

Life Writing After Empire: Penelope Lively, Doris Lessing and Janet Frame

Emma Parker

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of:

Doctor of Philosophy

School of English

University of Leeds

June 2020

Intellectual Property Statement

I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to John McLeod, the very best of teachers, whose kindness and support for this project often seemed limitless. Thanks also to the White Rose College of the Arts and Humanities (WRoCAH) for my doctoral funding, and to Clare and Caryn at the WRoCAH office.

For reading various drafts and extracts of this thesis thank you: Alexis Brown, Shirley Chew, Dom Davies, Catherine McIlwaine and Malachi McIntosh. Elleke Boehmer discussed all things autobiographical with me in New Zealand, Leeds and Oxford. Asha Rogers, Andrew Dean, Haya Alfarhan, Veronica Barnsley, Amy Rushton and Alberto Fernández Carbajal offered sound advice on many of the ideas in this study. Alison Gibbons and Nancy Pedri provided adventures and chats about life writing in Brazil. Josh Doble and Liam Liburd brought the excitement and chaos of organising our ‘After Empire?’ conference while Pam Rhodes and Lindsey English helped us through this event with characteristic good will. In London my colleagues at PositiveNegatives supplied an important refuge in the attic rooms of Russell Square: thank you Ben Dix, Emily Oliver, Laura Price and Sara Wong.

Special thanks to Penelope Lively for an afternoon in Islington discussing Egypt, empire and life writing. Thank you to the archives team at the University of Otago for organising my access to the Janet Frame papers, and to the Janet Frame Trust in Oamaru and Frank Sargeson House in Auckland for my memorable visits.

Alexis Brown and Ed Dodson have shown me the way through postgrad life since 2014, while my PhD family, especially Nathan Brand, Amber Lascelles, Clare Fisher, Rachel Johnson, Maddalena Moretti and Kate Spowage supplied many happy days and nights in Leeds. Dave Lawrence and Chris Williams ferried me around Gaborone and Johannesburg with good humour and strong

drinks. Beth Hughes, Hayley Toth and Ruth Davies shared late night conversations, holidays and different homes across Leeds and London with me over four years. Thank you.

My family, both immediate and extended, cheered me over the finish line and offered unconditional support for this project, especially Catherine and Jeremy McIlwaine, Maureen Parker, Jane Barber, Simon Davies, Sandrine Buisson and Glenys, Dave, Alice and Andy Meir.

Final thanks are to Dom Davies. Partner in crime, best friend, critic and confidant. From driving me across the South Island in pursuit of Janet Frame to providing consolation during the many evenings of doubt, you were there through it all: on hand with love, wisdom, and terrible puns. Words are not enough. Thank you.

Abstract

This thesis examines how the British Empire and the legacies of colonial rule impact upon and are explored within modern and contemporary life writing. It offers a chapter-by-chapter discussion of three life writers — Penelope Lively, Doris Lessing and Janet Frame — who wrote and rewrote their memories of growing up in colonies, former colonies and protectorates of the British Empire across numerous autobiographical texts. As travellers from their respective childhood homes in Egypt (Lively), Southern Rhodesia (Lessing) and New Zealand (Frame), their life narratives converge in London across a twelve-year period from 1945-1957. These autobiographical self-representations intersect at a crucial historical juncture when colonial rule was being dismantled across Britain's former Empire, yet the exchanges between metropole and colony remained equally intense. This study offers an original contribution to knowledge by drawing together three life writers whose work — with few notable exceptions — is rarely considered comparatively. While Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's life narratives might connect through the streets of post-war London, I argue that this is only the beginning of their overlapping and mutual interests. All of their life writings address, engage with and are shaped by, the legacies of colonialism. Their numerous autobiographical self-representations reveal how empire and its aftermath seeps into everyday life, with these literary texts exploring how imperialism functioned as part of a given world both during and after colonial rule. This thesis examines a considerable number of life writings by three late twentieth-century authors, tracking how their autobiographical non-fiction is deeply concerned with the aftermath of empire and explores the resonant legacies of colonialism long after official decolonisation.

Introduction: Life Writing After Empire	9
‘Strangers in London’: Arriving in the Post-War Metropolis	9
Life Writing	20
After Empire?	27
Writing the Colonial Remains	33
Chapter One: Remembering Egypt and Empire in Penelope Lively’s Memoirs	39
Introduction: Moving from a world of technicolour to black and white	39
An Island of Whiteness: Re-reading <i>Oleander, Jacaranda</i> (1994)	47
The Gardens: ‘an alien enclave amid fields of sugarcane and clover’	57
‘The view of things has a double exposure’	61
‘Everyone was heading home, except for me’	67
Speculative Life Writing in <i>Making It Up</i> and <i>Ammonites and Leaping Fish</i>	70
The Alternative Stories in <i>Making It Up</i>	76
Timeliness and Lateness in <i>Ammonites and Leaping Fish</i>	87
Conclusion: Wastelands and Willow-herb	94
Chapter Two: Settlers and Speculation in Doris Lessing’s Life Writing	100
Introduction: ‘Where is this British Empire?’	100
<i>Alfred and Emily</i> : Speculation and the Aftermath of Empire	109
Part One, Alfred and Emily: A Novella	114
Part Two, Alfred and Emily: Two Lives	121

The House on the Hill: <i>Going Home</i> and <i>African Laughter: Four Visits to Zimbabwe</i>	128
<i>Going Home</i> : ‘The hill where the house used to be’	134
<i>African Laughter</i> : Returning to the Southern Rhodesian Laager	147
Conclusion: The Old Muwanga Tree	162
Chapter Three: The Remains of Empire: Janet Frame’s Autobiographies	169
Introduction: Life Lines and Autobiographical Space	169
Imperial Debris, Ancestral Myths and Uncertain Origins in <i>To The Is-Land</i>	177
Objects and Interior Frontiers	185
Unsettled Settlers in <i>An Angel at My Table</i>	196
‘Claiming the features of the land’	202
‘The need to return to the place I have come from’	213
London and the End of Empire in <i>The Envoy From Mirror City</i>	216
‘A colonial New Zealander abroad’	220
Conclusion: ‘The words of London’	230
Conclusion: the tallboy, the trunk and the duchesse dresser	235
Bibliography	242

‘Strangers in London’: Arriving in the Post-War Metropolis

Janet Frame arrived in London’s Waterloo station at the end of August 1957. Having endured debilitating sea-sickness throughout the difficult, four-week sea crossing from her native New Zealand, Frame stood on the concourse and regarded a cityscape that was ‘raining and grey and [where] the black taxis looked like hearses’.¹ This ominous vision did little to dissuade the eager newcomer. Frame’s autobiography records how, during her early weeks in the city, she navigated the hostels and boarding houses that accommodated many ‘strangers in London’ and made ‘long bus journeys to places with haunting names — Ponders End, High Wycombe, Mortlake’.² Each time she found herself ‘arriving at a cluster of dreary-looking buildings set in a waste of concrete and brick’.³ She noted, with surprise, that many of the buildings’ inhabitants ‘appeared to be pale, worried and smaller in build than most New Zealanders’.⁴ As the September nights grew colder a thick fog filled her small, damp bedroom each night, leaving ‘a resulting railway taste’ across her tongue.⁵ Although Frame’s home country had become a dominion, rather than a colony of the British Empire in 1907, in the third volume of her autobiography *The Envoy From Mirror City* (1985) she remembers her early years in 1950s London as partly defined by the imperial legacies ‘that left a colonial New Zealander overseas without any real identity’.⁶

Arriving in Britain seven years before Frame, Doris Lessing too had suffered a month-long boat journey, departing from Cape Town, South Africa in 1949. The second volume of her autobiography, *Walking in the Shade* (1997), recalls that as she disembarked in Britain she was shocked to see ‘white men unloading a ship, doing heavy manual labour’.⁷ In Southern Rhodesia

¹ Janet Frame, ‘Volume Three: The Envoy From Mirror City’ in *The Complete Autobiography* (London: The Women’s Press, 1990), pp. 289-435 (p. 299).

² Frame, ‘The Envoy From Mirror City’, p. 306.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

⁷ Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade: Volume Two of My Autobiography, 1949-1962* (London: Fourth Estate, 2013), p. 4.

(now Zimbabwe), the racially segregated British colony in which Lessing had been raised, onerous tasks were exclusively carried out by black labourers. Lessing recorded the disorientating experience of arrival in several of her memoirs and autobiographies, including *In Pursuit of the English* (1960) and *Walking in the Shade* (1997). Like Frame, she also remembered the sinister fogs that would envelop the city, but her early encounters with the imperial metropolis exposed a bleaker, war-damaged urban landscape where ‘some areas [were] all [in] ruins, and under them holes of dirty water’.⁸ Just as Frame discovered in the 1950s that many Londoners were still ‘living as if during the days of the Second World War’,⁹ Lessing noted that the psychological traumas of the Blitz were clearly evident in 1949: ‘any conversation tended to drift towards the war, like an animal licking a sore place’.¹⁰ Despite being raised by English parents to consider Britain as home, Lessing’s first months in London saw her inhabiting an unrecognisable and unfamiliar post-war metropolis.

Rather than experiencing the aftermath of war, Penelope Lively arrived in London during 1945, towards the end of the conflict. Lively had also travelled to Britain by boat, undertaking the significantly shorter journey from Egypt. Having been raised in a grand mansion on the outskirts of Cairo Lively had grown up in a protectorate of the British Empire that, during the 1930s, ‘was still effectively run by foreigners and principally by the British’.¹¹ Despite her earlier arrival, she nevertheless navigated a visibly bomb-damaged city that would have been identifiable to both Lessing and Frame. The twelve year old Lively had travelled to the UK without her family and was quickly dispatched to live in her grandmother’s townhouse on Harley Street. While her lodgings were considerably more salubrious than the bedsits and fog-filled garden rooms where Lessing and Frame lived, the household on Harley Street was confined to a single ground floor room, as the windows on upper floors ‘had been blown out in the Blitz’.¹² Much like Lessing’s and Frame’s first impressions

⁸ Lessing, *Walking in the Shade*, p. 4.

⁹ Frame, ‘The Envoy From Mirror City’, p. 309.

¹⁰ Lessing, *Walking in the Shade*, p. 5.

¹¹ Penelope Lively, *Oleander, Jacaranda: A Childhood Perceived* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 20.

¹² Lively, *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 166.

of London Lively's were defined by unwelcoming accommodation and 'the inconceivable cold, the perpetually leaking sky'.¹³ As was true for many arrivals in the post-war period, Lively's colonial education featured a strong emphasis on English literature leading her to anticipate a convivial British landscape of 'immutable good weather, gambolling animals and happy laughing folk'.¹⁴ She quickly realised that, under strict rationing laws, 'the gambolling animals had been turned into offal and the happy laughing folk were transformed into the po-faced raincoat ranks at bus stops'.¹⁵ Other transformations were also taking place during this period. As has been well-documented, Lively, Lessing and Frame arrived in London at a time when Britain was not only recovering from the war, but also becoming 'a site of reverse colonisation, in which both workers and intellectuals from the (ex-) colonies migrated to the centre in unprecedented numbers'.¹⁶ Navigating the damaged streets of the post-war city, these three writers witnessed the end of the British Empire from within Britain itself, writing about the rapidly changing landscape of London and reflecting on their own distinctive roles as colonial strangers in the imperial metropolis.

This thesis examines how the British Empire and the legacies of colonial rule impact upon and are explored within modern and contemporary life writing.¹⁷ It offers a chapter-by-chapter discussion of three life writers — Penelope Lively, Doris Lessing and Janet Frame — who wrote and

¹³ Ibid., p. 165.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 173-174.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 174.

¹⁶ Jed Esty, *Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 165.

¹⁷ Throughout this thesis I capitalise the word 'Empire' when referring to a particular imperial power, e.g. the British Empire. However, I will also frequently refer to 'empire' in the lower case when discussing it as a concept and condition. The writers in this study responded to the collapse of numerous European empires during the twentieth century. My use of 'empire' therefore denotes a wide range of colonial practices that, accelerated by the rise of capitalism in Western Europe, led to 'the take over of territory, appropriation of material resources, exploitation of a labour force' and the 'interference with political and cultural structures of another territory or nation', in Ania Loomba's words. In addition, following Elleke Boehmer and others, this thesis operates on the understanding that empire was also 'a textual undertaking', and that colonial and postcolonial literatures contributed to 'the making, definition and clarification' of colonial preoccupations. — Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 6; Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 5.

rewrote their memories of growing up in colonies, former colonies and protectorates of the British Empire across numerous autobiographical texts. As travellers from their respective childhood homes in Egypt (Lively), Southern Rhodesia (Lessing) and New Zealand (Frame), their subsequent life narratives converge in London across a twelve year period from 1945-1957. These autobiographical self-representations intersect at a crucial historical juncture when colonial rule was being dismantled across Britain's former Empire. Yet as Bill Schwarz has suggested, 'the transactions between the imperial centre and the overseas possessions were as intense, perhaps more intense, in the dying days of empire as they had been at the height of British imperial rule'.¹⁸ My discussions of all three authors respond to recent arguments that 'writers who emerged during the period of post-war decolonisation, many of whom went on to become prominent literary figures of the late-twentieth century, have been especially overlooked' in critical assessments of the end of empire.¹⁹ This study offers an original contribution to knowledge by drawing together three life writers whose work — with few notable exceptions — is rarely considered comparatively.²⁰ While Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's life

¹⁸ Bill Schwarz, *The White Man's World (Memories of Empire)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 29.

¹⁹ Matthew Whittle, *Post-War British Literature and the "End of Empire"* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) p. 8.

²⁰ Although Lively, Lessing and Frame have not been considered as a trio in any previous comparative readings, John McLeod outlines Lessing's and Frame's struggles to discover 'the England of their (literary) dreams' in *Postcolonial London* (2004) while Gillian Whitlock considers Lessing and Lively as life writers 'whose childhood was, one way or another, implicated in the pink spaces of the maps of Empire' in *The Intimate Empire* (2000). In an article discussing Margaret Atwood, Penelope Lively and Doris Lessing, Susan Watkins argues that all three authors' 'engagement with ageing and gender allows them to create their own kind of "late style"'. Most recently, Cyrena Mazlin briefly compares the autobiographies of Frame and Lessing in *Janet Frame in Focus* (2017) tracing the biographical similarities between both writers to suggest firstly, that there is little distinction between their autobiographies and novels. Mazlin secondly develops the dubious claim that, for Lessing and Frame, 'the process of writing and depicting events and experiences from their lives in their fiction and autobiography was a means of coming to terms with their pasts'. Several of these earlier discussions provide an important foundation for this study, particularly McLeod's and Whitlock's considerations of how life writers responded to the legacies of British colonialism after travelling to the imperial metropole. I expand these earlier readings by tracing the impact of empire throughout each author's life writing, as opposed to these previous discussions which consider a single text in relative isolation. — John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 61; Gillian Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire: Reading Women's Autobiography* (New York: Cassell, 2000), p. 181; Susan Watkins, "'Summoning Your Youth at Will": Memory, Time and Ageing in the Work of Penelope

narratives might connect through the streets of post-war London, I argue that this is only the beginning of their overlapping, mutual interests. All of their life writings address, engage with and are shaped by, the legacies of colonialism. Their numerous autobiographical self-representations reveal how empire and its aftermath seeps into everyday life, from Lessing's home on a farming frontier in Southern Rhodesia, to the Frame family's cluttered and dilapidated suburban bungalow in Oamaru, New Zealand. Following Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, I read across these life narratives to emphasise that 'empire [was] lived across everyday practices'.²¹ These literary texts explore how imperialism functioned as 'part of the given world', 'weaving itself into the everyday' both during and after empire.²² This thesis examines a considerable number of life writings by three late twentieth-century authors, tracking how their autobiographical non-fiction is deeply concerned with the aftermath of empire and explores the resonant legacies of colonialism long after official decolonisation.

By drawing previously unrecognised connections between Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's autobiographical writings, this thesis contributes to recent critical dialogues between postcolonial and contemporary life writing studies.²³ While I concur with Gillian Whitlock that 'thinking about settlers' and the descendants of white colonialists has been previously considered 'unfashionable in postcolonial criticism', I argue that these three life writers nevertheless contribute unique and vital

Lively, Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 34:2 (2013), 222-244 (p. 222); Cyrena Mazlin, 'A Soldier's Daughter: The Autobiographies and Autobiographical Fiction of Janet Frame and Doris Lessing' in *Janet Frame in Focus: Women Analyze the Works of the New Zealand Writer*, ed. by Josephine A. McQuail (Jefferson: McFarland, 2017), pp. 39-61 (p. 40-41).

²¹ Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, 'Introduction: Being at home with the Empire' in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. by Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1-31 (p. 3).

²² Hall and Rose, 'Introduction: Being at home with the Empire', p. 3; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 3.

²³ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Life-Writing: Culture, Politics and Self-Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Astrid Rasch, 'Introduction' in *Life Writing After Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 1-6; Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire*; Gillian Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

insights into the aftermath of empire.²⁴ The authors within this study offer an important contribution to postcolonial literary cultures, both in Britain and beyond. By extending my analysis to texts — such as Janet Frame’s *To the Is-land* (1982) and Penelope Lively’s *Making It Up* (2005) — that seem ostensibly unconcerned with empire, I follow a recent critical trajectory which extends the remit of postcolonial critique ‘to those works which at first glance do not seem to fall within the postcolonial field of vision’.²⁵

Edward Said notes, in an autobiographical aside within *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), that critics with ‘a colonial background’ are attuned to the legacies of imperialism and that literary criticism must move ‘beyond the asseverations of personal testimony’.²⁶ Here I identify an opportunity to reconsider the importance of life writing and personal testimonies through contrapuntal readings. Throughout this thesis I contend that, even for life writers with colonial backgrounds, their concerns with empire have yet to be satisfactorily read and understood. Said’s contrapuntal reading — a foundational idea within postcolonial studies — offers a salient opportunity to reconsider the work of autobiographers and memoirists who grew up both during and after British colonial rule. While Lively, Lessing and Frame each expressed concern with the legacies of colonialism, my close literary analysis looks beyond their overt engagements with empire to examine — following Said — what ‘is silent or marginally present’ within these texts.²⁷ In other words, this thesis uses postcolonial literary analysis to go beyond each author’s own, declared responses to the legacies of imperialism in order to consider the formal and thematic concerns of life writing after empire.

While previous studies have claimed that the ‘white colonial woman writer remains invisible or marginalised’ within literary criticism, I prefer to emphasise the various forms of critique and

²⁴ Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire*, p. 41.

²⁵ Bill Schwarz, ‘Introduction: End of empire and the English novel’, in *End of Empire and the English Novel Since 1945*, ed. by Rachael Gilmour and Bill Schwarz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 1-37 (p. 17).

²⁶ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p. 77.

²⁷ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 78.

complicity that define Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's life writings after empire.²⁸ I specifically address the role of whiteness within these life narratives, building on Vron Ware's assessment that women across the colonies and 'of all classes were affected to some degree by imperialist ideology' whether as 'Mothers of Empire or Britannia's Daughters'.²⁹ While all three authors were critical, to varying degrees, of British imperialism, I neither ignore nor conceal that all three were implicated within the structures and legacies of European colonialism. As Sara Ahmed reminds us, colonialism 'makes the world "white"' and ensures that 'the body-at-home' is 'one that can inhabit whiteness'.³⁰ However I also explore, following Radhika Mohanram, how white women's experiences might reveal the ambiguities of imperial power, revealing how the 'superiority of whiteness was under siege, under threat, questionable'.³¹ By exploring first-hand accounts of colonial (Lively), settler (Lessing) and post-imperial (Frame) childhoods, I dwell upon the vulnerable habitations of whiteness in life writing after empire. While seminal surveys such as Whitlock's *The Intimate Empire* (2000) and Bart Moore-Gilbert's *Postcolonial Life Writing* (2009) have provided foundational overviews of colonial and postcolonial life writing, my detailed assessments span the full range of Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's autobiographical non-fiction, thus expanding the remit of these earlier studies. By drawing upon a range of life narratives from three authors who move across the categories of colonial, settler and post-imperial, converging in London during a period of formal decolonisation, I scrutinise and further develop Astrid Rasch's argument that 'life writing provides us with a lens through which to consider the end of empire anew'.³²

This thesis encompasses autobiographies, memoirs, travel narratives, documentary accounts and counterfactual life narratives. It is primarily concerned with Penelope Lively's five experimental

²⁸ Phyllis Lassner, *Colonial Strangers: Women Writing the End of the British Empire* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), p. 8.

²⁹ Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 162.

³⁰ Sara Ahmed, 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness', *Feminist Theory*, 8:2 (2007), 149-168 (p. 153-154).

³¹ Radhika Mohanram, *Imperial White: Race, Diaspora and the British Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 46.

³² Rasch, 'Introduction', p. 1.

memoirs, Doris Lessing's two-volume autobiography, African travel memoirs, documentary accounts and speculative life writing, and Janet Frame's three volumes of autobiography.³³ In Frame's case, her autobiographical writings, which are now published as a single volume, are discussed here as three distinct texts.³⁴ This thesis therefore begins by establishing life writing, or experimental autobiographical non-fiction, as a distinctive sub-section of each author's considerable oeuvre. It then asks: how are these three life writers — Lively, Lessing and Frame — impacted and shaped by Britain's colonial past? How do their numerous life narratives, which often write and rewrite their lives, bear witness to the end of empire? Do these multiple acts of autobiographical self-representation reveal an attempt to move beyond, deny or surpass each writer's intimate relationship with colonialism? Coterminously, can the formal qualities of these life writings, from traditional autobiographies to counterfactual memoirs, reflect the troubling legacies of British imperialism? How might Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's shared interest in recording everyday life, from childhood homes to family heirlooms, reveal the continuing legacies of imperialism both in Britain and its former colonies across the globe?

Although I discuss a range of life narratives which converge at the site of post-war London, the broader geographical focus of this thesis — spanning Egypt, Southern Rhodesia and New Zealand

³³ While this thesis's primary focus is upon non-fiction, as opposed to autobiographical novels, my chapter on Frame's life writing outlines the unusually fraught relationship between her autobiographies and novels, suggesting that all of that Frame's writing be considered within an autobiographical space. Frame's fictional writing is intertwined with her own life and experiences, creating a deliberately disorientating web of repetitions and cross-references. Frame is consequently, and by necessity, the only author within this thesis whose autobiographies are discussed with frequent reference to her novels and short stories. However, Frame's challenging autobiographical writings also extend the remit of this thesis, expanding its focus beyond authors who directly witnessed colonial rule. Her life writing allows me to discuss how the memories of empire continue to shape and contour everyday life long after official decolonisation. For further details on Frame's autobiographical space see: Claire Bazin, *Janet Frame* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2011); Nicholas Pierre Boileau, 'Places of Being: Janet Frame's Autobiographical Space', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 22:2 (2007), 217-229; Andrew Dean, 'Foes, ghosts, and faces in the water: self-reflexivity in postwar fiction' (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2017).

³⁴ Although Frame's autobiographies are now published as a single volume — *An Angel at My Table* — Frame originally published her autobiographies separately, over the span of four years, under three distinct titles. This thesis therefore refers to the texts by their original names, discussing them as individual publications.

— encompasses colonial histories that do not traditionally take centre-stage in literary studies of the British Empire. Egypt declared independence from Britain in 1922, yet ‘Britain’s relations with Egypt had been, since the 1880s, the foundation of her Middle Eastern power’,³⁵ while the Suez Crisis of 1956 marked the ‘first moment of clear colonial defeat in the modern period’.³⁶ However, despite Egypt’s pivotal role in both Britain’s colonial expansion and its imperial decline, Lively highlights how the country’s status of ‘protectorate’ created an unnerving ambiguity; as a child she questioned its place within the British Empire, concluding that its pink and white diagonal stripes within her world atlas were no match for the rose-coloured outlines of India or South Africa. Lively’s memoirs suggest that the country was simultaneously an administrative centre and a colonial space on the edge of empire. Lessing, too, grew up on the colonial margins, living in a colony which was, as Dane Kennedy reminds us, ‘curiously anachronistic’ when compared with its British counterparts.³⁷ Southern Rhodesia ‘stood awkwardly between the two dominant forms of colonial societies’, offering neither a temperate climate for full-scale European immigration, nor becoming a tropical colony ‘of European administration and exploitation’.³⁸ Finally, New Zealand’s early move from ‘colony’ to ‘dominion’ in 1907, combined with its geographical location on ‘the most distant edge’³⁹ of Britain’s Empire, has, until recently, obscured the extent to which ‘colonisation and its legacies continue to stand at the heart of New Zealand life’.⁴⁰ Literary scholars have subsequently noted that the country has rarely ‘enjoyed “classic” status within the purview of postcolonial studies’⁴¹ and discussions of

³⁵ John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-war World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), p. 206.

³⁶ Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), p. 190.

³⁷ Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 8.

³⁸ Kennedy, *Islands of White*, p. 2.

³⁹ Tony Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire: Locating New Zealand’s Colonial Past* (Vancouver: UCB Press, 2012), p. 109.

⁴⁰ Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire*, p. 13.

⁴¹ Julian Murphet, ‘Postcolonial writing in Australia and New Zealand’ in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature, Volume One*, ed. by Ato Quayson (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 446-483 (p. 447).

the end of empire.⁴² In short, by drawing Lively's memories of colonial Egypt into conversation with Frame's upbringing in the post-settler South Island and Lessing's childhood home in rural Southern Rhodesia, I examine how these texts also narrate life on the peripheral fringes of the British Empire. I draw upon Tony Ballantyne's characterisation of 'empire as a series of dynamic and interlocking webs', constructed from ongoing processes and exchanges.⁴³ My literary analysis views Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's life narratives as not only addressing empire and its aftermath in Britain, but also creates a networked account of colonialism and its legacies across Southern Rhodesia, Egypt and New Zealand.

Through detailed chapter-by-chapter readings of all three authors, this thesis examines life writing after empire as a fundamental and previously overlooked addition to the literature of empire's end. By scrutinising an ambitious range of texts published between 1957 and 2017, it also traces the legacies of colonialism into a new century. My understanding of these three life writers as converging in 'post-imperial Britain' is guided by the understanding, articulated by Matthew Whittle, that the end of empire marked both 'the uneven and ongoing process of decolonisation' and 'Britain's renewed commitment to strengthen its imperial networks'.⁴⁴ I therefore respond to both Whittle's and Edward Dodson's use of the critical term 'post-imperial' to denote 'the ambiguous state of coming after the major phase of imperial power without that transformation yet being complete'.⁴⁵ Post-imperial Britain continues, according to both Whittle's, Dodson's, and my own arguments, to contend

⁴² However, recent moves to position New Zealand within 'a wider frontier history experienced by many settler communities across the globe' has resulted in new literary analysis of both 'the history of New Zealand as a settler colony' and investigations into how 'contemporary Pacific writing' addresses 'colonialism and its legacies'. — Patrick Evans, *The Long Forgetting: Post-Colonial Literary Culture in New Zealand* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2007), p. 10; Stuart Murray, *Never a Soul at Home: New Zealand's Literary Nationalism and the 1930s* (Victoria, NZ: Victoria University Press, 1998), p. 13; Michelle Keown, *Pacific Islands Writing: The Postcolonial Literatures of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Oceania* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 7.

⁴³ Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire*, p. 49. See also: Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

⁴⁴ Whittle, *Post-War British Literature and the "End of Empire"*, p. 25.

⁴⁵ Edward Dodson, *Post-imperial Englishness in the Contemporary White Canon* (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2017), p. 20.

with the legacies of empire. Therefore, the historical span of this thesis builds upon the critical assessment, recently summarised by Jordanna Bailkin, that decolonisation — exemplified by events such as the Suez Crisis or the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980 — was a starting point rather than a conclusion.⁴⁶

Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's life writings offer a series of challenging reflections on the end of empire today, at a time when Britain's imperial past is being publicly scrutinised with renewed force. Numerous commentators have argued that 'the [2016] EU referendum showed up the last throes of empire-thinking working its way out of the British psyche' suggesting that Britain's contradictory campaign to leave the European Union viewed 'itself simultaneously as a reconstitution of Empire and as an anti-imperial liberation movement'.⁴⁷ However, such analyses imply that Britain's 2016 decision to leave the European Union concluded its troubling relationship with the colonial past. Yet in 2018 — fifty years after Enoch Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech — the Windrush scandal revealed that scores of British Caribbean people had been targeted by government legislation as illegal immigrants and deported to their countries of birth. As David Lammy MP protested, these men and women had become 'British subjects not because they came to Britain, but because Britain came to them' in the name of profiteering, slavery and colonisation.⁴⁸ For many imperial historians, the Windrush scandal demonstrates a particular 'pervasiveness of the colonial mentality' in modern Britain.⁴⁹ These recent events suggest that, firstly, Britain has certainly not seen 'the last throes' of empire thinking depart from its collective psyche. Secondly, they lend a renewed urgency to re-

⁴⁶ Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 238.

⁴⁷ Danny Dorling and Sally Tomlinson, *Rule Britannia: Brexit and the End of Empire* (London: Biteback, 2019), p. 42; Fintan O'Toole, *Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain* (London: Head of Zeus, 2018), p. 81.

⁴⁸ David Lammy, 'Perspectives on the Windrush generation scandal: A response from David Lammy MP', *The British Library*, 4 October 2018
<<https://www.bl.uk/windrush/articles/perspectives-on-the-windrush-generation-scandal-a-response-from-david-lammy>> [accessed 19 May 2020]

⁴⁹ Robert Gildea, *Empires of the Mind: The Colonial Past and the Politics of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 246.

reading literature which examines the collapse and contestation of British colonial rule. Doris Lessing is frequently discussed as a writer who witnessed ‘the ends of empire and the disasters of war’ yet Penelope Lively’s and Janet Frame’s writings are rarely included in such literary debates.⁵⁰ By drawing these life writers into conversation with Lessing, I outline how all three were shaped by and responded to the aftermath of empire.⁵¹ As the unfinished business of Britain’s colonial past remains, at the time of writing in 2020, the subject of renewed public scrutiny I advance the view that their life writing both bears witness to the end of empire and offer a series of timely insights into the continued influences of imperialism on our twenty-first century present.

Life Writing

Within this thesis the term ‘life writing’ refers to a proliferation of narrative forms and genres — including but also exceeding autobiographies, memoirs and travel narratives — through which the lives of individuals, groups and even institutions and objects are represented. It encompasses a wide range of texts which take as their subject the representation of the author’s life, or their reflections on the lives of others. This study focusses upon three authors who wrote the events of their lives, their memories of empire and their accounts of its aftermath across numerous genres. These experiments

⁵⁰ Dennis Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 2. Penelope Lively’s connections to the British Empire are rarely discussed at any length, but brief analysis occurs in: Huw Marsh ‘Unlearning empire: Penelope Lively’s *Moon Tiger*’ in *End of Empire and the English Novel Since 1945*, ed. by Rachael Gilmour and Bill Schwarz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 152-165; Caryl Phillips, *Extravagant Strangers: A Literature of Belonging* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997); Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire: Reading Women’s Autobiography*, pp. 179-192. There are also exceptions to Frame’s comparative neglect within postcolonial studies, including: Marc Delrez, *Manifold Utopia: The Novels of Janet Frame* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002); Rod Edmond, “‘In Search of the Lost Tribe’: Janet Frame’s England’ in *Other Britain: Other British: Contemporary Multicultural Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 1995), pp. 161-174; McLeod, *Postcolonial London*, pp. 59-92.

⁵¹ In her detailed study of Lessing, Susan Watkins identifies the following as the core, abiding concerns of Lessing’s considerable oeuvre: ‘her African childhood and girlhood, the impact of colonialism in Southern Africa and the emergence of African nation states after decolonisation’. — Susan Watkins, *Doris Lessing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 141.

with numerous narrative forms often present incomplete and even contradictory accounts of each woman's life. Life writing functions here as an key umbrella term for a wide range of autobiographical writing by Lively, Lessing and Frame, providing an important — if imperfect — working vocabulary with which to differentiate between non-fictional writing and autobiographical novels.⁵² While I remain wary of the need for further neologisms in the already crowded field of life writing scholarship, my consideration of different life writing forms also extends to 'speculative life writing', a term I coin to describe counterfactual lives which rewrite an author's previous memoirs and autobiographies.⁵³ 'Life writing' provides me with a flexible focus on individual works of non-fiction and for pursuing the connections between multiple accounts of the same life. By next outlining critical conceptions of life writing, I trace the field's intersections with postcolonial studies and my own interrelated development of 'life writing after empire'.

In her unfinished memoir 'A Sketch of the Past' (1939) Virginia Woolf reflects on 'the invisible presences who after all play so important a part in everyday life', without which 'we know very little of the subject of the memoir; and again how futile life-writing becomes'.⁵⁴ By implying her own dissatisfaction with traditional biographical and autobiographical forms, Woolf's reference to 'life-writing' anticipates the term's usage — as a self-representational practice, literary genre and field of study — by almost half a century. As the daughter of Leslie Stephen, editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Woolf was intimately familiar with the written lives of great men. Writing in the seminal essay collection *The Private Self* (1988), Shari Benstock discusses 'A Sketch of the Past'

⁵² Each author within this study transformed their experiences into autobiographical novels, from the Cairo setting of Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger* (1987) to the Rhodesian farmhouse 'with mud walls and thatched roof' in Doris Lessing's *Martha Quest* (1952). It would be entirely possible to discuss these fictions as life writing. However, it is beyond the remit of this thesis to examine all of Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's autobiographical writing and I instead look to establish experimental non-fiction as a distinctive and critically neglected sub-section of each author's oeuvre. — Doris Lessing, *Martha Quest: Book One of the "Children of Violence" Series* (London: Flamingo, 1993), p. 24.

⁵³ Chapters one and two of this thesis discuss this in greater detail.

⁵⁴ Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past' in *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings* (London: Grafton, 1986), pp. 71-160 (p. 93).

to address how and why autobiography had traditionally been ‘a genre that belongs to men, whose public lives it traces’.⁵⁵ For Benstock, writing in the late twentieth century, women writers were and continued to be ‘denied entrance to this writing’.⁵⁶ Early discussions of life writing aimed to break free of an autobiographical tradition in which a ‘developmental narrative’ ordered ‘both time and the personality according to a purpose or goal’, moving beyond ‘a set of texts that served to legitimate the field of autobiographical studies’.⁵⁷ By rejecting a previously established canon of autobiographical narratives — which often traced their origins to St Augustine’s *Confessions* (397-400 AD) — life writing sought alternatives to a teleological pattern of male development constructed through a retrospective view of an entire life.

Developed by feminist critics in the latter half of the twentieth century, the term ‘life writing’ indicates, to use Marlene Kadar’s words, ‘a less exclusive genre of personal kinds of writing that includes both biography and autobiography but also less “objective” or “personal” genres such as letters and diaries’.⁵⁸ It is used as a fluid and ‘general term for writing of diverse kinds that takes a life as its subject’.⁵⁹ As Linda Anderson explains, ‘the term’s inclusiveness acknowledges how hard it is to draw a rigid distinction between different genres’ of personal writing.⁶⁰ For biographer Hermione Lee, life writing indicates ‘impure, multilayered and multi-resourced narratives’, including the letters, journals and diaries which comprise modern biographies.⁶¹ Yet the all-encompassing possibilities of life writing have also ensured that it remains a partially contentious term: Max

⁵⁵ Shari Benstock, ‘Authorising the Autobiographical’ in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women’s Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 7-33 (p. 30).

⁵⁶ Benstock, ‘Authorising the Autobiographical’, p. 30.

⁵⁷ Linda Anderson, *Autobiography*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 8; Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd edn (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 199.

⁵⁸ Marlene Kadar, ‘Coming to Terms: Life Writing- from Genre to Critical Practice’ in *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice*, ed. by Marlene Kadar (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 3-16 (p. 4).

⁵⁹ Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Anderson, *Autobiography*, p. 144.

⁶¹ Hermione Lee, ‘“From Memory”: Literary Encounters and Life Writing’ in *On Life-Writing*, ed. by Zachary Leader (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 124-141 (p. 125).

Saunders suggests that although it covers ‘a wide range of texts and forms [...] it seems, to some, to cover too many’.⁶² If life writing could potentially be anything, Saunders implies, perhaps it denotes nothing.

Yet such critiques of life writing’s excessive flexibility overlooks the origins and necessity for this field of study; life writing arises from the contention, articulated by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, that ‘the term autobiography is inadequate to describe the historical range and the diverse genres and practices of life narratives and life narrators’.⁶³ Life writing attempts not only to break from an autobiographical canon dominated by the lives of men, but also to challenge Philippe Lejeune’s much-cited definition of autobiography as ‘a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence [...] in particular on the development of his personality’.⁶⁴ According to Lejeune, the autobiographer must declare that the author, narrator and subject of an autobiography are one and the same. Not only does this confine autobiography to a particular form of self-representational practice but it also, as Paul John Eakin notes, ‘promise[s] a rendering of biographical truth impossible in practice to fulfil’.⁶⁵ It concedes the inherently fictive nature of autobiographical self-representation even as it insists upon it.⁶⁶ Early feminist life writing scholars sought to challenge this model of an autobiographical subject who often lived an exemplary public life and whose foundations, as Bella Brodzki and Celeste Sckenck note, ‘rest[ed] upon the Western ideal of an essential and inviolable self’.⁶⁷ These challenges reveal how life writing was and continues

⁶² Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 4.

⁶³ Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 35.

⁶⁴ Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 4.

⁶⁵ Paul John Eakin, *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 27.

⁶⁶ Paul de Man’s seminal essay ‘AutoBiography as De-facement’ troubles the truth value of autobiography even further by suggesting, through a discussion of prosopopoeia, that all autobiographical narratives can only ever reproduce the very fictions they seek to dispel. — Paul de Man, ‘Autobiography as De-facement’ *Modern Language Notes*, 94:5 (1979), 919-930.

⁶⁷ Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck ‘Introduction’ in *Life/Lines: Theorising Women’s Autobiography*, ed. by Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 1-19 (p. 5).

to function as both critical theory and creative practice, with the former exploring partial and provisional self-representations otherwise excluded from autobiographical studies.

While this thesis is grounded in a critical tradition of life writing studies, it is more specifically responsive to recent intersections between life writing and postcolonial literature. On the one hand this intersection is reflected in the significant number of autobiographies and memoirs by prominent postcolonial theorists, including Edward Said's description of 'myself as a cluster of flowing currents' in *Out of Place* (1999), Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1989) along with, most recently, Bart Moore-Gilbert's memoir *The Setting Sun* (2014) and Stuart Hall's *Familiar Stranger* (2017).⁶⁸ In remembering his white childhood in east Africa and uncovering his father's possible crimes as a member of the Indian Police, Moore-Gilbert admits to feeling 'trapped between the emotional loyalties formed during childhood and the post-colonial political ethics I've acquired as an adult'.⁶⁹ On the other hand, these sometimes fraught and intimate connections to empire are threaded through the conventionally scholarly outputs of many postcolonial critics.⁷⁰ As Whitlock suggests, "autocriticism" — critique generated by autobiographical experience — plays an important role in the formulation of postcolonial theory'.⁷¹ When Dennis Walder interrogates his own South African position as 'a displaced colonial'⁷² in *Postcolonial Nostalgias* (2009) he follows Stuart Hall's direction to uncover how 'we all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific'.⁷³ Hall — as a middle-class Jamaican who has 'lived all my adult life in

⁶⁸ Edward Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (London: Granta, 2000), p. 295.

⁶⁹ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *The Setting Sun: A Memoir of Empire and Family Secrets* (London: Verso, 2014), p. 67.

⁷⁰ David Huddart outlines, in far greater depth, how 'the autobiographical moment in postcolonial theory' challenges normative or universal conceptions of subjectivity. — David Huddart, *Postcolonial Theory and Autobiography* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 11.

⁷¹ Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives*, p. 175.

⁷² Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias*, p. 13.

⁷³ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' in *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 222-237 (p. 222).

England’ — argues presciently for the need to consider both positionality and to acknowledge the autobiographical entanglements that ensure ‘that all discourse is “placed”’.⁷⁴

Given these longstanding and productive connections between postcolonial theory and autobiographical practice, it is perhaps surprising that literary critics have only tentatively begun to examine the intersections between postcolonial and life writing studies since 2000.⁷⁵ This still-developing field has seen both C. L. Innes and Elleke Boehmer explore the autobiographies of postcolonial male leaders as ‘embody[ing] a new nation’s struggle to come into being’.⁷⁶ According to Boehmer, political figures from Nelson Mandela to Jawaharlal Nehru ‘use autobiography to confirm their pre-eminent, form-giving and even dynastic position’ within newly decolonised nations.⁷⁷ My discussions of Lively’s, Lessing’s and Frame’s life writing after empire are therefore situated firmly in response to critical enquiries that have, to return to Moore-Gilbert again, explored ‘the differences of postcolonial life-writing from its western analogues’.⁷⁸ Such enquiries have ambitiously read Augustine’s *Confessions*, ‘the founding text of western autobiography’ as also containing — through Augustine’s journey from north Africa to the imperial centre of Rome — a conflicted account of cultural location ‘that foreshadows many of the concerns of postcolonial life writing’.⁷⁹ It is within these reimagined relationships between life writing, empire and its aftermath that my own discussions of Lively, Lessing and Frame take place. My engagements expand upon

⁷⁴ Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, p. 223.

⁷⁵ See: Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); C. L. Innes, ‘Authorising the Self: Postcolonial Autobiographical Writing’ in *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 56-71; Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Life-Writing*, 2009; Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire*, 2000; Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives* 2015. Several notable examples occur before 2000, including Françoise Lionnet’s *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender and Self-Portraiture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) and *Postcolonialism and Autobiography: Michelle Cliff, David Dabydeen, Opal Palmer Adisa*, ed. by Alfred Hornung and Ersntpeter Ruhe (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998).

⁷⁶ Innes, ‘Authorising the Self: Postcolonial Autobiographical Writing’, p. 56.

⁷⁷ Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, p. 84.

⁷⁸ Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Life-Writing*, p. 36.

⁷⁹ Bart Moore-Gilbert, ‘The *Confessions* of Saint Augustine: Roots and Routes of Postcolonial Life Writing’, *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 20:2 (2005), 155-169 (p. 166); p. 155.

Gillian Whitlock's analysis of colonial and postcolonial women's life writing in *The Intimate Empire* (2000), of 'how subjectivity has been produced, imagined, scripted and resisted both then, when much of the world seemed to be pink, and now, in its aftermath'.⁸⁰ In particular, her contention that autobiography functions 'as one of the most potent resources for sustaining the settler imaginary' has significant consequences for my readings of settlement in both Doris Lessing's and Janet Frame's life writings.⁸¹ As previously suggested, my detailed discussions of each author, by encompassing a wide range of their autobiographical non-fiction, build upon these earlier, initial surveys of the field. However, my focus on a more specific post-war era, and sustained comparative readings of just three writers, draw together a previously unrecognised cohort of life writers who witnessed the end of empire and reflected upon its aftermath.

Insofar as this thesis engages with questions of gender by interrogating the work of three female writers, it does so largely through the feminist legacies of life writing scholarship. The three subjects within this study were selected for discussion not because I wish to exclusively discuss women's writing (although some reference to this vital field of study is, of course, unavoidable), but because I focus upon life writers who wrote and rewrote multiple accounts of their own lives, and who recounted across numerous autobiographical texts their account of travelling to London during a time of imperial collapse. As we have seen, feminist challenges to autobiography place an emphasis on processual, even collective lives that question 'the sovereignty and universality of the solitary self', dismantling earlier models of a singular autobiographical subject.⁸² I therefore read the various rehearsals of Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's life narratives as feminist life writing. By writing and rewriting their lives, these authors can and must be viewed within a wider challenge to the singularity of autobiographical narratives which recount the lives of great men. It is not coincidental that across

⁸⁰ Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire*, p. 2.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁸² Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'Introduction: Situating Subjectivity in Women's Autobiographical Practices' in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), pp. 3-56 (p. 4).

their various life narratives, all three authors within this study profess to be influenced by the life and work of Virginia Woolf, whose own incomplete memoir reached for the expansive possibilities of life writing long before its critical inauguration.⁸³ By suggesting that life writing forms a vital and largely unaddressed element of Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's considerable oeuvres, I now outline the historical and literary concerns of these life writers after empire before providing a brief overview of this thesis's three chapters and organisational structures.

After Empire?

This thesis's periodisation of 'after empire' situates Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's life writing in relation to several key and interlocking transitional moments in twentieth-century history. All three writers were born in the decades after World War I and raised to believe, in Lively's words, that 'not only could the sun never set on the Empire, but it was inconceivable that it would ever do so'.⁸⁴ They each travelled to London in the twelve years following World War II and witnessed the end of the British Empire from within the imperial metropolis, the former heart of colonial power. Writing their numerous memoirs and autobiographies during the latter half of the twentieth century — and into the early decades of the new millennia — they often reflected upon Britain's imperial power as part of a rapidly diminishing past. The post-war period was a time of formal decolonisation chiefly in Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia. My formulation of 'after empire', therefore, refers not only to a

⁸³ In her horticultural memoir *Life in the Garden* (2017) Penelope Lively interweaves Woolf's famous garden at Monk's House with the flower beds and pergolas in colonial Egypt that were an 'intimate paradise' to the young Lively. The teenage Lessing was so influenced by Woolf's writing that her autobiography records 'I felt I had two elder sisters [...] Virginia and Olive [Schreiner]'. For Frame, to have 'known and experienced the rhythm and feeling of Virginia Woolf', particularly while reading *The Waves* (1931) was a crucial means of coming to terms with her sister Isabel's shocking death by drowning. — Penelope Lively, *Life in the Garden*, (London: Fig Tree, 2017), p. 2; Doris Lessing, *Under My Skin: Volume One of My Autobiography, to 1949* (London: Fourth Estate, 2013), p. 202; Janet Frame, 'Volume Two: An Angel at My Table', in *The Complete Autobiography* (London: The Women's Press, 1990), pp. 147-287 (p. 208).

⁸⁴ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 59.

chronological time period following formal colonial rule but contends that Lively, Lessing and Frame were each engaged in a lifelong pursuit of empire, chasing ‘after’ the colonial past within the postcolonial present. ‘Life writing after empire’ relies upon the arguments and terminology developed within Paul Gilroy’s influential study *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (2004), in which Gilroy contends that, since 1945, Britain ‘has been dominated by an inability even to face, let alone actually mourn, the profound change in circumstances and moods that followed the end of Empire and consequent loss of imperial prestige’.⁸⁵ Gilroy’s resulting diagnosis of Britain’s postcolonial melancholia, in which the nation is unable to address and work through the legacies of both its former Empire and its subsequent imperial demise, is a vital notion that also underpins this thesis, particularly in Chapter Three’s discussions of *The Envoy From Mirror City*.⁸⁶ His remarks also provide an important precedent for my own scepticism as to whether any of the three authors within this study are able ultimately to move past or beyond the influence of empire. My overarching usage and conceptualisation of ‘after empire’ subsequently expands upon Stuart Hall’s suggestion that ‘in this post-colonial moment, the sensibilities of colonialism are still potent’ and that we are all ‘still its inheritors, still living in its terrifying aftermath’.⁸⁷ ‘After empire’ does not indicate a time free from the influence of imperialism, nor does it view the history of British colonial rule from a distance; instead it considers what it means to inherit, live and write amongst the imperial remains.

By discussing ‘life writing after empire’ and using, as my starting point for doing so, three life writers whose paths converged in post-war London, this study responds to a broader challenge

⁸⁵ Paul Gilroy: *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 98.

⁸⁶ My formulation of ‘life writing after empire’ also responds to Astrid Rasch’s brief but important reflections in a collection of essays by the same name, in which Rasch distinguishes life writing as ‘a productive venue for the meeting of historical and literary approaches to the end of empire’. Rasch assembles a series of short contributions on oral histories, autobiographical memories and more to consider the aftermath of empire across a range of published and archival material. However, this collection, does not, for the most part, discuss literary texts and forms a vital, if divergent, set of enquiries for my own considerations of Lively, Lessing and Frame as ‘life writers after empire’. — Rasch, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Stuart Hall, with Bill Schwarz, *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands* (London: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 21.

— launched by historians and cultural critics — towards, in Stuart Ward’s term, ‘the minimal impact thesis’.⁸⁸ Broadly speaking, this argument presumes that ‘the broad cultural impact of decolonisation was confined to the colonial periphery’ and the end of empire had ‘little influence upon post-war British culture’.⁸⁹ Following Gilroy, my readings of Lively’s, Lessing’s and Frame’s life writing — all of which bears witness to the end of Empire in Britain — suggest how the collapse of British imperial power had a significant and lasting impact upon everyday life in the metropolis. However, as Edward Dodson notes, Gilroy’s original study ‘does not actually include much literary discussion’.⁹⁰ In discussing the formal and aesthetic concerns of life writing after empire, my close textual analyses address a distinctive body of materials that make a literary contribution to this wider cultural horizon. If the unsettling history of British colonialism ‘was diminished, denied and then, if possible, actively forgotten’ in post-war Britain, the life writers within this study challenge the strategic forgetting of empire through repeated accounts of their own relationships with the colonial past.⁹¹

Lively’s, Lessing’s and Frame’s shared memories of arrival, including the cold weather, alien social customs and disappointed literary fantasies, exist in relation to many other memoirs and autobiographies of migration to post-war Britain. Numerous critics have noted that these memories, manifest in scenes across numerous fictional and autobiographical texts, mind ‘the gap between the real and imagined metropolis’.⁹² Hall describes in *Familiar Stranger* ‘the sense of déjà-vu which assails colonial travellers on first encountering face-to-face the imperial metropole’ when recalling his own disappointment in discovering 1950s London to be a ‘dark, shuttered anonymous city’.⁹³ Like Hall, many arrivals from across the British Empire and Commonwealth ‘were shocked to discover

⁸⁸ Stuart Ward, ‘Introduction’, in *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 1-21 (p. 4).

⁸⁹ Ward, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Dodson, *Postimperial Englishness in the Contemporary White Canon*, p. 29.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire*, p. 188.

⁹³ Hall, *Familiar Stranger*, pp. 149-150.

that the England they saw at first hand on arrival bore little resemblance to the England they had learnt about in school'.⁹⁴ For Buchi Emecheta, England 'felt like walking into the inside of a grave' and was nothing like the venerable 'United Kingdom' her Nigerian father had described in hushed, reverential tones back in Lagos.⁹⁵

On the one hand, then, the texts I discuss take their place within a multitude of memoirs and autobiographies that bear witness to the end of the British Empire and record their authors' experiences of migration to post-war Britain. On the other, unlike Hall, Emecheta and many of their contemporaries, Lively, Lessing and Frame were not — as white women — racially identified as strangers in the metropolis. Even the ease with which they acquired their initial lodgings reveals that they did not experience the hostility, to use Gilroy's phrase, which transformed 'the political body of the immigrant' into a figure 'represent[ing] all the discomfiting ambiguities' of empire.⁹⁶ As the children (Lessing) and descendants (Frame) of white settlers, or the offspring of colonial administrators (Lively), the authors within this study were exempt from the racism endured by arrivals from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent.⁹⁷ By contrast, Emecheta and her young children were terrorised by Enoch Powell's 'poisonous vision' of a racial war, experiencing a populist racism that was, as Camilla Schofield demonstrates, itself 'touched by the lessons of empire's end'.⁹⁸

Yet the timing of Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's respective journeys to Britain almost precisely coincide with, in Clair Wills' description, 'the relatively short-lived period of the Commonwealth "open door"'.⁹⁹ The life narratives within this thesis are framed by the precise

⁹⁴ Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 4.

⁹⁵ Buchi Emecheta, *Head Above Water* (London: Blackrose Press, 1986), p. 29.

⁹⁶ Gilroy, *After Empire*, p. 110.

⁹⁷ As Graham MacPhee notes, alongside official hostility 'non-white migrants also met with racism and informal discrimination at the level of everyday life' significantly limiting their options in terms of accommodation and employment. — Graham MacPhee, *Postwar British Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 44.

⁹⁸ Emecheta, *Head Above Water*, p. 115; Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 3.

⁹⁹ Clair Wills, *Lovers and Strangers: An Immigrant History of Post-War Britain* (London: Penguin, 2017), p. xxi.

historical conditions during the fourteen years between the 1948 British Nationality Act and the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act. David Olusoga outlines how the 1948 Act was intended to enable ‘the continued flow of two-way traffic between Britain and the “old dominions”’ of Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.¹⁰⁰ By attempting to cement Britain’s relationship with its former white settler colonies, it also enabled thousands of former colonial subjects from the New Commonwealth to make homes in Britain. The later 1962 Act, which established stricter immigration controls, attempted to reverse this. The life narratives discussed within this thesis therefore converge during a period of sustained immigration both to and from Britain which ensured that ‘for the majority of Britons [...] the shrinking Empire meant not less but more contact with elsewhere’.¹⁰¹ It is important to acknowledge the distinct privileges that Lessing and Frame — and to an extent Lively — enjoyed as immigrants from ‘intended’ old dominions, who were in many ways encouraged to relocate to Britain. Their later roles as life writers after empire begin, I suggest, in their shared experience of arriving in or around the period of the so-called ‘Commonwealth open door’. This particular historical juncture would then prompt their life narratives to reflect upon their childhoods and early lives living in Britain’s protectorates and former colonies.

Gilroy’s influential formulation of ‘after empire’ has played a pivotal role in recent literary scholarship that explores how mid- to late-twentieth-century literature ‘may illuminate the historical question of the impact of the end of empire on the culture of the metropole’.¹⁰² These studies articulate an urgent need for ‘all postwar British literature’ to be ‘read with a consciousness of the continuing relevance of that imperial legacy’.¹⁰³ The almost unanimous critical focus upon a singular literary form — the novel — continues and extends Said’s influential arguments that ‘without empire [...]

¹⁰⁰ David Olusoga, *Black and British* (London: Pan Books, 2017), p. 495.

¹⁰¹ Wills, *Lovers and Strangers*, p. xv.

¹⁰² Schwarz, ‘Introduction: End of empire and the English novel’, p. 7. See also: Dodson, *Post-imperial Englishness*; MacPhee, *Postwar British Literature*; John McLeod, ‘The Novel and the End of Empire’, *The Oxford History of the Novel in English, Volume Seven: British and Irish Fiction since 1940*, ed. by Peter Boxall and Bryan Cheyette (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 80-93; Whittle, *Post-War British Literature*.

¹⁰³ MacPhee, *Postwar British Literature and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 2-3.

there is no European novel as we know it'.¹⁰⁴ Yet these still-developing discussions set an important precedent for reading post-war writing by white authors as, to use John McLeod's phrase, offering 'a view of the end of empire animated by something other than nostalgia for lost glories'.¹⁰⁵ Primarily focussing on literary texts which reflect 'the unfinished business of working through empire's legacies', these previous studies largely focus upon key texts published up to the 1970s.

While I concur with McLeod that writing by white authors may offer views of the British Empire more complex and multifaceted than colonial nostalgia, 'life writing after empire' also extends these studies of post-imperial British writing through three key contributions. First, by examining a range of texts published primarily during the latter decades of the twentieth century, this thesis considers the presence of empire in contemporary writing, particularly within texts published after 1980. I respond to a recent critical imperative to engage with 'politically alert reading of contemporary post-imperial fiction' while expanding these to consider literary non-fictional writings.¹⁰⁶ Second, this thesis examines and establishes a previously unrecognised cohort of female writers in a methodological framework which has, with several key exceptions, hitherto prioritised the work of male authors.¹⁰⁷ Third, I draw these discussions of the end of empire in British literature into a conversation with writings from the former margins — which themselves continue to be marginalised sites within postcolonial studies — including Egypt, Southern Rhodesia, and New Zealand. I do so by examining texts which explicitly address colonialism and its legacies (*Oleander*, *Jacaranda*, *Going Home*, *The Envoy From Mirror City*) alongside those in which empire is a partially obscured presence (*Making It Up*, *Alfred and Emily*, *To the Is-Land*).

¹⁰⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁵ McLeod, 'The Novel and the End of Empire', p. 82.

¹⁰⁶ Dodson, *Post-imperial Englishness in the Contemporary White Canon*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁷ While studies such as Whittle's *Post-War British Literature and the "End of the Empire"* (2016) analyse an exclusively male coterie of authors an important exception to this is Phillis Lassner's *Colonial Strangers* (2004). Lassner re-situates British female writers as 'central to postcolonial debates'. However, in so doing she claims a troubling victimhood for white colonial writers such as Elspeth Huxley. Rather than discussing their possible complicity with British imperialism — which itself might lead to fruitful literary analysis — Lassner focusses on exonerating these authors from their privilege. — Lassner, *Colonial Strangers*, p. 3.

Writing the Colonial Remains

Although Penelope Lively remains the youngest and — at the time of writing in 2020 — the only living author featured within this study, I discuss these three life writers in the order of their arrival in Britain, with each offering a distinctive account of life in a rapidly changing post-war and post-imperial cultural landscape. Chapter One therefore begins with a discussion of *Oleander, Jacaranda: A Childhood Perceived* (1994), Lively's first memoir of growing up 'English in Egypt', recounting her early years in colonial Cairo and concluding with her arrival in London during 1945.¹⁰⁸ My readings focus on the domestic spaces of *Oleander, Jacaranda*, examining the partially submerged and even subterranean levels of the text. I emphasise the importance of the basement within Lively's childhood home and scrutinise the memoir's accompanying photographs, which reveal a peripheral set of counter narratives to the written text. By focussing on domestic space in *Oleander, Jacaranda* I begin a broader set of interrogations — sustained across this thesis — into how empire lodges within the everyday in these life narratives. I then extend this analysis to consider Lively's later, formally experimental life writing, including her eight counterfactual lives in *Making It Up* (2005) and her memoir of old age *Ammonites and Leaping Fish: A Life in Time* (2013). Reading these texts side by side, I argue that Lively's late turn to imagining counterfactual lives is indicative of a wider practice within contemporary memoirs that I term 'speculative life writing', a process wherein an author rewrites their own previous accounts of their lives with alternative outcomes. My readings of *Making It Up* and *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* reveal how Lively's late turn to speculation is a return to, rather than escape from, her memories of colonial Egypt. Yet, this productive combination of factual and counterfactual lives is not a practice unique to Lively: my discussions of speculative life writing in Chapter One create a bridge to the readings of Doris Lessing's *Alfred and Emily* as a speculative memoir in Chapter Two.

¹⁰⁸ Lively, *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. vii.

Chapter Two examines the processual returns to Southern Rhodesia staged across Doris Lessing's long life writing project. It outlines how these texts reject a teleological view of selfhood in which the record of Lessing's life might move beyond the influence of empire. Reading across Lessing's life narratives — written both before and after Zimbabwean independence — I contend that they consistently compromise a fixed or final view of the self, with Lessing refusing to bring her memories of settler life to a definitive conclusion. Far from being a failure of self-representation or indulging in unabashed colonial nostalgia, the frustrated processions of Lessing's life writing depict the complexities and contradictions of a life lived both during and after empire.

By examining three life narratives which span her considerable oeuvre — *Going Home* (1957), *African Laughter* (1993) and *Alfred and Emily* (2008) — Chapter Two departs from previous critical discussions that focus primarily on the first volume of her autobiography, *Under My Skin* (1994).¹⁰⁹ However, I develop these close readings with reference to *In Pursuit of the English* (1960), *Under My Skin* and *Walking in the Shade* (1997). I chart a non-linear path through the network of Lessing's experimental non-fiction, beginning with *Alfred and Emily* and concluding with *African Laughter*, contending that these three texts represent Lessing's most formally experimental life narratives. Lessing's autobiographical writings are connected in a web of cross-references and reiterative returns, charting a non-linear journey through her life which is mirrored in this structure of this chapter. The memories of her white Rhodesian childhood on an isolated rural frontier of the British Empire, can be traced to both the thematic and formal concerns of Lessing's life writing, which strains against conventional autobiographical forms and experiments with new genres of self-representation. By proceeding to examine two of Lessing's African travel narratives, *Going Home* and *African Laughter*, I outline how each struggles to maintain Lessing's political commitments to anti-imperialism alongside her profound emotional connection to the southern African landscape.

¹⁰⁹ Lorna Martens, 'The Truth Criteria of Autobiography: Doris Lessing and Telling the Truth', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 29:2 (2014), 319-340; Susan Watkins, 'Second World Life Writing: Doris Lessing's *Under My Skin*', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42:1 (2016), 137-148.

Rather than attempting to reconcile these conflicting differences, I scrutinise the contradictions in Lessing's emotional and political connections to empire.

These discussions of remembering settlement lead to Chapter Three's consideration of post-settler cultures and the aftermath of empire in Janet Frame's three autobiographies: *To the Is-Land*, *An Angel at My Table* and *The Envoy From Mirror City*. As previously noted, I discuss these life narratives as separate, distinctive accounts of Frame's life, rather than a complete autobiography. Like Lively and Lessing, Frame's early education featured consistent 'praise of the Empire', familiarising her with a narrative of British imperial prowess that neatly glossed many historical details.¹¹⁰ While Frame — unlike the other two authors within this study — was not a witness to direct colonial rule, her life writing nevertheless registers the complex, dynamic impact of empire on literary self-representation. My close textual analysis of each autobiography in turn explores the details and minutiae of Frame's life narratives, expanding on Mark Williams' earlier assessment that the 'minor, imperceptive, and even inarticulate' elements of Frame's complex writing are as worthy of critical scrutiny as the 'break-out quotes of intense narrative perception' that her critics tend to focus upon.¹¹¹ By honing in on the details and detritus that clutter Frame's three autobiographies, I examine how her life narratives offer critical, and at times unintentional, responses to the ongoing legacies of British colonialism. These include the anti-imperial disorder which runs through *To the Is-Land*, the fraught representations of settlement and place in *An Angel at My Table*, and the account of imperial decline in *The Envoy From Mirror City*. These extend previous postcolonial readings of Frame's life writing which have focussed exclusively on *The Envoy From Mirror City*. By reading each of these texts in turn I propose that these life narratives make a particular and valuable contribution to this study by tracking the continuing — and sometimes surprising — traces of the colonial past long after official decolonisation.

¹¹⁰ Janet Frame, 'Volume One: To the Is-Land', *The Complete Autobiography* (London: The Women's Press, 1990), pp. 1-140 (p. 34).

¹¹¹ Mark Williams, 'Tending the Ovens: Janet Frame's Politics of Language', *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies* 33:2 (2011) 66-77 (p. 71).

