within the prison's confines, these relationships provide Mary with a sense of kinship.

Mary's declaration of the prison as "[her] place" hints at a deeper emotional resonance tied to her experiences within the institution. For Mary, the prison seems to represent more than just a physical space; it symbolises a sanctuary where she can find peace and respite from the traumas of her past. Unlike the outside world, where she has been subjected to oppression and exploitation, the prison offers Mary a sense of security and autonomy. In this space, she is shielded from the threats of external forces, liberated from the constant fear of harassment and abuse. In this regard, the prison becomes a sanctuary of sorts, where Mary can reclaim agency over her own life and find solace in her solitude, despite the spatial limitations.

Nevertheless, that place is also where she dies. Tragically, her life ends prematurely due to appendicitis, a condition easily treatable with antibiotics or surgery in the 1940s. According to Dr. William S. Richardson, "the first series of successful early appendectomy for acute appendicitis appeared in 1888" (162), showing the long-standing availability of medical interventions for this condition. This implies that had Mary received proper medical attention while in prison, she could have survived. However, the neglect and deprivation she endured throughout her life denied her even the most basic access to healthcare, showing the systemic injustices and neglect faced by marginalised individuals like Mary. Thus, this narrative not only exposes the consequences of systemic neglect but also serves as a reminder of the barriers faced by Aboriginal individuals in accessing essential healthcare services, even in cases where treatments are readily available. Mary's story epitomises the tragic intersection of social inequality and healthcare disparity, shedding light on the profound injustices that persist within Australian society.

In *Sorry*, Jones therefore illuminates the harrowing reality of Australia's colonial past. She not only exposes the systemic oppression and racial discrimination that resulted in the imprisonment of Aborigines, but also highlights their forced labour. For example, in a passage, Nicholas and Perdita spend a few days at the Continental Hotel. There, Jones unveils the dehumanising conditions endured by Aboriginal men:

> Nicholas and Perdita were both woken by […] a clanking metallic sound that turned out to be a group of Aboriginal men in iron chains, linked painfully by their ankles. They had been released from gaol to make bitumen roads. From the small window of her hotel room Perdita saw them, men joined in this way, humiliated, caught, and wondered what they had done to be so cruelly constrained. They wore ragged trousers and grimy singlets; their faces shone in the sunshine. A prison guard was sitting at a distance under the blue shade of the mango tree, pinching a cigarette into shape, licking it, turning it, slowly striking a match. He inhaled deeply, watching all the while. When Perdita and her father left the hotel, she realised that she recognised one of the

> chained men. It was Kurnti, who sometimes worked in the stockyard at the Trevors' station. (46)

Jones meticulously depicts the physical and emotional toll of this forced labour, highlighting the stark power differences and systemic inequalities that permeated Australian society during this period. The prison guard, depicted as a white authority figure, sits comfortably under the shade of a mango tree, leisurely smoking a cigarette while overseeing the chained men's labour. This stark contrast underscores the entrenched racial hierarchy and privilege enjoyed by the white colonisers at the expense of Indigenous Australians. Perdita's observation of this scene from her hotel window further emphasises the unequal power dynamics at play. From her vantage point, Perdita witnesses the humiliation and suffering of the chained men, questioning the injustices inherent in their plight.

Martha, the Trevors' cook in the novel, is depicted as a child much like Mary, both being underage teenagers consigned to toil in the households of white families. In this exploitative environment, they confront not only the challenges of domestic servitude but also the specter of sexual violence. Martha's experience highlights the grim reality faced by Indigenous youth in colonial Australia, where they were subjected to physical and emotional abuse within a system marked by racial inequality and exploitation, as we have already discussed. The portrayal of Martha's suffering underscores the pervasive injustices endured by Aboriginal children forced into servitude. Once Nicholas realises that he can assault the "fifteen or sixteen years old" girl without facing any consequences, he does it frequently, taking advantage of his power:

> Nicholas discovered that he could force the cook, Martha, and that she would not tell. All the white men did it; he felt manly and justified. At first he put his hand over her mouth, and watched her dark terrified eyes as he pushed hard into her. He made threats to kill her if she ever told. But gradually, he reasoned, Martha simply knew what to do; she believed his murderous threats and was sure to remain silent. Nicholas liked to pull her head back by its tangled hair and feel that he penetrated so that he hurt her. […] When, a few months later, Vera Trevor discovered that Martha was pregnant, she was sent away, down south, with few questions asked. The new cook, called Sheila, arrived almost immediately to replace her. (28-29)

Nicholas' actions towards Martha reveal a disturbing pattern of exploitation and abuse, as he manipulates his power and authority to coerce her into silence and submission, showing a blatant disregard for her well-being and autonomy. The claim that "all the white men did it" suggests a normalisation of such behavior within the society, indicating a culture of impunity and acceptance of violence against Indigenous women. Furthermore, instead of providing

assistance or acknowledging Martha's account, Mrs. Trevor chooses to dismiss the cook and promptly replaces her with a new one. She is swiftly removed from her position with little inquiry, while Nicholas faces no repercussions for his actions. This disparity highlights a profound indifference towards the plight of Indigenous women and a failure of accountability within society.

This indifference and lack of accountability are further underscored by Mrs. Trevor's reaction to the rumours about Nicholas Keene and native girls, revealing a mixture of disbelief, denial, and reluctance to acknowledge the possibility of such misconduct:

> Mrs. Trevor confirms that she's heard rumours about Nicholas Keene and native girls: she hadn't believed it at first and had once sent away a bloody good cook, […] because she thought she was lying about Nicholas Keene, who had not long arrived, and had a baby and wife, who seemed educated and well-spoken and was rather handsome, in fact. Didn't seem the sort, not at all, she added. (92)

Despite being aware of the rumors, Mrs. Trevor initially rejects them, unable to accept that someone like Nicholas Keene, who presents himself as educated and attractive, could engage in such misconduct. This response highlights a common societal tendency to ignore or minimise allegations of wrongdoing when they contradict established perceptions or expectations based on an individual's outward appearance or social status. Mrs. Trevor's choice to disregard the cook's concerns and send her away demonstrates a failure to take accusations seriously and prioritise the safety of Indigenous women, shedding light on the prevalent attitudes and systemic injustices that perpetuate harm and exploitation within colonial societies. This novel, therefore, "juxtaposes the intimate gendered and racialised trauma of sexual assault with the historic, public trauma of World War II" (Kennedy: 347).

In fact, *Sorry* emerges as a trauma narrative from its very beginning, rooted in the historical trauma of World War II. Born in 1930 and grew up during a period where fear "create[d] internal enemies, monstrous figures in newspapers" (114), Perdita directly experiences the horrors and upheavals of the war, both firsthand and through the accounts conveyed in newspapers and adult conversations. The arrest of Sis, a kind Aboriginal woman employed at the Continental Hotel where Perdita resides during Stella's hospitalisation, further illustrates the pervasive atmosphere of suspicion and discrimination fueled by wartime tensions:

> Japanese families were being relocated for internment; even Sis and her children, Perdita discovered, had been arrested and sent away, as if being the family of a Japanese pearl diver somehow threatened national security. Fear includes these churlish and punitive measures … Aboriginal families were sent to outstations and missions; the north-west was depopulated in

> anticipation of an invasion. Word was that the Government was prepared to lose the north to the Japanese, in order properly to defend the south. (114)

The arrest and relocation of Sis and her children, merely for their association with a Japanese pearl diver, epitomises the irrational hysteria, and discriminatory measures fueled by wartime paranoia. This atmosphere of fear extends beyond individual persecution to systemic actions, such as the forced relocation of Aboriginal families to outstations and missions in anticipation of invasion. The government's willingness to sacrifice entire regions underscores the extent of the wartime trauma and the lengths to which society would go to "protect" itself from minority groups.

During her time in the North-West, Perdita begins to adopt her mother's bleak perspective on life. She "absorb[s] her mother's doomed disposition" (128), indicating Stella's sense of hopelessness about their circumstances. Perdita, influenced by this outlook, starts to share her mother's pessimistic view of the future. She becomes convinced that there will be "subsequent ordeals" (128), suggesting that she anticipates further challenges or hardships ahead, just like her mother. It is due to the fact that despite her young age, Perdita is exposed to various forms of violence during this time:

> In those few days she spent in the town, which stretched in her memory disproportionately long, the way most children remember an extraordinary visit, or a birthday party, Perdita saw how tenuous was the social world torn by panic. She saw a scuffle between two soldiers outside Streeter and Male's store, a boulder thrown through an open window, the shattering consequence of which made her leap in fright, and an old Chinese man struck casually in the street. (128)

These traumatic events, witnessed by Perdita, not only deeply impact her as an individual but also reflect the broader trauma experienced by society during wartime Australia. The conflict among soldiers, the violent act of a boulder being thrown through a window, and the casual assault on an old Asian man all contribute to a sense of chaos, fear, and injustice. For Perdita, these experiences likely instill feelings of vulnerability, fear, and confusion, shaping her understanding of the world around her. Moreover, they highlight the pervasive trauma endured by society as a whole, where acts of violence and discrimination become disturbingly commonplace. During wartime, such occurrences have the potential to significantly destabilise societal structures, resulting in enduring psychological wounds for both individuals and communities.

As already discussed, *Sorry* delves deep into the complexities of historical trauma, particularly examining the profound impact of World War II on individuals and communities. One significant aspect explored within the narrative is the destruction of buildings, including historical sites, during this traumatising period. As the world was plunged into the chaos of war, countless architectural treasures fell victim to bombings and conflicts, leaving behind scars that extended far beyond physical structures. In the novel, Jones explores how characters grapple with the emotional aftermath of losing cultural landmarks, demonstrating how such devastation leaves a lasting impact on collective memory. Mr. Graves, Perdita's teacher, addressing his class on a Wednesday morning, passionately urges them to remember the devastation of war, particularly focusing on the destruction of Monte Cassino, a Benedictine monastery near Rome (see Jones, 2008: 183-184). He vividly describes the monastery's historical significance as a repository of secular and sacred treasures, including ancient artworks and the teachings of renowned philosopher Thomas Aquinas. Despite Mr. Graves' personal pilgrimage to the site in 1921, the monastery falls victim to Allied bombings, first in January and again shortly after school resumes. Amidst his urgency, Mr. Graves emphasises the profound impact of war by urging the students to remember "the loathsome ruination of war," (183) underscoring the lasting scars left by conflict and the importance of preserving historical memory. The once-majestic 1300-year-old building is reduced to rubble, symbolising the irrevocable loss inflicted by war:

> There was a quiet moment, in which the students expected a homily, or a summary, or a date to write down, but Mr Graves let out a harsh deep sob, and began to weep. This was not a guarded loss of control but a full-bodied collapse. He was loud and distraught. It was as if some force of dissolution had swept right through him. 'Monte Cassino,' he sobbed. (184)

This passage depicts the profound impact of war trauma on individuals, particularly through the character of Mr. Grave. The teacher's collapse symbolises the emotional toll of war, as he crumples into his seat, seeking refuge from the overwhelming distress akin to an air raid. His visible vulnerability disrupts the classroom, marking a significant moment of collective realisation among the students that they have reached an irrevocable point where the gravity of war's devastation becomes palpable.

