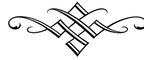
Introduction

Carnivalizing Reconciliation



On 11 June 2008, Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper addressed the House of Commons and the Canadian nation at large to issue an apology on behalf of the Canadian government. This apology formed part of a larger process of reconciliation between the nation of Canada and its Indigenous peoples. Before Harper actually spoke, several "distinguished guests" were announced and entered the House.[1] Some of them were visibly excited and delighted; others wiped their faces, and tears were shed. They were representative leaders of Canada's First Nations, welcomed with standing ovations that lasted several minutes. Among the delegates was Marguerite Wabano, 104 years old on the day of the apology and Canada's oldest survivor of a residential school.[2] She very visibly wore a silver Christian cross on her blue dress as Harper guided her to her seat. First Nations chief Phil Fontaine and his colleagues were directed to a circular arrangement of chairs in the center of the solemn hall. Against the impressive backdrop of the House of Commons, Fontaine's traditional headdress appeared even more iconic. Wooden carved benches and liveried government officials surrounded the representatives of Canada's Indigenous peoples as they listened to Harper's apology. The message sent out, as symbolized by this circle of chairs, was powerful, iconic, and far-reaching: after decades of fighting for recognition, Canada's Indigenous populations, with this gesture from the government, were effectively brought from society's margins to the discursive center, to the heart of the democracy, and to the root locus of governmental power. In reply to the prime minister's words of apology, Phil Fontaine stated triumphantly: "For our parents, our

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/TeichlerCarnivalizing

grandparents, indeed for all of the generations which have preceded us, this day testifies to nothing less than the achievement of the impossible."[3] The impressive architecture of the House, Marguerite Wabano's silver cross, and Phil Fontaine's iconic headdress, however, also testify to the fact that Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canada are, inevitably, culturally and historically entangled. The colonial encounter and subsequent attempts to culturally assimilate Canada's Indigenous peoples has left a lasting imprint not only on Indigenous identities but also on the Canadian society at large. These Indigenous leaders symbolize the many facets of Indigenous modernities and their central position within a contemporary Canadian national narrative.

The Canadian apology was predated by Prime Minster Kevin Rudd's gesture of atonement to Australia's Aboriginal peoples, and both formed an integral part of what Jeffrey Olick has termed the "politics of regret":[4] understood here as a set of processes and practices to reframe the past in the spirit of promoting human rights, "politics of regret" seem to appeal to contexts where societies struggle with the remainders of governmental abuse of power, racial segregation, and colonialism. These proceedings come with a lot of symbolic capital, for example, the promise of providing a stage to address these legacies and from which to break the structural silence that oftentimes surrounds historical injustices. Such "politics of regret" both create and use "commemorative tropes [that] work to inform the representation of diverse events and traumas beyond national and cultural boundaries, bridging—but not negating—spatial, temporal and ideational differences."[5] Such differences are turned into "matters of apology and healing" with their own discursive rules and performative conventions:[6] makeshift court proceedings, the facilitation of storytelling and testimony in a safe space, public apologies by institutions and governments, and final reports as the attempt to narrativize suffering are all key elements of these "politics of regret." The (hi)stories of the margins become the center of public attention for a specific period of time.

The presence of the Indigenous leaders within the House of Commons thus represents the promise that is a key part of the identity-political performances of such public apologies—during a specific time frame, discursive hierarchies and social positions can be temporarily reversed. Law scholar Teresa Godwin Phelps interprets this notion of reversed discursive hierarchies as carnivalesque and establishes a link to a mode of literary representation that literary theorist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin described as destabilizing or reversing power structures.[7] Derived from Bakhtin's literary theory, Phelps distills properties that, in her view, aptly describe the mechanisms of real-world truth and reconciliation commissions. Through the temporal and elite-licensed reversal of—in particular discursive and representational—hierarchies that structure a transitioning society, a sense of justice can be achieved. For Phelps, the notion of reversal is not connected with reversing actual

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/TeichlerCarnivalizing

regimes of power—like political regimes, for example—but with contesting monolithic historical representation or the complete lack thereof, with raising awareness and giving voice to the formerly marginalized and silenced—in short, with narrative activity. The carnivalesque, in Phelps's terms, is thus a figure of thought that can describe the mechanisms of alternatives to criminal justice: truth and reconciliation commissions.

Yet both variations of the carnivalesque—Bakhtin's literary aesthetics and Phelps's alternative justice through narrative action—are in themselves not able to accommodate identities, narratives, and histories that point beyond neatly arranged identity categories that structurally are the product of reconciliation. As will become obvious in the course of this study, reconciliation operates with binary models of cultural and historical identities, and while a carnivalesque perspective akin to especially Phelps's conception may reverse power hierarchies, it also reproduces these binary schemata.

Phelps's understanding of the carnivalesque fails to account for the inconsistencies and problematic aspects that reconciliation entails and produces, such as an extraordinary emphasis on victimhood. The notion of the carnivalesque, I argue, requires an opening up toward nonbinary systems of representing cultural encounters and entanglements. Therefore, in this study, I will set the carnivalesque with its central mechanisms of reiteration and reversal in relation to a transcultural perspective on collectives and identities. In this manner, a carnivalesque research perspective takes neither containers and compartments nor normative historical representations for granted and instead strives to highlight frictions, processes of mutual construction and exchange, and subversive identities that run against the official grain of reconciliation reproducing victimhood on a public stage. More precisely, it is through the analysis of fiction that more complex cultural encounters in the Australian and Canadian context become visible, that Indigenous modernities are explored, and that the moral impetus of "just remembrance" is creatively tackled. In the course of the present study, I develop the notion of the carnivalesque into a research perspective that highlights and captures ambiguity, and not essences and essentials. Moreover, the carnivalesque not only lends a specific expression to identity politics in transcultural contexts but also functions as an aesthetics of transcultural encounters. Through the analysis of a representative body of fictional engagements with the discourses, histories, and identities that reconciliation produces, a more ambiguous picture of Australian and Canadian (national) identities can be worked out. In summary, my carnivalesque perspective on contemporary Australian and Canadian literature and film highlights the subversive as well as empowering potential reconciliation, potential that is located within the sphere of the imaginary.

