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A Comparative Analysis of Recurring Themes”

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Introduction and Acknowledgements

The aim of this diploma thesis is to analyse recurring themes in the novels *Sorry* and *Black Mirror*, both written by the Australian author Gail Jones. The two novels resemble each other in several aspects. Indeed, many topics in Gail Jones' most recent novel *Sorry* seem to be only further developments of themes already touched on in her first work *Black Mirror*. This similarity concerns even some of the characters as well as the overall narrative structure, for both novels centre upon the question of the contrast between remembering and forgetting or suppressing the past. These obvious parallels allow analysing in greater detail four main themes both novels have in common:

1) The Image of Australia transported in the novels

Both novels chosen provide many allusions to Australia. On the one hand, Australia serves – at least partially – as the geopolitical setting for the narrative. On the other hand, the author discusses individual attitudes towards Australia mirrored in the novels' characters. The aim of my study is therefore not only to examine the main historical and geographical features of Australia depicted in the novels (e.g. colonialism and the Stolen Generations), but also to record the full spectrum of subjective perceptions of Australia, both positive and negative.

2) Aboriginal culture and the function of Aboriginal characters for the narrative

In close connection to the use of Australia as the historical background of the stories, another issue recurs in both novels: the discrimination against Indigenous Australians. Here it appears vital to investigate especially *how* the white Australian author succeeds in providing insight into Aboriginal culture. Furthermore it will be necessary to analyze the function of Aboriginal characters in the narrative and to examine their symbolic value.

3) Depiction of dysfunctional families

Another main theme occurring in both novels is the failure of traditional family patterns leading to the isolation and/or emotional breakdown of at least one of its members. To compensate for this, the author offers alternative (pseudo-)familial structures, such as foster mothers and friendships, especially with indigenous Australians, whose influence on the main characters is considerable. Another topic discussed in both novels is domestic violence, committed almost exclusively by male family members. This diploma the-

sis will list the reasons for the collapse of the traditional family as well as its consequences. This analysis will also include the question which characters (blood relatives/friends/others; male/female characters; Whites/Aboriginal people) influence the main protagonists most in their childhood.

4) *Memory and Forgetting*

Both novels deal with the reconstruction of past events: While *Black Mirror* describes the process of writing a biography based on the memories of the person depicted, the reconstruction of the past in *Sorry* mainly serves to come to terms with a traumatic situation. However, both concepts hold difficulties like the suppression of unwelcome memories or the mixing of memories. It will therefore be the aim of my analysis to record both, the possibilities and obstacles occurring when writing an (auto-)biography or at least when reconstructing past events. Due to the arbitrary sequence of reconstructed memories both novels lack a stringent chronological order, which will be discussed in my thesis as well.

The choice of exactly these four main themes was due to their prominence in both novels. Given the many parallels, it seemed worthwhile not to analyse the books separately. Instead, the chosen main themes form the backbone of the examination, which facilitates the comparison of their presentation in the two novels.

Writing this diploma thesis would not have been possible without the guidance of Univ.-Prof. Dr. Margarete Rubik to whom I am very grateful for always having offered me advice and support. In addition, I owe special thanks to Professor Gail Jones (University of Western Sydney) since she supplied me with some crucial first hand information about her works. Finally, I would like to thank all other people involved in the development of this diploma thesis.

1. Imagining Australia

Born in Western Australia, the author Gail Jones uses her native country as a background for both novels *Sorry* and *Black Mirror*. Whereas the characters in *Sorry* live in Western Australia, this region is part of recurring descriptions of childhood memories in *Black Mirror* as well. The presentation of Australia in the two novels can be divided into the following aspects: the realistic literary description of Western Australia and the characters' subjective perceptions of the country. The following chapter will point out that this typical Australian background is one of the distinctive features of the two novels. In other words, Gail Jones consciously roots her narratives in a patently Australian setting.

1.1. Providing the Background: Australia as the Setting

The literary portrayal of Australia is created in a distinctively realistic way by giving a detailed description of rural areas and towns on the one hand and by addressing unambiguously Australian historical and social problems on the other hand. Therefore, the following chapters will analyse how these topics are represented in the novels.

1.1.1. Between Urban Life and Outback

Both novels contain descriptions of both, the landscape of Australia and its urban areas. In *Sorry*, the outback of Western Australia is presented in contrast to Broome and Perth. In *Black Mirror*, the childhood memories as well as one scene when Anna comes back home, are set in a small town "in the Western Australian goldfields" (*Black Mirror* 164), with its mines and "beyond that [...] Aboriginal camps and the desert" (*Black Mirror* 55). The following subchapters try to analyse whether this depiction of different Australian areas serves a specific function in the narrative.

1.1.1.1. Living in the Outback

In general, nature as presented in the narrative has a clearly Australian character. For instance, the birdlife described in Western Australia: "There were flaring budgerigars and sulphur-crested cockatoo; sometimes there was a hawk, lazily circling, or a fleet

cloud of bush pigeon, heading towards the sun" (*Sorry* 59). Besides, "black cockatoos" (*Black Mirror* 72), "a desert hawk" (*Black Mirror* 21) and black swans (see e.g. *Black Mirror* 202) appear as typical examples of (Western) Australia's fauna.

Another impressive description of nature is given when Perdita and Mary join the Mandjabari women from the camp. When they go hunting, the special atmosphere is created as follows:

When they came to an area of escarpment, just before a plain, the women became quiet and began to separate out, searching for food. It was uneven rocky country, hard walking country. Perdita found nothing. She saw figures around her, moving outlines against the indigo sky, [...] and felt herself tiny, and insignificant, and unequal to this place. Once she saw at a distance a frilled-neck lizard and made a quick lunge in its direction, but it fled, its membranous neck flaring open transparently, like an alien blossom. (*Sorry* 69)

In general, lizards, geckos and snakes are extremely often mentioned in *Sorry*. A lizard is once described as "goanna" (*Sorry* 19) and "[g]eckos on the ceiling were clicking madly, incited by the vibrating charge in the air" (*Sorry* 72). Snakes are especially important in three scenes of *Sorry*: The first situation shows Stella Keene's relationship to snakes: she gets rid of them because they are nestling between Nicholas Keene's books. First, she throws them out of the house because she is so afraid of them, but then she kills the animals just because she is bored: "Stella was at first frightened, but became in the end so blasé about the numerous snakes that she kept a shovel nearby, so that she could flick them out the door as she was seeking her text. Sometimes, out of annoyance, she cut them in two with the blade [...] to see their writhing mad deaths" (*Sorry* 31). The second important situation with regard to these animals is when Mary and Perdita kill "the red-bellied black snake" (*Sorry* 70), which is later interpreted as "evidence of their special connection" (*Sorry* 70). The third incident is the "tiger snake, nestled in a coil" (*Sorry* 113) in the cage of the two finches that had been eaten by it. Stella is unable to kill the digesting animal and so Perdita performs this job that should normally be done by an adult. Generally speaking, snakes are not unusual in Australia and even in the novel, this fact is explicitly mentioned: When Stella arrives in Australia, she is afraid of snakes and screams when she sees a brown one. Mr Trevor – who is obviously used to these animals – simply responds with the words, "Better get used to it, luv" (*Sorry* 18).

For Perdita, the Australian bush is the shelter she needs when she escapes the domestic violence committed by her father against her mother, and also here the wilderness is distinctively Australian:

She fled into the bush and simply waited there until her own heart settled, crouching until there was such a quietness, an absorbing distinction and clarity to the look and feel of things, that she grew almost afraid. She was stirred by a rustle in the dry grass behind her and when she turned she saw three rust-coloured kangaroos, lazily grazing in the falling dusk. [...] Perdita liked the way their neat ears pivoted and twitched, catching her presence, and their upright arch, so casually alert. The large one scratched itself on the chest. Cocked its head. Eyed her sideways. (*Sorry* 34)

Another particularity of the Western Australian landscape are the salt lakes that are described in greater detail in *Black Mirror*. Victoria remembers “salmon-coloured salt lakes and inverted trees, cradled in a precarious and unrealistic suspension” (*Black Mirror*: 68). The Gidgee Lake (see *Black Mirror* 72) provides “a system of pink-coloured reflections: boundaries were indeterminate, surfaces were vitreous [...]. The air was crystalline and strange, the light gleaming as mirrors” (*Black Mirror* 73). Its surroundings are depicted as a “red country” (*Black Mirror* 72) and a “territory of stones and double-gees and treacherous pits of sand” (*Black Mirror* 72). Similarly, the area around the goldmines in *Black Mirror* is described as: “Desert country. Dust. [...] The Dead Heart of Australia” (258-259).

Apart from the depiction of the flora and fauna, meteorological phenomena, such as electrical storms (see *Sorry* 19) or a cyclone are described: “The wind rose higher, the barometric pressure fell. There was something ominous in the air, swelling and tumbling. [...] the birds had gone quiet, or had fled, or altogether disappeared. Small stirrings occurred, a circular sweep of dried leaves, the uplift of sand in a reddish spiral. [...] a cyclone was approaching” (*Sorry* 83). Furthermore, allusions to “a red sand storm” (*Black Mirror* 226) and frequent dust storms are made: “[Anna] waited for dust storms the way other children waited for Christmas. [...] The world restless, upset, susceptible to dislodgement” (*Sorry* 28).

At first glance, Australia seems so different to Europe that newly-arrived English migrants can hardly cope with it. In *Sorry*, the surroundings of Broome are presented in a rather negative way, reflecting a “European” opinion: Apart from its inhabitants, the rural area around Broome is described as a place with “boab trees, mud flats, mangy wandering dogs” (*Sorry* 15) and Broome itself has “[p]earling luggers, caught by the receding tide, listed in despondent formations beyond mangrove swamps” (*Sorry* 15). An even more negative and threatening depiction of Broome and its surroundings is given in the second chapter of the novel. The surroundings of the little shack, where the newly-arrived Europeans intend to live in, are not described. Instead, the first impres-

sion the reader gets of the new home, is through the eyes of Stella, who realises that a storm is approaching:

The wind in the scrubland was sear and soprano. It burned and sang. When it was high, it hoisted eddies of umber dirt, so that the air filled with grit and was choking and dry. There were swollen forms of spirals and belly shapes moving across the land; Stella found them eerie and preternatural. She learned to bring in the washing so that it would not be coated with dirt, and to close the doors and the shutters until the dust storms departed. (*Sorry* 17-18)

On the one hand, this description of the forces of nature gives a threatening picture of Australia and these reflections clearly show that the narrating person has not voluntarily gone to this continent. But on the other hand, an anticipation is given, namely that the character – Stella – will one day learn to cope with it, at least partially.

To sum up, the nature and meteorological phenomena presented are unmistakably Australian and cannot be misidentified with any other part in the world. The picture transmitted corresponds largely with common stereotypes of an inhospitable desert country with little vegetation and a unique fauna – threatening and fascinating at the same time. In other words, this pronounced Australian background is especially created by the portrayal of the outback, which includes images of the desert and salt lakes.

1.1.1.2. **Living in Urban Areas**

Apart from the representation of the Australian landscape also urban centres are described. In *Sorry*, with Broome and Perth, one town and one city are contrasted. In *Black Mirror*, no conurbations are mentioned by name, except Melbourne, but it is only part of the memories or a concept in the minds of some characters (Miss Tilly, Rose and Herbert Morrell, Victoria) and does not serve as a setting. Victoria Morrell's childhood memories as well as Anna Griffin's recollections refer to a nameless goldmining town in Western Australia, surrounded by the desert (see *Black Mirror* 55 and 164). According to the time frame of the novels, the analysis of the towns or cities mentioned starts with the unknown town in the goldfields around World War I, followed by Broome and Perth in the 1930s and 1940s. The views of these centres are mainly used in order to display historical events or socio-economic developments that are characteristic of Australia's past.

The **remote town in the desert** in *Black Mirror* does not have a name and can therefore be interpreted as a symbol of any town built in Western Australia during the gold rush

at the beginning of the 20th century. The equation of this unnamed town with Kalgoorlie (see Brady; Armstrong 39; Genoni 162; Jacobs 199) cannot be deduced from the novel. However, at the time of the gold rush, especially from 1890 onwards, Kalgoorlie was one of the major centres for mining in Western Australia (see Peel 32; Hagemann 70-71), which makes the proposed identification plausible. Finally, on my request, the author herself has verified this assumption: Kalgoorlie indeed served as a model for the mining town because Gail Jones has personal relations to this town since her father as well as her grandfather had worked in the mines.¹

According to the detailed portrayal, the mining town in the novel is intended to be rather large and is located “in the Western Australian goldfields” (*Black Mirror* 164). The fact that many settlements were created during the gold rush and then developed into some of the noisiest towns in Australia because of the mining-machinery, is impressively, but also critically depicted in *Black Mirror*:

[T]his town gold-rushed into the desert and left there booming [...], indecorous and hotch-potch, infernally heat-blasted, and also rendered mirage-like by suspensions of smoke and red dust. Solidity and dissolution were oddly combined. [...] Poppet heads poked up everywhere indicating major shafts; then there were boilers, chimney stacks, crushers and furnaces, as well as timber yards, tailing dumps, workers' shacks, and hotels. Not to mention condensers, cyanide plants, brothels and churches; railways, electric trams, horses and carts. Over everything, too, hung a prodigious din, since this was reputedly the noisiest town in Australia. There were already four hundred stampers and fifty crushing mills, and the sound of numerous air-compressors continually throbbed. [...] The town was rip-roaring and uproarious, a greedy myth made visible. (*Black Mirror* 168)

Situated on the west coast of Australia, approximately 2200 km north of Perth, the literary **Broome** in the 1930s and 1940s is presented as a multicultural place: “This was largely an Asian and Aboriginal town, built around the pearling and cattle industries. There were Japanese and Malay pearl divers, Chinese tradesmen, Aboriginal stockworkers, a tiny white community of owners and managers” (*Sorry* 15). Based on historical research, Gail Jones' detailed account of life in Broome corresponds to reality (see Jones, “A Dreaming” 12-17). So does her description of historical events, for instance the relocation for internment of Japanese families (see *Sorry* 114) after the attack on Pearl Harbor “at 8 a.m. on 7 December 1941” (*Sorry* 110), or the Japanese air raid

¹ I owe this information to Gail Jones herself, who was so kind as to answer my questions directly via e-mail (22/03/2010). However, since my analysis should be based only on the contents of the novels, I will not use the name Kalgoorlie when writing about the remote desert town in *Black Mirror*.

against Broome that was carried out on 3 March 1942. In the novel, the situation in Broome is described as follows:

In the town of Broome, everything had slowed down but the flow of displaced persons. With five hundred Japanese pearl divers and their families interned, things were quiet; the pearling industry was sunk. [...] Since Broome was a fuelling depot on the way to somewhere safe, American service personnel from the Philippines, rich businessmen from Asia, stray families like Perdita's, were all in transit. So too were Dutch refugees from Java. Catalinas, Dorniers and Empires rested in Roebuck Bay [...]. (*Sorry* 126)

Concerning the air raid, even the name of the fighter plane is mentioned in *Sorry*, showing that all the historical details used for the novel were researched well. Historically speaking, this attack (see *Sorry* 130-132) symbolizes the direct involvement of Australia in World War II, which was extremely important with regard to the process of creating an Australian national identity. For further details on this topic, see the chapter on "Australia at War" (1.1.2.2.).

Perth is also explicitly mentioned as a setting in *Sorry*, but this city is mostly described from the point of view of one character – Perdita. At war time, Perth is described as follows: "[...] an ordinary city street, with tramlines and rows of shops and electric lights affixed to poles [...]. From outside came a clanking, screeching, steely sound, like sheets of metal being torn apart" (*Sorry* 138). This sound was created by a tram rattling past. For a European reader, this description might evoke the impression that compared to Broome, Perth seems to have a rather "European" character, at least it is described as a "white city" (*Sorry* 149). Another description of the city life in Perth is fairly negative and again the reference to time is given: "It was no brave new world, but bleached and empty. The people in it were worn down by scarcities of war-time, and not particularly sympathetic to an English widow and her peculiar daughter" (*Sorry* 138). From Perdita's point of view, Perth is described as being "overall [...] boring and unmonumental" (*Sorry* 116). Only the discovery of the Swan River – a sign of nature in the city – is depicted as a relief to Perdita: "[f]or the first time, too, she truly saw the river. By late afternoon there was a purplish bloom on the water, and for all her disappointments she had to admit that it was remarkable in its beauty" (*Sorry* 148). The city of Perth without the aspect of nature is just "an ugly city" with streets, shops and trams (*Sorry* 149), but adding the Swan River, as a part of Australia's nature, there is at least something beautiful in this seemingly European city.

To conclude the chapters on nature and urban areas, the obvious portrayal of the Australian landscape as well as flora and fauna leads to an unambiguous localization of the narratives. Moreover, this effect is intensified by the depiction of towns and cities: by using them as background for typically Australian socio-economic phenomena (e.g. the gold rush) and important historical events (e.g. the Japanese air raid), the unmistakable depiction of Western Australia is further enhanced, both historically and geographically.

1.1.2. Historical Themes

The historical topics mentioned are central themes of Australia's past. The order of events in this chapter is not chronologically motivated but according to their importance for the characters. Since the topics of racism and the impact of colonialism on the aboriginal population are dominant in the two novels chosen, attention will be mainly focussed on this area rather than on the Australian participation in the First and the Second World War.

1.1.2.1. Racism, Colonialism and British Culture in Australia

The British rule over Australia, beginning in 1788, led to a massive transfer of culture and religion, but also of moral attitudes. In other words, the Australian indigenous population was influenced by the British colonialists, which mostly meant suppression. Gail Jones' novels show three aspects related to colonialism: the "civilizing" of Aboriginal people, racist ideas which are inherent in some characters and the economic aspects of colonialism. However, further details with regard to the topic of acculturation will be given in the chapter on Aboriginal people (see chapter 2.1.).

The best literary examples of characters being extremely colonialist-minded in Jones' novels are Nicholas Keene and Herbert Morrell, the father figures in *Sorry* and *Black Mirror* respectively: Both are migrants who move from England to Australia and who live and work in Australia but still long for "Britishness" and believe in the British Empire and its supremacy especially over native Australians.

The novel *Black Mirror* uses **Herbert Morrell** to give an example of the colonial opinions many European migrants held and he can be seen as "a personification of the modern, industrial spirit" (Genoni 162). This character is defined in terms of "his passion for collecting "objects on a criterion of radical unAustralianness" (*Black Mirror* 156), his

desire for ranking the races of the world (see *Black Mirror* 158, see Oreb 118), his obsession with expanding “his interests in gold exploration” (*Black Mirror* 164) and with making money (see *Black Mirror* 164). Moreover, he strives to create a nation called “New Britain” by means of economy (see *Black Mirror* 159). “For Morrell, the iconic imperial coloniser of Australia’s depths as well as its surfaces, the ‘magnitude of his investment’ in mineral exploration is a matter of valorisation that not only invokes but thrice exceeds the pinnacle of modernist achievement” (Roughley 63), for he is extremely proud that the depth of his mines is three times the height of the Eiffel Tower (*Black Mirror* 169).

This character despises anything that is Australian and wants to make it British. Consequently, his ranking of races compares other nations to the British Civilization:

Herbert Morrell had opinions on every race and nation on earth and had systematically ranked them. At the top of the list, at one hundred per cent, he placed Great Britain, Great Britain the incomparable. This was the nation he considered peerless in its qualities and achievements. [...] Other races and nations (for he mentally conflated them) fell away in the steep declension of imperfection [...] At the bottom of his scale were the Australian Aborigines, a people whom Herbert considered despicable since they were without markets, commodities and evidence of artistry, and moreover refused all blandishments of Civilisation. (*Black Mirror* 158-159)

The narrator, the biographer Anna Griffin, presents Herbert Morrell as a greedy, paranoid mine owner in Western Australia whose only purpose in life is the desire of expanding his gold mining business (see *Black Mirror* 164). His concentration on industry and the economy is clearly a colonialist point of view that cannot be compared to the philosophy of Aboriginal people, who live in harmony with nature, believe in spirits and decide on the holiness of certain places (see *Black Mirror* 301 and 53). The comparison between the newly arrived miners and the indigenous people of Australia is discussed in *Black Mirror* in the following way: “The indigenous people, the Maduwongga, had myths to account for the amplitude of the desert, its landforms and weather; but the migrant miners, mythically bereft and excommunicated, worshipped wealth and industry” (*Black Mirror* 53).

Moreover, Herbert Morrell can clearly be seen as a colonialist who believes in improving the Australian economy because his “[...] mine produces wealth, employment and national stability, and contributes daily to the Australian Gross National Product” (*Black Mirror* 171). Morrell’s concept of “New Britain” does not include any Aboriginal inhabitants at all for he states that “Australia would advance [...] only when the ex-

tirpation of the Aborigine was complete" (*Black Mirror* 159). This brutal and racist attitude is part of the larger concept of a "nation renamed New Britain" (*Black Mirror* 159) in which the flora should be adapted to the British Isle, since nature is intended to be "converted entirely by hedgerows and elms" (*Black Mirror* 159), which *again* shows the obsession with Great Britain, which was typical of many colonialists.

The other novel, *Sorry*, uses the character of **Nicholas Keene** to personify colonialist ideas. He is described in the following way:

[He] decided he must uncover the mystery of what he liked to call 'elemental man'. His theories on human development and the diversity of cultures were imperial and arrogant. He thought tribal peoples base, unintelligent and equivalent to children, but also that they held in their behaviour and beliefs the origins of sex, aggression and identity. He believed in the British Empire, in its rights of governance. (*Sorry* 7)

Through anthropological research Nicholas wants to prove the presumed inferiority of Aboriginal people. In this point Jones' narrative coincides with historical reality: the justification for the oppression of the indigenous population was based mainly on anthropological arguments (see Peel 40-41). The first-person narrator of the novel, Perdita, also underlines that Nicholas, her father, can be seen as a colonialist by explicitly stating that he "felt once again heroic [in Australia]. He was a frontiersman, white, filled with colonial aspiration" (*Sorry* 14) and sees himself as a man "on a mission" (*Sorry* 15), who intends to make a name by investigating an Aboriginal family group. The racist aspect becomes even clearer when reading the term used for this group: "They would be the subjects, or rather, the objects, of his research. They looked, he thought, rather mundane, not noble savages or extraordinary specimens of humanity" (*Sorry* 19). This statement shows that the character is convinced of the inferiority of Aboriginal people because he uses the term "object", and the pejorative word "specimen" instead of "persons" even underlines his negative and racist opinion towards the indigenous population.

Similarly to the attitude of the "typical" colonialist Herbert Morrell in *Black Mirror*, the anthropological studies of Nicholas Keene also come to the conclusion that Aboriginal Australians seem to be not fit for the modern world because they prefer the concept of family instead of competition, money-making and wealth:

For Aboriginal people, he said, kin was organisation, the structure of rule, obligation, system, code. [...] Nicholas added that kin would have to be destroyed if Aborigines were to enter the modern world. It made them share everything, he said, so they were always poor and could never accumulate property. It

made them think in communal, not individual terms, so that they were always bound to the past, to tribal savagery. (*Sorry* 71)

In both novels, three minor characters also support racist ideas like the need for cultural adaptation and the inferiority of the Aboriginal population: Miss Casey in *Black Mirror* and Captain Smith as well as Mrs Trevor in *Sorry*. The character of **Miss Casey** can be seen even more racist than her boss, Herbert Morrell, because she even refuses “to live in a house with a black woman and her bastard” (*Black Mirror* 182). Miss Casey is described as thinking “Lily-white an animal” (*Black Mirror* 182) and as openly despising Ruby – Lily-white and Herbert Morrell’s child.

The other minor characters personifying colonialist ideas are **Captain Smith**, whom Nicholas encounters when travelling up the west coast (to Broome), and Mrs Trevor, Nicholas Keene’s neighbour. Supplying Nicholas with “semi-local knowledge” (*Sorry* 12) about the Aboriginal population, Captain Smith also supports the idea that the research on indigenous people “would be useful in their management and control” (*Sorry* 12). The character of Captain Smith has racist opinions similar to Herbert Morrell’s in *Black Mirror*: “The Aborigine, he said, like all primitive peoples, had a tendency to expire on contact with a superior race. It was the sad duty of the Civilised Man to raise or erase lesser humans, to enable the March of Progress and the Completion of God’s Plan” (*Sorry* 12). Racism is here justified on religious grounds, which will be further investigated in the chapter dealing with the Stolen Generations (see chapter 2.1.). The function of Captain Smith as a character in the novel is to represent the “average” Australian who was raised in a colonial Australia and supports the idea of white superiority and of the predestined duty to acculturate and to convert the Aboriginal Australians. Captain Smith believes that the extinction or acculturation of the indigenous population is God’s will, and must therefore be exercised by white Australians like him.

Compared to the captain, Nicholas Keene’s position seems to be more intellectual, claiming to do anthropological studies. In fact, his approach represents the research of many real anthropologists who helped to form the backbone of scientifically based racism². However, Nicholas’ despise for the indigenous population is not only limited to scientific research: the reader learns that Nicholas is an extremely violent person, especially with regard to Aboriginal women whom he hits and rapes frequently.

² For more information on racism based on anthropological research see Peel 40-41.

The other minor character in *Sorry* representing colonialist ideas is **Mrs Trevor**, who also believes in “civilising” young “‘half-caste’ girls” (*Sorry* 22), by teaching them how to cook and clean. The narrator states that “Mrs Trevor – Vera – thought it her duty to civilise them, and to teach them good behaviour and habits of tidiness, to induct them into submission and quiet compliance” (*Sorry* 22). This attitude of white superiority embodied by Mrs Trevor in reality provided the ideological background of the forced acculturation of Aboriginal children, known as the Stolen Generations (see chapter 2.1.).

