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Rape - A Love Story?
Representations of Rape in *Disgrace*, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, *Atonement*, and *Rape: A Love Story*

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Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of rape in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), and Joyce Carol Oates' *Rape: A Love Story* (2003). The analysis of the novels is introduced by a background chapter that outlines the literary history of the rape metaphor and feminist attitudes towards the representation and definition of rape. Following this, the rape scenes of the novels are analysed in individual chapters. The Scenes are explored in their relation to intertextuality and narrative perspectives, which connect the rapes to a canonical Western framework for the metaphor of rape in literature. In addition, the critical response to the novels and the lack thereof, are explored in their function of cultivating the metaphor of rape. Finally, the argument is made that the rapes in *Disgrace*, *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *Atonement* mirror the traditional metaphorization of rape in literature in varying ways. However, *Rape: A Love Story*, which lacks critical response, reverses this tradition through its representation of rape and therefore disables the metaphorization process.

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Introduction

Rape has often been used as a generalized metaphor for oppression throughout literary history, because it is an effective political tool in the fight for change and equality. However, the constant re-use of this metaphor has created an issue: the over-use of rape as a general metaphor in literature threatens to obscure the act of rape itself by reducing it to a figure or an abstraction.

Literature and literary criticism have an essential function in making sense of culture and cultural issues like rape. The metaphor of rape has been subject to critical discussion, but critical voices discussing the actual act of rape are less frequent. The prevailing discussion of rape in literary studies tends to reinforce the social taboo of rape by employing it as a collective metaphor, rather than demystifying it to empower rape victims and give them a voice.

This thesis aims to explore the motif of rape and how it is received in a selection of contemporary novels and to discuss the tendency of literary critics to read rape as a metaphor. J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), and Joyce Carol Oates' *Rape: A Love Story* (2003) will serve as my case studies. The novels portray different kinds of rapes in various contexts and therefore provide the basis for a survey of rape scenes and the differing critical responses to them.

The discussion will concern itself only with female victims of rape and will not consider the gender of the respective authors. This focus has been chosen not just in response to the restrictions of scope in the thesis, but also to enable a more detailed analysis within clearly defined textual parameters.

The thesis starts with a background chapter, which illustrates the use of rape in literary works throughout history and examine the various engagements with rape in literary theory, including the difficulty of defining rape in feminist discourse. The subsequent chapters discuss the representation of rape in the four chosen novels and also the critical responses to those representations. Particular attention will be given to narrative perspective and intertextual elements, both as stylistic devices within the novels and as occasion for critical responses to them. The conclusion evaluates the preceding analyses and considers how the various novels coincide with, or depart from, traditional depictions of rape in literary history. It also considers the difficulties presented by the process of demystifying rape scenes in literary texts, especially when attempting to disassociate a given representation of rape from dominant critical discourses and metaphorical readings.

The aim of this thesis is to interrogate the tendency of contemporary literature to use rape metaphorically as well as the tendency of critical responses to read the representation of

rape in literature metaphorically. This interrogation is not aimed at undermining the use of rape as a metaphor in literary or theoretical material – such use has generated important insights in feminist and postcolonial theory – but rather to point to what is missed by this exclusive focus. Treating rape as metaphor only risks obscuring the violence of rape and risks conditioning public debate about rape in specific and limiting ways.

Because the stylisation of rape in literature creates new issues outside of literary discourse, it is important to create an awareness of the history of the representation of rape and critical rhetoric surrounding it. To implement the changes that will break the silence built from the metaphors surrounding rape and its discourse, the construction of the rape metaphor must be interrogated.

From Arthurian romance to *The Vagina Monologues* - A Brief History of Rape in Literature and Theory

Rape has been employed as a trope, or metaphor, throughout literary history. Rape and sexual violence against female characters have been woven into cornerstone narratives, ranging from Ovid's various portrayals of sexual assault to *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" (1712) and finally, Samuel Richardson's highly successful novel *Clarissa* (1748). Although these narratives are far apart on a historical spectrum, they share a commonality in their use of rape as a metaphor. Rape is metaphorized and used as a literary tool to convey a kaleidoscope of messages, meanings, symbols and comments, often as an illustration of multiple forms of oppression. The literary aesthetics, as well as the politics of rape give the authors of these narratives leeway to demonstrate, as Kathryn Gravdal suggests, the state of Ovid's relationship to Rome, Shakespeare's criticism of patriarchal structures, and, possibly, in the case of Richardson, a 'condemnation of sexism or an enlightened allegory of class welfare' (Gravdal 560).

Even this condensed survey of cornerstone literature engaging with the representation of rape demonstrates what is to be this thesis's main point of criticism: rape, in the history of literature, seems to have been utilized as metaphor for other conflicts and issues. Rape as a metaphor is certainly a powerful and justifiable symbol for other forms of oppression. However, the aim of this thesis is to discuss a prominent problem that arises because of the creation of the 'rape trope' or 'rape metaphor', namely, the displacement and removal of the actual, violent and traumatic act of rape. The second part of this chapter will discuss literature's obsession with the rape metaphor, as well as the extensive use of this metaphor in feminist theory, a use which risks adding to the process of defamiliarizing rape, and therefore, removing it further from its representation in literary texts onto a metaphorical and discursive level.

The representations of rape in literature have created a system of rhetorical devices and images around the act of rape that have resulted in the formation and perpetuation of some stereotypes concerning rape victims. The discussions of rape in literary works by critics reveal that there is no doubt that rape serves as a metaphor in literary texts. Rather than challenging the assumption that rape is always a metaphor, the assumption is used as basis for the critical discussions. The use of rape as a metaphor can be traced back to literary traditions of casting female rape victims into stereotypes and establishing the function of rape in literary texts. For instance, in tales of Arthurian romance, Chrétien de Troyes uses rape as a signifier of morality, of good and evil; rape is used to 'separate the good nobles from the bad' (Gravdal 563). In her study of Arthurian romance, Gravdal argues that the links created by Chrétien de Troyes

between the narrative structure of rape and romance can still be traced in today's cultural assumptions about rape issues. This is especially true for the matter of consent and non-consent (Gravdal 561), which also 'structures the issues of rape' (Sielke 80) in the present. To support her claim, Gravdal states that present legal conflicts around the issue of rape and sexual violence are still a 'matter of representation' (Gravdal 559), just like in literature. The blurring of lines between the representation of real rape and rape in literature will however be put aside for now and elaborated on later in my discussion.

Other factors that have helped to create the metaphor of rape and then forged it into a literary tope, can be observed in the discussions of other works from the literary canon. For example, Barbara Baines remarks that when we think of literary figures such as Helen, the Sabine Women and Lucrece, rape is 'transformed into an occasion for the conflict between men and for the privileging of male honour' (Baines 70). The transformation of rape into an occasion for conflict, or 'ideology of rape,' highlights how little concerned the works referred to are with the literal representation of rape. Other critics have identified similar issues in these works: Sylvana Tomaselli, is convinced that there is a recently developed tendency to avoid acknowledging the reality of rape, and that this tendency stands in stark contrast to the metaphorical representation of rape in characters such as Helen, the Sabine Women and Lucretia (Tomaselli 2). Carolyn Williams confirms the claim of this thesis that the representation of rape in literature has had a part in casting victims of rape into stereotypes, especially when discussing Shakespeare's Lucrece as the 'archetypal rape victim' (Williams 109).

Like Lucrece, Samuel Richardson's Clarissa is also seen as an archetypal rape victim. The 'demented fatality' (Castle 108) of Lovelace leads him to silence Clarissa by raping, thus victimizing, her. However, in her interpretation of the text, Terry Castle reads the act of rape as a 'form of hermeneutic intimidation' and as a 'punishment for attempting to interpret and express in her own way' (Castle 115). In other words, Castle reads the rape as a metaphor for gender politics and power struggles. Clarissa is the archetypal symbol of a victimized woman. Her traumatic experience is linked to figurative forms of oppression ('psychological, economic and social' (Castle 116)) rather than to the literal horror of the act of sexual violence. Castle's analysis suggests that the loss of independence for a female character is 'a loss classically culminating in rape' (117). Her choice of the term 'classically' displays how the metaphor of rape in relation to female characters is a commonly used trope in literary history. The use of the word 'classically' furthermore implies that rape is not only a literary trope, but also that it is commonly interpreted as such.

Rape as a metaphor can also be found in satire, as for instance in Alexander Pope's 'mock-epic' (Bates 57) "The Rape of the Lock", in which Pope contrasts serious issues with the trivial, and transforms rape into an 'emblem' (Bates 58) of war acts. Another instance of rape in satire is the repeated use of rape jokes and rape attempts in Henry Fielding's works, as well as his ongoing exchange with Richardson concerning sentimental representations of rape (Dickie 572). The use of rape as a means to criticize forms of oppression (in the previously mentioned works) adds a grotesque quality to the metaphor, which distorts the act of rape even further and redirects the reader's attention to its figurative meaning and the social commentary. The grotesque quality of the rape metaphor in satire has found its aesthetic counterpart in another form of writing, so called 'narratives of sexual danger' (Walkowitz 65). In her investigation of the violently and sexually charged Jack the Ripper narratives, Walkowitz states that the symbolism of these narratives have made crucial contributions to the production of feminist sexual politics. This is largely because the narratives epitomize the metaphor of the rape and oppression of the female body, whilst drawing on 'the grotesqueness of a whole tradition of rape and seduction tales' (Sielke 78).

Looking back at these representations of rape in literature, it appears that the tradition of utilizing rape as a metaphor is a common literary practice that is rich in symbolism. Despite the research conducted on these texts, and the vast amount of time that has passed since the days of Ovid and Chrétien de Troyes, it seems that the use of rape in literature still has a notable place in present day literary works. The fact that writers like Eve Ensler still feature rape as a dominant part in their works suggests that the metaphorization of rape is still relevant to literature, as well as the reading of literature. In Christine M. Cooper's interpretation of *The Vagina Monologues* (1996), Cooper says the following to convey the importance of Ensler's book in relation to Feminism: '[Ensler] thinks that 'taking the V-Word out of the closet' might release people 'to deal with other secrets –like violence and rape, fear and death'' (Cooper 732). Even though the 'V-word', rather than rape, becomes the vehicle for discussion in this statement, two noteworthy details are encapsulated in the 'V-word'. In addition to underlining the importance of violence toward women, Cooper's (as well as Ensler's) agenda is fuelled by the politics of the feminist movement. It is important to note that the victimization of women and the sexual violence represented in the previously presented narratives are a part of the rape metaphor. Hence, when it is employed as a part of the feminist rhetoric, it is in danger of perpetuating the tradition of framing women as victims.

The narratives rely on what Walkowitz calls the 'iconography of female victimization' (245) and this iconography is part of the aesthetic representation of rape in literary texts.

Therefore, the transferral of the rape metaphor from literary texts to theories of feminist politics becomes a difficult task that demands careful attention: if the tropes of literature are used in feminist thought, they need to be distinguished from reality. I argue that the blurring of the lines between rape in literary texts and real rape cases is especially problematic, because fictive rape cannot be likened to real rape experiences and the adaptation of the rhetoric of fictive rape in feminist theory could jeopardize the impact of the theory that employs it. For example, the use of the ‘iconography of female victimization’ could produce a new cultural “truth” depending on the interpretation that a culture decides to ascribe to this borrowed rhetoric. Sielke highlights the interconnectivity of the rhetoric of rape and other discourses. She states that ‘the meanings a culture assigns to sexual violence evolve from an interplay between constructions of cultural parameters of identity and difference (such as gender, race, and class) and their specific form of representation’ (Sielke 7). Sielke’s work affirms the assumption that the rhetoric of rape is relevant to literature past and present. Sielke also depicts how the rhetoric of rape is embedded in the feminist discourse.

Since most of the rhetoric around rape comes from literature, literature is often used as a starting point for the feminist discussion about rape. This means that the line between reality (real rape) and literature (fictive rape), as well as between literal and figurative representations of rape in literary texts are blurred. Art critics outside of academia might claim that there is a clear distinction between art and reality, because art in academia demands an analytical viewpoint, which automatically establishes a critical distance to the sexual violence or rape on display. Therefore, the act of rape is not viewed as real and art allows the viewer to participate in the ‘event’ of rape whilst also offering ‘comfort of aesthetic distance’ (Tanner 560). Arguably, rape is automatically read as a metaphor and has nothing in common with a real rape reported in the media.

However, the use of the metaphor of rape (as it occurs in literature) in feminist discourse transgresses the previously stated (simple) binary logic. Furthermore, the representation of real rape cases by the media often bear resemblance to the representations of rape in literature. The often-recounted Central Park Jogger Rape Case in which a woman was gang raped by strangers is an example of the merging of literary rape rhetoric and the reporting of real rape cases. Heller states that cases like this are now part of ‘popular memory’ that have ‘evolved to be part of our cultural mythology’ (Heller 330) of sexual violence against women. Sielke, simultaneously identifies the Central Park Jogger Case as a generator of discourse due to the rhetoric used when reported: “The Jogger and the Wolf Pack’ or ‘Central Park Horror’” (Sielke 1). The headlines demonstrate how the register of real rape case reports are intertwined with the register of literary

texts. If the rape metaphor is transferred into the discourse about real rape cases, how are we to distinguish the symbol from the literal act? And does the interpretation of real rape cases then not interfere with our reading of rape in literature if it uses the same rhetoric? It seems an impossible task to separate reality and fiction in these cases, even though real rape is not comparable to rape in literature, because rape narratives exist in ‘highly mediated ways only’ (Sielke 2).

Therefore, my question in this thesis is: where, in these discussions and portrayals, is the literal representation of rape in literary texts? Is it impossible to read rape without interpreting it as a metaphor? And if it is possible to dissect and subtract the metaphor, how does it help our reading? Moreover, is it possible to write rape without writing it figuratively? Another difficulty that the non-metaphorical discussion of rape in the case studies poses, is the fact that the readings of the rape scenes, as a metaphor for other concepts will have to be employed to answer and evaluate this question. Furthermore, I hope to find that the texts used as case studies might add a new nuance to the discussion of rape in literature, due to their varying topics and the fact that they are current works of literature, and therefore might reflect on changes in our attitude towards the issue.

However, to begin the analysis and discussion of my case studies, an understanding of the different feminist attitudes towards rape needs to be established. I will have to comply in the act of muddling the lines between the metaphor of literary rape and rape as it is tackled by feminist politics from different standpoints. As Sabine Sielke observes, when rape enters a discourse it ‘turns into a rhetorical device, an insistent figure for other social, political and economic concerns and conflicts’ (Sielke 2). This statement resembles the observations made by the critics in the earlier parts of this chapter, and yet this time the concern are the politics of feminism instead of literature. Today we employ terms like ‘rape culture’, ‘anti-rape discourse’ and ‘rape crisis discourse’ because rape is still a dominant issue in present society. The threat of rape is also seen as a predominantly female concern, which is the reason I have chosen to exclusively discuss female victims in my case studies. The term ‘rape culture’ is often applied by radical feminists in discussions about feminism in the United States, because this particular feminist movement has identified an increase in rape crimes in the United States in recent years (Sielke 191).

Nonetheless, Sielke argues that this does not mean that rape is a more frequently committed crime in the United States, but rather that the extent rape is talked about informs us about the ‘status’ of rape as a central trope within the American cultural imaginary instead of the state of real rape crimes (Sielke 4). This observation by Sielke highlights the rhetorical and

figurative nature of the way rape is talked about in feminist discourse. There are many terms for the “rape crisis” and the approach towards it varies, depending on the group voicing their concern, but the terms all encompass the agenda of the feminist movement, which is, regarding rape at least, ‘the objective of eliminating rape’ (McNickle Rose 75). Rape is viewed as the metaphor for the oppression of women by patriarchal systems by all feminist movements. It does, however, also divide opinions. Most critics seem to agree on the basis that rape is a female issue, a ‘trope for the female condition’ (Sielke 141), and a constant ‘threat’ (Cahill 1), because women are ‘rapable’ (Cahill 1). Because of the general view that women are ‘rapable’, rape as a metaphor, became an important part of the debates of the 1970’s second wave feminist movement. The idea that women reclaim their ‘right to control their own body’ (Weeks 16) was central to the movement, and especially in Grosz’s theory of ‘female corporeality’, which is concerned with the political and cultural ‘significance of bodies’ (Grosz 16). However, rape was a controversial topic, because it was (and is) predominantly seen as a female issue, which did not correspond with new ideas of Gender and sexuality as a shifting concept, or ‘historical invention’ (Grosz 12).