While the present study engages with two examples of "politics of regret," it can neither provide an exhaustive analysis of either transitional politics or

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/TeichlerCarnivalizing

restorative justice nor contribute to the field of Bakhtin research. This analysis will draw connections to other cases of reconciliation processes and hint at similarities and differences, yet it does not offer a conclusive evaluation of the international discourse of reconciliation. In this context, this study does not lay claim to practicing political or legal science but puts literary studies' concepts and methodologies to use in order to approach and analyze Australian and Canadian reconciliation.

Michael Rothberg's fervent call for us to broaden our analytical toolboxes and critical vocabulary, however, resonates profoundly within this study. Rothberg believes that our understanding of power, privilege, violence, and injustice suffers from an underdeveloped vocabulary. In particular, we lack adequate concepts for describing what Hannah Arendt called "this vicarious responsibility for things we have not done": that is, the manifold indirect, structural, and collective forms of agency that enable injury, exploitation, and domination but frequently remain in the shadows.[8]

While the processes of reconciliation in Australia and Canada are vitally important as tokens of recognition of Indigenous suffering and survival, and are as such tributes to both countries' Indigenous peoples, it is my contention that they are also invested in narrowing down the vocabulary, subject positions, and identity templates available to the discourses and practices of reconciliation. Instead of providing a stage to analyze the colonial practices of forcible removal and cultural reeducation and how they linger in the present, a collective reworking of Indigenous trauma as the result of these practices is "mandated"—to borrow a term from Lea David—to achieve a sense of reconciliation and, perhaps most controversially, justice.[9] As such, I argue, these processes are bound to disappoint, and to conflate the plurifold agents and positions to one very prominent victim paradigm that allows the state to reposition itself as a benevolent enabler of "new beginnings."

It is the realm of the fictional, the imaginary, where a broadening of perspective and vocabulary that Rothberg calls for is achieved. My reading of a selection of contemporary Australian and Canadian literature and film show that these "fictions of reconciliation" are by no means unproblematic, nor are they in the position to achieve social justice, but the authors and directors discussed here show a vested interest in exploring the past and its impact in more ambiguous ways than the official rhetoric, practice, and frameworks of reconciliation.

The Presence of the Absent: Memory, Identity, and the "Politics of Regret"

"The presence of the absent"—with this catchy phrase, Paul Ricoeur aptly refers to the influence that the past and its representations exert on the pres-

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/TeichlerCarnivalizing

ent, and thus describes the paradoxical nature of processes that venture into the past to lay claim to a specific present.[10] The past comes to bear on the here and now only to be related to imaginations of futures. If the past is reframed in a strategic manner, by political and civil agents and with a specific agenda in mind, such performances can be regarded as memory politics. Such orchestrated engagements with the past oftentimes supplant actual political action, as will be analyzed in this study.

The Australian and Canadian prime ministers' efforts to express remorse refer to systems of forcible cultural assimilation and reeducation that were in place during colonial rule and in its aftermath. Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd's apology was the result of a controversial decade-long debate whether or not to offer a gesture of atonement to Australia's Indigenous population—he had advocated for an apology during his election campaign. The Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia had been subject to enforced relocation to reserves, whereas their children—the ones of mixed descent in particular—were taken from their family and kin.[11] This foster system designed to culturally reeducate Aboriginal children into an ultimately European image was in place until the mid-1970s. In a similar manner, the weight of a specific episode of Canada's past came to bear fully on the present: Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized for the systematic mistreatment of Canada's First Nations under colonial rule and in its aftermath. In Canada, the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people were forcibly relocated, whereas their children were brought to residential schools.[12] These schools were run by churches and funded by the government, and it was their designated aim to oversee the children's "(re)education" as citizens of the commonwealth and members of the Anglo-Canadian society, thereby eradicating all notions of indigeneity. The last residential school for Indigenous children was closed in the late 1990s.[13]

In recent years, victims and survivors of both systems have forcefully claimed public attention by filing lawsuits and pressing governments for land titles and compensation. Australia witnessed a heated public debate, the so-called "history wars" during the early 2000s, with a powerful discourse emerging with regard to the origins of the Australian nation as a penal and settler colony, and the fate of the Indigenous population who posed an obstacle to colonial advancements. On 20 November 2005, Canada's Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was reached in order to merge all looming claims and to designate a clear path on how to proceed with the legacy of the past.[14] This Settlement Agreement envisaged the establishment of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The implementation of such a commission to publicly rework the legacies of forcible cultural reeducation constitutes a victory for Canada's Indigenous peoples: "Residential school survivors demanded that Canada open up, listen, learn

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/TeichlerCarnivalizing

and start taking responsibility for the damage caused. The Commission is their victory and tribute."[15] Contrary to Australia, the Canadian public has maintained a high degree of ignorance with regard to the Indian residential school system.[16] It was thus one of the designated aims of the Canadian commission to inform the public. Robyn Green describes the commission's task as an utter conundrum: "[T]he TRC strives to balance the painstaking tasks of obtaining and recording survivor stories, advancing a national pedagogical project, and creating a space for celebratory exhibitions of cultural resilience."[17]

The Australian National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Children from Their Families operated from 1995 to 1997 and published the famous *Bringing Them Home Report* in 1997. Among several recommendations directed at compensation and reimbursement, the key finding of the *Bringing Them Home Report* was that the system of forcible removal was genocidal in its intent and effect. This evaluation of the system of cultural reeducation and its effects led to a heated public debate about the appropriateness of such claims. Danielle Celermajer notes a "backlash of resistance, provoking some Australians to protest what they saw as an unjust accusation, an imputation of guilt and responsibility for actions they did not personally commit."[18] The self-image of Australia as a liberal and inclusive nation was under attack: the construction of a new national narrative that included Indigenous resistance and suffering posed a threat to well-established notions of national identity.