Although this thesis maintains and addresses the particular concerns, experiences and autobiographical forms of each author, clear points of comparison arise throughout these discussions. The pivotal role of each writer's childhood home looms large within my analysis, as do their attempts to return to their former houses and to reconstruct long-ruined properties through memory. Lee has noted that the writing of lives and the writing of houses are often inseparable endeavours, and that many life narratives pursue what Penelope Fitzgerald termed 'a house of air', attempting to reclaim a lost family home.¹¹² Yet more specifically I contend here that domestic, interior spaces are vital stages for understanding each writer's entanglements with empire. For Lessing, the site of her former family farm emerges across her life narratives as the focal point for her contradictory relationship with Southern Rhodesia and later Zimbabwe. Her memoirs and autobiographies are contorted by an imperative to return home to this original house, and to reject the white land-owning settler society in which she had been raised. Although Lively, unlike Lessing, was able to return to her childhood home as an adult — the house known as Bulaq Dakhrur was still standing by the time she visited Cairo during the 1980s — the property fulfils a similarly complex role in Lively's life writing. It allows her to explore the ambiguities of her colonial past, and what it meant to inhabit a property that was marooned in its Egyptian surroundings, sustaining life on an island of whiteness. While Frame's childhood home was considerably more dilapidated than Lessing's or Lively's, her detailed inventories of its battered furnishings reveal the long legacies of British imperialism within twentieth-century New Zealand. Frame's family, unlike the other two authors, did not own their property outright, yet my discussions of *To the Is-Land* reveal that they remained mortgaged (both imaginatively and literally) to the finances of empire.

While Lively, Lessing and Frame all travelled to London during the same post-war period, inhabiting a shared metropolis, the socio-economic conditions of their origins across the British Empire could not have been more different. While Lively was educated in a series of grand nurseries

¹¹² Hermione Lee, 'A House of Air' in *The Lives of Houses*, ed. by Kate Kennedy and Hermione Lee (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), pp. 30-46.

by a live-in nanny, Lessing experienced daily life at the opposite end of the African continent living beneath a leaking thatched roof and shifting mud walls. Frame's impoverished childhood, spent in a succession of railway huts across the South Island, saw her sharing a bed with three siblings and experiencing the shame of being sent to school with 'tide marks of dirt' across her neck and arms.¹¹³ Despite being distinctive and divergent, these women's life narratives are drawn into concert with one another by the ways in which they register and explore the ambiguities of white life in the aftermath of empire. They do so through personal accounts of their school years, childhood homes, family relationships and later travels to Britain. Colonial rule and the legacies of imperialism permeated their everyday lives, even configuring the very layout of their different households. As we shall see, my readings of these intimate encounters with the aftermath of empire support and complicate Ann Laura Stoler's suggestion that 'empire's ruins contour and carve through the psychic and material space in which people live'.¹¹⁴

I contest that across this diverse body of life narratives the private spaces of family life — including living rooms, parlours and gardens — are routinely configured and subject to the public histories of empire. There are tentative threads to be drawn between a Rhodesian farmhouse, an Egyptian mansion and a South Island bungalow. However, the various childhood homes recounted, at length, throughout life writing after empire, also remind us of the need to insist on each author's distinctive experiences, geographies and upbringings; the grandeur of Lively's Bulaq Dakhrur should not be straightforwardly equated with the pressurised confines of Frame's cramped living quarters. In my close readings of such details, I depart from previous comparative readings of white women's writing at the end of empire, which has accused postcolonial theory of 'stereotyping colonial women' and claimed a troubling form of victimhood for authors such as Muriel Spark and Olivia Manning.¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, I also challenge previous analyses of colonial women's life writing which through

¹¹³ Frame, 'To the Is-Land', p. 39.

¹¹⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, 'The Rot Remains: From Ruins to Ruination' in *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, ed. by Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 1-38 (p. 2).

¹¹⁵ Lassner, *Colonial Strangers*, p. 9.

comparative readings, collapse and ignore the distinctions between wealthy landowners and impoverished white settlers, drawing these loosely together by reflecting on a world ‘in the pink’.¹¹⁶ By focussing on empire as experienced in everyday life – in colonies, former colonies, and Britain too – I suggest that the influence of imperialism can be traced to the messy details of these autobiographical texts. I ask what it means for these writers to live amongst the bomb-damaged remains of empire, to sift through the broken detritus and misplaced heirlooms of settlers, and to examine the genealogies and origin stories rent apart by the legacies of imperialism. All the while, life writing after empire reminds us that colonialism remains, lingering in the cluttered corners of family homes and continuing to be made manifest in the ordering structures of daily life. It is to these texts that I now turn.

¹¹⁶ Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire*, p. 2.

Chapter One: Remembering Egypt and Empire in Penelope Lively's Memoirs

Introduction: Moving from a world of technicolour to black and white

In the weeks following the announcement of the 1987 Booker Prize shortlist, Penelope Lively's nomination for her seventh novel *Moon Tiger* (1987) was met with patronising derision in the British press. Even after its eventual win, *Moon Tiger* was repeatedly described as a 'housewife's choice' and the work of an author who wrote for 'the Harrods and Hatchard's market'.¹¹⁷ Implicit within these gendered criticisms is the repeated accusation that Lively's subtle prose is unequal to that of her male contemporaries. The press coverage surrounding *Moon Tiger*'s award was dominated by a suspicion that there 'is something too sheltered in Lively's work' and, more unfairly, that her writing does 'nothing to enlarge the sense of the possible for the novel'.¹¹⁸ Critics suggested that Lively's writings, which are often concerned with their characters' interior lives, could do little to expand or develop our view of the world. The network of familial and romantic relationships in *Moon Tiger* positions individual characters 'as hinges — fortuitous links between other people', assembling a disorientating vision of an entire life through fragments and memories.¹¹⁹ In order to sustain their dismissals, reviewers had therefore to strategically overlook the novel's complex, non-linear narrative structure. These reviews were part of a wider marginalisation of Lively's writing within public and academic discussions alike. While her steady book sales over five decades suggest a continuing popularity with readers, Lively's work has been routinely sidelined as 'part and parcel of the domestic proficiencies of English fiction' and therefore unworthy of academic scrutiny.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ 'Penelope Lively's Life in Books', *BBC News*, 31 December 2011 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-16362698>> [accessed 30 August 2018]; W. L. Webb, 'Lively leaps off with 15,000 pounds Booker prize', *The Guardian*, 30 October 1987.

¹¹⁸ Penny Perrick, 'Taking the tiger lightly by the tip of the tail – this year's winner of the best-known prize for fiction', *The Sunday Times*, 1 November 1987; 'Lively leaps off with 15,000 pounds Booker prize'.

¹¹⁹ Penelope Lively, *Moon Tiger* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 181.

¹²⁰ Dinah Birch, 'Growing Up', *London Review of Books*, 11:8 (1989) <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v11/n08/dinah-birch/growing-up>> [accessed 27 January 2020]

However, among the modest number of literary critics who do address Lively's writing, the reception of *Moon Tiger* has developed considerably since its early reviews. The novel is now rightly described as a masterpiece of postmodern fiction and belongs, as Luke Strongman notes, to a wider literary tradition 'of British regionalism and colonial fiction exemplified by [...] Rudyard Kipling and E. M. Forster'.¹²¹ Lemn Sissay's choice of *Moon Tiger* as his Golden Booker Prize nomination, three decades after its initial release, was met with delight 'that an apparently quieter female voice has stood the test of time against the more headline-grabbing male writers of the [late twentieth century]'.¹²² *Moon Tiger* is now discussed by literary scholars as a 'paradigmatic example of historiographic metafiction'.¹²³ Yet it remains the single text by Lively to have received any significant academic appraisal; only a select number of book chapters and journal articles, along with a single monograph study, have ventured beyond *Moon Tiger* to explore the broader themes of Lively's writing.¹²⁴ These have tended to reiterate her overriding concern with, to borrow the phrase of *According to Mark*'s (1984) eponymous protagonist, 'the curious ways in which truth can be not so much distorted as multifaceted'.¹²⁵ The characters in her novels frequently discover that the established narratives of their everyday lives can be altered and their perspectives permanently reconfigured in a single moment. As Mark suggests: 'give the kaleidoscope a shake and a different

¹²¹ Luke Strongman, *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire* (Amsterdam: Rodopi: 2002), p. 117.

¹²² Penelope Lively and Jan Dalley, 'Interview: Every Writer I Know is a Hungry Reader', *The Financial Times*, 22 June 2018 <<https://www.ft.com/content/962450a2-7499-11e8-b6ad-3823e4384287>> [accessed 15 June 2020]

¹²³ Christina Kotte, *Ethical Dimensions in British Historiographical Metafiction: Julian Barnes, Graham Swift and Penelope Lively* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2001), p. 139.

¹²⁴ For studies of Lively which discuss texts other than *Moon Tiger* see: Nadine Fligel and Anastasia Kozak, 'Excavating the Self: Archeology and Life Writing in Penelope Lively's *Oleander, Jacaranda*', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 23:2 (2014) 245-263; Mary Hurley Moran, *Penelope Lively* (New York: Twayne, 1993); Maricel Oró-Piqueras, 'When the Personal and the Historical Collide: Reimagining Memory in Penelope Lively's *Making it Up*', *Life writing*, 14:1 (2017), 57-68; Anthony Purdy, "'Like people you see in a dream": Penelope Lively and the Ethnographic Ghost Story', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 35:1 (2002), 35-51; Watkins, 'Memory, Time and Ageing in the Work of Penelope Lively, Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing', 222-244.

¹²⁵ Penelope Lively, *According to Mark* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 212.

picture forms'.¹²⁶ Meanwhile Lively's five memoirs — which constitute a significant body of contemporary experimental non-fiction — have received even less critical attention.¹²⁷ If all of Lively's work has suffered a notable critical neglect, her life writing remains an especially overlooked area of her oeuvre.¹²⁸

Rather than viewing Lively's everyday concerns as confining or limiting her prose, I contend throughout this chapter that the 'domestic proficiencies' of her writing frequently offer precise and scathing social commentaries. More specifically, I argue that Lively's focus on the minutiae of everyday life and domesticity within these texts reveals how private and public life in modern Britain is underwritten by the narratives of empire. By beginning with a discussion of Lively's first memoir *Oleander, Jacaranda* (1994), this chapter emphasises how Britain's colonial past seeps into the mundane, everyday aspects of Lively's autobiographical writings, lurking in photograph albums and the furnishings of family homes. I therefore expand Caryl Phillips's tentative positioning of Lively at the intersection of the colonial and the postcolonial, as Phillips argues that 'the legacy of empire has produced [and influenced] writing by descendants of the colonisers'.¹²⁹ Lively's memoirs include: an account of childhood in *Oleander, Jacaranda*, an exploration of her family home Golsoncott in A

¹²⁶ *According to Mark*, p. 212.

¹²⁷ For brief critical discussions of Lively's life writing — that almost entirely focus on *Oleander, Jacaranda* — see: Gillian Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire: Reading Women's Autobiography* (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 179-192; Huw Marsh 'Unlearning empire: Penelope Lively's Moon Tiger' in *End of Empire and the English Novel Since 1945*, ed. by Rachael Gilmour and Bill Schwarz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 152-165; Flagel and Kozak, 'Excavating the Self', 245-263.

¹²⁸ It is likely that the self-reflexivity of Lively's writing has deterred her would-be critics, as any critical interpretation of her memoirs must contend with the author's own explanations as to the meaning and intentions of her work. Consequently, critical assessments of Lively's writing have typically followed and occasionally reiterated the language and prescriptive interpretations of the texts themselves. There is a danger, when addressing Lively's work, of simply repeating the assessments of the author. Although some of my discussions here reference my own correspondence with Lively — she generously provided me with a lengthy interview in 2017 and has accommodated my questions and queries over several years — the close readings within this chapter are predicated on detailed textual analysis rather than the author's own statements. In so doing I respectfully suggest that the literary qualities of these life narratives reveal more complicated possibilities than Lively herself may care to admit.

¹²⁹ Caryl Phillips, 'Preface' in *Extravagant Strangers: A Literature of Belonging* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), pp. x-xii (p. xi).

House Unlocked (2001), a collection of speculative life narratives, *Making It Up*, essays on old age in *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* and the horticultural memoir, *Life in the Garden* (2017). Each of these recalls her colonial childhood in Egypt during the 1930s and her departure from the country in the midst of the Second World War. These texts return, many times over, to the scene of Lively's arrival in Britain during 1945 and the unwelcome discovery that she was an alien 'in this place that was apparently the homeland'.¹³⁰ I therefore read her life writing as indexing a particular moment of post-imperial arrival in the UK, describing Lively as an unfamiliar stranger in the country that she had been raised to consider her own.

While this chapter makes reference to all five of Lively's memoirs, I primarily focus upon *Oleander, Jacaranda, Making It Up* and *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, outlining how each produces innovative new methods of self-representation in order to write, and rewrite, Lively's life. Key scenes are described multiple times throughout these texts and even her first work of non-fiction, *The Presence of the Past* (1976) — ostensibly an introduction to English landscape history — includes scenes repeated within all of her later memoirs. These include Lively's memories of St Paul's Cathedral after the blitz, and her prized possession of 'two small, perfect ammonites' preserved in a chunk of Blue Lias.¹³¹ These patient, multiple returns to particular memories, and Lively's ongoing life writing project, reveal the need to read for the connections between these life narratives.

Here I suggest that Lively's memoirs register the continuing impact of her colonial childhood and track the legacies of British imperialism on her later life and career in Britain. Lively explained in an 2017 interview for this thesis that the moment of her arrival in 1945, when she was just 12 years old, was akin to 'having come from a world that was technicolour [to] having moved into one that was black and white'.¹³² This visual metaphor indicates the sensory shock of her arrival, and the profound sense of loss that followed her departure from Egypt (although she lived for brief stints in

¹³⁰ Penelope Lively, *A House Unlocked* (London: Viking, 2001), p. 162.

¹³¹ Penelope Lively, *The Presence of the Past: An Introduction to Landscape History* (London: Collins, 1976), p. 18.

¹³² Penelope Lively, 'interview with the author', 30 August 2017.

both Palestine and Sudan during the early 1940s, she left for England on a troopship in 1945). The acute cultural dislocation she initially experienced in Britain was, as she describes in *A House Unlocked*, rendered all the more painful by being ‘a refugee in this place that was apparently the homeland’.¹³³ Whether it is in the contrast, drawn in *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, between ‘the Middle Eastern world of warmth and colour to the chill grey of England’,¹³⁴ or *Life in the Garden*’s description of the ‘woolly jumpers [and] Chilprufe vests’ necessitated by her first English winter, the moment of her arrival in Britain is an important intersection at which all her life narratives converge.¹³⁵

I contend that the dual vision of Lively’s memoirs — exemplified by the contrast between technicolour and monochrome — reveals the continuing impact of her colonial childhood upon her later adult life. Although Egypt was technically ‘semi-colonial’ due to its official status as protectorate rather than formal colony of the British Empire, I draw on John Darwin’s assessment that the country was ‘the foundation of [Britain’s] Middle Eastern power’.¹³⁶ As Darwin explains, and as Lively’s memoirs also testify, ‘the whole region swarmed with British administrators, experts, technicians and soldiers’ throughout the 1930s, and the European society to which Lively’s family belonged was distinctly colonial in its habits and histories.¹³⁷ Living in a grand house known as Bulaq Dakhrur on the outskirts of Cairo Lively understood that, as a British protectorate, Cairo’s government offices might have been ‘manned by Egyptians’ but behind each local representative ‘stood a British official’.¹³⁸ Working for the National Bank of Egypt, Lively’s father Roger Low helped to uphold the country’s ‘precarious system of foreign administration’.¹³⁹ By exploring her own memories of British imperialism across her five life narratives, Lively therefore scrutinises her own complex position on an important hinge of global history; her memoirs explore what it means to be born and raised in one

¹³³ *A House Unlocked*, p. 162.

¹³⁴ Penelope Lively, *Ammonites and Leaping Fish: A Life in Time* (London: Fig Tree, 2013), p. 70.

¹³⁵ *Life in the Garden*, p. 112.

¹³⁶ Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, p. 206.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹³⁸ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 21.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

colonial world but to bear witness to another, postcolonial age. Lively's memoirs forge new and often unexpected connections between contemporary Britain and its former Empire through their palimpsestual view of the present, which is always underwritten by narratives from the colonial past. As this chapter outlines, Lively's descriptions of life in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century are both haunted by the memories of empire and committed to tracking its continuing aftermath.

This chapter begins with Lively's first memoir, *Oleander, Jacaranda*, a collection of vivid memories described as the 'brilliant frozen moments' retrieved from her childhood.¹⁴⁰ My readings focus upon the text's detailed descriptions of Lively's grand former home, a structure whose 'whole, infinitely familiar outline [...] has featured in my dreams for forty years'.¹⁴¹ I suggest that the house and gardens provide a particular view of colonial whiteness, exploring life inside a 'European enclave' that 'sat in the landscape like some incongruous island'.¹⁴² My readings pursue not only the visible structures of Lively's colonial childhood, but also explore the subterranean levels — almost concealed from view — which lie beneath this ordered, domestic realm. By pursuing the half-hidden narratives and counter-narratives within *Oleander, Jacaranda* I outline how the memoir's reconstruction of childhood is staged within an embattled domestic space. The green lawns and well-tended rose beds of her family's garden act, in the text, as a material and symbolic frontier for their English household, creating a barrier between inside/outside and familiar/strange territories. Meanwhile the rooms of her family home, filled with furniture and objects from Britain, create an island of whiteness that is carefully maintained amidst the Egyptian landscape.

Although Lively notes that she 'perceived it [colonial Egypt] all as an immutable state of affairs, requiring observation but no explanation', her memoirs nevertheless reflect upon certain elements of her upbringing with dismay.¹⁴³ These texts register a struggle with the complexities of a

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. vii.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 19.

dual perspective – the child’s unquestioning gaze and the adult’s hindsight – created by her childhood on an edge of the British Empire.¹⁴⁴ To explore this further, I focus upon several examples from the twenty-three black and white photographs of Lively and her family that are replicated in *Oleander, Jacaranda*. I read these images as a counter-narrative to the written text, creating a double vision elicited by written and visual components. These both extend and complicate the subterranean elements of *Oleander, Jacaranda*, drawing the viewer’s attention to the presence of narratives omitted from the memoir. Lively’s own description of the text as a series of ‘snapshots’ underpins my suggestion that it is structured like a family photograph album, a highly curated form of self-representation. Responding to this duality, and pursuing Lively’s own photographic metaphors, I then suggest that all of *Oleander, Jacaranda* is narrated through a ‘double exposure’.¹⁴⁵ In later memoirs Lively describes this as a dual vision, indicating that each supposedly singular memory contains multiple ways of seeing. Her haunted double vision suggests a powerful impulse, that can be traced across Lively’s life writing, to address the influence of colonial history through experimental narrative temporalities. From *Oleander, Jacaranda* to *Life in the Garden*, Lively creates a bifocal optic across her life writing, filtering the present through actual pasts and possible futures.

In order to explore how Lively’s colonial childhood at the end of empire impacts on the form and temporalities of her life writing, this chapter then turns to *Making It Up*, a collection of eight vignettes published a decade after *Oleander, Jacaranda*, each exploring an alternative outcome to Lively’s own life. Many of these stories offer alternative endings to episodes already recounted in both *Oleander, Jacaranda* and *A House Unlocked*. Yet in order to further clarify the relationship between her counterfactual and actual lives, Lively begins each story with an italicised explanation relating the tale to her own experiences. In several instances, these introductory passages contain a ghostly Lively in the present day reflecting upon her own alter-ego. I read these short stories as an unusual form of life writing before outlining how, if *Making It Up* is an experimental form of

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 52.

autobiographical self-representation, then *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* is a reflection upon this practice. The final sections of this chapter connect the reflective assessments of speculation and old age in *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* to Lively's counterfactual lives in *Making It Up*.

During our interview, Lively suggested that her turn to experimental life writing over the past three decades is the result of age: 'as you get old you get more and more interested in the way in which life is full of the roads not taken', a process which allows her 'a different way of considering the evidence' of her own life.¹⁴⁶ In response to this I argue that *Making It Up* constitutes a practice I term 'speculative life writing', wherein an author rewrites the previous record of their life with an alternative outcome. According to this assessment, *Making It Up* is not simply eight fictional short stories, but is instead a series of deviations from the paths of Lively's pre-existing life narratives. Many of these pathways return to, rather than escape from, Lively's colonial childhood. These speculations are a development belonging to the wider corpus of Lively's life writing, which sees her experiment with new forms of autobiographical self-representation to better trace the impact of the British Empire upon her own life. While Anthony Purdy has noted that 'all Lively's novels are about the ghosts that haunt us and how we deal with them', the spectral figures who populate Lively's memoirs have yet to be adequately addressed in critical discussions of her writing.¹⁴⁷ The readings in the latter half of this chapter therefore focus on the haunted counterfactual lives in *Making It Up* before discussing timeliness and late style in *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*. Together these two life narratives demonstrate how Lively's renewed interest in ghostly, alternative lives is indicative of her own, particular late style. This, in turn, leads her autobiographical writings once again to her memories of the colonial past and her early life in an English garden, surrounded by an Egyptian landscape.

These discussions of *Oleander*, *Jacaranda*, *Making It Up* and *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, when made with reference to the wider corpus of Lively's life writing, reveals that her unusual,

¹⁴⁶ Lively, 'interview with the author'.

¹⁴⁷ Purdy, 'Penelope Lively and the Ethnographic Ghost Story', p. 37.

experimental forms of self-representation are irrevocably connected to, and haunted by, her early life on the fringes of the British Empire. Reviews of Lively's most recent publications reveal the continuing sense that her life and career is now part and parcel of contemporary English literature. As one *New York Times* profile summarises: 'Lively's productivity has been so steady and reliable that she is sometimes taken a little for granted' in Britain.¹⁴⁸ Whether dismissed by reviewers, or accepted as a writer who 'has remained just on the edge of the radar', there remains a lingering suspicion that critics have largely failed to take a closer look at Lively's writing.¹⁴⁹ As her memoirs powerfully suggest that life in modern Britain is underwritten by the narratives of empire, these texts remain in urgent need of critical appraisal. As noted in this thesis's introduction, Hall and Rose have articulated how 'Britain's imperial project affected the everyday [at home] in ways that shaped what was "taken-for-granted"'.¹⁵⁰ Lively, like the colonial legacies she addresses, has occupied a similarly established role in the background of everyday British life and culture. We have barely begun to evaluate her unique contribution to contemporary women's life writing, nor have we fully understood how her work responds to the post-imperial nation. Her now-comfortable position as a well-loved pillar of the British literary establishment conceals, in many ways, the breadth and nuance of her non-fictional writings. Her life writing reveals a series of restless returns to the colonial past, as she utilises various, challenging literary forms to understand her own position amidst the aftermath of empire.

An Island of Whiteness: Re-reading *Oleander, Jacaranda* (1994)

Oleander Jacaranda explores Lively's childhood in Egypt, outlining the experience of being 'raised on the fringes of Africa' with vivid intensity.¹⁵¹ It recounts her life in the country from 1933 to 1945

¹⁴⁸ Charles McGrath, "'A Writer Writes': Penelope Lively's Fiction Defies the Test of Time', *New York Times*, May 4 2017 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/04/books/review/penelope-lively-profile-purple-swamp-hen.html>> [accessed 22 April 2020].

¹⁴⁹ McGrath, 'A Writer Writes'.

¹⁵⁰ Hall and Rose, 'Introduction: being at home with the Empire', p. 21.

¹⁵¹ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 75.

— a period punctuated only by brief sojourns in Palestine and Sudan — and recounts the disruption to family life caused by the ‘disquieting offstage rumble of war’.¹⁵² On hearing the rumours that General Rommel had earmarked their home as his own headquarters, Lively’s parents joked that at least ‘our dogs would be well-treated because they were dachshunds’.¹⁵³ Later Lively would view the acceptance of British informal rule in Egypt, and her family’s conviction that Cairo could not fall to the advancing German army, ‘as a manifestation of imperial confidence.’¹⁵⁴ Behind her mother’s cocktail hours and grand afternoon tea parties was the staunch belief that ‘not only could the sun never set on the Empire, but it was inconceivable that it would ever do so’.¹⁵⁵

Although, in retrospect, Lively looks back in astonishment at her childhood self playing peacefully ‘while the Middle East roared around her’,¹⁵⁶ *Oleander, Jacaranda* charts the subjective and disorientating experience of growing up ‘English in Egypt’.¹⁵⁷ Understanding that Egypt was her home, Lively also ‘realised that in some perverse way I was not truly a part of it’.¹⁵⁸ Instead she became aware that her Englishness ‘in some mysterious way hitched [me] up to this distant and inconceivable place of which I knew so little’.¹⁵⁹ When she did finally arrive in Britain, shortly before the end of the Second World War, it ‘bore no resemblance whatsoever to that hazy, glowing nirvana conjured up in the nostalgic chatter to which I had half listened back in Egypt’.¹⁶⁰ In retrospect she understood that the house and gardens of Bulaq Dakhrur represented two, inseparable worlds: ‘the Egypt of foreign administration and an England of assumptions that are now unthinkable’.¹⁶¹ Throughout the memoir the twin supports of Lively’s childhood — colonial Egypt and imperial Britain — are explored through the domestic spaces of her former home. This re-reading of *Oleander,*

¹⁵² *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 58.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Jacaranda interprets the intimate, interior spaces of Lively's childhood as, from the outset, configured within the global narratives of British colonialism.

Responding to the privilege of this colonial childhood, some previous analyses of *Oleander, Jacaranda* have defended the text from accusations of imperial nostalgia, attributing an absence of postcolonial readings of Lively's writing to a 'hostility in post-colonial criticism towards discussion of settler subjects'.¹⁶² While intending to bring the text into wider critical discussions — yet in doing so claiming a dubious victimhood for Lively herself — these readings have ignored the complexities of Lively's relationship with the British Empire and insisted that we should only 'read [Lively's] texts and their subjects in their own tradition'.¹⁶³ My re-reading of *Oleander, Jacaranda* seeks a more holistic approach by utilising postcolonial scholarship to scrutinise the memoir's response to British colonialism. My readings do not seek to exonerate Lively's privileged upbringing, nor do they obscure her role as beneficiary of British colonial rule.¹⁶⁴ Lively's nuanced engagements with the aftermath of empire should encourage, rather than prevent, thorough assessments of her life writing. By examining the complex operations of imperialism within *Oleander, Jacaranda*, I discuss this provocative, challenging account of life both during and after empire.

Oleander, Jacaranda not only witnesses the end of British colonial rule, but also reveals how life in England — and more widely Britain — elides and conceals the legacies of colonialism. Lively's childhood in Egypt is described as a lonely one, depicting an only child who largely played by herself in a garden 'that was my universe'.¹⁶⁵ Meanwhile, the private, confined world of *Oleander Jacaranda*

¹⁶² Rosalia Baena, "'Not Home but Here': Rewriting Englishness in Colonial Childhood Memoirs', *English Studies*, 90:4 (2009), 435-459 (p. 436).

¹⁶³ Baena, 'Rewriting Englishness in Colonial Childhood Memoirs', p. 436.

¹⁶⁴ Using Lively's memoirs as the means to supposedly debunk or criticise postcolonial theory is an increasingly frequent misreading of these texts. Fabiola Popa argues that *Oleander, Jacaranda* answers back to the 'binary oppositions so cherished by post-colonial criticism' which she argues, is too simplistically predicated upon 'mere oppositions'. Contrary to Popa's arguments, postcolonial criticism provides an important vocabulary with which to discuss not only Lively's writing, but to more broadly address the ambivalent position of white colonial authors from the fringes of the British Empire. — Fabiola Popa, "'The History of the World And Mine": Private and Collective History in Penelope Lively's Memoir', *University of Bucharest Review*, 10:1 (2008), 93-97 (p. 95).

¹⁶⁵ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 45.

offers glimpses of life on an island of whiteness, creating a first-hand account of an English household marooned within its Egyptian surroundings. Not only do my readings challenge previous dismissals of Lively's work as sheltered, they also draw attention to the subterranean, partially obscured elements of her first memoir. For Lively's rendition of a wealthy, white colonial childhood subtly gestures towards worlds and realities that are excluded from a surface level view of drawing rooms, verandahs and garden parties.

Just as importantly, these formative years in Egypt underwrite Lively's later experiences on another, significantly larger island. The final chapters of *Oleander, Jacaranda* — discussed both here and this chapter's conclusion — suggest that Lively's colonial childhood underscores the ongoing connections between Britain and its former colonies. Although her arrival in Britain coincided with an era of formal decolonisation, Lively's life writing shows an awareness of what Edward Said calls the 'overlapping territories [and] intertwined histories' of colonialism, that connected 'dwellers in the metropolis' to those 'on the peripheries'.¹⁶⁶ While *Oleander, Jacaranda* was initially received as the report of an 'English yet exotic childhood', and implicitly read as colonial nostalgia, Lively's account of an isolated upbringing has a much broader and continuing relevance than these early estimations suggest.¹⁶⁷ *Oleander, Jacaranda* not only belongs to a wider corpus of life writing after empire, but also offers a challenging account of how we remember and understand the legacies of empire in twenty-first century Britain.

Lively's home-schooled education in Egypt provided her with an uneasy view from the fringes, rather than the centre, of a world map covered in a 'global rash of pink'.¹⁶⁸ For her younger self there was a worrying ambiguity about Egypt's diagonal stripes of pink and white in the world atlas, indicating the country's status as protectorate rather than colony of the British Empire. *Oleander, Jacaranda* captures the contradictions of this lonely, colonial education as Lively was

¹⁶⁶ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 72.

¹⁶⁷ Graham Lord, 'Child's View of African Empire', *The Times*, 28 May 1994.

¹⁶⁸ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 18.

taught about ‘the finer moments of the [British] rise to pink glory’ through recommended books such as *Our Island Story* (1905).¹⁶⁹ These rolled ‘Boadicea and King Arthur and Sir Walter Raleigh and Kitchener and Queen Victoria’ into one, creating a convoluted history designed ‘to produce [an] essence of Englishness’.¹⁷⁰ But this triumphalist narrative induced quite the opposite effect in its young reader; Lively imbibed the fictionalised histories of past glories ‘with a whisper of unease’, questioning her own position as English in Egypt.¹⁷¹ No wonder: Henrietta Elizabeth Marshall’s bestselling children’s history *Our Island Story* narrates how the British travelled to, rather than violently colonised, foreign lands because ‘the little green island set in the lonely sea was no longer large enough to contain’ the ambitious Britons.¹⁷² It neatly sidesteps the histories of exploitation and dispossession which underpinned Britain’s imperial project, glossing the widespread massacres of Aboriginal people in Australia behind a description of an island ‘inhabited only by scattered groups of natives’ who conveniently disappear after the arrival of early European settlers.¹⁷³ Looking back in alarm, Lively acknowledges that the set texts of her colonial education meant ‘there was much unlearning to do’ in later life.¹⁷⁴

Oleander, Jacaranda begins with Lively’s first return visit to Egypt as an adult. After returning to Cairo she discovers that the city’s layout has drastically changed and expanded and that her former home will be difficult to locate amidst this altered, urban landscape. She begins the search for the house her parents named Bulaq Dakhrur by dialling ‘the phone number that has been in my head all my life’, only to discover that the line has been disconnected.¹⁷⁵ During the early stages of her search, Lively looks for her grand childhood home as the ‘whole, infinitely familiar outline that

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Henrietta Elizabeth Marshall, *Our Island Story: A History of Britain for Boys and Girls* (London: Phoenix, 2007), p. 5.

¹⁷³ Marshall, *Our Island Story*, p. 446.

¹⁷⁴ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 19.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

has featured in my dreams for forty years'.¹⁷⁶ Bulaq Dakhrur and its gardens are the charged epicentre of *Oleander, Jacaranda*, existing both as a physical named space, and a highly symbolic site within the memoir. Diana Fuss posits that 'the architectural dwelling is not merely something we inhabit, but something that inhabits us', and Lively's relationship with her Egyptian home suggests the fraught, life-long nature of this habitation.¹⁷⁷ In a later account of the house and its grounds, Lively explains that 'I can still draw a map' detailing its exact layout over seven decades later.¹⁷⁸ So profound was her orientation to this site that during her 'early months and years of exile' in the UK that she walked 'that landscape [of London] always with a faint sense of incredulity. Sooner or later, surely I would wake up and find myself at Bulaq Dakhrur'.¹⁷⁹

Yet despite her clear attachment to the property, after eventually rediscovering the house (now turned into a school) the adult Lively views the site of her former home and understands that it is both the focal point for her early memories and an 'expression of a world which was utterly extinguished'.¹⁸⁰ Her early years took place within this confined space, largely cut off from the surrounding landscape. Lively explains that she and her nanny, Lucy, would travel 'in to Cairo only once a week', meaning that the house and gardens formed the entirety of her world.¹⁸¹ In keeping with this isolation, *Oleander, Jacaranda* rarely strays beyond the boundaries of this tiny kingdom and instead tracks, in minute detail, Lively's life inside the compound. The nearby city of Cairo which boasted attractions such as the whites-only Gezira sporting club and the famed French cafe Groppis (still in business today) were distant landmarks in comparison to the house and its well-kept grounds.

The family's compound is remembered by Lively as a 'European enclave of three substantial, garden-encircled houses sat in the landscape like some incongruous island'.¹⁸² Although the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁷⁷ Diana Fuss, *The Sense of an Interior: Four Rooms and the Writers that Shaped Them* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ *Life in the Garden*, p. 2.

¹⁷⁹ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 170.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 12.

extensive, English-styled gardens were ‘largely my mother’s creation’, the water features and rose beds were realised through the labour of three, full-time servants.¹⁸³ Settled within surrounding fields and canals — known as ‘the cultivation’ — the house and gardens appear as an isolated, even embattled domestic space. If the verdant, green lawns encircling Bulaq Dakhrur acted as a frontier for Lively’s English household, the interior of the house was an equally bounded world; the rooms and verandahs, filled with furniture and objects imported from Britain, create an island of whiteness, a marooned vision of colonial life that had to be continuously maintained amidst the Egyptian landscape.

Our view of this island is generated by a virtual tour through the property. It begins inside the young Lively’s bed, examining the ceiling through a filmy white tent (a mosquito net) within the night nursery.¹⁸⁴ From here she strays across the upstairs floor, through a pantry solely for her and her nanny’s use, into her parents’ suite of ‘bedroom, dressing-room and bathroom at the far end of the corridor into which I seldom penetrated’.¹⁸⁵ Next she maps out the ground floor of the house, furnished with grand, bulky objects shipped over from England (most of which Lively was forbidden to touch) including a ‘Knole settee from which I was banned’ and an imposing nineteenth-century tallboy, which housed important documents and family photograph albums.¹⁸⁶ Passing through the hallway, drawing-room and dining-room, all furnished in an English style, Lively notes that the kitchen beyond was ‘of intense interest to me because [it was] largely out of bounds’.¹⁸⁷ In retrospect Lively recognises that the carefully maintained divides of her childhood home ‘mirrors the Victorian or Edwardian household in which children and servants exist in a stratum of their own’, forbidden to

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 37; p. 42.

¹⁸⁴ Elsewhere Lively has stated that the sight of the ‘filmy white canopy’ above her bed in Egypt is her first memory. Although she does not state this explicitly in *Oleander, Jacaranda*, this tour through the property also marks the beginning of her consciousness. — Penelope Lively, ‘On Egypt, Englishness and Her First Memory’, *The Guardian*, 1 August 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/live/2018/jul/27/penelope-lively-webchat-post-your-questions-now>> [accessed 23 October 2019]

¹⁸⁵ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 31.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

occupy certain privileged zones within the property.¹⁸⁸ Her descriptive floor-plan of the house, and its accompanying host of servants, are staged within the narrative as excursions from the safety of her bedroom and the shelter of the mosquito net. She trespasses briefly into her memories of the rooms that, in reality, she was forbidden to enter. The house becomes the original architectural blueprint to which Lively continuously returns. Immediately striking within this recounted journey is how little space was actually afforded to the single child as the lavishly decorated rooms — with the exception of the nurseries — remained, for the most part, mysteriously impenetrable to Lively.

This forensic reconstruction of the property uncovers the carefully stratified spaces of white colonial domesticity, with Lively described as being at home only in the few rooms devoted to her and Lucy's sole use. If Sara Ahmed outlines how whiteness might be understood as that 'which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they "take up" space', then this journey through the family home makes visible the orientations of colonial whiteness.¹⁸⁹ As the singular European child living in the property, Lively's domestic freedoms are sacrificed to the maintenance of the Knole settee and the English tallboy. She was forbidden 'to open [the tallboy's] drawers' and banned from the settee 'because I might bounce on it or dirty the cover'.¹⁹⁰ These solid pieces of Victorian furniture, shipped to Egypt across the Mediterranean Sea, are arranged and maintained to conceal their Egyptian setting. They reorient the house as an English habitation, with Lively recounting how the only 'Middle Eastern touches I remember were the khelim and Turkish rugs on the floors and the Crusader sword that hung over the mantelpiece'.¹⁹¹ The set pieces of heavy, antique furnishings arrange the spaces of Bulaq Dakhrur for exclusive European use. They supply an impression of immutability, of permanence, illustrating Hall and Rose's description that 'empire [was] lived across everyday practices', manifesting even in the arrangements of a household.¹⁹² But in *Oleander*,

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁸⁹ Ahmed, 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness', p. 150.

¹⁹⁰ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 32.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Hall and Rose, 'Introduction: Being at home with the Empire', p. 3.

Jacaranda this scene of white domesticity is less secure than it might first appear; the tallboy ‘eventually gets its come-uppance’, later relegated in Lively’s London home to a container for ‘detritus like surplus Christmas wrapping paper and discarded spectacles’.¹⁹³ Even when remembering these grand furnishings in situ, Lively is a trespasser who momentarily threatens the established order of the household, slipping into banned rooms and riffling through drawers. If the layout of the house seeks to establish a colonial order Lively highlights its frailties, refusing to be confined upstairs reading the myths of *Our Island Story* and instead probing at the boundaries of this highly stratified space.

This initial journey through Bulaq Dakhrur’s interiors is incomplete, guiding the reader only through the floors above ground. A further, submerged layer to the property appears when Lively later directs us down into the basement. There is a perennial childhood fear running throughout *Oleander, Jacaranda* of a subterranean threat rising to the surface. Lively’s horror of ‘swimming in deep water’ is attributed to the possibility of ‘some sinister mass [that] might come wheeling up from far below’.¹⁹⁴ Canoeing on the Nile shortly before her departure from Egypt she is terrified by the fast-flowing water, distracted by the idea of ‘crocodiles whipping up from below, jaws at the ready’.¹⁹⁵ This youthful fear is so widespread as to be almost unremarkable. But this commonplace concern within *Oleander, Jacaranda* indicates towards the hidden, or more accurately, *submerged* layers of the past which lurk below the narrative. Lively notes that although the majority of her memories are normally concealed from view, ‘there floats up from time to time some perfect fragment – a shining morsel of experience whose brilliance makes all the more tantalising that unavailable mass’.¹⁹⁶ Once we journey to the basement of Bulaq Dakhrur, the unsteady foundations of Lively’s marooned, island life come sharply into focus.

¹⁹³ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 32.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

The cellar bellow the house was ‘a dry, musty place’, visited with caution as Lively suspected it to be ‘the haunt of snakes and scorpions’.¹⁹⁷ The floor ‘was sandy, as though the desert had thrust up here, a few feet below the surface of the garden’.¹⁹⁸ As a child she made frequent trips into the Egyptian desert, undeterred by the threat of sand-vipers and drawn to this ‘singular, apparently endless’ landscape.¹⁹⁹ The desert was an enticing space which reached, unchecked, across the national borders of her children’s atlas, connecting Tunisia with Palestine in a shaded area of brown.²⁰⁰ It later became ‘something voracious, and unreliable’ during wartime Egypt, a vast expanse of ‘immensities in which the war roared and into which vanished those I knew’.²⁰¹ Many of the young soldiers who stayed in her parents’ house did not return from the desert alive. They left ‘a little stack of kit-bags’ on the sandy floor of the basement.²⁰² The shifting sands beneath the floorboards of her house emerge as an ominous presence within the memoir. The basement becomes frightening not only as a submerged site beneath the property, a threat similar to the unknown depths of the Nile, but because it is a porous zone. If the desert could stretch across national borders in her atlas, it is perceived within *Oleander, Jacaranda* as a deadly, shifting mass. Although in reality German forces killed the healthy young soldiers who had enjoyed her parents’ hospitality, Lively imagines that the desert consumes them. In a colonial household filled with symbolic boundary lines, which children and Egyptian servants are not permitted to cross, the stubborn appearance of sand in the property’s subterranean levels, moving unseen beneath the polished floorboards of the drawing room, betrays the impermanence of the colonial order upstairs.

Although the tallboys and rich furnishings of the house may suggest a stable world of wealth and privilege, I contend that the basement beneath them reveals the precarious foundations on which this ‘little England’ is built. The property’s extensive gardens were besieged on all sides by Egyptian

¹⁹⁷ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 66.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

farmland and Lively's horror of the sandy cellar is charged with the discovery that the desert had 'thrust up' below the house too.²⁰³ As the initially incomplete blueprint of Bulaq Dakhrur might imply, *Oleander, Jacaranda* presents a surface-level view of white colonial life – of steadfast Victorian furniture and endless garden parties – while indicating that beneath these lie unseen, subterranean narratives. If Ahmed stipulates that white domesticity 'puts things in their place', manifesting in 'the placement of things', then Lively's memoir disturbs the apparent security of Bulaq Dakhrur as a white habitation.²⁰⁴ Like a filling hourglass, the basement beneath the house reminds us that the family's tenure of this property, and by extension white colonial rule, is time-limited. By the 1940s the desert, previously a backdrop for picnics and parties, 'had become vicious, sown with hazards by way of unexploded bombs and ammunition dumps'.²⁰⁵ It is standing 'on that thin sand' beneath the house that Lively remembers 'leaving Bulaq Dakhrur' for the last time.²⁰⁶ Unlike the triumphal jingoistic histories favoured by *Our Island Story*, *Oleander Jacaranda* focusses on the undercurrents that whirl beneath the private island of the house and gardens.

The Gardens: 'fields of sugarcane and clover'

Reflecting on the grounds of Bulaq Dakhrur in her horticultural memoir *Life in the Garden*, Lively explains how the outside spaces of the property were both an 'alien enclave amid fields of sugarcane and clover, canals and mud-hut villages' while also being for her, 'a kind of intimate paradise, intensely personal, with private hiding spaces'.²⁰⁷ These gardens are simultaneously a deeply personal, even Edenic space and emblematic of British colonialism, highlighting the incongruity of her family's home amidst their surroundings. In *Oleander, Jacaranda*, these gardens shield her family physically from the landscape and Egyptian people, while also providing them with a stage to perform

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 66.

²⁰⁴ Ahmed, 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness', p. 155.

²⁰⁵ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 66.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ *Life in the Garden*, p. 2.

their own ‘little England’; the garden was a key space for enacting the social routines of tea parties on the lawn and afternoons swimming in the pool. Lively’s mother is, in *Oleander, Jacaranda*, always framed within the garden, ‘for ever part of a group on a lawn in the glowing light of an early evening, everyone tricked out with white cotton [mosquito] protection tubes on arms and legs so that they look like Michelin men [with] ice-clinking glasses of whisky and soda’.²⁰⁸ Here the recreation of Cairo’s colonial society is barely interrupted by the danger the Egyptian climate poses to their bodies (Lively recalls that ‘most Europeans in Egypt were mildly ill a good deal of the time’).²⁰⁹ The spectral threat of mosquitoes and malaria is only partially disguised by the setting of an English lawn and the perennial colonial routine of sundowner cocktails. Paying heed to her later warning that gardens are ‘not just a background in a story, but rather more than that – a story element, an essential feature’, the garden emerges in many episodes throughout *Oleander, Jacaranda* as a vital colonial contact zone.²¹⁰ Through the garden Lively provides glimpses of Egyptian staff toiling to recreate a living impression of England, while Europeans enjoy endless drinks parties upon the lawns, partially shielded from the Egyptian flora and fauna. The complexity of the garden is revealed in its multiple functions as both a sanctuary, an isolated island and a subtle indicator of colonial ambivalence. These incursions into the garden can be read as revealing, to borrow Said’s phrase, imperialism as ‘an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted and finally brought under control’.²¹¹

During his inaugural address as the Slade Professor of Fine Arts in 1870, John Ruskin explained that Britain’s imperial power as ‘mistress of half the earth’ was contingent upon the maintenance of ‘her enchanted garden’ in which her fields were ‘ordered and wide and fair’.²¹²

²⁰⁸ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 24.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²¹⁰ *Life in the Garden*, p. 79

²¹¹ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 271.

²¹² John Ruskin, ‘Conclusion to Inaugural Lecture (1870)’ in *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870-1918*, ed. by Elleke Boehmer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 16-20 (p. 19).

Evoking John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* (1690), Ruskin posited a justification for Britain's overseas colonies based on cultivation, implying that the seizure of foreign lands might be understood through the guise of a well-ordered English garden.²¹³ The carefully tended gardens across Britain's colonies and protectorates were both spaces of leisure and symbolic justifications for the colonial seizure of land. On a more practical level, as Richard Drayton explains, colonial gardens were 'spaces to which Europeans might retreat from the strangeness of alien environments', the necessity of their enclosed lawns only further highlighting the uneasy relationship between colonial/settler communities and the landscapes they inhabited.²¹⁴ When contextualised within these histories, the beautifully maintained flower beds, fountains and lawns of Bulaq Dakhrur function not only as a homage to English horticulture, but as an important symbolic arena that justified European colonisation and allowed the family to reenact important social rituals. Lively's experience of an English garden, which she describes as 'my universe', therefore took place in a particular space which had, across several centuries, reflected the complex agendas of imperialism. Yet the gardens of Bulaq Dakhrur offer both a visualisation of British colonial rule in *Oleander, Jacaranda* and, importantly, a space to explore its frailties and traverse its borders.²¹⁵

For on numerous occasions Lively utilises the garden to subvert the strict social mores of her childhood. Although the physical layout of Bulaq Dakhrur attempted to separate its white inhabitants from Egyptian servants, Lively experienced momentary encounters with household staff within the garden. She could reach the circle of gossiping cooks and gardeners who gathered around the backdoor by 'creep[ing] through the bushes' before sitting 'in fascination, watching and listening'.²¹⁶

²¹³ Locke's argument stated that property is 'As much Land as a Man Tills, Plants, Improves, Cultivates and can use the Product of'. His words would later serve as a justification for European colonialism that clearly resounds in Ruskin's arguments over 200 years later. – John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. by Mark Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 17.

²¹⁴ Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain and the 'Improvement' of the World* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 183.

²¹⁵ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 45.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Having entered through this liminal space, her presence on the fringes of the conversation would generally be tolerated. During one such excursion she meets Ahmed, the garden boy, who quickly becomes her friend. Yet she also acknowledges that her relationship with the staff was ‘unlike my relationship with anyone else [...] it is an intimate one, but is also somehow bewildering. I do not know quite where I am’.²¹⁷ Existing on the fringes of the strict social boundaries inside the house, the garden offers a vital opportunity to become disorientated and to cast aside, however briefly, the rigid confines of her world. Her relationship with Ahmed offers a tentative cross-racial friendship, but it also throws into sharp relief their differences; Ahmed is in the garden to work, while a young Penelope is there for solitary recreation. I contend that, in moments such as these, the garden emerges within *Oleander, Jacaranda* not just as a reflection of European colonial authority, but also a space for discussing and briefly challenging that power. Just as importantly, it allows Lively to highlight the ambiguities of her own position within the household, along with the clear privileges she experienced as a white colonial subject. The brief intimacies she experienced in the garden were all the more vital given her otherwise lonely existence.

If colonial gardens historically used a Linnaean system of classification, as Drayton argues, to represent the imperial ‘dream of possessing all nature in a microcosm and understanding its order’, Lively deliberately undermines this carefully ordered structure.²¹⁸ This creates brief moments of solidarity as when Ahmed and Lively both find themselves united in their ‘flight from authority’ (she from her nanny, he from the head gardener) and converge in ‘the place behind the bamboo clump’.²¹⁹ Their wordless exchange culminates in a dirt-eating contest. The garden’s potential for privacy facilitates Lively’s encounters with Ahmed and allows for petty acts of sabotage such as ‘snapping off poinsettia heads’, much to the horror of her mother.²²⁰ Although several servants and her mother subsequently attempt to ban Lively from particular flower beds, these rules are much harder to enact

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

²¹⁸ Drayton, *Nature’s Government*, p. 48.

²¹⁹ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 36.

²²⁰ Ibid.

in an outside arena. Lively slips through the insubstantial barriers of bushes to discover other social worlds and experience new encounters which would be unthinkable within the solid walls and carefully stratified spaces of the house itself. As her encounter with Ahmed demonstrates, these leafy worlds are charged with the possibility of social transgression.

The boundaries between the garden and the Egyptian landscape beyond its walls are both carefully maintained and, like the basement floor, curiously porous in Lively's recollections, as she attempts to trespass its barriers. Her childish transgressions in the garden challenge — with limited success — the social divisions of a colonial world. Her child's perspective captures how colonialism both structured and could be temporarily resisted in private, domestic spaces. The miniaturised territories within the grounds of Bulaq Dakhrur are not as stable as they seem when traversed by an inquisitive garden-loving, mud-eating child. By next turning to the photographs that accompany *Oleander, Jacaranda* and examining their relationship with the memoir's written narrative, I suggest that worlds outside the garden are occasionally brought into focus by these images. Lively's view onto her colonial childhood is both developed and complicated by what she terms her 'double exposure', and the multiple, overlapping realities revealed by these photographs. Like the basement of Bulaq Dakhrur, these images — along with Lively's photographic metaphor for dual meanings — draw our attention to what lies submerged beneath the surface of the narrative.

'The view of things has a double exposure'

During the confluence of events which led to her final departure from Egypt Lively had no indication that this was the end of both her colonial childhood and of the white enclave she inhabited. Describing the hubris of the early 1940s she notes that the general feeling in colonial Cairo was that 'the global British presence' was set to continue indefinitely.²²¹ Subsequently, Lively articulates the feeling that

²²¹ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 59.

her ‘view of things’ within this period ‘has a double exposure’, assembling multiple overlapping perspectives on the British Empire in which its end is both unthinkable and unavoidable.²²² Yet Lively’s dual optic is manifest in both the textual narrative *and* within twenty-three black-and-white photographs reproduced within the memoir. These depict her family at home in Bulaq Dakhrur, on the streets of Cairo and Alexandria, and picnicking in the Egyptian desert. Lively has a particular fascination with the revelatory power of photography; her thirteenth novel, *The Photograph* (2003), centres upon a single image which irrevocably alters each character’s life, its discovery casting a stone ‘into the reliable, immutable pond of the past’.²²³ *Oleander, Jacaranda*’s photographs also harbour the potential to disturb the accepted truths of the written text. In order to understand Lively’s double view of colonial life I now turn to scrutinise the people and scenes depicted in these images. The photographs fulfil various functions, at times illustrating the memoir’s written account, while during others supplementing the gaps in Lively’s memory. Jay Prosser argues that, within modern autobiographies, ‘photographs are increasingly used as shutes into something missing, pointers to a loss that can’t be recovered in the text’.²²⁴ Following Prosser, I suggest that these images provide a counter-narrative to *Oleander, Jacaranda*’s written account, providing stories which are otherwise hidden, concealed or repressed.

The sunny images of colonial life reproduced in *Oleander, Jacaranda* often capture scenes described within Lively’s memoir. They are accompanied by possessions and details which sustain a cultural landscape of Englishness; the young Lively eats breakfast next to a jar of marmite, clutches a Thermos flask in the desert and sports gingham-printed summer dresses in Cairo. Reflecting on colonial photograph albums, James Ryan concludes that these personal archives can reveal ‘as much about the imaginative landscape of imperial culture as they do about the physical spaces or people

²²² Ibid., p. 52.

²²³ Penelope Lively, *The Photograph* (London: Viking, 2003), p. 61.

²²⁴ Jay Prosser, *Light in the Dark Room: Photography and Loss* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 9.

pictured in their frame'.²²⁵ The personal snapshots from Lively's own family album are no exception. Yet they also capture a change in the family's circumstances brought about by the Second World War. In later pictures their domestic life is clearly interrupted as Lively's mother and her friends exchange tea dresses for khaki uniforms. These images of wartime, moreover, are not all from the family album, as the selection also contains historical photographs — mostly taken from archives at the Imperial War Museum — of Egypt during the Second World War, picturing Charles de Gaulle in Cairo and a tea-party for repatriated prisoners of war in 1943 where white POWs are served by 'attendant *suffragis*'.²²⁶ This sequence of historical photographs concludes in a full page spread showing the bombed ruins surrounding St Paul's Cathedral in 1941. The captions for these images describe Lively as 'PL', with the first person pronoun 'I', used in several instances, creating a startling disjunct between the named girl in the pictures, and the author who narrates her story. These short descriptions suggest that the images have been carefully selected and captioned to illuminate Lively's complicated relationship with both her former self, the named domestic spaces of her childhood and the British colonial presence in the Middle East. They also make explicit that her family were both representatives of and witnesses to the final decades of the British Empire.

Yet several photographs in *Oleander, Jacaranda* tell stories that do not feature in the text of the memoir. In one full page photograph Lively appears with a baby donkey, standing in the foreground of the shot (see fig. I). She is dressed in a smart overcoat, wearing white cotton socks,

²²⁵ James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualisation of the British Empire* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), p. 20.

²²⁶ Research into Lively's archive at the Harry Ransom Centre clarified the origins of these historical photographs, as her photocopied notes detail how the Imperial War Museum supplied many of the images — Austin, Harry Ransom Center, MS Penelope Lively, 16.4.

buckled leather shoes and with her right hand she pets the animal's long ears. This image, and the bemused interaction between child and animal, is reminiscent of British seaside towns with their



Figure I. ©Penelope Lively. Reproduced with permission of the author.

ubiquitous donkey rides along the shoreline. However, if we look behind the animal, three Egyptian children are also present within the background of the frame. Their bare feet and draped, slightly shabby, clothes are separated from Lively by the body of the animal. The four children meet, but do not touch. Unlike other photographs, in which Lively wears light, cotton dresses, this scene appears to be in winter; Lively's overcoat and the children's heavy, tightly wrapped scarves, imply a chill. Dead twigs and sharp stones litter the path around them. Only one child (Lively) is adequately clothed against the elements. The other three appear vulnerable, with their bare toes against the muddy ground. The donkey is both the focal point and a disturbingly clear

barrier within the photograph.²²⁷

²²⁷ In her brief discussion of this photograph Gillian Whitlock suggests that it is 'an exemplar for colonial discourse analysis, in particular that most elementary trope of the "self" and the "other", with the British child defined in and through the fellaheen'. — Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire*, p. 185.

The startling separation between these two worlds is acknowledged in the photograph's caption, which reads 'PL with *fellaheen* children near Bulaq Dakhrur. A deeply disquieting photo in its brutal contrasts, with the baby donkey as the cosy feature of interest'.²²⁸ The adult who writes the caption therefore disrupts 'the impervious, accepting eye of childhood', which allowed the younger Lively to dispassionately view scenes of Egyptian poverty and dispossession.²²⁹ Within the photograph the difference between the children's footwear is emphasised by their mutual interest in the donkey, as they cluster around the docile animal. The small group is gathered in a semi-circle, and they are clearly arranged to face the photographer. The children are both united and separated in a single image which is a carefully organised scene, rather than an uncoordinated social interaction. Crucially, this photograph witnesses an encounter absent from the main text of *Oleander, Jacaranda*. It is, to use Prosser's phrase, a 'shute into something missing', indicating realities omitted from the narrative.²³⁰ Although Lively recalls playdates with a handful of (European) friends, she notes that 'I was distinctly short on companionship', and there are no recalled encounters with Egyptian children within the textual narrative (with the exception of her dirt-eating competition with Ahmed).²³¹ The photograph's inclusion is far from accidental. By positioning it within images of herself playing amidst the sunshine, roses and fountains of an English styled garden, Lively gestures towards the lives and experiences that have been excluded both from the family photograph album and her own written account.

I contend that this photograph, nestled amongst family snaps, irrevocably alters the meaning of every subsequent and preceding image within *Oleander, Jacaranda*. Without it, the black and white images of Lively's family enjoying leisure time upon the beach, or eating sandwiches in the desert, are marooned in a decontextualised, domestic world. The isolation of Lively's childhood, in which 'for the most part I was significantly alone', potentially risks obscuring the realities and

²²⁸ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, photograph 7.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10-11.

²³⁰ *Light in the Dark Room*, p. 9.

²³¹ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 40.

consequences of British colonial rule.²³² There are brief traces in the background of other photographs. In one depicting a European WREN (a Women's Royal Naval Service member) and her companion enjoying leave in wartime Cairo we can see, to the sharply dressed WREN's right, a small shoeless child following in her wake. In the crowd behind her there are several barefooted children, their eyes clearly focussed on the smart couple. There is also the disturbing image of white POWs enjoying an afternoon at the Gezira Sporting Club, waited upon by Egyptian staff. But these do not feature Lively herself, nor do they take place within the domestic confines of her childhood world. In the full-page image of the children and the donkey the shocking results of racial segregation are both laid bare and positioned in close proximity to the author herself. This is a single glimpse of a reality that exists just beyond the various frames of representation in *Oleander, Jacaranda*. The gleaming reflection of still water on the left hand side of the photograph implies that this scene was captured next to the canal which lay just beyond the boundaries of Bulaq Dakhrur. The image is literally and metaphorically close to home, a vision that lies just out of sight when Lively describes long afternoons playing in the gardens. Evoking Ahmed's conceptualisation of whiteness once more, I maintain that the three figures of the children are not bodies-at-home in Bulaq Dakhrur; they can inhabit neither the interior of the house nor its gardens. As Ahmed reminds us, if 'the world is made white, then the body-at-home is one that can inhabit whiteness'.²³³ The figures within the background of this photograph are excluded from a habitation whose rooms attempt to spatialise a colonial order and whose furnishings expose the orientations of colonial whiteness. These three nameless children are 'at home' neither in Bulaq Dakhrur nor in *Oleander, Jacaranda*, they must instead hover on both the perimeter of the grand house and of the textual narrative.

Rather than viewing the images within *Oleander, Jacaranda* as a casual selection from Lively's photograph album, these reproduced pictures are deliberately arranged to create a complex, attendant visual narrative. As the text is arranged through a series of memories, which Lively then

²³² Ibid., p. 41.

²³³ Ahmed, 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness', p. 153.

analyses in detail, we might read *Oleander, Jacaranda* as akin to a series of snapshots, similar to a photograph album. In *Family Secrets* (1995), Annette Kuhn notes that ‘in the process of using – producing, selecting, ordering, displaying – photographs [for an album] the family is actually in the process of making itself’.²³⁴ Kuhn’s remarks highlight how the selection of photographs and written memories within *Oleander, Jacaranda* are not incidental. The first album which contained these images was an archive designed to fulfil the particular purposes of the Low family, the original contributors. But in their modified, reproduced form, these photographs have been curated to serve the memoirist, with Lively using them to create the narratives and counter-narratives of her colonial childhood. These pairings are always indicative of both presence and absence; although we catch glimpses of a privileged, English life within the confines of a lush garden, the photographs that accompany *Oleander, Jacaranda* simultaneously highlight the obscured narratives of lives beyond the compound walls. *Oleander, Jacaranda*’s written and visual elements are snapshots with a double exposure, charged with the dual meanings of a colonial childhood on the fringes of the British Empire.

‘Everyone was heading home, except for me’

This reading of *Oleander Jacaranda* positions Lively firmly within a wider cohort of twentieth-century writers — including Lessing and Frame — who experienced life in Britain’s colonies, dominions and international settlements before arriving in an unfamiliar country they had been raised to consider ‘home’. Departing Egypt for Britain aboard a packed troopship in 1945, Lively notes that ‘everyone was heading home, except for me, who was going into exile’.²³⁵ Upon her arrival she was left bewildered by England’s strict, but coded, social conventions. J. G. Ballard’s autobiography, *Miracles of Life* (2008), records how he too moved from Shanghai’s International Settlement to Britain in 1945, adapting with difficulty to the confusing social norms and inhospitable climate of his

²³⁴ Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 19.

²³⁵ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 163.

new island home. While Ballard realised, after the fall of Singapore, ‘that no amount of patriotic newsreels would put the Union Jack jigsaw together again’, he noted that the British were in denial over the loss of their former Empire.²³⁶ *Oleander, Jacaranda* speaks to a broader body of life narratives by post-war white writers that bear witness to the end of colonial rule and explore their authors’ vexed sense of belonging within Britain.

Yet Lively’s concerns with the aftermath of empire, expressed during the early 1990s in *Oleander, Jacaranda*, have become even more relevant in the new millennium. As Whitehall officials refer to the Brexit negotiations as ‘Empire 2.0’, reports from the Runnymede Trust have outlined the need for a more ‘thorough understanding of migration, belonging and empire’ within British school curricula.²³⁷ These preliminary studies suggest that empire cannot be viewed and taught as a late addition to British culture, but must be understood as an integral part of it. Against this backdrop, Lively’s first memoir, which ends with her arrival in Britain, continues to offer a timely and personal view of a shared post-imperial condition. While Britain’s colonial past may have come more sharply into focus in recent years, *Oleander, Jacaranda* reflects how Lively has quietly argued, since the early 1990s, that the decline and dismantlement of Britain’s former Empire is a potent force shaping contemporary British life.

At the end of *Oleander, Jacaranda* Lively explores the bombed ruins created by the blitz, glimpsing new liberating futures for herself ‘amid the wreckage of London and the seething spires of willow herb’.²³⁸ On this site of ruin and regeneration, she decides to break free from the ‘patriotic rantings of *Our Island Story*’ to seek more pluralistic views of Britain’s intersecting histories.²³⁹ We

²³⁶ J. G. Ballard, *Miracles of Life: Shanghai to Shepperton: An Autobiography* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), p. 21.

²³⁷ Sam Coates, ‘Ministers Aim to Build “Empire 2.0” with African Commonwealth’, *The Times*, 6 March 2017 <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ministers-aim-to-build-empire-2-0-with-african-commonwealth-after-brex-it-v9bs6f6z9>> [accessed 27 April 2020]; Kimberly McIntosh, Jason Todd and Nandini Das, *Teaching Migration, Belonging and Empire in Secondary Schools* (TIDE and The Runnymede Trust, 2019), p. 3.

²³⁸ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 180.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

might infer that Lively's own entanglements with empire will become part of this ongoing story. Yet in 2010, six decades after Lively's post-war revelation amongst the rubble, then British Prime Minister David Cameron proudly declared that *Our Island Story* had been his most treasured book as a child: 'it really captured my imagination and [...] nurtured my interest in the history of our great nation'.²⁴⁰ During Lively's childhood in the 1930s *Our Island Story* was already an anachronistic core text, part of a home-school curriculum that 'was not exactly up-to-date'.²⁴¹ Cameron's citation of the text as a personal favourite, whether true or not, reveals how the image of Britain as the undiminished centre of a global empire persists within contemporary British politics. *Our Island Story* has been re-mobilised in a new century to support a positive, yet amnesiac, response to Britain's colonial past. This in turn underpins increasingly strained conceptualisations of a shared British national identity. It demonstrates why Lively's memories of the end of empire continue to raise politically and culturally urgent questions, positioning her own life on an island of whiteness within a broader set of island stories. Her years in Bulaq Dakhrur respond to the myths and narratives of British colonialism that continue to circulate in public debates during the twenty-first century. With characteristic foresight Paul Gilroy describes twenty-first century Britain as being 'dominated by the inability to even face, never mind actually mourn' the altered circumstances 'that followed the end of Empire and consequent loss of imperial prestige'.²⁴² While Gilroy advises that modern Britain has historically faced away from the end of colonial rule, Lively's account of her own childhood encourages us to take a closer look at its aftermath. I suggest that in her returns to Bulaq Dakhrur, Lively asks a series of challenging questions about what it means to be at home during the end of empire, and how the memories of this original dwelling place orientate her later habitations in London. If Lively's reviewers and early critics viewed the domestic concerns of her writing as too

²⁴⁰ Andrew Hough, 'Revealed: David Cameron's favourite childhood book is *Our Island Story*', *The Telegraph*, 29 Oct 2010

<<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/8094333/Revealed-David-Camerons-favourite-childhood-book-is-Our-Island-Story.html>> [Accessed 27 January 2020]

²⁴¹ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 101.