Unlike the other children in the class, who either giggled at the teacher's mental breakdown or even "spat with masculine contempt," Perdita was "moved by Mr. Graves' theatrical announcement" (184). Perdita's respect for her teacher deepens as she witnesses his emotional response to the trauma of war. Despite initially feeling shaken by his collapse, Perdita

later reflects on the incident with a newfound admiration for her teacher. It is not merely Mr. Graves' breakdown that earns her respect, but rather his authentic display of emotion, which she perceives as an appropriate and genuine response to the horrors of war that she seems to understand at her very young age:

> There were, she knew, whole cities that had been destroyed; millions of people had been massacred and lay with their faces on black roads, or in mud, or in gaping pits, gleaming with blood-thickened rain. Survivors stared from the shells of bombed-out buildings, or hid terrified as war vehicles, hot with recent violence, rumbled by, crushing anything in their paths […] Perhaps this was what war did – destroy scale altogether. (184)

Her compassionate response to Mr. Graves' distress reflects a recognition of the human cost of war and the need for empathy amidst widespread desensitisation. Her act of guiding him out of the room (see 185) signifies a breaking through the emotional barriers that had previously restrained them, highlighting the inadequacy of detached responses to the enormity of war's impact. Perdita's newfound respect for her teacher stems not from his collapse itself, but from his authentic display of emotion, which contrasts starkly with the emotional containment practiced by herself and others. Furthermore, the expression "loathsome ruination" strikes a chord with Perdita, "sound[ing] Shakespearean" (185), summarising the deep pain and destruction caused by war that she felt she understood. Its Shakespearean quality suggests a depth of emotion and passionate declaration that transcends mere words, evoking a deeper understanding of the horrors of war that cannot be fully captured by abstract descriptions or sanitised portrayals in the media.

Within the context of historical trauma, Dr. Oblov's therapy sessions with Perdita may prove effective due to his personal experience with childhood trauma. Interestingly, the book reveals that Dr. Oblov is the sole survivor among his siblings of the Spanish flu, a devastating pandemic that swept across the globe in 1918. The Spanish flu, which occurred during a period of significant upheaval in world history, claimed around 50 millions of lives (Cleveland Clinic) and left lasting scars on communities worldwide. Dr. Oblov's firsthand experience with the loss of both his sisters to this disease provides him with a unique understanding of trauma and resilience, making him well-equipped to assist Perdita in overcoming her own traumatic memories. This shared experience of historical trauma not only strengthens the therapeutic bond between Dr. Oblov and Perdita but also underscores the interconnectedness of personal and collective trauma across generations. By drawing on his own experiences, Dr. Oblov offers

Perdita a sense of empathy, validation, and hope for healing in the face of profound adversity. In the following passage, Oblov says:

> When I was ten, and Olga and Ilena were twelve and fourteen, we all contracted the Spanish flu. Many people in our town became ill, very quickly; it terrified me. Olga and Ilena died, and I was left alone. I wanted to die too, but instead all my hair fell out, so that I was just a little bald boy, grieving, and feeling lost and absurd. (164)

The loss of his two sisters was a profoundly traumatic experience that left him so devastated that it led to suicidal thoughts and even caused him to experience hair loss as a result of the immense stress and grief. Moreover, due to his hair loss, Dr. Oblov endured a period of bullying, when he was subjected to verbal and physical mistreatment by other children: "When I was a bald boy, […] other children called me "the egg". They used to come up from behind, flip off my cap, and rap my skull with their knuckles. I was a weakling, I cried, so they grew more cruel" (186). His own experiences of bullying might explain why he is very understanding of Perdita's struggles: he was once a victim too.

Within the context of Mary's silent acceptance of the crime that Perdita had committed, the speechlessness, or "expressionlessness", is be explained by Rosanne Kennedy who uses Walter Benjamin's theory of history as trauma and a correlative theory of the historical conversion of trauma into insight:

> [Benjamin] recognizes that "the traumatized—the subject of history—are deprived of a language in which to speak of their victimization." Whereas "traditional theories of history tend to neglect the speechlessness of trauma," Benjamin develops "the expressionless" as a literary concept to identify the ways that trauma is registered through gaps and ruptures in language and narrative rather than through direct statement. The "expressionless" are "those who … have been historically reduced to silence [,] […] those whom violence has treated in their lives as though they were already dead." (Kennedy: 347)

In other words, Benjamin's concept of "the expressionless" underscores how trauma is conveyed not through direct verbal communication but rather through the absence or disruption of language and narrative. It highlights the plight of individuals who have been silenced by historical violence, portraying them as devoid of agency or voice. An instance of this can be found in the following passage:

> In her small world there was a kind of seizure of feeling: Stella, Mary, herself – none of them now cried. For all the woebegone and sorrowful events that had occurred, indeed for all the

> enormity of the war and the cataclysms of history, they had practised their own severe forms of containment and reserve. (185)

This passage describes how Stella, Mary, and Perdita have become emotionally numb or detached, unable to express their emotions fully despite experiencing significant hardships. In spite of enduring sorrowful events and the enormity of war, they have learned to suppress their feelings, displaying a sense of containment and reserve. This suggests that they have internalised their pain and suffering, possibly as a coping mechanism to deal with the trauma and upheaval they have experienced.

5. The Representation of Aborigines in *Sorry*

In the traumatic narrative of *Sorry*, the depiction of Aboriginal characters shines with a sense of positivity and dignity, offering a nuanced exploration of Indigenous identity while challenging stereotypes. Throughout the narrative, these characters emerge as beacons of resilience, kindness, and wisdom, despite grappling with the weight of their traumatic pasts. Rather than succumbing to bitterness or despair, they navigate their struggles with grace and compassion, embodying the enduring strength of Indigenous communities. There are no antagonists among the Aboriginal characters; instead, they are portrayed as resilient and compassionate individuals who positively influence those around them.

In fact, Jones represents her Aboriginal characters as clever indivuals, who possess an innate understanding and reverence for the natural world. This underscores their wisdom and intelligence, in contrast with the government's prejudice within the book. When Mary was kidnapped from her mother and placed in Balgo Mission, the "mission fellas noticed that she was *unusually* smart" (55, emphasis added). The use of the word "unusually" to describe Mary's intelligence implicitly reflects the prejudiced beliefs held by those in power at the time. It suggests that the prevailing assumption was that Aboriginal people were generally not intelligent, and therefore, any display of intellectual ability was seen as an anomaly. This perception was rooted in colonial and racist stereotypes that dehumanised Indigenous populations, believing them to be "primitive". By underscoring the systemic racism that considered Aboriginal people to be inherently less capable than white people, Jones effectively contradicts these stereotypes and prejudices.

Moreover, their profound connection to the land reflects the reality of Indigenous peoples, who managed to maintain a spiritual bond with their ancestral territories. At least two Aboriginal characters emerge as a symbol of wisdom, knowledge, and a profound connection with nature: Mary and Kurnti. Through her interactions with Perdita, Mary imparts valuable

insights about the natural world, revealing the hidden wonders and mysteries that lie beneath the surface (see 58-60). Mary's teachings extend beyond mere practical knowledge; they embody a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of all living things and the spiritual significance of the land: "There were forms of knowledge of the land and the body, carried into adulthood, that Perdita learned especially, and only, from her sister, Mary" (58). Mary's teachings to Perdita encompass a wide array of phenomena, from the colorful shine of licked stones to the subtle sounds of life beneath the earth's surface (see 58-60). "The twitchy and particular life of animals was of interest to Mary, and she was always aware of the barest movement, of dry grass bending, a rustly stir, the traces and suggestions of other live presences. Her totem was the honey ant: she knew where they nested" (59). She introduces Perdita to the concept of waterholes hidden in the desert, inaccessible to the white settlers, highlighting the Aboriginal connection to the land and its sacred sites (see Jones: 60). Through Mary's guidance, Perdita begins to perceive the world with new eyes, recognising the existence of a vast and intricate universe that transcends the visible realm.

For Mary, every sound, glimpse, and natural phenomenon carries meaning and significance, reflecting her intimate relationship with the land and its inhabitants. Her teachings emphasise the cyclical nature of life, with its processes of accretion, abrasion, and growth, mirroring the rhythms of the natural world:

> Vast, imperishable life was everywhere apparent; accretion, abrasion, the unthwarted growing of small things. The stars were there all the time, Mary said, outstretching her arms; we just couldn't see them all the time. This seemed to Perdita an amazing notion. She thought of stars adjusting, each night, their luminous arrangements, then effacing, disappearing, hiding behind day. Why had she never known things like this before? She wondered what God was, and whether he was there, or necessary. (60)

By portraying Mary as a character with profound wisdom, knowledge, and closeness to nature, Jones challenges negative stereotypes and misconceptions about Aboriginal people. Through Mary, Jones communicates the powerful message that Indigenous cultures possess an intricate understanding of the world that extends far beyond superficial perceptions:

> In the western desert, said Mary, there were still some blackfellas who had never yet seen the kartiya, people, her people, dressed only in hair-strings and feathers and treading lightly across the earth. They carried water bags of red wallaby skin, spears and digging sticks. *They knew everything, she said, everything about the world, every big important thing, and every single little thing.* (59: emphasis added)

Mary describes Aboriginal people in the western desert who have remained untouched by Western influence, still living in accordance with traditional ways. They are depicted as being in harmony with their environment, adorned with hair-strings and feathers, and carrying implements crafted from natural materials. Mary's assertion that these people "knew everything" reflects a deep respect and reverence for the wisdom passed down through generations. It emphasises the comprehensive understanding Indigenous communities have of their surroundings, from the grand mysteries of the universe to the minutiae of everyday life. This knowledge encompasses both the "big important things" and the "single little things," highlighting the holistic nature of Indigenous wisdom. The emphasis on Indigenous knowledge challenges the Western-centric view that places European knowledge systems above all others. Through Mary's words, Jones challenges the notion that Indigenous cultures are primitive or inferior, instead presenting them as rich repositories of wisdom and insight.