To sum up, the idea of excluding Aboriginal people or of changing their traditions or familial structures in order to create a rich, modern nation with great economical power is a common idea held by several characters in both novels. The two characters described in greater detail– Herbert Morrell and Nicholas Keene – can be seen as representatives of colonialism. Especially Herbert Morrell is presented in a one-dimensional way, being reduced to racist and capitalist attitudes only. In a way, Nicholas Keene might be interpreted as a more elaborate version of the character of Herbert Morrell because he also sees some good qualities in Aboriginal people: For instance, Nicholas needs an Aboriginal man called Willie to translate for him and to teach him the native language. When following Willie, Nicholas gradually begins “to admire the black man’s hard labour, and his dignified care in the explanation of his own words” (*Sorry* 39), but he still mistrusts him. Another example of appreciating at least some characteristics of indigenous people is the incident when Nicholas describes “a desert man in Broome” (*Sorry* 59), calling him an “important man of Law [who] knew things [...] that he would describe and uncover” (*Sorry* 59).

This chapter shows that many characters created by Gail Jones embody different colonialist ideas: not only is the economic exploitation made the subject of discussion, but also science-based racism, as well as the mission to civilize the indigenous population.

1.1.2.2. **Australia at War**

This chapter deals with the historical context of both novels which show the role Australia played in the two World Wars. While in *Black Mirror* there are only some allusions to the effects of the First World War with regard to Australian veterans, the Second World War is a vital part of the setting in *Sorry*. The Second World War is also part of several memories in *Black Mirror*, but since the events mentioned take place in Paris,

they can be neglected for the following analysis. This chapter mainly tries to show how the effects of each war on Australia are depicted.

In *Black Mirror*, there are only some references to the **First World War** (see *Black Mirror* 175 and 177). In these descriptions it becomes clear that Australia was not directly concerned because there was no fighting on Australian soil, but indirectly through Australian troops that served as units in the British Armed Forces in Battles in Northern Africa and Europe, e.g. in the Gallipoli-Campaign (see Voigt 27; Peel 65-66). Of the 30,000 Australian soldiers fighting in the First World War, 15,000 were seriously injured, sometimes even mutilated, when they were fighting for Great Britain, which was seen as their "motherland" (see Peel 67). In the novel, these returned men are described as people lingering miserably in the streets, without arms or legs, and some of them being mentally disturbed because of mustard gas that was used in the war (see *Black Mirror* 177). According to Herbert Morrell, these men are not heroes but "unmanly with tears and displaying embarrassing disabilities" (*Black Mirror* 177), and he finds it irritating that despite their experiences these "limbless men still wore their khaki uniforms, folded back, flapping and pinned up where the arm or leg used to be" (*Black Mirror* 177). He, as a personification of the successful business man in the novel, also criticises the participation of Australian men in the war and fears for his plans, knowing "his projected economic empire on the brink of collapse. New Britain was more and more implausible [...]" (*Black Mirror* 177). He sees that "[g]old profits were in decline, good workers were daily disappearing to enlist (seduced by handsome men in khaki with plumed hats and horses) and the mines were full of Enemy Aliens all plotting revolution [...] or stealing gold [...]" (*Black Mirror* 175).

In *Sorry*, the **Second World War** is frequently used as the background: Initially, it is only perceptible to the reader because of Nicholas' newspaper cuttings on the wall of their little shack (e.g. see *Sorry* 63 and 66) and his enthusiasm for the war. This is a clear allusion to the fact that Australia and its inhabitants are at first only spectators of the war raging in Europe, which corresponds with historical reality (see Peel 80-81 and Hagemann 94-95). For instance, Perdita reads in the newspapers that the German soldiers have killed "Jews at Kiev on 29 September [1941], as the Germans began their advance on Moscow" (*Sorry* 102). Two non-Aboriginal Australians in the novel try to enlist in the British army, however, both examples mentioned – Nicholas Keene and Mr Trevor – do not meet the requirements (see *Sorry* 40 and 115 respectively). Only gradually the direct involvement of Australia is recognizable because Australia is menaced by

Japanese troops and the fear of the war becomes increasingly perceptible to the reader, for example when Mr Trevor fuels the fear of violations committed against “English women” (*Sorry* 115), a cliché which was nurtured in novels and propaganda since the late 19th century (see Peel 58). The graphic depiction of the war reaches its peak with the Japanese air raid against Broome on 3 March 1942 (see *Sorry* 130-132). As already shown above (see chapter 1.1.1.2. on the depiction on Broome), these scenes are based on diligent historical research on the part of the author, Gail Jones.

Besides the historical descriptions, the narrators of both novels also give some insights into the mentality of several characters during the time of the two World Wars: Many whites in *Sorry* and *Black Mirror* consider themselves “British” or “English”, but there is no sense of belonging to Australia. To be precise, Nicholas and Stella Keene, Mr and Mrs Trevor, as well as Herbert Morrell in *Black Mirror* are typical examples of immigrants living in Australia who preserve the traditions and morality (see *Sorry* 36) of their mother country England. Concerning this attitude, an allusion to the educational system in Australia is given in *Sorry*, when Perdita discovers that “the history of the monarchs of England [...] was clearly the backbone of Australian education” (*Sorry* 141).

Fighting as a white Australian in the wars traditionally signified fighting for Great Britain. Johannes Voigt states in his article “Origins of the Australian National Consciousness” that Australia was a land of immigration, which meant that “the composition there remained subject to constant transformation and it remained colonially dependent for a long time and closely linked to her mother country, Great Britain, and the metropolis” (Voigt 19). According to him, it is true that the origins of Australian national consciousness already reached back to the second half of the 19th century but that the ties to the mother country were not noticeably loosened (see Voigt 20). This clinging to old traditions and European heritage is characteristic of Australia’s society, even after the establishment of an autonomous government in the middle of the 19th century (see Peele 37):

The desire to see one’s home country back again is, in general, inherent to every migrant but on that far removed continent it appears to be more marked than anywhere else. And this goal that the first generations did not manage to achieve was adopted by the second and third generations who still called the mother country “home” at a time when the Australian national identity had already been formed. (Voigt 20)

Johannes Voigt underlines this information, saying that Australia was “a European populated country, subject to the Crown, integrated into the British Empire, and a Western oriented state” (23). The First World War was the initial phase in the artificial creation of an Australian national consciousness, which was “manipulated propagandistically in order to keep the enthusiasm alive and win over the necessary volunteers” (Voigt 27). Despite being part of the British army, the inhabitants of Oceania fought together in the “Australian and New Zealand Army Corps” (ANZACS). Their duty, however, was not to defend their homes but to fight for English interests in the Mediterranean (see Voigt 27; Hagemann 86-87; Peel 65).

An obvious break with Britain only happened during the Second World War, when Canberra rejected Churchill's request to send Australian troops to Malaysia. Facing the Japanese threat, it seemed more important to defend their own country than to pursue British interests. Furthermore, Great Britain obviously was no longer able to guarantee the safety of its colonies. This step was probably the decisive factor for the formation of the Australian national consciousness: Australia's “own interests were placed above those of the mother country and those of the Empire. The Australian national identity dominated over the loyalty to the Empire/Commonwealth” (Voigt 29, see also Peel 81 and McKenna 9).

To conclude, the Second World War is seen as a turning point in Australian history, especially concerning the development of its own national identity that replaces the close bond to Great Britain. In *Sorry*, the Second World War can also be seen as a decision point because it tremendously changes the lives of the characters: after the death of Nicholas – around 1940 – Stella and her daughter move to Broome and later to Perth, where they lead a completely different life in an urban area, far away from their old home in the outback. In the old shack in the surroundings of Broome, Stella did not go to work and spent her days reading, sewing and sleeping and Perdita did not go to school but was “taught at home, inefficiently, [and] erratically” (*Sorry* 35) by her mother. In Perth, Stella has to gain Perdita's and her living by working in a florist's shop and her daughter must go to school. Moreover, both profit from electricity and running water as well as the public transport in Perth. Similar to Perdita's life, also Australian society changed in the course of the Second World War. One of the most important outcomes of the traumatic experiences was the creation of some kind of national identity as a consequence of the Japanese threat. The “old” Australian society had been influenced by the ideas of colonialism and consequently tried to keep British culture

alive. Even after the war, however, there was no radical shift and the sense of being only a British colony still remained strong. But slowly, the new generations became more and more rooted in Australia. Furnished with some kind of a national consciousness, their native country became more important to them than the “old”, colonial one (see Peel 19). Examples of the old generation in *Sorry* are Stella (see chapter 1.2.2.2.) and Nicholas (see chapter 1.2.2.3.): both are immigrants from England who move to Australia but who do not adapt to different circumstances in the target country, such as climate, nature or customs. Both characters also insist on the superiority of English culture against the Aboriginal one. In contrast to them, their daughter Perdita can be seen as a symbol of a new, post-war society because she really sees Australia as her motherland and is rooted in it, having grown up there and even trying to establish contact to the indigenous population (see chapter 1.2.2.1.).

Therefore I suppose that the historical time span in *Sorry*, including World War II, is chosen intentionally: Gail Jones presumably wants to point out the change in Australian identity: There is reason to believe that Perdita is the allegory of post-war generations that have got rid of colonialist ideas and try to approach the Aboriginal population, but that cannot successfully remove all the mistakes of former generations.

1.2. Fictional Australia – Subjective Perceptions of a Continent

The depiction of Australia in *Black Mirror* and in *Sorry* is not only confined to the historical background, but the country is also reflected in descriptions of landscapes and in different subjective opinions that the characters in the novels hold. Starting with the European stereotypes of Australia which are presented in the novels, the following chapters also will analyse the different connotations of Australia for the fictional characters as well as their subjective impressions of this country.

1.2.1. Stereotypical Views of Australia in Europe

In *Black Mirror*, especially the Parisian surrealists are represented as people who obstinately believe in stereotypes about Australia, clinging to the picture of a dark and very exotic continent, like Africa (see *Black Mirror* 20 and 145). The fictional surrealists of

the 1930s do not address Victoria properly, instead, they merely reduce her personality to the aspect of nationality by calling her "l'Australienne" – "the Australian" (see *Black Mirror* 18, 20, 21). "It was years before some of them called her Victoria" (*Black Mirror* 21). Furthermore, they make Victoria feel that she is

suddenly endowed with symbolic accessories: bounding kangaroos, vistas of orange earth, spectral stringy eucalypts, empty dead centres, any number of odd and arresting Antepodean inversion. The mantle of Australianness descended upon her, as though an invisible parasol had collapsed, leaving her drenched in novelty. She stood there bedraggled, pre-empted by nationhood. (*Black Mirror* 18)

At first, Victoria is ashamed and angry that she is reduced to nationality only, and she imagines cynically that the Surrealists might not "call her by her emblem" (*Black Mirror* 22) if she tattooed a map of Australia on her forehead (see *Black Mirror* 21-22): seeing the map would be "too unSurreal and literal-minded for them" (*Black Mirror* 21-22) so that they would probably cease to call her "l'Australienne". Interestingly, Victoria also says about the surrealists that they do not believe in nations. However, they reduce Victoria to a representative of Australia (see *Black Mirror* 22), most likely because they see this continent as a symbol for the primitiveness of humanity, which they are fascinated with. In this sense, Australia takes on the same role as Africa, namely that of a "dark continent" which especially the fictional character of André Breton is fascinated by: "He speculated on primitivist urges and waxed racist on Black Venuses. Their cunts, Breton declared, are our mystery, our homecoming. They are the darkest most unconscious places we know. Nature with no lights on" (see *Black Mirror* 144-145).

Breton's racist opinions are also reflected in a song about Australia including these verses: "black and black and black and black / black is the body continent / at which we force frontiers, / black is the juicy jungle, the tasty convolutions, / the monkeys, the monkeys, / the razors invading" (*Black Mirror* 20). The reaction of the only Australian person present at this spectacle, Victoria, is to turn away and to feel ashamed (see *Black Mirror* 20). Although, on the one hand, André Breton signifies Paris for Victoria, and she wants to be like him, she is also repelled by his primitive racist views (see *Black Mirror* 145). This situation makes it clear that Victoria's opinion about the surrealist has developed formerly: "Victoria *had* carried her own nationality like an inferiority complex, convinced of the superiority of all-things-European" [emphasis added] (*Black Mirror* 145). Despite the stereotypical views Victoria is confronted with, she demonstratively adopts an Australian identity (see chapter 1.2.2.1.).

Another character in *Black Mirror* that can be seen as typical of the European view of Australia is Mrs Dooley, who tells Anna that her nephew is living in Australia, too “with that heat and all, and the no-snow Christmases, and the kangaroos, and the desert, and the black people with pointy spears” (*Black Mirror* 34). While the French surrealists reduce Australia – as a second Africa – to its stereotypical role as some kind of the cradle of mankind, the prejudices uttered by Mrs Dooley are less philosophical: To her, Australia is, above all, simply an unknown and exotic part of the world, with unusual climatic phenomena, with hardly imaginable animals and with uncivilised human beings. Her view presumably mirrors the opinion of an average European with limited knowledge of the world. In this context it is remarkable that the same stereotypical views are attributed to Stella and Nicholas Keene in *Sorry*: There are two incidents when Australia is seen from a European position, namely before Nicholas and Stella go to this continent. Stella designates Australia as “the dark side of the planet” (*Sorry* 9) and the narrator says that Nicholas, as an anthropologist, only “chose Australia for his field work because it appealed to his sense of the insane: what intelligent Englishman would go willingly to Australia? A black continent, certainly, full of intractable mysteries” (*Sorry* 11). These two quotations show a negative view that is extremely superficial and typical of Europeans who have not had any contact with Australia apart from some rumours. The parallels to the character of Mrs Dooley, who voices her opinion of the “dark continent” in the 1990s, approximately sixty years³ after the Keenes (who expressed their prejudices in 1930), might be seen as an allusion that the stereotypes of Australia among the Europeans have not changed significantly throughout the centuries.

1.2.2. What Australia Means to Some of the Characters

Apart from several stereotypes expressed by European characters in both novels, Australia is also viewed differently by many characters living there. The spectrum of perceptions reaches from the identification with Australia as a home to the ancient cliché of Australia as a location of exile.

³ This is the result of my personal calculations: The characters of Nicholas and Stella Keene leave England in 1930 (see *Sorry* 11). In *Black Mirror* it is not said, when exactly Anna Griffins comes to London in order to research for the biography of Victoria Morrell. We do know, however, that Victoria “was born in Melbourne, Australia, in 1910” (*Black Mirror* 156) and that “when Ruby was born [...] she must have been seven or so” (*Black Mirror* 181). When Anna visits her home town after Victoria’s death, she meets Ruby who at this time “was about eighty years old” (*Black Mirror* 284). If we thus assume that Ruby was born in 1917, Anna’s visits to London and to Australia must be set in the late 1990ies. So Mrs Dooley’s prejudices against Australia are also placed in the late 1990s.

1.2.2.1. Home/Refuge

In some way Australia is perceived as homeland by all female protagonists (Victoria, Anna, and Perdita) of the novels *Sorry* and *Black Mirror*. In each case, however, the relation between the characters and Australia cannot simply be reduced to mere patriotism or national consciousness. In the following chapter I will analyse the reasons for the perception of Australia as a home and the intensity of the connection to it.

When **Victoria Morrell** leaves Australia, she does not depart because of the country itself, but only as a consequence of the problems she had to face: Having given up her baby for adoption, Victoria decides to go to England in order to avoid public gossip and to escape from her family (see *Black Mirror* 36 and 236-237): "I persuaded my father that the only hope for my virtue and my long-term marriage prospects was to send me abroad, to London, so that I could achieve the requisite female accomplishments divorced from the taint of local scandal" (*Black Mirror* 236-237). Victoria has indeed no reasons to stay in Australia because going to Europe also means fleeing from her family, especially from her cruel brother Henry, who was responsible for the death of Louis Bell, Victoria's first true love and the father of her child (see *Black Mirror* 233-235).

As already mentioned above (see chapter 1.2.1.), in Europe – especially in Paris – Victoria is reduced to her nationality ("L'Australienne", e.g. *Black Mirror* 20-21) and she feels like "a colonial. Lost." (*Black Mirror* 36). Apart from her relationship with Jules and her friendship to her step-sister Frances, she never seems to overcome her isolation, neither in Paris nor in London. Victoria sees her Australian identity as a burden and suffers from "an inferiority complex" (*Black Mirror* 145). At the same time she shows her connection to Australia openly by wearing black feathers as a headdress (see *Black Mirror* 17, 110, 129, 142, 222): "Upon her head she wore a crown of long black feathers, which quivered as though still expressing a will to flight" (*Black Mirror* 17). Later, Victoria's feathers are described as being "so dark that they had an oily sheen" (*Black Mirror* 129), and they are clearly swan feathers because Victoria greets her biographer, Anna, as follows: "In your honour I am wearing swans" (*Black Mirror* 17).

The black swan (*Cygnus atratus*) lives in the wetlands of Australia. It plays an important role in Aboriginal mythology, especially among the Nyungar people, who trace their origins back to these birds. The black swan was also vital for the identity of European settlers: The first settlement in Western Australia (c. 1700) was known as the

“Swan River Colony”. From this time on, the bird appeared on bank notes, government papers and postage stamps. Furthermore, it was used on the original State Crest and incorporated in the State Coat of Arms and Commonwealth Coat of Arms. Still today, the black swan is displayed both on the official flag and the Coat of Arms of Western Australia (see figures 1-3, see “Symbols of Western Australia”).



Fig. 1: Black Swan



Fig. 2: Coat of Arms of Western Australia



Fig. 3: Flag of Western Australia

The frequent use of the black swan in the history of Western Australia as well as in the novel *Black Mirror* makes it obvious that the animal serves as a symbol of Australian identity. Feeling lost and lonely in Paris, Victoria chooses her headdress with feathers of black swans as an unambiguous symbol of her origins. This explicit identification makes her feel part of a larger community, even if only virtually. From this chosen group-identity she gains self-confidence: “Her head-dress of swan’s feathers makes her appear tall and archaic, like some excavated goddess” (*Black Mirror* 84).

This pronounced Australian identity is in some ways constructed merely artificially. In fact, Victoria is not that firmly rooted in Australia. Born in 1910 (see *Black Mirror* 156) in a British colony, Victoria is a typical representative of generations of Australians growing up with a distinctly English dominated background. Due to her father’s con-

tempt for all things Australian, Victoria grew up in a house furnished with objects from all over the world except Australia (see *Black Mirror* 47, 156). However, Victoria does not share her father's "radical unAustralianness" (*Black Mirror* 156): At least she associates with indigenous Australians and finally even sees Lily-White as her mother (*Black Mirror* 118 and 192). Nevertheless, Victoria remains – culturally seen – part of Western civilization and her ties to Australia do not seem to be very close after having emigrated to Europe: Victoria is "still believing in Mother-countries" (*Black Mirror* 36) and wonders as an old lady: "How had she [her younger self] come across the ocean yearning for mother-England, and ended up in this red drawing room, clenching her gloved hands, anxious for approval and known only as a nation?" (*Black Mirror* 22). Besides, when Victoria thinks of Australia on a hot summer's day in London, "it was perhaps her *only* [emphasis added] true adult moment of radical nostalgia" (*Black Mirror* 67-68).

Obviously, Victoria's "Australian" identity is not based on cultural entrenchment or emotional ties but can rather be interpreted as an artificial construct helping her to overcome her isolation. This hypothesis would at least explain Victoria's inner conflict, which becomes apparent while being under hypnosis: When asked to name the creature she sees herself as, she answers "[s]wan and not swan" (*Black Mirror* 91). Although pretending to be closely tied to Australia, Victoria's subconscious reveals to the reader that she actually feels homeless. Her wish to be fully Australian is perhaps recognizable in Victoria's last will: after her death her ash is "mingled with her swan's feather head-dress" (*Black Mirror* 277) and brought back to Australia (see *Black Mirror* 277), which shows a last effort to become one with her home country.

While doing research on Victoria Morrell's life, **Anna Griffin** also reveals some childhood memories. The readers get to know that both women grew up in the same remote town in the goldfields in Western Australia. In order to do research on Victoria's biography Anna moves to London and lives in a boarding house (see *Black Mirror* 101), which indicates that the stay in England is only temporary.

In fact, the reader neither knows who has commissioned the young woman to write the biography nor where she actually comes from: Anna probably still lives in an Australian city, which is certainly not the one she was born in. When she returns to her home town after Victoria's death, the narrator states that "Anna has not been in her town on the goldfields for many years" (*Black Mirror* 278). Even though the reader cannot be sure

about Anna's real place of residence, it becomes clear that she feels lonesome in London. Therefore she starts a relationship with Winston Field, a married Jamaican man who is studying Shakespeare in London and whose blackness and isolation attract her (see *Black Mirror* 99, 101, 102, 105). Stating explicitly that she "adores the night of his skin" (*Black Mirror* 99) and that she considers him her "new-found land" (*Black Mirror* 99), a parallel between Winston's blackness and Australia can be drawn. The assumption that he serves as a surrogate for her home country is confirmed by the Jamaican himself. Being infuriated he says, "I will not be your fucking dark continent" (*Black Mirror* 98 and 102). Therefore, the relationship with Winston may indicate Anna's homesickness. This theory is strengthened by the scene of her return to Australia: Anna visits her home town in order to deliver "Victoria's ashen remains to her long-lost sister, Ruby" (*Black Mirror* 277). When she comes to see her father and his new female companion, "her homecoming almost moves Anna to tears" (*Black Mirror* 281) thanks to the loving care of her stepmother Lola.

To conclude, it is unknown where the character of Anna Griffin lives. There are reasons, however, to assume that she sticks to her Australian origins and feels uprooted when being abroad and relieved when returning home.

Like the two protagonists of *Black Mirror*, the main character in *Sorry*, **Perdita Keene**, was also born in Australia (see *Sorry* 24). In contrast to her parents Stella and Nicholas Keene, who are English migrants and who are hardly able to adapt to the new circumstances, Perdita is firmly rooted in this country. Australia is not only her home, but also a refuge. In order to escape domestic violence she once flees into the bush and is calmed by the peacefulness of Australia's nature (see *Sorry* 34). She is comforted by the presence of "three rust-coloured kangaroos" (*Sorry* 34) and it is exactly this experience that helps her to see that "the world is *also* still and calm without collisions; the world is *also* these fond, benevolent presences, fur-warm and comforting, wanting nothing, silent" (*Sorry* 35). Another example of searching refuge in Australian nature is when her best friend Mary is sent to prison and Perdita is so lonely that she decides to hide in an old boab tree with the intention of never coming out again (see *Sorry* 111).

A deeper understanding of Australia's nature is created through the contact to the indigenous population, mostly represented by Mary. With her help, Perdita even succeeds to be integrated in the community of the Walmajarri people. Especially on two occasions Perdita's wish to be accepted by them becomes apparent: When she is invited to

sit around the fire and to drink tea with the Aboriginal women of Mary's people, she is at first disgusted by the tea offered to her, but "[s]he wanted, for Mary's sake, to drink the terrible tea. She wanted to show that she was part of the group. Not to be subtracted, as she was in her parents' presence" (*Sorry* 69). Perdita is even more accepted after having brought a bagged snake to the Walmajarri camp. Mary and Perdita "held the snake up high, not a trophy, but an offering, and not mere food, but evidence of their special connection" (*Sorry* 70). Finally Perdita becomes a member of the Walmajarri, Mary's people (see *Sorry* 55):

[...] she learned that she – Perdita – had been given a skin group: since Mary had a designated daughterly role in relation to Madjabari, Perdita was included as a sister [...] She knew herself suddenly implicated in a wider pattern, where there would always be someone, somewhere, to know of and look after her; and she knew too of the formal recognition of her love for Mary, her sister. (*Sorry* 72)

In order to be fully accepted by her "new family", she even "wanted so much to be dark" (*Sorry* 73).

Due to her experiences, Perdita has a special connection to the outback of Broome. Her entrenchment in the surroundings of this "Asian and Aboriginal town" (*Sorry* 15) becomes particularly obvious after having moved to Perth. Although Perdita is at first "thrilled by the prospect of a move to the city" (*Sorry* 115), she is soon disappointed (see *Sorry* 116) at the ugly "white city" (*Sorry* 149). The narrator discusses Perdita's feelings of isolation and loss when leaving the well-known shack, showing that she will really miss its surroundings and the sense of belonging that she had felt in the Aboriginal community: "Perdita had yet to realise how utterly lost she would feel; how there are no replacements, ever, for the locations of childhood and their avid, intensified, blazing encounters. There are no substitutions. There are no cunning devices that make exile any less definitive" (*Sorry* 117).

At an allegorical level, Perdita's sense of belonging towards Australia is more complex. As already shown in chapter 1.1.2.2. (Australia at War), Perdita's parents might represent the pre-war Australian society with strong ties to Great Britain. They also symbolize the European feeling of superiority (see chapter 1.1.2.1.) and the European ideals of education, which are obvious, for instance, when Stella claims that Shakespeare is her religion and that "[h]e answers all the big questions" (*Sorry* 129). Her daughter Perdita, who was already born in Australia, is generally no longer interested in Great Britain. She symbolizes the Australian generations after the Second World War, a time when the

Australian national consciousness intensified. Perdita thus accepts Aboriginal people – contrary to the older generation – and even learns from them. But she is still neither able to help, nor to excuse herself to them. The incident of denied help refers to the scene in the novel when Nicholas rapes Mary and Perdita pretends not to realize the crime: “She [Perdita] did not want to know. She turned her face to the wall and shut her eyes” (*Sorry* 61). But further information with regard to the allegorical role of Mary will be given later (see chapter 2.3.).

