

The poetry of silence: Perpetuating the profound burden

A Female Family Narrative

deur
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Abstract

The thesis investigate the family narrative. While engaging specifically with my female family narrative, it essentially questions how and why we create and perpetuate this narrative of absence and presence. The acts of memory, autobiography, testimony and the subsequent creation of the archive are probed. Such probes attempt to enter the sphere of the unsayable and unsaid, partially lifting the female existence, identity and body from the silence surrounding the private and intimate realm she dwells in.

The creation and recreation of meaning through the use and manipulation of time and language is examined through-out whilst continually reading absence as presence. This is done in order to locate and access the silent and forgotten. The thesis problematises the notion of the 'I' and the 'initial' through looking at the repercussions of the employing linearity. Ultimately, this writing process reveals the contradictions and dualities we both create and aim to obliterate within the individual and collective composition of the family narrative.

Opsomming

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die familienarratief. Terwyl dit spesifiek die vroulike familienarratief bespreek bevraagteken dit *hoe* en *hoekom* ons die narratief van afwesigheid en teenwoordigheid skep en voortsit. Die dade van onthou, outobiografie, getuienis, en die daaropvolgende ontstaan van die argief, word gepeil. Hierdie ondersoek poog om die sfeer van die ‘ongesêde’ en die ‘onsêbare’ binne te dring, en so die vroulike bestaan, identiteit en liggaam te bevry uit die stilte van die ‘private’ en die intieme terrein waarbinne sy woon.

Die skep en herskep van betekenis deur die gebruik en manipulasie van taal en tyd word deurlopend ondersoek, terwyl afwesigheid as aanwesigheid gelees word. Dit word gedoen in orde om die stilte en vergete te vind en toegang daartoe te bewerkstellig. Die tesis problematiseer die begrip van die ‘ek’ en die ‘initiële’ deur na die reperkussies van die toepassing en gebruik van lineariteit te kyk. Uiteindelik onthul die skryfproses die kontradiksies en dualiteite wat ons beide skep asook poog om uit te wis binne die individuele en kollektiewe komposisie van die familie narratief.

For my mother, grandmother and Anne.

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Introduction

Research Concept

I investigate my female family narrative, and consequently the self by revealing the fabric of remembering and forgetting that it creates and sustains. The research concept grew from the disillusionment, entanglement, suspicion and awe that, for me, developed hand in hand with my existence in my family and the awareness of being a woman and one day becoming a mother myself. I wanted to investigate, not merely to stir at, the secret silence and shame of the humid shadows of bosom, bed and bedroom.

Context and Focus of Study

My research idea takes form within the domain of Visual Arts, particularly photography. My research differs from the texts with which I have engaged, offering something ‘new’ within the specific combination and amalgamation of the different fields of study and through their application to my particular area of interest - my maternal family narrative. My practical work consists of photography – using both photographs I take, as well as, family and found photographs. From this grew an analytical, almost obsessive and forensic investigation of the notion of family applied specifically to my own family. In the thesis the focus narrows to narrative specifically, as I realised that a discussion the theoretical aspect of photography as well would be a theoretical repetition, or illustration of what I do in my practical work. I do not want my two research streams, practical and theoretical to be illustrations or translations of each other but rather to share a relation and a dialogue with two separate voices. What I do in my practical work, investigating photography via the image, I do in my thesis by investigating narrative through language. The theory grew from the practical, even if I was often unaware of just how close and mutually informative this relationship was.

Problematic and Research Questions

The problematic arises from within the text – both the family narrative I investigate as well as this thesis as text – because at the core of the text one finds fragmentation, dispersal and a contradiction of existence. Memory and autobiographical reflection are unstable in essence for they are in basic sense acts of testimony. Testimony, in turn, is a threshold act, an act that exists in a ‘now’ that is never present, for this very reason one cannot linger in a threshold. This is complicated even further with the dispersal and inconsistency of the ‘I’. With the shifting of the ‘I’ comes the loss of the ‘initial’² (be it event, place, memory, happening) and this eventually leads to the loss of linearity in both narrative and time.

Within the core problematic of this investigation there are further problems, such as finding an entrance into the private and public mesh of the maternal, female narrative, where intimacy and the body are deeply submerged in silence and denial. In my examination of the area of focus certain issues become central, such as the awareness of the narrative as multiple and dispersed, and the ‘ineptness’ of language and ‘naming’. Family emerges as an “imagined abstraction” and the mother/daughter relationship is merged to be revealed as the simultaneous act of intimacy and writing; motherhood as the creation of texts (Siopis, 2005: 94). Amid the focus on memory, narrative and archive, where the family surfaces as witnesses who give testimony, this thesis as text also becomes an act of testimony.

Confronted with the problematic of the research, I arrive at various key questions: Why do we engage in acts of narrative, preservation and autobiographical reflection? In plain terms – why, and how, do we remember and forget the way we do? Where do these acts reside and are they in themselves ‘possible’? Even more so, is it possible to investigate these acts and, if

² I use the term ‘initial’ to indicate the notion of one original/first/true event, happening or experience from which the memory is formed and from which it deviates and is altered.

so, where does this leave the perpetrator of the investigation? How do we suffer the contradictions and ambivalence we create in the manipulation of, and via, narrative and time?

I theoretically question the singularity of the 'I', the 'now' and the 'initial' within the formation of the individual (self) and the collective (family) through narrative. While, within my specific area of focus, I ask *how* women *tell* the intimacies of their lives of domesticity with and within a narrative that denies the body, I will also be asking *how* I will *hear* this.

Objectives

The objective of this study is to investigate the creation of the family narrative, specifically the maternal, female narrative, and the navigation of the self and the collective within it. I look at the narrative as a way to establish how and why we remember and forget. I examine the family narrative as an inheritance, mode of preservation and creator of meaning in order to find that which is neglected. For the narrative is rendered between what is said and unsaid, and I need to reach the unsaid and unsayable in order to locate the female family narrative. I facilitate the telling of women's lives of domesticity between the silences of that, which is not commemorated, so that I may locate, at the core of this deep silence, the female body.

Within the family narrative I am dealing with lives as texts, texts that are very much intertextual, and for this reason call for interpretation. Yet the interpretation of the narrative, of the sayable and the unsayable, leads to a making and remaking of the narrative and meaning, and this requires a mode of interpretation that resembles poetry. This interpretation becomes a poetic configuration that reveals the fragility of the boundaries between fact and fiction, as well as the family's navigation and suffering of the dualities, contradictions and ambiguities within the narrative of their existence.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

In order to find answers to the questions I have raised within the problematic of my specific area of focus, I will be undertaking a theoretical study that employs conceptual and philosophical analysis and investigation using hybrid data. The data include formal discourse

and oral, life history analysis, historical, narrative and textual studies as well as theoretical, philosophical and conceptual research. The various forms of data lead me to have a low level of control of the structure of the design. A firm and broad theoretical understanding is needed on which to base the ‘field research’, which consists of gathering information through oral and written interviews as well as through correspondence, photographs and journals. The theoretical framework includes the fields of cultural and critical theory as interdisciplinary modes of study that incorporate the discourses of philosophy, psychology and feminism. Within these fields my research involves, to a certain degree, hermeneutics, existential phenomenology, epistemology and deconstruction.

This framework grounds and informs the interpretive study and investigation of the area of focus and the collected data from the ‘fieldwork’. The intense relationship between theoretical research and the fieldwork acts symbiotically for mutual substantiation as well as to sustain discussion. I do not enter into the research and investigation with the hope of finding any clear or definite answers, meanings or definitions. This is merely an investigation to partially reveal and illuminate the workings and complications of the maternal family narrative as well as its inherent silences, negations and denials.

Key Concepts

In this section I identify and define the key concepts in my investigation. The *narrative* and consequently the *archive* are the main focus of the investigation while the role and influence of poetry are considered throughout. The thesis as text looks at the act of *testimony* and within, and around this *silence* as an absent present, specifically the silence surrounding the female voice and body in my family narrative. The problematic arises with the discussion of issues surrounding the *self and the ‘I’*, *absence as presence* and the questioning of the creation and designation of *meaning*. As far as meaning is concerned, problems around *layering, plurality, fragmentation and fiction* are addressed. Within the larger investigation, concepts such as *inheritance, surrogates and preservation* often arise. The relationships between the *unsayable and unsaid, individual and collective, private and public*, and *intimacy and language/writing* are explored throughout the study.

Literature Review

The project entails a short literature review of the problematic I have discussed. Concerning the deconstructive³ element in my study, I turn to, amongst others, Derrida's theory of *différance* as well as his and Agamben's (as found in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 1999) outlook on the premise concerning the 'I' within the act of testimony. I also referring to them both relating to the notion of the 'archive'. I adopt Derrida's notions of absence as presence as expressed in his *Speech and Phenomena* (1986), and specifically the way in which he discusses the 'problem' of the 'I' arguing that the Self or the 'I' only exists to itself in relation to its possible extinction or 'disappearance'. Thus to say 'I am' is actually to say 'I am immortal', and within this act an identity is made possible. Within this identity the origin of presence and being is both achieved and concealed(1986: 54-55).

The complexity of meaning within language (that also suggests the problem of the 'I'), a strong theme in my thesis, is discussed by Derrida under the 'Supplement of Origin' in *Speech and Phenomena* (1986: 91), where he suggests that meaning is multiple and convoluted. He argues that the relationship between meaning, expression and object/subject is complex. And argues, for instance, that the same expression might mean different things, that two different expressions might mean the same or different things but refer to the same object.

Derrida's work is one of the strongest (though not the only) influences in my research, especially his theories on the archive, not only in *Archive Fever*, but also in the two papers, by Van Zyl (2002: 39-60) and Harris (2002: 61-82), on the lectures he gave at the University of the Witwatersrand in the '*Refiguring the Archive series*'. I do not always agree with Derrida's insistence that the archive is exterior and public yet this thesis does support his

³ Though Derrida and deconstruction play a large role in my research they are not the sole or primary influence.

notion that archiving ‘allows’ us to forget and that our archiving is driven by our death. However, when he was questioned after his lecture at University of the Witwatersrand, one of his answers reflects the key sensibilities of my thesis. He compares remembering to light and forgetting to consigning things to darkness; within this framework the archive, as act of preservation of memory, becomes a lighthouse, a space broadened to include the psychological and social as well as merely an idea. He continues that remembering and forgetting cannot exist without each other; they rely on, resemble and become one another. The act of imagining exists between and within remembering and forgetting. And thus no moment/event/feeling can be captured without being altered; it is never again complete or unique.

The dance of imagination, moving effortlessly through both conscious and unconscious spaces, shapes what is remembered and forgotten, and how the trace is configured. Each time the trace is revisited, this dance is busy with its work of shaping and reshaping (cited in van Zyl, 2002: 75).

Consequently the archive becomes an ongoing interaction between remembering, forgetting and imagining.

I do not necessarily see the notion of archive and narrative as mutually exclusive; they share many elements but the term ‘narrative’ suits the conceptual framework of my argument better. In my thesis I view the self and the family as texts that have to be interpreted and though my research includes various fields, I feel the term ‘narrative’; encapsulates best what it is that I am investigating: It offers me avenues to literature and fiction in order to accomplish my investigation in a style that can convey, reflect and embody the essence of my point of view. I find that a description by Agamben of the archive, where archive and narrative seem to both merge and separate, explains best how I view it within the context of my area of research:

the archive is the unsaid or sayable inscribed in everything by virtue of being enunciated; it is the fragment of memory always forgotten in the act of saying ‘I’. Every act of bearing witness thus carries with it an archive as that element of the unsaid under and around what is said. (Cited in Robert, 2006: 44).

In these extracts from Derrida and Agamben lies the core inspiration for my point of view in my research. As far as Derrida is concerned, he allows me to develop an insight into key aspects of my argument regarding acts of *naming*, the *questioning of linearity* and the notion of 'no beginning' in *The Ear of the Other*. The influence of Derrida's theory of *différance* is clearly visible throughout my investigation, especially concerning the *absence of the now* and the notion of both *testimony* and *différance* itself as threshold acts. In other words, both what I investigate as well as the investigation itself is situated on this threshold between memory and forgetting, absence and presence.

It is this very 'impossibility of existence in language' that Derrida describes so eloquently in *Speech and Phenomena* (1986) when he questions language, writing and meaning as they exist in terms of absence and presence. He contends that to reach that which exists beyond such dualities/contradictions unheard of thoughts are required, past language and knowledge, something *older* and further than meaning rather than something *new*. He contends that this must be understood in the following way:

but also understood differently: it is to be heard in the openness of an unheard-of question that opens neither upon knowledge nor upon some nonknowledge which is knowledge to come. In the oneness of this question *we no longer know*. This does not mean that we know nothing but that we are beyond absolute knowledge (and its ethical, aesthetic, or religious system)... In order to conceive of this age, in order to 'speak' about it, we will have to have other names than those of sign or representation (1986: 102-103).

I borrow from the fields of existential phenomenology and hermeneutics, drawing on the theories of Heidegger and Ricoeur, especially concerning aspects of *being* and *time and the narrative*. Heidegger questions the reciprocal relations between time and being. And Ricoeur investigates the relation between time and narrative. These reciprocal relations they discuss and the conclusions they draw are both the problematic as well as the unstable core of my research. It is this constant instability and uncertainty within the theoretical relations, mirroring the volatility of the family while they are used to interpret the family narrative, which leaves both the subject of the thesis and the thesis

as text itself to suffer contradictions and ambivalence. Heidegger discusses the essence of being and infers that it does not exist in time; yet it is determined, allocated and measured by what is temporal. Similarly time is not tangible or variable yet remains constant in its passing. Time and being have a reciprocal relationship, yet “neither can be former -being- be addressed as something temporal nor can the latter -time- be addressed as a being” (1972: 3).

Ricoeur in turn is of the opinion that “Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience” (1984: 3). He continues, entering the instability of the now: “We measure time *when it is passing*... It is in this very passing, in the transit, that both the multiplicity of the present and its tearing apart are to be sought” (1984: 16).

William Robert (in his article *Witnessing the Archive*) refers to Levi’s discussion of the lacuna of the witness and testimony, and Agamben’s suggestion to incorporate ‘nonlanguage’ in order to “bear witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness” (cited in Robert, 2006: 42). Similarly Ricoeur speaks of the ‘secret places’ the narrative possesses that do not allow interpretation and that mark the ‘inexhaustibility’ of the narrative. He continues by asking if there is a relationship and complicity between these secrets of the narrative and the untold elements of our lives, and if this relationship could possibly constitute the ‘prehistory’ from where narrative and meaning originate (1984: 75-76).

In this thesis I argue that these ‘secret places’ that constitutes a prehistory could possibly be what Derrida refers to when he writes about that which is beyond knowledge, a “nonknowledge which is a knowledge to come”, that which we would need other names as “sign and representation” in order to speak of it (1986: 102-103). And it is in facing this gap in, and inability of language and narrative that I, like Ricoeur, turn to the slight liberation of poetry’s fragmentation. He suggests a suspension of the purely descriptive and referential function and value of discourse and language for a more poetic discourse which

...brings to language aspects, qualities and values of reality that lack access to language that is directly descriptive and that can be spoken only by means of the complex interplay between the metaphorical utterance and the rule-governed transgression of the usual meanings of our words (Ricouer, 1984: x-xi).

It is then from within this theoretical context and inspiration that I create a thesis that in character, form and rhythm aims to exist in the slightly more emancipated arena of literature and specifically poetry. The decision for the format of the thesis is also based on the interaction with both Barthes's *Roland Barthes on Roland Barthes* as well as Derrida's *Postcard* (1987). Drawing on Barthes's post-structural, existential social theory, I also refer to his ideas on subjectivity as expressed in *Camera Lucida* (2000).

I draw from and am influenced by a variety of texts that share similar interests and investigate similar fields, I would like to highlight a few: Barthes's exploration of photography while reflecting on photographs of his mother in *Camera Lucida* is the introduction to bringing together the domains of critical theory and private observation. This occurs more overtly in Marianne Hirsch's *Family Frames, Photography, Narrative and Post-memory* (1997) as well as in smaller articles such as Annette Kuhn's *Remembrance, The child I never was* (2006), Richard Avedon's *Borrowed Dogs* (2002) and Penny Siopis's *My Lovely Day* (2005).

The broad fields of memory and narrative bring me to works such as *The Moral demands of Memory* by Jeffrey Blustein (2008) and the *Ethics of Memory* by Avishai Margalit (2002), who explore the consequences and imperatives of both remembering and forgetting.

Derrida's *Archive Fever*, Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz, the Witness and the Archive* (1999), Ricouer's *Time and Narrative* (1984) and Heidegger's *Time and Being* (1972) create a fuller understanding of the character of the archive, narrative and the relationship to and with time. This understanding is supplemented and extended with *Imagination and Time* by Mary Warnock (1994), *Witnessing the Archive: In Mourning* by William Robert (2006), *What Stories Are, Narrative Theory and Interpretation* by Thomas M. Leitch (1986).

Mark Freeman's⁴ *Rewriting the Self* (1993), Liz Stanley's *The auto/biographical I* (1992) and Patricia Hampl's *I could tell you stories* (2000) pave the way to the questioning of 'autobiographical reflection' and leads to the exploration of texts such as *The Remembered Self* (2000) and Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan, Jacqueline Rose and Julia Kristeva's writing on identity, language, ideology and discourse.

Marianne Hirsch's weaving together of narrative, psychoanalysis and feminism in her exploration of the mother/daughter relationship in *The Mother/Daughter Plot* (1989) contributes to the feminist tone of this research as well as to the specific concentration on the female narrative and the relation between mother and daughter. *The Narrative Study of Lives, Making Meaning of Narratives* (1999) and *The Narrative Study of Lives, Exploring Identity and Gender* (1994) generates a clearer understanding of the interpretation of narratives and the application of theory as well as offering examples of the practical gathering and interpretation of information accumulated in interviews.

I continue by looking at both feminist and literary texts to understand the private female sphere and the body, including *Women's realities, Women's choices* by *Introduction to women's studies* by the Hunter College women's studies collective (1995), Shirley Prendergast 'To Become Dizzy in Our Turning': *Girls, Body-Maps and gender as Childhood Ends* (2000) and Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978). I find much inspiration and support in Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976), especially in her style of writing, her approach to taboo topics and her personal references.⁵

Linda Wagner-Martin's *Telling Women's Lives* (1994) offers much illumination of writing about women's lives and consequently leads me to more literary texts such as: Trinh T. Minh-Ha's *Grandma's Story* (1993), Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1974) and *Moments of Being* (1985), *Mothers by Daughters* edited by Joanna Goldsworthy (1996),

⁴ Freeman studied under Paul Ricoeur.

⁵ Though this text dates back to the 1970's I find it highly relevant as it reflects the time frame for many of the researched events.

Surfacing by Margaret Atwood (1972), *Seisoene* by Engela van Rooyen (2005) and *’n Ander Tongval* by Antjie Krog (2005).

In the research I have mentioned the investigation of family narratives is either done at the hand of photography or includes the investigation of literary texts, as seen in the works by Hirsch, Stanley, Barthes, Kuhn and Siopis. When memory forms a large part of the study, it usually deals with events or families within a specific historical event or framework, such as the Holocaust. Or it tends to centre on a specific viewpoint such as Blustein’s heavily theoretical study of the morality of memory with merely a private, familial influence. Or, as seen in Hampl’s text, though rooted in personal/family memory and reflections, it revolves around specific aspects such as the act of autobiography and the memoir. Or it becomes less theoretical and simply literary as seen in Antjie Krog’s *’n Ander Tongval*, and also in Stanley’s questioning of the autobiographical ‘I’, where the text is centered exclusively on the family. Though I concur with the arguments of texts such as Freeman’s *Rewriting the Self*, he offers only an investigation of the self and does not include the family. The feminist texts becomes either personal reflections, as in Rich’s of *Woman Born* and Goldsworthy’s compilation of daughters writing about their mothers, or it becomes specific group-oriented case studies surrounding aspects of the female body and development as seen in Prendergast work. A similar approach is seen in Josselson and Lieblich’s narrative studies of lives.

My thesis share all these aspects, as well as features of the primary texts mentioned, but do not exist merely in one of these realms. It merges all these fields not only in order to find some measure of illumination of the family narrative as subject but also to try and remain unhyprocritical in the ambivalence of my meagre enlightenment. From all of these perspectives I look at the family narrative and the self, specifically my maternal family narrative as shared by my grandmother and her two sisters, my mother and her two sisters and myself. This thesis revolves around the lives of three generations of women, housewives and mothers with only a school education (not completed in some cases), in the social and physical context of a small Karoo Town in South Africa. The text does not look at the shared narrative of women in specific social, political or historical circumstances only, nor does it focus on women who have done something specifically ‘outstanding’ in the public sphere. This text involves itself with the narrative that is created and shared by women in the realm

of the banal and the domestic, the private and the body. And it expresses itself in a form that reflects the ‘new poetic configuration’ Freeman describes in *Rewriting the Self*:

When considering autobiographical texts, texts for which the interpreter is at once reader and writer, subject and object, it becomes even more clear that the meanings one arrives at are in some sense as much *made as found*, the process of autobiographical reflection being a fundamentally metaphorical one: a new relationship is being created between the past and the present, a new poetic configuration... The text of the self is thus being rewritten (Freeman, 1993: 30).

Chapter Outline

I close this chapter by giving a brief outline of the thesis. In the *opening chapter* my main goal is to present the *key arguments* and concepts concerning the *family narrative* in a broad manner. I also discuss this in *relation to my practical work*, but also that *they stand independant of each other*, indicating the relationship between my theoretical and practical work. Essentially, I question *acts of autobiography*, the family narrative and my thesis as text. I also *discuss the movement of interpretation toward poetry*, concerning matters of silence, repetition, fragmentation, and how these inform the shape of the thesis. The key elements I discuss and highlight are the *multiplicity of the narrative, the merging of the self and the family portrait* (portrait here including both narrative and photography) and also questioning the possibility of the portrait. These acts are seen as *modes of preservation* that exists within a *threshold* and are discussed in relation to the archive. The *family is designated as imagined abstraction* and important dualities such as imagined/physical, heaviness/lightness, stillness/flux arise here. Narrative and our relatives are viewed as *inheritance* while the intertextual nature of the family is addressed.

The *chapter narrows the scope* of the research to the maternal, *female narrative as main focus*. Focusing on the domesticity of the everyday lives of the women I locate the chapter’s *key theme within the duality of intimacy and writing*. Mothers are seen as amalgamating these ‘opposing’ acts in raising children. I ask *questions on bearing witness and the act of testimony*, specifically concerning silence and the *unsayable and unsaid within the female narrative*. I conflate the mother and daughter portrait and the thesis as text becomes an

investigation of the family and also a rewriting of the self. The *singularity of the 'I' and the 'initial' are discussed* and these become key aspects of my argument. It becomes evident that the matter is more complex than just oppositions such as 'live or tell', or binaries such as intimacy and writing.

Chapter two commences with a *short introduction to the discussion*, relating that the family narrative teaches the family to remember and forget and moves in the realm of poetry. I question where and how to begin and suggest that life is mere reminiscence that we 'are' but memory. I also argue that the present is never present and that neither narrative nor life is singular or linear but rather resembles a labyrinth. The contradictory conclusion, however, is that there is one clear first and last breath.

To address one of the *main concepts* of this investigation, the *cleft between writing and the female body*, the *third chapter centres on the discussion of the functions of the female body*. Also explored are the relationship between mother and daughter, and the mother's body as instrumental in teaching the daughter about being and being a woman. The core focus of this chapter is the investigation of the female narrative; in order to do this I have to enter the poetics of the unsaid and the body is at the core of this. The chapter is divided into discussions of menstruation and sex, pregnancy, birth and death.

Menstruation is discussed because it is the *beginning of the narrative of silence* concerning women's lives, because the mother's reaction has a great influence on the self-esteem and identity of the daughter and because it is a subject usually ignored in research. In this discussion the terms private and public are broadened in looking at the *silencing of the body* and the *role of hygiene and secrecy*. The same lack of knowledge and total silence pertains to sex as it does to menstruation. Concerning both these subjects, *contradictions and ironies arises* from the stifling of the body. These opposing ideas and messages around the body create ambivalence and feelings of disembodiment.

In *pregnancy* the body becomes threatening in a different way and is still swathed in silence; the pregnant *body is hidden* and the pregnancy is not talked about. '*Private*' becomes a more convoluted term in this context. I suggest that designated stories become *surrogates* for emotions in order to preserve the silence. I also look at the *role of the metaphor* and the *designation of the speakable and unspeakable* in retrospect. These aspects lead to the female body becoming something to endure without drawing attention to it.

Most important in the discussion of *birth* the issues of *meaning and the 'I'*. Sharing of *meaning within the collective of the family is explored and undermined*; the chapter considers the multiplicity of meaning and the deformation of memory to confirm meaning. The problematic of the 'I', 'you' and 'she' as existing only in discourse arises. Acts of *fusion* and *the lacuna* are discussed especially concerning the bond between mother and daughter in childbirth – while *fiction and fragmentation* surface in the threshold between language and non-language. The chapter mentions that the beginning and end of the created linear narrative are negated. I also look at the absence of the husband and the changing, layering and plurality of meaning. I arrive at the realisation that when the women in my family do break the silence, it is almost always merely to 'protect' another silence.

The chapter ends in the discussion of *death* within the family narrative. My key argument is that death *shares the 'lacuna of the witness'* and becomes impossible to write about. And most importantly I discuss how our inheritance includes secrets and silences and the *distinctions between the sayable and unsayable*. I assert that there is neither ownership nor possession in death for the person who dies; our deaths 'belong' to those around us. Here it emerges that the *family narrative's worst offence is not fiction but silence*. While writing around silences, some being broken and some remaining intact, I reveal the collective denial in our family narrative. I become an accomplice in the silence by adhering to the narrative and not revealing a specific incident, and in so doing declare that we have our origin in the aberrations of our past generations and that the narrative can render us paralyzed to our own better judgement. I also maintain that we are cast into roles, and we act upon cues that inform the 'selves' we perform. I close by discussing the *archive* as that which exists as the silences and denials around the family narrative.

In *chapter three* I focus on the *symbiotic relationship between time and narrative*. I then continue with the crucial discussion of my grandmother's ageing and mental deterioration as a *state of lacuna*, where she becomes practice to the theory. As significant is the analysis of the *mother's body in death*, and the *relationship of the child to and with the mother's body* is examined, revealing its importance in the formation of the child's sense of self. My grandmother's use of *surrogates* to negate intimacy is discussed as well as the daughters 'inheritance' and the *role of sanitization* in the narrative.

Chapter four centres on *studying the written narrative and voices of the women in my family*. It is argued that the mother not only gives the child language, but that the two of them actually share a voice for nine months, finding one's own voice is then a severing from the mother. For the child; especially the daughter, language and narrative then become substitutes for the mother. I mention that daughters speak two languages one of which is the mother/daughter language that is a non-language. It is within this framework that I have to find the voices of the women in my family, describing their domestic lives. Two narratives are presented; *the private, 'unofficial' narrative* of my grandmother's personal correspondence over the years and the more *'public-private' and 'official' narrative* in my grandmother's scrapbook/journal. The chapter locates *the spoken and unspoken, the female body, their daily routines* and their views on womanhood in these *written narratives*.

The following section in this chapter, entitled *Forgetting*, discusses two aspects of forgetting in the family narrative: the *collective act of forgetting and neglect* where the whole family is held accountable, and acts of *individual intentional and designated forgetting*. I follow this by discussions of the role of *Language and Religion* in the lives of the women in my family, what it indicates, how it is used. I also discuss the *act of 'naming'* and ask where a woman must go to find her own name. I discuss the act of the 'double murder' of the body and the name, and argue that language fragments the body and the self and fails women.

In *At the Loom* (an closing to chapter three) I close by discussing the act of the women in my family *weaving the narrative with and without language*, so that it becomes a ‘new poetic configuration’, and I pose the question of whether it is possible that the configuration might just be too old for us to read. I further claim that we as woman, and our lives, cannot be named and ‘told’ in language; we weave the narrative to order our lives, yet there is no beginning or end, because for women reminiscence goes beyond merely ‘from womb to tomb’. We remain faithful to the narrative, for we know we return to the quietness from where we came.

Chapter One

Chapter One discusses of the information I have gathered in order to form the broad focus of the thesis as a family narrative, but also to define the main focus as the female family narrative. In this chapter I also discuss the relationship between my practical and theoretical work. In order to address the central question of *how* and *why* we create the family narrative – *how* and *why* we *remember and forget the way we do* – the first chapter presents a theoretical framework and basis through highlighting certain questions and problematic areas. The discussion in this chapter serves as an illustration and appraisal of the self-reflexive nature of this study. The chapter centres on interrogating the family narrative and the way its inherent complexities and contradictions are negotiated. It also explores the possibility of interpreting and investigating the narrative (specifically the role I play), while dealing with the opposition between living/intimacy and telling/writing.

The act of the family narrative and interpreting its poetics

What sort of being is it who pauses long enough to engage in inner dialogue, who wishes to make sense of the personal past, and who traces its trajectory as a means of discovering the origins of the self? What sort of being is it who finds himself or herself important enough to write about? More simply, what sort of being is it who engages in autobiographical self-reflection? (Freeman, 1993: 26-27)

In this process of investigating my family narrative in order to find ‘how’ and ‘why’ we remember and forget the way we do, I am confronted quite often with the question of ‘autobiography’. I ask not only ‘what sort of being I am’ to undertake such an enquiry, but also why I undertake this. To what possible conclusion, meaning or truth do I think this investigation might lead? I realize, and this might make the very process seem pointless, there may possibly be no conclusions and meanings for me to find. There may very well be no answers. As tired as this revelation sounds it is unnerving where one’s family and sense of self are concerned.

I have to take into account ‘what sort of being’ this study makes me; where does this act that I am perpetrating reside, and where does this act of ‘autobiographical reflection’ leave me as perpetrator? After Mark Freeman asks who engages in autobiographical self-reflection he argues that because the reader and writer, subject and object in autobiographical texts are one, the act of producing autobiography is questioned, seeing that “the meanings one arrives at are in some sense as much *made as found*, the process of autobiographical reflection being a fundamentally metaphorical one: a new relationship is being created between the past and the present, a new poetic configuration... The text of the self is thus being rewritten (Freeman, 1993: 30).

The meanings arrived at in this thesis as text (as well as the various texts within the family narrative that it examines) are as much ‘*made as found*’. The act of ‘making’ and ‘finding’ of meaning starts much earlier than the autobiographical act; it starts within the ‘safe’ recesses and confines of the mind. The pastiche of meaning is rendered where we reflect within the solace of the privately furnished rooms of the mind. The relationship between past and present as well as the relationship between the conjured-up thoughts and the woven narratives are swathed in metaphor. Metaphor, in turn, is embedded in fiction and therefore this relationship between past and present becomes a ‘new poetic configuration.’ Because of this ‘emergence’ of poetry I find myself agreeing with Paul Ricoeur when he suggests a suspension of ‘direct’ and ‘referential’, descriptive language in favour of poetic discourse, seeing that poetic discourse consists of qualities that can speak of the complex play of metaphor that exists outside the regular meanings of words (1984: x-xi).

In order to comprehend the family narrative/autobiographical act I need to enter the realm of poetic discourse, where “one must interpret by making another’s words reverberate, allowing spoken and unspoken themes to come to life through the cadences and metaphors of poetic language, the musical speech of the unconscious... [Making, shattering and remaking conceptual patterns] is central to our interpretive poetics, as we seek to understand... ‘the nothing that is’” (Rogers, 1999: 83-84).

This study makes me an interpreter; my work is that of finding, creating, breaking down, and recreating meaning and narrative (be it the narrative of word, image or the body). In the narratives I investigate and in the narratives that I am creating, in my thesis as well as in practical work, I am intrigued by those realms that constitute the unsaid and the unsayable.⁶ The reflection and interpretation committed to the creation and recreation (orally) of narrative directs the narrative toward the domains of poetry. Narrative, be it the narrative shared by family members, or the narrative they enact in photographs or correspondence, is woven with a multitude of voices and reflections.

Poetic interpretation and the creation and perpetuation of the family narrative lies between what is said and unsaid, and what is possible and not possible to say (unsayable), and what is revealed and disguised. I am not merely interpreter but also part of the narrative being interpreted, while the multiple voices and reflections of the family members both create and complicate the narratives - the one telling and the one listening are both interpreting. Because of these dualities the acts and actors involved in the process of 'telling' are continually interpreting and reinterpreting: the one who lived it and told the story, the one who heard it and now writes about it as well as the one who eventually reads this text.⁷ All these stories and their telling/s, with their metaphors and rhythms of repetition and silence, becomes the poetics of the unsaid and the unsayable - existing not only in the narrative investigated, but also within the thesis and the practical work. This thesis has to be self-reflexive in nature, a 'new poetic configuration', where I rewrite myself.

The family narrative is created by a language of *remembering* and *forgetting*, both these acts are bound to, indebted to, and dependent on one another. Derrida describes the relationship between remembering and forgetting:

There is no remembering without forgetting. There is no remembering that cannot become forgetting. Forgetting can become a deferred remembering. Forgetting

⁶ When I use the term 'the unsaid' I refer to the things that we do not talk about, the things we do not mention or name. While the term 'the unsayable' to me relates to those events/ instances/ experiences/ people; that we cannot talk about, that which cannot be verbalised. The unsaid is the lack of the use of language and the unsayable refers to the inability of language to convey certain aspects.

⁷ The story can also be told through photographs and interpreted visually (as I do in my practical work) by one who saw rather than heard, and reinterpreted by the one who views the visual interpretation.

can be a way of remembering. They open out of each other, light becoming darkness, darkness becoming light. ... Dancing between remembering and forgetting, at once spanning them and within each, is imagining. No trace in memory, not even the image transposed onto film by a camera lens, is a simple reflection of event. In the moment of its recording, the event – in its completeness, its uniqueness – is lost. The dance of imagination, moving effortlessly through both conscious and unconscious spaces, shapes what is remembered and forgotten, and how the trace is configured. Each time the trace is revisited; this dance is busy with its work of shaping and reshaping. The archive then is a trilectic, an open-ended process of remembering, forgetting and imagining (Harris, 2002: 75).

What Derrida describes as the *archive*, I refer to as *narrative* within the conceptual framework of this thesis. This process of the narrative is a metaphorical one, a poetic configuration that rewrites the very text of the self (Freeman, 1993: 30). Thus, by writing the poetics of the unsayable and the unsaid (be it with word or image⁸), I am between memory and forgetting in the realm of imagination.

Although my thesis and practical work are strictly autobiographical acts, they are also at the same time the unravelling of the autobiographical act and text; I question the process while I enact it. I asked where this act resides and where it will leave me as perpetrator: it resides in a threshold where I balance not only between remembering and forgetting but also between fiction, biography and autobiography - exploring and questioning the possibilities of them, leaving me to return to the tender ambivalence of the knowledge that there 'probably are no meanings to be found'.

I claim awareness of the fragile relationship between fact (and what can be perceived as biography or autobiography) and fiction via the words of others. By doing so, I reveal my perspective (or one of my perspectives) on the narrative of my family:

It must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel (Barthes, 1975:1).

⁸ My practical work

my broers en my ma wat my geleer het hoe die stories rondom jou die waarheid kan lieg. Daarom is heelwat name en plekke verander – die ‘ek’ is selde ek, my ma en pa nie noodwendig my ouers nie, my familie nie regtig bloedverwante nie, ensovoorts⁹ (Krog, 2005: 407).

I view the text (both thesis and practical) that I produce, as well as the narratives I investigate, as literature – simultaneities of autobiography, biography, fiction, prose and poetry. The people in it are actors and characters, of whom there are no clear pictures or views to be had and no answers and meanings to be found.

Narrative, Archive and Inheritance

Complications and incapability of interpreting the family and the self:

Dispersal

The investigation of my family narrative is also an investigation of the self - a ‘rewriting of the self.’¹⁰ The thesis as text, as well as the narrative it investigates, is entangled with the complexities and dissonances that emanate from the relationship between ‘the made and the found’, or more crudely put, between fact and fiction. More complex than these dissonances is the dispersed self; it performs multiple roles within both the narrative and the writing of this text; it is author and subject yet also subject and object. The self writes and is being written upon by this text. This text does not only rewrite the self, but also writes upon the self, the self becomes palimpsest.¹¹

⁹ “my brothers and my mother who taught me how the stories that surround you can lie the truth. That is why many names and places were changed- the ‘I’ is seldom me, my mother and father not necessarily my own parents, my family not necessarily blood relatives, etcetera.”

¹⁰ As I have mentioned, Mark Freeman refers to the process of the narrative as “fundamentally a metaphorical one... a new poetic configuration... the text of the self is thus being rewritten” (Freeman, 1993: 30)

¹¹ ‘Text’, includes the investigation of the family narrative, the written and spoken word as well as the ‘texts created by living’ and the thesis as text. It also includes the investigation of the photograph as visual narrative within my practical work.

In her book *Family Frames* Marianne Hirsch writes, “Within the family, as I look I am always also looked at, seen, scrutinized, surveyed, monitored... I am always both self and other” (1997:8). Roland Barthes says “the photograph is the advent of me as other” (2000:12). In the texts of the family (narrative and photograph), and in the thesis as text,¹² ‘I am always both self and other’: I am looking and looked at, inscribed and inscription, writer and text.

Ek is; die spieël, venster en gordyn, die argief en argivaris, die dokument en die teks self. Ek is die pawn shop eienaar, die desperate koper en verkoper; ek is die gekneusde, aangepaasde, getinte objek. Ek hoer met stories - pimp en prostituut, elke kooi en vlek van die instituut¹³ (personal journal, undated. App. 1A).

Hirsch goes further to say that “Autobiography and photography share... a fragmentary structure and an incompleteness that can be only partially concealed by narrative and conventional connections” (1997: 84). The narrative of my family includes the family photograph as text, and my concerns and questions around the family narrative includes and extends to the family photograph. As autobiographical text, or as a form of self-reflection, the photograph is also a fragmentary and limited point of view. This, amongst other topics, are investigated in my practical work, though my practical work shares in many of the themes and concerns of the thesis it stands independently: the thesis is in no way an explanation of my practical work. Even though I approached the practical and theoretical work as separate investigations a strong relationship has grown and the two streams ‘independently share’ in many aspects without being illustrations of one another. Both areas are concerned with the poetry of the unsaid and unsayable in looking at and investigating issues concerning the family and autobiography, as well as creating meaning and the ‘impossibility’ of representation. The theory and the practical work become almost obsessive investigations of the family as “imagined abstraction”(Siopis, 2005: 94) by looking at absence as presence specifically concerning the silence of the body and its functions¹⁴. In both streams of work there is a reliance on, and mistrust of, memory, sharing aspects of fragmentation, repetition, silence and metaphor, while exploring issues such as preservation, inheritance, domesticity,

¹² As well as in my practical work

¹³ “I am; the mirror, window and curtain, the archive and archivist, the document and the text itself. I am the pawnshop owner, the desperate seller and buyer; I am the tainted, stained, passed on object. I whore with stories- pimp and prostitute, every bed and stain in this institute.”