Similarly, Kurnti is depicted in a positive way: as a brave and courageous figure amidst the chaos of an approaching cyclone. As an impending cyclone approaches (see 83-87), Kurnti appears as a reassuring figure, displaying an intuitive understanding of the environment's dynamics. Despite the ominous atmosphere and the impending danger, Kurnti appears at the door, wet and glistening, looking mysterious. However, instead of invoking fear, his presence brings a sense of reassurance and protection. Perdita designates him as a "saviour", calming her mother and acknowledging Kurnti's arrival as a source of salvation (see 84). He confidently navigates the storm, demonstrating proactive measures to ensure the safety of those around him. He demonstrates his understanding of the environment by taking proactive measures, such as heaving a mattress to create a makeshift shelter and guiding them through the ordeal. Jones portrays Kurnti as someone who is deeply attuned to the rhythms of nature, as evidenced by his statement, "wait; comin' back" (85), suggesting an intuitive understanding of the cyclical nature of storms. Kurnti's actions and demeanour showcase his courage and wisdom, underscoring the importance of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in navigating life's challenges.

In the narrative, the character of Willie, the Trevors' stockman, also emerges as a figure who is also deeply attuned to nature and labour. "Paid in tobacco and flour" (39), Willie's diverse skills are vividly depicted in a passage where he is shown roping steer, branding, erecting fence posts, chopping wood, carrying water, fixing the bore and the windmill, dragging sacks of provisions, breaking horses, nailing nails, and crafting furniture from wood (see 39). These multifaceted abilities not only demonstrate his mastery of traditional Indigenous techniques but also underscore his profound connection to the land, just like the other Aboriginal characters above. Willie's dedication to his work, coupled with his readiness to

share his knowledge with others, including Nicholas, despite initial reservations and cultural differences, further highlights his commitment to preserving and passing on age-old Aboriginal practices. His patient guidance and dignified demeanour serve as a testament to his authority in matters concerning nature and labour, establishing him also as a custodian of Indigenous wisdom.

Moreover, in the novel, the Aboriginal characters not only exhibit kindness but also demonstrate remarkable mercy and compassion. This is exemplified through the character of Mary, who, despite enduring immense suffering, displays extraordinary empathy in a pivotal moment. When she witnesses Perdita approaching her father with a carving knife, presumably with the intent to exact revenge for the man's heinous actions against Mary herself, she "vigorously sh[akes] her head", disapproving of Perdita's intentions, even during her own suffering (193). Despite the profound pain inflicted upon her by Nicholas, Mary's refusal to endorse violence reflects her unwavering commitment to moral integrity and the preservation of life. Through this gesture, Jones portrays Mary as a symbol of forgiveness and humanity. Instead of succumbing to the cycle of violence, Mary chooses to break free from it, embodying a sense of moral courage and resilience that transcends her personal suffering.

Rather than depicting Aboriginal characters as violent, vengeful individuals seeking retaliation for their suffering, Jones presents them in stark contrast: as inherently compassionate, affectionate, and nurturing. Perdita reflects on her upbringing devoid of parental affection, underscoring the deep influence of the Aboriginal women who provided care and guidance throughout her life:

> If it had not been for the Aboriginal women who raised me, I would never have known what it is like to lie against a breast, to sense skin as a gift, to feel the throb of a low pulse at the base of the neck, to listen, in intimate and sweet propinquity, to air entering and leaving a resting body. (4)

Perdita's profound connection with the Aboriginal women who raised her highlights a sense of genuine love and nurturing that transcends biological ties. Despite not being raised by her biological parents, Perdita experiences a deep bond and intimacy with these women, who provide her with essential care and nourishment that loving parents normally would. Perdita recalls her childhood:

> I would be passed, like other small children, from body to body, nestling there, cradled in capacious laps, and I would feel the long fingers sift through my hair for lice, and the stroking

> of my arms, and the tickle of a tease. I was nourished and cared for in ways my parents were incapable of understanding. (32)

This passage reflects the profound impact of the nurturing care provided by the Aboriginal women in Perdita's life. Despite the absence of parental love, Perdita finds solace and comfort in the affectionate embrace of these women. The imagery of being passed from "body to body" evokes a sense of communal support and collective caregiving within the Indigenous community. Also, the act of nestling in "capacious laps" signifies a sense of safety and security, while the gentle actions of "long fingers sift[ing] through [her] hair" and the "stroking of [her] arms", illustrate the tenderness and attentiveness of these women. These tactile sensations Perdita describes also evoke a sense of intimacy and affection, symbolising both physical and emotional nourishment. Perdita's acknowledgment of her parents' inability to understand this form of care underscores the cultural gap between her biological family and the Aboriginal community.

Moreover, Mary also shows immense love for Perdita, even on their first encounter. When a nun was applying ointment onto Perdita's infected eye, "Mary took her hand and stayed close, instantly affectionate, in an implicit companionship. It was a fond, easy handclasp. Perdita felt the lacing of their fingers. This was the moment, the very moment, that Perdita began to love Mary" (48). Mary's immediate display of affection towards Perdita upon their first encounter demonstrates her capacity for warmth and kindness. Despite being strangers, Mary's comforting gesture of taking Perdita's hand and staying close creates an instant bond between them. These acts of maternal and sisterly care underscore the interconnectedness and solidarity within Aboriginal communities, highlighting their positive cultural traits.

Mary serves as a sister figure to Perdita, offering companionship and support throughout their shared experiences. However, another Aboriginal woman, Sis, assumes a maternal role in Perdita's life, providing her with essential care and nurturing. Described as one who "ministered sustenance and gentleness to whomever wandered lost into her modest kitchen" (Jones: 44), Sis emerges as a temporary maternal figure in Perdita's life, embodying qualities of warmth, nurture, and understanding. From the moment they meet, Sis' actions and demeanour exude a sense of maternal care and empathy towards Perdita. Described as "modest" yet filled with sustenance and gentleness, her kitchen symbolises a safe space where individuals find solace and nourishment, both physically and emotionally. Sis' warm welcome of Perdita into her kitchen reflects Sis' innate maternal instinct to provide for others and offer them a sense of belonging. When Perdita tells Sis about her mother's struggles with mental illness, Sis remains nonjudgmental and sympathetic, offering Perdita comfort and support in her time of need, even

offering her food (see 44). This interaction illustrates Sis' ability to provide emotional guidance and reassurance, much like a mother would.

By portraying Aboriginal individuals with warmth, nurturing qualities, and wisdom, Jones actively challenges entrenched stereotypes and acknowledges the resilience and dignity of Indigenous peoples. Through characters like Mary, Kurnti, Sis, and others, Jones presents Aboriginal individuals as multi-dimensional and fully human, countering harmful narratives that have historically marginalised Indigenous communities. This deliberate portrayal of Aboriginal characters as caregivers, mentors, and pillars of strength underscores the importance of Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices in fostering resilience and healing within Indigenous communities. Characters like Sis and Mary offer essential care and guidance to the protagonist, Perdita, highlighting the strength and solidarity present within Aboriginal communities despite the adversities they face. Overall, Jones' deliberate choice of depicting Aboriginal characters in such a positive light can be interpreted as a deliberate gesture of reconciliation and apology. By acknowledging past injustices and affirming the dignity and humanity of Indigenous peoples through her narrative, Jones contributes to the broader goal of reconciliation in Australia, fostering empathy, understanding, and respect across cultural divides.

6. Symbolism and Metaphor in *Sorry*

In *Sorry*, symbolism and metaphor play crucial roles in conveying profound themes and messages. By utilising recurring symbols and vivid metaphors, Jones intricately constructs layers of meaning within her narrative. Through these literary devices, readers are invited to delve into the intricate emotional and cultural landscapes of the characters. As we examine the symbolism present in this novel, we will uncover the nuanced layers of significance that underlie Jones' exploration of themes: mainly reconciliation, identity, and the lasting impact of history on modern Australia.

In *Sorry*, as already mentioned, Mary undergoes great suffering in the narrative, marked by her forced separation from family as part of the Stolen Generation, to be placed in a convent to assimilate European customs, and later being sent to prison after being wrongfully accused of murder. Paradoxically, the novel portrays Perdita as the victim despite Mary's harrowing experiences. Perdita, a neglected child haunted by an elusive traumatic past, is depicted sympathetically, evoking empathy from the reader. In this way, Jones employs an inversion of trauma symptoms between Mary and Perdita – Mary, though physically assaulted,

displays no apparent trauma, while Perdita, though physically unharmed, exhibits symptoms through her speech impediment.

According to Marc Delrez, the term "trauma" was employed to characterise the settler population's increasing realisation of the darker aspects of the nation's history. "The destabilized settlers under Reconciliation can indeed be seen to be suffering from a sense of the traumatic, painful disruption of their earlier sense of belonging in the nation" (Delrez, 2011: 197). As a result, it seems that in some Reconciliation authors, there is a strong urge to appropriate the trauma of the Aboriginal population, aiming for an equivalence in experience, so as not to feel completely antagonistic or to not be left out from Australia's past:

> The somehow belated discovery that the foundation of Australia coincided with an act of dispossession and genocide resulted, for the settlers' descendants, in a traumatic sense of the loss of "a properly constituted national selfhood," (Gooder & Jacobs: 235) accompanied by a corresponding urge to repair the damage by offering a proper apology to the Aborigines. There is, then, a sense in which the quality of trauma, just like the postcolonial condition itself, emerges as an aspect of Aboriginal experience which is typically displaced onto the settlers, as the latter histrionically claim for themselves the kind of history that will display "a kind of indigenous equivalence," and consequently legitimate their "reconstituted attachment to the nation" (Gooder & Jacobs: 237). It is not irrelevant that, as has now been shown, this "white [...] mimicry of indigenous expressions of belonging" (Gelder & Salzman: 25) has formed a far from negligible dimension of Australian literary production during and after the Reconciliation years. (Delrez, 2011: 196)

In *Sorry*, this dynamic is reflected in the character of Perdita, who subconsciously appropriates Mary's pain and suffering as her own. Perdita's development of a speech impediment can be seen as a manifestation of this unconscious desire to share in the trauma experienced by Aboriginal individuals. By adopting a physical manifestation of trauma, Perdita symbolically aligns herself with the suffering of Indigenous peoples, reflecting the narrative's exploration of collective guilt and responsibility:

> There is … an eerie sense in which the settlers under Reconciliation, by dint of their very empathy with Aboriginal suffering, exhibit the desire to take possession of the wound itself, fantasized as that which will allow one to entrench one's entitlement to a 'full', restored Australian citizenship… In the context of the Australian predicament, it seems evident that trauma has come to be invested with such a capacity to produce empowerment that it elicits a desire to have suffered from it – if not because of the event of invasion itself, then as an aspect of the discursive aftermath it has produced, notably in the years of the Reconciliation… All

> this… allows the speakers (or indeed, as we shall see, the writers) to achieve legitimacy by proxy, through the pursuit of an experiential equivalence with the victims. (Delrez, 2011: 199)

In alignment with Delrez's observation on the desire of settlers to appropriate the trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples during the Reconciliation process, *Sorry* presents a narrative where the white protagonist, Perdita, inadvertently seeks to possess the trauma endured by the Aboriginal girl, Mary. Delrez's notion of settlers exhibiting a desire to "take possession of the wound itself" resonates with Perdita's subconscious inclination to internalise Mary's suffering, despite being the victim of sexual abuse and wrongful conviction herself. This phenomenon, characterised as "trauma envy" by John Mowitt (2000), reflects a complex interplay between the settler's quest for validation of their experiences and a yearning to establish a connection to their country through shared narratives of trauma. Jones illustrates Perdita's unconscious appropriation of Mary's trauma as a form of vicarious victimhood, whereby Perdita subconsciously adopts Mary's struggles as her own. Perdita's identification with her experiences blurs the lines between perpetrator and victim, reinforcing Delrez's notion of trauma being invested with a capacity for empowerment. Her "trauma envy" can thus be understood as a manifestation of the settlers' desire to achieve legitimacy through experiential equivalence with Indigenous victims, as highlighted by Delrez. Therefore, Jones presents the white girl as a victim who endured a traumatising childhood which manifests itself through her speech impediment and a short-term memory loss.