²⁴² Gilroy, *After Empire*, p. 98.

sheltered or myopic — confined to the ‘domestic proficiencies of English fiction’ — returning to *Oleander, Jacaranda* reveals how her interior worlds continue to illuminate and challenge the narratives of post-imperial Britain.²⁴³ Moreover, as this chapter now discusses, Lively’s memories of Egypt in *Oleander, Jacaranda* marked the beginning, rather than the end, of her life writing project. Four further memoirs followed this initial account of life on the fringes of empire. By next addressing two of Lively’s later memoirs — *Making It Up* and *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* — I discuss how their circuitous returns to Egypt, and their expressed interest in alternative, counterfactual lives, further track the continuing impact of Lively’s colonial childhood.

Speculative Life Writing in *Making It Up* and *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*

Any older person is a series of incarnations, this figure of today within whom has subsumed so many others, right back to the child there once was. Memory is identity, and a writer works out of all of those earlier working incarnations, a work in progress ... so unless late or later style means an involuntary departure from writing altogether, then a new direction, an adjustment of direction, looks like a late life advantage. Let’s say: ‘bring it on, late style!’

– Lively, BBC Radio 3 Lecture on ‘Late Style’

In her latest memoir *Life in the Garden*, Lively explains that in old age ‘you think of yourself as time made manifest: this body, with which time has had its way, undergoing metamorphosis from decade to decade, fetching up, it seems, as someone else’.²⁴⁴ Here Lively conceptualizes her own personhood as accruing through a series of layers, akin to the concentric rings within a tree’s trunk that record her ‘age with neat precision’.²⁴⁵ Throughout her fiction and life writing the material manifestation of time is often described in archaeological terms, imagined as layers of soil and sediment exposed through careful excavation.²⁴⁶ For Lively older people similarly carry a record of their own past lives,

²⁴³ Birch, ‘Growing Up’.

²⁴⁴ *Life in the Garden*, p. 122.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ In *Making It Up* Lively states that the ‘calm green countries’ of England are nothing but a surface veneer, explaining that ‘dig a few feet [down] and you are into bloodshed. The arrowheads

containing many previous selves and appearing in the present as ‘a series of incarnations’.²⁴⁷ Yet since the publication of her second memoir, *A House Unlocked*, Lively has returned to and reconsidered key pivotal moments — from important decisions to chance encounters — when ‘life would have spun off in different directions’.²⁴⁸ Her later memoirs reveal a fascination with alternative outcomes to her own life, resulting in the counterfactual pursuit of what I term ‘speculative life writing’. By next focusing upon *Making It Up* and subsequently *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, which I describe throughout this chapter as Lively’s third and fourth memoirs, I contend that these experimental life narratives record not only Lively’s personal experience of ageing, but reflect her particular development of a late style. In these unusual self-representations she describes her multiple past ‘incarnations’ while speculating on the persons she never became, rewriting her own life narrative.

Making It Up and *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* complicate the understanding of time expressed in Lively’s earlier memoirs — whereby the present is viewed through the layers of history and we walk amongst the silent record of ‘those who came before’ — as both texts use alternative pasts to reimagine other possible futures. *Making It Up* is a collection of eight short stories retelling pivotal moments from Lively’s life with alternative outcomes, while *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* offers a series of essays reflecting on her experience of ageing. This former exercise in rewriting creates a literary practice that I term ‘speculative life writing’, whereby an author reimagines key moments of their life with alternative outcomes. Although the terms ‘speculative memoir’ and ‘speculative life writing’ have previously been used by a handful of literary critics, their usage has been limited to discussions of novels, with no attempt to define or discuss them in relation to life

and the axes and the swords and the daggers [...] This landscape is howling, if you listen’. Lively’s writing repeatedly envisions present time as a kind of topsoil which may conceal, or reveal, the layers of the past that lie beneath. — *Making It Up*, p. 76.

²⁴⁷ Penelope Lively, ‘Late Style’, *BBC Radio 3*, 18 April 2017

<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08n2442>> [accessed 3 December 2017]

²⁴⁸ *A House Unlocked*, p. 176.

writing itself.²⁴⁹ By outlining a more precise understanding of ‘speculative life writing’, I develop a critical vocabulary with which to discuss Lively’s innovative late memoirs. Moreover, this approach highlights how both texts are part of an emergent literary endeavour in the new millennium; *Making It Up* raises numerous comparisons with Doris Lessing’s counterfactual memoir, *Alfred and Emily*, discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, while offering further similarities to Ruth Praver Jhabvala’s descriptions of her ‘alternative destinies’ in *My Nine Lives* (2004).²⁵⁰ In the case of Lessing and Lively, these unusual texts cannot be comfortably described as fictions; both women describe their counterfactual lives as diversionary routes from pre-existing life narratives, as both had previously published numerous memoirs and autobiographies. I therefore contend that we read their speculations as a form of life writing. Speculative life writing emerges, in my conceptualisation, not as a means of escape but instead of return, through which ageing life writers re-examine their memories of an increasingly distant colonial past. For both Lessing and Lively, speculation leads them back to their respective childhoods at opposite ends of the African continent.

Both here, and in my later discussions of *Alfred and Emily*, I suggest that speculative life writing represents a hitherto unacknowledged sub-genre of contemporary women’s life writing. While I view speculative life writing as a specific practice, exemplified by several texts discussed within this thesis, my terminology responds to a wider cultural and critical conversation surrounding ‘autofiction’. As a term coined by Serge Doubrovsky on the dust jacket of his novel *Fils* (1977),

²⁴⁹ Keith McDonald describes Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005) as a speculative memoir while neither defining the term, nor distinguishing it from speculative fiction. The other prior usage of ‘speculative life writing’ can be found in Sanna Lehtonen’s discussions of *Twilight* fan fictions in her 2015 article for *Fafnir*. Similar to McDonald’s conflation of speculative memoir with speculative fiction, Lehtonen defines the practice as ‘writing that combines real-life elements with fiction’. Neither critic discusses speculative life writing as an emergent sub-genre within contemporary life narratives. — Sanna Lehtonen, ‘Writing Oneself into Someone Else’s Story: Experiments With Identity And Speculative Life Writing in Twilight Fan Fiction’, *Fafnir : Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research*, 2:2 (2015), 7-18 (p. 8); Keith McDonald ‘Days of Past Futures: Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let me Go* as “Speculative Memoir”’, *Biography*, 30:1 (2007), 74-83.

²⁵⁰ Ruth Praver Jhabvala, *My Nine Lives: Chapters of a Possible Past* (London: John Murray, 2004), p. vii.

autofiction initially denoted — to use one English translation — ‘fiction, of strictly real events and facts’.²⁵¹ While autofiction has since been developed and expanded by innumerable critics and writers, including Doubrovsky himself, Lorna Martens explains that the term broadly indicates ‘a work that calls itself fiction but is about the self’ and which often features a character bearing the author’s own name.²⁵² This neologism was, in part, a rejection of Lejeune’s ‘autobiographical pact’, which understands autobiography as reliant upon ‘a contract of identity [between author and reader] that is sealed by the proper name’.²⁵³ The autobiographical pact represents a promise of authenticity and veracity made to the reader by the author. By contrast, Doubrovsky experimented with, and sought, ‘a form of autobiographical writing that permits a degree of experimentation with the definite limits of the self’ as opposed to ‘the slavish recapitulation of known biographical facts’.²⁵⁴ Autofiction is less concerned with reporting real events and factual encounters than engaging ‘with the speculative question of how that subject might respond to new and often imagined environments’.²⁵⁵ While autofiction is discussed as a particular and recurrent concern for numerous male authors, its recent female proponents (including Rachel Cusk, Olivia Laing and Sheila Heti) are less frequently included in critical discussions.²⁵⁶ Here I develop speculative life writing as an autobiographical practice which

²⁵¹ Catherine Cusset, ‘The Limits of Autofiction’, *Unpublished Conference Paper* (2012), <www.catherinecusset.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/the-limits-of-autofiction.pdf> [accessed 27 April 2020].

²⁵² Lorna Martens, ‘Autofiction in the Third Person, with a Reading of Christine Brooke-Rose’s *Remake*’ in *Autofiction in English*, ed. by Hywel Dix (New York: Palgrave, 2018), pp. 49-65 (p. 51).

²⁵³ Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, p. 19.

²⁵⁴ Hywel Dix, ‘Introduction: Autofiction in English: The Story So Far’, in *Autofiction in English*, ed. by Hywel Dix (New York: Palgrave, 2018), pp. 1-23 (p. 4).

²⁵⁵ Dix, ‘Introduction: Autofiction in English’, p. 6.

²⁵⁶ Numerous critics have identified Ben Lerner’s *10:04* (2014), Karl Ove Knausgaard’s *My Struggle* (2012) and various other contemporary autofictions as ‘responding to the perceived loss of centrality of the traditional male authorial figure by resorting to self-conscious narrative experiments, often involving the inclusion of characterised versions of themselves’. Yet discussions surrounding the crises of masculinity within modern autofiction have coterminously ignored the work of female writers; Lively’s *Making It Up* has, until now, been entirely overlooked within autofiction studies while Lessing’s *Alfred and Emily* is mentioned once, in a footnote, of *Contemporary Autofiction in English* (2018). — Marjorie Worthington, *The Story of “Me”*: *Contemporary American Autofiction* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2018), p. 26; Dix, ‘Introduction: Contemporary Autofiction in English’, p. 22.

deploys elements of autofiction by attributing the author's name to a fictionalised, counterfactual version of their own life. Yet more specifically speculative life writing is, according to my working definition, a critical response to a writer's previous memoirs and autobiographies. It rewrites the established truths and even the chronological timelines of an author's earlier life writing. However, by doing so it encourages a deeper and more complex view of these narratives, rather than debunking or dismissing them. Throughout this thesis I position and discuss Lessing's and Lively's counterfactual lives within their broader life writing projects. I therefore contend that, while speculative life writing relies, by definition, upon fictionalised self-representations, Lively's counterfactual lives in *Making It Up* both belong to — and must be considered within — the wider body of her life writing.

I also suggest that Lively's speculative experiments in *Making It Up*, that rewrite her existing memoirs, are indicative of her late style, described by Said as 'a sort of deliberately unproductive productiveness' (an argument which is, in turn, indebted to Theodor Adorno's formulation of lateness 'as process, but not as development').²⁵⁷ I explore here how Lively's development of a particular late style allows her recent memoirs to depart from a uni-directional old-age narrative of decline which Helen Small identifies in *The Long Life* (2007), as an assumptive 'progress narrative' ending in the 'terminal event' of death.²⁵⁸ Lively's late style seeks new ways to interrupt, and contradict, a narrative of ageing and inevitable deterioration. This in turn extends her ongoing interest in how her colonial childhood, and the legacies of British imperial rule in Egypt, continue to impact upon her later life.

Late style has been frequently discussed in literary studies over the last decade, prompted by Said's *On Late Style* (2006) in which he argues that, as great artists draw 'near [to] the end of their lives, their work and thoughts acquire a new idiom'.²⁵⁹ These arguments have been followed by a

²⁵⁷ Edward Said, *On Late Style: Literature and Music Against the Grain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), p. 7; Theodor Adorno, 'On Late Style in Beethoven (1937)', in *Essays on Music*, ed. by Richard Leppert, trans. by Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 564-568 (p. 567).

²⁵⁸ Helen Small, *The Long Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 105.

²⁵⁹ Said, *On Late Style*, p. 6.

notable critical backlash against the perceived ‘limitations and fundamental context-boundedness of the discourse of lateness’ of Said’s arguments.²⁶⁰ Despite scepticism surrounding late style’s association ‘with the history of genius’, recent critical discussions have nevertheless followed *On Late Style* by focusing almost exclusively upon male subjects.²⁶¹ Susan Watkins’ considerations of how ‘gender inflect[s] the relationship between ageing and what Said calls “late style,” or form’ are an important intervention in this field, as are Graham K. Riach’s considerations of Nadine Gordimer’s late style as negotiating ‘the shifting contours of literary prestige’ in post-apartheid South Africa.²⁶² My enquiries into Lively’s late style firstly intervene into a discussion of artistic lateness which has, until recently, largely ignored the work of women. Even within the context of Lively’s oeuvre, which has been ‘neglected by critical readers’, texts such as *Making It Up* and *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* remain especially understudied and little discussed.²⁶³ Yet secondly, my discussions also draw attention to Lively’s late life writing as highly responsive to the ongoing legacies of the British Empire.

Said understands late style as a ‘sense of apartness and exile’ in which the artist operates as ‘an untimely [...] commentator on the present’.²⁶⁴ The emphasis that he places here on the productivity on being out of time and the value of alternative chronologies, provides a vital framework for reading *Making It Up* as a speculative life narrative, with *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* as a reflection upon this practice. Through my readings, exile and untimeliness emerge as key components of Lively’s recent memoirs, which rewrite her position in historical time. The Adornian mode of late style utilised by Said, in which an artist’s late works exile them from their earlier

²⁶⁰ Gordon McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing: Authorship in the Proximity of Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 17.

²⁶¹ Gordon McMullan and Sam Smiles, ‘Introduction: Late Style and its Discontents’ in *Late Style and its Discontents: Essays in Art, Literature and Music*, ed. by Gordon McMullan and Sam Smiles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 1-15 (p. 12).

²⁶² Watkins, “‘Summoning Your Youth at Will’: Memory, Time and Ageing in the Work of Penelope Lively, Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing’, p. 226; Graham K. Riach, ‘The Late Nadine Gordimer’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42:6 (2017), 1077-1094 (p. 1094).

²⁶³ Flagel and Kozak, ‘Excavating the Self’, p. 247.

²⁶⁴ Said, *On Late Style*, p. 17.

creations, is further developed and expanded by Lively's speculative life writing. Drawing new connections with her earlier memoirs — particularly with *Oleander, Jacaranda* — these texts use a speculative late style to address Lively's 1930s childhood in Egypt and her flight to the UK during the Second World War. They not only return critically to her past, but repeatedly rewrite her life's narrative. In so doing, Lively creates a practice of late life writing which is entirely her own, embracing new forms of autobiographical self-representation to re-examine her colonial childhood. These unusual, creative memoirs interrogate and criticise the complex influences of twentieth-century history upon her own life, positioning herself in a series of alternative relationships to major global events, including the decline and dismantlement of the British Empire and the Korean War. By experimenting with a different set of coordinates for Lively's life and times, speculative life writing functions as a crucial element of her unique late style.

The Alternative Stories in *Making It Up*

Making It Up's eight short stories each begin with an italicised introduction explaining how the vignette connects to important events in Lively's life, including her childhood in Cairo, her arrival in the UK during 1945 and her fortuitous meeting with her future husband Jack Lively. In the book's preface Lively states that 'this book is fiction', but it is her 'own life [which] serves as the prompt'.²⁶⁵ She aims to 'have homed in upon the rocks, the rapids, the whirlpools, and written the alternative stories', looking back on the climatic moments of her life 'when things might have gone differently'.²⁶⁶ Lively's drafts of *Making It Up* list various alternative titles for the collection including: 'Forking Paths', 'Life as Fiction', 'Alternative Lives' and 'Confabulation'.²⁶⁷ While the last was Lively's preferred choice, correspondence with her editor reveals a shared concern that 'this

²⁶⁵ *Making It Up*, p. 2.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.; p. 1.

²⁶⁷ Austin, Harry Ransom Center, MS Penelope Lively, 11.6.

is not the easiest book to describe' and confabulation was not the explanatory title that unfamiliar readers might require.²⁶⁸ Within both the drafted and published versions, *Making It Up* therefore develops Lively's abiding interest with 'the different paths we might have taken and the lives we could have led'.²⁶⁹ Although Lively has repeatedly described the book as an 'anti-memoir', published and archival sources demonstrate its close relationship with her own life.²⁷⁰ But I further suggest that *Making It Up* should be read as an experimental memoir, not least because the preface and italicised chapter introductions anchor each counterfactual story firmly to a key moment in Lively's own life. This is a multilayered life narrative in which the factual is explored through and alongside the counterfactual. These real beginnings to each alternative diversion ensure that the reader never strays too far from the confines of Lively's real experiences. Moreover, *Making It Up* is a speculative life narrative which rewrites many memories already outlined in *Oleander*, *Jacaranda* and *A House Unlocked*; it reimagines key moments from Lively's previous memoirs as a means to critically return to, rather than escape from, the vital coordinates of her life.

Of the eight alternative outcomes within the text, three are concerned with Lively's childhood in Egypt ('Mozambique Channel', 'Comet' and 'Penelope'). The introduction to 'Mozambique Channel', returns to a familiar image of Lively's early 'fantasy life [spent] beneath the eucalyptus trees' of her mother's garden, modelled on an English style to feature 'ponds and pergolas and rose beds'.²⁷¹ Here Lively returns to the originary colonial gardens of Bulaq Dakhrur, and the imperial attitudes she has elsewhere described as 'the glories of Empire and the virtues of being English'.²⁷² As 'Mozambique Channel' is the first story in the collection, from its very beginning the speculative, counterfactual narratives of *Making It Up* demonstrate a renewed interest in interrogating the influence of these imperial fantasies upon Lively's own life.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Julia Llewellyn Smith and Penelope Lively, 'I had a really rotten childhood', *The Telegraph*, 25 August 2001 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4725292/I-had-a-really-rotten-childhood.html>> [accessed 30 August 2018]

²⁷⁰ *Making It Up*, p. 2.

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁷² *A House Unlocked*, p. 8.

In the counterfactual version of her own childhood within ‘Mozambique Channel’, Lively reimagines herself as Jean Leech, although the story is narrated by Jean’s nanny, Shirley. Shirley and Jean live a secluded life in Cairo throughout the late 1930s before fleeing the city ahead of the advancing German army. The descriptions of the family’s grand home are almost identical to the household of Bulaq Dakhrur in *Oleander, Jacaranda*. However, instead of travelling to Palestine (as Lively herself did during the war), Shirley and Jean escape from Cairo by boarding a boat for Cape Town. Onboard Shirley meets Alan Baker, a young medical orderly whom she soon hopes to marry. However, before their dreams can be realised a German U-Boat attacks their passenger ship. Alan stays to evacuate passengers from the sinking vessel and Jean dies in Shirley’s arms after boarding a lifeboat, having suffered a fatal blow to the head. The story closes with Shirley clutching Jean’s lifeless body while realising, in horror, that her lover has drowned and the future she hoped for is no longer possible.

Despite the narrative’s dramatic turn once Shirley and Jean are onboard the passenger ship, the first half of ‘Mozambique Channel’ takes place amidst the heat and dust of Cairo, as Shirley describes daily life in the family’s small European enclave. Although Jean is largely oblivious to the world around her (a trait common to Lively’s self-portrayals in her early memoirs), Shirley’s adult gaze registers, albeit reluctantly, her discomfort with the inequalities of colonial life. She recalls that when she first arrived in Egypt:

She’d been shocked by the beggars and the droves of children [...] the babies with flies crawling all over their eyes. How could people live like this? But they did, and after a while you got used to it. You seemed to be shut away on the other side of a glass screen, where things were done in the way that you knew, and out there was their world in which everything was otherwise, but it was none of your business.²⁷³

Shirley’s description subtly positions the responsibility for these scenes of squalor and poverty upon the local population, as if they have an alternative to ‘live like this’. Rather than interrogate the root causes of systemic poverty, she quickly turns away from these lived realities to accept the screened

²⁷³ *Making It Up*, p. 18.

comfort and domesticity of white colonial life. The ‘double exposure’ described in *Oleander, Jacaranda* is developed, in *Making It Up*, as a bifocal perspective, where we are both within and outside Lively’s memories. Through this speculative narrative Lively returns to the colonial past of her childhood but transforms personal memory into counterfactual fiction, creating a doubled gaze which includes details (such as the harsh life of the city streets) that are largely absent from the written, if not the visual, narratives of *Oleander, Jacaranda*. By splitting her experiences between the figures of Shirley and Jean, Lively pursues a vision of colonial life unavailable to her during childhood. *Making It Up* therefore expands Lively’s earlier project of returning to and criticising a colonial world which was unquestionably ‘in the pink’.²⁷⁴ In Shirley’s unsuccessful attempt to maintain a life sheltered behind ‘a glass screen’ Lively exposes the processes through which the social and physical boundaries of her own colonial childhood were constructed.

Although ‘Mozambique Channel’ reports many of the banalities of Shirley’s existence, including the attempts to protect hers and Jean’s bodies against the ‘daily perils of dirt, disease, sun’, threaded throughout these mundane descriptions is a carefully crafted vision of colonial malaise.²⁷⁵ While Shirley acknowledges that of course ‘one was English’, she struggles to remember her home in suburban London.²⁷⁶ This threatens the stability of her previous distinctions between home and the unfamiliar world of ‘out there’ in which ‘everything was otherwise’.²⁷⁷ She explains that she ‘couldn’t remember England very well’ and that ‘somehow a shutter had dropped down between that time and this, so that the norm was now heat, dust’.²⁷⁸ By rewriting her memories of life on ‘an incongruous island’ Lively once more suggests, in ‘Mozambique Channel’, that colonial life was itself a kind of marooning.²⁷⁹ Shirley is doubly stranded, as she is not only distanced from the busy life of Cairo’s streets, but also removed from her own past selves, articulating a sense of being shuttered and

²⁷⁴ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 18.

²⁷⁵ *Making It Up*, p. 10.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁷⁹ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 12.

screened from her memories of England. These recollections of home offer her little solace, conjuring up ‘an unreal and unreachable place, much like the time that was unattainable: before the war. [...] she had [even] begun to feel a bit strange with her family. Distanced’.²⁸⁰ Familial bonds, national belonging and personal memories are slackened by a perpetual present and Shirley begins to despair as she repeatedly describes her experience of being out of time. The escalating list of negative prefixes — ‘unreal’, ‘unreachable’, ‘unattainable’ — express her acute loneliness as she is stranded within an unfamiliar present and cut off from the past. I suggest that ‘Mozambique Channel’ sees Lively step beyond her own bounded upbringing in Egypt through the narrator of Shirley, only to subject her colonial childhood to further scrutiny. By transforming the pre-existing accounts of her early years in this speculative life narrative, Lively is thus able to depict colonial life itself as an untimely experience, one that situates even empire’s beneficiaries in a difficult, isolated subject position.

Furthermore, ‘Mozambique Channel’ provides a view onto the end of the British Empire and the collapse of white colonial society in Egypt. Although it was a protectorate rather than a formal colony, Egypt was ‘at the heart of British strategic thinking about the Middle East’.²⁸¹ The narrative initially details how Shirley and Jean’s life is painfully confined to the parameters of ‘the house, Gezira Sporting Club [...] and the YMCA’, as they occupy physical spaces demarcated solely for European use.²⁸² Yet there are subtle, tentative signs that this world is ending. The ageing Thomas Cook travel posters that Shirley glimpses at the docks advertise all the luxuries of colonial life — including the shipping of ‘Polo Ponies, at the best rates’ from Egypt to Britain — but Shirley knows that this era has been brought to an end by the war.²⁸³ The white residents of Cairo are increasingly looking to the opposite end of the continent, to the promised safe haven of Cape Town, where one nanny notes with relief that ‘they don’t let the natives’ use white recreational spaces such as the cinema.²⁸⁴ By rewriting her own, actual departure from Egypt, in which she, her mother and nanny

²⁸⁰ *Making It Up*, p. 11.

²⁸¹ Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, p. 113.

²⁸² *Making It Up*, p. 11-12.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

travelled to the British mandate of Palestine, Lively also reroutes the trajectory of this important journey. The Leech family leave Egypt, where British colonial rule (and the age of polo ponies) is clearly coming to a close, for Cape Town, where racial segregation was being rapidly concretised in law. Mrs Leech, Jean's mother, can barely contain her excitement at the prospect of living in a city that is perceived as being 'quite English really'.²⁸⁵ Contemporary memoirs chronicle how the mass relocation of white landowners from across Africa to Cape Town is still viewed, in Douglas Rogers's words, 'as a homecoming of sorts', a retreat to the same coastline from which Europeans first trekked into the African interior.²⁸⁶ This gathering on the Cape has been viewed as white communities turning their backs to the 'continent, their feet on the edge of the ocean'.²⁸⁷ By changing the destination of her family's departure from Egypt, Lively's speculative life writing illuminates an alternative view onto the end of empire. Sending the Leeches towards Cape Town, she redirects the family towards a segregationist haven where the social mores and racial prejudices of colonialism are not yet at an end. To use Rogers's phrase, the fantasy of a continued colonial life in South Africa sees the Leech family turning their backs on an impending age of formal decolonisation, retreating instead to the tip of the African continent and the promise of continuing white supremacy.

Although 'Mozambique Channel' is presented as a form of fiction its descriptions of Egypt, exile and the end of the British Empire clearly respond to the subject matter of Lively's earlier life narratives. In the first vignette of *Making It Up*, Lively reimagines her life through the character of Jean as never progressing after empire. She refuses to let this alter-ego experience a time following decolonisation, as Jean's life comes to a premature close before she has the chance to explore beyond the garden walls of Bulaq Dakhrur. These spectral alternative lives in *Making It Up* have much to tell us about Lively's colonial childhood and her exile to Britain in 1945; the loss of Egypt, and the shock of her arrival in post-war Britain, resurfaces as a focal point in many of the explanatory, factual sections introducing her counterfactual vignettes. It is, as I next outline, through the figure of the

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁸⁶ Douglas Rogers, *The Last Resort: A Memoir of Zimbabwe* (London: Short Books, 2010), p. 157.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

spectre, and the notion of haunting, that Lively's speculative life writing registers an interactive relationship between different temporalities, exploring the intersections of alternative pasts and possible futures in a haunted present.

Making It Up is a speculative life narrative haunted by the spectres of Lively's colonial past. In *Specters of Marx* (1993), Jacques Derrida develops his concept of hauntology, itself a play on ontology, as a 'disjuncture in the very presence of the present'.²⁸⁸ As Fredric Jameson explains further, Derridian hauntology serves as a warning 'that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity'.²⁸⁹ By jeopardising an understanding of the present as stable and ontologically determined, Derrida posits that histories cannot be neatly packaged into records of past time, arguing instead that the spectre heralds 'the untimeliness of its present'.²⁹⁰ Reading *Making It Up* through these discussions of hauntology suggests that the histories of empire in Lively's speculative life writing are never finished, fixed or completed. The counterfactual renditions of the past and the speculative futures within *Making It Up* suggest that the end of empire disrupts the internal chronology of Lively's life writing. Rather than narrate her life after empire, the presence of Egypt within Lively's speculative narratives suggests the difficulty and even the impossibility of her colonial childhood being contained within and confined to the past. While colonial rule itself might have come to a close, Lively's memories of empire continually resurface in her twentieth and later twenty-first century present.

As Fiona Barclay notes, 'the notion of haunting interrupts the constructed categories of colonial and postcolonial temporality' so that instead 'the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial emerges as a process which, fraught with tension, must be repeatedly renegotiated'.²⁹¹ Although numerous stories in *Making It Up* return to Lively's Egyptian childhood, 'Comet' and

²⁸⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 29.

²⁸⁹ Fredric Jameson, 'Marx's Purloined Letter', in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, ed. by Michael Sprinkler (London: Verso, 2008), pp. 26-68 (p. 39).

²⁹⁰ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 201.

²⁹¹ Fiona Barclay, *Writing Postcolonial France: Haunting Literature and the Maghreb* (New York: Lexington Books, 2011), p. xv.

‘Mozambique Channel’ suggest — by killing Lively’s alter egos — that a time after or beyond empire is fundamentally unavailable to her, even within her counterfactual life writing. Barclay’s comments allow me to situate Lively’s repeated renegotiations of colonial and postcolonial Egypt within a broader, hauntological framework. My reading of *Making It Up* as haunted by the spectres of empire responds cautiously to Stef Craps’s postulation that a ‘hauntological politics of memory can help counter the premature and obfuscatory celebration of the “post” in “postcolonial”’.²⁹² *Making It Up* and, as I later discuss, *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, explore what it means to live *after* empire, but by no means *beyond* its lingering influence.²⁹³ The circuitous returns to Egypt within these counterfactual vignettes might allow Lively to narrate her memories of empire from alternative perspectives, but she does not escape her colonial childhood by doing so. On the contrary, she commits to further, critical examinations of her own relationship with the colonial past.

In *Making It Up*’s sixth story, ‘Comet’, Lively returns to Egypt once more, exploring the counterfactual life of Penelope, who returns to Egypt in the 1950s and dies in a plane crash shortly after (in reality Lively’s first return to her former home was during the 1980s). Similarly to ‘Mozambique Channel’, Lively uses speculation to return to her Egyptian childhood, only to write herself out of time by imagining her alter ego’s death. Penelope dies several decades before the story begins and is a distant figure in ‘Comet’, whose surviving relatives know her only ‘as a sad legend mentioned less and less’.²⁹⁴ It is left to her half-sister, Sarah, to reconstruct Penelope’s life in Egypt over fifty years later. Sarah sifts through the remaining fragments of Penelope’s short life and the distant memories of people who knew her in Cairo. Sarah is told that, after Penelope’s return to Egypt,

²⁹² Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 63.

²⁹³ Although Craps’s *Postcolonial Witnessing* (2012) demonstrates the productive intersections of postcolonial literature and hauntological memory, literary critics have long noted that postcolonial writing is not that which simply comes ‘after empire’ chronologically. As Elleke Boehmer suggests, postcolonial literature ‘critically or subversively scrutinises the colonial relationship’ and, by extension, registers the continuing legacies of imperialism. — Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 3.

²⁹⁴ *Making It Up*, p. 169.

‘she used to say that she felt like two people – there was part of her for whom the place was familiar and homely, and another for whom it was a foreign country, baffling and intriguing and deceptive’.²⁹⁵ Sarah discovers how, during the last year of her life, Penelope was a split and tormented figure whose memories of the colonial past rendered her untimely in a rapidly modernising, independent nation. Many landmarks from Lively’s childhood described in *Oleander, Jacaranda* resurface in ‘Comet’, including Groppi’s and the exclusive Gezira Sporting Club. Despite these familiar surroundings, Penelope had returned to the country imagining that ‘it would be a sort of homecoming and it wasn’t’.²⁹⁶ Penelope’s childhood has left her stranded in time, unable to return to the colonial past yet equally incapable of adapting to a postcolonial present.

Lively renders her alternative self in ‘Comet’ as a ghostly figure, a dim image who is never quite in focus. Penelope’s old lover John explains that he can often ‘see her face, hold it for a moment’, but ‘then it dissolves’.²⁹⁷ Yet he acknowledges that, even before her death, Penelope was a ghost who haunted the streets of her former home. In this counterfactual life all that remains of the colonial childhood so dazzlingly recounted in *Oleander, Jacaranda* are snatched scenes and occasional sentences. Penelope appears as a double revenant, haunted in life and haunting in death. ‘Comet’ begins with a description of Sarah being given the damaged remains of her sister’s handbag, which has lain for fifty years amidst the wreckage of her ill-fated plane. Inside the purse are the pulpy remains of Penelope’s British passport where ‘somewhere in this wodge of matter there is the ghost of a face, a face that would be eerily familiar’ to the relative who gazes on it more than half a century after her death.²⁹⁸ The document affirming Penelope’s identity and status as a British subject is suggestively robbed of its official power to identify its owner, mirroring Penelope’s own uneasy sense of cultural identity. The formal signifier of her British citizenship, exemplified by the passport photograph, is reduced to a ghostly trace, while the passport itself becomes mere matter. When she

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 182.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 187.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 168.

was alive Penelope's 'Britishness' is vexed by her memories of, and affiliation with, Egypt's colonial past. In death she is a haunting, uncanny figure whose partially destroyed passport must act as a substitute for her lost body.

Because of Penelope's untimely demise, her final year in Egypt hangs suspended in time. For John it is 'now like some disturbing hiatus in my life, an unfinished story' that he has been unable to conclude.²⁹⁹ In the background of their young love affair he notes that 'the Suez crisis was starting to rumble. Eden sounding off; Nasser defiant. Demonstrations in Cairo; anti-British feeling on the up'.³⁰⁰ The final days of his love affair with Penelope took place amidst the end of informal British rule in Egypt, as the old coordinates of colonial Cairo were replaced with Arabic names and new construction works lined the banks of the Nile. From Sarah's vantage point in the twenty-first century these distant histories seem comfortably concluded, their outcomes documented and contained within a chronological historical narrative. Yet John suggests that his memories of this period continue to disturb him in the present; he too feels unable to move beyond his year with Penelope, which is inseparable from the broader histories of the end of empire. Reflecting on 'Comet', Lively explains that, like Penelope, she did entertain the idea of returning to Egypt in the 1950s, before quickly discarding the idea. But this counterfactual life is not an exercise in wish-fulfilment in which she rediscovers a lost homeland. Instead, she describes Penelope as a spectral, untimely figure who is unable to conclude her conflicted relationship with her childhood home, and whose death in turn prevents others from achieving closure. As a direct witness to the end of British colonial rule in Egypt Penelope remains caught on this hinge of history, unable to explore her relationship with the colonial past and subsequently unable to inhabit a postcolonial future.

Derrida's notion of hauntology is, as Katy Shaw explains, 'ostensibly about endings – the end of history, the end of an alternative to capitalism in a post-Soviet era'.³⁰¹ But it also reflects the

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 194.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 196.

³⁰¹ Katy Shaw, *Hauntology: The Presence of the Past in Twenty-First Century English Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2018), p. 11.

impossibility of final conclusions. By rewriting her own life in *Making It Up*, Lively defies a linear chronology of time which, inevitably, leads to a final ending (my discussion of *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* also attends to the problematisation of conclusions or endings in Lively's life writing). Through the ghostly doubles of Jean and Penelope, Lively fulfils an exercise in life (re)writing which challenges the progressive linearity of more conventional life narratives. By staging multiple rewritings of her own past, Lively highlights that the narratives of her life cannot be concluded or resolved with alternative outcomes (there are few happy or final endings to these vignettes). As so many of her alternative lives return to Egypt, I contend that Lively's relationship with her colonial childhood emerges, within *Making It Up*, as a unresolvable narrative she may return to but never conclude. As the Suez Crisis is a particular point of interest within 'Comet', Lively's speculative life writing returns to a historical event that has become emblematic of British imperial decline, but refuses to allow her alter-egos to live beyond or after empire.³⁰² Indeed, *Making It Up*'s speculative lives question all endings, especially the end of the British Empire. Within Lively's memoirs, the influence and impact of colonialism continues long after formal decolonisation.

Speculative life writing allows Lively to readdress her particular, privileged experience of empire and exile in 'a century of mass migration, the time when millions slipped from one culture into another, were born with one identity and died as someone else [...] reinvent[ing] both themselves and the place'.³⁰³ *Making It Up*'s combination of counterfactual narratives and actual recollections suggests that, in Lively's late life writing, the act of speculation uses an untimely temporality to make possible a particular critical consciousness. These counterfactual lives are the innovative means for Lively to continue her life writing project in old age. In their rejection of a stereotypical narrative of ageing as decline, *Making It Up*'s alternative vignettes also continue an ongoing project of life writing

³⁰² Robert Gildea, and innumerable imperial historians, have noted that 'for both France and Britain, the Suez intervention [quickly known as the Suez Crisis] was a desperate attempt to shore up their empires'. The loss of Egypt as a strategic site for maintaining British imperial influence in the Middle East also meant losing the Suez canal as vital route connecting Britain and its remaining colonies on the African continent. — Gildea, *Empires of the Mind*, p. 87.

³⁰³ *Making It Up*, p. 162-3.

after empire, remaining in pursuit of the colonial past. These speculative vignettes rewrite Lively's previous life narratives (*Oleander*, *Jacaranda* and *A House Unlocked*) with alternative outcomes.³⁰⁴ Yet rather than fully effecting an Adornian/Saidian model of late style, Lively's speculative writing revises — but does not alienate her from — her previous work. Speculation forges deeper and more complex connections between her autobiographical writings. Like Jameson's conceptualisation of the spectre, Lively's speculative experiments question the solidity of the present and, in so doing, develop further her engagement with the aftermath of colonial rule. If *Making It Up* is haunted by spectral alter-egos who do not live beyond or after empire, these figures are themselves suggestive of a relationship with the colonial past that cannot be definitively concluded. As this chapter next explores, the relationship between lateness and speculation in Lively's life writing is developed further in her fourth memoir, *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*.

'Timeliness and Lateness' in *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*

In his discussion of 'timeliness and lateness' Said argues that the life of an artist holds a 'correspondence to time' and that 'its appropriateness or timeliness' may lead to the acquisition of 'a new idiom, which I shall be calling late style'.³⁰⁵ Expanding upon Said's comments, Michael Wood states that 'lateness doesn't name a single relation to time, but it always brings time in its wake. It is a way of remembering time, whether it is missed or met or gone'.³⁰⁶ Both critics envisage an untimely

³⁰⁴ In *Late Style and its Discontents* (2016) Sam Smiles and Gordon McMullan outline how this distinction is sometimes termed 'spätstil' and 'altersstil': 'Late style (Spätstil) is most often associated with the work of the elderly artist, and indeed it is sometimes characterized additionally or alternatively as "old-age style"(Altersstil)'. However, they go on to note that 'just as only a handful of writers, artists, and composers are deemed to have developed a late style in their last works, so not every elderly practitioner can be presumed to have achieved an old-age style merely from the fact of being old.[...] That "late style" is not coterminous with "old-age style" is significant, for it draws attention to lateness as a sequential rather than a biological term'. — Smiles and McMullan, 'Introduction', p. 3.

³⁰⁵ Said, *On Late Style*, p. 8.

³⁰⁶ Michael Wood, 'Introduction' in *On Late Style: Literature Against the Grain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), pp. xi-xix (p. xi).

late style which exiles the artist from their earlier work while also insisting upon the importance of time to lateness. As I have outlined above, in relation to this first, named characteristic of lateness, Lively's late style departs from Said's (and Adorno's) understanding of the term in that her speculative life writing in *Making It Up* does not wholly contradict, nor exile her from, her earlier memoirs and self-representations. Instead of exile, the speculative lives of *Making It Up* illuminate ever more complicated connections between each of Lively's life narratives, particularly in their re-imaginings of her colonial childhood.

But it is in *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, a memoir comprising six essays on 'the view from old age', that Lively explores the close relationship between late style and the end of life: 'I have lived with time, but before too long time will dump me; it has far to go, and we don't keep up with it. None of us, ever'.³⁰⁷ On the one hand, this is late style as ageing style, but *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* also reveals how Lively's interest in speculation explores a novel form of belated untimeliness. Lively's late-life position on the fringes of time inaugurates, I suggest here, new experimental forms within her life writing. More specifically, while her colonial childhood still looms large within both *Making It Up* and *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, the added experience of late life and Lively's experimental rewriting of the narratives of her earlier memoirs further complicate her relationship with the aftermath of empire.

If *Making It Up* is an exercise in speculative life writing, *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* is a reflection upon this practice. Several of the book's essays reflect upon Lively's concerns as a life writer and these — when read alongside and through *Making it Up* — offer valuable insights as to why speculation is a crucial element of Lively's late style. *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* articulates a view of the present as haunted by the ghosts of past selves, suggesting how and why the experimental chronologies in Lively's later memoirs disrupt a linear view of history. The memoir outlines how old age offers Lively 'a new and disturbing relationship' with her individual experience of time, while

³⁰⁷ *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, pp. 157-158.

also tracking values that shift around her as she ‘grew up to the backdrop of one set of assumptions and [will] sign off in a very different society’.³⁰⁸ She reminds us that her early life in the Middle East appeared indestructible until war in both Egypt and Palestine deposited her in Britain, ‘a traumatised teenager uprooted from what had seemed a homeland [...] now fetched up in an alien society’.³⁰⁹ But this story, which appears in all of Lively’s memoirs, is subtly altered in *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, as these formative events are now being consigned to her grandchildren’s history books. Lively’s late life position in the twenty-first century threatens to confine her colonial childhood to the known narratives of a rapidly distant imperial history. Yet for Lively, the colonial past is still a powerful force within her daily life. The reflections on old age in *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* therefore suggest that through speculative life writing Lively challenges the histories of the British Empire as being cosily confined to a distant past, exerting little pressure or influence upon the present.

Unsurprisingly, Lively’s childhood in Egypt and the later shock of Britain’s role in the Suez crisis — which meant for Lively ‘my own country [was] dropping bombs on the country I still thought of as a kind of home’ — feature prominently throughout *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*.³¹⁰ Yet recalling these events from the new millennium, Lively is now an ‘observant time-traveller, on the edge of things, bearing witness to the customs of another age’.³¹¹ Appearing out of time in the new century, she is a late figure, perched ‘on the edge of’ a new era, while acknowledging the benefits that such an untimely position can afford her life writing.³¹² The reflections within *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* highlight how Lively’s late style and her turn to speculative life writing offer her a further means to consider a life which is after — but by no means beyond the influence of — empire. While the age of formal colonial rule and subsequent global decolonisation movements appears distant to her grandchildren, Lively turns to speculation and lateness to express the powerful, continuing legacies of colonial histories upon her later life. She uses the experimental forms of her

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 71.

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 81.

³¹¹ Ibid., p. 16.

³¹² Ibid.

late memoirs to traverse the increasing chronological distance between her twentieth-century colonial childhood and her present in a twenty-first-century, post-imperial Britain. Lively's late style reinvigorates her returns to the colonial past, weaving further connections between her numerous life narratives. Rather than fragmenting the body of her life writing, Lively's late memoirs forge ever stronger connections across her autobiographical non-fiction.

In *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*'s first chapter, entitled 'Old Age', Lively stipulates that the practice of writing and reconsidering one's own life narrative is a 'productive personal exercise' where the writer should:

trace the narrative thread, to look at the roads not taken, to see where you began and where you have got to. [...] There is one thing missing, of course, from personal life writing: that requisite ending. Tick without the tock. I would find that most unsettling, were I to attempt any sort of conventional memoir (which I shan't do); the novelist in me requires the tension between start and finish, the sense of a whole, of progress toward conclusion.³¹³

In this reference to Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), in which Kermode notes that 'tick is our word for a physical beginning, tock our word for an end', Lively distinguishes between the chronology of fiction (which, like Kermode, she sees as largely driven by endings) and the elided time of life writing.³¹⁴ Conventional autobiographical narratives, typically concerned with the deeds of a single life span, take place within a time frame which avoids the ending of death, a phenomenon that Lively understands as being the 'tick without the tock'. Responding to what she perceives as the limitations of the autobiographical narrative form, she therefore argues that a critical examination of the 'roads not taken' acts as a foil to the 'artificial plod through time of routine autobiography'.³¹⁵ Although I here develop my own understanding of the term 'speculative life writing', these comments reflect a certain self-consciousness from Lively as to how her experiments with alternative chronologies create life narratives distinct from, and even contradictory to, conventional

³¹³ Ibid., p. 27.

³¹⁴ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, 2nd edn (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 44-45.

³¹⁵ *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, p. 127.

autobiographies and memoirs. Indeed, *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* does not track the progress of Lively's life, but circles back to particular moments in time and includes what Lively calls 'those imaginative leaps out of my own time-frame and into other places'.³¹⁶ Here speculation is central to her experience of later life and her interest in endings. The endlessly proliferating possibilities of speculative life writing offer her a route beyond the confines of more conventional life narratives, taking her into alternative pasts and virtual futures. Yet speculative life writing also emerges from these descriptions as an intensely solipsistic exercise in which detours through alternative histories follow a circuitous line of travel, leading inevitably back to reflections upon Lively herself. Nevertheless, these different chronologies create new means to represent her position as an untimely late figure writing from the fringes of a new century.

In *Making It Up*, speculation is described as a 'different way of enlisting story to complement reality, at the opposite end of my life [to childhood]'.³¹⁷ Expanding upon these comments, *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* highlights how Lively's speculative late style depicts time in a manner distinct from her earlier life writing, explaining the necessity of this 'different way' in later life. She describes her own 'weathered body [as] the physical demonstration of passing time' before noting that time's progress can herald 'the sense in which memory is the mind's triumph over time'.³¹⁸ Even as she acknowledges the inevitable impact of age upon her own body, Lively describes a perception of time which is twofold. It is both the linear passing of the years which are written upon the body while also being something more fluid and mutable, a mental process in a constant state of flux which provides a plentiful source of inspiration. The latter becomes Lively's 'majestic, sustaining weapon' as a life writer.³¹⁹ As the next chapter in this thesis discusses, Lessing's conflicted relationship with her settler upbringing exerted a painful influence upon her later career and especially on her life writing; but Lively's reflections on time in *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* suggest that, while she returns repeatedly

³¹⁶ Ibid., p. 231.

³¹⁷ *Making It Up*, p. 248.

³¹⁸ *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, pp. 157-158.

³¹⁹ Ibid., p. 158.

to Egypt in her memoirs, she is not confined or bound to her colonial past, as Lessing often described herself as being in her life narratives. Instead, Lively's fluid relationship with time allows to her explore and probe her ongoing relationship with her memories of empire, and to consider these anew from her changing vantage point.

In her expressions of adapting to time through memory, Lively locates an alternative to an old-age narrative of inexorable decline. For Lively, the 'satisfactory shape' of final endings is the work of fiction, bestowing an 'internal coherence that reality does not have'.³²⁰ Instead, 'life as lived is disordered, undirected and at the mercy of contingent events'.³²¹ Although she acknowledges the importance of linearity to fiction, her comments simultaneously suggest the need for non-chronological life narratives, which might better represent the 'disordered' experience of living. They also demonstrate the clear need — implicit within this chapter's exclusive focus on her non-fiction — to distinguish between Lively's practice as a novelist and her work as a life writer. Here Kermode's distinction between *chronos* and *kairos* provide some further clarity on the untimely qualities of Lively's speculative life writing, with *chronos* representing "'passing time" or "waiting time" [...] and *kairos* [being] the season, a point in time filled with significance'.³²² To use Kermode's phrase, if *chronos* is quantitative, the time of clocks, then *kairos* represents a more critical or relational understanding of time. While Lively has described the past as 'lurk[ing] invisibly' below 'the landscape of the present' from the earliest stages of her writing career, her late style indicates a new development in these lifelong interests.³²³ As she documents the *chronos* of later life, her speculative life writing turns towards ever more experimental forms of *kairos*, or critical time.

Ammonites and Leaping Fish offers several further valuable reflections as to how Lively's late style connects to and results from her experience of old age. Describing her altered perspective in her eighties, she explains:

³²⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 47.

³²³ Lively, *The Presence of the Past*, p. 53.

Once, time was the distance into which you peered [...] in old age, that dependable distance has been whisked suddenly behind you [...] not long ago, there was some kind of balance – a fore and aft, as it were. No longer; time has looped back, regressed, it no longer lies ahead, but behind. It has turned into something else, something called memory and we need it – oh dear me yes, we need it – but it is dismaying to have lost that sense of expectation, of anticipation. Not only that, but we are aware of the change in ourselves – we are the same, but different, and equipped now with a comet trail of completed time, the memory trail.³²⁴

In this tentative description of her own position – rendered provisional by the repeated use of dashes, commas, and semicolons – Lively describes a shift in her experience of time in later life, implying a loss in this transformation of her life's terrain, namely the dependable comfort of future time which is rapidly curtailed. But this description also refuses to mourn the experience of old age, highlighting how later life offers new perspectives and possibilities for Lively as a writer. Here the importance which she previously attributed to an anticipated future is now transferred to memory, which takes on renewed significance and may be put to different uses. Memory, in *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, becomes the route to kairos, functioning as the means for escaping, rejecting, or critiquing the confines of clock-bound chronologies. This, I suggest, offers an important framework for understanding the speculative life narratives in *Making It Up*. Lively's rewritings of the past do not lead to concrete conclusions nor remarkable revelations; her speculative returns to kairos are processual, rather than developmental. Reading *Making It Up* through *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* reveals how the former's speculative life writing develops an untimely late style, akin to that identified by Adorno and Said, while also demonstrating a specific form of contemporary lateness which is entirely Lively's own.

In her BBC Radio 3 essay on 'Late Style', Lively drily notes that her 'rather idiosyncratic memoir writing in later years' could be understood as 'a late style of their own' and that a life writer tends to experiment 'in that kind of writing [once] there's a fair bit of life to look at'.³²⁵ Yet as my readings of these two texts suggests, Lively's later memoirs do not comfortably reflect on the events of her life from the vantage point of old age. Instead they offer a critical re-engagement with Lively's

³²⁴ *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, p. 43.

³²⁵ Lively, 'Late Style'.

colonial childhood and her alienating early experiences in Britain. Speculation does not liberate Lively from history, but rather allows her to re-examine her own involvements with empire. Speculative life writing may be a solipsistic exercise yet through it Lively is able to critically appraise her relationship with ‘the grand perilous global story’ of the twentieth century while simultaneously expressing her current, untimely position in the new millennium.³²⁶ Although she claims that her speculative experiments reflect the ‘apparently arbitrary outcome’ of the present, they also function as highly-stylised expressions of literary lateness. Reading diachronically across Lively’s memoirs reveals a tension between the author’s claims and the specifics of the texts themselves. A significant challenge to any critical reading of *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* is that the memoir frequently embraces a self-referential form of literary criticism. However, by reading *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* alongside *Making It Up*, a clearer vision of Lively’s late style emerges, one which is mobilised to scrutinise her memories of Britain’s colonial past. The speculative interests of both *Making It Up* and *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* must be situated within Lively’s broader life writing project, which is defined by her ongoing attempts to remember British colonial rule and to explore imperialism’s influence upon the present. Both texts cultivate new connections across the wider constellation of Lively’s life narratives and suggest that, across these autobiographical texts, the present is overwritten with past futures and future pasts.

Conclusion: Wastelands and Willow-herb

Oleander, Jacaranda ends with Lively’s childhood memories of ‘the bomb-flattened area around St Paul’s’, as the cathedral itself stood relatively unscathed amidst the ruinous aftermath of the blitz.³²⁷ As this moment is recounted elsewhere, appearing in both *The Presence of the Past* and *Life in the Garden*, the concluding scenes of *Oleander, Jacaranda* are neither Lively’s first nor last rehearsal of

³²⁶ *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*, p. 92.

³²⁷ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 178.

this memory. St Paul's is an image repeated throughout her life writing project, also concluding *Oleander, Jacaranda*'s sequence of reproduced black and white photographs. The picture is one of almost overwhelming destruction: the buildings formerly surrounding the white towering dome of the cathedral are reduced to splinters, while Royal Engineers in uniforms lug small pieces of wood and stone in an attempt to clear the area. The obvious landmark amidst this chaotic scene is the famously untouched church, which dominates the photograph's background. The caption notes that, although the picture was taken in 1941, Lively did not witness the destruction herself until 1945, by which time the debris had been cleared 'and the willow herb had grown but the effect was much the same'.³²⁸ Bomb craters had permanently altered the streets and layout of the surrounding area. In her various rehearsals of this scene, the image of the rubble and the willow-herb (sometimes known as fireweed) is, according to Lively, an encounter which marked the end of her childhood.³²⁹ Remarkably, Lively's juvenilia, held at the Harry Ransom Centre in Austin, Texas, also reveals an early account of this scene. In a teenage diary written in 1951, Lively states that London for her is:

above all the City — the core of London and yet the most elusive of all. I shall remember hot summer days spent stumbling among the rubble of bomb-damage for the satisfaction of examining a yard or so of Roman wall overgrown with purple willow-herb; I shall remember standing in the empty shell of a Wren church, the floor a carpet of grass open to the sky.³³⁰

Firstly, this private record reveals the threads of continuity that define Lively's long writing career. As a teenager she anticipated the subject matter that she 'shall' be describing throughout her memoirs. This early account also suggests that when she was an unfamiliar stranger in London, Lively understood the cathedral and the surrounding area of the City to be the core of the metropole. In this

³²⁸ Ibid., photo 24.

³²⁹ Leo Mellor highlights in *Reading the Ruins* (2011) that many London bomb-sites became the unexpected centre of study for naturalists during the war years; by 1941 ruined buildings in London had become 'luxuriant spaces where ruins and ashes were shaded by the energetic growth of leaves and flowers'. Mellor explains that that fireweed, in particular, became the emblematic plant of this devastated landscape, appearing in both Elizabeth Bowen's and Rose Macaulay's writing. Lively was therefore one of many post-war writers to be entranced by the plant, which thrived amongst the rubble, visualising both fiery destruction and verdant rebirth. — Leo Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 166.

³³⁰ Austin, Harry Ransom Center, MS Penelope Lively, 15.5.

diary entry, German bombs have revealed the concealed remains of a Roman wall, uncovering historical foundations that burst with new life. The historic heart of the metropole is both recently exposed and layered with the possibility of alternative futures. Willow-herb, a rampant weed that thrives in the aftermath of fire and whose flowers visualise new life in the wake of destruction, is a focal point in every iteration of this scene. The empty shells of buildings are also furnished with a green carpet of new growth. For Lively, there is great imaginative potential to be found in examining the physical strata of history, especially when these ruined foundations are overlaid with new, verdant narratives. It is the possibility of new life, what *Life in the Garden* calls ‘the sea of purple [flowers] in every bomb site’, that caught Lively’s attention and prompted her to rewrite this memory many times over throughout her life writing.³³¹

However, I suggest that by the time of its description in *Oleander, Jacaranda*, this encounter with the ruined city holds a particularly generative promise for the young Lively, a promise that is deeply implicated in her early experiences of colonial life. She traverses the streets around the site with an adult companion, describing the now-familiar scene of how ‘St Paul’s rose from a wasteland of rubble, cropped walls and sunken lakes of willow-herb. The effect was not one of destruction but of tranquil decay, like some ruined site of antiquity’.³³² Lively and her companion become intruders, as in order to walk among the flowered lakes of freely growing weeds they must ignore the signs — ‘Danger! Keep out!’ — barring them from these spaces.³³³ They wander as trespassers through the city, discovering that their pre-war maps no longer correspond to the altered terrain. But in this version of events, Lively’s wanderings are halted by the startling discovery of a Roman bastion:

What did this mean? We had Romans down in Egypt. Had Romans, time was. I knew about Romans. They came from Rome and Italy and surged all over Egypt and Palestine [...] They had dropped their money everywhere. [...] So how could there be Romans, right up here, in England?³³⁴

³³¹ *Life in the Garden*, p. 124.

³³² *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 178.

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

Amidst the confusing social mores and the disappointing landscape of her new island home, Lively finds common ground in the familiar histories of antiquity, sighting ruins similar to those that she had grown up alongside in the Middle East. But crucially, this glimpse of the concealed Roman foundations allows her to view post-war Britain within a wider, interconnected web of histories, from modern empires back to the ancient world. This Roman bastion demonstrates that Britain was once the colonial outpost of another empire, its inhabitants subject to a foreign imperial power. It is vital that this encounter takes place in the shadow of St Paul's Cathedral *and* in the aftermath of the blitz. As Robert Gildea explains, 'the photograph of the dome of St Paul's Cathedral rising above the smoke, published in the Daily Mail on 31 October 1940, came to symbolise Britain "standing alone" against Nazi Germany'.³³⁵ However, this famous photograph also partially concealed Britain's 'imperial crisis' that was well underway during the early 1940s. The image of a singular triumphant building, emblematic of an imperial nation, obscured the fact that anti-colonial movements were gathering apace across Britain's Empire, including in Lively's former homeland of Egypt. Just as importantly, the myth of a solitary nation standing strong against its Nazi foe was a falsehood: Britain's reliance on support and troops from its dominions and allies demonstrates, for Gildea, that 'if it had stood alone, it would have crumbled'.³³⁶

By way of conclusion, I suggest that this image of the cathedral is key to understanding Lively's nuanced and varied responses to empire within her life writing. In *Oleander, Jacaranda* — and throughout her life writing project — she delivers familiar images of imperial grandeur, appearing to veer into colonial nostalgia, before subjecting these to a double exposure. From the repeated image of the cathedral standing majestically alone amongst the rubble, to her memories of living in a grand colonial English house and gardens, Lively appears to deliver and home in on archetypal images of British imperialism, both 'out there' in the colonies and 'at home' in Britain. But if we scrutinise these images closely, we see that Lively quietly subjects them to a dual meaning, just as the snapshots

³³⁵ Gildea, *Empires of the Mind*, p. 53.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

of her most important memories have a double exposure. In the instance of St Paul's, her focus is not on the single dome which rises high above the London skyline but instead on what is beneath it, scrutinising the layers of history exposed in its foundations. Like Bulaq Dakhrur, with its basement full of desert sand, we are encouraged to examine what lies beneath this expression of imperial power. As the city's Roman foundations come into view, Lively experiences a vital epiphany that the 'the patriotic rantings of *Our Island Story*' could not account for the rich, complex landscape beneath her feet.³³⁷ The strata of history exposed by the bombs reveals the presence of Romans in the heart of London. If, as Derrida suggests, the spectre heralds 'the visibility of the invisible', Lively's encounter with the ruins marks multiple temporalities meeting at the epicentre of the imperial metropolis.³³⁸ She is startled to uncover a history entangled with the ancient monuments of her Egyptian childhood. These ruins reveal the multifarious threads connecting Britain both to the so-called margins of its Empire and to the histories of earlier colonial powers.

As Lively exposes the resonant images of British imperialism — including the colonial mansion and the stalwart cathedral — to a double exposure, I suggest that these offer important insights as to how her life writing conceptualises the ongoing, haunting legacies of colonialism. Moreover, in this repeated scene of the young, unaccompanied colonial stranger exploring the ruined streets of London in 1945, I indicate how Lively's early life, which bore witness to the end of British colonial rule in the Middle East, connects to the remains of empire in modern Britain. Not only does Lively's childhood in Egypt underwrite her later life, but her memoirs repeatedly debunk the island myths supporting a view of Britain's unimpeded imperial progress. In her early readings of *Our Island Story* Lively was encouraged to view the nation as a self-contained island untouched by its colonial past. It is this narrative that all of her life writing both resists and speaks back to. Her late turn to speculative life writing seeks new ways of understanding her colonial past, refusing to consign her memories of empire to a concluded historical narrative.

³³⁷ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 179.

³³⁸ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 125.

Throughout her significant body of memoirs Lively takes us into the literal and metaphorical basement levels that lie beneath daily life in both Britain's former colonies and the imperial metropolis. These texts explore empire's impact upon her own experiences and trace its continuing legacies in everyday life, exploring how these are manifest in the domestic arrangements of a house, or the recursive memories of childhood which haunt her in old age. Lively's commitment to tracking and pursuing the aftermath of empire within her life writing remains more important now than ever. Contemporary historians have repeatedly emphasised the need 'to move beyond the idea of [Britain as] a self contained island', arguing that, 'in reality "we" have been "made" by empire, Europe and the world as much as the other way around'.³³⁹ With this renewed urgency to scrutinise the impact of empire 'at home' in Britain, it seems fitting that a writer once derided for her association with the 'domestic proficiencies of English fiction' can now be read as a vital voice within the post-imperial nation.³⁴⁰ While Lively has tracked colonial legacies across her long writing career, the redoubled interest in Britain's imperial past suggests that Lively's longstanding interest in her colonial childhood now holds new significance for contemporary readers. With the possibility that she may yet add further texts to the corpus of her life writing — Lively continues to publish prolifically — her ongoing life writing project offers vital insights into the complex and continuing afterlives of empire.

³³⁹ David Reynolds, *Island Stories: Britain and its History in the Age of Brexit* (Glasgow: William Collins, 2019), p. 5.

³⁴⁰ Birch, 'Growing Up'.

Chapter Two: Settlers and Speculation in Doris Lessing's Life Writing

Introduction: 'Where is this British Empire?'

Thank you for offering me this honour: I am very pleased. But for some time now I have been wondering, 'But where is this British Empire?' Surely there isn't one. And now I see that I am not the only one saying the same.

— Doris Lessing, letter to Alex Allan, declining her Damehood

I have lived in over sixty different houses, flats and rented rooms during the last twenty years and not in one of them have I felt at home. [...] The fact is I don't live anywhere; I never have since I left that first house on the kopje.

— Doris Lessing, *Going Home*

In a playful letter to Alex Allan, principal private secretary to then British Prime Minister John Major, Doris Lessing declined the latter's offer to confer on her a Damehood. She did so on the grounds that, as a young woman, 'I did my best to undo that bit of the British Empire I found myself in: that is, old Southern Rhodesia'.³⁴¹ Writing in 1992, Lessing thought it distasteful for a writer to accept, in old age, 'honours from an institution she attacked when young'.³⁴² Here Lessing confirms her lifelong commitment to anti-imperialism even as she claims her 'undoing' of empire was the work of a younger woman. Yet Lessing's determination to expose the inequalities of colonial rule and to track the long legacies of imperialism after formal decolonisation is an interest which spans the entirety of her writing career. Born in the ruinous aftermath of the First World War, raised during the final years of the British Empire and emerging as a writer immediately after the Second World War, Lessing's life writing both depicts her memories of a white settler childhood and remains in pursuit of the colonial past. Her 1992 letter confirms that her interest in imperialism was not a youthful folly, nor was it confined to her early years living in Southern Rhodesia. As this chapter outlines, the considerable body of Lessing's memoirs and autobiographies — from her first memoir *Going Home* in 1957 to her final published work *Alfred and Emily* in 2008 — are fundamentally shaped by and concerned with the legacies of British colonialism. By drawing upon Lessing's significant body of

³⁴¹ Norwich, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, Doris Lessing Papers, 10D/006

³⁴² Lessing Papers, 10D/006

experimental non-fiction — which I refer to throughout this chapter as her life writing — I suggest that Lessing’s restless experiments with different forms of autobiographical self-representation, from documentary accounts to speculative memoirs, reflect her lifelong interrogation of empire and its aftermath.