In some ways, each of the female protagonists has rather close ties to Australia, where all of them were born. Perdita Keene's entrenchment is perhaps most obvious. This clarity is necessary for the narrative because Perdita can be seen as an allegorical character representing the post-war Australian society that has already developed a sense of Australian independence from Europe and that is no longer orientated exclusively towards England⁴. In this sense the function of the character is emphasized by the distinctively British/colonialist behaviour inherent in her antagonists Nicholas and Stella.

The case of Victoria Morrell is more subtle and her connection to Australia resembles rather an artificial construct than personal conviction. Although born in Melbourne in 1910, she does not seem to develop close ties to her native country. On the one hand she grows up against the radically English background of her family, represented especially by her capitalist father Herbert. On the other hand she gains at least a little insight into the Aboriginal lifestyle as well. However, the reader gets the impression that Victoria is not rooted in any of these cultures. In Europe she is soon reduced to her “Australian” nationality due to her origins and is confronted with stereotypical conceptions of an exotic and dark continent. Equating her to her native country does not make her proud, she feels inferior instead. In Paris she is lonely and isolated and therefore she – at least partly – discovers or reconstructs her Australian roots, which becomes obvious by the use of her head-dress, made of black swan feathers that symbolize her Australian origin. Finally, it can be stated that her artificially created “patriotism” is only the result of the isolation she feels in Europe.

There is not enough information about Anna Griffin in *Black Mirror*, so her attitude towards Australia cannot be fully revealed. Her relationship with Winston, however, may be seen as a compensation for the temporary loss of her home country – she seems

⁴ For more information on the topic of the “decline of the idea of Australia as a fundamentally British nation” see McKenna 2.

to be homesick. Moreover, the joy she feels when she returns to the mining town where she grew up indicates that she sees Australia as her home.

1.2.2.2. Exile and Isolation

This chapter examines Australia's role as a country of exile. The character that is mostly marked by this feeling of exile is **Stella Keene**, the character that had to move from England to Australia without her consent. Although there are two other characters – Rose Morrell and Maggie Griffin – who also feel isolated in the goldmining town of Western Australia, they will not be analysed in this chapter: not Australia *per se* means isolation and exile to them but rather the move from the city to the province within the continent. Stella on the other hand, is English and really sees Australia as a place of exile where she suffers from isolation.

Stella Grant was working in Cambridge when she met her future husband, Nicholas Keene, who dragged her “unconsulted, to the dark other-side of the planet” (*Sorry* 9). Already before her departure from England, Stella sees Australia as a place of exile and a threatening place to live in, maybe because she had not decided to move there herself or maybe because she had to leave her family, especially her favourite sister Margaret, whom Stella really loves. When talking to her daughter Perdita about love, Stella describes Margaret as the “the only person in her life [...] ever to have loved her” (*Sorry* 121). The description of Stella's memory of herself and Margaret in winter, when they were freezing and trying to warm their hands, makes it plausible to link Stella's snow dreams (see *Sorry* 19 and 20) and the recollection of snow-covered England. Therefore, Stella's dream of a snowy landscape can be interpreted as a consequence of her “cultural dislocation” (see Ley). The snow dream as well as the Spanish shawl, which was a wedding present from her sister Margaret (see *Sorry* 9-10), will remind Stella of England, where she longs to return to after the end of the war (see *Sorry* 75). “This shawl, black and tasselled and embroidered with looped patterns of scarlet poppies, became for Stella the sad emblem of all her lost dreams, of all that was unShakespearian about her life” (*Sorry* 10). This quotation shows that the narrator already anticipates that Stella's longing for Shakespeare is, in fact, a symbol of her emotional and cultural ties to England and her unfulfilled dreams there.

Stella's unhappiness and her “inexplicable obsession with Shakespeare” (*Sorry* 7; see also 63) is the more intensified, the more she feels alone, unhappy and exiled. On the

journey to Australia, she is seasick and feels so lost and desperate that she recites parts of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and hopes to drown. After having arrived in Broome, she experiences domestic violence and then again quotes Shakespeare, but this time it is Sonnet L, whose last line becomes the personal prophecy of her misfortune in Australia: "My grief lies onward, my joy behind" (see *Sorry* 16). The narrator explains how she foresees her life: "She resigned herself, that night, to gigantic unhappiness, the kind that novelists don't write of, the kind that doesn't kill, but preserves monotonously some empty register of experience, so that one waits, and waits, and waits, and waits, until whatever bitter end might mercifully present itself" (*Sorry* 17).

Stella does not adapt to life in Australia and continuously clings to England, which can be seen when she teaches English history and English values to Perdita (see *Sorry* 36). Stella even goes one step further, seeing Shakespeare as her religion and believing that "[h]e answers all the big questions" (*Sorry* 129). In Stella's life the importance of Shakespeare as one of the best-known representatives of English culture equals the significance of England itself.

Perdita, Stella's daughter, is completely different: she is attracted by Australia and the natural surroundings are a hideout for her. When she is inconsolably sad, Perdita hides in "one of the old boabs that had a hollow bottle belly [...], pleased to be enclosed" (*Sorry* 111). Stella on the other hand, hates these trees and calls them ugly, since they remind her of Broome, the hot dry north (see *Sorry* 139). Instead, she loves to work in a florist's shop in Perth on the grounds that the store's greenery "was almost English in its enwreathing ambience" (*Sorry* 139).

To conclude, Stella Keene's longing for England is expressed quite openly and in different ways: Most obvious is, of course, her obsession with Shakespeare, whom she recites frequently. But she also wears her shawl publicly – "for distinctive occasions" – (*Sorry* 79) and tells her snow dream to "anybody who would listen" (*Sorry* 20). However, the real meaning of these acts and objects as symptoms of homesickness remains concealed to others. Being isolated and misunderstood by everybody, Stella's only possibility to leave her exile is insanity.

1.2.2.3. **“Australia Unlimited”?**⁵

A Land of Opportunities ... and Failure

For more than two centuries Australia has been a traditional destination of European emigrants, who left their homes in order to start a new life on this remote but culturally not too different continent. The countless number of those who succeeded in improving their living conditions is represented most clearly in *Black Mirror*, by the character of Herbert Morrell. Not for every immigrant, of course, Australia was the place where all dreams were fulfilled. Many failed in trying their fortune abroad, and they are also subjects of discussion in Gail Jones' narrations. They are represented, for instance, by Nicholas Keene in *Sorry*.

Herbert Morrell, however, is not an average European immigrant. He has already accumulated enormous wealth before moving from London to Australia. Nevertheless this continent holds the opportunities to increase his prosperity:

Apart from his tin mine in Cornwall and his rubber plantation in Ceylon, apart from his shares in railways, steel production and the building of sea-going ships, the goldfields [of Western Australia] seemed to offer the prospect of truly world-dominating wealth. Herbert Morrell acquired a controlling interest in the Midas mine (and lesser shares in the Croesus, the Perseverance and the Lake View and Star), and felt for the first time the direct thrill of owning the labour of others. (*Black Mirror* 170)

Due to his capitalist ideology he considers the First World War a direct threat to his enterprise (*Black Mirror* 177, see also chapter 1.1.1.1.) when his (white) Australian workers leave the mines in order to enlist. This loss is compensated by other miners whom Morrell “imports” from Europe and Asia (*Black Mirror* 177). Already here the reader gets to know that not all Europeans could be so successful in Australia: Many less fortunate immigrants are obliged to work under inhuman circumstances, e.g. as miners. Hard work, however, also holds the opportunities to improve their economic situation: Ernie Bell, for instance, can quit his work in the mines in order to spend more time with his adopted son because he has collected enough money in his “good-paying job” (*Black Mirror* 288) and also the other migrant miners are said to worship only “wealth and industry” (*Black Mirror* 53). Herbert Morrell, on the other hand, benefits from the exploitation of migrants. Finally, Morrell sells his shares in the Midas mine

⁵ This was the slogan of several campaigns launched by Australian governments from 1920 onwards with the aim of motivating English workers to immigrate to Australia where they were promised a better life (see Peel 72-73).

and returns to Melbourne, but not for economic reasons: The scandalous trial of his son Henry, who was declared innocent after having murdered Louis Bell, as well as the rumours concerning Victoria's baby (see chapter 1.2.2.1.) compelled him to leave (*Black Mirror* 288).

In contrast to Herbert Morrell's economic success, Nicholas Keene fails miserably in his efforts to start a new life in Australia. Nicholas does not go to Australia because he needs money, in fact, his father owns "four haberdashery stores in London, which he had invited his son to manage" (*Sorry* 5). But Nicholas rejects his father's wishes. The narrator explains this refusal with a trauma Nicholas suffers from since his participation in the First World War: Having been confronted with the bodies of countless dead soldiers, he cannot bear the sight of lifeless mannequins in shop windows (see *Sorry* 5). However, due to the unclear identity of this narrator (see chapter 5.1.2.) the reader cannot be sure if this explanation is entirely credible. In any case, Nicholas refuses to fulfil his father's request and after the war he first works as a clerk in the Bank of England before returning to his university studies he had given up when he was recruited (*Sorry* 7).

Seeing no proper future in England, Nicholas decides to immigrate to Australia in order to gain a reputation as an anthropologist. Therefore, his main impetus to leave Europe – apart from fleeing from his father's demands – is to earn appreciation. An improvement of his financial situation is indeed not necessary: even in Australia he receives money from his father "which always arrived, monthly" (*Sorry* 40).

To Nicholas' disappointment, Australia, his land of hopes, soon turns out to be the scene of his complete failure. Despite his efforts, he produces nothing but a "meagre output of academic articles" (*Sorry* 39) and realises

that he would never become a famous intellectual [...] nor would his contribution to Aboriginal ethnography be anything other than a crude transliteration of stories, and the more useful, perhaps more respectable, delineation of language systems and kin groups, much of which, in the end, he garnered from Mr Trevor. Like his wife, Nicholas had developed a passivity in relation to his own life. He lost track of time; he lost purpose and ambition; the barest professional pretext enabled him to stay in a country in which he had unconscionably, disastrously, lost himself." (*Sorry* 39-40)

His only success is that he is at least "free from the haberdashery destiny Mr Keene senior would foist on him" (*Sorry* 40) because he lives on the other side of the world.

Nicholas is not able to openly admit his obvious failure to anybody although even the “[l]ocals in Broome thought Nicholas Keene a fraud and a bloody no-hoper” (*Sorry* 40). Especially in the correspondence with his father, he creates a whole universe of lies concerning his life in Australia. He states, for instance, that he is “on the edge of a scholarly breakthrough, that his work would have a universally relevant importance, discovering, as it must, the base infancy of man” (*Sorry* 40). When the Second World War breaks out (and Nicholas is not allowed to join the troops), he writes to his father that he is working “on some kind of clandestine mission” for the British Army Intelligence (*Sorry* 40). At some point even Nicholas himself seems to believe his fantastic constructs: When talking with his daughter Perdita about the German victories during the war, he tells her, “that it was only a matter of time before Australia would be attacked, and that he would be summoned, in a leadership role, to defend the hapless Australians from the evil Hun and their allies” (*Sorry* 54). Nevertheless, this self-deception does not work, and Nicholas seems to compensate for his massive dissatisfaction and humiliation mainly through committing acts of violence against women, hitting his wife Stella and raping Mary.

This chapter has shown that both novels have a distinctly (Western) Australian background. Apart from the detailed descriptions of its flora and fauna, also the portrayals of urban areas make the novels unmistakably Australian. This continent is not only used as the setting of (at least parts of) the novels, also the character's behaviour and ways of thinking are influenced by it. Therefore, Australia is not only manifested physically, but also the ideas of it, its subjective perceptions by the characters, are a theme which is omnipresent in both novels.

2. Aboriginal People in *Black Mirror* and *Sorry*

In Gail Jones' two novels *Black Mirror* and *Sorry*, the main characters are exclusively white people. Australia's indigenous population, however, plays an important part in both narratives as well and is represented by several characters. The aim of the following chapters will be to analyse the literary presentation of one of the most debated chapters of Australian history, namely the issue of the so-called Stolen Generations. The chapter will conclude with an examination of the way in which the Aboriginal characters appearing in the two novels are depicted.

2.1. The Stolen Generations

The term "Stolen Generations" denotes Aboriginal children, who were taken away from their families to be raised in white surroundings, such as state-owned institutions or church missions. This chapter will concentrate on the historical background of the Stolen Generations and the literary presentation of this issue in *Sorry* and *Black Mirror*.

2.1.1. Historical Background of the Stolen Generations

Acts of injustice committed against the indigenous population of Australia coincided already with the first British colonial attempts. The European feeling of racial superiority culminated in massacres of Aboriginal people, which only ceased in the late 1920ies (see Hagemann 99). The taking away of black and half-caste children already started in the 19th century. In the "Bringing Them Home" report it becomes clear that especially Aboriginal girls were stolen and forced to work in order to prevent them from starting a family:

As the ultimate purpose of removal was to control the reproduction of Indigenous people with a view to 'merging' or 'absorbing' them into the non-Indigenous population, Indigenous girls were targeted for removal and sent to work as domestics. Apart from satisfying a demand for cheap servants, work increasingly eschewed by non-Indigenous females, it was thought that the long hours and exhausting work would curb the sexual promiscuity attributed to them by non-Indigenous people. ("Bringing Them Home" 25)

Government officials claimed that indigenous Australians were doomed to extinction anyway, but at least half-caste children had to be saved (see Hagemann 99). In 1937, A.

O. Neville, who was the Chief Protector of Aboriginals in Western Australia, intended to assimilate the indigenous population (see "Bringing Them Home" 26). Neville's idea was to completely absorb half-caste people into the white society; therefore the forcible removal of Aboriginal children was part of his plan (see Hagemann 100):

From this time on, States began adopting policies designed to 'assimilate' Indigenous people of mixed descent. Whereas 'merging' was essentially a passive process of pushing Indigenous people into the non-Indigenous community and denying them assistance, assimilation was a highly intensive process necessitating constant surveillance of people's lives, judged according to non-Indigenous standards. Although Neville's model of absorption had been a biological one, assimilation was a socio-cultural model. ("Bringing Them Home" 27)

Until the middle of the 1960s, all Australian states – except for Tasmania – decided to put half-caste children into missions and children's homes. The children were removed by government officials and church employees "in order to be relocated in government or church institutions or white foster homes" (Jones, "Sorry-In-The-Sky" 163). Another aim of the forcible removal of Aboriginal minors was to increase a cheap and trained workforce: "In 1902, the chief protector of Aborigines in Western Australia, Henry Charles Princep, said he believed it was the government's duty to place children of mixed descent in missions to be trained as 'useful workers [...] and humble labourers'. He complained that the 'natural affections of the mothers' stood much in his way" (qtd. in Rintoul). Although the precise number of children affected is unknown today, some Aboriginal organisations speak of more than 30 000 minors (see Hagemann 100, see also Jones, "Sorry-In-The-Sky" 164).

Still today it is debated to what extent the white Australians knew about the stealing of the Aboriginal children because the removal mainly took place in remote areas, which the people in the cities were unfamiliar with. Another reason for their ignorance might be that after the Second World War the white Australians were busily engaged in the integration of the returning soldiers (see Hagemann 104).

Only in May 1997, did the real dimension of this dark chapter in Australian history become apparent when the report of the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, the so-called "Bringing Them Home" report, was tabled in Parliament. "Until its tabling few white Australians realized the vast extent of the practice, or indeed the ghastly dimensions of its damage" (Jones, "Speaking Shadows" 79, see also Birch 146). Apart from the already mentioned practice of removing indigenous children and their forcible integration into foster fami-

lies, church missions, or stately institutions, the report also revealed countless incidences of sexual abuse and acts of racial discrimination (see Dow). Furthermore, the report contained 54 recommendations, above all:

- an acknowledgement of responsibility and apology from all Australian parliaments, police forces, churches and other non-government agencies which implemented policies of forcible removal
- guarantees against repetition
- restitution and rehabilitation and
- monetary compensation (Dow)

Nevertheless, no full apology was given under the Howard government (see also Birch 138-140). John Howard formulated his "Opening Address to the Australian Reconciliation Convention" in Melbourne a few days before the "Bringing Them Home" report was tabled in parliament, expressing his personal concern, but avoiding an official excuse:

Clearly, there were injustices done and no-one should obscure or minimise them. We need to acknowledge as a nation what European settlement has meant for the first Australians, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and in particular the assault on their traditions and the discrimination and violence they endured over many decades. [...]

However, let me make this clear. Personally, I feel deep sorrow for those of my fellow Australians who suffered injustices under the practices of past generations towards indigenous people. Equally, I am sorry for the hurt and trauma many people here today may continue to feel as a consequence of those practices. [...]

Australians of this generation should not be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions and policies over which they had no control.

However, we must acknowledge past wrongs, understand that they still cause a great deal of personal distress and resolve to improve areas of indigenous disadvantage both now and into the future. (Howard)

Only on 13 February 2008, an official apology to the Stolen Generations was offered by the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, in Parliament:

To the stolen generations, I say the following: as Prime Minister of Australia, I am sorry.

On behalf of the government of Australia, I am sorry.

On behalf of the parliament of Australia, I am sorry.

I offer you this apology without qualification. (Rudd)

Even before Kevin Rudd gave this famous speech, Christine King from the Stolen Generations Alliance believed that the apology would give some peace to the Stolen Generations and their families (see qtd. in Rintoul) and she also said, "It's fundamental to our healing, it's actually fundamental to the healing of the whole country and so we're

very excited about it" (qtd. in Rintoul). She further explained that the word 'sorry' had great meaning in her Aboriginal community⁶, "it means having empathy and compassion and understanding" (qtd. in Rintoul).

2.1.2. Literary Presentation in the Novels *Black Mirror* and *Sorry*

While the topic of the Stolen Generations is discussed only partially in *Black Mirror*, it is one of the major themes in *Sorry*. In the earlier novel, *Black Mirror*, the problem of the removal of Aboriginal children is only fragmentarily revealed and demands prior knowledge on the part of the readers in order to reconstruct the full dimensions: the first allusion is made when the narrator of Victoria's biography, Anna Griffin, describes Lily-white, the Morrells' Aboriginal home help as "a mission girl, compliant, well-trained for housework and general slavery" (*Black Mirror* 178). A reader who is well-informed on Australian history will immediately realize that Lily-white is one of the countless victims who were stolen from their families and later raised by white institutions (see *Black Mirror* 285). The assimilation of Lily-white, however, is obviously not as profound as it was intended: Although having grown up in the mission, there is reason to believe that she rather sticks to the religion of her ancestors, believing in the power of totems and spiritual laws (see *Black Mirror* 291 and 183 respectively). Furthermore, she performs ancient rituals, for example with regard to mourning, and gets a native funeral (see *Black Mirror* 252 and 288 respectively). These assumptions, however, are only based on allusions made via the focaliser Anna Griffin. It is only her "novelistic" writing (see *Black Mirror* 156) about Victoria's youth through which the reader gets to know Lily-white's cultural entrenchment. This focalisation through white characters prevents the readers from gaining a deeper insight into Aboriginal culture.

Whereas in Lily-white's case only allusions to the Stolen Generations can be found, this topic of Australian history is clearly displayed when her daughter, Ruby, accuses the Australian Native Welfare of kidnapping half-caste children:

You know in those days Native Welfare used to come and steal us light-skinned kids, but my mum always managed to hide and to save me. Coupla times we went bush, way out into the desert, and stayed there, escaping, living on love and bush-tucker.

⁶ For more information on the word "sorry" see Catherine Schwerin's article "Speaking the Unspeakable – Manifestations of Silence in Gail Jones' *Sorry*" (Schwerin 37-38).

Whitefellas always wanta take what's not theirs, Mum used to say. Whitefellas always wanting things, always wanting more and more. [...] All those poor children, stolen away. But me, I was never stolen. (*Black Mirror* 288-289)

Nevertheless, Gail Jones uses the theme of the Stolen Generations only very sporadically in *Black Mirror*. A more elaborate approach is tried in the novel *Sorry*, where the forced removal of half-caste minors is one of the central topics. In the character of Vera Trevor, the author embodies an ideology which served as one of the major justifications of the forcible removal of Aboriginal children:

[t]here was a cook [Martha] and two girls [Sal and Daff] – 'station blacks', the whites called them – each sent by the Protector of Aborigines to learn the crafts of cooking and cleaning. These were 'half-caste' girls, in need of assimilation. Mrs Trevor – Vera – thought it her duty to civilise them, and to teach them good behaviour and habits of tidiness, to induct them into submission and quiet compliance. (*Sorry* 21-22)

Immediately after Mrs Trevor's justification it becomes apparent that the half-caste girls affected by forced removal and education cannot appreciate the whites' efforts to civilise them: "[...] Martha, the cook, and Sal and Daff, all looked desperately unhappy. They wore loose floral-patterned frocks, all made of the same material. They stood leaning together, conspiratorially, as if wishing to merge into one floral being that would conquer Vera Trevor" (*Sorry* 22).

The author's criticism inherent in this scene becomes even more apparent in the portrayal of Mary, the character affected most by the issue of the Stolen Generations. When Nicholas' wife Stella is in hospital, he needs a woman to manage the household and to take care of his ten-year-old daughter. Therefore, Nicholas and Perdita pick up Mary at a convent in Broome. The young Aboriginal woman is described as follows: "She had dark bronze-coloured skin and deep black eyes. [...] Mary was sixteen years old, tall for her age, and had about her an air of maturity and self-possession" (*Sorry* 47). In this scene, the reader also learns that she grew up in a Catholic orphanage in the south.

Through Mary's own speech, the readers discover that Marry is Walmajarri, that her people are desert people and that her mother, Dootharra, was left by Mary's father, a white stockman, who "buggered off, somewhere, long time, nobody knows, somewhere, longaway" (*Sorry* 55). At the age of six, Mary was discovered by somebody from the Government because of her pale skin. "Her people had gone to a feeding station to get flour and tobacco" (*Sorry* 55) when the incident happened:

[They] seized her from her mother and took her to Balgo Mission. She cried and cried. She said that her mother spoke to her in the wind, and that she was crying too, full of whispery breath, overflowing and spreading out, coming like wind-spirit across the land to find and to claim her. But it was no good, they never saw each other again. Mary was six years old when she was taken away. Mission fellas noticed that she was unusually smart, so later, two years later, she was sent down south, to an orphanage in the city called Sister Clare's. To learn to be a whitefella, she [Mary] said, to learn all them whitefella ways. (*Sorry* 55-56)

Living in the convent in Broome, Mary finds out that her mother has died because she asks some Aboriginal people who are passing through. "Dootharra had rolled into a campfire one night and was too tired, or too sad, maybe, to roll out again. Her skin was burned, she was lost" (*Sorry* 56). Instead of praying to find solace, Mary chooses to mourn in an Aboriginal manner (see Birch 143):

Mary found a rock and struck at her head until it bled, to show in the Walma-jarri way her grieving for her mother, to feel it truly and painfully. The nuns had seen her, and scolded her. They said her behaviour was unChristian. She had looked down at the blood-drops on the earth and wanted her own death. (*Sorry* 56)

To sum up, Mary should not be seen as a flat character of the novel, but rather as an allegorical character, as it is also suggested by the author herself, who is quoted in Jane Cornwell's article "Faith in a sorry life": "The novel is a political allegory. [...] It's an allegory in a Shakespearean mode. I didn't want to write a propaganda novel, but I *did want to make Mary symbolic*" [emphasis added] (qtd. in Cornwell).

In Jones' fourth novel, *Sorry*, the topic of the Stolen Generations is particularly important – as the title already suggests. The main character in *Sorry* is a young, white female whose best friend is of Aboriginal descent. In her article "Speaking Shadows: Justice and the Poetic", Gail Jones explains her choice of the main protagonist:

My own novel, *Sorry*, was written with some trepidation. It has a political-allegorical aspect – as one would expect, claiming such a title – but it is not centrally concerned with representing the Stolen Generations. As a white Australian, it would be presumptuous to do so and it would risk appropriation of others' painful experience. Nevertheless, *Sorry* deals with culpability and the refusal to say 'Sorry', the characteristics, as we now know, of a certain type of (persisting) dispossession. Forgetting, or guilty amnesia, is at the core of the text, yet so too is a loving friendship between an Aboriginal girl and a white girl, one which intimates a kind of ideal of community and reconciliation. (Jones, "Speaking Shadows" 84)

Mary is an allegory of the Stolen Generations – this fictional character embodies all the "typical" features of a removed Aboriginal child, who was taken away to be raised in

orphanages, foster families or missions to be “saved” from extinction by forcibly assimilating them into white society. Also the failure of a denied excuse is embodied in the novel, namely by Perdita. Her amnesia and stuttering prevents her from saying sorry to Mary until it is too late (see *Sorry* 204-205), which points to the assumption of an allegory (see Jaggi and France).

