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INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

Wit(h)nessing Trauma in Han Kang's *The White Book* (2016)

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Abstract

This dissertation presents a literary analysis of *The White Book* (2016) by the South Korean writer, Han Kang. In a series of semi-autobiographical prose passages, *The White Book* (2016) explores the socio-political and spiritual need to process trauma in a cross-cultural, globalised landscape. My aim is to examine how the text offers an alternative, feminine paradigm for representing, reading and bearing the burden of another's pain. The narrative voice identifies herself as a Korean woman living in Poland. She foregrounds her role as a writer in poetically recounting and rewriting her sister's life and death. Her metafictional thoughts are reflected through a series of short vignettes or prose passages that meditate on the colour white. Whiteness is closely aligned with the womb, feminine symbols, corporeality, transformation, spirituality, mourning rituals, and transitional and shifting landscapes. I argue that the narrator shares a common zeitgeist with the revisionist thinking of Bracha Ettinger, an Israeli artist, and academic of French psychoanalytic feminism. Going beyond the archetypes of motherhood and creativity, both artists use the pregnant-maternal body as an entry point for expanding our understanding of the aesthetic representation of trauma. For Ettinger, pregnancy forms the basis for a new connection-based, embodied mode of remembering through art she terms wit(h)nessing. Similarly, the narrator of *The White Book'*s (2016) concern with the colour white as a symbol of border-crossing, instability and maternity, creates a poetry that seems to mediate trauma via visceral connections. Through the lens of Ettinger's theory, I interrogate how womb imagery and whiteness in the text—both the symbolic representation of the colour as a poetic motif as well as the vast white spaces and photographs which form part of the layout of the text—come to represent a distinctive mode of wit(h)nessing and mourning the death of another through poetry/art.

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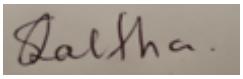
Signature: 

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Introduction

Literary Background & Theoretical Framework

> We live, historically, in a post-traumatic era, that is to say, coming after events of such an extremity and accumulation that they challenge modes of understanding and representation based on what preceded them. 'We,' the late-coming witnesses to events that are not our own, through time or geopolitical difference, nonetheless are affected unconsciously by the traces of these disturbances as they resonate across culture: in how we think about human sociality and ethico-political living together after such atrocities against humanity.
>
> —(Griselda Pollock, 2010a: 21)

The word 'trauma' comes from the Greek word 'traûma' which can be directly translated as 'wound' or 'defeat' (Barnhart, 1988: 23). In ancient Greece, the word referred primarily to the shock produced by a violent physical injury or an accident. Over time, however, the meaning has expanded to signify the psychic and cultural traces of suffering caused by a painful event that occurred in the past but continues to haunt the present (Boehmer, 2012: 30). The twenty-first century has been described as a "post-traumatic era" by the feminist art critic, Griselda Pollock (2010a: 21) in her article on intergenerational trauma and memory. My intention in using her quote as an epigraph is to draw attention to how the aftershocks from the Holocaust, nuclear bombs, terrorism, and other war atrocities, resonate across cultures and we are "affected unconsciously", or unavoidably implicated, by the trauma of others (21). There is an urgent need to engage with and understand the historical memory of different cultures as a means towards greater transnational justice and post-conflict resolution. Research in social and political trends has shown how collective traumatic memories (many of which are only now being recovered and made known) play a pivotal role in the rise of identity politics, fuelling the tragic proliferation of civil and ethical conflict around the world (Bell, 2006: 3). Sharing, communicating and bridging the gap between disparate historical experiences can assist to shape the contours of contemporary global politics and offer us much to frame new patterns in the future. As Pollock (2010a: 21) writes, "we" are those who did not experience

the loss and violence personally but are born into a world that is still processing its consequences.

Artists, writers, and film directors play an important role in shaping and pursuing the need to remember trauma in a global culture—finding visual elements and narratives that can force the scattered effects of the past into utterance. The study of these literary and cinematic representations of trauma has been given the umbrella label 'trauma theory' (Joyce, 2019: 462). This term was coined in the late twentieth century to describe a specific academic and scholarly interest in combining clinical trauma research and psychoanalysis with literary criticism (Caruth, 1995, 1996; Felman & Laub, 1992; Hartman, 1995; Van der Kolk, 1996). Over time, however, trauma theory has expanded to become a growing area of academic research, with many post-colonial (Andermahr, 2016; Balaev, 2014; Craps, 2010; Herrero & Baelo-Allué, 2011; Visser, 2016) and feminist (Bennett, 2005; Ettinger, 2006a; Murray, 2017; Ohmer, 2010) theorists revising and contesting its 'classic' psychoanalytical roots.

Of central concern to trauma theory in literary studies is the manner in which writers, together with critics and readers can create a participatory process of remembering: of speaking, listening and witnessing one another's trauma. "Trauma novels" can be defined as works of fiction "that convey profound loss or intense fear on an individual or collective level" (Balaev, 2008: 150). Writers are constantly uncovering and translating a plethora of bloody histories, perhaps derived from family memories or from different generations, cultures and languages. Authors often choose to fictionalise a traumatic subject based on factual events they did not experience first-hand. In this way, a global readership may bear witness or heal from the painful collective memories that have been creatively re-signified in a fictional landscape.

However, theorising on the role of writers and readers as secondary witnesses to a trauma they did not directly experience immediately raises an ethical dilemma. When trauma enters the representational arena of literature, it cannot easily be translated or reduced into symbolic form and readers/writers should not try to make personally understandable the experience (Reis, 2009: 90). This would risk undermining the integrity of another's loss, which is not

identical to one's own, or fetishizing the traumatic event with stereotypical expectations of the horrific that often drives patterns of consumption. As Kilby and Rowland (2014: i) warn, the publishing industry has created a "mass consumption of misery memoirs" by "morally murky shoppers looking for shocks to our systems and values". The risk of complacency, a rush to comprehension, reduction and mimicry has resulted in the prevailing skepticism and misgivings about witnessing the pain of others through trauma narratives (Craps, 2016: 56). This is has caused some theorists, such as Roger Luckhurst (2013: xi), to question whether or not the right to speak of trauma should be limited to primary victims. How can writers approach and represent another's pain in a way that is not appropriative? How can readers respond to and perceive the trauma of others without undermining or claiming their testimony, especially with concern to people in different parts of the world whose experiences differ from one's own?

This dissertation will attempt to grapple with these questions, among others, through a literary analysis of *The White Book* (2016a) by the South Korean writer, Han Kang. In a series of semi-autobiographical prose passages, the novel re-examines the socio-political, ethical and spiritual need to process trauma in a cross-cultural, globalised landscape. Interestingly, although the narrative portrays the psychological and spiritual havoc wrought by an unacknowledged past, the word 'trauma' is not mentioned. Instead, the protagonist of *The White Book* (2016a)—a South Korean woman living in Warsaw—links the aftermath of her sister's death to the haunting, yet also paradoxically beautiful phenomenon of whiteness. In this dissertation, I will argue that the symbolic construction of whiteness in the text provides an alternative representational model for witnessing the trauma of others. The text deliberately contests and re-negotiates the relationship between the primary victim and those with a 'secondary status'. The main concern of this research is to demonstrate the way in which this presents a cross-cultural ethical engagement for sharing, communicating and healing from past pain.

This introduction is divided into six parts. In Section 1.1. of this introduction I provide a synopsis of *The White Book* (2016a). In Section 1.2. I identify my central research questions and explain my research methodology. In Section 1.3. I outline the development of psychoanalytical trauma theory within the field of literary studies. I focus on theoretical

debates concerning whether or not trauma narratives establish an ethical solidarity with readers or elicit an objective identification with the victim. In Section 1.4. I show how this terminology provides a valuable tool to expand upon the practice of writing and representation in my chosen text. I then provide a detailed outline of the structure and focus of each chapter in this dissertation. Lastly, in Section 1.5. I present a brief summary of Han's oeuvre alongside the broader political, historical, and literary changes in her country. I conclude this introduction by showing how my analysis of the narrative will contribute towards the research gap in trauma theory and literary studies.

1.1. Chosen Author and Text

Han[1] is an avant-garde writer and professor at the Seoul Institute of Arts in South Korea (Chang, 2017: online). She has published ten books of fiction and poetry and has been translated into many languages, winning numerous literary awards in Korea and overseas. These include the 2005 Yi Sang Literary Award and the 2015 Hwang Sun-won Literary Award, as well as the prestigious Man Booker International Prize (2016) and the 2017 Malaparte Prize in Italy (Haman, 2017: online). Her latest work of fiction, translated[2] by Deborah Smith as *The White Book* (2016a) from the Korean title *Hwin* (흰) is a philosophical engagement with art, time and death. *Hwin* (흰) is the root word for white, and Han explains in an interview with Paul Fulcher (2018: online) that for her *hwin* portrays "a certain sadness" as "the colour of fate" which is why it was chosen over the synonym *hayan* (하얀), although there is not an explicit difference in meaning. Perhaps for similar reasons, the translator privileges the noun 'whiteness' over using the adjective white. Whiteness embodies a concept, while white is a one dimensional description. The suffix, -ness, is more emotionally and metaphorically evocative conveying something, mysterious, inarticulable and melancholic. If it evinces negative associations it is not the translators intention.

1 In Korea, the family name, not the given name, traditionally comes first. Therefore, I list the author's name as 'Han,', following the convention used by American and British reviewers (Levy, 2017; Taylor, 2017; Walsh, 2018)

2 This dissertation is not an extensive study of Han's oeuvre, nor is it a study of *The White Book* (2016a) in translation as I will refer only to the English edition of the text.

The text's experimental genre could be described as a literary memoir and artistic eulogy dedicated to honouring the author's sister (who died as a premature infant three years before the author herself was born) and the difficulties faced by her parents living in the rural countryside (Gleeson, 2017: online). Memoirs, like autobiographies, are based on true events related to the author's life. However, unlike autobiographies, memoirs normally do not cover the subject's entire life and can be of one's self or of other people or of a particular time (Fetherling, 2001: vii). *The White Book* (2016a) is partly aligned with the conventions of a memoir as the author tells the story of her creative calling to write about her sister's death, even though she was not alive to witness it. Han has shared with her readers how personal the subject matter of the text is and explained how it was written while she was on a four-month writer's residency in Poland in 2014 (Armitstead, 2016: online). Due to the extreme self-reflexivity with which she describes her act of bearing witness through literature, the text could be further categorised as a *Künstlerroman*[3] memoir ('the novel of the artist') or with what Shoshana Felman (1992: 207) calls "the performance of seeing". This refers to films and novels which narrate or act out how witnessing trauma, mourning death and overcoming guilt is facilitated through the creative process.

However, the text does not fit easily into the generic conventions of self-writing and Han reinvents and breaches the memoir's form in three significant ways. Firstly, the traumatic past of the author's family is retold through a series of sixty-five fragmented, abstract passages. At times these passages take the form of prose—enjambed sentences that are arranged in paragraphs with the pace and rhythm of a monologue, while at other times the lines merge into stanzaic form with the metre of poetry (Fetherling, 2001: vii). Due to the blend of the two formats, the text can be more easily defined as prose poetry than as a novel. Secondly, the text is interspersed with poignant black and white photographs of Han's performance art. The images transform and mirror the effects of the textual representation. Transitional literary forms which incorporate media are often termed "mixed-media" or "intermedia" (Kim, 2019: 103). Lastly, Han deliberately remains unnamed in the narrative, allowing the text to exceed her personality and to explore the responsibilities of an artist towards grief. In light of this, I tentatively give the hybrid genre of *The White Book* (2016a) the label of a mixed-media-lyric-

3 The *Künstlerroman* is a sub-genre of the *Bildungsroman* (novels which deal with self development). *Künstlerroman* fiction addresses the struggle to fulfil artistic potential and often offer an account of the poet's coming of age (Childs, 2006: 19).

memoir. In my close reading, I refer to the first-person narrator of the text as the protagonist/narrator and not as Han Kang. *The White Book* (2016a) could also be classified as "autofiction" (Dix, 2018: 3). This term describes narratives which lie somewhere in-between the genres of autobiography and fiction writing, belonging neither fully to one or the other. Autofiction combines the factual with the fictitiousthrough aesthetic and stylistic means. They are characterised by a departure from linear time, techniques such as stream of consciousness, radical shifts in narrative perspective, open-ended casualty, and elusive meanings and symbolism (Dix, 2018: 3).

The narrative voice identifies herself as a Korean woman who is currently living in Seoul, and reminiscences about the time that she was a "temporary resident" in Warsaw, Poland (9)[4]. She foregrounds her role as a writer in poetically creating an imaginative re-construction of her sister. The reader comes to learn that the story of her sister (who died as an infant two hours after having been born) was passed down from her parents to the narrator. If her sister had not died, her parents would not have wanted another child and the narrator would not have been born three years later. Therefore, at the root of her obsessive relationship to this oral archive of her family, is the need to locate herself in the death that made her life possible. Her metafictional thoughts are reflected through a series of short vignettes or prose passages that meditate on the colour white. Through the motif of whiteness, the narrator draws connections between the white pallor of her sister's face before she died, the whiteness of the snow-blanketed Polish countryside, haunted by its own traumatic past, and the whiteness of the blank page upon which she is writing in her narrative. Whiteness is closely aligned with the womb, feminine symbols, corporeality, transformation, spirituality, mourning rituals, and transitional and shifting landscapes. The metaphorical imagery in each passage articulates and deepens our understanding of aesthetics, representation and loss.

Despite the disjointed and fragmentary style there is a definite sense of progression and plot structure. The first chapter, entitled "I", is highly self-reflective as the narrator lays out the pros and cons of writing about her sibling. In the second chapter, entitled "She", the narrator begins to write from the perspective of her sister, had she survived and come to stay in Poland

4 The narrator's time in Poland "happened a long time ago" and in the third and last chapter of *The White Book* (2016a) the setting shifts back to South Korea (Han, 2016a: 9, 147).

instead of the narrator. She tries to hand over the domain of remembering to her sibling and calls forth snippets of her imagined childhood and adulthood. However, she repeatedly regrets that all her attempts to give her life are "sullied" (Han, 2016a: 39). Eventually, the narrator abandons the search for a perfect reconstruction of her sister and the third and final chapter, entitled "All whiteness", marks an undetermined, collective process of remembering (161). As Megan Walsh (2018: 42) writes in her book review, Han's "non-linear, disembodied prose is the perfect medium wherein the two sisters can coexist". The figurative and abstract language of *The White Book* (2016a) has the logical flow and pattern of a philosophical treatise. It is as if Chapter One is describing the 'method' of the narrator's experiment (writing about white things) and the nature of her inquiry (is it possible to give her sister life?). Chapter Two, in this sense, consists of the narrator's actual 'experiment': a poetic recreation of her sister, and Chapter Three presents the narrator's conclusions and discoveries.

As the narrator explores her responsibility as a writer to her sister, she represents the figure of an artist, standing at the threshold between past and present, travelling between two democratized, hyper-modern and capitalist cities (Seoul and Warsaw), while being aware of those who died to achieve them. Today, South Korea is known for its rapid modernisation and exports. However, only sixty years ago it was a war-torn country. Although this is not spoken about directly in *The White Book* (2016a), as An Sonjae (2002: 86) explains, "for contemporary Korean writers who are returning to the painful realities of their predecessors [...] the pain and conflict of the social context in which the poem [in Korean] is being written is intensely present in the silence, forming the white paper on which the poem is inscribed". Significantly, the European landscape in *The White Book* (Han, 2016a) allows the text to scrutinize the nature of suffering as a human problem that goes beyond a specific culture. The narrator finds intersections between the memorials of post-Holocaust Europe and her poetry. She metaphorically engages with the ambiguous and politically charged nature of bearing witness in the face of unrepresentable atrocities. As the reviewer Katie Kitamura (2019: online) writes, whiteness becomes an "urgent plea for the ritual power of mourning—for its significance in terms of both personal and historical restitution". The text is at once poetry and prose, argument and narrative. *The White Book* (Han, 2016a) resonates with an extensive tradition of criticism and philosophy that deals with the response to and representations of trauma/death.

1.2. Key Area of Investigation and Research Methodology

My research examines how *The White Book* (2016a) offers an alternative, feminine paradigm for representing, reading and bearing the burden of another's pain. In terms of research methods, I apply the literary skills of a close reading and textual analysis. Catherine Belsey (2005: 157) defines a textual analysis as the interpretation of cultural artefacts (literature, art, poetry, photography, fashion). She explains how the questions which the researcher sets out to answer arise from how the presentation of the text/image/film/media, invites readers, viewers and listeners to make sense of the world around them. Close reading involves gaining a richer understanding of the analytical elements and structure of a text and the different meanings, complexities and aesthetic beauty that they create. The principles of Belsey's close reading and textual analysis will be used to investigate how *The White Book* (2016a) portrays the writer's (and by implication the reader's) responsibility to another's trauma. I analyse both the literary aspect (by focusing on language, narrative strategies and recurring motifs) as well as the visual aspect (by focusing on the use of space and photographic compositions) of the text.

I argue that womb imagery and whiteness—both the symbolic representation of the colour as a poetic motif as well as the physical white spaces and photographs in the text's layout—come to represent a distinctive mode of witnessing and mourning the death of another through poetry/art. My argument is threefold. Firstly, I present a textual analysis of the motifs that form part of the symbolic construction of 'whiteness' in *The White Book* (2016a). These include: the trope of gestation and birth, and snowy white, liminal landscapes. I argue that the narrator's concern with the colour white as a symbol of border-crossing, instability and maternity, creates a poetry that seems to mediate trauma via visceral connections between herself and her sister. The representation of whiteness, therefore, becomes symbolic for the narrator's embodied and non-dualistic process of witnessing her sister's death through poetry. Secondly, I discuss the text in relation to the sociopolitical milieu of South Korea and Poland. I argue that the representation of whiteness becomes symbolic for an ethical-political, cross-cultural, empathetic and somatic engagement with the trauma of others (particularly across Occidental/Oriental divisions). Thirdly, I present an analysis of the physical (the prologue, cover image and white spacious layout) presentation of the text. I argue that the symbolic representation of witnessing trauma *in* the text (discussed in the previous two sections) further

reflects the function *of* the text layout, which serves to dissolve perceived borderlines between the reader, writer and narrative, presenting a threshold for the literary witnessing of trauma across different cultures.

This study adopts a feminist interpretative framework to illuminate the reading produced. Feminist criticism is concerned with the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) may reinforce the political position of masculine dominance (Eagleton, 2010: 192). At the same time, feminism also stresses the importance of studying women's art; imploring women to recognise and realise their full social, intellectual and political potential (Rooney, 2006: 32). Judith Butler (2004), Toril Moi (2002), Susan Stanford Friedman (1998), Alice Jardine (1985), and Barbara Christine (1985) are just a few of the major names of theorists who have constructed a feminist framework for the analysis of women's literature (Eagleton, 2010: 192). In particular, this dissertation has been influenced by the work of an Israeli artist and academic of French psychoanalytic feminism, Bracha Ettinger (1999, 2001, 2006, 2009, 2016). Although, Ettinger is lesser known in the field of literary studies than the aforementioned theorists, her terminology presents a paradigmatic shift in the "language available" for literary critics when addressing feminine "modes of healing and redress not currently privileged in trauma theory" (Abel, 1997: 5). Her theory of sharing trauma through art (which she terms wit(h)nessing) is centred around a transgressive, uncanny portrait of pregnancy (Ettinger, 2001: 89). This provides a framework of interpretation that is extremely relevant to *The White Boo*k (2016a), as the narrator-writer reflects on her struggle to mourn through visual and literary depictions of pregnancy and birth. Birth represents the gap between self and other that has escaped hegemonic understandings of intersubjectivity and empathy based and "the dominant masculine trope of a discrete subject" (Shread, 2005: 1). In the next section of this introduction, I underscore the model of *witnessing* trauma through literature that emerged at the advent of trauma studies and Ettinger's revisionist theory of *wit(h)nessing*. I follow this with a more detailed explanation of how these two terms are relevant to the landscape of *The White Book* (2016a).

1.3. Theoretical Framework

1.3.1 Witnessing Trauma: An Introduction to Psychoanalytical Trauma Theory in Literature

Trauma is an ambiguous term that has been highly debated by the various disciplines of social sciences and humanities. Most definitions of trauma today are still largely based on Sigmund Freud's (1920: 8) notion of "traumatic neurosis". As Dora Osborne (2013: 23) explains, if a past experience has been violent or overwhelming, our ability to remember what happened in any meaningful sense may be impaired. Freud (1920: 25) theorised that when this occurs, traces of the horrific incident are buried in our unconscious—the part of the mind which holds a reservoir of suppressed thoughts, automatic reactions and hidden desires. He argued that these memories are at the root of a variety of autonomic, dysphoric, and cognitive symptoms (most notably recurrent and intrusive nightmares) (25). The belated symptoms reveal how a traumatised person's mind is gesturing uncontrollably towards a pain that was not fully grasped at the time of its occurrence (25). According to Freud (13), this compulsive desire to return to trauma can only be arrested once the traces of repressed memory have been represented and reconstructed through substitute objects/language. The role of the psychoanalyst was therefore to guide their patient into speaking of whatever came to mind until their unconscious, implicit memory was translated into words (13). Finding modes for acknowledging, confronting and re-articulating the legacies of trauma and death is often called "the work of mourning", "memory-work" or "trauma process[ing]" (Durrant, 2004: ix; Visser, 2014: 110; Woods, 2012: 104). Freud's theory is not limited to the 'talking cure' that a psychoanalyst might prescribe for their patient, but also encompasses the highly relevant way in which artists pursue images and concepts that could effectively recount, translate and reconfigure the unrepresentable traces of memory.

In the 1990s, drawing on the connection between Freudian memory-work and art, a group of theorists from the Yale School of Deconstruction in America (Caruth, 1995, 1996; Felman & Laub, 1992; Hartman, 1995; Herman, 1997; Van der Kolk, 1996) pioneered a

psychoanalytical approach to the analysis of cultural and artistic representations of trauma. Cathy Caruth (1995), who coined the term trauma theory to define this discipline, is so often used as a point of reference that extensions of her work have come to be known as "Caruthian theory" (Visser, 2014: 109). Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's co-edited volume entitled, *Testimony Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992), has also been extremely influential. These theorists drew attention to the prevalence of literature as a means of addressing traumatic experiences (Dalley, 2016: 28). Rituals of healing and mourning consist of a series of actions related to the processing of and recovery from loss. When survivors record their testimonies, this can enact a ritual of mourning. The text forms the role of an intermediary, creating a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious, the dead and the living, for the purpose of articulating, externalising and exorcising painful memories that were "otherwise overwhelming or unfathomable" (Felman & Laub, 1992: 5). Those who are reading and responding to this address, like the analyst who listens to the patient, play a role in acknowledging the other's pain, and helping them work through their trauma. To clarify, the term 'witnessing' in trauma theory and literary studies has three different implications. Firstly, the 'witness' is the subject who speaks or writes through their own trauma (the primary witness). Secondly, the witness is the reader or writer who engages in another's traumatic narrative (the second-degree witness) (Freedman, 2018: 27). Lastly, there are second-generation witnesses, who came too late to personally know the experience of loss and violence that was suffered by their predecessors, but are engaging with the suppressed traces of cultural memory that has been passed down to them. They are referred to as witnesses of "post-memory" (Hirsch, 1997: 53; Osborne, 2013: 23).