Thus, in order to engage with reworking colonial legacies, many different claims, interests, and viewpoints have to be included and satisfied.[19] The Canadian TRC and the Australian inquiry were supposed to provide the framework to negotiate these different identity-political positions. Their common denominators are mandates to inform the public, to raise awareness of Indigenous suffering and continuous social disadvantage as a result of these systems, and to serve as spaces of Indigenous self-empowerment through voicing out.[20] In both cases, the emphasis was not placed on forensic and expert-centered reworking of colonial violence with a tangible juridical and political outcome; the focus rested on enabling storytelling and on eliciting emotional responses to the stories told in the context of the two commissions.[21]

Teresa Godwin Phelps analyzes this shift from legal justice to alternative conceptions of redress. She looks at various truth commissions and cases where processes of reconciliation were implemented after periods of state-sanctioned violence and oppression, and she highlights how these alternatives elevate storytelling and narrative activity to become the central principles of their understandings of justice:[22]

> The formal choice that a country makes to collect personal stories and to publish them, perhaps as a part of a larger, more general story, reflects a view of life, of politics, of what it means to be a government, of who citizens are and should be. Clearly, a country's examination of an oppressive past need not include personal stories at all. A country could employ political scientists and philosophers to write a general, abstract rendering of what occurred and why.[23]

The urge to find alternatives to criminal justice recognizes the impact that unresolved conflicts have on communities, and it acknowledges that new forms of dealing with "economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian issues" are required.[24] An advancing system of international jurisdiction in response to the atrocities of World War II and an increasingly worldwide demand for the promotion of human rights are significant for this paradigmatic shift in conceptions of justice.[25]

Regret and atonement have become central elements of memory politics; reconciliation has been "elevated to a general principle" in postwar and postcolonial identity politics.[26] Memory work has become a mechanism to obtain social justice. The Australian and Canadian processes of reconciliation are just two examples of such "politics of regret." In recent decades, various commissions with distinct purposes and in diverse historical and geographical contexts have been implemented. As such, the search for "truths" in relation to national histories, and to performatively reintegrate painful legacies into national identity and narratives, experienced a boom. In many cases, as in Australia and Canada, criminal justice was not an option, and additional approaches to and different understandings of "justice" were thus required.[27]

The commission that Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela conceptualized for South Africa became one of the most prominent and globally visible examples of an institutionalized truth and reconciliation process. After the effective breakdown of the apartheid state, alternative notions of justice were expected to enable South Africa's transition from authoritarian rule to democracy by including the legacies of apartheid into the newly formed national consciousness. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC South Africa) had a distinct outline: it initiated its proceedings immediately after the end of the apartheid regime, was equipped with amnesty and subpoena powers, fostered democracy, and intertwined victim and perpetrator narratives through its amnesty-for-testimony structure.[28] Although its fundamental setting is quite simple—victims are the antagonists of perpetrators, black stands against white—the workings of the TRC South Africa precisely blurred these neatly erected boundaries. It produced a South African national narrative that represented how difficult it is to maintain such lines of division—victim, perpetrator, even bystander—in these contexts. While it is arguably still debatable whether the South African TRC can be regarded as

an outright success, its international prominence and prototypical character contributed to providing truth and reconciliation commissions with a traveling framework. The TRC South Africa has in any case established the notions and rhetoric of (self-)empowerment of formerly marginalized groups through storytelling, and it has given the reworking of the past a specific mode or mechanism that appealed to other contexts of native empowerment.

Inquiries into the past carry the potential to fundamentally disrupt the "dominant narratives of the state," yet the "politics of regret" in Canada and Australia fortify the nation-frame and exclude claims of Indigenous self-government because they presuppose national cohesion as the goal.[29] Reconciliation remains curiously connected with the nation as the framework in which and through which new relations with Indigenous populations can be imagined. Hence, reconciliation processes are indicative of an altered perception of what a national container "is made of" and how it can be discursively reinforced. The production of national narratives, of national memories, is one of the key features of constructing national belonging and national identity. Homi Bhabha characterizes the complex connections between nation and narration in the following manner:

> If the ambivalent figure of the nation is a problem of its transitional history, its conceptual indeterminacy, its wavering between vocabularies, then what effect does it have on narratives and discourses that signify a sense of "nationness": the *heimlich* pleasures of the hearth, the *unheimlich* terror of the space or race of the Other; the comfort of social belonging, the hidden injuries of class; the customs of taste, the powers of political affiliation; the sense of social order, the sensibility of sexuality; the blindness of bureaucracy, the straight insight of institutions, the quality of justice, the common sense of injustice; the *language* of the law, and the *parole* of the people.[30]

Australian and Canadian reconciliations are centrally engaged with (re)defining the "narratives and discourses" that display and negotiate this "sense of 'nationness'": where to feel "at home" in the national fabric, what to reject as un-belonging, and what to fear as the "other." While this emphasis on constructing a national space makes complete sense in relation to the South African case, reconciliation is not at all about political change in Canada and Australia. It is about reconfiguring national history and national identity in the process. More precisely, the "politics of regret" in these contexts are about struggling with reconciling (at least) two competing national selves that have come to meet through reconciliation: both countries pride themselves on what they became after independence, in particular given their "humble origins" as British settler colonies.[31] Australia and Canada are both immigrant nations and ultimately understand themselves as multicultural.[32] Canada, in particular, self-represents and is regarded as an international bastion of human

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/TeichlerCarnivalizing

and minority rights—it was among the first nations to ratify the Genocide Convention in 1948. However, the fact that this Genocide Convention effectively banned the politics of forcible cultural reeducation and relocation of native peoples did not keep Canada from continuing its racist policies toward its Indigenous peoples, and in both countries, the practices were maintained well into the twentieth century. These two competing narratives—benevolent Canada and Australia versus the systems of forcible removal—collided within and through the framework of the "politics of regret."