As Herrero argues, she utilises Perdita's amnesia in the narrative as a means to critique the settlers who have seemingly forgotten or ignored Australia's history and the mistreatment of Aboriginal communities (see 288). Perdita's forgetfulness becomes a metaphorical reflection of the broader societal amnesia, symbolising the reluctance or refusal of certain settlers to acknowledge the historical wrongs committed against the Indigenous population. The narrative suggests that, just like Perdita struggles to remember her own traumatic past, the broader Australian society grapples with recognising and confronting the dark chapters of its history, particularly the injustices inflicted upon the Aboriginal people:

> Perdita's personal trauma […] symbolizes Australia's historical and foundational trauma. Her initial inability to remember her part in the scene of the crime, and then her inability to say "sorry" to Mary for allowing her to take the blame for her father's death after recalling that she herself had killed him, is nothing but a metaphor for Australia's forgetting of the Stolen Generations and the refusal on the part of Australia's then Prime Minister, John Howard, to acknowledge the nation's crimes and offer restitution for them. (Herrero: 288)

Therefore, it can be argued that Jones, in efforts to make all Australians feel responsible for the past, creates this double perspective: Perdita and Mary are both victims in their own ways. In this sense, she creates a narrative in which the whole country is undergoing a difficult period of healing from a collective trauma. Perdita is, therefore, an allegorical representation of the settlers, whose forgetful behaviour is being criticised by the author.

However, in the novel's conclusion, Perdita comes to the realisation that she made a mistake by not apologising to Mary and expresses immense regret for unjustly causing her imprisonment. This pivotal moment serves as a critique of Perdita's earlier behaviour and, by extension, scrutinises settler authors who adopt a victim mentality and seek to appropriate trauma that is not inherently theirs. Through Perdita's realisation, Jones highlights the complexities of trauma and reconciliation, presenting two traumatised subjects from different racial backgrounds: one who has endured trauma for valid reasons and the other who attempts to appropriate it. This juxtaposition underscores the disparities in experiences and perceptions of trauma, challenging notions of victimhood and entitlement within settler narratives. By portraying Perdita's journey towards self-awareness and accountability, Jones critiques the tendency of settler authors to prioritise their own narratives of suffering over the experiences of Indigenous peoples, ultimately advocating for a more empathetic and inclusive approach to reconciliation. Perdita's "redemption arc," therefore, implies a sense of hope for the future of Australia: maybe it is possible for the country to remember and acknowledge what Aborigines went through so the country can finally take a step towards reconciliation.

Moreover, Perdita's stutter serves as a symbolic representation of the broader challenges and impediments in the reconciliation process between the settler community and the Indigenous population. The stutter becomes a metaphorical barrier to effective communication, mirroring the communication breakdowns and misunderstandings that exist between these two communities in the aftermath of historical injustices. As Perdita undergoes treatment for her stutter, it is paralleled with her recollection of suppressed memories. This connection suggests that overcoming the impediment of the stutter aligns with the need for open and honest communication about the historical wrongs committed against the Indigenous people. The process of healing and reconciliation, therefore, involves acknowledging and addressing the uncomfortable truths of the past. Perdita's journey from a silenced, stuttering state to one of clarity and understanding can be interpreted as a metaphor for the broader reconciliation journey that Australia needs to undertake. It underscores the significance of ending silence and recognising historical injustices for achieving authentic reconciliation. The stutter, in this sense,

becomes a powerful symbol for the challenges and transformations required in the pursuit of healing and understanding between the settler and Indigenous communities:

> The silencing of Perdita's voice is only one example of several suppressed voices struggling to find expression in *Sorry*. To politicize the condition of silence itself, Jones accumulates a litany of marginal states of language to demonstrate the many ways in which individuals can be deprived of voice and forced to adapt through other means, in order to achieve some level of self- expression. (Eagle: 26)

In order to communicate properly, and to talk about the injustices committed in the past, Jones may be suggesting that there is a need for a different form of communication: sign language.

This is why Jones introduces Billy Trevor, the Keenes' deaf-mute neighbour. Billy, Perdita's close friend, emerges as a compassionate and understanding individual, displaying a genuine sympathy towards Aboriginal people, precisely Mary. Despite the prevailing prejudices of the time, he stands out as a beacon of acceptance, innocence and kindness. His friendship with Mary underscores his ability to connect with others beyond cultural and racial boundaries. In a society marked by discrimination and bias, Billy's character shines as an example of genuine humanity. His open-mindedness and warmth make him a unique and valued presence in Perdita's life, providing a counterpoint to the broader societal attitudes that perpetuate racial tensions. Billy rejects "the clumsy instrument of human speech," and instead, teaches Perdita how to convey herself through the "silent articulations of the body" (Jones: 205).

Billy's inability to speak takes on a profound symbolic significance, mirroring the challenge of articulating the horrors of Australia's troubled past. His silence becomes a powerful metaphor, suggesting that the atrocities committed against Indigenous communities and the legacy of discrimination can leave one speechless. In a society grappling with the weight of its historical injustices, Billy's mute presence becomes a reflection of the difficulty in finding words to express the magnitude of the collective trauma endured by Aboriginal people. His friendship with Mary and Perdita transcends verbal communication, emphasising the deep, unspoken connections that can form in the face of shared pain and understanding. Billy's silence speaks volumes, urging reflection on the unspeakable aspects of Australia's history and the need for a collective reckoning with the past.

Valérie Belleflamme delves into the narrative of *Sorry* and highlights the symbolic representation of another character concerning themes of peace and reconciliation:

> Reconciliation is indeed an all-pervading concern in *Sorry*, made manifest especially through the sisterly bond linking Mary and Perdita. When this bond is in danger of being broken by

> Mary's bodily imprisonment and by Perdita's mental and linguistic block, Jones introduces a new character into the narrative, Pearl Underwood. Pearl, "as rotund and smoothly white as her name suggest[s]" (197), is Billy's instructor at the sign language training school and also his future wife. Through Pearl's character, Jones introduces sign language, significantly described as "a form of poetry" (199) and "a language rich with hidden density, such as the body itself carries, and soulful as each distinctive, utterly distinctive, signer" (205), into her narrative. Ironically, this alternative language imagined by Jones is that of those who do not speak with words. (Belleflamme: 20)

Pearl writes to Perdita that sign language "*is necessary for the progress of our friendship*" (199: author's emphasis). In this way, Mary and Perdita's shared commitment to learning sign language for Billy and Pearl serves as a powerful allegory for the broader need for communication and understanding in Australia's journey towards reconciliation. In a prison setting where Mary is held, the use of sign language becomes more than a practical means of communication; it becomes a profound symbol of solidarity and connection. By engaging in this shared effort, Mary and Perdita demonstrate a commitment to breaking down barriers and fostering meaningful dialogue, echoing the larger societal call for reconciliation. The allegory suggests that, just as Mary and Perdita bridge the gap with sign language, Australia must find ways to foster mutual understanding, acknowledge historical injustices, and create pathways for genuine communication to heal the deep wounds of the past:

> Jones seems to advocate the importance of creation and creativity, as confirmed by her thematization of sign language, which is described in *Sorry* as "a form of poetry" (199), … as an alternative to ordinary (maimed) speech… So it seems that, in sign language with its "new meanings" (206), Perdita might well find an alternative to her mangled speech on the one hand, and to her mother's unsuitable Shakespearean lingo on the other. This privileging of sign language can be seen as a response to the silence that surrounds Mary's fate, as well as a confirmation of the novel's awareness that some things cannot be talked about or represented through traditional language. Thus a new, shared language between the victim (embodied by Mary) and the guilty (embodied by Perdita) needs to be established in order for forgiveness to occur. (Belleflamme: 668-69)

Therefore, in essence, the privileging of sign language in the novel can be interpreted as a response to the silence surrounding Mary's fate, symbolising a need for alternative modes of expression when traditional language fails to adequately convey certain experiences or emotions. This emphasis on the establishment of a new, shared language between the victim (Mary) and the guilty (Perdita) underscores the novel's exploration of forgiveness and

reconciliation, once again, suggesting that genuine understanding and healing can only occur through mutual communication and empathy transcending linguistic boundaries.

The stutter Perdita experiences due to trauma creates a barrier that did not exist before between herself and people around her. Even though Billy's mother, Mrs. Trevor, "had always liked [Perdita], ever since she had pulled her, slippery and full of life, from her mother's body," even "wish[ing] secretly that she could adopt [her]" (66), once she forms a speech impediment, the woman's attitude changes towards the girl, distancing herself from her, and later even refusing to converse with her. Even the attitude of her own mother, with whom she was never close, changes after she develops this speech impediment. It can be argued that there are parallels between how adults treat Perdita and how the Aborigines were treated by the settler population in Australia's history. Similarly to the condescending attitude Indigenous peoples faced from white settlers, Perdita experiences a lack of self-determination:

> Similarities thus exist between Perdita's treatment by adults and the Aborigines' treatment by the settler population. In the Australian past, Indigenous peoples used to be patronised by the white settlers and lost any capacity for self-determination, a phenomenon Perdita also faces: "Perdita knew then that in all the negotiations between them, Stella would always take precedence with speech" […] She further explains that Stella "enjoy[s] her power. She enjoy[s] talking for [her] and finishing the ends of [her] sentences" […] As a result of both her stutter and of being silenced by her mother, Perdita gradually stops speaking at all, which is when she alarmingly notices that "the quieter [she] [becomes], the more others [ignore] [her], the more [she] disappear[s]". (Belleflamme: 6)

The parallels drawn between Perdita's treatment by adults and the historical mistreatment of Indigenous peoples by the settler population in Australia's past highlight a recurring theme of power dynamics and the suppression of autonomy. Just as Indigenous peoples were patronised and stripped of their autonomy by white settlers, Perdita experiences a similar lack of agency, particularly evident in her interactions with Stella and Mrs. Trevor, where she is consistently overshadowed and silenced. As a result, Perdita's stutter and subsequent silencing by her mother contribute to her gradual withdrawal from communication, reflecting a disturbing pattern wherein marginalised individuals are rendered invisible and voiceless.