¹⁴ In my practical work I also include the body’s relationship to its surroundings (place. objects etc.)

secrecy and intimacy within the spheres of private/public and physical/imagined. Though there are many similarities the theoretical research/writing process and my practical art-making process are not directly related or dependant on one another.

I explore the narrative's 'partial concealment' of both the photograph and the 'autobiographical' text's 'fragmentation' and 'incompleteness'. The fragmentation and incompleteness of the autobiographical text become the incapable silences between memory and forgetting. It is because of these characteristics that autobiography moves into the realm of the poetics of the unsayable and unsaid, revealing the complications and consequences of the family narrative.

"Text and image, intricately entangled in a narrative web, work in collaboration to tell a complicated story of loss and longing that ... critical terminology can barely approximate" (Hirsch, 1997:4). It is within this intricate entanglement of text and image that I become aware of my incapability to 'approximate' this 'complicated story'. And I realise that it is, as Derrida writes:

A voice without différance, a voice without writing, is at once absolutely alive and absolutely dead. As for what "begins" then – "beyond" absolute knowledge-unheard of thoughts are required, sought for across the memory of old signs... In order to conceive of this age, in order to 'speak' about it, we will have to have other names than those of sign or representation (1986: 102-103).

The narrative itself is complex, while dealing with complicated subject matter. The relationship and collaboration between text and image is convoluted and incapable because of the inherent incompleteness and fragmentation of representation. Thus the narrative, and the thesis as text, is unable to tell a 'complicated story', needing 'other names than those of sign and representation', producing in its ineptness something closer to poetry.

Yet the 'complications' do not begin and end with the collaboration between text and image. The genesis for this collaboration, the creating and 'telling' of the family narrative is infinitely more complex. It is because text and image collaborate to tell of the family

narrative, an intricate relationship between ‘loss and longing’, a relationship akin to that of forgetting and remembering, that the ‘entanglement’ deepens. The complexities between text and image can hardly grasp the family narrative, because it is woven with what is absent as much as with what is present while it reveals an ephemeral subject matter of memory and neglect.

What obscures the investigation of the family narrative even more is the fact that I am entangled in this narrative web and because of this I, like the terminology, cannot approximate this investigation. I am a strand used in the weave of this family narrative, yet I am also entangled within this narrative cloth which changes easily from weave to web. This fabric can seem as both tea cosy and net; it is the snare of lace and the constriction of the bodice. Conscious as I am of these various roles that I play in this narrative (both in the family narrative as well as the thesis), I fear that I cannot but complicate my position even further. In *Family Frames*, Marianne Hirsch states that she is “deliberately conflating the self-portrait with the family picture”, for is the portrait of the family not always also a self-portrait, while the self-portrait is always also portrait of the family (1997:85)? Hirsch writes that “Just as the family picture can be read as a self-portrait, so the self-portrait always includes the other, not only because the self, never coincident, is necessarily other to itself, but also because it is constituted by multiple and heteronymous relations” (1997:83).¹⁵

This conflation, or rather the realisation of what is already conflated, renders me, yet again, incapable of approximating this investigation. The investigations are not only complex in their nature as both image (practical) and text (theory), or through its subject of forgetting and remembering, they are infinitely complex, because the narrative is indeed web and cloth. The narrative becomes increasingly multiple and dispersed because the portrait of the self and the family merges. In the act of investigating my family narrative I am faced with an inept approximation (be it image or narrative) of my family and myself, while I am both myself and am my family. Therefore as I participate in and am caught within this narrative, I am never singular, I am never only myself. Hirsch goes further to look at Lacoue-Labarthe’s “portrait of the artist”. He is of the opinion that “only with difficulty can we speak of self-

¹⁵ In the framework of this study *portrait* includes both image and the narrative (be it written or oral).

portraits'... If the authorial 'self' is multiple and dispersed... so is the visual 'self' of the portraits. 'Whose face exactly is being photographed?'"(Hirsch, 1997: 87). The self-portrait (and with this I include this text as well as the larger family narrative), is scattered within itself. This leaves us with an uncertainty- whose narrative is being written and investigated? We seem to return to Antjie Krog's words, in this investigation/thesis: "die 'ek' is selde ek, my ma en pa nie noodwendig my ouers nie"¹⁶ (Krog, 2005: 407).

The self is dispersed through the interrelated multiplicity of both the 'I' and the family. The multiplicity of 'the family' is contained in the 'I' as the multiple 'I' is contained in the family. The weave becomes more and more complex as it turns both away from itself and back onto itself. This is a very abstract place, yet at the same time, it is intimately and infinitely interwoven.

Abstraction and Fragmentation

We exist via one another, not just with and around one another. I relate the 'I', its family, their narrative, and their photographs to the way Penny Siopis describes the family: "The family is, like community, as much an imagined abstraction as anything else. It provides the model for many forms and ways of belonging; it is a lived reality, and a set of shifting maps for living itself. Family encompasses and exceeds our individual lives, we inherit our older relatives. They are, as it were, always already there and bear a history for us before we are born" (Siopis, 2005: 24).

Applying Siopis's view on family to this thesis renders the family and the self of this text as imagined and abstracted images and narratives. Something is abstract¹⁷ when it exists as a thought or idea, not as a physicality or practicality, when it does not represent objects in a realistic way, but when it merely expresses certain aspects of reality. An 'abstract' can be a short account of the content of something, such as a book, or be the removal or separation of something by severing its relation to the whole (Cowie, 1989: 5).

¹⁶ " ... the 'I' is seldom me, my mother and father are not necessarily my parents".

¹⁷ According to the Oxford Dictionary

Because I have followed Marianne Hirsch's example and conflated the self and the family portrait, it is indeed both the *family* and the *self* that can be described as 'imagined abstractions'. The family and by extension the 'selves' that the family consists of, as well as its narrative weave (which holds within it both images and texts) that mark the lives we lead, can be reduced to systems of abstraction that exist as ideas and thoughts. These abstractions are imagined for they are rendered by reflection and interpretation, which reside within the imagination: Therefore when referring to the intimacy of the family narrative, the word 'imagined', as the word 'fiction', seems cruel, yet not wrong.

It is challenging to navigate both the self and the collective through the contradictions of the fragile narrative, woven by the complexities and dualities of the individual and collective imaginations of my family. There are shifts between the family and these dualities; such as the play between the family as imagined abstraction and the family as physical inheritance. There is also a shift or a sway between the family as constructed and created within certain dualities, and certain dualities as constructed and created within the family. Because this is a self-reflexive text the complications within the family narrative also complicate the investigation of the narrative.

I cannot deny that my eyes resemble those of my father and that my father's eyes resemble his mother's eyes. When I look at my face I recognize this heritage. Thus, my self-portrait is a portrait of the family, for within my portrait I can recognize both the eyes of my father and of my grandmother. I am their reference. I am a part of a bigger content and even though I am abstraction and summary of the larger book, the family, I am also (in part) a physically abstracted and imagined notion. I cannot refute the reality of my physical family narrative, my related, familial, and practical heritage. The notion of physical heritage, though physically real in its manifestation, is also an imagined abstraction because it is partial and fragmented.

"Family encompasses and exceeds our individual lives, we inherit our older relatives. They are, as it were, always already there and bear a history for us before we are born" (Siopis,

2005: 24). I am, we are, not singular in our existence; we are multiple and dispersed through our physical and abstract perceptions of one another. As individual as the imagined construction of family might seem, it is also always collective. The ‘notion’ of family, just like the individuals within the family, are scattered within aspects of physicality and abstraction. How we (as family and as individuals within the family) suffer or perceive contradictions in the interrelations between dualities sustains the “poetic configuration” that is the family narrative (Freeman, 1993: 30).

Mark Freeman speaks of the process of looking at people’s lives and finds that what we have before us “are not lives themselves, but rather texts of lives, literary artefacts that generally seek to recount in some fashion what these lives were like” (Freeman, 1993: 7). We see and perceive everybody out of context. Removed from our families, we are separated from our contexts, because we are woven together, entangled and ensnared in our family, just as we are in language. As language is intertextual, so are we. We are bound and related to many other texts within the extended family and beyond it. We are the words in the dictionary that cannot be explained through themselves but only through the use of other words. We use other words, other people/ stories/ events/ places/ objects to describe and define ourselves. Through this we give ourselves and others the ability or accessibility to employ us in the same fashion. Via these acts we take part in the creation of ‘imagined abstractions’, be it family, community or state. And this is why we create narrative, why we remember and forget the way we do. Once we use language to define and find or explain ourselves, we take part in language and narrative. Once one is part of the ‘weave’, it becomes weft and web, and one expands through and within this entanglement, but cannot escape.

Inheritance and Acts of Preservation

The inherited relative is both physical and abstracted heritage. This heritage and its dualities manifest in the advent of the portrait (both image and narrative), or rather in the conflation of the self and the family portrait. The conflation is indeed this very inheritance, for ‘the family’ is inevitably ‘always already there’, thus the self-portrait is always also a portrait of the family.

Barthes speaks of the self-portrait in his book *Camera Lucida*: “‘myself’ never coincides with my image; for it is the image which is heavy, motionless, stubborn... and ‘myself’ which is light, divided, dispersed; like a bottled imp, ‘myself’ does not hold still” (2000: 12). The self-portrait holds the *self-as-other* through its image, as Barthes says: “The photograph is the advent of me as other”¹⁸(2000: 12). He goes further to create a divide between his self and his image, the image being “heavy, motionless and stubborn” while his self is “light, divided and dispersed”. Yet it is not merely the ‘self’ of the self-portrait that is dispersed and divided. The portrait itself (be it image or narrative) is scattered, for the portrait of the self is always also a portrait of the family. I agree with the description of the image as “heavy, motionless and stubborn,” yet, as an ‘imagined abstract’, it is at the same time also divided and dispersed – made up of a multitude of fragments constituting physicalities and abstractions.

The divide Barthes draws, the light and heavy of the self entails a very complex duality to navigate through. Diane Barthel uses the same distinction when she argues that the way one feels about preservation is dependent on how one feels about history: “Nietzsche spoke of the heaviness of history, of how the sheer volume of the past can weigh on the present... By contrast novelist Milan Kundera suggests that what people feel today is not the heaviness of history but an almost ‘unbearable lightness of being.’” She continues, “Everything that occurs threatens to pass away so quickly we are not even sure whether it really happened. We are even less sure if our perceptions of events are shared, a collective phenomenon, or purely individual sensations” (Bartel, 1996: 151).

The self-portrait rests, with history, in this divide between the *lightness* and the *heaviness*. Do we collapse under the weight of the portrait as well? Barthes says the image is “heavy and stubborn”; we remain uncertain whether the weight lies in the representation of the self or the other ‘other’, i.e. the self-portrait as family portrait. I find that it can possibly be our inherited family (that is always already there) that weighs so heavily on us. This very inheritance

¹⁸ Barthes refers to the image; in the context of my use of the term *portrait* I include narrative along with Barthes’s visual image.

facilitates both the rigidity as well as the dispersion within the portrait, creating one of the key contradictions of the family narrative.

Barthes's description is contradictory; he describes his 'self' as 'light, divided, dispersed', and 'not being able to hold still' and then continues to compare his 'self' to a bottled imp. Is this because of the complexity of the duality between the lightness and the heaviness that even his comparison cannot 'hold still'? The *portrait*, both as an image and as a narrative, is like the 'bottled imp' – a mode of preservation. The liquid (inside the bottle), the imitated amniotic fluid, is language in which we sway and drift; light, divided and dispersed through our intertextuality, yet unable to exist without it. The glass bottle is our images/photographs and narratives - the frustratingly limited views of ourselves that look inwards from the outside. I am reminded of a Sylvia Plath poem, *Stillborn*:

These poems do not live: it's a sad diagnosis...
It wasn't for any lack of mother love.
O I cannot understand what happened to them!
They are proper in shape and number and every part.
They sit so nicely in the pickling fluid!
They smile and smile and smile and smile at me.
And still the lungs won't fill and the heart won't start...
But they are dead, and their mother near dead with distraction,
And they stupidly stare and do not speak of her (1981:142).

Plath's bottledimps are not images of herself, but of her poems. Her poems are her 'children', yet they are also portraits of her. It seems that Plath's poems are as 'stubborn' as Barthes's images, because they "stupidly stare and do not speak of her". The frustration in both forms of preservation (image and word) persists; both attempts seem immovable and silent. At the same time I wonder how Barthes apprehends the 'self' he compares to his self-portrait? For the 'self' in a mirror, though more animated, is but another flat duplicate like the image. Trying to attain a view of the self is indeed like looking at a bottled imp. One cannot

ever (in a photograph, mirror, and narrative or within the family) fully apprehend the self, or a self that lives up to our notion of ‘true’ self.

Various modes of preservation confront me within the weave of the family narrative, be it image or narrative (the one I am writing as well as the narratives I observe). Specific moments, reflections, aspirations, glimpses are preserved, stubbornly sustained - enabling us to revisit and review them, only to find that they smile and stare and do not speak of us. It is starting to become clearer to me, as I have mentioned earlier, that “Only with difficulty can we speak of self-portraits”¹⁹ (Hirsch. 1997: 87). These states of preservation are, at the same time stubborn as well as divided and dispersed, left to sway between the lightness and heaviness of history. Perpetually leaving me uncertain, not just about the possibility of preservation/the portrait (image and narrative), but ultimately also of the possibility of the interpretation and investigation of the portrait/the family narrative. This leads me to contemplate: the bottle that holds Barthes’s imp is a thin transparent membrane, a threshold that facilitates the preservation of the portrait while also keeping it out of full view. Is this preserved state and threshold an example of the *lightness of being*, where “everything that occurs threatens to pass away so quickly we are not sure whether it really happened” (Barthel, 1996: 151)?

Derrida writes that “no now can be isolated as a pure instant, a pure punctuality” (1986: 61), while Antonio Damasio argues that “the present is never here. We’re hopelessly late for consciousness” (cited in Olney, 1998: 339). I think this ‘unbearable lightness of being’, this elusive *now* is the reason why we endure and continue to impose and create states of preservation. The ‘preserved’ (moment/subject/object/feeling) remain inert and obstinate, as well as in eternal motion, swaying between the intolerability of both weight and the lack of it. These contradictions and dual realities keep us obligated to remember and depend on them; obligated to perpetuate the narrative the way we do.

¹⁹ Including within the idea of self-portrait the written or spoken word.

We are bathed in language, the lives and actions of our family, and the ‘selves’ within it, become texts, abstractions. Texts require interpretation yet memory and recollection are obligatory in order to interpret. But language, and eventually memory, can only reach so far: that which is left, the silence and shadows where language and memory’s light does not reach, is where the unsaid and the unsayable reside. These shadows and silences do not simply refer to our preverbal years. They refer to every year of our lives in which we create *narrative* and text that always exist through and with their counterparts *silence and shadow*. As Derrida points out: “the archive is the unsaid or sayable inscribed in everything by virtue of being enunciated; it is the fragment of memory always forgotten in the act of saying ‘I.’ Every act of bearing witness thus carries with it an archive as that element of the unsaid under and around what is said” (cited in Robert, 2006: 44).

For all the texts we ‘write’, all the texts our lives become, all the photographs we take and memories we recollect, there are a thousand words we do not write, a thousand things we do not describe, recollect or frame with the camera. Wherever language or memory shine a light, a shadow is cast, and when shadows are cast repetitively, they grow darker and more incomprehensible. It is through reinforced or even through an obligated routine of neglect (both conscious and unconscious) that we create the narrative and its archive, consisting not only of the unsaid, but also of that which indeed becomes unsayable. We exist within a threshold, a hymen that is both inside and outside, facilitating preservation while inevitably marking its impossibility.

How to write the poetry of the non-descript intimacy of living:

Lives as texts / Living as writing

She belonged to the other religion, not the one of words, but the human one of intimacy, of hands that touch and eyes that look. The one that knows we die and bears silently the grief of this extinction, refusing the vainglorious comfort of literature’s claim of immortality (Hampl, 2000: 217).

This thesis as act of preservation both links and separates me through (what Barthes refers to as) the umbilical cord (2000:81). In this process of producing this thesis, I move between the *religion of the body* that quietly in its frail and brief existence bemoans its mortality, and the *religion of literature's immortality*, within which is the vain hope of leaving something behind to somehow prolong this violently intimate and brief stay. We are acutely aware of and bear this 'silent grief' - that propels us to create some semblance of an extension to this brevity, whether an annexe, an augmentation or a postponement. Is this not what I am doing, by investigating my family narrative, by looking at what, in this brief stay, fills and filled their grasp and gaze. In trying to access the ways in which they 'silently bore the grief of their extinction', I bear the grief of my own extinction.

Literature provides the 'comfort' and ability to say, that 'I was here', 'I was', and through this, in that instant of the word being read 'I am!' Mark Freeman (as I noted earlier) suggests that because we are immersed in language human lives are but texts within the infinite interplay of intertextuality. Freeman continues to infer from this that human actions, that render extensive repercussions, should be read and interpreted like literary texts or interviews (1993:8). Actions weave the dense narratives of our lives. Yet human action *is* a text as much as it *creates* a text; a life that transpires within time and has 'consequences' can and should be read 'not unlike literary texts'. A transpired life becomes a collection of meanings that should not only be read but interpreted. I am of the opinion that the religion 'not of words' but of touch and sight and intimacy is still a text, even though it may be silent, unwritten or forgotten. Because this so often is the text of the lives of the women in my family, I concentrate specifically on my female family narrative. Within this I am faced with the religion 'not of words', where intimacy and the body exist in silence. "A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze" – this connects us to the preserved (Barthes, 2000: 81). The body and preservation are interrelated and speak of each other. Narratives describe the body with language, while the image does it visually. The narrative is where we create and designate meaning, even if the body is not spoken of in the narrative; the umbilical cord always links us to the body, yet at the same time always keeps us separated. Although they might seem inadequate, the acts of a life cannot occur without consequence or trace.

Here, as so often in my research, the duality between living and writing arises. Roquentin says that “for the most banal event to become an adventure, you must begin to recount it...you have to choose: live or tell” (Sartre, 1964: 39). Should we then ask, as Mark Freeman does in *Rewriting the Self*: “Might it not be preferable to abandon narrative altogether, to refuse to be that further step removed from life itself, to embrace instead the untidiness of ongoing present moments?” (1993: 94). I find his notion difficult to fathom; do we have such a clear choice? It is as though he draws a line that designates narrative as comprised of specific things/acts/modes of doing and positions these opposite ‘present moments’.

Narratives do not only consist of the written word, be it literature, a diary, telegram, letter or the minutes of a meeting. Narratives are spoken, told and retold, they are performed and created. Narratives are the marks that the actions of our lives make on our surroundings (be it our physical environment or our interrelations with people); as our surroundings speak of us, so we speak of our surroundings. I do not think there is a clear choice between *living* and *telling*, for in the context of this thesis as text I practise both the religion of intimacy as well as the one of words (Hampl, 1999: 217).

I am of the opinion that we all create narratives, as Freeman says, ‘not unlike literary texts’ and maybe the fact that we are not all (professional) ‘writers’ who publish causes the “silence of our grief” (Hampl, 2000: 217). The women in my family are (and were) writers merely of diaries and letters. They are, however, the subject matter of family photographs, correspondence and memories. They are (and were) the subject matter of a home.

Even if unaware, we all, in one way or another, practise the ‘religions’ of literature and narrative, because through our actions we render ‘a kind of text’ a “constellation of meanings” (Freeman, 1993: 7). I find that mother’s, by giving birth to children, create the amalgamation of the two ‘religions’ of body and text. The mother introduces the child to the world by giving birth (physically body from body) and to language as a text (the body of language). The mother ‘writes’ the child as text that becomes part of the family narrative, and in the process of existing in, performing and perpetuating the narrative, the child learns its nuances. We move from the womb of membrane to the womb of memory.

Ek en my ma skryf, ons skryf aan ons stories, net nie op papier nie. Miskien skryf ek aan die dokument eerder as aan my eie storie. Is dit ook 'n rede vir die koorsigheid - die dokument is my storie. Wat is dit wat ek vrees, wat ek wil vermy? Dat ek eendag wakker word en niks *is* nie, en niks *beteken* nie? Wil ek met dit sê dat die vroue oor wie ek skryf niks beteken nie, omdat hul dae en rituele nie opgeskryf is nie? Oor daar nie daadwerklike bewyse is vir wat hul met hul tyd gedoen het nie, behalwe sewe dingedrade, gestopte voorskooie?

Ek en my ma skryf, sy skryf op ons en in ons en deur ons en ek ek skryf die dokument omdat ek nog te bang is om op kinders te skryf. Omdat ek dink woorde weeg meer as vleis, die vrug van my pen/brain is waardevoller as die vrug van my skoot? Woorde of werpsel?

Ek en my ma skryf op mekaar, ons is mekaar se dokumentasie, se korrespondensie, mekaar se lei en griffel. Die familie skryf almal op mekaar en die gesin nog te meer. Maar ek en my ma keer terug na mekaar soos kantlyne, vind altyd weer oorkoms/herkoms/afkoms daar. Keer terug na die vrugwater waar taal net bo op dryf²⁰ (personal journal, October 23, 2009. App. 1A).

Why and How to Tell / Why and How to Write

I write a text in the religion of literature about the religion of intimacy - telling of living. I tread and thread the line between these various ambiguities and dualities that emerge from writing, which, in itself, constitutes both the body of language and of living. This text that I am writing now is my present and my presence. I stand to bear witness to a narrative that is multifaceted and 'ungraspable'. From within this narrative I bear witness to many things I never saw, but "Within the family, as I look I am always also looked at, seen, scrutinized, surveyed, monitored... I am always both self and other" (Hirsch, 1997: 8). Thus from my

²⁰ My mother and I write, we write our stories, not on paper. Maybe I would rather write this document than my own story. Is this also a reason for the fever - this document is my story. What is this that I fear, that I want to avoid? That I one day wake up and I *am* nothing, and I *mean* nothing? Does this mean I want to say that the women I am writing about do not mean anything, because their deeds and rituals are not written? Because there is no clear evidence of what they did with their time, except for seven thread bare, mended aprons? My mother and I write, she writes on us and through us and with us and I am writing this document because I am still too scared to write on children. Because I think words weigh more than flesh, the fruit of my pen/brain is worth more than the fruit of my womb? Prose or progeny?

My mother and I write, we've been writing for years on each other, we are each other's documentation, correspondation, we are each other's pen and paper. The family writes on each other and the household even more so. But my mother and I return to each other like margins, always again finding descent and origin there. Returning to the amniotic fluid where language only floats on the top.

position within the family, with its recesses of ancestral heritage, I bear witness to the self and the other.

Bearing witness, then, marks a site in which the witness stands while offering testimony, yet this site is precisely where she cannot remain. Testimony is not an abode in which one can abide. Testimony takes place, as Agamben suggests, on the threshold of such a demure, on the threshold where inside and outside become blurred (Robert, 2006: 41).

This thesis is such an act of testimony (another act of preservation) – it constitutes the frail threshold in which I cannot abide, but which is also my present. I reiterate that this text, with its subtexts, *is not singular*; it has no beginning and certainly no end. “It will take a long time for living cannot be told, not merely told: living is not liveable” (Minh-Ha, 1993:2). Roquentin writes; “choose: live or tell”, but if ‘living cannot be merely told’, if living indeed is not ‘liveable’, where are we (the family), and where does this leave me (Sartre, 1964: 39)? What does this mean for the threshold act of testimony that I occupy? Where does this inaccessibility leave the women in my family, with their quiet, untold lives of domesticity, accessible now merely through memory? They have to somehow access the monotony of days-in and days-out, of weeks and months that turn into years, and the large part of their lives that turn and churn around the daily tasks of keeping house and raising children? Where in this tale do you start and stop, how do you tell it, how do you remember it? Patricia Hampl, the memoirist, suggests: “I am forced to admit that memory is not a warehouse of finished stories, not a gallery of framed pictures. I must admit that I invented” (2000:26). We are left but with one option; we must confess – ‘I admit I invented’. The texts will reveal themselves as partial inventions, showing the chaos that is hidden in order to render the picture. Narrative is rendered only through interpretation and ultimately invention: “Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly’s wing; but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron” (Virginia Woolf as cited in Rogers, 1999:105).

The view of our personal vignette captures only fragments of certain arbitrarily selected scenes. We aim to ‘tell’/to create narrative, even if the recesses of our lives are so impenetrable and the reach short, because we do not want to leave the passing of our days and lives ‘untold’. We want to exist, not only in the frail sense of being but by making marks

as evidence of our existence. We want legacies, stories, memories, heritage; we want somehow to *mean* so that we can bear Nietzsche's *heaviness of history* and Kundera's *lightness of being*.²¹

How do I tell of the slow breath of everyday life of the mothers and housewives who bore me? The question *how to tell* should address the 'possibility' of telling: How do I ask women of ages varying from 54 to 92 to *tell* of their lives? How do they tell if even "conscious reflection itself – will subtly transform what is being considered" and how 'accurate' can their tales be? (Freeman, 1993: 82). Memory is unreliable and incapable of rendering the past without altering it. Not only do we have to admit 'we invented', but we also have to admit that even conscious reflection will alter our memories. The women (housewives and mothers) who tell me the stories of their lives, filled with the domesticity of the everyday, lived in the framework of a home in a small Karoo town, will have to reflect, remember, transform and invent... Virginia Woolf writes to her husband Leonard at the end of the film *The Hours*: "Leonard, always the years between us, always the years, always the love. Always the hours" (Hare, 2002: 122). After the women in my family have faltered through their memories, what is it that remains of these hours?

Edward T. Lithental speaks of remembrance and writes that silence should not be a commemorative impulse, because "then the interpretive field would be left open for murderers of memory, all too eager to fill the void with comforting expressions of sanitization, domestication, trivialization and other insidious forms of forgetfulness"(2006: 235). Lithental seems to view 'sanitization, domestication, and trivialization' as murderers of memory – as ways of forgetting – but what if these are the very things one wants to remember?

²¹ "Nietzsche spoke of the heaviness of history, of how the sheer volume of the past can weigh on the present... By contrast novelist Milan Kundera suggests that what people feel today is not the heaviness of history but an almost 'unbearable lightness of being'. Everything that occurs threatens to pass away so quickly we are not even sure whether it really happened. We are even less sure if our perceptions of events are shared, a collective phenomenon, or purely individual sensation" (Bartel, 1996: 151).

Reading *A Sketch of the Past* by Virginia Woolf I find Lithenthal's theories both affirmed and denied. Woolf writes: "These separate moments of being were however embedded in many more moments of non-being. I have already forgotten what Leonard and I talked about at lunch; and at tea; although it was a good day, the goodness was embedded in a kind of non-descript cotton wool" (1985: 70). She speaks of the *domestic* and the *trivial* as Lithenthal does, of moments of 'non-being', moments of the everyday - stuck in the monotony of repetition that become nondescript and therefore forgotten. Yet she also mentions clear moments or memories of 'being': she remembers the pattern on her mother's lap when she was lying in it, the morning light and the sound of the blind from the window in the wind, walking down to the beach. These simple moments of body and home, as domestic and trivial as any other, are somehow moments that remain clearer than any other. She goes further to say: "Those moments - in the nursery, on the road to the beach - can still be more real than the present moment" (1985:67). The character of the *domestic* and *trivial*, though branded 'murderers of memory', seem to be more complex than this accusation implies. The domestic/the home, the everyday 'houses' both memory and forgetting and this is the reason why one finds the essence of the creation of the family and the individual narrative here. The women in my family, hopefully with the help of this investigation, will remember their 'hours', the moments of being, while the rest will fall into the archive. The home suffers, as we all do, from the contradictions and silences of the narrative.

How does one listen to and write about shreds that were taken apart and rewoven countless times over the years, woven in the domestic sphere by remembrance as much as by forgetting. I find a partial answer in the following comment: "...and though we listen only haphazardly, with one ear, we will begin our story with the word *and*" (Mueller cited in Wagner-Martin, 1994). Because I listened, and still listen, 'haphazardly, with one ear' it seems I too need to start with the word 'and'. Through my vignette, this tattered little text, I decide where the light falls and what remains dark - knowing my light always throws a shadow. And unlike Peter Pan I, and this text, cannot lose this shadow - we bear it, an albatross and a scarlet letter, our birth mark, our inheritance. It is the weight of my shadow, the heaviness of the past, which keeps my lightness of being from becoming unbearable.

I should also question *why* I want to hear before *how*: I want to engage in investigating the female narrative in my family, because I am not born of merely my mother's womb; I am born from the wombs of all the women that 'gave birth' to my mother. Yet I do not want to trace my lineage; I want to know about the silent domestic narratives that shaped me, woven by the 'women' who gave birth to me. I want to find the womb of membrane within the womb of memory.

The Problematic of the 'Initial' and the 'I'

Adrienne Rich says that "It is hard to write about my own mother. Whatever I do write, it is my story I am telling, my version of the past" (1976: 221). Conflating the family portrait with the self-portrait means that I am writing both about the self and the other/the family (Hirsch, 1997: 85). I want to go further and conflate specifically the mother/daughter portrait, for as Rich says writing about your mother is writing about the self. Within this text the mother and the daughter are conflated to the extent that the mother becomes both self and other to the daughter (and vice versa).

Within this text, which investigates the women in my family as much as myself, I start to write and rewrite myself. Within the act of narrative I also write with the self and, at the same time, the self is written and acted upon. Through being a part of the narrative and the act of investigating the narrative (a protracted act of autobiography), my 'self' becomes other to me.

The self, as the *initial*, is not a constant one can return to. In all our discourse in living with, against and onto each other, we can never return to the *initial*. Since every reflection, be it in the folds of the mind/spoken/acted or written "cannot help but alter the experience itself... [and] will subtly transform what is being considered" (Freeman, 1993: 82). We can never find access to that initial event/action/memory, or what Derrida refers to as 'trace', for the slightest reflection alters it:

No trace in memory, not even the image transposed onto film by a camera lens, is a simple reflection of event. In the moment of its recording, the event – in its

completeness, its uniqueness – is lost. Each time the trace is revisited; this dance is busy with its work of shaping and reshaping (as cited in Harris, 2002: 75).

There may very well be a clear moment of origin wherein a ‘truth’ lies, but we can never again access it. Not only do our pasts become impenetrable to us, in this sense, but the *selves* of that past become as unreachable. When it comes to our individual past we are more incapable than we are aware of. James Olney, in his book *Memory & Narrative, the Weave of Life Writing*, asks questions, not only about the self within memory and narrative, but also about the use of the pronoun ‘I’ and what it entails. He refers to Mary Warnock’s book *Memory* in which she asks the question “*Am I the same person I was forty years ago?*” (Olney, 1998: 230). At first this might seem like a fairly simple question, yet if one considers that the word/letter ‘I’ refers to both the self *now/presently and the self forty years ago*, one starts to realise that those two ‘selves’ are very changed and different, yet one and the same word/letter refers to both. Warnock writes that memory and imagination overlap, becoming hard to distinguish, both acts involving thinking of things in their absence. Olney elaborates on this:

By ‘things’ Warnock no doubt means objects, events, persons, and the like, but could we not say the same of the self and the *I* – that memory consists of thinking of the *I* in its absence... and its presence?...One might say that an *I* remembered from forty years ago has a ghostly presence in the linguistic *I* spoken or written now (1998: 231).

The self indeed becomes other to itself, within the act of narrative; in the acts of telling and writing the ‘I’ can only refer to its self in a ‘ghostly’ manner. William Robert similarly writes about the ‘I’ within the act of testimony, citing Derrida’s *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*:

The ‘I’ may shift for the same witness across time, since the date marks a difference “between the one who says ‘I’ and the ‘I’ of the young man of whom he speaks and is himself.” In other words, the subject in the present who says ‘I’ today cannot replace even her own ‘I’ from her original dated testimony (an ‘I’ that has become other), since she is no longer in the instant (2006: 43)

One cannot write or even reflect without subtly altering what is being considered; this alteration includes the self/the 'I'. We do not merely transform our memories we transform ourselves. The women telling me of their lives transform the events and people they recount as well as themselves. It is difficult journeying back to the nondescript 'cotton wool' moments of non-being we find in the repetition of everyday-living. Yet it seems it is probably also difficult because the 'I' reflecting is removed from the 'I' of the past. We are dispersed across years and events, across people and places. The 'I' is never singular, it is scattered. We cannot return to the 'initial' event of the memory just as we cannot return to the 'I' of the memory.

The text I am writing (as well as the texts it investigates), becomes more and more complex, not just the *writing* but also the *telling*. I find it hard to write about my mother, amongst others, because this act is so much more plural than just the fact that writing about her is writing my own story. The dispersion starts so much earlier; it starts with my mother's own reflection. She is removed both from the initial and the self/'I', and the act of telling removes her even further. I hear this 'haphazardly', after which I write about it; subsequently my mother's 'story' becomes my own 'story'; I continually rewrite myself (Mueller cited in Wagner-Martin, 1994).

Thus I aim to write about the women in my family telling of themselves and their lives within the domestic and the trivial, the 'murderers of memory'. I write about my mother/my other, who tells about her 'self'/ her 'I' that is a mere ghost to the spoken 'I' of her now. Therefore this investigation is infinitely more complex than just choosing to *live or tell*, than choosing the *religion of intimacy or literature*. I am ensnared within this maternal narrative, the inherent complexities forcing me to create and perpetuate it. The inherent complexities of this investigation simultaneously disturb and support its creation.

Closing Realisations

I have come to realise that this investigation makes me an interpreter and essentially a writer of poetry. I recognize the degree of self-reflexivity in this study, for it continuously coils back into itself while forcing me, inevitably, to rewrite myself – leaving me on the threshold between remembering and forgetting, and memory and imagination. I comprehend that we are texts, within the text of the family narrative, and that this thesis is a text using our surroundings (people, objects, places) to write our narratives. We create narrative/acts of preservation, for we want to leave marks, we want to ‘mean’ and create meaning. And because we are all bathed in language and intertextuality this is a collective as well as an individual act that is perpetrated simultaneously and reciprocally. Thus the narrative and the selves within it remain dispersed and fragmented.

I focus on locating fragments of my silent, female, family narrative; this is hampered by the incapability of *memory*, *telling*, *writing* and the sphere of the *domestic* and trivial. This thesis brings together the ‘opposing’ acts of living and telling/writing, as well as physicality and abstraction, in and with poetic discourse aiming to gain access to the metaphors and partially break the silences of the female narrative. Yet all this thesis can really do is be aware of both the narrative and its own incapability and uncertainty of meaning, while highlighting the ways in which the family narrative and archive are created and exist to accommodate and suffer the inevitable contradictions and silences, in this case especially concerning the women in my family. I understand now that the only place I can inhabit, or dwell in, is one of awareness and respectful sincere ambivalence.

Chapter Two

The aim of the second chapter is to enter the female narrative of my family - concentrating on the female body in order to try and cross the divide between the female body and telling/writing within the family narrative, looking at the role of the body in the formation of individual and collective identities and meanings, especially within the mother/daughter relationship. Because the body is at the centre of how we create and navigate meaning and memory, it becomes one of the main focal points of this study. Yet it is at the same time (for the women in my family) at the core of the unsayable and unsaid; therefore the female body is the strongest site from which the contradictions and complexities of the narrative radiate. Thus this chapter is divided into sections on menstruation, pregnancy, birth and death. Within this framework I question where and how to begin with the act of remembering/telling/writing. Within the contradictions of the narrative I look at the use of 'private' and 'public' as well as silence, secrecy and sanitization. I strongly question the creation and perpetuation of meaning in the narrative, concerning both the individual and the collective. And I close by differentiating between the unsaid and unsayable. By concentrating on the female body and narrative, I find entrance not only to the how and why we remember but, especially because of the denial and silence surrounding the body, to the how and why we forget.

'my mouth had no way with names'

Is there a place to begin from in this poetry?

"For most women, at least one of the dominant voices in their lives – perhaps the voice that literally gave them language – was their mother's" (Wagner-Martin, 1994: 94). There is no perhaps for me, my mother 'gave' me language, she gave me life and after this she slowly bathed me in the world of language. I was woven into this weave with my first utterances and my first acts of hearing. Within this weave I remain knotted.

In Wordsworth's poem *The Prelude* he writes: "What we have loved others will love; and we will teach them how" (cited in Warnock, 1994: 142). My mother did not merely 'give' me language – no, she gave me narrative, as her mother 'gave' it to her. My mother (like her mother) gave me a narrative already woven, which does not only teach me how to live and love, but also how and what to remember and forget. A narrative of both *living* and *telling*, of

how to and what to *tell* but also of what to disguise and where to keep quiet. Because this narrative includes both the present and absent, it has to be read like poetry rather than a narrative, for “we reach toward the artistry of poetry to hold the inarticulate” (Rogers, 1999: 105). Pablo Neruda writes:

And it was at that age... Poetry arrived in search of me

I don't know, I don't know where it came from...

I don't know how or when,

no they were not 'voices'

they were not words,

nor silence...

I did not know what to say,

my mouth had no way with names...

and I made my own way,

deciphering that fire,

and I wrote the first faint line...(1995: 13)

It is through my mother that 'poetry arrived' and it is with the narrative she gave me that 'the fire' of the metaphor and memory I need to decipher was created. Where do I begin to decipher this fire, this poetry? How does one order memory? Markham suggests: "I should like to begin at the beginning, patiently, like a weaver at his loom. I should like to say, "This is the place to start there can be no other, but there are a hundred places to start, for there are a hundred names" (cited in Wagner-Martin, 1994). It appears that one starts with either a place or a name, and I seem to return to Neruda's words: "I don't know, I don't know where it came from... my mouth had no way with names" (1995:13). Freud offers an answer when he writes of the maternal body that "there is no other place that one can say with so much certainty that one has already been there" (cited in Barthes, 2000: 40). Therefore I shall begin from the name *mother* and the place of the *womb*. Because, as Rich argues, the one experience we all have in common is the nine months we spent growing in a woman's body. "We carry the imprint of this experience for life, even into our dying" (Rich, 1976: xiii).