Reconciliation processes enable us as researchers to describe how two societies seek to reinvent themselves. Australian and Canadian "sorry politics" such as the government apologies and the two commissions are mnemonic practices and seek to institutionalize the remembrance of forcible cultural reeducation. The painful memories of the systems of forcible removal shake the foundations of Australian and Canadian national identity and force their reevaluation and reorganization. Individual remembrance—the testimony of the victim—is rendered a collective experience, highly politicized through their public performance, and a public narrative to be put to strategic use. Ann Rigney cautions us to further analyze the possibilities as well as the limitations and pitfalls of reconciliation.[33] She writes:

> The challenge for memory studies is to analyze from a multidirectional perspective the narratives and discourses underlying the reconciliation scenario, the repertoire of mnemonic practices that have accompanied its emergence and the political mechanisms at work in its application.[34]

The scripted framework of reconciliation, I argue, strategically limits the identity templates available. Despite all the rhetoric of empowerment, change, and revision, reconciliation is ambiguous in nature and scope: the performances of reconciliation tend to generate what Amartya Sen calls "singular identities":[35] The "politics of regret" structurally invite people to perceive their identity in a singular form, because one aspect—native identity, for example—requires and effectively undergoes a strategic emphasis. Reconciliation, accordingly, produces the illusion of unambiguous identity templates. Hence, advocates for cultural essentialism and authenticity can rely on the rather simplistic identity schemes that form the structural basis of reconciliation; a neat division into binaries like "us" and "them," superior and inferior, seems entirely possible and, as my analysis shows, *necessary* to come to terms with these specific pasts. The promise of the TRC—to guide a nation toward reconciliation—may appeal to those who see Australia's and Canada's future in the abandonment of difference, and in buying in to the narrative of a reconciled general public that encounters "the other" on equal terms. Charles Taylor specifically alerts us to the "inauthentic and homogenizing demand for recognition of equal worth, on the one hand, and the

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/TeichlerCarnivalizing

self-immurement within ethnocentric standards, on the other," that is both tempting and misleading.[36] Notions of cultural authenticity, as well as the conception of cultures and identities as containers, are structurally present within the framework that truth and reconciliation provides.

One example of such a "singular identity" is the category of the victim that is, as I show in my analysis, prominently reproduced in the context of Australian and Canadian "politics of regret." The notion of empowerment through voicing out is closely associated with the performative recalibration of social hierarchies, but this renegotiation starts with marking victims as such. Matt James remarks in this regard, that

> [a]lthough they have many different emphases and dimensions, victim-centered approaches treat truth as multifaceted and deeply experiential reality that is best approached by hearing the diverse voices of survivors of state-inflicted trauma on their own terms. The question of victim-centeredness is above all a question of how a commission approaches the business of gathering and conveying truth.[37]

This connection between regaining representational and discursive power is a remnant of the South African TRC and its quasi-legal powers. Victims were actually in power, because they could facilitate perpetrators receiving amnesty. As chapter 2 outlines, these quasi-legal capacities were not part of the reconciliation package that emerged in Canada and Australia. Because of the absence of legal powers and the centering on the voice of the victim, the notion of victimhood and the identity template of the victim are very prominently visible. In the process of reconciling, the "issue of the forced removal of children is framed specifically and characteristically as an Indigenous experience."[38] Consequently, the forcibly removed child becomes the primary framework through which to perceive Indigenous identity. To emphasize and center the residential school experience and the forcible removal of the "stolen generations" reduces Indigenous identity to a comprehensible, emotionally and ethically condemnable "stolen children" narrative. This reconciliation narrative suddenly ties in with the colonial discourse of native inferiority and resonates within the idea that Indigenous peoples rarely reach beyond a status of inferior childishness. It is precisely this conundrum that is characteristic of reconciliation: such processes and performances counter structural silences and raise awareness, but they also perpetuate Indigenous victimhood.

Beyond the Victim Paradigm

Teresa Godwin Phelps appropriates Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque in order to work out how this emphasis on victim and victimhood is

eventually productive and empowering.[39] Bakhtin imagines the marketplace as the venue where carnivalesque reversals of existing power structures occur. Because the carnivalesque emphasizes the polyphonic, playful exploration of several identities, norms, and roles during carnival, Bakhtin posits the sternness of feudal, official festivities—which are also hosted to further disseminate and vindicate the dominant ideology—against the playful, humorous, and at times grotesque character of the carnivalesque space. Mimicry and mockery function as diversion and temporary relief. Through its citational mechanism, carnival produces a counterideology to the prevailing one.

Bakhtin's carnivalesque highlights how the imaginative and descriptive space that literary fiction provides can challenge existing patterns of social hierarchies and predetermined roles. He established a theory of literary criticism in which he describes how new aesthetics—that of the bodily, the hedonist, the humorous, and the grotesque—found their way into (Renaissance) literary representation. Accordingly, the carnivalesque also describes a stylistic resistance to existing patterns, structures, and conventions of literary aesthetics and worldmaking. Bakhtin holds that the boundaries between art and life, between representation, perception, and these very formative structures under whose yoke the "low cultures" performed their carnivalesque resistance are permeable. Consequently, Bakhtin not only describes a cultural practice—carnival—but also the style in which, in his example, Rabelais subverted canonical procedures of representation and literary aesthetics. In order for these roles to come into being, and to subvert them, normative structures, formative patterns, and their respective agency have to be identified.