Another symbol suggesting the potential for reconciliation in Australia's future is Mary's book, *The Lives of Saints*, that she cherishes throughout her upbringing in the convent. The book recounts the tales of saints who

> were devoted to God, with extravagant piety, but then equally fated, most of them, to die deaths of hyperbolic and nonsensical suffering. The women, in particular, were predestined in this way, their holiness determined, it seemed, by the measure of their earthly torments" (57).

According to Belleflamme, this book, alongside with *Life of Captain Cook* that belonged to the late Nicholas, despite being about European beliefs and ideology, both serve as a kind of bridge between black and white Australians. She argues that Mary's choice of *The Lives of the Saints* does not signify a rejection of her Aboriginal identity; instead, it implies the opposite. Mary acknowledges that in Aboriginal narratives, transformation is perpetual—trees morph into women, women into trees, rocks embody former children, and stars converse. Mary's understanding encompasses the idea of spirit pervading all facets of existence, transcending the boundaries of conventional religious spaces. This perspective suggests an intertwining between the religious convictions of white settlers and the spiritual beliefs of Aboriginal culture (see Belleflamme: 17):

> Similarly, her and Nicholas's shared readings of *Life of Captain Cook*, a book which figures importantly in the canon of white settler literature, also implies the existence of a bond between the Aboriginal community and the white colonial supremacists. It is indeed from Nicholas's "crate of miscellaneous books" (30), which is supposed to help him in his anthropological quest for the primitive man, that Mary came to read books in the first place. (Belleflamme: 17)

Therefore, the symbols of reconciliation found in Mary's cherished book, *The Lives of Saints*, and Nicholas' copy of *Life of Captain Cook* suggest a potential connection between black and white Australians, despite the historical and cultural divides.

Furthermore, Belleflamme suggests that Mary and Perdita's shared act of reading together in the darkness of the shack (see Jones: 67) serves as a symbol of reconciliation, highlighting the complexity and ambiguity inherent in reconciliation efforts in Australia:

> By the same token, while reading "side by side, together and separate", "in the granular light of the shack", Mary and Perdita are "penetrated more by shadow than by light, [...] their heads flared open like parasols, open and inclining with sisterly ease" (67). This passage, with its enveloping darkness which overshadows Mary's and Perdita's sisterly reading bond, could be taken to echo the ambiguity of the recent Australian attempts at reconciliation. (Belleflamme: 17)

Just as Mary and Perdita are enveloped by shadows while reading, Australian society finds itself navigating through shades of darkness and light as it endeavors to bridge the gap between

Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. This metaphorical interpretation underscores the ongoing challenges and ambiguities inherent in the pursuit of reconciliation.

One last aspect worth noting in Belleflamme's analysis of the books is the symbolic significance attached to Perdita's receipt of *The Lives of the Saints* after Mary's passing. According to Belleflamme, this event serves as a pivotal moment, symbolising Perdita's belated recognition of the need for reconciliation and her remorse for not apologising to Mary earlier (see Belleflamme: 17-18). This symbolises the weight of historical injustices and the potential for healing through acknowledgment and mourning. Perdita's regret for not apologising to Mary further symbolises the missed opportunities for reconciliation and the importance of acknowledging past wrongs (see Belleflamme: 17-18). So, in essence, the novel "challenges white Australians to consider the ethical and political obligations that are conferred on them as beneficiaries of colonialism" (Kennedy: 353).

Moreover, there is symbolic significance attached to the "cat's cradle" (Jones, 2008: 206). Perdita observes Mary intricately crafting a "cat's cradle" from strings—a practice deeply ingrained in Aboriginal crafting traditions (see *Imagine If Libraries*). When Perdita expresses a desire to learn this craft, Mary cryptically refers to it as her "secret secret" (206), implying its cultural significance and exclusivity within her community:

> She was adamant and stubborn; she would not tell. Perdita learned then that Mary was not her mirror, that she had an *autonomy* no simple category could contain. And her own secrets, too, crisscrossing, unnamed, extraordinary as the patterns imagined in the stars, complex as the tracks that configured the desert. (206-207, emphasis added)

This response highlights the guarded nature of Indigenous knowledge, suggesting that it is often reserved for those within the community who understand its deeper cultural context. Mary's reluctance to share her knowledge underscores Indigenous autonomy and resistance to assimilation, reflecting a desire to protect Aboriginal traditions from appropriation or exploitation. By asserting her autonomy, Mary signals that some aspects of Indigenous heritage are not meant to be freely shared with "outsiders". Mary's rejection of Perdita's expectations pushes Perdita to approach Indigenous cultures with humility and respect, urging readers to acknowledge the significance of Indigenous knowledge systems, which often hold more depth than what is initially apparent.

Perdita's realisation that Mary is not simply a reflection of her own culture symbolises the recognition that each culture possesses unique traditions and knowledge systems. Jones emphasises the importance of respecting and valuing cultural diversity, as well as

acknowledging the sovereignty and autonomy of different cultures. Also, the symbolism of the cat's cradle as a representation of Aboriginal knowledge serves as a reminder of the resilience and ingenuity of Indigenous peoples. Despite centuries of colonisation and cultural suppression, Indigenous communities have preserved their traditions and knowledge systems, passing them down through generations as a testament to their enduring cultural heritage.

In a nutshell, Jones' *Sorry* employs symbolism and metaphor as powerful tools to explore themes of reconciliation, culture, and the enduring impact of history on contemporary Australia. Jones creates a complex web of meaning using repeated symbols and vivid metaphors, encouraging readers to explore the emotional and cultural dimensions of her characters more deeply. The use of symbols such as Perdita's amnesia, her stutter, Mary's cherished book *The Lives of Saints*, Nicholas' copy of *Life of Captain Cook* and the cat's cradle, serves as allegorical representations of Australia's complex history and the ongoing journey towards reconciliation. Perdita's amnesia symbolises society's reluctance to acknowledge historical injustices, while her stutter represents the communication barriers that hinder reconciliation efforts. Mary's book and Nicholas' copy symbolise potential bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, suggesting the complexities and ambiguities of reconciliation. Lastly, the cat's cradle symbolises Aboriginal knowledge and resilience, highlighting their endurance through colonisation and cultural suppression. It reminds readers of their rich heritage and the significance of preserving Indigenous knowledge in the journey towards reconciliation. Through these symbols, Jones critiques societal amnesia, challenges power dynamics, and highlights the importance of acknowledging past wrongs for healing and reconciliation to occur.

7. Narrative Technique, Structure

The recurring scene of Perdita's father's death commences and concludes the novel. Initially shrouded in mystery, the novel unfolds with an enigmatic scene involving Mary's blood-stained dress and the death of an unidentified person. Through a continuous series of flashbacks, readers gradually piece together the narrative, eventually discerning that Nicholas is the deceased individual. The circumstances surrounding his death become clearer as the story progresses, and the initial ambiguity surrounding the event becomes clear, too.

Initially, suspicions may arise about Stella or Mary being responsible, especially with Mary being in prison. However, it is only towards the conclusion of the novel that we find out that Perdita is the guilty one. Perdita's experience of memory loss and her non-linear narration of events parallel the way actual victims of trauma often recall and recount their experiences. Therefore, I will once again repeat the quote that *Sorry*'s "narrative mimics the structure of

trauma as a belated memory that is not directly accessible to consciousness" (Kennedy: 349). This constant repetition of the incident "mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression [...] Through repetition or correspondence, the simplest event can be invested with a symbolic aura" (Whitehead: 86). Herrero argues that *Sorry* effectively demonstrates Whitehead's theory on repetition, which exists in a state of ambivalence between trauma and catharsis. The novel's symbols, according to Herrero, embody this duality, portraying both a sense of entrapment and facilitating a process of healing and resolution (Herrero: 289). In fact, Jones employs multiple narrative levels, shifting perspectives, and intertextuality as structural elements in her narrative to vividly depict the complexities of trauma, of both white and black Australians. According to Belleflamme, who quotes Whitehead,

> despite the fact that "trauma carries the force of a literality which renders it resistant to narrative structures and linear temporalities" … novelists, in order to evoke as faithfully as possible, the effects of trauma in trauma fiction, must use literary techniques and stylistic features which "mirror at a formal level the effects of trauma" … These comprise a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice, intertextuality, and repetition. (Belleflamme: 9)

As "it is a commonplace of trauma theory that the bewildering effect of trauma is best registered through literary devices such as flashback, nonlinear structure, ellipses in language, and uncertainty about whether events occur in the register of the real or the imaginary" (Kennedy: 349-350), Jones precisely employs the same literary techniques in order to speak about trauma, while at the same time exercising careful consideration in their application, particularly when representing Aboriginal people. This approach aims to avoid appropriating their pains and struggles, showcasing a nuanced and respectful handling of sensitive themes in her narrative:

> In *Sorry*, Jones contrives to handle the delicate and highly controversial issue of voice and vocal appropriation encountered when dealing with Aboriginal (hi)stories through her appeal to trauma fiction and her use of different perspectives and "forms of indirection" such as allegory and intertextuality, which help her avoid the appropriation of Indigenous material, testimonial style and voice. (Belleflamme: 663)

Jones' adept use of literary techniques, such as flashback, nonlinear structure, and ellipses in language, allows her to effectively convey the bewildering effects of trauma while demonstrating a sensitive and respectful approach to representing Aboriginal experiences. By employing trauma fiction and incorporating various perspectives and narrative devices, Jones

navigates the complexities of voice and vocal appropriation, steering clear of appropriating Indigenous material and testimonial style.