Another controversial issue within feminist theory has been the perception of what constitutes rape. This debate has caused two different schools to emerge. On the one hand, is the influential work of the journalist Susan Brownmiller, and on the other hand stands the works of Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon. The gist of Brownmiller’s book *Against our Will* (1975) is that rape is a political weapon, a ‘conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear’ (Weeks 59). The important part of Brownmiller’s theory is that rape should be read as a violent assault, not as a sexual assault. In contrast, Dworkin and MacKinnon, who are known for their ‘anti-porn crusade’ (Weeks 59), argue that rape is a sexual crime. Although I agree with Dworkin and MacKinnon on this specific statement, the fact that they view ‘all heterosexuality as rape’ (Heller 341) must be contested. MacKinnon’s argument for her radical theory is the ‘compulsory nature’ (Cahill 3) and the ‘eroticization of masculine dominance’ (Cahill 3). Following this reasoning, MacKinnon argues that rape cannot be distinguished from heterosexual sex, just because rape is violent.

It is evident that the matter of consent and non-consent still lies at the heart of the issue regarding the definition of rape. The treatment of rape by legal systems reflects the change that the definition of rape has undergone: From changes to the Germanic law in 1200 by Pope Innocent III, who issued that the criminal act of ravishment (rape) could be changed into non-criminal by a marriage ‘if the victim will consent’, and therefore made rape a ‘way for men to contract a legal marriage’ (Gravdal 568), to the laws of 18th century Britain, in which rape was

seen as the violation of a man's property, to the constant re-evaluation of what defines an assault as rape or sexual assault, rape has constantly been redefined by law. Underlying these legal changes to the definition of rape is the issue of consent, which is ultimately what MacKinnon refuses to consider in her definition of rape. To be clear, in my analysis of the rape scenes discussed in this thesis, I will be adopting Ann J. Cahill's definition of rape as 'the imposition of a sexually penetrating act on an unwilling person' (Cahill 11). The issue of consent and non-consent is a point that I will return to in the following chapters.

Besides the controversy around the definition of rape in feminist discourse, the depiction and the rhetoric of rape in terms of its presentation and interpretation as figurative (as opposed to literal) remains the main concern of discussion. Several critics view the metaphoric nature ascribed to rape as foreordained and inescapable: some view sexuality and its history as 'always necessarily political' (Weeks 4), and therefore the 'symbolic focus of debates about male power' (Weeks 59). Others see rape as a metaphor that results from a 'Foucauldian model of power' (Mardorossian 745) that is entrenched in the binary categories (sex/gender, man/woman) 'whose origins and effects we should be questioning' (Mardorossian 745). What remains unchanged, however, is the idea that rape is a metaphor. The trope of rape is linked to feminist theory, because it has been made into a 'cultural product' (Grosz 58). Sending rape even further into abstract thought, critics like Joana Burke view rape as a social performance that is 'highly ritualized' (Burke 61) and thereby imply that rape is constructed in a way that allows change. A performance is something that can be altered, which implies choice. Furthermore, a performance is something that is scripted, which implies that a victim of rape plays a role that presupposes 'masculine power and feminine powerlessness' (Mardorossian 752). However, it does confirm the tradition to read rape as a metaphor.

Another approach towards the representation of rape is the one that Mieke Bal chooses; in her discussion of rape, she makes it into the ultimate metaphor because she believes that rape is 'by definition imagined' (Bal 142). In her opinion, rape cannot be visualized, only imagined because it is an experience that is completely 'inner' and makes the victim of rape 'invisible'. Her argument goes as follows: '[Rape] does that literally first – the perpetrator 'covers' her – and then figuratively – the rape destroys her self-image, her subjectivity, which is temporarily narcotized, definitely changed and often destroyed' (Bal 142). Because the experience of rape is inner, in her opinion, the representation of rape is only a translation, which means rape can never be represented in an objective way. Sielke discusses these translations in terms of 'refiguration' (Sielke 5); refiguration works through substitution, which means that the rape represented as a translation by Mieke Bal is also assigned meaning by its displacement into

other contexts. This shows that the meaning-production, by way of the representation of rape, as well as the metaphor of rape, continues to take place despite the multitude of discourses and analytical approaches it is flung into.

Finally, it is the meaning-making quality of the rape metaphor in feminist theory and literature that foregrounds the issue of the metaphor itself: It does not matter what kind of meaning is ascribed to the metaphor, it is the act of ascribing meaning that makes it difficult to distinguish between rape in literature and the representation of rape in other contexts. Sielke aptly states '[Literary texts] tell stories and translate tales of violation into nationally specific cultural symbologies and conclusive narratives.' (Sielke 6). Weeks takes a similar stance and states that narratives are so powerful that they carry the unconscious assumption that what is being elaborated for the reader is a 'true history' (Weeks 6). It is therefore important to distinguish the metaphor from what is presented to understand what part of the representation of rape in a narrative is literal depiction and what is ascribed meaning. If the difference between the two is not made and the rhetoric of rape from literature continues to be used without that distinction, we run risk to perpetuate the portrayal of women solely as victims in discourses and theories of feminism that actually aim to destroy this very portrayal.

‘Not rape, not quite that’ – The Silence of Rape Victims in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*

J. M. Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace* (1999) is an apt example of the depiction of rape in literature and the critical discussion surrounding it. It is particularly interesting to discuss because it comprises two different cases of rape. The representation of these two rapes raises questions about the metaphorization of rape as well as the importance of the narrative perspective that represents it. It furthermore exposes a close relation of the rape metaphor and intertextuality, which in turn enables the rape to be transferred into critical discourse. The following analysis of Coetzee’s novel will claim that the rapes of Melanie and Lucy are constructed in such a way that the rapes of Melanie and Lucy become “silent” topics, even though they serve as the starting point of various critical discussions of the novel. The basis for this claim is that the Western literary traditions offer a framework of aesthetics, which Coetzee negotiates.

The first sentence of *Disgrace* establishes more than just the main character’s personal attributes. It highlights the issue of ambiguity and perception: ‘For a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well’ (Coetzee 1). David Lurie is established as the main focalizer of the narrative, which is evident from the small bracketed incision of ‘to his mind’ in the middle of the sentence. The present-tense, third-person narration is constructed from David Lurie’s point of view from the first sentence onwards and, therefore, omits the possibility of other voices being represented without being filtered through David’s interpretation. The ambiguous depictions of the sexual violence through David’s limited perspective have caused scholars and critics to disagree as to whether the novel includes one or two rape scenes. This, in turn, has produced a variety of conflicting readings of the text.

The ‘the problem of sex’ in the first sentence foreshadows the topical concern of the novel and it tells us, as Michael Gorra puts it, ‘that David Lurie hasn’t solved the problem at all’ (paragraph 4). The critical divide over how the novel should be read and interpreted begins with this sentence. To Gorra, the sentence ‘is simply the status quo whose rupture will produce a story’ (paragraph 4), while to Deidre Coleman it signifies an ‘anthropological enquiry’ (598) that allows for a Darwinian reading of the novel, which ‘sees struggle and competition in racial as well as sexual and generational terms’ (Coleman 598). Coleman also identifies the intertextuality of the narrative in the first sentence, which she discusses in reference to Thomas Hardy’s novel *Jude the Obscure* (1895) as ‘the problem of sex’ is a direct quotation from Hardy’s novel about human sexuality. The preface to Hardy’s novel explains that the ‘problem of sex’ is a ‘deadly war waged between flesh and spirit’ (Hardy 23).

The intertextuality of the narrative is subject to many critical and literary discussions. These discussions show how the text is automatically read as an allusion, metaphor, or grand allegory (Swales 19). In fact, it seems impossible not to interpret the text as a metaphor, since it is so rich in intertextuality. Since this thesis is investigating the representation of rape, and critical responses to such representations, it is vital to investigate the construction of rape as a 'grand allegory'. In her discussion of the novel, Lucy Valerie Graham compares the treatment of rape in Coetzee's novel to the treatment of rape in the 'canonical literary narratives of the West' (439). She states that rape is often presented as the 'unspeakable', as being 'severed from articulation' and 'hidden' (439). The examples of western narratives and their representations of rape are important for an understanding the metaphorical nature of *Disgrace*. Graham recalls Shakespeare's Lucrece, who names her rapist, but nevertheless perceives 'herself as *disgraced*' (439). Lucrece's way out of her perceived "disgrace" is suicide, revealing that she cannot live after voicing the crime committed against her to her husband, continuing the tradition of portraying rape as an unspeakable crime, which also somehow taints the victim with some of the guilt of the perpetrator.

The second example from the Western literary canon, given by Graham, is Ovid's Philomela, who physically cannot speak of the rape she has experienced because Tereus cuts out her tongue after raping her. Philomela and Lucrece are mythological rape victims, who embody the canonical traditions of depicting rape, which are characterized by silenced victims, or in Graham's words, the 'Western artistic traditions in which rape has had a fraught relationship with articulation or representation' (439). The discussion of these two mythological figures is significant in relation to Coetzee's novel for several reasons. First, the title of the novel conjures up the association with Shakespeare's poem, because Lucrece perceives herself to be *disgraced* after she has been raped. Second, Graham observes that the names of the two rape victims in Coetzee's novel, Lucy and Melanie, 'echo' (439) the names of Shakespeare's and Ovid's Lucrece and Philomela. Moreover, David Lurie renames Melanie as Meláni: 'the dark one' (Coetzee 19), whilst 'Lucy's name has associations with light' (Graham 437) since it derives from the Latin word 'lux', meaning 'light' (latin-dictionary.net).

The intertextuality of the novel, especially in relationship to Lucy and Melanie, is clearly a dominant part of the construction of the narrative, as these examples illustrate. To examine the two acts of rape in *Disgrace*, I will begin by discussing the rape of Melanie, which is viewed as the more controversial case of rape in the novel throughout literary discussions. Graham notes in her analysis of the novel that 'The central incidents in both narrative settings of *Disgrace* are acts of sexual violation, but notably, in each case, the experience of the violated

body is absent, hidden from the reader' (Graham 433). I concur with this observation in every regard. However, the following discussion will point out the differences between the two cases of rape to illustrate how the rapes generate differing discourses.

One reason for the different representation is that David Lurie is both the focalizer of the narrative and the perpetrator in Melanie Isaac's case. Hence, the reader is presented with more information about the violation, since the focalizer is part of the scene. However, the fact that David is the focalizer of this scene also means that the representation of the rape and the embodied experience of Melanie are, as previously mentioned by Graham, 'hidden' from the reader. In other words, Melanie's experience is filtered through David's subjective narration.

The novel's narrative perspective creates another issue as a consequence of David's narrow point of view, which is the issue of ambiguity. David Lurie is Melanie's lecturer at university and therefore knows her, which obliterates the idea of the sudden attack in a stranger rape case. Adam Mars-Jones states that 'his advances to [the] 20-year-old girl were in no way resisted' (paragraph 3). This exemplifies the interpretation many critics make of Melanie's and David's relationship, which is that the rape is in fact a consensual sexual act, because Melanie does not defend herself actively and because she knows David.

David himself states that his abuse of Melanie is 'not rape, not quite that' (Coetzee 25). This is later backed up when David states that he 'makes love to her one more time' (Coetzee 29). The term 'makes love' is not consistent with the abusive actions that are being described from David's point of view. However, the contradictory representation of the scene enables critics to use it to argue against the rape accusations brought against David, by relying on the ambiguity of the narrative perspective. Because David does not perceive himself as a rapist, he is no rapist. Instead, critics describe the "relationship" between Melanie and David in different ways; Lucy Hughes-Hallett claims that the story is one of seduction and that therefore David only 'seduces a young female student' (Hughes-Hallett 5); other critics concur and call it an 'affair' (Morris 16, Youngusband 148, Du Peez 18), or 'a brief liaison' (Du Toit 4).

The text, however, does not seem to support such interpretations of the relationship between David and Melanie. As I have stated earlier, what happens to Melanie cannot be described with any other term than *rape*. I argue that the David's statement that it is 'not rape, not quite rape' is what signifies that David does indeed rape her; especially because this statement is preceded by these statements 'He has given her no warning; she is too surprised to resist the intruder who thrusts himself upon her' (Coetzee 24) and '...nothing will stop him' (Coetzee 25). Another phrase indicating that David is coercing Melanie to have sex with him is: 'he forced the sweater up' (Coetzee 23). The use of the word 'force' reveals that the

encounter is of a violent nature. These descriptions are then followed by statements which reveal that David knows he has abused Melanie. For example, David thinks of the rape as ‘A mistake, a huge mistake’ (Coetzee 25). He also admits that: ‘if she is behaving badly, he has behaved much worse’ (Coetzee 28). He knows that what he does to Melanie is ‘undesired to the core’ (Coetzee 25). It is clear from these statements that the sexual encounter between Melanie and David is only desired by David and that he is aware of his transgression, even though he refuses to accept his guilt by avoiding calling his act ‘rape’. The representation of the rape through David is at odds with the evidence presented by the narrative as a whole. This highlights the problem of having the focalizer, who is also the rapist present the rape. Although David defends his action as ‘not rape’, the observations he makes of the scene underline Melanie’s resistance. Despite his denial, it is rape and even though it is described through David’s eyes, it is clear that Melanie does not desire the act. This is made clear by her passive resistance: she lies ‘as though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck’ (Coetzee 25).

I argue (alongside critics such as Dooley and Graham) that this is a case of rape, because the previously listed array of phrases representing the rape scene convey a lack of consent, even though this is distorted through the narrative perspective of the rapist. Throughout the novel David himself, as well as critics discussing Melanie’s and David’s relationship, continue to refer to the act of rape by using various metaphors. Deirdre Coleman fittingly observes: ‘As a professor of literature, Lurie draws on a wide range of allusions, marshalling Shakespeare to propel his seduction of Melanie Isaacs and Flaubert to ironize his romantic and sexual longings’ (600). This implies that the Western literature David draws upon in his narrative and the critical responses to this literature, provide him with a framework which allows him to mediate his actions. By transferring his feelings towards Melanie into the literary realm, David can “escape” into a pre-existing framework of literary representation and discussion of rape, which allows him to interpret his actions as a seduction, rather than rape.

In addition to his tendency to obscure reality, David also nurtures a feeling of entitlement as a man. Initially he uses the services of Soraya, a prostitute, who is first the “solution” to his problem of sex. The critic Melinda Harvey applies Susan Sontag’s definition of pornographic imagination, which tends to ‘make one person interchangeable with another’ (Sontag 53) when she explains David’s shift of attention from Soraya to Melanie. Harvey states that Melanie becomes ‘another escort’ (Harvey 101), based on Susan Sontag’s definition. David crosses the boundary between professional and personal sexual relationships by transferring his desire from Soraya to Melanie. However, David’s interest remains superficial: he is interested

in her sexually simply because she is beautiful, not because of any aspects of her personality. This can be seen in David's general perception of beautiful women, who, in his mind, have no agency, because their beauty does not belong to them: '[A] Woman's beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world... She does not own herself. Beauty does not own itself' (Coetzee 16). The statement draws a comparison between Lurie's desire and Shakespeare's "Sonnet 1". It also emphasises the unbalanced power-relation between David and Melanie, especially through the way he thinks about Melanie's beauty: 'he speaks of [her beauty] in terms of ownership, of property' (Tegla 208). Even in his defence in front of the university's investigation committee, which is formed after Melanie reports him, David describes himself as a 'servant of Eros' (Coetzee 52) 'rather than an abuser or even harasser' (Mars-Jones paragraph 3).

It is evident that David's unreliability as a focalizer creates a problem for the reader; the preceding discussion makes clear that the narrative perspective allows enough ambiguity to divide opinions amongst critics. Whether David is perceived as a rapist or not, all discussions have in common that they provide an interpretation of the rape scene, even though it is hardly depicted at all. The representation of a rape scene, in my opinion, is only offered by the perpetrator who denies his crime. David thinks of himself as the servant of Eros and therefore transforms the reality of rape into something it is not.