Barthes asks in *Camera Lucida*: “Is History not simply that time when we were not born? I could read my non-existence in the clothes my mother had worn before I can remember her” (2000: 64). He reads and measures what constitutes history and his own existence ‘through’ his mother and her appearance; history it seems is the time before the womb. While life, according to Samuel Beckett, is mere “reminiscence from womb to tomb” (cited in Olney, 1998: 339). We are offered a framework and trajectory: history is what lies before the womb while life transpires between womb and tomb as mere memory with its “wondrous recollections and imaginings, its errors and confusions, its failures and overcompensations for failure, its capacity for transformation, distortion, ordering and reordering.” Hence memory “constitutes” what we “are” (Olney, 1998: 340).

Because we appear to be located in this framework, I commence from a precipice and labyrinth where we are never present, because life is merely an ongoing recollection beginning with the womb/mother and ending with the tomb. Life is memory, ‘terrifying, profound and multiple’, while this thing that is never singular, distorted, imagined, confused, and a failure, this thing that is re-collected, re-gathered, re-composed from *womb till tomb*, this thing is the self, the ‘I’. Therefore the ‘I’ can but only admit “I invented” (Hampl, 2000:26).

However, no matter how much we impose a trajectory, there is no ‘one’ chronology to adhere to. Because memory constitutes life and the self/‘I’, our existence will, to some degree, will not cease to be when we reach the tomb. The ‘I’ as it is created in and through and by memory does not exist within the linear confines that begin and end with the *womb* and the *tomb*. ‘We’ are not linear narratives, and we do not exist in and on one clear and singular trajectory – our existence, narratives and selves are multiple and dispersed. We do not fit within the confines and framework of biography nor fiction. We are poetry, narrative, photography, places, surrogates – we are our families (both our ancestors and our children). We move between womb and tomb ‘re-collecting’, but it is not one womb and not one tomb. Like the *self*, within the narrative, the *womb* and the *tomb* are not singular, it is not one incident, not one place. Yet as dispersed as we are through our existence in and through creation of the narrative, we all have one, irrefutable, first and last breath. Consequently, in this narrative (of the family as well as this thesis), there is no one clear beginning and end, no

single womb and single tomb. Because we are immersed in language and exist through, and with, the narrative, we weave our ‘selves’ while our lives are but memory. The self and the memory are imagined abstractions, yet we dwell in physically ‘real’ bodies; this constitutes constant contradiction and multiplicity within the narrative as well as in life (Siopis, 2005: 24). It is as St. Augustine writes: “Great indeed is the power of memory! It is something terrifying, my God, a profound and infinite multiplicity; and this thing is the mind and this thing is myself” (Olney, 1998: 340).

The female body within the family narrative

The silence behind the veil

‘ons was baie privaat’

Now it’s full night, clear, moonless and filled with stars, which are not eternal as was once thought, which are not where we think they are. If they were sounds, they would be echoes, of something that happened millions of years ago: a word made of numbers. Echoes of light, shining out of the midst of nothing. It’s old light, and there’s not much of it. But it’s enough to see by (Atwood cited in Cooke, 1992: 167).

Patricia Hampl, as I have noted, argues that privacy and expression are two “opposing religions: the god of privacy reigns in the vast air of silence... Privacy, by definition, keeps its reasons to itself and can hardly be expected to borrow the weapons of expression – language and literature – to defend itself” (1999: 216). Because of this very opposition, because of this cleft between the body and writing I will start from, and continue to focus on, the female body. I begin from the mother/the womb but not just from one womb; as Anne Leaton writes: “How impossible is it to write about one’s mother without including in this onerous inspection, one’s grandmother, one’s great grandmother, all the female forebears. Not that the fathers and grandfathers played no part. But the milk flowed from these breasts; in these comforting laps we sheltered to ingest the early lessons, for better or worse” (1996: 89).

Within the body of the mother, and indeed the ‘female forebears’, lie the ‘early lessons’. It is the very body from which we come, that is instrumental in teaching us about *being* and *being a woman* with and within the narrative. Like the cleft between the body and words, there is a similar divide within our family surrounding the body; we do not speak of the body and the functions of the body. Within the feminine narrative menstruation, sex, pregnancy and childbirth were the biggest taboos. These very natural actions of the body, which we all needed to ‘function as a woman’ and be deemed ‘woman’, were silenced.

Shulamit Reinharz writes on feminist biography and says that “Because information about women is hard to come by, it is particularly difficult to write a woman’s biography” and that “the history of women’s lives is largely unknown” (1994: 43, 37). I must agree that women’s lives are veiled, possibly by the domestic and the trivial, the ‘murderers’ of memory as Lithental called them (2006: 235). This veil is drawn over the entire existence of the women in my family - their lives, environment, routines and bodies are all swathed in the ‘private’ and therefore unknown. To access their lives I had to turn to photographs, correspondence and interviews. I found to my amazement that, though there were many silences and ‘blanks’ within their answers (that conveyed just as much meaning as what was said), these women were for the most part eager to tell their stories. Though they were shy and did not always understand how their lives are relevant to what I am doing, they seemed to be relieved to be able to *tell* someone. Is it possible that the lack of information and knowledge about their lives may also simply be because no one was ever interested, no one ever asked?

Menstruation and sex

Suffering the contradictions of the female narrative

flennie lappe wat jy self moes was

If the reader expects only certain kinds of material in good biography, then to find attention paid to biological processes (menstruation, pregnancy, menopause, as well as general sexual experience) may be troublesome... yet for women whose

lives often fuse public and private, a biography of less than the complex whole would be inaccurate (Wagner-Martin, 1994: 11).

In order to investigate the narrative of the women in my family I have to enter the ‘poetics of the unsaid’, and the body seems to be at the core of what is unsaid. The body, and its functions are one of the greatest silences, and not just within our family narrative. Shirley Prendergast writes: “how strange that a key and continuing event in most women’s lives, the onset of menarche and the experience of menstruation, which can have huge implications for women’s general health and well-being throughout the life course, has been so generally ignored in research” (2000: 106). In an introduction to women’s studies I found that most young girls learn about menstruation from their mothers. The mother’s attitude shapes the daughter’s reaction, which can affect her self-esteem, family relations and sexuality, while the secrecy, euphemisms and embarrassment surrounding menstruation imply shame and uncleanliness. (Bates, 1995: 101-103).

When asked about menstruation both my mother’s older sisters say that they heard about menstruation from their friends, but never talked about menstruation with their mother, nor did she with them. My mother’s middle sister describes the topic of menstruation as “heeltemal taboe”,²² they never talked about menstruation, not even later as grown women (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 2A). The eldest sister describes it as being “baie privaat”²³ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 3A). What stands out for me here is the clear formulation of the family narrative - what *is* and *is not* talked about within the family. Both sisters talked about this very ‘taboo’ subject with their friends, yet never with each other, showing that it remained taboo within the family. It becomes clear, as Prendergast writes, that “interwoven through all of this, girls also acquire informal social knowledge about menstruation: to whom and how she might speak about it” (2000: 108).

The denial of the body and its functions and the silence around it is referred to as being ‘private’. The word *private* encapsulates the female world within my family narrative.

²² Completely taboo.

²³ Very private.

Private is used to smother the areas that are not talked about – it is here where the silence and absences are constructed, employed and made manifest. The silence surrounding menstruation is created and kept within the ‘privacy’ of the family while it is talked about within the more ‘public’ realm of friendships. The *private narrative* (the family narrative) is created and perpetuated with very specifically constructed and functioning methods of silence and repetition, preservation and neglect, remembrance and forgetting. The narrative becomes a slow weaving of euphemisms, metaphors and denial.

Prendergast argues that: “menarche carries weighty presentiments for girls, marking an abrupt ending of childhood characterized by and necessitating radical new mappings and remapping of bodily experience, meaning and value” (2000:103). My mother said there was no communication with her mother about menstruation; she thought she was dying the first time she started menstruating and cried behind her bedroom door. She told her middle sister (who is twelve years her senior) what happened who in turn told her what the blood was and what to do (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 4A). With the age difference at least the silence between the sisters were broken and they started to stray from the narrative they were taught. Yet the silence with their mother about the body remained; these topics remained unmentioned. I broke this silence with my grandmother for the first time; she quite matter-of-factly told me that she struggled with heavy menstruation her whole life. I asked her what they used and she told me the following story:

Lappe wat jy weer moet uitwas, jy sit dit in die pot water dan was jy dit in skoon water en hang dit op vir wanne jy dit weer nodig het, flennie lappe. Dit was aaklig later toe ons kan ‘pads’ gebruik toe dink ek hoe ons darem met daai lappe reg gekom het. Want die môre wat ek jou sê wat ek by die skool staan en skryf het, toe het ek so een aan, en toe moet ek nog huis toe loop, toe loop dit al teen my been af²⁴(personal interview, June, 2009. App. 5A).

Through this act of telling, of breaking a silence, I manage partially to enter what had, till then, remained unsaid. Having had heavy menstrual flow my entire life, I had a similar experience at school, yet I could just quickly walk to the girls toilets and change my pad. Through this story and this experience, blood flowing so similarly, I can viscerally understand the physical inheritance – the connection between our bodies.

²⁴ Pieces of cloth you had to wash out, you let it soak in water and then washed it with clean water so you could use it again, flannel cloth. It was horrible, later when we had pads I wondered how we managed. Because I was wearing one of these cloths’ the morning I told you about when I was writing on the blackboard at school, I still had to walk home and by that time the blood was running down my leg.

Considering that my grandmother never talked to her three daughters about menstruation it is no surprise that she never talked to them about sex or pregnancy either. Prendergast writes: “With the onset of menarche... girls receive strong messages about the need for hygiene and secrecy” (2000: 113). One of my grandmother’s younger sisters told me that they were completely ignorant about matters of the female body: “daai dae was al daai goed so geheimsinnig”²⁵ (personal interviews, April, 2009. App. 6A). The pairing of hygiene, secrecy and concealment is what Lithenthal’s referred to as “murderers of memory” and “insidious forms of forgetfulness” (2006: 235). In a very different sense one can see here that *sanitization* is indeed used, if not as a murderer of memory, but as a way to conceal, a way to ‘repair’ unwanted or uncomfortable change. *Secrecy* and *sanitization* are taught through reactions to events such as the onset of menstruation. These reactions at this ‘critical’ event in a girl’s life send firm messages and teach strict lessons about the female body and indirectly female sexuality and identity. One starts to grasp the subtle yet fierce power of the maternal narrative, and how it is employed.

I asked my grandmother’s sister if it was a huge adjustment and shock to get married and she volunteers the following story:

Ek sal nou vir jou vertel, dis nou baie intiem...Dit was 1945. Toe ek nou moet trou toe weet ek niks, en ek het mos elke aand half ses met my fiets gery en by suster V (my ouma) gaan kuier toe vra ek haar een dag, ‘ek moet nou gaan trou maar ek weet niks nie’. Toe sê sy ‘nee wat, mens vind maar self uit’. Toe sê ek maar sê net vir my hoe is dit wat moet ek doen toe sê sy jy kan nie vir niemand vertel nie, jy vind maar self uit. Toe is ek nou maar daar in en so het die man my naargely en toe het ek nou maar aangegaan, my vrek geskrik²⁶ (personal interviews, April, 2009. App. 6A).

Like menstruation for the girl, sex for the young women is a road travelled alone with no information or knowledge. She had to, as other woman like my grandmother did, deal with it “unobtrusively, without calling attention to themselves” (Prendergast, 2000: 117). After the

²⁵ Those days these things were so secretive.

²⁶ I will tell you, it is very intimate... It was 1945. When I had to get married I knew nothing, I use to visit sister V with my bike every night at half past five, so I asked her one day, ‘I have to get married but I know nothing’. And she said ‘no you have to find out for yourself’. Then I said ‘just tell me what it is like, what do I have to do, and she said you can’t tell anyone what it’s like you, have to find out for yourself. So then I went through it, and my husband led me and I went on, got the fright of my life.

younger sister's marriage, after she 'had the fright of her life' (personal interview, April, 2009. App. 6A), she too had to 'forget and make invisible everything they have done', as girls who start menstruating do. Sex, like menstruation, belongs to the realm of the private/the unsaid (Prendergast, 2000: 117).

It is easy (on the basis of these stories) to pin point my grandmother as the origin of silence; she "keeps her reasons to herself" (Hampl. 1999: 216). She is the place of origin for our bodies, but also the origin of some of the fiercest silences, absences and restrictions. Concerning my grandmother and the body, I am indeed dwelling within the silence of the feminine family narrative. Yet she was just adhering to the narrative, or denial of narrative, that she was taught. These *silences* and *sanitizations*, these *absences* and *denials* of knowledge and information leave no alternative but the 'private'. It is here where we enter the chapters of the unsaid within my family narrative, where the silences are now slowly being broken and others merely slightly revealed.

The notion of the *private* and *public* realms is being expanded within the family narrative: public becomes the spoken or written, in a sense the 'public private' while the 'private private' is the unspoken and unsaid. For the most part the women in my family's world (their bodies and narratives) existed within the physical realm of the private, the home. As we have seen just by looking at memories surrounding menstruation, the female body is swathed in silence and concealed to the point of almost denying the body and its functions. Yet within these very situations the duality of *private* and *public* as well as the realms of the sayable and the unsaid are broadened. "Most women's lives are a tightly woven mesh of public and private events. The primary definition of a woman's selfhood is likely to be this combined public-private identity" (Wagner-Martin, 1994: 6). This 'mesh of public and private events' not only exists within the subject matter of the narrative, but also within its creation as both telling/writing and silence/absence. Thus the public and the private influence both the weave and the act of weaving.

Dualities, contradictions and ironies arise throughout this thesis, as they do within the family narrative it investigates. I find the female narrative reverberates with the various silences in

which the body is stifled and neglected. In *Lessons* Anne Leaton writes about the mother-daughter relationship and asks: “How long does it take to learn to live with contradictions like these? Or perhaps learning to live with such contraries is exactly the process of maturing into the kind of ambivalence which allows one to abide the moral and emotional chiaroscuro of the human carnival” (1996: 96). The contradictions and dualities that becomes a pattern in the narrative, the “human carnival”, start with the female body. Looking at menstruation, and the narrative that girls are taught surrounding it, one clearly sees the pattern of contradiction emerge as well as the ambivalence it generates.

Shirley Prendergast writes, “Menarche carries weighty presentiments for girls...characterized by and necessitating radical new mappings and remapping of bodily experience, meaning and value... a new being-in-the-world dominated by the need for excessive ‘mindfulness’ and ‘closure’... such mappings are often done by each girl on her own” (2000:103). Though one can clearly appreciate the magnitude of the onset of menstruation for a girl, and the repercussions it entails, I am baffled by the fact that a girl is expected to go through this on her own. The ‘adjustments’ and ‘rethinking’ of the self, gender and body, as well as all the practical and physical adjustments this requires, are done in ‘private’ – ‘each girl on her own’. An event that is, considering its scope and the reach of its repercussions, in no way trivial is *sanitized* and bathed in *secrecy*. The girl whose life has just changed in so many ways has not only gone through this alone with minimum information and guidance, but she also has to learn to conceal it - to manage ‘it’ so no one is aware of it: “Above all they must manage all of these things unobtrusively, without calling attention to themselves. Most ironically, then, girls’ last task is to forget and make invisible everything they have done” (Prendergast, 2000: 117).

Girls, like the women in my family, have to learn, with a minimal amount of support, to navigate themselves and their bodies with a constant ‘mindfulness’ that infiltrates and changes all facets of their lives. Yet, at the same time, they should ‘forget and make invisible’. Important here is not only the contradictions within the female narrative, but also the power of this narrative, the power of the unspoken, ‘private narrative’. The entire navigation of a girl’s entrance into ‘womanhood’ is fashioned with silence, negation and secrecy.

“At this time girls frequently describe feeling lonely, talk as much or more about loss and ambiguity as about pleasure at a new status” (Prendergast, 2000: 107). I find that the ambivalence experienced is created by the contradictions surrounding the female body. We ‘mature into this ambivalence’ because we have to suffer the contradictions of the female narrative. The contradictions surrounding the female body go far beyond menstruation – these inconsistencies accompany a woman into, amongst other things, sexual activity and motherhood. “Seeing the body ‘as the very fabric of the self’..., to expand our understanding of social interpretations, material practices and bodily experiences are essentially intertwined” (Prendergast, 2000: 104). The body is the fabric of the self, denied and sanitized, woven with and through contradictions into a narrative of private and public, said and unsaid.

Two ideas flow side by side: one, that the female body is impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity a source of moral and physical contamination, “the devil’s gateway.” On the other hand, as mother the women are beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing; and the physical potential for motherhood – that same body with its bleedings and mysteries – is her single destiny and justification in life (Rich, 1976: 15).

To negotiate these contradictions within the ‘fabric of the self’ we enter into ambivalence and the body remains silent. It is possibly this ambivalence that drives a woman to create and draw these veils over her body and travel, as Rich writes, as a “disembodied spirit” (1976:22).

Pregnancy

Expected silence

jy sou eerder gesterf het as wat jy dat iemand jou afneem

Within our family narrative the women did indeed, for the most part, “travel as disembodied spirits”(Rich, 1976: 22). Their bodies became less sexual and threatening with the onset of

motherhood, yet motherhood did not 'relieve' the body from silence. Pregnancy and childbirth were not spoken of within our family – they were marked by silence and absence. There are no photographs of any of the women in my family while they were pregnant. My mother's middle sister says if you talked about a woman who was pregnant, you had to do it behind your hand (personal interview, June, 2009. App. 2B). When I asked her why there are no photographs of them while they were pregnant, she replied:

Ag ja, nee daar is nie foto's van nie maar daai dae was dit ook, jy sou eerder gesterf het as wat jy dat iemand jou afneem. Ooh nee dit was 'n taboe onderwerp net om te praat daaroor, jy maak nie 'n 'tedoe' daarvan nie, daai dae was dit baie anders regtig, dit was vreeslike privaat²⁷ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 2A).

After careful/obsessive investigation I found a slide taken at the school athletics meeting of a cousin, in the crowd in the background of the picture, I recognised my mother, pregnant with my sister. Though elated to have found it, I also realised that this is the realm of the pregnant female body in our family narrative - hidden in the background, exposed by accident.

Surrounding pregnancy there are two significant events within my family: My grandmother becoming pregnant at 39 with my mother (when her other two daughters were already 12 and 16), and my mother becoming pregnant at the age of 16. With pregnancy an already taboo and 'private' subject, one can imagine that these two events rattled the family and their narrative. My grandmother says of her own pregnancy only that they were very surprised and then she quite often repeats the following story: "M** O***, hulle het op R**** ('n plaas) gebly, sy sê toe vir 'n vriendin van N (haar suster) ek loop nou nog in die straat en ek lyk 'n *sight*, en dit was swart wat ek gedra het, ek kon haar nooit onder my oë verdra het nie"²⁸(personal interview, June, 2009. App. 5A).

She does not speak of the pregnancy or the feelings she had, yet she repeatedly shares this story. From the story one can deduce not only how pregnant women, especially older pregnant women, were perceived, but also that my grandmother tried to hide her pregnant

²⁷ Oh yes, no there are no photographs but those days it was, you would rather have died than let someone take your photograph. Oh no it was a taboo subject just to talk about, you do not make a fuss about it, those days it was really very different, and it was very private.

²⁸ M** O*** , they lived on the farm R****, she told one of N(her sister) friends I am still walking around in the streets and I look a sight, and I was wearing black, I could never stand the sight of that woman.

body by wearing black. Through the repetition of the story and the fact that she still, at the age of 92, bears a grudge against ‘M** O***’, I realise the shame she must have felt. My grandmother does this often; she answers questions she does not want to answer with a totally different story - what is hidden revealed only by how it is hidden.

Asking my grandmother’s two eldest daughters about their reaction to their mother’s ‘late’ pregnancy, the middle sister responded:

Ek was so skaam, en toe sy nou begin wys, haai niemand mag weet nie, o dit was vreeslik. En een pouse (daai dae mag ons nog pouses huis toe gegaan het), het ek huis toe gegaan, ek het nou vinnig ingehol en die maats moet by die deur wag. Hulle staan op die stoep en ek gaan haal iets in die kombuis en toe ek weer uitgaan toe loer hulle in en toe sê een ‘oe is julle ma.., verwag julle ma?’ Toe het hulle al geweet en ek probeer hou dit nog stil, toe wou hulle natuurlik spesiaal saam gaan om nou te kyk²⁹ (personal interview, June, 2009. App. 2B).

My aunt was ashamed and tried to keep it quiet and hide her pregnant mother from her friends. She went on to say that once the baby (my mother) was there, they were mad about her and that it did not matter anymore. Once again that duality: the physical should be hidden, forgotten and silenced (just as menstruation), yet the result, a baby (or ‘womanhood’), may be made public. The pregnant body becomes a ‘freak’ attraction, something to be speculated about and gawked at. My aunt’s friends have to steal a glance of her mother’s pregnant body in a similar way in which I had to sneak a glance at my mother’s in the slide. My aunt describes her own pregnancies as ‘very private’; again we can see that *private* includes within this narrative that which is *not* photographed, exposed or talked about. The ‘private’ becomes a shroud that hides a multitude of negations.

Concerning my grandmother’s pregnancy my mother’s older sister says “ons het eers toe sy vêr is besef en agtergekom”³⁰ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 3A). From this I can gather that my grandmother did not talk to them about the pregnancy. I ask her if she felt shy

²⁹ I was so ashamed, and when she started showing, oh nobody could know, it was horrible. And one recess (those days we could go home during recess), I went home, I just ran in quickly and my friends had to wait at the door. They were standing in the porch and I was fetching something from the kitchen and when I came out again they sneaked a peak into the house and then one girl said; “oh is your mother.., is she pregnant?” They knew the whole time and I was trying to keep it quiet, they came with me just so they could see.

³⁰ We only realised it when she was far along.

and ashamed of her mother's pregnancy and she says no, and that she was still very childish at that stage (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 3A). I am surprised at the two very different reactions from the sisters, I tell her that the middle sister was very much ashamed and she replied: "My, sien ons het nie met mekaar daaroor gepraat nie"³¹ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 3A). Within the arena of the family and home that which is 'private', such as their mother's pregnancy and their menstruation, is not discussed by the two sisters. Even (or especially) within the private (the family/home) they do not talk about that which is 'private': what they are taught not to talk about remains unsaid, the degrees of the *private* are both ironic and complex.

My grandmother does not talk about the pregnancy either, not within the privacy of the home to her children or to me now. Yet she repeatedly tells the story of the woman that said she should not be walking on the streets in her 'state'. The story, about my grandmother's pregnant body in public, is told by a woman not of the private realm/the family, but from the public sphere of broader society. This 'public' story is used to deflect away from my grandmother's private realm: the story is used as an 'answer' so that she does not have to lift her silence, becoming a surrogate for the emotions she felt. Within my family the narrative often deflect the attention; it tells certain stories, certain regulated stories, so that the 'private', the silences, remains unscathed.

My mother's pregnancy shocked the entire family; no one expected it of her, as she was a sweet, sensitive and innocent young girl. She was the 'baby' in the family and everyone, even her sisters, looked at her as a child. At 16 she became pregnant and it seems that everyone remembers when, and how, they got the news. My mother told me how her parents received the news:

Dit was moeilik om dit vir my ma te sê want ek was sestien op daai stadium en ek en sy het nooit oor sulke goed gepraat nie, nie eers oor menstruasie nie, dit was 'n reuse iets en vir my was dit ontsettend... Dink ek het eers gesê ek is oor my tyd en toe het sy gesê ek het mos gelukkig nie rede om *worried* te wees nie en toe het ek haar later geroep. Snaaks genoeg ek het in my bed bly lê en ek het haar geroep na my toe en toe vir haar gesê maar dit het gebeur. Sy het nie vir oupa vertel nie sy het gesê Dr. M moet kom. Hy het die

³¹ My, see we never talked to each other about that.

aand na ons huis toe gekom en vir oupa en oupa G (my pa se pa) vertel, en toe het hulle gesê aborsie is dalk nog 'n moontlikheid³² (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 4A).

Two things stand out for me here, the first of which is the way this news is shared: even though my mother and her mother did not have a close relationship and did not ever talk about 'such things', she tells her mother first. She lies in her bed and calls her mother to her, as though the situation / the pregnancy has somehow altered the norms of acting, seeing that it was not the norm that my mother would call her mother to her while remaining in bed. For once, because of the circumstances they are forced into, the 'private' is talked about. Yet I find it important that my mother tells her mother (the female narrative), but my grandmother does not tell her own husband, but asks the doctor to tell him and my father's father. My grandmother shifts the *telling* away from herself; she still does not talk about the *private*, which in this sense seems to remain unsayable to her. Just as 'out of the ordinary' as it was for my mother to remain in her bed and ask her mother to come to her, it's similarly strange that my grandmother brings the *public* into the *private*; she hands the task of telling her husband over to their doctor. As was seen earlier when discussing menstruation, the private and public spheres are manipulated and used to sustain the family and specifically the female narrative, to uphold the 'private'/the unsaid. The second thing that stood out that my grandparents considered an abortion; though I want to note it here I will discuss this in more detail further on.

Eventually my grandmother had to share the news with others; I would like to refer to three such incidents as a way of further revealing the inner workings of the female narrative. One of my grandmother's sisters told me the following:

Ek weet net ek het een oggend by V (my ouma) gekom, dit was op 'n Donderdag oggend, toe gaan ek by suster V aan. En toe ek so inkom by haar in die kombuis toe sit sy op haar hurke en pak die kas reg, want die borde het nog so gestaan, sy het mos altyd skoongemaak. En ek sien sy het gehuil en ek sê 'nou hoekom het jy gehuil, is jy hartseer?' 'Ja', sê sy, 'ek is hartseer', en sy gaan staan so voor die stoof (sy wys met haar arms hoe my ouma gestaan het) toe sê sy, (pouse) wag hoe het sy nou gesê, dat ek nou mooi dink... 'L (my ma) verwag', net so. Toe is sy std 9, en die middag het ek weer na hulle toe gegaan toe L uit die skool kom, toe het ek met hulle gaan sit en gesels om die

³² It was difficult to tell my mother because I was just sixteen at the time and we never talked about such things, not even menstruation, it was a massive thing and for me it was dreadful... Think I first told her I was late and she said luckily I didn't have reason to be worried and then later I called her, strange I stayed in my bed and called her to me, and then I told her what happened. She didn't tell my grandpa (her father) she said Dr Moolman had to come. He came to our house that evening and told grandpa and grandpa G (my father's father), and they said it might still not be too late for an abortion.

tafel, F (my oupa) was nie by nie. Toe het L so langs my gesit, die streep skoolbaadjie, toe sê ek vir hulle dis nie die einde nie aanvaar dit soos dit is, en toe het L op haar hande gaan lê en sy het gesnik soos sy gehuil het en ek het haar so om haar skouers gevat³³ (personal interview, April, 2009. App 7A).

For me this is a beautiful example of the female narrative in my family; though ‘privacy’/silence reigns within the narrative, the women stand together and support each other even within the silence. Silence in this context does not mean lack of compassion; it is just how they were taught and how they operate, as will become even clearer further on in the thesis. Their narrative rendered them sadly incapable in many situations, as if it was a language they did not have access to, or rather language itself did not have access to this intimate realm. It is not just the female narrative that renders them incapable, but the role and restrictions of language within the narrative.

My grandmother does not go to or contact her sister to tell her; her sister finds her in the ‘female core’ of the home, the kitchen. My grandmother continues with her everyday tasks: “sy het mos altyd skoongemaak” (personal interview, April, 2009. App. 7A). She is sanitizing the domestic, taking control over her private domain by cleaning and creating order within the arena where all control had just collapsed. My grandmother is both physically distant and sparse with words in this rendition of events; the action she takes is to continue with the everyday tasks and create order within her home. Both conversations took place in the kitchen – normally when my grandmother’s sister visited they would sit in the drawing room – signalling again that the turn of events led them, in some ways, to ignore usual practices. The conversation took place between the women, as my grandfather is not there. In the second conversation my grandmother seems to remain quiet; she never speaks more than she has to.

³³ I just know one morning when I went to sister V (my grandmother), it was a Thursday morning, and I went by sister V’s. And when I came into her kitchen she was sitting on her haunches, organising the cupboard, the plates were standing around her, she was always cleaning. And I see she had been crying and I say ‘why are you crying, are you sad?’ ‘yes’ she says “ I am sad’, and she goes and stands in front of the stove (she shows me how my grandmother was standing with her arms) then she says, (pause) wait, how did she say it again, let me think carefully... ‘L (my mother) is expecting’ just that. She was in standard 9 and that afternoon, when she got out of school, I went to them and we sat around the kitchen table, F (my grandpa) was not there. L was sitting next to me, the striped school blazer, and I said it is not the end, accept it as it is, and then L laid her head on her arms and she sobbed as she cried and I embraced her.

My grandmother's preference, and employment, of silence is also evident in how she tells my mother's two older sisters about the pregnancy. To the eldest daughter she wrote a letter: "sy het vir my in daai brief, ek sal hom eendag vir jou wys, het sy vir my net die feite gesê",³⁴ her husband adds "sy het net iets gesê soos L (my ma) verwag E (my pa) se kind"³⁵ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 3A). My mother's middle sister was not told until later.³⁶ When my grandmother eventually told her, she was also just offered the facts. My grandmother weaves a narrative of negation and delegation, manipulating both *private* and *public* so that the designated sanitary silences, specifically concerning the body, can remain intact.

The two sisters, unaware of it, use the same metaphor when they describe how they felt upon hearing of my mother's pregnancy. The complexity of meaning within the play of both poetry and irony becomes evident here. As Derrida writes: "Two identical expressions... may mean the same thing, and yet have different objects... Two different expressions may have different *Bedeutungen* but refer to the same object... Finally, two different expressions may have the same *Bedeutung* and the same object" (1986: 91).

The eldest sister says: "toe het ons haar nog as ons kleinsussie gesien... ek onthou daai gevoel van *ek dink myself teen mure vas*. Ek dink aan laat aanneem... aborsie, ek dink aan trou... maar hulle is twee kinders. Dit was die magteloosste gevoel gewees want daar is nie 'n oplossing nie"³⁷ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 3A). My mother's middle sister retorts: "maar met jou ma-hulle (my ouers), *dis nie dat ek teen die mure wou uitklim daaroor nie*"³⁸ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 2A). Poetry, and through it the inconsistency of meaning, comes into play in a different way here: both sisters uses the same metaphor of the *wall*, yet to describe two opposite reactions to the same event. Patricia Hampl writes about metaphor; "For the first time in my life I was astonished by metaphor... apparently I

³⁴ In that letter she told me, I will show it to you one day, just the facts.

³⁵ She said something like 'L is expecting E's (my father's) child.

³⁶ She was pregnant at that time and the doctor was afraid that the news might be dangerous at that stage of her pregnancy.

³⁷ We still saw her as our little sister... I remember my thoughts *kept on hitting a wall*, I think of adoption... abortion, I think of marriage...but they were just two children. It was the most powerless feeling because there was no solution. (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 3A.)

³⁸ With your parents as well, it wasn't like I was *driven up the walls*.

understood a true metaphor is a risky business, revealing of the self” (2000: 22). In this context the metaphor is risky for it does not only reveal the self but also the nature of the family narrative. The metaphor reveals and reflects the contradictions and the ironies within the poetry of the unsayable and unsaid. It is from, or with, the metaphor of the wall that my mother’s eldest sister shares, for the first time, that they considered abortion as an option. It is also the first time that she mentions that they wanted my mother to give the baby up for adoption.

The unsaid, the ‘walls that surrounded her’, are revealed. I wonder why and how this could be revealed now, and a few questions later I get my answer. When asked if my mother’s pregnancy is something they would rather not think or talk about, my aunt replied: “nee, nogal nie omdat als so mooi uitgewerk het, sê nou hulle het vir ghoena (my broer) laat aanneem of aborsie of iets, dan sou mens nie wou nie” (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 3A). This is the framework of the family narrative; in retrospect one can *designate* what can and cannot be talked about depending on how the situation turned out. The unsayable (abortion and adoption) was not actually done, so this silence may be partially lifted.

Though motherhood redeems the female body, from one ‘unnatural’ state to another, the female body and its processes, were still not celebrated within our family. When my mother became pregnant at 16 one of the things she was told was to look at her sister (who was six months pregnant at that stage): “Wat almal vir my gesê het, waarom ek vreeslik gehuil het is ‘kyk hoe lyk O(haar suster) kyk hoe hoog swanger is sy’ en ek is net ’n kind en nou moet ek so lyk. Dit was vir hulle baie swaar want ek was net ’n kind”³⁹ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 4A). I understand the magnitude of becoming a mother at 17, and I understand that the family did not want my mother’s young body to go through the stress of a pregnancy. But the way in which my mother’s sister is portrayed and used to illustrate why she should not go on with her pregnancy shows how the pregnant female body used to disgust here. The pregnant body is something to be ashamed of, something one has to suffer. Pregnancy, like menstruation, has to be endured and afterwards things have to appear as if nothing happened. For my mother the ‘shame’ of the body was doubled. As sexual and impure female she

³⁹ “What everyone told me, over which I cried so much, was ‘look at O (her sister) look how heavily pregnant she is’ and I am only a child now I have to look like that. It was very hard for them for I was only a child.”

became pregnant, and as mother she carries a child out of wedlock; at this stage her body was her scarlet letter.

Birth

Revealing the stifled body

voete in die vrugwater

Puberty signals the socially embodied shift from childhood to adolescence... and another comes... when a woman's body is irrevocably physically, emotionally and socially changed by pregnancy and birth (Prendergast, 2000:105).

Giving birth, the 'climax' of female bodily functions, is another tacit topic in my family narrative. How ironic it is that we create a linear narrative of our lives, a clear trajectory – beginning, middle and end – yet we almost deny the beginning and end with our silence. Birth and death are not talked about, we talk around them, but of the body in birth and death we do not speak.

Engela van Rooyen writes in her book *Seisoene*⁴⁰ about her relationship with her mother. She mentions her first menstruation and her story as well as her relationship with her mother reminds me of my mother and grandmother: “Van menstruasie het sy my niks vertel nie, ek dog ek het myself beseer toe ek op my laaste plaasskooldag tydens 'n spelery geval het. Toe gee sy my lappe, wat ek self moes uitwas”⁴¹ (2005: 268). Having some insight into this relationship and incident, because it is similar to the experiences my mother has shared with me, I am wonderfully amazed at her description of giving birth to her youngest child. She breaks the silence of the narrative she was taught by writing, beautifully and honestly, about that which normally remains unsaid:

Ek verlang die baba tegemoet, al is die bevalling self koud en eensaam en vol primitiewe pyn. Is die enema nodig sodat jy saam met die pyngolf ook nog derms

⁴⁰ An autobiographical text in a rough diary form, spanning almost thirty years.

⁴¹ About menstruation she told me nothing, I thought I hurt myself the last day of farm school when I fell while I was playing. Then she gave me rags, which I had to wash myself.

moet ledig? En die skeer met 'n stomp skeermes op droë vel... wat dan tog van 'n bietjie warm water en seep? Moet die kraamtafel so hard en kaal en koud wees? Die breek van die vrugwater wat onder jou inspoel. Ek sou my voete daarin wou hou, hulle kry so koud⁴² (2005: 58-59).

I want to relate the stories my mother and grandmother told of giving birth to their children, drawing attention to specific complexities of the narrative weave: how stories and *meanings are intertwined*, how the *body in birth is negated* and how dominant the female *narrative is within this realm*. My grandmother told about the birth of her first child:

Ek het die more, nee die vorige nag gevoel daar is 'n verskil en toe het ek die more maar saam met oupa geloop huis toe, na mammie toe, nog geloop. En dit was seker so na sewe, en toe het dit maar gedraai en gedraai en gedraai en mammie het die verpleegster laat kom en ouma B (haar skoonma wat 'n suster was) natuurlik ook... Toe laat kom mammie die dokter oor dit so lank neem, en hy sê toe nee dit gaan nog vanaand laat wees en toe hy die voordeur toe trek toe kom die *baby*⁴³ (personal interview, June, 2009. App. 5A).

In another conversation she added: “Mammie het mos na Daddy dood is die sitkamer in 'n kamer verander, en dan was sy en N en K (haar jonger susters) op een bed en ek op die ander”⁴⁴ (personal interview, June, 2009. App. 5A). My grandmother goes to her mother's house to deliver her child; the doctor is sent for but the labour is attended by her mother, a midwife/nurse and her mother-in-law (who was also a nurse). The baby is delivered by her mother in law, and after the delivery my grandmother stays at her mother's house for ten days bed rest before she returns to her own home.

Giving birth takes place within the female realm; not only does it occur in her mother's house, attended by women, but men are not present at all. The doctor is present briefly and

⁴² Longingly I meet the baby, even though the delivery itself was cold and lonely and full of primitive pain. Was the enema necessary so that, with the wave of pain, you have to clean your bowels? And shaving with a dull razor on dry skin... what about a bit of warm water and soap? Must the delivery table be so hard and bare and cold? The breaking of the amniotic fluid that flows in underneath you. I would like to put my feet in it, they are so cold.

⁴³ The morning, no the previous night I felt there was a difference, and the morning I walked home with grandpa, to my mother's house, we walked. It was just after seven, and it tarried and tarried and my mother summoned the sister and naturally grandma Ben (her mother in law) as well... Then my mother sends for the doctor because it took so long, and he said it will continue till late that night, and as he closed the front door behind him the baby came.

⁴⁴ After my father's death my mother converted the living room into a bedroom, and with the birth she and N and K (my mother's youngest sisters) were on one bed, and I was on the other.

turns out to be ineffective; my grandfather is at work and only comes to see the baby after he is finished at work.⁴⁵ The birth of the child is treated as though it does not concern the husband. Men are excluded from the event of childbirth; my mother gave birth in a hospital to all three of her children but my father could be present in the delivery-room only when the youngest (me) was born; before that husbands were not allowed to be present at the delivery. The birth takes place within the core of the female realm, my great grandmother's house, more specifically in my great grandmother's bedroom and bed.