This chapter also establishes Lessing’s life writing as a distinctive and unacknowledged subsection within her considerable oeuvre. The confines of this multiple author study mean that I am unable to offer a detailed examination of Lessing’s autobiographical fictions (many of her novels, including the ‘Children of Violence’ series, clearly respond to the events of Lessing’s life and have therefore been discussed by some critics as life writing).³⁴³ My focus in this chapter is on Lessing’s memoirs, autobiographies and documentary non-fiction in which her own life and experiences are the text’s sole or partial focus.³⁴⁴ These experimental non-fictional writings have rarely, if ever, attracted sustained critical attention. I therefore outline here how *Going Home*, *In Pursuit of the English*, *African Laughter*, *Under My Skin*, *Walking in the Shade*, and *Alfred and Emily* track Lessing’s long relationship with her colonial past. I consider these six texts as interconnected, with each narrative being linked to both its successors and predecessors. This allows me to trace how certain scenes from Lessing’s life appear across multiple volumes, having been rewritten and reworked several times over. For instance, an encounter that the young Lessing has with a series of enigmatic cave paintings in the Rhodesian veld, which she presumes have been painted by prehistoric bushmen, appears in *In Pursuit of the English*, *African Laughter*, and *Alfred and Emily*.³⁴⁵ Or, as I discuss in this chapter’s

³⁴³ Susan Watkins rightly notes that whether her work is ‘classified as novel, essay, memoir or official autobiography’, Lessing is consistently ‘attracted to autobiographical forms and has been preoccupied with the blurred dividing lines between fact, truth and fiction’. — Watkins, *Doris Lessing*, p. 29.

³⁴⁴ This therefore excludes non-fictional essays and interviews, including *The Wind Blows Away Our Words* (1987) and *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside* (1986), as their overriding focus is not upon Lessing’s life and personal experiences. Although this chapter does make reference to these texts, the size of Lessing’s oeuvre means that it is beyond the remit of this thesis to address all of her non-fictional writings.

³⁴⁵ This scene is itself a clear intertextual reference to Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), in which Em and Lyndall encounter similar cave paintings under a shelving rock. These contain ‘red and black pigments’ depicting ‘grotesque oxen, elephants, rhinoceroses and a

conclusion, the erstwhile muwanga tree which marked the boundary of Lessing's family farm makes important appearances in at least three of her life narratives, with each rewriting of the tree complicating its previous meaning. It is imperative that critical assessments of Lessing's life writing account for the close relationships between these multiple self-representations. By doing so here, I track Lessing's continuing relationship with the British Empire across the arc of her long autobiographical project. I suggest that her multiple returns to Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe necessitated new experiments in the form, as well as the content, of her memoirs, autobiographies and documentary accounts.

Born in 1919, in Persia (modern Iran), Lessing's early life was spent in Kermanshah where her father was a bank manager for the Imperial Bank of Persia. Her parents had met several years before during the First World War. Alfred Tayler (Lessing's father) had lost a leg while fighting in the trenches and Emily McVeagh (Lessing's mother) was the nurse who brought him back to health. During their time in Persia, Lessing's parents decided to return to England for an extended holiday where they attended the British Empire Exhibition of 1924. There they encountered an advertisement for maize farms in Southern Rhodesia, filled with false promises of wealth and easy success. According to Lessing, this meeting 'changed my parents' lives and set the course of mine and my brother's'.³⁴⁶ Rather than return to Persia, the family decided to set sail for southern Africa. Lessing's father was the beneficiary of a scheme, instigated by the Rhodesian government in 1923, which encouraged British ex-servicemen to take up new careers as farmers, offering them land and equipment at subsidised prices. As Dane Kennedy's study of Kenyan and Rhodesian settler history highlights, families like Lessing's arrived to a white society that was 'rigidly stratified along racial, ethnic and cultural lines'.³⁴⁷ Racial segregation reserved the use of many public facilities for the

one-horned beast'. In *Under My Skin* and elsewhere, Lessing states that Schreiner exerted a powerful influence upon her early reading habits and later writings. — Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 10; Lessing, *Under My Skin*, p. 202.

³⁴⁶ *Under My Skin*, p. 46.

³⁴⁷ Kennedy, *Islands of White*, p. 149.

exclusive use of Europeans and settler culture was ‘preeminently the expression of the white community’s tenuously-held position of predominance in the colonial order’.³⁴⁸ Yet despite their new positions amongst a white ruling minority in Rhodesia, Alfred’s attempts to farm maize quickly failed and Emily was bitterly disappointed that her former life of ‘dinner parties, musical evenings, tea parties [and] picnics [in Persia] was gone’.³⁴⁹ The family’s lives in rural Southern Rhodesia were neither luxurious nor easy. In 1949, twenty-five years after her arrival, Lessing fled the country and boarded a ship bound for Britain. Her first autobiography, *Under My Skin*, describes this departure as Lessing fleeing from both the constraints of family ties and the white Rhodesian society she had come to despise. These formative decades — from 1925 to 1949 — in which Lessing witnessed the violence and paradoxes of white settlement in Africa, are the foundations of all her later life writings.

It is important to note, from the outset, that Lessing’s relationship with her homeland and memories of settler life was not one of straightforward critical distance. In interviews Lessing stated that ‘everything that’s made me a writer happened to me growing up in Southern Rhodesia, the old Rhodesia’, acknowledging the powerful influence that her upbringing exerted upon her career.³⁵⁰ Although she was fiercely critical of Rhodesian settler society, which she likened to ‘a mass disease’, the landscape of Lessing’s childhood is the site to which all her life narratives perpetually return.³⁵¹ In *Going Home*, she explains that although ‘I have lived in over sixty different houses, flats and rented rooms during the last twenty years [...] the fact is I don’t live anywhere. I never have since I left that first house on the kopje’.³⁵² The farmhouse built by her parents, which perched upon a hill overlooking the bush, is repeatedly identified as the focal point of her experiences.³⁵³ She continued

³⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 189.

³⁴⁹ *Under My Skin*, p. 59.

³⁵⁰ Eve Bertelsen, ‘Interview with Doris Lessing’, in *Doris Lessing*, ed. by Eve Bertelsen, (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1985), pp. 93–120 (p. 93).

³⁵¹ Doris Lessing, *Going Home* (London: Pantha, 1984), p. 17.

³⁵² *Going Home*, p. 37.

³⁵³ The value Lessing attributes to this site causes Lara Feigel, one of several memoirists to pursue Lessing’s influence upon her own life, to make a pilgrimage ‘to the Highveld and [to attempt to] locate the hill where Lessing’s house once stood’. Feigel’s journey re-enacts Lessing’s own disappointed return trips to this hillside, which she records in both *African Laughter* and *Alfred and*

to revisit this originary site throughout her life writing describing even in her final published book, *Alfred and Emily*, the ‘hill on which the house was built, giving views for miles’.³⁵⁴ Exiled from Southern Rhodesia in 1956 and only able to return to the newly-independent Zimbabwe in 1982, Lessing described the ‘inexhaustible well of tears’ created by these long decades of exile, which ‘excluded [me] from my own best self’.³⁵⁵

Yet for Lessing the act of return, both practically and ideologically, was fraught with difficulty. The Rhodesian government’s declaration that she was a ‘prohibited immigrant’ in 1956 — largely due to Lessing’s outspoken criticism of racial injustice, along with her membership of the Communist Party — made any future homecomings to Southern Rhodesia impossible. Meanwhile, Lessing was aware that to re-enter the landscape of her childhood was also to return to a colonial past of which she was resolutely critical. Her later relationship with Robert Mugabe’s regime was no more straightforward, as her initial optimistic declarations that Zimbabwe was a ‘success, for all its faults’, later gave way to her outraged denouncements of ‘Mugabe’s reign of terror’.³⁵⁶ Lessing’s relationship with her former homeland was therefore certainly not static, as she remained highly alert and responsive to the country’s dramatic changes across the course of her writing career.³⁵⁷ Moreover, her assertions that the Tayler family’s farmhouse on the kopje was her only true home jostle, uneasily, alongside her understanding that to return to this site was to be complicit in ‘the paranoia, the

Emily. — Lara Feigel, *Free Woman: Life, Liberation and Doris Lessing* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 38.

³⁵⁴ Doris Lessing, *Alfred and Emily*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2008), p. 174.

³⁵⁵ Doris Lessing, *African Laughter: Four Visits to Zimbabwe* (London: Flamingo, 1993), p. 12.

³⁵⁶ *African Laughter*, p. 9; Doris Lessing, ‘On Not Winning the Nobel Prize’, 7 December 2007 <<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2007/lessing/25434-doris-lessing-nobel-lecture-2007/>> [accessed 19 November 2019]

³⁵⁷ Lessing notes these changes in *The Wind Blows Away Our Words*, her account of travelling to Afghanistan and interviewing the Mujahideen during the Soviet-Afghan war. She explains that when she arrived in Britain, critics of Southern Rhodesia (then still a British colony) were ‘patronised, put down, laughed at’, and debates on the subject would ‘empty the House of Commons’. Several decades later, as she wryly noted, it became commonplace ‘to criticise the white regimes in South Africa’. This shift in opinion was, she argues, too late to prevent the violent excesses of the apartheid regime in South Africa and Rhodesia’s seven year war of independence. — Doris Lessing, *The Wind Blows Away Our Words* (London: Picador, 1987), pp. 70-71.

adolescent sentimentality, the neurosis' of white settler society.³⁵⁸ Anthony Chennells, who himself appears in several of Lessing's memoirs, suggests that all of her African writings reflect 'the absurdities and contradictions of white Rhodesia'.³⁵⁹ Throughout this chapter I argue that, while Southern Rhodesia was the point to which Lessing's life writing would always return, the journey homewards was a complicated passage.

Lessing's various accounts of her colonial childhood are part of a wider body of work by white Rhodesian and Zimbabwean life writers. These texts often explore the complex configurations of belonging to what Daphne Anderson terms 'that great, defeated, ashamed army of poor whites'.³⁶⁰ As Lessing's contemporary, Anderson's descriptions of poverty amongst white farmers exposes the violence of Southern Rhodesia; in one scene she describes how her grandfather, a farmer, would 'take his rhino hide sjambok' to starving thieves who had pilfered his maize crop.³⁶¹ But Lessing's memoirs and autobiographies are also connected to a successive generation of former white Rhodesian/Zimbabwean life writers, including Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* (2002). Fuller's narrative documents how some British families — including her own — continued to emigrate to Rhodesia until the 1970s, determined 'to keep one country [in Africa] white-run'.³⁶² Fuller belongs to a cohort of white Zimbabwean memoirists writing at the turn of the new millennium, including Peter Godwin and Douglas Rogers, who explore what it meant to be 'neither African nor English' during the country's war of independence and the ensuing decades of Robert

³⁵⁸ *Going Home*, p. 299.

³⁵⁹ Anthony Chennells, 'Doris Lessing and the Rhodesian Settler Novel', in *Doris Lessing*, ed. by Eve Bertelsen (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1985), pp. 31-43 (p. 43).

³⁶⁰ Anderson's *The Toe-Rags* (1989) reveals a series of startling, shared coordinates with Lessing's *Under My Skin*, as both writers had English fathers who failed to cultivate tobacco in Southern Rhodesia and experienced colonial childhoods which teetered on the precipice of poverty (although Anderson's upbringing was considerably more precarious than Lessing's). After reading Lessing's first autobiography, Anderson wrote to inform her that, in fact, the two had met as children, living briefly in the same convent school in Salisbury (now Harare). — *Walking in the Shade*, p. 13; Daphne Anderson, *The Toe-Rags: The Story of a Strange Upbringing in Southern Rhodesia* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989), p. 16.

³⁶¹ Anderson, *The Toe-Rags*, p. 9.

³⁶² Alexandra Fuller, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* (London: Picador, 2015), p. 23.

Mugabe's regime.³⁶³ For some, including Rogers in *The Last Resort* (2009), this results in a sentimentalised view of Rhodesia as 'a disappearing world, the last of a lost white tribe [...] the old days'.³⁶⁴ Such nostalgic accounts subtly but persistently erase the violence of white rule.

Lessing's clearly articulated anti-imperialism positions her as a curious predecessor to these memoirists, as her own life writings contain no such ambiguity. In other words, while these later memoirs present often sympathetic accounts of white Rhodesia, Lessing's life writing project refuses to confuse her attachment to the landscape of her childhood with a nostalgia for white settlement itself. Importantly, her life writings also remain responsive to the fact, as articulated by Bill Schwarz, that as formal colonial rule 'came to its end Rhodesia became a powerful symbolic site in which competing memories of empire were fought out' in Britain.³⁶⁵ As new immigrant communities populated post-war Britain's towns and cities, right wing politicians and commentators frequently evoked Rhodesia as an alternative, idealised vision of Britain. In so doing they rejected a view of a multicultural, post-imperial nation which included new immigrant communities from the Caribbean and South East Asia. Lessing's life writing launches a powerful and important rebuttal to the myth, propagated throughout the 1960s and 1970s, that 'Rhodesia represents Britain in its halcyon days'.³⁶⁶ Her autobiographical non-fiction records life within isolated, embattled and often impoverished settler communities that were, as Dane Kennedy notes, 'curiously anachronistic, largely at odds with the major currents of their time'.³⁶⁷ Lessing's anti-imperialism should therefore be seen not only in the context of her white settler childhood, but also its significance in post-war Britain, where Rhodesia was a key symbolic site that fuelled a new ethnic populism.

While Lessing's life writing describes her experiences in both Southern Rhodesia and Zimbabwe (she was prohibited from the country during Rhodesia's short-lived history as an

³⁶³ Fuller, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, p. 35.

³⁶⁴ Rogers, *The Last Resort*, p. 139.

³⁶⁵ Schwarz, *The White Man's World*, p. 397.

³⁶⁶ Harold Soref, quoted in Bill Schwarz, "'The only white man in there': the re-racialisation of England, 1956-1968", *Race & Class*, 38:1 (1996), 65-78 (p. 72).

³⁶⁷ Kennedy, *Islands of White*, p. 8.

unrecognised state), her place within postcolonial literary studies is still, perhaps rightly, regarded as tenuous. Dennis Walder, for example, accuses Lessing of sharing ‘a mythologising tendency with her colonial predecessors’.³⁶⁸ As the recent body of memoirs by white Zimbabweans suggests, this mythologising tendency might also be traced to her successors. Gillian Whitlock connects the comparative scarcity of critical interest in Lessing’s African writings to the fact that ‘thinking about settlers is deeply unfashionable in postcolonial criticism’, while Susan Watkins also attributes ‘the tendency to ignore Lessing amongst postcolonial critics’ to her settler roots.³⁶⁹ It is important, therefore, to note that my discussions of Lessing and empire do not ignore the complexities and ambivalences of her early life and her later recollections. At the same time, my reading insists on the relevance of colonial and postcolonial legacies to Lessing’s life writing and, as such, builds upon recent scholarship in postcolonial life narratives by both Moore-Gilbert and Whitlock.³⁷⁰ Lessing’s understanding of Southern Rhodesia and Zimbabwe provide an extraordinary insight into the country’s transition from a British colony to independent Republic and allow her to launch a scathing critique of the ‘unreasoning spirit of self-destruction [that] is seen at its clearest in white-settler countries’.³⁷¹ Moreover, while previous critical discussions have provided important analyses of Lessing’s autobiographies, these tend to isolate the first volume, *Under My Skin*, as their sole object of study.³⁷² There is a comparative critical neglect of early memoirs such as *Going Home* and later, experimental life narratives such as *Alfred and Emily*. More importantly still, these close readings have tended to obscure, or overlook, how Lessing’s life writing is an interconnected body of work. Her memoirs and autobiographies offer a network of cross references, as when *Under My Skin* describes finding ‘the cheapest boarding house in Cape Town’ before Lessing’s departure for

³⁶⁸ Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias*, p. 73.

³⁶⁹ Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire*, p. 41; Watkins, *Doris Lessing*, p. 172.

³⁷⁰ For further details see: Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Life-Writing* (2009); Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire* (2000) and *Postcolonial Life Narratives* (2015).

³⁷¹ *Going Home*, p. 88.

³⁷² Martens, ‘The Truth Criteria of Autobiography’, 319-340; Watkins, ‘Second World Life Writing’, 137-148.

England, she notes that *In Pursuit of the English* provides a more detailed account of this episode.³⁷³ By scrutinising the returns and rewritings within this body of experimental non-fiction, I suggest that Lessing's life writing project is processual. More specifically, her memoirs and autobiographies reject a teleological view of selfhood in which the record of Lessing's life might move beyond the influence of empire. Writing both before and after Zimbabwean independence, Lessing traces the ongoing legacies of colonialism within her own life. Reading across these life narratives, I contend that they consistently compromise a fixed or final view of the self, as Lessing refuses to bring her memories of settler life to a definitive conclusion. I suggest here that, far from being a failure of self-representation or indulging in unabashed colonial nostalgia, the frustrated processions of Lessing's life writing depict the complexities and contradictions of a life lived both during and after empire.

Lessing's frustrated returns to her memories of empire and her continued engagement with the long legacies of twentieth-century imperial history are at the heart of her final, speculative memoir, *Alfred and Emily*. This chapter begins with a discussion of Lessing's last life narrative, before charting a non-chronological path through her considerable body of autobiographical non-fiction. I focus, in particular, on three texts within Lessing's life writing that have received a comparative lack of critical attention: *Going Home*, *African Laughter* and *Alfred and Emily*. This non-sequential reading emphasises that, while Lessing's life writing project was undoubtedly protean and moved across multiple generic and thematic boundaries, these autobiographical texts do not work their way free from Lessing's memories of empire. Building upon the discussion of speculative life writing in Penelope Lively's later memoirs, I ask how Lessing's own turn to speculation in *Alfred and Emily* allowed her to readdress her twentieth-century settler childhood from a twenty-first-century present. I then consider how her two African travel memoirs, *Going Home* and *African Laughter*, offer distinct yet interconnected accounts of her return journeys to Southern Rhodesia and later Zimbabwe. In the first volume of her autobiography, Lessing states that, as a life writer, her key

³⁷³ *Under My Skin*, p. 407.

problem was ‘the one of shifting perspectives, for you see your life differently at different stages, like climbing a mountain while the landscape changes with each turn in the path’.³⁷⁴ While Lively considers the multiple accounts of her own life through dual images, alter-egos and the technique of double exposure, Lessing accrues numerous perspectives onto the terrain of her own life. She suggests that the view of her life was subtly altered by each autobiographical return and this image of a shifting landscape emphasises the need to attend to Lessing’s own changing position within her life writing. Drawing upon three key texts published across a fifty year period, and supplementing these readings with further material from her other life narratives, this chapter addresses Lessing’s commitment to tracking her memories of empire both during and after colonial rule. Beneath her playful question — ‘where is this British Empire?’ — lies a serious, sustained attempt to understand her own entanglements with British imperialism.

Alfred and Emily: Speculation and the Aftermath of Empire

Lessing’s final memoir, *Alfred and Emily*, is an unusual text of two halves. The book’s first section (Part I, ‘Alfred and Emily; A Novella’) rewrites the lives of Lessing’s parents — Alfred Tayler and Emily McVeagh — who lead separate, happy existences in an alternative twentieth century. Within this counterfactual world the First World War does not take place, and Alfred and Emily marry other partners. Lessing interpreted the First World War as inseparable from the competing interests of European colonial powers, an argument that has since been substantiated by many contemporary historians.³⁷⁵ In reality, Lessing’s father was attracted to Southern Rhodesia as the beneficiary of a colonial land distribution scheme for British ex-servicemen. Following his traumatic experiences in

³⁷⁴ *Under My Skin*, p. 12.

³⁷⁵ As Andrew Tait Jarboe and Richard Fogarty contend, ‘World War I was a conflict fought by empires to determine the fate of those empires’. — Andrew Tait Jarboe and Richard Fogarty ‘An Imperial Turn in First World War Studies’, in *Empires in World War I: Shifting Frontiers and Imperial Dynamics in a Global Conflict*, ed. by Andrew Tait Jarboe and Richard Fogarty (London: I. B. Tauris: 2014), pp. 1-22 (p. 1).

the First World War, and the loss of his right leg shortly before the battle of Passchendaele, Alfred Tayler hoped for a fresh start in southern Africa. By writing World War I out of European history Lessing thus re-routes the timeline of events which would lead her parents to Southern Rhodesia and, in the process, writes herself out of existence. In *Alfred and Emily*'s counterfactual world, Alfred does not serve as a soldier, nor is his body subjected to catastrophic injury. He instead becomes a farmer in southern England while Emily, who initially trains as a nurse, sets up the Martin-White schools, providing 'schools and books for the poor'.³⁷⁶ Both of these outcomes fulfil the lives that Lessing imagined her parents would have lived, if freed from their fateful encounters with war and empire.

Lessing had previously written numerous biographical sketches of both her parents, including a piece on 'My Father' for *The Telegraph* and a two-part biographical essay about her mother's life for *Granta* during the 1980s, stating that 'he [Alfred] had had a country childhood and always wanted to be a farmer' and that Emily's 'fate should have been to run a large organisation'.³⁷⁷ By the mid 1990s, writing in *Under My Skin*, Lessing tentatively began to imagine 'what they would have been without that war', once more suggesting that her mother 'a jolly efficient Englishwoman', would have excelled in running a national institution.³⁷⁸ Another decade later, in *Alfred and Emily*, Lessing finally plots these counterfactual lives from beginning to end, concluding Part I with a note that 'Alfred Tayler was a very old man when he died', while Emily suffers an untimely demise after being attacked by young men but is celebrated by 'the hundreds of people [who] came to her funeral'.³⁷⁹ *Alfred and Emily* therefore realises the hypothetical lives that Lessing had imagined for her parents over several decades of biographical and autobiographical writing. But this novella is not the final, satisfactory conclusion to her long biographical project. The speculative account of Lessing's parents' alternative lives is yoked to a final memoir — Part II — which returns, once again, to her colonial childhood.

³⁷⁶ *Alfred and Emily*, p. 97.

³⁷⁷ Doris Lessing, 'Impertinent Daughters', *Granta*, 14 (1984), <<https://granta.com/impertinent-daughters/>> [accessed 6 April 2020]; Doris Lessing, 'My Mother's Life (Part Two)', *Granta*, 17 (1985), <<https://granta.com/autobiography-part-two-my-mothers-life/>> [accessed 6 April 2020]

³⁷⁸ *Under My Skin*, p. 156.

³⁷⁹ *Alfred and Emily*, p. 138.

With this temporally disruptive second section in mind, I argue that *Alfred and Emily* confronts the impossibility of any final conclusion to Lessing's relationship with Southern Rhodesia and the former British Empire. Lessing, like *Lively*, develops a practice I have termed speculative life writing, wherein an author rewrites their own life story with alternative outcomes. In *Alfred and Emily*, Lessing rewrites hers and her parents' lives through a counterfactual novella, which purports to be escaping from Lessing's colonial past. However, she cannot conclude the text without returning to her Rhodesian upbringing. Her settler childhood is the inescapable conclusion of this experimental life narrative.

The second half of the book (Part II, 'Alfred and Emily; Two Lives') describes Alfred's and Emily's real, unhappy experiences in Southern Rhodesia, told through a series of episodic memories. This short memoir revisits many of the scenes and sites of Lessing's childhood, along with her parents' resolute belief in 'empire and its benefits', as previously narrated in *Under My Skin*.³⁸⁰ But in Part II of *Alfred and Emily* Lessing recollects her former life on the margins of the British Empire from a different century, noting that this renders her 'a survivor from a quaintly old-fashioned past'.³⁸¹ This shift in Lessing's own position heralds a different approach to her memories of a settler childhood. As for *Lively*, the turn of the new millennium prompted Lessing to re-examine her youth from the perspective of a new century. She explains that her upbringing was dominated by 'the British Empire, the white supremacy of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia', noting with alarm that these events had been relegated to 'a line or two in history books'.³⁸² For Lessing, the experience of later life heralds a new turn in her autobiographical writing; she would use speculation to return, once again, to her memories of white settler life. Here I outline how the relationship between the two halves of *Alfred and Emily* is suggestive of speculative life writing, a practice I have defined elsewhere as a

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

³⁸² Doris Lessing, 'When I Was Young...', in *Time Bites: Views and Reviews* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), p. 201.

genre in which ‘counterfactual lives [operate] as diversionary routes from actual life narratives’.³⁸³ In keeping with my working definition, the counterfactual world of Part I is explicitly described as an alternative to Lessing’s memories within Part II, and as previously outlined in her other memoirs and autobiographies.

Unlike Lively’s *Making It Up*, which pursues many counterfactual lives in a collection of short stories, Lessing’s own turn to speculative life writing results in a singular counterfactual history as an alternative to her settler childhood. Lessing held a wider, long-standing interest in counterfactual worlds beginning with *The Four-Gated City* (1969) and developed further in *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), which describes an alternative Britain where ‘everything, all forms of social organisation [have] broke[n] up’.³⁸⁴ These early speculative interests were then significantly developed by her ‘Canopus in Argos’ series, five science fiction novels which explore future histories. *Alfred and Emily* marks a further development in Lessing’s speculative writings by combining a novella of an alternative Britain with a memoir recounting Lessing’s own lived experiences. Part I initially appears as an archetypal counterfactual narrative by foregrounding ‘the effects of a single change in an existing causal chain, leading to a whole series of consequent changes in the course of history’.³⁸⁵ Yet Lessing herself insisted that she was not only ‘writing a history of Europe [as if there] had been no war’.³⁸⁶ Her speculations are focussed on the personal, rather than the historical. According to Lessing, Part I of *Alfred and Emily* is ‘about my parents and what might have happened to them if history had left them alone’.³⁸⁷

Reading *Alfred and Emily* as speculative life writing suggests that the book is not two discrete texts, but a single, experimental life narrative. The novella of Lessing’s parents’ alternative lives, free

³⁸³ Emma Parker, ‘Penelope Lively’s Speculative Life Writing: A Discussion of *Making It Up* and *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*’, *Moving Worlds: A Journal of Transcultural Writings*, 18:1 (2018), 63-78 (p. 64).

³⁸⁴ Doris Lessing, *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (London: The Octagon Press, 1974), p. 19.

³⁸⁵ Richard J. Evans, *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History* (London: Little, Brown, 2014), p. 176.

³⁸⁶ Hermione Lee and Doris Lessing, ‘A Conversation with Doris Lessing’, *Wasafiri*, 24:3 (2009), 18-25 (p. 21).

³⁸⁷ Lee and Lessing, ‘A Conversation with Doris Lessing’, p. 21.

from the deadly constraints of war and empire, is inseparable from the subsequent memoir documenting the devastating personal impact of these histories. Despite the text's dual structure — which might seem to separate its two parts — the counterfactual world of Part I is irrevocably joined to the factual in Part II. This connection does not conflate the clear generic and thematic distinctions between the two, committing the critical error identified by David James as 'entirely suturing the book's two parts' together, rather than examining 'the breach between them'.³⁸⁸ However, I suggest that the tense relationship between Part I and Part II indicates that *Alfred and Emily* is a speculative memoir, one in which Lessing rewrites previous accounts of her life to better understand her memories of Southern Rhodesia. Writing in *Alfred and Emily*, Lessing describes this innovative late life narrative as an attempt to give her parents 'lives as might have been'.³⁸⁹ She goes on to explain that this is 'an antidote to what I actually lived in — Rhodesia at war, the last throbs of the British Empire'.³⁹⁰ Five decades earlier she had described white settlerdom as a 'mass disease'.³⁹¹ If *Alfred and Emily* is an antidote, its counterfactual first half initially appears to remedy Lessing's exposure to white supremacy. But instead the text circles back, inexorably, to the African bush, returning to her memories of the family's house on the kopje.

Lessing's childhood in the bush was marked by her father's 'obsessive talking about the trenches' and the later realisation that, '[although] my mother had no visible scars [...] she was as much a victim of the war as my father'.³⁹² In the book's preface, acknowledging the violent legacies of war and empire upon her own life, Lessing describes herself in old age: 'here I still am, trying to get out from under that monstrous legacy, trying to get free'.³⁹³ Lessing's final life narrative launches a conspicuously failed attempt to escape the heavy, interlocking histories of both World War I and

³⁸⁸ David James, *Discrepant Solace: Contemporary Literature and the Work of Consolation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 153.

³⁸⁹ *Alfred and Emily*, p. vii.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

³⁹¹ *Going Home*, p. 17.

³⁹² *Alfred and Emily*, p. 170; p. 172.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

the end of the British Empire in Southern Rhodesia. Even by re-routing history, Lessing's counterfactual narrative does not — or perhaps more accurately, cannot — bypass her memories of settler life. Contrary to previous interpretations of this hybrid text as 'life righting', or as a corrective to Lessing's colonial childhood, I suggest that her speculative life writing offers a further return to, and problematisation of, her entanglements with empire.³⁹⁴

Part One, Alfred and Emily: A Novella

The counterfactual narrative of Part I takes place in a world which, initially at least, promises 'only peace and plenty' amidst seemingly endless 'summer days when the sun always shone'.³⁹⁵ In the absence of war, Britain in the early twentieth century is described as a prosperous, self-satisfied nation. We are told that it 'was as full of big houses and high-living people as it had been in Edwardian times'.³⁹⁶ The alternative lives of Alfred Tayler and Emily McVeagh intersect only through brief social interactions, as Alfred's world of cricket matches, billiard games and country dances is marked by occasional trips to London. There he encounters Emily amidst his visits to the Trocadero or Cafe Royal. However, the novella offers an increasingly disillusioned view of this world as Alfred and Emily grow older; not everyone has benefitted from this age of peace and prosperity and Emily becomes increasingly concerned that children in London's East End are 'pitifully ill-fed' and so malnourished that 'their poor little ribs [are] sticking out'.³⁹⁷ As we are later told, 'the riches of Britain [...] did not seem to percolate downwards'.³⁹⁸ These scenes of urban poverty interrupt the earlier, sunny image of Britain in a tranquil age. Glimpses of social inequality disrupt the smooth surface of

³⁹⁴ Blake Morrison, 'The Righting of Lives', *The Guardian*, 17 May 2008
<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/may/17/fiction.dorislessing>> [accessed 22 September 2017]

³⁹⁵ *Alfred and Emily*, p. 3.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

the novella's counterfactual world. If, as Lessing states, the book's first half seeks to realise her mother's wish that she might enjoy her 'good years all over again', she does not allow her parents to inhabit a utopia.³⁹⁹ Behind the fantasy of a prosperous imperial nation, the novella reminds us, are the shadowy figures of hungry children, excluded from both the public image of unmitigated success and Emily's private memories of a glorious peacetime. *Alfred and Emily*, then, is not an exercise in wish-fulfilment.

From its beginning the novella also makes clear that the two halves of the text — parts I and II — are not separate, but interconnected. The boundaries between them are permeable, with Lessing's real memories occasionally breaking through the surface of the counterfactual novella. In several scenes the counterfactual is punctuated by the actual, as when Emily's difficult years at nurse training college are temporarily disturbed by Lessing's real memories of her mother, retelling similar tales of youthful hardship to a daughter 'who was usually out in the bush somewhere, dusty bare legs in *veldschoen*'.⁴⁰⁰ This is the startling appearance of a child (Lessing) who, within the novella, has been written out of existence. In such moments, Lessing deliberately lifts the thin veil of her alternative world, revealing how the counterfactual narrative is structured always as a response to her own recollections. This sudden appearance of the author emphasises how *Alfred and Emily*'s hazy vision of a counterfactual Britain is firmly rooted in the heat and dust of Lessing's Rhodesian childhood. When the counterfactual and the actual collide, the alternative England of the novella becomes a hallucination, a fulfilment of the fantasy Lessing heard from her mother many times over. Lessing's reparative promise that she will give both her parents their 'best years' again in the novella — fulfilling their dreams of returning to pre-war English life — is misleading. In actuality, Lessing's speculative novella does not take place in an ideal Britain, nor does she fully erase the actual childhood that inspired this counterfactual world. James astutely notes that by 'breaking through the diegetic frame' in such moments, 'Lessing suspends our immersion' in her counterfactual world.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁰¹ James, *Discrepant Solace*, p. 156.

Going further than this, I suggest that these moments of disruption also forge greater connections between the remembered Southern Rhodesia in Part II and the counterfactual Britain depicted in Part I. The novella purports to realise both Alfred's and Emily's frustrated dreams, and to do so within an idealised England, but what it actually delivers is the failure of this vision. As an alternative history it cannot fulfil its initial promise of prosperity and peace.

The novella's counterfactual Britain reveals the underlying imperial concerns of Lessing's speculative life writing. Even as it sustains an alternative narrative (uninterrupted by Lessing's actual memories) in Part I, war and empire remain the twinned driving forces of the text. We are informed that, by the 1910s, the nation was:

wealthy, was booming, was at a level of prosperity the leader writers and public figures congratulated themselves and everybody on. Britain had not had a war since the Boer War; nor were there wars in Western Europe, which was on a high level of well-being. It was enough only to contrast the dreadful situation of the old Austrian Empire and the Turkish Empire, in collapse, to know that keeping out of war was a recipe for prosperity. Various skirmishes in Africa, which could have grown worse, were damped down, because 'Why spoil what we have?' France, Germany, the Low Countries were booming.⁴⁰²

England remains here a deeply class-ridden society, where the social conditions of the Edwardian era continue uninterrupted amidst peace and prosperity, yet this imaginary nation is still squarely set in the context of counterfactual colonial histories. Rather than being resolutely defeated during the First World War, the Austrian and Ottoman Empires are in a state of steady decline. These alternative empires may be distant global events, but they continue to simmer in the background of Alfred and Emily's alternative lives. The self-satisfied complacency of the leader writers and public figures reveals, moreover, an international order where both Britain and western Europe remain in a position of uncontested authority. The reference to dampening 'various skirmishes in Africa' suggests that the twentieth-century anti-colonial struggles against European rule across the African continent have, in this counterfactual world, failed to take place.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

Although Britain has steered clear of global conflicts, the counterfactual London in which Emily lives is filled with citizens fulfilling their imperial fantasies by proxy. Londoners choose sides to support in the ongoing conflict between the Ottoman and the Serbian Empires.⁴⁰³ Lessing reports that women supporting the Ottoman forces wear their hair in ostentatious ringlets to demonstrate their political allegiance and brawl with their equally-extravagantly attired Serbian supporting opponents. Meanwhile ‘the shingle and the bobs Emily’s smart friends wore had begun because of the riots and civil war that marked the end of the Hapsburgs’.⁴⁰⁴ We might deduce from such fashionable choices that although Britain itself has steered clear of conflict, the novella nevertheless takes place in a Europe experiencing widespread imperial decline. Furthermore, as the narrative progresses this self-satisfied image of prosperity is punctured by glimpses of civil unrest. Despite altering historical events, European colonialism continues to dominate Lessing’s alternative nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She modifies, but does not escape from the histories of empire which impacted so resoundingly upon her own life.

The young male counterparts of these coiffured women are restless, keen for their nation to re-enter international conflicts. Wearing army fatigues and polished boots, their homemade uniforms articulate the frustrated belief that they are ‘surplus to requirements’ because they do not have a British war effort to join.⁴⁰⁵ Beneath the frivolities of unnecessary uniforms and ostentatious hairdos, the young Cedric reminds his Aunt Emily that ‘we are the surplus generation; we have to assert ourselves’.⁴⁰⁶ Britain’s prosperous, uninterrupted future ironically excludes the nation’s youth, who are viewed as an unwanted excess. Unable to bolster the ranks of their own army, ‘the young men

⁴⁰³ The inclusion of a Serbian Empire in Lessing’s counterfactual world is at odds with the novella’s other, alternative imperial histories: while the reign of the Hapsburgs and the Ottoman Empire were both ended by WWI, the decline of the Serbian Empire took place over five hundred years earlier, as the Serbian Despotate was finally conquered by Ottoman forces in 1459. Lessing’s counterfactual timeline is therefore not one which consistently departs from reality in or around 1914, but is a speculative life narrative which conjures an impressionistic, counterfactual backdrop of imperial decline to Alfred’s and Emily’s lives.

⁴⁰⁴ *Alfred and Emily*, p. 81.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

were going off to London and signing up with recruiters for service in the wars that were going on elsewhere.⁴⁰⁷ Later, one of these returning soldiers describes his experiences of the Transvaal in South Africa to Emily. The younger generations described in *Alfred and Emily* are all motivated by colonial ambitions. They can fulfil these by proxy or, alternatively, by fighting as mercenaries in foreign wars. Lessing's counterfactual novella does not conjure a utopia, but reconsiders what Britain would be without its imperial ambitions, devoid of its aggressively held position at the centre of a global Empire. Cedric's generation assert its imperial sympathies by brawling on the street, or fighting as paid soldiers, because the nation does not require them to maintain its colonies and territories abroad. At the heart of Lessing's counterfactual novella is the implicit suggestion that, even in this counterfactual world, Britain cannot conceptualise a future without its Empire.

Although writing speculatively allows Lessing to alter the course of events which led to her Rhodesian childhood (namely, the outbreak of war and her parents' marriage), imperialism continues to simmer below the surface of the narrative. In moments when Lessing's actual recollections disrupt the novella's counterfactual world, we are reminded that her real memories of settler life are barely repressed in this alternative twentieth century. Reading *Alfred and Emily*'s novella as steeped in suppressed imperial histories troubles Elizabeth Maslen's assessment that Part I 'casts a kindly eye on a possible past'.⁴⁰⁸ This reading also contradicts Judith Kegan Gardiner's interpretation of Part I as offering 'the happier fictionalised alternative' to Lessing's actual life, 'happier for the individuals and the English nation'.⁴⁰⁹ In actuality, beneath the veneer of a wealthy Britain, Lessing's counterfactual narrative visualises the nation as perched uneasily at a crossroads, unable either to fulfil its younger generations' colonial ambitions or to reform a deeply stratified society. Contrary to Maslen's and Gardiner's visions of a utopia, this alternative Britain is one riven with inequalities and

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 108.

⁴⁰⁸ Elizabeth Maslen, *Doris Lessing*, 2nd edn (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2014), p. 101.

⁴⁰⁹ Judith Kegan Gardiner, 'Afterword: Encompassing Lessing' in *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings*, ed. by Alice Ridout and Susan Watkins (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 160-166 (p. 161).

steeped in the legacies of multiple empires. Thus, the colonial context of Lessing's life emerges in *Alfred and Emily* as inescapable; even as the text pursues a counterfactual reality, Lessing is unable to fully relinquish her memories of life both during and after empire.

Lessing's typescripts of *Alfred and Emily*, held at the Harry Ransom Center, reveal that the text went through at least six drafts. The dual structure and its key thematic concerns with war and empire are present in all of these. There is, however, one striking discrepancy between these typescripts and the final, published text: all six versions contain an italicised fable in which Lessing explains the imperial origins of her counterfactual novella. This was omitted at a relatively late stage, and without explanation, from the final page proofs. In this fable the Emperor of Germany meets a wise old Sage at the beginning of the twentieth century. The latter has seen into Europe's future and, horrified by the bloody events of the First and Second World Wars, determines to put a stop to the carnage. The Sage announces to the King, 'I am going to tell you what will happen' if he should instigate war in Europe, but the Emperor, being a greedy man, is too busy dreaming 'of having a navy as great as Britain's, and possessions in Africa to match'.⁴¹⁰ In this initial, frustrated exchange between the Sage and the monarch one crucial fact, absent from the published text of *Alfred and Emily*, is made clear: in this counterfactual world Britain remains at the head of a global empire. The nation's 'possessions in Africa' are cause for envy amongst other Europe nations. Britain's exploitation of colonial labour and mineral wealth is responsible for its pre-eminent position on the world stage, and we are led to infer that the glories of its uninterrupted Edwardian age rely upon its overseas territories.

Seeing that the King will not listen, and in order to prevent the ruin and devastation of Europe, the Sage puts him to sleep, giving him suggestive dreams:

When he [the King] woke only one idea was in his head. "I must conquer Africa. Yes, that's it. Why have I not really considered it before? Africa is so large...it has plenty of space ... there are only some blacks in it ... it has all that mineral wealth ... yes, of course, that's what I'll do." Thoughts of a war where Germany would triumph over the whole of Europe had unaccountably

⁴¹⁰ Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Doris Lessing Papers, MS-2460.

vanished from his mind. [...] William instructed his chiefs of staff, his generals, to halt the already well-advanced plans for mobilisation for war in Europe and adapt them for an invasion of Africa.⁴¹¹

This fable suggests that war between Germany and allied European powers can only be prevented, in Lessing's counterfactual novella, through a colonial land grab. In a manoeuvre of imaginary depopulation — the King lies to himself that 'there are only some' Africans already living on the land — the sovereign imagines that he might claim an (almost) terra nullius. This remarkable segment, which is present in all of Lessing's drafts, reveals that *Alfred and Emily's* counterfactual world was predicated on the First World War being averted *because of* Germany's redoubled colonial ambitions. While in actuality this global conflict was a direct result of imperial competition, in this alternative history Western Europe's competing nations are allied through imperial ambition and greed. Therefore, although catastrophe and ruin has been averted from Alfred's and Emily's alternative lives, directing them away from an unsuccessful farm in Southern Rhodesia, Lessing frames her counterfactual world with an alternative history of European colonialism. The King's decision to brief his generals and staff on an invasion of Africa echoes the real precedent, established in the nineteenth century and later described by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, that 'the fate of Africa' would be decided 'around conference tables in the metropolises of the western world'.⁴¹² While Lessing's drafts reveal a counterfactual history — wherein the German Emperor/monarch dreams of Africa's seemingly unlimited resources — this clearly responds to real events. The 1884 Berlin Conference prompted a scramble for territories in Africa amongst European nations, inaugurating a renewed and devastating period of colonial rule across the African continent. Lessing's novella demonstrates that the factual and the counterfactual are not dichotomous. Both respond to Lessing's childhood memories and the attendant histories of empire. It is crucial that, while the novella's counterfactual Britain claims to be

⁴¹¹ MS-2460. fol. 1.6.

⁴¹² Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1986), p. 4.

prosperous, even peaceful, it nevertheless exists within a geopolitical context where Europe's nations are renewing, rather than dismantling, their overseas colonies.

I suggest that this deleted excerpt is of vital importance. It reveals how the imperial background to *Alfred and Emily*'s counterfactual novella was foregrounded within each of Lessing's drafted versions. While the fable itself was excised at a relatively late stage in the text's production, these imperial concerns are nevertheless present within the final published text, manifest in descriptions of frivolous hairstyles and a complacent nation whose youth, in the absence of an imperial cause, feel 'surplus to requirements'.⁴¹³ Moreover, Lessing's fable demonstrates how, by rewriting her parent's lives through a counterfactual novella, she further scrutinises the legacies of European colonialism in Africa. I suggest that this alternative world cannot help but be a return to, rather than an escape from, the scenes from Lessing's childhood recounted in 'Part II "Alfred and Emily; Two Lives"'.

Part Two, Alfred and Emily: Two Lives

The majority of scenes from Lessing's colonial childhood within Part II have been previously described in her earlier life writings. Consequently, there is almost no new content in this short memoir. Yet in this final retelling Lessing undoes the developmental chronology of *Under My Skin* and rejects the dense social and historical contexts of her travel memoirs, *Going Home* and *African Laughter*. Part II of *Alfred and Emily* fragments scenes from these earlier life narratives, offering a series of vividly described episodes from Lessing's childhood accompanied by brief, reflective commentaries. This memoir is distinguished from the earlier biographical sketches of her parents and her previous life writings by insisting that there can be no conclusion or closure from these memories. Even when it appears to be rewriting history, Lessing's speculative life writing marks the limits of self-reinvention and my readings therefore outline how her colonial childhood frames both parts of

⁴¹³ *Alfred and Emily*, p. 92.

Alfred and Emily. Even as her turn to speculation suggests an escape from Southern Rhodesia, Lessing returns to the familiar setting of her parents' farmhouse on the veld. Just as the counterfactual world of Part I leads back to European colonialism in Africa, Part II marks a further return to Lessing's settler childhood in Southern Rhodesia.

The second part of *Alfred and Emily* confesses that, despite her many autobiographical writings, Lessing still 'cannot make sense of Time in its boundaries', as she struggles to contain her childhood within either a single life narrative or a developmental chronology.⁴¹⁴ This is reflected in Part II's structure, which fragments Lessing's memories of empire, retelling them through brief episodes rather than through a linear, progressive narrative. The result is a deliberately narrowed view of settler domesticity, which rarely strays beyond the boundaries of the family's former homestead and plots an uneven course through her parents' disappointed years in southern Africa. I suggest that, through these fragments and her own declarations of temporal disruption, Lessing's speculative life writing rejects the grand narratives of empire in which British colonialism functions as an upward arc of imperial progress. Rather — in ways that anticipate Chapter Three's discussions of imperial debris in Frame's autobiographies — Lessing focusses on the battered objects which cluttered her former childhood home. These recollected possessions demonstrate the impossibility of her parents achieving their anticipated future of prosperous, colonial settlement. Each of these items — including threadbare Persian rugs, battered brass bowls and moth-eaten dresses — reflects the lives her parents had *hoped* to lead in Southern Rhodesia. They had envisaged themselves as inhabiting a world of colonial comforts that would be brought to a timely end by a planned retreat to Britain. Lured to Southern Rhodesia by an advertisement which promised 'get rich on maize', Lessing's parents had planned to stay in the country for only five years, long enough to make their fortunes and leave.⁴¹⁵ But Alfred and Emily were unable to realise the colonial myth of easy prosperity that had led them to southern Africa. The family did not make enough money to sell their farm and return home, and

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

their lives on a rural frontier of white settlement were neither comfortable nor profitable. Lessing's speculative life writing therefore employs a counterfactual novella and a claustrophobic, fragmented account of Southern Rhodesia to suggest her inability to escape these foundational memories of frontier settlerdom.

Part II's narrative outlines how, after their encounter with the fateful advertisement at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition, Lessing's parents created a fantasy of their future lives on the veld inspired by their experiences in colonial Persia. Both were to be disappointed. The unrealised colonial fantasies which dominate Part II are, I contend, crucial to understanding Lessing's deployment of the counterfactual in Part I. Lessing explores the consequences of her parents' frustrated dreams through the items of luggage that both carried with them to Southern Rhodesia in anticipation of their new lives in Africa. Her father's held 'accoutrements and clothes for cricket: he had scarcely played in Persia but now he was going to a British colony and cricket there must be'.⁴¹⁶ Another trunk contained riding gear that he would never use as the soil around the farm was unsuited to horses. According to Part II, Lessing's father was delighted to be free from the constraints of his imagined life, which left him able to pursue a frugal existence as a farmer. However, Lessing notes that her father quietly cultivated another ambition, hoping that the move from Kermanshah's imperial bank to farming in southern Africa would allow him to 'fulfil his dream to buy a farm in Essex or Suffolk, and be an English farmer'.⁴¹⁷ Sifting through the neglected contents of Alfred's trunk, Lessing carefully describes how her father had been tempted and entrapped by a narrative of imperial and personal progress, one in which ex-soldiers would be sent to farm on the fringes of empire, so that they might later return and become wealthy landowners in Britain.

The contents of her mother's luggage also reveal an imagined life, anticipating a middle-class European existence which necessitated 'the trunk with the dozen or so dark-red leather volumes of music scores [along with] a trunk, "Wanted on Voyage" of evening frocks [...] silvery stockings,

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., p. 164.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., p. 174.

brocaded shoes'.⁴¹⁸ Emily, unlike her husband, saw social liberation in the rituals and outfits of colonial life, which she imagined as a composite of her previous experiences in Persia and tales of the notorious 'happy valley set' in Kenya.⁴¹⁹ Her luggage trunks were filled with practical items too, including nursing equipment and teaching resources such as 'crayons and chinks, and books'.⁴²⁰ Whether as an English farmer or a successful educator, Lessing suggests that her parents were fatally motivated by the image of their idealised, counterfactual existences. Through a conjunction of the counterfactual and the actual, her speculative life writing reveals how her parents' lives were dictated by the failed promises of empire. Neither section of *Alfred and Emily* surpasses the inescapable histories of empire, nor does it ameliorate the difficulties and isolation of colonial life. Similarly, neither the actual nor the counterfactual narratives of *Alfred and Emily* allow Lessing's parents to recoup their disappointed fantasies. The objects within their luggage emphasise how Alfred's and Emily's dreams of imperial progress are resolutely frustrated. These unrealised dreams find further expression in a speculative life narrative which can never quite deliver the promise of their counterfactual lives.

Throughout Part II, Lessing returns to one particular possession: a trunk, designed to carry luggage and marked 'Wanted on Voyage' that had belonged to her mother. It appears several times throughout her life writing and came to symbolise her parents' marooned lives on the farm.⁴²¹ Ironically, their inability to escape Southern Rhodesia is condensed, within Lessing's life writing, into the archetypal possession of international travellers. The trunk was supposed to indicate their mobile existence but instead its permanent position in their household announced the impossibility of a return voyage to Britain. As Lessing had already described in *Under My Skin*, Emily arrived in

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., p. 164.

⁴¹⁹ Beryl Markham's account of Nairobi (then part of British East Africa) in *West With the Night* (1942) personifies the city as the keeper of 'an English garden' who 'dresses for dinner, passes its port-wine clockwise and loves a horse-race'. Here, Markham retrospectively describes the white society Lessing's mother hoped to discover in Southern Rhodesia.— Beryl Markham, *West With the Night* (London: Virago Press, 2015), p. 165.

⁴²⁰ *Alfred and Emily*, p. 165.

⁴²¹ Lessing, 'Impertinent Daughters'; *Under My Skin*, pp. 104-106.

Africa armed ‘with the necessities for a middle-class life’ and her daughter would later understand this particular item of luggage as ‘a symbol for my parents’ exile’.⁴²² In *Alfred and Emily*, Lessing describes ‘in the house, under the thatch, pushed against the mud walls, was a “Wanted on Voyage” cabin trunk and in it were evening dresses and shawls, but on a tray at the top were fans, scarves [...] and there were the silk black [gloves], with minute jet buttons to the elbow’.⁴²³ In a single sentence, packed with details and numerous clauses, we journey from the exterior of the property to the interior of the home, and then beyond that into the interior of the trunk, which occupies the heart of the farmhouse. The black evening gloves with their jet buttons are an object of interest to Lessing, not just because of their material worth, but because they act as a window into the alternative life that Emily believed she would enjoy in Southern Rhodesia. The gloves indicate another world of opulence and luxury, which lay far beyond the confines of the family farm. But they are also a connection to a world that Lessing can explore only through the previous account of Emily’s counterfactual life. They suggest the life her mother *might* have led, rather than her actual, difficult experiences in a settler colony of southern Africa.

Lessing returns to the trunk several times within *Alfred and Emily*, later recounting the afternoon when she and her mother finally examine its contents together. Lessing was fascinated by the clothes and accessories inside, but a green linen dress catches her eye, prompting her mother to exclaim:

‘Imagine what people would say if I put that on in Banket.’

‘But what is it for?’

‘That’s a garden-party dress.’

A garden party!

‘You know the park in Salisbury? Well, imagine it with English trees, and English shrubs and flowers. There would be music, you see, and a big marquee with tea and refreshments.’

And now she was crying, and wiping her eyes.

[...]

‘I’m being very silly’, she announced, and swept herself up to her feet. ‘You’d better have these,’ she said. ‘You can use them for dressing up, Or cut them up, if you like...’⁴²⁴

⁴²² *Under My Skin*, p. 59; p. 104.

⁴²³ *Alfred and Emily*, p. 196

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 203-204.

I suggest that Part II of *Alfred and Emily* is structured, through its fragmentary episodes, like a matryoshka doll; each fragmented scene is a container encasing another smaller fragment inside. The reader therefore uncovers the family farm, the house, and the ‘Wanted on Voyage’ trunk before finally, at its centre, discovering the moth-eaten remains of the linen dress and shining black evening gloves. In these depleted items, which lie at the heart of Lessing’s speculative memoir, all the anticipated possibilities of the family’s colonial life are dissolved, destroyed by their actual experiences of rural settlerdom. Instead of the longed-for colonial garden parties — emblematic perhaps of Lively’s memories of Bulaq Dakhrur in *Oleander, Jacaranda* — the moth-eaten dress reveals the tenuous nature of the family’s existence in Southern Rhodesia. This encounter with the green linen outfit lays bare Emily’s dreams of empire. Being unable to realise these, or to move beyond the claustrophobic confines of her settler life — where people would gape if she were to wear the clothes on a trip to the nearby town of Banket — Emily can only suggest that Lessing destroys the cherished dresses. As their conversation takes place in the 1930s, the outfits created for Emily in 1924 are already unfashionable, their low-slung waistlines and shimmering material making them relics from an earlier time. Just as Lessing ‘can’t seem to make sense of Time in its boundaries’, her parents are also described as suffering from this temporal disruption, marooned in a fantasy of an Edwardian, imperial age that neither are able to realise.⁴²⁵ Neither the counterfactual nor the actual narratives of *Alfred and Emily* allow them to escape or move beyond this era. The failures and frustrations described within both parts of *Alfred and Emily* suggest how Lessing, along with her parents, is caught within these experiences of late-colonial life, trapped within the farmhouse on the hill.

Alfred and Emily purports to be a resolution, realising Lessing’s desire to give both her parents the lives they imagined by re-routing them away from Southern Rhodesia. But ultimately it neither provides nor sustains any of these consolatory visions. Instead, Lessing’s speculative memoir

⁴²⁵ Ibid., p. 159.

concludes with the stultifying atmosphere of white society, describing ‘those long afternoons that went on ... and on ... and on’.⁴²⁶ It was this world of verandahs and claustrophobic gossip that she felt so compelled to escape. Lessing acknowledges that ‘those years before we all left Rhodesia’ were a turning point in history — ushering in a post-war age — but her view does not expand to include a time after or beyond empire.⁴²⁷ *Alfred and Emily* is an encounter with colonialism’s life-long grip over both Lessing and her parents. By returning to the fragments and leftovers of her settler childhood, she might appear to rewrite her own upbringing through a counterfactual world, yet she repeatedly situates the narrative within the claustrophobic confines of colonial life. Lessing began her career as an author in 1950, immediately after leaving Southern Rhodesia for a new life in England. *Alfred and Emily* ends with her departure from Africa, therefore concluding at the beginning of Lessing’s life writing project. Although the text finishes with Lessing teetering on the edge of a new era, about to journey into a post-war world, it is to Southern Rhodesia that her life narratives are consistently compelled to return to.

Alfred and Emily has been typically read as a satisfying ending to the ‘process of filial reconciliation’ in which Lessing ‘imagine[s] and fashion[s] more satisfying lives for her parents’.⁴²⁸ Yet, as I have shown, Lessing’s final, experimental memoir refuses to provide consolation for her complicated relationship with both her parents and her memories of settler life. The permeable boundaries between novella and memoir suggest the need to read both, side-by-side, as a speculative life narrative. While the novella exempts Alfred Tayler and Emily McVeagh from their lives farming on the fringes of the British Empire, their alternative lives take place against a backdrop of imperial power and decline. As my readings of Lessing’s drafts demonstrate, this counterfactual narrative was initially framed within a fable of European colonialism, wherein the First World War is averted only through the German invasion of Africa. The imperial world of the novella therefore bleeds into

⁴²⁶ Ibid., p. 270.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., p. 272.

⁴²⁸ Roberta Rubenstein, *Literary Half-Lives: Doris Lessing, Clancy Sigal and Roman à Clef* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 193; p. 199.

Lessing's actual memories of the British Empire in Part II, with each informing the other. Crucially, neither section successfully escapes from Lessing's early life. In the final chapters of *Alfred and Emily*, Lessing outlines her parents' various schemes for 'getting-off-the-farm'.⁴²⁹ Her speculative memoir repeatedly rehearses the possibility of this departure, offering a counterfactual account which surpasses Southern Rhodesia, only to return to the confined world of her settler childhood once more. Within this text, neither Lessing nor her parents are ever truly able to get off the farm.

Reading *Alfred and Emily* as an attempt at speculative life writing departs from previous critics' assessments that insist on the 'sharp divide between the counterfactual first part of the book and the second' which they understand as, at best, 'a postscript' to Lessing's more developed autobiographical work.⁴³⁰ *Alfred and Emily* occupies a crucial, albeit complicated, position within the larger constellation of Lessing's life writings. We should, as David James suggests, be suspicious of Lessing's own claims in the book's preface and explanatory passages that the text is a work of 'reconciliation and consolation'.⁴³¹ This is not a final or definitive conclusion to Lessing's life writing project, in which she writes herself out of or beyond her memories of empire. Rather, the text is an experimental return that demonstrates the impossibility of escape. *Alfred and Emily* is vital to understanding how Lessing's life writing project, and its ties to the British Empire, could be neither concluded nor finally resolved. Even as it promises to reconcile Lessing with her settler childhood, allowing her life narratives to escape from Southern Rhodesia, it loops back to her memories of the veld and the family's farm. Lessing's last, speculative memoir is thus not an ending, but a beginning, one which closes the loop of her life writing and sends the reader spiralling back into her networked depictions of life during and after empire.

The House on the Hill: *Going Home* and *African Laughter: Four Visits to Zimbabwe*

⁴²⁹ *Alfred and Emily*, p. 255.

⁴³⁰ Dorothee Birke, 'Doris Lessing's "Alfred and Emily" and the Ethics of Narrated Memory' in *Narrated Communities - Narrated Realities: Narration as Cognitive Processing and Cultural Practice*, ed. by Hermann Blume et al. (Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2015) pp. 141-153 (p. 141).

⁴³¹ James, *Discrepant Solace*, p. 152.

Australia and New Zealand, Canada and the United States, Brazil, Africa — it is always the same story. The white men came, saw, coveted, conquered. The children and grandchildren of these invaders condemn their grandparents, wish they could repudiate their own history. But that is not so easy.

— Doris Lessing, 'Preface to the 1973 collection' in *This Was the Old Chief's Country*

If *Alfred and Emily* sends us back into the network of Lessing's earlier life narratives, the remainder of this chapter follows this trajectory, pursuing a reverse route into the corpus of Lessing's life writing. More specifically, I am prompted by the returns to Southern Rhodesia in Lessing's speculative life writing to examine her travel narratives *Going Home* and *African Laughter*. These document her numerous return journeys to Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, traversing the boundaries between journalism, travel writing and autobiography. Both texts collate the author's travelogues with interviews, diversions into trade union disputes, official reports and other commentaries. Neither book, as critics have noted, makes for easy reading, with digressions into the history, politics and geographies of Lessing's former home obscuring her personal journey in both narratives.⁴³² While *Going Home* offers a relatively concise account of Lessing's seven-week return trip to Southern Rhodesia in 1956 (during which she became a prohibited immigrant and was banned from re-entering the country), *African Laughter* is a sprawling rendition of four separate journeys to the newly independent Zimbabwe between 1982 and 1992. In both, Lessing tracks unfolding developments within her former homeland, from the 'the stale patterns of white domination' during the 1950s to the complications faced by a newly independent nation throughout the 1980s.⁴³³ Across these memoirs, Lessing lives up to her reputation as one of Southern Rhodesia's fiercest critics. In *Going Home* she

⁴³² John McAllister argues Lessing's radical overhaul of traditional travel writing in *African Laughter* forges an alternative to the goal-orientated, colonial quest narrative, but that Lessing's multi-faceted vision of modern Zimbabwe, staged across four parts, is delivered 'at some cost to the pleasures readers usually look for in travel literature.' — John McAllister, 'Knowing Native: Going Native', in *Zimbabwean Transitions: Essays on Zimbabwean Literature in English, Ndebele and Shona*, ed. by Mbongeni Z. Malaba and Geoffrey V. Davis (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 25-38 (p. 29).

⁴³³ *Going Home*, p. 18.

remains committed to exposing ‘the paranoia, the adolescent sentimentality [and] the neurosis’ of white society, while in *African Laughter* she is scathing of the ubiquitous ‘monologue’, her term for the circular criticisms that ‘feverish whites’ launched against their new black government.⁴³⁴

Although Lessing’s travel memoirs record daily life in Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, I outline how these documentary narratives are also tempered by frequent, autobiographical forays into Lessing’s early life. *Going Home* and *African Laughter* are vital components within the wider corpus of Lessing’s life writing, articulating her conflicted sense of belonging to southern Africa through a series of frustrated returns to her family’s house on the hill. The ‘long, cigar-shaped dwelling’ which was home to the Tayler family for almost two decades, made of mud and thatch and ‘built high, on a kopje’, is the central node to which these two meandering, loosely structured travel narratives continuously return.⁴³⁵ As this chapter has already intimated, the cracked linoleum floors, Liberty’s patterned curtains and the luggage trunks of Lessing’s childhood home appear across her life writing, including in Part II of *Alfred and Emily* and throughout *Under My Skin*. Yet the compulsion to return to the family’s former farm in Lessing’s travel memoirs emphasises the need to firmly contextualise her life writing within the fraught histories of white settlement in Southern Rhodesia and Zimbabwe.⁴³⁶ I suggest that her ferocious criticism of ‘that dreadful provincial country’ and her decision to reside permanently in London from 1949 onwards, can obscure the connections between her life writing and white settlerdom.⁴³⁷ I also suggest that this complicates the attempts to return

⁴³⁴ *Going Home*, p. 299; *African Laughter*, p. 89.

⁴³⁵ *Going Home*, p. 38.

⁴³⁶ The issue of land ownership and the predicament of white farmers in Zimbabwe was significantly complicated in the new millennium by Robert Mugabe’s controversial fast-track land reforms. Lessing responded to the expulsion of the white farmers from their land in the 2003 article, ‘The Tragedy of Zimbabwe’. Here she laments the squandering of Zimbabwe’s rich, natural resources, arguing that her former homeland had been ‘ruined, dishonoured, disgraced’ by Mugabe’s regime. She particularly criticised the government’s decision to take back white-owned land by violent means. However, the controversial history of land reform in post-2000 Zimbabwe is subsequent to *Going Home* and *African Laughter* and it is beyond the remit of this chapter to discuss this in any significant depth. — Doris Lessing, ‘The Tragedy of Zimbabwe’ in *Time Bites: Views and Reviews* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), pp. 231-247 (p. 231).

⁴³⁷ *Walking in the Shade*, p. 3.

home within her travel writing. By re-reading Lessing's travel memoirs and examining their fascination with her childhood home, I outline how her life writing is specifically forged in response to — and is inescapably bound up with — the particular forms of white belonging developed by Rhodesian settlers throughout the twentieth century.

As *Going Home* makes clear, Lessing was an unusual dissident within the otherwise almost-uniform conservative white society of her former homeland.⁴³⁸ Her return trip in 1956 prompted various school-friends to approach her on the streets of Salisbury (now Harare), chastising her communist sympathies and decrying her vocal criticism of the Rhodesian government. While these former acquaintances pleaded with her to 'write something nice about us for a change', strangers adopted a more threatening approach, giving her tarred feathers and attempting to pour drinks over her in crowded bars.⁴³⁹ Despite these frequent and occasionally violent encounters, Lessing describes her feeling of being immediately at home in Southern Rhodesia; before even disembarking from the plane she luxuriates in the return to 'my air, my landscape and, above all, my sun'.⁴⁴⁰ Lessing remained resolutely critical of white rule and racial segregation across her career, yet her sense of belonging in southern Africa, along with her need to recreate and return to the house on the hill, neither escapes nor surpasses the colonial legacies of land seizure and settlement.