Instead, her nuanced portrayal of trauma showcases a commitment to depicting sensitive themes with consideration. The novel "discloses the author's uneasiness with official historical discourses and continuous narratives through her concern with the complexities of traumatic time, one that is characterised by ellipses and stasis, but also (in the best of cases) by returns and sudden progressions" (Herrero: 284):

> [Jones] sees time as neither linear nor cyclical, but as intertwined; and *Sorry* can be said to incarnate, formally and thematically, not only this notion of folded time, but also the possible unfolding of experience, a process by which past events, which up until this moment have suffused the present with their repressed presence, can eventually surface and bring to light a previously silenced yet haunting chapter in the history of Australia. This resonates in the context of Jones's political allegory, as the narrative structure of *Sorry*, with its suggestive, forward-looking, and apology-oriented ending, encodes the political situation of White Australia under the Howard government, at a time when many people began to feel drawn towards Reconciliation. (Belleflamme: 664)

In addition to its engagement with historical discourse and political allegory, *Sorry* also reflects Jones' astute observation of human psychology and interpersonal dynamics. Through the lens of trauma and memory, the novel delves into the complexities of identity, belonging, and the lingering effects of historical injustices on individuals and communities. By intertwining personal narratives with broader historical themes, Jones not only critiques official historical narratives but also humanises the experiences of those affected by them.

Along with this non-linear narrative structure, Jones also uses intertextuality, drawing upon literary references, particularly Shakespeare. In the initial section of the novel, the opening line directly quotes a passage from Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale*:

> ANTIGONUS: ... thy mother
>
> Appeared to me last night; for ne'er was dream
>
> So like a waking. To me comes a creature,
>
> Sometimes her head on one side, some another –
>
> I never saw a vessel of like sorrow,
>
> So filled and so becoming ... (*The Winter's Tale III.* iii)

In this play by Shakespeare, the character Antigonus describing a sorrowful vessel might be linked to the novel's exploration of trauma and grief. Jones may have selected this specific passage to set the emotional tone for the story, foreshadowing the themes of sorrow, loss, and the quest for redemption that unfold in *Sorry*, and in Australia in general. It is directly apparent that there is a deeper connection between Shakespeare and this novel:

> Jones's discursive strategies involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, including interdiscursive Shakespearean references, in order to expose its underlying assumptions, before dismantling these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of both the novel's culturally hybrid protagonist and its readers. It is by first establishing an inter-discursive link with Shakespeare that Jones subsequently and most successfully manages to distance herself from the dominant discourse and to assert her own counter-discourse. (Belleflamme, 663-64)

In other words, Belleflamme's analysis implies that Jones' use of Shakespeare within the novel is a strategic move to engage with mainstream literature and discourse critically. By referencing Shakespeare, Jones enters into a dialogue with established literary traditions, but she does so with a critical perspective, challenging and deconstructing mainstream assumptions and narratives. This approach allows Jones to assert her own voice and perspectives within the broader literary landscape.

West-Pavlov accordingly delves into the complexities of Shakespeare's corpus, particularly Macbeth's famous soliloquy that begins with the words "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" (Jones, 2008: 209). The analysis suggests that, despite attempts to assert Shakespeare's universality and timelessness, his works often resurface in ways that defy easy categorisation. The focus is on Macbeth's enigmatic utterance, which "appears to echo the sequential drive of linear, teleological time, resisting reversal, declaring the ultimate demise of disposable ethnicities and racialized populations" (West-Pavlov: 400). However, the analysis also underscores the insistent and manic repetition in Macbeth's speech, pointing to a different dimension. This repetition is argued to "index the unclosed time-of-emergency still terrifyingly concrete in White Australia's contemporary colonial regime" (West-Pavlov: 400). In other words, despite the perception of time moving *forward* in a linear fashion, there is an underlying sense of unresolved crisis and urgency in contemporary colonial regimes. This interpretation suggests that Shakespeare's works, far from being fixed in a particular time or context, continue to resonate and provoke critical reflections on issues of power, identity, and colonialism in today's world, especially in Australia.

Stella's fixation on *Macbeth* and her recital of Lady Macbeth's lines during Nicholas' murder could be also interpreted as symbolic of a broader societal commentary, particularly

within the context of Australia's history. Just as Lady Macbeth grapples with the consequences of ambition and power in Shakespeare's play, Stella's obsession might symbolise the pervasive influence of dominant narratives and power structures within contemporary Australia, reflecting upon the nation's colonial past and its ongoing impacts on Indigenous communities. "Stella's 'What is done cannot be undone,' which again ventriloquises Lady Macbeth in Act 5, Scene 1, resists redress, and insists upon the impossibility of change" (West-Pavlov: 397). Stella acknowledges the irreversibility of past actions and thus, resists against seeking remediation or correction. In this way, she emphasises the futility of attempting to change the course of events once they have unfolded, particularly in the context of historical injustices towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, where the damage inflicted cannot be fully rectified or erased:

> With this quotation, Stella refuses to cede her usurped responsibility back to Perdita so as to release Mary from guilt … Stella's repeated refusal to offer absolution to Mary (Jones 2007, 201; 202) reveals that she, like Nicholas, subscribes to the notion of a historically determined demise of the Indigenous people that she does not deign to tamper with. (West-Pavlov: 398)

In essence, Stella's narrative arc and her refusal to acknowledge the need for change underscore the central themes of the novel, emphasising the complexities of guilt, complicity, and the enduring legacy of colonialism. Jones may be critiquing Australians who believe that the past is in the past, echoing sentiments similar to those of former Prime Minister John Howard, who resisted calls for a formal apology to Indigenous Australians. Through Stella, Jones highlights the danger of ignoring historical injustices and the importance of acknowledging and addressing the lasting impacts of colonialism.

In a nutshell, Jones employs various literary techniques and intertextual references to explore trauma, memory, and reconciliation within Australia's colonial history. Through a non-linear narrative and Shakespearean allusions, Jones critiques the dominant historical narratives and highlights the ongoing impacts of colonialism. Stella's refusal to seek redress symbolises societal reluctance to address past injustices, emphasising the importance of acknowledging historical wrongs for true reconciliation. By portraying the complexities of guilt and complicity, Jones seems to urge a deeper understanding and active engagement with the past, advocating for a more inclusive and truthful narrative in Australia's journey towards healing.

8. Conclusion

The reconciliation process in Australia is at a crucial point, marked by continued attempts to confront past injustices and encourage constructive dialogue between Indigenous and non-

Indigenous communities. Despite progress in some areas, significant challenges persist, underscoring the complexities inherent in the reconciliation process. As the nation grapples with its colonial past and strives towards a more equitable future, literature emerges as a powerful tool for raising awareness, promoting understanding, and catalysing social change.

While reconciliation literature has the power to spark dialogue and promote understanding, its impact is contingent upon broader societal attitudes and actions. Meaningful reconciliation necessitates not only literary engagement but also concrete efforts to address the systemic inequalities that continue to marginalise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Despite progress in some areas, Indigenous Australians remain disproportionately disadvantaged across various socio-economic indicators. They experience higher rates of unemployment, lower levels of education, and poorer health outcomes compared to non-Indigenous Australians. This systemic disadvantage contributes to a cycle of poverty and marginalisation that perpetuates intergenerational trauma and hinders community development.

Furthermore, the overrepresentation of Indigenous Australians in the criminal justice system underscores the urgent need for reform. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are disproportionately incarcerated, with rates far exceeding those of non-Indigenous Australians. This overrepresentation is linked to a range of factors, including historical dispossession, systemic racism, and socio-economic disadvantage. Limited access to education, employment opportunities, and culturally appropriate support services further exacerbates this issue. Addressing these entrenched inequalities requires a multifaceted approach that goes beyond symbolic gestures or literary representation.

It demands meaningful action to address the root causes of Indigenous disadvantage, including policies that prioritise Indigenous self-determination, culturally responsive education and healthcare services, and initiatives to address intergenerational trauma. Moreover, honouring Indigenous rights and sovereignty is essential for genuine reconciliation to occur. This includes acknowledging and respecting Indigenous land rights, promoting Indigenous languages and cultures, and ensuring meaningful participation in decision-making processes that affect Indigenous communities.

Reconciliation literature should thus be viewed as just one component of a broader reconciliation framework, complementing grassroots activism, policy initiatives, and community-led efforts aimed at advancing reconciliation in Australia. By raising awareness of Indigenous perspectives and fostering empathy among readers, reconciliation literature has the potential to inspire meaningful change. As former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser stated, “Reconciliation requires changes of heart and spirit, as well as social and economic change. It

requires symbolic as well as practical action" (speech given in Canberra for National Sorry Day, 2003).

Even in this fraught context it can be felt that contemporary authors play an important role in advancing the reconciliation agenda through their works, offering nuanced portrayals of Indigenous experiences, challenging dominant narratives, and inviting readers to confront terrible truths about Australia's history and ongoing societal inequalities. By centering Indigenous voices and perspectives, "reconciliation literature" not only amplifies the voices of those who have been marginalised but also fosters empathy, dialogue, and collective action. In recent years, there has been a notable surge in reconciliation literature, reflecting a growing awareness of the need to reckon with the legacies of colonisation and dispossession. Authors like Gail Jones, through works such as *Sorry*, use narrative techniques to vividly explore themes of trauma, identity, and belonging, while also challenging official historical accounts and humanising the experiences of those affected by them. Through their works, these authors explore the intricacies of reconciliation, prompting readers to face difficult realities and imagine a more equitable and inclusive future. Furthermore, reconciliation literature serves as a catalyst for broader societal conversations about reconciliation and social justice. By engaging with Indigenous perspectives and foregrounding Indigenous experiences, these works prompt readers to reflect critically on their own roles in perpetuating or challenging systemic injustices. In doing so, reconciliation literature contributes to a more inclusive and diverse discourse, where Indigenous voices are valued, and reconciliation is understood as a shared responsibility.

Reconciliation literature, through its exploration of trauma narratives, amplifies the voices of Indigenous Australians, raising awareness on the enduring effects of historical injustices and gathering empathy among readers. In this context, trauma literature results useful for exploring the psychological and emotional impact of past events on individuals and communities. In *Sorry*, Jones delves into the complexities of trauma, creating a narrative that resonates with the experiences of Indigenous Australians. The novel depicts various forms of trauma, including historical trauma stemming from colonisation and dispossession, intergenerational trauma passed down through families, and individual trauma resulting from personal experiences of violence and loss.

Through the recurring scene of Perdita's father's death and the unraveling mystery surrounding it, Jones confronts readers with the devastating consequences of colonial violence and its enduring legacy. The trauma experienced by Perdita, Mary, and other characters is palpable throughout the novel, manifesting in their fragmented memories, disjointed narratives, and psychological struggles. Perdita's memory loss and nonlinear narration mirror the way

trauma often disrupts one's sense of self and understanding of the past, highlighting the disorienting effects of violence and loss. Moreover, *Sorry* explores the ripple effects of trauma on individuals and communities, illustrating how unresolved trauma can permeate relationships and shape identities across generations. The novel's characters grapple with feelings of guilt, shame, and displacement, echoing the psychological toll of historical injustices on Indigenous Australians. Jones, therefore, skillfully captures the nuances of trauma, portraying its complexities with sensitivity and depth. As already mentioned, in *Sorry*, trauma is not only a personal experience but also a collective one, intertwined with Australia's colonial history and ongoing struggles for justice and reconciliation. Through her compelling storytelling and empathetic portrayal of trauma, Jones sheds light on the resilience and strength of Indigenous communities while also calling attention to the urgent need for healing and reconciliation in Australian society.

The novel's title serves as a potent symbol of remorse and acknowledgment, embodying the broader themes of guilt, shame, and the quest for understanding between settler communities and Aboriginal populations. Through the character of Perdita and her internal struggles with culpability and the refusal (or at least inability) to apologise, the novel reflects broader societal dynamics and the challenges inherent in acknowledging and addressing past wrongs. Jones' narrative delves into the historical context of Australia's treatment of its Indigenous populations, shedding light on the enduring legacies of colonialism, forced relocations, and cultural assimilation. The character of Mary, wrongfully imprisoned for a crime she did not commit, becomes a symbol of the systemic injustices and racial prejudices faced by Indigenous communities. Perdita's failure to extend a genuine apology to Mary reflects the lingering unresolved tensions within Australian society, highlighting the difficulties of reconciliation and the obstacles to genuine healing and closure. Through its refusal to provide simplistic resolutions, *Sorry* encourages readers to confront Australia's dark past and engage in a more nuanced and critical dialogue on reconciliation.

Although it may seem unconventional, *Sorry* incorporates gothic elements into its narrative structure, utilising settings such as the shed and the convent to convey a trauma narrative. These Gothic elements add depth to the novel's atmosphere, creating a sense of foreboding and unease that parallels the psychological trauma endured by the characters. The desolate landscapes and dilapidated buildings become symbolic representations of the characters' internal struggles and the haunting legacy of Australia's colonial past. By incorporating these gothic motifs into the narrative, the novel effectively underscores the

profound psychological and emotional toll of historical injustices, further enriching its exploration of trauma and reconciliation.

Jones' novel intricately incorporates the stories of traumatised characters, both white settlers and Aboriginal people, whose lives intersect in profound and often tragic ways. Perdita, the white protagonist, grapples with the trauma of committing a patricide, an act that leaves her haunted by guilt and remorse, as previously seen. Her inner turmoil reflects the psychological scars inflicted by violence and familial betrayal, underscoring the complex interplay between personal trauma and broader historical injustices. Similarly, Stella, Perdita's mother, experiences profound trauma at the hands of Nicholas, whose abusive behaviour triggers her descent into mental derangement. Stella's development illustrates the devastating impact of domestic violence on women's mental health and well-being, highlighting the cyclical nature of trauma and its enduring legacy across generations. Nicholas himself emerges as a deeply troubled figure, whose experiences serving in World War I have left him psychologically scarred and prone to violence. His trajectory from a traumatised war veteran to a perpetrator of violence underscores the interconnectedness of individual and collective trauma, revealing the enduring impact of wartime experiences on mental health and relationships.

Undoubtedly, the Aboriginal characters emerge as the most profoundly traumatised figures in the narrative, bearing the weight of historical injustices and intergenerational trauma inflicted upon the Indigenous communities. Through the character of Mary, in particular, the novel portrays the enduring impact of colonialism, dispossession, and cultural erasure on Aboriginal individuals. Mary's experiences epitomise the profound trauma endured by many Indigenous Australians, starting with her forcible removal from her family as part of the government's policies of assimilation. This traumatic separation from her cultural roots and kinship networks lays the foundation for Mary's subsequent struggles, as she is thrust into a hostile and unfamiliar environment devoid of love and belonging. Placed in institutions such as orphanages and convents, Mary faces further trauma and abuse, stripped of her autonomy and subjected to dehumanising treatment at the hands of those entrusted with her care. The cruelty inflicted upon her reflects the broader pattern of systemic oppression faced by Indigenous peoples within Australian society, perpetuating cycles of suffering and injustice. Even after leaving the institutional setting, Mary's trauma persists as she enters into the service of the Keene household, where she continues to endure exploitation and mistreatment. Her experiences serve as a stark reminder of the ongoing legacy of colonisation and its profound impact on Indigenous lives, highlighting the deep-seated inequalities and injustices that continue to shape Australian society.

While Mary serves as one of the central characters in *Sorry*, the novel adeptly extends its gaze to shed light on the broader experiences of some other Aboriginal individuals facing injustice and violence within settler society. Through subtle yet poignant references, the narrative briefly touches upon the plight of people such as Martha, without making their stories the central focus. In addition to Mary's harrowing experiences, *Sorry* portrays the systemic abuse and exploitation faced by Aboriginal servants within the broader context of settler society. The Aboriginal servants of the Trevor household, including the sixteen-year-old Martha, are subjected to similar mistreatment and marginalisation at the hands of Nicholas and other white settlers, reflecting the entrenched racism and power imbalances pervasive in Australian society. Martha's plight is further compounded when she becomes pregnant, a consequence of Nicholas' predatory behaviour. However, rather than holding Nicholas accountable for his actions or providing support to Martha, the Trevor household opts to remove her from the premises, effectively silencing her and erasing her presence from their lives. This callous disregard for Martha's well-being highlights the indifference and complicity of settler society in perpetuating the exploitation and marginalisation of Aboriginal individuals. Martha's story serves as a reminder of the 'double' colonisation faced by Indigenous women, whose voices and experiences are often silenced and overlooked within dominant narratives of Australian history.

Yet, despite enduring the most profound trauma within the narrative, Aboriginal characters in *Sorry* are not depicted in a violent or negative light, as we have seen. On the contrary, Jones portrays them with nuance and empathy, highlighting their resilience, kindness, and deep connection to nature. Mary and Kurnti, among other Aboriginal characters in *Sorry*, are depicted as strong and wise individuals who possess a deep spiritual connection to nature. Their understanding of the natural world extends beyond a mere practical brand of knowledge; it is rooted in a profound spiritual awareness that enriches their lives and guides their actions. Through their interactions with the land and its elements, Mary and Kurnti demonstrate a reverence for nature that reflects their cultural heritage and deepens their resilience when confronted with hardship. By challenging stereotypes representing Indigenous peoples as primitive, backward, or lazy, their portrayal underscores the spiritual richness of Aboriginal culture and offers a more respectful representation of Indigenous wisdom and strength.

Sorry is also rich in symbolism and metaphors, each layer contributing to a deeper understanding of Australia's colonial history and its ongoing implications for reconciliation. One of the most prominent symbols is Perdita's amnesia and stutter, which serve as powerful metaphors for Australia's collective forgetting of its colonial past. Through Perdita's struggles with memory and speech, Jones allegorically portrays how Australians have often suppressed

or ignored the atrocities committed by their ancestors against Indigenous peoples. Perdita's condition reflects a national amnesia, a deliberate or subconscious act of burying uncomfortable truths beneath layers of silence and denial. Moreover, Jones subtly suggests that conventional language may not be sufficient to address the complexities of Australia's colonial past and foster reconciliation between Indigenous and settler communities. By introducing the idea of alternative forms of communication, such as sign language, Jones hints at the need for a new language or dialogue—one that transcends linguistic barriers and acknowledges the diverse ways in which trauma and history are experienced and expressed. This metaphorical exploration underscores the importance of listening to Indigenous voices and narratives, which may not always conform to dominant modes of communication.

In addition to exploring the limitations of language, *Sorry* employs books within the narrative as symbols of reconciliation and cultural exchange. Mary's love for *The Lives of Saints*, a book about white saints, despite its cultural and racial disparity, symbolises her willingness to engage with and find meaning in the cultural artifacts of the dominant settler society. This gesture of openness and acceptance hints at the possibility of bridging cultural divides and finding common ground amidst historical and social differences. Similarly, the biography of Captain James Cook serves as a metaphor for the fraught relationship between Aboriginal and white settlers in Australia. Cook's arrival in Australia symbolises the beginning of colonisation and dispossession for Indigenous peoples, yet his biography also represents the settler perspective and narrative of exploration and discovery. Moreover, Mary's refusal to share the name or meaning of cat's cradle signifies her desire to safeguard Indigenous knowledge, refraining from imparting it to Perdita. This refusal underscores the importance of preserving the sacredness and secrecy of Aboriginal traditions within their community, highlighting the autonomy and authority of Indigenous peoples in determining the dissemination of their cultural heritage.

Sorry by Gail Jones is then not just a novel about trauma; it is a narrative that delves deep into the complexities of Australia' colonial history and the enduring pain experienced by its Indigenous peoples. What makes this exploration particularly striking is the novel's narrative techniques and structure. Jones employs a non-linear narrative, incorporating constant flashbacks that revolve around a pivotal event: the death of Perdita's father. This scene serves as the fulcrum around which the entire narrative pivots, shaping the lives of the characters and driving the themes of trauma, guilt, and reconciliation. The novel begins and ends with the scene of Perdita's father's death, setting the stage for the trauma that permeates the story. This traumatic event not only leads to Perdita's loss of speech but also sets in motion a series of

events that reverberate throughout the narrative. It is the trigger for Mary's imprisonment, as well as the aftermath of Nicholas' violent tendencies. Through the use of constant flashbacks, Jones illustrates how trauma operates, haunting the characters and influencing their actions and relationships. The non-linear structure of the novel serves to immerse the reader in the characters' experiences of trauma, mirroring the fragmented nature of memory and the persistence of traumatic events in the psyche. By presenting the narrative in this way, Jones captures the cyclical nature of trauma, where past events continue to resurface in the present, shaping individual and collective identities. Each flashback adds depth to the characters and provides insight into the interconnectedness of their experiences, highlighting the ripple effects of trauma across generations. The non-linear structure reflects the fragmented nature of Australia's history, where past injustices continue to reverberate in the present. By centering the narrative around Perdita's trauma, Jones makes a powerful statement about the enduring impact of colonialism on Indigenous Australians and the urgent need for reconciliation.

Ultimately, *Sorry* is a reconciliation novel that transcends its individual characters and settings to grapple with the deeper wounds of Australia's colonial past. Through its innovative narrative techniques and poignant storytelling, Jones invites readers to confront challenging realities and engage in a process of collective healing and understanding. In doing so, she offers a profound meditation on the power of storytelling to confront trauma, bridge divides, and envision a more just and inclusive future for all Australians.