It is important to note here the changes when the husband is absent. My Grandmother's father had already left her mother by that time, and because he was no longer living there, her mother converted the living room into a bedroom for her and her two youngest daughters. Yet she only converted the rooms after her husband had died, even though he had not been living in the house for many years before his death. To me it seems that even though he left his family a certain degree of respect remained. The final erasure – moving things in the house and converting it to suit the needs of the women – only takes place after he dies.

Though my grandmother tells of the birth, the only pain she reveals is the lower back pain she had when it started. What her body experienced and went through in childbirth, the physical labour, is not discussed. Of labour my grandmother only says: “dit was dood natuurlik daar was nooit *problems* nie, nie maklik nie maar daar was nie probleme nie”⁴⁶ (personal interview, June, 2009. App. 5A). When I asked my mother's eldest sister if her mother ever talked to her about childbirth and what to expect when she was pregnant she replied: “nee, huh-uh, ouma hou sulke goed stil”⁴⁷ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 3A). I ask the middle sister the same question and she replied: “nee ooh sy het net altyd gesê dis verskriklik en dis hel en dis vreeslik”⁴⁸ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 2A).

It was with this very same fear and lack of knowledge that my mother went into delivery, alone at the age of 17: “Hulle het my gehoor vloek en skel en skree in die gang en ek het mos pa se hand gebyt dat die gate sit. En hy het my agter op my rug gevryf dat die bloed deur die

⁴⁵ My grandfather's whereabouts are not included in the story; I get this information only after specifically asking about him.

⁴⁶ It was very natural there were never any problems, it was not easy, but there were never problems.

⁴⁷ No. Huh-uh, grandma kept such things quiet.

⁴⁸ Oh no, she always just said it was terrible and hell and terrifying.

vel gesyfer het. Dit was tot ek in is kraamsaal toe”⁴⁹ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 4A). And yet I know of what my mother’s body went through physically little more than that the blood was drawn on her back. I can say again, as I have earlier, that it is important to note that the female narrative of my family is one of silence, yet not one without compassion. For though my grandmother ‘told’ my mother nothing, she was there for her and supported her just like my great-grandmother did for her. Of my birth my mother says, “ek was toe baie dapperder, ek het nie weer gegil of so nie, en die geboorte self het vinnig gebeur”⁵⁰ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 4A). My mother was ‘braver’; the figurative silence became through practice, the third time around, the literal silence.

Meaning: Plurality and Layering

Within the narrative, specifically the narrative surrounding my mother and grandmother giving birth, two significant elements arise: the changing/layering and plurality of ‘meaning’ as well as lacunae.

The view of meaning I have advocated may be summed up in the phrase that *Meaning is essentially personal...* What anything means depends on *who* means it, when, where, why, on what occasion in what context, with what purpose, with what success... Hence it is the rule rather than the exception that the same “proposition” should have very different meanings in the context of two minds with different temperaments, histories and prejudices (Pear, 1922: 48).

It is not a revolutionary idea to infer that meaning is personal and variable. The same ‘proposition’ does indeed mean very different things to people with different ‘temperaments, histories and prejudices’, but what of the family or the collective? If meaning is so individual, how do we, specifically here as family, share meaning/experience? Can

⁴⁹ They heard me swear and scold and scream down the hall and I bit your father’s hand that it left teeth marks. And he rubbed my back till the blood seeped through the skin, this was until I went into the delivery room.

⁵⁰ I was a lot braver then, I did not scream anymore, and the birth itself went quickly.

meaning/events/experiences be shared and, if so, to what extent? Meaning and remembering are personal for they exist and are wrought into existence via the self. The shared event/meaning/memory is fragily *created* and *constructed* as we can only experience and mean with the self. We may share the memories of an event, but what we remember is the self in that event. Collective or shared meaning and memory is merely an anthology of vignettes. It is indeed so, as Diane Bartel argues, that the pace of occurrences is so fast that it leaves us uncertain whether they truly happened and even less unsure if it was a collective or individual sensation or experience (Bartel, 1996: 151).

In *The Remembered Self* it is proposed that “each person has a unique collection of autobiographical memories and that these memories can be examined in the effort to define who a person is” (Salovey & Singer, 1993:12). Our ‘collection of autobiographical memories’ is also a collection/creation of meanings. What is important is to distinguish between the collection of the *collective/shared* and of the *individual*. The family narrative is indeed a collection of memories and meanings, yet the character of the collection is different from the individual collection. The family collection is uncertain and elusive, more so than the individual collection because, as Bartel writes we are unsure if perceptions (or what Pear termed “propositions”⁵¹), are ‘real’ and shared, or merely individual ‘sensations’?

Though both individual and collective memory are questioned, the collective is plural in its uncertainty, for it is a collection of vague, individual hesitations. The words *sensation*, *perception* and *proposition* seem to me to be more ‘accurate’ almost than the words *memory* or *meaning*, because they reveal their own insecurity more adequately than the vain ‘promise’ of fact or accuracy that *memory* and *meaning* seem to suggest. Though the individuals within the family certainly share events, settings, experiences, etc., these ‘perceptions,’ though shared to an extent, are individually collected. It is within the individual collection that meaning is rendered, and “what anything means depends on who means” (Pear, 1922: 48). We *mean* and *collect* with and through our ‘selves’ and it is for this very reason that the collective event/memory can be nothing more than constructed and designated.

⁵¹ See p 74.

I find that within the family there is a preconceived notion of shared meaning more so than in any other group, possibly because we assume that a family shares what Pear called “temperaments, histories and prejudices” (Pear, 1992: 48). One has to remember that to ‘mean’ remains an individual act. Even if the family group is one of the collective’s where history/experience is shared the most. The individuality of meaning becomes clear to me, ironically, within the plurality of meaning in my family narrative – a plurality that indeed leaves one uncertain ‘whether it really happened’.

As I have mentioned, my grandmother’s two youngest sisters were present (they were still small children) when she gave birth in my great-grandmother’s house. When I asked them what they remember of these events they recounted the following:

K [my ouma se jongste suster]: Ja, kom ek vertel vir jou... toe was ek in std 2 en ek was in ’n konsert, daai rokkies wat jy aantrek en...

Ka [die jongste suster se dogter]: Maypole.

K: Ja Maypole dance.

N [my ouma se tweede jongste suster]: maypole ja.

K: Toe kry ek skarlaken koors en ons huis word onder kwarantyn geplaas, toe kan ek nie aan die konsert deel neem nie.

N: Ek het dit ook gehad.

K: Toe kom P (my ouma se oudste dogter) nou kraam daarso, ek het nou ook maar gehoor...

Ka: Nee P kon nie.

Ek: V (my ouma), het daar gekraam maar met P.

N: Ja suster V kom toe kraam.

K: Toe is P gebore...

N:... en mammie het vir ons in die kombuis ’n vloer-bed gemaak.

K: Ja ek onthou.

Ek: Dan wat dink julle wat gebeur nou?

N: Nee ons hoor maar net daar is ’n baba verder weet ons niks.

K: Ons het ons niks gesteur nie⁵² (personal interview, April, 2009. App. 7A).

⁵² K [my grandmother’s youngest sister]: yes, let me tell you... I was in std 2 then and I was in a concert, those dresses you wear and...

From this interview the fragility of meaning becomes evident in a variety of ways. The fact that meaning is personal becomes clear through the different ways in which one event, my grandmother giving birth, is recalled and remembered by others who were present. We remember via ourselves, and this is seen in the fact that my grandmother's younger sister remembers that she had scarlet fever, in what standard she was, and that she could not perform in the school concert. She remembers herself and her circumstances within the event of my grandmother giving birth. Though this event is 'allocated' as my grandmother-giving-birth-to-her-first-child, it 'means' very different things to different individuals. Even though they were all present and of the same family, within the same female narrative, the tale is very different for each of them. It is within this fragmented plurality that we start to question both the *collective* and the *individual*, for though both are needed to validate each other, they are inconsistent and dispersed – sharing little resemblance.

Ka [the youngest sister's daughter]: Maypole.

K: Yes, Maypole dance.

N [my grandmother's second youngest sister]: maypole yes.

K: Then I got scarlet fever and our house was placed under quarantine, and I couldn't be in the concert.

N: I had it too.

K: Then P (my grandmother's eldest daughter) came to give birth there, so I heard.

Ka: No it couldn't have been P.

Me: V (my grandmother) gave birth to P there.

N: Yes sister V came to give birth.

K: Then P was born...

N... and Mammie made a bed on the floor for us in the kitchen.

K: Yes I remember.

M: Then what did you think was happening?

N: No, we just hear there is a baby we knew nothing further.

K: We couldn't be bothered⁵²

Place and the body play a key role in memory and meaning. The youngest sister remembers this event ‘via’ her own body as well as the quarantine their home was under, while the second youngest sister allocates the memory via the fact that they slept in the kitchen and not in the room they normally did. Our movements and actions within space and our surroundings linger within the memory and disclose the complex nuances of certain scenarios. As my mother noted how strange it was for her to remain lying in her bed and call her mother to her when she told her she was pregnant,⁵³ in a similar way my grandmother’s sisters reveal the navigation of space to accommodate certain scenarios that deviated from the norm. This is also seen in my great-grandmother turning the living room into her bedroom after her husband died.

It also happens that events culminate and that the same event carries more than one meaning in much more obvious ways. I have on more than one occasion heard the story of when my grandmother’s (second youngest) sister met her husband on the same day my grandmother gave birth to her second child:

N: Kyk daai tyd het hulle by die huise gekraam en toe O (my ouma se tweede kind) gebore is...

Ek: Toe het oom F gekom...

N: 24 Oktober 1944, sy is daai dag gebore, toe lê sy(my ouma) in die voorste kamer. Oom F het nou die mooi meisie op die fiets sien ry toe sê sy broer ‘oe dis J* G** wil jy haar ontmoet’, ‘ja’, toe bring hy hom en daai dag is O gebore. En toe weet ek het V gesê, toe hy weg is, sy het net na die mooi stem geluister.

Nan: Toe ek nou haar laaste brief vir haar skrywe toe sê ek hierdie is altyd vir my ’n spesiale tyd, O se verjaarsdag, want dit is wanneer ek my man ontmoet het en of sy kan onthou sy het gesê hy het so mooi stem⁵⁴(personal interview, April, 2009. App. 7A).

⁵³ See p35.

⁵⁴ N: See, those days they gave birth at home, and when O(my grandmother’s second child) was born

Me: is when uncle F...

N: 24 October 1944, she was born that day, she (my grandmother) was still lying in the front room. Uncle F saw the pretty girl on the bicycle and his brother said “that is J* G**, do you want to meet her?”, ‘yes’ (he said), and that day he brought him over, and that day O was born. And I know V said, when he was gone, she listened to the beautiful voice.

N: When I wrote her last letter I told her this time of year is always special to me, O’s birthday, because it is when I met my husband and if she can still remember she said he had such a beautiful voice.

The duality of meaning is more evident here; in this case two different ‘events’, and not just two experiences of the same event, took place on the same day. These two events/meanings fuse within the same day, home and family. Both sisters involved tell me both stories, as though they feel the stories are equally important and one cannot be mentioned without the other. Yet for my grandmother it will always be the day she gave birth to her second child and for her sister it will remain the day she met her husband. Such different meanings exist ‘equally’ and simultaneously in the same narrative. Meaning is rendered individually; shared meaning and experience, within the family or collective, are merely a designated collection of individual events that are practised and taught. This collection is both what constitutes the female and family narrative as well as some of the narrative’s main purposes. On the basis of the examples I have discussed one can discern in what way collective meaning and experience exists in the family narrative, as well as (at the same time), the ‘impossibility’ of a ‘true’ collective.

Meaning: Slippage and Lacunae

Is the plurality, this collision of meanings, not true for all the days of our lives? In *Rewriting the Self* Mark Freeman (referring to Gusdorf) argues: “The illusion begins from the moment that the narrative *confers a meaning* on the event which, when it actually occurred, no doubt had several meanings or perhaps none. It is here that the failures, the gaps and the deformations of memory find their origin” (1993:31).

The ‘deformation’ of memory does not only occur with the confirmation of meaning, but also in the confirmation of the ‘I’. It is within the insistence of the ‘I’ – the designation of the subject – which the true fracture occurs. This slippage runs rampant within the plurality of the family narrative. Benveniste (as cited in Agamben) writes: “What is the ‘reality’ to which *I* or *you* refers? Only a ‘reality of discourse’ that is something quite singular” (1991:23). Robert argues that ‘I’ “can be defined and can have meaning only in terms of an instance in which an

individual stands and names herself as ‘I’” (Robert, 2006: 43). *I* or *you* only *means* in the ‘reality’ of discourse it only *means* in the instance of naming the self ‘I’ – but the act of discourse is not singular. The female discourse in my family is plural in various ways; this becomes evident in the interviews: My grandmother speaks of the event of giving birth; her sisters speak of the same event yet from within their own perspectives revealing different meanings. I myself know these stories and of these stories, and though I share in them my participation is three generations removed. Thus meanings become plural in both obvious and more complex ways. Plurality deepens and becomes a lacuna when the *I*, *you* and particularly *she* are uttered within the confines of a fractured discourse labelled ‘singular’. The discourse is the veil, that seem to be transparent, yet, just enough so to reveal that which is truly opaque.

The slippage within these conversations often lie within the use of ‘she’. The ‘she’ moves and is dependent on the discourse, but the discourse does not seem to move linearly: both the ‘she’ and the ‘I’ fall in and out of different generations. My grandmother’s youngest sister confuses my grandmother with her daughter and we have to correct her, this seems ‘innocent’ as she is an elderly women. One can ascribe it to old age, yet it can also be the veil of the discourse giving glimpses of that which is incomprehensible.

The second youngest sister uses ‘she’ so loosely I had to verify for the reader who it is she is speaking about. There are no clear distinctions between her ‘she’s’: “sy(die baba) is daai dag gebore, toe lê sy(my ouma) in die voorste kamer”⁵⁵ (personal interview, April, 2009. App. 7A). In this case the ‘she’ is dependent on me, because I know the story my great aunt was telling and I know who the ‘she’ refers to – yet, if not for me, this ‘she’ remains dependent on the discourse, slipping into uncertainty, transparent and yet opaque. “Hence any speech act takes place because the speaking individual identifies herself with and in the very event of saying... This reveals that ‘the subject of enunciation is composed of discourse and exists in discourse alone’” (Robert, 2006: 43). The problem with this ‘existence’ in discourse is the plurality that makes it simultaneously possible and impossible, accessible and inaccessible. I

⁵⁵ She (the baby) was born that day; she (my grandmother) was still lying in the front room.

contend that to ‘exist’ in, and be dependent on, discourse/narrative is a very problematic and complex state.

In my many visits with my great aunt it happened regularly that she would be speaking to and with me as if I am my mother, referring to people and places I do not know. This is not because of her old age, for her mind is crystal-clear; it happens within the discourse, within the ‘quick change’ she has to make between past and present in the act of telling/bearing witness. William Robert (referring to Derrida) describes this phenomenon when he writes about the use of ‘I’ in the act of testimony: “the *I* may shift for the same witness across time, since the date marks a difference ‘between the one who says *I* and the *I* of the young man (woman) of who he (she) speaks and who is himself (herself)’” (Robert, 2006: 43).

In my conversations with my grandmother I witnessed the most severe acts of fusion, where she moves not merely between generations and people, but also between scenes and settings. When I asked her about *my mother’s birth* and *my mother giving birth* to her first child, it became clear that she has somehow amalgamated these two events in her mind. She did this on two separate occasions; first I asked her if they, as parents, were very worried when my mother gave birth, especially because she was only 17:

Ja ons was, laat ek nou eers dink... sy was mos by die huis, sy het uit die huis begin kraam, Dr. M het nog kom kyk. Haai ek kan nie onthou dat sy hospitaal toe was nie, maar sy was. En dit was nie lank nie want toe my vriendin wat daar agter bly, J, sy was in die dorp en toe kry oupa vir haar daar by die stadsaal en sê toe vir haar (van die geboorte), want sy was toe naaste aan my. (Hy) sê toe vir haar dat L(my ma) gekom het, ooh maar sy kry amper stuipe. En verder sê hy haar neusie is net so groot (wys hoe klein dit was) want sy was so mooi⁵⁶ (personal interview, June, 2009. App. 5A).

On the second occasion I asked her again if they were worried about my mother giving birth and if there were people who were rude to my mother, she replied:

⁵⁶ Yes we were, let me think first... she was at home, she started to go into labour at home, and Dr M came to check on her. My, I can’t remember that she went to the hospital, but she did. And it wasn’t long because when my friend, that lived behind us J, she was in town and Grandpa ran into her at city hall and told her (about the birth), because she was closest to me at that stage. (He) told her that L (my mother) was born, oh but she almost fainted. And further he told her that her nose was this small (she gestures to show how small) because she was so beautiful.

Ja jislaaik sy was dan toe die ‘baby’, dit was ’n groot ding, dit was swaar om te verwerk maar ons het... net een, M* O** hulle het op R*** gebly en sy sê toe vir ’n vriendin van N (my ouma se suster) ek loop nou nog in die straat en ek lyk ’n ‘sight’ en dit was swart wat ek gedra het, ek kon haar nooit onder my oë verdra het nie⁵⁷ (personal interview, June, 2009. App. 5A).

In both cases when asked about my mother giving birth she begins to reply and then midway through she replaces my mother with herself - she becomes the one giving birth and my mother becomes the baby. This might possibly be because it was such a shock to see her child become pregnant at 16 and give birth at 17. She protects herself against certain feelings and memories, a ‘corrective’ merging of memories as she cannot ‘forget’ this incident nor deny it, so she merges the two events in order to make it bearable. What seems most significant to me is the lacuna that enters into the mother/daughter discourse and the fact that it enters surrounding childbirth.

Agamben suggests that: “It is thus necessary that the impossibility of bearing witness, the ‘lacuna’ that constitutes human language, collapses, giving way to a different impossibility of bearing witness – that which does not have language” (Agamben. 1999:116). While Adrienne Rich writes that mothers and daughter have always shared “a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, and preverbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other. The experience of giving birth stirs deep reverberations of her mother in a daughter” (1976:221). This bond between mother and daughter, especially surrounding the act of giving birth, exists in the realm of bearing witness that does not ‘have language’. The mother/daughter narrative exists in the threshold between language and the intimacy of the body, its opaqueness becoming only partially visible through the lacuna.

Penny Siopis writes about the audio of her grandmother speaking in her film *My Lovely Day*:

This happens, for instance, when she says in the film that the birth of her dead child nearly killed her and that she tore up the photo of him in his coffin “in the

⁵⁷ Yes of course she was the baby, it was a huge thing, it was hard to overcome, but we did... just one, M** O***, they lived on R****, and she told a friend of N (my grandmother’s sister) I was still walking around on the streets and I look a sight, and I was wearing black. I could never stand the sight of her.

end”. In another scene she informs the audience that she kept the icons of Saint Nicholas and the Virgin “until the day I died”. These ghostly utterances make a mockery of time as sequence, and of that kind of chronology on which we rely so heavily when telling ‘true’ stories (2005: 95).

On a third occasion my grandmother and I were paging through an old photo-album⁵⁸ of hers when I had a similar experience described by Siopis – as she was talking about the photographs I asked her if my grandfather was fond of my mother when she was little and she replied: “O ja, hy was verskriklik. En hy het vir my in die dorp kom kry, ek weet nie waarheen was ek nie, toe het sy nog nie die *baby* gehad nie, toe kom kry hy my in die dorp toe sê hy haar oortjies is net so groot (sy beduie met haar hand)”⁵⁹ (personal interview, June, 2009. App. 5A).

Here my grandmother not only merges the two births (my grandmother giving birth to my mother and my mother giving birth to her first child), but she removes herself from both incidents; my grandfather comes to her in town while, in reality, she was present at both births and could not have been in town. She ‘creates’ a role for herself on the periphery of these events yet she still has all the information as if she had been there. The painfulness of my grandmother’s memories and feelings (surrounding my mother’s pregnancy) are amplified by the fusion between mother and daughter in the act of giving birth; thus she protects herself from this by ‘reliving’ these experiences in the/a third person. With language and narrative she crosses the divide of the lacuna, creating a fragmented fiction, partially based on truth, which acts as a bridge from the realm of the body towards language – fiction fills the silence of the unsayable and unsaid. What is astounding is that the fiction my grandmother creates only exists so that she does not have to speak about the intimate and unsaid. This awareness brings to light another infuriating contradiction – even when the women in my family do break the silence of the intimate, they do so only to enable/protect another silence. The words and stories I hear are appropriated silences; this impossible text I am writing is, at best, an appropriated silence. We create and perpetuate the narrative in order to *mean, preserve* and leave a *mark*, but we also create it because it is *what* and *how* we were taught. We continue with the narrative because, with its contradictions, plurality, gaps and

⁵⁸ She always mentions that she won the album in athletics when she was 16.

⁵⁹ Oh yes, he was extremely (fond of her). And he came to me in town, I don’t know where I was she hadn’t had the baby yet, when he found me in town he said her ears were just this big (she gestures).

silences it becomes simultaneously something we have to ‘survive’ as well as something we can use in order to ‘survive’. Gayl Jones writes:

My great-grandmama told my grandmama the part she lived through that my grandmama didn’t live through and my grandmamma told my mama what they both lived through and my mama told me what they all lived through and we were supposed to pass it down like that from generation to generation so we’d never forget. Even though they’d burned everything to play like it didn’t never happen (cited in Minh- Ha, 1993: 5).

Death

Differentiating between the unsaid and the unsayable

Writing the quietness with dry ink

Theresa Hak Kyund Cha writes: “The ink spills thickest before it runs dry before it stops writing at all”, while Tao-te-ching suggests:

See all things howsoever they flourish

Return to the root from which they grew

This return to the root is called Quietness (as cited in Minh-Ha, 1993:2).

To write about death is such a baffling paradox - you continue with the task knowing you will fail. The writing of this thesis is similar to writing about death, for I write about memories and stories that also ‘fail’ to encapsulate the entirety of what they aim to hold. In her book *The Auto/biographical I* Liz Stanley refer to a photograph of her as a child kicking a ball and suggests that the photograph does not end in death while she is still alive and writing. When it does, it will be death to someone else as she herself cannot gaze back on this moment after death. In this sense our death never belongs to us but only to those we leave behind (1992: 47). As I read this William Robert’s words come to mind when he discusses Levi and Agamben’s views on the aporia of the witness:

The complete witness is such because she did not survive, and because she did not survive, she cannot bear witness. Herein lies the lacuna... survivors are not the true witnesses but speak only in place of the drowned, “by proxy as pseudo-witnesses; they bear witness to a missing testimony... knowing that she must bear witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness”(2006: 42).

The lacuna of the witness is also the lacuna of death, for in writing about death one must indeed write ‘in the name of the impossibility’ of writing about death. On one’s own death one cannot look back – our death can only be remembered by others. The irony is that the most intimate and uniquely personal event in one’s life can only be reflected upon by others, who can only remember ‘in the name of the impossibility’ of remembering.

Writing about death in our family narrative leads me to start with the death of my grandfather, for it is a death we (as individuals and as family) all painfully pay pseudo-witness to. I was 5 years old when my grandfather died; the night he died my parents took me to him in the hospital to say goodbye (he had emphysema and was in a coma by that stage). I vaguely remember the white, almost bleak light in the room, and I have a partial idea of him on the bed, his face grey and covered by the oxygen mask. I remember a nurse giving me a hug when I came out, and that she carried a tissue on the inside of her wrist in the strap of her watch. Even of these fragments I am uncertain. Of his funeral I only remember being lost in the crowd with everyone towering over me at the grave like buildings in a strange city. Of my grandfather I remember very little, mostly the way his pants draped over his knees and the noses of his shoes and slippers, seeing that I always played at his feet where he sat. This is the only testament I can give, first hand, of my grandfather and his death. Though my memory and idea of him is fully furnished with images, anecdotes, information and stories, of my own experience, I can merely offer these fragments.

Antjie Krog writes: “Dit is die nuus waarvoor ’n mens onbewus miskien jou hele lewe deur wag. Die een of ander tyd tref dit die meeste van ons. Dat hy weg is. Dat helfte van dit

waaruit jy kom, dood is”⁶⁰ (2005: 396). I learn about my grandfather’s death as I learned of his life, through others. Asking my mother and her two sisters about their father’s death, this is what they told me:

The eldest sister:

Kyk O (die middel suster) het gebel en gesê ons moet kom... en dis asof Oupa gewag het ons moet kom want toe is al die ander kinders daar. Hy het toe nog gelewe maar hy het gelyk, hy uhm... hy was in ’n koma... (sy sug, en begin huil) maar toe ek vir hom sê ‘Dadda ons is nou hier’ toe flikker sy oë so – (stilte, sy huil) ... nou na al die jare (sy verwys na die feit dat sy huil want sy wys nooit regtig haar emosies nie). Uhm, toe kon ek sien hy weet ons is daar, toe het ons nou maar so om hom gestaan en toe skielik toe sê ek vir O ‘Dadda word dan nou blou’, want kyk ek ken dit toe maar nie... Snaaks al die ander het hom gaan soen en ek het.... (sy raak stil, en huil weer, sy praat soos ’n kind deur die trane, haar stem diep) dit was net nie meer vir my hy gewees toe nie⁶¹ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 3A)

The middle sister writes to me when I ask her, in a questionnaire, about her father’s death:

Dadda se dood, ’n groot verligting na ’n lyding van onhoudbare benoudheid-suurstof help nie meer... Hy raak genadiglik in ’n koma en slaap so rustig totdat hy stil sterf. Ek is baie hartseer veral omdat ek vir hom so baie wou sê, en dit nooit gedoen het nie. Het nooit fisies kontak gehad nie, behalwe pik soentjie. Wanneer hy sterf soen ek op sy voorkop – die eerste en laaste keer!!! Het nie baie gehuil nie, was te dankbaar hy is verlos... My hartseer was nooit uiterlik nie, net ’n groot, swaar klip in my bors. Mis hom al meer soos ek ouer word⁶² (written questionnaire, Dec, 2008. App. 2C).

My mother (on two separate occasions):

Ek was mos by hom toe hy gesterf het... hy het gesterf, hy het daar gelê en oom G (haar oudste suster se man) het sy oë toegemaak (sy begin huil). Dit was mooi, dit is vir my ’n mooi herinnering aan oom G hy het dit so mooi gedoen, so sag en liefdevol maar ook so professioneel(hy is ’n dokter). Want ek het gedink, want partymaal het hy geroggel, en dan het oom G gehelp met die masjiene, en ek het geroep maar ek het half geweet, en die

⁶⁰ This is the news a person unconsciously waits for maybe your whole life. Some or other time it hits most of us. That he is gone. That half of that from which you come, is dead.

⁶¹ See O (the middle sister) phoned and told us we should come...and it was as if Grandpa waited for us to come because all the other children were there already. He was still alive but he looked, he uhm... he was in a coma... (She sighs, and starts to cry) but when I told him ‘Dadda we are here now’ his eyes flickered (silence, she cries)... now after all these years (she refers to the fact that she is crying, because she does not usually show her emotions). Uhm, then I could see he knew we were there, then we stood around him and suddenly I told O “but Dadda is turning blue’, because I did not know ... Funny, all the rest went and kissed him, and I... (She becomes quiet, and starts to cry again, she talks threw the tears like a child, her voice is deep) it just wasn’t him anymore.

⁶² Dadda’s death, a big relief after immense suffering with unbearable emphysema - oxygen does not help anymore... By the grace of God he goes into a coma and sleeps calmly till he quietly dies. I am very sad especially because there were so many things that I wanted to tell him, and never did. We never had physical contact except for a kiss *hello* and *goodbye*. When he dies I kiss him on his forehead - the first and last time!!! Didn’t cry much, was too thankful he was relieved... My heartache was never visible on the outside, just a big, heavy stone in my chest. Miss him more and more as I become older.

manier hoe hy toe te werk gegaan het, hy hoef nie vir my toe gesê het dis nou klaar nie, ek het geweet⁶³ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App.4A).

Ons het mos maar daar gestaan, ons het almal gegroet en maar gepraat en gedoen maar hy was nie meer by nie, ek neem aan hulle het dalk vir hom iets ingespuut. En toe het die twee swaers en twee susters mos eenkant gaan staan en gesels, ek weet nie waar pa was nie ek dink hy het die kleintjies huis toe gevat of iets. En toe sit my ma langs my pa se bed, hier voor by hom, sy het darem toe sy hand vasgehou, en toe het iets net vir my gesê ek wil nou hier by hulle wees, (sy begin huil) ons was lank alleen jy weet, ons was maar altyd alleen in die huis (omdat sy so 'n laatlam was). En toe het ek daar by hulle gaan sit en sy hand gehou, en daar bly sit tot hy dood is.⁶⁴ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 4B).

These are their testimonies of the day when 'half of where they have their origin' died. Suffice it to say that these three descriptions of this enormous event fail horribly to capture or convey what it is they experienced. I have nothing more to write about my grandfather's death, nothing I want to or can write about it. This is the truth as well as a lie. In the sense that death is impossible to write or tell I cannot write about it, yet, however fragmented and distorted we do find a way, through broken language to the brim of a narrative, but I do not want to write this narrative.

The Degrees of the Unsaid and Unsayable

However, there were events that led to my grandfather's death that have drifted to the surface of these murky waters. And these events, as unravelled by the three sisters, warrants inspection. I offer you three perspectives, three fragments within and between that which has lain dormant, revealing not only the ineptness of language but also the vehemence of silence. This is an uncovering of how the family narrative's worst offense is not creating a fiction, but the quiet violence of what is not said.

⁶³ I was with him when he died... he died, he was lying there and uncle G (her eldest sisters husband) came and closed his eyes (she starts to cry). It was poignant, it is a good memory of uncle G for me because he did it so beautifully, so soft and lovingly but also so professional (he is a doctor). Because I thought, because sometimes he sometimes it would rattle in his throat and then uncle G came and helped with the machines, and I called him but I knew, and the way he handled, he did not need to tell me, I knew. He did not have to tell me it was finished, I knew.

⁶⁴ We stood there, we all said our goodbyes but he was not conscious anymore, I think they gave him something. And then the two brothers in law and the two sisters talked aside, I don't know where dad was (my father) I think he took the children home. My mother sat beside my father's bed, in front next to him, she held his hand then, and something just told me I want to be here with them now, (she starts to cry). We were alone for a long time you know, we were always alone in the house (because my mother sisters were so much older than she was) and then I went and sat with them there and held my father's hand, and I sat there till he died.

In her memoir *Seisoene* Engela van Rooyen writes: “We spend our lives as a tale that is told. Maar ’n groot deel bly onvertel, dis elke keer ’n skedel vol geheime wat toegegooi word”⁶⁵ (2005: 30). Our death happens to us yet it ‘belongs’ to those around us, to those by whom we are known and remembered. There is no ownership in death, no possession; when we die we die, as Michael Ondaatje writes, “containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves.” He continues; “I wish for all this to be marked on my body when I am dead. I believe in such cartography... We are communal histories, communal books” (1993: 262).

Though we take with us a skull or body full of marks and secrets we also leave a body of marks and secrets. We leave behind a physical body as well as a metaphorical body, the body in and of the narrative. The death of loved one’s forces us to navigate the secret cartography both of the physical body, which is left behind, as well as one’s way through the complexities that consumes the family narrative surrounding death and the body. Penny Siopis says “we inherit our older relatives” (2005: 94). One of the things that makes it impossible to write about death is the fact that this inheritance includes that which is excluded from the narrative, the *secret* and the *unsaid*. We inherit that of which we have no knowledge and to which we have no access, yet we still carry the weight of this burden of silence!

Karel Schoeman writes in *Die Laaste Afrikaanse Boek* : “sy is ten slotte dood... en sy is bevry van die las van herinnering en lyding... en vir my wat nog aan tyd en ruimte gebonde is, is dit nodig om in terme van tyd en ruimte my eie bevryding van die verlede te probeer bewerkstellig”⁶⁶ (2002: 53). It is the burden of silence that the women in my family want to be liberated from, yet it is this very silence that makes this hard and even impossible. The silence, the *unsaid* and *unsayable*, weighs the heaviest and is near impossible to navigate in its darkness. However, it is important to note that there is a difference between:

⁶⁵ But a great deal remains untold; it is a skull full of secrets that is buried every time.

⁶⁶ In the end she is dead, it passed on, it is over, *all passion spent*, and she is free from the burden of recollection and suffering... and for me, who am still bound to time and space, it is necessary, in terms of space and time, to try and accomplish my own liberation from the past.

what is merely unsaid, and what may be, in some crucial sense, unsayable...from something merely omitted, to something that cannot be expressed in the context of a particular interview, to something difficult to say in any context, and finally, to something too dangerous to speak or even to know (Rogers. 1999: 79-80).

These degrees of the *unsaid* become visible as certain aspects of my grandfather's life and death are slowly revealed in the conversations with his three daughters. Within my mother's silence I locate and allocate that which remains unsaid and unsayable because it is too volatile.

The eldest sister:

Ek: Vertel vir my van oupa se siekte en se sterfte, maar as tannie P nie wil nie is dit...

P: Nee, nee. Ek was net vir hom bitter jammer omdat hy emfiseem gehad het want jong dis 'n leiding, pyn is beter. Toe het hy mos nou maar elke aan 'n bietjie whiskey gevat vir die benoudheid en na die einde toe was hy verslaaf. Deur sy lewe het hy hom nooit aan drank gesteur nie daar was nie eers drank in die huis nie en in sy ouer-huis was ook nooit 'n druppel drank nie maar dit was...

E: Was dit so dat dit ontwrigtend was, dat mens dit opgetel het?

P: Ag nee wat.

E: Want my ma het net gesê hy sou laat aand as almal gaan slaap het maar dit was glad nie so dat jy dit sou agterkom nie.

P: Nee ons het nooit hom gedrink gesien nie maar ek was bewus daarvan dat hy drink en...

Vi (die oudste suster se oudste dogter): Maar kan mens dit drink noem of...?

P: Vi daai laaste aand wat hy geval het, kyk toe het ouma al gaan slaap, lyk my dan het hy [meer gedrink]. Toe het hy geval in die badkamer, en dit was ysig dit was winter, en hy het daar gelê en ouma het nie geweet nie en toe sy hom eindelijk kry kon sy hom nie beweeg nie. Toe het hy longontsteking gekry en dit het...

Vi: Ja maar was dit as gevolg van die drank?

P: Ja dis soos ek dit het, wat hulle vir my vertel het, en toe het hy lank, jy weet mos hoe koud is daai badkamer, daar gelê

Vi: Maar is dit van te veel alkohol wat hy geval het?

P: Hy het seker maar gegly.

E: Soos my ma ook gesê het ek dink in die nag het hy heelwat gedrink want dis wanneer hy die benoudste was.

P: Ek het altyd gehoor hy woel in daai kas oorkant die kamer, die bottel was

Daar.

E: Het hulle nie nog in die hospitaal...

P: Hulle moes vir hom gee want toe was hy verslaaf hulle het vir hom in sy drup of êrens vir hom bietjie, bietjie gegee⁶⁷ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 3A).

The middle sister writes, answering a written questionnaire, in a summarized, short-hand fashion:

Hewige verslawing aan alkohol en nikotien- moet suurstofmasker ophang sodat hy 'n teug aan 'n sigaret kan neem en met 'n strooitjie flou whisky uit 'n glasie kan suig (met dokter se toestemming)... het hom nooit verwyt omdat hy te veel gerook en (eers op sy oudag) te veel gedrink het nie. Het verstaan dat dit vir hom ontvlugting is⁶⁸ (written questionnaire, Dec, 2008. App 2C).

My mother:

My ma: Oor hy gedrink het, maar dit was maar die later jare, dit was maar die laaste drie jaar wat dit sleg gegaan het... Ja ek besef toe hy dronk was moes hy seker moeilik gewees het maar hy was nooit 'n aggressiewe mens nie. Ek het nie 'n rekolleksie van enige aggressiwiteit nie ek weet nie of my susters het nie, selfs met sy werkers, hy sou dalk geskree of geskel het maar...

⁶⁷ Me: tell me about grandpa's illness and death, but if you don't want to it is...

P: No, no, I was just very sorry for him because he had emphysema, that is suffering, pain is better. Then he started to drink a bit of whiskey every night for the asthma and by the end he was addicted. Throughout his life he never bothered with drinking didn't even have alcohol in the house nor did his parents have a drop of alcohol in their house but it was...

E: Was it so bad that it was disruptive, did one notice?

P: No we never so him intoxicated but I was aware of it that he drank and...

Vivienne (the eldest sister's eldest daughter): But can you call that drinking or?

P: Vi that last night when he fell, see grandma had gone to bed already, seems to me he then[drank more], and then he fell in the bathroom, and it was freezing, it was winter, and he laid there and grandma didn't know and when she finally found him she couldn't move him. And he got pneumonia and that...

Vi: Yes but was that as result of the drinking?

P: That is the way I have it, what they told me, and for a long time he, you know how cold that bathroom is, laid there.

Vi: But was it because he took too much alcohol?

P: He probably slipped.

Me: Like my mother also said, I think at night he drank quite heavily because he was most asthmatic then

P: I always heard him fidgeting in the cupboard across the bedroom, the bottle was there

E: Didn't they still, in the hospital...

P: They had to give him alcohol because he was addicted by then; they gave it to him in his IV or somewhere, just small amounts.

⁶⁸ Massive addiction to alcohol and nicotine- must lift oxygen mask so that he can take a drag from his cigarette and drank weak whiskey and water with a straw from a little glass(with the doctor's permission)... Never blamed him because he drank smoked and (only in his old age) drank too much. Understood that it was an escape for him.

Ek: Wanneer het dit uitgekóm dat hy drink?

M: Ag ek weet nie, so geleidelik het ons agtergekóm en het sy (my ouma) nou maar gesê. Dis maar saans wat hy gedrink het, maar ek dink tog hy het later, soos sê nou maar middae al ietsie gevat. Soos ek sê hy was nooit besope gewees nie, nooit nie eers amper nie, dat ons glad nie kon sê 'hy het nou te veel gehad nie'.

E: Wat het tannie P en O (haar twee susters) daaroor gesê, het julle daaroor gepraat?

M: Huh uh, nee⁶⁹ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 4A).