While some interpret Melanie's experience as a metaphor for the oppression of the African population through colonialization, others, such as Swales, read this scene as an allegory for the oppression of women through patriarchy. Swales' reading of the scene is different insofar that he refuses a postcolonial reading of the novel based on the rape of Melanie, because he doubts that Melanie is black, merely because David refers to her as 'the dark one'. Swales states that 'any attempt to read David's exploitation of Melanie as allegorically expressive of white exploitation of the black population does not carry much conviction – not at least because Melanie is white' (9). It is true that it is never explicitly stated whether Melanie is black or white and Swales rightfully critiques the automatic assumption of her colour. In Swales opinion, this assumption is forced into readings of the novel, because it allows for a 'crude symmetry' to be 'set up between David's affair with [Melanie] and the black men's rape of Lucy' (9). The diverse interpretations of the novel show that the intertextual elements of the narrative allow for readings of the rapes as a metaphor of the oppression of South Africa, as well as the oppression of women. The various interpretations share the reading of the rapes as a metaphor for something else, which is enabled by the literary richness of the text. However, these readings leave out a reading of the rapes that is literal, rather than figurative.

As stated earlier, I contest the idea that David has an affair with Melanie, but agree with the comparison of the two rapes. Swales, for example, observes that the two rapes are usually compared with each other, beginning with the symbolic names of the two rape victims. The issue with the symbolism of Melanie's and Lucy's names, the intertextuality of the novel overall, and the protagonist's tendency to obscure what he perceives, all result in the frequent use of the rape as the 'basis for constructing allegorical meanings' (Dooley 129). This means that the act of rape, which is already hidden from the reader's view, is even further removed from its embodied reality, because it is employed as a metaphor that enables the discussion of social and political issues.

The metaphorization of rape becomes an even more dominant part of discussion when Lucy's rape is discussed. Because there is no doubt that Lucy is raped, there is no critical debate about whether she has been violated or not, as in Melanie's case. Instead, the focus shifts immediately to the meaning of Lucy's rape. David and his daughter Lucy, are attacked, and whilst David is beaten up and Lucy's dogs are being shot, she is gang raped by three strangers. Subsequently, she falls into a depression and refuses to report the rape to the police. Michael Gorra sees Lucy's rape as a plot point that reverses the previous rape of Melanie into a moment of poetic justice, 'in which what Lurie has in some sense done to another man's daughter is trebly visited on his own' (Gorra paragraph 10). I do not think that Lucy's rape mirrors or reverses Melanie's experience of rape in the novel. Instead, I would argue that the representation of Lucy's rape takes the issue of the representation of rape one step further than the representation of Melanie's rape. Whilst the reader is offered a depiction of Melanie's rape (albeit filtered through David's perspective), Lucy's rape is not depicted at all because she is in a different room from the one David is locked into. Concerning the mistreatment of Lucy, David, the reader, and literary scholars all become the interpreters of the rape. In this case all seem to read Lucy's rape as a metaphor.

According to Graham, David Lurie's opinion is that a 'history of wrong' speaks through Lucy's rapist' (437). This stands in contrast to David's own behaviour towards Melanie. After Lucy is raped David is concerned about her body and asks her to have HIV and pregnancy tests. As Graham points out, this opposes his 'lack of concern for Melanie Isaacs, whom he forces himself upon after his sexual relationship with Soraya, a prostitute' (438). Arguably, David's contradictory attitudes to rape are compliant with the issue of perception and ambiguity discussed in the preceding paragraphs. However, David's focus on his daughter's rape remains abstract as well: he focuses on 'race and economics' (Coleman 603) and in his attempt to understand what has happened to Lucy, David is merely able to see the rape as a transferral of

power, or 'supremacy', from one side to another. In the shadow of Petrus' house (farmworker and Lucy's future husband) David sees a 'shadow symbolic of the country's violent past' (Coleman 602), rather than his daughter's horrific experience. David's concern involves 'competition between whites and blacks for land and women' (Coleman 602), rather than empathy for his daughter.

Graham reads Lucy's rape as a metaphor for the situation in South Africa in general, putting aside a discussion of the rape in a non-figurative sense. She states that 'the anti-pastoral mode breaks with colonial mappings of the female body and land, depicting instead feudal systems of claiming and reclaiming where there is contempt for women as owners of property and land.' (Graham 439). In other words, Graham states that Coetzee suggests in his novel that female bodies still have no place in the new order of the new South Africa. This is symbolized by Lucy's rape, her resulting pregnancy, and her having to give up her land to remain in her house. A metaphorical reading of Lucy's actions, after she has been raped also reflects an attitude of refusal to perpetuate a cycle of punitive violence.

However, the fact that Lucy remains silent about her experience is more significant than all the interpretations of her experience. Critics agree that Lucy's silence is her way of reclaiming a small amount of agency in a highly metaphorical setting and narrative. Coleman calls Lucy's silence about her rape 'the novel's most disturbing and challenging feature' (607). Graham states that this represents Lucy's 'extreme refusal to play a part in a history of oppression' (Graham 439) and Gareth Cornwell aptly states that Lucy's silence is her refusal to 'give rape additional meaning or control over her life' (Cornwell 317). These readings reflect an understanding of the countries' transition to post-Apartheid South-Africa. However, by reading the text as a metaphor, the rape itself is moved into a figurative discussion, which does not take the actual act into consideration. By not sharing her story, which has already been made an un-representable topic by the narrative perspective, Lucy insists on the unique quality of her embodied experience. She insists on the "non-generalizability or transferability of her situation" (317). In the novel Lucy attempts to explain the subjectivity of her experience to David, uttering: 'You don't understand what happened to me that day' (Coetzee 157) and adding 'I want to decide by myself, without being pushed' (157) when she realizes that David cannot comprehend her experience.

Whilst David continues to impose meaning on his daughters' rape, he begins to contemplate the painting *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, which makes him question the portrayal of rape in art. He considers the possibility that rape exists in the Romantic Western literary tradition which he admires: 'He thinks of Byron. Among the legions of countesses and

kitchenmaids Byron pushed himself into there were no doubt those who called it rape' (160). David's contemplation of art and artists from the past in connection to rape is what seems to change his conception of art and literature and their 'authority' (Coleman 608).

However, the representation of rape remains a matter of embodiment and abstraction in David's world. He integrates his metaphorical and abstract understanding of rape, which derives from his current political situation and the literature he works with, with his understanding of Lucy's experience. David cannot escape his thinking: 'How they put her in her place, how they showed her what a woman was for' (Coetzee 115) and therefore he is stuck in a pessimistic view of 'the racial, sexual, and social compact evolving in the new South Africa' (Coleman 607). This kind of reading also implies that Lucy, in contrast to David, is not stuck in the same pessimistic view of the new South Africa. The fact that the discussion of Lucy's rape continually slips back into debates about metaphors and David's conceptions of art makes it clear that Lucy's experience, just like Melanie's, remains hidden underneath layers of construction and interpretation. But Lucy's story is her own to tell and therefore her refusal to share her experience is her way of claiming ownership even if this means, at least in David's opinion, that she is 'conferring ownership of the story to her rapists' (Coleman 607).

If one argues in favour of David's perspective, which is that if Lucy remains silent about her rape, she passes on ownership of her story to her rapists, could it not also be argued that she passes on that ownership to David? The experience is personal for Lucy: she is upset about the hatred she experienced during the assault and therefore she does not want to make this very personal matter public. This ties in with how Cornwell explains Lucy's silence as a tool that prevents her embodied experience from becoming a generalized experience. By refusing to share, or represent, her experience, Lucy disables the treatment of her experience as a parallel to other cases of rape. Thus, David's interpretation of the rape, as well as the readings by critics, is based on Lucy's silence. Therefore, the interpretations, however fitting, become speculations. The actual rape is not depicted, and yet a variety of meanings for the act have been created and applied to portray South African power-relations on a political, social and economic level. Graham expresses a similar idea: 'In *Disgrace*, Lucy is adamant that what happened is '[hers] alone', insisting that David Lurie - and, by default, the reader - was not there' (442).

Because the stories of Melanie and Lucy are 'elided' (Graham 444) in the novel, the reader is complicit in the creation of the rape scene, since it must be imagined. In other words, the act of rape is presented as so unspeakable in *Disgrace* that it must be constructed outside of the narration. Meffan and Worthington argue in a similar way to Graham and Cornwell, but transfer the debate further into abstraction by assuming what Coetzee intends to do by refusing

to construct Melanie's and Lucy's embodied experience in the narration: '...[Coetzee] seeks to encourage the reader to self-critique in the performative process of the act of imagination that is reading and from this basis to suggest the political possibilities of an ethical respect for alterity' (Meffan and Worthington 147). This reading emphasises the point of this thesis, which is that rape in literature seems to be inextricably intertwined with meaning, metaphor and message, rather than being read as a sexually violent and violently sexual act, without a necessary meaning attached to it. The interpretations of the novel are fruitful and important, but, as I have demonstrated, it seems problematic that the representation of rape is formulated in a specifically metaphorical manner. The acknowledgment of rape in a literal, rather than in a figurative sense, is missing from these readings.

As can be seen in this chapter, as well as in the preceding chapter, rape is a common subject in classical art and the Western literary canon. A certain framework of intertextuality and representation has been created to depict sexual violence by representations that both 'obscure and legitimise' (Graham 440) rape as an aesthetic tool. Coetzee addresses what Graham calls the 'elision' of rape in literature in "The Harms of Pornography" (1996) in which he states that the portrayal of violence is 'deeply anti-classical' (Coetzee 75). With Coetzee's own understanding of the representation of rape in mind, the question seems not to be "who speaks?", but rather "who does not speak?" in rape narratives. I will borrow Graham's words in order to convey my own assumption concerning the representation of rapes in *Disgrace*: Coetzee's novel negotiates and reveals the '...disjunction between allegiance to an ideology of aesthetics and allegiance to the ethical, revealing Western artistic traditions and perspectives that may condone unethical acts' (Graham 441).

This statement could be taken a step further by adding Stott's analysis of Lucy's silence in the novel to Graham's assumption, which is that by deciding to 'reject the possibility of narrative' (Stott 359), Lucy manages to show that 'the ultimate meaning of rape is that it has none' (359). Perhaps the non-portrayal of Melanie's and Lucy's embodied experiences, in contrast to the oversaturated use of metaphor and allegory created by David's narrative perspective, is a fitting representation of rape because it reflects how rape has been represented in Western literary tradition. The works discussed in the previous chapter represent rape from a point of view other than the victims, and the rape victims' choice of voicing their experience is usually denied in some way. Coetzee's novel does not simply echo this tradition of the representation of rape. *Disgrace* problematizes this portrayal by contrasting Melanie's and Lucy's attitudes towards rape with David's perception of it, and by revealing the "silence" surrounding the discussion of non-figurative rape. If the ultimate meaning of rape, as argued by

Stott earlier in this paragraph, is that it has no meaning we need to ask why it is so difficult to dissect rape from the meaning-making process of the critical discussions surrounding it.

‘When she went limp, he took the weapon out of her mouth and spurted all over her face’ – The Concealment of Rape in Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*

Shani Mootoo’s novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) exemplifies the complex relationship between rape and metaphor that arises from its representation. The novel differs from previously discussed rape scenes in content and narrative, most predominantly since the rape scenes are cases of incestuous child rape. Therefore, a reading of these scenes will add a new layer to the discussions of power struggles and male dominance that have begun with my discussion of Coetzee’s *Disgrace*. The novel has received less critical responses than *Disgrace*, especially regarding the rapes represented. Hence, the analysis will rely more on my own reading of the novel, rather than critical responses.

The following discussion will show how mixing the traditional representation of rape and a more explicit representation are featured in Mootoo’s novel. I argue that the way the two strategies of representing rape in *Disgrace* are equally employed but reversed in *Cereus Blooms at Night*. Whilst the rapes in Coetzee’s novel are not portrayed explicitly but discussed as part of the metaphor of oppression, the rapes in Mootoo’s novel are portrayed in an explicit manner without extensive use of metaphors. Hence, these scenes follow the tendency observed by Donahue-Wallace in the *Encyclopaedia of Rape* (2004): Donahue-Wallace describes the move from rape being presented as imagery of gods abducting beautiful women (16), to ‘overt representations of penetration and physical assault’ (15). In *Disgrace*, we could observe a play with both kinds of representation as described by Donahue-Wallace, mainly through the text’s intertextuality and its richness in metaphor. In other words, the rapes are not hidden from the reader. On the contrary, they are represented in explicit detail, but the structure of the narrative in which they are embedded, is highly metaphorical and intertextual (alike the narrative in *Disgrace*) and produces a similar effect. As I will argue here, the representation of the rapes in Mootoo’s novel creates the base for the metaphor of oppression and a critical discussion of gendered power struggles.

Cereus Blooms at Night is structured around Mala Ramchandin’s life, and the story is composed of various fragments of memories and flashbacks in omniscient third person narration altered with first person narration by Mala’s male nurse Tyler, and insertions of other characters’ stories. The first aspect of the novel I will consider, however, is the particularity of the incestuous nature of the rapes. In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mala and her little sister Asha (who flees from home) are raped by their father Chandin Ramchandin after their mother Sarah leaves the family to pursue a future with her lover Lavinia. According to scientists and literary

critics, father-daughter incest is the most frequent forms of incest (Willner 134, Leach 75). One explanation for the overpowering occurrence of father-daughter incest, in comparison to other types of incest, is the 'principle of dominance' (Willner 139). Fathers hold authoritative positions in the traditional Western nuclear family, because they function in a system that is reliant on patriarchal structures.

The Ramchandin family fits the description of a nuclear family, because they live according to the Christian values taught to them by missionaries. The concept of the nuclear family has led feminists to stress that incest is dominated by gender dynamics. The victims of incest are predominantly girls, whilst most perpetrators are men (Finkelhor 1994; Sedlak and Broadhurst 1996). According to feminists, the preservation of the patriarchal family structures has allowed incest to create and sustain a male-dominant culture (Armstrong 1978; Driver 1989; Herman and Hirschman 1977). The patriarchal structures of a nuclear family provide, as Wagner and Davenport put it, order to a family within its cultural setting (Wagner 1972; Davenport 1977). The perversion of this family structure can be caused by deviant sexual behaviour (like incest). The horror of incestuous rape derives from the fact that it commonly involves child abuse. Twitchell argues that the term 'incest' itself is associated with 'revulsion' (41) due to the etymology of the word. According to Twitchell, many non-Roman languages encapsulate the idea of blood defilement better than the English language. Twitchell states: 'the German *blutschande*, Danish and Swedish *blodskam*, Czech *Krvesmilstvo* (krv = blood), and Hungarian *vérfertőzés* (contamination of blood) all do what English politely overlooks' (42). The exemplary terms listed describe a sense of 'shame', or 'disgrace', thereby signifying the idea of defilement more strongly than the word 'incest'.

The breaking of the traditional order of the nuclear family through father-daughter incest usually occurs in a nuclear family after a disruption or estrangement of the sexual relationship between husband and wife (Machotka qtd in Lester 273). The focus of father-daughter incest studies is often laid upon an absent, 'cruel, unjust [or] depriving' (274) mother figure and the daughter's incestuous relationship with her father is a form of revenge. David Lester extends this evaluation with his theory that in the incestuous relationships between father and daughter the matter of blood ties has become less influential in popular discourse (Lester 96). This is because feminism has influenced the way in which the relationship is defined: 'Feminists have been primarily responsible for redefining incest as child sexual abuse' (Lester 96). This change to the legal definition of incest is incredibly important, as it emphasises the abusive nature of an incestuous father-daughter relationship. It highlights the abuse of authority that results from the power imbalance between a father and a daughter, which is a constituent of a nuclear family.

The diminished influence of blood ties, as Lester puts it, does not occur in the novel. Additionally, the idea that the incestuous father-daughter relationship is motivated by revenge is also not applicable to Mala's case, because the sexual advances by her father are unwished for and clearly portrayed as abuse.

The abuse Mala suffers at the hands of her father and the strategies he uses to control her will be analysed after a brief discussion of the setting and narration of the novel. This will help to establish the highly metaphorical and intertextual nature of the text, which contrasts the vivid depiction of the rape scenes. Firstly, the narration itself consists of several layers. The story is introduced by Tyler who sets the self-reflexive narrative frame of the story on the first page. *'By setting this story down, I, [...] am placing trust in the power of the printed word to reach many people.'* (Mootoo 3). Tyler, as the narrator and fictive author, creates an awareness of the story being constructed as a text and Tyler admits that he must be present in scenes, even though he is not presenting his own story: *'Might I add that my own intention, as the relater of this story, is not to bring notice to myself or my own plight' ... 'I cannot escape myself, and being a narrator who also existed on the periphery of the events, I am bound to be present'* (Mootoo 3). Tyler becomes the 'conduit' (Unjoo 11) for Mala, which, in return means that there is a gap between Mala's story and the story Tyler represents on her behalf. Tyler even anticipates a reader's possible mistrust of the accuracy of his version of the events and addresses them in the introduction: *'Forgive the lapses, for there are some, and read them with the understanding that to have erased them would have been to do the same to myself'* (Mootoo 3). Tyler's introduction is differentiated stylistically from the rest of the novel by in the use of italics. But the introduction establishes two of the novel's main concerns. Firstly, it reveals how identity and gender identity are constituted. And secondly, the atmosphere of the novel echoes traits of magical realism even though it does not employ magical elements.