If we read *Sorry* as “a political allegory”, as Jones herself has put it (see above, qtd. in Cornwell), Mary stands for the subjugated indigenous population and Perdita is the new generation (in contrast to the older, “colonialist” generation, represented by Nicholas and Stella), who are still unable to express their compassion and their will for an apology as well as a compensation. Perdita feels at home in Australia, especially in the outback, and she also develops a loving friendship with an Aboriginal teenager and is so enthusiastic about Aboriginal culture that she even wishes to be dark herself (see *Sorry* 73). As Gail Jones states in her article, “The Aboriginal girl is not the ‘shadow’ of the white girl; rather she is a ‘surer presence’” (Jones, “Speaking Shadows” 84). Perdita’s incapability to say “sorry” to her sister might also be an indication that the white girl is weaker than the Aboriginal one, and therefore suffers from guilty amnesia because she can hardly bear the truth. Although she – who might represent many Australians and the government – tries to approach Mary – the Stolen Generations –, it is just the beginning of the healing process, since no full apology is given. I interpret Gail Jones’ novel *Sorry* (published in 2007) as a warning to the Howard-government⁷ to say sorry before it is too late and the Stolen Generations are already deceased. In fact, the long-demanded apology came one year later, under Rudd’s government; but still, Gail Jones underlines that the suffering of the Stolen Generations cannot be undone (see quotation below).

In *Black Mirror*, Gail Jones already writes about the issue of amnesia with regard to colonialism: Winston, Anna’s Jamaican lover, expresses his criticism, saying, “Black people – everywhere – always remember. Only the imperialist has the privilege of amnesia” (*Black Mirror*, 103). Gail Jones’ intention concerning “historical amnesia” is also discussed in an interview with Summer Block, when the author of *Sorry* states that, “I wanted to write about historical amnesia [...] what it means to forget ... to have history with a gap in it” (Block). In the interview, Gail Jones summarizes her opinion on the political statements of the last two governments with regard to the Stolen Generations:

⁷ Block explains that “Jones began working on *Sorry* in the ninth year of John Howard’s tenure as Prime Minister of Australia, and witnessed Howard’s refusal to offer restitution for the crime” (Block).

My novel [*Sorry*] allegorizes the “forgetting” of the so-called Stolen Generations in Australia, [...]. One of the recommendations of the [“Bringing Them Home”] report was that the government of the day offer a formal apology to indigenous Australians for the wrongs done to them. The [Howard Liberal] government refused to say “*Sorry*,” a matter that was rectified [recently] when the new Labour government in Australia, under the leadership of Kevin Rudd, issued an apology at the opening of parliament. This did not necessarily atone or repair the hurt, but it did signal a new initiative for reconciliation and dialogue between Aboriginal and other Australians. (qtd. in Block)

2.2. Depicting Aboriginal Characters

Given the distinctively Australian setting of both novels (see chapter 1.1.) and Gail Jones' claim to produce – at least with *Sorry* – “a political allegory” (qtd. in Cornwell), the depiction of indigenous Australian characters is of crucial importance. Hence, it is interesting to analyse the mode, in which the author gives insight into Aboriginal culture. Moreover, it seems worthwhile to examine if there are certain features which the indigenous people in the two novels have in common. Another chapter will try to evaluate the function of these characters in the narratives.

2.2.1. Portrayals of Aboriginal Culture

Many characters in *Black Mirror* and *Sorry* are of Aboriginal descent, but none of them are protagonists. They are exclusively described from the point of view of other – namely white – people. In her article “Speaking Shadows: Justice and the Poetic”, Gail Jones herself explains why she did not choose an inside perspective of Aboriginal characters: “[S]ince the narrative force of testimony in this case can only ever be Indigenous, non-Indigenous writers wishing to engage with ‘stolen’ matters must write from another perspective and perhaps use forms of indirection that will signal a refusal to ‘claim’ the experience of others” (79). White Australians who talk about Aboriginal affairs – although they cannot have the necessary knowledge of it – are in some way criticised by Gail Jones in *Black Mirror*: When Anna learns that Victoria has been telling Winston about Australia's indigenous population, her reaction seems to reflect somewhat the author's personal opinion: “Jesus, thought Anna. What could she possibly know?” (*Black Mirror* 131).

Due to this approach, the Aboriginal people in the narratives are rather flat characters, apart from a few exceptions. Especially the portrayals of whole groups of natives are

frequently superficial, which reflect the perception of them by a white character. For example, when Nicholas Keene starts his research on Aboriginal people, his first impression is marked by disappointment:

When Nicholas pulled back the yellow curtains, he saw [...] a family group of about ten or twelve people. They would be the subjects, or rather, the objects, of his research. They looked, he thought, rather mundane, not noble savages or extraordinary specimens of humanity. They wore cast-off clothes, mostly filthy and shredded, and had matted hair and looks of drear resignation. (*Sorry* 18-19)

Soon, however, Nicholas gets a little more insight into Aboriginal society and behaviour. But again, no background knowledge nor further explanations or any analysis is given because the portrayal is only based on observations by the white focal character Nicholas:

[...] shy black people, who would make no eye contact but had a good sense of humour, who seemed – surprisingly to him – intelligent and quick-witted, and were at home sitting on the earth and hunting and gathering its produce. [...] At the same time, it was a confronting physicality that at first repulsed him. He found the shiny black bodies altogether strange. Many of the men had cicatrixes inscribed on their chests and upper arms, raised welts that signified initiation or high degree; many of the women had pendulous breasts, exposed, that he could not fail to stare at. The children were unclean, he thought, with glistening mucus beneath their noses and seeds and dirt, sometimes in clumps, studding their oily matted hair. (*Sorry* 23)

According to Nicholas' presentation, all Aboriginal characters appear one-dimensional. The quotation above shows that he mostly observes and does not often talk to Aboriginal people. In fact, he only seems to talk to Willie, an Aboriginal man, who works as a stockman at the Trevors'. The readers do not get much information about Willie, only about his work, for example that he is "paid in tobacco and flour" (*Sorry* 39) and that he works in many different fields: he must chop wood, fix the windmill or make furniture from wood (see *Sorry* 39). On the one hand, the readers learn that Willie has to help Nicholas with his anthropological research, by teaching him parts of "the tribal language of the region" (*Sorry* 39), by serving as a translator (see *Sorry* 23) and by supplying him with vital information about Aboriginal people "that his book-learning had monumentally excluded" (*Sorry* 39). But on the other hand, Nicholas blames Willie of "deliberately misinforming him on some crucial matter or other, but this was the characteristic treachery of the native he had been told to expect" (*Sorry* 39). The negative depiction of this Aboriginal worker, however, does not serve to characterise Willie, but rather Nicholas: the readers get to know that the latter's knowledge of Aboriginal culture is quite limited because he does not know that some Aboriginal secrets and knowl-

edge are taboo and therefore, they cannot be passed on to people outside the tribe. The superficially negative portrayal of Willie thus reveals more of Nicholas' racist attitudes than of Aboriginal culture or customs.

Parts of the organisation in an Aboriginal family can be understood best by Perdita, who has the closest contacts to the indigenous population, compared to all the other white characters in *Sorry*. Nevertheless, the depiction offered by her is also quite superficial and limited to apparent characteristics of Aboriginal social life. It is stressed, for example⁸, that among a group of Walmajarri-people, “[t]he men were all away somewhere, old man Dauwarrngu and the others, so it was just the women and children sitting together in a circle around the fire. The tea was sweet and black and tasted gritty and smoky [...]” (*Sorry* 69). In this context, another feature is recorded that is fundamentally diverging from the white characters' cultural background, namely a different kind of alimentation: as soon as the group of Walmajarri-women gets hungry, its members “began to separate out, searching for food” (*Sorry* 69). The enormous importance of finding food in the desert becomes apparent when the group “hailed Mary and Perdita together” (*Sorry* 70) for having brought a snake to eat.

This scenic presentation does not only apply to the depiction of Aboriginal communities but also to individual indigenous characters, who are almost exclusively described through the eyes of white protagonists. Therefore, the image of Aboriginal characters transmitted in the narrative depends significantly on the focalisers' opinions on these people. Especially in the comments of Herbert Morrell (*Black Mirror*), Nicholas Keene and Captain Smith (both *Sorry*) the contempt for the indigenous population becomes apparent. Their disrespect is based on conviction of racial superiority and the explicitness of their statements is necessary for these characters have to fulfil also their roles as stereotypical representatives of colonialist Europeans (see chapter 1.1.2.1.).

It is remarkable though, that in both novels the presentation of Aboriginal culture and individuals is overwhelmingly positive. This overall impression is created by the unambiguously high opinion of the two main focalisers, Perdita (*Sorry*) and Victoria (*Black Mirror*) because both show deep affection towards indigenous characters, and respect for their culture. Their affinity is due to strong emotional ties to Aboriginal women who take over crucial roles in the protagonists' education and even compensate in both cases for the lack of a loving family (see chapter 3.4.). This focalization also leads to a rather

⁸ Apart from the examples on scenic presentation of Aboriginal characters cited, see *Black Mirror* 53-55 and 187-188; *Sorry* 68-73, 98-101 and 143, 147-148.

flat and one-dimensional depiction of most Aboriginal characters, but this time it is presented in an extremely positive way: the characters convey the impression of moral superiority and the absence of any aggressive or violent behaviour. Despite the injustice inflicted on them by white characters, none of them reacts aggressively. Instead of rebelling, they suffer in silence and put up with their miserable situation. The author herself emphasizes that this positive depiction corresponds with her own experience: "It's been suggested that I have idealized Aboriginal people. But my experience of Aboriginal communities has been all about forms of affection and care" (qtd. in Cornwell). Through this exaggeratedly positive portrayal of Aboriginal Australians, Gail Jones succeeds consequently in enhancing feelings of compassion on the part of the reader, which is important for the political message she wants to transmit concerning the Stolen Generations (see chapter 2.1.).

2.2.2. The Function of Aboriginal Characters in the Narratives

As already stated in the previous chapter, several Aboriginal characters are described in the novels and they fulfil a special function in the narrative. Aboriginal characters are frequently suppressed by (male) white characters but on the other hand, they have a considerable influence on two young white characters – Perdita and Victoria in *Sorry* and *Black Mirror* respectively.

2.2.2.1. Victims of Domination and Violence Exercised by the Whites

In both novels, *Sorry* and *Black Mirror*, Aboriginal characters are oppressed by whites. The injustice Aborigines are confronted with is depicted at two levels: on the one hand, there are allusions to the humiliation of the whole indigenous population through white (colonial) administration and government. On the other hand, there are also characters that exemplify the physical violence inflicted on Aboriginal people in individual cases.

Especially in *Sorry*, the readers get the impression that the life of the Aborigines was controlled by the government in the first half of the 20th century. When Nicholas and Stella arrive in Australia, Nicholas receives "[p]apers from the Chief Protector of Aborigines – who owned, in a sense, an entire people – [which] instructed Nicholas on a location, and indeed the terms of his project" (*Sorry* 15-16). This quotation shows that even the Aboriginal people's residential area is regulated by the state. They are not only

“excluded from the inner city” (*Sorry* 147) of Perth, also their life in the outback seems to be restricted.

In both novels, there are incidents that describe the exclusion from towns and cities. In *Sorry*, Perdita meets Joey's Aboriginal family at the encampment by the riverbank in Perth, and by talking to them, she learns that “[o]ther Aboriginal people, too, were excluded from the inner city. Joey's family had no permission, so they came and went” (*Sorry* 147). Joey explains that he and his family are Nyoongar and that in fact, the area once belonged to his people (see *Sorry* 148). The segregation of the indigenous population deteriorated during the Second World War: because of the Japanese threat also other non-white Australians were suspected of collaborating with the enemy. “Aboriginal families were sent [from Broome] to outstations and missions” (*Sorry* 114).

In a similar way Gail Jones describes the segregation of the indigenous population in the remote mining-town where Victoria and Anna grew up: “[...] Aborigines were, on the whole, banned from the centre of the town and lived mostly in shabby camps around its outer fringes” (*Black Mirror* 187-188). Also the alimentation of the Aboriginal people shows their inferior status: “A butcher up the road gave away his unsaleable bits of meat, so she [Victoria] had seen black people pass by carrying sheep's heads and horse's heads and other objects, obscured, in dripping hessian bags. This sign of their deprivation: the mucky scraps of butchered animals.” (*Black Mirror* 188). Obviously, they can only afford – or they are only offered – food which is rejected by the whites for its low quality. Also this can be seen as a symptom for the suppression of the indigenous population: having left the desert and living in the surroundings of towns, they become economically dependent on the whites, in the best case working as cheap labourers without any real chance to improve their social status.

In the conversation between Perdita and the Aboriginal people from the riverbank in Perth, another dimension of unjust treatment against the indigenous population is presented: Aboriginal people are often in conflict with the police and the law in general. Joey claims that “[m]ostly the p'licemen look the other way” (*Sorry* 147) but that he and his people also prefer to avoid any contact to them. Later he criticises openly that “[l]otsa blackfellas [...] in trouble with the law. And them whitefella p'licemen just love to stick us all in gaol“ (*Sorry* 148). Another example depicting the indigenous Australians' problems with the executive is when Nicholas and Perdita are heading towards the convent in Broome and they see “a group of Aboriginal men in iron chains linked

painfully by their ankles. They had been released from gaol to make bitumen roads" (*Sorry* 46). Among the men, Perdita recognizes Kurnti, "who sometimes worked in the stockyard at the Trevors' station. Perdita called his name and waved, and he straight-away waved back, his face offering up a truly innocent smile." (*Sorry* 46). Although nothing is said about the individual background of the prisoners, nor whether they are guilty, the readers get the impression that the sentence inflicted on the Aboriginal men is unjust. This sensation is mainly provoked because the scene is described – and judged – through the focaliser Perdita: "She saw them, men joined in this way, humiliated, caught, and wondered what they had done to be so cruelly constrained" (*Sorry* 46). Again, the focalisation evokes compassion on the part of the reader.

Moreover, the white domination over the indigenous population is exemplified in acts of excessive physical violence, committed especially against females. In *Sorry*, Nicholas Keene once "spilled his fiery pipe on Mary's bare arm, burning a scarlet hole the size of a two-shilling piece" (*Sorry* 88). The young girl only reacts by brushing away the hot tobacco and suppresses her tears (see *Sorry* 88). In *Black Mirror*, Henry Morrell blinds Lily-white with a stick, but he is only lightly punished (see *Black Mirror* 189-190).

Apart from these examples of bodily harm, especially sexual assaults are made the subject of discussion in both novels. The topic is based on historical facts: as the "Bringing Them Home" report could reveal, the rape of Aboriginal women and minors has been a constant feature of white domination over the indigenous population for almost a century (see "Bringing Them Home" 66 and 140-145; see also chapter 2.1.1.). In *Black Mirror*, when Herbert Morrell loses Rose, he misses "only the shape of his wife" (*Black Mirror* 178) and therefore needs other women to satisfy his sexual needs and to show his superiority: "For a while he used [Victoria's nurse] Tilly and then [...] he visited the Japanese brothel in Brookman Street" (*Black Mirror* 178). Soon he finds an alternative, namely "the black woman, Lily-white, whom Rose herself had hired – a mission girl, compliant, well trained for housework and general slavery – became the outline that Herbert Morrell, mine owner, desired" (*Black Mirror* 178).

In *Sorry*, there are also two incidents of Aboriginal girls being raped. In both cases, the perpetrator is Nicholas Keene. His first victim is the 15 or 16-year-old Martha:

At the Trevors' Nicholas discovered that he could force the cook, Martha, and that she would not tell. All the white men did it; he felt manly and justified. At first he put his hand over her mouth, and watched her dark terrified eyes as he

pushed hard into her. He made threats to kill her if she ever told. But gradually, he reasoned, Martha simply knew what to do; she believed his murderous threats and was sure to remain silent. (*Sorry* 28-29)

Like in the case of Herbert Morrell, also Nicholas Keene's primary motivation for his deed is obviously not only to satisfy his sexual needs. Instead, he enjoys the act of domination itself, which enhances his self-confidence and compensates for his frustration in his research (see chapter 1.2.2.3.). This need for confirmation of his masculinity explains the pronouncedly violent character of the abuse: "Nicholas liked to pull her head back by its tangled hair and feel that he penetrated so that he hurt her" (*Sorry* 28-29). As a result of the frequent violations, Martha gets pregnant and is therefore immediately forced to leave the Trevor's household: "[S]he was sent away, down south, with few questions asked" (*Sorry* 29). Nicholas, however, soon finds a substitute for Martha and also his second victim is an Aboriginal female servant, namely Mary, whom he has hired at the convent in Broome. This time, Gail Jones describes the first rape from Perdita's point of view: "Perdita rose and half-asleep walked to peer through her father's doorway. Nicholas was hurting Mary. She saw the humped form of her father's back and heard him grunting and pounding, and she could hear from the shadow beneath him the sound of Mary softly weeping" (*Sorry* 60).

Both novels have in common that neither Herbert Morrell nor Nicholas Keene have to fear consequences for their crimes. Even if their victims wanted to tell anybody of their traumatic experiences, the reader gets the impression that they would not have great chances of being believed. One remark, uttered by Mary, points out the reasons for the Aboriginal women's helplessness: "'No one will believe the word of a bush blackfella. Unless,' she added, 'they're confessing a crime'" (*Sorry* 203). Indeed, this statement is confirmed in the novel *Sorry*: as already mentioned, Martha has to leave the Trevors' household because she is pregnant. Although she has tried to explain the situation to Mrs Trevor, she is sent away "with few questions asked" (*Sorry* 29). During the investigation on the murder of Nicholas Keene, "Mrs Trevor confirms that she's heard rumours about Nicholas Keene and native girls: she hadn't believed it at first and had once sent away a bloody good cook, her best cook ever, because she thought she was lying about Nicholas Keene [...]" (*Sorry* 92). The opinion that statements of whites are *a priori* more credible than those of Aboriginal people, is apparently based on the common belief that the latter are pathological liars and cheaters, equipped with "the charac-

teristic treachery of the native" (*Sorry* 39) – as once believed when thinking about Willie.

Concerning Mary, however, these reasons for the victims' helplessness do not seem a sufficient explanation for her passivity. Through the focaliser Perdita the reader gets to know Mary as an extraordinarily strong character who endures Nicholas' brutality in silence, not even showing her pain when he spills his pipe on her arm (see *Sorry* 88) or when he hits her at Christmas in 1940 when she tries to prevent him from striking Stella (see *Sorry* 79). Although she conveys the impression of being a proud and self-confident girl and although she obviously could live with the Walmajarri group who adopted her, she never utters the wish to run away from her miserable situation. There is, however, no explicit explanation for Mary's passive behaviour but there are grounds to believe that she considers her suffering a necessary sacrifice to protect Perdita and Stella. This teleological interpretation is at least the one implicitly offered by the narrator Perdita: for instance, Perdita tries to explain Mary's fascination with the martyrdom of Christian saints, assuming that "perhaps for Mary there was some solace in thinking that suffering might have a spiritual purpose" (*Sorry* 58). Mary's voluntary sacrifice would also fit Perdita's attempts to equate her own family situation in retrospect with the plot of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (see *Sorry* 27-28): at an allegorical level, her father corresponds with Leontes, the tyrannical king of Sicilia and there are also parallels between Leontes' wife Hermione and Stella since their husbands are responsible for their isolation in prison or on the remote continent of Australia respectively. Furthermore, in their exile, both give birth to a daughter whom they call Perdita. In *The Winter's Tale*, a courtier named Antigonus is given the task to dispose of the baby. But out of the goodness of his heart he saves Perdita's life by abandoning her on the sea coast of Bohemia (sic). Presumably, he pays this act of humanity with his life, since he exits the stage followed by a bear. If we compare Shakespeare's story with Perdita's life – as she does herself – Antigonus' fate can be equated to Mary's sacrifice for Perdita. Her most important sacrifice is when she takes over the responsibility for Nicholas' murder (see *Sorry* 92-93). Perdita's reconstruction of Mary's motives to endure her suffering seems to be quite probable: in prison, Mary herself gives a hint why she has protected Perdita: "Maybe I was foolish, eh? Back in those days I wanted to be a saint. [...] But I knew that I was much stronger than you, Deeta. And Stella, too. I was stronger than Stella. She wouldn't have survived if you'd been sent away to a home" (*Sorry* 203). The philanthropic attitude that made Mary bear the hardship of prison for Perdita

might also be the reason why she has never thought about leaving the Keenes' household.

To conclude, Gail Jones exemplified the crimes against the Aboriginal community mainly with the help of female Aboriginal characters who are raped by white men. In all the cases mentioned above, the fictional Aboriginal women are in a relationship of subordination and dependence because they are mission girls. Moreover, they are physically inferior, as they are *young* women. Additionally, they have to suffer injustice because their rapists are not charged, which is an excellent metaphor for the fate of the indigenous population as a whole that has long been suppressed by the whites. Mary's passivity can be explained best by assuming that she sees some purpose in her distress, sacrificing herself for the sake of others.

2.2.2.2. Influence on White Characters

Although most Aboriginal characters are victims of white suppression and play a rather passive role, some of them (Lily-white, Sal, Daff, Mary) exercise significant influence on the white protagonists Victoria (*Black Mirror*) and Perdita (*Sorry*). Not only do they take over the duties of mothers or sisters but they allow the children also to get some insight into Aboriginal culture. The aim of the following chapter is therefore to analyse in how far and to what extent this wisdom can indeed be passed on to non-indigenous characters.

In *Black Mirror*, the Aboriginal girl Lily-white, who lives in Herbert Morrell's house, becomes a mother figure for Victoria and teaches her at least parts of her people's spirituality. For instance, the young Aboriginal woman shows Victoria the "safe and dangerous spaces of the house" (*Black Mirror* 183) because Lily-white

[...] was disturbed by the Morrell collection of stuffed animals, and believed that white people violated any number of spiritual laws; that white people held nothing sacred; that some were actually devils. The space behind the curtain near the giraffe – Victoria's special place – was designated by Lily-white particularly safe; and they would retreat there with the baby [Ruby], sometimes to sleep, all three, as though they shared one body. Miss Casey learned to seek out Victoria there, and would drag her screaming back to the world of book learning. (*Black Mirror* 183-184)

This quotation shows, on the one hand, Lily-white's spiritual knowledge. On the other hand, this knowledge is contrasted to the knowledge acquired through books. Lily-white's opinion on white people and death is illustrated when she becomes the focal

character and explains that “white people violated any number of spiritual laws” (*Black Mirror* 183). This opinion is reflected in the scene when Victoria describes that Lily-white is deeply shocked about the mummies, which Herbert Morrell has sent from Egypt. Consequently, the Aboriginal woman decides to bury them secretly at night. Victoria helps Lily-white and together, after having buried the mummies “Lily-white lit some gum leaves and swept veils of smoke over the graves, and then sang a song in the voice that resembled sorrowful moaning” (*Black Mirror* 192). Another example of Victoria getting in contact with Aboriginal spirituality is when Lily-white helps Victoria to accept her mother’s death. The Aboriginal woman confirms that Rose Morrell is dead and that she has “[g]one to her spirit. Somewheres. [...] Maybe in whitefella heaven. Or in her spirit place.” (*Black Mirror* 192). Victoria is relieved to openly talk about her mother’s decease and finds consolation “in the dark triangle Lily-white had made with her arm” (*Black Mirror* 192). In both cases, Victoria herself confirms that she was confronted with Aboriginal culture and spirituality in her childhood. If we take a closer look, however, Victoria plays a completely passive role in both examples. Although she – as the focaliser in these passages – does *perceive* Lily-white’s behaviour, there are no indications that Victoria *understands* what she sees. Much later, when Victoria has a miscarriage in war-time Paris, it becomes obvious that she is not able to reproduce Lily-white’s rituals when she wants to bury her dead baby. Searching for a possibility to overcome her grief, she “remembered Lily-white singing over the body of the mummy-baby, her voice abysmal and the same moon rocking in her one liquid eye” (*Black Mirror* 245). Victoria only remembers the ritual but cannot perform it, which shows that her knowledge of Aboriginal spirituality is not very profound. This assumption finds further confirmation when Victoria tells Anna about totems:

Victoria had told her once that Lily-white’s totem creature was the blue-tongued lizard. She was not sure what this meant, except that Lily-white would never eat them and was careful not to harm them (*Black Mirror* 291).

Again, Victoria only perceives Lily-white’s acts from the position of an observer without any deeper understanding. Her impression that Lily-white “knew everything” (*Sorry* 292), only implies that Victoria is impressed by her Aboriginal mother’s knowledge of the arcane and spiritual world. But it does not show that she actually learns anything from Lily-white. The readers get the impression that Aboriginal knowledge can be accessed only partially by whites, namely whenever they *experience* Aboriginal traditions

or customs. A deeper insight, however, could only be gained if Aboriginal people intentionally passed on their knowledge.

The scenic representation, which describes the different hiding places in the Morrell's house (see *Black Mirror* 183-184), contrasts the knowledge of the white characters – represented by Miss Casey – and the knowledge of the Aboriginal people – embodied by Lily-white. For Victoria, the latter is more useful because instead of bookish refinements, she needs a shelter where she can escape from her heartless family. Here the practical knowledge of the Aboriginal woman is clearly more important for Victoria's development than the English education presented by Miss Casey.