The three daughters offer limited information about the last years of their father's life. We can discern from their timid confessions that there remains a considerable amount unsaid. All three sisters reveal their father's addictions, his addiction to smoking was not hidden, yet his addiction to alcohol was kept quiet. It is clear that the family was aware of this, yet they all turned a blind eye. They performed a collective 'dance' of denial around each other that facilitated their way of living to remain undisturbed. My grandfather was 'gracious' in his addiction: the alcoholism was a self-medication that was mostly done at night while everyone was sleeping.⁷⁰ Though they all knew, they would not interfere; they didn't interfere with him at night while he drank as he did not let the drinking interfere with their day. The narrative of silence and denial, of 'hear-no-evil see-no-evil', was so well practised and rehearsed that it could facilitate and accommodate a multitude of 'sins'. This narrative assists the family in the navigation of their lives and relationships. The sisters did not talk about their father's addiction then and still refer to it in the 'politest' of ways. The eldest sister will never speak ill of her father or his drinking yet she allows no alcohol in her house and does not tolerate drinking. The middle sister is a recovering alcoholic; she drank in secret for more than ten years, and one can detect this in her insistence on the fact that she did not blame her father for his addictions.

⁶⁹ My mother: Because he drank, but that was the later years, it was only the last three years that it was bad... yes I realize that he must have been difficult when he was drunk but he was never an aggressive person. I don't have a single recollection of any aggressiveness I don't know if my sisters have, even with his workers, he might have shouted and scolded but...

Me: When did it come out that he drank?

Mother: Oh, I don't know we gradually became aware of it and she (my grandmother) told us. It was at night that he drank but I do think later on he took something, for instance in the afternoon. Like I said he was never drunk, not even close, not that we could say 'he has had too much'.

Me: What did auntie P and Auntie O (her two sisters) say about it, did you talk about it?

Mother: Huh-uh, no.

⁷⁰ The addiction started in the last years of his life, by that time he was already suffering from emphysema and struggled to breathe especially at night, he was also suffering from depression.

One can also see (through the reaction of the eldest sister's daughter) almost disbelief of the fact that our grandfather was addicted and that this, in a direct and indirect way, led to his death. She can accommodate or tolerate the knowledge that he had a slight drinking problem at the end of his life, but finds it hard to hear that he fell because he drank too much and lay undiscovered for hours. This is not an image that she, nor I myself, want of our grandfather, of the grandfather whom 'we knew'. We learned and deduced, as we grew older, that he sometimes drank too much because he could not deal with his illness, but the degree of his addiction was kept vague and polite. In our minds he did not sneak around at night, he did not get so drunk that he fell and could not get up off the freezing floor. These things remain unsaid, for we cannot accommodate both the grandfather we knew and the man who drank in secret and died of his addictions.⁷¹ We are a family who gloss over the unwanted and the disgraceful with silence; we negate by neglecting to see it, name it, or talk about it. In this family one needs to acquire a blind eye and a deaf ear in order to aid the family narrative.

What remains unsaid

Pear writes in his book *Remembering and Forgetting*, (dedicated to his mother and father):

The distant lighthouse – flash stabbing the pitch darkness; the squeak of a mouse breaking the stillness of an empty room; neither of these comes where nothing was before. The point of light or of noise simply replaces in the field of consciousness experiences of sight or of hearing as positive as itself; darkness or silence. A man blind from birth does not live in a dark world or he who is born deaf in a silent one. Darkness and silence are seen and heard; for their appreciation one must have eyes and ears (1922:30).

My mother is the one who revealed to me what indeed was up to now *unsayable* and what will still remain *unsaid* after this. It remains *unsaid* for it is 'dangerous' to the mental well-being and emotional state of the remaining members of this family. In the interview with my

⁷¹ It has to be noted that my grandfather was never the man one would imagine developing a drinking problem. He was, according to everyone who knew him, a beautiful, gracious, soft spoken and loving man.

mother she speaks, for the first time, of a particular incident that leads to my grandfather's death. She has never shared it with anyone and because of the nature of my questions, shares it for the first time with me. I realise, however, that this information is of a very personal nature and I asked her later if I am allowed to use it (even though she knew I was taping the interview for this reason). She does not want me to use the information because of its extremely personal nature and because this knowledge can be very destructive. For this, then, I will not include this information, and by doing so I participate in this silence – I carry this weight that often seems unbearable. I keep silent here as my mother's daughter and not as the writer of this text. Though it is frustrating, I have to respect my family and their privacy. This silence becomes part of my inheritance, part of my family narrative, and now part of this thesis as text. One can only appreciate this silence by seeing and hearing it for what it is and what it negates.

As Karel Schoeman said, we as the living need to somehow create within the limits of *time* and *space* some sort of liberation from the weight of the past, the weight of the inheritance of the family narrative (2002: 53). I inherit this narrative of silence from my mother, and now I share in its weight and creation. Just as she, through her silence, takes part in the narrative her mother facilitated and created, specifically within this unspoken event. This silence abides within my grandmother; my mother and I are second- and third-generation carriers, yet we are also accomplices none the less. This I know and struggle with, for as Nietzsche warns:

It [i.e. critical history] is always a dangerous process, especially so for life itself... For since we are the outcome for earlier generations, we are also the outcome of their aberrations, passions, and errors, and indeed of their crimes; it is not possible wholly to free oneself from this chain. If we condemn these aberrations and regard ourselves as free of them, this does not alter the fact that we originate in them (1997: 76).

The critical and investigative nature of this thesis is a dangerous process as it finds and reveals 'offences' of a complex and shocking nature. Whether one finds release from the weight of the past or not, one cannot escape the fact that you have your origin in these transgressions. One can never be fully free from the family narrative; the woven narrative is

always also web. It is the inevitable entanglement within the family's own creation that so often paralyzes us in the face of our own, and others, offences. In the well-established boundaries of what our family allows to be seen and heard my mother was caught and rendered incapable. One cannot react merely for one's own conscience; one has to adhere to a family's code of conduct that establishes and maintains boundaries, in order to keep certain silences. The constraints of the family narrative paralyzed my mother in responding to what was a complex and sensitive yet major transgression. She adopted the well taught and well practised silence that accompanies these acts within our family, keeping her from speaking of this incident for twenty-two years. In *The Concept of Self* Kenneth Gergen writes:

We are cast into specific roles or identities by those around us... each of us harbours a multitude of self-concepts... the cues that other's give to us about ourselves serve to reinforce certain of these concepts and reduce the salience of others... We react with the 'self' learned in the presence of the other (1971: 82).

We are indeed cast into roles by those around us, roles to play in the family narrative, allocated for the preservation of this narrative. It is important to note that roles are not enacted according to directions, but to a mere cue; they are not discussed and explained, but merely signalled. The narrative and its cues are subtle, they operate below the surface and one acts and reacts accordingly to the given cue with the role or 'self' that one learns from the other. In my mother's case her cue was not to act but to remain silent, as the cue for the women women in my family so often is. In a study, *Gender, Generation, Anxiety and the Reproduction of Culture*, conducted by Wendy Holway and Tony Jefferson, it was found that:

Cultural meanings acquire their emotional resonances from the defences against anxiety that the parents are unconsciously communicating. Parents' meanings are refracted in a myriad of ways, affected, of course, by real events... themselves rendered uniquely meaningful in the context of that person's biography and the ways that they have evolved for coping with anxiety (1999: 134).

Not only do we receive cues for the roles we have to enact from our family members and specifically our parents, but we also receive the unconscious communication of meaning. The

meanings and cues we receive from our parents, which in turn inform the roles and ‘selves’ we enact, are produced within the context of ‘biography’ or what I call the family narrative. Events, circumstances and others inform the formation of the self both *with* and *within* the weave of the narrative.

My family narrative keeps me from writing about this incident concerning my grandfather’s death. I too acted upon a cue and asked my mother whether I could use this information and now I obey her request. I become the third-generation perpetrator in this silence. Our silence and our enacting of designated roles or ‘selves’ create the narrative that facilitates our functioning and ‘being’ as a family and individuals within the family. “Every act of bearing witness thus carries with it an archive of that element of the unsaid under and around what is said” (Robert, 2006: 44). Our family narrative serves as our testimony and that which remains *unsaid* and *unsayable*, for so many reasons, resides in this closed archive that exists ‘under and around what is said’. I cannot escape this narrative weave; I can merely navigate within it. I can write a text that asks one to see the darkness and listen to the silence, a text that bemoans the impossibility of paying witness.

Closing Realisations

The importance of the narrative and its perpetuation, as well as the extent to which we are immersed in it, became very clear to me in this chapter, while the narrative’s contradictions and incapability became even clearer. Ambivalence still seems the only abode, yet it now also appears that this itself is not merely a reaction to the contradictions of narrative but also caused by it.

Though I cannot fully understand the female narrative, I have become more aware of how it functions, especially of the interrelatedness and dependence of one silence upon another. I, and by extension this thesis, have become accomplices to the silence of the female narrative I investigate. I now gather the scale of complexities existing within the creation of meaning, for the individual and, more so, for the collective as they validate and confirm one another

with and within the narrative. The narrative is simultaneously what we survive with, and that which we have to survive, redeeming and devastating in equal strength.

Chapter Three

The Mother's body in and of the female narrative

In this chapter I focus on the child's (especially the daughter's) relationship with the mother's body, as observed within the narrative, as well as on how this influences the creation of self. At the same time I highlight the importance of the mother's body and its impact and consequences within the narrative, as well as the inheritance from the mother – in this case the use of surrogates and sanitization and the role of ordering the domestic and trivial. I concentrate on these aspects in order to gain an insight into *why* and *how* we create and perpetuate the female narrative the way we do. I attempt to reveal the simultaneous creation and destruction inherent in the narrative and question the possibility of bearing witness to the narrative.

The symbiosis of narrative and time

“why we keep on doing violence to words” (Minh-Ha, 1993: 7-8).

It is in the stories we tell about ourselves and our “tribe”, be it family or community, that we seek to unite the separate domains of private and public self, the sacred and the profane, past and present, our feelings and thoughts, as well as to bring into consciousness all of those many things, unknowable but insistent, of which the self is, in part, constructed (Kealey McRae, 1994: 214).

I want to discuss and relate *narrative*, *testimony* and *archive* in order to reveal the relationship between them, as well as the ramifications of these interactions, with a particular focus on the impact upon the self. Robert gives the name ‘testimony’ to “the system of relations between inside and outside, between the sayable and the unsayable, between the possibility and the impossibility of speech.” He continues by arguing that the archive “is the place where private (inside) and public (outside) meet... where human finitude meets a form of infinity in language” (Robert, 2006: 44-45).

It seems that our identities are formed within the threshold 'spaces' of *narrative*, *testimony* and the *archive*, but these are not spaces one can abide in. The imagined abstractions of self and family 'exist' only on this edge of dualities, be they private/public, inside/outside, sacred/profane, feeling/thought or the sayable and the unsayable. We remain in the divide between intimacy/life and language/narrative, though neither offers assurance, stability or immortality. Our identity, existence and being (as individuals and family) remain adrift; there is nothing to abide in except contradictions and ambivalence.

"We are in terror of letting ourselves be engulfed by the muteness depths. This is why we keep on doing violence to words: to tame and cook the wild-raw, to adopt the vertiginously infinite" (Minh-Ha, 1993: 7-8). It is not the fear of death but the uncertainty and inevitability caused by the contradictions at the core of this existence which drive us to create and maintain narrative. And through, and with, narrative we manipulate time as a way to order our lives. We do 'violence with words', but the words themselves have also become the violence.

Thomas Leitch, in his book *What Stories Are, Narrative Theory and Interpretation*, refers to Gerald Prince's definition of what a narrative is: according to his definition the sentence "A man was born... he lived and he died" is a narrative (1986: 10). This is the essence of the linear trajectory we have assigned to our lives, the essence of the violence we do to and with words within the narrative. With the use of words, silences, rhythm, repetition, metaphor, etc. we weave and order the narrative that emulates our lives so that we may have some measure of control. Leitch refers to Frank Kermode when he mentions that a clock makes the sound "*tick-tick*, but people humanize this sound by calling it *tick-tock*, providing it with a beginning and an end, a miniature plot defining 'a special kind of middle'" (1986: 13). With words we create and order time, constantly generating linear narratives, formulating a beginning, middle and end.

Paul Ricoeur writes in *Time and Narrative* that "Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience"(1984: 3). Mark Freeman similarly

suggests in *Rewriting the Self* that “the reality of living in time requires narrative reflection” (1993: 32). *Narrative* and *time* exist symbiotically; the relationship is complex and intricate, and forms the core not only of how we create our individual and family identities but also how we navigate the dualities and contradictions within this created existence. The contradictory nature of the relationship became evident in St Augustine’s explanations on the topic saying that he knows what time is until he is asked to explain and cannot do so. He suggests that because his discourse on time, exists in time he is able to know that time exists and can be measured, but still does not know what time is or how to measure it. “I am in a sorry state, for I do not even know what I do not know” (cited in Ricouer, 1984: xi & 15).

In this regard I have no insights. I do, however, observe how the thread of time is woven into the embroidery of my family narrative. Time and narrative have a peculiar relationship that one might even describe as ‘abusive’. Heidegger writes about time and the human condition: “When a man dies and is removed from what is here, from beings here and there, we say that his time has come. Time and the temporal mean what is perishable, what passes away in the course of time” (1972:3). He continues that time never passes away, but remains and is thus ascertained by a ‘kind of being’. Time is the temporal and the fleeting, an ‘entity’ that remains and never passes, simultaneously constant and ephemeral. Yet death means for us to pass away, for we are temporal and perishable; how peculiar to say ‘one’s time has come’, as if in death we ‘own’ time, we claim that moment as ‘our time’. Is it only in the culmination of death, when time comes to us, like a great idea, old memory or name you could not remember, that we grasp what exactly time is?

Marianne Hirsch answers this question⁷² when she discusses narrative. She argues that narrative is innately linear, moving towards an end – that serves as both explanation and death, and thus the structure of narrative can only be metaleptic, because the beginning presupposes the end. The final objective of narrative, on which it depends, is the process of reading/understanding and this depends on the end/death. She quotes Walter Benjamin: a man’s life “first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death” (1989: 53).

⁷² Referring to Peter Brooks.

Time (for a human being), like narrative, is metaleptic for the ‘beginning presupposes the end’. Therefore narrative and time (due to the nature of their relationship) are ‘understood’/become transmissible in death. Because of this, narrative remains linear and the relationship between time and narrative therefore establishes time as a linear concept and tool as well. Yet Ricoeur suggest that it is in the passing of time “in the transit that both the multiplicity of the present and its tearing apart are to be sought” (1984: 16). Within the linear trajectory we impose on time and narrative, and consequently on our lives, there is no place for the multiplicity of the present. There is nothing that can hold time as both ephemeral and constant. The linear narrative we create and enforce is not adequate, as Derrida suggests: “the human world, owing especially to it being bathed in language, is so ambiguous, complex, and heterogeneous that any attempt to capture it and hold it steady, as if it were an object, a physical thing, is simply not possible” (1978: 289). It is thus within our own insistence on the linearity of time and narrative that we, within this unnatural urge to ‘capture’ and ‘hold steady’, create contradictions and lacunae. We create the condition of the *heaviness of history* and the *unbearable lightness of being* (Barthel, 1996: 151). Due to the complex relationship between narrative and time, the narrative we create is simultaneously its own cause and effect. The narrative/testimony we create causes the condition that forces us to create the narrative. Because of this simultaneity and contradictory nature, this very process of creation carries weighty consequences, one of which is the formation of the lacuna and the impact on the self that is allocated to the archive.

Dwelling in the lacuna, the severing of the self

The morning is two mornings long

Within the contradiction between the *lightness* and the *heaviness* of our *history* we slip into the lacuna that linear time and narrative facilitates, and it is here that my grandmother currently dwells. Her notion of self is suffering the impact of the lacuna of the witness. This is similar to what Liz Stanley writes in *the auto/biographical I* about conversations with her mother in a post-stroke state, which she refers to as the “demolition of the apparatus of the self”: “she said... in a conversation about her parents and siblings and their deaths that ‘I don’t exist anymore’...it’s all gone, the world I lived in... They’re all gone, so have I really... there’s no point in my being alive, well, I’m not really, I’m just waiting.” Stanley adds about her experience with her mother at this time: “Nothing I’ve said... has depicted, nor anything I

could possibly convey in words could depict, how changed she is and in what way I perceive this happening” (1992: 245)

Likewise I have spent many hours with my grandmother during the last couple of years in the process of gathering information for this thesis.⁷³ During this time I kept a journal that is both a testimony to what I experienced at that time and a testimony ‘in the name of the impossibility of testifying’:

My grandmother is dying, she has begun her final descent and I am here to witness it. Her skin is like parchment, I am reluctant to touch it, fearful of the temperature, texture and weight of her arm and hand, for I know it will confirm the degree of decay that I fear she is in. How much does she still know? How much does she remember? What is important to her now?

She has lost her sense of time, she tells the same stories over and over again, instead of saying that the cabinet her father made is almost a hundred years old she says it is almost two hundred years old. She repeatedly tells me that the morning is very long; she says it is ‘two mornings long’.

Tonight she sat beside me, her narrow feet and thin legs dangling from the sofa. After being lost in thought for a while she turns to me and asks me how old she is, I tell her that she is ninety-two almost ninety-three. She asks me if she will turn ninety three this Christmas and I have to tell her that her birthday is in March. She takes time to digest the number ninety-two as though it is foreign to her, like the time of day is to a small child - just an arbitrary number. She replies ‘oh yes March’ but still does not mention her birth date; I don’t think she remembers it⁷⁴(personal journal, December 8, 2010. App.1A).

⁷³I have also recently spent two weeks with her helping my mother take care of her after an unexpected sickbed and considerable deterioration of her mental capacity.

⁷⁴As I am writing this, at a quarter-to-twelve at night, I hear someone walking in the hallway and go out to find my grandmother in the living room, walking around - she can’t sleep. I walk with her and once we have taken a turn through the house we return to our rooms. As she walks to and into her room she is lit from behind by the lamp at the end of the hallway and her smoked peach, flesh-colored night dress becomes totally transparent, a grape in the sun, the skin on a peach. And beneath this fleshy veil I can now view the birdlike silhouette, the body of an eleven-year-old girl, walking to her room and to her slow death. Death walks these halls, death sleeps in the room next to me, and she sits next to me on the sofa and eats at our table. Death has taken up

Death is a severing of the self from narrative and time; therefore death is a severing of the self from the self and its context. In the Lacuna the severing of death commences while one is still alive; this severing does not adhere to linear time – the presupposed, metaleptic end is neither single nor linear. My grandmother's mental regression came very quickly and within the space of a few months we went from having long conversations to me sitting beside her while her mind dwells in a place I am unfamiliar with, a place I now call the Lacuna. I am aware of the fact that we (speaking in a broad sense) no longer negotiate time and life the same way. Though I have theorised many things concerning time, I have preserved what I thought to be a realistic distinction, between theory and practice: For indeed, as I have written before, is there not one definite first and last breath?⁷⁵ This experience with my grandmother has become the practice to the theory. My grandmother does not exist within linear time any longer; she is losing time, not just in the sense that she is running out of time, that she is dying, but also quite literally that she is losing time in its linear sense and function. A morning is two mornings long to her, days, weeks and hours merge, one hundred years become two hundred. It can even be argued that this state she is in now is more 'natural' than the linearity we impose on time and narrative.

When she is tired (her 'confusions' and 'mistakes' increase). she cannot maintain the creating and enforcing of linearity both within the narrative and in time, revealing that to adhere to linearity requires a conscious effort that does not come naturally. Her participation in the family narrative and the creation of the self has not ceased, but no longer adhere to the same 'rules'. The boundaries of what is sayable and not sayable have merged and are negotiated very differently now. The narrative is a landscape of carefully constructed presences and absences that are navigated by clinging to a notion of linearity. It appears as if my grandmother does not have access to aspects of herself and the narrative any longer; the landscape has become foreign to her and she can no longer steer within it.

residence in my grandmother. For how many years will I remember this midnight walk? The church bell sounds its twelve definitive gongs, while I still hear her tossing and turning on her plastic covered mattress next door.

⁷⁵ See page 52.

The process of the severing of the self (both from the self and the narrative) is detected in various ways. I illustrate a few. There are still certain specific stories she repeats over and over again that hold to the old norms; for instance, she repeats most often stories about her father. Throughout both her and her sister's narrative certain positive stories about her father that illuminate good aspects of his character are repeated, while the rest of his life is completely swathed in silence.⁷⁶ Yet for the most part she has become lost to herself – on one occasion she asks me who a girl in a photograph is and I have to tell her it is a photograph of her when she was young. In many stories she tells I have to correct her about events where I was not present and people I know only through her stories and through our earlier interviews. Is it even my place to do this? The roles have shifted, I now have to remind her who she is and tell her things about herself, as she did with me when I was a child. I have to help her get dressed, carry her tray and her glass, give her medication, take her hand when we walk, as she once did for me. Yet within the narrative that stands firm I am still her granddaughter; it is as if I have taken a leave of absence from the narrative to do these things for her, but still return to it where I play my 'given' roles. The narrative remains linear, yet the lived reality has come full circle; she is recoiling back into herself, and I recognize that the self is not linear but rather a labyrinth.

It is as if my grandmother is in a state of undress and it feels almost perverse of me to watch her. I feel guilt when I look at her too long, as if I am gazing upon that which I should not. I do not know if I should be witnessing this? How should one witness this and how does one bear testimony? I have realized that you have to leave the imposed linearity of the narrative in order to negotiate the lacuna of death. Thus this testimony exists outside of my family narrative, and because of the relationship between narrative and time – that is made manifest in the lacuna of the witness – I now find myself within the archive.

⁷⁶ The 'self' she seems to linger in most is the 'self' of her childhood. Permit me to add that though she claims this to be the most wonderful time of her life I fear that it was possibly the hardest time of her life and that it is the denial and negotiation that keeps her anchored there rather than the 'happy memories'. This is discussed in more detail further on.

The role of the mother's body in the formation of the daughter's 'self'

To sleep in your mother's bed

I realise that death (like menstruation, sex and childbirth) is another function of the body. It is the end of the physical body, yet it is not as simple as just 'one first breath and one last'. Dying/life's farewell to the body, as in my grandmother's case, can be a protracted procedure. Virginia Woolf writes about the futility of life-writing: "I see myself as a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream" (1985: 80). Neither can I describe the stream my grandmother and I are in, yet I could (outside of the narrative) describe her body.⁷⁷

The body, especially the female body (as I have discussed), is wrapped in silence, denying its functions. Because of this, the relationship of one body to another, especially between mother and child, is also hushed. As we do not speak of the body in menstruation, sex or birth, we also do not speak of the body in death. My father's mother died when he was 17; when I ask him about her death (something we do not often speak of) he describes seeing her body in the mortuary: "ek was alleen by haar, ek weet sy het gelê in die kus en ek het aan haar gesig gevat, ek kan onthou hulle het watte, hulle het nie haar tande in gehad nie, maar ek weet daar was so watte in haar mond gewees wat tussen haar lippe uitgekom het, maar verder het sy gelyk of sy slaap"⁷⁸ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 8A). The relationship to and experience of the body, specifically our mother's body, plays a tremendous and loaded role in death as in life, impacting on the formation of the self, sexuality and self-worth. The mother's body as physical instrument teaches vital lessons to the child as I confirm by exploring the role of the mother's body within the narrative.

⁷⁷ Her skin is like parchment and I am reluctant to touch it, fearful of the temperature and texture and the weight of her arm in my hand for I know it will confirm the degree of decay I fear she is in... her profile in the lamplight, her pleated skin, her veins, her hair, her skull, her sunken eyes, her ribcage that has started to protrude, the chest seems to expand yet her breaths become smaller and smaller... the birdlike silhouette, the body of an eleven-year-old girl.

⁷⁸ I was alone with her, I know she was lying in the coffin and I touched her face, I can remember they put cotton wool, she didn't have her teeth in, but I know there was cotton wool in her mouth that protruded between her lips, but further she looked like she was asleep.

In her writing about the first time she left home Hamermesh refers to the “invisible coil” that binds her body to her mother’s and the moment of physical pain when she had to leave her (Hamermesh, 1996:17). This coil between one’s own body and the body of your mother winds around our identities and narratives as well; it spirals in and out of the ambit of the intimate and private. Bodily functions humiliate and disgraces; no room is made within the family narrative for functions of the body. The cotton wool that protrudes from my father’s mother’s mouth – which still protrudes in his memory – is one of the last disguises of the disgraces of the body, preventing the puss and fluids from pouring out as well as filling out the face so as not to look sunken and corpse-like. Even in death the bodily functions have to be hidden; as with menstruation, that which has happened has to be made ‘invisible’ (Prendergast, 2000; 117).

The body is silenced, yet it is with and from the body that we ‘have our being’ and procreate, as it is also with and ‘because of’ the body that we die. Still the body, specifically the mother’s body, as stifled as it may be, remains not only our physical point of origin, but also the basis from which we form our ‘self’. I want to examine the mother’s body especially within the context of the child’s formation of self, aware that I will merely scratch at the surface as a result of the impotence of language when it come to dealing with the intimate.

The character of the infant’s early relation to its mother profoundly affects its sense of self, its later object relationships, and it’s feelings about its mother and women in general. The continuity of care enables the infant to develop a self- a sense that “I am”... the experience of self concerns *who* “I am” and not simply that “I am” (Chodorow, 1978: 77-78).

Adrienne Rich writes that “For most of us a woman provided the continuity and stability – but also the rejections and refusals – of our early lives, and it is with a woman’s hands, eyes, body, and voice that we associate our primal sensations, our earliest social experience” (Rich, 1976: xiv-xv). The mother’s body is where we find our physical origin as well as the origin of the ‘self’, the ability to say ‘I am’, the taste of both love and rejection. Within my family narrative the relationship not only to the body but to the mother’s body has proven to be a

mesh of presence, absence and silence. I ask my grandmother's eldest daughter if her mother was warm and loving:

Ek het baie keer vreeslik geniet om by haar in die bed te slaap as oupa nie daar was nie, maar sy was kwaai, ouma was baie kwaai ek dink dis die wat ons so in ons spoor getrap het sy was baie streng⁷⁹(personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 3A).

She mentions sleeping with her mother seemed very special to her; she answers the question but never yes or no; she does not say directly that her mother was cold; she just says she was strict, yet she repeats this three times. Later I ask her if she and her sister ever took a bath together or saw each other naked:

P: Huh-uh ons was baie privaat.

Ek: Het julle kleintyd ooit julle ma kaal gesien, by haar gesit as sy bad of aantrek?

P: Ek kan dit nie onthou nie, ek het altyd gekyk as oupa skeer want dit was vir my so mooi, die skuim... maar nooit saam met ouma, miskien toe ons klein was dat ons nie onthou nie.

E: Maar julle het nie haar liggaam, ek het altyd by my ma gesit ek meen ek ken my ma se lyf kaal...

P: Ons het met ons kinders ook, maar nie met ouma V nie.

E: Het tannie P ooit al gewens dat sy warmer was?

P: Weet jy 'n mens is geneig om haar te onthou soos sy nou is en sy is eintlik nou sag en liefdevol.

E: Maar as tannie P nou in retrospek terugdink wens tannie P dalk sy was warmer met tannie P kleintyd of dat tannie P nou besef dis iets wat tannie P verlang?

P: Soos ek sê al wat ek van kontak onthou is dit was so lekker vir my as ek by haar kon slaap, so in haar skoot, maar ek moes seker maar baie klein gewees het en dit het seker maar min gebeur.⁸⁰ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App 3A).

⁷⁹ I enjoyed often sleeping with her in her bed when grandpa wasn't there, but she was strict, grandma was very strict I think that's why we never stepped out of bounds because she was very strict.

⁸⁰ P: Huh-uh, we were very private.

Me: Did you ever see your mother naked when you were little, sitting with her when she was taking a bath or getting dressed?

P: I can't remember that, I always watched my father when he was shaving, the foam was pretty to me, but never with grandma, may be when we were little that I can't remember.

M: But you didn't, her body, I always sat with my mother, I mean I know my mother's naked body...

P: We did with our children too, but not with grandma V.

M: Have you ever wished that she was warmer?

P: You know one tends to remember her as she is now and she actually is soft and loving now

M: But if you look back, in retrospect do you wish that she was warmer with you when you were a child, realising it's something you long for?

She starts off by saying that she and her sister never saw each other naked and offers the old chestnut 'we were very private'. In my family the word *private* covers an array of denials; it morphs into a decent excuse not to do, see or talk about many things. *Private* is a wall one can put up any place where you do not want others to trespass. When asked about seeing her mother naked, she says she cannot remember and immediately jumps to telling a story of witnessing her father in the more intimate act of shaving. She also adds that they might have seen their mother naked when they were younger and just can't remember. She never answers, she negates, she counteracts with another story or excuse so as not to face the reality.

When I ask her if she ever wishes her mother was warmer she does the same thing, here she resorts to time as a strategem time and jumps both between herself then and now as well as my grandmother then and now. Does she tend to remember her as she is now, or is it how she forces herself to remember, or rather to forget? I have to ask her specifically if she now, in retrospect, looks back and wishes her mother was warmer. She finally answers by mentioning again that she loved to sleep with her mother, being close to her body, sharing her intimate space. Then she adds that she must have been really small and that it probably did not happen a lot.

She cannot form a negative opinion about her mother, as though saying she was 'cold' would be a betrayal; one remains unsure of what it is she feels. It is clear that her relationship with her mother (particularly the physical relationship) is complex and uncertain, as she herself is insecure. This lack of intimacy with the mother and the denial of the body leave one wondering about my grandmother's daughter's formation of their selves, their identities and sexualities.

P: Like I say all physical contact I remember is that it was so nice when I slept with her in her lap but I must have been little and it probably didn't happen a lot.

When asked what she remembers of her mother's body face or clothes the middle daughter replies:

O: O kan nie so onthou nie.

Ek: Was sy vir O mooi?

O: Soos ek sê ons het nooit gedink aan mooi of lelik nie as ek nou 'n foto sien sal ek miskien dink sy lyk mooi, daai tyd ook.

E: Het O kleintyd gedink O wil soos ouma lyk as O groot is?

O: Nee, nee.

E: Hoe het sy geruik?

O: Ek kan nie onthou nie, al slaan jy my dood⁸¹ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 2A).

She retorts that she cannot remember what her mother looked like physically,⁸² yet later on describes her father in detail; one cannot but deduce here that this is a loaded silence. She does not answer whether her mother was beautiful to her or not; she affirms that they did not think in terms of beauty yet she is adamant that she did not, as a child want to look like her mother; this she seems to remember, yet cannot remember what her mother looked like. It seems that instead of negativity or honesty, she resorts to silence and denial; her mother's body, the physical and the intimate are totally refused. She utilizes 'forgetting' as the eldest daughter uses the term 'privacy' to steer away from the dark silences. The entire physical experience of her mother, her body, smell, face, and clothes everything is denied.

The middle sister recounts that she cannot remember her mother physically when she was growing up. She did not sleep with her mother, take a bath with her, see her naked, go into her bedroom or have much physical contact with her (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 2A). How then did she deduce her own sense of self, her own sensuality and sexuality? How

⁸¹ O: I can't remember

Me: Did you think she was pretty?

O: Like I said, we never thought about ugly or pretty if I see a photo now maybe I will think she looks pretty, those days as well.

M: When you were little did you want to look like your mother when you grew up?

O: No, no

M: What did she smell like?

O: Even if you hit me over the head with it I wouldn't be able to remember.

⁸² Her sisters could recall clearly what their mother looked like when they were children.

did she come to say ‘I am’? When I ask her to describe what kind of mother her mother was, she (like the eldest daughter) draws a line between then and now, between herself and her mother when she was a child and now. She suggests that with age and in retrospect she realises that there were ‘better times’ that her mother did care. She continues to deduce, in a very sober way, which she must have been close to her parents, because she hated to be away from home.

How can these silences, implied loss of memory and her austere and removed rendering of her mother and their feelings for one another, communicate anything but the depths of dysfunction, denial and tension in their relationship. What makes this more complex and multidimensional is that when I say that they were not physically close to their mother, but that their mother spoiled them with other things such as heating their clothes at the coal stove before school in the winter, she replies: “sy het daai bederf, oh yes, oh yes, daai tipe bederfies was daar altyd en met ons kos en met ons klere...”⁸³ (personal interview, Dec 2009. App 2A). I seem to come back to what I said earlier: as complex and as broken as this female family narrative might seem through all its neglect and silence, there is not a lack of love or compassion. The body and intimacy just seems to remain very deeply submerged.

Sad as it was to hear that my aunt kissed her father on the forehead for the first and last time only after he had died, it was even sadder to hear that my mother cannot remember her mother ever holding her hand as a child and that her mother never told her she loved her. When one hears these things, it is easy to form a specific and negative idea of this family, but it is not even remotely as simple as that. The narrative is threaded so intricately, constantly moving between weft and web, that one can never come to any one definite conclusion. This becomes very clear as my mother reveals her mother as she experienced her while growing up. One not only realises that relationships are individual (though there is undeniably a shared/collective thread), but that there is no singularity, of self or other. There is no one mother and one child, the ‘I’ for both shifts and stumbles. The testimony, the witness and those who are testified about remain unstable and in flux.

⁸³ She did spoil us in those ways, oh yes, oh yes that types of spoiling were always there, and with our food and with our clothes...

My mother remembers that her mother smelled like the Yardley perfumes, creams and make up she used; she remembers that she loved all her mother's scarves and jewellery and adds that she has many of her mother's things in her home. She continues:

Ek: Het Ma ooit by Ouma gaan slaap?

My Ma: Ek dink nie so nie ek weet nie van toe ek heel klein was en nie kan onthou nie maar nie wat ek kan onthou nie.

E: Het Ma Ouma ooit kaal gesien?

M: Ek glo nie nee, nie heel kaal nie, ek sou partymaal in die badkamer ingaan as sy besig was maar sy sou nie heel kaal gewees het nie, sy sou sê nou maar haar onderklere aangehad het maar ek sou moes wag dat sy eers dit aantrek of die handdoek oorgooi dan het ek partymaal daar gesit⁸⁴ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 4A).

E: Watse tipe ma was sy?

M: Kyk sy was 'n goeie ma ek kan weer dieselfde goed noem dat sy daar was vir 'n mens en as jy bang was of nie geweet het van iets nie sou sy jou gehelp het. Sy sou in alle opsigte vir jou gesorg het vir my baie bederf het. Sy was miskien nie warm in die sin soos aanraak of by haar sit of vertroetel nie maar tog het ek nooit betwyfel dat sy lief is vir my nie⁸⁵ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 4A).

Though my grandmother was not physically warm and available my mother never doubted that she loved her. My mother, to a limited degree, was allowed to enter my grandmother's intimate space when she was permitted to sit with her in the bathroom. Though she never saw her mother's body naked or slept in her mother's bed she is allowed more intimacy.⁸⁶

It is because of the family narrative that my mother has no doubt that her mother loves her; the narrative provides a 'language' in which to navigate without saying or doing what one

⁸⁴ Me: Did you ever sleep in your mother's bed?

My mother: I don't think so I don't know when I was little and can't remember but not that I can remember now.

Me: Did you ever see your mother naked?

Mother: I don't believe so, not totally naked, I did go into the bathroom sometimes while she was busy but she wouldn't be totally nude I would have to wait till she put on her underwear or got a towel, then I sometimes sat there.

⁸⁶ This could be because she is twelve and sixteen years younger than her sisters, my grandmother has possibly started to let her guard down.

does not feel comfortable with. It is also a set of rules and boundaries within which one must operate. Even in childhood there is a distinct awareness of this and as an adult, when the failures becomes visible and are still not admitted, certain excuses are made for the narrative.

Sy sou byvoorbeeld as ek siek is my bors invryf met vicks of partymaal my hare help vasmaak... my versorg het en begaan gewees het. Sy was net nie 'n aanraak/drukkie mens nie.

Sy het nie gesê sy is lief vir my nie, ek dink nie ek het dit ooit gehoor nie maar ek het nooit getwyfel daaraan nie. Sy kon kwaai wees en sy was in 'n groot mate, wel met my dan, baie negatief - sy sou as ek iets wou aanpak om te doen somer byvoorbaat sê ek sal nie kan nie of 'jy kan tog nie dit nie' of 'jy sal tog nie dat nie'. En dit was nogal sleg want in my lewe het sy my nooit selfvertroue gegee nie daar was nooit 'n aansporing nie, ek het nooit gehoor 'ja probeer dit jy sal kan nie'. Nooit het ek dit gehoor nie, nooit is nou 'n groot woord maar nooit.

So ek het nie gedink, nog steeds is dit 'n probleem, dat ek nie dink is tot veel in staat nie. En as daar 'n talent was, ek dink ons is so nederig grootgemaak (en dit het van my pa se kant gekom), as jy gesien het die kind het een of ander talent sou jy ook nie daarop geroem het en die kind aangepor het nie. Dan lyk dit netnou of jy spoggerig is, jy weet, of grootpraterig, so dis moeilik.⁸⁷ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 4A).

My mother relates that her mother never told her she loved her never supported or encouraged her and always ran her down. She describes and defends the narrative when she discusses how their talents were never encouraged, explaining that it came from her father's side, that they were very humble, partly out of fear that people might feel they were showing off. She ends by still saying that her mother was good to her. She has to adhere to the given narrative, knowing how to read both presence and absence and what meaning to attach to it. Pulling at one thread might lead to an entire collapse. I would go so far as to say that if my mother were the same type of mother as her mother was, she would say she was a bad mother. In raising her own children my mother could partially escape her family narrative,

⁸⁷ She would, for instance, when I was ill rub my chest in with Vicks or help me tie my hair... she would take care of me and be concerned about me. She wasn't a physical contact/hug type of person. She did not tell me she loved me, I don't think I ever heard it, but I never doubted it. She could be severe and she was to a large extent, well with me then, very negative - if I tried something she would say I won't be able to do it 'you won't be able to this' or 'you won't be able to that'. And that was bad because in my whole life she never motivated me or gave me self-confidence, there was never motivation I never heard 'yes, try that you can do it', never is a big word, but never. So I never thought, I still don't, that I have much ability. And if there was a talent, I think we were raised to be humble (that came from my father's side), if you saw the child had a talent you would not brag about it or spur the child on. Otherwise it might look like you are bragging, you know, or boasting, so it's difficult.

but when it comes to the household she grew up in and her own parents, she adheres to their narrative; there is no other way for her to navigate these relationships.