Despite the distinct differences between Lessing's two travel memoirs, both *Going Home* and *African Laughter* conclude with similar discussions of land distribution in Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. In *Going Home*, Lessing explains that 'the basis of white domination in Southern Rhodesia was the Land Apportionment Act, which took away land from the Africans and gave it to the Europeans', while also dictating how and when 'Africans were to live in "white"

⁴³⁸ Lessing's vociferous criticism of white rule and settlement in Southern Rhodesia was almost unmatched by her predecessors and contemporaries, with the exception of singular figures such as Arthur Shearly Cripps (1869-1952), an Anglican priest who repeatedly agitated for black rights in his published writings. In her second autobiography, Lessing identified Cripps as a lonely voice of white dissent in Southern Rhodesia. — *Walking in the Shade*, p. 179.

⁴³⁹ *Going Home*, p. 67; p. 188; p. 277.

⁴⁴⁰ *Going Home*, p. 10.

areas'.⁴⁴¹ This Act was not so much a singular piece of legislation, but octopus-like: its tentacular influence on every element of daily life was hard to comprehend in full and even harder to trace back to an individual document. The Land Apportionment Act was, in other words, inseparable from the Rhodesian settler state. *African Laughter* also closes with a reflection on the consequences of this legislation, concluding with a final entry — entitled *The Agriculture* — describing how 'under the whites most Africans lived in the Native Reserves', while the 'whites took the good land for their own farms'.⁴⁴² Though neither text offers a conventional conclusion, both end by reflecting on the consequences of land theft and 'redistribution' under settler colonialism. While the fraught histories of white settlement resonate across Lessing's life writing, her travel memoirs in particular reveal how her attempts to return 'home' are both contextualised and disconcerted by these colonial legacies.

As I have already outlined in the introduction to this chapter, Lessing remains a singular voice amongst white Rhodesian/Zimbabwean life writers in her repudiation of settler life. As Astrid Rasch and others have noted, there was a notable 'outpouring of memoirs by white Zimbabweans' following Robert Mugabe's land reforms at the turn of the twenty-first century.⁴⁴³ Many of these texts ignore the fact that Mugabe's policies were a direct response to the earlier, violent excesses of white rule. I contend that Lessing's nuanced examinations of homecoming and belonging in *Going Home* and *African Laughter* surpass the autobiographical efforts of all her successors. Recent memoirs by white Zimbabweans do, however, provide an important context for my own readings of Lessing's life writing. Wendy Kann recalls the powerful consensus underpinning her childhood in which 'all Rhodesian settlers believed themselves superior to blacks,' encouraging a unanimous and paternalistic racism which supported white claims to be at home in the African landscape.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴¹ *Going Home*, p. 302.

⁴⁴² *African Laughter*, p. 442.

⁴⁴³ Astrid Rasch, 'Postcolonial Nostalgia: The Ambiguities of White Memoirs of Zimbabwe', *History & Memory*, 30:2 (2018), 147-180 (p. 151).

⁴⁴⁴ Wendy Kann, *Casting With a Fragile Thread: A Story of Sisters and Africa* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), pp. 54-55.

Academic studies of Southern Rhodesia concur with Kann's judgement.⁴⁴⁵ These comments offer a stark reminder that Lessing's relationship with the landscape she describes as 'her myth country' — the landscape surrounding her family's property — was both profound and an ideologically risky business. A privileged minority of whites in Southern Rhodesia, who made up less than five per cent of the country's population, owned and occupied one third of its farming land.⁴⁴⁶ Settlers controlled and owned 'the greater part of the most fertile land'.⁴⁴⁷ Consequently, numerous Rhodesian/Zimbabwean life writers articulate a powerful sense of belonging to the 'tillable, rain-turned-over-fresh, fertile, worm-smelling soil', describing an umbilical connection to their farms which, if severed, means 'depriving us of air, water, food'.⁴⁴⁸ With repeated claims to an ahistorical rootedness in the soil, the white farmer is imagined in memoirs such as Fuller's *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* or Rogers' *The Last Resort* as a protector or custodian of this natural environment, rather than a coloniser or settler. As Rory Pilosof outlines, the memoirs and autobiographies of many white former Rhodesians prefer to imagine that their holdings had previously been 'barren, "empty" lands', using this as a defence 'of ownership, place and belonging that has a long tradition in Zimbabwe/Rhodesia'.⁴⁴⁹

Lessing's own return journeys to the farm and the 'myth country which tugged and pulled' at her heart describes a personal connection in conflict with her political commitments to criticising the 'stale patterns of white domination'.⁴⁵⁰ In an attempt to navigate this contradiction, her travel memoirs look to develop an alternative connection to the southern African landscape, one not predicated on

⁴⁴⁵ Kate Law stresses that, throughout the changes to the Rhodesian settler state during the twentieth century, 'white Rhodesians retained an unwavering belief in their racial superiority and the legitimacy of settler rule'. — Kate Law, *Gendering the Settler State: White Women, Race, Liberalism and Empire in Rhodesia 1950-1980* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 35.

⁴⁴⁶ David McDermott Hughes, *Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape and the Problem of Belonging* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 73.

⁴⁴⁷ Allison Goebel, *Gender and Land Reform: The Zimbabwe Experience* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), p. 7.

⁴⁴⁸ Fuller, *Don't Let's Go To The Dogs Tonight*, pp. 153-154.

⁴⁴⁹ Rory Pilosof, *The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: Farmers' Voices from Zimbabwe* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2012), p. 164.

⁴⁵⁰ *African Laughter*, p. 314; *Going Home*, p. 18.

ownership and settlement. They do so with limited success. Lessing's numerous attempts to return home in *Going Home* and *African Laughter* must therefore be read through the material and imaginative projects of white settlement in Southern Rhodesia. Reading across these two texts highlights how Lessing's refusal to return to the site of the farm in *Going Home*, along with her imaginative conjurings of this primary location, do little to resolve her conflicted relationship with her settler past. Furthermore, the eventual result of this delayed return journey to the site of Kermanshah Farm (her former home) in *African Laughter* is the *refusal* of closure in Lessing's life writing, rather than its attainment. Although *Alfred & Emily* returns to Lessing's earlier memoirs, here again her multiple journeys are able only to consider, rather than actually arrive at, her childhood home. As the following readings highlight, Lessing's repeated returns to the farm will not resolve her tense relationship with the colonial past. These memoirs wrestle with the difficulty of establishing a form of white belonging that might surpass the legacies of Rhodesian settlement. While critics have remarked that Lessing's colonial experiences both confined and 'cast her forever in a marginal role', *Going Home's* and *African Laughter's* returns to the house on the hill are not a failure to achieve a postcolonial model of self-representation.⁴⁵¹ These challenging accounts of Lessing's travels across her former homeland expose the risks and limitations of returning to the location of her settler childhood and the idiosyncratic settler colonial context of Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe.

***Going Home*: 'The hill where the house used to be'**

In the second volume of her autobiography Lessing explains how, in 1956, after nearly eight years in London, she realised she 'needed to go back' to Southern Rhodesia 'because my Rhodesian years seemed so distant, so cut off from me, and I was dreaming every night, long sad dreams of frontiers and lost landscapes'.⁴⁵² The subsequent trip she made to her former homeland was the basis for her

⁴⁵¹ Eve Bertelsen, 'Introduction' in *Doris Lessing*, ed. by Eve Bertelsen (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1985), pp. 15-28 (p. 25).

⁴⁵² *Walking in the Shade*, p. 172.

first travel memoir, *Going Home*. Shortly after her arrival she began to consider returning to her family's former farm:

All the way from Salisbury I was telling myself that now I would be firm, and turn off from Banket up past the police station, and along that red-dust road. [...] Yes. I said, turning the car sharply over the glittering hot railway lines, 'now I must certainly go and see how the hill where the house used to be rises empty and bush-covered from the mealie fields.' But I did not go.⁴⁵³

Despite Lessing's familiarity with the geographies of her former home — she traverses the railway tracks, roads and fields that might lead the traveller to this site — the house itself is an absence at the centre of this personal, mapped terrain. It forms a lacuna at the heart of Lessing's imaginative, cartographic sketch of home. By train, car or on foot, the approach reveals only an absence at the top of a small hill, an empty space surrounded by bush. This is the first description of a possible return to the property within Lessing's life writing. It reveals the emotional charge with which she recalls her childhood home and the acknowledged impossibility of returning to the long-gone material structure (the house had crumbled 'returned to the soil, was swallowed by the bush' less than a year after her family abandoned it).⁴⁵⁴ *Going Home* is ostensibly a work of reportage, recording how Lessing undertook her seven-week trip to report on the developing political situation in Southern Rhodesia, doing so under the sponsorship of the Soviet news agency, Tass. As Jenny Taylor notes, Lessing's authorial position shifts throughout the narrative; at times she is a journalist, vigorously interrogating trade union leaders, at others she is a life writer, exploring her own contradictory connections to her former homeland.⁴⁵⁵ For Taylor, this results in 'a political and cultural crisis' in the text, one that manifests 'not least in its inability to produce either a stable narrative voice or a fixed implied reader'.⁴⁵⁶ There is certainly some truth to this reading, but when we situate Lessing's need to see 'the hill where the house used to be' within her wider life writing oeuvre, as I have been doing throughout this chapter, we see that it is only the first of many such instances. Thus, in

⁴⁵³ *Going Home*, p. 208.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁴⁵⁵ Jenny Taylor, 'Memory and Desire on *Going Home*: The Deconstruction of a Colonial Radical' in *Doris Lessing*, ed. by Eve Bertelsen (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1985), pp. 55-63 (p. 56).

⁴⁵⁶ Taylor, 'Memory and Desire on *Going Home*', p. 56.

understanding *Going Home* as primarily a travel memoir that rehearses an impossible act of return, it becomes possible to track the wider and embedded impact of white settlerdom upon Lessing's autobiographical non-fiction.

Deferring this initial journey to 'the hill where the house used to be', *Going Home* instead stages an imaginary return to the family's farmhouse. An entire chapter describes how the Tayler family constructed their house with limited materials and tools, offering a step-by-step guide to home-making on the colonial frontier. Lessing explains how, to begin, 'you cut trees from the bush' to make the foundations and skeletal frame of the roof.⁴⁵⁷ Next, 'from an ant-heap nearby earth is cut in spadefuls and laid in a heap. Ant-heap earth is best, because it had already been blended by the jaws of a myriad workers'.⁴⁵⁸ After coating the frame in earth mixed with ox blood, and fitting it with a thatched grass roof, the house becomes 'a living thing, responsive to every mood of the weather; and during the time I was growing up it had already begun to sink back into the forms of the bush'.⁴⁵⁹ What Lessing describes in this recreation of her childhood home is something closer to a living organism than an inanimate structure. Her description positions the family's occupation as temporary, as if they are tenants of their surrounding environment, their house barely distinguishable from the surrounding bush. The farmhouse made from mud and thatch is, according to this description, on loan to the Tayler family, its building materials prised from the chewing jaws of worker ants. Lessing anticipates that the creatures and surrounding bush will later reclaim their rightful property. Occasionally the industrious ants would begin their own trek into the interior, sending 'outriders into the house' from the anthills outside and creating 'a red winding gallery, like an artery, on the walls'.⁴⁶⁰ The transitory nature of this farmhouse — which was already sinking back into the surrounding landscape when the family occupied it — appears at odds with the permanent sense of belonging that Lessing ascribes to it. And yet, Lessing also insists that the property is her singular, stable residence:

⁴⁵⁷ *Going Home*, p. 38.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

although ‘I have lived in over sixty different houses, flats and rented rooms [...] not in one of them have I felt at home [...] since I left that first house on the kopje’.⁴⁶¹

The impermanence of the house is crucial to Lessing’s expression of belonging in her childhood home. She explains that there ‘are two sorts of habitation in Africa. One is of brick, cement, plaster, tile and tin — the substance of the country processed and shaped; the other sort is made direct of the stuff of soil and grass and tree’.⁴⁶² For Lessing, living in the second kind of dwelling, made from materials that ‘most of the natives of the country live in’, intimates a dubious comparison of her own childhood with the lives of black Africans — although she stops short of claiming indigeneity.⁴⁶³ Her family’s settlement on top of the hill was, she stresses, only ever temporary and was therefore distinct from the white farmers who lived, ensconced and removed from the bush, in their houses of brick and cement. By the time of *Going Home*’s publication in 1957, Lessing had already explored the settlers’ condition of embattled quarantine in *The Grass Is Singing* (1950), describing Mary Turner’s hallucinatory premonition that her farmhouse is about to ‘be killed by the bush’.⁴⁶⁴ Mary is plagued by visions of throttling vines destroying her verandahs and ‘geraniums [growing] side by side with blackjacks’ in the chaos of her former garden.⁴⁶⁵ Her terror of the bush and the imagined ruin of her farm demonstrates the consequences, within Lessing’s writing, of living in the first kind of dwelling where ‘the substance of the country [has been] processed and shaped’.⁴⁶⁶ For Lessing, life inside walls of brick and cement preserved the settler forever as a stranger within a threatening, unfamiliar environment. By reconstructing her former home as a temporary structure, an organic part of a wider, expansive landscape, *Going Home* attempts to write beyond the archetypal settler fears of ruin and invasion that define the limits of Mary Turner’s homestead.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., p. 37.

⁴⁶² Ibid., p. 38.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Doris Lessing, *The Grass Is Singing* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1973), p. 242.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ *Going Home*, p. 38.

Nevertheless, in this first imaginative attempt to return home, Lessing's travel memoir is contorted by the legacies of settlement. It determines to rebuild an impermanent edifice unlike other white farms, but in the process embraces an untenable appropriation of Indigenous habitations. Although *Going Home* attempts to position Lessing as beyond 'the neurotic rigidities of white settlerdom', the success of this manoeuvre is questionable.⁴⁶⁷ Her family were undoubtedly white farmers, even if their house was built with mud walls and wooden poles rather than bricks. Pushing against the physical and emotional structures of settlement, Lessing's first imaginative reconstruction of home demonstrates the risks of attempting to refashion her belonging within Southern Rhodesia. On the one hand, her memories of the farmhouse as a temporary structure moves to decolonise the territory on which her family previously lived. *Going Home* begins with the argument that 'Africa belongs to the Africans: the sooner they take it back the better'.⁴⁶⁸ Yet Lessing immediately follows this statement with the qualification that 'a country also belongs to those who feel at home in it', expressing her hope that a shared love of Africa 'will be strong enough to link people [in the future] who hate each other now'.⁴⁶⁹ The inconsistencies in her twin arguments distinguish between Lessing's political belief in the return and repatriation of stolen land and her profound emotional connection to Southern Africa, as one who presumably 'feel[s] at home' in this landscape.

To unravel the complexity of this distinction, I turn briefly to E. Tuck and K. W. Yang's recent arguments that 'relinquishing stolen land' must remain at the heart of contemporary decolonisation movements and that 'decolonising the mind is [only] the first step' towards overthrowing colonial regimes.⁴⁷⁰ The ongoing debates surrounding decolonisation reveal how Lessing might be willing to relinquish the farm as a territory, but her life writing refuses to renounce the psychological, affective

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 226.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ E. Tuck and K. W. Yang, 'Decolonisation is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonisation: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1:1 (2012), 1-40 (p. 19).

relationship she holds with this landscape. On the one hand, Lessing's emphasis on the psychological rather than the territorial reverses the direction of more contemporary debates on Indigenous rights and decolonisation (which have overtaken earlier critical debates on decolonising the mind).⁴⁷¹ Yet on the other, the debates surrounding decolonisation provide a vital content for understanding the irreconcilable, dual strands of Lessing's argument. Her assertions that Africa belongs to Africans but also to anyone who feels at home there, reveal how her life writing must negotiate the inherent conflict of belonging in and to Southern Rhodesia.

From its earliest reimagining of Lessing's childhood home, *Going Home* shuttles between two diametric opposites: to make a claim upon the southern African landscape is, for Lessing, an act of appropriation that would place her in the company of other white farmers. Yet, her connection to her former family home remains the inescapable point of origin to which her first travel memoir — and indeed all of her later life writings — return. Though written twenty-five years before Zimbabwean independence and almost half a century before Mugabe's notorious land reforms, *Going Home* wrestles with the demands of territorial and psychological decolonisation. Julie Cairnie has noticed that 'the complications of white women's claims to home space in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe' largely centre upon their 'claiming or refusing the colonial bequest: a home and a farm in Africa'.⁴⁷² *Going Home* highlights that the act of return was, for Lessing, an attempt to traverse these boundaries, navigating the tension between these two poles of refusal and reclamation. Her descriptive attempts to position her family's farmhouse as neither wholly homestead nor bush but instead oscillating between the two, is illustrative of her efforts to stage a homecoming that surpasses the trappings of white settlement. Lessing was, from the beginning of her writing career, alert to the

⁴⁷¹ I understand Tuck's and Yang's arguments as responsive to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's articulation of decolonising the mind, in which he raises the vital distinction between how colonialism 'imposed its control of the social production of wealth' and the seizure of the land, but insists that 'its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised'. — wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, p. 18.

⁴⁷² Julie Cairnie, 'Women and the Literature of Settlement and Plunder: Toward an Understanding of the Zimbabwean Land Crisis', *ESC: English Studies in Canada*, 33:1-2 (2007), 165-188 (p. 167).

politics of land ownership in colonial Africa, and remained scathing of white memoirists like Karen Blixen who, in *Out of Africa* (1937), ‘never saw that her 6000 acres were not hers’.⁴⁷³ Blixen was, for Lessing, little more than a squatter on her farm. Such criticism suggests that Lessing’s own memoirs reach for an alternative relationship with her former homeland, attempting to write around and out of the enclosures of white settlerdom. Unable to reconcile the territorial *and* epistemological concerns of her anti-imperialism with her ongoing sense that Southern Rhodesia was her only home, *Going Home*’s imaginative return to the house on the hill registers and negotiates these conflicting demands.

According to *Going Home*, the rough materials, uneven floors and bumpy walls of her family’s farmhouse afforded Lessing a particular intimacy with her environment. Recalling the rough surfaces of her bedroom wall she notes how ‘I knew the geography of that wall as I knew the lines on my palm’.⁴⁷⁴ Elsewhere she describes the house as ‘my other skin’.⁴⁷⁵ The house, in this projected reconstruction, becomes an extension of Lessing’s body, a surface as intimately familiar as the creases of her own hands. But she also recalls how the property was imprinted with the faint impressions of other bodies who had moved through it, lightly touching its surfaces:

There were areas of light, brisk graining where Tobias the painter had whisked his paint-brush from side to side [...] there was another patch where he had put his hand flat on the whitewash. Probably there had been something in his bare foot and he had steadied himself with his hand [...] Then he had taken out whatever was in his foot and lifted his brush and painted out the hand mark. Or thought he had. For at a certain moment of the sunrise, when the sun was four inches over the mountains [...] that hand came glistening out of the whitewash like a Sign of some kind.⁴⁷⁶

Here the certainty of Tobias’s movements and the precise, measured circumstances under which his palm print could be viewed (‘when the sun was four inches over the mountains’) quickly gives way

⁴⁷³ Doris Lessing, ‘A Deep Darkness: A Review of *Out of Africa* by Karen Blixen’ in *A Small Personal Voice: Essays, Reviews, Interviews*, ed. by Paul Schlueter (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1974), pp. 147-155 (p. 151).

⁴⁷⁴ *Going Home*, p. 51.

⁴⁷⁵ *Under My Skin*, p. 195.

⁴⁷⁶ *Going Home*, p. 52.

to unfamiliar and unknown possibilities: ‘*probably* there had been something in his bare foot [...] he *thought* he had’ painted out his own hand (emphasis my own). During its daily re-emergence the handprint appears like the prehistoric palm prints of a cave painting (several of which, in the nearby Ayrshire hills, were familiar to the young Lessing).⁴⁷⁷ But importantly, the meaning of the hand — described as a ‘Sign’ — remains uncertain, despite the imaginative re-enactment of its origins. The authority of Lessing’s narrative voice wavers during this recollection, as the question of what ‘kind of sign’ is revealed here remains unanswered. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century colonial travel memoirs ordered unfamiliar landscapes for a largely metropolitan readership, creating narratives which were, to use Bill Ashcroft’s phrase, inseparable from ‘debate[s] about possession [...] about who owns the world’.⁴⁷⁸ Yet Lessing refuses to imagine the house as the central point in an ordered report of her travels. The trajectory of *Going Home* is not one of assured possession, but of a failed attempt to return. As the self-effacing title suggests, Lessing is always going home — both to Southern Rhodesia and the house on the hill — but never arriving. Similarly, imagining how the farmhouse was first constructed reveals that there are no stable coordinates within this travel memoir. As with her descriptions of the ‘Wanted on Voyage’ trunk in *Alfred and Emily*, in the re-building of the farmhouse in *Going Home* Lessing’s narrative moves continually inwards — from the hill, to the walls of the house, to its interior, to the handprint upon her wall — but refuses to offer a conclusive interpretation of its meaning.

If the bedroom wall is an extension of Lessing’s own body, then the hand print — which persists in its daily reappearances — is also impressed figuratively upon her own skin. The impression upon the surface of the wall therefore leaves its mark upon Lessing herself. Sara Ahmed suggests that we might ‘associate the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace’.⁴⁷⁹ By highlighting the word ‘press’ nestled into the

⁴⁷⁷ *Alfred and Emily*, p. 211.

⁴⁷⁸ Bill Ashcroft, ‘Afterword: Travel and Power’ in *Travel Writing, Form and Empire: the Poetics and Politics of Mobility*, ed. by Julia Kehne and Paul Smethurst (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 229-241 (p. 230).

⁴⁷⁹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 6.

word ‘impression’, Ahmed’s comments can help us to illuminate the emotional and the affective echoes that are entangled into this memory of a palm print on a bedroom wall. Moreover, what is remarkable about this particular mark is perhaps not its presence, but its distinction within a house that bears endless impressions upon its surfaces: the construction of the Tayler’s farmhouse involved ‘great handfuls of mud’ being slapped by labourers against wooden poles while any remaining gaps were filled with ‘handfuls of grass’.⁴⁸⁰ Many of their building materials were accidentally sourced from a nearby burial site, meaning that ‘the walls of our house had in them the flesh and the blood of the people of the country’.⁴⁸¹ This fleeting (and alarming) reference suggests how many bodies, both living and dead, leave their marks upon and within the walls of Lessing’s childhood home. Yet her intimate relationship with just one of these impressions, the single hand print upon her bedroom wall, leads her to a set of origins that she can only hypothesise. The mark is the originary sign of a creator — although it also implies the signatory act of an illiterate worker — which occupies the heart of Lessing’s natal location. But in the end, it reveals only the limits of knowledge within the settler imaginary, a sign whose meaning remains unclear.

Whitlock identifies the emergence of the palm print upon Lessing’s bedroom wall as one of the ‘most intimate moments of longing, memory and identification’ within *Going Home*, suggesting it is a sign ‘of prior occupation’.⁴⁸² In her reading, Tobias represents the unknown Africans who occupied the land before the arrival of white settlers. I argue that, in addition, this mark indicates both the potency and the limitations of Lessing’s own occupation of the house. Although she might speculatively recreate the actions which imprinted this palm upon her bedroom wall — imagining how Tobias *may* have leaned on the wall and *might* have examined the underside of his foot — she cannot offer a resolution which secures its meaning. The palm print reveals a partial view of the many hands which shored up Lessing’s childhood home. She attributes the unusual longevity of the

⁴⁸⁰ *Going Home*, p. 40.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸² Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire*, p. 197.

farmhouse (which had been built to last several years but stood for two decades) to the fact that it ‘had been built with affection’.⁴⁸³ But the lives of labourers like Tobias (who appears only in this single scene, and never again in the vast corpus of Lessing’s life writing) are almost entirely obscured by her memories of the house on the hill. The house and the act of life writing are, in this moment, irrevocably intertwined, as a single hand print registers this otherwise absent labourer on both the surface of the property and the textual surfaces of Lessing’s memoir. When Lessing says that the house remained standing through affection, we might ask: whose affection, apart from Lessing’s, is supposedly supporting its unstable foundations? What do the impressions of these hands actually reveal of their original creators? Neither the stories of labourers whose imprints are pressed into the mud walls, nor the blood and bones of the ancestors accidentally mixed into the building materials, can be fully known or narrated in Lessing’s reconstruction of her former home. Even though she strains against the settler imaginary — Lessing has repeatedly been described as an ‘expert in unsettlement’ — the physical and psychic boundaries of the farmhouse remain largely intact.⁴⁸⁴

Although Lessing does not return to the actual site of the farm itself in *Going Home*, it was nevertheless ‘urgently necessary to recover every detail of that house [...] I had to remember everything, every strand of thatch and curve of wall’.⁴⁸⁵ I suggest that, in her earliest memoir, Lessing’s aim is not to get off the farm, nor does she plot a final escape from the confines of her early settler life. If the house was ‘like my other skin’, her moves to view this surface as impressed by the hands of others might be viewed as a rebuttal of miscegenation, a rebellion against the strictly segregated society of her childhood.⁴⁸⁶ That her memories of the house on the hill cannot wholly fulfil this promise is, I suggest, largely irrelevant. To be clear: Southern Rhodesia created, for Lessing, an

⁴⁸³ *Going Home*, p. 40.

⁴⁸⁴ Lorna Sage influentially posits that Lessing was an ‘expert in unsettlement’. While Lessing undoubtedly addressed the long legacies of white settlement upon her own life, and recorded her experience of exile from Southern Rhodesia in considerable detail, the specifics of her attempts to unsettle her memories of Rhodesia, especially within her life writing, have yet to be fully discussed by critics. — Lorna Sage, *Doris Lessing* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 11.

⁴⁸⁵ *Going Home*, p. 55.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

existence ‘within a slowly narrowing and suffocating cage’ where the colour bar dictated every element of daily life.⁴⁸⁷ Her first travel memoir neither escapes nor resolves the difficulties of this domestic and political incarceration. Lessing’s account of homecoming is therefore part of an ongoing, unfinished process which is disconcerted by white settlerdom. Yet this is, I suggest, precisely the point. For Lessing to resolve or conclude these homecomings would be to undermine the complexity of both her anti-imperialist political stance *and* her affective emotional ties to this landscape. James Arnett states that, for Lessing, ‘there was no excusing, or recusing, herself from entanglement in coloniality [...] she was a colonial subject, albeit one who endeavoured to engender anti-colonial politics and society’.⁴⁸⁸ Extending Arnett’s reflections to *Going Home*, I suggest that the unfinished homecomings in Lessing’s first memoir reflect a political commitment to acknowledging and scrutinising her own life-long relationship with empire.

It is also important to emphasise that Lessing’s reconstruction of her former home, and her refusal to imagine it as a permanent or lasting structure, subvert the processes of imperial monumentalisation that she witnessed throughout her seven-week trip in 1956. Throughout *Going Home*, Lessing describes the monuments white Rhodesians erected as markers of their progress. She notes that, seeking to live up to Cecil Rhodes’ legacy of a named settler state, Lord Malvern approved the creation of Lake Kariba in the early 1950s. This project to build the largest man-made lake in the world was part of Malvern’s search to build ‘a monument big enough to retire on’, attempting to concretise, both literally and metaphorically, a progressive history of white settlement.⁴⁸⁹ Several of Paul Hogarth’s uncaptioned drawings within *Going Home* depict imperial monuments of another sort, including a statue of Paul Kruger, standing high on a plinth in Church Square, Pretoria.⁴⁹⁰ These

⁴⁸⁷ *Going Home*, p. 18.

⁴⁸⁸ James Arnett, ‘Colonizing, decolonizing: bad-faith liberalism and African space colonialism in Doris Lessing’s screenplay *The White Princess*’, *Journal of Screenwriting*, 10:1 (2019), 81-95 (p. 82).

⁴⁸⁹ *Going Home*, p. 218.

⁴⁹⁰ This particular statue still stands today and, following the 2015 high-profile removal of Cecil John Rhodes’s statue from University of Cape Town, it has been the subject of considerable debate and ongoing controversy in South Africa. As of 2020 however, Paul Kruger remains on his plinth

solidified expressions of white progress are the antithesis of Lessing's reconstruction of her childhood home as an impermanent edifice. By contrast, white regimes in both Southern Rhodesia and South Africa used official monuments to shore up singular historical narratives where colonial subjects were the beneficiaries of empire. Lessing's own life was — as Arnett stipulates — entangled within these glossed histories of exploitation and dispossession. It is vital, therefore, that her meandering journeys in *Going Home* are not oriented around the central, monumentalised and preserved site of her childhood home. Kermanshah Farm is not a historical property to which Lessing (or, indeed, any interested visitors) might return to romanticise her frontier upbringing.⁴⁹¹

To conclude this section, I outline how the legacies of settlement impact not only on the depictions of failed homecomings in *Going Home*, but also in the memoir's form. Rather than offering a definitive conclusion, *Going Home* ends with a series of postscripts written across 1956 and 1957, added at varying stages in the editorial and printing process. These postscripts update the reader on the developing political situation in Lessing's former home. While their content is ostensibly impersonal — and there are certainly no further returns to the house on the hill — the first note from 1956 outlines how Lessing discovered, once back in Britain, that she had been made a prohibited immigrant by the Rhodesian government. *Going Home* therefore ends with the logistical impossibility of return. Three notes from 1957 provide legislative updates on trade union politics in Southern Rhodesia, while two further postscripts from 1967 and 1982, along with an afterword in 1992, provide a running commentary on the changing events in the country both before and after independence. Documenting her shifting political persuasions throughout this period, Lessing suggests that the postscripts were 'added almost in desperation to try and keep up with events'.⁴⁹² Jenny Taylor

overlooking Church Square. — Adrian Blomfield 'Radical South African party calls for statue of Boer leader Paul Kruger to be removed', *The Telegraph*, 20 May 2018
<<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/05/20/radical-south-african-party-calls-statue-boer-leader-paul-kruger/>> [accessed 4 February 2020]

⁴⁹¹ As I note in this chapter's conclusion, this has not prevented some literary critics from attempting to make their own pilgrimages to the site once known as Kermanshah Farm.

⁴⁹² Doris Lessing, 'Afterword' in *Going Home* (London: Flamingo, 1992), p. 255.

compares this ongoing commentary to ‘the retraction of a confession’, with Lessing disavowing some of her previous interests in communism and the Soviet Union.⁴⁹³ However, I suggest that these additions to *Going Home* are the formal expressions of a memoir committed to homecoming as a work in progress. Lessing’s ongoing, processual returns to the site of her former home anticipate, in many respects, the arguments of contemporary critics who establish decoloniality ‘not [as] a static condition [...] or a lineal point of arrival or enlightenment’ but an ongoing project to ‘displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis and thought’.⁴⁹⁴ Decolonisation is, in other words, a work in progress. Similarly, Lessing’s attempts to both return to and decolonise her former home as a settler-owned farm and territory were a career-long endeavour. The additional notes which refuse to conclude *Going Home* suggest two competing impulses; on the one hand they indicate that Lessing was unwilling to draw her relationship with Southern Rhodesia to a close. Yet, on the other, they make explicit how her continuing attempts to return home, to get back to her settler past, were ideologically antithetical to her beliefs in racial equality. These notes depict an autobiographical subject caught between two poles of life writing after empire, straddling both the politics of anti-imperialism and a deep-rooted emotional connection to her memories of settlerdom.

As this chapter has outlined, Lessing’s late experiments with speculative life writing in *Alfred and Emily* reveal that her attempts to track the legacies of empire spanned her life writing career. The multiple postscripts and afterwords of *Going Home* are, I suggest, an earlier formation of this interest. The structure of Lessing’s first memoir — which offers, in many ways, the antithesis of a conclusion — strains against the confines of her seven week trip. This brief excursion therefore connects to broader patterns of return and refusal within Lessing’s autobiographical non-fiction. In *Going Home*, Lessing restlessly experiments with different imaginative returns to her childhood home which could surpass the trappings of white belonging. This chapter’s close readings firmly situate Lessing’s

⁴⁹³ Taylor, ‘Memory and Desire on *Going Home*’, p. 58.

⁴⁹⁴ Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *Decoloniality: concepts, analytics, praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 4.

attempts at homecoming within the specific context of Rhodesian settlerdom, expanding Anthony Chennells' arguments that 'Lessing's experiences were not with Africa [...] but with Southern Rhodesia', whose colonial history 'had no counterpart'.⁴⁹⁵ That Lessing's first memoir is unable to conclusively effect a homecoming suggests not a failure of self-representation, but a commitment to tracking the impact of Southern Rhodesia upon her life writing. As the final afterword to *Going Home* is dated 1992, the year of *African Laughter*'s publication, I now move to a discussion of Lessing's second travel memoir as the sequel to her first, one that offers four further updates on the pitfalls and possibilities of returning to her myth country.

African Laughter: Returning to the Southern Rhodesian Laager

African Laughter chronicles four trips Lessing made to Zimbabwe across a tumultuous decade: these four distinct accounts initially document the country's collective 'state of shock' in the aftermath of war in 1982; the cautious optimism 'which transformed the atmosphere' of Zimbabwe in 1988 following Robert Mugabe and Joseph Nkomo's Unity Accord; and the later, devastating impact of the escalating AIDS crisis as witnessed during her journeys in 1989 and 1992.⁴⁹⁶ Lessing's second travel memoir remains the most critically neglected of her life writings, having been discussed in only a few recent studies.⁴⁹⁷ In the twenty-five years of exile that separate *African Laughter* and *Going Home*, Lessing had repeatedly told herself that she did not wish to return to the white society of her former homeland. However, she noted that these arguments were only 'rational considerations [that]

⁴⁹⁵ Anthony Chennells, 'Doris Lessing and the Rhodesian Settler Novel' in *Doris Lessing*, ed. by Eve Bertelsen (Johannesburg, McGraw-Hill, 1985), pp. 31-54 (p. 31).

⁴⁹⁶ *African Laughter*, p. 48; p. 152.

⁴⁹⁷ See: Anthony Chennells, 'Doris Lessing's versions of Zimbabwe from *The Golden Notebook* to *Alfred and Emily*', *English Academy Review*, 32:2 (2015), 53-69; Sarah De Mul, 'Zimbabwe and the Politics of the Everyday in Doris Lessing's *African Laughter*' in *Migratory Settings*, ed. by Murat Aydemir and Alex Rotas (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), pp. 139-156; McAllister, 'Knowing Native, Going Native', pp. 25-38.

did not reach some mysterious region of myself'.⁴⁹⁸ The longing she felt for Southern Rhodesia was a sadness 'that was apparently an inexhaustible well of tears'.⁴⁹⁹ Night after night in London she 'dreamed the same dream' of being back in the bush, or walking the streets of Salisbury.⁵⁰⁰ After arriving in Zimbabwe for the first time in 1982, Lessing noted that, for the remaining whites within the country, life in 'the Rhodesian lager [sic]' continued apace (*laagers* were circular encampments of wagons favoured by early settlers and pioneers). Independence had done little to resolve the divisions of this racially segregated society. Indeed, Lessing saw Zimbabwe's white communities as even more isolated and insular throughout the 1980s, noting that their houses resembled miniature fortresses and that an embattled collective mentality continued the toxic legacies of the colour bar.

The memoir begins with two maps, printed on opposite pages, depicting southern Africa during the colonial era and then after independence. The complementary maps are captioned: 'then...Southern Rhodesia'; and 'Now...Zimbabwe'.⁵⁰¹ Meanwhile, *African Laughter*'s first chapter, entitled 'A Little History', informs the reader that 'Southern Rhodesia was a shield shaped country in the middle of the map of Southern Africa, and it was bright pink because Cecil Rhodes had said the map of Africa should be painted red from Cape to Cairo, as an outward sign of its happy allegiance to the British Empire'.⁵⁰² Here, Southern Rhodesia belongs neatly in the past tense, the strange result of one man's failed colonial ambition. It is offered as an emblem of an Empire that no longer exists. It was to be one link in an incomplete chain of British colonies and dominions which Rhodes hoped would span the length of the African continent. On the colonial map which begins *African Laughter*, even Southern Rhodesia's name, listed alongside its neighbours of Portuguese East Africa and Bechuanaland, indicates a discrete and increasingly distant historical era, confined to the world of 'then'.

⁴⁹⁸ *African Laughter*, p. 12.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, np.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

‘A Little History’ presents a brief outline of the boundaries and ninety-year history of the Rhodesian settler state. The maps meanwhile show how, despite being renamed Zimbabwe, the national borders of the country remain essentially unchanged, altered only by the striking addition of the man-made Lake Kariba, whose early construction Lessing had witnessed and recorded in *Going Home*. The creation of the lake, which gave Rhodesians their own ‘inland sea’ for boating and angling, ‘obliterated every ecological process extant on 5,500 square km’, irrevocably altering the landscapes of modern Zimbabwe and Zambia.⁵⁰³ *African Laughter*’s opening cartographic and written representation appears to fix the historical and geographical boundaries of Lessing’s former home. The country which other white memoirists frequently describe as ‘teapot shaped’ is firmly established, its borders and histories contained within these opening chapters and their attendant paratexts.⁵⁰⁴ But Lessing goes on to immediately outline how her experience of exile, contrary to the preceding map and historical sketch, pushes up against the neat outlines of Southern Rhodesia’s history. ‘Then’ and ‘Now’ are, perhaps, not as distinct as the two maps would lead us to believe. *African Laughter* begins with Lessing’s description of becoming a prohibited immigrant and the subsequent impact of this on her life in London. Although, during the 1960s and 1970s, she was unable to return to the country, she nevertheless experienced a vital connection to her homeland. This bond would not be confined to the cartographies of an outdated map, nor demarcated by the print of legislative documents that had exiled her: ‘you cannot be forbidden from the land you grew up in, so says the web of sensations, memories, experiences that binds you to the landscape’.⁵⁰⁵ Lessing’s relationship with her childhood home similarly cannot be surmised in a complete linear timeline of a ninety-year history, or the neat singular outlines of a shield-shaped country. It is instead a network,

⁵⁰³ McDermott Hughes, *Whiteness in Zimbabwe*, p. 30; p. 49.

⁵⁰⁴ It is perhaps unsurprising that Lessing avoids this sentimental comparison with the quintessentially British image of the teapot. This image of home, which is often deployed to secure Zimbabwe to a British colonial history, appears in various white memoirs of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe including: Kann, *Casting With a Fragile Thread*, p. 4; Andreas Eames *The Cry of the Go-Away Bird* (London: Harvill Secker, 2011), p. 71; Catherine Buckle, *Finding Our Voices: Letters from Zimbabwe 2013-2017* (Marondera: Catherine Buckle, 2018), p. 14.

⁵⁰⁵ *African Laughter*, p. 11.

with multiple intersecting nodes spanning back and forward in time. Once again, a tension which was first raised in *Going Home* emerges from the visual and textual elements which begin *African Laughter*: although the altered names on the map indicate her desired outcome of decolonisation (ostensibly, this small portion of Africa does indeed now ‘belong to Africans’), Lessing cannot detach herself emotionally from Southern Rhodesia.⁵⁰⁶ These powerful senses of longing and belonging are at odds with the mapped co-ordinates. Her relationship with home cannot be contained or accounted for by the cartographies of the new Zimbabwe. Instead, Lessing’s sense of belonging to both the African landscape and the former settler state is comprised of more fluid points, configured through feelings and recollections. From its opening lines then, *African Laughter* is a documentary account which stretches to accommodate a subjective autobiographical narrative, a text which questions the closure of the colonial past and tracks Lessing’s attempts at homecoming through a series of postcolonial presents.

Rather than resolving the troubled relationship with her settler past in *Going Home*, *African Laughter*’s opening chapters establish that Lessing’s contradictory connections to Southern Rhodesia were not concluded by the collapse of the white settler state. She compares her longing for home during her decades of exile to a ‘lake of tears’, which ‘slop about, or seep, or leak, secretly making moist what I thought I kept dry’.⁵⁰⁷ There is a stark disparity between the image of a mapped terrain, whose relatively short history can be described in just a few pages, and a liquid experience of exile which seeps into the fabric of everyday life. Like Lake Kariba, which strikingly altered the outlines of Southern Rhodesia and later Zimbabwe’s national borders, Lessing’s own lake of tears disrupts the boundaries of the ‘rational considerations’ with which she reminded herself that ‘I did not want to live in Southern Rhodesia [...] it was provincial and tedious’.⁵⁰⁸ The ‘inexhaustible well of tears’ which harbours Lessing’s longing for the landscape of her childhood is, according to *African Laughter*, lodged deep within her unconscious. But this description of a hidden, leaking connection

⁵⁰⁶ *Going Home*, p. 10.

⁵⁰⁷ *African Laughter*, p. 13.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

to her former home suggests how its influence upon Lessing's life writing cannot be neatly contained within the boundaries of a mapped terrain, or filed as a concluded historical narrative. Lessing's second travel memoir begins, therefore, with the need to continue her unfinished and perplexing processes of belonging and homecoming.

Despite *African Laughter* outlining — and appearing to fulfil — Lessing's intention to record daily life in the newly independent Zimbabwe, the Rhodesian landscape of her childhood permeates this documentary account with additional layers of autobiographical self-representation. In its dizzying record of voices, topographical features and social commentary, *African Laughter* is all-at-once a multi-vocal travelogue, a polyphonic vision of a new nation, and a deeply personal life narrative which tracks Lessing's life after empire — or perhaps, more accurately, life after settlement. These tensions within the text make *African Laughter* a vital component in the wider corpus of Lessing's life writing. As I outline in this chapter's conclusion, it clearly belongs alongside her other, formally experimental life narratives — including *Alfred and Emily* and *Going Home* — which push against the generic boundaries of autobiographical self-representation. By re-examining these texts it is possible to trace further the impact of British colonialism upon Lessing's life writing project.

If the two maps which begin *African Laughter* suggest that Lessing's route across these four travel narratives will be discernible — or indeed, that the reader might be able to plot her course across the terrain — this implication is misleading. The bewildering directions of Lessing's travels make it difficult, and at times impossible, to follow her journey from beginning to end. Although the narrative is filled with named places and people — chapters are frequently given titles such as 'a trip to Simukai' and 'the garden in Harare' — these do little to orient the reader.⁵⁰⁹ As Sarah De Mul explains, *African Laughter* 'challenges the traditional travel plot' that offers an account 'of a singular, chronological journey from departure to arrival'.⁵¹⁰ The text is a collection of fragments, comprised of recorded encounters, notes, interviews and reports. As one scene does not necessarily follow on

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 372.

⁵¹⁰ Sarah De Mul, 'Doris Lessing, Feminism and the Representation of Zimbabwe', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 16:1 (2009), 33-51 (p. 40).

from another (despite the four sections being clearly dated) the narrative's internal chronology quickly breaks down. As Arnett notes, Lessing was a volunteer throughout the 1980s 'with the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Book Team, which travelled across Zimbabwe gathering the common wisdom of the people on a range of topics such as governance [...] agriculture and land management'.⁵¹¹ The team collected colloquial forms of knowledge in order to supplement the scarce number of printed texts circulating within the country. *African Laughter's* fragmented form, which abandons a cohesive narrative and records the disparate voices of ordinary Zimbabweans, therefore reflects Lessing's work as an NGO volunteer during these four visits. As a result, Lessing's own position is frequently hard to distinguish from the dizzying, ever-changing landscape of people, places and subjects.

Included within this polyphonic vision of life after formal decolonisation is, yet again, an account of Lessing's return to the landscape of her childhood and her struggles to understand her own memories amidst this new, significantly altered terrain. The structure of *African Laughter* has led to numerous critics describing it as an anti-imperial travel narrative. For John McAllister, it is the antithesis of colonial African travelogues written by European authors, where 'an epistemologically privileged male outsider moves purposefully and consecutively through space and time, observing and assessing the world of the Other from an object point of view'.⁵¹² For De Mul, too, *African Laughter* 'strategically constructs [the] temporality of the everyday for the purpose of the narrator's anti-colonial politics'.⁵¹³ While disagreeing with neither assessment, I suggest that these readings overlook the significant autobiographical content of *African Laughter*, as scenes from Lessing's childhood are dispersed throughout her sprawling travelogue. We need to pay attention, I contend, to how these significant sections of the text eventually re-stage her long-deferred return to the site of her family's former farm. Lessing's second travel memoir demonstrates how the author's anti-

⁵¹¹ James Arnett, 'Doris Lessing and the Ethical African Archive', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 37:2 (2018), 435-444 (pp. 435-6).

⁵¹² McAllister, 'Knowing Native, Going Native', p. 28.

⁵¹³ De Mul, 'Zimbabwe and the Politics of the Everyday in Doris Lessing's *African Laughter*', p. 140.

colonial politics impact upon her autobiographical acts of self-representation. In multiple scenes depicting Lessing's attempts to return home, *African Laughter* highlights the political and aesthetic challenges of a homecoming still bound up with the settler past.

During the first trip to Zimbabwe in *African Laughter*, Lessing once again defers her anticipated return to the family's farm. She travels instead to visit her brother Harry, who warns her not to 'go back [to the farm...] I don't know how to explain it but it did me in'.⁵¹⁴ Yet during their first reunion meeting in 1982, Lessing returns to a different, temporary homestead from her childhood. Detouring briefly from her journey to Harry's farmhouse, she drives through the Marondera District — known by white Rhodesians as the Marandellas — an area where both siblings and their parents used to camp. Lessing configures this camping ground as the furthest extension of their house just outside of Banket: 'as a child the Marandellas was the other pole to our farm'.⁵¹⁵ Lessing's return to this place in 1982 is, therefore, the first of a series of homecomings staged across *African Laughter*. She remembers that in order to set up their quarters for the night:

The 'boy' cut branches to make an enclosure about twenty feet by twenty, but round, in the spirit of the country. This leafy barrier was to keep out leopards, who were still holding on, though threatened, in their caves in the hills. We could have lain out under the trees without the barricade for any leopard worth its salt could have jumped over it in a moment and carried us off. No, the walls were an expression of something else, not a keeping out, but a keeping together, strangers in a strange land. My parents needed those encircling, branchy arms.⁵¹⁶

These holidays in the bush marked the few occasions during which Lessing's family would stray beyond the mud walls of their home and into the wilderness beyond. Here, Lessing notes — in a description which references *Going Home*'s earlier explanation of constructing the farmhouse from the living materials of the bush — how her parents required their black servant to provide an illusory enclosure, separating them from their surroundings. The symbolic meaning of this structure develops throughout Lessing's description, going on a rhetorical journey from an 'enclosure' to a 'barrier' to a 'barricade', none of which would protect the family from the predations of a leopard, should one

⁵¹⁴ *African Laughter*, p. 37.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

have descended from its cave in the hillside. The round enclosure ‘in the spirit of the country’ refers to the kraal, a traditional circle of African huts surrounded by a fence, but also suggests that the campsite’s enclosure imitates the roughly circular outline of landlocked Southern Rhodesia. It evokes both the shield-shaped country mapped at the beginning of *African Laughter* and the circular insularity of white Rhodesian life. Throughout her second travel memoir Lessing compares both Zimbabwean and Rhodesian white society as akin to a ‘lager [sic]’, a circle of tents and wagons used throughout southern Africa by early settlers. Within a laager, a family would arrange themselves in this configuration for safety, facing inwards towards their fires in the hopes of keeping a foreign landscape — and its potentially hostile inhabitants — at bay. The laager is also a defensive military manoeuvre; when nineteenth-century pioneer columns in South Africa found themselves under attack, livestock and families would be placed in the centre of the laager to shield them from harm. In this description of their encampment, Lessing’s parents continue the historical precedent of the settler state, relying on actual and psychological boundaries to distinguish themselves from their African surroundings. The imagined threat of leopards, clinging to their own embattled homes in the hills, serves to further justify the need for their circular, defensive camp. The campsite is both a temporary homestead and a microcosm for the imagined nation in Lessing’s memories of these trips.

She wryly observes that, on these journeys beyond the farm, her parents would preserve ‘their customs as if they were still inside the house’, washing in white porcelain bowls and sticking to their regular mealtimes.⁵¹⁷ This raises an implicit distinction between making a home in southern Africa and being *at home* in the veld and the bush. Rather than recalling her family as comfortable in their surroundings, Lessing’s return to the Marandellas instead highlights their estrangement from this supposed homeland. Their attempts to erect a confined enclosure, and to continue the domestic rituals of their household, suggests that they are, like the voortrekkers of the early nineteenth century, ‘strangers in a strange land’. If her parents viewed the campsite as a tight, intimate embrace, with the

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

'branchy arms' comforting them enough to sleep outside, Lessing understands this space as containing the contradictions of white belonging in Southern Rhodesia. Even as they purport to be straying into the bush, these temporary encampments — as an extension of the farmhouse itself — reflect her family's continuing estrangement from their surroundings, their fearful, embattled position within a circle of settlement.

By contrast, Lessing and her brother had been raised almost entirely on the African continent and relished the opportunity to sleep outside on these camping trips:

We two had a pact [...] that we should help each other not to fall off to sleep [...] I lay rigid, face absorbing moonlight, starlight, as if I were stretched out to night-bathe. I knew that this lying with no roof between me and the sky was a gift, not to be wasted [...] This lying out at night might never happen again. On verandahs — yes, but there always seemed to be mosquito nets and screens between you and the night. And it didn't happen again. I never again slept under the sky in Africa.⁵¹⁸

The verandah, the emblematic architectural feature of white colonial life, is identified by Lessing and her brother as an impediment to their relationship with the land. This distinctive inside/outside space, perched on the outer reaches of the home but separate from the wilderness beyond, is dismissed by the two children, who crave an immediate connection with the African night sky, unmediated by the 'mosquito nets and screens' which protected their bodies from an often hostile climate. By staying awake, staring directly at the stars, Lessing attempts to break out of the material and imaginative laager constructed by her parents. She intends to escape vertically from the confines of their encampment through skin-to-skin contact with the night sky. Yet already, Lessing's attempt to forge a new intimate form of habitation, one which escapes the literal and symbolic boundaries of settlement, is limited. Even as she recalls this early moment of communion with her surroundings, the connection also marks the beginning of her exile from the Rhodesian bush. Lessing understands that sleeping under the skies 'was a gift, not to be wasted' and unlikely to be repeated. Neither the kraal, nor the laager, can become her permanent dwelling place.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., p. 27.

Lessing's journey through the Marandellas and her subsequent reminiscences with her brother about these family camping trips are the closest she comes, in 1982, to returning to Kermanshah Farm. On the one hand, these scenes highlight how venturing off the farm brought her and her brother into closer contact with their environment. The children revelled in their proximity to the creatures living nearby, for 'being in the bush was to be with the animals, one of them'.⁵¹⁹ But, on the other, a closer examination of these camping trips reveals how their temporary home is a defensive construction, one which tried to contain the Taylers from the uncertainties of the landscape beyond their futile barricades. They may appear to be living temporarily inside a green leafy 'boma' or 'kraal', affecting the habitations of Africans, but in actuality their home-away-from-home is the archetypal image (the laager) of the white settler. When the family sleep beneath the sky, kitted out in their pyjamas and wrapped tightly in blankets, their exposure to the bush — far from rooting them in the landscape — only outlines the tenuous, contradictory nature of their settlement.

As if to emphasise the consequences of these holidays, after driving through the Marandellas Lessing describes how her brother now lives inside a permanent, defensive encampment of his own. The journey to his house ends when she 'stopped the car outside a fence that reminded me of pictures of internment camps, a good twelve feet high, of close mesh', while inside the enclosure 'two large Alsatians bounded and barked'.⁵²⁰ Once again, Lessing's figurative language emphasises how the defensive security measures of the white homestead (in this case made of close meshed fencing, rather than leafy boughs) lock white Rhodesians and now Zimbabweans into their quarantined lives. Just as internment camps imprison their occupants, Lessing's brother is incarcerated by his farmhouse, rather than provided with refuge by its high walls. Like his parents' holiday trips to the Marandellas, Harry Tayler's act of enclosure quickly produces a barrier and then a barricade. Although Lessing herself is supposed to fulfil the role of the exile in this reunion, she suggests that her brother is also expelled from the landscape, cut off behind the high fortifications of his home. He notes his unease, expressing

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

to his sister that ‘I often wonder if I’ve lived my life right [...] I should have been in the bush’.⁵²¹ Caught in the physical and psychological boundaries of white rule, Harry, like his sister in London, is separated from the landscape of his childhood and left to peer out at the bush beyond his meshed wire fence.

By deferring her return to the house on the hill, and exploring hers and her brothers’ memories of these camping trips — which Lessing describes as ‘the best times of my childhood’ — *African Laughter* emphasises the political complications of homecoming and homemaking within Lessing’s life writing. All white domestic space, both during and after colonial rule is, according to her implication, intertwined with the construction and maintenance of the settler state.⁵²² This is perhaps nowhere more explicitly voiced than in a scene where Harry, after joining his sister in collective reminiscences about their family camping trips, lapses back into ‘the monologue’ — the circuitous, racist criticism of Zimbabwe’s new government that Lessing encounters throughout *African Laughter*. Harry’s outraged response to the end of white rule focusses on the image of a new black president living inside ‘our Government House’.⁵²³ Harry rants that ‘he [Zimbabwe’s first president, Canaan Banana] hasn’t been in it a week before he has chickens running all over the gardens, our gardens, and all his friends and relations camped in the place, like a kraal’.⁵²⁴ The official residence of Rhodesia’s Governor, which was later renamed as Zimbabwe’s State House, becomes a distillation for the intersecting images of home and nation within *African Laughter*. The irony of Harry’s objections to camping aside, his dislike of President Banana taking up residence in this symbolic house-of-the-nation emphasises how life in ‘the Rhodesian lager’ is always conceived through a racial other: life in the African kraal.

Although literary critics have previously overlooked the importance of these early chapters, it is only after Lessing recalls these camping trips, and spends time in her brother’s fortified home,

⁵²¹ Ibid., p. 41.

⁵²² Ibid., p. 40.

⁵²³ Ibid., p. 42.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

that *African Laughter* becomes a meandering, fragmented travel narrative. Indeed, for the majority of '1982'— the memoir's first, lengthy chapter — Lessing's travels follow a clear trajectory: after her arrival by plane, Lessing takes a car ride through the Marandellas, spends time in her brother's house and makes the decision that, after a fortnight with Harry, she will 'take off' to explore the country. Through these encounters with various family homes, both past and present, Lessing stages a crucial confrontation with the enclosed limits of life in the laager. She then elects to leave these enclosed spaces and set off into the new nation. This decision is reflected in an abrupt shift in the narrative's form: the linear travelogue becomes fractured, the text's internal chronology breaks down and Lessing's encounters are broken into ever smaller entries with abstract titles such as 'rain' and 'the assistant'.⁵²⁵ Temporal confusion is created by entries beginning with vague descriptions such as 'one afternoon' or Lessing's declarations such as 'I have spent a day ... two days .. three days in offices in Harare'.⁵²⁶ Despite the four dated sections of *African Laughter*, the travelogue documents these later events in a disorientating timeframe. As the narrative meanders further into the minutiae of Zimbabwean life, Lessing's own role as narrator is increasingly obscured. But importantly, I suggest that this change in the memoir's form is prompted by Lessing's first attempt at homecoming in the Marandellas, and her subsequent realisation that she will not, for the time being, be able to return to the site of Kermanshah Farm. Towards the end of '1982' Lessing realises that 'the same reluctance that in 1956 made it impossible to turn the car's steering wheel into the track of the farm gripped me still'.⁵²⁷ As we have seen, this references earlier descriptions from *Going Home*. The structural changes which take place throughout *African Laughter* indicate that Lessing's second travel memoir is compromised by two conflicting impulses, attempting on the one hand to escape the laager of her childhood and, on the other, seeking always to return to her originary home of the house on the hill. Unable to resolve these opposing forces, *African Laughter* embarks on a series of journeys which appear to have neither points of departure nor a final destination.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., p. 130.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., p. 230.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., p. 139.

African Laughter begins with the initial promise of return, the fulfilment of *Going Home* in its implication that Lessing will return to the house on the hill and confront her myth country. But the wandering narrative, which encompasses farms, communal areas and government offices across Zimbabwe instead defers Lessing's return, so that when she does finally stage this much-anticipated scene, it is anti-climactic. This eventual homecoming is also, importantly, not the conclusion to the narrative itself, appearing in the second, rather than the fourth and final chapter. Arriving home is not the eventual destination of Lessing's travels in *African Laughter*. Nor is it the origin point which allows her to finally orientate herself (and her readers) within modern Zimbabwe. By extending the key concerns of *Going Home*, Lessing's second travel memoir commits to homecoming as a process which cannot and should not be completed. For Lessing to *arrive home*, after all, would be to return to the enclosed Rhodesian laager of her early years, confining herself once more to the habitations of settlerdom.

Warned by Harry not to 'go home or you'll break your heart', Lessing avoids returning to the family farm until her second trip in 1988.⁵²⁸ Her eventual return raises clear distinctions between how she and her brother continued to imagine this site as their home. Upon her arrival, it is not the absence of the original farmhouse that, Lessing realises, caused her brother such pain, nor was it the fact 'that they cut the top off "our" hill'.⁵²⁹ Rather his distress was caused by 'the bush. It had gone. Where he had spent his childhood were interminable red fields, *his bush* — gone'.⁵³⁰ Her distaste for these archetypal settler myths is registered through punctuation and typeface. The hill becomes 'our' hill, the landscape becomes '*his bush*' and therefore, according to these inflections, becomes the property of the white family — the Taylers — who had inhabited it several decades earlier. But Lessing is unwilling to concede this argument, maintaining a distinction between her own feelings of attachment and her brother's suggestion that he continues to own the farm.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., p. 314.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., p. 314.

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

Lessing subsequently forces her gaze away from the altered landscape and the spectacular view provided by the elevation of the kopje, looking towards the more modest environs of the farm itself:

Everywhere over the flat place that tops the hill are disused brick buildings, and, half hidden in grass, a brick and concrete line with rusty iron rings which had been pigs, or perhaps cows. A barn was up here too: surely unintelligent. [...] What I was looking at was not only the scene of our life, that had left no traces, nothing, for the ants and the borers and the termites had demolished it all, but at the remains of another later effort, which had failed. Everything here spoke of failure. [...] What we were looking at, I was sure, was just such another effort as my parents' — who were always trying a little bit of this and a little bit of that. One might believe that their spirit had infected the people who came after them.⁵³¹

In a move of deflection that echoes her earlier scene of a handprint upon her bedroom wall, Lessing's narrative voice refuses to authoritatively interpret the scene in front of her in this charged moment of return. *Perhaps* the rusted iron rings imply pigs, or perhaps cows. The only flash of certainty is in her recognition of a mutual failure. Lessing's rediscovery of her childhood home configures her parents' failure to successfully farm on the land as one instalment in a long litany of commercial failures upon the site. While their own habitation has vanished, ageing and already depleted later efforts stand where the farmhouse once was. This stands in direct contradiction to the recorded arguments of many white Rhodesians, including her brother's, that 'the Affs, they can't run anything', implying that previous white farmers and governments had enjoyed nothing but unmitigated success.⁵³² Lessing suggests a tentative continuity between these generations of failure: her parents' spirit has 'infected' those who came after, connecting these pitiful attempts to make the land profitable. When read through the charged context of land ownership in Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, this line of continuity between her parents and the later black tenants of the farm is a subversive manoeuvre. As McDermott Hughes outlines Rhodesian writers frequently 'crafted a property claim and self-image around an absent native unworthy of his environment'.⁵³³ A similar property claim inflects Lessing's brother's attempt to claim the site. This argument presented white farmers and tenants as singularly

⁵³¹ Ibid., p. 316.

⁵³² Ibid., p. 42.

⁵³³ McDermott Hughes, *Whiteness in Zimbabwe*, p. 7.

capable of protecting and enhancing the land. Lessing contends, in this description of finally returning to the farm, both that the land does not belong to her (despite her intense feelings of attachment it is not *her* bush which has been depleted) *and* that her family were no different to their successors in failing to make the most of this fertile soil.

Lessing's remembrance of the farm as a site of imperial ruin is used to frame her present vision of the rusting equipment and crumbling concrete. In this way, the depleted Zimbabwean farm is simply a later version of empire's remains. Lessing's homecoming interrogates her family's claim to this land, emphasising that they had 'left no traces' of their occupation. Far from preserving this environment through industrious settlement and fulfilling their fantasies of imperial progress, her family's tenure has left a legacy of mediocrity and failure. Moreover, in this act of return, Lessing is suddenly unsure of what the scene in front of her actually reveals; the farm which was so familiar in her memories appears only as a small patch of neglected soil. There is no revelation in this eventual act of return, only a pitiable sight of depletion.

Later, in 1992, Lessing plans to make another 'quick trip to my myth country' imagining that she might return to 'that hill always steeped in moonlight, starlight, sunlight'.⁵³⁴ This sublime, fantastical image of simultaneous moon and sunlight is brought to an abrupt halt by a large sign which impedes Lessing's homecoming on the edge of the property: 'Trespassers will be Prosecuted'.⁵³⁵ The question of how Lessing, as former inhabitant and now trespasser, belongs to this run-down farm remains unresolved by the close of *African Laughter*. At the memoir's conclusion, Lessing finds herself on the other side of the barricades. She is a prohibited immigrant no longer, but nevertheless barred from the place she had come to paradoxically describe and imagine as *her* 'myth country'.⁵³⁶ In the aftermath of colonial rule, new settlements and barriers have been erected and Lessing is — in the moment of return — physically and emotionally refused entry to this pivotal site. Her aim of returning to, but not claiming possession of, the farm is refused in this anti-climatic journey to the

⁵³⁴ *African Laughter*, p. 426.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*

perimeter of her former home. McAllister suggests that Lessing's eventual returns to the farm are 'the antithesis of the climactic moment that conventional travel narratives typically make out of reaching their goal'.⁵³⁷ It could indeed be tempting to suggest that because of *African Laughter's* fragmented, non-linear narrative, the narrator and her attempts to return to her childhood home are almost entirely displaced from view. But Lessing's various attempts to return home are, in fact, dispersed throughout *African Laughter's* wandering travelogues. These autobiographical narratives stubbornly refuse to disappear from view. Lessing's conflicted sense of belonging to her memories of Southern Rhodesia take on, I argue, a new potency during her travels across Zimbabwe. The contradictory compulsions to return to the house on the hill while also disavowing the legacies of white settlerdom, are manifest in both the form and content of her second travel memoir. Rather than resolve these tensions, *African Laughter* traverses the contested boundary lines of Lessing's myth country, suggesting how the political co-ordinates of her anti-imperialism remained inseparable from her memories of settler life. *African Laughter* demonstrates that, for Lessing, empire was and remained a deeply emotional affair. In these numerous acts of homecoming, Lessing's memories of settlerdom exert contradictory pressures on her life writing, creating a productive and unfulfilled longing for her former home unassuaged even by an eventual act of return. Lessing's two African travel memoirs reveal, perhaps more clearly than her other life writings, that the impossibility of returning permanently to the colonial frontier did not halt her life-long pursuit of Southern Rhodesia within her writing.