This dichotomy between the Aboriginal way of passing on wisdom orally, on the one hand, and the European tradition of book-learning, on the other hand, is another parallel between *Black Mirror* and *Sorry*. Knowledge learnt by reading is mainly embodied by Perdita's parents, two white English migrants. Stella teaches a randomly drawn up list of subjects to Perdita and uses Nicholas' books, which are in fact too difficult for her daughter. Moreover, Stella's knowledge is principally based on William Shakespeare's works, which seem to answer all the 'big questions' (see *Sorry* 37, 59, 129) for Stella: "She told her daughter that everything one needed to know about life was contained in a volume of Shakespeare; that he was all-wise, incomparable, the encompasser of every human range" (*Sorry* 37). Despite her age, Perdita knows intuitively that her mother overestimates the importance of Shakespeare (see *Sorry* 37). The limits of book-based knowledge become apparent to her when she steps "into the dazzling light of Australia" (*Sorry* 37) and thinks about her personal experience with the indigenous population in the outback. The life there, "all this huge unelaborated life, told her there was more on heaven and earth than was dreamt of by Mister Shakespeare" (*Sorry* 38). Unlike other white characters, Perdita is susceptible to seemingly unimportant impressions of nature. In accordance with her "white" education, she considers these questions at first "small", but then the idea begins to grow that "there were *different* big questions" (*Sorry* 38) than the ones her mother insists on. Later, Mary confirms this assumption by explaining that her people in the western desert "knew everything [...] about the world, every big important thing, and every single little thing" (*Sorry* 59). Perdita believes Mary and appreciates the wisdom of the desert people, "wondering what they knew. The *big* questions. The *other* questions" (*Sorry* 59). Obviously, Perdita does not know the answers to these "big questions" and actually, she is not even sure about the questions themselves.

Nevertheless, she is one of the few white characters in both novels that gets at least a little insight into Aboriginal wisdom and spirituality.

Perdita Keene is raised by several Aboriginal women: firstly, by the wet nurse Jukuna, secondly by Mrs Trevor's domestic helps Sal and Daff, and thirdly, by Mary. In brief, it can be stated that Perdita is highly influenced by Aboriginal females in her childhood. Similar to Victoria in *Black Mirror*, also Perdita gets in contact with the indigenous Australian culture very early, for instance, from Sal and Daff she learns:

[...] fragments of their language, Yawan, as well as a few basic words of my wet nurse's tongue. [...] I loved the full-mouthed sounds of indigenous nouns, the clever and precise onomatopoeia of the bird names, the cyclical songs, full of sonorous droning. [...] From Sal and Daff I learned that my totem was a green tree frog: many had appeared in the wet season, at the time of my birth, and this frog-fella, this one, this one was special to me. 'Im special frog-fella.' Sal's totem was *puturu*, a grass seed that her mother was gathering to grind for flour when she discovered she was pregnant. We didn't know what Daff's totem was; she could not remember her mother. (*Sorry* 32-33)

However, this passage does not indicate any profound elementary education in Aboriginal culture. Perdita, who is the focaliser here, admits indeed that she learned only *fragments* of Sal and Daff's language. Concerning the bird names, Perdita states that she liked the pronunciation of the words but this does not imply the ability to reproduce them.

Perdita's insight into Aboriginal customs and wisdom is certainly intensified by her contact to Mary with whom she is linked by extraordinarily close emotional bonds, calling her "sister" (see e.g. *Sorry* 49, 58, 72, 204, 211). Mary also shares some of her Aboriginal knowledge with Perdita: the young Aboriginal woman sings desert songs, recognizes bush birds, tells "blackfella stories" and explains that corpses must be buried so that life can go on after death (see *Sorry* 54, 55, 58-60 and 64).

So far, the two white protagonists of *Sorry* and *Black Mirror* are depicted in a similar way concerning their knowledge of Aboriginal culture. Perdita, however, differs from Victoria in one decisive aspect: unlike Victoria she does not remain a mere observer of Aboriginal customs but is explicitly taught by Mary. This teaching is mainly limited to the knowledge of Australian fauna and flora:

There were forms of knowledge of the land and the body, carried into adulthood, that Perdita learned especially, and only, from her sister, Mary. [...] The twitchy and particular life of animals was of interest to Mary, and she was always aware of the barest movement, of dry grass bending, a rustly stir, the traces and suggestions of other live presences. (*Sorry* 58-59)

Mary recognizes Perdita's susceptibility to Australian nature. She states that usually "[w]hitefellas can't see nothin' around them; whitefellas all buggered up in the head" (*Sorry* 54), apart from Perdita and Billy. This susceptibility enables Perdita to understand Mary's lessons:

Mary [...] looked after Perdita, daily attending her, offering companionship, knowledge and canny advice. She taught her poker (how to shuffle, to deal, how finally, to cheat), desert songs (learned from her mother from whom she'd be taken), and the lives of the saints (the strange details of which she had read about in the orphanage). She taught Perdita, and Billy too, how to locate pitjuri, bush tobacco, and to chew it until the sides of their cheeks began to tingle and salivate, so that they experienced its sour, stimulating effects. She showed them the chevron sand-lines of lizards, identifying the species, and taught them how to track back, hunting stealthily, to a log hole or a burrow. The ripples of the departed snakes, the scroll shapes and mounds and pathways of bush tucker – all that had been inscribed there before them, in a hidden language never noticed, became suddenly visible. [...]

Under her intelligent guidance the scrub, which had seemed so empty, took on fullness and detail. Every bird had a true name, every mark in the wind-scalloped dirt betokened liveliness and activity. Even the glass-clear sky was a fabric of signs. There were seasons that a whitefella never noticed, marked by tiny efflorescences and the swelling and fading of bush fruit. (*Sorry* 54-55)

Mary's teaching, is largely limited to the visible world. Perdita's perception of Australian nature is expanded but there are no indications that she learns anything about Aboriginal culture or their spirituality. Therefore, she can only wonder what "The *big* questions. The *other* questions" (*Sorry* 59) are.

Later it becomes clear that Perdita's "Aboriginal" education is indeed more useful than her mother's teaching. At school Perdita becomes aware of the fact that "[h]er mother's history and geography were wild surmise, her politics were eccentric to the point of crude error; even her Shakespeare was a nonsens, partial accomplishment, a clutter of stories and quotations [...]. This maternal inheritance, more than anything, would serve to humiliate her" (*Sorry* 65). Only the fragments of Aboriginal wisdom passed on to her by Mary remained in her memory, "securely lodged, and vouched safe" (*Sorry* 65) so that Perdita "carried [it] into adulthood" (*Sorry* 58).

But the analysis of Perdita's Aboriginal education includes another problem concerning her source of information. Mary is a child of the Stolen Generations. Aged six and having a lighter skin than other children, she was taken away and educated in an orphanage and a nunnery. Later she was sent to a convent in Broome to force her acculturation into white society (see *Sorry* 55-56). Despite the forcible removal from Aboriginal society, she is seemingly equipped with all the knowledge of her people. It appears rather pecu-

liar that – although she is stolen from her Aboriginal mother at the age of six – she is very experienced in traditional songs, stories and customs. Moreover, it is stated clearly that she is a very good hunter at the age of sixteen (see *Sorry* 70), which seems rather implausible in view of Mary's life story and the fact that she has spent the previous years in an orphanage and a nunnery, probably without any contact to her people who could have taught her these hunting skills. Also the statement that she remembers songs her mother has taught her (see *Sorry* 54) is not credible. On the whole, the character of Mary is therefore psychologically not convincing.

In conclusion, the two female protagonists, who have the closest contact to Aboriginal people, Victoria and Perdita in *Black Mirror* and *Sorry* respectively, are mostly influenced by female Aboriginal characters in their childhood. The black women function either as substitutes for their biological mothers – like Lily-white in *Black Mirror* or Jukuna, Sal and Daff in *Sorry* – or they fulfil the role as sister – like Mary. Therefore, these Aboriginal characters exercise considerable influence on Anna and Victoria. Although these two get more insight into Aboriginal culture than any other white character in the novels, none of them can understand it in its real depth. Victoria remains a passive observer and the few fragments of Aboriginal life she knows are negligible. Due to Mary's teaching, Perdita, on the other hand, can indeed acquire some practical knowledge about Australian nature and life in the outback. But not even Perdita fully succeeds in understanding Aboriginal culture and spirituality, for the girl's wisdom is limited to the perceptible world only.

3. Dysfunctional Families

Although the Keenes (*Sorry*), the Morrells and the Griffins (both *Black Mirror*) differ considerably in terms of their social and economic background, they have one thing in common: all of them can be categorized as dysfunctional families whose features will have to be analysed. Furthermore, the following analysis will concentrate on the main character's search for alternative families or new family concepts. Before this examination, however, it seems worthwhile to take into consideration one significant similarity between the three families, namely that their failure seems to be predestined even before the protagonists are born.

3.1. The Inevitability of Failure – Starting a Dysfunctional Family

Victoria Morrell, Anna Griffin and Perdita Keene all grow up in broken homes. Their families' dysfunctionality shows up especially after the children's birth, but in each case the failure is already foreshadowed in the parents' relationships that are clearly marked by a lack of emotional bonds between the spouses.

The problems of all three families are presented as a logical consequence of a dysfunctional relationship between the parents. Already before the birth of the three female protagonists, their families seem to be predestined to fail in their duty to serve as a shelter for the new-born children. However, if we take a closer look, these deterministic explanations for the families' failure could simply be the result of an arbitrary reconstruction of past events on the part of the narrators. This seems especially true for *Sorry*: the narrator in the novel is mostly Perdita herself, either as a first-person narrator or as a seemingly detached or even "omniscient" third-person-narrator. She attempts to overcome the traumatic situation of having murdered her father by trying to reconstruct oppressive memories of her childhood. Therefore, almost everything that is stated about her parents is based on her own assumptions or recollections. The picture which Perdita conveys of her parents' relationship is unambiguously negative: "It was certainly not love; [...] It was an assertion against loss, a form of acquisition" (*Sorry* 5). Perdita's reconstruction has to depend largely on suppositions, which becomes clear when she tries to explain Nicholas' intention of going to Australia with his wife without telling her: "Perhaps

Nicholas also wished to punish his pale insipid wife, to drag her away from her sisters, to make her more dependent. Marriage had not been what he had expected; frustration and regret were already its features" (*Sorry* 11). Of course, the narrator cannot know Nicholas' motives, or what he expected from a marriage. Probably, Perdita simply projects her own bad experiences with her parents back onto the time before she was born. She is deeply convinced that her parents did not feel any love for each other: "And in my dreams my father and mother do not appear together: it is as though I have always known they never quite met – never met, that is to say, as lovers do [...]" (*Sorry* 21). Therefore everything points to the conclusion that the explicit foreshadowing of the Keenes' failure is the result of Perdita's explanation in retrospect, in order to make her reconstruction of the past more logical.

A similar observation can be made concerning the Morrells and the Griffins. Also their family lives are presented through the eyes of Victoria and Anna, whose opinions can hardly be objective. Again, the failure of their families seems to be predestined from the very beginning. Moreover, the readers have to bear in mind that Victoria's story is narrated by Anna, her biographer. Even if based on the blurred memories of Victoria, Anna's writing is inevitably reconstructive. Therefore, readers must be cautious because every reconstruction of the past automatically tends to create causal connections. The same assumption might be true for Anna's own life, who also reflects upon her past and her parents' marriage.

According to Anna's narration, **Thomas Griffin** ("Griffo") meets his future wife **Maggie** during an annual holiday. He falls in love with the 17-year-old girl and they get "married five weeks later" (*Black Mirror* 121). Marital problems are already foreshadowed in the wedding ceremony as Griffo does not kiss his bride on the mouth, but he "leant forward and kissed his bride as one kisses a child: lightly, ceremoniously, just above the eyes. The congregation snickered and Maggie was disappointed" (*Black Mirror* 122). When they finally move to the town in the goldfields, Maggie is aware of the wrong decision she has taken: "[...] although she had liked the idea of being married to a miner – it seemed a pure, manly, almost heroic form of labour – when she saw the town with its tin houses and the insect-looking poppet heads [...] she knew immediately that she had made a terrible mistake" (*Black Mirror* 122). Thomas neither sees his wife's desperation, nor realizes that his wife does not return his love: "Griffo doted upon Maggie, but Maggie doted upon film stars" (*Black Mirror* 122-123). One year after the wedding, Anna is born, and Maggie falls into post-natal depressions:

A year later, when her only daughter was born, Maggie's life was cemented in the mode of unglamorous dismay. She looked into the eyes of her infant and saw there an image of herself, incredibly diminished. She wept for days and days before Griffio realized that she would need time away, in a hospital. [...] A shadow consumed her. (*Black Mirror* 123)

Finally, Anna explains that her mother leaves Thomas and so Anna grows up in a single-parent family. Her father also has to take on the role of Anna's mother, but he seems overtaxed and is unable to express his emotions towards his daughter. Griffio's adoptive father is his "Uncle" Ernie, who is like a grandfather for Anna and becomes her best friend, too (see *Black Mirror* 50-51). This family constellation could also be denominated a skip-generation family because Anna is raised by Uncle Ernie instead of her biological parents.

With regard to mutual emotions, the family life of the Morrells in *Black Mirror* seems even worse. But the readers must be cautious on the grounds that the following descriptions of the Morrell family are seen through the eyes of Victoria, whose accounts are retold by Anna Griffin, her biographer. And Victoria herself explains to Anna that she has learned many things about her dead mother's emotions by reading her coded diary (see *Black Mirror* 216).

The relationship between the successful entrepreneur **Herbert Morrell** and **Rose** does not convey any impression of mutual love and once it is even described in Victoria's biography as a "logical marriage, two shapes in coalition" (*Black Mirror* 178). The reader also learns that after Rose's death, Herbert is lonely but "it was only the shape of his wife that he missed" (*Black Mirror* 178). Rose seems similarly indifferent to her husband and is not even impressed by his economic success because she was "born of a different class – her parents were indigent Irish, a farm labourer and a housemaid" (*Black Mirror* 159) and she believes that "wealth is always undeserved" (*Black Mirror* 159). Since her husband is only interested in his business and her beauty, Rose tries to compensate for this lack of love by starting an adulterous relationship with William, the chauffeur, who becomes Victoria's biological father (see *Black Mirror* 163).

Victoria's biography does not tell whether the birth of the Morrells' first child, Henry, has had any effects on the parents' lives. The readers only get to know their reaction when their second baby, Victoria, is born:

[...] Herbert Morrell announced in a loud and gaudy newspaper advertisement the Auspicious Arrival of Victoria May, sister of Henry Edward, and Scion Additional of the Eminent and Ever-expanding Morrells; but his wife was more

than usually elusive and quiet. Rose read in her daughter's face the immanent presence of her lover [...] Rose rocked her and kissed gently the diamond-shaped fontanelle. She peered and itemised, thought how unMorrell. (*Black Mirror* 161-162)

Herbert's reaction is mainly motivated by his pride. For him as a businessman, Victoria means, first of all, another visible proof of his success – also in his private life. From the point of view of the mother (which is described in her diary), the baby resembles its biological father, William, and she loves Victoria deeply. She has even “dismissed the nanny from all night-time duties” (*Black Mirror* 162) and refuses her husband's proposition to employ a wet nurse (see *Black Mirror* 163). His wife's affair is never discovered by Herbert Morrell, but it shows the readers that their marriage is not working.

The worst example of marital life is offered by the **Nicholas Keene and Stella** in *Sorry*. Nicholas is an English veteran of the First World War, who does not want to take over his father's haberdashery store, and so decides to make anthropological studies in Australia in order to become a famous intellectual. Perdita's mother, Stella, has an “inexplicable obsession with Shakespeare” (*Sorry* 7) and is working as a lady's companion, when she meets Nicholas in a teashop in Cambridge. Stella describes the following incident to her sister Margaret as follows: Nicholas accidentally spills tea on Stella's lap and they start a conversation, an event which is later denominated by Stella as “implicitly sexual” (*Sorry* 6). In general, however, their relationship “[...] was not an ardent courtship, or an impassioned connection, merely the magnification of an accident and its spreading stain” (*Sorry* 6).

Their only daughter, Perdita, is born under these unfavourable circumstances. Later she describes her parents' opinion of children as follows:

When I was born, two years after my parents' marriage, my mother was thirty-eight, my father thirty-six. Neither had expected children; indeed, both were accustomed to self-enclosure and habituated to forms of loneliness their partnership did not quite alleviate. I was a mistake, a slightly embarrassing intervention, and I knew this melancholy status from earliest childhood. (*Sorry* 4)

Retold from the point of view of Stella's parents, the readers learn that they do not want to have a child and when they find out that Stella is pregnant, they are ashamed, and order “medicine to make it go away” (*Sorry* 22), but the parcel arrives empty. Now, both are confronted with the task of becoming parents, but instead of preparing for their new life with the baby, they “fell into habitual silence. [...] Their shared misgivings remained unspoken” (*Sorry* 22). Even shortly after the birth of Perdita, Nicholas still

wishes the new-born infant to die, and Stella describes the baby as “a bloody mess and utterly unlovely” (*Sorry* 24), which already foreshadows the mother’s post-natal depressions. Only two weeks after the infant’s birth is Stella able to give the child the name Perdita, “the lost one” (*Sorry* 40), after a character from Shakespeare’s play *The Winter’s Tale*. Stella will later explain to her daughter the origin of her name, saying that “Perdita was the daughter of a dead woman” (*Sorry* 26). This “dead woman” clearly is meant to represent Stella’s life because she feels that Nicholas equals King Leontes of Sicilia, a tyrant who is powerful and unjust and who puts his wife Hermione to prison, where she bears their child Perdita (see *Sorry* 27 and chapter 1.2.2.1.).

While Stella’s baby is being cared for by Jukuna, an Aboriginal wet nurse, as well as by Sal and Daff (see *Sorry* 26), Stella is “sent to the hospital in Broome, ‘for a rest’ [...]”. The baby meanwhile flourished in black arms, which found and embraced her” (*Sorry* 26). At the same time, Nicholas lives at the Trevors’, where he enjoys “relative comfort and babyless quiet” (*Sorry* 28) and he only moves back when his wife returns from hospital. Still not being cured from her depressions, Stella is not interested in her baby and when Aboriginal women take care of the little girl for several hours, she does not even notice Perdita’s absence (see *Sorry* 29). From an adult point of view, Perdita characterises her parents as a “remote father” (*Sorry* 87) and an “unstable mother” (*Sorry* 87) and also explains that “[t]hey didn’t count to each other, my parents. And they barely counted me” (*Sorry* 27). Due to the lack of emotions in their marriage, the parents are also unable to show their feelings towards their little daughter and they are not capable to adapt their lives and behaviour to the needs of a small child, which the grown-up Perdita criticises: “Predictably, both treated me as a smallish adult, arranging a regimen of behaviour, insisting on rules and repression, talking in stern, pedagogical tones. Neither thought it necessary to express affection, nor to offer any physical affirmation of our bond” (*Sorry* 4). The word “predictably” shows that under the circumstances given, namely the unhappy marriage of her parents and their indifference towards Perdita, it is impossible for the child to grow up in a pleasant and loving atmosphere.

To conclude, the conspicuous foreshadowing of the families’ miserable failure right from the start of the parents’ relationship need not correlate to diegetic reality but might only be the result of reconstruction. Predestined or not, the families become dysfunctional, at the latest in the first years of the protagonists’ childhood. The following chapter will now try to find the main characteristics that allow classifying these families as broken homes.

3.2. Family Roles and the Inability of Fulfilling Them

The final collapse of the protagonists' families is in all cases, apart from the death of Rose Morrell and Stella's mental illness, exclusively caused by problems created by the families themselves. It is not due to any other external events that the families become dysfunctional, but their problems are rooted in the parents' inability to properly fulfil their roles as fathers and mothers. As will be shown, especially the loss of the mothers through death (Rose Morrell), flight (Anna Griffin) or insanity (Stella Keene) is one of the decisive reasons for the families to collapse definitively. Therefore, it appears logical to start the following analysis with the protagonists' mothers before considering the fathers.

3.2.1. The Mothers

Rose Morrell dies when Victoria is three years old, and so Victoria cannot remember any details of her mother. Only through Rose's diary does it become clear that she has been a loving mother. She even enjoyed the breastfeeding so she rejected her husband's idea to have a wet nurse or a nanny taking care of the baby during the night (see *Black Mirror* 162-163). Victoria remembers that she and her brother missed their mother dreadfully and "[i]n the first year after Rose's death the children lived in perplexion" (*Black Mirror* 172). Both children, however, cope with this situation differently: Henry soon develops an aggressive behaviour, hurting his sister and the Aboriginal girl Lily-white who replaces their biological mother, and he even kills several animals (see *Black Mirror* 173). Victoria on the other hand, retreats into secret rooms and hides from Nurse Tilly, Mrs Murphy and her cruel brother to play with her invisible friends (see *Black Mirror* 173-174).

In contrast to Rose Morrell, **Maggie Griffin** gives up her role as a mother voluntarily, running away with a "handsome visitor, an itinerant worker with slicked back hair" (*Black Mirror* 123). Being based exclusively on Anna's memories, the narrative is not very clear about the feelings Maggie had for her daughter. The only situation in which the reader gets the impression that Maggie has indeed loved her child, is when Anna tells Victoria that she remembers "every little thing" (*Black Mirror* 62) of her mother. She can still recall her mother's evening ritual of putting her to bed and kissing her

good night (see *Black Mirror* 62-63). However, because of the fact that this is the only example of her mother's love, Anna's claim to remember "every little thing" must be seen critically: does Anna indeed recall her mother's affection or is her "memory" rather the product of her desire? Assuming her mother's love and care can perhaps be interpreted as a kind of protective mechanism against the feeling of being the reason for her mother's leaving. Indeed, Anna does not seem to reproach Maggie for having left. Furthermore, Anna's attempts to understand her mother's decision do not include the idea that it was primarily her birth that made her leave, but the overall situation of being stuck in a life Maggie never wanted. Presenting her mother's flight in that way clearly shows that Anna rejects any personal responsibility. According to Anna, Maggie fled her family commitments because she could not "endure the realist insufficiencies of her life" (*Black Mirror* 124) any longer. She exchanged her seemingly miserable situation for a stranger's promise of a movie-like world outside the desert (see *Black Mirror* 124). This explanation is clearly reconstructive and it is highly improbable that she only recites her father's interpretation, since he seems to be completely unable to speak about the incident. For example, it is not him who informs Anna of her mother's leaving with another man, but her friends Moira and Beryl (see *Black Mirror* 64). Anna has not been prepared by her father and is therefore unable to deal with the truth: she is so shocked and so ashamed of this story that she does not go to school for three weeks (see *Black Mirror* 65). By running away, Maggie destroys the Griffins' nuclear family: she leaves Griffio behind, who is lovesick (see *Black Mirror* 32), and overtaxed with the new situation of being a single-father.

Perdita's mother, **Stella Keene**, is an emotionally unstable character, who first suffers from post-natal depressions and then from delusions and acute depressive phases. Stella's role changes significantly in the course of events and can be described by a three-stage model: at the beginning (1) she is clearly oppressed by her husband, but after his death, (2) it is her who becomes the dominant person in the Keene family. This change, however, turns out to be only temporary and soon, (3) her insanity makes her completely dependent on Perdita, thus reversing the family roles. In none of the stages mentioned, however, does Stella succeed to fulfil her supposed role as a mother.

Before Nicholas' death, Stella's is described as an unhappy, discontented mother and wife, who longs to return to England (see *Sorry* 10-11), to her beloved sister Margaret. In fact, from the beginning onwards, Stella believes that "[h]er baby was a duty, her husband a fate to be suffered" (*Sorry* 29). Not only does she suffer from Nicholas' con-

tempt and her isolation, but also from physical violence exercised by her frustrated husband (see chapter 3.3.). Her relationship towards Perdita seems to be loveless from the very beginning, starting with the wish to abort the unwanted child before its birth (see *Sorry* 22). One of the few occasions in which the relationship between mother and daughter appears harmonious, is when they get closer through Stella's home-schooling (see *Sorry* 35-36). However, Stella's illness does not permit her daughter to *really* get to know her. Since the married couple themselves are unable to discuss their problems and retreat into their own private world of reading (see *Sorry* 30), this technique of avoiding communication is also applied to their daughter. Even when it is clear that Nicholas' death has caused Perdita's stuttering – as a symptom for some emotional imbalance –, both, Stella and Perdita, do not speak about the incident and decide to read instead. Their problem-solving abilities are extremely limited – since they exclude talking and asking other people for help – and this lack of communication is one of the reasons that causes the collapse of this nuclear family.

After Nicholas' death, Stella's psychological weakness first seems to disappear and she takes over Nicholas' role as the head of the family. Perdita is "oppressed by her rules" (*Sorry* 129) and soon knows that in all the negotiations between them, Stella would always take precedence with speech" (*Sorry* 129) because she can talk more quickly than her stuttering daughter. Perdita herself explains, "She enjoyed her power. She enjoyed talking for me and finishing the ends of my sentences." (*Sorry* 151-152). Nevertheless, Stella does not fulfil the role as a mother, because she does not support her child. For example, when she finds out about Perdita's broken speech, she shows no understanding, but feels "alone, and burdened with a stubborn, idiot child. She raged and scolded. She told me [Perdita] to pull myself together" (*Sorry* 11). Moreover, she does not try to find help for Perdita so that her stuttering would be cured (see *Sorry* 152) and when her daughter's stutter is healed, "she expressed no particular surprise. Nor for that matter, any rejoicing" (*Sorry* 152). Stella does not see Perdita's stuttering as a problem that has to be examined by doctors, but instead

[s]he enjoyed the concern she solicited, as a widow encumbered by an apparently dumbstruck daughter. [...] she was simply accustomed to discontent and disillusioned with life. It fitted somehow, this damaged child. It did not occur to her to seek help, medical or otherwise. She was a resolute fatalist: passive, ill-tempered, constantly complaining, and fuelled by a persistent sense of regret. (*Sorry* 152)

Stella does not seem able to act as a mother because she is rather presented as an egoist, who uses her daughter to attract other people's attention and to be pitied. At least, this is the point of view that the reader gets to know because Perdita is the narrator of this scene and the young woman reflects on her life and her mother several years after her father's death (see *Sorry* 151).