I ask my mother when she felt close to her mother:

My ma: Sê maar as ek siek was en sy het my bietjie vertroetel en as sy my dan aangeraak het. In haar kerk miskien, dit het ons saam gedoen saam Anglikaanse kerk toe gegaan. Partymaal, daar was klein oomblikies wat ek nie vir jou kan sê wat was dit wat gebeur het nie, wat daar nabyheid was. Nou nog partymaal, soms gebeur dit dis sulke goue oomblikies. Want andersins, soos ek sê, ek is lief vir haar en sy is lief vir my en ek weet dit, dis nie altyd dat sy lelik is nie maar dis min wat daar 'n 'closeness' is, wat jy daai iets voel, veral nou wat ek my groter jare kan onthou.

E: Sou ma wou gehad het sy moes warmer wees?

M: Ja ek dink dit sou lekker gewees het en ek dink dit sou my ook warmer gemaak het in die lewe en om warm te wees met jou mense gee hulle 'n stuk selfvertroue. Dis 'n *comfort*, ek het geweet ek is geliefd maar dis tog iets anders 'n vrede wat dit binne jou bring, 'n heelheid, jy is kompleet⁸⁸ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 4A).

My mother recalls being ill and her mother tending to her as the moment she felt closest to her mother, the only time they were physically close and intimate with each other's bodies. When there is a function to fulfil, my grandmother could be intimate physically but not for other reasons. Mira Hamermesh writes:

Only at night did I love my mother absolutely. Sharing her bed, the maternal body which engulfed me in its warmth and scent filled me with a sense of security and bliss. Even in the intimacy of sharing a bed her flesh signalled an aura of majesty which explained in part her distance from childish things. She was a good mother devoted to her children and home. We were all fed and dressed, and were kept neat. There was no nonsense about toys, stories or hugging us. Only during an

⁸⁸ My Mother: When I was sick and she would pamper me and when she would touch my then. In her church maybe, that was something we did together, going to the Anglican Church. Sometimes, there were small moments, that I can't really tell you what it was that happened, that there were closeness. Now still sometimes it happens, little golden moments. Because otherwise, like I said, I love her and she loves me and I know that, it's not that she was always nasty to me but it's not often that there was a 'closeness', where you felt that something, especially now that I remember my older years.

Me: Would you have liked it if your mother was warmer?

Mother: Yes, I think it would have been nice and I think it would have made me warmer in life, and to be warmer towards your family gives them a piece of self-confidence. It's a comfort, I knew I was loved but it is different, it brings peace inside you, wholeness, you are complete.

illness did I feel her hot, anxious love, and was sorry when I quickly recovered (1996: 28).

Strange how Hammermesh also singles out sleeping with her mother and when she was ill as moments of love; she offers similar reasons as to why her mother was a 'good mother'. Yet she hungered for love and the intimacy with her mother's body, so much so that she wished to remain ill. Being close to her mother's body, the warmth and the scent, fills Hammermesh with a sense of security and bliss. Similarly my mother answers that if her mother was warmer, it might have offered her more self-assurance, peace and a sense of wholeness and being complete. This illustrates the importance of the child's physical and intimate interaction with the mother's body.

My mother also mentions the small moments that she cannot recall or really describe, but moments of closeness, 'golden moments of closeness', which she otherwise rarely experienced. Rich writes that "the child gains her first sense of her own existence from the mother's responsive gestures and expressions. It is as if in the mother's eyes, her smile, her stroking touch, the child first reads the message: *You are there*" (1976: 18). Because of the lack of physical intimacy with their mother, my mother and her sisters seem not to have successfully gained the ability to say that they 'are', and 'who they are'. The lack of physical intimacy seems to have deprived them of a full 'presence' and sense of self.

Adrienne Rich also writes that "Mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other – beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival – a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other" (1976:220-221). The bond between a mother and daughter is visceral, beyond or before language, one body's knowledge of and connection to another. The denial of intimacy between mother and daughter is the denial of an ancient yearning that ultimately becomes a denial of self for the child. In the absence of this female narrative the wailing silences restrain even the subliminal, leaving only the ligature marks for one to try and comprehend. What is our family narrative? For better or worse it is being able to say: "Want andersins soos ek sê ek is lief vir haar en sy is lief vir my

en ek weet dit”, despite the fact that you were never told or allowed to experience it intimately⁸⁹ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 4A).

Surrogates, Inheritance and Sanitization

It is as though my grandmother was just incapable of dealing with or showing/participating in certain emotions and activities, I cannot glean if this is because of a true incapability, or for self-preservation or some darker, hidden reason. She often allocated *surrogates* to do that which she could not; for example, her sister took her eldest daughter to school on her first day, the eldest daughter (still very young herself) took the middle daughter on her first day, and another of my grandmother’s sisters took my mother. The reasons for this I cannot begin to fathom, but this is the narrative she negotiated, the web she spun around herself. My grandmother, who was for as long as I can remember the head of our family, is as complex as the narrative that she has played such a large part in weaving⁹⁰.

The material that I relate above leads me to believe that the women in my family have been at the head of an order of their own where they navigate a narrative within the narrative. The female narrative, a careful regiment of negotiations that exist within the larger structure of the family narrative is part of the daughter’s inheritance. Adrienne Rich refers to the child as “ a piece of reality, of the world, which can be acted on, even modified, by a woman restricted from acting on anything else except inert materials like dust and food” (1976: 20). While

⁸⁹ Otherwise, like I say, I love her and she loves me and I know that.

⁹⁰ Though my grandmother was often first in her class she wanted to leave school at sixteen, when I ask my grandmother what she wanted to be when she grew up she says nothing, yet she still has all her high school report cards at the age of ninety-two. She always says she had no ambitions and her favourite thing to do was dusting, she is not a social person and demands order and routine. At the same time my grandmother worked for a large part of her life, doing the ‘books’ for certain shops in town, she often wrote pieces for the local paper she was member and chairperson of the AWCA(African Women’s Christian Association) her whole life, she was involved in establishing a home for the elderly. Though being called a ‘hermit’ by some she always visited the elderly and the poor and instilled the importance of this in her children. She loved to give, and in secret she was always putting parcels together for the poor. She had a very good relationship with the coloured people of the town and was for many years the only white member of the town’s Anglican Church. My grandmother has corresponded with a coloured woman, whom she befriended when she worked in her house when she was a newlywed, for the last seventy years.

Nancy Chodorow writes that “Girls’ identification process, then, are more consciously embedded in and mediated by their ongoing relationship with their mother” (1978: 176). The eldest sister talks about her mother’s relationship with her father: “sy was kwaai met oupa, ek het partymaal in opstand gekom, jong as ouma dit moet hoor (ongemaklike laggie) toe hy ouer geword het, sy was verskriklik ongeduldig met hom, ek dink dis hoekom ek ook met oom G (haar man) so is ek beseft dit nie” (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 3A).⁹¹ The middle sister says something similar as she lists the traits and aspects she inherited from her mother: “Lap- en stopwerk by my ma geleer, sy het al hul kinders se stopwerk gedoen... Om volkome en tevrede huisvrou te wees – ongelukkig ook om te ‘nag’. Dat die versorging van my kinders prioriteit is – ongelukkig ook om my man dan op die agtergrond te skuif. Om antisosiaal te wees, te huisgebonde⁹² (written questionnaire, Dec, 2008. App. 2C).

My grandmother gave birth to daughters and created a home; she also gave birth to a narrative and created or made manifest certain identities. She acted upon her children, knowingly and unknowingly, as if they were props on a stage, objects to be imbued with identity and the ability to say “I am” (Chodorow, 1978: 78). And it is indeed as Zoë Heller writes about her mother: “I am, I realise, the best memento I have of her” (1996: 12). My grandmother’s daughters inherited and then enacted their mother’s relationship with their father with their own husbands. The middle sister lists together (matter-of-factly) her fondness for mending clothes, her distance from her husband, her children as priority and the propensity to be antisocial and a nag. ‘Domestic abilities’ are ranked with one’s husband and children, the surroundings of the housewife’s life, her environment, and family are the props upon which she acts.

Edward T. Lithental, as referred to earlier,⁹³ writes that silence should not be a commemorative impulse for “then the interpretive field would be left open for murderers of memory, all too eager to fill the void with comforting expressions of sanitization,

⁹¹ She was severe with grandpa, I sometimes became rebellious, if grandma should hear this (uncomfortable laugh) when he got older, she was very impatient with him, I think that is why I am the same with uncle G (her husband) I don’t even realise it anymore.

⁹² Mending and needlework I learned from my mother, she did it for all her siblings... to be totally satisfied as a housewife – unfortunately also to nag. That the care of my children takes priority – unfortunately also to shift my husband to the background, being antisocial and too housebound.

⁹³ See Chapter 1.

domestication, trivialization and other insidious forms of forgetfulness” (2006: 235). My grandmother wove a narrative to surround and support her silence’s with the use of what Lithental calls the ‘murderers of memory’. The domestic, sanitizing and the trivial are what my grandmother’s life consisted of and what she clung to in order to organise and make sense of her life, and inevitably what she passed onto her three daughters. The eldest daughter feels that the most important part of her identity is that she likes order in her life (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 3A). She is someone who is precise and strict about schedules this she indeed learned from her mother. The middle sister tells me that on the day her father died she could not stop thinking about whether she should open one or two cans of sweet corn that night (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 2A). Sanitizing and ordering the domestic and trivial are at the core of the female narrative, inherited through the mother/daughter relationship in order to perpetuate it.

My mother told me that when she was little her grandmother had chicks and told her she could have one. She was extremely happy for she was never allowed to have pets. There was a little white one that was her favourite, but she picked the yellow one; when her grandmother asked her why, she said it would not get dirty as easily as the white one (personal journal. App. 4C). In our interview my mother tells me:

Ma: Ek dink nie ek het ooit vuil geraak nie ek weet nie hoe ek dit reg gekry het nie maar ek was nooit vuil nie. Ek was altyd so verskriklik skoon ek weet ek het partymaal, want dan was daar kinders wat vuil is en dit het vir my lekker gelyk, dan gaan sit ek in daai gruis en dan gaan smeer ek myself... maar dan wil ek nie vuil lyk nie jy weet dis stowwerig seker maar ek het nie kolle nie ek is nie vuil nie (sy lag).

Ek: (ek lag) Ouma het ma seker gescotchgaurd met geboorte.

M: Ek weet Mnr. van Onselen (dit het ouma my vertel) as hy daar kom dan sê hy weet nie hoe hou sy my so skoon nie. Ek weet nie hoekom was dit snaaks om vuil te wees nie dit het net lekker gelyk⁹⁴ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 4A).

⁹⁴ Mother: I don’t think I ever got dirty I don’t know how I did it but I was never dirty. I was always so clean, I know sometimes I, because there were other children that were dirty and it looked nice, I went and sat in the dirt and smeared myself... but I couldn’t get dirty, dusty but no stains I’m not dirty (she laughs).

Me: (I laugh) Grandma probably Scotch-guarded you at birth.

Mother: I know Mr van Onselen apparently always use to say (my mother told me), that he didn’t know how my mother kept me so clean. I don’t know why it was interesting to look dirty it just looked good.

Hygiene and sanitization were my grandmother's allies against whatever befell her days; cleaning and having order in her home were the tools she used to create her narrative of silence and negation. My grandmother's sister's words return to me; as she described the day she found out my mother was pregnant, she mentioned that my grandmother was cleaning: "sy het mos altyd skoongemaak"⁹⁵ (personal interview, Apr, 2009. App. 7A). It was the way my grandmother operated and what she taught her daughters, yet my mother could barely adhere to these 'rules' of hers and could never make them her own. She chose the yellow chick because she yearned to be dirty, to shed the facade of cleanliness. Yet, hard as she tried, she just could not get dirty. My mother is the one of my grandmother's three daughters who in many ways, concerning the everyday practice and upkeep of the narrative, untangled herself most from it. Yet when she visits her mother, she still adheres to those rules and she shares and keeps the sanitized silences of the unsayable and unsaid that make up the largest part of her inheritance⁹⁶.

Closing Realisations

I have come to understand that we navigate, control and create the contradictions and complexities in and of the narrative through our interaction with words and language, and our manipulation of time. This interaction and manipulation carry an aspect of violence. This act of simultaneously creating and surviving the narrative remains inadequate, because we enforce linearity, thus creating lacunae and the condition of the heaviness and lightness of being (Bartel, 1996; 151). I realized that for me to consider things beyond linearity, where it becomes labyrinth (such as my grandmother dwelling in the lacuna), I have to go outside of the narrative; thus I move within the archive. Finally I have learned from this chapter that our family narrative is beset with neglect and silences yet this does not indicate a lack of love or compassion. Our family narrative, contradictory in essence, seems to be (for better or worse), knowing without being told – that you are loved.

⁹⁵ She was always cleaning.

⁹⁶ This will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter Four

The mother's voice and the body in narrative and language

In this chapter I aim to locate the female voices, of my family narrative amid the complexities of language and the mother/daughter relationship. I look at the written female narrative as it exists in the realm of the private and the public, attempting to locate the spoken and unspoken themes of the body and daily routines of the housewife and mother. Within this focus on the written female narrative I observe the role of forgetting (collective, individual and selective), metaphor and surrogates. The problematic relationship with language arises as I observe the influence and repercussions of language, religion and naming in the lives of the women in my family. By finding their voices in their written narratives (both private and 'public') and locating their active, written participation in the narrative (even though unconscious), I aim to uncover some of the silences. This should lead to a clearer view of not merely how and why we (as women in my family) remember but especially how and why we forget.

Finding a voice of one's own

The world's earlier archives or libraries were the memories of women. Patiently transmitted from mouth to ear, body to body, hand to hand. In the process of storytelling, speaking and listening refer to realities that do not involve just the imagination. The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted and touched. It destroys, brings into life, nurtures. Every woman partakes in the chain of guardianship and transmission... Every gesture, every word involves our past, present and future. The body never stops accumulating, and years and years have gone by mine without my being able to stop them, stop it (Minh-Ha, 1993: 6-7).

As I have discussed in the previous chapters, the relationship between the body and the narrative is complex because of dualities such as *living/telling* and *intimacy /language* that linger throughout. What I find to be more convoluted than writing about the female body within my family narrative is finding the female body within the narrative. Locating and observing the female body in the writing of the women in my family is as difficult. As Minh-Ha notes, these archives and libraries are created by patient and intimate transmission –

possibly a place where the binaries of *'live and tell'*, *intimacy and writing* and *privacy and expression* are momentarily fused. It is here that speech needs to be 'seen, heard, smelled, tasted and touched', where speech, like the female body and the narrative, 'destroys, brings into life and nurtures'.

In the same vein, Mary Warnock writes that "to identify myself is to identify my body, including its brain; and to tell the story of my life is to express my awareness of this body that has persisted through time, and look back with the aid of imagination to make sense of, or interpret the past" (1994: 127). But the relationship between women, their bodies and language is complicated. In his discussion on the notion of the self, female sexuality and the woman's relationship to language, Marcel Mauss writes that to question the girl's body one has to question the women's body as a language. He proposes that we must salvage the female body from the oppression of language and the 'phallic term', and goes on to suggest that femininity is ascribed to a point before language that gives women access to an "archaic expressivity". This point of origin is the indistinguishable space of the mother's body that is recognized by the girl child (2000: 63).⁹⁷

This is possibly because the maternal body can be viewed as a point of origin before language, a place that is both in-descript⁹⁸ but familiar to the daughter, that Minh-Ha describes the discourse between women as speech that needs to be experienced through the senses (Minh-Ha, 1993: 6-7). The relationship between women, their bodies and language is intricate, yet the discourse between women, about and including, or negating, the body even more so.

As I have already quoted, Linda Wagner Martin, who writes in her book *Telling Women's Lives*: that for women the mother's voice often 'gave' them language yet the mother's voice

⁹⁷ I do however want to note, concerning both Minh-Ha and Mauss, that though I support their viewpoints I do not feel that the female writer is in any way (because of her complex relationship with language or this ulterior connection beyond or prior to language) 'unable' as a writer. I refer to an incapability of language and writing in a broad sense yet in no way demeans female writers or their ability, rather the 'ability' of all writers.

⁹⁸ I use the word 'in-descript', which indicates that the place cannot be specifically described, rather than 'nondescript', which implies the ordinary and unremarkable.

does more than just this (1994: 94). Adrienne Rich cites an extract from the diary of a European woman: “I was not myself. And not for a brief, passing moment of rapture, that men, too, experience, but for nine watchful quiet months.... then it was born. I heard it scream with a voice that was no longer mine” (1976: 161). It is because mother and child shared a voice for nine months that the girl child ‘recognizes’ herself in the place of origin, of the maternal body.

The creation or formation of a self and a personal own voice is a severing from the mother. Hirsch describes in *The Mother Daughter Plot* that girls deal with the ‘loss’ of the mother through language and narrative which becomes processes of substitution (1989: 53). Warnock writes that the process of finding one’s identity is to “express my awareness of this body that has persisted through time” (1994: 126). Thus language and the narration of the self – in order to establish one’s identity – is the severing from the mother’s voice to find one’s own voice.

Yet one cannot speak without having used the mother’s voice first – she is indeed for most of us ‘the one who gave us language’. “The daughter therefore speaks two languages at once’... what she calls the literal mother-daughter language exists only in brief moments of interruption and silence within the pervasive fabric of the symbolic”⁹⁹ (Homan cited in Hirsch, 1989: 45). Between the severing from the mother’s voice to find one’s identity and the recognition of the in-descript place that is the maternal body as the point of origin, the daughter indeed speaks two languages at once. The daughter reaches far beyond the grasp of ‘language’, a woman’s voice being hard to find. Her voice becomes confused between the separation from the mother, in order to find her own identity, and the non-language that has its origin in the ‘in descript place’ of the maternal body.

In my family it is hard to find the female voices even in interviews and questionnaires. In the correspondence my grandmother kept over the years and her scrapbook, I found an oddly haphazard, fragmentary choir of beautiful voices – voices that speak, if the words are “seen,

⁹⁹ Though Homan discusses the Victorian period I find this excerpt applies to my argument.

heard, smelled, tasted and touched”; they reveal the deep silences of the body (Minh-Ha, 1993:6).

The body *in* and *of* the text

Letters, the private and unofficial written female narrative

We can hear and trace languages of the unsayable. They lie in the realm of the timeless dream, which works by an associative logic and is often coded in metaphoric or figurative language... one must interpret by making another's words reverberate, allowing spoken and unspoken themes to come to life through the cadences and metaphors of a poetic language, the musical speech of the unconscious (Rogers, 1999: 83-84).

In *Surfacing* Margaret Atwood writes; “I touched him on the arm with my hand. My hand touched his arm. Hand touched arm. Language divides us into fragments, I wanted to be whole” (2004:140). As I read through my grandmother's correspondence, I read responses to her voice never her voice. I listen for the echoes of the spoken and unspoken within the fragments of body and metaphor, seeing that poetic language divides that which wants to be whole.

The written narrative I am confronted with can be divided into two categories: *Unofficial* and *private* – a scrapbook; and *official* and *public* – personal letters (of some only certain pages have survived). I shall start with the private. Though I find some of the handwriting hard to read I also find it intimate¹⁰⁰. Their handwriting becomes a remnant of their bodies. I remain aware of their bodies more intensely as I interact with these letters than when viewing their photographs. In one letter I find smears within the writing and realise that they were made by tears. I am moved by this further propinquity to the body of a woman I never knew myself. A woman who was older sister to my grandmother and aunt to my mother. A woman who, as I glean from her writing, was married to an abusive, unfaithful drunk. In her letters I hear both

¹⁰⁰ Many of the writers I knew and still know, many I never met yet know via the narrative.

the sound of silence's breaking as well as the reverberation of many unspoken themes, and via her writing I am introduced to many an arena I otherwise have had no access to.

I'll write about the letters more or less in the order I read them: In the first letter (one of the earliest letters) my grandmother's eldest sister writes that when she wants to cry she has to go to the garage. She continues by telling my grandmother of an incident where her husband was so drunk that when he went outside to urinate he fell with his head against a rock – blood streaming. She had to struggle for twenty minutes to get him into the house, adding that she couldn't leave him outside because it was too cold. These are not topics or incidents that are discussed in our family. I do not know how much my grandmother shared with her sister in return but do, however, gather from later letters that it is more than she normally discloses (Ill. 1A).

In her next letter T commences by bemoaning how fast time runs out, saying that her eldest child is turning 37 soon and that it is “autumn and the leaves falling past”(Ill. 1B). A few pages further she adds “want ons leef mos in en vir ons kinders¹⁰¹”(Ill. 1B). She measures her time with and by her children; it is clear from her letters that her life revolves around them and that her *being* is measured in and through them. Her children become surrogates – for herself, for her time and for what she has done, as well as what she could not do, with her time. She continues:

Alles, alles verg tyd en die kospotte wat gedurig roep is 'n dodelike sleurwerk, ek doen dit reeds nege en dertig jaar. Die vakansie het gekom en gegaan met sy klomp kinders in die huis en die groot vallende, dronk man, wat gedurig skimp, fout vind en snags lê en sanik oor seks... ek het gesê al die verlepte blomme in die huis weerspieël my verlepte gees; een vir een het die kamers leeg geraak tot op 'n aand dat net ek in die kombuis gesit het... ek wou huil, toe los ek maar¹⁰² (Ill. 1B).

¹⁰¹ Because we live in and for our children.

¹⁰² Everything, everything takes time and the pots on the stove that are always calling are a deadly routine work, I've been doing it for thirty nine years. The holiday came and went with its crowd of children in the house and the falling, drunk man, who regularly hints, finds fault and at night lies moaning about sex... I said all the wilted flowers in the house mirror my wilted soul; one by one the rooms emptied till one night there was only me sitting in the kitchen... I wanted to cry, but I didn't.

She mentions the monotony of the drudgery of a housewife that never end, suggesting the pointlessness of what has filled her hours for thirty-nine years. The house becomes a surrogate for her as well, and as it empties of children, so she becomes emptier, because as she wrote she lives ‘for and through them’. She is left alone in the kitchen, which is the centre of her life of drudgery as housewife and home as well as her place of solace. The ambivalent physical space of the home, specifically the kitchen, reflects the ambivalence of the housewife and mother, for though it is the cross she seems to bear, it is also all she is left with after the children are gone. In one of her later letters, when she was living in an old age home, she writes “I dream of my warm kitchen of long ago” (Ill. 1C).

She wants to cry but does not. There is no room for her emotions; they are hidden either in the garage, negated or merely marked as something she yearned for but did not do, as in this letter. Hence the letter to her sister becomes a surrogate or vessel for her emotions. Many years later she writes to my grandmother (after my grandfather passed away) to console her: “I just want the letter to be a lifeline between us” (Ill. 1D). The letter itself is not merely a mode of communication; it is also a physical object that becomes a surrogate for both her own feelings as well as a ‘lifeline’ between her and her sister. The letter becomes an embrace, a presence, holding much more than just words.

T writes plainly and openly about the body; the body exists in her writing as it does in her life; she does not deny or silence it. hers is one of the clearest voices concerning the body in our female family narrative, shattering one of the largest taboos when she writes that her husband complains about wanting sex. Sex is never talked about; to write about it is (in this family) revolutionary, but to write that she denies her husband sex is even more astounding. She does not use euphemisms or skirt around the issue. She writes it plainly. Later in the same letter she writes that stockings, toiletries and pads are so expensive. Again, this is not something that they conversed about (Ill.1B). Somehow T moved beyond the confines of the narrative; she and my grandmother are almost opposites in this sense. The individuality in meaning and the employment of the narrative becomes evident in the ways these two sisters from the same background and upbringing, negotiate the narrative so differently.

T writes on a small piece of stationery, ironically bearing an ‘Always ask for Mainstay’ logo, no address, no date, just added onto a letter (no way of knowing which letter):

Ai V (my ouma) ek het so swaar met die ou man, sy blaaie vrot so, skoon knoffel, wil nie was nie, toe ek vanoggend sê ‘was jou blaaie’ moet jy sien hoe ek met rooi oë deurboor word. Sy pote vrot net so, en sy opgooi, o alles stink so ek is op gesukkel en jy weet whiskey vrot so. Ek het hom al gesê ‘jy lewe nog en is nou al stink’. Ek word so kwaad. T¹⁰³(Ill. 1E).

I do not think there is any other such description of the body anywhere in our family narrative. This note is the epitome of what we never talk about. What also strikes me is that out of many years of correspondence these are the letters my grandmother kept, even though they must have caused her disgust and discomfort. Were they possibly her surrogate for what she never talked about, the monument to her own silence around the body? As though she too felt that somewhere such descriptions had to exist, somewhere and by someone, even if not by her?

It is also in one of T’s letters that I found evidence of my grandmother’s menopause, a subject obviously not talked about, and a subject that in those days did not even have a name. In the same letter in which she writes that her husband hints for sex, she asks my grandmother how it is going with her hot flushes (Ill. 1B). Just one simple question, pointing to an insignificant act of the body, reveals to me my grandmother’s menopause and the intimate physical changes in her body that otherwise have gone unmentioned. While reading T’s writing, Adrienne Rich’s words comes to mind: “I have come to believe... that female biology – the diffuse, intense sensuality radiating out from clitoris, breasts, uterus, vagina; the lunar cycles of menstruation; the gestation and frustration of life... has far more radical implications than we have yet come to appreciate” (Rich, 1976: 21).

The everyday, domestic tasks that filled these women’s lives filter into their writing and one finds fragments of documentation of lives and tasks that were otherwise never

¹⁰³ Oh V (my grandmother) I have such a hard time with this man, he’s armpits stinks so, pure garlic, doesn’t want to wash, you must see the piercing, red-eyed look I got this morning when I told him this to wash his arm pits. His feet smell just as bad, and his vomit, oh everything stinks so I am tired of this struggle, and you know how whiskey can stink. I have told him ‘you’re still alive and you’re stinking already’. I get so angry. T.

commemorated. From this I glean what is important to them, how they view women and their duties and ‘place’, as well as catch brief glimpses of the expression of a self that becomes quite poetic.

T closes a letter to my grandmother by saying that it is getting late and that she still has to make something for supper. She starts another by writing: “Dis vroeg, net na ses en heel koud vanoggend, soveel so dat ek die kombuis vensters al twee toe moes maak en op my ou plek voor die Esse sit skrywe. Klaar koffie gedrink, hond en kat kos gegee, my godsdiens gedoen”¹⁰⁴ (Ill. 1F). A lifelong friend of my grandmother’s starts her letter: “Dis Sondagoggend na kerk en terwyl die Sondagete sy laaste stoompies prut begin ek maar skryf – sommer hier by die klein kombuistafeltjie neffens die stoof”¹⁰⁵ (Ill. 2A). The ‘simple’ routines and lives of the housewife and mother that belong to a world of silence are finally written in their own words, radiating from the kitchens of their homes, speaking of daily tasks.

The letters also reveals ideas about what they feel a woman, wife and mother should be. My grandmother’s friend J writes (while waiting under the dryer in the hair salon) that some of the stories she overhears become quite rough: “Ai die swakker geslag darem! Waarom sou ons dan ons ingetoënheid verloor het!?”¹⁰⁶ (Ill. 2B). This was written by a woman who, after the death of her husband, moved back to the city, started to work again and raised three children on her own. About motherhood she writes that my mother should be pleased she has a little boy and that it is a huge thing for a woman to be allowed to carry a man in her body (Ill. 2C). In another letter she writes: “a boy is your boy till he takes him a wife, but a daughter is your daughter all her life... it’s only the privilege of woman to bear and rear a man” (Ill. 2A). All of these fragments are slight entries into these women’s lives and their way of thinking. I sense from this the absolute pedestal on which these women placed men, yet always keeping them away. Women, no matter what their circumstances, view themselves as weaker than men. The bond between women is clear, for though it is an honour to carry

¹⁰⁴ It’s early, just after six and so cold this morning that I had to close both the kitchen windows and am writing at my old spot in front of the Essie (coal stove). Made coffee, fed the dog and cat and said my prayers.

¹⁰⁵ It’s Sunday morning after church and while the Sunday meal is simmering away its last bits of steam I start writing - here at the small kitchen table next to the stove.

¹⁰⁶ Oh the weaker sex! Why would we have gone and lost our modesty?!

and bear a boy he, unlike the daughter, does not belong to you. The daughter remains ‘her mother’s’.

These letters were written by a certain ‘self’, a certain ‘I’ who are without these accounts as much lost to them as to me. These letters give the reader glimpses of specific days that otherwise would have vanished, of ways of thinking and seeing that are now lost even to the author herself. The letter becomes a place where the housewife and mother’s life, filled with domesticity and sanitization (what Lithental labelled “the murderers of memory” (2006: 235)) are commemorated in their own words. Though it still hides the underbelly and mostly adheres to the outline of the narrative, we see fragments of a freedom here, an intimacy that is nowhere else to be experienced.

Through the letters one becomes aware of the complex code of metaphor, of the poetics of both what is written and not written. An example is T’s reference to flowers throughout years of letter writing. She mentions all the dead flowers in her house after the holiday and the departure of all her children and that the flowers reflect her soul. She ends this letter by saying “ons het sopas weer ’n hewige bui reën met blitse en donders gehad, my blomme hang almal pap gereën”¹⁰⁷ (Ill. 1B). Seventeen years later she writes (consoling my grandmother after my grandfather died), that she is in thought with my grandmother and (in her mind) visits my grandfather’s grave and puts on it a “small bouquet of forget-me-nots to always cherish his memory” (Ill.1.G). Later she advises my grandmother to keep fresh flowers in her bedroom and lounge: “it means so much to one, sometimes I had only one flower when it was winter, yet that one flower gave me cheer” (Ill.1H). Through the metaphor, that both suggests and conceals the unsaid, the poetry of the women in my family’s domestic ‘trivial’ lives becomes quite clear.

¹⁰⁷ We just had a heavy rainstorm with lightning and thunder; my flowers are all hanging, pulped by the rain.

Lest I Forget, the unofficial and public written female narrative

In my grandmother's little scrapbook, entitled *Lest I Forget*, one finds the official narrative. It contains articles on World War One and World War Two, my grandfather's printing apprentice certificate, invitations to weddings, obituaries, "In Memoriam" cards, a drawing by her eldest daughter that appeared in the newspaper and a few telegrams. *Lest I forget* is my grandmother's *official rendition*, the script for and by society, a place where the private was and could be celebrated in public.

Lest I Forget is my grandmother's antidote to her silence; it's her 'designated remembrance.' Yet between and within the official one uncovers another voice stirring in the silences. Her book has been visibly altered over the years as one finds certain pages torn out and clippings pasted over, creating a layering of articles and writing, some more visible than others. This book is my grandmother's palimpsest and should be acknowledged for the official writing in it, the selection of articles, their subtext and undertone, as well as that which is written/pasted over and torn out.

I want to single out four themes from my grandmother's book, the first of which is her father. Her father fought in WW1 and was nearly fatally wounded at the battle of Dellville Wood. This part of the narrative, here officially rendered, was also told and retold endlessly by my grandmother and her sisters. This interpretation of their father was very important to them and was, I believe, the most 'praiseworthy' fact about their father, something they could proudly hold up to the public.

When one opens the book it holds on the first two pages an In Memoriam card for her father and a letter he sent her. The card reads: "We were not there to see him die, or even hear his last faint sigh. Only God in heaven knows the sorrow of parting without farewell" (Ill. 3A). In the letter her father asks my grandmother to ask her mother to please send him his belongings and work tools with someone he will send, and ends the letter "Your affectionate father, R G" (Ill.3B). Her father, an alcoholic, left them because he brought too much shame

on the family. I guess this letter came shortly after he left – my grandmother was the only person he had contact with. Years later he died alone and was buried in Port Elizabeth; my grandmother and her eldest sister attended the funeral. The police informed my grandmother of his death, because by that stage she and her father had no contact any longer. By starting the book with her father’s death I realise the importance of remembering him. I find it strange that she includes the letter, because it slightly reveals the underbelly of this relationship – displaying information she does not usually volunteer or commemorate. The book marks both the end of her relationship with her father, via the letter, as well as the end of her father’s life, via the In Memoriam card. The official, ‘fit for the public’ narrative is shared, while a hidden narrative is hinted at, observed only if one listens to the unsaid.

Throughout the book there are articles, letters and clippings from newspapers containing writing on what a woman, wife and mother should be, some even underlined. I refer to just a few:

“Ek hou van ’n vrou omdat sy die moeder van ’n volk is. Ek hou van haar omdat sy my altyd sterker in haar teenwoordigheid laat voel. Ek hou van haar omdat sy bereid is om baie meer liefde te gee as wat sy ooit sal terugkry... ek hou van haar omdat sy die dood tart om my naamgenoot die lewenslig te laat sien.¹⁰⁸”(Ill. 3C)

“Moenie verspot aantrek nie. Moenie gedurig die onmoontlike wens nie. Moenie jouself bejammer nie. Moenie altyd ontevrede wees nie. Moenie aan onaangename dinge dink sodra u wakker word nie. Moenie oneerlik met uself wees nie¹⁰⁹”(Ill. 3D).

In my grandmother’s own hand is written: “sal ’n skrywer ooit kan die dieptes van ’n opregte moeder se gevoelens vir haar kind peil en besing. En die grootsheid van die liefde in haar hart? Nooit. Want dit het geen perke nie. Dit is goddelik en onbeskryflik.”¹¹⁰ A few pages on: “My wedding ring is the symbol of my two children” (Ill.3E). Though very little of her own voice is to be found, one can deduce that she must have had questions and struggles surrounding womanhood and motherhood; these collected writings were reminders and affirmations for her to steer by. I wonder if this is what she believed, what she wanted to

¹⁰⁸ I like a woman because she is the mother of a nation. I like her because she always makes me feel stronger in her presence. I like her because she is willing to give much more love than she will ever get back... I like her because she taunts death to bring my namesake into life.

¹⁰⁹ Do not dress foolishly. Do not constantly wish for the impossible. Do not pity yourself. Do not always be unsatisfied. Do not think of unpleasant things as soon as you wake up. Do not be dishonest with yourself.

¹¹⁰ Will a writer ever be able to fathom and praise the depths of a sincere mother’s love for her child? And the greatness of the love in her heart? Never. Because it has no limits. It is godly and indescribable.

believe or what she felt she had to believe. Though motherhood surfaces and is commemorated here, it is still ‘motherhood’ as ascribed by men and society.

Below my grandmother’s handwriting, asking if a writer will ever be able to capture the depths of a mother’s love for her child, a newspaper article (from the local paper) on the death of her mother is pasted. The heading reads: “Een van die goeie Moeders heengegaan¹¹¹”. The article mentions when and where her mother died, describes the funeral and then describes her mother: “Sy was een van die stilles in die samelewing, maar sy het haar onderskei deur ’n goeie vrou en moeder te wees¹¹²” (Ill.3F). This public view of my great grandmother reveals subtlety the person she was. Though her children and grandchildren loved her dearly and had nothing but praise for her, she was in her simplicity a complex woman. There are not very many photographs of her as she hated to be photographed, she did not really have any friends and did not leave the house much except to visit her children. She was, for the most part, a recluse. My mother says that she thinks she became more and more reclusive over the years, first because apparently she and my great-grandfather ‘had to’ get married as she was with child.¹¹³ After the wedding her family (who were prosperous farmers) ostracised her. Her husband was poor and after he returned from World War One, he became an alcoholic. Because of his alcoholism they were definitely on the margins of the community. Eventually her husband left her and she raised the smaller children on her own. This makes me wonder whether she was willingly a recluse or merely excluded from society. With this knowledge the fact that the newspaper labels her one of the ‘quiet ones’ in the community certainly takes on a more layered significance. The knowledge of what is unsaid, or not commemorated, alters that which is. The silence/archive alters the narrative impacting, changing and evolving through the creation of the narrative.

The fourth theme in the scrapbook, which stays with me the most, is the denial of entry to various aspects. These renegotiations of access are visible in pages torn out, clippings and telegrams removed with just the corners still remaining. In various places things were pasted

¹¹¹ One of the good mothers pass away.

¹¹² She was one of the quiet ones in society, but she excelled by being a good wife and mother.

¹¹³ This is not spoken of, I found out only recently.

over handwriting, in one of these instances I can decipher the following fragments of my grandmother's handwriting:

“Almal word vriendelik gegroet en verwelkom, net ek word verby gekyk. Ek wat so angstig op jou terugkoms wag en jou belange na die uiterste van my vermoë probeer behartig, en so verlangend uitsien... vir my helder... van ons twee is nou... Kwaad geword maar sien nou dis... is ek hartseer en bitter teleurgesteld¹¹⁴” (Ill. 3G).

What these fragments mean, to whom they were written and to what they refer I will never know. Yet these fragments remain important to me because they, as the archive of my grandmother's designated remembrance, speak loudly of the burden of her silences. Through the unwritten narrative, the silence of *Lest I Forget* seems to be what marks 'Lest I remember'.

Forgetting: Individual and Collective

Collective Forgetting

The distant lighthouse flash stabbing the pitch darkness; the squeak of a mouse breaking the stillness of an empty room; neither of these comes where nothing was before (Pear, 1922: 30).

By saying 'I do not know' something is known; by saying that the thing-in-itself is unknown and unknowable we render it knowable and indeed know something about it (Stanley, 1992: 43).

In my family it is seen as the woman's work to keep in touch, or to correspond. There is almost no correspondence between men and the women in the family; the women write to other women. Even when the letter is addressed to my grandmother and all three her daughters, it does not include my grandfather; regards and love are sent to him via my grandmother; he is never spoken to directly in the letters. Concerning correspondence and

¹¹⁴ Everybody are welcomed and greeted friendly, only I am looked over. I whom waited so anxiously on your return and am trying to look out for your interests to the best of my abilities, and waits so longingly... clear to me... of us two are now... Got mad but see now it's... I am sad and very disappointed.

keeping contact my aunt says “mans doen mos maar in elk geval nie so iets nie” (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 2A). When my grandfather’s brothers write from the prisoners of war camps in World War Two (some of the only letters written by men) the letters are mostly directed at my grandmother. Letter writing and keeping contact between families was the domain of the wife.

One of the deepest silences of our female narrative is found within this female realm of correspondence. My mother writes in a journal about her childhood, “Ouma het wel kontak gemaak (met Anne), sonder oupa se medewete, briewe gestuur en geskenke. Alles deur my ma”¹¹⁵ (personal journal. App 4C). Anne¹¹⁶ was my mother’s father’s sister; she was her parents’ only daughter and suffered from epilepsy since the age of 16. When she was older she went to live in Johannesburg. She had more than one husband as well as alleged affairs. It is also said that she drank. Because of her ‘lifestyle’ and choices, her father (my mother’s grandfather) banned her from her familyhome; she was not allowed to come back and no one was allowed to have contact with her or speak of her. As my mother writes, her grandmother kept contact with her daughter (Anne) through my mother’s mother. My mother, as well as both her sisters, remembers the letters and parcels that were sent to Anne. When I ask my grandmother what my grandfather (Anne’s brother) said about their correspondence she replies:

Ouma: Ja nee dit het hom nie gepla nie maar hulle was nie baie close nie...