In alignment with this carnivalesque ideology, Phelps considers the "politics of regret" as ultimately carnivalesque in nature, and to a certain extent they are. This carnivalesque space is sanctioned by "elites," the political agents and institutions involved in these processes. These performances create a space where resistance to formative patterns, roles, and identities is temporarily—precisely for the duration of these performances—possible. The "politics of regret" by default rely on the reiteration of antagonisms, identity containers, and monolithic, simplified identity portfolios. The distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, between victim (or survivor) and "the rest," between colonizer and colonized is programmatic. Whether these simplistic dichotomies live up to social realities of contact, intermingling, and exchange is not the issue of discussion in Phelps's study. On the contrary, the strong element of play and exploration within Bakhtin's conception is reduced to the fact that elevating the survivors' stories above all other possible narratives is a temporal reversal of narrative power regimes.

In chapter 3 of this study, the limits of Phelps's notion of the carnivalesque become evident when applied to the two apologies of the former prime ministers of Australia and Canada. In effect, the translation of Phelps's

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/TeichlerCarnivalizing

carnivalesque to the context of performative politics in Canada and Australia shows how Phelps's carnivalesque is unable to accommodate the frictions, inconsistencies, and ambiguities that accompany identity negotiations and transcultural encounters. When the "carnival of reconciliation" is over, the playful exploration of resistance to elites ends, and the social hierarchy returns to the status quo ante.

Consider the apology scene that I described at the beginning of this introduction: the arrangement of Indigenous leaders receiving the apology firsthand in the very center of the Canadian state is an ultimately carnivalesque gesture. Stephen Harper adopts the rhetoric and habitus of humility, remorse, and recognition. The state performatively bends the knee. Consequently, power hierarchies are temporarily reversed, and the Indigenous leaders are literally moved from the margins to the center. While the Harper apology is especially powerful in terms of images that were created through this specific arrangement, Kevin Rudd's apology is more interesting in terms of its wording. Through the apologies, the state reinvents itself as an agent of redemption and remorse.

Yet, upon closer scrutiny, it becomes clear that these apologetic performances only function because they rely on very schematic identity portfolios beyond which they rarely reach. The two apologies resurrect simplistic containers like a singular national history in which forcible reeducation is only one "sad chapter." They rely on a construction of collectives that are composed of the "Indigenous," or even "Indigenous victims," on the one hand, and an amorphous settler community on the other. In this vein, there is no playful exploration of identities and hierarchies that is so central to Bakhtin's carnivalesque, no imagination of contemporary realities and Indigenous modernities. Akin to Bakhtin's notion, however, the reversal of power hierarchies through the apology performances comes to an end once the processes are finished. The scripted framework of reconciliation strategically limits the identity templates available and presupposes the outcome: a reconciled society.

Hence I propose to reconsider what is at the core of Bakhtin's idea of carnivalesque reversal: the (playful) exploration of "the other" by fools and tricksters who paint outside the lines that dominant structures—here, Australian and Canadian reconciliation—provide. The carnivalesque mechanisms after all are not limited to reversal but also entail contestation and exploration. The latter lose their grit when remaining limited to exploring Indigenous trauma and being preconditioned as victim-centered.

A carnivalesque lens that is sensitive to transcultural dynamics not only helps to identify simplistic binary identity templates such as victim/perpetrator, Indigenous/non-Indigenous, but also exposes them as strategic fictions, or "lies that bind," as Kwame Anthony Appiah would have it.[40] Bakhtin's

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/TeichlerCarnivalizing

carnivalesque has always been both, an aesthetic and an identity-political concept, but it is also complicit in perpetuating the upper-lower binaries. My carnivalesque, I argue, remains attentive to aesthetics and politics in fiction, yet it pays attention to and helps describe how cultures cut across each other, become entangled, and leave behind scripted realities.

The carnivalesque I develop in this study is particularly powerful when it comes to describing and analyzing processes of transcultural encounters. Monolithic conceptions of nation and culture are still part of the "national romantic," as Dagmar Brunow reminds us.[41] Yet, the end of (British) imperialism and the advance of globalization processes have fundamentally contributed to understanding that these simplistic notions of the connection between culture and nation (both in the singular) are no longer valid instruments to describe postcolonial realities and societies. Decolonization and its accompanying struggles for reframing cultural encounters as acts of violence perpetrated by one dominant culture on others demanded the introduction of a research and descriptive category that would accommodate the fact that "target cultures refuse to sit still for pedagogic purposes."[42]

Transcultural research, consequently, perceives cultures not as essential but as performative.[43] In a similar vein to the carnivalesque, a transcultural perspective looks for moments when cultures escape their own compartmentalization through and within their representations. Cultures, thus imagined, cannot be understood as fixed, stable, and profoundly distinct from others but rather as effects of borrowing, imitation, encounters, and exchange, and also of oppression, colonialism, and social hierarchies. This constant process of evocation enables renewal and thus precludes any system from moving in a circle of ceaseless repetition.[44] This means that each performance of cultural inventory, every citing of a cultural framework, delimits the range of what is fictionalized into "belonging" to this specific framework. Astrid Erll highlights the power of perspective in this regard:

> [W]hile it may be true that members of a family, residents of a city, or citizens of a nation can establish a memory culture and will usually conceive of it as pure, holistic, and discrete (this is the actors' perspective), an analytical observer's point of view on the people, contents, media, forms and practices of such memory cultures will always reveal their inherent transcultural nature. All memories produced in culture are transcultural. They are borrowed from elsewhere, inspired by neighbours, stolen from strangers. They are co-constructed and amalgamated.[45]

The notion of playful explorations, radical transgressions, and reformulations of social hierarchies and norms that Bakhtin so prominently highlights are hence also characteristic of transcultural dynamics. As the reader will see in more detail in chapters 2 and 3, the spaces that processes of truth and recon-

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
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ciliation open up cannot provide this liberating quality. These processes are highly scripted and dependent on the execution of certain roles—the victim, for example—and these roles are *not* meant to be imaginatively explored and humorously contested.

Notwithstanding their temporariness, the "politics of regret" profoundly resonate within the Australian and Canadian societies and have sparked cultural productions and fictional explorations of national narratives and historical truths. Artistic engagements with memory politics form part of the larger processes of reconciliation that outlive the strategic temporariness of public apologies and truth commissions. They may venture further and dig deeper into the entanglements that historical legacies hold ready. Carnival produces a counterideology to the prevailing one. Literature and art provide alternative spaces where the negotiations of identities, histories, and truths may be continued or taken into radically different directions.