Conclusion: The Old Muwanga Tree

Despite suggesting in this chapter's introduction that Lessing's life writing must be considered and discussed as a constellation of interconnected texts, I have — in the interests of clarity — separated my discussions on a book-by-book basis. As a final remedy to this practical consideration, I here conclude my discussions with a cross-textual reading of a distinctive muwanga tree — and its

⁵³⁷ McAllister, 'Knowing Native, Going Native', p. 30.

attendant roots, trunks and branches – which marked the edge of Kermanshah Farm. Lessing’s many processual returns home, staged across the long span of her life writing, converge at the site of the muwanga (that Lessing sometimes incorrectly spells as ‘mawonga’) tree which lay on the outer boundary of the cleared bush surrounding the farmhouse. Although the tree is curiously absent from *Going Home*, it is described with some detail in *African Laughter*, *Under My Skin* and *Alfred and Emily*. Otherwise known as *pericopsis angolensis*, a species indigenous to Zimbabwe, the muwanga is known for reaching considerable heights, often growing to over 20m, and Lessing remembers the tree as the tallest landmark in the area.⁵³⁸ The memory of this tree is described in *African Laughter* — Lessing asks her brother ‘what happened to the muwanga tree?’ — featuring in her first return to the site of the farm in 1988: ‘gone was the big muwanga tree that once dominated all this landscape, full of honey which we cropped once a year’.⁵³⁹ The erstwhile tree appears again in *Under My Skin* as a vital coordinate of Lessing’s childhood: ‘in front of the house was a big mawonga tree, its pale trunk scarred by lightning, an old tree full of bees and honey’.⁵⁴⁰ By *Alfred and Emily*, Lessing recalls the tree as being ‘always full of birds, sporting a conspicuous broken branch which had buckled beneath the weight of a locust swarm’.⁵⁴¹ Reading across these descriptions, the muwanga tree emerges as border line, distinguishing the family farm from the uncultivated bush. Inhabited regularly by bees and birds, it initially appears to offer a symbol of home that the Tayler family shared with other creatures. The seasonal returns of migratory birds that would roost in its branches marked the circular passing of the seasons in their household. Lessing frequently remembers the distinctive ‘black lightning scar’ which marked its trunk as a visual reminder of the challenging climate that her family, as settlers, contended with throughout their two decades on the farm.⁵⁴²

⁵³⁸ Keith Coates Palgrave, *Trees of Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Penguin Random House, 1997), p. 297.

⁵³⁹ *African Laughter*, p. 313.

⁵⁴⁰ *Under My Skin*, p. 55.

⁵⁴¹ *Alfred and Emily*, p. 231.

⁵⁴² *African Laughter*, p. 313.

The muwanga occupies a key symbolic function in Lessing's multiple returns to the natal site of her childhood. As the tallest tree for several miles around it functions as a local landmark, yet it also promises a specific legacy for the family once they are gone. According to *African Laughter*, Lessing's parents would repeatedly declare "you can bury us under the old muwanga tree", meaning it was certainly not as good as an elm or an ash or an oak, but the next best thing'.⁵⁴³ This imagined burial under the old tree would, they imagined, anchor the Tayler family to their new homeland, giving them burial rites in southern Africa. Moreover, the muwanga was prized by Lessing's parents precisely because it is not ash or elm, both associated with the English countryside. As an indigenous, southern African plant it remained distinct from the non-native 'guava trees, plantains, marigolds' which populated Lessing's mother's garden.⁵⁴⁴ Such flowers and trees surrounded settlers' farmhouses in their district, creating a colourful boundary line which 'marked white occupancy'.⁵⁴⁵ But the muwanga, unlike these imported intruders, belongs to the bush rather than the farm. It becomes, for the Taylers, an approximation of indigeneity. In Lessing's life writing it reflects their desire to be at home upon the farm.

As her parents anchored themselves to this local landmark, imagining that the steadfast muwanga would outlast them, it promises a particular genealogical certainty, becoming a family tree that records the interconnected lives of numerous generations. Lessing and her brother would become the inheritors of the muwanga, the natural heirs to this homestead. The tree not only commemorates her parents' lives but also suggests the futurity of their descendants, who they hope will continue to inhabit the land after their deaths. Lessing too had her own, personal form of communion with this particular tree. As a teenager seeking sanctuary from her mother, Lessing would 'sink in the shade of [the] tree not a hundred yards from the house' reading and daydreaming of her adult freedom.⁵⁴⁶ Lara Feigel, who made her own pilgrimage to the site of Kermanshah Farm in Zimbabwe while writing

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ *Under My Skin*, p. 52.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 160.

Free Woman: Life, Liberation and Doris Lessing (2018), emphasises how the muwanga tree connected Lessing to her myth country: ‘she [Lessing] read sprawled under the Muwanga tree at the bottom of the hill [...] the ridges of her spine tessellating with the roots protruding from underneath her’.⁵⁴⁷ In a scene which is a reiteration — rather than a critical interpretation — of Lessing’s *Under My Skin*, Feigel depicts the tree as an extension of Lessing’s developing body, its roots anchoring her to the southern African soil.

However, I suggest that to read the muwanga tree as an anchor, a tomb, or a clichéd living representation of Lessing’s family tree — one which shores up the Taylers’ claims to be ‘at home’ in Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe — fundamentally misreads the vexed forms of homecoming staged across Lessing’s life writings. For rather than grounding Lessing permanently within the Zimbabwean landscape, the muwanga tree reveals her unstable, tenuous position within her myth country. Importantly, it does not offer longevity, or a secure connection to the land. Furthermore, its dual, unstable meaning mirrors the fraught renditions of family trees, ancestry and genealogy in Frame’s autobiographies (more on this will be discussed in Chapter Three). The final retelling of Lessing’s return to the farm in *Alfred and Emily* once again recalls ‘the mawonga tree’, repeating her parents’ wish to be buried beneath it and adding their exclamation of ‘well, that old tree will still be here when we are gone’.⁵⁴⁸ By securing their family to a time frame that would outlive their own brief settlement, this imagining of the muwanga aims to ensure the futurity of their afterlives upon the farm. As it happened, Lessing drily notes the tree ‘lasted not much longer than they did’; it was felled by lightning shortly after her father’s deteriorating health drove her parents permanently from the bush and back into the suburbs of Salisbury.⁵⁴⁹ The literal meaning of the tree as grounding or rooting the family to the soil, is misleading. In actuality, it provides neither a permanent monument nor a record of their

⁵⁴⁷ *Free Woman: Life, Liberation and Doris Lessing*, p. 25.

⁵⁴⁸ *Alfred and Emily*, p. 232.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

existence there. The muwanga's shifting, developing meaning highlights the need to read across Lessing's numerous life narratives.

Although Lessing's numerous descriptions of the tree suggest that she too felt a profound connection to it, her life writing also emphasises the impossibility of this becoming a living home for Lessing. The muwanga cannot offer her a permanent connection to the land. When Feigel describes the tree tessellating with Lessing's spine, she imagines that its trunk connects Lessing's bones to the soil beneath her feet. Yet in actuality, Feigel's focus on the tree reveals how the unresolved tensions of Lessing's repeated attempts to go home are now impacting the life writers who explore Lessing's work after her death. Reading across Lessing's life writings reveals how the muwanga was neither a permanent monument to Lessing's parents, nor does it provide Lessing with permanent roots in the landscape of her childhood. Returning home, both to the country and to the specific site of the house on the hill, was both a complicated and ultimately unresolved process for Lessing, as this chapter has repeatedly outlined.

I contend that the muwanga is a deliberately dismantled monument to Lessing's settler childhood. She must undermine and question its central position within her autobiographical writings because, like Benedict Anderson's conceptualisation of 'cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers', Lessing's muwanga tree is 'saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings'.⁵⁵⁰ It is vital that the muwanga tree is not permitted to become a tomb for Lessing's parents, or a figurative set of natal roots for the author herself, as this would ensure the futurity of Southern Rhodesia, an act of preservation to which Lessing was resolutely and ideologically opposed. Instead, the tree becomes a nexus for exploring Lessing's conflicted sense of belonging to her former homeland. Her life writing may be compelled to return, over and over, to the site of the muwanga, but always to uproot its symbolic functions. Like the farmhouse itself, Lessing will not permit this monument to her childhood

⁵⁵⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 10.

to remain standing. In each rendition of the muwanga's eventual death, Lessing emphasises how, like the house on the kopje, it quickly collapsed and became indiscernible from the surrounding bush.

Lessing had already written of her 1988 return to Kermanshah Farm in *African Laughter*, yet in *Alfred and Emily* she significantly rewrites this return journey towards the end of Part II. This episode recounts how Lessing had a mild altercation with a drunk farmworker, telling him that 'there used to be a big tree here', only for him to retort in anger, 'there was never any tree'.⁵⁵¹ He continues to state that, even if there had once been a muwanga tree, Lessing is using 'the wrong name'.⁵⁵² Lessing is left to retreat from the property noting that in this exchange she has witnessed 'history being unmade, the past forsworn'.⁵⁵³ Once more, the muwanga clearly intersects with the contested histories of the former settler state, even becoming representative of them. As *Alfred and Emily* reimagines her parents' lives within an 'unmade' history, exploring the alternative possibilities of a world without World War I, Lessing's own attachment to the muwanga as a marker of Rhodesian history is doubly complicated within this exchange. Even as she attempts to surpass the legacies of white colonial rule by rewriting history in a speculative life narrative, Lessing reveals her inability, as a life writer, to execute this manoeuvre. What remains clear within this charged tussle over the memory of the muwanga tree is that, in the newly independent Zimbabwe, her family's past lives on this land are being extinguished, while all physical traces of their tenure are long gone. Even the tree, a vital co-ordinate of her childhood, is not just forgotten but categorically denied (there was *never* a tree here). Although Lessing does not allow the muwanga to stand as a monument to her childhood or her parents' lives on the farm, neither does she want its existence — and by extension her own memories of Southern Rhodesia — to be denied.

The muwanga becomes, in its numerous appearances, an ironic symbol of permanence across Lessing's life writing and a vital touchstone that exposes the contradictory forces underpinning her

⁵⁵¹ *Alfred and Emily*, p. 229.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*

numerous attempts to go home. Despite its central position within her life writing project, this tree cannot root Lessing to southern Africa. It does not deliver on its genealogical promise and neither is it the permanent monument or tomb to her parents' lives on the farm. Like the secure, branching arms which temporarily enclosed her family on their camping trips in the bush, the muwanga tree offers only the illusion of safe anchorage. But significantly, like the dilapidated farmhouse which quickly sinks back into the bush, it reveals how Lessing refuses to monumentalise or preserve the vital coordinates of her childhood. Writing in *Under My Skin*, Lessing explains that her central problem, as a life writer, was that 'of shifting perspectives, for you see your life differently at different stages, like climbing a mountain while the landscape changes with every turn in the path'.⁵⁵⁴ Her description of an ascent through shifting terrain is indicative of her processual life writing project: Lessing's memoirs and autobiographies do not irrefutably fix the facts of her life, but return multiple times to her memories and experiences. Just as *Alfred and Emily* suggests that Lessing was always 'trying to get free' from the traumatic, twentieth-century histories of empire, all of her life narratives are suggestive of unfinished business, of entanglements with Britain's colonial past that will not, or cannot, be undone.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁴ *Under My Skin*, p. 12.

⁵⁵⁵ *Alfred and Emily*, p. viii.

Chapter Three: The Remains of Empire: Janet Frame's Autobiographies

Introduction: Life Lines and Autobiographical Space

“Life lines of Toby Withers, Zoe Bryce, Pat Keenan and others whom I have not yet named. Life line, umbilical chord, fishing line, trip wire, strangling rope”

— Thora Pattern in *The Edge of the Alphabet* (1963)

By the time of her death in 2004 Janet Frame had published eleven novels, three volumes of autobiography, several collections of short stories and one of poetry. She had become a foundational figure within New Zealand literary culture and occupied, in the words of her biographer Michael King, the awkward title of ‘New Zealand’s best known but least public author’.⁵⁵⁶ Her autobiographies, along with Jane Campion’s subsequent film adaptation, *An Angel at My Table* (1990), furthered a growing public interest in the close relationship between Frame’s life and work. Yet as Thora Pattern — a narrator in Frame’s third novel *To The Edge of the Alphabet* — reminds us, life writing is a complex and potentially violent business. In a series of metaphors which themselves recreate the span of a single life, Thora notes that life lines can sustain like an umbilical chord, deceive like a trip wire or destroy like a strangling rope. As Frame’s readers, we have been warned.

Meanwhile, a steady stream of posthumous publications, including two novels and a collection of assorted non-fictional writings, have added to Frame’s considerable oeuvre and continued to generate interest in her life and writings. As Claire Bazin outlines, by the time her autobiographies were published during the 1980s, Frame’s earlier novels were largely out of print. Had it not been for these three texts, which were immediately popular with readers in both New Zealand and Europe, Frame’s ‘novels, poetry and even short stories might have been forgotten’.⁵⁵⁷ The publication of *To the Is-Land* (1982), *An Angel at My Table* (1984), and *The Envoy From Mirror*

⁵⁵⁶ Michael King, ‘Janet Frame’, *The Guardian*, 30 January 2004, <<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2004/jan/30/guardianobituaries.booksobituaries>> [accessed 23 October 2018]

⁵⁵⁷ Bazin, *Janet Frame*, p. 4.

City (1985) significantly changed and shaped the reception of Frame's work. In particular, the arrival of *To the Is-Land* heralded a seismic shift in her career. According to King, at the beginning of 1982 she remained a reclusive writer living 'in a small New Zealand city known to and read by a minority of aficionados', while by its end 'she was a nationally known figure, a best-selling author and a holder of one of the country's highest civic awards'.⁵⁵⁸

Like Lessing's and Lively's life writings, Frame's autobiographies bear witness to a childhood imbued with the legacies of British colonial rule. Her formal education offered consistent 'praise of the Empire, the King, the Governor-General, the Anzacs at Gallipoli, [and] Robert Flacon Scott at the South Pole'.⁵⁵⁹ Frame's early understanding of British imperialism here moves in ever-widening concentric circles, expanding from a central, male figure of the imperial monarch outwards to polar exploration. These models of colonial masculinity are imagined as, quite literally, spanning the globe. Like Lessing and Lively, Frame too travelled to Britain in the post-war period, discovering that London remained, in 1956, a post-war city where 'the relics were evident: bombed sites not yet rebuilt, overgrown with grass and weeds and scattered with rubble'.⁵⁶⁰ But while previous readings of Frame as a postcolonial author have focussed upon her account of travelling to Britain in the third volume of her autobiography, *The Envoy From Mirror City* — and her fictional renderings of this journey in novels such as *The Edge of the Alphabet* (1962) — I suggest that a preoccupation with empire can in fact be found *throughout* Frame's three autobiographies.⁵⁶¹

My reading of Frame's life writing places these texts in, to use Stuart Murray's phrase, 'the international context that sees New Zealand as one country, among others, wrestling with the legacy of a British colonial heritage'.⁵⁶² As Tony Ballantyne also outlines in *Webs of Empire* (2012),

⁵⁵⁸ Michael King, *Wrestling with the Angel: A Life of Janet Frame* (London: Picador, 2001), p. 451.

⁵⁵⁹ 'To the Is-Land', p. 34.

⁵⁶⁰ 'The Envoy From Mirror City', p. 309.

⁵⁶¹ See: Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 102-107; Edmond, "'In Search of the Lost Tribe": Janet Frame's England', pp. 161-174; McLeod, *Postcolonial London*, pp. 59-92.

⁵⁶² Murray, *Never a Soul at Home*, p. 18.

‘colonisation and its legacies continue to stand at the heart of New Zealand life’, and his conceptualisation of the British Empire as a dynamic ‘set of shifting linkages’ provides an important context for this chapter.⁵⁶³ As noted in this thesis’ introduction, there are stark and vital differences between Frame’s impoverished upbringing on New Zealand’s South Island and Lively’s early life in an exclusive colonial enclave in the Middle East or Lessing’s childhood in the Rhodesian veld. Unlike Lessing and Lively, Frame returned to the country of her birth after seven years of living in Europe, during which she primarily resided in Britain. She returned to what she had previously described as life ‘on the edge of the farthest circle’ in 1963.⁵⁶⁴ My reading of her life writing suggests that, both before and after this return journey, she was concerned with the long-term impact of British imperialism, both in New Zealand and abroad. Charting a path through her three autobiographies, I contend that the partial and at times inadvertent engagements with New Zealand’s colonial legacies in *To the Is-Land* and *An Angel at My Table* inform Frame’s later, more explicit confrontations with the end of Empire in Britain in *The Envoy From Mirror City*. As she drafted these autobiographies in the early 1980s, Frame witnessed New Zealand’s Māori renaissance with interest and participated in protest marches against the Springbok rugby tour of 1981, petitioning her government to remove their tacit support for apartheid South Africa.⁵⁶⁵ While Frame — unlike the other two authors included in this study — was not a witness to direct colonial rule, her life writing nevertheless registers the complex impact of colonial legacies on literary self-representation.

This chapter focusses upon Frame’s three autobiographies: *To the Is-Land*, *An Angel at My Table* and *The Envoy From Mirror City*. As these were initially published as separate texts, I discuss these life narratives as distinctive accounts of Frame’s life, rather than a complete autobiography. However, this focus comes with a caveat: in Frame’s writing the boundaries between fiction and life writing are permeable rather than solid. It is therefore negligent to discuss her autobiographies without

⁵⁶³ Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire*, p. 13.

⁵⁶⁴ ‘To the Is-Land’, p. 94.

⁵⁶⁵ King, *Wrestling with the Angel*, pp. 439-440.

reference to her wider oeuvre. As Roger Robinson, and many others have surmised, it is ‘difficult to discuss Frame’s texts separately’, as ‘plots, preoccupations and metaphor recur and merge’ across her novels, short stories and autobiographies.⁵⁶⁶ It is not enough to say that events and themes are *repeated* across Frame’s oeuvre, but that the boundaries between apparently discrete texts are, in fact, porous. Frame returns to and rewrites particular incidents from her own life so that, for example, *To the Is-Land*’s account of the death of Tommy Miles, a railway ganger run over by ‘the express train on the railway line outside our place’ is retold in the posthumously published *Towards Another Summer* (2007). The book’s protagonist Grace Cleave (a writer who bears clear resemblances to Frame) recounts how her father spoke of Tommy Lyles’ accident ‘with a terrible doom in his voice’, before adding ‘[y]ou see it was my father who drove the train that killed him’.⁵⁶⁷ The two accounts of Tommy Miles’/Lyles’ death highlights how the recursive repetitions in Frame’s oeuvre conceal and reveal in equal measure. In this instance the ‘truth’ lies between the two accounts: in an early draft of *To the Is-Land* Frame notes that her sister Myrtle ‘said that Dad had been [driving] the train [...] although I never checked [sic] the truth’ and, following both her sister’s and her father’s deaths, neither account could be established as definitive.⁵⁶⁸ In either case, Tommy’s gruesome accident reveals how Frame’s narratives often extend beyond the boundaries of individual texts. Although this chapter reads Frame’s life writing after empire, I also acknowledge that an objective or final rendition of Frame’s life is rendered impossible in these texts and that the truth is dispersed amongst the numerous recitations of her life story. Frame’s readers should, I argue, locate meaning in the interactions *between* her multiple retellings and read across these accounts.

Throughout Frame’s oeuvre, objects and events move across the boundaries of texts, seeming to leap between the covers of their respective books. In his ‘parallel’ reading of two Frame novels, Andrew Dean notes: ‘the bus ticket that floats over Grace Cleave’s wall and into her garden in

⁵⁶⁶ Roger Robinson, ‘New Zealand’ in *The Commonwealth Novel Since 1960*, ed. by Bruce King (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 105-120 (p. 107).

⁵⁶⁷ Janet Frame, *Towards Another Summer* (London: Virago Press, 2008), p. 75.

⁵⁶⁸ Dunedin, The Hocken Library, MS 3028/954.

Towards Another Summer seems to have been thrown from *The Adaptable Man*, where Unity Foreman, a writer, watches a “bus ticket drifting over the garden wall”.⁵⁶⁹ Dean’s reading reveals how the boundaries separating these two novels are permeable, at best. Although *To the Is-Land, An Angel at My Table* and *The Envoy From Mirror City* remain the focal point of this chapter, they are understood through and within the constellation of Frame’s fiction, which informs and complicates my readings. My attention to the autobiographies as three core texts — referred to throughout this chapter as Frame’s life writing — therefore does so with consistent references to her ‘fictional’ writings and acknowledges the problematic, blurred lines between these narrative genres. While Frame’s autobiographies have been repeatedly denounced as her ‘least troubling works’, I on the contrary view them as complex and experimental forms of literary self-representation which offer a vital, and by no means straightforward, contribution to this study of life writing after empire.⁵⁷⁰

By reading Frame’s autobiographies through and alongside her fiction, my arguments challenge previous critical readings that these texts offer only ‘an analeptic or hermeneutic tool — a precious key — with which to reread the novels’.⁵⁷¹ My contention with this interpretation is twofold: first, such assessments rely on a tired and reductive trope of Frame’s life as somehow ‘unlocking’ the secrets of her fiction.⁵⁷² Second, this argument limits the many possible readings of Frame’s autobiographies to the single use of examining her novels. In any case, Frame is rarely considered in comparative studies nor is she generally placed alongside literary contemporaries whose work might inform and respond to her own preoccupations as a writer. Therefore, this chapter uses selected passages from Frame’s fiction to facilitate a re-reading of her autobiographies while, in turn, placing

⁵⁶⁹ Dean, ‘Foes, ghosts, and faces in the water’, p. 22.

⁵⁷⁰ Gina Mercer, ‘A Simple Everyday Glass: The Autobiographies of Janet Frame’, *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 11 (1993), 41-48 (p. 44).

⁵⁷¹ Bazin, *Janet Frame*, p. 4.

⁵⁷² I refer here to Patrick Evans’s statement that ‘there are no greater secrets to her [Frame’s] writing than the depth of its autobiographical bases and, distinctively, the author’s need to write her life in a way that asserted control of it’ – Patrick Evans, ‘Dr Clutha’s Book of the World: Janet Paterson Frame, 1924-2004’, *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 22 (2004), 15-30 (p. 22).

her within a broader study of life writing after empire. This positions Frame alongside a cohort of late twentieth-century female life writers with post-imperial concerns.

However, I remain cognisant of Michelle Keown's warning that 'the question of whether Janet Frame can be considered a "postcolonial" writer is a vexed one'.⁵⁷³ My readings of these autobiographies contend that the complexities of Frame's life writing can be better understood through postcolonial literary scholarship, though without positioning Frame as a categorically 'postcolonial' author. Furthermore, although the lines separating Frame's life writing and fiction are irrevocably blurred, *To the Is-Land*, *An Angel at My Table* and *The Envoy From Mirror City* can and should be understood as far more than pale imitations of Frame's novels, interesting only insofar as they illuminate her more accomplished fictions. Inverting this critical focus, I draw upon Frame's novels and short stories to supplement and even generate new readings of her life writing. My focus on the three texts published with the sub-title 'an autobiography' acknowledges that the distinctions between life and fiction are frequently collapsed in Frame's writing and that all of her work therefore inhabits a distinctive autobiographical space.⁵⁷⁴ However, my use and development of

⁵⁷³ Keown, *Pacific Islands Writing*, p. 66.

⁵⁷⁴ In his discussion of 'The Autobiographical Pact', Philippe Lejeune conceptualises 'autobiographical space' as one in which autobiographies and novels by a single author can be understood 'in relation to the other'. This contests André Gide's suggestion that 'perhaps we come closer to truth in the novel' than autobiography. Contrary to Gide, Lejeune rejected the competitive model between autobiography and fiction, and preferred to hypothesise that autobiographies and novels by a single author can be understood 'in relation to the other'. For Lejeune, autobiographical space came to operate as an alternative autobiographical pact between writer and reader, allowing the latter to view all of an author's works as varying forms of self-representation. I am by no means the first to suggest that Frame's oeuvre constitutes an autobiographical space. Dean contends that Frame's metafictional strategies 'became so concerned with her autobiographical space that she wrote against [her] readers'. Frame's recourse to metafiction served, according to Dean, to 'close down interpretative possibilities rather than open them up'. It is evident that the confused boundaries between Frame's texts encourage a form of frustrated reading, where a multitude of possible interpretations are curtailed by a prescriptive authorial presence. As Alexis Brown confirms, Frame's interest in authorial control and the reception of her writing highlights 'the adversarial and controlling relationship Frame has with her readers'. — Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, p. 27; André Gide, *If It Die...An Autobiography*, trans. by Dorothy Bussy (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 187; Dean, 'Foes, ghosts, and faces in the water', p. 154; p. 144; Alexis Brown, 'An Angel at My Table (1990): Janet Frame, Jane Campion, and Authorial Control in the Auto/Biopic', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 34:1 (2016), 103-122 (p. 105).

autobiographical space aims not to discuss or further problematise Frame's metafictional tendencies, but instead to pursue new readings of her autobiographies. By focussing upon these three texts and reading them in relation to Frame's wider oeuvre I scrutinise their textual proclivities and entanglements with empire, rather than pursuing the difficult relationship between her life writing and fiction.

While numerous critics describe Frame as 'having grown up with a permanent sense of being in the wrong place because, as a Pākehā [white] New Zealander, she feels at home neither in New Zealand nor in Britain', critical understandings of Frame and the British Empire must be extended beyond such biographical readings.⁵⁷⁵ I stipulate that Frame's engagements with imperialism can be found in the minutiae of her life writing project, from the debris of leftover objects from her childhood home to her bereft descriptions of the 'nothingness and nowhere-ness' that followed her experiences in psychiatric institutions.⁵⁷⁶ But I pursue these readings with the same caution expressed by many (if not all) of Frame's critics, that her 'work will not fit easily into any single discursive or theoretical frame', while also agreeing that flexible, creative approaches to her writings are urgently needed to expand the critical debates surrounding her oeuvre.⁵⁷⁷ Therefore, this chapter concedes that neither colonial histories nor a postcolonial present are Frame's overriding or categorical concern. Instead, the rubric of 'life writing after empire' illuminates new pathways for exploring these three autobiographies and their complicated relationship with Frame's wider oeuvre. In other words, Frame's life writing reveals a particular set of relationships with the remains of empire and engages — to varying degrees — with the long legacies of British colonialism in both the South Pacific and Britain. My readings here demonstrate that Frame's autobiographies can be productively read alongside those of other life writers who inhabited the margins of the former British Empire. Frame's

⁵⁷⁵ Carmen Luz Fuentes-Vasquez, *Dangerous Writing: The Autobiographies of Willa Muir, Margaret Laurence and Janet Frame* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), p. 170.

⁵⁷⁶ 'An Angel at My Table', p. 215.

⁵⁷⁷ Janet Wilson, 'Janet Frame: Ten years on', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 51:5 (2015), 574-578 (p. 574).

inclusion in this thesis significantly broadens its scope by highlighting how life writing after empire may encompass authors who did not themselves live through imperial rule.

This chapter's three sections address each of Frame's autobiographies in turn, offering close textual analysis of *To the Is-Land*, *An Angel at My Table* and *The Envoy From Mirror City*. These read Frame's life writing as responsive to the ongoing legacies of the British Empire, beginning with the anti-imperial disorder and confused settler genealogies that I trace throughout *To the Is-Land*. This chapter then turns to *An Angel at My Table* to discuss how Frame's restless searches for belonging not only reflect her incarceration in various psychiatric institutions, but also raise alternatives to the structures of enclosure, settlement and ownership in mid-twentieth century Pākehā society. This chapter's third and concluding section focusses on narrating the end of the British Empire in *The Envoy From Mirror City*. With this reading I acknowledge that Frame's descriptions of imperial decline in Britain present her most explicit engagement with the legacies of empire in her life writing.

On the one hand, my readings outline how New Zealand's settler past offers a vital historical context for interpreting Frame's attempts to uncouple herself from geographical locations, or the inherited histories of a family tree. However, by re-reading the legacies of imperialism and settlerdom into Frame's first two autobiographies, it is important to note that Frame rarely confronts the aftermath of empire directly in either of these texts. She engages with her own position as 'a colonial New Zealander' and her country's role within the British Empire only after her account of travelling to London in *The Envoy From Mirror City*. My readings of *To the Is-Land* and *An Angel at My Table* build upon recent critical discussions that have expanded postcolonial critique 'to those works which at first glance do not fall within the postcolonial field of vision'.⁵⁷⁸ By supplementing my readings of her autobiographies with occasional forays into her fiction, this chapter therefore outlines how Frame's life writing tracks the continuing — and sometimes surprising — traces of the colonial past long after official decolonisation. Not only do her autobiographies witness the end of Empire in

⁵⁷⁸ Schwarz, 'Introduction: End of Empire and the English novel', p. 17.

Britain, when read together these texts question the impact of colonial genealogies, land seizures and migrations — all so integral to New Zealand’s settler past — upon life and life writing in the twentieth century.

Imperial Debris, Ancestral Myths and Uncertain Origins in *To the Is-Land*

To the Is-Land ostensibly narrates the first eighteen years of Frame’s life, describing her childhood in a family of ‘railway people’ and their different homes in railway towns across the South Island. Beginning with a description of Frame’s shadowy Flemish ancestors who travelled to New Zealand in the mid-nineteenth century, she explains how her daily existence was interwoven with stories of these mythical predecessors. The tales of who ‘did this, was this, lived and died there and there’, were part of the fabric of family life.⁵⁷⁹ Through this exploration of her origins Frame constructs an understanding of her ancestral beginnings not as a concrete fact or record, but as a set of shifting familial myths. Meanwhile, *To the Is-Land* also records how Frame’s early years were punctuated by significant changes in her domestic arrangements, initially caused by her brother Bruddie’s undiagnosed epilepsy and later by her sister’s untimely death, that left ‘a blankness, a Myrtle-missing part’ in family life.⁵⁸⁰ The family’s poverty, exacerbated by the medical bills for her brother’s ongoing treatment, was clear to Frame from an early age. The narrative finishes (as do each of Frame’s autobiographies) with a journey, when in the final chapter she travels to the South Island city of Dunedin by train and begins her training at a teachers’ college. At the end of *To the Is-Land* Frame prepares for what she calls ‘my Future’, discarding her old nicknames of ‘Nini and Fuzzy and Jean’ and practicing a new signature of ‘Janet Paterson Frame’ inside her notebooks.⁵⁸¹ Frame’s first

⁵⁷⁹ ‘To the Is-Land’, p. 10.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁵⁸¹ ‘To the Is-Land’, p. 140. In this signatory act, Frame implies that her signed name is an invention, rather than an inheritance (as Frame is her father’s surname and Paterson from her maternal grandmother). This is further complicated by her unusual decision to change her name by deed poll, in 1958, to Nene Janet Paterson Clutha. She therefore writes under her birth name, but

autobiography thus begins with a genealogy that obscures her ancestral origins and ends with a signatory act both asserting and complicating her status as the named author of the text. The signed name of ‘Janet Frame’ is one of many possible personas in her life writing.

I suggest that Frame’s deliberate disordering of the record of her life is a vital aspect of her autobiographical project. Her repeated, even obsessive, inventories of objects in *To the Is-Land* are used to conceal a lack of other narrative content. Lists of chipped and broken items are recited many times in Frame’s first autobiography. But what appears initially to be an ordering impulse, in the form of catalogues and lists, is actually a distinct form of disorder. The connections between these items, and even their meaning, is often uncertain. More specifically, the deliberate disassembly of origins, genealogies, inheritances and even material heirlooms in *To the Is-Land* challenges an understanding of empire as an origin point or determinant in Frame’s life writing. Although Frame does not conceal her family’s beginnings as Scottish settlers in New Zealand, she frustrates any attempt to secure her roots to such genealogical origins. These autobiographical manoeuvres have been frequently read as Frame’s determination to escape the confines of a life narrative which had incarcerated her within numerous psychiatric institutions.⁵⁸² Yet the rejection of fixed origins and known genealogies in Frame’s life writing *also* rejects the causal sequence which would place her as the successor to New Zealand’s histories of settlement.

The European colonisation of New Zealand began, as Anne Salmond outlines, with the voyage of the *Endeavour*, and it is therefore inseparable from a colonial order that employed Linnaean

lives with a pseudonym. As Vanessa Finney notes, not only does Frame’s legal name stage a partial return to her childhood nickname ‘Nini’, it disperses her origins within a fast-moving body of water (the river Clutha) which cuts through New Zealand’s South Island. Frame’s unstable signature deliberately undermines the autobiographical pact as outlined by Philippe Lejeune, in which the named author of an autobiography corresponds to its subject. Yet Frame also refuses a deconstructivist view of the autobiographical signature offered by Paul De Man in ‘Autobiography as De-Facement’, who notes that the signature offers a legal, but not epistemological authority.— Vanessa Finney, ‘What Does “Janet Frame” Mean?’, *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 11 (1993), 193-205; Lejeune, *On Autobiography*; de Man, ‘Autobiography as De-Facement’, 919-930.
⁵⁸² Andrew Dean, ‘Reading An Autobiography: Michael King, Patrick Evans, and Janet Frame’, *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 29 (2011), 46-65.

taxonomy in an attempt to ‘examine, analyse, count, classify and record’.⁵⁸³ Salmond’s comments, specific to a particular South Pacific context, reflect Edward Said’s broader arguments that imperialism ‘relentlessly codified and observed everything [...] so thoroughly and in so detailed a manner as to leave few items untouched’.⁵⁸⁴ The attempts to impose a colonial order, as a feature of the earliest Pākehā-Māori encounters, sought to transform the newly discovered islands and their inhabitants into a series of bounded entities. By focussing upon origins and objects in *To the Is-Land* I suggest that Frame’s life writing, which eschews linear sequences in favour of more complex genealogies, can also be read across and through these imperial legacies, rejecting what Said, Salmond, and Ann Stoler — following Michel Foucault — have termed the colonial ‘order of things’.

Frame’s first autobiography opens with a description of ancestral origins which confounds any attempt to pinpoint exact beginnings within her life. Opening *To the Is-Land* by outlining her family history, Frame asks: ‘the ancestors: who were they, the myth and the reality?’⁵⁸⁵ But the distinctions between the mythic and the real are quickly blurred:

As a child I used to boast that the Frames ‘came over with William of Orange’. I have since learned that this may have been so, for Frame is a version of Fleming, Flamand, from the Flemish weavers who settled in the lowlands of Scotland in the fourteenth century. I strengthen the reality or the myth of those ancestors each time I recall that Grandma Frame began working in a Paisley cotton mill when she was eight years old.⁵⁸⁶

Here Frame deploys a vague etymology to imply her connection to Flemish weavers, outlining a continuity between Flemish immigrants in the fourteenth century and her own childhood in Otago. These in turn link her family, via the ancestors, to longer histories of immigration and settlement than the mass exodus of Scots to New Zealand during the nineteenth century.⁵⁸⁷ However, William of Orange was proclaimed King of England, Ireland and Scotland in 1689 and therefore bore no

⁵⁸³ Anne Salmond, *Tears of Rangī: Experiments Across Worlds* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2017), p. 34.

⁵⁸⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 222.

⁵⁸⁵ ‘To the Is-Land’, p. 7.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁷ Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 170.

responsibility for the Flemish weavers ‘who settled in the lowlands of Scotland’.⁵⁸⁸ Frame’s fourteenth-century Flemish ancestors migrated two centuries before William of Orange became William III of England. The lines of continuity Frame appears to draw in this description are duplicitous and the record of her family history is unstable from its earliest rendition in *To the Is-Land*. According to King, the connection between Frame, Fleming, and Flamand was discovered through a passing conversation at a dinner party.⁵⁸⁹ The relationship between her private life and more public histories proves to be similarly contingent, with the attempt to trace the etymology of her name proving just as inaccurate as the initial boast that her family ‘came over with William of Orange’.

Such discrepancies, combined with Frame’s telling description of ‘reality *or* myth’ (emphasis my own), suggests that the two are, in fact, interchangeable in Frame’s life writing. It is the reiteration of remembered stories, rather than the historical record, which constructs her familial origins. Frame ‘strengthens’ the connections between medieval Flemish weavers and nineteenth-century cotton mill workers with each recitation of these personal myths. While Grandma Frame may have indeed lived in the Scottish town of Paisley, the exact details of her early life and immigration to New Zealand are, Frame reminds us, always subject to alteration.⁵⁹⁰ It is important to emphasise that although she appears in the opening paragraphs of *To the Is-Land* to weave together the different threads of her family history, Frame in fact creates only a tangential connection between the presumed profession of her early ancestors and her grandmother’s experience of the Scottish textile industry. For Frame,

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ King’s biography describes how Frame came across her possible Flemish ancestry at a dinner party, held on the 5th September 1969, in which Frame happened to meet ‘a singer named Robert who, like her, had a grandmother named Paterson who came from Paisley. He told her that the Frames were descended from Flemish weavers who had crossed to the Scottish Lowlands in the fourteenth century, and that her name was originally Flamand’. – *Wrestling with the Angel*, p. 341.

⁵⁹⁰ The Scottish weaving town of Paisley, home to Grandma Frame, faced widespread poverty in the mid-nineteenth century. By 1842, ‘a quarter of the population of Paisley, some 12,000 people, had been kept from actual starvation by the means of soup kitchens’. After pleading with the British government for assisted passage, a significant number of the town’s residents emigrated to New Zealand, beginning a chain migration route which was eventually traversed by Mary Paterson (later Frame) in 1874. – Jock Philips and Terrence John Hearn, *Settlers: New Zealand Immigrants from England, Ireland and Scotland, 1800-1945* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008), p. 1.

all origins are necessarily invented, with her first autobiography declaring the impossibility of known beginnings. While Frame's novels and autobiographies have been repeatedly interpreted by critics as a general challenge to 'the idea of fixed truth', *To the Is-Land* is more specifically critical of ancestral knowledge.⁵⁹¹ Frame's family legends, contingent on repetition and recitation, were 'always slightly different' in each retelling.⁵⁹² *To the Is-Land* may begin by outlining the lives of her ancestors, but Frame pursues an understanding of ancestral knowledge as unstable and fluid, decoupling herself from the known coordinates of her family tree.

The connection between reality and myth is therefore capricious from the earliest beginnings of Frame's autobiography. She *was* the immediate descendant of Scots who had travelled to New Zealand as part of a mass migration scheme, but her connection to Flemish weavers is far less certain.⁵⁹³ From the opening chapters of *To the Is-Land*, Frame's genealogy as a settler is charged with invention and her provenance rendered deliberately uncertain.

To understand how this destabilisation might be read through and across New Zealand's colonial past, I turn to Anne McClintock's description of 'the crisis of origins' as one of 'the stalwart themes of colonial discourse'.⁵⁹⁴ She contends that colonial "'discovery" is always late', as 'the inaugural scene is never in fact inaugural or ordinary: something has always gone before'.⁵⁹⁵ McClintock therefore argues that extravagant acts of colonial discovery were so contingent on the *invention* of origins that these beginnings had to be marked visibly, through flags, names upon maps or even monuments.⁵⁹⁶ I read Frame's own uncertain beginnings through this crisis of origins. By drawing attention to the artificial nature of origin myths and implying that such narratives are always

⁵⁹¹ Jane Unsworth, 'Why does an author who apparently draws so much on autobiography seem committed to "alienating" the reader? A reflection on theories of autobiography with reference to the work of Janet Frame' in *The Uses of Autobiography*, ed. by Julia Swindells (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 24-30 (p. 27).

⁵⁹² 'To the Is-Land', p. 10.

⁵⁹³ Tanja Bueltmann, *Scottish Ethnicity and the Making of New Zealand Society 1850-1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 32-33.

⁵⁹⁴ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 28.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

the result of invention, Frame refuses to anchor her autobiographies to an inaugural moment of colonial discovery or settlement. *To the Is-Land*, rather than rehearsing or reciting the lines of Frame's family tree, pursues an anti-genealogical route that rejects linear narratives of imperial progress and refuses to position Frame as the successor to any ancestral beginnings.

The foundations of myth and invention in *To the Is-Land* have significant consequences for Frame's later two volumes of autobiography, which feature recursive descriptions of the writer as weaver and the text as a woven textile.⁵⁹⁷ As Roger Robinson notes, the motif of 'weaving, clothing and enmeshing' occurs throughout Frame's oeuvre.⁵⁹⁸ Although these descriptions of weaving seem initially to trace Frame's vocation to her Scottish ancestry, in actuality this does not secure her family history. Instead, the act of weaving holds multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings in Frame's life writing, becoming both a comfort and suggestive of 'burial by entrapment or warmth'.⁵⁹⁹ In either sense, these figurative textiles cannot definitively stitch Frame's life narrative to the origins of her ancestors. The unstable myths of Flemish weavers and Paisley cotton mills in *To the Is-Land* complicate the supposed genealogical order of Frame's later autobiographies. This manoeuvre marks Frame's refusal to be confined by the perimeters of her own origin story.

The complex genealogies described in *To the Is-Land* have been previously read as indicative of 'Frame's indebtedness to Maori culture' and her interest in woven lines of descent interpreted as 'reproducing a holistic view of the world akin to that of Maori'.⁶⁰⁰ However, I suggest that *To the Is-*

⁵⁹⁷ The connections Frame draws between ancestry and weaving also respond to the close relationship between flax-work and bloodlines in Māori culture, exemplified by the multiple meanings of Māori words such as 'kāwai' (which can refer either to the fibres used in weaving, lines of descent or the plaited handles of a flax basket) or 'kanoi' (meaning strands of rope, an individual's line of descent or the threads within a cloak). Braiding and weaving frequently emerge in Frame's writing as the means of knowledge production, while the Māori connections between flax-work and genealogy is referenced in Frame's novel *The Carpathians* (1988) through Rua's announcement that 'I know flax and flax knows me. You understand the kind of knowing I mean?' —Salmond, *Tears of Rangī*, p. 134; Janet Frame, *The Carpathians* (New York: George Braziller, 1988), p. 86.

⁵⁹⁸ Robinson, 'New Zealand', p. 108.

⁵⁹⁹ 'The Envoy From Mirror City', pp. 307-308.

⁶⁰⁰ Paola Della Valle, *From Silence to Voice: The Rise of Maori Literature* (Auckland: Libro International, 2010), p. 65.

Land's descriptions of ancestral knowledge and weaving-as-genealogy cannot be straightforwardly understood through 'the arboreal and rhizomatic forms' of whakapapa (Māori genealogies).⁶⁰¹ Frame claimed in an early biographical essay that 'my step-great-grandmother was a full-blooded Māori', yet she was later scathingly critical of white New Zealanders who tried 'to falsify genealogical tables so that they might be able to trace an obscure relative who was a Maori'.⁶⁰² Throughout her three autobiographies, and particularly in the confused familial origin stories of *To the Is-Land*, Frame is reluctant to repeat such claims of settler nativism.⁶⁰³ While she may trouble the lines of descent connecting her to settler ancestors, Frame does not appropriate the networked genealogies of whakapapa.

It is important to note that, by obscuring or calling into question her own ancestry in *To the Is-Land*, Frame attempts to deflect the suspicions of her early critics that the origins of her life would explain the complexities of her fiction.⁶⁰⁴ The dynamic between what Jan Cronin describes as 'prescriptiveness and elusiveness' in Frame's writing can lure the reader 'into looking for answers and solutions' in her work.⁶⁰⁵ In many respects, her autobiographies are concerned with manoeuvring

⁶⁰¹ Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, *Roots and Routes: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), pp. 163-164.

⁶⁰² Janet Frame, 'Beginnings', in *Beginnings: New Zealand Writers Tell How They Began Writing*, ed. by Robin Dudding (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 25-33 (p. 27); Janet Frame, *A State of Siege* (London: W. H. Allen, 1967), p. 120.

⁶⁰³ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang identify 'settler nativism' as a practice wherein non-Indigenous peoples 'locate or invent a long-lost [Indigenous] ancestor' before using 'this claim to mark themselves as blameless in the eradications of Indigenous peoples'. They identify how these strategic claims generally focus upon the figure of a kindly, if distant, grandmother, preferably from a royal bloodline. Although Tuck and Yang's arguments are firmly situated in the context of North American settler colonialism, they highlight why Frame was reluctant to repeat her earlier romanticised claims of having a great-grandmother who was a Māori princess. — Tuck and Yang, 'Decolonisation is Not a Metaphor', p. 10.

⁶⁰⁴ Patrick Evans's infamous argument that Frame's writing conceals some 'kind of uncomfortable aboriginal truth, some skeleton in the oedipal closet' is indicative of a wider critical suspicion, prevalent in early critical discussions of Frame's writing, that the record of her life would unlock the secrets of her prose. Frame's problematisation of truth in her autobiographies, and her articulation of origins as myth, operates as a powerful riposte to such claims and reflects her uncomfortable relationship with critics interested in her work. — Patrick Evans, 'The Case of the Disappearing Author', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 11 (1993), 11-20 (p. 17).

⁶⁰⁵ Jan Cronin, *The Frame Function: An Inside-Out Guide to the Novels of Janet Frame* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2011), p. 16.

Frame beyond the confines of biographical readings. This is reflected in the epigraph of *To the Is-Land* where Frame declares that the record of her life, with ‘its mixture of fact and truths and memories of truths’, is directed ‘always toward the Third Place, where the starting point is myth’.⁶⁰⁶ Elusive though this beginning is, it also functions as a disclaimer that the reader cannot expect — nor demand — an objective, truthful account of Frame’s life. To be clear: I do not suggest here that Frame’s settler ancestry is the definitive answer to, or sole concern of, her first autobiography. But I do contend that we might read against the grain of Frame’s autobiographical preoccupations. Following these deflected and confused genealogies to the mythologised ancestors, I trace the continuing impact of settler and colonial histories on an individual subject (Frame) born long after formal decolonisation. If Frame’s lineage is not grounded in the evidence of an ordered, catalogued archive, nor confined to the genealogical certainties of a family tree, then her provenance as the descendent of Scottish settlers is manifest in associations, vague etymology and the language of myth. When Frame dismantles and disassembles her own ancestral origins these manoeuvres also denaturalise the celebrated myths of arrival and settlement which underpinned European colonialism in New Zealand.

Therefore, while numerous critics have noted that Frame confounds the established coordinates of her life in her life writing, with Bazin claiming that these camouflage the author, I stipulate that these refusals also attest to the aftermath of empire.⁶⁰⁷ As I next discuss, the mythologised origin stories and crowded domestic spaces in Frame’s first autobiography are — to use Ann Stoler’s term — ‘interior frontiers’.⁶⁰⁸ These private spaces bear the imprint of public, imperial histories and destabilise their continuing influence in the present. Importantly, Frame’s descriptions of cluttered intimate spaces and lost heirlooms refuses, through confusion and disarray, a colonial order which would position Frame as an inheritor to her settler ancestry. By building upon

⁶⁰⁶ ‘To the Is-Land’, p. 7.

⁶⁰⁷ Bazin, *Janet Frame*, pp. 20-21.

⁶⁰⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), p. 80.

recent studies of ‘domestic and public interiors of empire [as] significant locations’ of colonial rule, I argue that the cluttered domestic spaces and deliberately confused genealogies in *To the Is-Land* can be read as anti-imperial disorder.⁶⁰⁹

Objects and Interior Frontiers

I have outlined how *To the Is-Land* opens with a rejection of origins and originary myths as a stable determinant in Frame’s life writing. Yet the various houses Frame inhabits in her first autobiography are littered with furnishings, objects and documents that initially offer tantalising glimpses into the family’s beginnings. Many of these items are made by hand, the result of the family’s ‘passion for making things’.⁶¹⁰ These are displayed in Frame’s early description of her father:

Like his father, our Grandad Frame, a blacksmith who made our fire pokers, the boot-last and even the wooden spurtle smoothed with stirring the morning porridge, my father survives as a presence in such objects as a leather workbag, a pair of ribbed butter pats, a handful of salmon spoons.⁶¹¹

This description posits that hand-made objects can offer a connection between the living and the dead, imbued as these items are with the memories of their original creators. Meanwhile, the spurtle, a wooden kitchen tool designed to stir porridge, dates back to fifteenth-century Scotland and thus promises a further connection to the mythical Flemish ancestors.

Yet once again, such possible origin points prove misleading. These objects suggest not the presence of Frame’s paternal relatives throughout the text, but rather their absence. Neither Grandad Frame nor Frame’s father are brought into focus by the fire pokers, the boot-last or the pair of ribbed butter pats. These mismatched items conceal rather than reveal the details of their lives. The carefully

⁶⁰⁹ Robin D. Jones, *Interiors of Empire: Objects, Space and Identity within the Indian Subcontinent, 1800-1947* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 21.

⁶¹⁰ ‘To the Is-Land’, p. 7.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*

described materiality of these items, made of iron, wood and leather, obscures their insubstantial meanings. While this particular description of ‘objects of use, things produced by the family labour’ has previously been interpreted by critics as evidence of the Frame family’s ‘genealogies, geographies of place, origins, myths and memories’, I read these objects as in fact conveying precisely the opposite.⁶¹² Their unstable meaning — in which the spurtle gestures to an tenuous originary myth of Flemish ancestors and Frame’s father haunts a handful of innocuous salmon spoons — indicates that these are not heirlooms but detritus. Rather than providing continuity across the generations of Frame’s family, as they are meant to do, they demonstrate the absence of origins and the impossibility of known beginnings in her life writing.

Also responding to this description of spurtles and salmon spoons Mark Williams notes that, like James Joyce, ‘Frame displays a curiously double attitude towards language’, arguing that her fascination with solid objects and her tendency to focus upon material things is matched by a paradoxical tendency ‘to downgrade the referential bias of language’.⁶¹³ Williams states that Frame’s words become ‘self-enclosed and self-referring structures’.⁶¹⁴ While Frame’s interest in solid objects is indeed complicated by her habit of stripping objects of their referential meaning (her father does not, after all, survive through an odd assortment of angling equipment), I argue that this ‘double attitude’ should not prevent us reading Frame through contexts and ideas beyond her own oeuvre. I read the fluid meanings of solid objects in Frame’s first autobiography through the cultural legacies of empire and colonial order.

Several of these objects, including the erstwhile iron bootlast, reappear in *The Envoy From Mirror City* when Frame returns to the family home, Willowglen, following the death of her father. She concludes her final life narrative by describing the dismantling of an already-dilapidated

⁶¹² Lydia Wevers, ‘Self Possession: “Things” and Janet Frame’s Autobiography’, in *Frameworks: Contemporary Criticism on Janet Frame*, ed. by Jan Cronin and Simone Drichel (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 51-67 (p. 59).

⁶¹³ Mark Williams, *Leaving the Highway: Six New Zealand Novelists* (Auckland, Auckland University Press, 1990), p. 36.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*

household, as she returns to find familiar ‘picture frames and table-legs still angled among the ruins’ of the property.⁶¹⁵ Inside, the house is preserved as it was on the day of her father’s death:

The old iron boot-last was still there, just outside the back door [...] My father’s pyjamas hung over a chair. His long cream-colour Mosgiel underpants with a faint brown stain at the crotch lay on the floor; even his last cup of tea sat in its saucer, a swill of tea at the bottom of the cup, making an old brown ridge against the china. [...] Books, linen were scattered everywhere.⁶¹⁶

Frame picks her way through these items, abandoned in the midst of their everyday use, while hoping to reconstruct the family life she has missed during her seven years in Europe. Yet, tellingly, she is unable to interpret or imagine her father’s final years through the objects in this cluttered space. Even the clothes marked by his body refuse to reveal the intimate details she desires. The boot-last, much like the stained underwear, are the leftovers of life. These objects are shaped by their original owners’ bodies, outlining their contours, but they reveal little about them.⁶¹⁷ They have become refuse, the waste products marked and discoloured by their once-owners. Moreover, the boot-last and the underpants are inanimate objects which can only belatedly mimic the physical form of the human body. While they might testify to bodily functions (the congealed tea at the bottom of the cup indicates thirst, the faintly stained underwear implies excrement), this debris is far-removed from the body itself. The items are scattered, rather than arranged, bereft of an order which might allow Frame or the reader to reconstruct a meaningful narrative of her father’s last years. All that remains are remains, the mundane details of his final morning. These soiled and dirtied possessions indicate how objects

⁶¹⁵ ‘The Envoy From Mirror City’, p. 426.

⁶¹⁶ ‘The Envoy From Mirror City’, p. 427.

⁶¹⁷ The fascination with furnishings and material objects that are impressed by the bodies of their human owners can be found elsewhere (and arguably everywhere) in Frame’s fiction. In *Scented Gardens for the Blind* (1963) Vera stumbles through rooms filled with objects, explaining that ‘Edward has not lived here for eleven years, yet the layers of life which peel from us from time to time like discarded skins still stay attached to the furniture which Edward used’. Frame’s fascination with the kinship between furniture and their living owners is apparent across her entire oeuvre. – Janet Frame, *Scented Gardens for the Blind* (London: Women’s Press, 1998), p. 19.

in Frame's life writing frequently reveal an absence of life or, paradoxically, in the very materiality of their presence, the absence of material history.

Preparing to leave Willowglen for the final time and frustrated by the distance between these discovered objects and their original owner, Frame reconfigures them as 'keepsakes', imagining that she is sorting her way through 'the family "treasures"' and insisting that, rather than being 'the pathetic remnants of a family's life', each 'object was alive with its yesterdays'.⁶¹⁸ Her conviction that these items could be turned into heirlooms, or keepsakes, does not last long. During the journey to her sister's house they become 'a heap of apparent rubbish — a bundle of frayed linen, an old broken kitchen clock, a chipped ivory chanter with a reed, a stained flybook'.⁶¹⁹ Frame's use of 'apparent' alerts us to the fact that these frayed, broken and chipped objects might not be what they seem. For these items are quickly discarded as junk, or repurposed as children's outdoor toys, becoming little more than debris. They cannot and will not reveal the particulars of the family's intimate lives together, and neither will they sustain the dead — as suggested at the beginning of *To the Is-Land* — as a presence amongst the living.

Andreia Sarabando identifies the incomplete attempts to order and define material possessions in Frame's writing as part of her habit of 'cataloguing, often containing long lists enumerating objects, names and people, [with] their elements apparently obeying an arrangement of their own, creating a world that consistently challenges the supposed naturalness of human categories'.⁶²⁰ Indeed, the transformation of her family's household goods into keepsakes and then finally to disposable junk, indicates an unease — manifest throughout Frame's life writing — with categories and the meanings they ascribe to things. Sarabando concludes that the catalogues 'of things and objects in [Frame's] work disclose an ontological vertigo in which everything can be connected, but in which no

⁶¹⁸ 'The Envoy From Mirror City', p. 432.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

⁶²⁰ Andreia Sarabando, "The dreadful mass neighbourhood of objects" in the fiction of Janet Frame, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 51:5 (2015), 603-614 (p. 613).

connection is inevitable'.⁶²¹ The challenge to naturalised categories that Sarabando locates in Frame's writing is distinctly Foucauldian and can be read through the challenge, raised in *The Order of Things* (1966), to the classificatory relationship between categories that 'has no existence except in the grid created by a glance'.⁶²² Therefore the order provided by a classificatory grid in fact conceals a set of arbitrary relationships between things. According to Michel Foucault, systems such as 'the classifications of Linneaus', an archetypal imperial taxonomy, create a false sense of bounded, discrete entities.⁶²³ The 'ontological vertigo' Sarabando reads out of Frame's catalogues and objects is catalysed by the dizzying series of unknown and unknowable connections between them. Building on this, I stipulate that the inconsistent connections between things in Frame's life writing also reject the classificatory schemes and schemas of empire. What Sarabando interprets as a dizzying genealogy, I read as an anti-genealogical manoeuvre and a vital component of Frame's response to the legacies of British imperialism.

Through these unruly, disordered objects, Frame's life writing evades particular manifestations of imperial order. If imperialism, to use Edward Said's phrase, 'dominates, classifies and universally commodifies' space, then Frame's mismatched objects (whose exact meaning is never sure) reject this universalizing impulse.⁶²⁴ Indeed, the closer we scrutinise the spoons, the boot-last and the used linen, the more their meaning appears to collapse. These items evade the very classificatory authority which, as Said notes, European colonial powers consistently enacted. 'The vocation of ordering the world's forms' was enthusiastically undertaken by imperial botanists, geographers and explorers who set out from Europe with the intent to categorise and control.⁶²⁵ Against this, Frame's life writing refuses such categorical designs. In so doing, her first autobiography

⁶²¹ Sarabando, 'The Dreadful Mass Neighbourhood of Objects', p. 613.

⁶²² Michel Foucault, 'Preface' in *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. xvi-xxvi (p. xxi).

⁶²³ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. xxiv

⁶²⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 271.

⁶²⁵ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 34.

attempts to unstitch the narrative threads connecting her to the genealogical order of her white settler ancestors. While it is impossible for Frame to disentangle herself entirely from her own ancestry, imperial taxonomies provide a vital context for reading the complex, un-classificatory systems in her life writing.⁶²⁶

Reading across Frame's autobiographies reveals that the meaning of solid objects is no more stable than the shadowy ancestors and invented origin myths in *To the Is-Land*. The relationship between objects and origins is implicated in Frame's description of the ancestors themselves as prized goods: 'these were the ancestors, then, given as mythical possessions'.⁶²⁷ Yet the careful descriptions of furnishings and possessions in *To the Is-Land* are as fundamentally unstable as Frame's own uncertain beginnings. These possessions can be read as imperial debris, a detritus of objects which connect the intimate, domestic sphere of Frame's family home with the public histories of British imperialism.⁶²⁸ Like Foucault's evocation of the Chinese encyclopaedia, which emphasises the arbitrary connections inherent within systems of categorisation, Frame examines and troubles the relationship between things.⁶²⁹ This allows her to pull apart the apparently steadfast connections between heirlooms and origin stories.

The connections between furnishings, objects and empire in *To the Is-Land* are apparent in Frame's first description of her childhood home. Here she traces the history of its furnishings, explaining that these items were bought by her parents 'when Dad returned from the war':

⁶²⁶ Stoler's *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* acknowledges these limitations, arguing that while 'colonial governance was managed and ordered [...] its logic was contingent on irregular interventions in time and space'. Stoler contends that colonialism was both dependent upon, and reproduced, that confused space. — Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, p. xvii.

⁶²⁷ 'To the Is-Land', p. 10.

⁶²⁸ This description builds upon Stoler's formulation of imperial debris, in her introduction to *Imperial Debris* (2013), as the 'physical structures, objects and dispositions' through which the histories of empire are conveyed. Imperial debris also indicates that which people are left with in the aftermath of imperial rule, the residual remains that contour and affect their daily lives. — Stoler, 'Introduction, "The Rot Remains"', p. 5.

⁶²⁹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. xvii.

He and Mother set up house in Richardson Street, St Kilda, Dunedin, helped by a rehabilitation loan of twenty-five pounds, with which they bought one wooden kerb, one hearth rug, two Morris dining chairs, one duchesse, one oval dining table, one iron bedstead and flock mattress, one kitchen mat, these items being listed on the document of loan with a chilling reminder that while the loan remained unpaid, the King's representative (the agreement was between "His Majesty the King and George Samuel Frame") had the right to enter the Frame household to inspect and report on the condition of the "said furniture and fittings".⁶³⁰

As Frame's biographer explains, her father George 'responded to the call of King and Empire' in 1916 before returning, somewhat reluctantly, to New Zealand in 1919.⁶³¹ New Zealand was a dominion in the aftermath of the First World War and the Frame family home was, according to *To the Is-Land*, built and arranged with the modest rewards for her father's military service to Britain. But the document of loan also enforces a relationship between these goods, as the finances of Empire gather these items into a single household.

Through this catalogue of objects, Frame imagines imperial authority as a physical intruder inside the family home, creeping through individual rooms to comment on and inspect their furnishings. Prying into the intimate corners of daily life, the aftermath of empire is not a distant, impersonal force but a daily trespasser within the house. The imperial agent functions as a personified representative of the King. Frame's description of her childhood home firstly suggests the family's subjugation to a colonial taxonomy: the goods and furnishings in their household are ordered and arranged through the King's loan. But Frame also describes her family as mortgaged to an imperial power through the twinned figures of the royal representative and the sovereign. This description indicates the importance of the royal presence in both twentieth-century colonial societies *and* in communities long after official decolonisation. David Cannadine notes that 'the imperial monarchy intruded itself into the individual lives and collective consciousness of imperial subjects in numerous ways', including through coins and stamps which bore the royal image.⁶³² The sovereign's image,

⁶³⁰ 'To the Is-Land', p. 10.

⁶³¹ King, *Wrestling with the Angel*, p. 16

⁶³² David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 103.

reproduced on everyday items such as currency and stamps, was thus circulated through the intimate spaces of households in colonies and former colonies across the globe. Frame's family was no exception. Her 'earliest recollections' are infused with the family's chatter of when 'the Prince of Wales had [recently] visited Dunedin'.⁶³³ But the document of loan, and its conditions, demonstrates that the imperial monarch remained an important, imaginative element in her daily life long after the official end to colonial rule in New Zealand. Her recollections of this snooping — even feared — official reveal that the private interiors of her family home were partially configured, furnished and understood through a prism of imperial power.

In the titular short story of the posthumously published collection *Between My Father and the King* (2013), Frame reworks this episode from her parents' early years of marriage into fiction, outlining once more how her father returned from the war with:

a very important document which gave details of my father's debt to the King, and his promise before witnesses to repay the King the fifty pounds borrowed to buy furniture: a bed to sleep in with his new wife, a dining table to dine at, linoleum and a hearthrug to lay on the floor, two fireside chairs for man and wife to sit in when he wasn't working and she wasn't polishing the King's linoleum and shaking the King's hearthrug free of dust.⁶³⁴

In this fictionalised version the agreement between the King and his subject is explicitly one of subjugation. Not only is Frame's father indebted to the monarch, but her mother is condemned to the perpetual upkeep of these items. Her household labour is playfully imagined not in service to her husband, but as her patriotic duty to the imperial sovereign. Yet just as *To the Is-Land* outlines how heirlooms may eventually transform into junk, Frame catalogues these items in order to track their ruin. The short story goes on to note that: 'in our conscienceless childhood days we ripped the backs from the kitchen chairs [...] penciled and crayoned the dining table, scuffed the linoleum, bounced on the bed'.⁶³⁵ The Frame children stage a juvenile rebellion against imperial authority by destroying

⁶³³ 'To the Is-Land', p. 11.

⁶³⁴ Janet Frame, 'Between My Father and the King' in *Between My Father and the King: New and Uncollected Stories* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2013), pp. 10-12 (p. 10).

⁶³⁵ 'Between My Father and the King', p. 11.

the King's possessions. The consequences of their destruction are made apparent when the King's representative appears at the front door, announcing that 'I happened to be passing through Richardson Street, Dunedin, and I thought I'd inspect your bed and mattress and chairs and linoleum and hearthrug and wooden fireside kerb', leading her parents to conduct 'a tour of the far-flung colonial furniture'.⁶³⁶ The wry humour in this exchange acts as a reminder of the distance between New Zealand and Britain and evokes an understanding of the former as, to use Michelle Keown's words, 'a constellation of tiny "islands in a far sea" remote from European colonial centres of power'.⁶³⁷ While representatives of the British Crown were unlikely to ever be in the vicinity of Richardson Street, Dunedin, the story imagines that this furniture, bought on loan, is itself a colony. The family's living room is a site to be owned and occasionally toured by the imperial monarch. This notion of the King's possessions is connected to a more sinister understanding of an omnipotent imperial authority, which may enter, inspect and judge the domestic arrangements of any home across the former British Empire.

Unlike the account of this imagined episode in *To the Is-Land*, 'Between My Father and the King' inventories the furnishings before offering an alternative list of goods and payments. In the fictional version Frame's father creates his own catalogue of debt, outlining the injuries he sustained during active service in the First World War, including the shrapnel lodged inside his back and the gas which lingers in his lungs. The damage his children cause to the furniture therefore becomes a sinister reflection of the violence inflicted upon his body. Eventually Frame's father explains, in a letter to the sovereign, that 'the corresponding dents and stains and wear and tear in my life surely atone for the wear and tear of your precious kerb and hearthrug'.⁶³⁸ In so doing, he creates his own counter-document of loan, writing an alternative litany of settlement and debt. He reconfigures his relationship with the monarch's authority by creating his own small act of resistance against this former colonial power.

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Keown, *Pacific Islands Writing*, p. 4.

⁶³⁸ 'Between My Father and the King', p. 12.

This brief detour into Frame's short fiction not only highlights the many intersections between Frame's fiction and life writing (these are too numerous to mention), but also outlines how this particular episode, rewritten several times across her career, configures the later practice of cataloguing and documentation in her autobiographies. While Frame repeatedly challenges the relationships between listed items, prising apart their meaning, the inventories of objects and goods in *To the Is-Land* are steeped in the legacies of empire. Through mundane, everyday goods that are often broken and frayed beyond their originally intended use, Frame suggests how colonial histories, and the traces of imperial authority, lodge in the minutiae of daily life. Across the multiple renderings of her New Zealand childhood, imperialism is found in often-unexpected locations. Agents of the British Empire rearrange the household furniture, threaten to inspect and judge the domestic life of the family and become a fearful imaginative force in Frame's early life. Resistance to the powerful, ordering structures of imperialism also take place in these intimate spaces: in her descriptions of a ripped upholstery cover or the scuffed linoleum lining of her mother's floor, Frame imagines a juvenile rebellion against the authority of the imperial monarch, dismantling the colonial order that would otherwise impress itself upon her family home.

Returning to *To the Is-Land*, the document of loan outlining the agreement that was between 'His Majesty the King and George Samuel Frame' becomes a particular emblem of authority in Frame's early life. As an incontrovertible legal document, it contrasts sharply with the shifting landscapes of domestic myths and legends in the household. It is crucial, therefore, that the loan:

was repaid after a few years and the document of discharge kept by my parents in their most hallowed keeping place – the top right-hand drawer of the King's duchesse [dresser] – where were also kept my sister Isabel's caul, Mother's wedding ring, which did not fit, her upper false teeth, which also did not fit, Myrtle's twenty-two-carat gold locket engraved with her name, and Dad's foreign coins, mostly Egyptian, brought home from the war.⁶³⁹

The document proving the family's independence is kept in the heart of their household, the fabled top-right drawer of the King's duchesse which is also home to several unused appendages to her

⁶³⁹ 'To the Is-Land', p. 10.

sister's and mother's bodies. Much like the tallboy in Lively's *Oleander, Jacaranda*, whose drawers contained 'objects of importance: my father's papers, photograph albums', the dresser is the authoritative, administrative centre of the Frame household.⁶⁴⁰ Yet the meanings of these material items, invested with the family's internal myths, are not what they seem. For although the wedding ring and the upper false teeth are treasured and preserved, neither can fulfil their original intended function, as they no longer fit Frame's mother's body. Meanwhile, although Isabel's caul was kept in the mistaken belief that it ensured 'she would never drown', she later died swimming in Picton Harbour.⁶⁴¹ The wedding ring and Isabel's caul lead us back, once again, to the instability of solid objects in Frame's life writing: like the caul, their meaning may be misunderstood, or like the ring and teeth, they may become surplus to requirement. The document of discharge, then, does not categorically prove the family's freedom from the imperial authority of the monarch. The 'hallowed keeping place' of the King's duchesse contains only a mismatched selection of detritus that reveals and conceals the lives of the family in equal measure.

Frame's engagements with colonial and settler histories in *To the Is-Land* vacillate between intentional and implicit responses to empire. In the former, Frame describes the King's representative inspecting her parent's living room as an agent of colonial authority, revealing how her family home was built with and mortgaged to imperial finances. Yet the latter, more oblique engagements with empire's aftermath reveal that the objects cluttering Frame's family home are an implicit rejection of colonial taxonomies. Indeed, these material goods are themselves imperial debris. Like the origin stories which shroud Frame's family history in myth, these objects deliberately confuse the connections between generations of the Frame family as none of the items in the top duchesse drawer can become heirlooms for Frame. Rather than interpreting this as a purely defensive manoeuvre, or as part of the wider paradigm of what Cronin calls 'the elusive and the prescriptive' in Frame's

⁶⁴⁰ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 32.

⁶⁴¹ 'An Angel at My Table', p. 240.

writing, I read the disordering of objects and origins in *To the Is-Land* as a critical response to the lingering colonial order in her New Zealand childhood.⁶⁴²

Stoler argues that ‘physical structures [and] objects’ reveal how ‘empire’s ruins contour and carve through the psychic and material space in which people live’.⁶⁴³ In these descriptions of feared legal documents and imagined intruders who creep through the family home, Frame outlines how imperial legacies shaped – or to use Stoler’s phrase, contoured – the physical spaces of her early life. Their presence in *To the Is-Land* tentatively connects Frame to broader, global histories of migration and the British Empire. I propose that they position Frame as the troubled successor to the histories of her white settler ancestors. In her renderings of these colonial remains, Frame reminds us that colonialism remains, tracing its legacies into the cluttered corners of her family home. Through its descriptions of imperial debris, *To the Island* offers both a particular account of life after empire and looks to undo the ordering, categorical structures of the colonial past.

Unsettled Settlers in *An Angel at My Table*

Frame’s second autobiography, *An Angel at My Table*, opens in 1943 during her arrival in Dunedin and closes in 1956, with her departure from New Zealand aboard the *Ruahine*, a ship bound for Southampton, England. In the thirteen-year interim Frame was incarcerated in numerous psychiatric institutions across New Zealand. Her initial admittance was sparked by a university assignment in which she wrote ‘a condensed autobiography’ confessing to a recent suicide attempt.⁶⁴⁴ After reading this essay, Frame’s university tutor recommended and arranged her committal to Seacliff Lunatic Asylum. According to Frame her six week stint at Seacliff was a ‘concentrated course in the horrors of insanity and the dwelling-place of those judged insane, separating me forever from the former

⁶⁴² Cronin, *The Frame Function*, p. 94.

⁶⁴³ Stoler, ‘Introduction “The Rot Remains”’, p. 5; p. 2.

⁶⁴⁴ ‘An Angel at My Table’, p. 189.

acceptable realities and assurances of everyday life'.⁶⁴⁵ Although she spent many subsequent years in institutions across New Zealand, *An Angel at My Table* provides relatively brief descriptions of these experiences. It outlines how Frame was subject to hundreds of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) treatments, with each 'the equivalent, in degree of fear, to an execution'.⁶⁴⁶ It also records that during her time in Avondale psychiatric hospital Frame was scheduled for a leucotomy (prefrontal lobotomy). However, following the publication of her first book, *The Lagoon and Other Stories* (1951), Frame became the recipient of the Hubert Church Award for literature and her prize prompted the hospital's superintendent to reverse his decision to operate.⁶⁴⁷ Throughout her second autobiography Frame keenly emphasises that her writing 'actually saved my life'.⁶⁴⁸

An Angel at My Table depicts a particular rendition of personhood which, I argue, expands upon Frame's frequent acts of disassembly in *To the Is-Land*. Her second autobiography outlines a troubled relationship with place and belonging by chronicling a series of dislocations, most prominently her catastrophic incarcerations in psychiatric institutions. These years of hospitalisation prompted an ongoing cycle of displacement for Frame, instigating 'a dreadful feeling of nothingness' and the sense that 'there was no place on earth for me'.⁶⁴⁹ Although she was released from hospital shortly after winning her literary prize, Frame remained fearful that she might be returned to hospital by the New Zealand health authorities. She left — or perhaps more accurately fled — her home country in 1956, going on to spend seven years in Europe. The majority of this time saw Frame living in London, with sojourns in Ibiza, Andorra and rural England. In a letter to the Samoan writer, Albert Wendt, written a decade after her 1963 return to New Zealand, Frame connected the long-term impact of her hospitalisation to broader political and cultural issues in her home country:

I went to the PEN Congress recently [...] I felt sad that there were no Māori writers there to speak for themselves. I think it's an insult to people when others try to speak for them — I

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 193.

⁶⁴⁶ 'An Angel at My Table', p. 224.

⁶⁴⁷ King, *Wrestling with the Angel*, p. 112.

⁶⁴⁸ 'An Angel at My Table', p. 221.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 212-213.

guess I had so much experience of this, all those years in hospital, when everyone spoke in the third person in my presence — “she thinks, she needs” and so on.⁶⁵⁰

Here Frame positions her experiences of hospitalisation within a network of other marginalised communities, connecting these to the struggle for rights and representation amongst Māori people. Her correspondence reveals how the legacies of colonialism continued to determine the possibilities of literary self-representation in late twentieth-century New Zealand. The letter also sees Frame distinguish between those who speak and those who are spoken for and, despite being a Pākehā writer, she notably claims elements of both subject positions. But she also indicates the possibility of solidarity and shared conversations between communities of ‘third persons’. This letter highlights Frame’s continued self-identification as an outsider long after her institutionalisation. Furthermore, it reveals how her experiences of psychiatric hospitals informed her later criticism of both New Zealand society and international literary communities that excluded Indigenous voices. In Frame’s correspondence I identify an urgent need to read *An Angel at My Table* in contexts and histories that both intersect with and look beyond the asylum. These traumatic years of incarceration connect to and inform Frame’s later understanding of the struggle for self-representation in a postcolonial society.

If Frame’s first autobiography positions her as the inheritor of imperial debris and undoes the genealogical certainty of her family tree, my reading of place and displacement in *An Angel at My Table* focuses on Frame’s continued attempts to disassemble her own subjectivity. Yet, as I outline in greater detail, the shifting models of unsettled personhood in Frame’s second autobiography respond to the historic and continuing controversies surrounding land settlement and ownership in modern New Zealand. In other words, Frame’s thematic and formal concerns with place in *An Angel at My Table*, and her refusals to claim a permanent home are connected — through my readings — to a particular set of political concerns with Pākehā colonisation and settlement. As a result, Frame embarks upon a circuitous (and arguably inconclusive) journey towards a means of belonging in her

⁶⁵⁰ Wellington, Alexander Turnbull Library, MS-Papers-9153-18.

home country which surpasses the models of settlement established by New Zealand's colonial past. Frame's unusual, highly flexible model of belonging is read here as a partially generative manoeuvre, one which searches for alternative models of life writing in the aftermath of empire.

I therefore position *An Angel at My Table* within the wider concerns of what J. M. Coetzee terms the 'literature of unsettled settlers'.⁶⁵¹ Frame's second autobiography offers a particular rendition of this 'unsettled' life through her repeated attempts to decouple her personhood from a particular geographical place. However, I also read Frame's refusal of place and her attempts at 'unsettlement' as distinct from Coetzee's reflections on South African writers: her fraught relationship with belonging responds not only to her incarcerations in psychiatric institutions (as many critics have already suggested), but also to the particular legacies of Pākehā settlement in New Zealand.⁶⁵² Despite the Treaty of Waitangi's formal agreement in 1840 to grant Māori people 'the undisturbed possession of their lands and estates', the British government sanctioned the theft and seizure of Māori lands for European settlement throughout the nineteenth century.⁶⁵³ Chadwick Allen notes that in the decades following the Second World War the policies of successive New Zealand governments implemented the expropriation of 'remaining Maori land holdings', sparking 'a series

⁶⁵¹ J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 4.

⁶⁵² *An Angel at My Table* is by no means Frame's first attempt to address the controversial topic of Pākehā land ownership and theft. In her sixth novel, *The Rainbirds/Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room* (1968), Godfrey Rainbird — a character who has inexplicably and inconveniently risen from the dead — explains 'how important it was [...] to stake a claim in the earth and keep it' while other characters wonder, uneasily, 'who is the first owner, where is the origin of the dispute of possession?' Godfrey dies on the site of coastal land reclamation (likely inspired by the Andersons Bay Inlet in Dunedin) and the novel reimagines this contested space as a clash 'between the sea and the Harbour Board'. I read this encounter as a satirical re-imagining of the Treaty of Waitangi, as Mrs Rainbird wonders how the sea can meaningfully negotiate when it 'could not write its own name on a document, and yet its mark was more powerful than its name'. With the mark of the sea alluding to the moko signatures of Māori chiefs on the 1840 treaty, Frame scrutinises colonial histories of dispossession and land theft, re-staging this foundational moment of New Zealand history on the outskirts of twentieth-century suburban Dunedin. — Janet Frame, *Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room* (New York: George Braziller, 1969), p. 89; p. 38; p. 19.

⁶⁵³ 'Article the Second', *Treaty of Waitangi*, 1840 <<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/treaty/read-the-treaty/english-text>> [accessed 15 October 2019]

of indigenous land and cultural rights movements'.⁶⁵⁴ Indeed, as the very recent 2018-19 Ihumātao protests demonstrated, controversies over land ownership and housing development in New Zealand have continued into the new millennium.⁶⁵⁵ *An Angel at My Table* responds to these important and continuing debates through Frame's reluctance to tether herself to specific geographical sites or locales. As a result, she refuses a model of belonging in her home country which is predicated on the ownership of land or a named street address. I read Frame's criticism of belonging to named places as part of a wider, restless search for ways of living and writing life that surpass previous models of Pākehā settlement and land ownership.

As the first half of this discussion outlines, Frame's refusal to settle in *An Angel at My Table* is intimately connected to her unwillingness to claim ownership or cultivate a portion of land as her own. Instead, Frame rehearses a series of fluid and provisional means of existence in which she is, at best, a temporary tenant rather than an established owner. Throughout her descriptions of living in unhomey attic rooms, rented bedrooms and even sheds, *An Angel at My Table* documents a transitory existence which neither claims nor attempts to possess the landscape as a territory. While Frame's many brief tenancies are undoubtedly described in her life writing as debilitating – none more so than her time in psychiatric institutions – I also argue that they have a further, dual purpose. The failure to own property and the alternative role of permanent tenant emerges in Frame's second autobiography as an attempt to cultivate a politically-charged form of tenancy. This form of belonging searches for an alternative to the structures of enclosure, settlement and ownership in mid-twentieth-century Pākehā society. Frame's second autobiography contains an implicit critique of what she perceives as the stereotypical New Zealand dream of a family property on a quarter acre plot of land. Yet I further suggest that property ownership and inhabitation in *An Angel at My Table* have much to tell us about the legacies of empire in Frame's life writing project. New Zealand's settler past offers a vital

⁶⁵⁴ Chadwick Allen, *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 108.

⁶⁵⁵ 'Ihumātao protests a long time coming', *TVNZ*, Wednesday July 2019, <<https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/ihum-tao-protests-long-time-coming-after-government-auckland-council-failed-act-activist>> [accessed 20 August 2019]

historical context for interpreting Frame's written attempts to uncouple herself from known, geographical locations.

This reading of *An Angel at My Table* therefore responds to and expands the arguments of numerous critics who argue that all of Frame's writing illustrates 'the search for a "my place"'.⁶⁵⁶ Frame's oeuvre is filled with references to the terrible predicament of placelessness, from Toby Withers' lament that 'there is no place for me' to the inhabitants of Kowhai Street who, in *The Carpathians* (1988), cling to their bungalows as a 'place of being' and are fearful of the homeless who 'may not ally their being to a house or gate or an item of furniture'.⁶⁵⁷ *An Angel at My Table* deliberately dismantles numerous dwelling places, with family homes and rented rooms becoming impossible to inhabit for Frame. Although Frame's second autobiography is filled with the details of her numerous homes – many of the book's chapter titles are named after her addresses, including 'Garden Terrace, Dunedin', 'Willowglen' and the 'Grand Hotel' – she continues to suffer from an acute 'homelessness of [the] self'.⁶⁵⁸ These comprehensive lists, which document cramped boarding houses and minuscule rented rooms, create a litany of named places which nonetheless fail to literally and metaphorically accommodate Frame. I read *An Angel at My Table*'s account of place and displacement as a productive failure: through these descriptions of uninhabitable homes Frame stages a troubled rehearsal of settlement which remains unfinished by the end of her second autobiography. These unhomely dwelling places fulfil an important function, allowing Frame both to acknowledge the legacies of colonial settlement and experiment with new ways of navigating beyond their borders.

An Angel at My Table describes how, following Frame's experiences of electric shock treatment, she 'inhabited a territory of loneliness which I think resembles that place where the dying

⁶⁵⁶ Isabel Mitchel, "'Turning the Stone of Being": Janet Frame's Migrant Poetic' in *Frameworks: Contemporary Criticism on Janet Frame*, ed. by Jan Cronin and Simone Drichel (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 107-135 (p. 112).

⁶⁵⁷ Janet Frame, *Owls Do Cry* (London: Virago Press, 2014) p. 98; *The Carpathians*, p. 16.

⁶⁵⁸ 'To the Is-Land', p. 110.

spend their time before death'.⁶⁵⁹ The struggle to find and establish her own place is almost irrevocably jeopardised by her experiences in the asylum. The consequences of these formative and traumatic experiences spans the entirety of Frame's life writing project. I concur with Jan Cronin's warning that "'place" in Frame's work is not necessarily about "place" in [the] socio-political ways' her readers might wish to construe it.⁶⁶⁰ I nevertheless contend that Frame's troubled descriptions of place respond to the legacies of European land theft in New Zealand which occurred, as Alex Calder notes, 'through purchase or swindling, invasion or treaty'.⁶⁶¹ While these colonial histories continue to impose damaging legacies upon Indigenous communities, *An Angel at My Table* registers how the legacies of empire might also unsettle colonialism's beneficiaries. If Frame's life writing troubles notions of place, her autobiographies do respond to a specific geographical locale — describing life beneath the 'Southland skies with their shimmerings of Antarctic ice' — and the colonial histories of New Zealand.⁶⁶² Again, I agree with Cronin that New Zealand is frequently 'deployed as a hypothetical site' in Frame's writing.⁶⁶³ However, Frame's troubled relationship with place and her challenges to achieve alternative forms of dwelling are acutely responsive to both New Zealand's landscape and the country's settler past, reaching tentatively towards alternative means of living in the aftermath of empire.

'Claiming the Features of the Land'

⁶⁵⁹ 'An Angel at My Table', p. 213.

⁶⁶⁰ Jan Cronin, "'Encircling Tubes of Being": New Zealand as a Hypothetical Site in Janet Frame's *A State of Siege* (1966)', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 23:2 (2005), 79-91 (p. 79).

⁶⁶¹ Alex Calder, *The Settler's Plot: How Stories Take Place in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2011), p. 109.

⁶⁶² 'To the Is-Land', p. 29.

⁶⁶³ Cronin, 'Encircling Tubes of Being', p. 80.

At the beginning of *An Angel at My Table*, Frame describes her initial move away from the family home in Oamaru as she moves in with relatives in Dunedin:

My knowledge of Aunty Issy and Uncle George was limited. I looked on them as I looked on most adults and relatives as ‘formidable’, living in a completely separate world where I could not imagine myself as belonging — the world of constant recitation of comings and goings of countless relatives and friends, of names of places, all spoken with the certainty of possession, of knowledge that each person was in a destined right place.⁶⁶⁴

Frame’s relatives establish themselves ‘in the right place’ through repetitive conversations and speech. These gather family and friends into a network of relations and display social rituals within which Frame feels unable to participate. But implicit here is also a connection between ‘belonging’ and ‘the certainty of possession’ which Frame, ‘living in a completely separate world’ views only from a distance. This description of her isolation highlights, to use Calder’s phrase, how ‘settlement requires not only access to land, but also rituals of belonging’.⁶⁶⁵ Calder suggests how the possession of land in colonial societies must be established and re-established not just through the acquisition of territory, but through repeated social exchanges. Frame’s relatives establish and secure their claims to be at home in the South Island through the recitation and the re-enactment of such rituals, much like her mother’s spoken iterations of the family tree in *To the Is-Land*.

This passage is indicative of how place becomes property in *An Angel at My Table*. Frame’s second autobiography is marked by her attempts to discover other, alternative means of inhabitation which mark different ways of finding ‘her place’. In this description of her relatives’ ‘separate world’, Frame highlights her inability and possibly her unwillingness to follow suit and settle with self-certainty in Dunedin. Aunt Issy and Uncle George’s cramped, tiny cottage — ‘like a large doll’s house’ — becomes a dark, forbidding site in *An Angel at My Table*. This setting prompts Frame to discuss the subject of home ownership, explaining that ‘all the worries of the world’ might be contained in her parent’s ‘payments to the Starr-Bowkett Building society’ which, if missed, would

⁶⁶⁴ ‘To the Is-Land’, p. 151.

⁶⁶⁵ Calder, *The Settler’s Plot*, p. 121.

mean ‘we’d be turned out of our house again’.⁶⁶⁶ Place as a possession, as an owned and mortgaged property, emerges as a terrible burden in Frame’s life writing and a predicament she seeks to avoid. As her second life narrative looks for an alternative means of dwelling, I read Frame’s frustrated attempts at habitation as a barely-concealed anxiety about permanent settlement which both responds to the parameters of the colonial past and demands alternative forms of dwelling for the future.

If *An Angel at My Table* depicts habitation in post-settler societies as a never-ending process of possession, Frame occupies the margins of these settled communities. She is unable to participate in the processes of home ownership and establishes herself as, at best, a temporary tenant in Dunedin.⁶⁶⁷ She is aligned with a community of other, unseen young women whose ‘lives were frail, full of agonies of embarrassment and regret’, making ‘detours along the bush-covered Town Belt to dispose of sanitary towels’ and living in dark accommodation because they are ‘too timid to ask for a lightbulb to be replaced’.⁶⁶⁸ Frame details here what it means to inhabit the literal and social fringes of the city, skirting around the green belt which marked its boundaries and living in temporary lodgings bereft of basic amenities. The epicentre of the city becomes for her ‘the Southern Cemetery’, which was both her favourite place and a shelter from the expectations that she should ‘sit with Aunt Isy in the small dining room by the fire’.⁶⁶⁹ Frame seeks temporary respite from the cramped quarters of her aunt’s house and instead prefers to develop an alternative dwelling place in the outdoor,

⁶⁶⁶ ‘An Angel at My Table’, p. 191. Frame’s repeated, fearful descriptions of her family’s payments to the Starr-Bowkett society contradict the co-operative’s principles of mutual self-help. Throughout the mid-twentieth century it operated as one of the few financial networks in which members pooled their modest resources to become home-owners. The foreboding nature of the Starr-Bowkett book implies that it may be the process of owning and being mortgaged to a property, rather than the institution itself, which is the feared process for Frame. An outline of the Starr-Bowkett’s history in Australia and New Zealand can be found in G. R. Hawke’s *The Making of New Zealand: An Economic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and Maxine Darnell’s ‘Attaining the Australian Dream: The Starr-Bowkett Way’, *Labour History* 91 (2006), 13-30.

⁶⁶⁷ Later in *An Angel at My Table* Frame notes, with some amusement, that the island of Rangitoto (visible from the city of Auckland) was a place ‘everyone in Auckland claimed as theirs, speaking of its perfect shape viewed from all directions as if they had helped design and form it’. Throughout her life writing Frame both acknowledges and satirises Pākehā claims of ownership over New Zealand’s landscapes. — ‘An Angel at My Table’, p. 248.

⁶⁶⁸ ‘An Angel at My Table’, p. 158.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

overgrown space of neglected gravestones. This cemetery is largely unused and unnoticed by other city-dwellers. The unkempt site which houses the dead become, ironically, a more welcoming environment for Frame than the tightly confined suburban homes of the living. But importantly, these descriptions of dwelling permanently out of place illuminate her need to live without ownership, a desire that directly contrasts with her family's struggles to establish their own permanent settlement.

Not only does Frame herself refuse ownership in favour of a more transitory existence in *An Angel at My Table*, she also focuses on those forced to occupy the margins of settled communities. She empathetically describes the 'misfits who drift without much sympathy or help from hotel to hostel and boarding house, finding a temporary home and work for "so much a week and all found"'.⁶⁷⁰ Frame herself inhabited many of these hotels and boarding houses as a temporary member of staff. As Gina Mercer notes, her focus is on those who 'live in unrecorded or unacknowledged spaces, those who dwell in the gaps', but Frame also reveals how New Zealand's widespread emphasis on permanent home ownership forces others into such liminal existences.⁶⁷¹ *An Angel at My Table* explores the lives of those 'for whom working and living in a place like a hotel became a shelter and who, in the hotel surroundings, appeared strong and confident, yet glimpsed in the street displayed like a banner their frailty and difference'.⁶⁷² Here the act of straying outside the boundaries of the hotel reveals domestic staff themselves to be outsiders. Their role as tenants indicates, for Frame, how temporary spaces may also function as shelters for the vulnerable. Her focus on the lives of the dispossessed, the inhabitants of attic-rooms and boarding-houses, allows her to highlight the violent exclusions underlying her family's belief of 'being in the [destined] right place'.⁶⁷³ This is perhaps most explicit in her descriptions of the silent, lobotomised patients who 'were being "retrained" to "fit in" to the everyday world'.⁶⁷⁴ Their presence reminds Frame of the dehumanising punishment for outsiders who would not, or could not, conform to the social norms of mid-twentieth-

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 232.

⁶⁷¹ Gina Mercer, *Janet Frame: Subversive Fictions* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 1994), p. 17.

⁶⁷² Ibid., p. 236.

⁶⁷³ Ibid., p. 151.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 223.

century New Zealand. Frame asks her readers to consider those (including, at times, herself) who cannot establish home as a permanent possession, nor settle in and familiarise a place as their own. Focussing on life in the gaps of Pākehā society reveals a need, articulated throughout *An Angel at My Table*, to find a means of dwelling in which to inhabit is not necessarily to possess. While there are obvious and clear differences between psychiatric hospitals and the post-settler state, Frame draws our attention to who is excluded from belonging in both institutions.

An Angel at My Table's subtle critique of land ownership, settlement and possession is further extended in *The Envoy From Mirror City*, when Frame returns to Auckland in 1963 and is 'thrust into a world where there was much talk of "reclaimed" land, "desirable" property [...] I felt I was seeing a new kind of greed for whatever could be touched, measured, seen and priced'.⁶⁷⁵ Frame is particularly scathing of those who 'hoped and prayed for and paid for a *view*' before adding, with alacrity, that 'no one was saying what or whom the land belonged to before the famous reclamation'.⁶⁷⁶ Frame exposes home ownership in New Zealand, and particularly the rapid development of properties during the 1960s, as an act of neo-colonisation that denied her country's colonial past and sought to erase the histories of Māori communities. As Claudia Orange outlines in *The Treaty of Waitangi* (1987), the increase in Māori protests throughout the 1950s and 1960s responded to government legislation which ignored Māori land rights, 'disregarded Māori values and aimed at economic rationalisation and use'.⁶⁷⁷ Frame responds to this in *The Envoy From Mirror City* through her telling allusion to 'whom' the land might have belonged to before these new homes were built, pointing towards pre-colonial inhabitants and communities who might hold alternative claims to, and relationships with, the land. She raises the possibility that these could surpass the model of proprietorial belonging staged by her relatives.

⁶⁷⁵ 'The Envoy From Mirror City', p. 423.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ Claudia Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1987), p. 242.

Writing in *Imperial Eyes* (1994), Mary Louise Pratt identifies a set piece of colonial travel writing that she terms the ‘monarch-of-all-I-survey scene’, involving a (usually male) European explorer discovering a previously ‘unknown’ site and surveying the landscape.⁶⁷⁸ Through these literary encounters ‘geographical discoveries were “won” for England, resulting in a particular interaction ‘between aesthetics and ideology’.⁶⁷⁹ In Frame’s critical references to ‘whom the land belonged’ before its famous reclamation, she responds to colonial descriptions of New Zealand which incorrectly depicted the islands as empty.⁶⁸⁰ In 1840 the British Crown claimed the entire South Island as a *terra nullius*, committing a strategic depopulation of the landscape that allowed surveyors to map and divide land in preparation for sale.⁶⁸¹ I read Frame’s suggestive emphasis in her description of those who ‘hoped and prayed for and paid for a *view*’ as a twentieth-century parody of the ‘monarch-of-all-I-survey’ scene.⁶⁸² In Frame’s estimation, these suburban home owners, living on the outskirts of Auckland on land that was recently uncultivated bush, re-stage their own miniature enactment of colonial discovery. Reading across Frame’s autobiographies therefore reveals how the alternative, and sometimes productive, forms of tenancy described in *An Angel at My Table* anticipate the explicit criticism of land reclamation in *The Envoy From Mirror City*. Frame’s resolute focus is upon *who* is excluded from these cycles of settlement and possession. These marginalised communities include impoverished Pākehā (such as live-in hotel staff) alongside communities whose connections with the land were, throughout Frame’s adult life, largely unrecognised in government legislation.

An Angel at My Table therefore critiques Pākehā models of belonging and inhabitation, while also tentatively experimenting with other means of dwelling in the aftermath of empire and settlement. During her first lonely year as a student in Dunedin, Frame travelled to Central Otago, participating in a war effort scheme where students worked on fruit farms. Frame was dispatched

⁶⁷⁸ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 200.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁶⁸⁰ ‘The Envoy From Mirror City’, p. 423.

⁶⁸¹ Salmond, *Tears of Rangī*, p. 305.

⁶⁸² ‘The Envoy From Mirror City’, p. 423.

with a group of fellow students to a small township named Miller's Flat. This new landscape had an immediate impact, offering her a first glimpse of 'a turbulent green churned-white river, there known as the Molyneux, but further downstream as the Clutha'.⁶⁸³ She explains how:

From my first sight of the river I felt it to be a part of my life (how greedily I was claiming the features of the land as "part of my life"), from its beginning in the snow of the high country (we were almost in the high country), through all its stages of fury and, reputedly now and then, peace, to its outfall in the sea [...] snow-green, mud-brown and borrowing rainbows from light [...] a being that persisted through all the pressures of rock, stone, earth and sun, living as an element of freedom but not isolated, linked to heaven and light by the slender rainbow that shimmered above its waters. I felt the river was an ally, that it would speak for me.⁶⁸⁴

This description might initially be seen as Frame — finally — emulating the proprietorial desires of her relatives and staking a claim to the landscape, an impulse she acknowledges in parenthesis. Even as she denounces the urge to claim 'the features of the land' for her own, this initial meeting with the Clutha implies that this is precisely what she hopes for. Frame later chose to live under the name of the river, undertaking the unusual decision to publish under her birth name and live under the pseudonym Janet Clutha. The Clutha, named after the River Clyde in Scotland which passes the town of Paisley, offers a further, tantalising connection to Frame's Scottish grandparents. Renaming herself after the river evokes further settler ancestral connections while simultaneously gesturing towards the complex networks of whakapapa which, as Salmond explains, view the 'associations between people and waterways [as] deep and intimate'.⁶⁸⁵ This relationship was recognised in the 2014 settlement acknowledging the Whanganui river as a living being, becoming the first waterway in the world to gain this legal recognition. Frame's encounter with the river is inseparable from the broader cultural significance of waterways in New Zealand. While this scene appears to offer a tantalising location in which she might place herself, her first meeting with the Clutha ironises and denaturalises (though stops short of fully rejecting) the settler impulse to 'claim the features of the land'.

⁶⁸³ 'An Angel at My Table', p. 166.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ Salmond, *Tears of Rangī*, p. 300.

It is important to note that in this first meeting with the Clutha, Frame's focus is not on a terrestrial communion with the soil, nor does she anchor herself to a fixed set of geographical coordinates in an attempt at settlement. Instead the location to which she belongs is dispersed amidst the fast flowing waters. Her descriptions of the immovable 'rock, stone [and] earth' are potentially misleading as, in actuality, her moment of charged self-identification focusses upon a shimmering mirage — the rainbow — which hovers above the water. Even as she appears to pursue a grounding moment of self-identification rooted in the topographical features of Central Otago, Frame evaporates this into an optical illusion conjured through a combination of water and sunlight. Far from 'claiming the features of the landscape' for her own, in this encounter Frame resolutely focusses on a temporary, fragile prism of light created in a space she identifies as hanging between the celestial and the terrestrial.⁶⁸⁶ What emerges from this vital passage is not a form of belonging offered by the proper noun (wherein Frame identifies with the Clutha and is later officially named as 'Nene Janet Paterson Clutha'). Frame's first meeting with the river asks what it means to deny actual inhabitation in favour of a more figurative sense of dwelling. In a cultural context where waterways represent an ontological order binding human communities, their ancestors and the landscape together, the relationship Frame peruses with the river Clutha represents a significant attempt to belong in this South Island landscape. While she cannot physically live, or locate herself, in the shimmering light which hangs above a river, her second autobiography nevertheless directs its most powerful expression of self-identification towards an ephemeral display of refracted light.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁶ 'An Angel at My Table', p. 166.

⁶⁸⁷ Frame's initial conceptualisation of this scene, as outlined in the numerous draft manuscripts and typescripts of *An Angel at My Table* at the Hocken Library, place little emphasis on the Clutha. In her early drafts she describes instead her memories of raspberry picking, describing the colour and texture of the fruit in considerable detail. This shift in emphasis — from the fruit to the river — is particularly notable, as Frame appears to move away from a concern with memory (the raspberries) and towards a more explicit interest in belonging and being (the river). In the later drafts, as with the final published version, Frame's emphasis is on a new communion, a kind of habitation or dwelling place, offered through her relationship with the Clutha.

Moreover, rather than speaking for the landscape, Frame here insists that the river will speak for and represent her. This reversal frustrates a tradition of colonial autobiographical writing in and about New Zealand through which, as Peter Gibbons outlines, ‘the land was not felt to be fully a European possession until it had been travelled through and catalogued’.⁶⁸⁸ Here colonial self-representation operated as a further means of possession. Yet Frame’s descriptions of the landscape’s immaterial features resist and reject an autobiographical tradition in which life writing stakes a claim to the land. This, when coupled with her suggestion that the river will speak for and represent her, launches a powerful rebuttal against such understandings of acquisition and ownership. Through her communion with the area around Miller’s Flat, Frame proposes that the land, or more accurately, the churning body of water which cuts through it, owns *her*.

Frame’s biographer confirms that this encounter with the Clutha was a formative one: ‘so strongly did this powerful current fascinate and attract her that her fruit-picking companions came upon her one night, prone on the edge of the river in what they described as a “trance-like” state’.⁶⁸⁹ She had to be carried, still prone, back to their sleeping quarters. If, for Frame, an awareness of ‘claiming the features of the land’ belies a concern with settler histories, *An Angel at My Table* therefore responds to what Peter Gibbons describes as the implication of ‘writing in and about New Zealand’ being involved ‘in the processes of colonisation, in the implementation of imperial power’.⁶⁹⁰ The collisions of textual and geographical spaces in the Treaty of Waitangi reveal how non-fictional writing could become ‘[act[s] of making, continually reinventing provisional notions of “New Zealand”; of its past and present, its “place” in the world’.⁶⁹¹ This provides a vital context for reading Frame’s refusal to catalogue and record the fixed features of the landscape, and her preference for a provisional, even processual relationship with the insubstantial features of rainbows and a fast-flowing river. In so doing, Frame refuses to position herself categorically in relation to the landscape,

⁶⁸⁸ Peter Gibbons, ‘Non-Fiction’ in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, ed. by Terry Sturm, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 31-119 (p. 52).

⁶⁸⁹ King, *Wrestling with the Angel*, p. 56.

⁶⁹⁰ Gibbons, ‘Non-Fiction’, p. 32.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

carving out ‘her place’ in a site which might be demarcated on a map. She turns towards alternative epistemologies, entangling her life with the waterways of the South Island and moving to inhabit a permanently unsettled and fluid dwelling place in her childhood home.

This meeting with the river was prompted by Frame’s recruitment for what she calls the ‘*War Effort*’.⁶⁹² This involved being dispatched to a rural farm and briefly experiencing life on a kind of frontier, sleeping beneath burning ‘corrugated iron walls and the roof of the large shed where we lived and worked’.⁶⁹³ To an extent, this summer work reenacts Frame’s mother’s endless storytelling of ‘the “olden days” of the *pioneers*’, along with her mythologized stories of ‘storms and the shipwrecks’.⁶⁹⁴ But Frame finds herself unable to fulfil these childhood narratives of the frontier. She describes how ‘every day, all day, we picked raspberries as we’d been taught, crouched, milking them gently from their stalks’ but ‘I was a slow picker, earning barely enough to pay my fare home to Oamaru’.⁶⁹⁵ She fails to fulfil the originary settler myth outlined in both her mother’s stories and the early histories of New Zealand settlement. As the latter justified ‘European appropriation of the land by claiming that only Pakeha had made it fruitful’, Frame’s failure to cultivate the fruit crop and to profit from her labour disrupts this settler tradition.⁶⁹⁶ This undermines both her and her ancestors’ rights to settlement. This disastrous attempt at cultivation is closely connected to Frame’s relationship with the Clutha: rather than making the soil productive, Frame explores modes of belonging which are not conditioned on possession and occupation.

Importantly, this financially unsuccessful trip does not undermine Frame’s connection with the landscape. Her memories of this time centre upon ‘the bounty of the river and the landscape, the

⁶⁹² ‘An Angel at My Table’, p. 166.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁶ Kynan Gentry, *History, Heritage and Colonialism: Historical Consciousness, Britishness and Cultural Identity in New Zealand 1870-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p. 128.

matagouri and the snowgrass'.⁶⁹⁷ As she explains, after her first meeting with the Clutha, 'I fell in love with Central Otago and the river, and the naked hills covered only in their folds by their own shadow, with their changing shades of gold'.⁶⁹⁸ Frame homes in on the insubstantial features of light cast upon an undulating landscape, appreciating the 'changing shades' of gold created by the morning sky, which dissipates 'in the evening to its depth of purple'.⁶⁹⁹ A material homestead is entirely absent in this imaginative, immaterial moment of belonging. Indeed, her communion with the landscape comes in contrast to the fruit pickers' temporary living quarters, which she describes as 'the nightmare of burning corrugated iron enclosing us with its fire'.⁷⁰⁰ Amidst the hard toil and unwelcoming accommodations of this summer trip, Frame focuses upon an ever-changing palette of light and shadow, pursuing the substances of the insubstantial. Through her encounter with the Clutha and the Otago hills, Frame articulates a powerful form of identification which is not predicated on ownership nor attributed to the landscape's features. Instead, she instigates a dynamic relationship with the land which does not require her labour and cultivation in order to be valuable.

There is a clear distinction between the formal structure and the aesthetic interests of *An Angel at My Table*. Ostensibly, the chapter titles announce a linear, progressive narrative grounded in a litany of named addresses, from Garden Terrace, Dunedin, onwards to Willowglen and a later succession of boarding houses before finally arriving in Frame's now-famous stay at Frank Sargeson's Army Hut.⁷⁰¹ Yet, these titles are intentionally deceptive, as Frame is neither at home nor definitively located at any of these addresses. Frame repeatedly looks to cultivate an insubstantial relationship with her South Island home which rejects permanent settlement as a route to belonging.

⁶⁹⁷ 'An Angel at My Table', p. 168.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁷⁰¹ After eight years in various psychiatric institutions, Frame was introduced to Frank Sargeson, an Auckland based author. For over a year she occupied an army hut in Sargeson's garden, completing her first novel *Owls Do Cry* (1957) while in residence there. Although the hut Frame lodged in was destroyed in the early 1960s, Sargeson's preserved home is now a museum on the outskirts of Auckland, complete with handwritten postcards from Frame still pinned to the cork board walls.

Contrary to the named locations provided by her chapter titles, there is a tension between Frame's desire to belong and her inability to do so. Frame's understanding of dwelling more closely resembles what James Procter describes as 'a spatial and temporal process, rather than a signifier of closure or resolution'.⁷⁰² For Frame, as for Procter, 'to dwell is not necessarily to arrive or "settle"'.⁷⁰³ Frame's charged encounter with the Clutha indicates how she does not live and dwell beneath her birth name, nor does she offer an address at which the reader may imagine her at home. While this is, in many ways, a defensive manoeuvre against the strictures of biographical readings — anticipating her later retreat to the hallucinatory Mirror City at the end of *The Envoy From Mirror City* — it also holds generative potential. These troubled dwelling places should be viewed in a context beyond Frame's experiences of hospitalisation and her subsequently fraught relationship with the critical reception of her writing. When understood in this way, the failed attempts to find permanent habitation in her second autobiography can be seen to move beyond the confining legacies of settlement. The experimental forms of belonging and dwelling in *An Angel at My Table* both navigate the legacies of New Zealand's settler past and envisage new forms of life writing after empire.

'The need to return to the place I have come from'

In Frame's first published autobiographical sketch, a short essay entitled 'Beginnings', she describes 'a novel-length autobiographical essay' which remained unpublished during her lifetime.⁷⁰⁴ Although Frame deemed the text 'embarrassingly personal', it was released posthumously as the autobiographical novel *Towards Another Summer*.⁷⁰⁵ The novel focusses on Grace Cleave, a New

⁷⁰² James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 15.

⁷⁰³ Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 15.

⁷⁰⁴ Frame, 'Beginnings', p. 33.

⁷⁰⁵ King, *Wrestling with the Angel*, p. 245.

Zealand writer living in England who is ‘suffering from the need to return to the place I have come from’.⁷⁰⁶ Frame worked on an early manuscript while living in London throughout the spring of 1963, a period she described in letters as a ‘roots crisis’ in which she felt that: ‘if I don’t get back to New Zealand I’ll die or, which is equivalent to death, my writing will get worse and worse’.⁷⁰⁷ The novel’s protagonist, Grace, consistently imagines herself to be a migratory bird, ruminating on her painful experiences of exile and sharing many memories described in Frame’s autobiographies. In one incident, which Frame would later repeat ad verbatim in *To the Is-Land*, Grace describes one of her earliest memories of listening to ‘the wind moan in the telegraph wires’, experiencing a state of extreme loneliness ‘when I knew that I was in my place; it was early to learn the burden of possession’.⁷⁰⁸ Both Grace and Frame draw a juvenile understanding between belonging, feeling at home, and the trappings of place as property. Elsewhere in the novel, Grace endures a difficult weekend stay with friends and finds, in their spare bedroom, a map of New Zealand that ‘catalogued the physical details of the land’.⁷⁰⁹ She notes that ‘the colours of the map were such delicate pastel shades [...] there was no sign of Empire blood; only a peaceful burnt umber, leaf-green [and] gold’.⁷¹⁰ In these descriptions Frame anticipates, twenty years prior to *An Angel at My Table*, many of the key concerns of her second autobiography, including its fraught configurations of place, belonging and ownership. Moreover, she situates this within a powerful visualisation of both imperial cartographies (the ‘blood’ referring to the pink territories traditionally depicted on maps of the British Empire) and the aftermath of colonial rule. This imperial shade of pink has been replaced with the same umbers, greens and golds that Frame would later describe in her charged encounter with the Clutha. The new palette of shifting colours Frame discovers on her first trip to Central Otago, apparently anticipated in *Towards Another Summer*, reimagine the homogenous shades of ‘Empire blood’. Yet in the context of Frame’s larger body of life writing, I contest that the legacies of empire cannot simply be painted

⁷⁰⁶ *Towards Another Summer*, p. 55.

⁷⁰⁷ Janet Frame, ‘Letter to John Money’ quoted in *Wrestling with the Angel*, p. 243.

⁷⁰⁸ *Towards Another Summer*, p. 55.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*

over and erased. Imperialism appears in often unexpected locations throughout Frame's second autobiography, informing her troubled explorations of belonging in and to New Zealand.

The numerous, frustrated rehearsals of settlement in *An Angel at My Table* indicate not an absolute or totalising failure, but an attempt to move beyond the old, established myths of settlers and pioneers. Neither Grace Cleave nor Janet Frame can wholly remove themselves from 'the place I have come from', but both seek new relationships and alternative configurations with their New Zealand home which surpass the pink cartographies of the colonial past.⁷¹¹ Frame's traumatic years in numerous psychiatric hospitals resulted in the terrifying possibility that 'there was no place on earth for me' and, as Alexis Brown notes, Frame's concern with the reception of her work centred around 'replacing one narrative with another — especially in relation to the public perception of her diagnosis of mental illness'.⁷¹² This interest in placing herself beyond her experiences at Seacliff and other psychiatric hospitals prompts Frame's autobiographies to at times undertake a deeply reactionary stance. The manoeuvre to obscure her familial origins and describe herself as permanently placeless are undoubtedly defensive, buttressing Frame against the intrusion of biographical readings and speculation.

Yet the troubled iterations of place in *An Angel at My Table* also look to move beyond modes of belonging based on possession and profitable cultivation. Calder reminds us that land seizure in New Zealand 'not only brought violence and injustice to indigenous peoples in the past, [but] it also leaves a legacy of cruelty and unfairness that unsettles — though often fails to disturb — its beneficiaries'.⁷¹³ Frame's life writing repeatedly turns to the disturbances that this unsettling history might bestow even on Pākehā beneficiaries. There are clear limitations to Frame's attempts to locate herself both in a churning body of water and, even more tentatively, in the refracted light above its surface. Yet these failures to cultivate new dwelling places reveal, at their limits, the difficulty of

⁷¹¹ *Towards Another Summer*, p. 55.

⁷¹² 'An Angel at My Table', p. 213; Brown, 'Janet Frame, Jane Campion, and Authorial Control in the Auto/Biopic', p. 105.

⁷¹³ Calder, *The Settler's Plot*, p. 109.

establishing a form of belonging beyond the confines of settlement. *An Angel at My Table*'s interest in surpassing property ownership and enclosure brings Frame into conversation with other life writers from across the former British Empire. Just as Lessing repeatedly expresses the need to escape her confined life in the Southern Rhodesian laager, Frame too explores modes of habitation and belonging outside the enclosures of the colonial past. *An Angel at My Table* reveals how Frame can and should be more firmly situated within the histories of settlement in New Zealand, and the ongoing processes by which Pākehā writers locate themselves in the landscape. As I next discuss, Frame further develops her response to the aftermath of empire during her time in London, expanding her previous focus on the legacies of settlement in New Zealand. By witnessing the end of British colonial rule from the former imperial centre, and by considering her position as a white New Zealander abroad, Frame further confronts her and her country's role in the wider narratives of the British Empire.

London and the End of Empire in *The Envoy From Mirror City*

More than three decades after its initial publication, the third volume of Frame's autobiography *The Envoy From Mirror City* continues to be described by critics as the 'definitive account of the expatriate New Zealander in Britain and Europe'.⁷¹⁴ The narrative depicts Frame's seven years of exile in Europe and her extensive time in London. C. K. Stead noted that her 'life of cheap city bedsits, damp country cottages [and] last-minute cheques' placed Frame in the company of other twentieth-century New Zealand travellers, including 'predecessors like Katherine Mansfield and Frances Hodgkins in their earliest years abroad'.⁷¹⁵ However, unlike Mansfield and Hodgkins, *The Envoy From Mirror City* documents Frame's decision to return, permanently, to New Zealand following the death of her father in 1963. Her years living in and around London were a particularly productive

⁷¹⁴ Gibbons, 'Non-Fiction', p. 102.

⁷¹⁵ C. K. Stead, 'A Life of the Mind', *The Dominion*, Saturday 12 August 2000, p. 26.

period in Frame's career, as she published *Faces in the Water* (1961), *The Edge of the Alphabet* and *Scented Gardens for the Blind* (1963), along with two collections of short stories during this time. *The Envoy From Mirror City* documents the significant impact of Frame's time abroad upon her personal as well as her professional life: her months in Ibiza resulted in a tentative first love affair, a subsequent short-lived pregnancy and a later marriage proposal from an Italian suitor. Following her return to London she lived in temporary rented rooms and worked a variety of menial jobs, including as cleaner and cinema usherette. Meanwhile, her treatment at the Maudsley hospital authoritatively denounced her earlier diagnosis of schizophrenia. Frame had grown accustomed to — if never fully accepting of — this condition and recalls her ambivalent response to being 'suddenly stripped of a garment I had worn for twelve or thirteen years' and had occasionally used 'for shelter from the cruel world'.⁷¹⁶ In short, Frame's third autobiography is a record of an extraordinary period in the author's life as she enjoyed a solitary but independent existence, began her early life as a writer in exile and, finally, chose to return to her home country to pursue her writing career.

Beyond the personal importance of Frame's years in Europe, *The Envoy From Mirror City* marks another crucial juncture in Frame's life writing project, expanding her account of life after empire beyond New Zealand to encompass her experiences of living in Britain as well. As Rod Edmond and others have noted, Frame's life in London places her in a wider company of 'writer-travellers of the 1950s and 1960s [who] were also part of that rolling back of empire'.⁷¹⁷ However, as this chapter has outlined, Frame's relocation to Britain — often described as a journey from the frontier to the imperial centre — in many ways overshadows the concerns with empire that are found throughout Frame's life writing project. We have seen how imperial legacies are manifest from the beginning of Frame's autobiographies, in her Flemish ancestors and the King's representative in *To the Is-Land*, and extended in the fraught forms of dwelling and belonging in *An Angel at My Table*. In other words, Frame's arrival at Southampton Docks does not mark the moment when her work

⁷¹⁶ 'The Envoy From Mirror City', p. 375.

⁷¹⁷ Edmond, "'In Search of the Lost Tribe": Janet Frame's England', p. 162.

suddenly becomes concerned with the aftermath of British colonialism. I therefore conclude this chapter with a discussion of Frame's London in *The Envoy From Mirror City*, paying close attention to her descriptions of a metropolis — and more broadly a nation — facing the end of empire. Through my analysis, I suggest that Frame captures the curious twinned processes of commemoration and national myth-making that took place during this era of formal decolonisation.

Frame's descriptions of basements, bedsits and boarding houses offer a nuanced record of life on London's literal and symbolic margins. The place-names which haunt her, listed as 'Tooting Bdy, Hatfield North, Crystal Palace, High Barnet', are significantly the final destinations of bus routes. In her recitation of these locations, Frame imaginatively circles the outskirts of the city, positioning herself in relation to the ends of transport lines while rarely mentioning or visiting the cultural landmarks in London's centre. Despite being surrounded, for the first time, by an international community of people from colonies, dominions and former colonies of the British Empire, Frame's life in London is one of acute loneliness. She lives in overcrowded accommodation where lodgers are largely confined to their individual rooms. This vision of a grey city filled with lonely neighbours, fearful landlords and cramped lodgings, was shared by many other life writers who arrived in London during the post-war era. This is depicted (as previously noted in the introduction to this thesis) not only in the London writings of Lessing, but also in Buchi Emecheta's *Head Above Water*, Beryl Gilroy's *Black Teacher* (1976) and, more recently, Stuart Hall's *Familiar Stranger*. On the one hand, Frame acknowledged that, as a white immigrant from a Commonwealth country, she was 'more favoured in having my ancestors placed among the good, the strong, the brave [...] the patronising disposers'.⁷¹⁸ Yet on the other, her third autobiography also records the New Zealander's awkward reputation as 'more English than the English' and her struggles to accommodate the inevitable differences she experienced between this new, strange city and the country of her birth.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁸ *The Envoy From Mirror City*, p. 312

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

I argue that Frame's account of arrival and city life details how formal decolonisation during the post-war period was discussed — or more accurately overlooked — by her fellow Londoners. Frame encounters other recent arrivals from colonised locations, yet their presence in the city is never explicitly connected to Britain's overseas territories. Many of Frame's fellow Londoners are instead trapped in the confined spaces of their Blitz experiences, unable to participate in the rapidly changing life of the metropolis. Frame's conversations with these city-dwellers are generally mournful, melancholic exchanges, filled with past regrets and terrifying memories of the home front. Bill Schwarz has outlined how 'laments for England' in writings of the 1960s 'carried within them, sometimes spoken, sometimes not, laments for empire'.⁷²⁰ Following this line of inquiry, I suggest that Frame's encounters with Londoners throughout *The Envoy From Mirror City* reveal a nation steadily turning inwards, creating new, national myths in the aftermath of empire. Conversely, the rapid dismantlement of the British Empire remains, to use Schwarz's phrase, an unspoken narrative in the conversations Frame records.

I conclude this chapter, then, with a discussion of how Frame dismantles the dominant mythologies of London as told and retold by the city's inhabitants. Her interest in rewriting the narratives of the old imperial metropolis, and 'in the dismantling of the centre', have previously been read as a distinctively postcolonial concern.⁷²¹ I too argue that by circling the city's outskirts and recording London's curious petrification in a perpetual present, Frame seeks to undo or (as I shall explain) 'unwrite' Britain's rapidly developing national myths. However, in contradistinction to received readings of her work, I argue that we must position Frame's continued attempts to dismantle the authority of the written word firmly in the broader, abstracting tendencies of her life writing project. In turn, we should not ignore the possible limitations of these repeated 'undoings'. While Frame's unstitching of London's mythologised narratives can and should be read as an important account of Britain at the end of Empire, her autobiographies constantly seek to dissolve the known or

⁷²⁰ Schwarz, 'Introduction End of Empire and the English Novel', p. 11.

⁷²¹ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, p. 105.

concrete ties which would tether her to a family tree, her homeland, the histories of British imperialism and a whole host of other historical or personal contexts. By way of conclusion, therefore, I question how Frame's wish to be 'alone, creator and preserver of my world' has significant consequences in her life writing.⁷²² By lastly examining Frame's retreat to the environs of Mirror City at the end of her third autobiography, I suggest two things. Firstly, that Frame's determination to inhabit a solitary authorial role results in her attempts to decouple her autobiographical self from contextual or stable forms of knowledge that — she believes — would incarcerate her upon the page. But secondly, in the context of post-war London, these typically Framean manoeuvres to break loose from the rapidly calcifying narratives of the city take on a new potency. Frame's encounters with words written on the debris and waste material of London indicates how the abstracting tendencies of her life writing project complicate, rather than negate, her references to colonial histories and imperial order. As Frame's readers we must discern how the writer's attempts to rebuff critical and contextual frameworks reveals, in its strategies of evasion, both a concern with and resistance to the long legacies of empire.

'A colonial New Zealander abroad'

The period during which Frame lived in London (1956-1963) has been identified by imperial historians as a time when the 'intertwining of decolonisation and metropolitan life was especially intense'.⁷²³ The violence of Indian partition, the after-effects of the Suez Crisis, and an increase in race riots in the UK had combined to create a 'psychological watershed which exposed the Commonwealth's frailties'.⁷²⁴ Although post-war legislation on citizenship and immigration sought to secure Britain's position at the centre of the newly established Commonwealth, the widening cracks

⁷²² 'The Envoy From Mirror City', p. 353.

⁷²³ Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*, p. 5.

⁷²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

in the nation's imperial project became increasingly visible during this period. Frame's initial impressions of London depict a post-war city populated with inhabitants from across the British Empire. These include: her Singaporean roommate with whom she fruitlessly searches for the 'real circus' at Piccadilly; Nigel from West Africa who surprises her with his knowledge of New Zealand's 'landscapes, bays, rivers, waterfalls; exports and imports'; and Frame's fellow lodger Patrick O'Reilly, an Irishman who assumes that, 'as a colonial', Frame 'would understand what the English had done to Ireland'.⁷²⁵ Although Frame describes these encounters as a chance to remedy her own ignorance — to learn about 'the people who until now had been only statistics, stereotypes' — all of these encounters are marked by their awkward failures or, as with her tumultuous relationship with O'Reilly, a complete breakdown.⁷²⁶ Frame describes herself as a 'colonial New Zealander abroad without any real identity' and does not find solidarity or lasting connections amongst other former colonial subjects.⁷²⁷ She gains some limited insights into the lives of people she had previously imagined only as numbers or clichés, yet her encounters with other colonial subjects are characterised by their brevity and often their failure. While the 1948 British Nationality Act inaugurated the new status of 'Citizen of the United Kingdom and its Colonies', Frame's emphasis on social failure and ostracisation in London outlines how these colonial arrivals were regarded — and viewed each other — as strangers in a new land. In Frame's rendering of the city their perceived strangeness is mirrored in their social estrangement from one another.

Frame's descriptions of her early years in London are defined by loneliness. In her regular outings to the cinema the darkened screenings are a space for both entertainment and shelter. However, when the house lights are turned on one afternoon Frame notices, for the first time, that the audience members around her are other lonely city dwellers. She is surrounded by 'poor Londoners, middle aged men alone [...] West Indian immigrants, men and women [...] suddenly illuminated,

⁷²⁵ 'The Envoy From Mirror City', p. 301; p. 311; p. 304.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

they looked like plants set the required distance from one another in some unkempt allotment by the railway line'.⁷²⁸ If these people are plants then the gaps between cinema-goers prevent their metaphoric roots from overlapping. In this moment of physical proximity to other subjects from Britain's current and former colonies, Frame emphasises the separation between them. Moreover, throughout her third autobiography it is made clear that Frame, as an arrival from a white settler dominion, receives preferential treatment in London when compared to her West Indian neighbours. As Kathleen Paul explains, Britain perceived its relationship with white dominions to be so important during the post-war period that — despite an urgently needed labour force at home — official UK government policy encouraged an average of 125,000 emigrants a year to countries including New Zealand, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia.⁷²⁹ It is therefore important to assert that Frame's presence in and perspective on post-war Britain was connected to her position as a 'desirable' immigrant from a white dominion.

Nevertheless, *The Envoy From Mirror City* also confronts the paradoxical forces which bestow and withhold constructions of 'whiteness' upon London's immigrant communities. When Patrick O'Reilly presumes 'there was a bond between' himself and Frame because neither of them are English, underlying this statement is the assumption that he and Frame are united in their status as white subjects *and* by both having been on the receiving end of British colonial history.⁷³⁰ By contrast, O'Reilly's overt racism towards those he claims are 'stealing all the work' in London indicates that his colonial solidarity — offered to Frame through a shared dislike of the English — has strict limitations.⁷³¹ Aside from being overtly racist, Patrick also implies that *he* is not perceived as a problem, as he cannot be viewed as an immigrant who steals 'all the work'. But as an Irishman, Patrick would have also been subject to prohibitive and casual forms of racism in 1950s London. As

⁷²⁸ Ibid., p. 390.

⁷²⁹ Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Post-War Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 25.

⁷³⁰ 'The Envoy From Mirror City', p. 304.

⁷³¹ Ibid., p. 305.

Richard Dyer explains, Irish communities in Europe throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were only temporarily ‘assimilated into the category of whiteness’, and this temporary inclusion often acted as a strategic social buffer against black and Indigenous peoples.⁷³² Patrick’s own position as a racial subject in post-war Britain is, as Dyer’s comments reveal, far from straightforward.⁷³³ As Frame originated from a white settler dominion she was unlikely to ever be included in the now-notorious ‘banned’ categories on accommodation advertisements that she describes as the infamous ‘no children, pets, coloured or Irish’.⁷³⁴

Yet Frame nevertheless goes to great lengths to hide both her medical history and her reliance on National Assistance from landlords and potential employers in London. Chapter seventeen of *The Envoy From Mirror City* outlines how she attempted to conceal the source of her income (National Assistance cheques) from the Morgan family, her landlords at Grove Hill Road. Therefore, in their distinctive ways Patrick and Frame inhabit precarious positions within the city, becoming fringe figures in the pool of ‘acceptable’ white tenants and employees, but are rarely permitted to progress beyond this initial, temporary inclusion. After all, Patrick has to keep reminding himself that ‘he was a successful bus driver who had refused promotion to inspector [...] because he preferred to be active, up there driving the bus’.⁷³⁵ Frame notes that even while he makes these repeated declarations, Patrick’s behaviour belies a uncertain unease. He cannot dispel the lingering suspicion that, despite his formidable work ethic, as an Irishman he would not be *allowed* a promotion to the role of inspector. While Patrick prefers to see himself and Frame as approved-of immigrants, Frame is keen

⁷³² Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 19.

⁷³³ Noel Ignatiev’s study, *How the Irish Became White* (1995), outlines how Irish immigrant communities in the USA had ‘to enter the white race’ as a ‘strategy to secure an advantage in a competitive society’. However, as Ignatiev repeatedly emphasises, ‘while white skin made the Irish eligible for membership in the white race it did not guarantee their admission’. Ignatiev’s comments suggest how and why Patrick’s position in London appears so tenuous. Rather than feeling solidarity with or sympathy for other new arrivals in London, Patrick’s partial acceptance as an employee and tenant is contingent on his recognition as a white subject. In the process, he must distinguish himself and remain separate from other immigrant communities. — Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 3; p. 59.

⁷³⁴ ‘The Envoy From Mirror City’, p. 386.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

to remind us that this label could be removed as quickly as it was bestowed. She quietly insists that Patrick, and the other tenants in their lodgings at Cedars Road, are ‘reject[s] of a demanding world’, and that she too is likely to join this community of outcasts.⁷³⁶

The Envoy From Mirror City registers Frame’s growing awareness of the contradictions of race and whiteness in 1950s Britain, as the post-war nation badly needed workers from across the Commonwealth, yet subjected them to humiliating forms of racism once they joined the workforce. Frame also realises that although she and Patrick inhabit the edges of British society, they are exempt from the violent abuse endured by London’s West Indian community. She notes that the newspapers repeat an endless narrative involving the sexual exploitation of white women at the hands of black men in which ‘the women were prostitutes, the black men pimps, the white men unfortunate victims’.⁷³⁷ The hypocrisies of these stories are revealed steadily throughout Frame’s third autobiography, not least when she realises that Britain’s newly established National Health Service is almost entirely reliant on immigrant labour from ‘Africa, Ireland, the West Indies and [even] one or two [nurses] from New Zealand’.⁷³⁸ Frame notices that while Britain’s black communities are demonised through salacious narratives of sexual exploitation, in reality they are a foundational – and largely unacknowledged – force in the rebuilding of the post-war nation.

Frame would later return to New Zealand with a heightened awareness of Māori land theft (as outlined earlier in this chapter’s discussion of *An Angel at My Table*). I therefore draw a connection between Frame witnessing racism in London and her burgeoning awareness of how the aftermath of empire hindered the lives and opportunities of many formerly colonised subjects across the globe, including both black Britons and Māori New Zealanders. From the very first chapters of *The Envoy From Mirror City* — which describe her first foreign landfall at Curaçao — Frame begins to regard her colonial-style education as suspect. She questions the established mantra that taught her ‘that

⁷³⁶ Ibid., p. 319.

⁷³⁷ Ibid., p. 312.

⁷³⁸ Ibid., p. 373.

Maori and Pakeha had equal opportunities’, even while her teachers insisted that Māori men just happened to be better at operating heavy machinery.⁷³⁹ Here we can see that, while still en route to Britain, Frame begins to notice the contradictions in her understanding of race. This then informs the subtle instabilities of her own whiteness in London. The result is that *The Envoy From Mirror City* records her growing awareness of both colonialism’s institutionalised racism and the continuing currency of racist ontologies in mid-twentieth-century New Zealand and Britain.

As Frame’s depictions of London are often characterised by their loneliness and a lack of human connection, her observations of extensive communication or lengthy conversations are rare. An important exception is her encounter with the people she calls ‘the storytellers of Battersea’.⁷⁴⁰ For the two weeks prior to her journey to Ibiza via Paris, Frame accepts work as a housemaid and waitress at the Battersea Technical College Hospital where she meets a number of fellow cleaners who permit her to sit and observe their daily chatter. Each morning Frame hovers on the edges of their conversation. She records how, over the meal of ‘morning tea’ served at 11am:

I found myself unexpectedly living as if during the days of the Second World War [...] The discussion of the television programmes was clearly seen as an introduction to the major topic, and perhaps as a reassurance that the events to be vividly recounted were now also in a shadow world of the past. Yet day after day the women talked of the war, reliving horrors they had never mentioned and could only now describe, while I, with a shuddering eerie sense of the overturning of time that one is often persuaded may flow so neatly from past to present to future, sat silently listening, feeling a growing respect for the relentlessness of experience that like a determined, pursuing, eternally embracing suitor will at last secure its match with speech. [...] Perhaps if the war had not been a shared experience the memories might not have had the combined force that enabled them temporarily to abolish the present.⁷⁴¹

Although this episode takes place over a decade after the end of the Second World War, Frame is surprised to find that her colleagues have collectively transformed their traumatic memories of Britain at war into a perpetual present. She registers the delay between the women’s experiences and their ability to discuss these as a community, sharing recollections that they ‘could only now describe’.

⁷³⁹ Ibid., p. 296.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 306.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., p. 309.

Moreover, not only do the participants in this daily conversation (within which Frame is an observer, not a conversationalist) look back to their former lives, this gaze allows them to ‘temporarily abolish the present’. Their present-day was, as we have seen from Frame’s travels across London, teeming with new arrivals from Britain’s former colonies. Yet Frame depicts the British as locked into a different historical narrative. Although the histories of the British Empire’s end and the Second World War are closely intertwined, Frame’s colleagues largely ignore — or are perhaps distracted from — the dismantling of Britain’s imperial power, trapped instead in the reiteration of their war-time experiences.

Although the storytellers might be understood as engaged in a collective, therapeutic exchange, Frame hints that in actuality, the recitations of these memories may become destructive rather than restorative. By looking only to the wartime past and allowing this recent history to erase their present selves, the storytellers of Battersea banish any notion of futurity, trapping themselves temporally in a continual ‘reliving [of] horrors’ where they are perpetually ‘thirty-two year[s] old’.⁷⁴² There is little to suggest that these conversations allow them to process and move beyond their experiences. Frame claims that through the storytellers of Battersea she was ‘relive the war as the Londoners had known it’, explaining that ‘the relics’ of the Blitz were still visible throughout the city in 1956 as the ‘bombed sites [were] not yet rebuilt, overgrown with grass and weeds and scattered with rubble’.⁷⁴³ Like Lessing and Lively, Frame’s early impressions of London are dominated by images of fireweed growing across abandoned buildings and of empty spaces, filled with dark pools of water, where houses once stood. Yet distinctly, Frame suggests that the rubble and other visible signs of the Blitz have become relics or sacred objects, with the potential to become places of worship in the city.⁷⁴⁴ By reliving their traumatic experiences, the storytellers of Battersea may begin to venerate Britain’s experiences of war through their fixation upon these sites.

⁷⁴² Ibid.

⁷⁴³ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 309.

On the one hand, *The Envoy From Mirror City* witnesses a nation rebuilding itself in the aftermath of war, with Frame reporting on the development of the NHS and a wide range of public services, including National Assistance. This was, as David Edgerton notes, a period in which ‘a British developmental state focused on changing the nation, on building a new national future’.⁷⁴⁵ However, on the other, Frame’s third autobiography also offers a vision of a nation turning inwards, beginning to create its own national stories that avoid or preclude scrutiny of Britain’s relationship with its former colonies. Although there is a clear generational distinction between the storytellers of Battersea — who witnessed the Blitz first hand — and twenty-first century evocations of the need for ‘Blitz spirit’, I suggest that Frame witnesses the early beginnings of a national narrative focussed on Britain’s wartime history.⁷⁴⁶ These national myths have led Paul Gilroy to hypothesise that ‘an overarching figuration of Britain at war against the Nazis’ has come to evacuate other, postcolonial histories, from the public consciousness.⁷⁴⁷ Frame witnesses, in circular conversations that cannot escape the war and the bomb-sites that are being viewed as a relics, a vision of an increasingly insular nation that is no longer the imperial centre of a global empire. I read, in these passages of *The Envoy From Mirror City*, the early beginnings of a national narrative that inform Gilroy’s later formulations of post-imperial melancholia.

Throughout these early years in London Frame was struck by a story she had overheard of ‘the former Underground station with its hundreds of entombed Londoners caught in an air raid’.⁷⁴⁸ The image of the entombed Londoners (which presumably recalls the mass fatalities in Balham underground station during a 1940 air raid) is highly suggestive: the inhabitants of the city are trapped under the weight of its symbolically charged rubble, lying in stasis beneath the city’s infrastructure. Reading this alongside the storytellers of Battersea, the Londoners Frame encounters are trapped —

⁷⁴⁵ David Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation* (London: Penguin, 2019), p. 281.

⁷⁴⁶ Alastair Macdonald, ‘May evoked Blitz spirit to show EU Brexit progress’, *Reuters*, April 11 2019 <<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-eu-blitz/may-evoked-blitz-spirit-to-show-eu-brexit-progress-idUKKCN1RN26Z>> [accessed 7 September 2019].

⁷⁴⁷ Gilroy, *After Empire*, p. 97.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

physically and figuratively — beneath the weight of their recent history. Frame had already explored this image of bodies beneath rubble in her novel, *Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room/The Rainbirds* (1969), describing the ‘dead in Balham Tube Station’ whose bones will be later discovered ‘by County Council workmen digging drains’.⁷⁴⁹ This memory of civilian fatalities is returned to several times by Godfrey Rainbird, a protagonist who has himself recently awakened from the dead. The bodies beneath Balham tube station haunt him as he adjusts to his new (after)life. But in *The Envoy From Mirror City*, Frame’s descriptions of the bombed sites encasing the bodies of Londoners suggests a community unable to struggle free from the debris of their recent past. They remain trapped in the shelters and enclosed spaces of the Blitz, locked into a recent history that will later serve as national myth.

The question of London’s future, however, develops in Frame’s subsequent descriptions of life at Grove Hill Road, Camberwell, where she is one of two lodgers in the home of the Morgan family. There she encounters Tilly, her fellow boarder and ‘another Londoner whose memories of the war had matured for harmless telling’.⁷⁵⁰ Tilly’s ‘street, her home, her family [had been] destroyed by a flying bomb’ during the Blitz.⁷⁵¹ Each night in hers and Frame’s shared, tiny kitchen she explains that ‘if I’d had my post-war credits [...] life would have been very different for me’.⁷⁵² Like the cleaners at Battersea Training College, Tilly’s continual recitation of war-time horrors is anything but a ‘harmless [re]telling’.⁷⁵³ Her resolute focus on the six years of the war, along with her determination to tell and retell her experiences to Frame, are viewed as a dangerous compulsion. In the absence of her post-war compensation Tilly views everything as a betrayal — so much so that when her doctor suggests the amputation of one of her toes ‘to alleviate her arthritis, she saw the betrayal as extending to her own body’.⁷⁵⁴ She believes that her own ‘government had failed her: she

⁷⁴⁹ *Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room*, p. 39.

⁷⁵⁰ ‘The Envoy From Mirror City’, p. 386.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*

⁷⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

was bitter, and wary', yet ironically her meeting with Frame takes place against Harold Macmillan's 1957 election campaign, whose slogan announced 'you've never had it so good'.⁷⁵⁵ *The Envoy From Mirror City* views Londoners like Tilly as incarcerated within both their own memories and their post-war living conditions. Living as lodgers or earning paltry wages as cleaning staff they are stuck, occupying a static position in the rapidly changing metropolis.

In an early draft of this encounter, Frame explicitly connected Tilly with the workers at Battersea, stating that both contributed to the 'memories of war [that] were being slowly released throughout London, like fumes buried with the Blitz, showering everyone [...] my skin, my clothes, my life had now permanently absorbed the odours of [...] Londoners in the Second World War'.⁷⁵⁶ In this earlier version, Frame conceptualises these lingering wartime memories as a radioactive fallout (in this draft, various members of the household at Grove Road are haunted by the image of the atom bomb). Frame's figurative language imagines Britain's wartime memories as the slowly releasing carcinogens of a nuclear attack, and she must live in its poisonous aftermath. Here Frame is affected, and quite possibly infected, by traumatic memories that permeate her daily life in London. By omitting this potent metaphor from the later published edition of *The Envoy From Mirror City*, Frame loses the implication that the memories of Britain at war are toxic to London's present inhabitants, exposing even new arrivals in the city to a melancholy which settles in barely perceptible layers upon their clothes and hair. But importantly, Frame's drafting process reveals how she explicitly understood Tilly, and the cleaning staff at Battersea, to be engaged in the same activity, a connection that is only implicitly rendered in her final draft. These intersecting images were edited and developed to suggest that communal memory-work could have toxic consequences.

While the constant repetition of wartime stories in *The Envoy From Mirror City* reveal a range of traumatic and previously unprocessed memories, Frame offers a further brief commentary on the social consequences of this collective trauma. She notes that the repeated stories of Britain at war

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁶ Dunedin, Hocken Library, MS 3028/962.

covertly lock ‘everyone in place’, sustaining the social inequalities of an English class system that Frame and her fellow New Zealanders quietly describe as ‘medieval’.⁷⁵⁷ Reading Frame’s meetings in Battersea and her conversations in the kitchen with Tilly reveals that the repeated wartime stories prevent these Londoners from imagining — let alone agitating for — alternative, more egalitarian futures. These repeated stories create, in Frame’s words, an air of stultifying calm with ‘not even the prospect of a storm to dislodge and rearrange’.⁷⁵⁸

O’Reilly’s racism towards black immigrants, his ambivalent sense of his own whiteness, Frame’s lonely afternoons in cinema screenings alongside West Indian communities, and the repetitive collective memories of the Second World War are, I argue, all connected. Her encounters with the city and its inhabitants combine to create a vision of a nation turning inwards on itself, whose citizens are unable to address their present. As she leaves London for New Zealand, Frame notes that her time in the city bore witness to ‘the Suez crisis’ and the arrival in Britain of ‘the West Indian novelists’; yet, as we have seen, these events are barely registered in her conversations with other Londoners.⁷⁵⁹ Here I contend that, when Frame travels to the country her relatives still insist on calling ‘home’ she expects to witness the waning of Britain’s imperial power in its metropolitan heart, yet instead she discovers that the British themselves are determinedly building new narratives of the nation, stories that largely overlook the collapse of their former Empire. Yet, as I shall now explain by way of conclusion, Frame’s response to these twinned processes of nation building and imperial decline is not to rewrite the narratives of the metropolis in a more familiar postcolonial mode, as has previously been argued, but to begin dismantling the stability of writing itself.

Conclusion: ‘The words of London’

⁷⁵⁷ ‘The Envoy From Mirror City’, p. 310.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹ ‘The Envoy From Mirror City’, p. 417.

Frame's third autobiography is concerned with life in an imperial centre where the former grand historical narratives of British colonial prowess are being reworked. Framing her encounters with melancholic storytellers and lonely lodgers in *The Envoy From Mirror City* are her attempts to piece together 'items and images absorbed in early history lessons', as she blearily recalls 'the Angles. The Saxons. The Picts and the Scots. The Romans'.⁷⁶⁰ Despite her best efforts these shadowy figures will not be arranged into a known historical timeline, and in her recitations of Britain's tribes Frame never makes it past the fifth century. Unlike Lively, who orients herself through the discovery of Roman ruins beneath St Paul's Cathedral, Frame's invocation of the Romans disorientates her as she wanders across London. Meanwhile, she makes long bus journeys around the outer city, exploring Crystal Palace and Ponders End, all the time reading what she calls 'the words of London'.⁷⁶¹ These are found in 'the stacks of newspapers and magazines, sheets of advertisements in the windows [...] the illuminated advertising signs, the menus chalked on blackboards [...] the graffiti in the public lavatories'.⁷⁶² Delighted by these writings both in and on the city, Frame hungrily consumes these temporary texts. Occasionally their words betray darker meanings, such as the placards of the homeless on Camberwell Green which read: 'War Wounded. Stumps for Legs. Blind From Birth'.⁷⁶³ But if she is hoping to excavate the layers of history beneath her newly discovered environs — like Lively's investigations of the Roman remains exposed by bomb damage — they are not revealed through such acts of public reading, nor through half-remembered history lessons in Oamaru. Frame's fragmentary ephemeral reading material creates a kaleidoscopic impression of urban life, the disjunctive parts of which will not assemble to form a comprehensive whole. The 'words of London' are inscribed on a variety of materials, including flimsy paper and rain-soaked cardboard that cannot last. Rather than excavating the historical timeline which underpins the city — like Lively examining St Paul's — Frame hones in on its temporary texts: blackboards which are wiped clean of their chalky

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 306

⁷⁶¹ Ibid.

⁷⁶² Ibid., p. 306.

⁷⁶³ Ibid., p. 371.

menus, newspapers discarded by the kerbside, and the bathroom graffiti which is quickly overwritten with new obscenities.

At a time of new ethnic myths, when the nation is binding itself against social change and attempting to ignore the influx of new arrivals which mark the end of Britain's Empire, Frame is busily engaged by an alternative storytelling project. It is here, in the gap between Frame's attention to the ephemeral 'words of London' and her fellow Londoners' retreat into their memories of the recent past, that we might retrospectively locate one of Frame's many valuable contributions to life writing after empire. While others have productively read *The Envoy From Mirror City* as belonging to a body of post-war literature where 'neglected and disused environments' are spaces in which 'new narratives are written and new communities emerge', I suggest something furthermore.⁷⁶⁴ Frame depicts an urban environment where historical narratives and chronologies will not or cannot stick to the page. What emerges as Frame hones in on the ephemeral and otherwise ignored words of the city is less a rewriting than a reversal of the writing process itself. No narratives, new or otherwise, are allowed to flourish in Frame's rendition of the city. In her description of the words of London, Frame reminds us that they will soon be painted over, wiped clean, or disintegrated by the rain. The result is a vision of London crowded with historical records and literary achievements (such as the generations of poets who have written of their walks on Hampstead Heath), while Frame remains, as ever, characteristically determined to dismantle the stability of the written record. Her attempts at disassembly in *The Envoy From Mirror City* must be read alongside and through the collective myth-making of Britain as a post-imperial nation. Her determination to pursue the fragmentary, ephemeral stories of the city resists the alternative, totalising histories that emerge from her conversations with city-dwellers. In turn, Frame's dismantling of master narratives in London exemplifies how many of her autobiographical attempts to disassemble known meanings and apparently solid connections (in objects as indicators of origins, or places as offering a fixed form of belonging) are circumscribed by the legacies of empire.

⁷⁶⁴ McLeod, *Postcolonial London*, p. 185.

The readings across this chapter are complicated by Frame's repeated statements that she intended to be 'alone, creator and preserver of my world, in harmony with other worlds because I could interpret them as I wished'.⁷⁶⁵ Indeed, such comments have led numerous critics to comment upon Frame's defensive position as a life writer, as an author who is always attempting to wrest meaning from her own readers.⁷⁶⁶ In letters, Frame stated that her autobiographies were intended to 'set the record straight', particularly on the subject of her misdiagnosis, despite the futility of knowing 'that records are born crooked and twisted'.⁷⁶⁷ As we have seen, autobiographical writing holds the potential to become, for Frame, a form of incarceration: official documents were used to imprison her for many years in various psychiatric institutions and it was the writing of a 'condensed autobiography' that brought Frame to the attention of the New Zealand authorities in the first place.⁷⁶⁸ Indeed, the image of the lonely author as the sole creator of meaning arguably finds its full fruition in Frame's eventual removal to Mirror City at the end of her third autobiography. Frame's gradual retreat into this imaginative realm, which abstracts reality into a series of capricious watery reflections, might be seen as a removal from the world, placing the author in a depopulated city of the mind where she becomes impervious to criticism and external forces.

But to paraphrase Jan Cronin, there is a difference between what Frame's life writing says and what it does.⁷⁶⁹ While *The Envoy From Mirror City* states, in its final chapters, that the author is staging a retreat to the inviolate, empty streets of Mirror City, in actuality her third autobiography is, like all of her life writing, deeply concerned with material histories and worldly affairs. Her account of 'the words of London' and the storytellers of Battersea builds upon her earlier descriptions of ancestral salmon spoons or her fascination with suburban dwelling places, all of which locate the afterlives of empire in unexpected and often unlikely locations. Frame's life writing consistently challenges the authority of imperialism and colonial order in these encounters. These efforts

⁷⁶⁵ 'The Envoy From Mirror City', p. 353.

⁷⁶⁶ Dean, 'Foes, ghosts, and faces in the water', p. 22.

⁷⁶⁷ Janet Frame, 'letter to Vogts' quoted in *Wrestling with the Angel*, p. 449.

⁷⁶⁸ 'An Angel at My Table', p. 189.

⁷⁶⁹ Cronin, *The Frame Function*, p. 13.

culminate in her charged interactions with the ruins of post-imperial London, in which she stops short of writing alternative, counter-histories but nevertheless dismantles the post-war myths of the nation. Through my readings, Frame's third autobiography — and indeed, her life writing in general — constitutes a significant and unique response to the material histories of British colonialism, rather than an authorial retreat to an inviolate and immaterial realm.

In her account of life in the former administrative and financial heart of the British Empire in *The Envoy From Mirror City*, Frame unhinges the established authority of the imperial metropolis and exposes the complicated, even messy, processes of narrating and neglecting the end of Empire in modern Britain. She delivers a written account of life after empire which extends many of the readings and conceptual understandings outlined throughout this study: Frame was born in a former dominion long after the end of official colonial rule, and arrived in Britain as it was decidedly facing the end of its imperial power. Yet she delivers this both in spite and because of her overarching attempts to dissolve stable, contextual meaning in her life writing. While the author herself would refuse any such frameworks which might categorically position her as, for example, a postcolonial writer, Frame's autobiographies have much to tell us about life in the aftermath of empire and how the long-reaching, tentacular influence of imperialism is infused into contemporary life writing.

Conclusion: the tallboy, the trunk and the duchesse dresser

By advancing a critical framework of ‘life writing after empire’ this thesis has examined how the autobiographical writings of Lively, Lessing and Frame are entangled with the British Empire and the legacies of colonial rule. The previous chapters demonstrate that these three authors pursue the colonial past through numerous autobiographical narratives, and explore how their life writing addresses the post-imperial present. Although the structure of this thesis follows a chronological route through each author’s arrival in post-war London, it encompasses more expansive chronologies and geographies than mid-twentieth century Britain alone. By discussing texts published from 1957 to 2017, I have sought to uncover an expansive, networked view of life narratives from across the former British Empire, one that includes the different colonial histories of Egypt, Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and New Zealand. In focussing on life writers who narrated their childhoods in these colonies, ex-colonies and protectorates across multiple texts, I have endeavoured to offer a comparative interpretation of colonialism’s lifelong grip on each of these authors. My detailed readings of Lively, Lessing and Frame outline how their autobiographical narratives have engaged with the legacies of empire, sometimes critically and at others, inadvertently.

In *British Culture and the End of Empire* (2001), Stuart Ward argues that ‘the stresses and strains of imperial decline were not safely contained within the realm of high politics’, and urges a consideration of the end of empire across a range of cultural, social and literary forms.⁷⁷⁰ As we have seen, empire leaks across the boundaries of Lively’s, Lessing’s and Frame’s multiple life narratives. The aftermath of colonialism manifests in often surprising ways throughout their long life writing projects. In order to read empire within and across these texts, these three chapter studies demonstrate the need to pay attention to the details and detritus of colonial remains. When we engage with life writing after empire, the legacies of colonialism appear in unexpected places, from battered pieces of furniture to family photographs and the configurations of childhood homes. To borrow the image of

⁷⁷⁰ Ward, *British Culture and the End of Empire*, p. 6.

Lessing's internal 'lake of tears', caused by her decades of exile from Southern Rhodesia, imperialism is a shifting, liquid force that floods the cracks and crevices of life writing after empire, and searching it out demands flexible and attentive critical readings.⁷⁷¹ By examining a multitude of autobiographical narrative forms in concert, I have not only pursued the aftermath of empire into memoirs such as *Oleander*, *Jacaranda* and *Going Home*, where colonialism is placed centre-stage, but also in other texts such as *Making It Up* and *An Angel at My Table*, whose connections to empire are not so apparent. Taken together, I have shown how life writing after empire offers challenging and sometimes conflicting perspectives on imperialism that still pertain to our shared twenty-first century present.

My approach reveals previously unrecognised connections between these three authors' distinctive works. Rather than assimilating these writers into a singular, cohesive agenda, this thesis remains alert to – indeed, insists upon – both the comparisons and divergences between them. On the one hand, life writing after empire may be generative, inaugurating new autobiographical forms such as speculative life writing or recording each writer's overlapping memories of the end of Empire in post-war Britain. Yet on the other, reading Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's life narratives through the critical lens of 'after empire' reveals the limitations, as well as the possibilities, of their autobiographical endeavours. In *Alfred and Emily*, Lessing's counterfactual life narratives deliberately refuse to console or rewrite her parents' failed dreams of imperial progress. These frustrated, processual returns to the house on the hill reveal how all of Lessing's life writing might be read as a series of failed escapes from Southern Rhodesia. Yet these failures are critically productive, allowing us to explore the irreconcilable conflict between Lessing's attachment to her memories of settler life and her committed anti-imperialist politics. By contrast, Lively's relationship with Egypt is not wracked by such tense oscillations between critique and complicity. Nevertheless, her memoirs raise alternative challenges to life writing after empire, as these texts necessitate an examination of the elided or concealed colonial histories that haunt the margins of her life narratives. Lively's

⁷⁷¹ *African Laughter*, p. 13.

restrained returns to Egypt are clearly distinct from Lessing's intimate disclosures of painful exile, and yet they require an equally flexible critical framework that is occasionally prepared to read them against their author's assertions. Through these readings, both Lively's and Lessing's late turns to speculation reflect upon on their memories of empire. We can therefore read these imperial histories not only out of the thematic concerns, but also the structural forms of their life writing.

My contention that life writing after empire must include within its purview life narratives that are unable to mobilise and fully engage with the legacies of colonialism and settlement is perhaps most pertinent to Frame's first two autobiographies. As my discussions of settlerdom and unstable genealogies in *To the Is-Land* and *An Angel at My Table* highlight, while it is not Frame's manifest or sole intent to dwell on the legacies of British colonialism in these texts, they can nevertheless still be meaningfully read as life writing after empire. My discussions draw Frame's oblique engagements with empire into conversation with her explicit descriptions of imperial decline in *The Envoy From Mirror City*. Frame's life writing project, perhaps more than any other discussed here, emphasises that life writing after empire is not a straightforward process charting a linear development from colonial rule, to the end of empire, and beyond into a postcolonial future. Instead, the repetitions and returns that I have traced throughout this thesis suggest that, for Lively, Lessing and Frame, life writing can and should be read for its deliberate pursuit of empire, and also more subtly, for the imperial legacies that linger in the background of everyday life long after official decolonisation. If the formal dismantlement of colonial rule was, as John M. Mackenzie suggests, a 'complicated mix of implosions, explosions and small sputterings', then the meandering, circular trajectories of life writing after empire record this uneven and ongoing process.⁷⁷²

It is important to stipulate, as I have done throughout this thesis, that despite their divergent forms of autobiographical self-representation, it is overwhelmingly confined domestic spaces that offer each writer a stage for rehearsing the fraught nature of colonial and settler life, both during and

⁷⁷² John M. Mackenzie, 'The persistence of empire in metropolitan culture' in *British Culture After Empire*, ed. by Stuart Ward (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 21-36 (p. 23).

after empire. The legacies of colonial rule lie in the details of these autobiographical texts, from the house and gardens of Lively's Bulaq Dakhrur to Lessing's reiterative returns to Kermanshah Farm and the house on the hill. These two properties, at opposite ends of the African continent, are both originary homes and sites that reveal the untenable nature of white settlement. In Frame's case, the family home of Willowglen — the first and only property in which her parents were owners, rather than tenants — may not have occupied such a literal colonial frontier, but it nevertheless harbours similarly unsettling legacies. In the numerous bungalows and railway huts in which Frame lived as a child, there was always the possibility that a representative of the imperial monarch might knock on the door at any moment, ready to conduct a tour and inspect 'the far flung colonial furniture'.⁷⁷³ Bulaq Dakhrur, Kermanshah Farm and Willowglen are domestic spaces exposing the contradictions and the details of life after empire. By pursuing the representations of home and private, interior realms in these distinctive life narratives, I have shown how imperialism is housed in a range of intimate dwelling places and how it maintains the power to permanently unsettle their inhabitants.

My readings of life writing after empire therefore trace numerous threads of connection and comparison between three life writers who are rarely compared in academic studies. To capture these succinctly, we might consider a recurring motif that appears across these texts: the three distinctive pieces of heavy Victorian furniture that occupied the heart of Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's respective households. For Lively, this is the tallboy, a large Victorian set of drawers with brass handles that stood, proudly, in the main hall of Bulaq Dakhrur, having 'twice navigated the Mediterranean Sea'.⁷⁷⁴ The tallboy 'signified official, adult concerns', housing her 'father's papers and family photograph albums'.⁷⁷⁵ For Lessing, it is the heavy trunk marked 'wanted on voyage', which sat in the centre of her parent's farmhouse, containing outfits stored beneath 'layers of crisp, white tissue paper', along with old photographs wrapped in protective oil cloths.⁷⁷⁶ Although this

⁷⁷³ Frame, 'Between My Father and the King', p. 11.

⁷⁷⁴ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 32.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁶ *Under My Skin*, p. 104.

trunk was initially Lessing's portal to another, more glamorous world, moths would eventually reduce the contents of the trunk — dresses, photographs, ostrich feathers and all — to the consistency of lace. It came to serve as an ironic symbol of her parents' inability to return home to Britain, encapsulating their failed dreams of imperial progress. Lastly, in Frame's numerous households across Otago a grand duchesse dresser occupied the centre of the household, functioning as her parents' 'most hallowed keeping place'.⁷⁷⁷ The drawers of the duchesse contained documents of loan, receipts of payments, the family's few items of gold jewellery, a pair of false teeth and her sister's birth caul. The 'top duchesse drawer' was especially important, as the place 'where the family "treasures" were kept'.⁷⁷⁸

These solid pieces of furniture house each family's personal archive, functioning as a repository for official documents, treasured heirlooms and photograph albums. Each item was distinctly Victorian, bestowed with an air of authority lent by both its antique appearance and its practical usage in the household. To my mind, these important containers, and the objects within them, reveal the distinctions between the three life writers discussed here. In Lively's case, *Oleander*, *Jacaranda* describes the tallboy where it now stands in her London bedroom. Once signifying a world of colonial administration and 'adult' concerns from which she was (as a child) resolutely banned, the tallboy has got 'its comeuppance' and become a store for 'surplus Christmas wrapping paper and discarded spectacles'.⁷⁷⁹ The tallboy, along with Lively's colonial past, is firmly transplanted and accommodated within her present life in Britain. We might glean from the tallboy's continued and even comforting presence as a repurposed object, that Lively's memories of empire do not disrupt her life writing. Like the tallboy, her memories of the colonial past are harmoniously folded into her memoirs, serving as useful prompts for exploring her position in the post-imperial present.

For Lessing, however, the 'wanted on voyage' trunk appears never to have left the family's farmhouse. There is no mention of it when she describes her parents' final flight from Kermanshah

⁷⁷⁷ 'To the Is-Land', p. 10.

⁷⁷⁸ 'An Angel at My Table', p. 240.

⁷⁷⁹ *Oleander, Jacaranda*, p. 32.

Farm. Lessing is consequently unable either to inherit, discard or, like Lively, repurpose the trunk. Instead, she writes and rewrites its important role within her settler childhood across numerous life narratives. Even in *Alfred and Emily*, her final published book, Lessing is still examining the trunk's moth-eaten contents, claiming that in old age, after decades of scrutinising her many connections to empire, she was still 'trying to get free'.⁷⁸⁰ If the trunk symbolised her parents' inability to return to Britain and to put their former lives in the colonies behind them, it also serves as a reminder that Lessing herself is never quite able to get off the farm.

In Frame's case, the duchesse dresser reveals that her family's home is mortgaged to the finances of empire, having been purchased through her father's loan from the British monarch. Its contents are often described as little more than junk, including foreign coins, her mother's false teeth and a set of beads that Frame had inherited from her Scottish grandmother (and which suspiciously later went missing). But as we have seen, the keepsakes and heirlooms within the duchesse's top right-hand drawer function as imperial debris. With her colonial education, half-remembered tales of settler ancestors, and lost heirlooms, Frame grows up in the aftermath of colonial settlement but nevertheless contends with — and can be seen to resist — a colonial order of things that relied on imperial taxonomies. She prises apart the meaning between these objects, questions the lines of inheritance that would connect her to her ancestors and refuses to claim permanent settlement within her South Island home. When we, as readers, are permitted to examine the contents of the duchesse dresser, we are therefore left to sift through the leftovers of empire, considering Frame's life amongst colonial remains.

These containers appear as meeting places and diverging routes, both concrete and imaginative, in the expansive geographies of life writing after empire. They remind us of the vital differences between an impoverished childhood on New Zealand's South Island and an upbringing on Southern Rhodesia's volatile farming frontiers. Each of these aged items evoke an earlier Victorian age of imperial progress, and each reveals that Lively's, Lessing's and Frame's arrivals as colonial

⁷⁸⁰ *Alfred and Emily*, p. viii.

strangers in the metropolis is neither the beginning nor the end of their entanglements with empire. My discussions of family furniture and childhood homes suggests not only that the aftermath of empire is registered in the everyday across these texts, but investigates how it is specifically manifest and sometimes concealed in these intimate and personal locations. I trace empire to the minutiae of these life narratives. I have outlined how imperialism's presence is registered in the details, investing seemingly trivial objects such as cutlery and family photographs with further complex meanings. In so doing, I have shown that private lives across Britain's colonies, former colonies and protectorates can significantly expand public narratives of Empire and its aftermath. Moreover, I suggest that life writing after empire is an ongoing process, tracing autobiographical projects that continued across significant swathes each author's oeuvre, spanning both the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. I have studied the memoirs and autobiographies of three white female life writers to uncover interpretations and narratives of the colonial past that surpass imperial nostalgia. Although the processes of life writing after empire are by no means limited to the three authors included in this study, the texts discussed here outline with particular clarity imperialism's continuing, pervasive influence on contemporary life writing. In this way, life writing after empire encourages us to scrutinise the colonial past and its continuing influence on our post-imperial present.

Bibliography

- Adorno, Theodor, 'On Late Style in Beethoven (1937)', in *Essays on Music*, ed. by Richard Leppert, trans. by Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp.564-568
- Adams, Timothy Dow, *Light Writing & Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999)
- Ahmed, Sara, 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness', *Feminist Theory*, 8:2 (2007), 149-168
— *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2014)
- Allen, Chadwick, *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002)
- Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006)
- Anderson, Daphne, *The Toe-Rags: The Story of a Strange Upbringing in Southern Rhodesia* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989)
- Anderson, Linda, *Autobiography* (New York: Routledge, 2001)
- Arnett, James, 'Colonizing, decolonizing: bad-faith liberalism and African space colonialism in Doris Lessing's screenplay *The White Princess*', *Journal of Screenwriting*, 10:1 (2019), 81-95
— 'Doris Lessing and the Ethical African Archive', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 37:2 (2018), 435-444
- 'Article the Second', *Treaty of Waitangi*, 1840 <<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/treaty/read-the-treaty/english-text>> [accessed 15 October 2019]
- Ashcroft, Bill, 'Afterword: Travel and Power', in *Travel Writing, Form and Empire: the Poetics and Politics of Mobility*, ed. by Julia Kehne and Paul Smethurst (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 229-241
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2002)
- Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Doris Lessing Papers, MS-2460
- Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Penelope Lively Papers, MS 11.6
— MS 15.5
— MS 16.4
- Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969)
- Baena, Rosalia, "'Not Home but Here": Rewriting Englishness in Colonial Childhood Memoirs', *English Studies*, 90:4 (2009), 435-459
- Bailkin, Jordanna, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012)
- Ballantyne, Tony, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)

— *Webs of Empire: Locating New Zealand's Colonial Past* (Vancouver: UCB Press, 2012)

Ballard, J. G., *Miracles of Life: Shanghai to Shepperton: An Autobiography* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008)

Barclay, Fiona, *Writing Postcolonial France: Haunting Literature and the Maghreb* (New York: Lexington Books, 2011)

Bazin, Claire, *Janet Frame* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2011)

Benstock, Shari, 'Authorising the Autobiographical' in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 7-33

Bertelsen, Eve, 'Interview with Doris Lessing', in *Doris Lessing*, ed. by Eve Bertelsen (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1985) pp. 93–120

— 'Introduction' in *Doris Lessing*, ed. by Eve Bertelsen (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1985), pp. 15-28

Birch, Dinah, 'Growing Up', *London Review of Books*, 11:8 (1989) <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v11/n08/dinah-birch/growing-up>> [accessed 27 January 2020]

Birke, Dorothee, 'Doris Lessing's "Alfred and Emily" and the Ethics of Narrated Memory', in *Narrated Communities - Narrated Realities: Narration as Cognitive Processing and Cultural Practice*, ed. by Hermann Blume et al (Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2015) pp. 141-153

Blixen, Karen, *Out Of Africa* (London: Penguin, 2000)

Blomfield, Adrian, 'Radical South African party calls for statue of Boer leader Paul Kruger to be removed', *The Telegraph*, 20 May 2018 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/05/20/radical-south-african-party-calls-statue-boer-leader-paul-kruger/>> [accessed 4 February 2020]

Boehmer, Elleke, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

— ed., *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

— *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005)

Boileau, Nicholas Pierre, 'Places of Being: Janet Frame's Autobiographical Space', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 22:2 (2007), 217-229

Brodzki, Bella, and Celeste Schenck, 'Introduction', in *Life/Lines: Theorising Women's Autobiography*, ed. by Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 1-19

Brown, Alexis, 'An Angel at My Table (1990): Janet Frame, Jane Campion, and Authorial Control in the Auto/Biopic', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 34:1 (2016), 103-122

Buckle, Catherine, *Finding Our Voices: Letters from Zimbabwe 2013-2017* (Marondera: Catherine Buckle, 2018)

- Buelmann, Tanya, *Scottish Ethnicity and the Making of New Zealand Society 1850-1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011)
- Buse, Peter, and Andrew Stott, eds, *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999)
- Cairnie, Julie, 'Women and the Literature of Settlement and Plunder: Toward an Understanding of the Zimbabwean Land Crisis', *ESC: English Studies in Canada*, 33:1-2 (2007), 165-188
- Calder, Alex, *The Settler's Plot: How Stories Take Place in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2011)
- Cannadine, David, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London: Penguin, 2001)
- Chennells, Anthony, 'Doris Lessing and the Rhodesian Settler Novel', in *Doris Lessing*, ed. by Eve Bertelsen (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1985), pp. 31-54
— 'Doris Lessing's versions of Zimbabwe from *The Golden Notebook* to *Alfred and Emily*', *English Academy Review*, 32:2 (2015), 53-69
- Coates Palgrave, Keith, *Trees of Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Penguin Random House, 1997)
- Coates, Sam, 'Ministers Aim to Build "Empire 2.0" with African Commonwealth', *The Times*, 6 March 2017 <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ministers-aim-to-build-empire-2-0-with-african-commonwealth-after-brex-it-v9bs6f6z9>> [accessed 27 April 2020]
- Coetzee, J. M., *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (London: Yale University Press, 1988)
- Connor, Steven, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004)
- Craps, Stef, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)
- Cronin, Jan, "'Encircling Tubes of Being": New Zealand as a Hypothetical Site in Janet Frame's *A State of Siege* (1966)', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 23:2 (2005), 79-91
— *The Frame Function: An Inside-Out Guide to the Novels of Janet Frame* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2011)
- Crowley, Patrick, and Jane Hiddleston, eds, *Postcolonial Poetics: Genre and Form* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011)
- Cusset, Catherine, 'The Limits of Autofiction', *Unpublished Conference Paper* (2012), www.catherinecusset.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/the-limits-of-autofiction.pdf [accessed 27 April 2020]
- Dalley, Jan, and Penelope Lively, 'Interview: Every Writer I Know is a Hungry Reader', *The Financial Times*, 22 June 2018 <<https://www.ft.com/content/962450a2-7499-11e8-b6ad-3823e4384287>> [accessed 15 June 2020]
- Darnell, Maxine, 'Attaining the Australian Dream: The Starr-Bowkett Way', *Labour History*, 91 (2006), 13-30

- Darwin, John, *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988)
- Dean, 'Foes, ghosts, and faces in the water: self-reflexivity in postwar fiction' (unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2017)
 — 'Reading An Autobiography: Michael King, Patrick Evans, and Janet Frame', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 29 (2011), 46-65
- Della Valle, Paola, *From Silence to Voice: The Rise of Maori Literature* (Auckland: Libro International, 2010)
- Delrez, Marc, *Manifold Utopia: The Novels of Janet Frame* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002)
- DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M., *Roots and Routes: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007)
- de Man, Paul 'Autobiography as De-facement', *Modern Language Notes*, 94:5 (1979), 919-930
- De Mul, Sarah, 'Doris Lessing, Feminism and the Representation of Zimbabwe', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 16:1 (2009), 33-51
 — 'Zimbabwe and the Politics of the Everyday in Doris Lessing's *African Laughter*' in *Migratory Settings*, ed. by Murat Aydemir and Alex Rotas (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), pp. 139-156
- Derrida, Jacques, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994)
- Dix, Hywel, 'Introduction: Autofiction in English: The Story So Far', in *Autofiction in English*, ed. by Hywel Dix (New York: Palgrave, 2018), pp. 1-23
- Dodson, Edward, *Postimperial Englishness in the Contemporary White Canon* (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2017)
- Dorling, Danny, and Sally Tomlinson, *Rule Britannia: Brexit and the End of Empire* (London: Biteback, 2019)
- Dow Adams, Timothy, *Light Writing & Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999)
- Drayton, Richard, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain and the 'Improvement' of the World* (London: Yale University Press, 2000)
- Dunedin, The Hocken Library, MS 3028/954
 — MS 3028/962
- Dyer, Richard, *White: Essays on Race and Culture*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2017)
- Eakin, Paul John, *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992)
- Eames, Andreas, *The Cry of the Go-Away Bird* (London: Harvill Secker, 2011)

- Edgerton, David, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation* (London: Penguin, 2019)
- Edmond, Rod, “‘In Search of the Lost Tribe’: Janet Frame’s England’ in *Other Britain: Other British: Contemporary Multicultural Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 1995), pp. 161-174
- Emecheta, Buchi, *Head Above Water* (London: Blackrose Press, 1986)
- Esty, Jed, *Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004)
- Evans, Patrick, ‘Dr Clutha’s Book of the World: Janet Paterson Frame, 1924-2004’, *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 22 (2004), 15-30
 — ‘The Case of the Disappearing Author’, *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 11 (1993), 11-20
 — *The Long Forgetting: Post-Colonial Literary Culture in New Zealand* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2007)
- Evans, Richard J., *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History* (London: Little, Brown, 2014)
- Feigel, Lara, *Free Woman: Life, Liberation and Doris Lessing* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018)
- Finney, Vanessa, ‘What Does “Janet Frame” Mean?’, *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 11 (1993), 193-205
- Flagel, Nadine, and Anastasia Kozak, ‘Excavating the Self: Archeology and Life Writing in Penelope Lively’s *Oleander, Jacaranda*’, *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 23:2 (2014), 245-263
- Foucault, Michel, ‘Preface’, in *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. xvi-xxvi
- Frame, Janet, ‘An Angel at My Table’, in *The Complete Autobiography* (London: The Women’s Press, 1990), pp. 147-287
 — *A State of Siege* (London: W. H. Allen, 1967)
 — ‘Beginnings’, in *Beginnings: New Zealand Writers Tell How They Began Writing*. ed. by Robin Dudding (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 25-33
 — ‘Between My Father and the King’ in *Between My Father and the King: New and Uncollected Stories* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2013), pp. 10-12
 — *Owls Do Cry* (London: Virago Press, 2014)
 — *Scented Gardens for the Blind* (London: Women’s Press, 1998)
 — *The Carpathians* (New York: George Braziller, 1988)
 — ‘The Envoy From Mirror City’ in *The Complete Autobiography* (London: The Women’s Press, 1990), pp. 289-435
 — *The Lagoon and Other Stories* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991)
 — ‘To the Is-Land’ in *The Complete Autobiography* (London: The Women’s Press, 1990), pp. 1-140
 — *Towards Another Summer* (London: Virago Press, 2008)
 — *Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room* (New York: George Braziller, 1969)
- Fuentes-Vasquez, Carmen Luz, *Dangerous Writing: The Autobiographies of Willa Muir, Margaret Laurence and Janet Frame* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013)
- Fuller, Alexandra, *Don’t Let’s Go to the Dogs Tonight* (London: Picador, 2015)

- Fuss, Diana, *The Sense of an Interior: Four Rooms and the Writers that Shaped Them* (London: Routledge, 2004)
- Gentry, Kynan, *History, Heritage and Colonialism: Historical Consciousness, Britishness and Cultural Identity in New Zealand 1870-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015)
- Gibbons, Peter, 'Non-Fiction' in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, ed. By Terry Sturm, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 31-119
- Gide, André, *If It Die...An Autobiography*, trans. by Dorothy Bussy (New York: Vintage Books, 2001)
- Gildea, Robert, *Empires of the Mind: The Colonial Past and the Politics of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019)
- Gilmore, Leigh, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994)
- Gilroy, Paul, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (New York: Routledge, 2004)
- Goebel, Allison, *Gender and Land Reform: The Zimbabwe Experience* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005)
- Hall, Catherine, and Sonya Rose, 'Introduction: Being at home with the Empire' in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. by Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1-31
- Hall, Stuart, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' in *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 222-237
— with Bill Schwarz, *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands* (London: Duke University Press, 2017)
- Hawke, G. R., *The Making of New Zealand: An Economic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)
- Hirsch, Marianne, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997)
- Hornung, Alfred and Ersntpeter Ruhe, eds, *Postcolonialism and Autobiography: Michelle Cliff, David Dabydeen, Opal Palmer Adisa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998)
- Hough, Andrew, 'Revealed: David Cameron's favourite childhood book is Our Island Story', *The Telegraph*, 29 October 2010 < <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/8094333/Revealed-David-Camerons-favourite-childhood-book-is-Our-Island-Story.html> > [accessed 10 April 2018]
- Huddart, David, *Postcolonial Theory and Autobiography* (New York: Routledge, 2009)
- Hughes, David McDermott, *Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape and the Problem of Belonging* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)

- Ignatiev, Noel, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995)
- ‘Ihumātao protests a long time coming’, *TVNZ*, July 2019, <<https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/ihum-tao-protests-long-time-coming-after-government-auckland-council-failed-act-activist>> [accessed 20 August 2019]
- Innes, C. L., *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
- James, David, *Discrepant Solace: Contemporary Literature and the Work of Consolation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)
- Jameson, Fredric, ‘Marx’s Purloined Letter’, in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida’s Spectres of Marx*, ed. by Michael Sprinkler (London: Verso, 2008), pp. 26-68
- Jarboe, Andrew Tait, and Richard Fogarty ‘an Imperial Turn in First World War Studies’, in *Empires in World War I: Shifting Frontiers and Imperial Dynamics in a Global Conflict*, ed. by Andrew Tait Jarboe and Richard Fogarty (London: I. B. Tauris: 2014), pp. 1-22.
- Jones, Robert D., *Interiors of Empire: Objects, Space and Identity within the Indian Subcontinent, 1800-1947* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007)
- Kann, Wendy, *Casting With a Fragile Thread: A Story of Sisters and Africa* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007)
- Kadar, Marlene, ‘Coming to Terms: Life Writing — from Genre to Critical Practice’ in *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice*, ed. by Marlene Kadar (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 3-16
- Karpinski, Eva C., *Borrowed Tongues: Life Writing, Migrations and Translation* (Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012)
- Kennedy, Dane, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987)
- Keown, Michelle, *Pacific Islands Writing: The Postcolonial Literatures of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Oceania* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)
- Kermode, Frank, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, 2nd edn (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000)
- King, Michael, ‘Janet Frame’, *The Guardian*, 30 January 2004, <<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2004/jan/30/guardianobituaries.booksobituaries>> [accessed 23 October 2018]
- *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (London: Penguin, 2003)
- *Wrestling with the Angel: A Life of Janet Frame* (London: Picador, 2001)
- Kotte, Christina, *Ethical Dimensions in British Historiographical Metafiction: Julian Barnes, Graham Swift and Penelope Lively* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2001)
- Kucala, Bozena, ‘Penelope Lively’s Autobiographical Memory’, *Brno Studies in English*, 43:1 (2017), 157-169

- Kuhn, Annette, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 1995)
- Lammy, David, 'Perspectives on the Windrush generation scandal: A response from David Lammy MP', *The British Library*, 4 October 2018 <<https://www.bl.uk/windrush/articles/perspectives-on-the-windrush-generation-scandal-a-response-from-david-lammy>> [accessed 19 May 2020]
- Lassner, Phyllis, *Colonial Strangers: Women Writing the End of the British Empire* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2004)
- Law, Kate, *Gendering the Settler State: White Women, Race, Liberalism and Empire in Rhodesia 1950-1980* (New York: Routledge, 2016)
- Lee, Hermione, 'A House of Air' in *The Lives of Houses*, ed. by Kate Kennedy and Hermione Lee (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), pp. 30-46.
 — *Body Parts: Essays on Life-Writing* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005)
 — "'From Memory": Literary Encounters and Life Writing' in *On Life-Writing*, ed. by Zachary Leader (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 124-141
- Lee, Hermione, and Doris Lessing, 'A Conversation with Doris Lessing', *Wasafiri*, 24:3 (2009), 18-25
- Lehtonen, Sanna, 'Writing Oneself into Someone Else's Story: Experiments With Identity And Speculative Life Writing in Twilight Fan Fiction', *Fafnir : Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research*, 2:2 (2015), 7-18
- Lejeune, Philippe, *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989)
- Lessing, Doris, 'A Deep Darkness: A Review of *Out of Africa* by Karen Blixen' in *A Small Personal Voice: Essays, Reviews, Interviews*, ed. by Paul Schlueter (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1974), pp. 147-155
 — *African Laughter: Four Visits to Zimbabwe* (London: Flamingo, 1993)
 — *Alfred and Emily* (London: Fourth Estate, 2008)
 — *Going Home* (London: Pantha, 1984)
 — 'Impertinent Daughters', *Granta*, 14 (1984), <<https://granta.com/impertinent-daughters/>> [accessed 6 April 2020]
 — *In Pursuit of the English: A Documentary*, (London: Panther, 1980)
 — *Martha Quest: Book One of the "Children of Violence" Series* (London: Flamingo, 1993)
 — 'My Mother's Life (Part Two)', *Granta*, 17 (1985), <<https://granta.com/autobiography-part-two-my-mothers-life/>> [accessed 6 April 2020]
 — 'On Not Winning the Nobel Prize', 7 December 2007 <<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2007/lessing/25434-doris-lessing-nobel-lecture-2007/>> [accessed 19 November 2019]
 — *The Grass Is Singing* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1973)
 — *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (London: The Octagon Press, 1974)
 — 'The Tragedy of Zimbabwe' in *Time Bites: Views and Reviews* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), pp. 231-247
 — *The Wind Blows Away Our Words* (London: Picador, 1987)
 — 'When I Was Young...', in *Time Bites: Views and Reviews* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), p. 201-202

- *Under My Skin: Volume One of My Autobiography, to 1949* (London: Harper Collins, 1994)
- *Walking in the Shade: Volume Two of My Autobiography, 1949-1962* (London: Fourth Estate, 2013)

Lionnet, Françoise, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender and Self-Portraiture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989)

- *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity* (London: Cornell University Press, 1995)

Lively, Penelope, *According to Mark* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989)

- *A House Unlocked* (London: Viking, 2001)
- *Ammonites and Leaping Fish: A Life in Time* (London: Fig Tree, 2013)
- ‘Interview with the author’, 30 August 2017
- ‘Late Style’, *BBC Radio 3*, 18 April 2017 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08n2442>> [accessed 3 December 2017]
- *Life in the Garden* (London: Fig Tree, 2017)
- *Making It Up* (London: Viking, 2005)
- *Moon Tiger* (London: Penguin, 2000)
- *Oleander, Jacaranda: A Childhood Perceived* (London: Penguin, 2006)
- *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe* (London: Egmont, 2012)
- *The Photograph* (London: Penguin, 2004)
- *The Presence of the Past: An Introduction to Landscape History* (London: Collins, 1976)
- ‘Webchat: on Egypt, Englishness and her first memory’, *The Guardian*, 1 August 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/live/2018/jul/27/penelope-lively-webchat-post-your-questions-now>>

Lively, Penelope, and Julia Llewellyn Smith ‘I had a really rotten childhood’, *The Telegraph*, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4725292/I-had-a-really-rotten-childhood.html> [accessed 30 August 2018]

Locke, John, *Second Treatise of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. by Mark Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)

Loomba, Ania, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 1998)

Lord, Graham, ‘Child’s View of African Empire’, *The Times*, 28 May 1994

Macdonald, Alistair, ‘May evoked Blitz spirit to show EU Brexit progress’, *Reuters*, April 11 2019 <<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-eu-blitz/may-evoked-blitz-spirit-to-show-eu-brexit-progress-idUKKCN1RN26Z>> [accessed 7 September 2019]

Mackenzie, John M., ‘The persistence of empire in metropolitan culture’ in *British Culture After Empire*, ed. by Stuart Ward (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 21-36

MacPhee, Graham, *Postwar British Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011)

Markham, Beryl, *West With the Night* (London: Virago Press, 2015)

Marshall, Henrietta Elizabeth, *Our Island Story: A History of Britain for Boys and Girls from the Romans to Queen Victoria* (London: Phoenix, 2005)

- Marcus, Laura, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Criticism, Theory Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994)
- Marsh, Huw, 'Unlearning empire: Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger*' in *End of Empire and the English Novel Since 1945*, ed. by Rachael Gilmour and Bill Schwarz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 152-165
- Maslen, Elizabeth, *Doris Lessing*, 2nd edn (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2014)
- Martens, Lorna, 'Autofiction in the Third Person, with a Reading of Christine Brooke-Rose's *Remake*' in *Autofiction in English*, ed. by Hywel Dix (New York: Palgrave, 2018), pp. 49-65
— 'The Truth Criteria of Autobiography: Doris Lessing and Telling the Truth', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 29:2 (2014), 319-340
- Mazlin, Cyrena, 'A Soldier's Daughter: The Autobiographies and Autobiographical Fiction of Janet Frame and Doris Lessing' in *Janet Frame in Focus: Women Analyze the Works of the New Zealand Writer*, ed. by Josephine A. McQuail (Jefferson: McFarland, 2017), pp. 39-61
- McAllister, John, 'Knowing Native: Going Native', in *Zimbabwean Transitions: Essays on Zimbabwean Literature in English, Ndebele and Shona*, ed. by Mbongeni Z. Malaba and Geoffrey V. Davis (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 25-38
- McClintock, Anne, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995)
- McDonald, Keith, 'Days of Past Futures: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let me Go* as "Speculative Memoir"', *Biography*, 30:1 (2007), 74-83
- McGrath, Charles, "'A Writer Writes": Penelope Lively's Fiction Defies the Test of Time', *New York Times*, May 4 2017 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/04/books/review/penelope-lively-profile-purple-swamp-hen.html>> [accessed 22 April 2020]
- McIntosh, Kimberly, Jason Todd and Nandini Das, *Teaching Migration, Belonging and Empire in Secondary Schools* (TIDE and The Runnymede Trust, 2019)
- McLeod, John, 'The Novel and the End of Empire', in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English, Volume Seven: British and Irish Fiction since 1940*, ed. by Peter Boxall and Bryan Cheyette (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 80-93.
— *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (New York: Routledge, 2004)
- McMullan, Gordon, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing: Authorship in the Proximity of Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
- McMullan, Gordon and Sam Smiles, eds, *Late Style and its Discontents: Essays in Art, Literature and Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)
- Mellor, Leo, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)
- Mercer, Gina, 'A Simple Everyday Glass: The Autobiographies of Janet Frame', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 11 (1993), 41-48

— *Janet Frame: Subversive Fictions* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 1994)

Mignolo, Walter D., and Catherine E. Walsh, *Decoloniality: concepts, analytics, praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018)

Mitchel, Isabel, “‘Turning the Stone of Being’: Janet Frame’s Migrant Poetic’ in *Frameworks: Contemporary Criticism on Janet Frame*, ed. by Jan Cronin and Simone Drichel (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 107-135

Mohanram, Radhika, *Imperial White: Race, Diaspora and the British Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007)

Moore-Gilbert, Bart, *Postcolonial Life-Writing: Culture, Politics and Self-Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2009)

— ‘The Confessions of Saint Augustine: Roots and Routes of Postcolonial Life Writing’, *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 20:2 (2005), 155-169

— *The Setting Sun: A Memoir of Empire and Family Secrets* (London: Verso, 2014)

Moran, Mary Hurley, ‘The Novels of Penelope Lively: A Case for the Continuity of the Experimental Impulse in Postwar British Fiction’, *South Atlantic Review*, 62:1 (1997), 101-120

— *Penelope Lively* (New York: Twayne, 1993)

Morrison, Blake, ‘The Righting of Lives’, *The Guardian*, 17 May 2008 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/may/17/fiction.dorislessing>> [accessed 22 September 2017]

Murphet, Julian, ‘Postcolonial writing in Australia and New Zealand’ in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature, Volume One*, ed. by Ato Quayson (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 446-483

Murray, Stuart, *Never a Soul at Home: New Zealand’s Literary Nationalism and the 1930s* (Victoria, NZ: Victoria University Press, 1998)

Norwich, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, Doris Lessing Papers, 10D/006

O’Grady, Carrie, ‘What Might Have Been: Penelope Lively’s *Making It Up*’, *The Guardian*, 30 July 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/jul/30/featuresreviews.guardianreview13> [accessed 30 August 2018]

Olusoga, David, *Black and British* (London: Pan Books, 2017)

Orange, Claudia, *The Treaty of Waitangi* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1987)

Oró-Piqueras, Maricel, ‘When the Personal and the Historical Collide: Reimagining Memory in Penelope Lively’s *Making it Up*’, *Life writing*, 14:1 (2017), 57-68

O’Toole, Fintan, *Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain* (London: Head of Zeus, 2018)

Parker, Emma, ‘Penelope Lively’s Speculative Life Writing: A Discussion of *Making It Up* and *Ammonites and Leaping Fish*’, *Moving Worlds: A Journal of Transcultural Writings*, 18:1 (2018), 63-78

- Paul, Kathleen, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Post-War Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997)
- ‘Penelope Lively’s Life in Books’, *BBC News*, 31 December 2011 < <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-16362698>> [accessed 30 August 2018]
- Perrick, Penny, ‘Taking the tiger lightly by the tip of the tail – this year’s winner of the best-known prize for fiction’, *The Sunday Times*, 1 November 1987
- Phillips, Caryl, ‘Preface’ in *Extravagant Strangers: A Literature of Belonging* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), pp. x-xii
- Philips, Jock and Terrence John Hearn, *Settlers: New Zealand Immigrants from England, Ireland and Scotland, 1800-1945* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008)
- Pilosof, Rory, *The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: Farmers’ Voices from Zimbabwe* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2012)
- Popa, Fabiola, ‘“The History of the World And Mine”: Private and Collective History in Penelope Lively’s Memoir’, *University of Bucharest Review*, 10:1 (2008), 93-97
- Pratt, Mary Louise, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2008)
- Prawer Jhabvala, Ruth, *My Nine Lives: Chapters of a Possible Past* (London: John Murray, 2004)
- Procter, James, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003)
- Prosser, Jay, *Light in the Dark Room: Photography and Loss* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005)
- Prose, Francine, ‘Growing Up: Penelope Lively’s Memoir of an Egyptian childhood in Egypt’, *The New York Times*, 12 June 1994
- Purdy, Anthony, ‘“Like people you see in a dream”: Penelope Lively and the ethnographic ghost story’, *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 35:1 (2002), 35-51
- Rasch, Astrid, ‘Introduction’ in *Life Writing After Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 1-6 —‘Postcolonial Nostalgia: The Ambiguities of White Memoirs of Zimbabwe’, *History & Memory*, 30:2 (2018), 147-180
- Reynolds, David, *Island Stories: Britain and its History in the Age of Brexit* (London: William Collins, 2019)
- Riach, Graham K., ‘The Late Nadine Gordimer’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42:6 (2017), 1077-1094
- Rich, Motoko, and Sarah Lyall, ‘Doris Lessing Wins Nobel Prize in Literature’, *New York Times*, 7 October 2007, < <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/11/world/11cnd-nobel.html>> [accessed 20 March 2017]

- Ridout, Alice, and Susan Watkins, eds, *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings* (London: Continuum, 2009)
- Robinson, Roger, 'New Zealand' in *The Commonwealth Novel Since 1960*, ed. by Bruce King (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 105-120
- Rogers, Douglas, *The Last Resort: A Memoir of Zimbabwe* (London: Short Books, 2010)
- Rubenstein, Roberta, *Literary Half-Lives: Doris Lessing, Clancy Sigal and Roman à Clef* (New York: Palgrave, 2014)
- Ruskin, John, 'Conclusion to Inaugural Lecture (1870)' in *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870-1918*, ed. by Elleke Boehmer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 16-20
- Ryan, James R., *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualisation of the British Empire* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997)
- Sage, Lorna, *Doris Lessing* (London: Methuen, 1983)
- Said, Edward, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993)
 — *On Late Style: Literature Against the Grain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006)
 — *Out of Place: A Memoir* (London: Granta, 2000)
- Salmond, Anne, *Tears of Rangi: Experiments Across Worlds* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2017)
- Sarabando, Andreia, "'The dreadful mass neighbourhood of objects" in the fiction of Janet Frame', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 51:5 (2015), 603-614
- Saunders, Max, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)
- Schofield, Camilla, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)
- Schreiner, Olive, *The Story of an African Farm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- Schwarz, Bill, "'The only white man in there": the re-racialisation of England, 1956-1968', *Race & Class*, 38:1 (1996)
 — 'Introduction: End of Empire and the English novel', in *End of Empire and the English Novel Since 1945*, ed. by Rachael Gilmour and Bill Schwarz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 1-37
 — 'The Fact of Whiteness: Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* — a Historian's Notebook', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42:1 (2016), 127-136
 — *The White Man's World (Memories of Empire)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)
- Shaw, Katy, *Hauntology: The Presence of the Past in Twenty-First Century English Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2018)
- Sissay, Lemn, 'Penelope Lively – Moon Tiger', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oY_iw-WGmSg> [accessed 5 June 2018]

- Shaw, Katy, *Hauntology: The Presence of the Past in Twenty-First Century English Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2018)
- Small, Helen, *The Long Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson, eds., *De/colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1992)
 — 'Introduction: Situating Subjectivity in Women's Autobiographical Practices', in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), pp. 3-56
 — *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd edn (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2010)
- Sontag, Susan, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 2002)
- Sprinkler, Michael, ed, *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx* (London: Verso, 2008)
- Stead, C. K., 'A Life of the Mind', *The Dominion*, 12 August 2000
- Stoler, Ann Laura, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010)
 — 'The Rot Remains: From Ruins to Ruination', in *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, ed. by Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 1-38
- Strongman, Luke, *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002)
- Taylor, David John, 'Intriguing Exercises in the Subjunctive: *Making It Up* by Penelope Lively', *The Independent*, 21 August 2005, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/making-it-up-by-penelope-lively-5347344.html> [accessed 3 August 2018]
- Taylor, Jenny, 'Memory and Desire on *Going Home*: The Deconstruction of a Colonial Radical' in *Doris Lessing*, ed. by Eve Bertelsen (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1985), pp. 55-63
- 'Time Regained- Oleander, Jacaranda: A Childhood Perceived', *New Statesman & Society*, 3 June 1994
- Tuck, E., and K. W. Yang, 'Decolonisation is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonisation: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1:1 (2012), 1-40
- Unsworth, Jane, 'Why does an author who apparently draws so much on autobiography seem committed to "alienating" the reader? A reflection on theories of autobiography with reference to the work of Janet Frame', in *The Uses of Autobiography*, ed. by Julia Swindells (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 24-30
- Ward, Stuart, 'Introduction', in *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 1-21
- Ware, Vron, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso, 1992)

- wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1986)
- Walder, Dennis, *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2011)
- Watkins, Susan, *Doris Lessing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010)
 — 'Second World Life Writing: Doris Lessing's *Under My Skin*', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42:1 (2016), 137-148
 — "'Summoning Your Youth at Will': Memory, Time and Ageing in the Work of Penelope Lively, Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 34:2 (2013), 222-244
- Webb, W. L., 'Favourites fail to make Booker short list', *The Guardian*, 24 September 1987
 — 'Lively leaps off with 15,000 pounds Booker prize', *The Guardian*, 30 October 1987
- Webster, Wendy, *Englishness and Empire 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)
- Wellington, Alexander Turnbull Library, MS-Papers-9153-18
- Wevers, Lydia, 'Self Possession: "Things" and Janet Frame's Autobiography', in *Frameworks: Contemporary Criticism on Janet Frame*, ed. by Jan Cronin and Simone Drichel (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 51-67
- Whitlock, Gillian, *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)
 — *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007)
 — *The Intimate Empire: Reading Women's Autobiography* (London: Cassell, 2000)
- Whittle, Matthew, *Post-War Literature and the "End of Empire"* (New York: Palgrave, 2016)
- Williams, Mark, *Leaving the Highway: Six New Zealand Novelists* (Auckland, Auckland University Press, 1990)
 — 'Tending the Ovens: Janet Frame's Politics of Language', *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies*, 33:2 (2011) 66-77
- Wills, Clair, *Lovers and Strangers: An Immigrant History of Post-War Britain* (London: Penguin, 2017)
- Wilson, Janet, 'Introduction, Janet Frame: Ten Years On', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 51:5 (2014), 574-578
- Wood, Michael, 'Introduction' in *On Late Style: Literature Against the Grain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), pp. xi-xix
- Woolf, Virginia, 'A Sketch of the Past' in *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings* (London: Grafton, 1986), pp. 71-160
- Worthington, Marjorie, *The Story of "Me": Contemporary American Autofiction* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2018)

Yelin, Louise, *From the Margins of Empire: Christina Stead, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer* (London: Cornell University Press, 1998)

Young, Robert J. C., *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001)