The phase of maternal authority, however, does not last long. Soon, Stella's insanity leads to a complete reversal of family roles, for Perdita has to care for her helpless mother from this time on. Stella's psychological instability is mentioned several times in the novel: first, she suffers from post-natal depressions (see *Sorry* 25-26) and is sent to the hospital in Broome. When Perdita is ten years old, her mother is again sent to take a rest under medical surveillance because of her insanity (see *Sorry* 41-43). The third incident of severe depression happens in Perth, when Perdita is about twelve years old (see *Sorry* 153-156). In 1943, already after Nicholas' death, Stella's third phase of her mental disturbance starts, which is completely unexpected from the point of view of her daughter because their little world seems almost perfect: Stella works in a flower shop, Perdita goes to school and they live in a little house in Perth (see *Sorry* 153). According to the young girl, it is natural to take care of her mother: "As her plight wrapped them both, Perdita chose to stay home from school to keep her mother company. She would nurse her, she decided. No one need know of Stella's illness, and it would pass, surely, as it had done before. They would battle this together" (*Sorry* 154). It appears, however, that Perdita, who is at this time only 12 years old, is overtaxed with her mother's illness and it is her mother's employer, Mrs Brodie, who finally calls in the welfare department for Perdita, and the ambulance for Stella.

There are, however, incidents that foreshadow Stella's weakness in some earlier passages of the novel: for instance, after a cyclone, Stella is completely disoriented and helpless like a child. She needs Mary's emotional support. In retrospect, Perdita, who is the narrator, considers this weakness a first step in the reversal of family roles and claims that she then "realised in a wave of pity that I was stronger than she [Stella] and would be called upon some day to act my part and protect her" (*Sorry* 87-88). This changing of roles finds its conclusion after Stella is released from psychological care and Perdita is staying with her foster family. "Perdita [...] stepped forward to embrace her mother [...] [T]hey were misproportioned, the daughter now slightly taller than the mother" (*Sorry* 187). The changed proportions of mother and daughter point out visually what has happened: Perdita has *definitively* taken over the role of her mother's pro-

tector and is able to put her arms around Stella's shoulder, such as a caring parent does with a child.

Throughout Perdita's life, which is described by herself in the narrative, Stella does not show love and affection towards her daughter openly. Stella's reservedness is revealed in various scenes, for instance, when she returns from hospital at Christmas: Perdita hugs her mother, but "her embrace had no reply: Stella stood like a statue, her arms at her sides" (*Sorry* 74). Indeed, Stella never shows affection for her daughter, apart from the scene when Perdita returns after the air raid of Broome. Believing that her daughter has died, Mrs Keene weeps and when she sees her again, Perdita describes that they were "clinging to each other, pleased at least to have each other alive" (*Sorry* 132). However, this "unusual gift of her mother's tears" (*Sorry* 132) is soon withdrawn: Stella blows her nose, wipes her tears and turns away from her saved daughter (see *Sorry* 132). In retrospect, Perdita is aware of the one-sidedness of emotions: "I know now that I was selfish and opportunistic. To have my mother embrace me, bawling, as if she really loved me; it was like a reward in the midst of other people's devastation [caused by the air raid]" (*Sorry* 136). Perdita is so glad of her mother's stirring of emotion that the readers once again realise the usual lack of feelings and the emotional isolation the young Perdita suffers from because of her mentally disturbed and callous mother.

Nevertheless, Perdita knows that at least some kind of bond exists between them: "Despite the fact that I was unconvinced of her love (since she had never been a mother who might embrace, or kiss, or reach inadvertently to caress), there was the stringent complicity of our isolation and the far-fetched world of notions we had daily shared" (*Sorry* 49-50). Perdita herself seems undecided concerning her emotions towards her mother. Once, she speaks of a "wave of love and concern" (*Sorry* 42), "affection" (*Sorry* 74) or of a "fondness so huge that it must have been love" (*Sorry* 121). Basically, Perdita's love for her mother seems to increase proportionally with Stella's helplessness and culminates when Perdita has finally taken over full responsibility for her mother. Nevertheless, their relationship has never been close, which can also be seen when Perdita describes their appearance on the photograph of Billy and Pearl's wedding:

In this, the only image Perdita has of Stella and herself together, they are both in shadow. Stella is faint and blotted, her features bluish and inky. Perdita is beside her, leaning close, as directed by the photographer, and it will pain her later to note how little resemblance exists between them, how even in this most conventional act of documentation, they are still set apart, they are still strangers. (*Sorry* 201)

The three female protagonists presented in *Black Mirror* and *Sorry* lose their biological mothers in their early years. This lack of maternal support has to be compensated, either by their fathers, or by foster mothers and alternative families, as the following chapters will show.

3.2.2. The Fathers

Herbert Morrell is presented as a rich businessman, who does not have any time for his family and therefore employs several women to take care of his two children, Henry and Victoria. Only two passages cast light on his attitude towards his son and daughter. Herbert's preference is shown when he tries to explain the map of the Midas mine to his son, who is completely uninterested in his father's enormous investment. Hence, the father is infuriated and he hits his son so hard that his upper lip bleeds (see *Black Mirror* 171-172). Realizing that Henry will never be a worthy heir of Herbert's business, he "wished that his daughter Victoria was a boy" (*Black Mirror* 172). Later, it is explicitly stated that "Herbert Morrell liked his daughter, but could not abide his son. He thought him gormless, a dullard and cowardly to boot, a fact confirmed when it was only Victoria who could be persuaded to ride in the biplane" (*Black Mirror* 183). Except for her sharing her father's interest in aviation (see also *Black Mirror* 167), the relationship between father and daughter does not appear very close. This might be due to the fact that he is not at home very often, but takes care of his business by travelling to other countries, such as Egypt (see *Black Mirror* 184 and 193). For Victoria, his absence is not unfortunate, she even believes that "it was good to have him away; the house was altogether more spacious and altered in tone" (*Black Mirror* 184). When Victoria is pregnant, she does not dare to tell her father, but confides in Mrs Murphy because she fears his reaction (see *Black Mirror* 235). It is, however, improbable that he has known beforehand of the assassination of Victoria's lover, Louis Bell, who is executed by his son Henry, since the aftermath of this murder forces Herbert to leave the town and his beloved gold mine (see *Black Mirror* 288). Even if Herbert ever felt affection for his daughter, this sentiment seems to vanish after he finds out about Victoria's pregnancy: he sends her "to the city in the south" (*Black Mirror* 236), where she gives birth to her child that must be offered for adoption. After the infant is born, Herbert agrees immediately to Victoria's request to be allowed to go to London, where she could escape the scandal and where she "could achieve the requisite female accomplishments" (*Black*

Mirror 237). Another aspect of Herbert Morrell's understanding of his role as a father is presented through the narration of Ruby. She is the one who later tells Anna of the events after Victoria's departure and the scandalous trial against Henry, in which he was found innocent:

Mr Morrell [...] sold his share in the Midas mine and pissed off back to Melbourne. [...] He left Henry in the house, all alone, because no one would have anything to do with him, the bastard. [...] Henry Morrell [...] stayed on in the house. Some kind of riding accident, people said, put him in a wheel-chair, and he stayed on inside, getting crazier and crazier [...]. Henry's dad paid a fortune to have nurses come and look after him [...]. (*Black Mirror* 288-289)

This quotation shows that Mr Morrell even sells his mine, his greatest obsession, to get away from the scene of crime. Although his son is a murderer and a lunatic, he still supports him financially. Mr Morrell's behaviour probably rather indicates his sense of responsibility than genuine love for his son.

Thomas Griffin, Anna's father, becomes a very silent person after his wife has left him (see *Black Mirror* 29). Before this separation, he "used to be a laughing man, this bloke, this bloke they call Griffio; [...] People round here remember a different Griffio" (*Black Mirror* 30). The loss of his wife weighs heavily on Thomas (see also *Black Mirror* 31-33) and is the cause of his inability to express his love for Anna: "Griffio's silence, and their poverty, impose an economy on language" (*Black Mirror* 30). Although his feelings are not obvious, he is presented by his devotion as a father who tries hard to compensate for the missing mother. Being overtaxed with this situation he does not succeed in fulfilling both, the role of a father and the role as a "mother". Nevertheless his attempts are valued by Anna, who realizes early that her taciturn and reserved father tries his best to raise her. There is one episode which Anna recalls in great detail and which shows that Griffio is "[...] mindful of the need to indulge his motherless daughter, [and so] Griffio includes in the picnic a can of condensed milk" (*Black Mirror* 29). Anna knows that he struggles valiantly to fulfil the role of a caring parent, and so she also wants to support him: in Anna's reconstructed memory "she knows her father has forgotten the jam, but [Anna] will not move to tell him" (*Black Mirror* 30). Here it becomes apparent that it is true, Thomas really tries to fulfil his role as a father but paradoxically, it is only Anna's sympathy for her father's shortcomings that enable him to play his role. Actually, it is rather Uncle Ernie who cares for Anna and gives her the emotional stability she needs.

Perdita's father, **Nicholas Keene**, neither shows any emotions towards his wife, nor towards his daughter. After the birth of the baby, he concentrates on his studies instead of his family (see *Sorry* 29-30). When Perdita is five years old, Stella starts to home-school the girl and Nicholas leaves the house early each morning (see *Sorry* 35), which shows that he is not interested in his daughter's education. Another indication of his indifference towards Perdita is that all the books Nicholas has ordered from Sydney are adult books (see *Sorry* 30 and 35) and not suitable for a child.

Due to the indifference towards his daughter, Nicholas does not deem it necessary to talk to her, not even about details of Stella's psychical illness (see *Sorry* 41-42). She is not even allowed to accompany them to see what happens to her mother, but is "[i]nstructed to stay in her room while her mother was taken to the hospital [...]" (*Sorry* 43). Another incident when Perdita experiences a significant information gap is when Nicholas takes her to the convent in Broome and she does not know the purpose of this action. He has not talked to her about his plan of picking up an Aboriginal girl from there as a domestic help. Not knowing anything, Perdita grows afraid because "[s]he wondered suddenly if Nicholas planned to leave her here [...]. She experienced a moment of panic; why was she never told anything? Why did adults, always and anyhow, get to make all the decisions?" (*Sorry* 47).

Apart from the failure of passing on information to Perdita, Nicholas is not interested in his daughter's health either: When they go to Broome by jeep to take Stella to hospital and to look for a domestic help in the nunnery, "Perdita sat with their luggage in the tray, in the dust and sun, jolted at every turn" (*Sorry* 42). Finally, in the room of the Continental Hotel, Perdita feels the consequences of this journey: "Perdita slumped onto her bed, feeling as if she had been battered. There were bruises on her buttocks and knees from the journey, and she felt a sting in the corner of her eye that she knew was the beginning of an infection" (*Sorry* 43). Nicholas, however, does not realize his daughter's painful condition. After he has taken Stella to hospital, he is sitting in the hotel bar, drinking too much alcohol and has completely forgotten his ten-year-old daughter, who is sitting next to him (see *Sorry* 45). Nicholas never talks about his wife's illness with his child, nor does he realize her aching eye. Only in the convent does Perdita's sore eye receive attention by Sister Immaculata, who applies some ointment to it (see *Sorry* 47).

Due to Nicholas' incompetence in anything that has to do with children, it does not even occur to him that the images of the Second World War – which he pins on the walls of their shack – are not suitable for children. Nicholas is obsessed with the war. He is even characterized by his daughter as having “a war inside him” (*Sorry* 62). Actually, it is Nicholas who first brought the depressing topics of war and death to his young daughter by putting up war images on the walls (see *Sorry* 62-63). In her narration, Perdita criticizes her father's behaviour by conveying the opinion of the two policemen who investigate Nicholas' murder. They “[...] discover what appears to them a madman's shack. What kind of bloke would have this many books in the bush? What idiot would pin war images where a little girl was sleeping?” (*Sorry* 91).

Concerning Nicholas' role as a father, which is presented through the point of view of his daughter, it can be stated that he is neither a loving, caring or attentive parent, for he is only preoccupied with his own interests – his studies and the war – so that he does not see his daughter's need for affection, emotional support, good health or useful education. Instead of being supported, Perdita is unaware of her father's feelings, she is left alone without understanding of her mother's illness and she suffers from bruises and a sore eye. To conclude, Nicholas fails to fulfil the role of a father who guides and protects his daughter.

Although the three fathers are – at least temporarily – in charge of their daughters, they do not fulfil their role as an attentive parent and leave their children in other people's care: Uncle Ernie mothers Anna Griffin, several women look after Victoria Morrell, and Mary is given the task of replacing Perdita Keene's mother. The non-fulfilment of parental roles makes it necessary for the female protagonists to search for alternatives, which enable them to escape from their dysfunctional families (see chapter 3.4.). But before this analysis, the following chapter will reveal another aspect of a broken home, namely violence.

3.3. Violence

Violence is one of the factors that characterise a dysfunctional family in the two novels. The male members of the Morrell family in *Black Mirror*, as well as Nicholas Keene in *Sorry*, show violent behaviour, especially towards women. This chapter will try to especially find the explanations that are implicitly or explicitly offered by the focalisers, as well as to analyse the consequences of brutal acts for other characters' development.

The unpremeditated murder of Nicholas Keene committed by his daughter will not be analysed in this chapter because violent behaviour is not a central feature of Perdita's character. Her act of violence is "only" the result of the spontaneous wish to defend her best friend Mary when being raped by Nicholas. Therefore Perdita differs significantly from the male characters whose outbreaks of violence are frequent and premeditated.

Herbert Morrell does not describe explicitly why he prefers Victoria and dislikes Henry. The scene when he hits his son quite brutally is based on Victoria's memories and also the conclusive statement that Herbert Morrell "wished that his daughter Victoria was a boy" (*Black Mirror* 172) must not be accepted unreservedly. Herbert and Henry Morrell's outbursts of violence are only presented by other focalisers, such as Victoria and Ruby, and therefore, the readers do not get a very detailed insight.

Herbert Morrell – as presented in the biography written by Anna Griffin – is a megalomaniac businessman, who is thrilled at the idea "of owning the labour of others" (*Black Mirror* 170). He loves to calculate the number of workers he possesses (see *Black Mirror* 171), but he does not care about installing safety equipment and he tries to break the unions (see *Black Mirror* 230). Although he has nightmares about workers who suffocate because of the bad air in the mines, due to the lack of ventilation (see *Black Mirror* 175-176), he does not change his capitalistic attitude. Therefore, he does not have any friends in town and with regard to his workers, he "knew too that they hated him and wished him dead. When he looked into their faces murder looked back" (*Black Mirror* 167-177). Although his harshness in business cannot be compared with his behaviour in his family, there are reasons to assume that also his private life is dominated by matters of honour and rationality rather than love: Firstly, he has married his wife only because of her beauty. Secondly, he likes his daughter Veronica, but forces her to put her illegitimate child up for adoption, and thirdly, he hates his son Henry because he thinks him a coward and a dull person, who is not interested in the mining business. With regard to Henry, Herbert Morrell develops such a considerable amount of frustration that even small matters cause his outburst of rage and violence. To Herbert Morrell, the most important thing in his life is the Midas mine, and since Henry is not interested in it, his father's anger is vented on him:

[...] Herbert studied the Midas mine map for its unclaustrophobic simplicity. He ran his ring-studded finger down the length of the main shaft, trying to impress his son Henry with the full magnitude of his investment. Henry Morrell picked at his nose and asked not a single question. The boy was a buffoon: Herbert cuffed his head. Then he hit again, and harder, until Henry flew side-

ways, toppled and fell. A wail rang out, and a sobbing gurgle. Blood appeared on the child's cracked upper lip. (*Black Mirror* 171-172)

Victoria tells her biographer that – already at a very young age – **Henry** experiences his father's violence and it is explicitly expressed that “[m]otherless, Henry Edward grew mean and morose [...]” (*Black Mirror* 173). Henry is aggressive towards his sister and loves to stab at “mice and lizards with his antique swords” (*Black Mirror* 173). Victoria, who is unbearably sad after Lily-white and Ruby are gone, burns her dead mother's wardrobe and is punished by her brother Henry, who beats her so violently that her face is “swollen and discoloured, remade in lilac and indigo, and with two black eyes” (*Black Mirror* 209). However, Henry's aggressiveness becomes worse: for example, at the age of eleven, he blinds his Aboriginal step-mother Lily-white in an extremely brutal way:

Victoria was somewhere else, sitting in the dirt with the infant Ruby, and Henry summoned Lily-white to identify the lizard he had stabbed. He had pinned it through the gullet with a stick, and left it there, squirming. As Lily-white bent down to examine the creature, Henry pulled out the stick and then suddenly pushed it, like an arrow, through Lily-white's eye. (*Black Mirror* 189)

After this brutal attack, nobody in the Morrells' household likes Henry anymore and so he “existed as an emotional isolate, his heart a stone” (*Black Mirror* 183). His aggressive behaviour finally culminates in the atrocious murder of Louis Bell, Victoria's lover. Within just a few minutes, Henry and his two accomplices destroy the Bell family by killing Louis and by seriously hurting Louis' brother Ernest. The use of swords and acid conveys a particularly cruel impression of the crime:

Henry Morrell and two other men knocked down the door of Louis' cottage in the middle of the night. They were armed with antique swords and a metal pail of acid. One of the men flung the acid at Ernest's face, and as he fell, blinded, the other man sliced at his side with a sword. Henry himself, so the trial revealed, cut down my [Victoria's] beloved Louis in a fit of maddened fury. The amount of blood was immense [...]. (*Black Mirror* 235)

Despite all his brutal deeds, Henry is not brought to justice, as Ruby – Victoria's half-sister later reveals to Anna. Whereas Henry's collaborators are hanged, “Henry Morrell was pardoned. He was pronounced temporarily insane [...]” (*Black Mirror* 236). However, Henry experiences a kind of punishment because his father leaves him and he is said to become “a complete looney” (*Black Mirror* 289; see also 45). Although Victoria does not have any contact to her family any more, she is still haunted by her brother's

menacing presence: "I dreamt my brother was above my bed, swinging his swords. Here I am, an old woman, and still afraid of him [...]" (*Black Mirror* 152).

In *Sorry*, the source of aggression is **Nicholas Keene** (see France), who might be aggressive because he has seen many atrocities in the First World War and is unable to lead the life he wishes. Therefore, he develops a considerable amount of frustration, which may result in his violent behaviour concerning his family and other women. But again, it is his daughter's vision of the world and her opinion of Nicholas and his violent deeds that the readers are persistently confronted with, whereas his feelings are never explicitly articulated by himself.

Nicholas' victims are exclusively women. Having arrived in Australia, his hostility towards his wife Stella can already be seen on the first evening in the Continental Hotel, where he "tried to reason with his wife, but ended up hitting her" (*Sorry* 16). He also forces her into having sex with him (see *Sorry* 16). Two more examples of domestic violence against his wife are presented in the novel, obviously seen through the eyes of his young daughter: When Nicholas and Stella argue about the tiniest things, the husband gets so aggressive that he swings at Stella "striking her with an audible whack to the cheek" (*Sorry* 34), so that Perdita flees into the bush to escape the tense situation. The second incident happens at Christmas in 1940 and again, the focaliser in this scene is the ten-year-old Perdita. Having drunk too much, the parents convert a peaceful celebration into an outburst of violence: When Nicholas makes fun of Stella's performance of the fifth act of Shakespeare's *Othello*, she is so enraged that she tears the newspaper cuttings from the wall. As a consequence, he hits Stella,

sending her flying backwards so that she toppled a stack of books. When Mary rose to protest, Nicholas also struck her, but though she wavered and was hurt, she did not fall. She stood before him in staunch, smarting accusation, so that he became self-conscious and perhaps even ashamed. (*Sorry* 79)

Although all these scenes show Perdita's negative opinion of her father, she only remains an observer and does not dare to interfere in the violent actions of Nicholas. But Mary does, although she has also been a victim of Mr Keene's brutality because he has already raped her as well as another Aboriginal home help (see chapter 2.2.2.1.). Perdita assumes that her selfless deed forces Nicholas to stop his rage and makes him leave the room (see *Sorry* 79), but Nicholas' motives remain unexplained because he is not the focaliser in this scene and so his innermost thoughts are kept in secret.

Perdita underlines Nicholas' negative influence on the family, saying that he creates an oppressive and hostile atmosphere in the Keenes' home. Only when he is away for four days, does the family – including Mary and Billy – play poker and enjoy the relaxed ambience (see *Sorry* 81). Their relief is almost overwhelming when they finally hear that Nicholas has to stay in the hospital of Broome for one or two nights because he has had a riding accident (see *Sorry* 83). “Stella smiled. She looked down at her cards. There was silent celebration of the temporary “release from tyranny” (*Sorry* 83). But when Nicholas comes back from hospital, the three women are frightened again. Perdita, the narrator of this scene, depicts the tense atmosphere after Nicholas' return as follows:

When my father returned, his torso bandaged, I realised that I resented him. Mary flinched at his presence. Stella withdrew. Unmanned by his accident, Nicholas snarled at us all, and demonstrated his capacity for careless brutality. Once he spilled his fiery pipe on Mary's bare arm, burning a scarlet hole in the size of a two-shilling piece. As she brushed away the hot tobacco, she refused to cry.

Warily, we watched him and moved out of his way. A menacing possibility had entered our lives. We feared him, waiting as one waits for the arrival of a cyclone, cringing, cautious, to see what it is that converts a home into a ruin. (*Sorry* 88)

Feeling helpless – or “unmanned”, as Perdita puts it – is not the only reason for Nicholas' frustration. From the very beginning of his marriage he is disappointed with his private life (see *Sorry* 11) – as Perdita reconstructs – and his mood deteriorates with Perdita's birth and Stella's growing insanity. Furthermore, he slowly has to realize that he is unable to produce an outstanding piece of academic work (see *Sorry* 39, see Schwerin 40). As a consequence of his frustration and weakness, he wants to show his power by being extremely aggressive. This is at least the explanation implicitly inherent in Perdita's narration with regard to her father's evil deeds.

Due to the fact that male characters in *Sorry* and *Black Mirror* are mainly described through the eyes of their daughters, the reasons for their aggression are never explained by themselves. Instead, their motives are only assumptions deduced by the female narrators. To sum up, the reasons for violent behaviour in *Black Mirror* and *Sorry* cannot be fully revealed, but there are implicit and explicit explanations offered through the point of view of other characters, which might help the readers to interpret the aggressive behaviour of male family members.

3.4. Looking for Alternatives – New Concepts of Family Life

Living in dysfunctional families, the three main characters of *Black Mirror* and *Sorry* try to search for different ways of substitution. They look for someone they can trust, mostly outside their family. This chapter will analyse how the biological parents are – at least partially – replaced by friends or other families or even another member of their own family. Finally, this chapter will also point out if and how long the substitutions are helpful for the characters of Victoria, Anna and Perdita.

In *Black Mirror*, **Victoria Morrell**'s mother dies when she is still very young, her father is only interested in his business, and her brother Henry is a violent person. Therefore, Victoria looks upon Lily-white as her new mother (see *Black Mirror* 192, 206 and 208) and sees her daughter Ruby as her sister (see *Black Mirror* 195 and 198). The Aboriginal woman takes care of Victoria and frees her from her loneliness. Lily-white and Ruby's real importance for Victoria only becomes clear to the readers when the young girl returns from boarding school and both are gone: "[...] Victoria, then, [...] returned to a place which was no longer her home. [...] She sang to herself in a way that recalled her lost mother, Lily-white. She cried, and forgot to eat, and was tormented by loneliness" (*Black Mirror* 206, see also 207 and 230).

Being all alone, without anybody to trust, she falls in love with Louis Bell and is given a cordial reception in the Bell family. She really loves Louis, but "the gently confirming and the familial" (*Black Mirror* 234) are even more important for her. In this family, she finally feels "[t]he aura of veneration and simple tenderness" (*Black Mirror* 234). Therefore, Victoria clearly states, "[T]hey offered me for a short time a new kind of family" (*Black Mirror* 231). But this adopted family is later completely destroyed by the brutality of her brother (see chapter 3.3.).

Mrs Murphy, who keeps her company after the disappearance of Lily-white and Ruby, is not an adequate substitute for her foster-mother: when Victoria confides her pregnancy to her, the old housekeeper immediately passes on this information to Mr Morrell because she seems to be "driven by some old-fashioned code of honour, locked into servant fidelity and mixed allegiances" (*Black Mirror* 235). Therefore, Mrs Murphy is to blame for Louis Bell's murder, too. The housekeeper's disloyalty shows that she is not a person to be trusted and can therefore never be a substitute for Lily-white's tender love and care.

The other protagonist in *Black Mirror* is **Anna Griffin**. Since her mother has left, her father has to raise his child alone, but he is supported by his foster-father, Uncle Ernie. Although Uncle Ernie lives in another house, Anna has obviously visited him so often that she cannot distinguish between his house and her father's home anymore, when she later tells Victoria about them (see *Black Mirror* 46). Uncle Ernie is Griff's foster father, and loves him as if he was his biological son (see *Black Mirror* 49 and 289). After the death of his brother, Louis, and the disappearance of Louis and Victoria's child, Ernie adopted Thomas and – according to Ruby – he “[...] made a fuzz like any new mother. [...] He had eyes, as they say, only for baby Thomas” (*Black Mirror* 289, see also 293). Considering Thomas a son, Uncle Ernie sees Anna as his grandchild. Even when Maggie is still at home, he takes care of the little girl. Once, Anna knocks herself unconscious with the swing. She wakes up and sees that “[h]is eyes were swollen and it was clear that her uncle had been crying” (*Black Mirror* 50), which shows his serious concern. She then remembers the strong arms of her protector, on which she is carried to her mother (see *Black Mirror* 49-50), and which she describes as “a cradle she rested in” (*Black Mirror* 50). Her mother, Maggie, is furious at Uncle Ernie, who unsuccessfully tries to defend himself. At that moment, Anna expresses her deep feelings for her uncle because “Anna felt then the cruelty of her mother's recriminations and the ungovernable surge of love for this man, this tender tobacco-stained uncle” (*Black Mirror* 50). Her affection for this man is also expressed when Anna “listed out for herself the reasons she adored her Uncle Ernie” (*Black Mirror* 50): the most decisive detail of her list is that - in contrast to her father or mother – she can tell him everything, he even “liked to be told the gossip of school” (*Black Mirror* 51). Anna also confides to him, for example, that she has a crush on Eamon Ahern and her uncle “treated the knowledge formally, with respect and seriousness” (*Black Mirror* 51). Besides, Uncle Ernie helps Anna to grow up by giving her a bike as a birthday present. This bike can be interpreted as a symbolic gift of freedom and independence:

On her ninth birthday Uncle Ernie gave Anna her own bicycle. He took her into his backyard, instructed her to close her eyes, then wheeled it in, ceremoniously.