For most of the foundational writers in trauma theory—including Cathy Caruth (1995: 11) and Felman and Laub (1992: 24)—it was this dialogic exchange between speaker and addressee, victim and secondary witness, that enabled the therapeutic effects of literature. However, while acknowledging that secondary witnessing might establish solidarity, they were against the idea that the imaginative participation in the life of the trauma victim could help people to *understand* what they have suffered (Craps, 2016: 55). As the post-colonial literary critic, Stef Craps (2016: 57) explains, they saw this as facile, empty or crude empathy. According to Felman and Laub (1992: 5), the trauma survivor's testimony is composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by the occurrence. Therefore, acts of

remembrance cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition (5). This causes a "radical collapse inherent to the historical experience of witnessing", as listening to human suffering involves an encounter with "inaccessible and irreducible difference" (xvii). Genuine empathetic engagements with the trauma of another become eroded if secondary witnesses over-identify with what they cannot fully comprehend. In doing so, the secondary witness will reduce the other to their own "horizons of significance" and create a shallow, consumeristic fixation with shock and violence (Craps, 2016: 57). Felman and Laub (1992: xvii) and Caruth (1995: 10) argued that this appropriation could only be avoided through the stylistic techniques of postmodern literature, such as fragmentation, paradox and the unreliable narrator. These literary devices serve to "desacralise the witness" so that the reader would not try and master the trauma of the text through a false claim to knowledge of events (Felman & Laub, 1992: xvii). The initial allure of trauma theory, as Craps (2016: 55) summarises, was that the "indeterminacies of representation in the analysis of the text that bear witness to traumatic histories can grant us a paradoxical mode of access to extreme events and experiences that defy understanding and representation".

Unfortunately, it has been well documented (Andermahr, 2016; Balaev, 2014; Craps, 2010; Herrero & Baelo-Allué, 2011) that the theorists of the Yale School marginalised non-western novels by favouring European forms of literature and European definitions of trauma. Felman and Laub (1992: xvii) were correct in noticing a "crisis" caused by the over-identification with the trauma victim. However, it is equally problematic if the trauma victims' testimony is dismissed as altogether "unclaimable" (Caruth, 1996: i). By defining trauma as universally unrepresentable, Caruth, Felman and Laub (1992: xvii) overlooked the specificity of trauma as a socio-cultural construct and undermined the subjective experience of the survivor. Post-colonial theorising—with its emphasis on how configurations of power in the colonial world have remained largely intact in the post-colonial period—have stimulated new analytical tools for re-evaluating the 'classic' trauma discourse. This has challenged the Eurocentric basis of trauma theory and critiqued the privileged position from which trauma novels are often analysed and witnessed.

Since the emergence of trauma theory, there have also been a number of feminist theorists (Bennett, 2005; Ettinger, 2006a; Palacios, 2013; Shread, 2005), who have argued that a

'phallic' theory of subjectivity implicit within the Western canon of trauma theory has resulted in a limited way of conceiving how meaning is conferred, negotiated and mediated through trauma fiction and art. As Ettinger (2006b: 218) observes, both Sigmund Freud's original definition of subjectivity and Jacques Lacan's reinterpretation of the former's writings, are based on a model of repression centred around the castration complex[5] and its male perspective. The Freudian-Lacanian paradigm defines the activity of establishing one's identity and ego during infantile stages by focusing on the child's separation from the mother (Freud, 1917a: 181; Lacan, 1977: 151). In this model, self and other must necessarily emerge as opposites. This fundamental polarity remains at the root of all psychic life and social interactions, with inside and outside, body and mind, love and hate, creation and death, feminine and masculine, maternal and paternal, persisting in tension with one another (Rosado & Marques, 2016: 4). This binary has informed and coloured the ethical understanding of witnessing trauma through art and literature. For example, Caruth's (1995: 10) emphasis on the obscurity and fragmentation that marks an encounter with the victim and secondary witness is built upon an implied subjectivity that continually subsumes otherness. Felman's trauma theory is similarly "contained by the frontiers of the discrete subject" (Shread, 2005: 33). Felman (1992: 33) describes how the secondary witness might overlap "to a degree, with the experience of the victim". However, she concludes that the witness "preserves his/her own separate place, position and perspective" (33).

The theoretical foundations of trauma theory need, therefore, to be re-evaluated to do justice to alternative ways of conceiving the self-other distinction when experiencing, witnessing or reconstructing a traumatic event. Ettinger (2001, 2006a,b, 2009, 2016) is a prominent theorist in this debate. Her collection of essays, *Regard et Espace-de-Bord Matrixiels* (1999), was first translated into English as *Matrix and Metramorphosis* (1992), and more recently republished in a special edition entitled *The Matrixial Borderspace* (2006a). Her theoretical contributions

5 In the early days of psychoanalysis, Freud (1917a: 181) famously theorised that an infant's unconscious repression of a desire for the parent of the opposite sex (the Oedipus complex) forms the foundations of their gendered identity. The primal wound occurs when an infant loses his mother upon the intrusion of the father (181). The boy child will then retrospectively come to recognise the penis as being what the mother desires and in fear of castration, he relinquishes his attachment to his mother and aligns himself with his father (181). Jacques Lacan (1977: 151), a French psychologist specialising in the reinterpretation of Freud's writings, places more emphasis on the acquisition of language in the formation of the subject. He argues that prior to language, the child's attachment to the mother lies outside of symbolic divisions (151). Lacan (151) interprets castration as a symbolic loss that occurs when the child learns that s/he does not possess the Phallic signifier of the mother's desire and recognises their relationship is not dyadic.

to art and trauma theory are developed in two contexts. First, she begins with a revision of psychoanalytical theories concerning subjectivity[6] and how we relate to others, and, second, she revisits the process of witnessing trauma through art. Through revisiting the origins of the subject, she is able to think through the ethical act of receiving a testimony with a wider set of terms than those available to Caruth, Felman and Laub, even though the fundamental gesture of her analysis is based on a similar understanding (Shread, 2005: 252). That is, Caruth, Felman and Ettinger all recognise the need for artists and writers to establish connections and empathetic dialogue with the trauma of different cultures and generations, while respecting alterity and difference through non-knowledge and the creative practice of blindness. Caruth and Felman, however, imply that a literary encounter with another's trauma will almost inevitably produce in the reader a desire to domesticate or reject what they do not understand (Shread, 2005: 25). Ettinger moves away from this binary view of memory in order to argue for the existence of a symbolic space where alterity is recognised. Her project is indebted to and works in conjunction with many other deconstructionist and psychoanalytical theories that problematise dichotomous thought, such as Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, Gilles Deleuze and Pierre Guattari's schizo-analysis, and the feminist interventions of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler (Shread, 2005: 76).

1.3.2 Wit(h)nessing Trauma: Ettinger's Revised Psychoanalytical Theory

In order to posit an alternative structuring of the unconscious, Ettinger begins with the subject's prenatal experience of the womb (Shread, 2005: 254). The Freudian-Lacanian account of subjectivity begins only after birth and pregnancy is understood to be a regressive period (Ettinger, 2006b: 218). Having separated from the mother first in birth and then further with the acquisition of language, Freud (1917: 181) and Lacan (1973: 62) argued that the child longs for the pre-Oedipal oceanic feeling of connection with the mother. However, as Karen Rodriguez (2016: 30) summarises, "to fall back into the longed-for/feared union with the mother would be to be assimilated, destroyed or devoured and, whether happy or not, to no longer exist". Ettinger is not the first post-Freudian psychoanalyst to question this assumption and re-consider how the intra-uterine experience may shape and underscore

6 From the outset, it must be emphasised that Ettinger's theory of subjectivity is not in opposition to but "in addition to the castration complex", and she does not wish to ignore the repressed anxiety and conflict that may structure phallic subject/object relations (Shread, 2005: 67).

identity. Most notably, the French psychoanalytic theorist, Julia Kristeva (1984: 62), has sought to reassert the role of a pre-Oedipal phase. In her analysis of poetry, she looks for the underlying influence of a rhythmic, onomatopoeic sound which precedes the symbolic order and is repressed in a patriarchal linguistic structure (Childs, 2006: 87). Kristeva (1984: 62), however, retains Freud and Lacan's assertion that before the schism of birth and separation, the experience of living in the mother's womb is a state of blissful unity.

Ettinger (2001: 107) differs fundamentally from the conception of pregnancy and going contrary to Freud, Lacan and Kristeva, she argues that pregnancy is "not undifferentiated fusion or archaic bliss". Instead, it is a "fragilising" and even life-threatening encounter where the mother does not know her pre-natal infant nor the infant her (108). She theorises that during pregnancy there is a transgression of individual boundaries as mother-to-be and child-to-be are simultaneously changing through one another (108). The pregnant body carries a "guest who is stranger than any other guest you've ever hosted, insofar as you have never even met; and yet also closer and more intimate than any other, insofar as they are, really, a part of yourself" (Gurton-Wachter, 2016: 2). Therefore, the pre-subject in the womb experiences the paradox of relating to someone who is "intimately known and ultimately unknowable" (McMillan, 2016: 28).

The central tenant of Ettinger's argument is that a psychoanalytic understanding of pregnancy as bliss and unity overlooks the fact that mother-child relations are a response to what is unknown. When this is emphasised as a part of the development of subjectivity, it opens up another option for ethical relations. It posits that people have an inherent capacity to connect, recognise and value inalienable difference (Shread, 2005: 25). Ettinger (2001: 90, 103, 105, 107) uses a variety of neologisms—"joining-in-separating", "borderspace", "relations-without-relating", "subjectivity-as-encounter", "border-linking"—that all imply neither a complete union nor a complete rejection of the other. However, she chooses the overarching label "matrixial", which is derived from the Latin word "matrix" and can be directly translated as "womb" (Van Schalkwyk, 2006: 121). In her foreword to Ettinger's book, Judith Butler (2006: ix) summarises the matrixial as a "linked space of primary psychic relation". From this emerges "a space in which we unknowingly inherit the trauma and desire of others,

and find that they are indistinguishable from our own, that we are transitively instated by the other, and the speaking of the 'we' or of the 'I' is not really possible in this domain" (ix).

Ettinger (2001: 105) believes that through her exploration as a painter she can mediate these traces and imprints of birth "separating-in-jointness" which are repressed by the child, remaining in the unconscious and corresponding to an alternate matrixial 'substratum' of subjectivity. When artists and viewers are re-linked to this vulnerable stratum of their subjectivity, they access an embodied form of 'knowledge.' This 'knowledge' does not depend on cognitive or learned processes, but occurs at an *unconscious* "borderspace" between self and other (103). Through this borderspace, the remnants of an unknown experience may be registered and carried by the artist/viewer, with or without their awareness and intentions (103). Ettinger (105) describes this process as wit(h)nessing. The additional 'h' distinguishes the wit(h)ness from our definition of a witness, who *consciously* observes and responds to a crime against another. Wit(h)nessing is the ethical quality of being 'with' someone else in witnessing them, without reducing the other's experience to what is understandable to the self (105). As an Israeli citizen, Ettinger's artistic oeuvre is a second-generation wit(h)ness to the victims and survivors (including her family) who were deported to Auschwitz. In an interview for the *New York Times* (Evans, 2016: 4), she explains that in her art "the subject matter is not simply a representation" but "should work like a passageway, through which a blurred idea—as it is breathing its new form through colour, line, and light—elicits an affective response in the viewer that paves the way for a sense of personal responsibility".

Ettinger's theory is expanding upon and challenging a sub-field of psychoanalytical theory known as object-relations theory. Freud's (1917a: 181) discussion of sexual instinct and the subject who seeks an object or person by which to be gratified originated the notion of object relations. Object relations refer to an individual's need to relate to others by focusing on the relationship between mother and child, arguing that the unconscious residual of this relationship affects a person into adulthood. Objects are usually people, parts of a person (such as the mother's breast), or symbols of one of these in the childhood environment. Building on the foundation of Freud (1920), Melanie Klein (1952: 433) argued that "object-relations are the centre of emotional life". She coined the terms projective and introjective

identification in order to explain her theory on the cycle of unconscious communication between mother and infant (Scharff, 1996: 11). In the relationship between mother and infant, the infant may unconsciously take an aspect of its internal world—object or self—and project it out, locating it in the mother in order to externalise these from the self. Klein (1952: 433) refers to this as projective identification. The mother then re-projects aspects of herself and the infant takes this in through introjective identification. Klein has been extensively discussed in literary studies (Facundo, 2016; Tambling, 2018). Therefore, I have chosen not to focus on her theories and instead use the concepts of Ettinger which have not yet been substantially explored in literary studies.

Ettinger's theory becomes problematic when the "matrixial" is used as an Eurocentric analysis of century old spiritual traditions, overlooking the fundamental difference between the psychoanalytical realm and the spiritual realm. As Joseph Gelfer (2010: 1) explains, Ettinger's description of a matrixial borderspace suggests a sphere which oscillates between "pre- and post-individuation" creating "a web of movements of borderlinking." This has resonance with "sacramental mystery", "Atman", and the "non-dual awareness" of Eastern philosophy (1). However, Gelfer (1) is concerned that the secularism of European higher education has discouraged writers from acknowledging religious world-views in the development of their theories, leading to appropriative rather than constructive arguments. The spiritual (as opposed to the psychoanalytic) dimension of Ettinger's matrixial borderspace is vaguely implied through obscure sentence structures and neologisms, such as the prefix "trans" and vague references to the "spirit" (1). Ettinger's theory, therefore, will be acknowledged alongside the role of spirituality in the text. The ritualistic art of writing in *The White Book* is more than a meditation of psychoanalytical repressed grief, it calls forth virtual, transmaterial and "unutterable mythological" forces (Bjerregaard, 2016: 17).

1.4. Structure of this Dissertation

Ettinger provides a relevant model for taking into consideration *The White Book*'s (Han, 2016a) representation of trauma and innovative genre. The approach that I take to studying these elements through the lens of Ettinger is based on Carolyn Shread's (2005: 232) matrixial analysis of Nancy Huston's novel *L'Empreinte de l'ange* (1998). Shread (232)

demonstrates the two levels in which Ettinger's psychoanalytical concept of wit(h)nessing can be used in a literary analysis. Firstly, the process of wit(h)nessing can be identified at a narrative level in the characters of the text (232). Secondly, in the performative realm of reading practices, certain features in the text may awaken an ethical, matrixial responsibility in readers, calling them to wit(h)ness the trauma that is presented to them (232). Following Shread's example, the first two chapters of my analysis of *The White Book* (2016a) focus on the narrative.

In Chapter One, entitled "Familial Borderspaces: The Dialectic between the Narrator and her Sister", I analyse how the narrator comes to terms with the death of her sister through the symbolic mediation of white material objects, places and bodies. I draw attention to how this process is associated with and compared to pregnancy. I argue that there are some striking parallels between the narrator, as she is trying to give testament to the unknown life of her sister through writing, and the philosophy of Ettinger, a second-generation Shoah survivor, and painter. Going beyond the archetypes of motherhood, femininity and creativity, both artists use the pregnant-maternal body as an entry point for expanding our understanding of the aesthetic representation of trauma. For Ettinger, pregnancy forms the basis for a new connection-based mode of remembering through art. Similarly, in *The White Book* (2016a), the narrator's poetry is aligned with the qualities of embodiment, borderlinking, transformation, and unconscious processes. I argue that the mother-child relationship during pregnancy and birth becomes symbolic of a matrixial borderspace created between the narrator and her sister through the creative process of birthing her book.

Having examined the unique way in which the narrator reimagines her relationship to her sister, in the next chapter entitled "Cultural Borderspaces: The Dialectic between South Korea and Poland", I look at the contextual and political-ethical implications of the motif of whiteness. I argue that it represents a borderspace between the writer and the trauma of different cultures and generations. The narrator intertwines her need to write about her sister with her need to wit(h)ness Polish history, and the traumas that shape a foreign country are mediated through her imaginative investment. In this sense, the subtext of *The White Book* (2016a), speaks to one of the prominent questions of trauma theory today. This, as Caruth (1995: 11) writes, concerns how the survivors of one culture's catastrophe might address the

trauma of another through symbolic articulations, or similarly, how might a surviving generation recollect and pay tribute to the experience of a previous generation. Ettinger's unique approach to the artistic engagement with second-generation memories of cultural trauma resonates with the text. Wit(h)nessing is a useful term for describing how the responsibility of the narrator represents a writer's transnational/transgenerational responsibility.

I conclude my analysis of *The White Book* (2016a) with an examination of the performative role of the text. In Chapter Three, entitled "Paratextual Borderspace: The Dialectic between the Reader and the Writer", I argue that through its experimental genre and physical presentation, *The White Book* (2016a) negotiates a borderspace for readers to wit(h)ness the real-life traumatic memory of the author's family and that of Poland's history. The term "paratext" was first introduced by Gérard Genette (1997: ix) as "the liminal devices and conventions both within the book and outside of it that mediate the book to the reader", such as the cover image, prologue, and layout. In this chapter, I make reference to the book cover, the inclusion of photographs, the genre and the role of the text as a translation, as well as to the spacious layout and blank pages of the text. In addition, I refer to interviews where the author discusses her relationship to trauma, the history of her country, and the implication of her decision to create a generically ambiguous text. My analysis of all of these extra or additional features of the text is focused on one question: How does *The White Book* (2016a) employ a unique approach to how readers witness the trauma represented in the text? Recourse is made to Shread (2005), who argues that Ettinger's paradigm of feminine subjectivity, which had previously only been used in relation to visual art and film, can be employed to rethink in what manner a literary text functions as a witness to trauma. Shread (2005: 170) posits "matrixial reading" as a new methodology for literary criticism. Matrixial reading emphasizes how trauma is exchanged in a literary representation, linking readers to an event one did not directly experience (170). I argue that through a borderspace, *The White Book* (Han, 2016a) seems to exhibit qualities that gesture or "call" for an intimate and active engagement with readers (Shread, 2005: 137). This communicates the type of reader-writer encounter that Shread describes in her model of matrixial reading. The text presents a threshold for the literary witnessing of trauma across different places, times and cultures. I bring *The White Book* (2016a) into dialogue with South Africa's traumatic history of

Apartheid and Colonialism as well as the global, collective trauma caused by the recent pandemic. I argue that the concept of whiteness presented in the text is extremely relevant as we find ways of supporting and bearing witness to each other in this shared crisis. I quote from the South Africa writer, Mohale Mashigo, whose novel *The Yearnin*g (2016), intersects with some of the core themes of connectivity in Han's text.

To summarise, my analysis of the text can be broken down into two key questions: What does the motif of whiteness reveal concerning the narrator's process of wit(h)nessing trauma, as the second-child born after a death in her family (Chapter One), and as a foreigner in post-Holocaust Europe (Chapter Two)? How do the deliberate ambiguities in the genre, the spacious white physical presentation and the photographs affect the readers, as secondary wit(h)nesses to the trauma presented to them through the text (Chapter Three)? Throughout my close reading, I often refer back to the model of witnessing initially put forward by Felman[7] in 1992 and the psychoanalytical views of Freud and Lacan. I focus on the concern that the writer might appropriate the experience of the other in their representation. This serves as a reference point to account for how wit(h)nessing in the text diverges from what is commonly perceived as listening/reading about another's trauma in the Western canon of trauma theory.

As the colour white is elucidated through a variety of abstract descriptions in *The White Book* (2016a), each prose passage deliberately evokes polyvalent meanings and could be interpreted simultaneously as an extended metaphor for grief, spirituality, subjectivity or art. However, I limit my close reading to a focus on the metafictional significance. I examine how each description of whiteness builds upon the previous one, adding layers of meaning and new perspectives to the readers' understanding of the dialectic between the narrator, her sister, a foreign country and her text. This dissertation is not an exhaustive investigation into the meaning of whiteness. I discuss the motifs only in relation to the ethics of representation and place less emphasis on the existential implications. In the narrator's mourning process, there is a sense that she is creating a "passage into parallel worlds" through her material processes

7 I am referring only to Felman's early writings (1992, 2000) as they clearly illustrate the interplay between literature on trauma and psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that Felman (2014) has since revised her seminal text and, as a feminist theorist, her theory goes well beyond Lacan and Freud.

(Bjerregaard, 2016: 16). This requires a deeper layer of interpretation beyond the scope of this analysis.

There are also many times when the narrator's evocative portrayal of whiteness speaks directly to notions of subjectivity within a Korean/East-Asian ontological framework. This is especially with regard to the narrator's anecdotal descriptions of Buddhist mourning rituals in her family (71). However, in the text religion is de-centred and the art of poetry is described as akin to or almost as a replacement of these rituals. I contextualise and understand the colour white by reference to traditional associations of whiteness in Korea. However, the specific cultural connotations of whiteness[8] are not the focus of my analysis. Instead, I argue the colour forms a "universal vocabulary of pain", while remaining grounded in a specific cultural identity (O'Neill, 2007: 141). I use wit(h)nessing as a conceptual tool in my analysis, as there are some significant points of intersection between the theoretical and artistic goals of Ettinger and the narrative. However, psychoanalytical science does not have a privileged access to the text. The notion of the existence of an unconscious that structures the subject in a particular way, may or may not reflect the position of the narrator. The aim of this interpretive framework, therefore, is not to provide reductive cultural interpretations or make broad generalisations, but to mediate between psychoanalytic and culturally specific concepts in order to provide a richer account of the text. By way of concluding this introduction, I now provide a literary and historical background of the author, before explaining how my analysis of her text makes a unique addition to the field of literary studies and trauma theory.

1.5. Han Kang and South Korean Literature

With the rise of the women's rights movement, Korean literature[9] in the 1990s saw an increase in women's voices. Writers such as Han, along with Shin Kyungsook, Kim Insuk, Seo Hajin,

8 Interviewers have questioned Han about the representation of her culture in her novels. Judging from her response, she seems to dislike the critical preoccupation with ascribing ethnic and racial identities to a text and hints at the danger of culturalist explanations. For Han (2017), the problem of human cruelty and destruction that she grapples with is universal. Therefore interpreting *The White Book* (2016a) as an act of mourning that relates only to Korean society is too narrow. As Han explains in an interview with *Livre Magazine* (2017: online), "I never try to portray Korean society in my books. This may come out wrong, but when I write I don't think that much about readers. The communication is between myself and the book."

9 Due to North Korea's state-controlled isolation from the rest of the world, any discussions of 'Korean' literature published post-1953 can only refer to *South* Korean literature (Sonjae, 2002: 77)

Jon Kyungnin and Jo Kyungran took the lead in producing "politically progressive and artistically subversive" literature (Hwang, 2010: 52). In his article *Modern Literature after the 1960s,* Sanggum Li (2016: 25) explains that categorising and defining any "new generation" of literature is an impossible and highly debatable task due to the diversity of what has being published. However, Li (2016: 34) reflects on how the women writers of the 1990s definitely "opened up a new realm in Korean literature"—a chapter that has continued over the past decade to push against the limits of Korean fiction with their striking presentation of feminine sexuality, modernity and nationalism.

Historically speaking, post-1990 writers could afford to be "less socially engaged" and "less concerned with lamenting patriarchal structures" (Fulton, 2002: 29). Previously, Korean writers were publishing in an intensely dramatic socio-historical context of repression. Dissident writers and poets during the dictatorial regimes (1948-1987) focused on combatting the oppression of their own government. They protested against the violation of citizens' rights in the name of national security (Kaufman, 1994: 224). During this period, many writers were imprisoned and tortured for their political activity, especially during the presidency of General Chun Doo-Hwan (1979-1980), who expanded the reach of martial law, closed many universities, restricted press freedom, and prohibited political gatherings. In May 1980, hundreds of students and activists gathered in protest at Chonnam National University in Gwangju, demanding democratic elections and an end to martial law (Kim, 2017: 33). Although their efforts were peaceful, General Chun responded with brutal military retaliation. His troops killed hundreds of civilians and arrested and tortured hundreds more (Kim, 2017: 33). For South Koreans, Gwangju is no longer just the name of a southwestern city, but home and grave to hundreds of the activists who were massacred by their own government.