The reference to magical realism is a nod to the mythical and allegorical nature of the story. One example of this is the Cereus flower, which recurs as an image throughout the novel. The Cereus only blooms one night a year, and its scent is described as something that can be smelled through the streets of Paradise (which is the town Mala where lives). The rare blossoming of the flower at night and its overpowering fragrance resemble the rare and precious flowers in fables, folk tales and fairy tales. A second example is the stylistic use of snails, insects and bugs that are printed in the text and therefore give the reader the impression of insects crawling over the pages. This draws the reader into the setting of Paradise, Lantanacamara.

The novel's setting is another part of the semi-magical nature of the narration. Lantanacamara is a fabricated, imaginary island, and it is contrasted to the faraway Shivering

Northern Wetlands to which people move to pursue a better future, to study and to flee from the strongly religious societal structures of Paradise. According to Unjoo, the employment of a fictive island allows Mootoo to produce a work of fiction that ‘evoke[s] a universe that feels at once authentic and recognizable but also affords the singular insights and leaps of a fictive imagination.’ (Unjoo 11). In the statement Unjoo is referring to the resemblance between Lantanacamara and real countries which carry institutional and cultural baggage from their colonial pasts. Critics tend to read the island as an allegorical version of a Caribbean island, due to the descriptions of different ethnicities, geography and cultural dialects within the novel. The fact that Mootoo creates an imaginary universe, no matter how much it resembles Trinidad (the place of Mootoo’s upbringing), is her ‘declaration of independence’ (Unjoo 11). Because Lantamacamara is a fictitious place, it allows Mootoo to hint at themes such as colonial oppression without being bound to historical accuracy.

Another important part of the narrative as a basis for allegory is not only the fictional setting of the events but also the inter-play with genre conventions and intertextuality. Not only is the novel written in five parts, like a play, it also seems to echo Shakespeare’s revenge tragedy *Titus Andronicus* (approx. 1594). The depictions of graphic violence and rape are especially reminiscent of Shakespeare’s play. The following elements of the play also appear to be incorporated within the intertextual world of Mootoo’s novel: the rape of Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*, which takes place in a forest; one of Lavinia’s rapists (called Chrion) who appears in front of her father Titus, pretending to be the Spirit of Rape, and the fact that Titus ends up killing his “disgraced” and mutilated daughter, as well as feeding her rapists to their mother in a pie. I argue that Mootoo has taken these elements surrounding Lavinia’s rape in *Titus Andronicus* and has evoked them in her novel, in Mala’s rape. Furthermore, the references to the play only appear in a distorted and displaced manner, which has allowed Mootoo to bend the rules of Western literary tradition without explicitly referencing Shakespeare’s play.

The last three parts of the novel are disproportionately short and are chronology inconsistent in the of the representation of the events they describe. This means that the play and the novel have a similar structure, but Mootoo fragments the traditional chronology of time, as well as the narration which seamlessly slips from first person accounts into omniscient third person narration. In addition to this, the name Lavinia is used in both works. In Shakespeare’s play, Lavinia is Titus’s daughter and the victim of rape. In Mootoo’s novel Lavinia Thoroughly is the name of Chandin’s stepsister, who he wants to marry. Upon her refusal of Chandin’s advances, he marries Lavinia’s best friend Sarah (Mala’s mother), who then elopes with Lavinia because they are lovers. I argue that although Lavinia is not Chandin’s daughter in *Cereus*

Blooms at Night, the notion of incest, which is later played out on Mala, is already evoked here because Lavinia is Chandin's stepsister, and therefore they are related when he falls in love with her.

Furthermore, the fact that Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* is raped in a forest and then has her hands and her tongue cut off so that she cannot tell who her rapists are, is mirrored, once again in a distorted manner, in Mala's closeness to nature and the silence she sinks into after her rape. Firstly, the book literally crawls with nature like the house in which Mala lives. The house enters a symbiotic relationship with the plants surrounding it, because they begin to grow into the house once Mala lives there by herself. Secondly, Mala's use of language declines after the most traumatic case of rape which she experiences. Mala is described as distancing herself from people and language, and increasingly becomes a part of nature by adopting sounds of nature (when Tyler meets Mala for the first time when she is an old lady she only makes cricket and frog sounds). Hence, the rape of Lavinia in nature seems to be related to Mala's rape and her becoming more like her natural surroundings. Especially striking is the silence of the rape victims in both works, which once again draws a connection between the play and the novel as well as deconstructing the representation of rape in Shakespeare's play.

The character of Chiron in *Titus Andronicus* is one of Lavinia's rapists and disguises himself as the Spirit of Rape in front of Titus. However, it is Titus who kills Lavinia. It can be argued that Chandin, in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, is a combination of the two characters in Shakespeare's play, because his name echoes Chiron's name, who is also a rapist, but Chandin is also the patriarch in his family structure (arguably like Titus is the head of Rome and the father of Lavinia). Furthermore, it could be argued that Mala, like Lavinia, is metaphorically killed by her father. Her father's abuse causes Mala to descend into what the other characters describe as "madness" which I will discuss later as Dissociative Identity Disorder. Because of Mala's traumatic rape experience, the child in Mala, which she refers to as 'Pohpoh', is killed, or at least dissociated from her personality as a troubled grown up, and frozen in time, because the rape experience 'lingers' (Baldan Sachdev 2) in her mind. Lastly, use of intertextual references to *Titus Andronicus*, in addition to the speculations of Lantacamara's colonial history, evoke colonial issues of the power imbalance between different people from different cultural backgrounds. In *Titus Andronicus* the plot is driven by the actions of characters attempting to become the head of Rome, and in *Cereus Blooms at Night* the stories of the characters are directed by religious missionaries and the perceived racial divide between white, black and Indian characters.

The intertextual elements of the novel support the reading of it from a postcolonial

perspective and the notion of oppression, which is conjured up by the allegorical narration of the novel, is mimicked in the rape scenes. Yet, the ornamental, layered nature of the intertextual elements of the novel are not featured in the representation of rape in the narrative. On the contrary, the descriptions of rape are more explicit and straightforward than the distorted way in which intertextual references are employed. One reason for this stylistic shift in the narration can be explained by Leary's suggestions in her work on the jurisdiction of child pornography laws: 'precise language can help convey the particular gravity of harms against children' (Graw Leary 109). This implies that descriptions of the violence done to a child needs to be precise and explicit to accurately represent the seriousness of the crime. This also applies to the descriptions of incestuous child rape in Mootoo's novel. In her comment on the novel Balwan Sachdev identifies the narration as explicit, as 'an illustration of brutal, confrontational writing' (Balwan Sachdev 4) and Rachel Devlin similarly describes scenes of father-daughter incest as an 'emotional violence and traumatic portrayal' (Delvin 626).

The most important instance of the explicit depiction of sexual violence in *Cereus Blooms at Night* is when Chandin rapes Mala after he finds out that she is in love with Ambrose. Due to 'magical intuition' or a 'phenomenon' (Mootoo 216), in the shape of mysterious chest pains that occur in the very moment that Mala 'embraces her gentlemen suitor' (216), Chandin decides to come home early from the rum shop and discovers his daughter's relationship. However, the reaction following Chandin's discovery makes it clear that the tone of the narration is changing to a more serious and realistic level: 'A man tiefing my baby? He brave to even try. I ent go let nobody tief my woman again. No man, no woman, no damn body go tief my property again. I go kill he. I go kill she too, if it come to that. I go kill meself too' (Mootoo 220). These statements also clarify why Mala is experiencing sexual abuse from her father. Chandin refers to Mala as his 'baby' and then immediately replaces baby with 'woman', which subsequently is replaced with 'property'. Chandin is incapable, or unwilling to distinguish his former marriage to an adult woman from his relationship with Mala as well as his notion of both as property, showing that Mala is being punished for her mothers' disappearance.

In addition, the immediate reference to murder makes clear that Chandin operates a system of control through fear in his family, which emphasises that the incestuous element of their relationship is clearly unwanted by Mala. Chandin's intimidation of Mala through fear and dominance is also depicted when Chandin confronts Mala in the kitchen; he shatters chairs and moves through the kitchen 'like a hurricane' (Mootoo 221). Mala's fear of her father is immediately expressed through her 'wailing' and expressions of 'fright' (Mootoo 221). Mala

also connects her father's violence with the disappearance of her mother, because Chandin's rage conjures up memories of his reaction of the moment of the discovery that Sarah left. Chandin turns his violent anger into sexual violence: 'Instead of hitting her he unbuckled his belt and unzipped his trousers' (Mootoo 221). Mala decides to defy Chandin for the first time because of her relationship with Ambrose has revealed to her that sexual intercourse can be pleasant.

However, this infuriates Chandin even more and he threatens to kill her, once again exercising emotional violence over Mala: 'I go kill you right here. I ent fraid.' (Mootoo 221). First Chandin physically exercises control over Mala by shoving her face into the kitchen sink and pulling her hair (Mootoo 221-222). This is followed by these descriptions: 'He yanked out his penis, hardened weapon-like by anger. He used his knees to pry her legs open and his feet to kick and keep them apart', 'With his large fat fingers he parted her buttocks as she sobbed', and 'He reached around and squeezed her breasts, frantically pumping them to mimic the violent thrusting of his penis' (Mootoo 221-222). The representation of the rape in this scene is mostly reduced to depictions of body parts: face, chin, hands, penis, knees, legs, feet, fingers, buttocks, and penis (again).

The effect of the reduction of the act of rape to the description of body parts pushes the physicality of the act into the foreground and leaves hardly any space for the metaphorization of the rape scene as discussed in previous chapters. However, it leaves room for the metaphor created by the description of Chandin's penis as a weapon. As Balwan Sachdev states, Mala's body becomes a sight 'for both violence and submission' (4). Chandin's body parts are described as predatory and violent, whilst Mala's body parts are described as submissive in relation to the interaction with violence. The dominance of male over female bodies is foregrounded. The peripheral details of the scene are non-existent, and therefore do not allow for any further interpretation of the rape, apart from the male/paternal dominance over the female body.

This scene is followed by more physical violence directed at Mala. She is flung around, slapped until her lip splits and her left eye tears, thrown onto the floor, pulled up by her hair and then raped orally: 'She chocked and gagged as he rammed it down her throat. When she went limp, he took the weapon out of her mouth and spurted all over her face' (Mootoo 222). The description of Chandin's penis has changed from a weapon-like body part to being the weapon itself, once again highlighting the threatening, hostile and brutal nature of the act by paralleling it with a symbol of warfare, invasion and dominance. Furthermore, Chandin uses derogatory terms like 'whore' (Mootoo 223) when addressing her during and in-between the

rapes, as well as threatening her with a cleaver, which puts Mala in a submissive position physically, as well as mentally, while he continues to abuse her.

The physical violation of Mala's body, described in these instances, is a fragmentation of her in every way. Physically Mala is split open, gagged and choked, and this mirrors the fragmentation that begins in Mala's personality. As a result of the rape, Pohpoh (the child) is split from Mala (the woman) and disintegrates towards a life away from language. Language is literally choked out of her in this scene, and Mala moves away from humans towards nature. Chandin does not acknowledge Mala as more than a body, an outlet for his madness in these scenes of rape, which is demonstrated by Chandin's anger and his ability to shut out his daughter's loud crying and attempts to protect herself (Mootoo 223). The representation of this traumatic event ends as follows: 'He raped her three more times that night. He made her stay in his bed. Next morning he got up as usual' and 'It was the first time since that very first time when she was a child that she felt so much pain' (Mootoo 223). The ending of this section of the novel reveals to the reader that Mala has been raped since her childhood and that it is part of Chandin's way of controlling her, just as leaving the cleaver next to the bed and forcing her to sleep next to him.

The consequences of the rapes that Mala has experienced are manifold. First, Mala and Ambrose accidentally kill Chandin. Secondly, Ambrose abandons Mala after finding out about the traumatic experiences she has had. Thirdly, Mala distances herself from the childhood version of herself (Pohpoh) and lives an isolated life in silence until she is discovered by Otoh (Ambrose's son). This results in the discovery of Chandin's body and Mala's transferal to Paradise Alms House, where Tyler becomes her caretaker after Mala is deemed unfit for a murder trial.

Chandin's death occurs in the moment in which the fragmentation of Mala's personality is completed. Balwan Sachdev describes Mala's story as one of becoming (6). First Mala 'evolves' from the human to nature and then back to the human 'while maintaining links with nature' (Balwan Sachdev 6). I argue that Mala does not evolve. Rather, she disintegrates, and the human part of her which is structured by society and by her father's abnormal behaviour, becomes evanescent while she lives in solitude.

In the moment that Chandin attempts to kill Ambrose with a cleaver, Mala fights back by reversing Chandin's physical actions. First, Mala makes him fall and then she disarms him in a violent manner: 'she tore the cleaver out of his suddenly limp hand. With the back of her other hand she wiped her father's blood from her face and spat at him.' (Mootoo 227). The physicality of Mala's actions reflects and reverses Chandin's behaviour from the previous night,

by making his body the submissive 'limp' part, while Mala becomes the dominant body. Whilst Mala is standing up for both, herself and for Ambrose, Ambrose first only watches the scene and then attempts to flee, struggling to comprehend what is happening. Ambrose's flight causes a door to hit Chandin's head while he is being attacked by Mala which ultimately leads to Chandin's death. Yet Ambrose never clarifies this, which leads to Mala's life of loneliness and subsequent submission to Paradise Alms House.

Ambrose's lack of assistance in the life-threatening confrontation with Chandin is a direct result of Ambrose's discovery that Mala has been raped by her father. Critics and sociologists have established that it is often believed to be the rape victim's own fault that she is raped, because she must have provoked it in one way or another (Acock and Ireland 1983; Burt and Albin 1981; Check and Malamuth 1985; Damrosch 1985; Muehlenhard et al. 1985). Ambrose's reaction to Mala's trauma is filled with shame for himself and for her. The fact that he feels 'betrayed' (Mootoo 227) by Mala and must 'wrestle with the notion that she could not possibly, not conceivably have been agreeable to intimacies with her father' demonstrate that he is incapable of feeling empathy for her, because she has been raped, and is therefore disgraced in his view. Ambrose refers to the rape as the 'shameful going-on in the house, to which he had become connected' (Mootoo 228), which is why he refuses to report the crimes.

Victim blaming like Ambroses', is one of feminists' main motivators for redefining rape as a 'crime of male power over women, rather than as a sexual offence rooted in passion and desire' (Maybrey 28). It is evident from Ambrose's reaction, that there is a need to redefine the way in which rape and rape victims are viewed, because it would shift the blame from the victim to the offender in the eyes of society. Because of Ambrose's culturally-ingrained notion that being a rape victim, or being associated with a rape victim, is shameful, he is unable to return to his loving and caring feelings for Mala. In fact, his love is transformed into repulsion as can be seen in the following sentence: 'in the kitchen he saw, instead of the woman he had made love to the day before, an unrecognizable wild creature with a blood-stained face, frothing at the mouth' (Mootoo 228). The fact that Ambrose can no longer see Mala as a human but only as a 'wild creature', which implies that to him, rape means the loss of humanity. Paradoxically, the primitive element of Mala, or her transition to nature, which is repulsive to Ambrose, is Mala's personal sanctuary after the rapes and the murder of her father.

The third consequence of Mala's rape is that Mala distances herself from her childhood and the rape by developing what is called Dissociative Identity Disorder. According to the *Encyclopaedia of Rape*, this is a disorder commonly developed as a result of extreme trauma: 'To survive the abuse, people disconnect their minds from what is done to them' (Linehan 56).