So you can fly, Uncle Ernie said. Try it, Anna.

He steadied the back of the seat as she learned to ride, watched as by gradations her body tottered, righted and balanced itself, and then learned slowly the negotiated posture of wheels. By the evening she was confident and flew off, a little shaky, into the purplish air. [...] How glorious the wind was, now that she owned it. (*Black Mirror* 54-55)

Uncle Ernie teaches Anna to cycle and she immediately realizes the possible dimensions of her new skill: "It occurred to her that she could ride on her bike forever, but she always stopped" (*Black Mirror* 55). Only later will she leave her home town, when she is ready to do so. This process of learning how to ride a bike can be seen as an allegory on education in general: at first, adults help minors by passing on knowledge as well as by giving advice, and then, gradually, the children are able to take care of their further development themselves. Uncle Ernie loves Anna dearly and he is proud of her education, which the young woman learns of later, when Ruby describes Ernie's deep affection for Anna (see *Black Mirror* 290).

The main character of *Sorry*, **Perdita Keene**, also grows up in a broken home: her father is a violent and self-centred person, whose only interests are anthropology and warfare; her mother suffers from depressions and retreats into her own world. Fortunately, in the course of her life Perdita encounters several alternatives to compensate for the lack of love offered by her biological family. As Perdita herself formulates it, "There are other families [...] not just the one you are born with" (*Sorry* 165). This statement clearly shows that Perdita's understanding of family exceeds traditional concepts.

In her early years, Perdita is predominantly under Aboriginal influence (see *Sorry* 4) because her mother suffers from post-natal depressions and cannot be moved to look after her child. A wet nurse, Jukuna, is employed to support Stella, as well as Sal and Daff, Mrs Trevor's servants, who must help in the Keenes' household (see *Sorry* 26 and 32). Although Perdita and Billy are white, Sal and Daff integrate them into their family by taking them to their family near the creek-bed (see *Sorry* 32), where Perdita is treated as if she was really one of them. She recalls these scenes as follows: "I would be passed, like other small children, from body to body, nestling there, cradled in capacious laps, and I would feel the long fingers sift through my hair for lice, and the stroking of my arms, and the tickle of a tease. I was nourished and cared for in ways my parents were incapable of understanding" (*Sorry* 32). This alternative family, however, does not have any future for Perdita tells that after several years "Sal, and one month later Daff, disappeared with no warning. I was six, perhaps, when they abandoned me. I cried for days and days, as did Billy beside me [...]" (*Sorry* 32).

After Sal and Daff, another Aboriginal girl, Mary, becomes the most important person in Perdita's life. Interestingly, Mary is not seen as a replacement for her mother Stella, but she is regarded as a sister, which Perdita herself confirms: "I have thought of it, over

the years, not as a substitution – since one person can never, after all, replace another – but as the portentous sign of things made dangerously misaligned. Mary was not a mother, but a sister” (*Sorry* 49). Not only does Mary educate her (see chapter 2.1.2.2. and 2.2.3.), but she also introduces her to the Aboriginal group which has already adopted herself, too. As a sign of the acceptance of the white girl, they even give Perdita a so-called “skin group” (*Sorry* 72) and she is extremely happy to know that she belongs to a group whose members really care about each other:

[...] Perdita was both surprised and delighted. She knew herself suddenly implicated in a wider pattern, where there would always be someone, somewhere, to know of and look after her; and she knew too of the formal recognition of her love for Mary, her sister. [...] this was when Perdita decided once and for all that Billy was her brother [...] (*Sorry* 72)

Mary and Billy Trevor are her best friends and the quotation above shows that Perdita sees them as brother and sister. Consequently, they can be seen as a “new family”. After Mary has told Billy and Perdita about her mother’s death (see chapter 2.2.3.), the two younger children show their compassion and love: “[a]nd though she was the youngest and smallest, Perdita reached her arms around Mary and Billy and gathered them in; and their little group, like another family, inclined lovingly together, couched in the comfort of hot bodies in a clumsy child’s embrace” (*Sorry* 56). Later, their special bond is confirmed in a kind of ceremony, when they gather black and red *Jequirity seeds* (see *Sorry* 65) to make necklaces for themselves. “As they worked, Mary sang a song in her own language [...] When the necklaces were made the three wore them as a sign of their bond, their own little tribe. This moment of making will remain after everything else collapses: fingers, voice, the summoning unity of three souls” (*Sorry* 65).

Mary, Billy and Perdita have *actively* created a new familial community, whose members support and love each other. Only Mary’s arrival could show Perdita that “her parents were locked in their obsessive devotions, that only Mary, finally, could be relied upon to notice her, her own small life, there in the background, her own small, unfinished life, with all its huge, aching questions” (*Sorry* 63). However, once again, Perdita’s attempt to find an alternative to her biological family fails, since Mary is put into prison because she is declared guilty of the murder of Nicholas Keene. At the end of the novel, it becomes clear that this time it has been actually Perdita’s own fault that her new “family” is destroyed for it was *herself* who has killed her father.

When Mary is in prison, Billy and Perdita visit her and their friendship is not only renewed but also extended because Billy’s deaf and dumb girlfriend Pearl joins them.

Pearl teaches them sign language because she believes that their friendship could only progress via this means of communication (see *Sorry* 199). Finally, they even develop “an idiom, an idiolect” (*Sorry* 205). “So it was that they became a new community of four, all repudiating the clumsy instrument of human speech, and participating instead in the silent articulations of the body” (*Sorry* 205). After the birth of Billy and Pearl’s twins, Perdita becomes their godmother and teacher (see *Sorry* 210), which shows that she is fully integrated in Billy’s new family.

Another temporary family that takes care of Perdita are the Ramsays. Although it is the welfare department that has chosen this family for her, the young girl enjoys the relaxed atmosphere at the Ramsay’s and she describes herself being “almost happy” (*Sorry* 162) because she no longer feels the burdensome presence of her mother (see *Sorry* 162). In contrast to the Keenes, Perdita’s foster family is a lovely, elderly couple who really take trouble to make Perdita feel at home (see *Sorry* 157). Ted and Flora Ramsay are both in their sixties and have grown-up children (see *Sorry* 156) and Perdita is “aware of the fulsome goodness of the Ramsays” (*Sorry* 187-188). They are also described as “sensitive, considerate people, who said grace before dinner and did not finish her sentences” (*Sorry* 156). The Ramsays also spend their time with Perdita: Ted makes a wooden box with her (*Sorry* 157), Flora shows her the “rudiments of cookery” (*Sorry* 158) and goes window shopping with the girl (see *Sorry* 168). Moreover, they both take her to Stella, who is in hospital. From her foster parents, Perdita receives a “little pencil and notebook, so that if she did not feel like talking, she might write down messages” (*Sorry* 156). The girl herself wonders why she and Stella have not thought of such a means of communication. A reader might interpret this incident as a sign of neglect on the part of Perdita’s mother, who does not only ignore her daughter’s problems, but is not interested in her healing process either (see *Sorry* 152). In contrast to her biological family, the Ramsays help Perdita to cure her stutter by sending her to Dr. Oblov, a speech therapist. When Perdita finds out the truth about her father’s death, her stuttering can be almost healed and she can re-enter the world of communication by taking care of Billy and Pearl’s children, whom she teaches to talk.

Due to the problems the female protagonists encounter in their biological families, alternatives are needed and sometimes even actively looked for. The three situations have in common that the blood relatives seem to be unable to fulfil their intended roles. Even in Anna Griffin’s case, it is not her real uncle but the foster-parent of her father who takes care of her. Concerning Victoria and Perdita, it is apparent that their early child-

hood is profoundly influenced by Aboriginal women (see chapter 2.2.2.2.). But the alternatives to the dysfunctional families of the female characters are only temporary; even Perdita's stay at her foster parents' is only for a short time. At the end of the novel *Sorry* it seems, however, that Perdita has found a family, where she has a role to fulfil and is therefore thoroughly integrated.

To conclude, the traditional concept of a nuclear family collapses and alternatives must be found. Blood relatives, however, are not apt to compensate for the parents' absence or carelessness and so the children rudimentarily experience feelings of family life in other forms of community. Nevertheless, the consequences of the protagonists' unhappy childhood remain omnipresent throughout their entire development depicted in the novels.

4. Memory and Forgetting

This chapter will concentrate on the aspects of memory and forgetting in *Black Mirror* and *Sorry*. Whereas the writing of a biography and its consequences on the main characters are vital in *Black Mirror*, Perdita's forgetting that leads to a trauma and her attempts to overcome it are essential topics in *Sorry*. The protagonists' problems and their inability to recollect their memories also have an influence on the structure of both narratives, which will be discussed in the final subchapter.

4.1. *Black Mirror*: Writing a Biography and Finding Oneself

Black Mirror is a narrative that centres on the topic of writing a biography: Victoria Morrell is an old artist who reveals parts of her life story to the Australian biographer Anna Griffin. On the one hand, the novel deals with the process of writing down someone's life and illuminates the problems a biographer can encounter. On the other hand, the narrative shows that retelling one's life can be like a therapy and is seen as a relief by both major characters.

The perspective in the novel shifts between first-person-narrations of Anna or Victoria and third-person limited narration, which presents Victoria or Anna's life stories, attitudes, dreams or thoughts. An example of a first person narration are Victoria's most important reports, the so-called "Black Mirror Stories" (see *Black Mirror* 215-247), where she gives detailed descriptions of her greatest traumata. The stories are told by herself and she often addresses Anna directly (e.g. see *Black Mirror* 216, 222, 224, 230). Examples of a third-person limited narration are the two short scenes at the beginning of the novel, when the two characters are afraid of meeting each other (Anna's scene: *Black Mirror* 1-2; Victoria's scene: *Black Mirror* 3).

The readers do not know who has commissioned Anna to write the biography, but it certainly cannot have been Victoria herself, for she neither knows the biographer's name, nor does she want to tell her too many details: "*Anna Somebody*. She [Victoria] has already forgotten the name. I will not say too much, Victoria decides. I will sound sensible and plausible. Wise. Entirely plausible. [...] Victoria is afraid of meeting her biographer [...]" (*Black Mirror* 9). The first problem Victoria is aware of is that she does not know the person who will scrutinize her past and therefore she is not willing to di-

vulge too many details of her life. Therefore, Victoria intends to leave out everything that is too personal or that might seem implausible to a listener.

The second consideration that Victoria takes into account is the problematic nature of passing on personal memories and feelings to somebody else, because she thinks herself incapable of verbalizing them. Moreover, the old painter is worried and uncertain about the details, which her biographer will want to know: "How can she [Victoria] speak her own life when so much exists as unspeakable images, wound filmic and narcissistic in this old, old head?" (*Black Mirror* 8). The quotation above shows that Victoria is aware of the fact that passing on one's memory is difficult because many "unspeakable images" simply cannot be explained to anybody else (see *Black Mirror* 8).

Apart from Victoria's difficulties with regard to retelling her biography, also Anna encounters two problems when she is writing Victoria's life story: Firstly, it was not Victoria who had hired her and so the old lady does not want to divulge any too personal confessions. At the beginning, the reader gets to know that Anna is extremely disappointed with her job. According to Anna, the situation of writing a biography about a woman who does not want to talk about her life, means depressing prospects:

She [Anna] had flown twelve thousand miles around the curve of the globe to meet a woman wearing swans who did not want to talk to her. They had drunk tea, eaten cake, and engaged in a shallow conversation about the English weather. Victoria was polite, evasive and having second thoughts; she dismissed her visitor after only twenty minutes. (*Black Mirror* 35)

This reaction almost makes Anna give up her task, but then she writes a letter to Victoria telling her that they had grown up in the same goldmining town, and she also adds that they "share images" of their home town with regard to the desert and the mines (see *Black Mirror* 35). Actually, a biographer should keep some distance, so Anna's reaction is somewhat unprofessional – as she herself points out (see *Black Mirror* 35). But it is exactly her personal revelations which help her to gain Victoria's confidence. After that the old artist is willing to provide the information Anna needs.

The second problem Anna points out is the difficulty with regard to the literary genre of a biography (see Oreb 114 and Dalziell 50-51). She knows that a biography cannot fully paint the picture of a person's life and that the biographer has a strong influence on the text, since "so much depends on the right words" (*Black Mirror* 36). Anna "knew in her heart the crankish ambition of biography, its overweening possessiveness, its latent collusions, its disrespect for the irreducibly copious life" (*Black Mirror* 35). Furthermore,

she is overburdened with her writing because she appears to be disappointed when she cannot simply reconstruct Victoria's life from the notes she has collected.

There is a stringency to writing biography that Anna seems unable to observe. She had imagined a process of solidification, like the building of an identifiable face out of clay. [...] But the more Anna knew of her subject the more imprecise she began to seem, the more dispersed in story, the more disincarnated. She assembled her notes and transcriptions in a chain before her, and saw not the neat confirmation of a life but its meagre supplement. [...] Biography works, she thought, as reliquary does, investing in fragments. (*Black Mirror* 155)

Obviously, Anna has expected that it would be easier to write a biography than it actually is for her. So the readers might conclude that the young Australian does not have any experience in writing this kind of text. Nevertheless, she does not want to write Victoria's memoirs in the way it is presented in an art catalogue, which Anna sees as a too simplified version of the artist's life. According to her, the presentation in the catalogue "registers none of the strangeness of Victoria's life. [...] It is like reading about someone else, someone already dead [...]" (*Black Mirror* 17). Anna's narration, on the other hand, seems to include too many personal details and strange stories retold by Victoria, so that the reader does not get the impression of objective reports, but rather a personal interpretation of the old woman's life by the biographer (see chapter 4.3.). In fact, Anna uses hardly any other sources apart from Victoria's descriptions (only Rose Morrell's diary and later Ruby's brief explanations), which also shows the subjective quality of her product. She is uncertain how to order the information and how to start Victoria's biography. Finally she starts with the parents and hopes to "meet Victoria Morrell once again. Novelistically" (*Black Mirror* 156). The biography Anna writes is subdivided into eight chapters (see *Black Mirror* 156-209) and it does not become clear in how far its contents are based on Victoria's memories, Rose's journal or mere assumptions. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to judge the truth value of the information on the part of the reader. Anna has never tried to verify Victoria's narration. Furthermore, the elderly woman's memories of her childhood and youth might not be true, due to the psychological effect of changing memories in order to endure them and due to the long interval (see chapter 4.2.). The biography is a third-person-narration, which presents the world by an "omniscient narrator" (Anna) or through the eyes of several focalisers, for example Herbert Morrell, Rose Morrell, Nurse Tilly and Victoria Morrell.

In fact, for Victoria, the aim of telling her life story is not that it will be published, but she tries to come to terms with her past. According to Tanya Dalziell, "[...] a sympathetic listener is what Victoria seeks rather than a biographer *per se*" (Dalziell 56). At

the beginning, her memories are either not very detailed or she is not willing to talk about them (see *Black Mirror* 35). Therefore, the readers are confronted with a multitude of fragmentary recollections which cannot be understood at first sight, but which are only explained and solved during the novel, when Victoria is ready to tell them, or when she is able to retrieve her forgotten memories. On the one hand, Victoria is afraid to tell her life stories to Anna, but on the other hand, she explains at the beginning of the novel that she really wants to talk to her biographer: “*I am waiting for this visitor so that I can tell my story and die*” (*Black Mirror* 3). This attitude is confirmed by Anna's observations on Victoria's behaviour and health:

Within just a month, Victoria has weakened. It is as if giving up her own stories depletes her of something vital. Yet she is an avid narrator, and looks forward to Anna's coming as though her life depended on it; this contradiction is somehow at the basis of their relationship. How is it possible, Anna asks herself, that Victoria wills her own fading, just as she comes so amply into being? (*Black Mirror* 108)

Also, Cécilia, Victoria's nurse realizes that Victoria is convinced to die as soon as she has retold everything that she wants to reappraise concerning her past: “[...] Victoria has made a decision – Cécilia has seen this before – that her time is nearly over” (*Black Mirror* 269). According to the nurse, “some patients greet their end, as though they are travelling towards a loving or imperative assignation” (*Black Mirror* 269). Only at the beginning of the novel do the readers learn that Victoria wants to tell her story and then intends to die (see *Black Mirror* 3), but later, it is through the eyes of Anna or Cécilia that Victoria is presented. The readers only get to know Victoria's statements, but not her feelings. Outwardly, she is joking about death: “In six weeks, says Victoria, I'll be dead as a doornail, and I want no ceremony at all. A cremation, impersonal, and no blubbering from anyone. Surrealists only believe in the future tense. [...] I'll be cinders. *Cendre*. Madame Cinderella. *Madame Cendrillon*. Victoria chuckles” (*Black Mirror* 109). Another example is when she humorously says that she wants to hasten her dying by drinking some cocktails (see *Black Mirror* 268). In all these scenes, Anna is the focaliser and so the readers do not know if Victoria really believes what she says. However, in the end, the readers are assured that her narrations have helped Victoria to reappraise her past and to be able to calmly pass away in her dreams:

When she was not in monologue Victoria had been asleep, deeply removed and inaccessible. Towards the end she slept more fitfully, and her fragments of speech shortened, but what marked them above all was self-communion. Victoria's *liaison* was with her avatars, her own other selves [...]. Victoria was racing through her history, swift as an animation, colliding with herself. She

seemed – how to put it? – she seemed almost busy. Then, on the final day, Victoria at last became quiet. [...] Her quietus was a slow sinking into the space of her dreams. (*Black Mirror* 276-277)

Victoria's reconsideration of her past is not always easy for her because she relives many traumatic experiences, such as the death (see *Black Mirror* 235) and the disappearance of her lovers (see *Black Mirror* 148-150), or the incidents when she was almost strangled (see *Black Mirror* 143) and when she was raped in Paris (see *Black Mirror* 243), or when she had a stillbirth (see *Black Mirror* 244). Nevertheless, having a biographer whom she tells all her stories and memories also helps her to come to terms with her reminiscence in her dreams. Therefore, a reader might have the impression that Victoria is finally satisfied with having agreed to talk to a biographer because she has found herself and so she has found her peace.

From Anna's point of view, the biography is not as successful as it had been intended. Firstly, she sees the shortcomings of only listening to a person without knowing the validity of her claims, and secondly, she cannot write an objective report because she is too personally involved in the topic, believing that Victoria is her grandmother (see *Black Mirror* 252-253, 269, 270, 276). Earlier in the novel, Anna is not sure if Victoria remembers the incidents described correctly. She is also critical of the old Surrealist because it seems to her that Victoria "speaks in the register of the hyperbolic; she is unsubtle, she exaggerates, she commemorates her own life with self-conscious fuss" (*Black Mirror* 148). Through Anna's eyes, the readers get the impression that Victoria's calamities are all invented, since the young biographer cannot believe the stories: "[...] her [Victoria's] life is so racked by inordinate disfigurations of grief it might all be untrue; it might all be fabrication. There are too many gravesites, located and unlocatable, and too many fragments betokening self-magnification" (*Black Mirror* 269-270). Only after Victoria's death does Anna return to Australia because she must deliver her ashes to Ruby, Victoria's half-sister. From her, Anna hears the true story about her father's descent and that Victoria is not her grandmother (see *Black Mirror* 286-287). Some of Victoria's stories are also revised by Ruby, giving her point of view that sometimes falsifies and sometimes supplements Victoria's reports (see *Black Mirror* 284-290).

It can therefore be stated that the writing of Victoria's biography helps both, Victoria and Anna, to find themselves and to cope with their past. Although Anna is not an experienced biographer and so the biography might be different to the expected outcome, it helps her to learn more about her own family by reflecting about various incidents, by

telling Victoria about her upbringing and by talking to Ruby in the end. Victoria needs to tell her own stories to somebody in order to reflect about her distressing experiences. Finally, Anna's rather unconventional way of collecting information for writing a biography is the only possibility to make Victoria speak about her most painful recollections, the "Black Mirror Stories". Owing to Anna's interview, Victoria can finally put behind her past and die peacefully.

4.2. Limits of Credibility: Blurring, Mixing and Suppression of Memories in *Black Mirror*

As has been shown in the precedent chapter, Anna is well aware of the difficulties one encounters when writing a biography. The main source of problems is the limited capacity and lack of reliability of human memory.

This is all the more true in the case of Anna's situation: firstly, Anna sometimes doubts the credibility of Victoria's remembrances, given the latter's age and mental disposition. Secondly, Victoria's narrations only cover approximately the first 30 years of her life, that is, she recalls events that happened already more than 50 years ago – needless to say, that in the course of this time, many memories must have become blurred or intermingled. Furthermore, the parts of her life Victoria tells Anna include traumatic events, especially her mother's and her lover's deaths and having lost two babies, one by involuntarily putting it up for adoption, another one by miscarriage. The importance of these events becomes clear at the end, for Victoria herself calls them her "Black Mirror Stories", and it is these key events of her life she keeps secret from Anna the longest. This suppression of traumatic situations means of course another obstacle to the biographer's task.

However, apart from Victoria's age and the distance to the past events, there is another factor of the inevitable inaccuracy of her biography, namely the biographer herself. Anna commits the mistake of leaving the sphere of an objective observer quite quickly, and in the end, she even wishes to become part of Victoria's biography herself by clinging to the idea that she may be Victoria's grandchild. This personal involvement, however, seems to induce Anna to unconsciously intermingle Victoria's past with her own memories and emotions. Both sources of imprecision and lacking credibility of the bio-

graphical account need to be analysed in greater detail with the help of several remarkable examples.

Starting with Victoria, especially the memories of her childhood are not always reliable, probably due to the long time that has gone by. For example, Victoria does not exactly remember her family's house, "as though time has confiscated the rest of the house and left it blurred into history" (*Black Mirror* 7). Neither does she recall Ruby's birth, although at that time she was already seven years old (see *Black Mirror* 181), nor her mother's death (see *Black Mirror* 62 and 215) but this is probably due to suppression of memories (see below) rather than simple forgetting. Victoria's accounts of her life after having left Australia are in many cases extremely detailed and the facts she mentions concerning the war correspond with historical reality (see e.g. *Black Mirror* 67 and 242). More difficult to verify is the role that Victoria claims to have played in the circle of Parisian Surrealists around André Breton. For instance, she shows Anna one of her paintings called "Waves With Wings, Illimitable" (*Black Mirror* 82), but asserts that it is the work of Jean Cocteau (see *Black Mirror* 82) which she once stole from him (see *Black Mirror* 48-49). The painting, however, can be clearly identified as hers, for it contains several of the motifs typical of her own works, mainly symbolic representations of her remembrances, such as the shape of Australia, a black baby, a human foetus or dark wings (see *Black Mirror* 83).

Whereas in these situations Victoria's claim can be thus revealed to be untrue, there is another passage that is harder to interpret and that perfectly illustrates the constant state of uncertainty the reader is confronted with: the third-person narrator uses Victoria as the focaliser of this scene who describes her loneliness after having arrived in Paris: "If Picasso had appeared he would have recognised his *Crying Woman*" (*Black Mirror* 12). Interestingly, later Victoria indeed claims to have served as the artist's model for this painting. This claim, however, seems improbable to Anna and when at some point of their conversation she loses her patience with Victoria, who once again holds back vital information, she wants to cause a quarrel: "Picasso's *Crying Woman*, Anna said, in annoyed retaliation, was inspired by his lover, Dora Maar, in 1937. It's in all the books, it's history, everyone knows this" (*Black Mirror* 57). Confronted with what Anna – and the readers of the novel – consider the truth about the painting, Victoria defends herself:

Just goes to show how ignorant you are. *La Femme qui Pleure*: the woman who fell upon him in the studio the first time Jules left. Dora Maar put her arms around me, and said, *Don't cry, don't cry*. [...] It was me he painted.

Anna can imagine it: Victoria hysterical in Picasso's studio, claiming for herself, egoistically, the possession of all feelings, the origin of all images. She is not even sure if Victoria ever met Pablo Picasso. Her subject is as self-aggrandising as she is wedded to modest detail. She is unresolved and imprecise, like a photograph not properly taken. (*Black Mirror* 58)

Due to the fact that this passage is told from Anna's point of view, Victoria's credibility is significantly reduced, for the biographer judges the old woman's story against the background of her prior knowledge obtained from books. Anna's scepticism culminates in doubting "if Victoria ever met Pablo Picasso" (*Black Mirror* 58). This distrust, however, proves to be unfounded, when Anna finds a photo of Victoria and Pablo Picasso in one of the old woman's drawers (see *Black Mirror* 151). This passage shows that Victoria must have met Picasso at least once and consequently, the reader has to judge the old woman's credibility anew.