Carnivalizing Reconciliation in Literature and Film

Young settler daughter Perdita, the main narrative voice in the historical novel *Sorry* (2008), looks back on her childhood trauma and tells the reader how difficult it was for her to find her words, to regain her voice, again:

> A whisper: sssshh. The thinnest vehicle of breath. This is a story that can only be told in a whisper. There is a hush to difficult forms of knowing, an abashment, a sorrow, an inclination towards silence. My throat is misshapen with all it now carries. My heart is a sour, indolent fruit.[46]

Australian author and scholar Gail Jones published her novel as an intervention in the controversies surrounding a governmental apology in Australia. As she states in the acknowledgments, it is personally important to Jones to display "solidarity" with Australia's Indigenous peoples and their fight for recognition and land titles, and her novel is "written in the hope that further native title grants will be offered in the spirit of reconciliation."[47] *Sorry* is just one example where authors and directors have made it their task to comment on and engage with the discourses of reconciliation, forcible removal, cultural reeducation and (trans)cultural identities by means of fiction. These artistic explorations attest to the impact that reconciliation processes in Canada and Australia had on their respective (artistic) communities, and to the capacity of literature and film to further explore identities, histories, and futures in this context. As will be analyzed on the basis of a select corpus of fiction—from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors and directors—the carnivalesque as a figure of thought and a literary aesthetic can be encountered in these works with a hitherto unknown power for aesthetic transgression.

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/TeichlerCarnivalizing

The carnivalesque, as will be analyzed in chapters 4–6, proves a valuable category to approach identity politics in fiction once it is supplemented with a transcultural perspective on collectives and narratives. My carnivalesque viewpoint has the power to leave behind this tight framework of political constraints, of discursive regimes and confining normative structures, that official discourses of reconciliation in Australia and Canada provide. Through narrative fiction it becomes possible to venture further along the slippery slopes of politically sanctioned identity formations, of further exploring truths and fictions, discourses and histories, and, most importantly, identities. Fictional narratives can be understood as "referential constructs projecting fictional worlds,"[48] and as powerful means to enable "imaginary extensions to the scope of knowledge."[49] This scope of "knowledge" refers to fiction's capacity—in the present context of Australian and Canadian reconciliation—to try out, picture, mimic, mock, or envision national narratives, histories, identities, and social orders. Thus conceived, the nature of fiction can be described as ultimately carnivalesque.

Essential to this understanding of the mechanisms of fiction as carnivalesque is that explorative narrative activity is the primary human capacity of constructing a self, a sense of existence in time and space, as well as a historical consciousness.[50] The self is constructed through

> the interconnection of events constituted by emplotment[, which] allows us to integrate with permanence in time what seems to be its contrary in the domain of sameness-identity, namely diversity, variability, discontinuity, and instability.[51]

In this manner, fictional narratives are by default able to leave behind the identity political constraints and simple container mentalities that, through reconciliation, are validated on a public platform. They can delve into identities and truths that run against the political grain and venture where no politician, activist, lobbyist, or lawyer could go. Historical "knowledge" that is often invoked as being revised by reconciliation processes becomes appropriated "knowledge" to readers and viewers; it is simulated, mediated, inevitably secondary experience that is transmitted through narrative fiction.[52] Its secondary nature resonates within the idea of carnival and marketplace that Bakhtin describes as central to carnivalesque explorations: in a specific framework, the rules, norms, and truths of dominant groups are taken up, appropriated, transformed, and ultimately contested. It is its penchant for nonconformity and creativity that makes the undermining, subversive character of carnival, and thus can be set in fruitful relation to the mechanisms of narrative fiction. Narration, thus conceived, is "the fundamental condition of our representation of experience and explanatory mode for our ways of representing experience."[53]

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/TeichlerCarnivalizing

In chapters 4–6, a selected body of fictional works will be explored and analyzed in terms of their carnivalesque mechanisms and aesthetics. All works discussed here were conceived by prominent and quite visible creative artists who are very engaged in identity politics in the Canadian and Australian context. Joseph Boyden, for example, was regarded as Canada's most successful Indigenous author. A controversy over Boyden's fraudulent native identity flared up in recent months, rendering him a mnemonic imposter.[54] Tomson Highway (Canada) is known for his dedication to promoting Indigenous cultural heritages and traditions, and he has publicly discussed his experience as a survivor of an Indian residential school. Zacharias Kunuk (Canada) sets out to retrace a notion of Inuit historical identity in order to reiterate and preserve it for contemporary Inuit people, and his feature film made it all the way to the Cannes Film Festival. Gail Jones's Australian aforementioned "sorry novel"—a generic ascription that will be analyzed in more detail in chapter 4—was published only months before Kevin Rudd actually delivered the public apology. Baz Luhrmann (Australia) tasked himself with creating an Australian national epos that interrelates settlement, the Stolen Generations, as well as the historic achievements of British settlement in Australia. His movie, although it is not his most successful one, reached a wide audience across the globe. Kim Scott is a prominent author in Australia, yet his works are probably best known among specialists.

Some of the cultural productions analyzed within this study are bestsellers and blockbusters, having attracted and reached a vast reader- and viewership, while others are niche products with less success in terms of revenue and readership. Nonetheless, all examples have become available to international audiences and traversed several cultural and national boundaries. Some of them have won prestigious prizes—Zacharias Kunuk's *Atanarjuat* (2001) was, for example, awarded the Golden Camera in Cannes; Kim Scott's novel *Benang* (1999) was bestowed with the Miles Franklin Literary Award in 2001. Accordingly, the fictional explorations of the discourses and identities of Australian and Canadian reconciliation have certainly impacted these negotiations. All of the works discussed here employ some version of the carnivalesque in order to make their political points regarding memory. The latter can be identified through the subversion of social hierarchies (victim versus perpetrator) or historical representations ("the nation forged in fire" paradigm), or by contesting fixed notions of cultural identities and belonging by conceiving protagonists that freely oscillate between cultural boundaries (the persona of the trickster-fool, for example). Yet there is a major difference in quality and scope perceivable with regard to the primary works, and these discrepancies are reflected in the structure of this study.