It is a survival technique that is frequently developed by victims of long term incest (57) and it is often observed that ‘a child personality carries the secret of rape’ (57). The observations about rape cases by Linehan are applicable to Mala’s development in the novel. Throughout the first half of the novel, it is not clear that Pohpoh is Mala, which is an effect of the fragmented narrative that demonstrates the later revealed divide in Mala’s personality. Only when Chandin’s body is discovered by the police at the end of the narrative, does it become clear that Pohpoh is actually Mala. The constable notices that Mala continuously talks to someone who is not in the room, while the body is unveiled: “‘Father, Pohpoh,’” she whispered. “‘Remember him? Doh go near him. Even now, he still like to try and touch too much.’” (Mootoo 183). Mala takes on a parental position, attempting to protect Pohpoh from her father, consoling and reassuring her that ‘everything will be awright. Doh frighten’ (Mootoo 183). Mala’s adult identity attempts to be the parent she never had, to save herself from harm (‘*Save Pohpoh*, she chanted. *Save Pohpoh*’ (Mootoo 180)).

What is striking about Mala’s attitude is the obligation she feels towards him as a daughter, even after his death. Even after being violently raped she feels embarrassed and fearful, because she did not make breakfast for her father (Mootoo 224). Moreover, she finds excuses for her father’s behaviour, by imagining the pain he must have felt when his wife left him (Mootoo 224) and she feels as if she deserved the rape because she ‘cheated’ (Mootoo 224) on Chandin.

It could be argued that Mala also suffers from the Electra complex to some extent. The Electra complex was established by Euripides’ tragedy by the same name (Ulanov 4) and developed by Freud and Jung. It is the female version of the Oedipus complex and signifies a ‘girl’s fixation upon her father’ (Courteau 1). The idea of the Electra complex is that the girl suffers from penis-envy, or an inferiority complex, and by developing an affectionate relationship with her father the girl can ‘obtain’ (Ulanov 149) the ‘vital genital equipment’. In Mala’s case, it can be argued that the affection for her father is rooted in her pity for his situation since her mother left. It also reveals that Mala tries to maintain the inherent social code of the nuclear family which she has been taught, although these social structures are broken and traumatic in her case.

Mala is incapable of understanding the wrong of Chandin’s deeds, because he is the patriarch, and therefore the trusted rule-maker of the family. Mala cannot escape the wish to fulfil her “duty as a daughter”. This sense of obligation remains in his death, which is shown when she says to the constable ‘I still looking after him all these years now. Is a daughter’s duty, Constable’ (183). Mala’s sense of duty is contrasted with her rage, which results in

Chandin's death. These conflicting feelings represent the split of her personality, as well as the dichotomy between nature and humans, from which Mala moves back and forth. Mala is described as more nature than human after her traumatic experience and her companions become the garden's 'birds, insects, snails and reptiles' (Mootoo 127). It is also nature that slowly devours Chandin's body. What first is described as dust on the dead body turns out to be a blanket of moths, covering and eating his corpse. The moths, as a part of nature and Mala's identity, function symbolically as Mala's act of reclaiming her own identity after the rape. The slow dissolution of the power that Chandin had over Mala's life (as her father and a man), is disintegrating like the body that has previously been described as a weapon.

The tension between language and violence, between humans and nature, is a recurring theme in *Cereus Blooms at Night* and is mirrored by the contrasting descriptions of Mala's violent rape and the way in which the rest of her story is told. In her study of *Titus Andronicus* Murray Kendall remarks that 'rhetoric dismembers the very reality it would portray or influence' (Mootoo 299), meaning that rhetoric can distort the event it attempts to present by making it metaphorical. I argue that the representation of rape in *Cereus Blooms at Night* is composed with as few rhetorical devices as possible for the very same reason that the violence in Shakespeare's play is so explicit. It confronts the reader/viewer with the terror of the scene. As in Shakespeare's play, language functions differently when depicting violence and rape, because 'language engenders violence and violence is done to language through the distance between word and thing, between metaphor and what it represents' (Murray Kendall 299). In Mootoo's novel, the distance is reduced to a minimum, because the violence depicted is, represented without making the rape into a metaphor.

The representation of rape in Mootoo's novel is explicit and not generally used as a metaphor, apart from the metaphor of weaponry, arguably to convey the violence and gravity of rape. However, I argue that the rape automatically becomes a metaphor when it is read in context with the rest of the narration which is highly metaphorical and intertextual in its form. For example, not only does the novel resemble Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, it also references Shakespeare's inspiration for Lavinia's rape, which is Ovid's Philomela. This in turn is a reference also discussed in the previous chapter with Coetzee's *Disgrace*. Balwan Sachdev argues that both *Disgrace* and *Cereus Blooms at Night* present rape as an 'event, which cannot not be seen outside the assemblages that place rape into a particular category' (1).

One of my main arguments from the discussion of Coetzee's novel will also serve as this chapter's final consideration which is the matter of voice and silencing through narrative perspective. Even though *Cereus Blooms at Night* includes explicit descriptions of rape, the

literal representation of rape is as hidden as it is in *Disgrace*, because it is represented by someone other than the victim. Like Melanie and Lucy in Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Mala and Asha are silenced victims, because they are denied a voice to represent the rape themselves. It is harder to observe the representational layer that is added in Mootoo's novel, because it slips from first person narration into omniscient narration. However, the fact that the story is framed by Tyler's introduction and his pleading at the end of the novel (the novel is his way of reaching out and possibly finding Asha, Mala's sister), remind the reader that he is the narrator of the entire story. Hence, the representation of Mala's rape is also Tyler's fabrication and retelling, since he is the imagined author of the novel. Therefore, all four rape victims, Lucy and Melanie in *Disgrace*, and Mala and Asha in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, have their stories represented by a male character, who imagines most of the events by either piecing together fractures of stories and information, or telling their story exclusively from their point of view. Hence, all characters discussed so far can be characterized by different forms of silence, or rather the lack of their own voice, even though all the cases differ in their representation and by the 'type' of rape they experience.

‘The truth had become as ghostly as invention’ - The Construction of Stories Through Rape in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*

This chapter looks at the representation and reception of a rape scene in Ian McEwan’s novel *Atonement* (2001). After a brief discussion of the scene itself, the chapter will focus on the novel’s form, its use of intertextuality, and the representation of the author/reader relationship as it is presented and problematized in the novel. By revealing the intertextuality connected to the rape, as well as the subsequent deviation from the discussion of rape, I hope to problematize the representation and interpretation of the rape in this novel. The discussion will demonstrate reason for this, specifically the interconnectivity of rape scenes with intertextuality and narratives. The way in which discourse, which is enabled by the rape scene, strays from the discussion of the rape in a literal sense shall be revealed by exploring some of these discourses. The discussion and evaluation of these aspects of the novel will show how rape is employed as a metaphor.

In *Atonement* the rape is not presented through the eyes of the victim, but witnessed by Briony, a young girl who is the main character, as well as the narrator and fictive author of the novel. Briony recreates the rape through her fictional narration (Pitt 25). Because of the way it is represented, rape becomes a tool for the discussion of something else, which ranges from storytelling, to the critique of class systems (Carlson 2, Pyrhönen 112), to the discussion of the ‘global trauma of World War Two (Pitt 10); to religious readings (Shah 43) and ‘reflections on moral agency’ (Garrad 695). All these readings of the novel are related to the rape by Briony and the critical discussion of the novel, however they are not concerned with the rape itself. The literary allusions and metafictional elements of the novel do, however, require the reader to read critically and to ‘evaluate minor details that may obscure or reveal the "truth" embedded within the text (D’Angelo 102). The responsibility of the reader, to evaluate the “truth” of the narration, therefore also lies in questioning the representation of the rape.

The epigraph to *Atonement* is a passage from Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1817) and it establishes the main concerns of McEwan’s novel: ‘Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities?’. In the quoted passage, Henry Tilney confronts Catherine Morland (the main character of the novel), who has concocted a story of gothic scope about Henry’s father because of her inability to differentiate between her reality and the worlds of the gothic novels she has been reading. This passage outlines both the centrality of

perspective and intertextuality between *Northanger Abbey* and *Atonement* and the importance of fiction and metafiction

On the last few pages of *Atonement*, Briony, is revealed to be not only the focalizer, but also the author. Therefore, when Briony observes the rape of her cousin Lola, the reader is offered only Briony's interpretation and representation of the scene, which she revises numerous times in her process of producing the novel in the time frame of 1940-1999.

Even when Briony recreates the scene in the novel, it becomes clear that her crime, which is accusing the innocent Robbie Turner of Lola's rape, is based on her misinterpretation of what she perceives. Briony says that she cannot read Lola's expression 'However close they were' (McEwan 167), because it is night, and yet she is convinced that she saw the rapist clearly: 'of course I did. Plain as day. It was him' (McEwan 167). As Patrick Henry puts it: 'Briony observes what she believes to be Robbie raping Lola' (Henry 80). Briony's misconception of Robbie, due to earlier events in the novel, which she fails to interpret correctly, causes her to blame Robbie instead of Paul Marshall, the actual rapist: 'Suddenly Briony wanted [Lola] to say his name. To seal the crime, frame it with the victim's curse, close his fate with the magic of naming' (McEwan 165).

The use of the words 'frame', 'curse', 'fate' and 'magic', indicate the concern of the novel, which is anchored in Briony's lively imagination. Because of Briony's obsession with writing, she uses storytelling and fairy-tale tropes to make sense of the world around her, therefore shaping the way characters' lives play out, like Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*. Briony 'imposes the patterns of fiction on the facts of life' (Finney 78). In other words, the rape here becomes Briony's vehicle for storytelling and filling in the gaps of her (mis)understanding of her sister's relationship with Robbie, as well as her own lack of knowledge about sexuality, as she is only thirteen years old at the time of the rape. All the information the reader is offered about the scene is, that it is dark and that Briony can make out a 'larger figure', (McEwan 165) and then Lola, once the rapist has run away. James Phlean comments on Briony's perspective by drawing attention to the interpretive nature of it: '[Briony's] interpretative judgment is overrun by her ethical and aesthetic judgments' (328).

The rape scene represents another, prominent concern of the novel, in addition to being the reason Briony writes the novel. It offers insight into the metaphorical and intertextual quality of Briony's 'literary artefact' (Finney 74). For example, the rape she witnesses is juxtaposed with Lola's and Paul's marriage five years later. Finney comments that Lola's rape takes place 'by the eighteenth century, crumbling, stuccoed Greek temple in the Tallis grounds' (75) and then aptly observes that the wedding takes place in a church in London that resembles

a Greek temple, whose 'neo-classical facades [represent] a joint lie, and the destructive memories of a war from which Marshall made his fortune' (75). The resemblance of the two buildings draws a connection between the rape and Lola's marriage. Further, both buildings are associated with decay and destruction, which symbolize the 'joint lie', or 'façade' that Lola, Marshall, and Briony are living.

The fact that Briony draws these parallels between the rape and the wedding, demonstrates how carefully she pays attention to the construction of the story she is telling. Hence, the rape and the trauma it causes become more about Briony's reaction than about Lola's experience. Farther, it becomes the vehicle for the narrative to take place, or in Otto's words: the rape becomes the 'catalyst that determines the development of the plot and the characters' (Otto 2). The rape is even foreshadowed when Briony decides to wait for 'real events' to take place, 'not her own fantasies', so that they 'dispelled her insignificance' (McEwan 77). These examples reveal Briony's attempt at willing a story into existence. Briony is searching for a way to shape her own identity by acting not only as the author of her own life, but also by taking control over the other character's lives through her story-making. She seems to feel that she lacks secrets and that she 'could not have an interesting life without them' (Wood paragraph 5). The rape, or rather the trauma of witnessing it, becomes Briony's sought after secret.

Briony perceives the rape as an opportunity for herself as an author to leave behind the romantic 'fairy stories' (McEwan 160) that are her main interest, until she thinks she has cause to mistrust Robbie based on the note he has her deliver to Cecilia. Robbie accidentally gives Briony the wrong version of his note, which, instead of being the intended, handwritten love letter, is one of the many frustrated "prototypes" of the letter. It reads as follows: 'In my dreams I kiss your cunt, your sweet wet cunt. In my thoughts I make love to you all day long' (McEwan 86). Briony, who has never heard or read the word 'cunt' is nevertheless able to grasp its meaning: 'The context helped, but more than that the word was at one with its meaning, and was almost onomatopoeic' (McEwan 114). Even though Briony can decipher the meaning of the note (which she is not meant to read), she is unable to interpret the relationship between Robbie and Cecilia correctly, because the note, and the word 'cunt' in particular, 'disgusted her profoundly' (McEwan 114).

Due to her young age and lack of sexual education, Briony decides that she needs to protect her sister from Robbie and shares her knowledge about the note with Lola, who decides that Robbie must be a 'maniac' (McEwan 120). These instances are accompanied by Briony's description of her perception of the situation, which is signified by expressions that are connected to storytelling: Briony refers to Robbie's and Cecilia's encounter at the fountain as

the ‘mystery of the fountain episode’ (McEwan 119) and decides not to share this part of the ‘story’ (McEwan 119) with Lola, demonstrating how she selects scenes of life in an editing process to reconstruct her narrative. Briony also thinks that her knowledge of the note elevated her from her realm of fairy–tales into ‘the drama of life beyond the nursery’ (McEwan 160) and that she now must ‘discover the stories, not the subjects, but a way of unfolding them, that would do justice to her new knowledge’ (McEwan 160). It is evident that Briony is influenced by her ‘diet of imaginative literature’ (Finney 69) and that she is too young to understand the implications her construction of a story based on “real events” has on the world around her. Briony search for new knowledge beyond the nursery also reflects her wish not to be a child anymore.

The previous discussion of instances in which Briony relates events referring to the rape suggests that the focus of her narrative lies on the construction of the narrative itself, rather than on the content from which it is constructed. Many critics have discussed the topic of storytelling in the novel and the reader/author relationship that results from this technique. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge the form of the novel, which is divided into four parts, the first part taking up more than half of the novel. The first part consists of what Genette has termed ‘variable internal focalization’ (188), meaning that the focal character changes, even though the characters are all presented by Briony. Finney argues in his essay on the novel that McEwan uses this ‘modal determination’ (Genette 188) to differentiate the narrative from the classical realist novel with an omniscient point of view. Finney also views the employment of this stylistic choice as Briony’s attempt to receive her atonement by putting herself in Cecelia’s and Robbie’s position (Finney 75).

Furthermore, the fact that Briony writes a story in which Robbie and Cecelia are reunited after Robbie’s time in prison and after the war, shows that Briony attempts to do ‘what she failed to do at the time project herself into the feelings and thoughts of these others, to grant them an authentic existence outside her own life’s experiences’ (Finney 81). However, this reunion is, as the reader finds out in the last two pages of the novel, a fictitious ending. In fact, Robbie dies at Dunkirk and Cecilia in the bombing of a tube station. Briony’s fictitious ending for the lovers remains a creation, even though that is not apparent until the end of the narrative. The bombing in which Cecilia dies is another metafictional element of the novel, since the Balham bombing did take place. However, Briony gets the date wrong, revealing another flaw in her narrative construction. The flaws in Briony’s construction of the narrative remind the reader once again, to carefully consider the “truthfulness” of the narration, which in turn means that the accuracy of Briony’s representation of the rape also should be questioned.

According to D'Angelo the fact that the novel turns out to be Briony's search for atonement after her misrepresentation of the rape, makes it clear that the novel is not only concerned with fiction making, but also 'concerned with the reading of fiction, as well as the reading of experience' (D'Angelo 89). Alongside critics such as Finney and Wood, D'Angelo argues that the metafictional elements of the novel, the novel's concern with storytelling, require the reader to be active in the reading of the novel, because the reader is "tricked" into believing the events reported by Briony are the "real" events of the narrative. The revelation of the "truth" at the end also reveals that the truth is just another narrative level; rather than being Briony's narrative, it is McEwan's narrative.

The revelation that the reader has been misled, is a critique of the reader's role by Ian McEwan. D'Angelo refers to the reader's 'ethical responsibility' (89) in contemporary fiction that is made evident by the twist in McEwan's narrative: 'Readers hold the final power of interpretation, judgment, and atonement; to meet these aims, they must maintain a stance toward the text that involves both critical assessment and empathetic identification'. The novel's self-conscious fictionality is only revealed at the end of the narrative and only after a near complete reading of the novel the reader can see the signs that point towards its self-reflexivity as a piece of fiction, even though they are evident throughout the text. Wood refers to these signs as 'manipulative distortions' that enable the author of the text to play with the reader's 'complacency' (Wood). Wood implies here that McEwan plays with the reader's expectation and the tendency of transforming fiction into fact. It is a critique of the reader who is complicit in accepting Robbie's fate, by passively accepting the manipulative distortions made by the fictional author of the novel, even though there are hints not to trust the narrators voice from the epigraph onwards. Regarding the rape scene, this means that the reader is complicit in the creation of Robbie's and Cecilia's fate, by accepting the storyline that follows the rape until it is revealed that they are another fictive layer of the novel.