Ek: Wou hy nie met haar kontak hou nie?

O: Huh-uh hy sou nie.

E: Maar hy het nie geworry dat ouma kontak gehou het nie?

O: Dit sou nie gehelp het hy worry nie ek sou nie opgehou het nie.

E: Sou ouma nie opgehou het nie?

O: Huh-uh ek was erg oor haar en sy was so erg oor my¹¹⁷ (personal interview, Sept, 2008. App. 5A)

¹¹⁵ Grandma however did keep contact, without Grandpa’s knowledge, send letters and gifts.

¹¹⁶ Anne is the only person whose name I use in this thesis, her name and legacy has been silenced and forgotten long enough. In this thesis as text marks her name and her existence.

¹¹⁷ Grandma: Yes, no it didn’t bother him; they were not very close...

Me: Didn’t he want to keep contact with her?

G: Huh-uh, he wouldn’t

M: But he didn’t mind that you did?

G: It wouldn’t have helped if he minded I wouldn’t have stopped.

M: Wouldn’t you have stopped?

G: Huh uh, I was fond of her and she of me.

I was surprised by my grandmother's reply. It made me realise just how powerful the female narrative could be. Its force could exclude men and thereby defy their power. As such the female narrative is an empowering and, alas, also a manipulative force.

Anne was an enigma; all the women seem to remember her, even though she was not to be spoken of. My mother's sisters remember Anne:

sy was uh altyd 'snaaks' want kyk sy het epilepsie gekry... En dan weet ek dan het ouma-hulle ons net skielik ons kleintjies uit by die voordeur, en dan moet ons op die stoep wag. Dan het sy 'n aanval gekry hulle wou nie hê ons moet dit sien nie want dit was lelik, sy het geruk en skuim..maar sy was 'n fyn skraal mens en... sy was nogal aantreklik... sy het altyd die lang naels gehad... ons het ons verkyk aan haar¹¹⁸ (personal interview, dec, 2009. App. 3A).

When I ask her about Anne's 'banishment', she seems to know nothing about it. I explain to her the situation as I heard it and she is still dumbfounded and replies: "ek het net gedog sy het maar nie meer gekom nie want sy het nog altyd geskryf ek sien nog die handskrif haar briewe" (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 3A). Though one sister claims to remember nothing, the other sister tells me the story (as she was told by her mother) of Anne's first epilepsy attack as well as how she remembers her:

Ouma het gesê sy (Anne) was vyftien of sestien... en sy het die aand saam met 'n kêrel uit iewers heen en toe hulle terugkom het hy haar voor op die stoepie gesoen en toe maak oupa F (haar pa) die deur oop en sien waar hulle staan en soen. Toe slaan hy haar met 'n belt of iets voor die man, toe het sy haar eerste aanval...

Ja, ons het altyd aan haar lippe gehang want sy het in die stad gebly... en sy het altyd so mooi aangetrek, sulke lang naels gehad wat sy bloedrooi geverf het en sulke fyn wit vingertjies... ek weet nie hoeveel maal sy getroud was nie, maar sy het baie mans gehad, sy was eers Taylor en op die end was sy Coetzee sy het baie boyfriends en nooit kinders gehad nie¹¹⁹ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 2A).

¹¹⁸ She was always uh interesting because she had epilepsy... Then I know grandma would suddenly take the small children outside and we would have to stay on the stoep. Then she had an attack they didn't want us to see because it was ugly, she had convulsions and foamed at the mouth... but she was a delicate slender person... she was quite attractive... she always had long nails... we were in awe of her.

¹¹⁹ Grandma said she was fifteen or sixteen... and that night she went out with a boyfriend somewhere and when they came back they kissed on the porch and grandpa (her father) opened the door and saw them kissing. Then he hit her with a belt in front of the man and then she had her first attack...Yes, we were always in awe of her because she lived in the city... and she always dressed so beautifully, she had long nails always painted blood red and such delicate white fingers... I don't know how many times she was married, but she had many men, she was first Taylor and in the end Cloete, she had a lot of boyfriends and never any children.

Anne seemed to be, for all involved, an attractive and mysterious being. Though they found her intriguing, beautiful and different, with her red nails and sophistication, she was also someone that they had to be protected from. They were ordered to leave the room when she had a fit because ‘it was not pretty’. My grandmother’s younger sister remembers similar incidents (personal interview, April, 2009. App. 6A). Ultimately, they were protected from her influence through the enforced ‘denial’ of her existence. She embodied both that which they were attracted to and that which was hidden from them. She personified the taboo. It is easy to think that she started out as an outcast because of her epilepsy, yet it seems her relationships with men played a bigger and more decisive role. Of all the stories told about Anne – how different she was, that she drank, that she had many men – I only once heard the story of her first seizure. It is clear to see here that the family pinned a scarlet letter on Anne, as red as her fingernails. I am as intrigued as the rest with Anne and am overwhelmed with compassion for her. Anne has become, in more ways than one, a part of my inheritance. Through the female and family narratives, both the denial of her and the remnants of her existence have become a part of my inheritance.¹²⁰ For me, as woman in this family, I become the archive for the forgotten (such as Anne) – my body becomes the archive for her physical inheritance. Despite my great-aunt’s words (“sy het heeltmal verdwyn”), Anne remains in the archive that is created by forgetting as the consequence of remembering – erasure as the result of documentation (personal interview, April, 2009. App. 6A).¹²¹

Blustein writes that “remembering must be understood in relation to the value of forgetting... the responsibility to remember must be regulated and tempered by an appreciation of the need to forget” (2008: 5). While Brison argues that a “traumatic event is experienced as culturally embedded (or framed), is remembered as such... and is shaped and reshaped in memory over time according, at least in part, to how others...” (Brison 1999: 42). It is of the utmost importance that the ‘value of remembering’ must be understood in relation to the ‘value of forgetting’, seeing as the two always occurs hand in hand. We have to not only view the periphery of the family narrative, but also keep in mind the reasons and circumstances for forgetting and that both remembering and forgetting are done within a ‘framework’ – in this

¹²⁰ Having recently had an epileptic seizure I am sharing in Anne’s physical inheritance and now, ironically, often have to mention my grandfather’s sister who had epilepsy.

¹²¹ In the sense that Robert (referring to Agamben) describes the archive: “every act of bearing witness thus carries with it an archive as that element of the unsaid under and around what is said” (2006:44).

case the framework of the family narrative. Anne is an example of how remembering and forgetting become embedded and manipulated within the family and individual narrative.

My mother tells me that when she was 11 or 12, she went with her parents to visit Anne. By that stage she was in a home as a result of her deteriorating condition from the epilepsy:

Ek: Het oupa saam ingegaan?

Ma: Ja (sy raak bewoë en haar stem klink amper soos 'n kind s'n) toe sy (Anne) vir hom gesien het, het sy so aangegaan, heel berserk geraak, sy was bly, in ekstase, die jare wat sy niemand gesien het nie en hier staan hy voor haar...

E: Wat het hy gedoen?

M: Ek weet nie dit was vir my verskriklike, ontsettende baie goed wat ek moes inneem want Anne was vir my hierdie misterieuse mens waarvoor my ouma en ma briewe geskryf het en pakkies gestuur het...

E: Hoe het sy gelyk?

M: Weet jy meitjie ek kan iets onthou van 'n kamerjas wat sy aangehad het dit was dunnerig en sy was nie normaal vir my nie, verstaan, hulle moes vir haar kalmeer ding kom gee. Ek kan nie die gesig onthou nie en ek dink baie gou na die ontmoeting het ouma gesê ek moet uitgaan, ek weet nie hoe my ma hulle gedink het dat hulle haar nie kon laat voorberei nie.

E: Het julle na die tyd daarvoor gepraat?

M: My ma-hulle het seker maar hulle het nie met my daarvoor gepraat nie, dit was vir my 'n baie erge ding, het my ma met jou oor dit gepraat?

E: Ek dink sy het gesê sy kan nie onthou nie.

M: As ek dit kan onthou dan moet sy dit kan onthou sy was 'n groot vrou. Sy (Anne) was eers half of sy nie geweet het wie dit is nie en toe se hulle vir haar, sy het gegil en berserk geraak¹²² (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 4A).

¹²² Me: Did Grandpa go in with you?

My mother: Yes (she becomes emotional and her voice sounds like a child's) when she (Anne) saw him she went off, totally crazy, she was happy, she was ecstatic all the years she didn't see anybody and here he was standing in front of her...

Me: What did he do?

Mother: I don't know for me it was terrible, appalling, many things I had to take in because to me Anne was this mysterious person my grandmother and mother wrote and send packages too.

Me: What did she look like?

Mother: You know meitjie I can remember something about a gown she had on it was thin and she didn't seem normal to me, understand they had to come give her something to calm her down. I can't remember her face and I think very soon after the meeting grandma told me to go outside, I don't know what my parents thought that they did not have Anne prepared.

Me: did you speak about it afterward?

Mother: My parents probably did but they didn't talk to me about it, it was a very severe thing to me, did my mother talk to you about it?

The conversation with my grandmother about this visit went as follows:

E: Kan ouma onthou dat ouma, oupa en mamma een keer vir Anne gaan kuier het in die gestig waar sy was, toe mamma nog 'n klein dogtertjie was?

O: (In 'n stil stem, fluister) Dit kan ek regtig nie onthou nie sussie.

E: Mamma het my daarvan vertel.

O: Dit kan ek regtig nie onthou nie want sy was in verskillendes.

E: Ek dink dis toe julle in Pretoria of so was.

(Sy se niks en praat weer oor die vlieë wat haar irriteer)¹²³(personal interview, June, 2009. 5A).

My mother discloses the immensity of seeing this woman in a state of deterioration and neglect, a woman who up to now has been a mysterious recipient of letters and parcels whom others both did and did not speak of. My grandparents did not speak to my mother about this after it happened. Though my grandmother had seemingly forgotten this incident, the trauma of the experience could not be obliterated from my mother's mind. In her journal my mother wrote about the same event and described it in detail:

Die gebou was baie donker binne. Roomkleur olieverf mure en al wat deur en kosyn en vensterraam was donkerbruin olieverf geverf. Daar was deure mat glaspaneel in. Geriffelde glas. Daardeur het ons geloop tot in 'n tipe ontvangs lokaal met stoele in. Kaal, koud en aaklig. Toe het hulle haar gaan haal. Tot in die uur kan ek nie onthou hoe haar gesig gelyk het nie. Sy was skraal en het 'n kamerjas aangehad. Baie armoedig. Sy was vreeslik opgewen en verward. Het glad nie geweet wie my pa was nie. Toe hy vir haar sê en verduidelik het sy mal geword. Sy was buite haarself en buite beheer. Sy het hom vassegryp en vreeslik tekere gegaan. Verder kan ek niks onthou nie. Dit was vir my 'n verskriklike ondervinding. Wonder of my ma my dalk uitgevat het, die dat ek nie onthou nie. Of het ek dalk verkies om niks verder te onthou nie?¹²⁴(personal journal. App. 4C).

Me: I think she said she couldn't remember.

Mother: If I can remember it she should be able to she was a grown women. She (Anne) was first as if she didn't recognize him and when they told her she screamed and became crazy.

¹²³ Me: Grandma can you remember the time you and Grandpa and Mom went to visit Anne in the institution, when mom was still a little girl?

Grandma: (in a quiet voice, whisper) I really can't remember that.

M: Mom told me about it.

G: That I really can't remember because she was in different ones.

M: I think it was when you were in Pretoria or somewhere.

(She says nothing, talks again about the flies that are irritating her).

¹²⁴ The building was very dark. Cream colored oil painted walls and every door and doorframe and windowsill was painted dork brown oil paint. There were doors with glass panels in. Corrugated glass. Through that we walked into a type of reception area with chairs in. Empty, cold and horrible. Then they went to fetch her. Till this day I can't remember what her faced looked like. She was slender and had a nightgown on. Very impoverished. She was very wound up and confused, didn't know who my father was. When he told her and explained she went crazy. She was outside herself and out of control. She grabbed him and totally lost control.

The journal was written before our interview. In the interview she does not mention her uncertainty about why she cannot remember, while in the journal she states that she is unsure. She is uncertain whether her mother took her out of the room or she just does not remember because she does not want to remember. My grandmother claims she remembers nothing of this event, yet the influence the mention of the event has on her tone of voice, lowering it to a whisper, and her sudden change of topic to the bothersome flies leaves me wondering. Like my mother I can merely ask if they truly forgot, responding in accordance with the response of the others (the family's), or merely did not want to remember.

One can start to discern the narrative's demands for the need to forget. My mother writes further in her journal one of the most important passages of this family's narrative:

Tot vandag toe kan ek nie verstaan dat 'n mens 'n geliefde van jou, bloed van jou bloed, so kan vergeet nie. So tot niet laat gaan. Vereensaam, alleen, verstote, verarm. Here help my dat ek dit nooit doen nie. Of weer doen nie... Sy het toe sy dood is 'n armlastige se begrafnis gehad, want niemand was bereid om daarvoor te betaal nie. Wat maak dit in elk geval toe saak, toe weet sy nie meer nie. Sy was die oudste van my ouma-hulle se kinders en het drie van haar vier broers oorleef. My pa was vyf en sewentig toe hy oorlede is en sy het nog lank daarna gelewe. In my oë die grootste sonde ooit gepleeg deur die familie. My inklusie¹²⁵ (personal journal. App 4C).

What my mother participated in but cannot fathom is the demand and fierce hold the web of the narrative has on the family that weaves, inherits and utilises it. To say that one does not know is to know something, the knowledge that silence and the dark are not empty. Blood runs thicker than water, but in our creation and practice of self and family, I am unsure if blood runs thicker than the narrative. The duality of the physical/body and language/narrative participates in both the perpetuation of the narrative and the contradictions that disturb the narrative.

Further I can't remember anything. It was a shocking experience for me. Wonder if my mother took me out, thus I don't remember anything. Or did I choose not to further remember anything?

¹²⁵ Till this day I can't understand how one can let a loved one, blood of your blood, be forgotten like that. Let her go to waste. Forlorn, alone, ostracised, impoverished. Lord help me to never do something like that. Or never do it again... When she died she had a pauper's funeral because no one wanted to pay for it. What did it even matter by then, she didn't know anymore. She was the eldest of my grandparents' children and survived three of her four brothers. My father was seventy five when he died and she still lived long after that. In my eyes the biggest sin ever committed by this family. Myself included.

Individual Forgetting

There are many forms of forgetting, practised for many reasons. One of these forms of forgetting is intentional forgetting – forgetting for self-preservation and the preservation of the idea or memory you would rather hold instead of the ‘reality’. In our interview my mother tells me that there are certain things she does not want to remember such as things that happened to her or her children, things her children did, my father’s heart attacks and triple heart bypass, and events surrounding her father’s death. These things she can think of and talk about to a degree but she does not ‘go there’, she ‘bans’ them from her mind. Events where she does not have all the information, where she fears for the worst and will never know the truth, she bans from her repertoire of memories¹²⁶ (personal interview, Dec, 2009. App. 4A).

She does not ‘practice’ these memories or thread these narratives, and they become intended, purposeful silences and gaps. Here the act of actively ‘not remembering’ and premeditated neglect becomes the preservation of the self (and of others) in a ‘state’ or a ‘plot’ that is acceptable to the self and the family.

My grandmother admits to a similar act of selective forgetting, when I ask her when she felt scared:

(in ’n sagte stem antwoord sy dadelik) As my Pa te veel gedrink het en hy is beduiweld, dit was *disgusting*, ek haal dit uit my geheue, ek wil dit nie onthou nie... Dan het hy nou in ’n ander kamer gaan slaap en dan is ons, die hele spul, by Mammie in die kamer, nou nie ligte nie die lamp brand nog, almal om haar, N(haar suster) ook. (stilte)
Ek sal nie my kinderdae vergeet vir die koningin nie, dit was te lekker.

¹²⁶ Me: Did Grandpa go in with you?

Mother: Yes (she becomes emotional and her voice sounds like a child’s) when she (Anne) saw him she went off, totally crazy, she was happy, she was ecstatic all the years she didn’t see anybody and here he was standing in front of her...

Me: What did he do?

Mother: I don’t know for me it was terrible, appalling, many things I had to take in because to me Anne was this mysterious person my grandmother and mother wrote and send packages too.

Me: What did she look like?

Mother: You know meitjie I can remember something about a gown she had on it was thin and she didn’t seem normal to me, understand they had to come give her something to calm her down. I can’t remember her face and I think very soon after the meeting grandma told me to go outside, I don’t know what my parents thought that they did not have Anne prepared.

Me: did you speak about it afterward?

Mother: My parents probably did but they didn’t talk to me about it, it was a very severe thing to me, did my mother talk to you about it?

Me: I think she said she couldn’t remember.

Mother: If I can remember it she should be able to she was a grown women. She (Anne) was first as if she didn’t recognize him and when they told her she screamed and became crazy.

(praat in 'n vrolike ligte toon en trant met my ma) Ek se vir haar (vir my) toe wat N so nege was, definitief nege, wat Daddy vir haar gesê het 'the belle of new york'... uhh (knik by haarself)¹²⁷ (personal interview, June, 2008. App. 5A).

She 'takes it out of her memory', she does not want to remember it, yet she still unfolds what it is she does not remember (though I understand that there is probably much more to the memory she removes than merely the description she gives). She offers this information for in her old age her 'guard' has come down, yet she still always censoring the narrative: she is so used to ordering and choosing her memories that in the same sentence she admits to disgust with her father (and the exclusion of these memories) she claims that she would not exchange her childhood for anything in the world. She ends off by telling an anecdote where their father interacted with one of his children in a positive way. I fear that there were not many of these moments, for between the sisters I have heard a small number of these tales shared over and over again. It is as though they have elected a few good memories to become the refrain, designating a narrative for their father. I guess the hope is that with the repetition of the good and the designated forgetting of the bad, one just might convince others, and hopefully yourself, that the narrative you have created is true. The women in my family seem to have become masterful writers/weavers of fiction.

The mother tongue as second language and the 'stranger's seat'

Language and religion

I have discussed the relationship between the mother and language, arguing that (as Mauss¹²⁸ suggests) the maternal body is a place of origin reaches 'before' language, and concluded (agreeing with Hirsch¹²⁹) that the daughter learns to speak two languages. One of these, the

¹²⁷ (In a soft voice she immediately answers) When my Father drank too much and he was like one possessed, it was disgusting, I take it out of my memory, I don't want to remember it... then he went to sleep in a different room and then we, the whole lot, were with Mamie in her room, not lights, the lamp still burning, everyone around her, N (her sister) too. (A pause) I won't forget my childhood for the queen. It was too nice. (talks in a light tone and manner with my mother) I told her it was then Daddy called N, when she was around nine, definitely nine, "the belle of New York" ...Uhh (nods to herself).

¹²⁸ 200:63

¹²⁹ 1989: 45

‘mother/daughter language’ existing in the intimacy of silences, which radiates from the stifled body.

The language we speak in my family was indeed given to us by our mother, yet she did not give us her ‘own’ language. For the women in my family language, religion and their names were to a certain degree sacrificed when one entered a marriage. For many generations in our family mothers raised their children with a spoken language not their own, possibly contributing to the fierce power of the narrative as a form of discourse, rather than a language, becoming a grid for living and interacting.

When I read my grandmother’s correspondence I noticed, especially in her sister T’s letters, that she wrote sometimes in Afrikaans and sometimes in English. On closer examination I found that the letters concerning everyday life, the private, the body were in Afrikaans but the letters in English were written for specific reasons such as condolence letters after my grandfather and their mother died. I also note that the later letters, when T was older, in a home and nearing her death, are almost all in English. Since childhood I can remember that for my grandmother certain things were done and said in English. When my grandmother said something profound or dear, it was more often than not is done in English; when she wrote something official (such as on the back of photographs), she did so in English. The official, the publicly/socially accepted is done in English, while the everyday, the living, the body is Afrikaans.

My grandmother and her parents were still taught English in school; what they knew ‘officially’ was English, while Afrikaans was a language for the home/the private. Yet in my grandmother’s home they spoke English because her father was English, her mother was Afrikaans, estranged from her family. More importantly, the language when speaking to their father was English. Yet they spoke to their mother in Afrikaans. My grandmother tells me of an incident in one of our conversations: “En een môre het ek iets gedoen wat verkeerd was toe sê Mammie ‘loop sê vir Daddy’ en ek gan en ek sê ‘Daddy’, nou is ek deur die wind en ek

wil Afrikaans praat en ek sê ‘maar’, hy sê ‘don’t you speak Afrikaans to me’”¹³⁰ (personal interview, June, 2009. App. 5A). My grandmother’s sister also tells me that they were not allowed to speak Afrikaans to their father and that her mother always wrote to her in English; she adds “skool was Engels soos ek sê ‘we were governed by England’ met die gevolg alles was Engels”¹³¹ (personal interviews, April, 2009. App. 6A).

They were ‘governed by England’, but they were also governed by their father. This is evident especially in how things changed after he left and after he died. My grandmother’s sister tells me that they were all confirmed in the Anglican Church except for the youngest sister; she went to the NG Kerk. The youngest sister was still very young when their father left and thus she became more ‘Afrikaans’ or as her sister puts it, “sy het heel verafrikaans”¹³² (personal interview, April, 2009. App. 6A). Of her two older sisters (one of which is my grandmother) she says that they were “baie goed in tale want hulle het Engels vlot gepraat want toe het Daddy gelewe en was die huistaal Engels”¹³³ (personal interview, April, 2009. App.6A). When her father was alive they went to the Anglican Church and spoke English. When he died, the youngest sister became Afrikaans and went to the NG Kerk. Interesting to note is the story my grandmother’s sister tells of going to the NG Kerk with her mother:

Baie keer as ons nie ’n predikant gehad het nie dan het Mammie dat ons NG Kerk toe gaan en dan het sy altyd voor gesit, hulle het dit die *vreemdelings bank* genoem, omdat sy half doof was, want mense het mos banke gehad met hulle naam op wat aan hulle behoort.¹³⁴ (personal interview, April, 2009. App. 6A).

Though her mother sat in the ‘vreemdelings bank’ because she was hard of hearing one cannot help but wonder if that was the only reason. When the Afrikaans woman returns to her own church after her English husband has left her she, sits in the ‘vreemdelings bank’. There

¹³⁰ And one morning I did something that was wrong and Mammie said ‘go tell Daddy’ and I go and I say ‘Daddy’, but I am dazed and I want to speak Afrikaans and I say ‘but’, he says ‘don’t you speak Afrikaans to me’.

¹³¹ School was English so like I say ‘we were governed by England’ with the consequence everything was English.

¹³² She became totally Afrikaans

¹³³ They were very good in English because Daddy was still alive then and we spoke English at home.

¹³⁴ A lot of the time when we did not have a minister we went with Mammie to the Dutch Reformed Church and then she always sat in front, they called it the ‘stranger’s bench’, because she was half deaf, and people had benches with their names on that belonged to them. These had been the benches with the doors on and it was the stranger’s bench and what in the front of the church and Mammie sat there so that she could hear.

is no true return for the woman after she has married; she does not even return to her own language in letters to her children, and she returns to her religion as a ‘stranger’.

My grandmother’s sister married an Afrikaans-speaking man, raised her children in Afrikaans and went to the NG Kerk.¹³⁵ My grandmother married an Afrikaans-speaking man, raised her children in Afrikaans and went with them to the NG Kerk, though she still went to the Anglican Church as well. When I asked her in what language she prays she quickly answers ‘English’.¹³⁶

The two languages, English and Afrikaans, demarcate certain realms, modes of behaviour and characteristics: English was the public, dominant, patriarchal, masculine and more ‘dignified’ language. Afrikaans marks the private, submissive, intimate realm of mother and home, used to speak of the unofficial – the body and the domestic. What is our (the women in my family’s) mother tongue? Could it not be true that they speak that ‘second language’ (which goes beyond language) and exists more in silences, because they are, and were, never speaking with their mother’s tongue? We do not have a language, just as we do not have a name.

Unnamed and Fragmented within Language

Naming

With their husband’s religion and language, a woman also take his name. I do not want to take my husband’s name, yet my name is my father’s and if I take my mother’s maiden name I take her father’s name, if I take my grandmother’s name I take her father’s name. How far

¹³⁵ Personal interview, April 2009. App. 6A.

¹³⁶ Personal interview, Sept 2008. App. 5A.

does a woman have to go back to find her own name? Mira Hamermesh writes in her essay *I love my mother, but* of the same frustration: “posterity of sorts is secured for our fathers, alive or dead, by bureaucracy. It took me a while to realise the gaping omission about our mothers” (1996: 27). In revolt she starts to add her mother’s name to all bureaucratic forms, through this documentation aiming to secure some posterity for her mother. Yet her mother’s name, her surname, is still not her own. Shakespeare asks –“What is in a name?” (1950: 912) Adrienne Rich writes that her mother’s name held a “kind of magic” for her as a child (1976: 219). Louis Althusser argues that “to recognize that we are subjects and that we function in the practical rituals of the most elementary everyday life (the hand-shake, the fact of calling you by your name, the fact of knowing... that you ‘have’ a name of your own, which means that you are recognized as a unique subject, etc.)” (2000: 32).

It is not as simple as the ‘rose still smelling as sweet ’; a name offers and means more than we are aware of. Except for the ‘bureaucratic posterity’, it offers one the ability to recognise oneself and be recognized by others as a subject - indeed to function as a subject. In her book *The Ethics of Memory* Avishai Margalit refers to David Edgar’s play, *Pentecost*. The play deals with the story of children, squeezed into cattle trucks on their way to concentration camps, so hungry that they eat the cardboard nametags tied to their necks. Margalit writes: “It is clear that no trace of the children and no trace of their names will be left after they perish. What is so terrifying in this play is not just the knowledge that the children are on their way to be murdered but that they are going to be murdered twice, both in body and in name” (2004: 20-21).

One exists both in and through body and name. Thus what is in one’s name is one’s existence, one’s presence and an essence of being. As Dorothy Richardson suggests (cited in Reinharz, 1994: 53): The problem women... have had with their names... are one index of the problems they have had with their... identities”. The problems women have with names is twofold, the first of which is the problem with the last name. There is no family name a woman can take (even if it is her mother or grandmother’s maiden name) that is not a father’s name, that is not of male descent and that does not secure and reinforce posterity for the father. There is no posterity for a mother and no last name that is not ‘male’. Our identity (as

much as it is connected to our surname) will always have its origin in our fathers and not our mothers.

As I have noted, Mauss argues that women find expressivity outside of “linguistic exchange” because the maternal body is the point of origin before language (2000: 63). In this regard Andre P. Brink writes:

Jy is 'n ritme uit my slaap
wat nog nie woord geword het nie
woord vlees
wat in die begin by God was
ribbebeen tussen vyblare
nou vy
waaruit die aarde gevul kan word
met alles wat nog naam moet kry¹³⁷ (1965: 9).

The maternal body gives birth to that which has to receive a name, yet it is not her name that is given; there is no posterity for the mother. The maternal body, the mother, though point of origin, seems to remain outside of, and prior to, language and thus is also not included within the advent of the name. Names exist within the realm of language and though Juliet argues that name is neither hand nor foot nor face, language is the act of naming (1950: 912). *Hand* and *foot* and *face* are names as well. Language fragments – to exist in language, to have a name, is to be fragmented in body and in ‘self’.

¹³⁷ You are a rhythm from my sleep
that has not yet become word
word flesh
that was in the beginning with God
rib between fig leaves
now fig
from which the earth can be filled
with everything that still needs to be named

Language's fragmentation of the self brings us to the second 'problem' with names. Very few people call me by my given first name; we are a family of nicknames. Different people call me by different names; these names mark how I know someone, how long I have known them and what relationship they have with me. In the interviews, when talking about my grandfather's ostracised sister Anne, there is often reference made to her name that changed. When she was young and lived at home they called her Annie ('ennie'), but when she moved to the city she became Anne (pronounced as you would in English).¹³⁸ The change in name marks the change in her, a new name a new identity, or rather a variation of the old. The change of her name expresses the hierarchical positioning of English as 'above', higher, superior to Afrikaans in the positioning of the city over the rural and country life.

In the interviews my grandmother refers to my grandfather as F when she speaks of their younger years together, but when talking about the later years she will refer to him as grandpa, as though she was talking about two different people. The change in name changes her tone of voice and her expression as well, as though the different names means different things to her and the names imbue him with different qualities. One can see that 'F' was her lover, her friend and husband and that 'grandpa' did not necessarily share those roles. At the end of a long interview about her husband (their relationship, their wedding and their 'early years') she leans her head on her hand, stares off into the distance, introspectively, as though she is not talking to me anymore and says "Ja... Oupa, Pa, F"¹³⁹ (personal interview, June, 1009. App. 5A) . She collects all the names that fragmented her husband into the roles he played, bringing him back to the man she met, as though he belonged to different people and as 'F' he belonged to her.

The observations above find resonance in the writing of Reinhartz : "names had their own etiquette, logic, and geography. They were separate entrances" (1994: 50). Liz Stanley writes:

We use titles... as simple ways of describing and summarizing a variety of different kinds of relationships... 'She's my lover', 'this is my mother', and 'he is my husband'. We use them to explain in summary form the relationship between

¹³⁸ Personal interview, April, 2009. App.6A

¹³⁹ Yes... Grandpa, Dad, F.

us and another person so signified. But at the same time that we daily use these titles, we also know that they are rather like icebergs: beneath the simple one-dimensional tip lies the complex ninety nine percent, which can contain a welter of shifting and often antithetical thoughts feelings and emotions... The lover, the enemy and the husband, after all, can be different ways of glossing the 'same' relationship at different or even the same points in time (1992: 162).

Names and titles refer to many things, yet because they are 'in language,' they merely suggest and fragment. Language is the protruding tip, which can never truly reveal the complex instability of what lies submerged. Even so the act of language, the act of naming, though incapable, is still the pinnacle. Linda Wagner-Martin feels that: "the act of writing is a way of giving name and identity to a person" (1994: 94). She also states that:

all writing is some incomprehensible mix of impulse and reason, strands of memory crossing immediate details and provoking the writer to telling – or naming. Recounting the experience, or perhaps only the emotions connected with it, is the writer's naming, making concrete words out of vague, suffused feeling (Wagner-Martin, 1994: 70).

There seems to be no name for a woman to claim, truly, as her own. The incapability of titles leaves us all unstable and barely surfaced. Where do women stand concerning naming as telling? How do we recount, give name, give identity? Names do not only fail women and their identity, but also the content of their lives. Language fails to reveal the submerged for "many of the tragedies that mark women's lives – rape, incest, emotional victimization as well as physical – fall into the category of 'women's issues'... somehow to name the trauma in women's lives is controversial" (Wagner- Martin, 1994: 13). Language fails women; we do not and cannot truly exist within language. It fails women because we do not have our own name; titles merely fragment us, while our bodies are smothered in silence. Even our trauma remains unnamed. Within language and by language we suffer a double murder both of the body and the name. This is possibly why we adhere to the narrative, why we continue to create, perpetuate and suffer the contradictions.

At the loom, bound and faithful to the narrative

Returning to where we started

I refer to Adrienne Rich's lines (as cited in Stanley):

In speaking of lies,
we come inevitably
to the subject of truth.
There is nothing simple
or easy about this idea.
There is no 'the truth!'
' a truth' -
truth is not one thing
or even a system
It is an increasing complexity.
The pattern of the carpet
is the surface.
When we look closely
or when we become weavers,
we learn of the tiny multiple threads
unseen in the overall
pattern, the knots on the
underside of the carpet (1992: 32).

Karel Schoeman cites a passage from an Agatha Christie novel in his book *Die Laaste Afrikaanse Boek*: "To you it is unbearable that anyone should be hurt. To some minds there is something more unbearable still – not to know. (...) Truth, however bitter, can be accepted, and woven into a design for living" (2002: 71). Truth is not one thing; it is a bitter

complexity that is woven into a design. A design of multiple threads that produces a pattern through unseen knots. It seems ‘untruthful’ to use the word truth, for “the telling of life history... is ultimately to be seen... as a fiction, an imaginative – even imaginary – story we weave out of those tangled threads we believe to be responsible for the texture of our lives”(Freeman, 1993: 30). As I have noted, Freeman argues that in autobiographical reflection meanings are as much made as found, “a new relationship is being created between the past and present, a new poetic configuration” (1993: 30).

The women in my family weave a narrative that is ‘as much made as found’. Because they weave with and without language, and because it finds origin in the maternal body that transcends language, the narrative becomes poetry. Indeed a ‘new poetic configuration’ is created, but perhaps it merely appears new because it is too old for us to recognize. The women in my family weave as much, or even more so, with silence and absence than with anything else. “Patiently transmitted from mouth to ear, body to body, hand to hand... The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted and touched. It destroys, brings into life, nurtures. Every woman partakes in the chain of guardianship and transmission” (Minh-Ha, 1993: 7).

Earlier I did not know how or where to start, and asked in Wagner- Martin’s words: “How is it possible to bring order out of memory? I should like to begin at the beginning, patiently, like a weaver at his loom. I should like to say, ‘This is the place to start, there can be no other... but there are a hundred places to start, for there are a hundred names’” (Wagner-Martin, 1994: 69). There may be a hundred names, but for a woman there is no name truly hers. Within language we can never truly be named, we cannot be held by a title, our lives cannot be told. We are weavers at a loom and we do ‘order’ memory into the poetry of pattern and knots, of absence, silence and miraculous presence. But there is no name here, no beginning, and hopefully then no real end.

When my grandmother gave birth to her first child, she did it in her mother’s house, attended to by her mother and her mother-in-law. When my grandmother’s mother died, she died in her daughter’s house and my grandmother’s mother-in-law washed and prepared her body.

My grandmother's eldest sister writes to her in a letter that she will soon be going to her daughter who is about to deliver her child, just as my grandmother will stay with my mother when her time comes, "so sal ons getrou bly tot die dood toe, kom wat wil"¹⁴⁰ (Ill. 1G).

I started from the name mother and the place of the womb (Olney, 1998: 339). In the end there is no name, for woman the narrative/the reminiscence reaches from womb to tomb, and beyond. The women in my family neglect and forget, we hide and disguise, and we weave fictions and live the poetry we weave. We remain faithful to the narrative that binds us 'until death' and beyond. We see and know that:

All things howsoever they flourish

Return to the root from which they grew

This return to the root is called Quietness (Minh- Ha, 1993:3).

Quietness.

¹⁴⁰ So we will remain loyal until death, come what may.

Closing Realisations

The understanding that has been lingering throughout the research becomes clear once again in this last chapter: the multiple nature of the narrative because language and speech are able to simultaneously nurture and destroy. Within this narrative the women in my family struggle to untangle their own voice from the complexities of language and the relationship with their respective mothers. We weave our narrative as much with silence as with anything else while we employ metaphors and surrogates. Yet the narrative, and specifically the archive, becomes our surrogate for our voices, silences, aberrations and taboos – it carries that which we are incapable of holding. I asked what runs thicker – blood or the narrative? But this answer is always in flux, constantly in motion between the two. Because of the divide between the body and language, because we as women cannot exist in language and do not have a name, we create and perpetuate the narrative. But because the divide between blood/the body/the physical and narrative/abstraction still remain, the archive is created. We create the narrative with remembering as much as with forgetting; forgetting, like the narrative itself, becomes as much what we survive as it is how we survive.

Thus we create and perpetuate this narrative, because it offers us slightly more freedom than language, and within this narrative that remains weft and web, we live the poetry we weave, while always carrying the weight of our archive. We create and perpetuate this narrative, because it is what we were taught by the collective of the family – we negotiate the narrative and its wealth of contradictions and complexities through and with the self. In the narrative we create individual meaning that is always connected to the collective.

Final Synthesis

The self-reflexive nature of this investigation of my family narrative renders me interpreter and poet, agencies that manifest both in my art and in writing this text. I support the notion of family as a multiple, diverse and abstract construct. As a result, the narratives of the individual and a family as a group exist as dispersed fragments, because the interaction between members is reciprocal and simultaneous. While family members confirm one another, this fragmentation also brings about a denial of one another.

We perpetuate the hidden and unhidden narratives of our families in order to recreate, continue to newly create and preserve meaning. Such meaning also has a bearing on the self. The narrative and the act of creating it are my inheritance and my education. In my family it is particularly the women who are responsible for the narrative's creation and perpetuation. The focus and distance that this study enables force open the boundaries of my comprehension of the family narrative's histories, a process that brings about both deconstruction and reconstruction of the self.

I realise that the interrelated and simultaneous nature of the narrative and its archives remains complex and largely incomprehensible. Although I continue to weave with presence and memory I also continue to encounter absence and forgetting. Even though silence, neglect and denial also furnish my narrative, it is not void of love and compassion. The narrative relates what it survives, even while it indicates the means of continual survival. It redeems and devastates in equal measure. Thus it is a profound and potent burden that is also surrogate to all that transpires within the family.

I now know that my photography and this text originate from the same place where disillusionment and illusion, suspicion and trust, fatigue and awe intersect and that the family narrative also finds its genesis in these intersections. My investigations (practical and theoretical) come from the paradoxes, contrasts and contradictions that constitute a family narrative. By entering the shadows of bosom, bed and bedroom, I reveal my imagination

inclusive of all its improbable constructs – the creation of image and the perpetuation of narrative. The theoretical investigation of family narrative completely intersects with and generates the making of such imagery. At the same time, my family narrative reveals the sources from which these images emerge, while the images search for the reasons that in the first place gave rise to the narrative: its issues, spaces, incidents and experiences of the private and public, of violence and the banal.

The process of writing, as much as the process of art-making, turns interest and stimulus into creative enactment, thus sustaining a fruitful, independent reciprocity between my writing and my photography. Both the theoretical and practical avenues of the investigation clarify the self-reflexive role I necessarily must embrace in living.

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De Vulluis 8 to 16

Carnarvon.

7 Feb 1972.

Liefste Susters,

Baie, baie dankie vir
julle oproepe en julle trooswoord
kan julle ooit besef wat-die
vir my beteken, die hele wêreld!
Want pa skel net op my en B en A.
oa G. weg is. As ek huil moet
ek in die garage gaan huil en
daar vir krag en mit houvemoei-
~~omhoog~~ pleit. Ah kry dit ook.