In chapter 4, a fictional work that is particularly innovative and imaginative in writing "against the official reconciliation grain" is juxtaposed with

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/TeichlerCarnivalizing

an example where the carnivalesque in a Phelpsian manner reproduces fixed, compartmentalized identities and narratives. Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road* (2005) pursues the agenda of overturning representational hierarchies with regard to Canada's mythicized "birth of the nation" in the European theaters of the Great War. Beyond that, Boyden's text is especially powerful with regard to imagining a transcultural identity, employing a trickster-fool character that in a carnivalesque manner transgresses all the ultimately fictional cultural boundaries. This transcultural protagonist is not a victim, although he went through a residential school, but uses his mixed cultural background to his advantage. Boyden's novel is juxtaposed with Gail Jones's attempt (2007) to explore Australian settler guilt, but *Sorry*'s uniquely manieristic narrative makeup and the strategic lack of a viable Aboriginal perspective reverse-carnivalizes Jones's well-meaning intentions and instead produces a case of settler navel-gazing rather than an intervention into the apology discourse.

As discussed in chapter 5, Kim Scott's *Benang* (1999) impressively pushes the Australian cultural boundaries by imagining a protagonist who literally "floats" between the cultural poles: Harley is imagined as a powerful transcultural protagonist who, having turned the tables on his molesting grandfather whose breeding project he is, presents a uniting force instead of a vengeful, divisive one. The character of victim and perpetrator and their cultural makeup is taken up very prominently in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (1998). From his autobiographical background, Highway set out to personalize the abstract perpetrator force and employs, akin to Boyden's text, traditional Indigenous mythological characters (the *windigo*, the fur queen as a trickster figure) to represent raping priests and native cultural heritage. Contrary to the explorative force of *Benang,* Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* remains curiously stuck in this binary system.

The two feature films analyzed in chapter 6 both consider themselves as representing Canada's and Australia's national history in an epic manner. Zacharias Kunuk's feature film *Atanarjuat* (2001) remediates the Inuit oral myth of the fast runner and seemingly sets out to imagine an Inuit identity that is untethered by colonialism. Yet, upon closer investigation, *Atanarjuat* innovatively carnivalizes the notion of cultural authenticity by the use of intertextual references to other filmic investigations of Inuit identity. Thus conceived, Kunuk's film carnivalizes not only the notion of cultural containment but also of the "colonial gaze," a formative tradition of derogatively representing indigeneity in Canadian feature film and documentary history. Baz Luhrmann's colorful filmic epos *Australia* (2008) also attempts to diversify Australian national identity by representing a (hi)story whose narrative agency seems to be firmly placed in Aboriginal hands. In a similar manner to Jones's *Sorry*, Luhrmann's film strives to empower Aboriginals, yet it appropriates their voice, speaks for them instead of with them: ultimately *Austra-*

lia practices "enforced" reconciliation because it lets an Australian history of settlement and world war participation culminate in a central "Mother Australia" figure, a British settler wife who reconciles all rifts and inconsistencies in Australian history within herself. In the process, the self-set task to democratize and broaden Australian history and identity by relating it to the Aboriginals renders them as props and affords them minor roles in the overarching national narrative.

Through the discussion of the fictional works, it will become evident that a carnivalesque perspective and the analysis of carnivalesque aesthetics result in the discovery of highly productive ways of engaging with Canadian and Australian "politics of regret." These texts naturally go further and delve deeper into the spheres of identity politics than any commission or public apology could. The cultural productions analyzed in this study imagine transcultural identities that eventually might come closer to the experiences of cultural realities in Australia and Canada.

Before the analysis turns toward these fictions of reconciliation and their critical, subversive potentials and shortcomings, the two processes of reconciliation in Canada and Australia and their respective memory politics as "politics of regret" will be introduced and discussed. In the following chapter, I will shed light on how the notion of justice through storytelling—which is emblematic to Australian and Canadian reconciliation—harks back to the TRC South Africa and its proceedings. The specific outline of Canadian and Australian reconciliation also shows how the notion of "native empowerment" through such proceedings has cut across different contexts, and has discursively connected Indigenous histories, experiences, and identities across the globe. Despite the fact that, in Australia and Canada, Indigenous (hi)stories can no longer be ignored and have claimed a prominence unprecedented in scope and effect, mechanisms that were central to the South African context have been abandoned. This has led to a pointed emphasis on victims and victimhood, and thus creates its own identity-political drawbacks, as will be outlined in this next chapter. The analytical lens that a carnivalesque research perspective provides enables me to work out the potentials as well as the shortcomings of Australian and Canadian reconciliation that coexist in such curious proximity.

Notes

1. A video of the official apology is available on the website of the Government of Canada, "Indian Residential School Statement of Apology—Prime Minister Stephen Harper," n.d., retrieved 15 May 2015 from http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015677/1100100015680.