The issue of reader responsibility in McEwan's novel is addressed by several critics, because it poses important questions. Finney observes the main complication of the relationship between fiction and reality in his analysis of Briony: 'Briony is the prime example of the way art shapes her life as much as she shapes that life into her art' (Finney 78). The same influence is exercised over the reader by creating the illusion that Briony is recounting true events. The metafictional element of the narration forces the reader to question to what extent narration/storytelling influences life. It is evident to the reader that Briony is constructing a fictional story about Cecilia's and Robbie's relationship, as well as about Lola's rape. However, the reader is equally misled into the belief that the first three sections of the book are a truthful

account of events, because of the novels' construction. Moreover, the fictive events of the plot parallel the effect of the novel itself by outlining the 'serious consequences' (D'Angelo 103) such a misreading has on others, therefore suggesting that the reader needs to develop a more critical way of reading.

Shah argues that Briony's inventions of events, as well as her distortion of reality, reflect the way people cope with 'the angst of knowing only part of the story' (Shah 44). Shah argues that 'because humans are selfish and fictive, stories exacerbate the discord they would heal (44)'. Arguing Shah's standpoint for Briony, it can be said that Briony's creation of her fictive narrative is her attempt to 'heal'. She constructs a story in which she allows Robbie and Cecilia to have a happy ending. Therefore, Briony atones herself and her childish misperceptions of the rape. Shah sees *Atonement* as a work that subjects its characters and readers to 'nihilistic tyranny' (45). Pyrhönen agrees that, because the novel is grounded in Briony's understanding of authorship, it compares not only the communication amongst the novel's characters, but also amongst authors and readers (Pyrhönen 104). Like Finney and Wood, Pyrhönen points out that the reader is all too ready to believe 'in the sugar-coated conclusion of Briony's embedded novel' (Pyrhönen 117). Regarding the rape this means that the reader, who is aware of Robbie's innocence, is too ready to believe in the fabricated happy ending that Briony composes to atone for her misinterpretation of the rape, rather than to question the position of the witness/author. The 'angst of knowing only one part of the story' which Shah refers to, is brought out in the Briony and the reader and the revelation at the end of the text confronts the reader with their own tendency to muddle stories, and their accuracy, together. Hence, the rape is lost in the distortion and merging of different versions of the narrative and its different representational layers.

Encased in the discussion surrounding story-making and the relationship between reality and fiction is another characteristic of the text, which is hinted at in the beginning of the discussion with the mention of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*: intertextuality. Evidently, the novel is intertextual from its outset, paralleling Catherine Morland's conglomeration of reality and fiction with that of Briony's. For example, in Finney's point of view, the matter of storytelling and the 'compensations and limitations' (Finney 69), which the entering of a fictional world can offer 'its readers and writers', is emphasized by the intertextuality of the novel. Regarding Austen's novel, Finney argues that the epigraph serves as both a 'a warning and a guide to how the reader should view this narrative' (Finney 70) and Pitt argues that 'Catherine, like Briony, cannot separate the world of reality from the world of fiction' (Pitt 32). The statements by Finney and Pitt show how closely linked the narratives' intertextuality is

with the metafictional element.

The 'warning' of the epigraph instructs the reader to read cautiously, by hinting at a characters' inability to differentiate reality and fiction. A second, dominant intertextual reference in the novel is the work of Virginia Woolf, both in content and in form. Firstly, Briony reads *The Waves* in between her nursing shifts. Hence, the novel makes direct reference to Woolf's work. Secondly, Briony experiments with modernist writing in the process of writing her novel, which is commented on by her editor Cyril Connolly. In an interview, McEwan states that Woolf's works are significant to his novel as they allow him to 'enter into a conversation with modernism and its dereliction of duty' (McEwan qtd in Finney 71). Because the backdrop of the novel is a group of wealthy characters in World War Two, Finney compares *Atonement* to Woolf's *Between the Acts*. Furthermore, comparisons between McEwan's novel and Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* can be drawn based on the depiction of the parodied family dinner in *Atonement*.

The dinner in McEwan's novel is one instance in which the sexual abuse of Lola by Marshall is hinted at. She has an injured arm and Marshall has a scratch on his face, but Briony misinterprets what she sees and assumes that the injury is done to Lola by her little brothers. The misinterpretation of these signs pointing towards previous sexual assaults reveals that Briony is already misunderstanding the dynamic between Lola and Marshall. The association of the dinner with the dinner in *To the Lighthouse* emphasizes the construction of the narrative, because Woolf's novel is written in a modernist style that uses the layering of narrative perspectives and is especially concerned with the portrayal of subjective perception. This resembles Briony's various attempts to narrate and recreate the rape and its aftermath by producing her novel.

In addition to creating a complex connection between reader and text, many of the intertextual references in *Atonement* function on a symbolic and metaphorical level. For example, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, which is being read by Cecilia in the first part of *Atonement*, can be read as a foreshadowing of the impending rape. And Lola's name conjures up images of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. Lola is a young girl who is described as sexually attractive (Falzon 79) and is depicted as a 'highly eroticized figure' (Morganroth 218), which also evokes Nabokov's *Lolita*. Lola is described as a girl on the turning point from childhood to maturity, which can be seen in the way her clothing is described. She wears trousers that emphasise the female shape of her hips and 'other tokens of maturity' like a 'velvet choker'. (McEwan 60) The first meeting between Paul and Lola reveals that Paul imposes sexual and violent fantasies on Lola when he offers her the 'Army Amo' chocolate bar. Otto aptly states

that the bar itself is 'fetishized as a phallus by Paul' (Otto 22). Firstly, Amo stands for the Latin verb 'to love', which is contrasted with the word 'army' as well as with the word 'ammunition', which amo is supposed to stand for. Hence the sexual and violent paradox of Paul's interest for Lola is established in the title of the product. Paul then asks Lola 'to bite' the bar, which he fetishizes. This emphasises the sexual and violent fantasy Paul imposes on Lola (McEwan 62). In Nabokov's *Lolita* the reader is not offered insight in Lolita's feelings her treatment by Humbert. On the contrary, her point of view is 'silenced' (Tamir-Ghez 72), meaning that the reader must imagine her feelings. The same silence is imposed on Lola in *Atonement*, because Lolas experiences are imagined through Briony.

Robbie foreshadows his own fate (obviously being represented by Briony) by referring to himself as Malvolio from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. In Finney's opinion, this reference is 'warning the reader that Robbie is likely to prove similarly deluded' (Finney 72). Moreover, Robbie takes W. H. Auden's "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" with him to the war in France, foreshadowing not only his death. D'Angelo aptly states that the poem also foreshadows Briony's failure to atone through writing, which can be seen in these lines from Auden's elegy: 'For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives / In the valley of its making' (qtd in D'Angelo 95). Finney on the other hand, states that the reference to Auden is used 'to establish a connection between the microcosm of the lives that Briony has disrupted and the macrocosm of a world at war' (72). Moreover, the fact that Robbie remembers reading D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* when writing his note to Cecelia, emphasizes the class difference between the lovers, which is also a concern in D.H. Lawrence's novel (Finney 72).

Another book that adds to the intertextual nature of *Atonement*, whilst illustrating the Cecilia and Robbie's relationship, is an edition of *Gray's Anatomy*. In the novel Robbie accidentally puts his carefully written love letter to Cecilia into the pages of *Gray's Anatomy* where a vagina is illustrated, which is why he accidentally ends up sending his crude note through Briony. The association of the love letter with the medical illustration of a vagina once again foreshadows the misreading of the sexual intercourse between Robbie and Cecilia by Briony, as well as mirroring the mixed messages that are sent. Finney refers to this instance as a 'Freudian slip' (Finney 73), therefore picking up on Robbie's own reminiscing on Freud: 'How had it crept up on him, this advanced stage of fetishizing the love object? Surely Freud had something to say about that in *Three Essays on Sexuality*. And so did Keats, Shakespeare and Petrarch, and all the rest, and it was in the *Romaunt of the Rose*' (McEwan 84).

Behrman also draws intertextual connections between *Atonement* and Arthurian Romance and other literary productions from the Middle Ages (she names Trolius and Criseyde,

Griselda, and Tristan and Isolde). The connection of the novel to Arthurian romance is interesting, because it evokes the traditional imagery discussed in the background chapter of this thesis, which is that of silenced rape victims. It supports the idea that a framework for the representation of rape exists in the Western literary canon. Behrman's reason for this argument lies within the fact that Briony mimics 'the legendary Briton in her desire to what for a pre-dinner miracle' (Behrman 454). She argues further: 'Arthur's decision to delay dinner tends to result in the near destruction of his cherished realm. For instance, [...] Arthur's tradition almost causes the death of his beloved nephew, Gawain' (Behrman 460). Behrman's second reason for associating Arthurian Romance with *Atonement* is the motif of the wasteland, which is a common motif in Arthurian legend and is depicted in the war scenes in McEwan's novel while also implying a connection to T.S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land".

The preceding discussion of different interpretations of the novel reveal that *Atonement* is concerned with representation including that of rape. *Atonement* uses rape as a tool to convey something other than the rape itself. Rather than being about the trauma of the rape, or the effects on Lola for example, the discussion seems to be dominated by a concern with storytelling, which also highlight the issue of representing rape. Falzon aptly comments that the primary concern for Briony is the way in which she perceives the rape as a trope, rather than as an event: 'Everything, even the truth, is subservient to it [the word]' (Falzon 60).

In addition, the rape is not just unrepresented by Briony, it is also hardly discussed within the literary discourse, where it is interpreted as a literary trope. Phlean for example quickly refers to the rape as 'sexual assault' (322), thereby avoiding calling it 'rape' in his discussion, to make his point about Briony's attempt to atone through writing. And Heta Pyrhönen comments '[w]hat complicates this deliberation is that the principal victim is dead. In Briony's defense, she does eventually confess, although this takes place beyond the grave' (112). It is important to note that Pyrhönen talks about Robbie in the passage where she makes this comment, therefore making it unclear whether she means Robbie or Lola. Either case seems problematic. If she is referring to Robbie it means that the rape itself is so far removed from the narrative that Lola is not even considered a victim. If she is referring to Lola this would be the only instance in which Pyrhönen refers to Lola in relation to the rape. These two examples are an illustration of the scarce amount the rape itself is discussed in the novel. This small proportion is mirrored by the amount of analysis and discourse connected to the rape, as demonstrated in this chapter.

Thus, it can be argued that the novel's structure emphasizes the lack of representation, or the misrepresentation of Lola's rape and the effect it has on the characters of the novel,

through the way that story-manufacturing is highlighted, experimented with and problematized. The reason Briony gives for her narrative inventions, is that an account of the real events would be a dissatisfying reader experience: ‘What sense or hope or satisfaction could a reader draw from such an account?’ (McEwan 371). Consequently, the novel demonstrates how the manipulation of facts and the transgression of the boundaries between art and life result in the misrepresentation of truth: ‘the truth had become ghostly as invention’ (McEwan 41).

The tension that arises because of the meta-levels of the narration in *Atonement* are addressed by Phlean: ‘what does it mean for an accomplished novelist writing in 2001 to construct a novel along modernist lines and simultaneously question such a construction?’ (334). In Phlean’s opinion this tension is resolved in the ending of the novel, which reveals that the novel is not a ‘straight modernist’ novel, but a more self-reflexive and self-conscious piece of work. By framing Briony as the author of the novel, McEwan conveys and reinforces the meta-message that the misjudgment of the reading experience has occurred far too easily: ‘in retrospect, we must admit that we were too ready to believe that Robbie survived the retreat’ (Phlean 335). Thus, the rape in *Atonement* is mediated through Briony, through the narrative perspective and through literary sources. The novel reminds the reader to be critically in their reading and to also be more alert, in this case to the signs pointing at the fact that the narration is a fabrication. The novel’s construction and problematization of representation, pose the idea that there can be no facts and the rape becomes a means of illustrating this, by being made into a metaphor. Hence, the title quote of this chapter, which is “[t]he truth had become as ghostly as invention” (McEwan 41) encapsulates the way in which the rape is represented in the novel.

Arguably the representation of rape in McEwan’s novel and its resulting literary discourse, is even less concerned with the act of rape than the discussions surrounding *Disgrace* and *Cereus Blooms at Night*. As with the previously discussed novels, the rape vanishes into a metaphorical discussion of other issues through its representation by characters that are not the victims of the rapes themselves. Another aspect that the novels share is that they are highly intertextual, which allows them to be read as metaphors, or allusions for other topics than the rape. *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *Atonement* also share the fact the narrators are also the fictional authors of the novels themselves, which results in a self-reflexivity of texts as literary artifacts; which is also emphasized by the intertextuality of all three novels. The reference to other literary works demonstrates that the novels are in a conversation with other literary representations of rape, as well as highlighting their fictionality.

Thus, the interim conclusion of the previous chapters is arguably that: 1) contemporary

fiction that represents rape is written from a perspective other than the victim, 2) the rape scenes enable highly intertextual connections to other works, and 3) rape functions as the carrier of a multitude of discourses and metaphors. The next chapter shall provide a reading that contradicts these preliminary conclusions, in order to evaluate different approaches to the treatment of rape in contemporary fiction.

‘Anybody can cry rape’ – Witnessing Rape in Joyce Carol Oates’ *Rape: A Love Story*

Joyce Carol Oates’ *Rape: A Love Story* (2003) is a novella to which I have found no critical response, apart from reviews. The analysis in this chapter aims to demonstrate that the way in which the rape is depicted is the reason for the lack of critical response to the text. The first part of this chapter will develop an understanding of Joyce Carol Oates’ work and the observations made by critics about Oates’ work in general. This contextual introduction to Oates’ work is to show that her work is associated with particular features, which will help me argue why there is a lack of critical response to the novella. The contextual placement of the novella will be followed by an analysis of the text itself, which will include the analysis of the rape, its representation, and the rape’s social and legal repercussions. The conclusion will include an evaluation of issues posed in the narrative regarding the representation the rape and the explicitness of its portrayal.

The consensus regarding Oates’ work is that it exists in abundance. Critics either admire her productivity, or charge her with ‘overproductivity’ and ‘presenting [of] excessive violence’ (Allen 496). Allen argues that Oates’ fiction can be described as ‘an account of the death throes of the culture of narcissism’ because of the way Oates employs violence to depict the transformation of Renaissance egocentrism to a contemporary ‘communal consciousness’ (496). A similar observation about Oates’ focus on the communal consciousness is made by Hattenhauer, who argues that Oates’ work focuses on explorations of ‘the public, the collective, and the inclusionary’ (498). Joyce Carol Oates herself has stated in an interview that it is the writer’s obligation not simply to write, but to experiment with forms and language in a ‘visionary sense’, to produce literature with ‘an awareness of and concern with history, or at least contemporary history; a sense of the interlocking forces of politics, religion, economics, and the mores of the society; concern with aesthetics’ (Oates in Sjoberg 281). Oates’ concern with topics encompassing all aspects of life supports critical observations that her work deals with society, or communal consciousness and the interplay of different societal forces.

A particular emphasis, when discussing Oates’ work, is placed on her explicit depictions of violence, which leave critics stating that ‘Oates transcends the terrifying’ (Dean 317). In her journalistic piece on Oates’ work, Fraser fittingly summarises: ‘As decades of critics have observed, Oates’s primary subject is victimhood, and her work features a kind of Grand Guignol of every imaginable form of physical, psychological, and sexual violence: rape, incest, murder, molestation, cannibalism, torture, and bestiality’ (Fraser Paragraph 3). The gruesome choices of topic, however, are not the only noteworthy aspect of Oates’ work: the intensity with which

Oates explores the consequences of being victimized, as well as exploring victimization itself, makes her novella a particularly interesting study for the representation of rape in contemporary fiction.

The critics Horeck and Atkins both identify another particularity in Oates' portrayal of rape, which is that the states of victimization and humiliation are often concerned with 'the figures of the adolescent girl and the young woman' (Horeck 25) and that Oates' 'narratives frequently entrap girls in situations of rape' (Atkins 436). The focus on girlhood and womanhood is also evident in *Rape: A Love Story*, which the ensuing analysis of the text will explore in-depth. Rape scripts, rape myths and their deconstruction are major elements in many of Oates' other works (Atkins 436) and I argue that the same observation can be applied to *Rape: A Love Story*. In an interview Oates states 'One of the little-understood responsibilities of the artist is to bear witness—in almost a religious sense—to certain things ... the experience of suffering, the humiliation of any form of persecution' (Oates in "Bearing Witness: Joyce Carol Oates Studies"). The following analysis of the novella will demonstrate how Oates depicts the rape and its aftermath in a way that also enables the reader to 'bear witness'.

The novella is made up of various narrative fragments, most of which are delivered in third person narration. The pieces of narration, which are also divided into small (often just paragraph-long) chapters, take on different viewpoints. Often, thoughts are conveyed in italics mid-sentence and it is not always clear who the speaker is, because of the constant change of perspective. This ambiguity emphasises the element of communal consciousness previously mentioned, because it is designed to mirror the thoughts portrayed by the public that are inserted into, and represented by, the narrative. The diversity and recurring anonymity of the narrative perspectives that comment on the rape, lie at the center of the three-part novella and evoke the image of a society that functions on gossip and miscommunication.

The rape is depicted in the first part of the narrative, which comprises the first half of the novella while the third part is only two pages long. However, the rape is the centre of the narrative, because it functions as the driving plot device for the ensuing legal proceedings and the treatment of the victims. Furthermore, the rape is the most discussed and repeatedly represented part of the narrative. It is narrated in various ways and through various people. Most significantly, the rape is represented by Bethel Maguire (Bethie) who holds an exceptional narrative status. The parts of the novel concerning Bethie directly, are the only ones not written in third- person narration. Instead, the "Bethie-fragments" are written in the second person singular, establishing a personal connection between Bethie and the unknown narrator. Subsequently, a personal or empathetic connection between Bethie and the reader is created,

forcing the reader into a position of “knowing” Bethie more intimately than the other characters. However, the reader is not informed of how this connection to Bethie has been established and therefore the personal mode of second person narration creates a tension between familiarity and unfamiliarity with Bethie’s character.

The rape in *Rape: A Love Story* is a particularly violent case of gang-rape and it leaves two victims: Bethie and her mother Teena (Martine) Maguire. Whilst Bethie is sexually assaulted, physically hurt and emotionally scarred after the rape (she is twelve at the time of the rape), Teena is the main victim of the rape. The number of rapists is five or six (Bethie and Teena cannot identify all suspects in the following court case). Even though rape is the centre of the narratives in the novella, the first chapter is a conglomerate of opinions and judgements regarding the rape by other citizens of Niagara Falls, emphasising that the text is concerned with the interpretation of rape and its aftermath, not only for the victims, but also for their community. A sample listing of some of the chapter titles of the novella foregrounds the narrative’s concern with the rape, the ensuing judgment and victim blaming, and the processing of the rape case on several legal and communicational layers: ‘She Had It Coming’ (3); ‘Like Mother, Like Daughter’ (17); ‘Gang Rape’ (32); ‘Bitch You Better’ (81); ‘The Broken Woman’ (81); ‘The Female Prosecutor’; ‘Media Frenzy’ (128); ‘Lonely’ (153). It is important to note that the first chapter, in which the different judgments are voiced, is the one entitled ‘She had it coming’, which immediately sets the tone of the novel and summarizes the hostility with which Teena and Bethie are mostly met.

The discussion of the aftermath of the rape will be continued after the following analysis of the rape scene itself. The rape takes place on the night of the fourth of July in an old boathouse in Rocky Point Park, Niagara Falls. The boathouse is set in a dichotomous landscape, which is described as moonlit (Oates 24) and mysterious. However, the boathouse and its surroundings, especially the lagoon path, are perceived as beautiful by Teena (*‘so pretty’*) and as decaying and threatening by Bethie: ‘Beer cans and litter floating in the lagoon’ (Oates 25). The boathouse itself is described as ‘historic’ with ‘dark brick, cream-coloured stucco’ (Oates 25) facades, but the description emphasises its decaying state by focusing on its crumbling mortar and the once elegant iron scrollwork. The most significant description of the boathouse is the description of stone figures that are positioned in alcoves and on the roof: ‘Heroic stone figures [...] nude male warriors with swords and shields, females with blank faces and hair to their waists’ (Oates 25). The contrast between the male figures, with weapons, and the female figures, who are described as blank-faced and characterized by their feminine appearance foreshadows the tension between men and women in the aftermath of the rape. Whilst Teena’s

and Bethie's perpetrators continue to attack and harass the women after the rape, Teena becomes a face-less figure in the public eye and is continuously reduced to her appearance, by the members of public and her perpetrators.

The most important figure on the roof of the boathouse is, however, a mermaid, which is described as having a 'ridiculous curving fish tail instead of legs' (Oates 25). Whilst Bethie fails to see 'the point' of a 'deformed female with no legs', and fears her, Teena simply sees the mermaid as a creation for men: 'What's the point of anything made up? Just something exotic for men to look at, I guess. Men make these things up' (Oates 26). The different reactions to the mermaid figure not only emphasize the age difference between twelve-year-old Bethie and thirty-five-year-old Teena, but also symbolize different attitudes towards the mythologization and objectification of women. What Bethie perceives as the deformation of a female body, can be read as the construction and distortion of women, as well as the oppression of women, if the lack of legs is read as a lack of independence. It furthermore re-establishes the superficiality of the way women are perceived, which is already hinted at in the description of the other female figures. The rape and its aftermath are the implementation of what is foreshadowed in the description of the boathouse as a place that symbolizes the decaying and distorting historic portrayal of women.

The rape of Teena and the sexual assault of Bethie begin after they pass the boathouse, when they are suddenly surrounded by several men who are under the influence of Crystal Meth. The first part of the attack is written in second person singular and in italics, which signify that this is part of the Bethie-narrative. The fact that it is written in italics makes the passage stand out formally, as well as creating the impression that Bethie is continuously being addressed by the narrator and by the reader. The second part of the attack, which takes place in the boathouse, is also a Bethie-narrative, but it is not written in italics. The distinction between the two narratives could be read as mirroring the way Bethie experiences the attack: the first part is direct, she visually witnesses the events, while the second part is restricted because Bethie hides and can only hear the rape.

The dominant imagery of the first narration depicting the rape is hunting imagery. The men are not described as humans, but, like Bethie perceives them, as beasts: '*Faces rushing at you. Grinning teeth, glittery eyes*', '*Teasing, laughing. Yipping*', '*lunging like a barracuda with bared teeth*' (Oates 27). The attack is a hunting game for the men, who let Bethie run for a while, only to chase and catch her repeatedly, accompanied by laughter. Teena is also being chased by the men 'like a pack of dogs jumping their prey' (Oates 3), while she is begging them to leave her and Bethie alone. The parts that are written in italics also highlight Bethie's age by

constantly referring to Teena as 'Momma': '*Momma pleading please guys leave us alone, okay? Please don't hurt us, don't hurt my daughter please she's just a little girl, okay, guys?*' (Oates 28). The heightened awareness of Bethie's age highlights the horror of the crime. This is further achieved by the descriptions of her child-body: 'So small-boned, so skinny. No breasts no hips. Not enough female flesh to grab on to. Where's the little cunt, where the fuck is she hiding?' (Oates 29). Because the attackers are intoxicated with drugs, they forget about Bethie quickly, but the narrator comments: 'You were of no significance to them, who had an adult woman' (Oates 30), which highlights the odd relationship between the narrator and Bethie, which seems personal through its format, but harsh and distanced through comments like this. It could be argued that the perspective implies that Bethie suffers from a split personality and is addressing herself, taking on the shame and blame society teaches her to feel about the rape. However, it is not clear whether that is the case.

Because Bethie manages to hide, after being kicked and having her arm dislocated, she is not able to see the rape, but only to hear it. However, the narrator explains what happens to Bethie explicitly. It is described that Teena is kicked, grabbed and laughed at when she attempts to protect herself (Oates 30). The description of the attack emphasizes the explicit nature of the rape. Farther, the narrator mimics the rapists' dehumanization of Teena by stating the attackers' intentions: 'They had torn your mother's clothes from her body as if the female's clothes infuriated them. They spat in your mother's face as if her beauty infuriated them [...] One of them would gouge repeatedly at her right eye with his thumb, wishing to blind her' (Oates 30). The way the scene is related reveals the hate ingrained in the attack, by replacing 'Teena' with 'female', and 'she' with 'her beauty'. The change from personal descriptors of Teena to general signifiers like 'female' demonstrates that the attackers objectify her. Instead of focusing on Teena personally, the narrator represents the attacks as attacks on the concepts of femininity and beauty.

Moreover, the attempt to blind Teena, in other words, the attempt to destroy that part of her face, which is traditionally viewed as a window to the soul, conjures up the images of the faceless women on the roof of the boathouse. Later passages of the novella also state that Teena no longer has a soul after the rape: 'she'd become again merely a body, an inert and soulless weight' (Oates 83). By reducing Teena to her body, the rapists dehumanize her and highlight their own detachment from her. Several of the rapes are related to Bethie by the narrator in the same body-centered manner: 'They would grab your mother's slender ankles, spread her legs violently as if they wished to tear her legs from her body', 'How they straddled your mother's limp body and jammed their penises into her bleeding mouth and into her bleeding vagina and

into her bleeding rectum' (Oates 30-1). Once again, the horror of the act of rape is phrased in combination with the depiction of Bethie's and Teena's relationship as mother and daughter, contrasting dehumanization of a woman with the emotional bond between a mother and her child. These descriptions also repeat the attempt of the rapists to physically destroy Teena. The mode of narration furthermore foregrounds how her mother's rape is disclosed to Bethie directly.

The narrator acknowledges the fact that Bethie cannot see the rape. However, it is never questioned whether she does witness rape because she can hear it. The fact that Bethie has not witnessed the whole rape visually, is voiced by the rapists' lawyer as a reason to doubt Bethie's statement in the following court trial. However, the narrator states that without a doubt, Bethie witnesses rape, but acknowledges that she is too young to know what rape is: 'You did not think *rape*. The word *rape* was not yet a word in your vocabulary. You would think *beat*, *hurt*. *Try to kill*' (Oates 30). The fact that Bethie does not know what rape is until the attack, does not change the fact that it is rape. Especially, because the attack is how she learns what rape is.

The parts of the rape that Bethie only witnesses by over-hearing are reinforced as true when the police arrive at the crime scene and evaluates Teena's injuries. The section following the rape is a description in third-person narration by John Dromoor, who later becomes Teena's and Bethie's avenger. He is the first to enter the crime scene and what he sees confirms that Teena has been raped: 'the naked woman lay open-mouthed, open-legged in the supplicant posture of death' (Oates 35). Teena's wounds are described in detail, making mention of her head wounds, broken nose, split lips, jagged nails, mucus encrusted lashes and the pool of blood 'spreading from between her legs' (Oates 35). The scene he finds clearly disturbs Dromoor, who is described as shaking when he sees 'the victim of gang-rape', which he has only every seen in photographs before: 'Here, he amended, was rape. This was a rape' [...] 'He would not forget the sight' (Oates 36).

Dromoor is, as shown by the preceding quote, affected by the rape scene for the rest of his life. For Bethie, however, the rape is not only a trauma she carries with her forever, but the day of the rape identified with Bethie's loss of her childhood. The sentence '[y]our childhood ended when you were twelve years old' (Oates 17, 37) is repeated throughout the novel, as well as the distinction between before and after the rape, between 'before you and your mother became victims' (Oates 44). Bethie and Teena suffer from the trauma separately from each other, because Teena experiences memory loss for twelve days after the rape. Teena regains partial memory, which Bethie observes in the hospital: 'You see the stricken look in her face sometimes, her mouth opening in a silent cry' (Oates 53). As a result of her severe mental and

physical injuries, Teena not only has to relive the rape, but also needs to relearn how to walk and only partially regains her eye-sight. She internalizes her pain and refuses to see Bethie (Oates 81), as well as refusing to be touched (Oates 60). Teena especially struggles with the touch of men: ‘she [could not] bear to be touched by any man. No, no! God, no. Panicked, screamed, scratched at them’ (Oates 82-3). Teena is also diagnosed with severe depression, is highly medicated for a while and then diagnosed as suicidal (81). During one of her suicide attempts, the reader is offered a rare insight into Teena’s desperate state of mind through direct thought: ‘*God help me. God give me peace. God?*’ (Oates 83). This passage depicts Teena’s emotions directly, offering the reader an unmediated instance of a rape victim voicing the effect the rape has had on her.

When the legal proceedings begin, Teena and Bethie keep receiving threats from members of the rapists’ families and their neighbors. For example, on one occasion a note is slipped into Teena’s letterbox, which exemplifies the language used by society to describe Teena: ‘BITCH YOU BETTER BE SAYING YOUR PRAYS WHOR BETTER BE ON YOUR KNEES NOT SUCKING COCKS’ (Oates 61; sic). Teena rereads the note continuously, attempting to comprehend the ‘hatred emanating from it’ (Oates 61). On another occasion, Bethie is confronted by a gang of girls in a 7-Eleven: ‘...you better watch your mouth, bitch. You better not be saying wrong things about my brothers, bitch [...] they’re gonna finish up, you and your bitch momma don’t keep your fucking mouths shut’ (Oates 62; sic). As these instances make clear, neither Bethie nor Teena receive any support from society after the ordeal they suffered. On the contrary, they are met with degrading language and threats. The narrator reveals that Teena has begun to internalize the slander, the gossip and the judgment of society regarding herself: ‘When she saw her reflection in a mirror, taken unawares she did not think alarmed *I must do something about my appearance, Jesus!* but *That pathetic woman, they should have finished the job*’ (Oates 83; sic).

What finally pushes Teena into seclusion is not just the way in which strangers treat her but especially the way Casey, her boyfriend, treats her. After the rape, Casey attempts to support Teena, but he is ‘terrified of what injuries, the worst of them internal, had been done to her in that part of her body hidden by bedclothes’ (49). He feels ‘guilty’ (96) for not being able to love her any longer, but he does not see her as the same person anymore (49, 96). Although both Teena and Casey are depicted as wanting to comfort each other it becomes clear that neither of them is capable of reconnecting. For example, Casey is scared of touching Teena ‘not knowing if she’d wince, or try not to wince’ (58), and Teena has to force herself to smile at him, even though Casey is hurting her. The implication of the portrayal of Teena’s failed personal

relationships is that the rape is an isolating trauma.

Regarding a different work by Oates (*I Stand Before You Naked*, 1991), Woodruff states: ‘This fear of her husband’s response shows the extent to which the victim herself has been brainwashed by rape scripts and has thus internalized shame about the attack’ (Woodruff 441). The same can be applied to Teena’s reaction towards Casey. The suggestion seems to be that, apart from suffering from the trauma itself, the other after effect of rape is that it alienates the victim from society and from their personal support system.

The judgement and blame that Teena faces from society is predominantly based on her appearance. One of the statements in the first chapter (“She had it coming”) is that the way Teena dresses is why she brought her rape on herself: ‘A woman like that, thirty-five years old and dressed like a teenager. Tank top, denim cutoffs, shaggy bleached-blond hair frizzed around her face. Bare legs, high-heeled sandals? Tight sexy clothes showing her breasts, her ass, what’s she expect?’ (Oates 5). It is clear from these statements that Teena is judged by the way she physically presents herself. It is also clear that because Teena is dressed in a way that the society of Niagara Falls deems unacceptable, she must be a bad mother. The narrative is filled with comments such as ‘Christ knows what she was thinking’ (Oates 3), ‘What kind of mother would drag her young daughter with her to a drunken party’ (Oates 6), ‘*The daughter was drinking beer, too. Like mother, like daughter in that family*’ (Oates 22).

In addition to the hostility of these statements, they reveal that speculation is a large part of the talk about Teena and Bethie. These are speculations because they contradict the way that the events of the narrative are presented. The feminist critic Alyn Pearson argues that the root of victim-blaming lies in the assumption that rape is about sex, rather than about power, or about lust rather than about oppressive violence (Pearson 14). Hence, Pearson argues, the blame is often put on women who do not comply with the following “rules”: ‘Avoid dark streets (obviously), avoid bad situations (well, to most of us, a bar in general is a bad situation), avoid going out alone, walking alone, drinking too much, dressing too revealing, being too aggressive, smiling too profusely, or acting too insecure’ (Pearson 13). Pearson critiques these statements by pointing out that society today is immersed in rape culture. Thus, if a woman grows up with the above-stated message and if she does not stick to those rules, society blames her for being raped, instead of blaming her rapist (Pearson 14).

The most harmful judgement that Teena and Bethie face, however, is not the gossip on the streets of their hometown, but the way they are treated in court, when fighting for justice. For Bethie the trial is torturous because she is asked to repeat what has happened to her over and over again. She receives no emotional support and is left alone with the fear that if she

identifies the rapists, they will kill her and Teena: 'He would come back to kill you. He was the enemy' (Oates 39). She then struggles with the fact that the rapists' defendant, Kirkpatrick, doubts her: '*How can the child be sure? How can we believe her? How can a child of twelve swear? How can a child of twelve testify?*' (Oates 43) The wording used in court to describe Bethie's attackers seem to especially distress her: "'Suspects" they were called. As if they hadn't done what they'd done to you and your mother but were only "suspected" of doing it!' (Oates 41).

Due to the lack of support and the doubt with which Bethie is met, her mistrust of the legal system increases with every court visit. The tipping point for Bethie and Teena is when Teena is asked to testify. Firstly, Teena is advised by her lawyer to dress conservatively, therefore succumbing to the prejudiced attitude of her society. Secondly, she must appear in court and face all her rapists. She tries to ignore the 'young men who were staring at her with undisguised resentment, hatred' (Oates 65), whilst the family members of the accused are shouting curses at her: "'Bitch! Whore! Liar!' (Oates 65). And thirdly, the judge meets Teena with the same disrespect and prejudice as the rest of the town. He talks to her condescendingly and asks her to remove her glasses in an unfriendly manner, even though she needs them due to her eye-injury (Oates 72). The judge is kinder, or rather 'not sarcastic' (Oates 73), with Bethie, only because he 'would not wish to appear unsympathetic with a child victim of a violent sexual attack, at least at the preliminary hearing' (Oates 73).

The depiction of Teena's and Bethie's trial is significant in that it portrays the difficulties faced by a rape victim if they seek justice through the law and reveals how excruciating such a process can be. Dromoor observes Teena while her lawyer goes through her rape in detail, imagining how she must feel: 'Must be hell to hear yourself talked of like that. Gang-rape, bleed to death, left to die. This was ugly' (Oates 68). Teena is then accused of having been drunk and the defense states that all sex was consensual and that if a rape happened, it must have happened after Teena's encounter with the suspects. The lawyer delivers his defense not only stating 'there had been no rape' (Oates 73), but also by accusing Teena and judging her for her appearance and supposed drunkenness, which is met with applause from the audience in the court room.

Tonya Marie Lambert argues that gang rapes are more difficult to prosecute than rapes involving only one attacker, because 'the assailants may provide alibis for each other or offer differing versions of events, making it hard for the authorities' (Lambert 86). As a result of this, victims are less likely to report their rape, in particular because they fear reprisals from more than one person' (Lambert 86). The description of Teena's and Bethie's trial matches Lambert's

observation perfectly. After the hearing, Teena refuses to return to court, because of the lack of understanding and help. The text continues with narrations by the rapists and their parents, making clear that the rape has indeed happened, and therefore highlighting the problematic nature of the harsh legal system for rape and sexual assault victims like Teena and Bethie. One of the rapists' parents ponders '*Kirkpatrick is a genius, isn't he? Best damn lawyer in upstate New York. Of course you'll have to refinance your home, sell your second car [...] the man to call when you're in deep shit*' (Oates 80). The reason the rapists can escape conviction (whilst blaming each other for different, contradicting crimes) is that the only witnesses to the rape are the victims themselves. As one of the rapists' parents states aptly: '*The woman's word against theirs. Anybody can cry rape. Reasonable doubt is all a jury needs*' (Oates 80). As Woodruff observes (again regarding a different novel by Oates) 'The protagonist's reluctance to ask for help, following her analysis of the shame involved in doing so, reflects not so much her individual paranoia as the reality of institutionalized misogyny' (440).

The narrative depicts another aspect of the aftermath of the rape by focusing on the media reaction to it: 'Through July/August/September/October you could not escape the inch-high headlines and their accompanying photographs, often in full color' (Oates 128). All forms of media report the rape, ranging from the local newspaper to television and radio, which means that neither Bethie nor Teena are allowed to forget their trauma at any point of the trial. It is clear from the newspaper headlines that are listed in the narration in capital letters, that the rape is seen as 'sensational' (Oates 129) and seen as a crime that becomes a form of entertainment. Biressi argues that a story based on true crime is 'by definition an entertainment based on 'what is known already'' (Biressi 183). This headline makes clear how the news coverage of a personal trauma such as rape as a sensationalised story can be harmful to the victim: 'GRIEVING MOTHER VOWS "DEFAMATION" LAWSUIT AGAINST TEENA: "*That Woman Has Destroyed My Son's Life*"' (Oates 129). The critic Jill Gorman remarks on the problematic of media coverage concerning rape cases in her study. According to Gorman the publication of the identity of rape victims is problematic, because it often hinders victims from going to trial since they fear being placed "'on trial" in the public eye or from public embarrassment' (Gorman 125).

On the other hand, Gorman argues, the problem of not naming victims is that the 'ideal' of an unnamed, silenced victim 'contributes to a culture of shame and disempowerment for rape victims' (125). The latter statement seems to be concerned with a kind of identity loss. However, as Oates' novella suggests, empowerment through naming the victim fails in a society conditioned by prejudices concerning sexual assaults and gender stereotypes. According to

Alison Kuhn, the portrayal of rape cases by the media often ‘cultivate the state of our rape culture’ (Kuhn Paragraph 1). Kuhn refers to the blaming of rape victims, which has been discussed earlier, as a main element of the way rape is represented in the media. She states that ‘this attention to the actions and choices of the victim revokes credibility from the victim as well as responsibility from the rapist’ (Paragraph 4). This observation reflects the way in which Teena is perceived by society through the media. And finally, Woodruff adds to the previous statements, that ‘the rape victim often avoids going public regarding assault as she is subsequently blamed for her own victimization’ (440).

The judgment that Bethie and Teena face at home, in court and in the media, demonstrates how they are excluded from the society they had hoped to get help from. The only ‘relief’ that they are given is in the form of revenge through John Dromoor, who assassinates the rapists on his own accord. He is able to cover up the murders, because he is a police officer and knows how to stage suicides. Because of his concern for her mother, Bethie transfers romantic/grateful feelings onto Dromoor. When Dromoor drops Teena off after saving her from a suicide attempt, Bethie opens the door thinking: ‘*I love you. You are all to me*’ (Oates 85). This is one of the two instances when it is mentioned that Bethie loves Dromoor in some way or another. This ‘love’ is particularly questionable, because Bethie states that she loves Dromoor for her mother, because Teena is incapable of it. The second instance in which Bethie’s feelings for Dromoor are referred to is in the third part of the book, which depicts an older Bethie, who has married, and who considers whether she is ever going to reveal the trauma of her past to her husband: ‘*When will you tell him? Maybe never. For why tell him? He would not understand. There was ugliness in that world but there was beauty, too. There was hatred, but love. Only one man could understand and your husband is not that man*’ (Oates 153). I argue that the fact that Bethie is described as ‘falling in love’ with Dromoor in only two sentences, in addition him being the only one who actively helps Teena and Bethie (in his own way), proves that she cannot understand her own feelings of gratitude towards him and therefore misinterprets them as romantic love. The title of the novella, which raises the expectation that there will be a love story, is dissolved. The love Bethie feels is gratitude, rather than romantic love.

In conclusion, Oates’ novella portrays a rape and its aftermath by focusing on the two victims and society’s perception of them. The horror of Teena’s and Bethie’s experience is undeniable and confronts the reader with the problems surrounding the legal system regarding rape, the representation of rape on a narratological level and in the media, and the effects the trauma has on the victims and those close to them. The rape trauma is not metaphorized in the

novel, it is simply portrayed, although in various expressive modes, rather than through traditional rhetoric (Dean 331). The mere portrayal of victims in Oates works, rather than the open critique of oppressive systems, or the imagining of an ‘otherwise’ (Fraser 26) has caused critics to describe Oates other works as ‘lukewarm’ (Fraser 26), or as works of ‘normative feminism’ (Gates 543). Fraser puts it like this: ‘Oates’s female protagonists are already dead women’ (Fraser 27). In other words, feminists critique Oates for not providing the reader with a positive role. Other critics problematize the use of the word ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’ in general, because it perpetuates the fictions of male power, which ‘linguistically tokenize women’s bodies as always already overpowered by men’ (Spry 29), which is what Judith Butler has called the ‘reified stabs of gender’ (Butler 271).

However, I argue that the portrayal of the rape in *Rape: A Love Story* is more than ‘lukewarm’. Certainly, Oates reveals the rape scripts that exist in society within the text without offering a positive solution to the problem. Rape scripts are ‘prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists’ (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 705) and they suggest that rape is a justified action towards a woman, as well as constructing the woman as already victimized. Hesford explains how the word ‘script’ calls attention ‘how historical, geopolitical, and cultural struggles, narratives, and fantasies are not antithetical to material “reality” but fundamental to social and political life’ (193).

By showing how these scripts play out in society on various levels, Oates reveals their destructive nature. Arguably, the novella itself is the criticism of a system that clearly does not work. In fact, Oates offers an exploration of what is deeply wrong with the way the rape scripts function in her text, by making it a tragic story. The ‘bearing witness’ (Oates “Bearing Witness: Joyce Carol Oates Studies”) of suffering in such detail as in *Rape: A Love Story* is Oates’ persecution of the violence, oppression and society she presents. Bethie states on the last page of the novella: ‘You learned how if a thing is not spoken of, even those closest to you, who love you, will assume that it doesn’t exist. In your marriage, you would cultivate this wisdom’ (Oates 135). Bethie is clearly suffering from her silence, because she is isolated from the world around her (from Teena and from her own husband). By writing a novella full of the excruciating details of different aspects of the rape, Oates breaks this silence and reveals the decaying and destructive nature of this tradition of silence, which is symbolized by the boathouse in which the rape takes place.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to interrogate both the tendency to use rape as a metaphor in a selection of contemporary fiction and the tendency of literary critics to insist on reading rape as a metaphor. My argument has been that rape is frequently deployed and read as a figure for something else and that various problems arise from this. Although I have focussed on contemporary fiction and critical responses to it, I have suggested that these works effectively continue a long tradition in the Western canon of treating rape in literature as a figurative device.

The narrative perspectives in *Disgrace*, *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *Atonement* deny the rape victims their own voice and therefore autonomy over their own experience. By this I mean that the victims are present in the narrative, but their rapes are portrayed from the perspective of other characters. Only in *Rape a Love Story* does the victim represent herself (on a few instances) or is represented by her daughter, who is present during the rape and also a victim of sexual assault. Critical responses to these novels have primarily read the sexual violence depicted as a figure for something else. Again, *Rape: A Love Story* stands out in contrast here too. Strikingly, there has been no critical response to this novel –this may be because the literal depiction of sexual violence frustrates (deliberately so) any attempt to read metaphorically.

My findings suggest that critical discourse regarding rape scenes is only possible when the narrative deploys rape as a figure, so that figurative readings can take place. However, when the narrative is explicit and literal in its representation of rape, as in *Rape a Love Story*, critical responses become difficult. This confirms my introductory hypothesis that rape, although present through its metaphorical function, is a “silent” topic in literature.

This silence in literature confirms the feminist claim that rape is an issue that needs to be voiced. The feminist slogan “break the silence” (Marodiorissian 772) encapsulates this agenda. The shame and uneasiness that accompanies the discussion of rape is reflected in the literature discussed in this thesis. For example, the titles of the novels conjure up images of shame and sin, in the case of *Disgrace* and *Atonement*, whilst *Cereus Blooms at Night* is a title that evokes images of mystery and of traditional femininity. The titles of these novels express existing attitudes towards the topic of rape. Oates’ title, *Rape: A Love Story*, stands out as a contradictory provocation.

Oates’ title is a fitting description for the treatment of rape in literature. It embodies the paradoxical use of rape: it is a well-established and favoured metaphor for oppression in literature. In fact, rape as a trope is not only a factor in literary discourse; the rise of rape as a trope as in history and popular culture in general, reveals how ‘obsessed’ (Williams paragraph

1) narratives of popular culture are with rape. Williams observes that rape is a trope that serves as a tool to sensationalise a drama (paragraph 1), as well as guaranteeing controversy through its fictional depiction (paragraph 13).

Furthermore, rape is characterised by silence, by the way it is mediated through representation and discourse. In my background chapter I discussed the arguments of Sabine Sielke and Mieke Bal who define the silencing of rape through mediation. To Mieke Bal rape is an inner experience which cannot be visualized, only imagined by the reader/audience. Therefore, according to Bal, representations of rape are ‘translations’ (142). Sabine Sielke calls the process of mediation through translation ‘refiguration (5)’. Sielke’s notion of the refiguration of rape includes the transposition of rape into other cultural and social contexts. Sielke’s analysis aptly concludes that the ‘refiguration’ and rhetoric of rape leads to discourses that do not concern rape, but rather a ‘cultural literacy concerning matters of rape’ (5).

My argument has been that the depiction and discussion of rape in a literal sense, rather than as a metaphor for something else, is necessary both in literary studies and in wider discursive contexts. This necessity is evidenced by the following example: the actor Nicolas Cage has been quoted saying that he will adapt Oates’ *Rape: A Love Story* (entertainmentweekly.com). The adaptation of the novella will be renamed ‘*Vengeance: A Love Story*’ (ew.com paragraph 1). The change of the title is significant, because it avoids addressing the main concern of the novel: the rape. Instead, the focus is directed to elements of a love story, as well as the notion of vengeance. Certainly, both elements are part of Oates’ novella. However, as I have argued, the love story is not really present in the narrative (if at all only in a de-familiarized manner) and vengeance is a subsidiary part of the plot. Thus, the one novel that I have discussed as an example of the explicit, literal confrontation with rape as rape (instead of rape as metaphor) is being turned into another narrative that relocates rape into a different discursive context. The novel is being adapted into popular culture by focusing on the elements which can be sensationalised and by avoiding direct confrontation with rape.

It is important to emphasise that, despite its shortfalls, the use of rape as a metaphor in literature and literary study is important as it has enabled significant discussion about various forms of oppression. The aim of this thesis has not been to propose a negation of these practises but rather to focus on what they may leave out. Instead, the discussion of the novels in this thesis has aimed to outline the existing framework of discussion of the representation of rape and at suggesting how the mystification and abstraction of rape might be problematic.

The demystification of rape is an important part of the discussion of rape, in addition to the discussion of rape as a metaphor. It seems that rape, its portrayal and its discussion, are

difficult partly because rape cannot be defined as one unified experience. The fluidity of the definition of rape makes it hard to discuss. It has led critics to state that rape ‘has become academia’s undertheorized and apparently untheorizable issue’ (Mardorossian 743). Mardorossian critiques feminist scholars and activists for reproducing the ‘ideology of rape’ (746) by depicting women as victims who are subordinated to men. Following this argument, and Beatty Warner’s statement that rape has an important role in individual and collective life ‘as myth, imagination, and fantasy’ (13), it is clear that the concept of rape crosses a variety of discourses. These discourses cross-pollinate each other and influence the way in which rape is categorically treated as a figure.

Despite its shortfalls the metaphor of rape is important and helpful in literature and literary discourse, but the metaphor is so ingrained in our understanding of rape that it seems almost impossible to distinguish it from the literal portrayal of rape. What needs to take place is a reconceptualization of the understanding and the rhetoric of rape. Mardorossian identifies this need to reconceptualise rape in feminist discourse: ‘without a concerted effort on the part of both feminist academics and activists to reconceptualize rape, the radical feminist slogan “break the silence” might soon have no more valence than “keep talking”’ (772). As this quote suggests, the literary tool that allows us to differentiate the metaphor from the rape seems to be missing from the toolbox. An approach to narratives that allows us to read the metaphor, but simultaneously enables us to acknowledge the rape without its metaphorical veil, is needed. It would enable the discourse about rape to move away from the mystification of rape that conserves ‘stereotypes about victims’ (Schmidt 191). If rape is not reconceptualised we are in danger of perpetuating the silence that surrounds it.

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