It was only in the late 1980s and 1990s, with the dictatorship responsible for the torture and killings deposed, that censorship regulations were dismantled. The new government showed a commitment to democratise their political processes. Writers then felt that they could work without restriction or interference. Han, who first began to publish poetry in 1993, expresses how significant this was in an interview with Sarah Shin (2016: online). She explains, "We felt that we had obtained the freedom to investigate the interior of the human—without the guilty sense that we ought instead to be making political pronouncements through our work"

(online). Nevertheless, in the aftermath of liberation, fiction in the urban and post-modern era continues to be a critical mode of bearing witness. This is not only through representations of the dictatorship era, but moving in and beyond a myriad of horrific incidents that define South Korea's distant history, including the pain of the Japanese colonialism (1910 to 1945) and fratricidal war (1950-1953). In choosing to deal with this collective trauma in an indirect or personalised way, fiction such as Kim Min-Suk's short story *Scarlet Fingernail* (1987) or *Your Republic is Calling You* (2010) by Young-ha show how the repercussion of these tragedies are still very much present. The widely held sentiment that Japan has not atoned for the colonial period, the pain still existing from the tragic division of what had previously been a single country, and the fact that a cease-fire agreement to date has never progressed into a peace treaty, is the driving force behind many novels (Bevan, 2017: 14). These novels are frequently described as an expression of *han* (14). The word *han* has no english equivalent, but can be loosely translated as a deep psychological wound that operates on a collective and personal level in Korea. *Han* has accumulated from a long history of intense suffering at the hands of foreign invaders and excruciating poverty following the Korean war (Huer, 2009: 1). *Han* is transmitted across generations, through family histories, narratives and artistic practices that have allowed people to express their sorrow (Bevan, 2017: 182).

Although Han, who was born in 1970, "experienced neither the Japanese occupation nor the Korean War", as a writer she is very aware of how "the twentieth century has left deep wounds not only on Korea but on the whole of the human race" (Han in Shin, 2016: online). Born in Gwangju in 1970, Han was raised during an era of radical political transition. She was very young at the time of the Gwangju massacre and is, therefore, a part of a generation who, as Li (2016: 34) observes, will always be under "the indirect influence of a dark political outlook of suppression", which marked their childhood and still filters into their aesthetic sensibility. The "broad spectrum of humanity, which runs from the sublime to the brutal" has "been like a difficult homework problem" for her (Han in Shin, 2016: online). In an interview with Krys Lee (2016: online), Han explains how the recurring clash between human compassion and cruelty, dignity and disgust runs throughout her work. According to Han, "violence is part of being human, and how can I accept that I am one of those human beings? That kind of suffering always haunts me" (online).

In the work that Han has had translated into English, she frequently foregrounds trauma and embodied or shared memory. For instance, in her short story *Convalescence* (Han, 2013), a woman's estranged relationship with her sister manifests somatically in a broken ankle. It is as if by ignoring her ankle until it becomes infected, the protagonist is inflicting punishment on herself for their conflict. In her first novel to be translated into English, *The Vegetarian* (Han, 2015a), a housewife, Yeong-hye, refuses to eat meat in an attempt to reject human cruelty and destruction by withdrawing from her body. However, instead of eliminating violence, her vegetarianism is feared as a disruption of the status quo and Yeong-hye becomes subject to the patriarchal abuse of her angry father and husband. Han's second novel to be translated into English, *Human Acts* (2016b), is an artistic response to the Gwangju massacre. *Human Acts* (2016b) does not just reconstruct the tragic death of thousands of Koreans protesting for democracy, but also reveals the continually recurring presence of this national trauma. The novel imagines the Gwangju massacre from seven vantage points, stretching chronologically from 1980 to 2013 (Kim, 2017: 33). In the epilogue of *Human Acts* (2016b: 201), Han writes herself into the novel as a character and explains how her family had moved away from Gwangju to live in Seoul, four months prior to the Massacre. She was nine years old at the time and the event was kept from her. However, when she was twelve, she discovered in a cupboard a secret album with photographs documenting the massacre. She writes, "I remember the moment when my gaze fell upon the mutilated face of a young woman, her features slashed through with a bayonet. Silently, and without fuss, some tender thing deep inside me broke. Something that, until then, I hadn't even realised was there" (201). In many ways, *The White Book* (2016a), is part of this ongoing literary series. Han (in Livre Magazine, 2017: online) explains how *The Vegetarian* (2015a) asks "is a total refusal of violence even possible?". Following on from this theme, *Human Acts* (2016b) attempts "to understand human dignity against human violence", and *The White Book* (2016a) tries to depict "something in us that cannot be hurt or destroyed [..]—and maybe we can call that something white".

1.6. Research Gap

Having outlined my theoretical framework, chapter content, and the literary background of Han, I conclude this introduction by discussing the research gap that my dissertation

addresses. Firstly, there has been no substantial critical engagement with my chosen text. The Literature Translation Institute of Korea's quarterly magazine, *Korean Literature Now* (2016), ran a special feature on Han featuring a few short articles by Korean writers Krys Lee, Sophie Bowman, and Kwon Heecheol. However, due to the under-representation of Korean Literature in English[10], as well as the relatively recent international fame of Han, there has been no substantial critical scholarship in English on *The White Book* (2016a). This project aims to address the lack of theoretical attention given to writers such as Han, who show a deep ethical commitment to bringing issues of traumatic legacies to the surface of cultural awareness through their writing. *The White Book* (2016a) reflects shifts and trends in the present-day manifestations of memory and the work of mourning in literature.

Secondly, this dissertation aims to contribute towards the use of Ettinger's theory in the field of literary studies. While the psychoanalytic tools of Ettinger have been widely used in the analysis of visual art and film—by theorists such as Julia McMillan (2016), Griselda Pollock (2010) and Marissa Vigneault (2017)—she is less well known in the practice of literary interpretation and criticism. Carolyn Shread (2005), Phil van Schalkwyk (2006), Janice Brown (2013) and Mariëlle Smith (2013) are rare examples of theorists who have employed the matrixial as a tool for the analysis of novels. Ettinger's radical re-conceptualisation of art has great potential to answer the "clear call" in post-colonial literary studies "for a new model of reading, understanding, and interpreting trauma that can enable more differentiated, and more culturally and historically specific notations" (Visser, 2014: 108).

Thirdly, this project aims to address the lack of theoretical attention given to the symbolic role of pregnancy motifs in trauma narratives. This makes a unique contribution to the growing body of research in the field of feminist, postcolonial and psychoanalytic literary criticism. Before I explain further, let me provide some examples of recent studies in trauma theory and literary studies that resonate with the subject matter of this dissertation. There have been many articles and books that have focused on reformulating or rejecting the language used in Freudian trauma studies. Many literary trauma theorists, such as Michel Balaev (2014), Ewald

10 The English translations of Korean authors have not received the same level of interest as Japanese and Chinese literature. Furthermore, most translators do not seem to have had the opportunity or time to reflect on the works they have translated, meaning that English journal articles, full length discussions and academic studies on contemporary Korean writers are rare (Sonjae, 2002: 72).

Mengel and Michela Borzaga (2012), Chris Van der Merwe (2012), and Irene Visser (2014), have focused on concepts such as ritual, ceremony, sacrifice, and forgiveness in order to do justice to more culturally unique ways of processing trauma. There is also a great interest in the interrelatedness of memories found in novels from different cultures, including authors such as Stef Craps (2010), Sam Durrant (2004), and Amy Novak (2008). In particular, this dissertation has been influenced by literary theorists who address feminine modes of healing and redress not previously privileged in trauma theory, by encouraging a re-orientation towards women's authorship and representation. Most notably, Sarah Ohmer (2010), Jessica Murray (2017) and Silvia Schultermandl (2007), who all intersect with the focus of my research by taking into consideration women writers and the embodied, trans-generational and transnational effect of trauma in their narratives.

Ohmer (2010) in *Re-membering Trauma in the Flesh: Literary and Performative Representations of Race and Gender in The Americas* expands upon our understanding of memory. In her chosen novels she places emphasis on the role of the representation of the body in tune with mind and spirit in the act of connecting an individual to the collective past. She is much indebted to Barbara Christian (1985), who appears to be one of the first theorists to incorporate an awareness of African cosmology in her analysis of Afro-American writers such as Paule Marshall and Alice Walker.

Murray (2017), in her journal article *'I was a Girl of my Time': A Feminist Literary Analysis of Representations of Time and Gender in Selected Contemporary South African Fiction by Women* focuses on three novels by African writers. She argues that the female protagonists in her selected novels are shaped by the patriarchal logic of linearity (clock dominated coercive time) and binary oppositions which exclude their experience of trauma from the dominant social narrative (Murray, 2017: 2). The presence of unexplained somatic symptoms in the novels are used to indicate that a hidden or suppressed past is speaking through the female character's body (3). This, Murray (3) argues, shows how trauma demands an alternative understanding of time as circular, corporeal and feminine.

Schultermandl's (2007) article on the novel *Comfort Woman* (1997) by Nora Okja Keller presents a rare discussion on contemporary Korean trauma literature. Although Keller is a Korean American writer and not a Korean writer, the novel's treatment of the female body and multigenerational trauma in Korea resonates with the subject matter of *The White Book* (Han, 2016a). The novel revolves around the mother-daughter relationship of Akiko—a first-generation immigrant from Korea who endured sexual violence under Japanese imperialism—and her Americanized daughter, Beccah. Facing typical ethnic and language dissonances, Schultermandl (2007: 94) focuses on Beccah's commemoration of her mother's death, through performing a traditional Korean burial using ritualistic and shamanic language. Schultermandl (96) argues that because the daughter does not speak Korean, the language of her body can become an alternative discourse to commemorate death. The prospect of a "transnational feminist solidarity" that cuts across cultural differences in the novel means that Keller's trauma goes well beyond Korea and calls for "an interpellation of individual readers" into subjects who identify with abuse of women and resist patriarchal oppression (96).

These three examples reveal some important trends in scholarly engagement with the literary manifestations of trauma in women's literature. I conclude that the role of femininity, sexuality and the process of processing trauma has become a fruitful area of study and the subject of considerable scholarly attention. While recognising these ideas, but taking a slightly different perspective, this project aims to make a unique addition to the field of trauma theory and literary studies, through outlining how *The White Boo*k (Han, 2016a) shifts the focus of the trauma narrative onto the pregnancy motif. There has been no substantive critical engagement with the motif of pregnancy within trauma criticism in literary studies. For Murray, the somatic manifestation of trauma is a rupture to patriarchal time, while for Schultermandl it is a site of feminine solidarity against marginalisation. I draw less attention to how the somatic recovery of trauma serves as a point of resistance and departure from hegemonic memory, and more attention to how the trope of pregnancy leads to differences in the interpretation and translation of trauma. There is a small, growing number of studies which focus on depictions of child birth and mothering in literature, including authors such as Sarah Blewitt (2015), Parley Boswell (2014), Susan Friedman (1987), Lindsey Gay (2017), and Lily Gurton-Wachter (2016). However, the same cannot be said about a literature that

examines the *intersection* between trauma narratives and pregnancy narratives.[11] This, as Gurton-Wachter (2016: 2) explains, is unfortunate since pregnancy, like trauma, "offers us a representation of, and a response to, the extremity of human experience" (Gurton-Wachter, 2016: 2). *The White Book* (2016a) brings to the fore the frequently overlooked intersections between trauma and pregnancy, which are both extreme experiences that push us beyond comfort or even comprehension. Pregnancy and death occur at the boundary of life, they both evade explanation and both trigger the obliteration or disintegration of the self (Gurton-Wachter, 2016: 2). In placing the feminine poetic language of the text together with Ettinger's unique approach to psychoanalysis, this dissertation draws attention to the alternative representational model that pre-natality can offer trauma theory and literary studies.

11 Boswell (2014: 11) defines "the pregnancy narrative" as a narrative that inscribes any suggestion of the wide spectrum of women's physical, emotional and sexual relationship to pregnancy—from menstruation, to sex, to birth control, to conception. The representation of pregnancy is often used to reveal certain aspects of the human condition, emphasise moral complications, reveal character flaws, or telegraph promise and joy (10).

Chapter One

Familial Borderspaces: The Dialectic between the Narrator and her Sister

This chapter argues that the motif of whiteness in *The White Book* (2016a) becomes a symbol for how the narrator's poetry mediates a matrixial borderspace between herself and her sister. In the opening passage, the narrator identifies herself as a Korean woman and as a writer who, having come "abroad in August" to a "country [she] had never visited," appears to be on a short-term writers' residency in Warsaw, Poland (Han, 2016a: 6).[12] She begins by writing a list of white objects and phenomena such as snow, swaddling bands, ice and the moon. She explains, "With each item I wrote down, a ripple of agitation ran through me. I felt that yes, I needed to write this book, and that the process of writing it would be transformative" (5-6). The urgency of her writing project appears to be driven by a surreal, almost sublime encounter with physical pain. It becomes clear that this is more than a simple headache, but is the visceral knowledge of something that she cannot easily articulate; something that she attempts to describe through the haunting yet beautiful phenomenon of whiteness. Although nothing is mentioned of her sister in the first passage, as the chapter continues, it becomes increasingly obvious that the narrator's magnetism to whiteness is rooted in the suppressed traumatic history of her family. In the prose passages that follow, the narrator retells the haunting story of her twenty-two-year-old mother, alone in the countryside, giving birth to her older sister, and explains how it is "here in this unfamiliar city" that "old memories" drift to the surface (21). The reader comes to learn that had the premature baby lived longer than two hours, the narrator herself would never have been born three years later.[13] Perhaps driven by the guilt of being alive on account of another's death, or the need to confront emotional scars buried deep within her family's psyche, the narrator decides to reconstruct the unrealised memories of her sister through poetry. She imagines her father choosing *Seol*, meaning snow,

12 The narrator does not explain exactly where she is staying or what she is doing. However, she refers to the capital city of Poland and explains that she has rented an apartment on a short-term lease (Han, 2016a: 6; 9).

13 While the narrator focuses on the loss of her sister, in the third chapter of the narrative she briefly mentions the loss of another premature sibling. Her mother gave birth to a boy a year after Seol who died soon after being born (Han, 2016a: 137)

to be one of the characters in her sister's name, and the colour white becomes a slate onto which she tries to extend the traces of her sister's short existence (47).[14]

Each prose passage is entitled with one of the white object/phenomena on the narrator's list and is comprised of a poetic discussion of that object/phenomena; ranging from an exhibition of a salt hill, the image of frozen waves, or a dissolving snowflake. This creates a series of interrelated moments and memories that are all in some way connected to her sister. The narrator returns to the same image over and over again, as if fixated with a certain element or angle of the colour. I have found that these interrelated descriptions can be loosely grouped together in various categories, or rather, constellations of repeated images.

In this chapter, I focus only on the narrator's 'container' metaphors and frequent references to the transformative stages of gestation and birth, of which I have given the umbrella label of 'white womb imagery'. As the narrator describes her sister's birth and death, she often foregrounds the stillness found "within whiteness" and the intimacy between mother and child (161). I will argue that this white womb imagery goes beyond describing her mother's trauma, and turns instead into a templet upon which the narrator questions her own poetic processes. In this way, the mother-child relationship during pregnancy, birth and post-natality becomes a symbol for the narrator's writing. By way of introducing the structure of my argument, I begin this chapter with a close reading of the third and fourth prose passages, entitled "Swaddling bands" and "Newborn gown" respectively (15; 17). These passages provide the first detailed description of Seol's birth and death. Thereafter, the specific details of this day reappear repeatedly throughout the narrative in more abstract variations. Therefore, within these two passages lie the structure and flow at the heart of the entire novel.

In the narrative "Swaddling bands" is an abstract dedication to the inexpressible emotions and vulnerability of a mother and child at the moment after birth (15). It is far removed from the romantic impressions of femininity that are often associated with childbirth. Instead, the narrator gives a vivid and sensory impression of the mother's "astonishing agony" and the

14 For the sake of clarity, throughout this dissertation, I will refer to the narrator's sister as Seol. However, in the text Seol is just one character in her sister's name and not her whole name (Han, 2016a: 47). Furthermore, this name is only mentioned once and for the rest of the book, her sister remains unnamed, with "she" becoming an ambiguous pronoun that refers to either/both the narrator and/or her sister.

shock of a newborn child's "abrupt projection into limitlessness" (15). She describes post-pregnancy as follows:

> Unexpectedly, the child quiets itself. It will be because of some smell. Or that the two are still connected. Two black unseeing eyes are turned towards the woman's face—drawn in the direction of her voice. Not knowing what has been set in motion, these two are still connected. In a silence shot through with the smell of blood. When what lies between two bodies is the white of swaddling bands. (15)

The narrator's imagery in this passage foregrounds the tension between the continuation of a connection despite the pain of separation, and thus an overarching preoccupation with borderlines emerges. In a strange and stark image the narrator gives "smell" the action of cutting and penetrating silence, evoking the emerging, tunnelling child, "shoot[ing]" through as the mother is in labour (15). The narrator foregrounds the mother's "confusion" and details how a newborn child must feel, having suddenly transitioned from one world into another: from being symbiotically attached to the mother's body and enclosed in embryonic fluid, to becoming a discrete entity in time and space. However, in spite of their mutual bewilderment, mother and child draw comfort from each other. Repeating the phrase, "the two are still connected", the narrator emphasises their visceral bond (15). The strange tactile quality of the child's gaze means that she/he cannot see but is nonetheless drawn towards the mother's face. The words "silence" and "unseeing eyes" de-emphasises the sense of sight and sound in favour of smell and touch (15). The "white of swaddling bands" represent mending, binding and the connection of two bodies (15). They are "wound around the newborn baby" creating a protective skin and providing the illusion of the lost warmth in the womb (15). They encompass the tension between connection and separation, situated in the moment when mother and child intersect, lying in the space "between two bodies" (15).

The follow-up prose passage, entitled "Newborn gown", presents a vivid description of her mother's traumatic, unassisted and premature birth (17). Unlike the previous passage, in which the mother giving birth is unnamed and universal, the narrator now turns to her own family history, and in this description the child does not live but dies. The narrator remembers the story of how her mother was at home alone, with the nearest phone twenty minutes away, when she began to feel the first contractions. Her due date was still two months away and she

was completely unprepared. In response, she sat down and began sewing a small white dress for her baby. Sadly, her daughter lived for only two hours. The narrator describes this tragedy as follows:

> She dressed the bloodied little body in the gown she'd just made, and held the whimpering scrap in her arms. For God's sake don't die, she muttered in a thin voice, over and over like a mantra. After an hour had passed, the baby's tight-sealed eyelids abruptly unseamed. As my mother's eyes met those of her child, her lips twitched again. For God's sake don't die. Around an hour later, the baby was dead. They lay there on the kitchen floor, my mother on her side with the dead baby clutched to her chest, feeling the cold gradually enter into the flesh, sinking through to the bone. No more crying. (18)

The horror that a newborn life could turn into death so soon is emphasised through the narrator's attention to the small details of her sister's tiny life ebbing away. She describes how her sister whimpered until eventually her eyes remain closed like they had been stitched (18). Her mother's desperate words, "please don't die", are like a prayer or an incantation willing her to live (18). The narrator explains how her "mother never forgot" the moment that Seol turned her head and opened her eyes to look at her (18). In Chapter 2, the narrator again describes this painful moment, but this time her sister and not her mother is the focal point of her passage. The narrator describes how her sister slipped from consciousness slowly, "not knowing what boundary she was now passing over" (126). From this passage onwards, a sense of the mother and child's pain, love, separation and attachment saturate the text. Every small detail of this day—the fact that there was frost on the window, her sister's cold bones, the brief second that the child's eyes met her mother's—is expanded upon in the prose passages that follow. In particular, the motif of eyes and gazing reappear repeatedly throughout the text. The narrator seems to encounter black eyes everywhere. She reads the "terror in the two black eyes" of a dog and looks up to see a face in the moon with "darkness soaking out of two black eyes" (64; 75). Likewise, the trope of touch is also prevalent throughout the narrative as the narrator sees, moves, breathes, observes, touches, and interacts with white materials, tracing and manipulating them in the space of her writing.

In this way, the profound lucidity and simplicity of the aforementioned two passages (Swaddling bands and Newborn Gown) lay the foundation for the narrator's lyrical,

meditative prose. Arguably, three phases of birth are foregrounded in these passages. Firstly, the mother's initial pain of contractions. Secondly, the moment of birth and separation, and thirdly, the post-natal gaze as the infant looks up at her mother. These three stages seem to structure the three chapters of the narrative. Therefore, I trace the development of the pregnancy imagery by engaging in a systematic analysis of each chapter, selecting one or two relevant prose passages. Throughout my close reading we begin to see more clearly how the *story of* her sister's birth begins to constitute a metaphor for describing the workings and difficulties of the narrator's process of *writing about* this birth. The narrator constructs a metaphorical alliance between her mourning work and her mother's experience of pregnancy, birth and post-natality.

In Section 1.1. I analyse Chapter One (entitled "I") of the text (4). I draw a connection between gestation and the narrator's description of the initial 'germination' or 'conception' of her book. I compare the narrator's questions to the emotional response of a woman in the early stages of pregnancy, who is contemplating an unknown entity inside of her. In Section 1.2. I analyse Chapter Two (entitled "She") of the text (43). I draw parallels between the narrator's self-reflective description of her representation of Seol and the sudden pain and contractions of birth. I argue that these allusions to birth become illustrative of the splintering and self-estrangement of the writing subject. This aspect of the text reflects the relationship patterns and drives posited by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. In Section 1.3. I analyse Chapter Three (entitled "All Whiteness") of the text (135). I find parallels between the narrator's description of her poetry and the postpartum relationship between mother and child. The continuation of a connection despite the pain of separation, reveals how the narrator's description of writing, like Bracha Ettinger's theory of wit(h)nessing, challenges and expands upon some common assumptions concerning representation within the Freudian-Lacanian tradition of trauma theory and literature. The narrator does not answer all the questions that she poses, nor does she resolve all the moral ambiguities that surround her representation of her sister. Nevertheless, her maternal imagery becomes symbolic for a self-conscious reflection on the art of poetry as a tangible, spiritual and psychological space that can forge connections between herself and her sister.

The division of this chapter analysis into pregnancy, birth and the postpartum experience is artificial, as the narrator's metaphorical imagery unfolds and blurs as a continuous experience, shifting fluidly across time from the point of view of herself and her sister. The indirect and subtle nature of her allusions to pregnancy do not neatly correspond to a three-part structure. Nevertheless, I have divided my analysis in such a way in order to demonstrate how, at different points in the text, the different phases of pregnancy offer new insights into her poetic representation. Through this overarching analogy, the pregnant female body is a starting point for refiguring how the traumatic death of her sister may paradoxically become an intimate part of the narrator, while remaining unknown and unwitnessed.

1.2. Chapter One ("I") and the Metaphor of Pregnancy

In Chapter One, entitled "I", the narrator explains her painful awareness of her sister's death and the way this event has shaped her life (4). She describes her need to create a poetic representation of her sister through abstract impressions of the colour white. As she contemplates her need to write, she resembles a new mother's uncertainty regarding the mystery of a developing foetus inside her womb. I have selected three passages in Chapter One: the opening passage (which is untitled), the second passage (entitled "Door") and the concluding passage (entitled "Candle") (5; 9; 15). In each passage, the trope of pregnancy appears in varying forms and descriptions of whiteness and gives significant insight into her creative process.

1.2.1.The Opening Passage

In the opening passage, the narrator is going through the stages of affirmation and doubt so well known to the creative process. The feminine language and the subtle imaginings of pregnancy that frame her anxieties, illuminate the entangled relationship between her description of her mother giving birth and her descriptions of her own writing processes. She states:

> In the spring, when I decided to write about white things, the first thing I did was to make a list.

> Swaddling bands
> Newborn gown
> Salt
> Ice
> Moon[…]
> With each item I wrote down, a ripple of agitation ran through me. I felt that yes, I needed to write this book, and that the process of writing it would be transformative, would itself transform, into something like white ointment applied to a swelling, like gauze laid over a wound. Something I needed.
>
> But then, a few days later, running my eyes over that list again, I wondered what meaning might lie in this task, in peering into the heart of these words.
> If I sift those words through myself, sentences will shiver out, like the strange, sad shriek the bow draws from a metal string. Could I let myself hide between these sentences, veiled with white gauze? (5-6)

The image of a bandage and ointment ascribe the qualities of healing to the narrator's writing. Moreover, gauze is associated with swaddling bands and her reference to a swelling makes one think of a pregnant stomach. In this sense, gauze and ointment have maternal as well as medicinal implications. The narrator's body is a passageway for sifting the words "through" herself (6). This causes the regeneration of words into sentences like the transformation of a child inside the uterus. The sound imagery in this metaphor further alludes to a woman giving birth as the bow (a traditional Korean string instrument) produces an extremely high-pitched wailing. Through this language, the narrator merges the idea of writing about her sister with that of falling pregnant. This metaphor resonates with Ettinger's (1999: 19) description of the "working of an art-work" as echoing the encounter between the body of a mother and her baby during pregnancy. In all of Ettinger's art, as well as her writing on art, pregnancy is also a conspicuous motif.

Likening a literary composition to pregnancy is an effective metaphor as the "writing process, going along unseen but with gradual results, is as mysterious and work-intensive as gestation itself" (Gay, 2017: 39). As a pregnant woman wonders about the unknown shape of her child, the narrator is clearly riddled with doubts concerning whether she could bear witness to the death/life of her sister through the act of writing. While hoping that transformation will be initiated, she also struggles to find a middle ground between remembrance and forgetting, healing and concealing (Han, 2016a: 6). The image of hiding in her sentences implies that her

creative act may simply screen over and obscure the violence of her sister's death. This would allow the narrator to conceal her guilt and pain instead of helping to resolve this family trauma.

Having introduced her doubts, in the next paragraph, the narrator explains how she procrastinated and avoided writing her book until two months after having arrived in Poland. At this point, a "viciously familiar" headache made her realise that "hiding would be impossible" (6). While the list of white objects signalled the conception and germination of the narrator's ideas, this headache marks the moment when she can no longer ignore her growing need to write. This need is expressed through the following words:

> Now and then, the passage of time seems acutely apparent. Physical pain always sharpens the awareness. The migraines that began when I was twelve or thirteen swoop down without warning, bringing with them agonising stomach cramps that stop daily life in its tracks. Even the smallest task is left suspended as I concentrate on simply enduring the pain, sensing time's discrete drops as razor-sharp gemstones, grazing my fingertips. One deep breath drawn in, and this new moment of life takes shape distinct as a bead of blood. Even once I have stepped back into the flow, one day melding seamlessly into another, that sensation remains ever there in that spot, waiting, breath held.
>
> Each moment is a leap forwards from the brink of an invisible cliff, where time's keen edges are constantly renewed. We lift our foot from the solid ground of all our life lived thus far, and take that perilous step out into the empty air. Not because we can claim any particular courage, but because there is no other way. Now, in this moment, I feel that vertiginous thrill course through me. As I step recklessly into time I have not yet lived, into this book I have not yet written. (6-7)

The onset of the narrator's headache brings with it an acute awareness of "time's discrete drops as razor-sharp gemstones" (6). People are seldom consciously aware of time passing in everyday life, due to the monotonous, unidirectional way it is perceived. However, a new consciousness of passing—of death, growing old and of lost innocence—emerges in this passage. Although the narrator has not spoken about her sister yet, the headache implies a physical lingering of intergenerational trauma. The body, as Jessica Murray (2017: 5) writes, can "speak" of an unremembered past through the manifestation of somatic symptoms. In this passage the narrator's body seems to have retained and be speaking of the traumatic

experience of her mother. It is as if the impulses and emotions which formed part of her mother's somatic memory were passed onto her. The headache points towards her inescapable need to externalise this wound that was passed down, and never cognitively processed.

Significantly, the psychological and physical effects of her headache (its all consuming, suddenness, associated with "agonising stomach cramps") are similar to her mother's "quick[]" and "intense pain" as she gave birth alone (Han, 2016a: 7; 18). Furthermore, the narrator's headaches and cramps begin two months into her stay at Poland, which reminds one of the trimester symptoms of pregnancy. During the first two to four months of a pregnancy, a woman normally experiences headaches and cramps due to her expanding womb and influx of hormones. Therefore, the narrator's urge to translate bodily pain into words (which implies bestowing a new form to her sister) mirrors the experience of a women carrying a child. This can be related to Ettinger's writing, as she draws an interesting connection between the artistic processing of trauma and pregnancy. Ettinger suggests that the trauma of another generation or family member engraves a silent, encrypted memory that is felt through the body (Ettinger, 1999: 17). This calls for a narrative of art that can release this trauma into "aesthetically occasioned, and shareable memory" (Pollock, 2010: 27). The translation of somatic trauma involves accessing the archaic traces of a partial and shared subjectivity that existed in the womb (Ettinger, 1999: 17).

The image of pregnancy is especially evident when the narrator explains how her excruciating experience is potentially rewarding, allowing "a new moment of life" to take shape "distinct as a bead of blood" (Han, 2016a: 7). The headache is the catalyst for her art, as she overcomes her initial reluctance to write, not because she can claim "any particular courage" but because she is compelled by this visceral crisis (7). This act of writing releases the tension of "solid" time to become "suspended" and "vertiginous" (7). Her pain, therefore, triggers the potential of her imaginative capacity to create temporal dislocation and escape the linearity and logic of masculine, hegemonic time (Murray, 2017: 5). The last line of this passage privileges an unsanctioned form of maternal time which she herself has "not yet lived" and is linked with creativity, art and childbirth (Han, 2016a: 7). The landscape painted before her is uncertain and unsteady, just as in birth the mother experiences her subjectivity as continuously in flux and as sustained mutability. As Ettinger (2009: 6) proposes, "[t]he place of art is a point of

instability where the invisible becomes visible". It is a "transport-station" that rather than being a dwelling place or time, is instead "a time-space offered for co-emerging and co-fading, borderlinking and borderspacing, over different times" (6).

1.2.2. Door

The second appearance of a metaphorical connection between pregnancy and the narrator's art is subtly evident in the second prose passage entitled, "Door" (Han, 2016a: 9). In this passage, the narrator enters her temporary apartment in Warsaw for the first time. She is disturbed by the prevalence of rust on the front door and stains on the white walls of the apartment. To her, the rust resembles "a vestige of violence, like long-dried bloodstains, hardened, reddish-black" (9-10). She feels as if the gouge lines on the door, which were engraved by someone in "a long line of temporary occupants", are "glaring" at her "clenching their teeth shut" (10). Her surreal, dream-like description becomes parabolic for the ethics of representation. While there is no explicit mention of her sister here, the rust and stains can be interpreted as symbolic for traces of Seol's death. The narrator is entering as a new tenant in a house with a history of pain, much like the way in which her own life is occupying a place left empty by her sister's death. Her sister's death was something that allowed the narrator to live; it housed and facilitated her life. The narrator's entrance into this apartment also marks the beginning of her writer's residency, indicating a period of incubation as the ideas for her book are being made manifest. The door, therefore, is a symbolic frontier. It acts as a threshold between the boundaries of outside and inside as she enters into a white walled, womb-like space of encounter with the otherness of Seol.

This encounter, however, triggers fear and adversity. The narrator proceeds to paint over the rust on the door and the stains on the walls of her apartment with white paint until the "deep-gouged numbers disappeared", "those rusted bloodstains vanished" and the "imperfections" of a "the scar-laced surface [...] were erased" (10; 11). Instead of paying tribute to the bloody traces of trauma, she suppresses them, expelling what the self cannot tolerate. In the last paragraph, having painted her apartment, the narrator stands in stunned silence, an "unmoving, dumb witness" to the snowflakes (11). This is a rather hopeless image of helpless indifference as she struggles to face violence and cruelty. It represents the artist as a concealer

and a deceiver who does not face death but hides from it. Language, like a paintbrush loaded with white paint, has the potential to mask another within a text. Through this image, the narrator foregrounds one of the principle concerns of the text: how, as a writer, can she avoid usurping and denigrating the position of her sister? Her womb-like apartment can be interpreted, firstly, as a symbol for the way in which her sister's death 'gave birth' to her own life, and secondly, as a symbol for how her poetic representation might 'give birth' to her sister's life without concealing or 'painting over' her existence.

This dual meaning is continually implied through the thematic weaving of womb imagery in the proceeding passages. For example, in a passage entitled, "Moon-shaped riced cakes" (19), the narrator explains how hearing of the loss of her sister affected her own psychological development and growth. She writes, "It was the story which I had grown up inside. The most helpless of all young animals. Pretty little baby, white as a moon-shaped rice cake, how I'd been born and grown up in the place of that death" (19).[15] This suggests that as a 'replacement child' who was born after the infant's death, the narrator would have suffered from the unresolved grief of her parents. The explanation of growing up 'inside' a story implies that her sister's death, which would have been related to the narrator by her parents, contained her like a womb. At a later stage in Chapter One, the narrator explains how she has always sensed the continued presence of Seol her life. As a child, some "vague sensation" or "stirring of seemingly unprompted emotion, might, unbeknown to [the narrator], have been coming from [Seol]" (33). It is this growing awareness of the other "stirring" in her (like the awareness of stains in her apartment) that causes the narrator to desperately question how her writing could be a way of making visible her sister (33). The narrator is not simply rewriting her sister's life from a complete absence or void. Rather, she is questioning how "cross-inscriptions" and traces of Seol that have always existed in her life, can be made observable in the space of her poetry (Ettinger, 2006b: 166). The narrator's quest is perhaps best articulated in a question that Judith Butler (2011: 151) raises in response to Ettinger's art. Butler asks, "Where is that

15 It is significant that the narrator likens the pallor of her sister's newborn face to that of the uncooked dough of *Songpyeon* or moon-cakes. *Songpyeon* are one of the dishes prepared for *Chusoek* which is a three-day harvest moon festival celebrated on the 15th day of the 8th month on the lunar calendar. It is a day set aside by Koreans to honour their deceased ancestors and relatives. On the morning of *Chuseok*, tribute foods are arranged on a table and family members may bow and say a prayer to their deceased relatives (Na, 2014: 213). The rice powder dough of *Songpyeon* is shaped into small crescent moons filled with a mixture of mashed sweetened red beans or sesame seeds. Traditionally, it is thought that *songpyeon* are made this shape because the crescent moon (which can 'fill-up' to become a full moon) suggests abundance and fertility. To the narrator, the half-moon, womb-like shape of uncooked *Songpyeon* appear "so lovely that they do not seem of this world" and represent the innocent, sacrificial death of Seol (Han, 2016a: 19).

other in me?" and, "how and through what form and material can trauma be registered from and for the other?" (151).

1.2.3. Candle

Having foregrounded some of her anxieties and questions concerning the creative process, the last prose passage of Chapter One, entitled "Candle", is a dramatic announcement of the narrator's decision to write (Han, 2016a: 39). This decision is made regardless of her skepticism and doubt, and presents an important development in the conceit of whiteness and pregnancy. The passage reads:

> As I have imagined her, she walks this city's streets. At a crossroads, she sees a section of red brick wall. In the process of reconstructing yet another shattered building, the wall had been taken down and rebuilt a metre in front of its original position, along with a low epitaph explaining that the German army used it to line up civilians and shoot them. Someone has put a vase of flowers in front of it, and several white candles are crowned with wavering flames.
>
> Wreathes of fog still shroud the city, less thick than in the early morning, translucent as tracing paper. If a strong wind got up and skimmed off the fog, the ruins of seventy years ago might be startled into revealing themselves, pushing out from behind the present reconstructions. The ghosts that were gathered there, very close to her, might stand up straight against the wall where they were slaughtered, their eyes blazing out.
>
> But there is no wind, and nothing is revealed beyond the already apparent. The warm white candle wax creeps ever downwards. Feeding themselves to the white wicks' flame, these stubs sink steadily lower, eventually out of existence.
>
> Now I will give you white things,
>
> What is white, though may yet be sullied;
>
> Only white things will I give.
>
> No longer will I question
>
> Whether I should give this life to you. (39-40)

A sombre landscape of mourning and pain permeates the passage. In the first paragraph, the narrator appears to be walking in the streets of Warsaw when she stumbles upon a memorial wall dedicated to all the civilians who were shot there by Nazi Germans occupying Poland (1939-1945). Instead of writing from her own perspective, the narrator chooses to describe the wall from the imagined perspective of her sister, had she survived. The line, "as *I* have imagined *her*", reveals the complex relationship between the two sisters (39). The narrator is entangled within the voice of her sister as she speaks for her, and her sister becomes a fantastical construct entangled within the voice of the narrator. When "*she* sees" and "*she* walks", the reader is confused as to whether the pronoun makes reference to what the narrator imagines her sister is seeing, or what the narrator is seeing and feeling herself (39). The deliberate ambiguity of "she" remains and we can read the "she" of this narrative as "either herself, her sister, or both" (Pitts, 2018: 1). As the narrator's sister is evoked at the sight of a Polish memorial, it is almost as if she is formed off its template. The reconstructed nature of the wall "which had been taken down and rebuilt a metre in front of its original position" speaks to the narrator's role as a poet, who like the architect, encounters the remaining ruins of her sister and rebuilds them (Han, 2016a: 39).

The second paragraph begins with an evocative description of the weather. Through the narrator's metaphor, one can imagine the circular shape of fog clinging to the buildings like grave clothes around a body, or wreaths of flowers placed at a graveside. This image creates the impression that the entire city is like a person in a grave. In the subtle personification of Warsaw, the death of thousands of Polish citizens connects and resonates with the death of her sister. The significance of merging a personal, seemingly apolitical infant death with the eerie continuation of pain in present-day Poland, is discussed in more detail in the following chapter. What is important for the moment, is that the wind and fog are described by the narrator as being potentially catalytic: changing the quality of her process of witnessing trauma. The "present reconstructions" of the memorial wall give way to outlandish and fleeting impressions of the blazing eyes of ghosts (39). Through comparing fog to the translucency of tracing paper, there is a subtle hint of the narrator's writing material. Like the creative process, fog and wind represent an expansion in the narrator's individual observation. She has chosen to step outside of her experience and stare at the site of one of the horrors of

the 20th century through the eyes of her sister's ghost. Her sister, and the ghosts of Poland's past, who are very close to her, are momentarily revealed.

In the third paragraph, her transcendent vision of fog, wind, and ghosts is suddenly replaced by the harsh, mechanical observation that nothing is revealed "beyond the already apparent" (39). The word "[b]ut" marks a distinct shift in tone from the first paragraph (39). She notices how the candles placed alongside the memorial are sinking eventually "out of existence", indicating the ephemerality of any gesture of mourning and a stark image of death (40). The candles are "feeding themselves" into the flame and allude to the sacrificial death of soldiers, civilians, and Seol, upon whose lives the present generation, including the narrator, are indebted (39).

Following this paragraph, the last stanzaic-like section brings an equally abrupt shift in tone. Her spacing indicates a radical break from the previous statement and in five short sentences, she ushers in the second chapter, as if in revolt to her own doubt. These shifts in affect and tone are particularly meaningful. They create tension between the narrator's discontent and her resolve, showing how she continues on while still questioning the very notion of art. Her decision to give her sister white things is a direct inverse to the black hole or gap conjured up by the image of "white wicks" creeping "out of existence" (40). The moment that the narrator decides to "give this life to [her sister]", she becomes Seol's literary mother and the metaphor of her writing as a birthing or pregnancy is confirmed (40). "White things" allude to how white paper functions as a screen onto which the narrator can project and house her creation (40). She lends her "I" to the "she" of Seol who has no voice, and so the act of writing gives life to another (39). The lines in this stanza are markedly shorter than the above paragraph, meaning that the blank space of the page encloses and contains the stanza in a circle of white. In this way, the womb-like white spacing mirrors the womb imagery of the text.

Beginning by describing her writing as "something I needed", the narrator's quest to "give you white things" marks a shift from a solitary voice to one that is accompanied (5; 40). Interestingly, the phrase, "It was the story which I had grown up inside", is mirrored at a later stage in the novel. Except this time the narrator changes the pronoun to refer to her sister,

explaining that "[s]he grew up inside this story" (125). Repeating this line suggests that just as the narrator had grown up inside the story she had heard from her mother, knowing that she was born in the space of Seol's death, so she wishes that Seol could grow up inside the literary space of her creation. The idea that a page of art could create a dwelling-space for the inscriptions of another, becoming attuned to "the voice of an object otherwise rendered mute", is central to Ettinger's (1999: 19) writing on art. Her theory describes a shift away from finding something absent or lost to the presence of invisible or inaudible traces that may be "trans-scribed and transmitted when transformed via artwork" (19).

In conclusion, the narrator's initial decision to write in Chapter One can be compared to the pregnancy of her mother. I have demonstrated in the aforementioned three passages how the metaphorical connection between pregnancy and the narrator's writing unfolds. The narrator foregrounds, firstly, the pain behind her gestation drive to produce art and, secondly, her authoritarian impulse to cover up the otherness of death (an impulse that must be avoided). Lastly, she communicates her conviction that, despite distrusting the creative process, she must allow her art to be an act of 'giving birth' to the remnants or fragments of her sister that live on, in the same way that her sister's death 'gave birth' to her. Having emphasised the intersection between pregnancy and the early formation of the narrator's poetry, I now focus on how the womb motif evolves in Chapter Two and Three of Han's text. I turn my attention to how the expulsion of birth is echoed in certain passages in Chapter Two and how the intimacy of the post-natal gaze is emphasised in certain passages in Chapter Three.

1.3. Chapter Two ("She") and the Metaphor of Childbirth

In the second chapter, the conceit of whiteness and womb imagery continues to evolve, lending new insight into the narrator's writing. All the prose passages in this chapter are narrated in the third person, deliberately displacing the narrator ("I") in favour of the ambiguous pronoun ("she") (40; 45). As the narrator feels as if her life has been hosted by her sister's death, she tries to reverse their roles by imaginatively hosting the memories or 'life' of her sister (had she lived). She begins by reimagining the day that her sister was born. Instead of dying, her sister is given the name Seol by her father and "grow[s] up" to be sensitive to the cold (Han, 2016a: 47). The narrator then imagines that, as an adult, Seol had come to

Poland instead of her. The reader will remember that in the opening passage the narrator is introduced as a writer in Poland (6). However, in Chapter Two, Seol is now wandering in the streets of Warsaw looking for inspiration to write (51). In this way, the narrator hands over her present situation and becomes a vessel to be filled by the past. She shares brief, surreal glimpses of 'her' memories and experiences (these could be Seol's imagined memories or reference to memories of the narrator). For example, the narrator describes the memory of the death of two of "her" university class mates in a bus crash (89). The narrator imagines that "she" once watched an anchovy shoal with "her" uncle as he calmly steered the boat through a storm (97). The narrator describes how "she" loved learning the names of bones as a teenager (105).

The extended irony is that this chapter is built upon the memories of someone who died virtually without any memories. Furthermore, the narrator has explicitly foregrounded her own role in creating these memories into existence. Having already signalled her unease about concealing or covering over Seol in Chapter One, there is an underlying tension as the narrator (most probably) merges her sister into her own past. The whole of Chapter Two explores a precariously marginal position for the narrator and portrays a sense of foreboding and guilt. "She" wishes the "[c]lean, cold light" of stars to "scour[..] her mind of all memory" (85). Evocative snapshots of decay—a drunk man lying in the streets at night (24), an aged couple "with no time left for desire" (49), a dishevelled dog (63)—present a fractured emotional state. The narrator continually makes Seol enact her own transience by dwelling on white materials that are in a physical state of transforming and disappearing. Watching "the seemingly endless recurrence of the waves", Seol feels "that our lives are no more than brief instances [..] with unequivocal clarity" (59). In the next passage, she stares at sleet, thinking of how "everything she has clung to will fall away from her and vanish" (61). Through the splendid, harsh and beautiful white landscapes, an "illusion" of "eternity" is confronted with the reality of mortality, Seol's mortality (61).

As Chapter Two ends, the narrator expresses disappointment at her poetic construction of 'she.' Having orientated Seol and her writing in whiteness in the first chapter, the imagery in the second chapter places more emphasis on the clash between black and white. This suggests that the intrusion of death, decay, and disease make it impossible for the narrator to mediate

her sister's innocence and purity. The problems and failings of her literary experiment are exemplified in a passage towards the end of Chapter Two entitled "Black writing through white paper" (119). In this passage, the two siblings become estranged and reject each other. What is striking about this description is how the narrator's representational loss can be likened to her mother's maternal loss at childbirth. Although the narrator's relationship to Seol remains ambivalent throughout Chapter Two, it is on the pain and separation in this particular passage that I would like to concentrate. The passage reads as follows:

> Each time she groped her way back to health, she would find that life now cast a certain chill. A feeling which it would be too feeble to call 'resentment', too severe to call 'rancour'. As though the one who had been tucking her in and kissing her forehead each night had suddenly turned on her yet again, driving her out of the house into the cold, making her painfully aware that all those sunny smiles had been only on the surface.
>
> Looking at herself in the mirror, she never forgot that death was hovering behind that face. Faint yet tenacious, like black writing bleeding through thin paper.
> Learning to love life again is a long and complicated process.
>
> Because at some point you will inevitably cast me aside.
> When I am at my weakest, when I am most in need of help,
> You will turn your back on me, cold and irrevocable.
> And that is something perfectly clear to me.
> And I cannot now return to the time before that knowledge. (119-120)

Stanza 1 begins with an interrogative tone. The slow, long, winding sentences and intermittent pauses suggest the onset of a subtle change in temperature or "chill" (119). The narrator initially struggles to pinpoint Seol's undefinable sense of "resentment" or "rancour", before finding clarification with a simile (119). In the simile, Seol's experience is compared to that of being unfairly treated by an abusive parent, whom she trusted but who then "suddenly" rejects her (119). The "one who had been tucking her in and kissing her forehead each night" is suggestive of a mother (119). In this image, the narrator, who is Seol's literary parent (as she gave birth to her in the form of a fictional creation), is implicitly condemned as superficial. The callousness of a mother who casts her child out into the cold could be interpreted as a metaphor for the writer injuring her creation. The language used creates parallels to the splitting and separation of her mother's premature birth. As her mother's body expelled and

exiled her sister so does the white, womb-like page of the narrator's art symbolically drive Seol out of the poetry which housed her.

Stanza 2 is progressively shorter and more abrupt. With ghostly diction—"faint", "tenacious", "hovering"—the narrator describes how "she" sees her death reflected in the mirror "like black writing bleeding through white paper" (119). This is an interesting and complex image that encourages multiple angles of interpretation. The moment of seeing death is likened to the visual traces of ink behind a page of writing. The mirror imagery points towards the mimetic activity associated with the art of narrative. 'She' is looking beyond the mirror to what is hovering behind. This implies that the reality of death is hiding behind the narrator's literary reconstruction of Seol, as it is impossible to remain true to the unrealized personage of her sister. As the narrator tries to insert Seol into her text, her poetry tames and controls what it does not understand. However, the death hovering behind 'her' face, points towards an otherness outside of the symbolic: a death that the language which wanted to give Seol life tried to negate and conceal.

In the last stanza, the narrator switches from third-person descriptions of her sister to directly addressing her sister with the second-person pronoun "you" (119). The preposition of 'she' that was maintained for most of Chapter Two begins to unravel and fracture. Through the interaction between third and first-person narration, it is as though the narrator does not know whether she is herself or an other. Her short-lived identification with her sister falls apart. Her imagined sister/alter-ego/sister-self is talking back to her. Seol is no longer the victim, but she is the one rejecting the narrator. From within the narrative, not only is the creation rejected by the artist, but the artist is rejected by her creation. The narrator then abruptly concludes that she can never return to a time before this knowledge (120). Perhaps the narrator is longing for "a time before" her sister's death, "a time before" their separation or, in light of the maternal imagery, a pre-symbolic connection before knowledge and language itself (120). In all cases, her unavoidable "knowledge" seems to stem from the recognition of her lost sister as separate and other (120). Through allusions to birth and the violence of one person separating from another, this passage points towards the divisions between self and other that are imposed through language. The image of birth foregrounds a clash between the narrator and her sister,

just as Ettinger (1999: 18) recognises how her aesthetic representations mediate a trauma that is not "purely [hers]", leaving a profoundly "fragmented" and "fragile" sense of self.

The emphasis placed on a separation between the writing subject and the object of representation is *en parre* with many contemporary philosophers in the mid-twentieth century. These include Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan's developmental narratives and the influential writings on literature that stemmed from their research. As Sarah Gendron (2008: 117) observes, both theorists describe "not only the benefit of the subject perceiving itself as Other, but also the inevitability of this separation and the fragmentation of the subject as a consequence of being born into language". I would like to review the connection between this Freudian-Lacanian philosophy and the mark of separation that is in the above passage. However, by undertaking such parallels, I do not wish to reduce the narrator's nuanced mourning process to a repression of otherness, but would rather like to establish a framework for understanding her self-criticism. It will become more apparent in my analysis of Chapter Three of Han's text, that *The White Book*'s (2016a) investigation into the ethical and ontological significance of writing ultimately goes beyond the limitation that binaries of self and other impose on the writer and object of representation. Correspondingly, Lacan and Freud's early theories are important to the development of Ettinger's theory of matrixial relations as well as her respect for the divisions between self and other. However, Ettinger's concept of the matrixial ultimately moves beyond phallic imagery and questions the positioning of a prenatal infant as a separate entity.

1.3.1. Freud's Melancholia

The narrator's profoundly disturbed frame of mind in this passage becomes suggestive of the concept of melancholia within a Freudian psychoanalytical framework. Freud (1920: 10) theorised that once infants have learned to relinquish their mother, they seek to master this loss through surrogate objects. He observed that the same impulse and 'strategies' are notable in adults responding to secondary losses later in life such as the death of a loved one (13). He showed how mourning can be facilitated through the reconstruction, retrieval and erasure of the loss through substitute objects (13). However, if the subject cannot accept the boundaries between self and lost object, Freud (1917b: 243) argued that she/he would be susceptible to a

psychically damaging form of unresolved grief he termed melancholia. Melancholia is rooted in an unconscious desire to preserve what has been lost (be it a person/object/ideal) by incorporating the loss into the ego and establishing a "narcissistic" identification with it (43). In maintaining a deep identification with the lost object, the person becomes unable to process the loss or invest in new objects. The melancholic participates in his or her own self-depreciation, ceasing to show "interest in the outside world" and losing "the capacity to love" (244).

If interpreted along this line of thinking, the narrator's melancholic fixation with white objects may arise out of a desire to preserve her sister through her art. White objects and memories which carry the traces of her sister are evoked in symbolic form in a gesture of preservation. When the narrator "gives [her sister] white things" she appears determined to reverse Seol's death (Han, 2016a: 21). However, in trying to make her sister alive, Seol becomes merged into the narrator's occupation, location and personality. 'She' may be registered as a mistaken "fantasy of oneness", where Seol is recast into the narrator's ego (Freud, 1917b: 253). It is only in the prose passage quoted at length above, that the narrator explicitly begins to tear apart this identification and we witness how her unresolved conflict surfaces.

Psychoanalytical melancholia provides a model to consider how and why "learning to love life again is a long and complicated process" for her (Han, 2016a: 119). If the narrator wishes to resurrect her sister, she herself must be absent from the world of whiteness that she is trying to render, but this is impossible (Rainsford, 2018: 1). Therefore, the narrator frustrates her reconstructive work of Seol in order to avoid the melancholic love which has suppressed the otherness of her lost object (Osborne, 2013: 104). As Judith Butler (1998: 182) writes in her re-interpretation of melancholia, "a saving of the other requires the imperilling of one's own existence". The narrator's aggression and guilt are turned inwards as she makes Seol reject her in this passage. It is as if she is recognising the inherent danger of "tucking her" sister neatly into prose (Han, 2016a: 119). Her processes of assimilation are suspended and unresolved, since, in her desire to incorporate the lost object, she only loses her sister's innocence (Butler, 1998: 180).

1.3.2. Lacan's Mirror Stage

Secondly, this passage is strikingly reminiscent of Lacan's (1977: 234) description of "the mirror stage". According to Lacan (120), the infant constructs an image of his/herself as a discrete subject when they first see their reflection in the mirror. However, the cost of their identity formation and entry into language is the loss of an undifferentiated mother/child bond (220). This loss drives the child towards identification with substitute objects (*objets petit autre* /*objet a*) that all derive their value from missing components of the self (245). For Lacan (120), a work of art is distinguished from all other objects of the world, precisely to the extent that the painting tries and fails to capture the absent *objet a*. As Ettinger (2001: 98) explains, the Lacanian gaze indicates a "vanishing residue of impulses and desires" reaching for the impossible return of birth and emergence. The moment when the 'she' of this passage stares at her reflection in the mirror (before being 'cast out' by a motherly figure), echoes this stage of ego development in Lacan's psychoanalysis. Here, the narrator seems to be revealing how the fragmented nature of the subject affects her writing. By describing 'her' relationship to death in the mirror in terms of the visuality of black and white writing, the very medium in which the narrator is working is positioned on either side of a divide. Her representational language is caught in the inevitable dichotomy between clean and polluted, dark and light, interior and exterior, and her life and Seol's death. When the narrator laments that she can never return to a time before that knowledge, she seems to long for a time prior to the divisions of the mirror stage and the boundaries that language impose on self and other.

In conclusion, this passage is an iconoclastic moment that shatters the narrator's phantasmagoria of her sister in order to re-consider the relationship between self and other, representation and death. Freud's theory of melancholic identification and Lacan's description of the psychoanalytical lack formed at the mirror stage both present a compelling framework with which to conceptualise the narrator's problem. Through the lens of Freud (1917b: 243) the question posed would be as follows: How can she 'preserve' her sister through writing without incorporating and degrading her into her own ego? Through the lens of Lacan (1977: 220) this question would be: How can she gaze upon her sister through writing without transforming her into an object and reflection of lack? This passage seems to accuse and condemn the narrative voice for desiring to control the process of representation and restore

what was lost. It would seem to suggest that the only way to protect the other against herself is through the violent destruction of her own voice in order to externalise and eject the lost object (as Freud (1920: 13) viewed the process of mourning). However, this passage does not conclude the narrative. The withdrawal of the narrator and the rejection of her creation is not final, it is a turning point and a shift in the narrative. It highlights the narrator's need to find a place where a paradoxical relationship between self and lost-object can exist. In this way, the Lacanian-Freudian model is only partly true of the narrator's relationship to Seol. This passage, therefore, sets the scene for the radical re-framing of the narrator's relationship with her sister that appears in the last chapter.

1.4. Chapter Three ("All Whiteness") and the Metaphor of a Postpartum Mother-child Relationship

As the pain of the two sister's inevitable separation fades, the narrator returns to gaze at whiteness. This time, however, she does not inflict upon the object of her gaze a second death but describes another gaze that offers connection in separation. In this way, the structure of the book mirrors the description of Seol's birth. In the passages entitled "Newborn Gown" and "Swaddling bands", the narrator shifts focus away from the pain of contractions to focus on the moment just after birth where the infant looks up at her mother's face (15; 17). In the same way, the emphasis on schism and separation in the passage that I analysed from Chapter Two of the narrative does not conclude the novel. Instead, the post-natal mother-infant relationship is foregrounded in her conclusion. Honing in on Ettinger's description of art as a mediation of the "intimately known" but "ultimately unknowable", my analysis of this chapter introduces the paradoxes and ambivalences of whiteness (McMillan, 2016: 28). Whiteness gestures towards the two sisters' ever-present relationship that is never fully together, yet never fully apart. I argue that there is a movement away from a Freudian-Lacanian gaze to a matrixial gaze (Ettinger, 1999: 20). Through the use of the womb metaphor, the narrator re-signifies death, switching its association as an endpoint and a void to a womb-like space of becoming.

1.4.1. The Post-natal Gaze: "I saw differently when I looked with your eyes" (Han, 2016a: 139)

The first prose passage of the third chapter gives one of the clearest portraits of the poetic, womb-like borderspace that the narrator senses exists between her and her sister. In this passage, the narrator reveals:

> This life needed only one of us to live it. If you had lived beyond those first few hours, I would not be living now.
> My life means yours is impossible.
> Only in the gap between darkness and light, only in that blue-tinged breach, do we manage to make out each other's faces. (Han, 2016a: 137)

"Blue" marks a rare appearance of colour in the narrative. It is a relief from the tension between black and white and all the polarities (self/other, sister/narrator, life/death) that this tension represents. In a sense, the "blue-tinged breach" of this stanza is what all the prose passages in the text are reaching towards (137). Throughout the narrative, in-betweenness is repeatedly evoked in mysterious and abstract descriptions of permeable landscapes, and shifting objects and spaces. Fog, for instance, is described as the co-existence of white and black (22). The narrator describes how "shade retains a certain chill, however white it shines" (74); how "the same clouds instantly shine white and cold" (75); how breath in the cold is instantaneously "white flecked with grey" (79). Another brief moment of liminality and connectivity is reflected through nature when the sky becomes a "chiaroscuro" of black and white and the moon is "wreathed with ashen pale blue lights" (75). The narrator also explains how in the northernmost parts of Norway, darkness prevails in winter and during summer it is always light. The paradox of a "white night" unravels familiar measurements of time (115). It becomes symbolic for a borderless mode of remembering where "stale pain has not yet withered quite away, fresh pain has not yet burst into bloom" (115). The mixed shades and intersections of black and white, and darkness and light, in these descriptions (which accumulate in the "blue tinge" of the above passage), reveal an amalgamation of 'I' and 'she' (137). Finding it "impossible" to be fully reconciled to her sister (as only one and not both of them are permitted by "life" to live), the narrator affirms the possibility of borderlinking, or joining-in-difference (137).

Instead of seeing her creation as a mirror which might capture her sister's spectral reflection for observation, the narrator now turns her focus away from the authoritative gaze of a creator. The sisters "make out each other's faces" and therefore, Seol is able to look back at the narrator (137). This gaze where they make out each other's faces correlates back to the description of her sister's eyes meeting those of her mother. The visuality of "between darkness and light", like the image of a pregnant body, is suggestive of a relation which "destabilises categories such as subject and object" and which "withdraws into that darkness beneath the skin precisely to question what can not be seen, imagined and touched" (Blewitt, 2015: 27). In the passage from Chapter 2 of the narrative entitled "Black writing through white paper", the symbolic dualism of her writing is mapped through the violent contrast of black ink on white paper, and allusions to birth. In this passage, however, she shifts to a ritual of metamorphosis and transcendence, through echoing the gaze of Seol, whose infantile, optical nerves had not yet awoken.

The link between how the narrator relates to Seol, and her newborn sister's way of perceiving is more explicitly highlighted in a follow-up passage, entitled "Your eyes" (Han, 2016a: 139). In this passage the narrator describes how her poetic encounter with her sister affected her body and vision. It reads as follows:

> I saw differently when I looked with your eyes. I walked differently when I walked with your body. I wanted to show you clean things, before brutality, sadness, despair, filth and pain, clean things that were only for you, clean things above all. But it didn't come off as I intended. Again and again I peered into your eyes, as though searching for form in a deep, black mirror.
>
> If only we'd been living in a city back then, I heard my mother say several times during my childhood. If only an ambulance could have taken me to hospital. If only they'd put her in an incubator, that tiny rice cake of a baby. They were a new thing then, incubators.
>
> If only you hadn't stopped breathing. And therefore been granted all this life in my stead, I who would then never have been born. If it had been granted to you to go firmly forwards, with your own eyes, and your own body, your back to that dark mirror. (139)

The *Financial Times* reviewer, Catherine Taylor (2017: online), suggests that the narrator senses her dead sister as a ghostly doppelgänger[16], and "feels compelled to live life for her and see it through her eyes." She wishes to lend her body and "lend her life" to her sister (Fulcher, 2018: online). However, more than living *for* her sister, the narrator's choice to walk with her sister's body and to see with her eyes suggests that in some way she *is* her sister. This marks the registering of a visceral connection to the other, without returning to an ideal of oneness. Casting Seol into a perfection that contains "only" her (showing her clean things before brutality) remains impossible (Han, 2016a: 139). Yet, the ambiguity of the gaze asserts the blurred and interchanging relationship between self and other. From looking "with" her sister's eyes, only to change a moment later to looking "into her [sister's] eyes", there is a constant shifting in whom gazes at whom (139).

The post-partum language in this passage resonates with Ettinger (2001: 105). The narrator does not long for a lost origin nor does she eulogise the womb as a site of original plentitude forever denied (Vigneault, 2017: 119). Instead, she hints at a different kind of "participating otherness" inscribed within the unconscious (Pollock, 2009: 43). According to Ettinger (2006b: 194), pre-natality creates a paradox "which language fails to formulate in clear-cut concepts" as mother and child are intimate and yet unknown to each other. This corresponds to a repressed potential in adults to wit(h)ness; to become responsible for the traces of another's trauma with no explicit knowledge of events (Ettinger, 2001: 105). As the narrator finds herself fragile and intuiting how her newborn sister saw and felt, it is as if she is accessing her own repressed "cavities" and "formative erosions" that were carved in her mind in the womb (Pollock, 2009: 44). The description of Seol's prenatal connection to their mother becomes a part of explaining the narrator's matrixial connection to Seol. It represents her process of wit(h)nessing, participating and carrying the remnants of an unknown experience.

16 The German word *doppelgänger* can be directly translated as "double goer" and usually refers to the ghostly counterpart of a living person (Webber, 1996: 5). In fiction or poetry, the *doppelgänger* hero/heroine normally encounters a replication of themselves, developing an ambivalent and strained relationship to this other self (5).

Crucially, the text is the place where this (im)possible matrixial subjectivity can be mediated. When the narrator describes how she saw "with your [Seol's] eyes", it suggests that she is speaking to her sister (Han, 2016a: 161). However, the pronoun 'your' may also refer to Seol as a literary construct. This passage, therefore, alludes to her work of poetry as an optical aid, which enables her to see and feel as her sister saw when she was born. The repetition of "if only", and the placing of commas at the same rhythmic intervals, is profoundly melancholy and lyrical (139). This creates a cyclical pattern which seems to suggest that the beat and intonations themselves become a means for creating a connection. Written in the past tense, this passage brings a conclusion and an explanation to the motifs of rhythm, touch and gaze that were foregrounded in the text. It is a reflective passage that shows how her creative process is an attempt to mirror the modes of communication of her newborn sister. "Seeing through her eyes" and "walking with her body" can, therefore, be interpreted as deliberate acts of inscribing a womb-like encounter into her art (139).

In Ettinger's psychoanalytic terms, the matrixial/maternal and prenatal infant relation can be mediated through art. As Shread (2005: 142) writes, art creates a matrixial borderspace, akin to the subject's experience of the womb, allowing for the proximity and the exchange of trauma and relations with a stranger who is "yet unknown [and] non-recognizable". Through her writing the narrator is soulfully attuned to her mother's experience, creating a vivid connection between the present and the past, and between her sister and herself. It is as if the surface of the page functions as a membrane between her and her family, turning her writing into an affective threshold that mimics the intrauterine encounter (Vogel, 2013: 23). The white spectral material which marks her art projects a surface onto which an effective exchange can be foreclosed, serving as a mirror that functions as an interface between the two.

1.4.2. The Concluding Passage and Blank Pages: "With your eyes, I will see" (Han, 2016a: 161)

In the concluding passage of *The White Book* (2016a), there is a continuation of the motif of her sister's eyes. However, the narrator changes from the past tense ("when I looked with your eyes") to the future tense ("With your eyes, I will see") (139; 161). I quote this passage at

length, to show how the climatic and atmospheric language, and the distinct shift in tense and tone, has bold implications for the narrator's poetry of wit(h)nessing. The passage reads:

> With your eyes, I will see the deepest, most dazzling place within a white cabbage, the precious young petals concealed at its heart.
> With your eyes, I will see the chill of the half-moon risen in the day.
> At some point those eyes will see a glacier. They will look up at that enormous mass of ice and see something sacred, unsullied by life.
> They will see inside the silence of the white birch forest. Inside the stillness of the window where the winter sun seeps in. Inside those shining grains of dust, swaying along the shafts of light which slant onto the ceiling.
> Within that white, all of those white things, I will breathe in the final breath you released. (161)

The dreamlike image of swaying "dust" and her abstract vision of inside the "silence" of a forest are some of the most notable and transgressive portraits of the colour white in the novel (161). The narrator shifts between tightly constructed descriptions of domestic objects such as cabbage, dust and a window, to great expansive landscapes with glaciers and forests. Penetrating the smallest particle to the largest natural phenomena, she makes everything, even the seemingly commonplace, become "sacred" (161). This sacredness, however, is not idyllic. Rather, the narrator creates a greater awareness of the fragility and mutability of life. The risen half moon is a powerful image, yet it links back to the vulnerability of her dying sister's moon-cake face, and holds the austerity of a "chill" during the day (161). The passage conjures up a feeling of desolation and loneliness, with the thought of a dusty house and a still forest. All the images have the non-material, non-human quietness of something that is not familiar or safe. They are surreal and cold metaphors, but also beautiful. With the melting, gliding movement of moon and ice, the landscape the narrator evokes has a sense of fixity and tranquility.

The combination of the sacred and mundane, small and large, beautiful and melancholy, movement and permanence, evokes some of the traditional Korean aesthetic associations of the colour white. In indigenous Korean art, portraits of white landscapes have been commonly misinterpreted as representing eternal mourning or the aesthetic of the tragic. However, as one Korean art critic, Kim Yŏng-na (2005: 258), has commented, the colour was used to signal

something beyond perceptual facts—the un-signified or the colourless. Kim (258) writes, "Our ancestors who painted landscapes with brush and ink did it not, of course, because they could only see nature in black and white or because they could only render it that way, rather, they did it because they believed the essence of nature could be more easily expressed with ink on white paper [..] In a word, white on its own embodies all possible creation".

There is a sense that the narrator's encounter with impressions of white stands for her creative work with a white page. Through this encounter, 'she'—both the narrator and her sister—will be transformed. Most reviewers have discussed *The White Book* (2016a) with reference to religious terminology. Deborah Levy (2017: online) describes it as a "secular prayer book", where white objects become a part of the "ritual of mourning and remembering", while for Brian Haman (2017: online) the story is "incantatory" like the words of a magic charm. The abstract, sparse and meditative lines create the impression that the narrator is in a trance-like state of mind communicating with the spirit of her sister like a *mudang* (Korean for shaman). In an interview with *The Guardian* (Armitstead, 2016: online), Han explains how she has always imagined "the part of you that can be alive after you're dead" as "a soft, pure thing". In the Korean language, this is described with the word "hon". *Hon* is directly translated by Smith as "shadow or soul-self" but has no equivalent in English nor any "religious meaning" (Armitstead, 2016: online).

Crucially, the sublime vision, touch, and silence of *hon* or whiteness is always seen, firstly, through her sister's eyes and, secondly, through a process of retreating "within" or "inside" (Han, 2016a: 161). There is a clear interaction between 'inward' imagery and the acoustics of the passage quoted above. The plosives 'p' and 'd' and 'b' repeated in the first line have a percussive effect. This enhances the magic of entering a "dazzling place within", creating a musical and dramatic entry point into the prose passage (161). This is followed by the lyrical and softer sibilance (noticeable in phrases such as "see inside the silence", "stillness", "sun seeps", "shining", "swaying shafts"). Phonetically, the sibilance creates a sense of floating, intensifying the metaphysical and transcendent image of "something sacred, unsullied by life" (161). The sibilance is reminiscent of the sounds from below the surface, such as underground water, an echo chamber or embryonic noises. Together, the sound textures reflect the inward movement of the imagery, revealing how the narrator is undergoing a gradual process of

unearthing the layers of herself and, in interrogating her surroundings, is searching for something beneath the apparent.

Moreover, the physical form of the prose passage reflects an inward and outward movement. The assorted length and patterning of the lines create a sparse white space at the top of the page. The first two sentences each begin on a new line, becoming denser as the words gather in the middle until the last sentence breaks off to stand alone. This marks a subtle stylistic shift from the prose passage entitled "Black writing through white paper" in Chapter Two of Han's text, which begins with long winding sentences and ends in shorter sentences (119). In this way, the structure, as well as the content of the conclusion is an inversion of Chapter Two. The narrator undoes the harshness of been kicked "out" into the cold by going back "inside" and her doubtful tone is replaced by an embrace of the indescribable (119; 161). Her metaphorical engagement with the act of dwelling in-between external and internal worlds accumulates in one final movement inwards, and there is a change in the narrator's tone as she resolves that she "will see inside" (161).

The last line of *The White Book* (2016a) is the most suggestive of a radical re-ordering in the priority of self and other, stressing the narrator's dependence, indebtedness to, and responsibility to her sister. She writes: "Within that white, all of those white things, I will breathe in the final breath you released" (161). The word 'white' and the word 'breath' are echoed, increasing the emotional intensity of the line. The narrator connects the moment that a premature infant took her last breath to the moment when her own lungs filled with air and sees that she was inhaling and internalizing another's life and death. Although the narrator can never fully (or accurately) undo this moment, through their breath, like a hidden pulsation, a certain colour, line or sensation of whiteness, she finds beauty in precisely what "she cannot make live again" and yet is somehow living on (Butler, 2011: 155). It is implied that in breathing in this last breath, her sister continues. This links back to the mantra "*Don't die. Live*" and confirms the circularity and entanglement of life and death (Han, 2016a: 159). Seol is paradoxically made present, although not as a complete, bounded subject, but as a trace of shared remembrance. A trace of some unimaginable or in-articulable whiteness, that lives on and through the narrator, perhaps through her white bones, her white breath or through those memories which remain "inviolate to the ravages of time" (Han, 2016a: 93).

This last prose passage may initially seem to contradict the narrator's previous metaphors. In earlier prose passages, she concluded that giving her sister only white things was "impossible" and only in the "gap between" black and white could she connect their differences (137). Yet in this passage, there is no black or grey or blue in her description, only whiteness. The break away from "sullied" whiteness and "in-between" whiteness to "All whiteness" is accompanied by the shift from past to future tense (39; 137; 161). This marks a movement towards something outside of language and poetry altogether. Jacques Derrida (1991: 225) describes poetic language as the "imminence of some traversal outside yourself". Through her impressionistic description of white objects and landscapes in the conclusion, the narrator seems to be predicting and looking forward to a capturing of the immaterial. There is a sense that something mysterious, some secret hidden "inside" unfathomable depths, or invisibly concealed like the other side of a half-moon, is about to be revealed (Han, 2016a: 161).

Blank pages

After the concluding passage, there are eight blank pages, far exceeding what is normal. This seems to be the fulfilment of the narrator's conclusion, meeting the anticipation of an unsullied whiteness that the narrator said she "will see" through her sister's eyes (161). A dream landscape that is as inviolable as a glacier and as inexplicable as inside dust, is embodied in a series of blank pages secure from the infringement of her words. There is an intensity to them that is quite at odds with any theory. It is as if in the search for her sister, and not just an idea of her sister, she must remove any traces of written memory or images from the page. These last pages point towards something that cannot be expressed.

The absence of words on these blank pages resonates with Shoshana Felman's (1992: 183) argument that European trauma literature reflects "the making of silence". Concerning the rhythmic breakdown in the poetry of Mallarme, Felman (37) writes that silence is the displacing counterpoint to sound. She explains, "[silence] appears not just in between

his stanzas and his verses, but even in the very music of the phonetic flow and the poetic fiction of his words. It strives to de-fetishise his language and to dislocate his own aesthetic mastery over the subject matter" (37). This argument may be a way of conceptualising the blank pages, which, through their breakdown of conscious meaning, represent the narrator's sister who can not be understood or owned. Whiteness, like the literary techniques of the post-modernists, resists comprehension and conventional representation, "unleashing the depths of silence" (164). However, the text describes a more nuanced relationship between silence and not knowing as the narrator engages with her family's trauma.

The spatial and topographical description in the concluding passage suggests that 'inside' whiteness does not readily reveal itself, but it is not simply the absence of space, sound or colour. It is the site of yet unformed knowledge; a substance rather than a lack that is locatable and semi-tangible (Shread, 2005: 219). Building upon the layers of mother-child imagery, the narrator shows how 'inside' holds the potential for creation, transformation and a borderspace relationship with the other, like the womb. The narrator, as a writer, has transmitted this potential through the medium of her art; weaving in and out of time's "keen edges" through poetic twists in languages and, most importantly, through silence (Han, 2016a: 6). The blank pages, therefore, represent not a historical abyss, but the hypnotic presence of fragmented and silent traces of the narrator's sister. Seol retains her otherness, as the ghostly appearance of the colour white gives an impression of her that resists mastery or knowledge. However, she does not "pass unnoticed [...] missed or rejected, repudiated in an act of incomprehension" (Shread, 2005: 25). Instead, whiteness becomes a spectre or reflection that joins the past and the present and offers the possibility of a space of encounter. Rather than a conceptual thought, it communicates a material impression and an embodied sensation, within which one can connect and respond to.

1.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the narrator's self-awareness of her position as a writer in relation to her sister is expressed through pregnancy, birth and postpartum imagery. In my analysis of the first chapter of the text, I suggested that the narrator's desire to reanimate her sister through writing could be compared to the pregnancy of her mother. In my analysis of

the second chapter of the text, I compared the narrator's sense of loss as a writer, who cannot accurately represent her sister, to the loss that her mother experienced in giving birth. In my analysis of the third chapter, I argued that the narrator's recognition of an intimate, embodied connection to her sister (despite the ineffability that characterises her) mirrors the post-natal gaze of Seol that her mother described. Through mirroring this matrixial, newborn gaze, the narrator finds that the life of an unknown stranger—her sister—is nonetheless communicated and accessed through her writing. This leads me to the conclusion that the representation of whiteness and womb imagery imbues a matrixial meaning and purpose to the narrator's poetry of mourning and memory-work. Uniquely, her writing is not, as traditional psychoanalysis describes, only about translating or re-constructing suppressed memories. It is a time-space borderlinking between two different bodies that, whether alive or not, met or unmet, continue to connect and transmit to each other. The dialectic between the narrator, her sister, and her text resembles Ettinger's (1999: 93) conception of "aesthetic wit(h)nessing" as a "fragile [..] zone of potential sharing with-in the trauma of the other".

Chapter Two

Cultural Borderspaces: The Dialectic between South Korea and Poland

The first chapter of this dissertation was primarily concerned with the relationship between the narrator and her sister. In this chapter, I examine the relationship between the narrator, her own culture and that of Poland. As a Korean writer, she inscribes a space within her creation to share in the destructive effects of warfare on Polish society. I argue that this reveals how literature—through a process of translation—can create a matrixial borderspace between the trauma of different cultures. The psychoanalytical concept of translation is attributed to Sigmund Freud (1920). As Cathy Caruth (1995) explains, a traumatic event is often not fully experienced at the time of its occurrence due to its suddenness and the lack of preparedness of the person. This intensifies the need for narratives and imagery which can *translate* what exists at the unconscious or subconscious level up to consciousness. Going beyond the schema outlined by Freud (1920: 20), it has been observed that many people experience the impact of a trauma preceding their own birth. In 1997, Marianne Hirsch introduced the idea of post-memory to describe how a younger generation might return to the traumatic event of a previous generation. Their connection to the past is not mediated by recall but by stories and images which *translate* the traumatic occurrence into collective memory. Needless to say, in any discussion pertaining to the post-memory of a foreign country, the word 'translation' will also refer to the adaption of a narrative from one language to another language. As the narrator experiences the white of another city's winter, these two different levels of translation are at play in the novel. She struggles to overcome her linguistic isolation as a Korean speaker temporarily residing in Poland, and she also struggles with an awareness of the voids of another culture's trauma which she tries to translate into her poetry. Through the practical ethical dilemmas articulated by the narratorial voice, *The White Book* (Han, 2016a) symbolically questions how a writer can translate the traumatic experiences of one culture for another culture to understand and witness.

This chapter examines the narrator's approach to the translation of another cultures' trauma through a close reading of her abstract engagement with the colour white. For present purposes, I focus only on the narrator's metafictional observations and not on the role of *The White Book* (2016a) itself, as a text translated from Korean into English. This is discussed in the following chapter. I have already proposed that avoiding the appropriative action of "turning an Other into a Same" is of central concern to the narrator's poetry on her sister (Shread, 2005: 25). In this chapter, I explore the narrator's wider concern with fostering an empathic response to Poland's history that does not subsume cultural differences and the contagion of another's affect. I split my argument into two broad sections. In the first half of this chapter, entitled "The Question of Translation", I analyse a selection of three prose passages where the narrator is considering some of the ethical issues involved in translation. This is discussed in relation to the questions that Shoshana Felman (1992) raises concerning the role of literature following the Holocaust and the Second World War. In the second half of this chapter, entitled "Whiteness as a Universal Language", I discuss what 'solution' the narrator offers in response to these issues. I put 'solution' in inverted commas as the narrator does not offer any definite conclusions. Her fiction does, however, resemble a matrixial ethics of mourning and remembering that encourages an "intimate distance" between races without needing to assimilate differences (Shread, 2005: 170).

2.1. The Question of Translation

2.1.1. Incomprehensibility

In the first chapter, in a passage entitled "Fog", the question of how to translate and understand the trauma of her family, and the trauma of Poland, vividly emerges (Han, 2016a: 21). The narrator writes:

> Why do old memories constantly drift to the surface, here in this unfamiliar city? When I go out into the streets, the scraps of conversation which pull into focus when the speaker brushes past me, the words stamped on all the street and shop signs, are almost all incomprehensible.

> At times my body feels like a prison, a solid, shifting island threading through the crowd. A sealed chamber carrying all the memories of the life I have lived, and the mother tongue from which they are inseparable. The more stubborn the isolation, the more vivid these unlooked-for fragments, the more oppressive their weight. So that it seems the place I flee to is not so much a city on the other side of the world as further into my own interior.
>
> The early hours of the morning, and the city is cloaked in fog.
> The border between sky and earth has been scrubbed out [..] all else is white. But can we really call it white? That vast, soundless undulation between this world and the next, each cold water molecule formed of drenched black darkness. […]
>
> What do the ghosts of this city do, these muffled early-morning hours?
> Slip soundlessly out to walk through the fog that has been holding its breath, and waiting?
> Do they greet each other, through the gaps between those water molecules which bleach their voices white? In some mother tongue of their own, another whose meaning eludes me? Or do they only shake or nod their heads, without the need for words? (21-22)

This passage is a clear demonstration of the two levels of translation that are at work in the text. The first being, the psychoanalytical understanding of a translation of trauma from unconscious to declarative memory. The second being, the linguistic meaning of translating trauma testimonials from one language to another. Psychoanalytical trauma theory sheds light on why the narrator conceives of her body as prison walls or an ocean surrounding an island with "unlooked for fragments" of "old memories" (21). When trauma is not assimilated into memory, the traumatised subject cannot help but repeatedly return to the unrecognisable fragments or "traces" of the event that have been left in their subconscious (Osborne, 2013: 62). The past, while remaining 'absent' and hidden from conscious thought, compels the subject with its paradoxical and undecipherable 'presence'. In this sense, the narrator's entrapment metaphorically reflects her estrangement from personal and familial trauma. The more "stubborn the isolation the more oppressive the weight" of these memories, which will continue to haunt her unless she can find a way to meaningfully process them (Han, 2016a: 21). The prison metaphor does not only refer to the barriers of consciousness and psychological repression that are preventing the narrator from understanding her family's past (which is *like* a foreign language). It also refers to the literal language barriers she is experiencing in Poland. Her inability to speak Polish prevents her from communicating her past to others and learning about the past of the city she is in. She imagines how the "ghosts

of this city" might greet each other through the gaps between the molecules of fog (21). However, the inside of water molecules is an image of obscurity and incomprehensibility, and if the ghosts spoke words, their language would evade her.

Her longing to overcome these psychological and linguistic barriers is poetically explored through a description of fog. Fog is a mystical substance through which her imagination can operate. It dissolves the edges and dividing lines "between sky and earth" and creates "an undulation between this world and the next" (21). The fog transforms the mundane into the subliminal: a dust-clogged puddle is turned into a "mysterious swamp" and ordinary pine trees become "otherworldly" (22). This represents the underlying gesture of the narrator's poetry to connect the past and the present, transgress barriers of time, and penetrate non-declarative layers of memory.

As she is describing her longing to translate the lost memories of the ghosts of her family and Poland into figurative language, she resonates with Felman's (1992: 230) description of the difficulties in 'seeing' a traumatic experience one did not witness first-hand, especially in a different culture and language. As Felman (230) observes:

> To testify from inside Otherness is thus to be prepared, perhaps, to bear witness from within 'ra-ra-ra', to be prepared to testify not merely in a foreign language but from inside the very language of the Other: to speak from within the Other's tongue in so far as it is precisely the tongue of the Other is by definition the very tongue we do not speak, the tongue that, by its very nature and position, is one that by definition does not understand. To testify from inside Otherness is thus to bear witness from inside the living pathos of a tongue which nonetheless is bound to be heard as mere noise.

In this passage, Felman (230) is reflecting on the radical deception, blindness to historical truth, and pain that marked the European worlds' investigation of and response to the events of the Holocaust. She argues that the language of the victims' testimony is not only a foreign language to listeners of different countries, but a foreign language even to the native speakers themselves (209). This is because they could not fully comprehend or testify to the full extent of the horror (209). The aim of the Nazi scheme was to make the Jews invisible not merely by killing them, but by reducing even the materiality of the dead bodies to smoke and ashes. The

German army was forbidden to even use the word corpse or victim, and so their deaths were also verbally, as well as physically rendered invisible (209). It is thereafter very difficult, Felman (233) writes, to cross the dividing line between outside (as secondary witnesses) to inside (those who were within the situation) as inside is inscribed with silence, secrecy and amnesia. This "radically annihilates the recourse (the appeal) to visual corroboration (to the commensurability between two different seeings) and thus dissolves the possibility of any community of witnessing" (211). Felman's (230) discussion of the disparate between 'inside' and 'outside' resonates with the position of the narrator, as a writer bearing witness to a foreign country's history. Listening to the conversation of ghosts inside water molecules marks the beginning of the narrator's "uncanny journey towards the other" and eerie visit to "inside" the face of historical oblivion, obliteration, and silence (153). However, in spite of the inaccessibility of Poland's past, there is also a familiarity which triggers the narrator's old memories. The narrator recognises her own "interior" in the landscape, even though it is a country "on the other side of the world" from her hometown (Han, 2016a: 21). She finds a kindred spirit in Poland through a shared experience of pain, and their lingering, emerging memories intertwine. This fundamentally alters her position as a writer and brings to the fore an ethical question. The question being, how could her art attempt to establish an empathetic dialogue with the 'Other', when the deep, cryptic nature of trauma resists representation?

2.1.2. Appropriation

Throughout the text, the narrator continues to reflect on the difficulty of commemorating and mourning loss, especially with regard to those who disappeared without leaving a language or trace with which to work. In a passage, entitled "White City", the ethics of translation are further examined (25). In this passage, the narrator compares her task as a poet to the modern architecture of Poland, which was built on the ruins of buildings devastated by World War II. In 1944, Germany laid Warsaw to waste with Luftwaffe bombing and heavy artillery fire. Buildings were destroyed and burnt and artworks were ransacked in order to quell the city's revolt against German occupation. Ninety-five percent of Warsaw was obliterated over a period of six months. The narrator begins the first paragraph of this passage with a reflection on some aerial footage that was taken at the time of the destruction (25). She describes how, as the plane with the camera descended, the filming brings into increasing focus the image of

ruins (25). What at first appears to be an illusion of snow, disappears to reveal the ashen remains of bombed buildings. The feminine language she uses to describe how the "city's visage sharpened" to reveal where fire had "touched", personifies the city with the features of a woman (25). Her gentle imagery and diction uncovers and mourns Warsaw's historical death. With the recently viewed images of the bombing in mind, the narrator then explains how, due to the destruction of WWII, nothing of Warsaw has existed for over seventy years. She muses about the modern city, and is struck by the reconstruction of an old castle, which had been rebuilt with the use of photographs to mimic the one that had been destroyed. She explains:

> I came upon an old hospital building. A faithful reconstruction of a building that had been destroyed in a 1944 air raid, no longer used as a hospital but as an art gallery. As I passed along the narrow trail, vaulted with a mass of intertwined tree limbs, where the birds' high trill put me in mind of skylarks, it occurred to me that all of these things had at one time been dead. These trees and birds, paths and streets, houses and trams, and all of these people.
>
> In this city there is nothing that has existed for more than seventy years. The fortresses of the old quarter, the splendid palace, the lakeside villa on the outskirts where royalty once summered—all are fakes. They are new things, painstakingly reconstructed based on photographs, pictures, maps. Where a pillar or perhaps the lower part of a wall happens to have survived, it has been incorporated into the new structure. The boundaries which separate old from new, the seams bearing witness to destruction, lie conspicuously exposed.
>
> It was on that day, as I walked through the park, that she first came into my mind.
> A person who has met the same fate as that city.
> Who had at one time died or been destroyed. Who had painstakingly rebuilt themselves on a foundation of fire-scoured ruins. Who was therefore something new. Who, some broken pediment having survived, has ended up bearing a strange pattern, the new distinct from the old. (25)

As the narrator stares at the reconstruction of the hospital, she seems depressed by the facade of historical architecture, finding it "fake", and noticing how "the boundaries which separate old from new [...] lie conspicuously exposed" (25). What "happen[ed] to have survived" from the older building would have been intricately interwoven and rebuilt into the modern structure. However, the ruins become very apparent to the narrator. Even the landscape of the castle grounds, with its "intertwined tree limbs" implies a palimpsest (25). She observes

fractures and cracks in the buildings where the older ruins, like an erased text seeping through paper, can be observed.

The image itself is a palimpsest, with many layers of interpretation that serve to link the narrator's personal literary experiment with the underlying trauma of a foreign country. Poland is a personification for Seol as the narrator's description of the bombed city's "visage" implies the features or senses of a person (25). Seol, however, also becomes a metaphor for Poland's architecture. Seol is a literary creation of the narrator's imagination. 'She' is a personification of poetry and an act of mourning and, therefore, allegorical for witnessing the past. The image of a structure incorporating the remainder of ruins can be linked to how fragments of her sister's memory and her short life have been moved and "rebuilt" into a poetic representation (26). The palimpsest image draws attention to the precarious balance between the original and recollection, history and reproduction and between reality and imagination. As the new buildings simultaneously obscure and yet preserve the older ones, so too the narrator subtly questions how her poetry could visualise and conjure up the essence of the past (both the past of her family and that of Poland). Her meditative prose questions what it means to re-inhabit the war-devastated quarters of Poland. What happens when a person's story is retold and reinvented by someone who was not there to witness it? This resonates with Felman (1992: 189), who argues that the most uncompromising and crucial question for European writers after WWII is: What does it mean to inhabit history as a crime, as the space of the annihilation of the Other? When the narrator gestures towards the falseness of the hospital reconstruction, she implies that the action of rebuilding, whereby one form is replaced by another, is dangerous.

This implicit danger can be better understood when taking into consideration the progression of the narrative as a whole. As previously discussed, the narrator splits herself in Chapter One and Two, to occupy first the position of "I" and then the position of "she" (Han, 2016a: 45). In the passage entitled "Black writing through white paper," her worst fears appear to be realised, when the otherness of her sister evades her representation (119). The tension between her and her sister can be extended to describe the tension between the writer and Poland's trauma in her architectural imagery. The narrator reveals the difficult task of the writer, who must embrace interlaced pronouns and mediate between the reader, the traumatic

past, and the self. A literary representation of a previous generation or another culture's trauma may attempt to recreate the past. However, authorial self-annihilation is impossible and there is unavoidable conflict and tension. The narrative may risk absorbing the past into present understandings, like a new building covers an older one.

The ethical dilemma of appropriation and the metaphor of the reconstructed city is continued in a passage entitled "Spirit" (131). It reads as follows:

> Were spirits to exist, she thought, their motion would be the invisible correlate of just such a butterfly's trembling flight.
> If that were so, would the souls of this city sometimes drift to the wall where they were once gunned down, and flutter there for a time with such a soundless motion? But she knew that the people of this city did not light candles and lay flowers in front of that wall only for the sake of such souls. They believe that there is no shame in having been butchered. They want to draw out their grief for as long as possible.
> She thought of certain incidents in her own country's history, the country she had left in order to come here, of the dead that had been insufficiently mourned. Trying to imagine those souls being thus eulogised, in the very heart of the city streets, she realised that her country had never once done this properly.
> And, less significantly, she learned what had been left out of her own reconstruction. Of course, her body had not yet died. Her spirit still had flesh to house it. Like the remaining section of a ruined brick wall, which the bombing had not managed to destroy completely, since moved and incorporated into another structure—from which the blood has been washed clean. Flesh which was now no longer young.
> As she walked she imitated the steady gait of one who had never been broken. A clean cloth veiling each unstitched place. Doing without farewells, without mourning. If she can believe that she has never been shattered, she can believe that she will be shattered no more.
>
> And so, there are a few things left to her:
> To stop lying.
> To (open her eyes and) remove the veil.
> To light a candle for all the deaths and spirits she can remember—including her own.(131-132)

As the narrator imagines Seol standing at the memorial wall where Polish civilians were slaughtered, she foregrounds the atrocities of war in a foreign country. The phrase "less significantly" shifts the importance away from the narrator's private mourning of her sister to

a wider recognition of “all the deaths” (131). This passage further relates to the traumatic experiences of Korea as the narrator imagines Seol’s “insufficiently mourned” country (131). In an interview for *Livre Magazine* (2017: online), Han explains that “the candles lit for the people who were executed during the war are connected to a massacre in Korea.” Poland, together with this reference to the Gwangju massacre, and together with her sister’s death, represent “all that was mutilated beyond repair” both in Korea and other countries, which continues to pollute the present with an ongoing “radioactive spread” (Han in Shin, 2016: online).

The political implication of the above-quoted passage is that if her decision to invent her sister’s life is a lie, then so is the poetry of a witness if it replaces a harsh reality with something easier. The line “from which the blood had been washed clean” (Han, 2016a: 131) suggests that any sign of death has been removed, symbolising a recurring failure to mourn and acknowledge the past. The cynical instruction to Seol “to stop lying” is a highly ironic statement as someone who is dead cannot mourn for themselves (132). It does, however, effectively portray the narrator’s fear that her project lacks genuine empathetic mourning and the ability to acknowledge the violence in her life. The impulse to give life to the dead seems to require a cleanliness that cannot be achieved, and, like the painting over of dirty white walls, it would be a sanitization or “veiling” of the truth (131). This “veiling” and “lying” represents the evasion of historical responsibility and becomes symbolic for all the stories that are shamed, silenced and hidden for the ‘effective’ functioning of modern-day life (132). The narrator admires how the citizens of Poland “draw out their grief” with “no shame”, presenting a subtle critique of the pressure placed on the bereaved to disconnect, cut ties and ‘move-on’ from what has been lost (131).

All the prose passages enumerated up to this point have revealed some of the narrator’s ethical questions concerning her process of translating trauma. In the passage entitled “Fog”, the metaphor of a prison emphasises the problem of language barriers (21). In the passage entitled “White City”, through the metaphor of palimpsest architecture the narrator questions the tendency of present reconstructions to cover-over the past (25). In the aforementioned passage entitled “Spirit”, and through her references to veiling and lying, the narrator hints at

how sensationalist or ideological closure in writing would do injustice to historical trauma (Kaplan & Wang, 2004: 12).

2.2. Whiteness as a Universal Language

As the narrative progresses, the indeterminate and ambivalent colour of 'whiteness' provides a distinctive alternative to the dilemma of translation that the above passages foregrounded. The colour white evolves to become a symbolic middle ground between appropriating ("veil[ing]") the past in the process of translation, or leaving the trauma "incomprehensible" and unwitnessed (Han, 2016a: 131; 21). As Megan Walsh (2018: 42) writes, whiteness in the text "creates a universal language to communicate with those we have lost". Felman's literary trauma theory and the concern with appropriation has provided a useful starting point for articulating the narrator's ethical questions. However, the narrator describes an experience of poetic representation that differs from dominant trauma fiction paradigms, such as Felman's (1992), in several respects. I have found that Ettinger's theory offers a helpful language to describe this difference. For Felman (1992: 189), the question of the writer is "[h]ow to testify from inside Otherness?" Ettinger (in Evans 2016: 5), however, turns this question upside down, radically asserting that otherness is inside the witness already and that there is an "impossibility to not-share" trauma on some level, whether conscious or not. Her term wit(h)nessing gives a new perspective to how art may represent strangers through retaining an irreducible difference and a degree of distance, without casting them into obscurity on this account (Shread, 2005: 25). There are times when the narrator engages with museum archives in Poland and consciously interprets and witnesses their past. However, at other times, she engages with an embodied and mysterious form of memory that is more closely aligned with the concept of wi(h)nessing. I present three examples in the text where the visceral (but yet unknown) connection between the writer and the trauma of another culture is illustrated through the motif of whiteness.

2.2.1. Whiteness and the City Motif

In this section I return to the white architecture imagery in the two passages quoted at length above: "White City" and "Spirit" (Han, 2016a: 25; 131). Earlier, I emphasised the ethical questions that were raised in these passages. I interpreted the rebuilt modern city of Warsaw as a symbol for the narrator's writing, which is a reconstruction of Seol. However, the relationship between the new buildings and past ruins can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the narrator's physical relationship to her older sister. In the passage "White City", the narrator observes how Seol was like the bombed remains of Poland (27). She explains, "A person [Seol] who had met the same fate as that city. Who had at one time died or been destroyed. Who had painstakingly rebuilt themselves on a foundation of fire-scoured ruins. Who was therefore something new. Who, some broken pediment having survived, has ended up bearing a strange pattern, the new distinct from the old" (27). Through this analogy, the narrator implies that she herself is like the modern building, for in the 'structure' of her body are the remaining impressions or "pediments" of Seol's death (27). As she is observing Polish architecture, with the "new distinct from [the] old", it as if she is observing the composition of her own life (27). The phrase "painstakingly rebuilt themselves" is a merging of Seol's death with the fate of those who died in Warsaw and, paradoxically, giving the action of rebuilding, not to those who came after, but to the person who died. It represents a cycle of borderlinking, whereby multiple subjects are seen as sharing, building upon, and indeed "linked" by their fractured subjectivities (McMillan, 2016: 16). The narrator establishes that at the core of her structure and emergence is an encounter with otherness. The unfamiliar is turned into a foundation that built her. This radically challenges the distinction between foreign and homely, death and life.

In this sense, the last stanza of "Spirit" which suddenly urges "she" to stop lying and mourn her "own death" is ushering in a new way of mourning that can acknowledge an imbricated and layered subjectivity (Han, 2016a: 131). If we abandon the presumption that 'she' is one person, then we can see how in this line the narrator is describing Seol's death as her own death. The narrator wishes to let go of the lie that "she has never been shattered" and acknowledge how part of her is built from someone who died (131). Interestingly, the word "shattering" is an image of multiplicity and makes one think of shards of glass. It links back

to the opening line of this passage which imagines the spirits of Poland as having an "invisible correlate" of trembling butterfly wings (131). This seems to suggest that the narrator's shattered insides extends beyond intimacy with the death of her sister, to an interlinked temporality where Poland's past is emerging within her.

2.2.2. Whiteness and Food

The theme of an embodied connection to something unknown is continued into the next prose passage entitled, "Rice raw and cooked" (133). This short passage begins by emphasising the cultural differences between Poland and Korea. The narrator describes how 'she' (Seol or herself) struggles to find Asian rice in the European supermarkets. However, the process of cooking and eating the rice turns into a ritual as she sits in front of a steaming bowl "as though in prayer", unable to deny that, "at that moment, she feels something inside her" (133). What exactly she feels inside of her is left unexplained. However, her visceral and tender response to the bowl of foreign rice continues the theme of retaining and valuing difference.

2.2.3. Whiteness and Womb Imagery

The third motif of cross-cultural matrixial ethics in the text that I would like to draw attention to is pregnancy. I have already discussed how the womb-like qualities of whiteness connect the two sisters in the previous chapter. This time, however, I shift the focus away from the narrator's personal literary experiment onto the broader implications of the colour motif. Through the narrator's descriptions of second-generation memories, the text becomes a manifesto, or philosophical inquiry, into the relationship between the artist, the viewer, and the traumatic history of others. However, the narrator's task diverges from what is commonly understood as post-memorial work when she begins to focus less on her parents oral archive and more in the unwitnessed experience of Seol during gestation and birth. As Megan Walsh (2018: 42) writes, this "neither bears witness to the living nor commemorates the dead but, through a series of trance-like vignettes, consecrates the *never-lived*". When the narrator tries to "see with her [sister's] eyes", this would normally risk becoming a moralistic identification with the trauma victim (Han, 2016a: 139). It could be interpreted as a symbol for the artist

who tries to master uncertainty and intrusively arrogates and appropriates his/herself into the victim's experience. However, the reader knows that the narrator is focusing on the blurred legibility of a baby's eyesight. This displaces the possibility of appropriating another's experience, for if she cannot fully see the object of her writing, she is barred from a controlling or othering gaze. Paradoxically, through the "eyes" or the gaze of her sister, she still finds accessible a piece of knowledge that is inaccessible (161). The womb imagery in the conclusion reiterates that the narrator "will see" inside "whiteness", "silence" and "dust", even though they are strangely invisible places (161).

This has ethical ramifications for understanding how authors may relate or rewrite fiction based on the historical testimony of someone else. Witnessing through poetry is never completely objective, not speaking from inside to an inside position, or remaining in an outside position, but lived and negotiated at an intersection (Bennett, 2005: 12). The narrator is a symbol for a form of memory that is not produced or understood as the expression of a singular subjective account but is a shared experience of remembrance. The highly specific nature of her approach to translating her family's trauma through the lens of pregnancy is further reflected in how the narrator relates to Poland. Instead of creating a utopian or comfortable global ethos, the narrator foregrounds personal and historical differences. She reiterates her linguistic isolation and observes Poland from the semi-blindness of her sister's body (21). Nevertheless, even though the trauma of another culture is not fully known or seen, it is intimately and deeply felt. The narrator is heavily impacted by the footage of Warsaw besieged by Hitler's airforce (25), and by a memorial at the wall where Polish civilians were lined up and shot (39). She continually looks for something beyond the visible and cognate descriptions, to the ghosts that greet each other, soundlessly (21). This reveals a fragmented and vulnerable psyche, where the other is somatically accessed.[17]

17 Interestingly, Han (in Fulcher, 2018: online) has described how, through her writing of *Human Acts* (2016b), she wanted to "lend her body" to the characters and give her life to the people who inspired these characters and had since died. Embodied memory is a recurring preoccupation in her oeuvre. For example, in her poem entitled *Mark Rothko and I* (2018), the narrator pinpoints her conception to be on the same day as the suicide of the abstract expressionist painter, Mark Rothko. She locates her body "in the crack between Spring light and spreading darkness" and "between life and death [;] into such places I find myself wanting to make my way, hunching the shoulders inside, bending the waist" (Han, 2018: 169–172). Thus the narrator of this poem viscerally connects her life, as a Korean poet, to the death of a European painter and reveals her transcultural ties to others.

Through re-working and re-framing the death of an infant within the narrative of a war-torn country, the text serves to challenge the boundaries that divide the national and the foreign. Just as swaddling bands lie "between [the] two bodies" of mother and child, white is the colour "between" two countries (15). The narrator's spontaneous use of white imagery creates a strong connection between Korea and Poland. For example, through the colour motif, the narrator describes various post-mortem rituals and ancestral commemorations in Korea: the white dough of *Songpyeon* (rice cakes) cooked during the harvest moon festival (*Chuseok*) (19); the white ashes of the narrator's mother in a columbarium attached to a small Buddhist temple (71); the white smoke from a cotton shirt and jacket that was burnt in a ritual for the narrator's mother (151). This speaks to whiteness as an emblematic colour of Korean indigenous art and folk culture. According to Ihn-Bum (2011: 73), white became an iconic colour of Korean national identity in the early twentieth century, signalling a nationalist return to the country's roots, wiped clean of Western and Japanese influences. However, the use of white in *The White Book* (Han, 2016a) is not a nationalist colour nor a cultural cliche. In fact, it is more readily associated with Poland's iconic birch forests, ice landscapes, memorials and architecture. In this way, the colour white becomes the focal point where the two landscapes meet in her text, symbolising how the white paper upon which the narrator is writing joins the two cultures.

2.3. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed whiteness as a matrixial motif. I argued that it not only reflects the borderspace created through writing between the narrator and her sister, but it also reflects the borderspace created between the writer and the past of different countries. I interpreted the imbricated layers of old ruins and new buildings, the digestion of unfamiliar rice, and the visceral connection between mother and child, as a symbol for an exchange in which difference is maintained within an intimate space. I suggested that the fragments of internalised, shattered whiteness indicate the poetic relationship of the narrator to an event she did not witness. The narrator seems to go beyond the testimonial meaning of bearing witness and gesture towards something that is much more than what is generally understood by empathy or ethical solidarity (Pollock, 2010b: 831). She indicates the existence of a continuum between subjectivities that are estranged; the ghosts of the victims of the Polish

genocide are “very close to her” and yet “unfamiliar” (39; 21). The matrixial model is better equipped for understanding how such an apparently contradictory state of being might emerge and be expressed.

Ettinger (2009: 14) expands upon already-existing theories pertaining to post-memory. She argues that there is a form of the past that is not present in intergenerational dialogues nor archives, but exists as residuals and traces of “non-memories” or voids of unprocessed trauma (14). These traces cannot be explicitly or consciously evoked, but only felt. The role of art is to express and translate a network of “borderlinks” that can occur between and among subjects, so that this unknowable and untranslated history of the other is not possessed by artists and viewers nor, is it entirely separate (Ettinger, 2001: 112; 105). As an artist, Ettinger collages traces of images from the Holocaust—mothers, women, and children—abandoned, naked and facing their death. In such a matrixial borderlinking, Ettinger (90) explains that “not only am I concerned by my own traumas, and not only is the encounter with the Other to me traumatic, but I am also concerned by the trauma of the Other.” *The White Book* (2016a) relates to Ettinger’s description of her paintings as a borderspace created between her, as an artist, and the collaged traces of images from the Holocaust. Through *The White Book*’s (2016a) metaphorical references to the white landscape, architecture, and food of Warsaw, the narrator similarly defines her writing as a palimpsest of temporality, memory and history.

Chapter Three

Paratextual Borderspaces: The Dialectic between the Reader and Writer

In the previous two chapters, I argued that the motif of whiteness represents a borderspace relationship between the narrator, her sister's death and Poland's history. In this chapter, I will argue that the symbolic implication of whiteness further reflects the matrixial role of the text itself, as an aesthetic seeking to represent the real-life traumatic memory (of the author's family and Poland's history) for readers to wit(h)ness. The presentation and performance of memory in *The White Book* (2016a) will be discussed in relation to Carolyn Shread's (2005, 2007) pioneering theoretical expansion of Bracha Ettinger's oeuvre in the field of reader-relations and translation studies. Propositions about the relationship that a reader has to a book have been extensively debated. The New Critics[18] of the 1940s insisted that an analysis of the internal semantics and syntax of a text could unearth one self-contained and inalienable meaning. With the development of cultural materialism and new historicism in the 1970s, the locus of meaning shifted from the text onto the reader. Roland Barthes (1967), Paul De Man (1973), and Michel Foucault (1979), argued that the meaning of a text was discursive, dispersed and indeterminate. They critiqued the "imaginary imprisonment" of a text and disliked the reductive analytical techniques of literary formalism (De Man, 1973: 28). While their radical interventions dismantled textual objectivity and the hierarchical nature of textual criticism, Shread (2005) believes that post-structuralism overlooks the ethical possibilities of a reading experience. With reference to Emma Wilson (1996: 27), Shread (2005: 20) explains how Barthes' aggressive "death of the author" and "preoccupation with the model of combat, power relations, activity, and passivity" has become "ubiquitous as a metaphor for reading relations". This means reading is only seen as "an appropriation of meaning" that assimilates the text to the self (20). Thus, the potential for creative connection and communication as well

18 The term New Criticism or The New Critics is used to refer to the work of a group of literary critics in the 1940s who urged "a new spirit of objectivity in criticism" (Childs, 2006: 156). Their aim was to free literary criticism from "amateur" assumptions based on impressionism and emotionalism by focusing their research on the relationships and elements inherent to the language of poetry (156). The New Critics included theorists such as William Wimsatt & Monroe Beardsley (1946).

as the redistribution of meaning between reader, text and author is de-emphasised because literary criticism is "constrained by discrete subject/object relations" (144).

Going beyond declarations of the author's intended meaning and of the readers' autonomous interpretation, Shread (25) uses the terminology of Ettinger to articulate a "neglected ethical dimension" to reading, which she terms "matrixial reading". In this paradigm, reading is seen not just as a process of creating meaning but as a plural and transferential activity. There is no possibility that authors can predict who the reader is or how they will respond; nor can the reader see the text from the point of view of the author. However, readers and writers may remain strangers and yet assume a matrixial position, allowing traumatic traces to be shared within the transitional borderspace created by a text. Matrixial reading is not an assessment of what the literary text has done through its representational translation of trauma. It is impossible to speculate on the effect of the writing on the author or reader. Rather, it is an interpretative strategy for analysing how a text may exhibit a matrixial deposition with qualities that call for an ethical engagement, to which the reader may or may not respond (36). The content of a text may encourage a reader to shift "dramatically from an other on the sidelines (present only to identify the author's intentional meaning, or as a reader who ignores the author to make whatever they want of the text) to a matrixial relation, in which participants contributing to the emergence of meaning are in a situation of distance-in-proximity to the text" (121). An ethically orientated reader may or may not alter their perspective, access forgotten stories, or be affected by a text and, therefore, they may or may not participate in a socially relevant, joint shaping of consciousness and memory (3).

In this chapter, Shread's (2005) theory is used in an analysis of the text as a material artwork with specific spatial, pragmatic, and functional characteristics. In order to do this, I combine Shread's approach to the matrixial ethics of reading a text with Gérard Genette's (1997) influential theory of the paratext. Paratextual devices are conventions within a book (peritext) and outside of a book (epitext) that mediate its contents to the reader (Genette, 1997: 4). Examples of peritextual elements include the preface, table of contents, and examples of epitextual elements include interviews or author's websites. These create a zone of transition and transaction that is both between the text and off the text, affecting individual and cultural perceptions of the book (4). In this analysis, I will focus on *The White Book*'s (2016a) sparse

layout, the process of translation, the incorporation of photographs and the ambiguous genre. I argue that these paratextual devices embody the significance of whiteness as a borderspace motif and encourage a matrixially orientated reader. I end this chapter by discussing how *The White Book* (2016) is relevant to South Africans, as we process our traumatic past. I reference a South African novel, *The Yearning* (2016) by Mohale Mashigo, as an example of a literary text which represents the present and past struggles of our country and strongly resonates with *The White Book* (Han, 2016a).

3.1. Genre

To begin with, the hybrid genre of *The White Book* (Han, 2016a) is an important way in which the text challenges our assumptions of literary witnessing and testimony. While it is not strictly speaking a part of the paratext, the conventions that designate the text as a specific genre are also important liminal devices that present the narrative to the reader. In my introduction, I described the text as a mixed-media-lyric-memoir. I noted how the text contains some of the discursive features of a memoir, such as an emphasis on interiority, reflexivity and memory. However, according to Han (in Livre Magazine, 2017: online), the text "isn't perceived as a memoir" and "the innovative form has received attention". She explains her choice of genre: "There was no writing strategy. I discovered this form. I don't know what form it is myself, but these 65 fragments were the right way to write this book, not as the traditional narrative of certain novels" (Han in Livre Magazine, 2017: online). The reviewer Deborah Levy (2017: online) describes *The White Book* (2016a) as an "autobiographical meditation on the death of the unnamed narrator's baby sister". This is somewhat of a paradox, for how can a text be autobiographical and yet the narrator remains anonymous and unnamed? Memoirs and autobiographies normally focus on the perspective of the author. However, Han has chosen to write from the fictionalised perspective of her sister and she abstracts her narrative through the use of poetry and lyrical prose.

The complex genre of *The White Book* (2016a), and its relationship to trauma points towards the limitations of existing theoretical approaches to literary witnessing based on a binary dialectic of self and other. According to Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992: xviii), the

"crisis" of listening to human suffering and narratives comes from readers "experiencing their boundaries and their separateness". In *The White Book* (2016a), however, the ambiguous genre is one of the ways in which secondary witnesses are invited to witness trauma, not through mastery, but through a borderspace created between the reader and author. The unusual combination of the personal and abstract anonymity in the text blurs the line between public and private. The genre requires that as readers, we the reader veer between witnessing the specificity of Han's grief, to finding points of intersection and connection with a universal figure of loss. Therefore, the identity and trauma of the personage of the author and the reader can be easily correlated and combined without clashing. Furthermore, through the combination of confessional record and fictitious manipulation, we are invited into a psychological truth that extends beyond factual accuracy. The documentary elements of her sister who never lived longer than two hours, and the sociological facts of Poland's genocide, are overlaid with abstract lyrical images. These images convey the narrator's ethical imperative. In particular, the association of an infant's gaze with the narrator's act of secondary wit(h)nessing indicates a transcultural, embodied encounter with trauma. Readers are similarly encouraged to follow the narrator and allow the formative process of pre-natality to alter their reading practice and rework trauma through this ethical framework. In this way, the text could be conceived as potentially behaving like a matrixial borderspace, mediating the expression of repressed trauma and the unconscious traces of birth intimacy that resides within every reader.

3.2. The Text as a Translation

A borderspace for witnessing trauma is further facilitated through the role of *The White Book* (Han, 2016a) as a text in translation. In *The Task of the Translator*, Walter Benjamin (1968: 72) describes how "an echo of the original" should be awakened in "the language into which the work is to be translated." On the basis of Benjamin's foundational essay, Felman (1992: 159) argues that trauma testimonials will therefore cause the inevitable "failure of the translator" as the "original language is killed" because there is no possible witnessing or rendering of the original event. In a matrixial borderspace, however, something of the painter, or in this case, the writer's trauma is projected outward from the engraved surface of the artwork, even if it is only realised in a silent awareness (Vigneault, 2017: 120). Perhaps the

original trauma and language is no longer present in the written or articulated meaning (as Felman (1992: 159) suggests). However, the past that Han has written about, like a palimpsest, cannot be fully erased by the process of translating, printing, viewing and reading.

In her article on translation, Shread (2007: 223) suggests that Felman's interpretation is stuck in a long tradition of literary criticism which separates the original text from the translated one. In this model, the translation will always be deficient in so far as the presence of each signifier is seen as the absence of preceding ones (223). Shread (213) uses Ettinger's theory to rework the traditional notions of how translations may 'serve' original texts. She returns to the work of Benjamin and argues that he is "re-directing translators away from a conventional practice towards a more empowering and daring undertaking, one which is more taxing, since translating is no longer seen as rote reproduction, but as a creative production that innovates language" (215). The translation, in a feminine, matrixial paradigm, need not be subserviently faithful to the style of the original. Rather, the translator should value the ability of their translation to influence, distort, and openly manipulate the source text. At the same time, the translation should not completely mask the original. Rather than turning the source text into immediately recognizable forms evaluated in terms of fluency, the translation should disrupt the familiar language and culture with an importation of the foreign (216). In this way, a translation may foster an ethical, matrixial exchange through the inclusion of differences in an intimate space.

Han's notes on translation resonate with the revisionist thinking of Shread. In 2015, she attended a translation workshop in England. Following the workshop, she wrote a reflective essay in which she describes the "extremely delicate, elaborate process" of translation as both impossible and beautiful (Han, 2015b: online). She explains how the uncertainty inherent to the process triggered a distressing dream. Han (online) writes:

> In the early hours of the morning, I had a dream. Someone was lying in a white bed, and I was quietly watching them. Their face was covered with a white sheet, so I couldn't tell whether they were male or female. Somehow, I was able to hear what he/she was saying. 'I have to get up now…no, that's too flat.' 'I really will have to get up now…no, that's too bland.' 'I have to leave this bed…no, that's awkward'

The genderless, blanketed figure points towards the instability of a text in translation, cloaked by a world of linguistic, contextual and cultural factors. In light of the enormous controversy that Smith's translation of Han's work has caused in South Korea, the author's nightmare has proven prophetic. Many Korean scholars have criticised Smith's "brilliant but flawed" translation of *The Vegetarian* (2015a) with allegations of "numerous errors, omissions and embellishments" (Kim, 2018: 65; Yun, 2017: online). The synopsis on the back cover of *The Vegetarian* (2015a), which describes "a novel about [..] our faltering attempts to understand others, from one imprisoned body to another" inadvertently touches on the controversy that arose regarding her work in translation. As discussed in Chapter Two of my dissertation, the theme of translation is similarly evident in *The White Book* (Han, 2016a) where the narrator is haunted by an acute awareness of "the mother tongue" within which "all the memories" of her life are trapped (21).

The estrangement caused by a foreign language in Han's dream (as well as the symbolic preoccupation of her fiction) resonates with Felman's theory. However, as Shread (2007: 214) demonstrates, Ettinger's feminist language provides us with new tools for thinking through and describing the process of translation. In spite of the losses, difficulties and frustrations, the white sheet of Han's dream is perhaps a symbol for the only visible way of engaging with a text in translation. What lies under the sheet is a complex reality of words that cannot easily be adapted and standardised, causing multiple choices with limited predictability. In an article for *The New Yorker* (2018: online), Jiayang Fan suggests that Han's dream, "in which a white sheet cloaks phrases she is trying to get right" reveals how a good translation "is a living, breathing thing, which must be understood on its own terms, discovered from beneath the great white sheet". A translation is an excavation, an unearthing that gives a "sense of agency both to fictional characters and to those whose lives inspire them" (Fan, 2018: online). Translators, according to Han (2015b: online), are "[p]eople who ask questions of and answer themselves, alone beneath the white sheet, ceaselessly re-writing sentences".

At the end of her reflective report, Han (online) expresses her gratitude towards "everyone in our session, including Deborah—no, somehow to every translator in the world", for their "delight in the intricacies of language", and their determination to "give a single text a new birth in another language". Her relationship with her translator is evidently highly

collaborative, and she has described how the manuscript went back and forth between them. She praised Smith's talent for avoiding bland and awkward expressions and for expressing feelings "rather than automatically transposing the original Korean sentence structure" (online). This shows her commitment to the ethical negotiation of linguistic and cultural differences in a translation, that goes beyond dictionary and grammatical equivalents. In a matrixial borderspace, the translator "does not overlay or efface its source through an ideal of equivalent matches" (Shread, 2007: 225). Rather, they enable a border-linking of the foreign within the local, and the local within the foreign, as the source and translated text creatively meet.

In Smith's translation of *The White Book* (Han, 2016a), many Korean words are left untranslated, especially when referring to family members, such as "*onni*" for brother (141). The untranslated kinship ties serve as linguistic markers of familial and cultural intimacy. This regional solidarity is also mixed with cosmopolitanism and global solidarity. This is seen in the English title *The White Book* (2016a) (a translation of *Hwin*) which brings to mind the Polish 'White Book'—a collection of official documents concerning German-Polish relations and the outbreak of hostilities (Republic of Poland, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 1942: 2). These documents described the atrocities committed as the German army occupied Poland and were assembled in 1942 as an urgent appeal to the allies for assistance. Han's *The White Book* (2016a), written over 70 years later, presents a poetic parallel to these documents and becomes a response to Poland's initial plea for recognition from the world community.

Therefore, in Smith's translation of the text, there is a visible interaction between similarities (a shared experience of pain and trauma) as well as "foreignizing and uncanny processes" (language and cultural differences)(Shread, 2007: 213). It can be argued the process of changing *Hwin* (Han, 2016c) to the English *The White Book* (2016a) and Dutch *Wit* (Han, 2017) has created an exchange of traumas: an encounter between I and non-I (to use terms Ettinger prefers for self and other). As discussed in Chapter Two of my dissertation, a universal language of whiteness connects the trauma of the narrator's family to that of Poland. This symbolically points towards a Western/Asian borderspace. In the same way, *The White Book* (2016a), as a poetic work translated from Korean into English, as well as into Dutch, is a means to overcome the "prison" barriers of political isolationism and cultural indifference

(Han, 2016a: 21). Like the narrator, the text itself can be viewed as crossing over and negotiating between different languages and cultures. Through its international reception, *The White Book* (2016a) encourages a transformative and generative encounter with different artistic and cultural ways of mourning. This allows the English-speaking world to read about a Korean trauma, and the Korean-speaking world to read about a Western trauma. The potential of recognizing a shared heritage between vastly separate cultures aligns the text with what Ettinger calls the 'matrixial affect' of art (Vigneault, 2017: 120).

3.3. Photographs

The inclusion of eight black and white photographs enhances the spatial and visual layout of *The White Book* (2016a), further contributing towards the text as a borderspace. The photographs were taken by the photographer and filmmaker, Choi Jinhyuk, of a performance-artwork presented by Han (Bowman, 2016: 11). Four videos of her performance were screened at an exhibition called "Vanishing Point" which took place on the 3rd of June 2016 at the O'Newall art gallery in Seoul. In the text, the first photographic still of her exhibition appears before the passage entitled "Swaddling bands" and captures Han sewing a small white dress (15). She is wearing black and sitting on a stool. Her face is obscured as she is hunched over, completely absorbed in what she is doing. She seems small in an empty exhibition space and the sharp angles created by the wall and the floor create the impression that she is in a box. The room is dimly lit from the side, casting enough light to silhouette her figure, but not enough to lighten the grey-white walls. This has an isolating effect, and to the reviewer, Rowan Buchanan (2017: online), Han seems almost trapped by darkness. A similar composition is repeated towards the end of the text (Figure 1), except this time she is facing the wall and the viewer is looking at her profile from the side. Leaning forward, the curve of her back contrasts with the sharp line of the wall and her posture brings to mind someone in a silent prayer. This composition reflects on how Han's mother—"gripped by contractions and terribly afraid"—found a needle and some white cloth and began to sew a newborn gown (18). There is a contained, solitary and sober aura to this performance of Han sewing. This mirrors the isolation of her mother giving birth unaided, miles away from a life-saving incubator.

Dispersed at different intervals in the text are three more photographic stills taken from her performance. Here, Han is washing a white pebble with melting ice and salt. In the first picture of this series, her hand fills the entire frame of the photograph and a small white pebble covered in grains of salt and ice rests on her palm. The next two photographs feature her hands engaged in a ritual of pouring water from a small white bowl over the pebble (Figure 2). One frame is slightly more zoomed in to reveal the water droplets dripping through her fingers. The performance of washing a stone with melting ice is suggestive of a purifying, healing process and these three materials: snow, ice, and a white pebble, reflect features of the narrator's writing.

The picture of a pebble in Han's hand placed at the end of Chapter one, while the second picture of a pebble dipped in water is placed towards the end of Chapter three. In a passage entitled "White pebble", the narrator explains how she once saw pebble by the ocean with "whiteness" which seems "transparent" (Han, 2016a: 101). However, when she picked up this pebble and placed it in her hand it appeared "perfectly ordinary" and solid (101). This oscillation between solid and transparent sheds light on the reason for the placement of these two images. The solid pebble at the end of Chapter 1 symbolises that this chapter is 'contained' by her single authorial perspective. In contrast, the picture of water covering the pebble in Chapter 3 mirrors the movement of the text away from the solid boundaries of one narrative voice "I", to the porous borderspace between the narrator and her sister. Visually taking the pebble out of Han's palm and dipping it back into water, represents removing the control of the author's voice to that of engaging with mystical and 'transparent' reality. As this picture appears before the last three paragraphs in Chapter 3, it serves to group the conclusion together. The narrative ends with a plea to her sister to not die but "live" and the last line which explains how she, the narrator breathed in the last breath of Seol (159). Thus the symbolism of a round stone visualises the cyclical pattern of life and death with which the author concludes.

In the book's centre pages, there is placed a photograph of Han scattering feathers over a white page (Figure 3). Before this picture, there is a passage entitled "Certain objects in darkness" which describes how "darkness" which is "imbued with even the faintest light" will make objects which "would not otherwise be white glow with a hazy pallor" (29). The

strange paradox of darkness creating whiteness, is explored by the photographer's use of lighting in this central image. The dimly lit room gives a ghostly glow to Han's silhouetted shape and enhances the white objects laid on the floor. In the passage, the narrator lies in bed and thinks about her sister while looking out into the darkness, "waiting for her contours to coalesce" (29). This connects to the contours of Han's shape in the picture. Furthermore, the feathers in this passage evoke lightness, and softness associated with the border between sleep and wakefulness. In this performance her posture is foetus-like—her back is curved, head bowed, and her legs bent as she leans over a white piece of paper on the floor. Aside from these photographic series, the cover of *The White Book* (2016a) (Figure 4) includes a black and white image featuring Han holding up a white back-lit semi-translucent sheet in front of her stomach. The light creates a womb-like shadow or contour on the sheet, suggestive of a pregnant woman or the outline of an ultrasound.

Together, all of these compositions reveal a performative ritual of repeating, remembering and reanimating her sister's birth and death. The gestation and birth symbolism, as well as the sewing of a white dress, repeat the actions of her mother. Through melting ice and scattering feathers, Han commemorates Seol's short two-hour life. Julia McMillan (2016: 33) describes how the memory attached to material objects and archives, such as family albums or stories, are used to compose Ettinger's artwork, evoking "affective responses and attachments" that can be acted upon and performed through the artist's body. Like Ettinger's artwork, Han's performance functions as a symbolic reconstruction of suppressed memories, representing a physical encounter with the trauma of her family. She collapses the temporal distance between the day of her mother's traumatic birth and her own present-day reality, and establishes an intimate connection between herself and her sister.

The Vanishing Point Exhibition, where the four videos of Han's performance were screened, created a forum where she could directly address her parents and her readership. Writing for *Korean Literature Now*, the translator Sophie Bowman (2016: 11) explains how significant this was. She observes,

> The atmosphere in the packed courtyard grew heavy; it was clear that Han's parents were quite taken aback at what they had just heard, but also deeply

> moved, to find an experience they had lived through, a fact of life, recounted in this way by the daughter who had followed. Breaking the silence that hung heavy after her reading, Han repeated the words of her mother to the newborn, "Please don't die, don't die, live". With a quiver in her voice she added, "These are words for all of us" (11)

By ending her presentation with the refrain of her mother, explaining that those words are "for all of us", Han invites the audience to interact and participate in sharing and redefining trauma. Interestingly, *The White Book* (2016a) is not the first time the refrain has appeared in her writing. In her novel *Human Acts* (2016b) (about the Gwangju massacre), Han takes the words of her mother and turns them into the words of a character struggling with the impossible task of bearing witness to a national atrocity. In an interview for the *Livre Magazine* (2017: online), she explains her reasons for doing this:

> Maybe it was too painful for me, maybe I felt too close to the narrator. I had the impulse to distance myself from her pain, but because of that, I knew I had to rewrite the chapter. I gave her the last monologue in the final passage: Don't die, please don't die. Those were the words my mother said to her first baby, in the two hours before she died.

This interview reveals how, as an author, her mother's refrain becomes the words through which she is able to access the pain of Gwangju through her fictionalised narrator. Although Han grew up in the city of Gwangju, she was not physically present to witness the events of May 1980 as her family had just recently moved to another city. Returning to a deeply personal account of her sister's death facilitates her desire as an artist to return to a national trauma that went unwitnessed in her childhood and, as Cathy Caruth (1996: 104) writes, produce an "act of homage to a missed reality". In the Vanishing Point Exhibition, it is as if this refrain serves a similar purpose. While living and working through her mother's loss on a platform, Han creates a network for the redistribution of trauma. As a performer and an artist, she allows viewers to absorb her vulnerability and bravery, encouraging the traumatic processing of national and personal loss.

Through the inclusion of photographs, these performative, discursive and relational aspects which define Han's presentation at the O'Newal gallery, find their way onto the pages of *The*

White Book (2016a). The reading and witnessing of trauma in the narrative is enriched through the cross-over of her performative art and poetry. According to Sophie Bowman (2016: online), Han's speech at the exhibition revolved around her experience between two different artistic mediums: expressing herself through the written words of *The White Book* (2016a) as well as expressing herself through the silent performance of gestures and objects that are captured on video. Bowman (2016: 10) writes,

> Han expressed that for her, the difference was not all that great, "We are all born with bodies; I believe that it is all connected, there are translations between mediums happening all the time, poetry becoming dance, becoming music, I think I had already felt this." The sense of joy that she felt in the realization that her ideas had been detached from language then is less about the content, the feeling of what they convey, but connected to the constraints of language. She explained, "Language is a very important tool for me, it is something which I love dearly, but it is also an impossibility which causes me pain.

The observations and translations that Bowman (2016) makes at Han's exhibition reveal how *The White Book* (2016a) bridges the border between exhibiting and describing, particularly in the way the images of Han's foetal positions and ritualised movements create performative spaces within the text. Although Han's performative art and her work of literature differ, they share the same sacral symbolism, repetitive quality and a determination to rupture the boundaries of memory. Han's somatic expressiveness transmits from her photographs to the activity of reading. In this way she opens up new opportunities for border-crossing between cognitively reading about another's trauma and registering an embodied memory. The photographs "concretized [the] dialogic exchange" that occurred between the author, her family, her sister and her audience (Shread, 2005: 34). This 'infects' the text: informing and communicating a reader-writer encounter. Through the images, Han's physicality is copied onto the white paper within her text. However, her silhouetted features also deliberately draw her back to allow for the presence of unknown readers. Reader and author intermingle in her work. Therefore, the performance photographs, together with the narrative, re-frame and call for a readership experience that is matrixial. This, as Shread's (19) writes, "can have real affective consequences, calling on, awakening, and developing a sense of ethical responsibility".

3.4. Blank Pages

Aside from the photographs, the white spaces in-between the prose passages and the eight blank pages at the end of the book are also significant paratextual devices. As previously discussed, these pages relate back to the narrative motif of whiteness and come to represent the indescribable essence of the narrator's sister. However, they also speak to the unknown presence of the reader. Without the conventional formalities that signal the end of a text, the ending is unspoken and unexplained. An open space shows how the writer's gaze does not hold or control her representation for too long, as there is not the "possession and gain" of a definitive ending (Shread, 2005: 38). Instead, as a material object, *The White Book* (2016a) is offered to readers as a "threshold" without boundaries and sealed borders and, as if to put the weight of meaning-making process on the reader, the novel constructs the ending as a void left in their hands (Genette, 1997: 1). The reader is invited to undo their illusory perception of understanding in the process of bearing witness. They enter into a "time [..] not yet lived", pursuing a corresponding mourning ritual of silence and contemplation (7).

This goes contrary to Felman's radical statement that "no poem is intended for its reader, no picture for its beholder" (1992: 160). Likewise, this also contradicts Barthes (1967: 2) argument that no reader can behold the meaning of the author, as only individual subjectivity and identification processes are determinant in defining the meaning (Shread, 2005: 35). The absence of language signifies that the meaning of the pages cannot be owned by the writer or the reader. Nevertheless, through the lens of Ettinger's (2001) theory, it can be conceived that matrixial knowledge drifts from the writer and is registered by, and felt by us, the reader. The reader's gaze can momentarily merge with a gaze that is interwoven into the poetry and the spaces, just as the narrator and her sister gaze at each other (Vigneault, 2017: 120). The pages strive towards and across different countries and times, whose shared experience of violence resonate with each other. In conclusion, this chapter has reinforced how *The White Book*'s (2016a) genre, role as a text in translation, performative exhibition and blank pages, allows a readership to connect to the trauma that is represented by means of a dialogic and at times matrixial, exchange.

3.5. The Text in a South African Context

To conclude this chapter, I discuss *The White Book* (Han, 2016a) in a South African context. The familial and relational dynamics represented in the novel are microcosmic and can be discussed with reference to debates concerning the process of remembering the historical trauma of other cultures and previous generations. It follows that the *The White Book* (2016a) is extremely relevant to South Africans, as we search for ways to mourn the painful memories of Apartheid and colonialism, and as we try to bridge the gap between different racial and cultural boundaries. The text can be brought into dialogue with many South African writers such as Zakes Mda (2019), John Coetzee (2015), Sindiwe Magona (1998) and academics such as Bev Orton (2018), Pumla Gqola (2010), Edward Mengel and Michela Borgaza (2012), Phil Van Schalkwyk (2006), and Achille Mbembe (2006) who are rethinking and processing our history.

By way of example, I would like to briefly mention some of parallels between *The White Book* (2016a), and a South African text called *The Yearning* (2016) written by Mohale Mashigo. *The Yearning* (2016) is a fictionalised memoir telling the story of a young South African woman, Marubini, who begins to suffer from a series of epileptic fits with "no apparent [biomedical] cause" (Mashigo, 2016: 86). Marubini will eventually discover that her uncanny somatic symptoms are rooted in a myriad of personal, cultural and ancestral traumatic memories speaking through her body "from beyond the confines of linear time" (Murray, 2007: 5). These memories appear connected to a mysterious force— the "Yearning"— which remains outside of what is known and definable and stems from a trauma that is hers and yet does not belong to her alone (Mashigo, 2016: 1).

Although neither *The White Book* (2016a) nor *The Yearning* (2016) are overtly political, the historical and cultural context of both writers is crucial to an interpretation of the texts. Both Han (who was born in Gwangju in 1970) and Mashigo (who was born in Soweto in 1983) were raised during an era of radical political transition in their respective countries. They were both very young when protestors campaigning for democracy were met with brutal retaliation from a military dictatorship (in South Korea) and the Apartheid regime (in South Africa)[9]. Although Han and Mashigo have completely different writing styles, speak different

languages and were born in different countries, as young women writers, they both share a profound commitment to witnessing and revisiting the traumatic impact of these events. Both authors see themselves as writers of "a free generation"—living in a global Seoul and multicultural Cape Town—yet are burdened with the traumatic memory of their parents (Han in Shin, 2016: online). They show a determination to fill in the gaps of silence that surround their nations' story by artistically investigating the trauma of a previous generation. As Mashigo's novel explores the relationship between the past and the present through the character of Marubini, the narrative seems to implore that as South Africans we should no longer "bury our stories and memories and wonder why we are in so much pain" (Mashigo in Malec, 2018: online).

The connection between these two texts is just one example of how *The White Book* (2106a) creates a borderspace with local artists and writers, and is a pertinent entry point to reflect on the broader significance of this study in relation to the South African context. The assertion of non-binary subjectivity contributes to the process of decolonising our thinking in relation to the past. There are clear connections between the representations of whiteness in my chosen text, Asian spirituality and revisionist African ontology (Edwards, Makunga, Thwala, *et al.*, 2009; Eze, 2015; Steenkamp-Nel, 2018). In Nguni culture, *ubunye* is the belief in a non-duality or oneness that underlies material existence, interlinking human beings to their ancestors (the "living-dead" or *amadlozi* of a community) and connecting them to nature and the cosmos (Edwards, 2015: 274). Trauma, therefore, is a problem that must be understood in its totality, as not just affecting an individual person but also the community and environment that the person is connected to. A traumatic event is shared and witnessed collectively through the spiritual self which can extend into transpersonal realms.

The White Book's (2016a) recurring references to the problem of language and intercultural communication resonates with some of the problems of witnessing raised by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. South Africa's need to witness the past must be negotiated at an intersection of cultures and peoples' language. This is much like the space of loss evoked in *The White Book* (2016a) as a threshold or cultural meeting place. In the context of transcultural witnessing in the text, racial difference is not made irrelevant or overlooked.

However, a cross-cultural ethical engagement with trauma that foregrounds different experiences of the past, does not overrule a space for mutual understanding.

The metaphorical representation of the relationship between the narrator and members of her family and community following painful traumatic events are especially poignant in these times. The department of home affairs has suspended all other activities to issue death certificates to those queuing outside the doors, and clergy are doing funerals several days in a row each week (Housten, 2021: 10). This book represents a deeper portrayal of intersubjective recognition and empathy, focusing on what we have in common, and on our ability to witness trauma at an intersection of self and other. It is vital as we confront this global pandemic to watch and bear witness to each other as intimate strangers.

Conclusion

Through a textual and paratexual analysis, this dissertation sought to interrogate the way in which *The White Book* (Han, 2016a), offers an alternative representational model for witnessing the trauma of others. I argued that the narrator's unique approach to representing and witnessing her sister's death is comparable to Bracha Ettinger's (2001, 2006a,b, 2009, 2016) theoretical oeuvre. This alternative stance is that through the creation of a borderspace, art can connect empathetically to the trauma of others without appropriation. Contrasting Ettinger's vantage point of wit(h)nessing to Shoshana Felman's (1992) definition of witnessing provided a framework to analyse how the creative devices employed in *The White Book* (2016a) diverge from hegemonic conceptions of empathy in the Western canon of trauma theory.

In Chapter One of this dissertation, I cited the multiple ways in which the narrator represents her writing process through the recurring motif of whiteness and womb imagery. Although there are numerous ways of interpreting the figurative dimensions of whiteness in each passage, I limited my interpretation to focus solely on the narrator's description of poetic experience. Through a systematic analysis of each consecutive chapter of the text, I showed how the mother-child relationship during pregnancy, birth and post-natality, become a symbol for how the narrator's poetry mediates a matrixial borderspace between herself and her sister. In my analysis of the first chapter of the text I found parallels between the pre-birth incubation of a baby in the womb and the way in which the narrator muses about what it would mean to incarnate her sister through writing. In my close reading of the second chapter I likened the narrator's sense of loss in the text to her mother's sudden premature birth. I brought the narrator's anxious allusions to pregnancy and birth into dialogue with the psychoanalytical views of Sigmund Freud (1920) and Jacques Lacan (1977). I argued that the narrator foregrounds a clash between her own persona and that of her sister through the womb imagery. Whiteness becomes a lost ideal; the unattainable that the narrator cannot achieve through her writing.

Having foregrounded, firstly, the sister's connection and, secondly, their separation, I then looked at how the third chapter of *The White Book* (2016a) describes a middle ground between the two. This affirms that the narrator believes her writing can operate simultaneously as a vessel for her sister as well as for herself. In my analysis of this chapter, I focused on the narrator's description of her infant sister's blurry-eyed gaze. I argued that the post-natal connection between mother and child, the "gap between" white and black, and the movement between inside and outside, becomes symbolic for the narrator's literary wit(h)nessing of her sister (Han, 2016a: 137). As the feminine landscape of the text shifts and changes, Ettinger's re-reading of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis offered an alternative, feminine theorisation of art that underpinned my analysis. Through the lens of Ettinger, I showed how the narrator's retrospective reconstruction of her sister, triggers and necessitates an embrace of the non-dualistic nature of memory and the dichotomy of self/other disappears.

Chapter Two of this dissertation was an examination of the political and ethical implications of the presentation of whiteness. I reflected on the intriguing way the narrator's relationship to her sister becomes a symbolic entry point for discussing the indebtedness of the present to the previous generation and the trauma that they bore. I argued that as the narrator travels between Korea and Poland, and between writing as the personage of her sister and as herself, she creates a language of mourning that seems to correlate and combine multiple traumas. She connects directly with a Western trauma through the interplay between the poetic invocation of her sister and the historical tragedy she witnesses in the landscape of Poland. Her ritualistic construction of whiteness demonstrates a creative process that enables her to rewrite the palimpsest history of their family and their nation by creating trans-national connections. Whiteness, therefore, is symbolic of an ethical-political, artistic process that allows the writer to relate to the world and others.

In Chapter Three, a combination of peritextual (layout) and epitextual (interviews) devices were referred to. I argued that *The White Book* (2016a) has borderspace values at the core of its structure and not just in its symbolic representation of whiteness. The visceral and effective witnessing of Han's exhibition conveyed through the black and white photographs, serve to create points of intersection between the author, the past, and her readership. In the same way,

the hybrid lyric-memoir genre, the process of translation (from Korean into English), the page layout, and the published interviews of Han, all contribute to the formation of *The White Book* (2016a), as an aesthetic form of witnessing trauma where "forms are transgressed; borderlines surpassed and transformed to become thresholds [and] conductible borderlinks" (Ettinger, 2001: 105). The values reflected in the paratext change the way we perceive the function of the text itself. Through the lens of Carolyn Shread (2005: 17), I showed how ethical encounters may arise between a writer and a reader who, although remaining unknown, "meet in the fictional space of a text". This is overlooked in Felman's (1992) trauma theory which approaches literary witnessing as an inescapably individual occurrence.

In conclusion, this dissertation has elucidated how the motif of whiteness represents the creation of a borderspace, between the narrator and her sister (Chapter One), between Korea and Poland (Chapter Two), and between the reader and text (Chapter Three), for the wit(h)nessing of a violent past. I have sought to emphasise the creative dialogue and affinity between Ettinger, an Israeli painter and academic of French psychoanalytic feminism; and Han, a South Korean poet, artist, novelist and academic. Despite their cultural difference, both artists reveal a global *zeitgeist*[19] and show the potential for new ways of approaching our unresolved pasts. In the twenty-first century, there has been an enormous resurgence of buried collective memories of war and conflict (Pollock, 2010a: 21). Our era is marked by an artistic and spiritual drive in different parts of the world to resolve this collective trauma and rethink our relationship to others. According to Ettinger (in Johnson, 2006: 1), the function of a psychoanalytic theory for art may be to "lend its conceptual tools in order to expose the existence in art of a site of yet unformed knowledge about sexuality and subjectivity". This "clarifies the site [of art] as a source for ideas that are awaiting signification in language, and articulates them" (Ettinger in Johnson, 2006: 1). However, "the work of art does not illustrate or establish theory—theory can only partly cover or uncover, the work of art" (Ettinger in Butler, 2011: 151). Therefore, I conclude that the term wit(h)nessing can "partly uncover" and resonate with the meaning behind whiteness in the text (151).

19 The word *zeitgeist* refers to the general beliefs and feelings typical of a particular period in history, including societal consensus on values, moral judgments, and the need for changes and innovation (Höland, 2014: 99)

The narrator of *The White Book* (Han, 2016a) is permanently caught in a state of in-betweenness in her practice of recognising and reconstructing memories; she bears witness to a trauma that simultaneously belongs to her and to others. This can be related to Ettinger's (2001) ethics, which is founded on relations with strangers without the assimilation or redemption of difference. This can be differentiated from Felman's (1992) model as the creative presentation of trauma in the text occurs across the demarcations of self/other. This has political and ethical implications for how a transcultural encounter with migrations, colonizations, subjugations and traumatic events may be simultaneously personal and foreign. This further recasts our assumptions concerning the process of witnessing trauma through reading literature. Refracted through poetic representations, as well as the physical presentation, *The White Book* (2016a) captures for readers some of the globally relatable violence experienced by the author's family and by the country of Poland. The text invites a reader to resolve trauma (both their own and the trauma presented to them through the text), as an active and not passive participant. Whiteness, therefore, is both a symbol representing the narrator's relationship to death and a praxis of open space used to affect the experience of those reading about it.

Appendix

Figure 1: Han sewing a small white dress (pg142)

Figure 2: Washing a pebble (pg67)

Figure 3: Han scattering feathers (pg30)

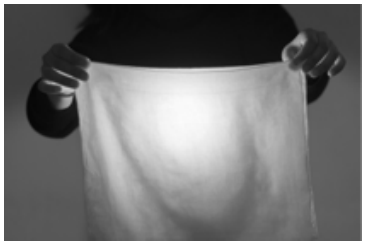

Figure 4: Holding a white sheet (cover image)

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