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/TeichlerCarnivalizing

2. See Aaron Wherry, "The Commons: The Apology," Macleans, 12 June 2008, retrieved 4 March 2018 from http://www.macleans.ca/uncategorized/the-commons-the-apology/.
3. Phil Fontaine as quoted by Wherry, "The Commons: The Apology."
4. Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
5. Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson, eds., *The Transcultural Turn: Interrogating Memory between and beyond Borders*, 1st ed., Media and Cultural Memory/Medien Und Kulturelle Erinnerung, vol. 15 (Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 18.
6. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham, "Introduction," in *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, ed. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 14–15.
7. Teresa Godwin Phelps, *Shattered Voices: Language, Violence, and the Works of Truth Commissions* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2004), and Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
8. Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victim and Perpetrators* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2019), 1.
9. Lea David, *The Past Can't Heal Us. The Dangers of Mandating History in the Name of Human Rights*, Human Rights in History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
10. Paul Ricoeur, *History, Memory, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 97.
11. For further reading, see, e.g., Justin Healey, ed., *The Stolen Generations* (Rozelle: Spinney Press, 2001).
12. For further reading, see J. R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).
13. See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Interim Report*, 10 December 2014, retrieved 4 March 2018 from http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=580.
14. "The Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement" is available online at http://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/settlement.html, retrieved 4 March 2018.
15. Matt James, "A Carnival of Truth? Knowledge, Ignorance and the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6 (2012): 184.
16. See Julie McGonegal, "The Great Canadian (and Australian) Secret: The Limits of Non-Indigenous Knowledge and Representation," *English Studies in Canada* 35, no. 1 (March 2009): 67–83.
17. Robyn Green, "Unsettling Cures: Exploring the Limits of the Indian Residential School System Settlement Agreement," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 27, no. 1 (2012): 131.
18. Danielle Celermajer, "The Apology in Australia: Re-covenanting the National Imaginary" in *Taking Wrongs Seriously: Apologies and Reconciliation*, ed. Elazar Barkan and Alexander Karn (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 153.
19. See, e.g., Priscilla Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions* (New York: Routledge, 2011).
20. See Olick, *Politics of Regret*.
21. See James, "Carnival of Truth?" and Anne-Marie Reynaud, "Dealing with Difficult Emotions: Anger at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," *Anthropologica* 56, no. 2 (2012): 369–82.
22. Phelps analyzes the cases of the Argentinian, Chilean, and Salvadoran Truth Commissions as well as the South African example. See Phelps, *Shattered Voices*, in particular chapters 5 and 6.
23. Phelps, *Shattered Voices*, 75.

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/TeichlerCarnivalizing

24. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, final report, n.d., retrieved 4 March 2018 from http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf.
25. See, e.g., Scott Veitch, ed., *Law and the Politics of Reconciliation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), and Jennifer Lind, *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).
26. Olick, *Politics of Regret*, 14.
27. See, e.g., Sarah Keenan, "Moments of Decolonization: Indigenous Australia in the Here and Now," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 29, no. 2 (2014): 163–80, for an overview of attempts by Indigenous claimants to attain justice through the Australian legal system. She writes: "Indigenous law and practice is the foundation of native title, but Indigenous Australia is constructed as an almost mythical place located in the distant past and only capable of being rescued by (settler) law in limited circumstances." Keenan concludes that not only is the Australian legal system unable to address colonial legacies through its frameworks, but Australian law is also complicit in historicizing and discriminating the Indigenous. For Canada, Leslie Thielen-Wilson states a similar case by emphasizing that Canadian law is an inept tool to further decolonization, because "colonial power continues to operate through law in the present." Leslie Thielen-Wilson, "Troubling the Path to Decolonization: Indian Residential School Case Law, Genocide, and Settler Illegitimacy," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 29, no. 2 (2014): 184.
28. The TRC South Africa will be introduced in more detail in chapter 2.
29. Ronald Niezen, *Truth and Indignation: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 10.
30. Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 2, emphasis in the original.
31. This aspect will be taken up again in chapter 2.
32. For further reading in the Australian context, see David Goodman, ed., *Multicultural Australia: The Challenges of Change* (Newham: Scribe, 1991). For the Canadian context, see Tridafilos Tridafilopoulos, *Becoming Multicultural: Immigration and the Politics of Membership in Canada and Germany* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013).
33. Ann Rigney, "Reconciliation and Remembering: (How) Does It Work?" *Memory Studies* 5, no. 3 (2012): 251–58.
34. Rigney, "Reconciliation and Remembering," 252.
35. Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (London: Penguin, 2006), xii.
36. Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 72.
37. James, "Carnival of Truth?" 185.
38. Denise Cuthbert and Marian Quartly, "Forced Child Removal and the Politics of National Apologies in Australia," *American Indian Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2013): 185.
39. See Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*.
40. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies that Bind: Creed, Country, Colour, Class, Culture* (London: Profile Books, 2016).
41. Dagmar Brunow, *Remediating Transcultural Memory: Documentary Filmmaking as Archival Intervention* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 25.
42. Frank Schulze-Engler and Sissy Helff, "Introduction," in *Transcultural English Studies: Theories, Fictions, Realities*, ed. Frank Schulze-Engler and Sissy Helff (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), x.
43. See Andreas Lagenohl, Ralph J. Poole, Manfred Weinberg, eds., *Transkulturalität. Klassische Texte* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 13.

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/TeichlerCarnivalizing

44. Anne Enderwitz, “Ereignis und Wiederholung als Koordinaten von Geschlecht und Gedächtnis,” in *Iterationen: Geschlecht im kulturellen Gedächtnis*, ed. Anja Schwarz (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2008), 37.
45. Astrid Erll, “Travelling Memory in European Film: Towards a Morphology of Mnemonic Relationality,” *Image & Narrative* 18, no. 1 (2017): 6.
46. Gail Jones, *Sorry: This Is a Story That Can Only Be Told in a Whisper* (London: Vintage, 2008), 1.
47. Jones, *Sorry*, 217.
48. Richard Walsh, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality: Narrative Theory and the Idea of Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007), 159.
49. Walsh, *Rhetoric of Fictionality*, 161.
50. See, e.g., Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vols. 1–3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984–85), and Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
51. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 140.
52. See Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia Press, 2007).
53. Kristin Veel, *Narrative Negotiations: Information Structures in Literary Fiction* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 15.
54. This aspect will be taken up again in chapter 4.

Carnivalizing Reconciliation
Contemporary Australian and Canadian Literature and Film beyond the Victim Paradigm
Hanna Teichler
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