9. Bibliography

- "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Literacy", *The Information Access Group*, URL: https://www.informationaccessgroup.com/literacy_levels/aboriginal_torres_strait_islander.html#:~:text=between%2040%20per%20cent%20and,to%20do%20well%20at%20school. Accessed on March 11, 2024.
- Alber, Jan (2017). "Indigeneity and Narrative Strategies: Ideology in Contemporary Non-Indigenous Australian Prose Fiction", *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1-2, pp. 159-81.
- "About Native Title", Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Islander, URL: https://aiatsis.gov.au/about-native-title. Accessed on April 22, 2024.
- Black, Carlina, Margarita Frederico & Muriel Bamblett (2019). "'My mob is telling their story and it makes me feel good': here's what Aboriginal survivors of child sexual abuse told us they need," *The Conversation*, October 21, 2019, URL: https://theconversation.com/my-mob-is-telling-their-story-and-it-makes-me-feel-good-

heres-what-aboriginal-survivors-of-child-sexual-abuse-told-us-they-need-122645. Accessed on March 20, 2024.

- Belleflamme, Valérie-Anne (2015). "Saying the Unsayable: Imagining Reconciliation in Gail Jones's *Sorry*", *English Text Construction*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 159-76, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1075/etc.8.2.01bel.
- Belleflamme, Valérie-Anne (2015). "'Shakespeare Was Wrong': Counter-Discursive Intertextuality in Gail Jones's *Sorry*", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol. 51, No. 6, pp. 661-671, DOI: 10.1080/17449855.2015.1105854.
- Benjamin, Walter (1972). *Gesammelte Schriften*, R. Tiedemann & H. Schweppenhäuser (eds). Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Block, Summer (2008). Interview: Gail Jones. *January Magazine*, URL: https://www.januarymagazine.com/profiles/gailjones.html?_ga=2.267317518.123604558.1704620033-510858902.1704620033.
- Brady, Maggie (1995). *The Prevention of Drug and Alcohol Abuse among Aboriginal People: Resilience and Vulnerability*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.
- Butler, Judith (1997). *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Carrington, C.J. Shepherd, Jianghong Li, Francis Mitrou & Stephen R. Zubrick (2012). "Socioeconomic Disparities in the Mental Health of Indigenous Children in Western Australia", *BMC Public Health*, Vol. 12, pp. 1-12, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-12-756.
- Caruth, Cathy (1995). *Trauma: Explorations in Memory.* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Caruth, Cathy (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP.
- Clarke, Kris & Yellow Bird, Michael (2021). *Decolonizing Pathways Towards Integrative Healing in Social Work*, Oxfordshire: Routledge.
- Clayer, J. (1991). *Mental Health and Behavioral Problems in the Urban Aboriginal Population*. Adelaide: South Australian Health Commission.
- De Guzman, Chad (October 13, 2023). "Australians Reject Proposal to Enshrine Indigenous Representation: What to Know", *Time*, URL: https://time.com/6323355/australia-indigenous-voice-referendum-results/. Accessed on March 22, 2024.

- Delrez, Marc (2009). “Fearful Symmetries: Trauma and ‘Settler Envy’ in Contemporary Australian Culture”, *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies*, pp. 51-65.
- Delrez, Marc (2011). “‘Twisted Ghosts’: Trauma Envy and Historical Resolution in Andrew McGahan’s *The White Earth*”, In D. Herrero & S. Baelo-Allué (Eds.), *The Splintered Glass: Facets of Trauma in the Post-Colony and Beyond,* New York: Rodopi, pp. 191-204.
- Eagle, Christopher (2012). “‘Angry Because She Stutters’: Stuttering, Violence, and the Politics of Voice in *American Pastoral* and *Sorry*”, *Philip Roth Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 17-30.
- Eekhoff, Judy K. (2021). “No Words To Say It: Trauma And Its Aftermath”. *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 81, pp. 186–206. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/s11231-021-09288-w.
- Eitinger, Leo, & Strom, Axel (Eds.), (1973). *Mortality and Morbidity after Excessive Stress: A Follow-Up Investigation of Norwegian Concentration Camp Survivors*. Oslo and New York: Humanities Press.
- “Evidence of First Peoples”, National Museum of Australia, URL: https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/evidence-of-first-peoples#:~:text=Aboriginal%20people%20are%20known%20to,came%20to%20be%20in%20Australia. Accessed on April 22, 2024.
- Fraiser, Malcolm (2003). “Condolences”, Speech Delivered at the Great Hall of Parliament House for National Sorry Day, Canberra: Australia.
- Freud, Sigmund (1961) [1920]. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, (J. Strachey, Trans.). New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Freud, Sigmund (1939). *Moses and Monotheism*, London: The Hogarth Press.
- Gelder, Ken, & Paul Salzman (2009). *After the Celebration: Australian Fiction 1989–2007*. Carlton: Melbourne UP.
- Gerber, Megan R., Gerber Emily B. (2019). “An Introduction to Trauma and Health”, Gerber, M. (eds). *Trauma-Informed Healthcare Approaches.* New York: Springer. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-04342-1_1.
- Gooder, Haydie, & Jane M. Jacobs (2000). “’On the Border of the Unsayable’: The Apology in Postcolonizing Australia,” *Interventions*: *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 229–47.
- Grenville, Kate (2005). *The Secret River*. Melbourne: Text Publishing.

- Helme, Sue (2007). "Education Inequality and Indigenous Australians Perspectives and Possibilities", *International Studies in Educational Inequality, Theory and Policy,* edited by Richard Teese, Stephen Lamb, and Marie Duru-Bellat, Vol. 1, pp. 257–74. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Herrero, Dolores (2011). "The Australian Apology and Postcolonial Defamiliarization: Gail Jones' *Sorry*", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing,* Vol. 47, No. 3, pp. 283-295, DOI: 10.1080/17449855.2011.572660.
- Higgins, Daryl & Kristen Davis (2014). *Law and Justice: Prevention and Early Intervention Programs for Indigenous Youth*. Resource Sheet no. 34, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health, Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Hirschberger, Gilad (2018). "Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning", *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 9, pp. 1411-41.
- Hoeveler, Diane (2012). "Anti-Catholicism and the Gothic Imaginary: The Historical and Literary Contexts," *Religion in the Age of Enlightenment*. Brooklyn: AMS Press, pp. 1-31.
- Howard, John (1997). Interview with *ABC* 7.30. Retrieved from Youtube, URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTtlHZxigOY&t=23s.
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. (1997). *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families.* Sydney: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Hunter, Ernest (1993). Ab*original Health and History: Power and Prejudice in Remote Australia*. Melbourne and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hunter, Ernest (1994, April 12). "Freedom's Just Another Word": *Aboriginal youth and mental health*. The Bill Robinson Memorial Lecture, Perth, Australia.
- Jones, Gail (2007). *Sorry,* London: Vintage.
- Jones, Gail (2008). "Speaking Shadows: Justice and the Poetic", *Just Words?: Australian Authors Writing for Justice*, Bernadette Brennan (ed.). St Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland, pp. 76-86.
- Kennedy, Rosanne (2011). "Australian Trials of Trauma: The Stolen Generations in Human Rights, Law, and Literature", *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 3. pp. 333-355.
- LaCapra, Dominick (1996). *Representing the Holocaust,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- LaCapra, Dominick (2001). *Writing History, Writing Trauma.* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Miles, Robert (1993). *Gothic Writing 1750–1820: A Genealogy*. London: Routledge.
- Moran, Anthony (1998). "Aboriginal reconciliation: transformations in settler nationalisms", *Melbourne Journal of Politics*, vol. 25: 101–31.
- Moran, Rosalind (2021). "An Introduction to Australian Gothic literature", *Reader's Digest*, URL: https://www.readersdigest.co.uk/culture/books/editor-s-picks/an-introduction-to-the-australian-gothic. Accessed on March 28, 2024.
- Morris, David B. (1985). "Gothic Sublimity", *New Literary History*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 299-319.
- Mowitt, John (2000). "Trauma Envy," *Cultural Critique*, Vol. 46, pp. 272–97.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (1989). *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, New York: Vintage.
- O'Brien, Grace (2021). "Racial Profiling, Surveillance and Over-Policing: The Over-Incarceration of Young First Nations Males in Australia", *Social Sciences*, Vol. 10, No. 68. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10020068.
- Raphael, B., Swan, P., & Martinek, N. (1998). "Intergenerational Aspects of Trauma for Australian Aboriginal People", *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, Springer: Boston, MA, pp. 327-339.
- Read, Peter (2006) [1982]. *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales 1883 to 1969*. Surry Hills, N.S.W: New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs.
- Richardson, S. William (2015). "The Evolution of Early Appendectomy as Standard Treatment from Appendicitis: What We Can Learn from the Past in Adopting New Medical Therapies", *The American Surgeon*, Vol. 81, No. 2, pp. 161-65.
- Rudd, Kevin. (2008, February 13). Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples. Parliament of Australia.
- Schwerin, Catherine (2009). "Speaking the Unspeakable – Manifestations of Silence in Gail Jones' *Sorry*", *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov*, Vol. 2, No. 51. pp. 37-40.
- "Spanish Flu", *Cleveland Clinic*, URL: https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/21777-spanish-flu. Accessed on March 28.
- Stanner, W.E.H. (1968). *After the Dreaming* (Boyer Lecture).

- Tennant, Christopher Charles, Goulston, Kerry., & Dent, Owen, (1993). “Medical and Psychiatric Consequences of Being a Prisoner of War of the Japanese”, *The International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, New York: Plenum Press, pp. 231-239.
- “Trauma”, Merriam Webster, definition of Trauma: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trauma#:~:text=Trauma%20is%20the%20Greek%20word,to%20refer%20to%20emotional%20wounds. Accessed on March 19, 2024.
- Visontay, Elias (2023). “Australia Rejects Proposal to Recognise Aboriginal People in Constitution”, *The Guardian*, URL: https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/oct/14/australia-rejects-proposal-to-recognise-aboriginal-people-in-constitution. Accessed on March 21, 2023.
- Wang, Labao (2020). “White Story and Black Pains in Gail Jones’ *Sorry*”, *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 2, pp. 115-35.
- West-Pavlov, Russell (2015). “Shakespeare Among the Nyoongar: Post-Colonial Texts, Colonial Intertexts and their Imbrications – *Macbeth* in Gail Jones’ *Sorry*,” *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, Vol. 63, No. 4, pp. 391-410.
- “What Is Cat’s Cradle?”, *Imagine If Libraries*, URL: https://sites.google.com/view/imagineif-cats-cradle/home. Accessed on May 11, 2024.
- Wilson, Janet (2017). “(Not) Saying Sorry: Australian Responses to the Howard Government’s Refusal to Apologize to the Stolen Generations”, In Collier, G., Davis, G. V., Delrez, M. and Ledent, B. (eds.) *The Cross-Cultural Legacy: Critical and Creative Writings in Memory of Hena Maes-Jelinek*. Vol. 193, Leiden: Brill/Rodopi. pp. 295-312.