Another factor that increases the degree of unreliability is that Victoria has been suppressing her traumatic events for years. She remembers little of the time she spent at the boarding school near Perth, where she felt absolutely isolated (see *Black Mirror* 201). Even more fragmentary is the memory of her mother. Although she was an eye-witness to her mother's horrible death, Victoria does not recall this event at all: "I suppose as a child I had always assumed that my mother committed suicide" (*Black Mirror* 224). She only gets to know the truth through a letter from her former nurse Miss Tilly, in which her mother's death by burning is described in detail. But not even then does Victoria succeed in reconstructing her memory:

I remember none of this. I remember no mother ignited with sparks sweeping around the room, no mother-shape beneath a curtain, no flesh smell, no horror. It is all in darkness. Tilly claims that I cut my hand on a shard of vase and was preoccupied at the time with my own small bleeding. Perhaps this explains it. Or perhaps, even then, I was too unloving and egoistical. (*Black Mirror* 225)

Victoria's own attempts to explain the lack of memory do not seem credible. It rather seems that Victoria has simply suppressed the trauma. It is at the same time one of the most important secrets in her life, one of her so-called "Black Mirror Stories", which she reveals to her biographer only at the very end (see *Black Mirror* 213). Also the other two "Black Mirror Stories" Victoria entrusts to Anna deal with major traumata in Victoria's life: firstly, the murder of her lover Louis Bell committed by her brother Henry when she was seventeen (see *Black Mirror* 235) and secondly, the events in Paris during the German occupation when she was almost killed by an unknown man who throttled

her (see *Black Mirror* 143), when she was raped by three German soldiers (see *Black Mirror* 243) and had a miscarriage (see *Black Mirror* 244).

The three “Black Mirror Stories” have one feature in common: the memories of these traumata are painful for Victoria and before she meets Anna for the first time, she is afraid of being reminded of these horrible events. The only way Victoria has tried to overcome these tragic memories was in her paintings: especially her work “Black Mirror” contains many allusions to her traumata, e.g. a flaming tree that symbolises her mother’s death (see *Black Mirror* 224-225). When Anna does not know Victoria long enough and wants to talk to her about the painting, she completely refuses to comment on it:

Tell me about your painting called *Black Mirror*.
No, said Victoria.
Why not?
No.
What is happening? Why is the reflected woman on fire?
No, repeated Victoria. No, no, no. (*Black Mirror* 57)

Her complete rejection shows that she is not ready to talk about the burning woman – who the reader will later interpret as her mother. Only later will she speak about this incident in her so-called “Black Mirror Stories” (see below). Slowly, Victoria starts to regard telling her past as a kind of therapy (see Dalziell 57) and in the end she overcomes her suppressed memories by revealing the three “Black Mirror Stories” mentioned above.

But it is not only Victoria’s suppressed or blurred memories that restrict the credibility of her biography. The “novelistic” approach Anna chooses to reconstruct Victoria’s life (see *Black Mirror* 156) leads almost automatically to arbitrary reconstructions of the past. Given Anna’s lack of distance from the protagonist of the biography she writes, it does not surprise that in some passages, Anna’s personal memories and experiences clearly interfere with what should be an account of Victoria’s past. This becomes especially obvious in Anna’s description of the scene when Victoria joins her father in a flight with his biplane. At this time, Victoria is only three years old and it is highly improbable that she remembers anything of that excursion. Nevertheless, Anna’s biography tells the readers that “[s]he could feel her father’s thighs move up and down as he worked the pedals. She loved the shape of his bracketing arms around her, his mechanical excitement, his voice distorted by speed” (*Black Mirror* 167). This passage, however, resembles one of Anna’s own memories of riding the bike on her father’s lap:

“Sometimes Griffio whistled and his notes sounded slippery and shiny as they blew up behind her. She liked the way his arms extended around her in protective brackets” (*Black Mirror* 54). Apart from these parallels, another detail is remarkable. In Anna’s account, Victoria loses her bonnet when she is in the plane, high up in the air. Again, it is hardly possible that a three-year-old child would remember such a fact. And indeed, this story seems to have been invented by Anna, who was probably inspired by one of Uncle Ernie’s tales: “It was a plane, a biplane, one of the very first in Australia. [...] Just like in the papers. An then, guess what? A hat floated down. A little girl’s bonnet. [...] An it floated into my hands, green ribbons an all” (*Black Mirror* 77). Owing to the limited number of biplanes in Ernie’s and Victoria’s youth, Anna’s reconstruction of events is not fully implausible, but still it remains an arbitrary reconstruction.

To sum up, the task of writing a biography is full of difficulties, especially when it is based exclusively on the subject’s memory. Forgetting and suppression of memories, but also the simple refusal to divulge one’s past, mean obstacles to the biographer’s work. In Anna’s case, another problem is her personal involvement that leads her to a novelistic approach, mixing Victoria’s memories with her own.

4.3. *Sorry*: Overcoming a Trauma by Reconstructing the Past?

The issue of memory and forgetting is one of the major themes in *Sorry* because the protagonist, Perdita Keene, is traumatised by the murder of her father, but she cannot remember the exact circumstances of his death. Therefore, the reconstruction of the past serves to overcome her distress, which is made visible by her stuttering.

This assumption is mainly based on an analysis of the perspectives used in the narrative: throughout the novel, Perdita’s life is reconstructed or retold via a first-person and a third-person narrator. The first-person narrator can clearly be identified as Perdita herself, who is at least 30 years old⁹ and who remembers and reflects on the incidents of her childhood, trying to get over her trauma. To my mind, the third-person narration can also be attributed to her because in that way, she might try to distance herself from her

⁹ According to several dates given, I calculated Perdita’s age in the following way: From Perdita, the readers learn that Stella Keene “lived until she was almost sixty-eight” (*Sorry* 20), and when Perdita is born in 1930, her mother is 38 years old (see *Sorry* 4). Therefore, Stella’s year of birth was 1892 and she died in 1960. Consequently, Perdita must be approximately 30 years old when her mother dies.

past. Rachel Hennessy also believes that “[...] the majority of the book is seen through Perdita’s eyes, through a self-conscious mixture of third and first person narration and [...] this twelve year old has knowledge well beyond her age and era” (Hennessy 50). These assumptions are also confirmed by Gail Jones herself to whom I am grateful for having answered my question about the alternating perspectives used in *Sorry*:

I have played with perspective shifts in *Sorry*. The technical problem for me was to figure out how to represent a child’s befuddlement, but also to suggest that the text was a form of adult recollection. I didn’t want the whole text to be written in the first person, and I also make use of indirect free speech. [...] the 3rd person is meant to indicate Perdita’s reconstructions. (Gail Jones, e-mail)

Perdita’s trauma – which is made audible through her broken speech – (see Schwerin 39) becomes clear when she tries to speak to Billy about the awful incident, because her mother has refused to do so (see *Sorry* 93-94). Many years later, the grown-up Perdita functions as the first-person narrator who analyses that the process of forgetting started when Perdita re-entered the little shack, and she also explains that she often returns to this memory:

It is an image of our house, seen at night from the outside, that I continually revisit, as though I have converted my history into the opening shot of a second-rate movie. This was the night Stella and I returned after the murder. [...] as we came upon it, beneath a three-quarter moon, I saw emblematically the shape I would seal my secret within. I was already choked by words and inexpressive [...] here was the shape to contain my calamity. [...] I was afraid to re-enter our house, but I think now that the return enabled my distinctive forgetting. As I crossed the threshold of the doorway, pushing back the screen door, I saw a multicoloured patched rug, a disguise, a deletion, and no longer knew exactly what had happened in that room. (*Sorry* 212-213)

Owing to the speech therapist, Dr. Oblov, Perdita realises that she cannot recall the circumstances of her father’s murder and that she has ignored this fact ever since that day (see *Sorry* 156 and 166). To the reader, it seems that the doctor already knows that the stuttering will only be healed if Perdita remembers the details of her father’s death again. He inquires into her life story and encourages her to recite Shakespeare in order to feel comfortable and to train her ability to speak without stuttering. Talking in iambic pentameter helps the twelve-year-old girl to speak more fluently. The stuttering, though, does not completely disappear (see *Sorry* 173-174). As an adult, Perdita knows that her stuttering was “one of the rarer. Called psychogenic, it is the consequence of shock, or upset or circumstantial disaster. It is infrequent in its appearance and enigmatic in its cure. Most stuttering is developmental, and fades over time; the eruption of stuttering, as it were, is a stranger thing” (*Sorry* 151). However, a reader might wonder why the

first-person narrator (who is the adult Perdita) does not realise at that point that the discovery of the truth might bring relief. Maybe, the fact that she cannot see her father's murder as the real reason for her stuttering, can be interpreted as a sign that even the grown-up Perdita has not overcome the trauma.

During one of the sessions with Dr Oblov, Perdita suddenly recalls how her father was murdered and that she was the culprit. This recollection is suddenly activated when Perdita reads out a scene of *Macbeth* (see *Sorry* 191), which turns out to be exactly the same scene that Stella was reciting when Nicholas was dying (see *Sorry* 124): "Perdita saw before her, as if cinematically arranged, the complete, recovered scene of her father's death" (*Sorry* 192) which she then *fluently* retells to Dr Oblov. Although the readers might then suspect that her stuttering is cured because she can remember that she was her father's murderer, there is one allusion presented earlier in the novel by the first-person narrator, which shows that the stuttering could not be completely "cured": "In my dreams I still sometimes stutter, even though, at fourteen, I had been trained to overcome it, or at least to disguise my remnant halting. The images are fluent, but the language is difficult" (*Sorry* 21). Another symptom of her continued traumatization is that the memory of her return to the Keenes' house after Nicholas' murder still haunts her frequently (see *Sorry* 212).

Dr Oblov's therapy, which intends to liberate Perdita from her stuttering by revealing the truth about the murder, indirectly causes another problem: Realising that Mary has gone to prison for a crime Perdita has committed, evokes the latter's bad conscience (see *Sorry* 211): not only is Perdita responsible for Mary's stay in prison, she does not manage to excuse herself for it either (see *Sorry* 204-205 and 211). Once again, she seems to suppress her feelings until it is too late: Mary dies of appendicitis (see *Sorry* 210) and Perdita will never get the chance to say sorry. A sign for the repression of her bad conscience is the ending of the novel:

Afraid of slumbery agitation, or ghostly visits, I willed myself to think instead of Stella's snow dream: a field of flakes descending, the slow transformation of the shapes of the world, the slow, inconclusive, obliteration. I saw a distant place, all forgetful white, reversing its presences. I saw Mary, and Billy, covered by snowflakes. I saw my mother's bare feet beneath the hem of her nightgown. Everything was losing definition and outline. Everything was disappearing under the gradual snow. Calmed, I looked at the sky and saw only a blank. Soft curtains coming down, a whiteness, a peace. (*Sorry* 214)

The blanket of snow, which can be interpreted as a symbol of Perdita's suppression, covers the inconvenient memories, especially her feeling of guilt towards her Aboriginal

friend. Rachel Hennessy even sees some racial connotation in the picture of the black girl who disappears in whiteness:

[...] Jones leaves her character in a white peace. It was hard not to feel that the reader was being invited to equate whiteness with peace and, given it is Mary who has been lost, doesn't a landscape of snow conveniently cover blackness? Of course, this might be the point: this is a manifestation of white Australia's continuing erasure of Aboriginality, a blanket of forgetfulness. (Hennessy 53)

Perdita is unable to come to terms with the fact that she has murdered her father and tries to suppress the memories related to that terrible incident. The fact that she develops a stuttering shows that she suffers a severe trauma and that her broken speech is her only outlet to show the world that something is wrong with her. Dr Oblov helps her to overcome her speaking problems partially, since he leads her back to her past. But even after the discovery of her crime during Dr Oblov's sessions, she "will wonder, in fact, all the days of her life – why it was that she actually *forgot*" (*Sorry* 208). On the one hand, she seems to forget that she once murdered her father, but on the other hand, the discovery of her guilt creates the problem that she should say sorry to Mary, which she fails to do. To sum up, her double traumatisation remains an unsolved problem because she cannot face her past and so – even when her speech is practically restored – she is only "*almost* ready for the world" [emphasis added] (*Sorry* 210).

4.4. The Narrative Structure of *Black Mirror* and *Sorry*

As the previous chapters have pointed out, the issue of memory and forgetting is a vital theme in *Black Mirror* and *Sorry*. Its importance is also reflected in the narrative structure of both novels, since the order of events does not follow a linear chronology, but is decisively influenced by the question of what the characters remember and when they are ready to reveal it.

The structure of *Black Mirror* is enormously influenced by the fact that the whole narrative is based on an achronological sequence of memories of both protagonists. Before attempting an analysis of the non-linear narrative, it seems important to state that the narrative is presented through Anna's knowledge and consciousness. Furthermore, the whole narrative is a retrospection, which becomes clear because of the use of prolepses. For instance, even before Anna meets Victoria for the first time it is stated: "And later, when Victoria is dead, she will remember how on this day of their very first meeting she was so distracted [...]" (*Black Mirror* 1).

Although the novel is narrated in retrospect, the order of events is not reconstructed chronologically. Instead, the sequence follows the order of the focalisers' remembrances. Already at the beginning of the novel when Victoria awaits her biographer, first fragments of the old woman's memories disturb the chronological order. What comes to her mind are remembrances of her families' house in Australia, of a man trying to strangle her in a park in Paris and of trying to rescue a baby out of the Seine in 1942 (see *Black Mirror* 8-15). All of these memories remain extremely fragmentary for the reader, but they are further developed in the course of the novel.

The further structure of the narrative depends exclusively on the order in which Victoria divulges her memoirs. The following table tries to give an overview of the sequence of her memories as they are revealed to Anna:

	Memory	Page	Narration
1	fragments: Victoria's childhood (her family's house in Australia; being almost strangled in Paris during World War II; trying to rescue a baby thrown into the Seine; being alone in Paris (c. 1940-1944)	7-15	3 rd person
2	Victoria arrives in Paris (post 1936); first experiences with Surrealists	18-23	3 rd person
3	Victoria gets to know her lover Jules in London (c. 1936), both move to Paris: 1937	36-44	3 rd person
4	Victoria's house and her childhood (fragment)	46-47	3 rd person
5	1936: Surrealist exhibition; Jules	67-71	3 rd person
6	Victoria's life with Surrealists: Carrington, Dali	84-92	1 st person
7	Victoria's father (fragment)	93	1 st person
8	Jules' illness (tachycardia), Jules and Victoria's life	109-116	3 rd person
9	Victoria and Jules in Venice	127-128	1 st person
10	1940: problems in her relationship with Jules, Jules gone (because of the war)	140-152	3 rd person

Apart from minor chronological confusions and two fragments, in which Victoria reveals some facts of her childhood, the memories she confides to her biographer mostly centre upon the time she spent in Paris before the Second World War. The emphasis of her accounts lies on her relationship with Jules and her experiences with the circle of Surrealists.

This quite limited information is expanded in the course of the novel. The first gap is filled by Anna herself, who develops a first attempt of Victoria's biography (see above) that reaches from the time of the Rose and Herbert Morrell's marriage until Victoria's return from boarding school at the age of 17, when she burns her dead mother's wardrobe (c. 1908 – 1927; see *Black Mirror* 155-209). The reader does not know, however, to what extent this novelistic piece of biography is indeed based on information provided by Victoria herself. For some parts also Rose Morrell's diary apparently serves as a source (see *Black Mirror* 161-163). Even if the degree of credibility cannot be evaluated, Anna's account provides the only possibility for the reader to reconstruct Victoria's childhood.

Until this point in the narrative, some of the key events in Victoria's life have not been revealed yet. These gaps are filled by Victoria's so-called "Black Mirror Stories" (*Black Mirror* 215-247), which are all told by Victoria as the first-person narrator. Through these revelations, the readers get to know some of Victoria's major traumata: it turns out that she saw her mother going up in flames when she was three years old (Black Mirror Story 1, see *Black Mirror* 215-227) and that her first lover and father of her first child Louis Bell was brutally killed by her brother Henry when she was seventeen, and that she had to put the baby up for adoption (Black Mirror Story 2, see *Black Mirror* 229-237). Furthermore, Victoria reveals that after Jules' disappearance during the German Occupation of Paris, she was once almost strangled by an unknown man and raped by three German soldiers. Due to a miscarriage she lost the baby and after the war she was publicly humiliated for having had sexual contact to the German enemy (Black Mirror Story 3, see *Black Mirror* 239-247). Interestingly, the Black Mirror Stories differ from the other memories Victoria reveals, for example about her time in Paris and her relationship with Jules, in the perspective used: while the latter are mainly presented by a third-person-narrator (Victoria as the focaliser of Anna's narration), the Black Mirror Stories are exclusively told from the point of view of Victoria. By choosing this perspective, the reader gets involved more intensively, especially because the narrator addresses Anna – and also the reader – repeatedly as "You" (see e.g. *Black Mirror* 216, 224, 226, 230).

The chronological order of events is even more corrupted because Victoria's memories are frequently interwoven with Anna's own remembrances of her childhood. These flashbacks are provoked either by associations created through her interviewee's accounts (see e.g. *Black Mirror* 24-33, 48-57, 71-77) or by being directly asked by Victo-

ria about her past (see e.g. *Black Mirror* 45-46, 62-63, 93). These analepses enable the readers to also reconstruct the biographer's life, or at least her childhood until the age of 13 (see *Black Mirror* 71-77).

As has been shown, the novel allows the readers to reconstruct Victoria Morrell's life from her birth in 1910 until the end of the Second World War. The information necessary for this task, however, is not provided in a chronological order. To some extent this is certainly due to the arbitrary order, in which Victoria reveals her past, but there is also another aspect which must be taken into account: Victoria is only ready to talk about the most delicate parts of her past after Anna has succeeded in gaining her trust. Consequently, also Anna's own memories, which are repeatedly interwoven in the text, are adverse to a linear narration. Therefore, it can be stated that the theme of memory and forgetting, the question of what we remember and divulge and what we suppress and keep in secret, provides the novel with its narrative structure.

In her fourth novel, *Sorry*, Gail Jones uses a similar technique of non-linear narrative. Again, the lack of chronology in the sequence of scenes is due to the fact that the story centres upon the issue of gradually reconstructing one's past (see chapter 4.3.): "Time [...] is not linear but what Gail Jones calls folded and pleated: many of the characters exist in the present but live their lives most intensely in the future or in the past [...]" (Miles Franklin Literary Award 2008 – Judges' Formal Comments).

Sorry starts with key elements of a classical detective story: the readers only get to know that the first person narrator's father has been murdered and that at least two people are present, namely the female first person narrator – Perdita, as becomes clear later – and her friend Mary (see *Sorry* 3). One of the most important factors for the understanding of the novel's structure is the fact that Perdita is so heavily traumatized by the murder that she almost immediately suppresses any memory of it (see *Sorry* 213). Only at the very end does it turn out that Perdita's incapacity of remembering the event is motivated by the denial of taking on responsibility, since it was her who killed her father (see *Sorry* 192). Until this point, however, the real perpetrator remains unknown and it is exactly this uncertainty that gives the novel its structure. Rachel Hennessy states that "Jones is very clear as to the consequences of an extreme act of violence but chooses to employ the repression of trauma as a useful narrative device. We are encouraged to keep reading by the simple strategy of the whodunit" (Hennessy 51).

Nevertheless, there is a problem: the story is narrated by Perdita in retrospect, so she could tell right from the start that she was her father's murderer and if we assume that she does not want to make her life a detective story, there can only be one explanation for this narrative technique of leaving the readers uninformed about the truth: as has been shown in the previous chapter, Perdita retells her life in an attempt to overcome her trauma and in order to maintain some kind of artificial distance, so she often chooses a third-person perspective (see chapter 4.3.). This attempt to reconstruct her past as objectively as possible also seems to be the reason for not revealing anything important via prolepses. Instead, Perdita's reconstructions are, apart from some allusions that foreshadow forthcoming events (see e.g. *Sorry* 11, 20, 65, 102), strictly chronological. This is, in fact, necessary if discovering the past should help Perdita to overcome her trauma: she must try to reconstruct her life step by step without projecting too much of her adult reflections and knowledge onto her childhood. In other words, she must try to retell her life from the perspective of herself as a child, together with her suppression of memories.

The partial lack of chronology in both novels is due to the fact that the narratives slowly develop out of the protagonists' memories which are revealed only gradually. Therefore, secrets or the suppression of traumatic events are adverse to any linear chronology and have irritating consequences on the order of the narrative. The novels are not only alike in their themes, but also in their fragmented structure and complicated narrative technique. This makes it difficult for the readers to reconstruct the full "truth", but mirrors perfectly the themes of memory and forgetting, of trauma and reconstruction, which Gail Jones deals with.

5. Conclusion

This diploma thesis has shown that Gail Jones' novels *Black Mirror* (2002) and *Sorry* (2007) resemble each other strongly. Both novels have close connections to Australia because it is on the one hand the main characters' country of origin and on the other hand it provides the setting for parts of both narratives. Moreover, Gail Jones chooses the theme of the suppression of Australia's indigenous population and exemplifies its consequences by discussing the issue of the Stolen Generations in the two novels. Another similarity of both narratives are the lives of the female protagonists, for they all grow up in dysfunctional families and so they are forced to look for alternatives in order to compensate for the lack of emotions or indifference on the part of their biological parents. Due to the main characters' attempts to come to terms with their past, and especially their childhood, this thesis has shown that the themes of memory and forgetting distinctly influence the structure of the two narratives, creating two non-linear accounts, which also show frequent shifts in perspectives.

Comparing the recurring themes of *Black Mirror* and *Sorry*, it seems that in her latest novel (*Sorry*), Jones takes up some of the themes of her first novel (*Black Mirror*) and extends them. This is especially true for the issue of the Stolen Generations which is only alluded to in *Black Mirror* but which becomes one of the most important topics in *Sorry*. Also the ideas of finding alternative family concepts and reconstructing the past are more elaborate in Gail Jones' more recent novel.

However, the obvious similarities are not limited to the topics, but also some of the characters appearing in *Sorry* seem to have precursors in *Black Mirror*: some of Nicholas Keene's characteristics, such as his violent behaviour against women and his racist attitudes, can already be perceived in the portrayal of Herbert Morrell. Even more obvious are the similarities between Lily-white (*Black Mirror*) and Mary (*Sorry*), who both serve as examples for the injustice Aboriginal people have been confronted with.

The complex structure of both novels and its shifts in perspectives confront the reader with a wide range of possible interpretations of the text. Much remain unexplained and would require further investigation. In this thesis, however, I have only concentrated on four themes, which seemed vital to me. It is likely that an analysis of other features would contribute to the overall impression of a close relation between the two novels.

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8. Appendix

Abstract

Im Rahmen der vorliegenden Diplomarbeit wurden mit den beiden Romanen *Black Mirror* und *Sorry* zwei Werke der australischen Schriftstellerin Gail Jones hinsichtlich allfälliger Gemeinsamkeiten analysiert. Ausgehend von einer Einteilung der Untersuchung in vier Hauptthemen beider Romane, können folgende Ergebnisse festgehalten werden:

Beide Romane weisen eindeutige Bezüge zur australischen Heimat der Autorin auf. Einerseits dient dieser Kontinent zumindest teilweise als Ort der Handlung, wobei naturräumliche Besonderheiten (z.B. Outback) explizit herausgehoben werden. Andererseits sind die Romane auch insofern klar in Australien verortet, als wiederholt auf spezifische Ereignisse aus der Landesgeschichte Bezug genommen wird. Australien spielt jedoch nicht nur als geographischer eine Raum bedeutende Rolle. Vielmehr wird der Kontinent auch in seiner positiven wie negativen Wahrnehmung durch die Figuren der Romane reflektiert.

Die deutliche australische Prägung der Romane wird zusätzlich dadurch verstärkt, dass Gail Jones an vielen Stellen die Geschichte der australischen Ureinwohner (v.a. die Stolen Generations) thematisiert und, speziell in *Sorry*, implizit die Verdrängung dieses dunklen Kapitels australischer Geschichte in der Öffentlichkeit anprangert. Sämtliche Romanfiguren mit Aboriginal-Hintergrund werden fast ausschließlich aus der Sicht der Protagonistinnen Perdita (*Sorry*) und Victoria (*Black Mirror*) beschrieben, die beide stark von Aborigines geprägt wurden. Die Schilderungen sind daher überwiegend positiv.

Eine weitere prägende Konstante beider Romane ist die Schilderung gestörter, teils de-saströser Familienverhältnisse. Dabei spielt in jedem der Fälle der Verlust der Mutter (durch psychische Krankheit, Flucht oder Tod) eine zentrale Rolle. Zusätzlich sind zwei der Familien (Keenes, Morrells) durch häusliche Gewalt zerrüttet. Die solcherart im Kindesalter in Mitleidenschaft gezogenen Protagonistinnen müssen nach Alternativen suchen und finden diese in Freundschaften, Liebesbeziehungen oder Pflegefamilien, jedoch meist nur kurzfristig.

Beide Romane sind prinzipiell um die Rekonstruktion von Erinnerungen aufgebaut: Während es in *Black Mirror* um das Schreiben einer Biographie geht, steht bei *Sorry* Vergangenheitsbewältigung im Mittelpunkt. Beide Ansätze führen zu einem ähnlichen Ergebnis, nämlich zur (teilweisen) Selbstfindung der Protagonistinnen und zur Verarbeitung vergangener Traumata. Die Lückenhaftigkeit der rekonstruierten Erinnerungen führt in beiden Werken zu einer nicht-linearen Erzählstruktur.

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