Liewe hemel ons het ontrent
daardie eerste week deur die
waleis beweeg. G. het geheel dan
smik en hulle sy so sy kan nie
p raak nie, al wat ons kan
wys word is "kom haal my".
Dit was heel mens kan nie
slaaps of ons kry vir jou self nie.
Ous het dit vir onse probeer wep-
steek maar ee is hy pal drank
hy is fyn op 'n ding en was
haar somer daardie eerste week
gaan haal. Die vriende, sy braes

Illustration 1A

ons almal het hom gewys op die
 dwaasheid daarvan. Ek het hom
 gese sy sal nie kan lewe van
 die paar duisend rand wat sy
 jon dopters los nie, wie weet-wake
 man kry sy, sy het-nam al 'n
 vreeslike kalverliefe in 'n arm
 weduwee se seun, soos sy kan
 aflei in die knif, dit bly met
 Dennis van vroeg tot laat. Haar
 afskeid van hom was pateties, twee
 kinders albei het so gehuil. Maar
 ek sal my inderste bes doen om
 hom saam te neem die 18^{de} 20^{de}
 sy. En ek sal sy losse stelling
 betaal, want-hy is al klaar in-
 geskel, vreeslik in pauper. En
 hy verweet sy die seun is ook 'n
pauper. O Susters ek wens julle
 kan weet-wat mense hom se
 oor sy onregverdigheid met sy
 seuns. Buren is klaar wegsteld
 Tommy sit sonder werk, dan kan hy
 ander verdoem.

Maar o hy is en
 was pateties. Eerste tyd was ge-
 heel

nie net gerook en gedrink, as ek praat-
daerom sê hy hy wil hom dood
drink of doodskiel. oor sy kind
wat ons weg geneem het van
hom af. En tog het hy nooit
met hem gespraak nie, en toe sy
gebore was, was sy woorde
"ek wil hom nie sien nie, dis
in ou meisiekind". Dit gaan
van daeren liden, dank God.

Laas

Saterdag aand (veerpistevand), was hy so
drank toe hy uitgaan om te (pi)et-
hy neergeslaan om sy kop teen die
muur laat die (bloed) spoor, en het
uragie seker 20 minute gesukkel
om hom net op te kry, hy is so
drank en so swaer. Die meisiekind
het altoos een arm en ek een gevat-
den keer ons tot hy op sy vante is,
dan drink sloot ons hom so tot hy
sy bed, maar G. is weg en H. het-
hy in slaapie geslaap. Ek was
later in my nightrigale het om my
te kan help, so het ek gesukkel en
ek is so paf swak ontrent soos in
hande. Ek kan hom tog nie so los nie

was reeds daer die aand so rond. Ek het
vanoggend so op my twee knieë
gedruk en gesê los tog die baie brandwye
dis hulle ook wat-jin bene so laat pyn,
en kyk na die groot boesdery terwyl
Bona op akeruie is, by het na alles
gekyk toe ons vagnuie gelou het. My
werk vreeslik hard daer die wind.

Na heel- ek tog mi, by is weg veld-toe
mel die volk, hoop maar op die beste
maen ek besef by kan nie sonder die
drank klaar kom nie.

Goslin se begrafnis

Wat ek jou van gesê het Vivi was vreeslik
aandoenlik. My was 'n Freemason en hulle
begrafnis rede is vreeslik plegtig. Goslin
n.g. duns, dan hulle en die volkies
het so harteen gesing. My is in 'n
oornik weggeruk, op aerdie niks
makeer nie - mel ploteling die pyn
in die bors en weg is by.

Susleno ek

skrywe weer, hoop julle kan die skrif
les. Vivi jou dielare buif sal ek
mel die tyd antwoord, soos
ek in G. skrywe, ek is bey ag is

so besig, ek ook — in die huis;
 in die tuin, sekeres besaai,
 Vir Anita help toe, skryfme dan
 treur en verlang mens mi so
 meeslik nie.

Vir: as julle mi
 haer iets wil skryf, in eetding
 of niks goed is altyd so welkom.
 Kalle hie is meeslik oor iets wat
 lekker niks soos perfume of
 Talc of seep. of natuurlik eetgoed.
 Skryf wat jill wil ek doen
 maar wil sien die hand. An ek
 se ook senuu Gnie Gnie dankie
 in julle liefdesyke gebaar.

baie liefde graet,
 Sully.

NS. Hoop Jean is steeds baie gesond
 met die nuwe behandeling. T.

Haar Huishandskool,
 Privaatsak 309,
 Adelaide.

De Villiersstraat 16,
Carnarvon.
20 April 1972.

Liefste Vivi,

Ah het jou brief van 19 Jan. voer my en by begin so: "Kyk net - waar trek die eerste maand van die nuwe jaer alweer." Nouja wat sal ek se maer dit beaam, die 20 April, my oudste kind se 37^{ste} verjaardag, en die alweer "enthusiasm & the leaves falling fast." Baie baie dankie vir al jou skynwe Vivi veral vir hierdie kostelike brief, les dit reeds kom vir die derde keer. Ghy sal well en verstaan hoekom ek nou eers antwoord, die stonnie is as old as the hills - die pligte en verpligtinge word daaglik meer en meer en die kragte neem af. Vandal - ek ook Church warden is of ek dit my plicy om die ou en siek persone wat aan my Kerk behoort ook vlytig te besoek, die ou hand vas te hou en

Illustration 1B

moed in te praat, party se denie
 met trene in die oë. Alles, alles
 verg tyd en die kospotte wal-
 gedienig raep is 'n dodelike slawaerke
 ek doen die reeds 39 jaar. Die volk
 het bekom en gegaan met my klemp
 kinders in die huis en die groot,
 vallende drank man, wat gedienig
 skimp, font vind en snags te en
 saak en reks. Sowaar het ek
 gesê ek is met in staat tot alles
 deur God wat my krag gee. Die hert-
 seer na al die kinders weer weg
 is, ek het gesê al die verlepte
 blomme in die huis weerspieël
 my verlepte gees; een vir een
 het die kamers leeg geraak
 tot op 'n aand dat met
 ek in die kombuis gesit het,
 'Dum by die kroeg Anita by
 maters — ek was huil, toe
 los ek maar. G. het weer bitter
 swaar weggegaan, die lewe bly
 ureed.

Vir my wat 'n groot voorreg
 dat jy so vir jou kinders kan

Lystaen, in groot voerreg en plezier
 want ons leef mos in en in ons
 kinders. Jou klein kindertjie
 is te dierbaar en ek was so
 bly om hulle te sien en in
 Gannie en Pixie, sy is weer so
 pragtig soos in Prinses en Gannie
 in ware heer en geneesker,
 sy kan trots wees op al jou
 kinders want Andanis, Bumba
 en haar en Reuntjie is net so
 pragtig en hōni het mos die
 moedert, saalste en dierbaarste
 gesigste min my. Ah is so dank-
 baar dat Pixie ook nou gesond
 is mens kan dit doodelik
 sien want sy lyk jartestis. O
 ek is bly dat hulle so voerspaedij
 is min sy het nie help gummisse
 oor jou kinders soos ek nie.

Hierdie
 onregverdige man wat in Bani
 die helte van sy aankomte gee en
 vir Jan wie by nie meer help
 nie, gee my slaapplese nagte.
 O vir die is daren waer dat-as

Hy suk is en sy siel is ook suk
 raak sy nooit gesond nie, daarom
 sal dit in elke pasiënt salig wees
 om in Gawie voor sy bed te lê
 want met hom straal sy
 innerlike.

Bus het al meeslik
 baie veen gehad hierdie jaar, die
 veen is net en betaal groot pryse,
 B.V. omman en Brien het laas
 week in Lammers op die veen
 verduisie R14.20 stuk gekry, die
 stek is groot 27 in. Brien
 het dan in 28 verke wat by
 Newton toe plaas het R610
 gekry - verbuel ja! Ek is een-
 dag in hulle toe hulle die geld
 so deel, julle maal in dan ook
 geld gee, hy het nie geld in 'n
 kers, in gallon petrol of dosie
 sigarette nie, en julle swem in
 die sand. Bes moet hom alles gee en
 verwyt en skel hom daagliks.

Vin is die Cortina is
 bekomp, so is die Mercedes, maar
 mens maak aan alles gewoond.

Nou wil ek eens weer se duisende
 dankies vir G. se geskenke, o die
 rok lyk sy wonderlik mee, you
 have no idea, somer so baie
 dankie viri, gee maar gedurig
 as sy wil, kleue is duur en
 hulle kos my, en fortuin want
 wil mooi aantrek, gevolg ek
 skiet maar altes oor. want die
 kouse, reuk goed en pads alleen
 kos in fortuin. Ek se so baie,
 mensse maaiie dink as sy
 in sul gestelde man het dat by
 jou beurs vol geld het nie, o
 mee gladnie sy word steeds
 verwylt en gevloek oor geld. God
 is my witness.

Weet sy viri Herdie
 week was ek elke leue dag uit
 die huis, Maandag Bank toe met die
 kerk se geld, Dinsdag per se gemaak
 gite met plaas-toe, Vrydag vroue-
 bidens toe en mane is Koekens
 verspa deuring — hou wa ek jou met bene
 in die oë, behaer jou siel!

Hoe gaan.

dit met Philip se senuwees Vini
 en met-jin glade, ek hoop en verstaan
 tog baie beter. Ek se geen senuwee
 of senu middel te wêreld is so
 kalmerend soos in doppie nie,
 daarin is sy verradenlikheid, as
 ek saans hulpe brandewyn drink
 slaap ek tog voornag rustig en hoor
 nie die gesnork so nie.

Dankie ook in
 waart-se knipie vini, en weer dankie
 vir G. se pakkie met-jin geskiedenis.
 sovele dank! Ek is so bly julle kon
 vir Baba sien en dat-die-so goed gaen
 met hulle almal. Die Verwaerd-
 dem is seker in gesig om te sien
 ek wil nog taal-Brian taal-ous ook
 gaan kyk want-die ouman sê in
 niks meer belang nie met-in die
 bottel.

Nanyá Vini dit-wat taal-in
 ek moet iets maak vir soppek, ons het
 so pas weer 'n hennige lui reën
 met blitse en donders gehad, my blomme
 hang almal pap, gevein.

Baie en groot kaffe, Dilly.

Casnewton 7060-

13 Sept. 1988.

My dear Sister,

I hope the few lines find you all well & happy under the circumstances, the days are growing longer and the intense cold growing less cold & there is new hope in the spring for us all. I wonder so if you are still with Keri & I will mean post my letter to Sterksburg. The heat of summer I find very hard to face, but on this tiny room with its hard bed is an ice chest in winter, I don't turn the heater on for I fear the warm room & then in the cold passages & dining room will give me asthma, so I mean stick it & dream of my warm kitchen of long ago. Dear I always pray to God to give you inner peace & an acceptance of your loss & for Him to guide your footsteps in the way of joy in your beloved children & grand children & ever make your life full & joyous in His Grace, after all what more can we ask of life especially if we see & read of the awful floods & famine & bombs & death upon the face of this earth, we stand speechless & in awe. You will always have my love, my dear. Give my love to your children as well. Fondly Lily.

Illustration 1C

Parnasfontein 60,

15 Aug 1988.

My dear Sister,

a few lines to say I hope you are well & able to abide your loss, as the days weeks & months fly past at a terrific pace I am so thankful you have got Andrew's books, as time passes they will even be more worth to you than ever they were, I thought they might let Philip sleep with you nights. Near I still constantly think of you & pray for you & will always do so, you need not answer this either as I just want the letter to be a life line between us! I was very, very sorry that we had to leave so soon after the funeral, & I could not chat to all my sisters, but as I told you dear Brian is Captain of the golf club & they had a competition & Braai's on that day & I did not want him to miss it for as I wrote to Roberta it is only God in Heaven knows how good he is to me, Then I want to take this same opportunity to say thank you very, very much for my lovely pink slip-ons, that you could still think of me in spite of your loss means so much to me. My corns give me hell on earth & now I wear them to the T.V. & my poor old feet can relax. Many & heartfelt thanks. You will always have my love & kind thoughts & support. Dileg.

Illustration 1D

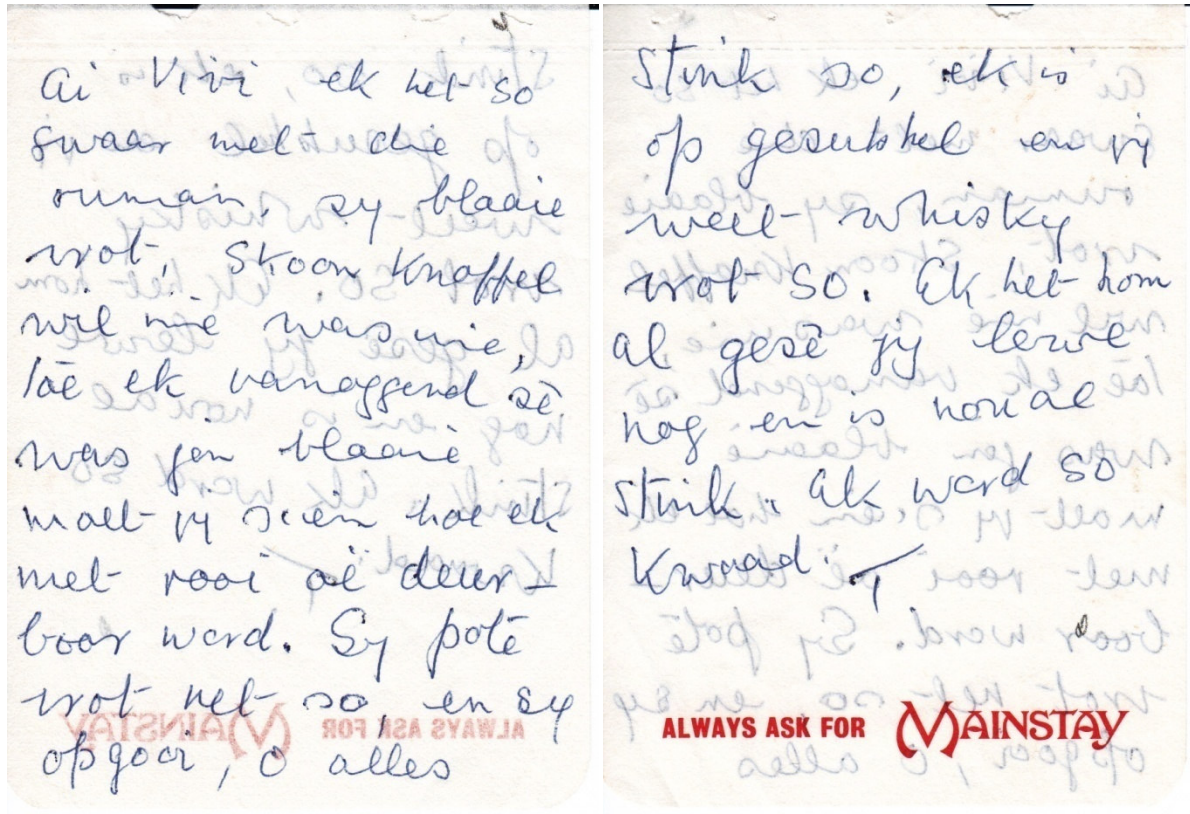


Illustration 1 E

De Villiers Str 16,
Carnarvon.
7060
25 Jan, 1974.

Liefste Suster,
Baie dankie vir jou
brief, ook vir die vorige en hōri syn,
baie dankie.

Dis vroeg, net- na ses
en heel koud vanoggend, so veel
so dat ek die kombuis vensters altyd
toe maak maak en op my ou plek
voor die Esse sit skrywe. Klaar koffie
gedrink, hond en kat- kos gegee, my
Godsdienis gedaen. Jy bly in my gedagtes
en ek het- al so baie vir jou gebied
vir voortwaer 'n swaar las wat jy moet
dra — alles wat oor mens se kinders
gaan is haar ondraaglik. Maar wat kan
ons vir jou daen net- maar niks
end uit- sal jy moet alleen die las
dra, maar toe maar aan alles kom 'n
einde. Maak en brei sy nou alreus
al iets vir haar babatjie, en bly
Erik by julle aan huis en ondergaan
my sy "training" as bewaarder?

Illustration 1 F

Ek hoop jy is weer gesond Viri
 jou hertseer briefje is na Thelma,
 van haer af mael dit na die
 Meesichinders, ek was so hertseer
 oor jou briefje O so hertseer en val
 so saam met-jin en bid so min julle.
 Jy en Philip is nou in dieselfde taal-
 as ons? O die ouman het laes nag
 alleroverskriklike ghaes van twee uur
 af, wonder of hy nie ook Long kanker
 het van die baie rook nie. Dis ab-
 neeslike en sy kos bly met-mie buime
 nie, hy gaan op vreesik. Maer wat-rook
 en drink is hy en Viri vlak, dis
 te vreesik ek is al so klein stomp
 gevloek en my kinders met-so. As
 ek mag vra waarom word ek so
 gevloek as jy drink is, hoer ek net-ek
 moet gevloek word. Hy se hy nie hi
 ek mael weer weggaan, in goed. Nou
 se ek hom hy mael die slag gaan want-
 hy maak al die maelikhid. Ek se
 ek het al baie gegaan na Anne-katie
 na mummie, Kaaps-tae, hy mael nou
 taal-waai. O bin hy is nou eens weer
 eng, in mens sou se hy mael-aan

my onsterflikke siel begin dink, maar hy is roekeloos.

Viri ons het altyd by in kerk afgedraai as ons na Albertus se huis my, hy het in Newton Street; Newton Park gebly dan my ons met die Cape Road en draai by die kerk af, en daar was nog 'n groot kerk in die Kaapseweg, so een van hulle is seker die Baptist Church. Ja ek is so lief vir daardie hoofstuk omdat ek ook in my lewe so baie smerte maes verdur soos die Man van Smerte. Maes ek het al telke male gesê ek glo ek is meer gevloek as die Here want hy was maar jonk toe hy maes sterf ek is reeds oud en word steeds so gevloek. By die Passie Spele was die hartroerend om te sien hoe die gepeupel hom spot en vloek, ek het so gehuil.

Haai
Viri is Vivienne waarlik al spier, die jaer vlieg ons soos skimmie, mens kan net nie meer tred hou nie, ons is oud, lalik ek is gedou en een van die dae maet ons grond toe en steeds

lewe mens in 'n gebakke. Maar jing
 ons sal met die stuyt maalt voortsit
 want hoe anders. maar ons maalt
 wie wees soos hulle wat geen meer
 hoop het nie, o nee laat- ons sterk
 staan in die Geloof in Jesus Christus,
 en ons maalt oorwin. Ek gaan
 na Delma as laer kindjie maalt kom,
 jy bly by Lori as hore kom, so
 sal ons gesam bly tot die dood toe, kom
 wat wil.

Jing soos ek op die telefoon
 gese het, op die stadium glo ek
 nie rook of nie rook sal die mens
 se lewens enigsin verkeer of verleg
 nie, laat- Philip rook. Ek sien as hierdie
 man in dag of so as hy baie oik
 was nie rook nie, wil hy mel-
 delg en verdelg, totdat hy weer rook
 en dink en die vicious circle"
 in full swing is, is hy "happy!
 Ek wens jou sterkte toe my suster, my
 gebede om van jou soos 'n mantel. Wees
 sterk!

Barie en minne hofde,
 Jullie,

(11)

Cameron 7060,
28 Jan 1989.

My Dear Sister,

I hope you are well & happy & also contented under your circumstances of being alone for six months, the time of which no one can hardly believe Philip has been gone so long already to me it seems as yesterday we laid him to rest. His birthday is coming up in Heaven for the first time & I bring you a word of comfort dear, him being among the chairs of angels free from his earthly travail (as he will be for a while while I wipe my tears). I try to bring comfort & on myself in need of it.

I thought I will be with you when you visit his grave, & put a small bouquet of forget-me-nots, to always cherish his memory.

Illustration 1 G

Dear many thanks for your letter +
 all the news, I am glad you are going
 to your children & hope all will be
 well for you while you are away. I
 was very glad indeed of the
 writing materials, many, many
 thanks I write so often & so much &
 am, like I wrote to Margo, "nie net oud
 nie maar nou arm ook." My interest I
 get does not cover my board, my
 doctor, insurance etc & my children
 regularly give me money for my
 daily needs. Dear Anita took me
 to the Dr & he gave me Voltarin &
 an hip injection & thank the Good
 Lord my leg is much easier & I
 walk much better, so thank you for
 telling me of the Voltarin, I have had
 months of intense pain & discomfort
 which was hell to bear. I send you
 my love, kind thoughts & a special
 prayer to uplift & hold you. Tilly-

Carnarvon 10 60.

Tuesday

My dear, dear Sister,

a few lines to assure you that you are daily in my thoughts and nightly in my prayers. I think of you so often I feel sure you must be aware of the fact. There can never be any try & always have a few live flowers in your bedroom or lounge, it means so much to me, sometimes I had only one flower when it was winter, yet that one flower gave me cheer. Also would you consider a Kitty or a cloggie. You know dear my Siamese cat loved me so much, when I sat reading in my room in winter, and I dose she lies on my feet fast asleep. If & when I get up she sits in the window sill like a statue. I still miss her so dreadfully, she is with Anita. Thank you dear for your letter & the Messenger, oh but it is a wonderful tribute to Philip, I am going to send it to Helma & Genevieve. Although I have adapted to my destiny, I shall never stop missing my home, my garden & my cat. Don't answer this as I cannot communicate with you I do it with these few lines. Excuse handwriting, which is steadily ^{growing} worse. Love & kind thoughts. Lily.

Illustration 1 H

Goodwood Street 60,
Goodwood.
8/9/74.

Liewe Vivi,

Dis sondagoggend na kerk en terug die
Sondagete sy laaste stompies prut begin ek maar
skryf - sommer hier by die klein koombuis-
lofettjie neffens die stoof.

Die son skyn heerlik vandag na al
die nat en koue (gister nog gereis - selfs ys-
hoorels geval!) en die sonstrale val weldadig hier
deur die venster - heerlike weelde vir
my - deesdae kry ek nooit tyd om my
huus te geniet nie.

As jy nou hier was, kon jy met
my tee gedrink het - rooitee, sagges op die
stoof gestowe met baie melk - soos die
Namaqualanders dit drink. Ja, jy raai reg-
ek het onlangs in Namaqualand gewes - byna
2 weke weg gewees van die huus. Eintlik
het ek drie dinge daarvan daan saamge-
bring: hulle lekker rooi tee resep, hulle
sennelbeskuit resep (ek onthou steeds dat
"sennel" een van jou skelwoorde was, maar
hierdie sennels in die beskuit is regtig lekker)
en van pofadder se klippe - onder andere
in groen marmor horlosie waarvan die

Illustration 2 A

2

letters klein geslypte hieroo Klippies is - te pragtig vir my! Die weelde het ek myself veroorloof ná 'n ruime terugbetaling van Jan Tax aan my. En as ek wil bereken wat ek alles met die geld kon doen, gaan kyk ek maar gou in die sitkamer hoe pragtig die eenvoudige klip horlosie is. As julle tog eendag dalk in Pofadder kom - klein vaar ou doopie in die Boesmanland - maer die marmer fabriek verbyloop nie! Daar is die pragtigste staarlamp (alles uit klip gesny - roemkleurig) - my hart het daarby aangerobly maar soveel het my gewete my darem nie toegelaat nie.

So' - die etc is klaar en nou maak Schon nog net uit die Sondaghoed kom. Ek het gister Christo se ou pakke vir hom reggemaak - hy het nog altyd maar 'n grusbroek en baadjie gedra (klein Berris in). Toe hy vanoggend voor verk sy broodbroodjie kom eet met die langbroek en pers hemp en das het my hart gestrik toe ek my kind sien en weet dat hy reeds my jongste seun is en nie meer my klein seuntjie nie.

3.

Hy het gisteraand vir Hendrina Smith (Johan se vrou) gese' hy gaan soos sy broer nie vir hom in meisie kry nie, want hulle kos te veel van 'n mens se sakgeld! So my seuns het hal eie kopstukke wat hulle gesels - my kinders word groot en een van die dae is hulle weg en ek alleen, want is dit nie so: a boy is your boy till he takes him a wife but a daughter is your daughter all her life. Net - die dogters kry ook maar hul eie belange. Dis egter ook waar: "it's only the privilege of a woman to bear and rear a man".

Riëtte is heeldag voor (of se mens agter?) haar boeke. Sy moet so' bitter hard leer vir haar punte, en dan is sy nie haar ma se kind wat haar slaap kon verloor nie! Geveldig slaap sy Vrydaerniddae van alle goeie dae - haar werk se verlore slaap in.

Vivi - ek sit skryf nou sommer snout wat jou sal vervel. Baie dankie vir my verjaardag present. Dankie ook vir Christo's. Hy sukkel baie met die wiskunde en die Engels. Johan het homma verlede kwartaal eerste geskoon in sy sekerie.

4.

Hier is so baie kinders in die skool. Hulle het 3 sk. 4 Klasse. Riette hulle is ook 3 Klasse vir Matric. Ons het gister haar snik vir die afskeidrok gaan hulk. Nou maak die materiaal nog gekoop word. Dit sal glo reën kletsing wees. Ek sou so graag van haar 'n foto wou neem maar sy laat haar mos nie afneem nie.

Dit vir my so naer van mr. Bernie se dood en ook tank. Miemie Kemper is weg (of is dit nie van haar wat ek gelees het nie). Wat gaan Frieda nou doen. Dit maar net Bernie wat haar op Victoria-les gehou het.

Gee my beste groete aan jou kinders en soen klein Eritie vir my part. Ons is al so nuuskierig om hom te sien. Huk hy soos sy mamma? Berna se babu is seker behalstlik groet.

Groete van huis tot huis,
Jo + gestri.

Goodwoodstraat 60,
Goodwood.

3-2-1973.

brewe Vivi,

Ai - die snaaks plekke waar ek deesdae kan brewe skryf! Maar mens keer mas later om elke kydji te gobnik. Op die oomblik sit ek dus hier in die washokkie van die haarkappersalon en wag om my hare skoors en netjies te kny - enigste wedde wat ek myself toelaat!

My haarkapper is 'n man - so in ou stratejie maar sy dan vingertjies is so knap en vinnig! Natuurlik kom jy haagsters by hom uit om jou hare te "set", Dikwets kom hy net. Gewe ou neegal en hoewel hier ook maar 'n brommerende gesels is, is dit nie halpval so dol soos by die vrou waar ek eers gegaan het nie. Dit was 'n behoorlike melhuis en die storiejies dikwets maar erg skurf. Ai die swabber geslag daarom. - waarom sou ons dan ons ingetoëntheid verloor het!?

Dankie vir jou brief, ters- en bedankings kaartjies. Dis altyd maar so lekker om van ou vriende te hoor. Dankie

Illustration 2 B

Goodwoodstraat 60,
Goodwood.
18/6/74.

lieue Vivi, Berna & Lorinda,
Nou waar sal ek begin?
Eerstens - dankie vir jou brief
Vivi - in my gedagtes het ek
hom al hope Keere beantwoord.
Dankie vir die telegram Berna
Ek was nie hier nie maar
Ritte was teleurgesteld - sijn geglo
dit sal in maarsie wees. (asof
dit nou enigiets met haar te
doen het.)

baie geluk Lorinda. Dis
in groot doring vir in vrou dat
sy in maarsie in haar liggom
mag dra en opvoed. Daar is
in besondere blaar kussen in
mader en in seuns. Nou is hy
nog in Klein maarsie wat in jou
arm te. maar eendag as hy
soos Christo nou - langer as
ju is en sy arm om jou
nek sit en se "my ou mamme
en ju die "eer" het om te vol
hee hard sy baard is endit
moet beoordeel (al staan daar net

Illustration 2 C

2

hier en daar 'n stobkie) —
 dan sal jy verstaan van die
 band tussen moeder en seun.
 In my pille jong was daa-
 in plaas waarop gesig was!
 in seun se beste vriend is moeder.
 Maa jou seun dit altyd so on-
 dervind dat sy beste vriend sy
 moeder is. Geniet hom maar
 hoor — daar is nooit weer een
 soos in mens se eerste kind
 nie!

Soe! maar hier in die
 Kooop reën dit darem dat die
 strome loop!! Gister het ek
 vir die eerste maal in 2
 weke gewas en al die droe
 vol-sordes dat die son ooit
 gestuur het. Gelukkig het die son
 toe vandag gestuur — maar beslis
 nie sterk genoeg om alles
 droog te maak nie — die gevolg
 is dat winddroë wasgoed nou
 die hele huis vol hang.

Daar is nou dinge waaraan
 ek nooit in die plek gewoond

4.

te veroorsaak. Riette was so braai
oor die verwagting en het my
gebel toe Anna hospitaal toe is
met die vraag: Mamona daar
hef, mos nie iets te gebeur
nie? Maar daar het en
Boos dr. du Toit destyds was
my gese het - in baarmoeder is
stromer as in dokter - so
alo ek maar dat alles meewet
ten goede.

Soon het sy armo
skoue tand weer in haar
los geval in die net gladde
gare van die skeet en sy
tippe stukkerd. Ek het getoep
dat hulle die tand nou sou
requit stoot maar daarvoor
wan die dr. nie hoor nie.
As ek hulle klomp gade staan,
verbaas dit my dat dit net
tande is wak hulle los val
Hy is bara so lank soos ek,
sy knie knoppe staan uit en
sy baadjie moue is nooit
vir lank lank genoeg nie.

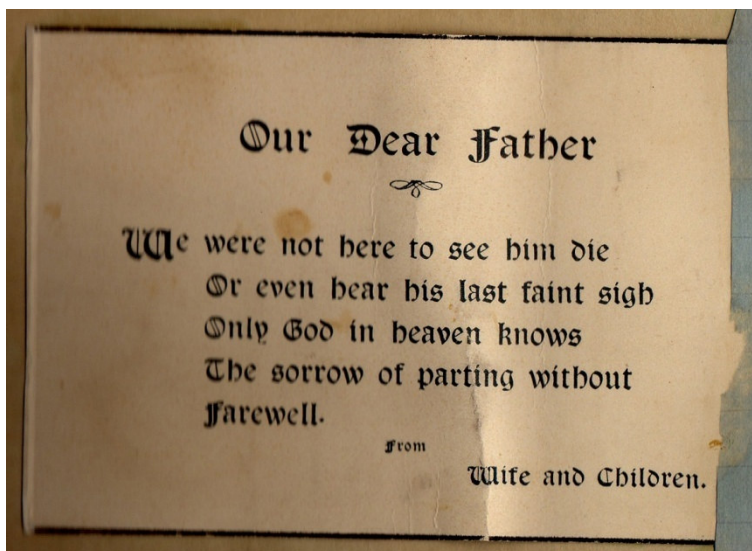


Illustration 3 A

Homans Hof
16-8-38

Dear Vivian,
Just a line to let you know
we Humun is going in to Victoria
to morrow I am sending in some
please send it down to your m
also she must give me Humun a
my belongings such has my shoes
and my slippers and other things
follows the sink that is hanging
the roof in my shop the glass

Illustration 3 B

no box
16-8-38

you know
victoria nest
in some oranges
your mother
Homon all
my shorts
er things as
hanging on
the glass sample

on the wall my picture frame clamp
on the shelf and 3ft of lead
piping also in the shop or battie
will find it he must also find
Jerry and tell him he must come
out with me Homon on Thursday
we Homon will go to the house for
these things inion do me this favour
please give my best regards to
Philip

your affectionate father
Robert
eylbb,

Ek Hou van 'n Vrou

VROUE is dikwels die onderwerp van bespreking by ons mans. Mens kry werklikwaar soms hoendervleis as jy die uitlatings oor hulle moet hoor. Ek is ook 'n man, maar vir my is 'n vrou nie die onderwerp van bespreking in 'n geselskap nie. Vir my is en bly sy altyd die kosbaarste besitting wat ons Vader aan ons mans toevertrou het.

1 Ek hou van 'n vrou omdat sy die moeder van 'n volk is. 2 Ek hou van haar omdat sy my altyd sterker in haar teenwoordigheid laat voel. 3 Ek hou van haar omdat sy gewillig is om baie meer liefde te gee as wat sy ooit sal terugkry. 4 Ek hou van 'n vrou omdat sy so opgewonde soos 'n kind kan raak, al belowe ek haar net om 'n dag saam met my te gaan visvang. 5 Ek hou van haar omdat sy die dood tart om my naamgenoot die lewenslig te laat sien. En ek hou van haar omdat sy my vrou is! — „Gelukkig,” Thabazimbi.

Illustration 3 C

Toe die vliegtuig

- Moenie verspot aantrek nie.
- Moenie gedurig die onmoontlike wens nie.
- Moenie uself bejammer nie.
- Moenie altoos ontevrede wees nie.
- Moenie aan onaangename dinge dink sodra u wakker word nie.
- Moenie oneerlik met uself wees nie.

Boer, wat c
in die stad. D
die koerantver
Vrou „Ja, ou
bou nie.”
pinkle sh
“I ha
and err
choosing
arrange
a cellar c
If, like

In Memoriam **IN MEMORIAM**

Illustration 3 D

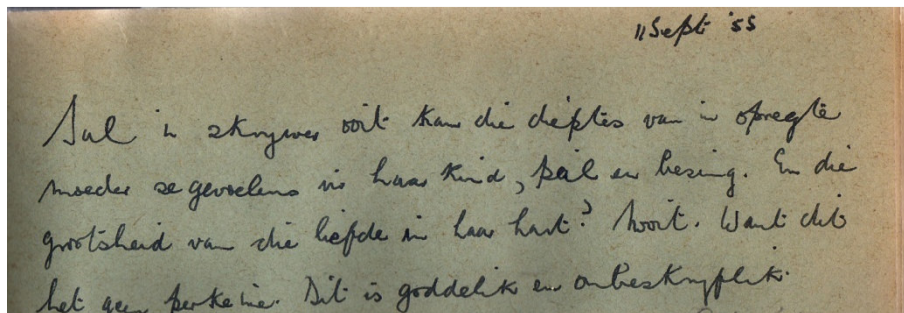
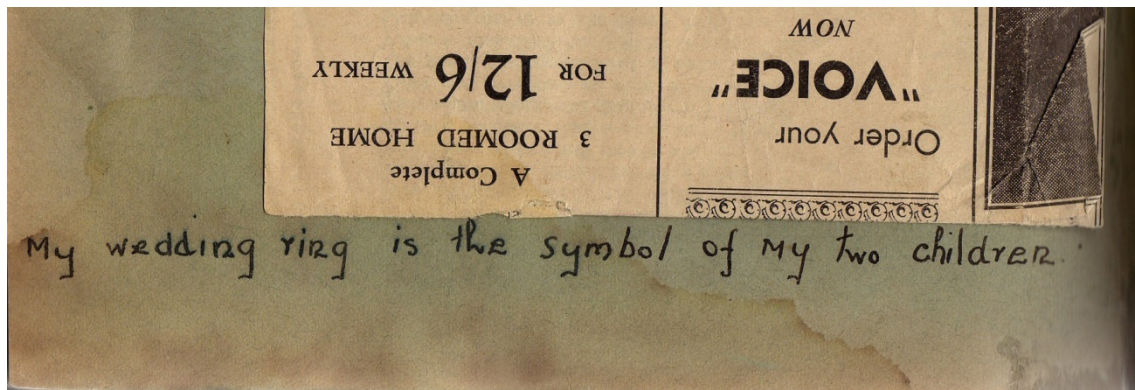


Illustration 3 E



Illustration 3 F

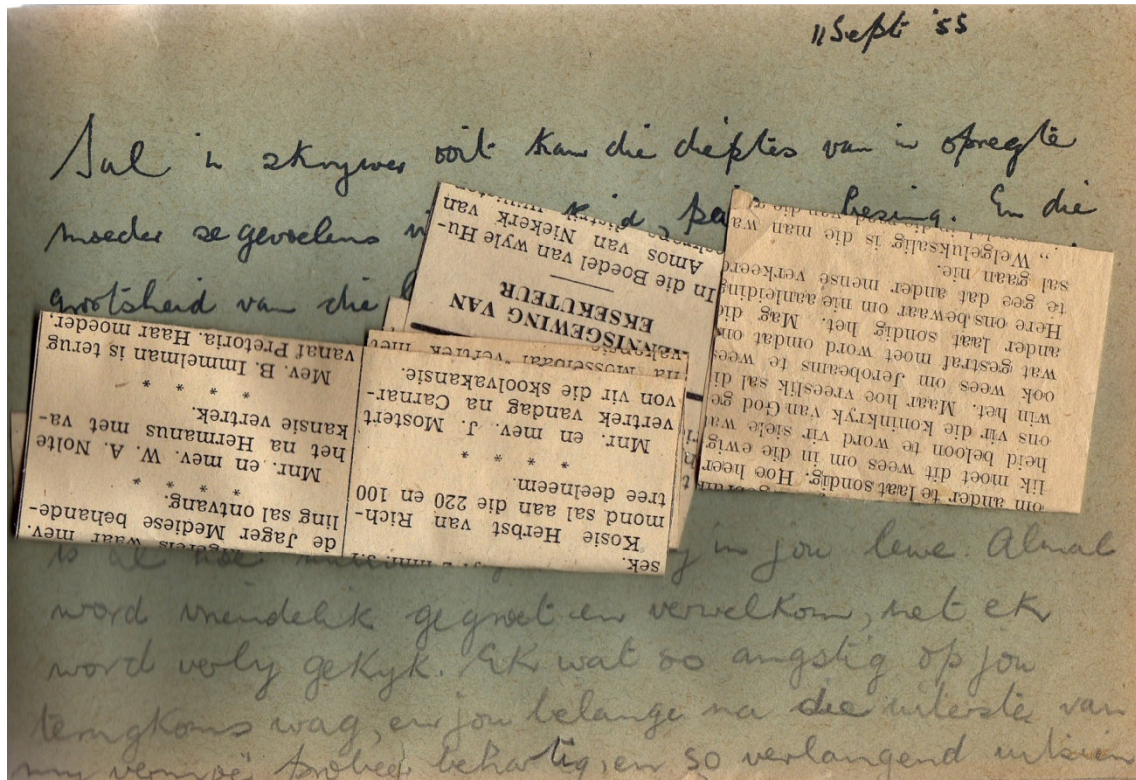


Illustration 3 G

ERROR: stackunderflow
OFFENDING COMMAND: ~

STACK: