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**The Role of the Great Arts and Literature in Narrative Counselling to Reveal Beauty as
a Life-Giving Healing Experience and a Rediscovery
of the Human Spirit as a Noetic Spirit**

by

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This paper is dedicated to Joshua and Lyla, my two beautiful children,
so that you may know that when life serves its inevitable challenges,
there is always a *good* way out.





DECLARATION

I hereby declare that: *The role of the great arts and literature in narrative counselling to reveal beauty as a life-giving healing experience and a rediscovery of the human spirit as a noetic spirit*, is my own work, that all sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references, and that this dissertation was not previously submitted by me for a degree at another university.

Signed at Pretoria on this, the 20 th day of October

K Earle



“Dance is the hidden language of the soul of the body.” Martha Graham

“To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion, all in one.” John Ruskin

“The aim of the whole and of the part is to remove those living in this life from a state of misery and to guide them to a state of happiness”

on the meaning of

The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri



Avenue of hope by I am Kloot

Along the avenue of hope
the footsteps falter, fingers grope
and the days, stretch out beneath the sun.

No-one's born, no-one dies,
no-one loves, so no-one cries
and we wait to see just what we will become.

Don't let me falter, don't let me ride
don't let the earth in me subside
let me see just who I will become.



ABSTRACT

“Beauty is something without which we may die, and through which we may live” Michael Ventura

Dante wrote in a letter to his patron that the meaning of the *Commedia* is to guide those that live in the absence of hope towards a state of cheerfulness (Latham in Dreher 2015:43). Aristotle originally explained in the *Poetics* that art has the ability to heal by means of balancing the two fundamental passions, namely pity and fear (Kearney 2002:137-138). The ancient Egyptians and Greeks “*employed drama and music as a means to help the disturbed achieve catharsis, relieve themselves of pent-up emotions, and return to balanced lives*” (Gladding 1985:2). Therefore, the purpose of the great arts is to employ the imagination which responds to both comedy and tragedy, and thereby keep a balanced and realistic perspective on life (Gladding 2016:6).

In January 2017, a meaningful story unfolded in my life that became a great source of creativity, whereby the great arts and literature were utilised, resulting in the working-through of a personal narrative of imbalance into a cathartic retelling of a narrative of balance - a rediscovery of my human spirit as a noetic spirit. When reading this in Chapter 3, I invite you, the reader, to allow yourself to freely enter your imagination and become part of our ‘Creative Protagonist’ narrative. I encourage you to chronologically view the attached video clips (Part I, II & III - [Prynnsberg Part I.mp4](#); [Prynnsberg Part II.mp4](#); [Prynnsberg Part III.mp4](#)) that was produced as invitations to the weekend at Prynnsberg, and to watch the final mythical clip (Part IV - [Prynnsberg Part IV.mp4](#)) that was produced after the weekend at Prynnsberg.

Furthermore, I invite you to join me on this odyssey in exploring my idiosyncratic journey through a narrative therapeutic lens whilst undergoing a theoretical study of the balancing act of the great arts and literature, and how it can be used to influence and facilitate the working-through of problem narratives in the therapeutic process of re-writing one’s narrative.



1 CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Rationale for the Study

“Creativity is a lot like kissing in that it is so intrinsically interesting and satisfying that few bother to critically examine it.” Samuel Gladding

Aristotle, originally in the *Poetics*, and as presented by Richard Kearney in *The Narrative Imagination and Catharsis* (2012a:audio), explained that art can heal by virtue of a purging or balancing of the two fundamental passions, pity and fear. When we become readers, or spectators, of art, we may experience a cathartic release. Why? Because the artful artificiality of mimesis detaches us from the action unfolding before us, affording us sufficient distance to grasp the meaning of it all, which performs the catharsis or balance (Kearney 2002:137-138).

At the age of 12 years old I was sexually abused, which resulted in the construction of a power discourse of patriarchy as a weapon, that generated either fear, or pity, throughout my life narrative, thus a narrative of imbalance.

In January 2017, I unexpectedly discovered a farm, Prynnsberg Estate, near Clocolan in the Free State, South Africa. Thereafter, a meaningful story unfolded, which became a great source of creativity that resulted in the curation of a women’s weekend called ‘Creative Protagonists’, which took place on Prynnsberg. The weekend consisted of embedding the great arts and literature, such as Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Homer’s *Odyssey*, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Joyce’s *Ulysses*, as discussion material. Stories within a story, carrying a central theme of exile, traversing across wounds on the path to healing. In doing so, it afforded me the distance and the imagination needed to result in the working-through of my personal narrative of imbalance, or sense of exile, into a cathartic retelling of an alternative narrative of balance - a rediscovery of my human spirit as a noetic spirit, and thus authenticating the Aristotelean Theory.

While I found that the great arts and literature had been a useful tool in my personal journey of healing, giving rise to originality, resilience and insight, it became apparent that an in-depth study was necessary to understand in what way the balancing act of the great arts and literature could be utilised to influence and facilitate the working-through of problem



narratives in counselling. Without a study of this process of healing, I could risk the misconception of the powerful and invaluable advantage that the balancing act of the great arts and literature holds in achieving wholeness within the context of therapy.

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Question

My idiosyncratic journey of healing made me realise that it is imperative that we know and understand more about the balancing act of the great arts and literature so that it can be practically utilised to influence and facilitate clients in the working-through of their problem narratives. The practices of outsider witnesses (OWP) and insider witnesses (IWP), which I would like to draw on, are widely recognised as effective methods in narrative counselling. For example, Michael White (2007a:165) writes of definitional ceremonies, where people have the option of telling their stories before chosen outsider witnesses (OWP), this being a ritual that acknowledges and regrades people's lives, as opposed to many rituals in contemporary culture that judge and degrade people's lives as they are measured against socially-constructed norms. I would like to extend this idea to the great arts and literature that rely on the conception that identity is founded on an association of life, voices that are influential on the construction of identity. It is about recruiting an audience, real or fictional, to therapeutic conversations so that this audience can contribute to rich story development. People can gain insight, release emotions, and gain perspectives by aligning themselves with characters in action-packed tales that display heroism, strength, weakness, tragedy, triumph and humanity. As clients find ways to integrate their experiences, literature can offer guidance and insight into potential futures.

Taking into consideration the ideas and insights shaped through my personal journey of healing, the question of my research is: *“How did the balancing act of the great arts and literature influence and facilitate the working-through of my problem narrative and contribute to the rewriting of a narrative of balance, or to the preferred way of living?”*

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to uncover the workings of the narrative imagination in a healing, cathartic way. I specifically explore my personal journey in responding to the balancing act of



the great arts and literature, as in Aristotelean Theory, with regards to achieving catharsis and returning to a balanced life.

The objectives are:

- To discuss the social construction of the principal events that contributed to my narrative of imbalance.
- To better understand the balancing act, or healing potential, of the great arts and literature (Western canon of literary works), as in Aristotelean Theory.
- To map my personal process of healing, or balance, as a result of immersion in the great arts and literature.
- To contribute towards a practical approach of utilising the balancing act of art in therapy.

1.4 Research Design

I narrowed my enquiry to focus on the following planning decisions, so that it could lead to insight that is gained from an exploratory, descriptive and explanatory research approach:

- I commence with a qualitative social constructionist research approach to my narrative of imbalance.
- The second stage consists of exploring my experiences at Prynnsberg, understanding the process and interpreting it, which involves the following:
 1. Investigating the Aristotelian Theory, originally in the *Poetics*, that art can heal by virtue of a purging, or balancing, of the two fundamental passions, pity and fear, which is cathartic.
 2. Enquiring into Richard Kearney's examples that he uses to illustrate the meaning of the workings of the narrative imagination in a healing and cathartic way, namely Joyce's *Ulysses*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Homer's *Odyssey*.
 3. Interpreting the collected research into my personal narrative of balance and healing that started gradually at Prynnsberg and continued developing thereafter.



- Thirdly, a comprehensive study of current literature, on the topic of the arts in counselling, is undertaken by means of reviewing existing methods of utilising art in counselling by researching the performing practices of OWP and IWP.

1.5 Research Method

This study heuristically explores the narrative of my personal journey of trauma and healing. I start by undertaking a social constructionist research approach to the perspectives I had, interpretations I made and actions I took, on account of my childhood trauma, as this approach treats people as though their thoughts, feelings and experiences construct a reality that exists at a social level rather than at an individual level. Furthermore, the research will be qualitative and concerned with meaning, thus how such understanding and experiences are derived from, and feed into, larger discourses (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2006:278). As I focus on the goal of the research, I explore, describe and explain my healing experiences at Prynnsberg with a research approach aligned with the interpretive tradition (romantic hermeneutics). The interpretive tradition seems best suited, as it focuses on the subjective and noetic understandings and experiences of individuals (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2006 1999:278).

The Dance Floor

“Dance is the hidden language of the soul of the body.” Martha Graham

Furthermore, and in the context of this paper, I would like to ask the reader to engage with the metaphor of a dance. In this dance, there are five distinct dance steps, and they will be explored by way of a synaesthetic unfolding of events, happening one after the other, similar to an intuitive theatrical production, where the stimulation of one sense triggers the stimulation of another. It is a dance that embraces the constancy of unavoidable change, yet is filled with great possibility (Dickson 2019:e-notes). Diane Ackerman (1990:289) explains the source of the term synesthesia as being derived from the Greek *syn* (together) and *aisthanesthai* (to perceive) - together to perceive. This is thus a synaesthetic journey that combines the interchangeability of our senses with the various dance movements to bring about a greater understanding of this heuristic exploration of my personal journey of trauma and healing. Ackerman (1990:xvii)



eloquently describes that “*Our senses don’t just make sense of life in bold or subtle acts of clarity, they tear reality apart into vibrant morsels and reassemble them into a meaningful pattern*”. I utilise the dance metaphor, sorting and taming all of its sensory impressions, and translate it into practice by scaffolding it on Johann-Albrecht Meylahn’s dance movement in *Church Emerging from the Cracks* (2012:56-63) and Susan Nicholson’s practice map that she developed in *The Narrative Dance – A Practice Map for White’s Therapy* (1995:23-27).

The methodology that I use is a translation into practice derived from Meylahn’s five dance movements, combined with Nicholson’s practice map, and consists of:

1. Listening and Hearing - a double listening, or deconstructive listening, of my story, thus identifying the shadow, or private, story, as well as the dominant, or broader societal, story.
2. Interpreting and Smell - interpreting my story, thus determining the meaning that was made from both the private and the dominant story in the context of the past, present and future.
3. Discerning and Taste - discernment of the dominant myth through the telling of the existing untold stories, or the stories that do not fit the dominant plot, thus providing an entry point into the development of reconstructing the preferred story.
4. Re-authoring, Poetry and Touch - this is the necessary scaffolding process (White 2007a:263), a re-imagining of the familiar story by bringing in other stories with the emphasis of putting the *self* in touch with the discoveries about the written *other*, which is cathartic as it moves toward what might be possible going forward.
5. Embracing, Listening and Vision - embracing the new story that flows into a future script through the process of celebrating and exploring the implications and possibilities of the preferred narrative.

Furthermore, an inductive approach is employed to analyse, and derive explanations from, the existing body of knowledge on the topic. According to Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter (2006:44), this approach is open, flexible, exploratory, descriptive and explanatory, and attempts to look for new insights into phenomena, and make preliminary investigations into relatively unknown areas of research.

2 CHAPTER 2: The Narrative of Imbalance (Listening - Hearing and Interpreting - Smell)

2.1 The Subjugation of Imbalance



The Dream Before by Laurie Anderson

Hansel and Gretel are alive and well
And they're living in Berlin
She is a cocktail waitress
He had a part in a Fassbinder film.
And they sit around at night now
Drinking schnapps and gin
And she says; 'Hansel, you're really bringing me down'
And he says, 'Gretel, you can really be a bitch'
He says; 'I've wasted my life on our stupid legend,
when my one and only love was the wicked witch.'

She said; 'What is history?'
And he said; 'History is an angel,
being blown backwards into the future.'
He said; 'History is a pile of debris.
And the angel wants to go back and fix things
to repair the things that have been broken.'
But there is a storm blowing from Paradise.
And the storm keeps blowing the angel
Backwards into the future.

And this storm, this storm
is called
Progress.



I open my story with the lyrics of Anderson, as it resonates with my emotions, “*history is a pile of debris*”, yet we take our debris with us into our future because we hope that we can fix the things that have been broken. Humans have a deep need for meaning and understanding - we want an explanation for the events in our lives. Some of the serious consequences of trauma is that it shakes our entire view of life and our conception of God and can greatly change our concept of self (Retief 2009:26). Experiences, particularly those that involve trauma and suffering, demand a revisiting of our meaning systems that ultimately construct a new meaning that will be strong enough to make suffering sufferable (Benner 2011:7). Although we need hope, and the sense of a future, to construct meaning after trauma, we do have to be conscious of the idea that meaning is never achieved in some final form. It rather evolves and gets constructed as life happens. The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1844) said that life can be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards. When I reflect back on how I responded to my story of trauma, I understand now that, in my state of disorientation, I was not able to connect deeply and be considerate towards those I loved because I was singularly attentive to the lack of these qualities towards myself (Brueggemann 1986:43). This I take forward with me, gazing through a narrative lens, leading the way to thoroughly explore the meaning that was made, the effects thereof, and my particular response to my story of imbalance. Additionally, the first two dance steps of listening (hearing) and interpreting (smell) will be set into motion.

It is discussed by listening to three voices. In this chapter, the first voice will examine what literature says about narrative theory, pastoral therapy and the relevance of deconstructing social constructions that shape power discourses in the lives of people that have been subjected to trauma. The second voice provides a look at my private story of trauma. Thereafter, the final section traverses the terrain of the dominant stories and the influence it had on the interpretation and meaning that I made as a result of the trauma. In Arabic, absurdity means “*not being able to hear*”, which has its root in the translation from the Greek *alogos*, “*speechless or irrational*” (Ackerman 1990:175). Thus, and as described in “*The Dance Floor*”, to reason with perception, the sense of hearing embodies the first dance step of a double listening, or deconstructive listening, in order to identify the shadow, or private, story as well as the dominant, or broader societal, story. Thereafter, the sense of smell is employed to interpret what meaning was made



from both the private and the dominant story in the context of the past, present and future. Key reflections draw together these findings and connect the main points discussed in the theory and in my personal journey.

Listening and Hearing

“I was all ear, and took in strains that might create a soul under the ribs of death”

John Milton, “Comus”

There is an etymological assumption that the world will make sense while we are able to see, smell or touch, but if we lose our sense of hearing, we shall lose track of life’s logic (Ackerman 1990:175). The core concept of hearing is listening. Like twins, inseparable. When we engage our sense of hearing, we become in tune with the daily commerce of the world and the sounds thicken the sensory stew of our lives. We are dependent on sound to help us interpret, communicate and express the world around us (Ackerman 1990:175). Listening leads to reason and coherence and is therefore the first step in the dance metaphor. To listen means to enter into, and actively listen to, the narratives, and to the various layers of the narratives (Meylahn 2012:57). A double listening, or deconstructive listening, is needed to identify the shadow, or private story, and the dominant problem, or broader societal, story.

Problem stories are dominant. They never include the full richness of lived experience and they do not tell the full story of the person’s life. They create a sense of certainty which is the arch-enemy of change. There will always be a multitude of present and past experiences that can tell a very different story. These are the experiences that have fallen in the shadows of people’s lives and have thus gone unstoried - the shadow stories. Michael White comments: *“Our lives are multi-storied. No single story of life can be free of ambiguity or contradiction. No self-narrative can handle all the contingencies of life.”* (White 1994 in Nicholson 1995:23). Nicholson continues that the process of creating possibility, for the discovery of the preferred narrative, starts with deconstructing the dominant problem story. Deconstruction aims to analyse and examine the dominant myth, so that it can be reduced to its constituent parts in order to reinterpret it. This process begins with naming the dominant restrictive story in order to separate, or externalise, it from the person, so that a relationship and a negotiation process



with the problem narrative can be entered into. Externalising conversations are central to this process, so that the person's identity is freed from the problem story. This stimulation of the hearing/listening sense moves the stimulation of the next sense, smell, and the next dance step comes into play, interpreting. The synaesthetic dance is in motion.

Interpreting and Smell

"...and he burned fragrant incense on it, just as the LORD had commanded Moses."

Exodus 40:27

Nothing evokes memories more instantly than a smell. Aristotle wrote that there is nothing in the intellect that has not previously been perceived in the senses (Hoeller 2016:e-lecture). Ackerman (1990:5,6) puts it beautifully in her description of this: *"Smell is the mute sense, the one without words."*, yet, when we *"...hit a tripwire of smell, memories explode all at once. A complex vision leaps out of the undergrowth."* My trauma has a distinct smell: hot, pungent and strong, with a bitter, astringent flavour. We cannot give smell a specific name, but we can describe how it makes us feel, and when we *feel*, a story develops. The smell of my trauma, the story of my trauma, needs to be interpreted, thus the meaning that was made from both the private and the dominant story in the context of the past, present and future. This deconstructive process involves three layers of questions: questions on the historical background of the dominant narrative, questions of how one was, and is being, recruited into understanding the self as a result, and questions into exploring the implications of events continuing in the way they have been. Part of this interpretation process is to place my private story into the wider narrative context of religion and patriarchy (Meylahn 2012:58). Meylahn (2012:59) writes: *"the process of interpretation goes through layer and layer of interpretation trying to find the ultimate legitimisation of these stories, not in search of a grand narrative, but of the ultimate myth that founds and justifies the dominant common language – one could say the ideology that founds the common language or the myth that sustains and legitimises this common language."*

Thus deconstruction is the process where the dominant restraining narrative is unmasked and re-examined from a new perspective, while its background and feeding forces are identified, leading to exploration of the impact of the dominant story on the view of the self (Nicholson



1995:24). White writes that “*the personal story of self-narrative is not radically invented inside our heads. We don’t individually make up, or invent, these stories. Rather, these stories are negotiated and distributed within various communities of persons, and also in the institutions of our culture*” (White 1994 in Nicholson 1995:24).

2.2 Narrative Theory as a Postmodern Therapeutic 'Technique of the Self'

“*We are what we experience*” Buddhist saying

Social theorist Michel Foucault defines 'techniques of the self' or 'arts of existence' as those reflective and voluntary practices by which people not only set themselves rules of conduct, but seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make of their life a work of art that carries certain aesthetic values and meets a certain stylistic standard (Foucault 1990:10,11). One could suggest that Foucault was the intellectual father for the theoretical basis of narrative therapy, whereby Michael White and David Epston lay the methodological approach of it in the late 1980s, and which has since been gaining popularity for its respectful, collaborative and agency-promoting effects (Beaudoin & Zimmerman 2011:7).

Where modern psychology is based in individualism, narrative therapy is based in anti-individualism (Madigen n.d.:1), arguing that we are dependent on each other and our social context, with the existence of multiple truths rather than a singular truth (White & Epston 1990:79-82). The first step in narrative therapy is to begin embracing the post-modern experience of many selves, with a large range of self-definitions available to each person (Meeko n.d.:78). Ninety percent of the world’s most watched TED talks open with a story. It is easy to grab people emotionally with stories because we can all identify with it. Because stories are such an important frame through which we make meaning, the narrative therapist thinks about people's lives as stories, and works with them to experience their life stories in ways that are meaningful and fulfilling. The therapist enquires into the stories of their clients’ lives to expose and deconstruct oppressive discourses by way of challenging the assumptions, the values, the beliefs and the biases, in order to reach the new outcomes or preferred stories that are in grasp, giving clients a sense of agency. Narrative therapists do not locate the problem in the people they consult, but look at the context, society as a whole, and the impact that



culture has on their clients (White & Denborough 1998:2). The therapist believes that each person who consults with them have knowledge, competencies, values and beliefs that will help reduce the influence of problems in their own lives, and that this will enable them to re-author their life narrative (Morgan 2000:2).

Being loyally committed to storytelling, the narrative approach does so by asking questions about, not giving answers to, problems (Epston 2016:workshop notes). Problem stories pretend to be the truth, but they are not. The famous words of Michael White that *'the person is not the problem, but the problem is the problem'* has become well-known in the field of narrative therapy. This post-modernistic approach of narrative practice is thus a critique on what people assume to be real, approaching the stories of people's lives as multi-layered and challenging them to think in broader perspectives. The process starts with deconstructing the person's internal *"regimes of truth"* by way of externalizing conversations around the problem stories. The linguistic narrative practice of externalization provides an antidote to these internal understandings of *"truth"* by objectifying the problem (White 2007b:vimeo). In this unpacking process the problem story is named, and by doing so, separated from the person. Once a conversation is opened, through which the problem is named and separated from the person, the therapist is interested in asking questions to inquire into the effects and history of the problem to discover times of lesser and greater influence. This positioning of the problem story as one of many possible stories, enables the therapist to notice when people make direct or indirect reference to events that would not be predicted by the plot of the problematic or dominant story (Freedman & Combs 1996:46), with the assumption that a person has many more ways of being, than those represented by the problem.

From this post-structuralist perspective, problems only survive and thrive when they are supported and backed-up by particular ideas, beliefs and principles. Narrative therapists are interested in discovering, acknowledging and *"taking apart"* these beliefs and ideas that are serving to support the problem. Deconstructing these taken-for-granted *"truths"* is important to be able to arrive at richer storytelling. This involves the times when the problem had less influence, and it may lead to an exploration of the person's skills and competencies at that time (Morgan 2000:36). As soon as these conversations are taking place, re-storying work has



begun. This continuous development of events, and telling of stories, forms part of the re-authoring process. It helps people to include some of the more neglected, but potentially significant, events and experiences that are “*out of phase*” with their dominant, or problem, storylines. These unique events and experiences can be considered as times when the problem was not dominating. Over time, this process leads to the development of multiple storylines, with rich and complex meanings, that speak of multiple possibilities for people’s lives that lie within their grasp (Freedman & Combs 1996:93). Unique outcomes help to generate hope and new behaviours for clients and provide the starting point for re-authoring conversations (White 2007a:61). A new narrative is the breeding place for hope. If our stories are stronger than our lived experiences, then the preferred narrative themes and plots can co-exist with the problems in our lives. As we choose the stories we want to tell, we produce new meanings with different nuances and strengths for our relationships (Cottor & Cottor 1999, in Hedtke 2002:5).

2.3 A Narrative Approach to Trauma

‘To live life means suffering; to survive life means to search and discover meaning in suffering’ Viktor Frankl

As people begin to story their experience of trauma, they often find themselves struggling with a loss of voice and a loss of a sense of themselves (Durrant & Kowalski 1992:Penn 1998 in Beaudoin 2005:48). The narrative therapist is therefore respectful of the slow process and leaves enough space for clients to reflect and to make use of their own words for their experiences of trauma (Beaudoin 2005:49). When clients, through storying their experience, are able to notice all their actions, despite the challenge of the traumatic situation and how these actions support their values, they are more capable of seeing themselves as skilful and knowledgeable individuals (Beaudoin 2005:49). Therefore, in the context of trauma, the narrative therapist helps individuals to practically trace how they make meaning of traumatic events, whilst identifying the discourses that emerge as a result of their trauma. In deconstructing these discourses through externalization, discussed previously, the client has the opportunity to separate themselves from the problem, and is invited into a process where the problem gets investigated (White 2007a:9). This process relieves the person from being the problem and leads to an opportunity of having a negotiating relationship with the externalized problem. Externalisation provides opportunities to discover hidden and untold stories that



reveal the hopeful skills and knowledges that the person possesses, in the face of the traumatic event.

The more traditional models of counselling are shaped by modernism. This approach of counselling identifies people by equating them with pathological labels, as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the DSM-5. These contemporary understandings about pain and distress, as a result of trauma, obscures the complexities of people's experiences of trauma, and can contribute to the construction of a thin description of the person and a vulnerable sense of self. This modernist approach closes down options for people to take action in regard to their predicaments, and debilitates their knowledge on how to proceed in life (White 2005:1). White explains that because of the inevitable loss of a sense of self in trauma, the language of inner life, or the 'stream of consciousness', should be redeveloped in therapy as it gives rise to the sense of self. But it is important to note that, as therapists, we must be careful not to engage in efforts to directly contradict the negative conclusions that carry a status of fact about a person's identity that was generated as a result of trauma, as it can contribute to a sense of being disrespected, or the person feeling mocked (White 2011:123,124). The redevelopment of the sort of personal reality that gives rise to the self can be achieved through a therapeutic enquiry that brings together a person's diverse experiences of life into a storyline that is unifying and that provides a sense of personal continuity through the course of one's history.

The narrative therapist supports the idea that no person is a passive recipient of trauma, but rather that the ongoing psychological pain in response to trauma is a testimony of the violation of something that the person holds precious (White 2006:154). It therefore includes people's understandings about cherished purposes, their values and beliefs, hopes and dreams and commitments about ways of being in their life. White coined the idea of the "*absent but implicit*". It can be understood by assuming that if pain is a testimony to the violation of the values and hopes of a client, then the intensity of the pain experienced can be considered to be a reflection of the degree to which those values and hopes are held precious and were violated in their trauma (White 2006:154). White speaks of these values that exist as being, in itself, an extraordinary tribute to the person's refusal to part with what was so powerfully disrespected in the context of the trauma (White 2011:125). It is important for therapists to richly represent



to the client that which is treasured, so that the language of inner life can be redeveloped and revitalized to enable the client to become less vulnerable to the experience of disassociation, which is a result of trauma (White 2011:127). This also helps people to discover other territories in which to stand, as they begin to review their experience of trauma. Beaudoin speaks of micro-practices, to engage clients to enter into the powerful re-authoring of spaces such as valuable actions that were taken, or not taken, that remain unstored in the shadow of the dominant problem story (Beaudoin 2005:33). This process repositions itself and focuses on subordinate storyline development, which is found in the client's particular response to the trauma that they have been subjected to. Focussing on these responses, which easily goes unnoticed or disqualified, is of vital importance to restore and develop a sense of personal agency, as these particular responses to trauma are founded upon the client's values which, in turn, reflects the client's knowledge and skills (White 2006:146). In therapy we should therefore be attentive to the narrative approach of double listening, where we are interested in listening for more than one story. This is intentionally looking out for a second story, based on response (Yuen 2009:7). By exploring our clients' responses to trauma, rather than discovering the details of their trauma, it is surprising how many actions are taken to protect themselves, which is thus the development of a second story. It is within these conversations that people have the opportunity to discover a range of positive identity conclusions that override negative 'truths' that they have come to believe as a result of the trauma. There is always the existence of the 'small acts of living' and the everyday resistance to difficult circumstances (Wade 1997, in Yuen 2009:14). Our responses are often unnoticed, or rendered insignificant, but could turn out to be small gems of hope (Yuen 2009:14). It is our responses that guide us to discover what we give value to in life. These are significant knowledge and skills that contribute to the re-authoring process of a person's identity. After all, identity is the component largely at stake when people have been subjected to traumatic experiences and abuse. It is a client's sense of self, their perception that they are able to have some effect on the shape of their own life, that must be preserved and developed. The restoration of personal agency, found in these responses to trauma, provide a remedy to the highly disabling identity conclusions of being a passive recipient to trauma (White 2006:151). Through detailed conversations about these more hopeful moments, new options become available that lead to new alternatives and richer meanings, that result in a process of healing. Therefore, in therapy, it is important to richly develop subordinate storylines in consultation with clients that have been subjected to trauma,



as it provides them with an alternative territory of identity as they begin to voice their experience of trauma, and simultaneously, and importantly, provides a significant degree of protection against re-traumatisation (White 2006:164). Our tasks as therapists therefore require us to search for, and co-discover responses, ask meaning-making questions and remain ever curious in order to unearth the hidden gems (Yuen 2009:14).

Furthermore, rich descriptions of positive identity conclusions are vital in narrative therapy, because an experience loaded with more affect than cognition has a greater likelihood to being stored in the brain than does an experience that is loaded with more cognition than affect (Beaudoin & Zimmerman 2011:2), which aligns with the science of neuroplasticity (Zimmerman 2016:workshop notes). The psychologist Donald Hebb, who was influential in the area of neuropsychology, cleverly phrased '*neurons that fire together, wire together*'. This reminds us that every experience, thought, feeling, and physical sensation, triggers thousands of neurons, which form a neural network. When you repeat an experience over and over, the brain learns to trigger the same neurons each time. Narrative therapy gleans from neuroplasticity in a way that it is always possible to develop new pathways in the brain, thus the possibility to develop new stories. When we continuously loiter around the event of freedom from the dominant problem story, or unpack the particular response to trauma, we create the platform for rich story development, which forms part of the re-authoring process (Carey 2015:video).

2.4 Pastoral Narrative Therapy

*"The moment God is figured out with nice neat lines and definitions,
we are no longer dealing with God."* Rob Bell

Spiritual discourses influence our identities, perceptions, actions and relationships. Most people walk into a consulting room stripped to the core of their being, feeling that they have lost the experience of beauty (Ventura 2001:2). In suffering, spirituality can be a rich source for rediscovering beauty as a life-giving healing experience. Thus engaging in spiritual talk, and utilising personal spiritual strength to address problems, can contribute to the co-construction of a richer "*meaning-making*" of life events. Pastoral narrative therapists create a platform for their clients to language a free and liberated voice, to engage their imagination



creatively towards the Holy God, and to form new possibilities, which contributes to the healing process (Brueggemann 1986:35). We draw inspiration from the stories in the Bible, and relate the timeless biblical truths to the situations that people face in life, asking questions such as “*Which story from the gospels does your situation remind you of?*” (Meteyard 2009 in Kutuzova 2010:2). Like Jesus, we turn with sympathy and compassion to all those that no-one else turns (Küng 1977:235). Client and therapist collaboratively explore how the spiritual realm is connected to an appropriate understanding of God (Louw 2014:1) and His message to us, which is aimed at the whole of our being - our soul, our mind and our material existence (Küng 1977:237). Pastoral theology considers religious truth in relation to spiritual needs, and simultaneously acknowledges the plurality of possible descriptions of reality, reminding us that there are as many different solutions to moral dilemmas as there are believers (Alexander & Cook 2008 in Kutuzova 2010:2). Thus the pastoral therapist understands Christian theology as a theology of genuine dialogue (Bosch 1991:483), one that requires a commitment to one's own theological tradition, yet is simultaneously submerged in a non-exclusive, humble, non-judgemental and sympathetic approach, not attempting to convert, but respecting and utilising the specific spiritual position of the client (Kutuzova 2010:1).

Furthermore, pastoral theology has a crucial role, as every crisis in life is a question about God (Brueggemann 1986:19). Benner (2011:3) suggests that spirituality invites us to the development and deepening of a meaning of life, yet any such meaning that has even a chance of being strong enough to help us face all that life brings, is a meaning that will always have been fired in the hearth of suffering. Working from a spiritual and theological perspective, the pastoral narrative therapist cares for people who are troubled and hurt. We share the language of our humanity and grief, our familiar joys and communal rage, with our clients, and provide them with a sense of solidarity (Brueggemann 1986:19). To do this, we stay attentive and informed with what is going on in our own lives, so that we can gain insight and knowledge of the conditions of our clients (Brueggemann 1986:18). It is in the events of life, that push people to the desperate edge of their humanness, that we meet them. We draw from the Psalms by listening to the voices of the dislocated and angry, those willing to speak their chaos to the face of God (Brueggemann 1986:22). We are witnesses to our clients' disorientation addressed to God, and guide them towards a new orientation, which is not the return to the old form, but



rather a re-authoring of the old narrative. We thus encourage them to speak in an honest voice about their experiences and guide them to discover the possibility and presence of God's grace in their lives (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:189). Our Christian belief, that we are all created in God's image and that we are all equal before him, supports our strive to honour every client's uniqueness in every aspect, including the position of their faith walk (Fowler 1981:xii). Jesus did not judge the world (John 8:11). He turned to people with compassion and had a deep concern for their well-being. So, do we turn to those that no-one else turns, with sincere concern for their suffering (Küng 1977:236). In following Jesus, who criticised the dominant religious discourses of his time and voiced alternative practices of freedom, equality, respect and sincerity (Cook in Kutuzova 2010:3), we unpack the religious discourses that support the problems in people's lives. In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul equally encourages us to investigate and deconstruct the mainstream cultural discourses so that God can mature and transform us. When co-constructing alternative meanings with our clients, we use Biblical principles, such as the renewal of our minds, forgiveness and self-control, to bring healing and to produce whole-hearted living. Forgiveness, which is a form of externalising, enables us to enter into a space of greater choice and freedom (Kutuzova 2010:5). It brings new order to the disorder (Brueggemann 1986:20) and is an initiating factor that enables us to make new meaning of our faith (Fowler 1981:173,182). The pastoral narrative therapist questions existing cultural practices and seeks a different kingdom, one that is about a relationship with God, and not about following a particular doctrine (Alexander in Kutuzova 2010:4).

The linguistic practice of externalisation has been present in the language of the church for a very long time (Kutuzova 2010:5). On every occasion, Jesus externalizes sin from people. He sees the sin as the problem, and not the person as the problem, thus externalising, or separating, the person's identity from the problem and draws people to himself to free them (Küng 1977:235). Similarly, we start the healing process in therapy first and foremost by externalisation (Morgan 2000:17). In the desert, Jesus himself refuses to identify with the false images presented to him by Satan (Nolan 2006:109). Satan similarly accuses us with false images of ourselves (1 Peter 5:8) yet, throughout the Bible, God presents us with re-authoring opportunities. For example, in the gospel of John, Jesus says that we will know the truth, and the truth will set us free. In Isaiah, the prophet reminds us not to be afraid, for God loves us.



We are precious to Him and, when we walk through the fire, the flames will not consume us. God's truth and promises are a hopeful starting point for re-authoring. Pastoral narrative therapy takes on this approach of hope and optimism with a firm belief in the transformative effect of languaging stories into new meanings, and it has faith in the resilience and strength of people, and in their ability to change. Our language confirms the language of the Psalms, which is that of dying and rising, and in the process, committing an act of radical hope (Brueggemann 1968:24,30). Jesus was not interested in a common, unchangeable human nature (Küng 1977:239), but his gospel constantly invites us to possibility, to rid ourselves of old and harmful ways, and to take on an entirely new way of life that is closer in proximity to beauty. Michael White speaks of narrative therapy not being a work that is about people discovering their 'true' nature or their 'real' voice, but rather that it is about opening possibilities for people to become other than who they are (White 2007b:vimeo). I consider these principles to be God's will for our lives. God gave us free choice to how we want to live our lives and he invites us to explore possibilities to co-construct with Him alternative meanings for our lives.

Narratives are *"not only structures of meaning but structures of power as well"* (Brown & Augusta-Scott 2007:3). Narrative methods are an exploration of the relationship between knowledge and power, with the aim to avoid keeping oppressive discourses alive (Brown & Augusta-Scott 2007:7). Irene Alexander draws parallels between the way Jesus related to power, and that of the partnership between therapist and client in narrative practice. Here it is understood as a power that transforms, one that releases the person to their own choices, with as little domination as possible, and creates a heart towards others rather than a power over them (Alexander & Cook in Kutuzova 2010:5). This type of power has profound positive effects and produces a sense of agency. Thus we enter into conversation respectfully, regarding the client to be the expert of their life experience (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:25-39), exploring spiritual issues whilst being thoughtful of the client's specific spiritual framework and their particular view of reality (Prest & Keller 1993:141). Bosch (1991:484) explains that this type of dialogue with clients is possible when we view our clients within the context of their particular culture and convictions, and only if we proceed with the expectation of meeting God, who accompanies us, and has gone ahead of us, in the preparation of our clients within. Thus we take off our shoes and enter this holy space with deep respect (Bosch 1991:484),



inviting our clients to participate in the meaning-making and re-authoring of their spirituality in such a way that it becomes a life-giving force that will sustain them in their journey forwards. For Jesus, service to man as an individual, free from any system, law or religion, has priority over the observance of the law (Küng 1977:252). It is the state of the heart that God is concerned with (Küng 1977:249) and, as therapists, we need to be aware of the state of our own hearts. Bosch (1991:483,484) explains the necessity to accept the co-existence of different faiths in the global village because we cannot possibly enter into any meaningful dialogue with people if we resent the views that they hold precious. However, Bosch (1991:484) continues that for us to have authenticity in dialogue, one must be committed to one's own theological tradition in an attitude of humility, or else it is worthless and becomes arrogant. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he told the story of the good Samaritan, the national enemy of the Jews, the heretic (Küng 1977:260). In the parable, attention is drawn to the Samaritan's complete willingness to use all means, time, strength and life, for saving the injured man, his *enemy*, (Esser 1976 in Louw 2013:9), and not to yield to the religious and political discourse of his time. Jesus expects from us a radically changed awareness, a fundamentally different attitude, a new orientation in thought and action (Küng 1977:249). It is a decisive change of will, an awareness changed from the roots upwards, it is a new basic attitude of love, not a poetical, theoretical or humanistic love (Küng 1977:250). For Jesus, love means courageous deed, open towards the individual and his/her needs in a particular situation (Küng 1977:256). It is an alertness and a receptivity to our fellow man (Küng 1977:257). Jesus' radicalism of love is not an ideology, but is found in the behaviour of ordinary life, such as forgiveness, service to others and a renunciation of rights in favour of the other person (Küng 1977:262,263). When consulting people of different faiths, in pastoral narrative therapy, we honour the creative tension between Christianity's claim of Jesus Christ as the only way and, at the same time, we do not construct God by limiting His saving power and his sovereignty (Bosch 1991:488). We strive to unify opposites in mind and experience (Fowler 1981:198) and we relinquish understanding, preparing ourselves to live within a framework of penultimate knowledge, not opting for agnosticism, but for humility and balance (Bosch 1991:489).



2.5 Social Constructionism

“When people talk to each other the world gets constructed” Vivien Burr

The basic structure that we build our society on, are social constructs. Thus we are all accomplices in the construction of modern society (White 2007b:vimeo). Together, we construct our realities as we live them (Freedman & Combs 1996:23). An example of these social constructs includes gender binaries, power relations and social class. They exist only because people collectively agree that they exist. The values and beliefs that we hold, which seem to be 'normal' and 'common sense', are constructs of the organisations and institutions that are shared through language (Bullock 1999:25). Without language, experience dissolves and cannot be shared, and community cannot be formed (Weingarten 2001:2). We live, therefore, with each other in a world of conversational narrative, and we understand ourselves and each other through changing stories and self-descriptions (Anderson & Goolishian 1992, in Hart 1995:184). This transference of communal memory and history, through language, as the building blocks, solidifies a collective identity that binds a people together and constructs a culture (Snodgrass 2016:1). The multi-stories of life are therefore cultural, relational and historical in origin, being possible constructions of the events and experiences of life (White 2006:150), and we continue to look back to our culture and our history to guide us on what feelings are desirable (Rottenberg 2014:22). One could suggest that it is literally impossible to be a member of society without being part of its power in creating our very own identities.

Just as human beings evolve their own languages and create their inter-subjective meanings regarding their daily experiences through dialogue, so people generate meanings surrounding their spirituality (Prest & Keller 1993:140). From a social constructionist view, a person's religion or spirituality is regarded as being constructed in their particular social network. Therefore, people's faith and knowledge of the Divine can be understood as an accumulation of the specific tradition that they were instructed in, by means of discourse and through their particular personal spiritual experiences. These structures of tradition and experience can contribute to negative religious discourses that have consequences on people's understanding of their faith and their identity (White 2007b:vimeo).



The previously discussed ideas to narrative practice. In counselling, we critique the structures that people assume to be real because they hold power that could have negative consequences on people's identity conclusions (White 2007b:vimeo). We are interested in 'taking apart' the assumed beliefs and ideas that are serving to assist the problem. This deconstruction of the taken-for-granted 'truths' is an important process in the reconstruction of a 'robust' sense of self (White 2005:1), which forms part of the re-authoring process that provides people with a sense of their 'self' being able to influence a particular preferred result.

2.6 Discourse and its Power

"The post-modern way of looking at reality is called discourse" Debra Marshall

Discourse is a concept proposed by Foucault, which is how human beings conceptually see, and make sense of, their reality (Marshall 2013:video). He recognised that the ways we think and talk about a subject, influence and reflect the ways we act in relation to that subject (Karlberg 2005:1). It is the grammar of what is knowable and what is say-able, and it is the spoken and written examples of communication. Parker (1992:5) suggests that discourse is a process of reasoning, or a set of statements, that construct an object. It includes our relationships with others, and our relationship with the structure of society, and also includes our beliefs of power (Marshall 2013:video). Foucault was hugely influential in shaping our understanding of power and led us to the idea that 'power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere' (Foucault 1998, in Gaventa 2003:1). Power, diffused in discourse, is a set of values and norms that guide a collaborative action, or a "*regime of truth*" that is in constant flux and negotiation by society (Gaventa 2003:1), representing the unconscious and conscious mind and the emotional life of the subject it seeks to govern (Weedon 1987:108). Power, through discourse, makes us essentially what we are (Gaventa 2003:1).

Foucault further insists that knowledge and power are inseparable, and his study of the ways in which humans govern themselves and others through the production of truth, provide central ideas to narrative therapy (Brown & Augusta-Scott 2007:19). It leads to a conclusion that narratives are not only structures of meaning or knowledge, but also structures of power (Brown & Augusta-Scott 2007:3). Therefore, the stories of people's lives are powerful, and should be approached with careful discernment (Bruner 1986, in Brown & Augusta-Scott



2007:3). The modernist approach of revisiting trauma, or the catharsis approach, in therapeutic work, has played a significant role in the reproduction of the discourse of victimhood (White 2006:151). These discourses of being 'damaged' and 'messed up' on account of what a person has been through, are highly disabling discourses or conclusions about identity, which establishes a long-term sense of emptiness and misery and leads to the development of the overpowering immobilising occurrence of 'vulnerability' and 'fragility' (White 2006:151,152). In contrast, the narrative methods such as externalizing, deconstructing and reconstructing dominant social discourses, provide a platform for an exploration of the relationship between knowledge and power, with the aim of avoiding the keeping alive of oppressive stories (Brown & Augusta-Scott 2007:7). However, to practice effectively, the narrative therapist needs to have knowledge and power - the issue is how these are deployed (Brown & Augusta-Scott 2007:9). In the modernistic 'systems' metaphor, the notion of control towards a goal or expert position of the therapist seemed to invite therapists to become even more controlling toward the people they work with, and to treat dysfunction as the focus of therapy (Freedman & Combs 1996:4). When goals are achieved, the therapy experience often does not enhance the people's sense of personal agency. Opposed to this 'systems' approach, the narrative therapist moves away from the traditional position of power, or the "*all-knowing expert*", and the client, who possesses the latest update in their story, moves rightfully towards the position of being the expert. From this post-modernist position, it is suggested that the client is the expert on content, and that the therapist is the expert on process (Anderson 1997, in Brown & Augusta-Scott 2007:7), both as active embodied subjects in the therapeutic process of co-authoring identities (Brown & Augusta-Scott 2007:19).

However, it is important to highlight that power influences our view of reality, not only in oppressive, but also in empowering, ways. For example, peace researchers, feminist writers and theorists have articulated alternative ways of thinking and talking about power because of the mutualistic dimensions of power that have played a significant role in the history of humans (Karlberg 2005:1). Power has profound positive effects, giving agency, and bringing hope and healing. Foucault recognised that power produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge and produces discourse (Foucault 1980:119). Discourse, in turn, gives what we do meaning, and has the ability to shape an individual's choices about which self, and other, narratives are storied, and which remain un-storied. However, in the context of trauma, there is always the threat towards the preferred identities and values that people hold precious in life.



The meaning that people give to their experience of trauma therefore invariably include powerful negative identity conclusions or discourses (White 2011:132). This is when the narrative therapist needs to guide conversation to deconstruct the negative power discourses so that a new outcome, supported by the skills and knowledge of the client, is displayed. We can make use of 'the absent but implicit' concept described earlier by White, where pain is seen as a testimony to values that were violated, and distress is considered a tribute to their ability to maintain a relationship with these values. This added knowledge and understanding can be identified and become richly known, to create a powerful opportunity for people to experience being at one with a wide range of positive identity conclusions that replace the negative 'truths' or discourses that they have come to believe as a result of their trauma (White 2006:154).

2.7 The Private story of Trauma

"The pen is the tongue of the mind." Miguel Cervantes, Don Quixote

It is 1980, in Apartheid South Africa. The Dutch Reformed Church, and its three sister churches, announce that they have no objection to the reconsideration of the Immorality and Mixed Marriages Acts. The British and Irish Lions begin an 18-match rugby tour of South Africa, despite protests from anti-Apartheid groups. The South African Defence Force attacks the town of Chifufua in Angola. Umkhonto we Sizwe attacks the Booyens Police Station in Johannesburg with grenades, rocket launchers and AK47s. Hundreds of Coloured school children are arrested in terms of the Riotous Assemblies Act. Pink Floyd's "*Another Brick in the Wall*" is banned, for fear that it may become a song of liberty for Black pupils. On the 6th of June, Mmusi Maimane, the now politician and Democratic Alliance leader, is born.

In Randburg, Johannesburg, it was a hot Sunday afternoon in April. My best friend and I, both twelve years old, were roller-skating in the deserted alleys of our local mall. He was about fifty metres ahead of me. As he disappeared around a corner, five young South African soldiers cornered me off, encircled me and started sexually provoking and touching me. A numb, mute and irrational fear overwhelmed me. My friend was only twelve. He could not have acted, protested or protected me in any way. Thereafter, my feelings toward my much-loved father and brother changed drastically. I found it difficult to receive love and support from people who sincerely cared for me. Disturbed, confused and shamed, I persisted in not speaking about



that day. It was almost as if I was deprived of words, or at loss of my voice. People often lose their voice as a result of trauma (Newman 2008:6). I made a concerted effort to not let this event affect my life. It was packaged and *forgotten*. Shame became a cause for great regret and disappointment.

“I’ve wasted my life on our stupid legend” Hansel in Anderson

Reflecting back, I recognise that, to contend with the disassociation caused by the trauma and the high standard of perfection that the media forced upon society, I constructed and employed a second *self*. *She* was critical, demanding and disapproving of my behaviour and appearance. A dictator. With great animus toward each other, the *me* and the *her*, the awareness of this personal persona made me feel even more shameful and dysfunctional. I did not speak about these internal struggles because I feared further guilt and confusion. At the age of seventeen, coinciding with adolescent changes in my body, the continuous unbalanced force of patriarchy, supported by the powerful voice of the media, resulted in incongruous criticisms towards myself. This subsequently resulted in the development of bulimia, a hate towards myself and my body. Furthermore, I controlled and developed a persona of strict sexual purity, manipulating religion to provide a rationale.

Thus, the voice of patriarchy, together with an internal ‘regime of truth’, persuaded and coerced me to disassociate, to become perfectionistic and irrational, which led to a vulnerable ‘messed-up’ sense of self. Over time, a self-preserving aloofness towards myself, my family and peer group ingrained itself throughout my life narrative. This disconnection caused much pain and hurt in my relationships. With disconnection we lose the experience of beauty in our lives. Esther Perel, therapist, author and speaker on human relationships, explains that the effect of long-term detachment and segregation is rooted in indifference toward the self and toward others, and has consequences. She speaks of it as a uni-tonal voice that people bring to what they feel and what they say. Whether they say “*I love you*” or “*I am sorry*” or “*I want you to be happy*”, it is all said with the same affect and tone (Perel 2018a:podcast).



2.8 Patriarchy as a Weapon

Patriarchy became a weapon that generated either fear/indifference or pity/irrationality throughout my life narrative, a narrative of imbalance. The American historian, Gerda Lerner, wrote that the dominant power discourse of patriarchy, as a system of oppression of women, is socially constructed and seen as natural and invisible. Male control over women's sexuality is a fundamental cause and result of patriarchy (Lerner 1986:8-11). It is the primary cause of woman's oppression and it accomplishes this by alienating women from their bodies. Alienation from one's body is effective in producing a willingness to tolerate inferiority and domination. As heard in the recent BBC report on the Human Right Watch's statement that sexual abuse of women in North Korea is widespread, sexual abuse is endemic in everyday life and without recourse allowed by the government which, in turn, deepens cultural acceptance. Female market traders are harassed daily, and forced to pay bribes as an alternative to sexual favours (BBC 2018:radio broadcast). Powerful men find nothing wrong with sexually harassing women, and women find ways to contend with their oppression.

In a recent article in *The Economist* (September 27th 2018), on *Sex and Power*, the author eloquently explains that the #MeToo movement, sparked by an alleged rapist that spread virally in October 2017, could be the most powerful force for equality since women's suffrage, the right of women to vote in elections that began in the late 19th century, but has an uphill journey ahead. Before #MeToo, Mr Weinstein, the American film producer accused by dozens of women of rape and sexual assault, was protected by an unspoken assumption, a power discourse, that powerful men can set their own rules in certain situations. However, although #MeToo instigated a shift that reflects a broader social change, this sign of progress risks men's predation of women becoming a culture war. Research shows that it takes approximately a decade for patterns of social behaviour to change, and #MeToo has only just started. The article points out that it is not about sex so much as about power and the distribution of it, and how people are held accountable when power is abused. The contemporary Republican politics of the current president of the United States of America, Mr Trump, demonstrates that it is less about ideals than about power and dominance. In Bob Woodward's book titled *Fear: Trump in the White House*, he quotes the president advising a friend that is accused of sexual misconduct: "You've got to deny, deny, deny and push back on these women...If you admit to



anything ...you're dead.” Thus, a deeper cultural change is needed to prevent harassment in the first place. Research shows that male dominance in the workplace perpetuates harassment. A federal agency in America noted only a 3% rise in sexual harassment complaints filed in 2018, post #MeToo, as organisations continue struggling to differentiate between unacceptable and unlawful behaviour. Accusers continue to face public opinion, as opposed to having to face the law itself. Furthermore, since #MeToo, the number of female CEO's have fallen, and progress in closing the pay gap has stalled (The Economist 2018:13,38,57,58).

The event of my trauma, supported by the dominant and unbalanced patriarchal myth, resulted in a construction of a *double* power discourse in my personal narrative - disassociation and perfectionism. Subjugated by this construction, it had a critical impact on my understanding of the world and relationships. Furthermore, it was continually reinforced and redefined through the powerful voice of the media (Gaventa 2003:4), controlling and supporting dominating inner thoughts that developed in me as a young woman. Rosalind Coward (1978 in Walby 1990:98) investigates in her book *Sexual Liberation and the Family*, the multiplicity of discourses of femininity that can be found in the language and images of contemporary women's magazines. Walby (1990) writes: “*There are many different ways in which 'femininity' is represented. In 'Woman's Own' and 'Good Housekeeping', femininity is seen in relation to family roles of cooking, cleaning and child care. ...in 'Cosmopolitan' the focus is on the sexualisation of the body of woman in the context of successful careers and sexual and economic independence, ...references to family roles are almost non-existent... The glamour image is continued through the advertisements for related products such as make-up, soaps and body lotions. The film 'Emmanuelle' offers yet another form of femininity, in which female sexuality is presented for the voyeuristic male gaze.*”

In November 2018, Esther Perel announced that she will host her *Sessions Live 2018* on the topic, *The Masculinity Paradox Livestream*. She explains: “*I realized the greatest cultural need at this moment is to address the complexities of modern masculinity. Masculinity continues to be something that men have to prove over and over again. To both men and women.*”. She facilitated therapists, coaches and other mental health professionals in conversation about our culture guiding us in outdated definitions of masculinity. It is clear that society vacillates



between the desire for change and obeying the demands of culture, where femininity is either restricted to domesticity, or to various forms of sexualisation. The danger of this is perpetuating the aim of the weapon of patriarchy at greater control, instead of at the liberalization of woman.

2.9 The Dominant Myths of Patriarchy and Religion

2.9.1 Patriarchal discourse

“Peace in patriarchy is war against woman” Maria Mies

At the core of patriarchy lies the myth of sex and gender difference, and I feel it is important to honestly face its deep pathology. However, to start, it is important to note the difference between sex and gender. Sex refers to the biological differences between male and female, thus naturally fixed. Gender is the socially and culturally constructed roles for men and women and have nothing to do with biological differences. Gender is a result of a historical process in which males are central to holding power and domination in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property, thus leaving those at the hands of them discriminated against and often subjected to violence and abuse. As Lewis says, *“Gender is a reality and a more fundamental reality than sex...a fundamental polarity which divides all created beings”* (Lewis 1943 in Eldredge 2001:35).

Its origins take us several thousand years back into the history of humans, and to the beginning of institutionalized male dominance, when *“men discovered how to turn difference into dominance”* and *“laid the ideological foundation of all systems of hierarchy, inequality and exploitation”* (Lerner 1997 in Jensen 2017:10). Sociologist Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy as *“a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women”* (Walby 1990 in Jensen 2017:39). In Jensen’s (2017:35) book *The End of Patriarchy* he writes: *“Patriarchy is the appropriate term to describe the majority of human societies for the past several thousand years we need to challenge its domination/subordination dynamic that defines the contemporary world”*. Jensen continues to explain that patriarchy is a type of *“power-over”* rather than *“power-with”*, from which women are largely excluded. This distinction between *“power-over”* and *“power-with”* is credited to Mary Parker Follet, a theorist and social activist, and is often spoken of in feminist activists’ circles. *“Men’s*



*assertion in patriarchy of a right to control women's sexuality, backed by violence, was central to a process that created a world rigidly ordered by 'power-over' - power defined as the ability to impose your will on others or to resist that imposition by others, contrasted with the collaborative conception of 'power-with' (Jensen 2017:10). Roland Barthes' description of the term he coined as *ex-nomination*, i.e. patriarchy as the 'norm' or common sense, is extremely relevant. For as long as patriarchy remains the 'norm' as a key principle of experiencing gender difference, and for this reason a dominant discourse in the organization of society, it will be difficult to contest its power (Buchbinder 2013:106,107).*

Gerda Lerner, in her scholarly odyssey *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986), explores more than six thousand years of history as she seeks to uncover the roots of patriarchal dominance, arguing that it's a socially constructed system. She examines when the ideas, symbols and metaphors of patriarchy took hold of western civilization and why women's roles, so central to procreation, were marginalized. She shows that male dominance over women has nothing to do with biology, and everything to do with cultural and historical habits, drawing her evidence from archaeological, literary, and artistic sources. In the Platonic dialogue, *Meno*, an ancient political figure and prominent Greek general, sums up the respective virtues of men and women in Classical Greece. He says: "*First of all, if you take the virtue of a man, it is easily stated that a man's virtue is this – that he be competent to manage the affairs of his city, and to manage them so as to benefit his friends and harm his enemies, and to take care to avoid suffering harm himself. Or take a woman's virtue: there is no difficulty in describing it as the duty of ordering the house well, looking after the property indoors, and obeying her husband.*" (Lamb 1967:section 71e).

This restricted and sub-ordinated position of women is also found in the works of Aristotle, a student of Plato, where he portrayed women as morally, intellectually, and physically inferior to men (Fishbein 2002:27). Aristotle believed that women had colder blood than men, which caused women not to evolve into men, the sex that Aristotle believed to be superior (Lerner 1986:206). Lerner (1986:210) argues that through this patriarchal belief system, passed down from generation to generation, people have been conditioned to collectively assume that men are superior to women. She draws especially on archaeological evidence of the cultures of



ancient Hebrew and Mesopotamian societies (Lerner 1986:199-211). These cultures, from which modern western civilization derives, rests upon the foundation of the moral and religious ideas expressed in the Bible. She emphasizes that women were excluded from participation as far back as the important historic period when humankind made a qualitative leap forward in its ability to conceptualize large symbol systems which gave meaning to their existence. She describes the importance of symbol making as follows: unlike animals, humans invent, speculate on mortality and make mental constructs to explain the meaning of life and their relationship with God. For it is in the making of symbols, creating language and symbolic systems that we become truly human. Lerner (1986:199) quotes Ernst Becker: *“Man has a symbolic identity that brings him sharply out of nature. He is a symbolic self, a creature with a name, a life history. He is a creator with a mind that soars out to speculate about atoms and infinity, who can place himself imaginatively at a point in space and contemplate bemusedly his own planet.”* She argues that men found a way to deal with the existential dilemma by assigning symbol-making power to themselves and finitude to woman, thus excluding women from this important meaning-making process. She uses the structures and symbols of class and religion to trace the ways in which men and women have been classified as separate, and the ways in which men and women’s experience of society differs, and explains that these symbols are benchmarks that children learn as they grow up and in which the cycle of patriarchy perpetuates (Lerner 1986:201).

Thus, our culture has, and continues to, breed a sense of entitlement amongst men, enabling them to treat women as inferior, and women unconsciously support this cultural phenomenon. We are all therefore, men and women alike, participants in ensuring the survival of patriarchy. We fall automatically into these roles as our culture and traditions produce the dominant gender discourses that become obstacles for societal progression. Actress Ashley Judd writes of her experience of patriarchy: *“Patriarchy is not men. Patriarchy is a system in which both women and men participate. It privileges, inter alia, the interests of boys and men over the bodily integrity, autonomy, and dignity of girls and women. It is subtle, insidious, and never more dangerous than when women passionately deny that they themselves are engaging in it. This abnormal obsession with women’s faces and bodies has become so normal that we (I include myself at times—I absolutely fall for it still) have internalized patriarchy almost seamlessly.*



We are unable at times to identify ourselves as our own denigrating abusers, or as abusing other girls and women". Sociologist Sylvia Walby (1990:20) points out that our culture represents women in the media and popular culture "*within a patriarchal gaze*" which women unconsciously support, as they participate in alienating themselves from their bodies. Tradition thus fuels and encourages power and supremacy to be associated with masculinity, and compliance and subordination with femininity (Bergen 2005:319). It gets acted and re-enacted in ways that only perpetuate patriarchy and harm women, and causes men to persist in their efforts to control women's sexuality. Women, on the other hand, do not offer resistance, as they are so far removed from power that they have developed a strange aloof imagination of power, in which they can relate themselves only in angry passivity. This socially constructed ideology of patriarchy is handed over from father to son to daughter and is the root cause for the casual attitude society has of sexual violence against woman.

This assumption of hierarchical authority over woman grossly distorts men's perception of sexual intercourse and sexual violence. Jensen (2017:79) explains when writing on rape and rape culture: "*men generally are trained through a variety of cultural institutions to view sex as the acquisition of pleasure by the taking of women. Sex is a sphere in which men are trained to see themselves as naturally dominant. Throughout the culture, women are objectified and women's sexuality is commodified. Sexual interactions are most sexy when men are dominant and women are subordinate; power is eroticized.... Feminist research into, and women's reflection upon, experiences of sexual violence indicate that rape involves the sexualization of power, the fusing in men's imaginations of sexual pleasure with domination and control.*" Importantly, Jensen points out that we must not be misled by the common phrase that 'rape is about power, not sex'. He elaborates that rape is, in fact, about the fusion of sex and domination. It is about the eroticization of control (Jensen 2017:80). In addition, the social discrediting of sexual abuse smothers the voice of woman, providing further support for men to continue asserting their sexual domination. Jensen (2017:59) continues that: "*the physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering endured by women varies widely, again depending on other attributes and sometimes just on the luck of the draw, but no woman escapes some level of that suffering.*"



Brownmiller, a radical feminist, points out that violence is considered to be socially shaped (Brownmiller 1975 in Walby 1990:134). She argues that male violence is the basis of men's control over woman. Men settle disputes using violence, and their strength is eulogized in popular culture. Walby (1990:134) interestingly notes that the cultivation of violence among men finds its peak in the army, where many young men spend a portion of their lives. Our sexuality too gets constructed within different social platforms. Research shows that the provision of prostitutes for American soldiers in Vietnam did not eliminate rape, but rather that once women were reduced to such a level of objectification, rape became more, not less, likely (Walby 1990:134). Patriarchy would not exist without (hetero)sexual abuse, (hetero)sexual harassment and the (hetero)sexualization of every aspect of female bodies and behaviours (Frye 1992 in Jensen 2017:59). Frye (1992 in Jensen 2017:57) continues: *"For females to be subordinated and subjugated to males on a global scale, and for males to organize themselves and each other as they do, billions of female individuals, virtually all who see life on this planet, must be reduced to a more-or-less willing toleration of subordination and servitude to men...."*. Catherine MacKinnon (2005:92), lawyer and feminist activist, reiterates that it is the socially constructed hierarchical system that justifies why one group has power, superiority and domination over another. In her book *Women's Lives, Men's Laws* (2005), she makes visible the deep gender bias of existing law and has recast legal debate and action on issues of sex discrimination, sexual abuse, prostitution, pornography and racism. Her work has largely influenced changes brought about to the reframing of the pornography debate around harm, rather than morality, the recognition of sexual harassment, rape, and battering as claims for sexual discrimination, and the redefinition of rape in terms of women's actual experience of sexual violation. Jensen postulates that the pathology of patriarchy, the idea that one group controls another, is a global phenomenon and at the core of today's crisis, as seen in the recent #MeToo campaign. Despite feminist resistance and activism, the patriarchal sex/gender system has proved resilient, and institutionalized male dominance continues to structure our lives and influence our understanding of ourselves (Jensen 2017:10). MacKinnon notes that women's identities are not theirs, because the female identity is entirely constructed and defined, and continuously redefined, by the perpetuating patriarchal culture (MacKinnon 2011:161).

"Feminism is the light in the darkness of patriarchy" Shaista Gohir



Jane Clare Jones points out that feminism, at *her* heart, is a political movement aimed at the liberation of women. It is the most coherent critique of patriarchy and challenges the patriarchal assumption that reproduction-based sex differences yield dramatic differences in other areas of life (Jensen 2017:53). Gerda Lerner importantly emphasizes that when women regain their history, restoring their knowledge of their past and understanding the social construct that they have been subjected to, then only will women assert and exercise their right to participate in deconstructing: the meaning-giving process of interpretation and explanation (Lerner 1986 in Rosenhan 1987:581). The same can be said of men. Jensen (2017:113) eloquently states that; *“when men use women in pornography and prostitution, they are implicitly endorsing the idea that that is what women are for, but when men decide not to participate in the sexual-exploitation industries they are stating that they believe women are fully human, deserving of dignity, and do not exist to satisfy men’s sexual pleasure. When men make that choice, men are also stating that they believe that men are fully human, too”*. Human nature made patriarchy possible, but that does not mean patriarchy is unchangeable (Smuts 1995 in Jensen 2017:33). Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009:TED) speaks of the danger of a single story: *“the single story of patriarchal dominance is dangerous and unsustainable and leaves a bitter world for both men and women”*. She further explains that: *“If we continue to teach our girls that they can have ambition, but not too much ... to be successful, but not too successful, or they’ll threaten men...we are perpetuating the single story of female subordination”*. What she essentially asks is that we begin to speak and dream about and plan for a different, fairer world - of happier men, and of women who are truer to themselves. When men and woman engage in honest conversation about the history and contemporary practices in patriarchy, and we recognize that gender in patriarchy is a category that established and reinforces inequality (Jensen 2017:33), we shall be ready to build a world free of dominance and hierarchy, a world that is truly human.

2.9.2 Religious discourse

“Tell me your image of God and I will tell you your theology” Marcus Borg

John Eldredge writes that when Adam falls, all his sons fall with him. After that, and as the story unfolds, we see violent men and passive men, strength gone bad. Patriarchy and religion



act provocatively close to each other. Cain kills Abel, and his descendant, Lamech, the first polygamist mentioned in the Bible, threatens to kill everybody else. God floods the earth because of the violence, and it's still going on (Eldredge 2001:55). We can arguably demonstrate that the Quran and the Bible propagate the idea that God destined men to be in charge of women. Religious narratives depict man as 'God's firstborn', created to dominate the earth. It is important to open a discussion that considers that the Bible suggests that a woman was created only as a second thought, to provide comfort to the domineering active man. These types of religious discourses influence our relationships and the construction of our identities. Society widely concludes that the core of Christian narratives and Islamic discourse on sexuality is the belief that patriarchy is divinely instituted. Spender (1980 in Walby 1990:100), through her examination of the use of words, argues that language, religious discourse included, is patriarchally structured, that is, made by and for men, which contributes to male power. These are the ideas that courageously demonstrate the notion that religious discourse creates and maintains patriarchal discourse.

Furthermore, Foucault's notion that discourse has power through knowledge (Barrett 1987 in Walby 1990:98), includes the social and religious practices that organise and regulate power relations between people (Drewery & Winslade 1997:35). For example, his examination of the continuity between the modern practice of psychoanalysis and that of the Catholic Church's confessional, of speaking about sex in the process of confessing it as a sin, argues that sexuality has increasingly been controlled, not repressed (Foucault 1981 in Walby 1990:116). Radical feminist theorists utilise this control aspect of Foucault's discourse approach. They provide provocative accounts where language and religion, as patriarchal discourse, control and perpetuate the subordination of women (Walby 1990:103, 104). Here, religion is understood as patriarchal at its core. God is depicted as a man, and scripture teaches that men are the head of the household. Eve, a woman and a temptress, is considered the original sinner. Walby (1990:116) continues that these institutions of expert professionals, and the Church, lead to greater control over people and not to the liberalization, or greater freedom, of people. Language and religion, constructed as patriarchal discourse, make it more difficult for women to think outside the global patriarchal gaze (Walby 1990:100).



2.10 Pity and Fear in Patriarchy

*“Truth does not belong to the order of power,
but shares an original affinity with freedom”* Michel Foucault

Drawing from the Aristotelian theory of balance I would like to propose that, in a narrative of imbalance, our fundamental passions, namely pity and fear, are left to their own devices. Pity, in its extreme form, over-identifies, becomes sentimental and irrational, or passive. Fear on the other hand, leads to indifference, violence and cruelty (Kearney 2012a:e-conference). The destructive implication of men possessing too much power in the system of patriarchy, thus a narrative of imbalance, creates a culture of entitlement amongst men. Men can take what they want when they want it, leaving women to succumb to either pity or fear in their extreme forms. Our society ensures that the dominance of patriarchy is upheld, and when the dominance is threatened, its oppressors’ resort to drastic means (De Bruin 2012:25). An example of such drastic means is violence and rape. MacKinnon (1989), in her book *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*, explains that the societal perception of sex as sadomasochistic is because rape and consensual sex are viewed as one and the same thing. Needless to say, rape is forceful sex without consent. However, MacKinnon explains that, within this sadomasochistic view, forced sexual intercourse becomes consensual through men’s forceful dominance and women’s fearful submission (MacKinnon 1987 in De Bruin 2012:25). Rape is a constant threat in all spheres of our society and is a method to retain control. In her 1975 book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Susan Brownmiller argues that rape is a conscious process of intimidation by which men keep women in a state of shame, passivity, fear, panic and distress. Clearly a narrative of imbalance for both men and women. She deals with how rape has been accepted in all societies and how it continues to profoundly affect women's lives today and contends that *“only when all accounts of rape are collected and correlated, does the true underside of women's history emerge”* (Brownmiller 1975:115).

2.10.1 Patriarchy and pity

Pity, in its extreme form, results in irrational behaviour such as retreating passive men and sentimental clingy women. Pity, in its extreme form, causes regret, disappointment and shame. Shame is a powerful word because it is associated with our conscience. It makes us believe that we are undeserving. When we question our own self-worth, shame happens. It is paralysing.



Shame keeps us from owning and embracing our sexuality. Research Professor Brene Brown (2011) speaks of vulnerability and connection as an antidote to shame. When we share our shame with the significant others in our lives, it dissolves. We must speak about it. Connection, together with the embracing of our vulnerability, helps us deal with our own shame and that, in turn, challenges patriarchy.

In 2013, journalist Ragini Nayak postulated in her article in *The Hindu* that rape and shame is the curse of patriarchy: *“The driver of the bus in the December 16, 2012 gang rape of the 23-year old physiotherapy student mentioned that it was the defiance of the victim that angered him the most; that she dared to fight back, speak back and stand up to them. This anger exposes the deeply ingrained patriarchal mindset that would automatically switch on the punishment button. And the punishment is to shame her through sexual violation.”* She continued that in the context of India’s gender inequality, shame is used against women from various angles. Women are viewed as shameless transgressors for acts like seeking a divorce, or asking for a share in ancestral property, and they are forced to feel ashamed of the physical and sexual atrocities committed against them. Shame, in the form of moral sanction, is an effective tool that patriarchal society uses to subjugate women, to limit their independence and their choices. Nayak importantly expresses that: *“Shame is directly linked to the utmost necessity for a victim of sexual violation, i.e., her rehabilitation in society. Her social acceptance would be complete only when society stops creating conditions under which she will feel guilty and ashamed for what was done to her.”* She encourages parents to teach their sons the importance of respecting women and treating them as equals, to stand up and show support for rape victims and to ostracise the assaulters, and to stop seeing women as belonging only in the domestic realm. Nayak concludes that men should willingly share with women the public domain, where one gets remuneration, property, power and control, and only then will the battle of patriarchy be holistically won (Nayak 2013:e-article).

With the recent reports that have become highly publicised in the #Me Too campaign, it is clear that the world is shouting “it is time to say *enough*”. Meera Atkinson (2018), in her book *Traumata*, writes about how patriarchy perpetuates trauma: *“When I was studying transgenerational trauma as a PhD candidate, people inevitably asked what my thesis was*



about, and as I answered eyes often glazed over; the idea of trauma transmitting threw them. But the big picture that came into view through my years of research revealed socially structured cyclical traumata founded in patriarchy.” She continues by sketching how patriarchy is inherently traumatic, as it continues to infiltrate our beings and shape our lives, first from the outside in, and then from the inside out. She urges her audience to snap out of the fantasy that socialised traumas, like rape and other violent crimes, are aberrations in an otherwise fundamentally commendable and fair society. In other words, to move toward a narrative of balance, we need to stop viewing socialised trauma as exceptional events, and face the fact that abuses and offences like these are logical and predictable outcomes of a deeply troubled social system built on the belief that some individuals, by virtue of certain sex organs and physical ability, are inherently superior and more entitled than others (Atkinson 2018).

2.10.2 Patriarchy and fear

Violent behaviour, in whichever form, is a cover-up for fear (Eldredge 2001:56), and fear, in its extreme form, results in driven, cruel and violent men, and passive, humiliated and controlling women. Both are overcompensating for their wounds. Here, I would like to briefly point out two platforms of fear that are produced through patriarchal discourse - the oppressors’ fear, or hidden cowardice, that is displayed as violence, and the fear being produced in the oppressed to serve as a weapon in the hands of the oppressor, both leading to imbalance - a narrative of disconnection, control, indifference, detachment and cruelty. Rebecca Whisnant (in Jensen 2017:167), associate Professor and Chair in the Philosophy Department at the University of Dayton, writes of Andrea Dworkin’s 1975 speech “*The Sexual Politics of Fear and Courage*” where she specifically argued that fear shapes and constrains the lives of women under male supremacy. “*As women,*” she said “*we learn fear as a function of our so-called femininity. We are taught systematically to be afraid, and we are taught that to be afraid not only is congruent with femininity, but inheres in it. We are taught to be afraid so that we will not be able to act, so that we will be passive, so that we will be women ...*” (Whisnant in Jensen 2017:167). The fear of male violence shapes women’s everyday interactions with men, from sexual relationships to everyday passing encounters on the street.



Men and boys fear too, of not measuring up as a man. Jensen reflects on his personal experiences: *“Through feminism, I came to understand that the fear and isolation I felt, and many men feel, was the result of a conception of masculinity in patriarchy that traps us in an endless struggle for control, domination, and conquest. The problem was not my failure to live up to the standards of masculinity but the toxic nature of masculinity in patriarchy....through feminism I came to understand that the way I was used as a child by other boys and adults wasn’t a result of my weakness or failure but was the product of patriarchy’s brutal sex/gender system”*.

The fear that Dworkin spoke of is isolating, confusing, and debilitating, as it continues to deform our personalities and prevents us from understanding and organizing against the oppression of dominant discourses. Within the dominant system of patriarchy, both women and men are afraid of men, and rightly so (Whisnant in Jensen 2017:167). The evidence is clear that Adam and Eve’s fall sent a tremor through the human race, and it’s been passed on to every son and daughter (Eldredge 2001:57), both male and female strength gone bad. We are wounded beings and it is therefore crucial to find our hearts and return to them, for it is in the finding that life is beautiful.

2.10.3 Deconstructing

“The unexamined life is not worth living” Socrates

The context of my personal trauma falls under a gender-specific phenomenon supported by powerful dominant discourses and therefore calls on listening and deconstructing to empower wise discernment and interpretation. Discourses are socially constructed sets of ideas. Patriarchal and religious discourse are interwoven with my particular story. These constructs, produced through discourse, are irreducibly complex and unstable, and influence conclusions we come to regarding identity. Algerian-born French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, encourages us to question the socially constructed traditional assumptions and prejudices which we find ourselves loyally committed to. These questions are vital so that a particular discourse can be reduced to its various components, and to enable a deeper understanding of the meaning and interpretations that are made on account of the discourse. This is where the ubiquity and pervasiveness of time comes into play. Ricoeur summarizes the sceptical paradox of time, with



its three primary constituents, past, present and future, as a phenomenon of the external “*time of the world*” and the internal “*time of the soul*” (Dowling 2011:19,20). As all things and all experiences are in time, we need to unpack the time-related burden with patience, especially in the case of the self (Wood 1991:2). It is a way of confronting the fear that these discourses shape and the danger of the unsustainability it creates. If a concept is a ‘social construction’, that means it can be deconstructed, and we could live without it. Marilyn Frye (1992) reiterates: “*To deconstruct a concept is to analyze it in a way which reveals its construction—both in the temporal sense of its birth and development over time and in a certain cultural and political matrix, and in the sense of its own present structure, its meaning, and its relation to other concepts. One of the most impressive aspects of such an analysis is the revelation of the ‘contingency’ of the concept, i.e. the fact that it is only the accidental collaboration of various historical events and circumstances that brought that concept into being, and the fact that there could be a world of sense without that concept in it.*” (Frye 1992 in Jensen 2017:27).

However, it is important to note Derrida’s belief that “*Deconstruction is not a method, and cannot be transformed into one*” (Bernasconi 1988:3). This is because deconstruction is not a mechanical operation. It is rather exploratory in nature and not a prejudicial procedure that only finds what it sets out to find. Commentator Richard Beardsworth (1996:4) explains that: “*Derrida is careful to avoid the term method because it carries connotations of a procedural form of judgement. A thinker with a method has already decided how to proceed, is unable to give him or herself up to the matter of thought in hand, is a functionary of the criteria which structure his or her conceptual gestures...for Derrida this is irresponsibility itself.*” Deconstruction enables a process of exploration into which stories were not storied on account of the dominant myth. It empowers new meaning-making and reinterpretation, which forms part of the healing process. However, complete meaning is always “*differential*” in language, as it varies with each circumstance and ingredient. Yet we shall always continue to examine, even though there is never a moment when meaning is complete and total.



2.11 Interpretation - Smell

*“Challenging the meaning of life is the truest expression
of the state of being human.”* Viktor Frankl

An exploration into the interpretations made on account of dominant discourses is vital in narrative therapy. Interpretation is an explanation of the meaning of information. Heidegger defines it as the ‘working out of possibilities projected in understanding’ (Heidegger in Wood 1991:50). Jordan Peterson, in his book *Maps of Meaning* (1999), explains that when we explore, we transform the indeterminate status and meaning of the unknown into something known, rendering it useful. He continues that it is the organised interpretation through creative investigation of results and behaviours in a given situation that constitute the world, past, present and future. Action and thought produce phenomena. A creative exploration into novel acts and thoughts produce new phenomena, which is directly linked to being (Peterson 1999:61,62). Ricoeur, in *Narrative and Interpretation*, explains that time is the economy of being. It is not just that all things and all experiences are in time, but that time has a major impact on how we think of identity, of truth, of meaning, of reason, of freedom, of language, of existence, of the self (Ricoeur in Wood 1991:2). Thus, interpretation importantly gives meaning to the dilemma we all share with St Augustine’s perplexing cry *“What, then, is time?”* and, in turn, time influences how we think of ourselves. When first proposing the narrative metaphor for therapy, Michael White explained that in our striving to make sense of life, we face the task of arranging our experiences of events in sequences across time in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of ourselves and the world around us. Specific experiences of events of the past and the present, and those that are predicted to occur in the future, must be connected in a lineal sequence to develop this account. This account can be referred to as a self-narrative, or a story of the self (White 1989 in Nicholson 1995:23). White importantly points out that we should not think of stories as a reflection of life, but rather that these stories shape our lives, creating structure with real, not imagined, effects (White 1992:123). Narratives, oppressive or liberating, gives us a sense of continuity and meaning and that it is therefore important to listen to the various layers of these narratives so that we may distinguish what is preferred or not (Nicholson 1995:23).



“The capacity to create novel behaviours and categories of interpretation in response to the emergence of the unknown might be regarded as the primary hallmark of consciousness”

Jordan Peterson

Humans can shape their world, take apart and put together, and design their lives with far more skill than any other creature. Although animals such as dolphins and whales have a large brain with a sophisticated nervous system, they cannot alter the shape of their world. The unique combination of hand and eye enable humans to perform creative functions, to manipulate things, and allow us to experience, analyse and interpret the nature of things. It literally enables us to change the structure of the world (Peterson 1999:64,65,66). Thus, the meaning-making process is an essential human quality. Exploring what type of meaning is made from events in our lives is vital in therapy. In this meaning-making process of interpretation, and as discussed in *“The Dance Floor”*, I propose to employ the sense of smell to embody the interpretation process. Smell is the mute sense, yet it has the ability to conjure up vivid memories that can translate into meaning (Ackerman 1990:5). My trauma, with its distinct smell, enables the development of a story that brings forth interpretation and meaning. Helen Keller interestingly swore that by simply smelling people she could decipher the work they are involved with (Ackerman 1990:23). Like kittens to a bowl of milk, researchers have been drawn to the smell of fear. The chemical signals emitted by the body in sweat when a person is frightened can be detected by others and subconsciously trigger parts of the brain associated with fear (Alleyne 2008:e-article). Smell sets in motion a deciphering of the works of the dominant myths and the influence it had on the meaning I made of life.

To decipher dominant myths that are brought to the therapy room, we need to take a closer look at stories. Stories are framed by a broader context, which includes a consideration of power in its operation, and in turn impacts people’s lives and relationships (White & Epston 1990:18). This is when the powerful dominant story becomes so all-encompassing that there is no room for the many other stories to be voiced and heard. White argues that the role of therapy is to story the un-storied stories, to bring them out of the shadows and to elevate them, interpret them, so that they play a far more central role in the shaping of people’s lives (White 1994:Family therapy networker symposium). It’s often proposed that power is negative in force



and character, as it disqualifies, limits, denies and contains. However, Foucault argues that we predominantly experience the positive or *shaping* effects of power. We are predisposed to power through ‘normalising’ truths that shape our lives and relationships (Foucault in White & Epston 1990:19). White continues that in the operation of power, these ‘truths’ are not facts, but rather sets of constructed ideas that are given a status of truth. Rather than proposing that this form of power represses, Foucault argues that it subjugates. It gains control over us rather than subduing us by force. That is why the process of creating possibilities for the discovery of preferred and solution-focused narratives starts with deconstruction (Nicholson 1995:23). When deconstructing these ‘normalising truths’ we set ourselves free to appropriately engage in the listening process, the first step in the dance metaphor. To listen means to enter into myself and to actively listen to the narratives and to the various layers of the narrative of imbalance (Meylahn 2012:57). It is an exploration of what meaning was made from both the private and the dominant story in the context of the past, present and future. Listening in this way leads to the process of interpretation that works through each layer of meaning that was made in trying to find the ultimate legitimisation of the dominant stories (Meylahn 2012:59).

In a therapeutic context, the therapist and client dance between and across the dimensions of time, and back and forth between these stories of experience and meaning (Nicholson 1995:24). Meylahn importantly reminds us that when interpreting these stories, we need to place them within the wider narrative context and their various narrative settings (Meylahn 2012:58). It is the process of unpacking, destabilising, loosening up and reducing the substance of the dominant myth - to unmask and critically examine it from a new angle, so that interpretation and discernment can be achieved, which provides an entry point into the development of the preferred story. Nicholson importantly notes, that in practice, the movement from deconstruction to reconstruction generally occurs within the same time dimension. Thus, as one explores the present impact of the dominant story on the person’s current life, there is a natural opening to identify unique outcomes that stand in opposition to the dominant myth and which form the building blocks for the new narrative (Nicholson 1995:26).

In Table 1 below, I propose to illustrate the deconstruction process by drawing both from Nicholson’s table of deconstructing the dominant myths, and by utilizing the creative metaphor



of Meylahn’s narrative dance that captures something of being on a journey (Meylahn 2012:56). The first two dance steps of deconstruction are the process of hearing/listening that leads to smell/interpretation as the private story is placed into the wider narrative context, namely the various narrative settings of religion and patriarchy (Meylahn 2012:58). The table serves to enable an understanding of, and to apply, the narrative therapy approach.

Table 1: Deconstruction of the Dominant Myth

Timeframe	Experience/Listening	Meaning/Interpretation
Past/History	1. Recruitment	2. View of self
Present	3. Life & relationships	4. View of self/Evaluate & Justify
Future	5. Collapse time	6. View of self

Here, the impact of the dominant problem, which consists of both the private story and the dominant story, on the person and their relationships with others and their view of themselves, is listened to and explored. Meylahn (2012:57) explains that these narratives form the common shared language of various people within a community, which captures the norms, values, history and dominant theme of the community. White (1994:Family Therapy Networker Symposium) reiterates that the private story of self-narrative is not individually fabricated, but rather negotiated and distributed within various communities of persons and also in the institutions of our culture. Nicholson (1995:24) explains that, through the deconstruction dialogue, the collectively produced dominant problem story is loosened up. Its identity, both in terms of its historical construction and in terms of its impact on the person’s current life, is uncovered. Questions around the impact on the person’s view of themselves are an important process as it evokes and elicits the core characteristics of the dominant myth and explores its influence on the person’s life and on their significant relationships (Nicholson 1995:24). In these conversations the dominant myth is externalised by naming and separating it from the identity of the person. Later in the conversation clients are encouraged to evaluate the influence of the story on their lives, to judge whether it is preferred or not, and to account for this evaluation. Thus, in therapy, we deconstruct the dominant restraining narratives that are constructed as a result of trauma, to unmask and re-examine it from a new angle (Nicolson 1995:24).

“My work takes me to the inner chamber of my life” Leonard Cohen



For the sake of this exercise I ask the reader to journey back with me in time, into the past experience of my narrative of trauma, and to bring it vividly into the present. Referring to Table 1, the presenting complaint, or problem story, falls within the *present* experience (in the column entitled “*Timeframe*”). The first dance step involves listening to the complaints that the person brings to therapy. The *present* experience (item 3 in Table 1) would have brought forward grievances that were experienced in the context of my identity and relationships such as depression, frigidness, inability to love, isolation, the dilemma of bulimia, self-hatred, etc. Less common, yet still within my personal story, the presenting complaint would also be the restraining dominant story itself, i.e. patriarchy (item 4 in Table 1 – present/meaning) and its impact on the view of self, such as believing myself to be worthless, shamed, messed-up, socially inadequate, detached, shy, etc. Additionally, in relationships, specifically with men, an extreme form of either pity (over-identification) or fear (detachment) is dominant, both resulting in disconnection to the self and detachment from the *other* (item 4). Both are narratives of imbalance. Externalizing conversations, or engaging in separating the problem from the person, enable a negotiating relationship with the narrative of imbalance (Nicolson 1995:24,25). In trauma it is always the identity that is largely at stake. The questions that are asked regarding the impact of the presenting complaint on a client’s life and relationships, and view of themselves, is a slow process, and the narrative therapist is respectful of it by leaving enough space for the client to reflect and to make use of their own words for their experiences in trauma (Beaudoin 2005:49).

Now we are in a position to engage in questions that take a look at the history of how a person is recruited into holding the problematic beliefs of themselves. Nicholson (1995:24) explains that: “*Questions are asked regarding the historical basis to the dominant narrative, questions regarding how the person got recruited into the perspectives of self...being interested both in the person’s private story and the broader societal context. As suggested by the term ‘exoticising the domestic’, the focus is on unmasking those taken-for-granted practices that underlie the dominant story, particularly practices of power relating to gender, culture, class and race.*” In my personal narrative, the history of the problem involves an exploration of the trauma event in 1980, within the broader societal context of patriarchy as present at the time of the event (*past/history* in the column entitled “*Timeframe*”). Exploring the history is important



and is done in some detail to be able to gain a broad understanding of the effects that the problem has on the person's life, yet cautiously avoiding re-traumatisation or renewing anguish (Morgan 2000:39). A story is a collective construction, and the meaning that is made from it is dependent upon the contributions of everyone involved in the story, both the reporters and the spectators. But the influence of each voice in the story is not always equal. Whomever is in a position of dominance will exercise greater influence in the meaning-making process of the story that is told, while the knowledge and the meanings of the person who is in a more vulnerable position will be subjugated. The strongest voice threatens to become a single-voice or single-story.

A single-story facilitates the re-traumatisation of people seeking assistance, as it focusses only on the suffering and its effects, and thereby shrinks the person's identity to some pathological labelling. Apart from the risk of contributing to re-traumatisation in single-storied conversations, negative identity conclusions that are the outcome of experiences that are traumatic or disqualifying, are reinforced (White 2000:41). Thus, it is required to engage in the therapeutic skill of listening for a double-story, or multiple-story, which simultaneously creates a safe space that is not re-traumatising (Latorre 2012:43-45). A double-listening explores the story and history of trauma together with the story and history of resilience. These conversations facilitate non-re-traumatisation, as it expands the preferred territory of people's lives, which enables a sense of empowerment (Latorre 2012:45). In the exploration of the effects of the problem, the client gains more distance from the dominant myth and problem-saturated view of self, and it also becomes easier for clients to notice the other stories that stand in direct opposition to the dominant myth.

To continue, we move towards eliciting the meaning and interpretation that is attributed to these past experiences, (item 2 in Table 1 – past/meaning) (Nicholson 1995:25). The meaning and interpretations I made translated into various 'truths' such as the superiority of men, an angry God, the construction of the other *self* (the critical and demanding dictator), self-hatred displayed by bulimia and isolation. These *truths* were interpreted into a conviction of belief that I had been punished by God, was socially inadequate, asexual, shy and incapable of love. By means of languaging and storying I thus constructed a new identity and made new meaning



of God, the *angry patriarch*, and the hierarchical culture of my patriarchal society and my church (Kutuzova 2010:3). With suffering we always experience some form of loss (Retief 2009:27), and with loss we ask the 'why' question (Louw 2014:2). As a means of understanding the 'why' in my narrative, I opted for legalism, thus denying connection and beauty. Although legalism is discernibly unbalanced, it offers an immense advantage by providing us with security as our decisions and actions can be accurately calculated (Küng 1977:242,243). Fear impelled me to set rigid rules of conduct in order to gain and maintain control of my life, my God and my relationships. Furthermore, the discourse of Christian 'normalising standards', with rules such as how often we pray, the way we act, or how often we read the Bible, leads to an expectation that, when these are met, we shall be blessed with a successful and happy life, free from suffering (Fowler 1981:173), reiterated in the narratives taught in Sunday school. When not met, we are disapprovingly judged by God, and it results in feelings of punishment, guilt, worthlessness and unworthiness of being a Christian (Kutuzova 2010:5). Thus, a discourse of obedience develops, either out of the misguided fear of punishment, or with the motive that we will be rewarded. It is important to point out that it is precisely this legalistic attitude that Jesus deals a deathblow - reward and punishment can never be made the motive of moral action or even the motive for living life (Küng 1977:243,250). A literalist and reciprocal relationship with God (Fowler 1981:143) will always search for the wrong we do, to deserve the suffering in our lives.

The influence of these restraining stories continued throughout my life. From past meaning made (item 2 in Table 1), to a reappearance in the present meaning made (item 4 in Table 1). I overwhelmingly felt that life was not whole, that it was not the romantic wellbeing I was taught in Sunday school, and I yearned back to the equilibrium of the time pre the trauma event (Brueggemann 1986:21). I lost my connection with God, the *man*, struggled with an understanding of his compassion and his character (Louw 2014:2), and feared him as the ultimate patriarch, feeling that he was angry with me (item 2 in Table 1). My life was turned upside down, it became meaningless, and I rejected previous moral and religious principles (Fowler 1981:173). One can notice how the deconstructing process dissolves the dominant story and uncovers its identity in terms of its historical construction, and its impact on my life (Nicholson 1995:24). Furthermore, the dismantling of the restraining dominant myth enables



un-storied stories to be storied. Knowledge is power, and when we understand that a taken-for-granted truth is a mere social construction, it loses its validity and power as truth, and we create room for possibility.

The next step is to ask the person to evaluate the impact of the dominant narrative on their life (item 4 in Table 1). Thus, a judgement is made, whether the effects of the problem narrative is preferred or not. After the evaluation is explored, the therapist asks the simple question “Why?”. This question is vital, as it seeks to elicit a justification as to why the effects of the dominant myth was evaluated in a certain way (Morgan 2000:43). For deeper insight into the preferred way of living, the therapist could explore the ‘*absent but implicit*’ concept of White - that ongoing psychological pain in response to trauma is a testimony of the violation of what the person holds precious (White 2006:154). The notion of the “*absent but implicit*” is based on Derrida’s ideas about how we make sense of things, about how we experience stories, and how the meanings that we derive from stories depend on the distinctions we make between what is presented to us (privileged meaning) and what is “*omitted*” (subjugated meaning). White drew on these ideas to propose that in order to make sense of certain experiences, we need to tell these experiences apart from others that already have meaning and which have already been described. We therefore can only understand what things are by contrasting them to what they are not. For example, we can only differentiate isolation if we already have an understanding of connection (Carey, Walther and Russel 2009:e-article). In the case of trauma, people always take steps to prevent the trauma they are subjected to, and when it proves impossible to prevent the trauma, they then take steps to modify its effects (White 2006 in Yuen 2009:7). People always respond, and the steps they take in that response lead us to what they hold precious (Yuen 2009:7). As Derrida (in Carey 2009:e-article) importantly wrote: “*It’s not possible to talk about anything without drawing out what it is not. Every expression of life is in relation to something else.*” I responded to my trauma with severe disconnection toward myself and others. This is when our preferred way of living becomes hidden and kept secret to ourselves and to the significant others in our lives. My responses were precisely so because the specific values I care for, that of connection and relationship, were violated (White 2006:151).



The effects of patriarchal discourse and the private story pertaining to the event of my trauma (that of disconnection and disassociation from my body, my sexuality and significant others) are negatively evaluated, as they stand in direct opposition to my preference for living, i.e. that of being free, loving, connected to others, myself and my body. A narrative of balance and of beauty. This justification enquiry awakens the preferred and alternative way of living, giving rise to greater knowledge and understanding of the self. The ‘*why*’ question in the evaluation of the effect of the dominant myth evokes a new narrative of hope – one of believing that I deserve to love myself and my body, and that I am worthy to love a man. My deep need and longing for freedom, love, connection and balance draws attention to the many aspects of my preference for living (Morgan 2000:43). From these justifications one begins to develop the alternative stories of hopes, beliefs and preferences to follow later in this story. However, one should always be aware that the dominant myth has the potential to become a single-story that overshadows the alternative story. Therapist and client should therefore continuously draw attention to these hopes and preferences to assist a process of reconnection (Morgen 2000:43).

In the process of deconstructing the dominant myth, it is important to explore future experience and future meaning. These are questions that explore what the future ramifications could be, as a result of experiences (item 5 in Table 1) and interpretations (item 6 in Table 1), if events continue as they have been under the restricting narrative (Nicholson 1995:25). White’s and Epston’s earlier work refer to this as ‘*collapsing time*’ type questions. The consequences of this are addressed in terms of the impact these would have on the person’s view of themselves and their relationships (item 6 in Table 1 – future/meaning). Exploring these future-based questions further assists people to evaluate likely future effects of the existing state of affairs, which assists even further in deciding what matters to them and what does not (Nicholson 1995:25). Similarly, one can also explore predictions for the future in which the problem is no longer oppressing the client, that enables an entry point to the preferred narrative. These are valuable questions to explore, as they enable clients to wisely evaluate the implications of the problem narrative’s influence on a hypothetical future. Thus, throughout this process of interpretation, we create a safe space where each client’s personal story can be drawn from as a source of healing and empowerment, always keeping in mind that the consulting room attends to what the world devalues and ignores and that it is a space that values beauty (Ventura 2001:7).



In my personal narrative, the future ramifications for continuing to live subjugated by the restraining story, leaves me feeling shamed and detached, an apathetic, submissive, passive, frustrated and helpless future narrative. When we lose connection to ourselves and to others, we lose the experience of beauty in our lives. To be connected to myself, and to have that voice of connection heard, is an essential value for my future.

2.12 Key Reflections

*“Our lives are unique stories in the mosaic of human existence
- priceless and irreplaceable”* Henri Nouwen

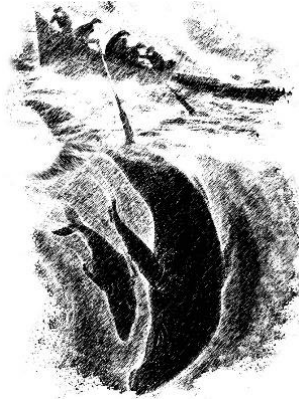
Moral character can be conceptualised as our inherent quality to think, feel and behave. However, because we communicate through language and the telling of stories, we construct our emotional, ethical and social realities, which influences our thinking and our behaviour. In this chapter, I placed my private story of trauma in the context of patriarchy and religion. Both these institutions are constructs that, through our repetitive and co-operative conversations, we have determined as true. Collectively we created these constructs as structures of power that either serve, or control, us. Narrative therapy takes note of, listens to, and interprets these power structures because, through them, people reach identity conclusions that have consequences on their lives. Spirituality plays a major role in the meaning-making of lived experiences. The credibility of pastoral caregiving is closely connected to the quest regarding the link between images of God and the human experience of suffering, isolation and hopelessness (Nauer 2010 in Louw 2014:1) and gives attention to questions regarding the meaning and purpose of life (Sperry 2002 in Louw 2014:1). In our own, and our clients', lives, particular images and stories, shaped in the social contexts in which we live, are used as a framework, and become dominant and powerful, which can be oppressive when they constrain us from noticing or attending to experiences that might otherwise be useful but, important to note, can also be empowering (Madsen 1999:7). Our conversations and images of God matter greatly, as these shape what we think God is and what we think the Christian life is about (Borg 1998:57). The bold, dangerous and authentic language of the Psalms creates a safe space for us and our clients to speak about life the way it really is, and thus allows the words of scripture to bring power and authority to what we know about ourselves (Brueggemann 1986:16,28). Our God identifies with us in suffering. He knows sorrow, grief, betrayal and death, and yet turned these hopeless stories into stories of love, grace, joy and life (Alexander & Cook 2008 in Kutuzova 2010:4).



In closing this chapter, I propose to briefly initiate hope regarding the dilemma we are facing with the dominant patriarchal system. Today there are many debates around patriarchy, gender equality, toxic masculinity, fatherhood and changing sexual dynamics. No matter where we look, it is shading, shaping and constructing our perceptions and interventions; throwing us into an unusual time of transition, confusion and trouble (Perel Sessions Live 2018c: The Masculinity Paradox). In the closing pages of *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Lerner (1986) makes an impassioned plea to feminist scholars, urging *them* “to step outside of patriarchal thought and to develop a ‘courage that stands alone’, to reach further than our grasp, ... to risk failure”. Whisnant (in Jensen 2017:167) similarly supports this courage when she writes that courage need not take the place of fear, but can, and must, exist alongside it. And our fear need not be ‘slave fear’ - silent, inward-looking, paralyzing and detached; it can and must be a revolutionary fear, or as Richard Kearney (2016a:24) refers to as a fear that is an art of exquisite empathy. Thus, the hope I propose develops from a process of converting our fear from being oppressive to a fear that empowers. Whisnant encourages men and women to *fear* the destructive and hierarchical systems that dictate the terms of their everyday lives, as it has something important to teach them; when courageously facing their fears, they can act as revolutionaries for the values of human dignity, solidarity, and equality (Whisnant in Jensen 2017:167). Every single one of us, men and women, sons and daughters, could use some mercy now.

3 CHAPTER 3: Prynnsberg (Discernment - Taste)

3.1 Prynnsberg 1881



Moby Dick by Herman Melville

*What is the great globe
itself but a Loose-Fish?
And what are you, reader,
but a Loose-Fish
and a Fast-Fish, too?*

Herman Melville (1851 in Landay 2011:blog) explains the law governing ownership of whales at sea. It frequently happens that when several ships are cruising in company, a whale may be struck by one vessel, then escape, and be finally killed and captured by another vessel. For example, after a weary and perilous chase and capture of a whale, the body may be loosened from the ship by reason of a violent storm, and be retaken by a second whaler, who tows it alongside without risk of life or line. Thus, the most vexatious disputes would often arise between the fishermen, were there not some written or unwritten, universal, undisputed law applicable to all cases, which is that a Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it when it is connected to a ship or boat, and a Loose-Fish, even though it might have broken free after being harpooned, is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it.

The idea of “*fast fish*” and “*loose fish*”, is a useful way of thinking about many things. Landay (2011:blog) explains that every story is a loose fish - nobody can own it, no matter how well or how often the story has been told before. That is how art and ideas work. We borrow, remix, reimagine. However, at the same time, every story is a fast fish too. One



could say Prynnsberg's story is a variation on Frost's "*The road not taken*" or de la Mare's "*The Listeners*". My story is an improvisation on Prynnsbergs' story. On and on it goes. It's all been done before. Our stories fold around each other like gallant angelic wings, for it is by reading stories and histories that we learn the complete range of human possibilities (Ricoeur in Wood 1991:48,51). The story of Prynnsberg, even with my harpoon dangling from its side, is that of a loose fish. My challenge is to fight that whale, not let it get away and snugly tow it alongside (Landay 2011:blog).

Discernment and Taste

"Taste with relish each morsel, as if tomorrow you could never taste again." Helen Keller

Smell, the previous sense utilized in the dance movement of interpreting, contributes largely to taste, and this leads to the next dance step of discernment. Just as we can smell something only when it begins to evaporate, we can taste something only when it begins to dissolve (Ackermann 1990:140, 141). Here we shall proceed by dissolving, or discerning, the dominant myth by means of evaluating and justifying the influence of the dominant myth. Through the telling of the stories that do not fit the dominant plot, we *taste* each of these stories, and we gain an ability to loosen up the dominant story and critically examine it. This provides an entry point into the development of the preferred story.

"Monotony is not our code. Diversity is our delight" Diane Ackerman

As we gain distance from the dominant myth, we start to notice particular parts of our lives that contradict the problem narrative, and that embrace a broader experience, including feelings and behaviours. These excluded, unheard and marginal stories help us discern, and deconstruct, the restricting dominant myth (Meylahn 2012:60) and enables us to move from a realm of experience, toward a realm of meaning. What do these broader experiences mean? Anthropologist Claude Levi-Straus found that primitive tribes classify foods "*good to think*" or "*bad to think*" (Ackerman 1990:135). Similarly, in our process of reconstruction, we classify, and richly describe, the good to think stories. We further explore by bringing in dimensions of time, beginning with the present, moving to the past, where the history of the preferred narratives is discussed, and finally into the hypothesising of future outcomes



(Nicholson 1995:24), thus entering the next dance movement of touch/re-authoring, to be discussed in the next chapter.

3.2 My *self* and Prynnsberg

My journey with Prynnsberg starts in a doctor's waiting room. While indifferently paging through a magazine, the story of a family that lived for four generations on a farm in the Free State compelled me to stop and read. My heart stirred, rearranged and changed position. Their home, an extraordinary sandstone house built at the end of the 19th century, has been appropriately described as "*The Free State's Crown Jewel...it is one of the most magnificent sandstone buildings in the country and a window into the historical development of a unique South African family*" (Toffoli 1995:93).

A couple of months later, on a road trip back from the Eastern Cape coast, I met *her* for the first time, and the story unfolds. It is a cloudless blithe day, early January 2017. We're driving along a softened sun-drenched road between Marquard and Clocolan, on the edge of the Maluti Mountains. An inconspicuous sign, marked Prynnsberg Estate, leads us off the tar and onto a cool Cypress-lined lane, with distant sounds of bellowing calves. As we turn around a lazy bend, imposing outlines of the mysterious Free State mansion emerge to the right. A moment later, *she* appears, sitting heavy and naked, basking in the thin hot dust, her countenance as calm as a full moon in a vitreous sky. I notice the force of her confident presence, undisturbed despite her story. She has seen much. The clasp of my hands tighten, and my throat clots with wonderment and grief, as if guilt had rubbed off her splendour. Everywhere brick-piles are hoarded, in wait of renovation. A dry stifling heat smacks as I get out of the air-conditioned car. My bare feet sink into her powder sand. With fingertip sensitivity, small bits of stone tickle my toes. For a moment I listen, dazed, to what seems like the perfect song of sun beetles. Methodically, I breathe in, out.

A faint breeze stirs me to move towards the entrance hall, dark and musty like a library, but without books, only horse tack hanging in conglomerated bundles. Inside, the air is thick with the scent of myrrh and musk from days gone by, and it's as if I am face to face with her untold memories. At the far end of the entrance passage an archway opens onto a courtyard, beyond which I glimpse a garden. I ache to be there, in that cool spot of green. But I purposefully hold



myself back and, for a moment, all I can hear is the steady ticking of her heart. With meticulous attention I peek around her corners and brush over her fine vignettes. So many stories, a compelling yarn woven into the crowded tapestry of masterpiece and neglect. In unexpected forethought I murmur "*it's true, I was made for her.*" Each layer of her story touches one in mine. The woundedness in her connects with the woundedness in me. She cuts to the core of my identity, crossing the lines and breaking the rules, offering me a spiritual home, bringing order to the chaos. She gives, though not aware, a gift that does not belong to her. Yet she possesses the key to unlock the hidden boudoir, so that I can enter and be free - retrieve that which was taken, repair that which was broken. A precious gift, perceived much later, and one I did accept. The idealist in me keeps her, and her stories, in the ballroom of my heart. *Che sarà, sarà* (whatever will be, will be).

3.3 Prynnsberg's History

*"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances ..."* Shakespeare

Kipling's poignant words "*If you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two impostors just the same...*" has a stark resemblance to the story of the magnificent Prynnsberg Estate. She is the creation of Charles Newberry, who arrived in South Africa from Brampton, England, in 1864, a 23-year-old carpenter-builder "*with nothing but my hands and my brain*", as he wrote in a brief memoir in 1912. Prynnsberg was built as a result of the purchase of 20,000 hectares of land, circa 1880, from his wife's maternal grandfather, William Pryn, who ran a trading station on the estate, the remains of which can be seen today in the Retreat Valley. It was here that King Moshoeshoe of the Basuto, Chief Sekonyela of the Batlokwa, and Major Warden, the British Resident at Bloemfontein, met to negotiate and sign a peace treaty in 1845. Newberry did take some time off from his uncompromising dedication to building his fortune at Kimberley. In the late 1870s Charles was invited to visit Thaba Nchu by a friend, Tom Daniel, the eldest son of a Lesotho-based missionary, John Daniel. It was there that he met and fell in love with Tom's sister, Libby (Elizabeth Mary), who was born in 1858, and decided to make his home in the area. Along with his new wife, he set about fulfilling his dream of creating a classic English country estate in the "*wilds of Africa*".



The house began as additions to the original single-story farmhouse and developed into a spectacular, two-story 20-room manor, built beneath a rock-face in the veld. Constructed of local sandstone, which was finely-crafted on site in the African veld. Newberry filled it with Victorian antiques and ancient Egyptian treasures, surrounded it with shaded pools, and marble nymphs and fauns. The gardens were surrounded by an adventure of rare Cypresses, that led in a grand sweep up to the house, from which descended three flights of stairs leading, in its turn, to terraces filled with beautiful flowers (Bloemfontein Gazette 1894 in Alabaster n.d). The estate included two churches, a vicarage, a gamekeeper's lodge, stables and a game farm aimed at conserving what was left of the local antelope. The house was built in old-world grandeur, becoming a national gem with its superb collection of Art Nouveau and late Victoriana, all of which was transported by oxwagon from the ports of the Natal coast, and decorated by the London firm James Shoolbred and Company of Tottenham Court Road. Charles' artist daughter, Winnifred, who married the director of the Cairo museum, painted superb Egyptian friezes in the stately billiard room (my personal favorite). Charles' museum, as referred to by the family, included items such as skulls, stuffed birds, Crusader armour, antiquated shotguns, and relics of the Egyptian tombs brought there by Winnifred. The estate often housed travellers of high rank and guests such as Lord Milner, the Duke of Westminster, President Steyn and Rudyard Kipling. It was Kipling who painted the frieze of Noah's ark in the night nursery while he was a guest at the house during Christmas of 1900. Ten years later, while writing *If*, Kipling, unbeknown to himself, perhaps had a hunch of what lay ahead for the grand Old English home he visited.

Prynnsberg possessed the uncanny ability to survive in the face of adversity when she escaped the horrific farm burnings at the hand of the British during the Boer War, also known as the South African War, on account of being English-owned, as if enveloped protectively by the wings of an angel. Of Charles and Libby's seven children, it was their daughters, Winnifred and Ruby, who inherited their father's talent and passion. Winnifred was a successful artist whose paintings are displayed in British art galleries, and Ruby wrote South Africa's first gardening book, *A Garden in the Veld*.

In an effort to preserve what he'd built up for future generations, Charles exercised the inheritance law of *fidei commissum* (entrusted in faith), leaving Prynnsberg to the eldest son of



the fourth generation, thus preventing his spoilt-rotten sons from selling the property. This meant that the second and third generations only had occupancy, never full ownership. Herein lies the key to Prynnsberg's neglect over the generations that followed. Living in a vast house, surrounded by a priceless collection of art, antiques and rare artefacts, but with no working capital, the generations to come found themselves trapped, so to say, in a gilded cage. Tragically, this led to very little money being spent on the upkeep. In 1984, Trevor Newberry, inebriated grandson of Charles's eldest son Ernest, reluctantly inherited the entire estate. Having never married, he lived alone on Prynnsberg after the death of his parents. Unfortunately, Trevor had developed a lifelong drinking problem and was mostly not in a fit state to maintain the house. When relatives complained, he repaired some holes in the roof, where rain entered, but did not tend to most of the damage caused by damp, the overgrown gardens, the bees in the bedrooms or the honey under the floorboards. Today, the sweet smell of honey lingers throughout. Of the many eccentric stories recounted about Trevor is that when the conservatory began collapsing, instead of repairing it, he hitched it to his tractor with ropes and tore it down, telling everyone he'd never liked it anyway. His great-grandmother's pendant, holding a large uncut ruby, was wrapped in a dirty kitchen towel and carried in his pocket, perhaps as a talisman. Trevor's father and grandfather had been equally careless with Prynnsberg. Inevitably, a grave awaited Trevor in the churchyard and he died from cirrhosis of the liver in 1993 at the age of 49. He died intestate, with no children. His next-of-kin sought to sell, as they had no interest in a faded Prynnsberg, clearly as much a tragedy for us as for Charles and his dream. In a 1912 memoir, ten years before Charles died, he wrote that his aim with Prynnsberg was to secure a good start and standing in the world for all his children and to save them from the anxious struggle that he endured. All he asked for was their wholehearted loyalty. Sadly, the careless attitude of his sons, carried over from one generation to the next, left Prynnsberg to go to ruin. Good intentions turned to a pile of debris. After Trevor's death, an effort was made by the remaining Newberry family members, who were willing to fight for its preservation by forming a trust, through which they could pool resources to *repair the things that had been broken*. Mortified by the fact that the artefacts could be split up and sold off piecemeal, they approached all sorts of millionaires and mega-corporations, including the National Monuments Council, in hope of sourcing funding. Regrettably, no-one was forthcoming with cash to preserve it.



On 25 and 26 March 1996, Stephan Welz & Co, in association with Sotheby's, gave the public an opportunity, for the first time, to view what was among the very best of gracious living in South Africa a century ago. Prynnsberg, with most of its original contents, was placed on auction. A part of her proud heritage could be bought - the antiques, pictures, furnishings, carpets, silver and metal ware, ceramics, garden ornaments, books, Winnifred's miniature paintings and the Egyptian antiquities she brought along with her to South Africa. After the house was, so to say, pillaged, many items being stolen, that which was left were the fixtures such as the fireplaces and the door finishings. Thanks to Gill Moffett, great granddaughter of Charles, who took a brave twenty-minute custodianship by removing the for-sale stickers on the fireplaces and door friezes as she rushed through from room to room, the 3 000 plus crowd was prevented from taking it all. With the general view held that when the furniture was out, it was the end of Prynnsberg, the affair was concluded with the selling of the land to a local farmer, a neighbour, who was less than interested in the manor and its heritage. He had plans to strip the wood and fittings and turn it into a farm shed. How to make sense of this? In 1910, and with striking sameness, Kipling wrote *If*: "...If you can dream and not make dreams your master... or watch the things you gave your life to, broken. And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools...".

Reader, do you remember the storm? The storm from Paradise called Progress? The storm that kept blowing the angel backwards into the future?

As conveyed in his 1912 memoir, Charles Newberry's dream was an expression of love for his family. Charles' dream went awry. Three generations later, when the hammer fell on the house that Trevor had wasted, all the love had been destroyed. Not to lose hope, dreams can be powerful. Prynnsberg narrowly escaped complete ruin via the intervention of London art dealers and twin brothers, Charles and James Alabaster. The Alabasters were passionate about Prynnsberg's renovation, but they were London-based and, although they undertook some renovations, they could not do much, as it proved impractical. In 2002, Prynnsberg's journey made a turn. She became a place of celebration once more when Johannesburg-based couple, Rick and Sue Melvill, who were initially drawn to the area for polo, searched for a weekend cottage. As what happens to most of us when we meet Prynnsberg, Rick, and his wife Sue, fell in love. After an eight-hour gruelling interview by the twin brothers, dressed in full English



country squire attire, perhaps as a form of intimidation, Rick was judged suitable for the task of renovation and the Melvill's gained ownership. Perhaps the interview may have been with God himself.

The Melvill's set about restoring Prynnsberg to her former grandeur. Their first task was the securing of the Manor House roof and the taming of acres of terraced gardens that had long since returned to the wild. After that came the task of restoring much of the woodwork, of which major aspects included the white oak windows of the billiard room and many of the original lead-paned windows. The famous Glass Staircase was returned to its original splendour, followed by all the sash windows in the Manor House itself. The glory days returned. Prynnsberg became vivid with joy once more. She belonged to an adoring family again. For 16 years the Melvill's loved and cared for her and made an astronomical attempt at renovating the manor and other buildings on the farm. The couple, seeing themselves as custodians rather than owners, stood long and patiently at the crossing of two roads and, in 2018, made the bleakest of decisions, but for various reasons the better, and sold Prynnsberg to David McKai, a businessman from Bloemfontein. After all, the world's a stage. They bade their farewell and sent Prynnsberg forth on her next adventure, perhaps more beautiful and more magical. For that, we shall have to wait and see (excerpts from Toffoli 1995:87-93; Melvill 2017:website notes; Melvill 2019:interview).

3.4 Creative Protagonists' Weekend - October 2017

*"One must still have chaos in oneself to be able
to give birth to a dancing star"* Nietzsche

My idiosyncratic journey on Prynnsberg Estate became a rich source of meaning, beauty and creativity. I, so to say, found my *self* - for it is always in the finding that life is astonishing, mysterious and beautiful. Let me explain. The encounters I had on the farm enabled me to experience my *self* in a new and preferred way, which stood in direct opposition to the subjugation of the myth that dominated most of my life narrative that, on account of my childhood trauma, was stained by feelings of shame, disconnection, voicelessness and an inability to love, that contributed to a sense of my being dysfunctional. These new experiences helped me gain distance from the problem narrative and I steadily embraced a broader



experience, including feelings and behaviours that contradicted the dominant problem story. Furthermore, these new experiences of *self*, inspired me to find an explanation for my problem story and helped me deconstruct, discern, evaluate and justify the influence of the restricting dominant patriarchal myth (Meylahn 2012:60). This further enabled me to move from a realm of experience, toward a realm of meaning. What do these broader experiences mean?

It signified ability, potential and possibility going forward. A strong desire developed to reconnect and engage with my *self* and with others. As I progressively honoured these desires, more skills and knowledge, previously unknown, became known to me. It was as if I was watching my *self*, from the outside, engaging and behaving in unfamiliar novel ways, which activated my imagination and, in turn, caused me to retell my history forward, into a preferred narrative. Untold stories and new stories became storied, such as being honest, novel, loving and creative. As a new preferred identity started showing up more and more, a sense of an alternative way to be, other than who I was before, became clearly visible.

Through the telling of the stories that do not fit the dominant plot, we *taste* each of these stories and we gain an ability to loosen up the dominant story, and to critically examine it. My new experiences of my *self* on Prynnsberg brought alternate stories out of the shadows and elevated them to play a far more central role in the shaping of my life forwards. Thus, my journey at Prynnsberg demanded of me, in a manner of speaking, to revisit my meaning-making system, which ultimately constructed a new meaning from my experiences I had on the farm that, in turn, facilitated a space for me to freely start re-storying my story. Discernment breeds freedom, and this freedom developed into a re-experiencing of beauty in my life, an awareness towards myself and a sense of homecoming.

I digested and re-digested these new experiences that I had of myself, which subsequently resulted in the curation of a women's weekend on the farm, called 'Creative Protagonists', with the theme 'Resurrecting Beauty'. Twenty women, who were strangers to each other, were invited to bring their personal stories along with them, to be shared and incorporated in discussions on the great arts such as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Homer's *Odyssey*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Joyce's *Ulysses*. Prynnsberg, with its own multiple layers of stories, was the perfect



backdrop. Stories within a story. The programme was designed in the form of the making of a myth, with each participant being a main protagonist. Myths unite us. Literature allows us to try various ways of being-in-the-world (Wood 1991:50). Furthermore, the fictional theme created an illusionary stage for drama, a playful connection with each other, serving to inspire us to participate in the narrative approach - which is a knowing that every word spoken creates not only new possibility, but creates a new world. I intended to create a platform to experience the value that lies in the multiplicities of stories. We can glean from the stories of the great arts, and also from each other's stories, various elements that serve us well. It affords the possibility to open up. The aim was for each participant to have the opportunity to become other than who they were for the weekend and to create an aliveness by looking for, finding and resurrecting beauty in our lives.

As excitement and ideas for the weekend formulated, I realized that a visually-evocative medium was needed to convince my audience to break away from their busy routines and enter a mythical odyssey. To capture their imagination, I made three short video clips. These were sent consecutively, serving as preludes to the weekend event, namely Invitation Part I, Part II and Part III (these are attached hereto - [Prynnsberg Part I.mp4](#); [Prynnsberg Part II.mp4](#); [Prynnsberg Part III.mp4](#)).

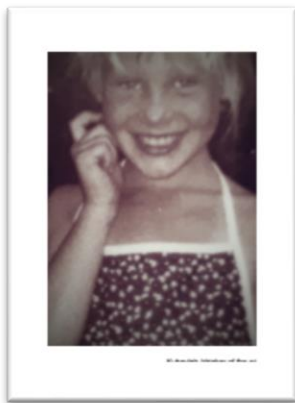
In the following pages I shall briefly describe some of the events that unfolded over the course of the weekend.

3.5 The Protagonists and their Metaphors

The English *metaphor* is derived from the 16th-century Old French word *métaphore*, which means "carrying over" or "transfer". It serves to be a purposeful reference to another thing, carrying its meaning over or transferring the meaning of one thing to another. In *The Rule of Metaphor* (1977), Ricoeur focusses on how metaphor makes meaning. He claims that it is the principle that restores our perception of the world and through which we become aware of our creative capacity for seeing the world anew. When discussing Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Jan Garret (2007:28) stated "*metaphor most brings about learning.*" Foss (2009:249) argues that since reality is mediated by the language we use to describe it, the metaphors we use shape the world

and our interactions with it. Thus, we could think of metaphor as something real, alive or living, hence the title of Ricoeur's book, *La Métaphore vive* (originally published in 1975).

Prior to the Prynnsberg weekend, I proposed for each protagonist to reflect back on a past experience of beauty, and to choose a picture of themselves during that time in their life. Accompanying the picture, they had to think of a metaphor that best described their preferred self. The metaphor would become their *protagonist-name* for the weekend, while the picture served as a reminder of the past experience of beauty together with an opportunity to story and re-story it. The aim was to enable an exploration of personal possibility, and simultaneously to create an opportunity to enter into that identity for the weekend. Each protagonist's picture, with their metaphor, was printed on a card and hung from the *Tree of Life* (to be explained later in this chapter). The significance of the picture and the identity of the metaphor was purposely placed together in order to support and magnify each other. Below, an example of my chosen 'moment of beauty' taken in our garden when I was eleven years old, together with my metaphor, Kuhaylah, drinker of the wind.



Kuhaylah – Drinker of the Wind

In the summer months I loved running into our garden moments before a typical Highveld thunderstorm and wait for its fury to build and sweep over our neighbourhood with abrupt finality. I would stand with arms spread wide between two, what seemed immense, Cypress trees in front of our house. As metaphors intend to do, the story of Kuhaylah transferred



meaning to my story. It goes as follows: when God created the horse, he said to the magnificent creature *“I have made thee as no other. All the treasures of the earth lie between thy eyes. Thou shalt carry my friends upon thy back. Thy saddle shall be the seat of prayers to me. And thou shalt fly without wings, and conquer without any sword”* - The Koran.

The Arabian is the oldest of all horse breeds. Arabians' strength, courage, and devotion to humans, are legendary. They are good-natured, quick to learn, and willing to please. They were the warhorses of the ancient Assyrians, Hittites and Egyptians, and participated in the Crusades. Napoleon's famous war horse, Marengo, was an Arabian. According to Bedouin legend, Allah created the horse from the four winds. He endowed the animal with spirit from the North, strength from the South, speed from the East, and intelligence from the West. Some give credit to a great-grandson of Noah for domesticating the Arabian. Others say that Ishmael, son of Abraham, was given the horse by God. The angel Gabriel descended from heaven and awakened Ishmael with a whirling storm cloud. At a command from the angel, the mist and dust solidified into the first Arabian horse, the stallion Kuhaylah, Drinker of the Wind.

Each protagonist's personally-crafted metaphor carried and transferred a beautiful story:

- Cryptic Minded Sea Soul
- Saturday
- Qinisile
- Trusting Muse
- Guillotine
- Flame Lili
- The Rare Librarian
- Sage on the Stage
- Cynical Miracle Worker
- Magical Prins
- Colourful Monkey
- Boccolupa
- Queen Maeve, of the faeries
- Multifaceted Soother
- Sieze the Day
- Sentient Transcendent
- Amadeus Book Babe
- Prodigal Daughter
- Paris Girl
- Kuhaylah, drinker of the wind



3.6 The Theme

“Follow your inner moonlight; don't hide the madness” Ginsberg

I opened the weekend by describing why I chose the theme Resurrecting Beauty. Beauty has been so cheapened in our culture, that it almost sounds naïve to suggest to awaken it. Yet I chose *beauty* as a theme because it is the cornerstone of our lives and we often disastrously neglect it. It is then that we find ourselves in terrible chaos and crisis. Beauty is not merely decorative. Its primary function is to connect our innermost being to the world, and it is this lack of connection that afflicts so many (Ventura 2001:3). Beauty is a combination of qualities that pleases the intellect and the aesthetic senses. Many of our greatest artists, thinkers and writers have been drawn to the topic of beauty. Tolstoy's psychological dramas remind us of our own polarity, the good and the bad that reside in each of us, and our infinite human potential that he calls us to awake to. In his literature he proposes that art and beauty have a great mission. Through it we are beckoned to force out the lower thoughts and replace them with higher and kinder ones that better serve us, individually and collectively. Michel Foucault (1990:10,11) defined the 'arts of existence' as those reflective, intellectual and voluntary practices by which people not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make of their life a *work of art* that carries certain aesthetic values. Aristotle, two and a half thousand years earlier, wrote that beauty, in any form of art, can heal, explaining that the purpose of great art is to balance our fundamental passions of pity and fear, which is healing. Emmanuel Kant, who wrote mostly on ethics and politics, produced a seminal piece on Beauty and Art in the late 1700s, while approaching the end of his life. In it he states that beauty is a reminder of, or provokes us to become, our better selves. It is there to keep ourselves in check.

3.7 Introducing our Mythos

To vividly play out our myth for the weekend, I thought to utilise the various spectacular settings at Prynnsberg:

- The *'Cave Deck'* symbolised our 'rendezvous' or meeting place, a watering hole where our souls connected and were restored. It presented our 'sacred place' where the treasure chest, containing our stories, would be opened. To the entrance of our *sacred place* I hung a white



coat with a red belt around the waist, and next to it, a black court robe. Before entry to the meeting place, I proposed that, symbolically, each protagonist take off the court robe and put on the white coat with the red belt, the court robe symbolising judgement and the white coat symbolising respect and curiosity, explaining that an attitude of curious curiosity was a vital ingredient for our conversations. Curiosity eliminates judgement. The red belt symbolised the belt of truth as described in the book of Proverbs - to write truth on the tablets of our hearts, to wear it as a girdle around our waists. Thus, truth forming a circle around us. I reminded the group that, on entry to the *rendezvous*, each take off their shoes, for the ground we stand on is holy. Holy because each protagonist's story is sacred and we become more, not less, through each other's stories. I continued by explaining that language creates, and we need to choose a language that connects, beautifies, gives recognition, acceptance and invitation. Furthermore, our 'listening' is important - it has a shape. The shape of our listening, shapes the telling of our stories.

- The '*Tree of Life*' is often used in mythology as a metaphor for connecting all living forms of creation. A Poplar, our Tree of Life, beside the *cave deck*, symbolised our inter-connectedness and the significance of each participant's key role for the weekend. The cards with the pictures and their metaphors dangled from thin strings tied to the poplar branches. The slightest breath of wind brushed the pictures against each other, raising awareness of our collective connectedness.

- The '*Baths of Purification*' were represented by Prynnsberg's exquisite bathing deck overlooking the Free State plains. It holds four Victorian baths, each with a white Chinese cloth umbrella. When entering the bathing deck, I urged a symbolic purging of all unclean thoughts, an attitude of letting-things-go. A space to forgive, not just others, but ourselves too, a time to set order from the chaos in our lives, not a dull space, but one of freedom and liberation. I spoke of the opulent and sybaritic lifestyle of the Egyptians, who invented the art of bathing, and who viewed bathing as a restorative, sensuous, religious and calming experience. The white shady umbrellas were used as metaphors for shelter, peace and rest.

- Finally, our secret '*Place of Ritual*' was revealed and explained, where we would meet with finality at the end of the weekend to perform our ritual ceremony, representing transition, our



rite of passage. The place where we would burn *beauty* as an offering, cleanse *her* to resurrect *her* again - a journey similar to that of Dante's *Commedia*, travelling through *Inferno*, *Pergatorio* and finally *Paradiso*.

Thereafter, I gave each protagonist a sealed letter, embossed with *Che sarà, sarà - whatever will be, will be*.

Dear Cryptic Minded Sea Soul,

Remember that you are a daughter of a King,
and your mother is the Queen of the East.

Always remember the pearl, keep it close.

Wear flowers in your hair, secrets in your eyes.
Smoke cigarettes and take midnight swims.

Be naked, open your soul, your dreams & your hopes.
Have social intercourse, it brings diversity, variety, colour & warmth.

Follow your bliss and don't be afraid,
doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be.

Remember the craft of questions, the craft of stories.
It conjures the invisible!

Re-author your world, one narrative at a time,
till you experience a sense of homecoming.

Live your life so well that Death will tremble to take you.

Che sarà, sarà!

With love,
Kuhaylah

3.8 Stories within a Story

The purpose for our weekend at Prynnsberg was to return our attention to stories, and the influence they have. The fact is that stories change our lives. More so, we use myths and stories as metaphors to mimic real life. The story of Prynnsberg, our stories, and the stories of the great



arts, hold extensive potential for us to become other than who we are. It is far more liberating to think of our 'self' stories as fiction rather than fact as it creates room for re-authoring. Stories provide a starting point for appreciating intersubjective elements of personal identity - we are subjects in others' stories, others are subjects in ours. Stories, real or fictional, influence our stories, and ours theirs. We, so to say, constantly author each other's stories. Our connected collectiveness rewrites our individual narratives and simultaneously spills over into a rewriting of the collective narrative.

My private story, the stories of Prynnsberg Estate and the stories of the great arts such as the *Divine Comedy*, the *Odyssey*, *Hamlet* and *Ulysses*, have a central theme of exile, traversing across wounds on the path to healing (Kearney 2012a:e-conference). When we study art as referential to the external world, that is the world consisting of events that the human mind can experience, we return to mimesis. Mimesis, as Aristotle defines it, is not simply the imitation of some pre-existing reality, but rather a creative imaginative imitation, or a reconfiguring where meaninglessness threatens the meaningful (Ricoeur 1984:45). Mimesis makes possibility come alive. When we become readers or spectators of art, we may experience a cathartic release. Why? Because the artful artificiality of mimesis detaches us from the action unfolding before us, affording us sufficient distance to grasp the meaning of it all, which performs the catharsis or balance (Kearney 2002:137-138). And where there is balance there is option. Thus, by engaging in the act of mimesis, we afford ourselves the sufficient distance and imagination that results in the working-through of personal narratives of imbalance and the opportunity to conjure alternative options.

3.9 Myths

"He who has a why to live can bear almost any how" Friedrich Nietzsche

Reading mythos is learning the magic of language. First it is dead words, then, when we listen carefully, the story starts to speak to us and we, in turn, start speaking to it. The great poets, like Dante know that no-one can find their way through life without a great guide. Myths lead us and teach us the deepest horrors and the highest hopes that are still undiscovered in our hearts. And when we discover it, we are in a position to decide whom we choose to become. Myths have a freedom of imagination, but a tension with reality. They carry a responsibility to the real, but inspire the real life into something new.



Vasalisa the Wise

The Baltic myth of Vasalisa the Wise is largely about the feminine spirit guided by intuition. Intuition is our greatest gift, a divine instrument. The story of Vasalisa demonstrates the different phases of a life journey - the *womb*, the *wound*, the *wander* and finally the *wonder*.

Vasalisa's story starts off in the wound-phase of her life journey. Vasalisa's loving mother is lying on her deathbed. Together with her father, she sits praying at the end of her mother's bed asking God to guide her mother into the next world. Her mother calls to her and gives her a tiny doll dressed in the same clothing that Vasalisa is wearing. Tears leak from the corners of her mother's slit eyes and in a soft whisper she utters "*Should you lose your way or be in need of help, ask this doll and she will guide you*". Prior to her mother's death, life was in the womb-phase, it was good and there was balance. With her loss, life shifted. Vasalisa was hauled out of the equilibrium the womb provided. Her father remarried and the young girl found herself to be a stranger living with the new family. The wicked stepmother and her two daughters hated Vasalisa and conjured a plan to send her away. They conspired for the fire to go out and sent Vasalisa into the woods to find Baba Yaga, the witch, to beg fire for their hearth. They were convinced that she would not survive as Baba Yaga was known to be wicked and cruel. Vasalisa complied and set off into the woods to find the fearsome Baba Yaga. Her journey through the woods represents the wander-phase. A lot happens in this phase. There is disorientation, but it is when we grow the most. The journey to the Yaga is a journey of confronting the fearful things in Vasalisa's life, because when she does that, she gains strength. She can no longer rely on her family, society or on the culture she comes from. She must look inward for strength. Baba Yaga personifies what Vasalisa has been taught to fear and it is therefore important to confront her. As Vasalisa wanders through the woods she is frightened, but every time she reaches into her pocket to touch the doll, she feels better. At every fork in the road Vasalisa consults the doll and the doll helps her, personifying her wise feminine intuition, an intuitiveness that guides her through the wandering disorientation of her life. She uses the doll as a mentor, like a wise old woman that is always with her, guiding her. Finally, she meets Baba Yaga and, with the guidance of her doll, she asks the right questions, gives the right answers and fulfils all the chores that the Yaga demands. After successfully delivering many challenging tasks and passing difficult tests, Baba Yaga reaches for a smouldering skull with fiery eyes, puts it on a stick and gives it to Vasalisa. She commands her angrily to be on her way. Vasalisa's triumph



in acquiring the fire represents the wonder-phase, the aha!-moment. She eagerly heads for home through the dark woods, following twists and turns in the road, and the doll skilfully guides her. When she finally reaches home, the skull has an even stronger fire blazing from its ear, eye, nose and mouth holes, which instantly burns the wicked trio to cinders.

The myth of Vasalisa is a metaphor for us to have confidence in our intuition. Metaphors give our fictional self, or preferred self, a deeper meaning. Being aware and confident of one's intuition forms part of the journey that enables a reconnection with what you believe is best for you. It forms a stark contrast between the widely-held fixed image, and the preferred image. When you trust intuition, you do not act out of obedience to societal, or a cultural, dictation, but out of a responsible self. This is important because, in life, things are offered to us, and we just take them because they are in front of us, but we can make wise choices from deep inside. Intuition is an awareness and connection to our inner world, which is a time for blossoming, not surviving. We gain confidence to examine wisely and wholeheartedly our parental, religious and cultural values, before we conform to them. We challenge these structures, deconstruct them and trace their histories. In doing so, we become mavericks, nonconformist, independent-minded women, yet always with close tension and relationship towards reality, responsibility and compassion, thus allowing ourselves innovation and transformation (Pinkolo-Estes 1992:70-79).

The Pearl

The *Hymn of the Pearl*, sometimes also called the *Hymn of the Robe of Glory*, is a classic gnostic myth describing the exile and redemption of the soul. It is a beautiful symbolic expression of the origin and development of the conscious ego. The story is of a boy who is sent to Egypt to retrieve a pearl from a serpent. He is the son of a king and his mother is a queen from the East. When his parents provide him with provisions for his journey, they take off his royal robe that was woven for him by their love. They make a covenant with him and write it in his heart so that he would not forget that when he brings back the pearl he will again put on his robe of glory. During his quest, he is seduced by Egyptians and forgets his origin and his history. However, a letter is sent from the king via a messenger to remind him of his past and his heritage. When the boy receives the letter, he remembers his mission, retrieves the



pearl and returns to his father. When he is presented with his royal robe, he stretches forth and receives it to clothe himself, as a metaphor of his soul that is awakened to his destiny.

In life, the ego metaphorically begins as a child of a royal heavenly family, which corresponds to its original state of identity with the self. The ego is sent away from the original paradise, on a mission. This refers to the necessary process of conscious development, that separates the ego from its unconscious matrix. When it reaches the foreign country, it forgets its mission and falls asleep, which corresponds to meaninglessness. The letter from his parents awakens him from his sleep and reminds him of his mission. Meaning returns to his life when the connecting link between the ego and its super-personal origins are re-established. It is an awakening of awareness. And the awakening is brought about through the agency of the letter, which has many images – first, it is a letter but also an eagle, thereafter it is a voice that becomes holy speech, and when the boy starts his return trip, the letter is a guiding light. The many transformations of the letter is a dynamic symbol. Birds have always been considered the messengers of God, and such is the symbol of the letter, as an eagle. Furthermore, the symbol as a holy voice is that of our calling. Our calling expresses an awakening that leads us out of personal preoccupation and into a more significant destiny, something higher, that helps shoulder the load. The letter, as a guiding light, is paralleled by the star of Bethlehem that guided men to Christ.

The hymn is commonly interpreted as a gnostic view of the human condition, that of being spirits lost in a world of matter, forgetful of our true origin. This state of forgetting our true origin can be fixed by a prophetic message delivered by a messenger. The letter takes on a symbolic representation of spiritual mysteries. It is also a metaphor that we are children of a king, with a specific purpose, but that we have become entangled in a mesh of ignorance and deceit, and our way out is to find the pearl, the pearl of wisdom, the reminder of the reason why we are here. Consciousness of these meanings and symbols have an awakening, transformative affect.



3.10 Narrative Imagination and Catharsis

“It is a brave man that writes about something that never happened” James Joyce

It is 1915, Vienna, and the First World War is rummaging through most of the nations of Europe. While writing an article, Sigmund Freud (1920:14) is babysitting his grandson, Ernst. Ernst’s mother was out running errands, and his father was away at war. While observing little Ernst in the playpen, Freud realises that the child, who is sixteen months old and not speaking yet, is having a profound fit of anxiety because of the absence of his mother. Being Freud, he does not comfort the young boy, but continues to observe him. Then, something profound happens. In the midst of his grandson’s fit of anxiety, Ernst finds a ball of wool and starts playing with it, pushing it so that it rolls away under the cover of his blanket and pulling it out again so that it returns to him. And in this act of playing he utters his first words “*gone, back*”. It is when the child repeatedly does this, that he starts to calm down. In Freud’s analysis of his grandson’s case study, he explains that we play with words in order to overcome anxiety. We use language to fill in the gap between the abandoned self, or the absence of the other. Thus, the speaking cure, and by extension the writing cure, can help us to respond when we find that life is intolerable unless we fill the darkness with words. This is a profound example of that which is impossible in reality, being made possible in fiction.

To demonstrate the writing cure, the protagonists at Prynnsberg discussed the Irish writer, James Joyce’s modernist novel *Ulysses*, one of the most influential pieces of twentieth century English literature. It is the epic story of one man’s journey during a single day in Dublin. The story of *Ulysses* was birthed in 1906. Joyce was exiled from Ireland (a self-imposed exile for personal and political reasons) and was living in Rome at the time. He named his novel after the character from the *Odyssey*. The Latin name for Odysseus, is Ulysses, who is synonymous with exile and the search for home. In Rome, Joyce is dismissed from his work in a bank. That night, on his way home, he decided to stop and have a drink. One drink became two, and so on, until he finally left with far less of his severance pay than what he arrived with. On his way back home, he decides to take a short cut and gets mugged and robbed of the rest of his pay. As he lies in the gutter, beaten up, looking at the stars and feeling guilty because he has a young son and wife at home and the pay was supposed to cover the rent, he remembers a previous trauma that he had forgotten. Trauma often does this as we experience it. We remember



previous traumas that have been forgotten. Joyce remembers that he was similarly mugged in Dublin a few years earlier, just outside the Abbey Theatre. Not bystanders, nor anyone else passing by, stopped to help. Until one man, by the name of Hunter, “*a cuckold Jew*”, arrived in true Samaritan's fashion, picked him up, dusted him off, took him to his house and gave him a mug of steaming hot cocoa. This repetition of woundings triggered a lost memory in Joyce, where an immigrant Jew came to the rescue of a wounded Dubliner and planted a seed of *caritas* in his imagination. Several weeks later, back in Rome, Joyce and his wife Nora receive free tickets to an opera whose librettist was called Blum. Joyce marries the two events of sad and happy, and the character of Leopold Bloom, one of the main protagonists in *Ulysses*, is birthed - an ordinary man that acts heroically.

Bloom, born from a Jewish father and a Catholic mother, has an outsider status in predominantly Catholic Dublin, and works in an advertising firm. The other main protagonist is Stephen Dedalus, a reluctant teacher of history at a boys' school. At the beginning of *Ulysses*, Stephen is a self-conscious young man whose identity is still in formation. Stephen's detachedness, and his attempts to understand himself through fictional characters such as Hamlet, dramatize his struggle to reinforce this identity. He exists mainly within his own world of ideas ... solipsistic fancy! His actions tend to distance himself from others, and from the world itself. Stephen's struggle with his place in the world, the authority of God, the authority of the British empire, and even with the authority of the mocker or joker, is said to be a harshly-drawn version of Joyce himself at age 22. Much has been said about Joyce's personal trauma that was reworked through the narrative of *Ulysses*. Carl Jung, after diagnosing Joyce's daughter, Lucia, with schizophrenia, later told Freud that the act of Joyce writing *Ulysses* saved him from a similar madness to that of his daughter's. The story acted as a catharsis to Joyce. One could say that *Ulysses* is the book of Joyce himself (Kearney 2015:131,132).

In the middle of *Ulysses*, Bloom and Stephen's paths cross at the entrance of the national library in Dublin. It is a pivotal scene where Stephen describes, in detail, his theory on the father and son idea in *Hamlet*, his theory being that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* in the same year that his son, Hamnet, died, and his father, John Shakespeare, was dying. According to Stephen Dedalus, *Hamlet* is the book of Shakespeare himself, avoiding his own madness and serving as a catharsis for the mourning that he was not able to properly express in his personal life.



Thus, writing the narrative of Hamlet acted as a healing balm for Shakespeare's personal trauma because, the truth is, he was absent from his own son's funeral, and he did abandon his father's Catholicism, which was potentially traumatic. In *Ulysses*, when Stephen tells us that *Hamlet* is the story of Shakespeare's personal father and son relationship, he is only echoing his own relationship with his absent, alcoholic father, Mr Dedalus, and his substitute father, Leopold Bloom. This is itself an imitation of Homer's *Odyssey*, again the story of the son, Telemachus, and his absent father, Odysseus, traversing across wounds on the path to healing. *Ulysses* is therefore a story within a story within a story, but it is forward repetition, meaning that the stories of Odysseus & Hamlet are brought into the novel of *Ulysses* to perform healing in Stephen and Bloom and, by extension, healing in Joyce himself.

In Homer's *Ulysses*, the Latin name for Odysseus, we find the standard theme of myth - sons acting like fathers until someone says stop. Odysseus leaves his mortality in Ithaca and sails off to heroic glory, but his attempts to become an immortal warrior are thwarted by constant reminders of his mortality through the calamities that he is faced with and through the brutal killing of all his men in Troy. He left Ithaca a hero, and it is only when he returns as a beggar, an outcast, a failure, therefore accepting his mortality, that he and Telemachus, his son, are reunited, and healing takes place. In the *Odyssey*, we can only hypothesise about Homer's personal trauma, but it is not necessary, as the narrative performs a catharsis in the story of the traumatised hero, Odysseus, that carries lasting scars of exile and injury towards healing. Works of art, like the *Odyssey*, are therefore machines for the cleansing of wounds. It is a strategy to symbolically resolve what cannot be resolved in the lived experience of life.

In life, we cannot attempt to heal if we do not know, or if we do not speak and tell our stories. Trauma continuously visits us, like ghosts returning over and over again, until we give it a name and story it. The conversion of the untold wound into some form of telling, is healing. Narrative is therefore cathartic. However, it does not bring closure or completion. In life, we are always bound to the binaries, mortality, life and death, our cultural demands, our histories. We want to, by nature, buck death, try and get away from it through the imagination, but we cannot. We are split beings, as Jean-Paul Sartre wrote: "*we are who we are not, and we are not who we are*". The human dilemma. But we do have a way out. Not totally, but it is good enough. Thus, storytelling fails to cure trauma, but will always try to heal because, through this



effort, there is the pleasurable balance of pity and fear. All that is impossible in reality, becomes possible in fiction, which result in a process of transforming the open wound of *life* into a workable scar, the story (excerpts from Kearney 2016a:77-90 & 2017:182-196).

To conclude, the past is factual and fixed, but the future is filled with opportunity and hope. Jeanette Winterson (2005) sums it up elegantly when she explains that storytelling is a way of navigating our lives and when we read ourselves as fiction rather than fact, we can change the story. And that is liberating.

3.11 The Letter

“I am not what has happened to me, I am what I choose to become” Carl Jung

The protagonists were asked to write a letter addressed to their younger selves. It was a means of communication, from a safe distance, so that the knowledge that had been accumulated about oneself up to the present, could be skilfully utilised to speak honestly, possibility-driven, to one’s younger self. I encouraged the women to think of their preferred self as fictive, rather than factual. It leaves room to reinvent oneself. Our fictive self presents a more complete truth than what the literal, fixed, uncompromising and factual self presents. We brought attention exclusively to ourselves, without children, husband, parents or God. It allowed compassion towards the self and enabled us to engage our imagination solely towards our preferred way-of-being in the world.

To further enrich our letter writing, we discussed the use of metaphors, such as the metaphor of a moth. Moths are nocturnal and celestial navigators, thus navigated by the heavens and the moon as their source of light. The moon, always on their horizon, helps them to fly straight. However, with artificial light, their angle gets confused and the moths plummet downwards, symbolising the artificiality of constructs that so often make us plunge rapidly into deceit and imbalance. We used the dynamic celestial navigation of the moth as a metaphor for us to draw towards a spiritual navigation that grants blessings instead of curses. We concluded that when we save ourselves, we save the world.



3.12 The Meal

Communal dining is an archetypal human experience. Eating is social, and it involves our social sense, taste. It is rare to find people dining in solitude. Having a meal is intimate and gives us a sense of community. Eating together fosters connection with one another. People share food as a gesture of peace or hospitality. The table is a place of memory where we become aware of who we are and with whom we are. We engage and gather as a symbol of solidarity (O' Fresco 2012:78). Furthermore, we surround food with ceremony. The Last Supper, perhaps the most famous meal, is filled with ritual and symbolism. If an event is meant to matter emotionally, symbolically, or mystically, food will be close by to consecrate it (Ackerman 1990:128). The table makes us human.

At Prynnsberg, all our meals were shared. *We broke our bread* together, symbolically linking us to the protagonist clan. We gathered and ate at the old oak tree, in the lush garden at the manor, under the stars in the sandstone cave, in the Newberry dining room, and out on the cool front porch overlooking the rosarium. We reconciled, laughed, and built memories, as stories blossomed around the tables of Prynnsberg.

3.13 The Ritual

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" Wittgenstein

A word creates a world, and our word for the weekend was *Beauty*. In our conversations and experiences on the farm, we arrived at the conclusion that beauty is not a naïve and superficial concept. It's is provocative, inexhaustible and compelling, and has a gentle but urgent call to be awakened. In the presence of beauty there is generosity, grace, stillness, connection, thought and perception. Beauty is a homecoming of the human spirit, an insistent reminder of our common universal being. The graceful sunset is as attractive to the tired farmworker as it is to the prince, a flight of birds is as compelling to a child as to the learned professor. Being suppressed for loving beauty is the worst thing one can do to a woman. It is not possible for her to have a full life if that is done to her (Pinkola Estes 2008:Podcast).

Prior to the weekend, each separate letter of the word *beauty* was three-dimensionally constructed in wire mesh, with a wire frame, giving its form. Each letter, one metre tall and 60



centimetres wide, can stand free and upright. The ‘disassembling’ of the word *beauty* was intentionally done to demonstrate the process of taking *beauty* apart and unpacking the word. Words mean more or less the same to us, depending on culture and experience, yet they ultimately each carry a unique meaning to a person. Even though we come from similar social and cultural backgrounds, we can never assume that the meaning of a word is the same to everyone. Words are understood in an individual context, therefore partly unknowable and therefore necessary to unpack. To know what *beauty* meant individually to each person, we formed six groups, to each of which one wire letter was assigned. I suggested that each group’s specific letter would guide and inspire a rich description of what *beauty* specifically meant to them. One group densely weaved foraged grass and wild flowers through their wire letter, illustrating that *beauty* represents an act of sowing and reaping. Another used soil to make mud that was plastered onto the wire mesh, symbolising the unbreakable and eternal bond that beauty has with nature’s virtues, such as integrity, honesty, order and worthiness. A different group used their letter as a tool to inspire other words that meaningfully expressed what beauty embodied for them.

Our *ritual* was done light-heartedly and playfully yet filled with symbolic meaning. We gathered around and each group presented their shared understanding of beauty and, for fun, we reorganised the letters to form a new word, EBUTAY, symbolically reconstructing what we deconstructed. By giving new meaning to *beauty*, we breathed new life into her and resurrected her, hence the theme for the weekend. We continued to discuss how our new descriptions of beauty could impact our preferred ways of being in the world. Furthermore, the deconstructing and reconstructing of beauty illustrated how we similarly can deconstruct and reconstruct the ideas we find ourselves loyally committed to.

The Fire

The oldest and most important piece of technology in the history of man, is fire. Fire is what has made us the dominant species on the planet. We don’t give the technology of fire enough credit because we don’t give our ancestors, people known as savages, much credit for their ingenuity. In certain caves in southern Africa, the earliest and oldest layers of the caves contain whole skeletons of carnivores and many chewed-up bone fragments of the food they were



eating, including us. Then comes the layer from the period during which we discovered fire, and ownership of the various occupants of the caves switches - the human skeletons are whole, and the bones of carnivores are fragments. Thus fire is the difference between eating lunch, and being lunch (Lanchester 2017:e-article). Fire makes us human.

“What is to give light must endure burning” Viktor Frankl

We laid our reconstructed beauty, EBUTAY, on our altar and set *her* alight. The burning further symbolises the unpacking process, which is necessary to achieve new meaning. Thus, for beauty to give her light, she had to endure burning. She had to die, before she could live.

3.14 Mythos at Prynnsberg - Part IV

At the end of the weekend I created a myth that featured each protagonist’s metaphoric name, together with a specific character role in the story (Part IV attached hereto - [Prynnsberg Part IV.mp4](#)). The plot symbolically represented a playful imitation of some of the events that unfolded over the duration of the weekend. I was surprised at the overwhelming positive and emotional responses I received after posting the myth to the group, creating an even closer sense of comradery amongst us. Today, the protagonists maintain strong ties with each other.

Part IV

Daughters of Kings, a traveller stopped by to tell me a story: ‘There once was a mystical land, filled with *Colourful Monkeys*, *Boccolupa Wolves* and *Cryptic Minded Sea Souls*. The land was called *Qinisile*, and was ruled by the great *Queen Maeve, of the faeries*. The queen arose upon a *Saturday* morning from voyaging through a *Multifaceted Soothing Dream*, determined to *Sieze the Day!* Therefore, she lit her *Flame Lili* and placed it upon her crown as a sign of adoration. She ascended her Arabian stallion, *Kuhaylah*. Together they *Sentiently Transcended* to *The Rare Librarian*, for she was the keeper of *Amadeus Book Babe*, the one and only *Sage on the Stage*. ‘Pay heed’ said the sage to the queen, ‘for your *Prodigal Daughter* is in need of a *Cynical Miracle Worker*’. She bade the daughter a guide, *Paris Girl*, who prompted her to be a *Trusting Muse*. For only when she believed wholeheartedly, the *Magical Prins* would rescue her from the *Guillotine!*’



Follow your bliss!

Che sarà, sarà.

The End.

3.15 The Story of San Michele

*“My home shall be open for the sun and the wind and the voices of the sea –
like a Greek Temple – and light, light, light everywhere!”* Axel Munthe

In approaching the closing of this chapter, I would like to invite the reader to one more harpooned story, *The Story of San Michele*. Ten years ago, while living in Stockholm, I read a book of memoirs by the Swedish physician and author, Axel Munthe. The story is about a villa, San Michele, built around the turn of the 19th century on the Isle of Capri, Italy. It is regarded as the story of Munthe’s life. Munthe grew up in Sweden and moved to France, where he attended medical school and then established a medical practice in Paris. He later assisted in the 1884 cholera epidemic in Naples. A few years prior, at the age of seventeen, while on a sailing trip that included a brief visit to the island of Capri, young Axel took a hike up the Phoenician steps to the village of Anacapri. Here, he came across a ruined 10th century chapel built by Emperor Tiberius. And a dream, to one day restore the ruin into a home, was born. Years later, in 1887, and with a successful medical career, he managed to purchase the run-down property, and subsequently spent much of his life on Anacapri, restoring and building the villa of San Michele. The villa is not a residence in the ordinary sense of the word, but rather a bearer of Munthe’s thoughts and feelings on beauty and the great questions of life, and yet, at the same time, it is open for personal interpretation. The architecture emphasises the magnificent landscape while creating a romantic-symbolic spirit that is worthy of great art. Statues overgrown with ivy are found throughout the exquisite gardens surrounding the villa. Everywhere, mossy marble pieces in secluded nooks guide the visitor’s view through framed openings overlooking the cobalt Bay of Naples and the Sorrentine Peninsula, with the volcano, Mount Vesuvius, in the distance. Various art objects are scattered amongst tall pines, palms and cypresses.



The story of San Michele had touched me deeply. In 2014, on a family trip to the Amalfi Coast, I was fortunate, and determined, to visit the island. In dense heat, and through thick Mediterranean bush, I hiked the same Phoenician steps that Axel had hiked many years before. Emotions that I could not make full sense of, stirred. On that day, a significant photograph was taken of me. The photograph vividly captured the lingering sweet smell of roses, the faint wind in my hair and the sincerity of my peaceful gaze over the Mediterranean. An untroubled aesthetic feast. To me, the photograph represented a moment of freedom and balance.

Three years later, in August 2017, while visiting Prynnsberg with my mother and sisters, something extraordinary happened. While browsing through the manor's library I noticed *The Story of San Michele* nestled amidst a section of old books that had remained from the original Newberry library. Pleasantly surprised, I hastily took the book down and discovered that it was one of the first published copies, printed in 1929. A remarkable concurrence - my favourite book in my favourite place. That evening, back in my bedroom, I encountered unforeseen laptop problems. The screen had completely blanked out and randomly flashed unrecognisable files which were impossible to open, as if the hard drive had been liquidised into senseless gibberish. Files flashed erratically amidst the blackness of the screen. After some several unsuccessful attempts, the screen settled and displayed a single folder, filled with icons that looked like html files. Desperate, I tried to open each one. Alas, I was having no luck until I reached the last icon in the folder, and a strange thing happened - it opened. Of the tens of thousands of pictures stored on my laptop, the only image that could be retrieved was the *freedom* photograph taken at San Michele. The synchronicity of stumbling on *The Story of San Michele* in the library only a few hours before the specific photograph taken at the villa in Italy opened on my laptop, elicited some wonder. It was as if Prynnsberg sympathetically responded to my longing for freedom, generously pledging release and liberation.

3.16 Key Reflections

“If fiction is only completed in life and life can only be understood through the stories we tell about it, then an examined life, in the sense of the word we have borrowed from Socrates, is a life recounted.” Ricoeur



Why did the story of Prynnsberg change the trajectory of my life? To answer, I shall return to stories and their influence. One of the most important roles of stories is a story's ability to project fictive experiences of time, which allows us to orient ourselves to time, in the sense of reckoning with our past, present and future (Ricoeur in Wood 1991:50). When we think about where we came from, who we are now and where we are going, it helps us to enter into our imagination and try out various ways of being-in-the-world. Thus, stories provide a strategy for describing what is possible. What is 'possible' is an essential component in self-understanding. Thus, our infinite possibilities are intrinsically linked to who we essentially are. When we discover to do something, we discover ourselves (Ricoeur in Wood 1991:48,50). We find and affirm ourselves in our acts. In the same way that a project opens possibilities in the world, it opens new possibilities in ourselves, and reveals a possibility of acting. Our power-to-be manifests itself in our power-to-do (Ricoeur 1967:69). Prynnsberg offered her story to me. One that I could identify with and enter and, in turn, the Creative Protagonist weekend at Prynnsberg offered a proposed fictional world that I, and the protagonists, could enter, inhabit and project our innermost possibilities within. It initiated a new understanding of myself and my possibilities, which was extended to my fellow protagonists. Ricoeur explains that when we explore possibilities of action, we have a fictive experience of inhabiting the proposed world, which is important, as it remakes our reality by projecting a possible world, which can transform us. Fiction corresponds to our imagination as a type of power to re-describe our world. The more imagination can deviate from that which is called reality, the more it approaches the heart of the reality, which is no longer the world of manipulable objects, but the world into which we have been thrown by birth, and within which we try to orient ourselves by projecting our innermost possibilities onto it, in order to dwell there. Ricoeur insists that the works of fiction do not only refer to reality, but actually *remake* it, arguing that it is not less real, but more real, than the things they represent (Ricoeur in Wood 1991:49). Thus, reality, the way we perceive it, is only a description of what we focus on at the time. We only see what we aim at, and the rest of the world is hidden, which is most of it (Peterson 2018:283). Prynnsberg enabled me to rethink my fixed reality, thus to story reality into fictive possibility.

Furthermore, the story of Prynnsberg is the dance step of *discerning*. Discerning is an awakening. A becoming-aware-of the workings and effects of the dominant myth, which



enables the dissolving of it. Meylahn importantly notes that, as we discern the ultimate myth, we need not judge it from an outside objective perspective, by comparing it to a higher myth. It is a process that comes from within. This kind of discernment is a highly critical tool as it does not criticize from the outside, by comparing one ideology with another, but it censures from within by exposing the myth through the telling of the excluded, suppressed and untold stories (Meylahn 2012:60). When we discover and give voice to the untold stories, it helps us to imagine and plan a different future, free from subjugation by the dominant myth. When the untold stories are storied, hope and freedom is bred. My experiences at Prynnsberg initiated a remembering of the un-storied stories, and the development of new stories that stood in direct opposition to the suppressive myth.

In discussing *discernment*, our sense of taste is integrated to enhance a deeper understanding. When we taste, we enquire and test. Nothing enters our bodies without passing through the mouth, the door to the body (Ackerman 1990:143). It is where we greet the external world, the laboratory of trial and risk. Taste is an intimate sense and largely social. We cannot taste things at a distance, it is experience-near. And we can taste only when something dissolves (Ackermann 1990:140, 141). Similarly, we gain understanding of the dominant story only when we dissolve or deconstruct it and, in turn, this leads to discovering and *tasting* the stories that stand in opposition to the dominant plot. This process provides an entry point to the development of the preferred story. As we gain distance from the dominant myth, we notice the particular parts of our lives that contradict the problem narrative and that embrace a broader experience, including feelings and behaviours. Thus, the excluded, unheard and marginal stories help us discern the restricting dominant myth (Meylahn 2012:60), and enables us to move from a realm of experience, toward a realm of meaning. What do these broader experiences mean, what do they tell about me, what possibilities open up for me?

The story of Prynnsberg, and my story, resonate. Prynnsberg was a result of love and care. She was the outcome of a beautiful dream. The dream that marked her genesis was neglected and caused trauma. I had a dream. But because of the trauma I experienced as a young girl, I neglected the dream. I mistreated my *self*. The neglect that Prynnsberg endured agreed with so many meanings, images, emotions and memories of my own forgotten self. It was not a failing



brought about by my family or my husband , but rather an abandonment of my *self* by myself. A mismanagement that was sustained by the dominant myth that resulted from the trauma. After the trauma I became convinced that I did not fit. My *self* was rooting around for definition. To confirm the *self's* existence and substance, it needed to fit in, to have a home, to belong. When I met Prynnsberg, my dysfunctional self could plug into another self, that of Prynnsberg's. She made me alive. I could control, steer and give life to a new identity. I started inhabiting it, and it became alive. She helped me earth in my essence and suspend the old *self* with its divisiveness and judgement. In the days spent at Prynnsberg I became connected to the ground, the air, sounds of nature and the smell of colour. My senses became alert and alive, a feeling of oneness. No matter the contrast of Prynnsberg's identity to mine, she found a place to relate in me, and I in her. Before, in the old narrative, I was limited. She was the catalyst that set me free. Herman Melville (1851) compellingly wrote that "*truly to enjoy bodily warmth, some small part of you must be cold, for there is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast*". Becoming mindful of what I did not have, thus examining my life, I became truly mindful of what I did have. Contrast produces variety and possibility, and simultaneously provides hope.

4 CHAPTER 4: Aristotle and Balance (Re-authoring, Poetry - Touch)

4.1 Narrative Imagination and Catharsis



Odyssey by Homer

*But we two, sitting here in the shelter, eating and drinking,
shall entertain each other remembering and retelling
our sad sorrows.*

*For afterwards a man who has suffered
much and wandered much
has pleasure out of his sorrows.*

In Homer's poem, pleasure, and ultimately healing, occurs when Odysseus and Telemachus sit together in the swine's den, entertaining each other by remembering and retelling their sad sorrows. In the moment of narrative re-creation they are invited to revisit their lives and to discover a way to give a future to their past (Kearney 2007:51). Thus, in the process of retelling our stories, we reimagine our history and our relationships to enable us to live our stories otherwise, so that the deadlocks of bitterness and mistrust can be reinterpreted. This is the healing power of stories (Kearney 2018a:75). White (2007a:263) refers to the retelling as a necessary scaffolding process, a reimagining of the familiar story by bringing in other stories with the emphasis on putting the *self* in touch with the discoveries about the written *other*, which is cathartic as it moves toward what may be possible going forward. Discussing scaffolding conversations further, White (White & Epston 1990:263,264) explains: "*people do what is known and familiar to them in their effort to address their predicaments. They have engaged*



in actions that are in keeping with familiar conclusions about their lives. The gap between what is known and familiar and what might be possible for people to know about their lives can be considered a 'zone of proximal development'. This zone can be traversed through conversational partnerships that provide the necessary scaffolding to achieve this in manageable steps ... the therapist contributes significantly to the scaffolding of the proximal zone of development and also recruits others to participate in this ... It is in traversing this gap between the known and the familiar and what is possible that people experience a newfound sense of personal agency; a sense of being able to regulate one's own life, to intervene in one's life to affect its course according to one's intentions."

Furthermore, the retelling of experience through the actions and personas of others in fiction, novels or performances, permits us to repeat the past, forwards, in a healing way. "*History needs story to bring the past to life again*" (Kearney 2018a:79), and this very act of creative repetition allows for a certain kind of pleasure, or release. To cite Aristotle's *Poetics*, we often need a narrative plot to reconfigure past sufferings into a meaningful act of healing, cleansing or release (Kearney 2018a:79). Myths are master plans to symbolically resolve what remains unresolvable in the lived, empirical experience (Kearney 2015:135). Our human existence is cursed by our tragic desire to escape suffering, and the poetic role of plot and imitation that comprises tragic drama, as Aristotle reminds us in the *Poetics*, is to story our heroic desires, even though they are impossible, which achieves catharsis, just as storying at Prynnsberg achieved for me. This type of healing, however, is never closed or completed, but remains an open-ended story, namely a storytelling that fails to cure but always tries to heal, and through this effort to tell the untellable tale, there is pleasure – Aristotle's pleasurable purgation of pity and fear by pity and fear - which I shall refer to often in this chapter (Kearney 2017b:3). This will be discussed as I draw largely on Richard Kearney's findings on the narrative imagination and catharsis, based on Aristotle in the *Poetics*. Thereafter I shall explore the narrative therapeutic theory of re-authoring. The research approach will take my idiosyncratic journey of healing and re-authoring that took place at Prynnsberg Estate into consideration throughout the theoretical findings of this chapter.

4.2 Touch

“We call our emotions feelings, and we care most deeply when something ‘touches’ us”

Diane Ackerman

I would like to briefly explore the next synaesthetic dance movement, that of touch. I have included touch in this chapter because of its carnal experience that often triggers our ability to acknowledge a shared humanity, pardon or grace, which may lead to the opening of re-authoring a problem narrative. Touch is a form of wisdom and empathy that operates at the level of the body, a discerning sensibility that functions at the level of skin and flesh, nerve endings and sinews, a form of tact within contact (Kearney 2018a:78). Kearney speaks of the healing touch and refers to the stories of Abraham and Sarah turning hostility into hospitality by extending empathy to the strangers in the tent at Mamre (Genesis 18), offering them food rather than the sword. In Homer’s poem, *Euryclea*, Odysseus’ childhood nurse welcomes the hero home by touching the childhood scar (trauma) on Odysseus’ thigh. Another example are the Biblical scenes of Jesus’ radical hospitality featuring hands offering nourishment, or forgiveness with a healing touch (Kearney 2018a:78). These acts are double works of heart and hand, striving to give a future to the past through the re-authored narratives of empathy, healing and gestures of touch (Kearney 2018a:79).

Ackerman (1990:79) explains that touch: “... teaches us the difference between I and other, that there can be someone outside of ourselves.” She writes on Saul Schanberg’s comments at a conference on touch that “we forget that touch is not only basic to our species, but the key to it” (Schanberg in Ackerman 1990:77). She continues that “...touch teaches us that life has depth and contour and that we live in a three-dimensional world. It allows us to find our way in the world, in the darkness or in other circumstances where we can’t fully use our other senses” (Ackerman 1990:94,96). This dance step of touch is the re-authoring process, the poetry of life. It proclaims liberation and life, it breeds hope and it is a process of identification and association with seemingly impossible, yet possible, options emerging once the dominant power has been broken (Meylahn 2012:61). Ackerman elaborates: “D. H. Lawrence’s use of the word touch isn’t epidermal but a profound penetration into the core of someone’s being”, i.e. a rediscovery of the human spirit as a noetic spirit. This is important because we tend to get stuck in our role, in our own view of things and the way we see ourselves. When we bring the



touch of poetry, the great arts and literature, we invite roleplay which increases our empathy. It helps us to step outside of the narrowness of our own perspective, thus to step outside ourselves and into the *other* (Perel 2018b:podcast).

4.3 Imagination and Healing

“Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited.

Imagination encircles the world” Albert Einstein

Most people walk into a consulting room stripped to the core of their being, feeling that they have lost the experience of beauty (Ventura 2001:2). In Aristotle’s most well-known work on ethics (Nicomachean Ethics II), he writes of the golden mean, or golden middle way, as the desirable balance between two extremes, one of excess and the other of deficiency. The ancient Greek way of thinking regarded this balance as a quality of beauty and, to them, beauty consisted of three *“ingredients”*, namely symmetry, proportion and harmony. The Greeks believed that there is a close association in mathematics between beauty and truth, and they judged all of life by this mentality. Beauty brought balance and was seen as an object of love, and as something that was to be imitated and reproduced in their lives, architecture, education and politics (Hamilton 2017:425-438). In therapy, it is necessary to guide our clients to re-experience beauty in their lives, as it serves to act as a healing balm. Ventura (2001:2) describes the experience of beauty as that of one’s soul and one’s world being connected in an engagement of wonder. He continues that, in *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, Jung wrote *“I had had a vision of unearthly beauty, and that was why I was able to live at all”*.

The ancient Greeks and Egyptians employed storytelling in drama and music as a means to help the disturbed achieve catharsis, to relieve themselves of pent-up emotions and to return to balanced lives (Gladding 1985:2). Early in the 14th century, Dante wrote in a letter to his patron on the meaning of the narrative of the *Commedia*: *“The aim of the whole and of the part is to remove those living in this life from a state of misery and to guide them to a state of happiness”* (Dreher 2015:43). A return to beauty. In contemporary therapy, the purpose of storytelling is to employ the imagination, which responds to both comedy and tragedy, and thereby keeps a balanced and realistic perspective on life (Gladding 2016:6). Regarding the great arts and literature’s healing role in therapy, White (White & Epston 1992:125) writes that when



considering the proposition that life is constituted through an ongoing storying and re-storying of experiences, we enter into a process that Geertz (1986:380) concluded to be a ‘copying that originates’. Lionel Trilling quotes an 18th century aesthetician asking the wrenching question of “*How comes it that we all start out Originals and end up Copies?*” and finds a reassuring answer that it is the copying that originates (White & Epston 1992:125). Thus, from the ancient Greeks to the present day, the healing power of mimicking stories have been recognised.

Why do stories have this healing power? To answer this, we need to unpack it. Stories recruit the imagination and are therefore artistic in their essence. The creative representation of reality that stories possess, are made up of two fundamental ingredients: plot and imitation. This plot-imitation is what Aristotle called *mythos-mimesis*. Aristotle, originally in his *Poetics* and as presented by Richard Kearney (2012a:e-conference) in *The Narrative Imagination and Catharsis*, explained that art/stories can heal by virtue of a purging or balancing of the two fundamental passions, namely pity and fear. Kearney (2007:51) explains that Aristotle spoke about this purging character of representation as the double act of imitation together with plot - *mythos-mimesis*. More specifically, Aristotle defined the function of *katharsis* as ‘purgation of pity and fear’. This comes about, he explains, whenever the dramatic imitation of certain actions in stories arouse pity and fear, simultaneously providing an outlet for pity and fear, thus enabling a cleansing of our fundamental passions of pity and fear. Kearney suggests that pity refers to the basic act of empathy, evoked by an imaginative portrayal of human action and suffering. This is referring to our emotional response to events unfolding. But there is always the danger of a sentimental extreme, where we over-identify with the tragic event, and lose our wits and become blinded with excessive passion, unless checked by a countervailing movement of distance and detachment, which is fear as an estrangement device. For Aristotle, this fear was the chorus, or commentary, that cut across the fictional pretence of the drama, removing the audience from the heat of the action to reflect on the hidden cause of things. But if we would take this fear to its extreme, we would end up as cold voyeurs, mercilessly contemplating the horrors unfolding. That is why Aristotle insisted on balancing these two opposing stances – subjective and objective, attached and detached, proximate and distant. When pity moves too close, fear steps in and argues for some distance, transforming pathological pity into compassion – the proper way to be *near* to pain. When fear is too far removed, pity steps in



and argues to move closer, transforming pathological fear into serenity – the proper way to be *far* from pain (Kearney 2017b:3). And it is this balancing act of stories that results in catharsis - getting rid of, release or healing. It is an invitation beyond extreme pity, towards compassion, and beyond extreme fear, towards serenity and calm. Stories literally cleanse our two basic passions, pity and fear, until they are distilled into a healing brew. It may be compared to a homeopathic remedy that finds the antidote within the disease, turning malady into health. According to Aristotle, catharsis makes for healthy citizens with purged emotions that leads to practical wisdom (Kearney 2017b:3).

4.4 Exploring Imagination with Paul Ricoeur

“My most productive pleasures are curiosity and imagination.” Helen Keller

The power of imagination, according to Ricoeur (1972 in Kearney 1995:173), is that it does not only derive images from our sensory experience in the past and present, but it has the capacity for letting new worlds shape our understanding of ourselves through meanings found in our language. He continues that imagination could be treated as a dimension of language, therefore linking imagination and metaphor. Imagination always demands new meaning. As a result, it is important to think of the imagination more in terms of language than vision. Kearney (2018b:187) explains that the *“imagination is assessed as an indispensable agent in the creation of meaning in and through language”*. Ricoeur (in Kearney 2018b:189) maintains that imagination is a simultaneous juxtaposing of two different worlds, real and unreal, which produces new meaning through language. Kearney (2018b:189,190) continues that this power to give new meaning to previous meaning through language, thus images are spoken about before they are seen, enables us to construe the future as a free theatre of hope. Language has this capacity to open up new worlds, that in turn open up new perspectives that provide us with projects of action that might lead to transformation (Ricoeur in Kearney 2018b:190). Thus, for new meaning to come into being, it must be spoken in the form of new verbal images. A new world ultimately gives a new understanding of ourselves. Kearney continues that, for Ricoeur, we can only come to know ourselves through interpretation. Stories contain meanings and symbols that are continuously being deciphered by our human imagination, thus creating the shortest route from the self to itself through the images of others (Kearney 2018b:190). And once we accept that stories cannot provide us with a factual description of the ways things



really are, then only can we begin to appreciate its creative role as a symbolizing power (Kearney 2018b:191).

4.4.1 Trauma

“No one has a programme of the concert of life” Dutch proverb

When we enter narratives of imagination, we engage in the process of rewriting the story of our lives, thus re-authoring our problem narratives. However, trauma, by definition, is unspeakable, as it seems to defy meaning and language (Kearney 2017b:1). Trauma means wounded (Retief 2009:23). It is the overwhelming experience of sudden damage and suffering which always influence the development of our capacity to feel (Russel in Kearney 2016b:94). And when we cannot feel, we cannot express. The effects of trauma remain with people lifelong, or at least long after the incident that caused it has passed, and leaves those affected hard on the exterior, uncaring and without empathy (Retief 2009:22,23). Kearney (2016b:97) explains that trauma says “*No*” as it nullifies, interrupts, stops and violates. Trauma cuts across hope, desire, expectation and security, where narrative, on the other hand, restores. Narrative produces peripeteia, the reversal of events, as it counteracts the “*No*” and says “*Yes!*”. Thus, one of the most attractive functions of narrative, is catharsis (Kearney 2007:51).

Another reality is that wounds of trauma remain timeless and, by extension, they are invisible, and cannot be touched or told where scars appear in time as they are written on the body to be seen, touched and told (Kearney 2017a:183). Therefore, unless the wound of trauma is *touched*, it will continue to exert an influence on the lives of the people affected by trauma as well as on the lives of those near to them (Retief 2009:23). When a wound is tangible, it becomes perceptible, and we can start giving meaning to it through language. Children follow the behaviour of the adults in their lives and it becomes important to them to obtain ‘permission’ from role models to acknowledge and display emotional reactions to trauma. However, if the adults do not acknowledge and reveal their own vulnerability and pain, it becomes the default behaviour of the culture within the family (Retief 2009:23). Therefore, it is vital to story trauma, to touch the untouchable, so that it can become visible, closed and healed.



On the other hand, the role of imagination is to stand in for the past, thus allowing a refiguration of time, bringing the past into time, which is an important element for identity in the process of healing (Kearney 1995:174) as it is always the identity of the victims of trauma that is affected. They no longer feel in control of their lives as they question their actions for not being able to prevent the trauma, with the result that they lose self-respect and respect for others (Retief 2009:49). However, from the earliest of literatures, we find stories of trauma that testify healing through storytelling and touch. Stories bring balance. They are cleansing and healing. The narrative imagination thus performs a twin therapy of narrative catharsis and carnal working-through, a double healing by word and touch (Kearney 2017a:182). The basic act of narrative imagination can trigger a transfer of empathy, the ingredient that deepens our humanity, between the different histories, and often embittered relationships, of strangers (Kearney 2018a:75,77). We can remake history by imagining otherwise. The narrative imagination enables us to make a wager on the impossible possibility of a shared humanity. It allows for what Ricoeur called the ‘miraculous’ act of forgiveness that lies in the search *‘not for the things that separate us – but for something common among us fellow human beings, the compassion and empathy that bind our human identity’* (Gobodo-Madikizela 2002 in Kearney 2018a:78).

4.4.2 Myth and healing

“To feel what wretches feel” Shakespeare

So, how then is catharsis actually expressed? It is through vicariousness, a sense of being elsewhere, in a different place and time, imagining things differently, experiencing the world through the eyes of another, the stranger. An ability to sympathise with suffering, while acknowledging healing taking place through this process of vicariousness. To illustrate in short, I will use one of Kearney’s (Kearney 2007:53) examples of how the healing character of narrative harks back to the earliest forms of myth.

The anthropologist, Claude Levi-Straus, writes how a village shaman tells the story of an unfortunate mortal trapped in a cave with fierce monsters prowling around the outside, with a view to healing a woman dying in childbirth as a result of a blocked birth canal. The shaman has no access to medical facilities, with his only option being the most ancient of therapies –



myth. As he and the villagers gather around the dying woman, reciting aloud the final battle scene of the story where the trapped mortal escapes the cave and defeats the monsters, something extraordinary happens, and the woman gives birth to the child. Through the telling of the myth, the woman entered the state of a type of cheerfulness that transformed all her fear into something elevated, thus succeeding in the ‘healing cause’.

“Follow your bliss, and become the hero of your own life story” Joseph Campbell

The great mythologist, Joseph Campbell (Campbell 2010:JC foundation video), talks about the rituals of ancient tribes he studied in Papua New Guinea. In their initiation rituals, the older men in the tribe disguise their identities with masks and costumes of the great gods. A myth is created by which the young boy being initiated must enter into battle with a god, i.e. an older man masked in god-like costume. After some time, the *god* manipulates the battle to allow the young boy to triumph over him. Thereafter, he takes off his mask to reveal himself to the young boy. As the god-mask gets removed from the older warrior’s face, it is handed over to the boy to cover his face which, through the myth, represents the power that has shaped the boy and his community. The young man takes that meaning-made with him into his life and represents what the metaphor stands for, that he is a true warrior. Myths therefore possess a freedom of the imagination, but a tension with reality. They carry a responsibility towards the real, but the myth is there to inspire the reality into something new. Narrative imagination is a restructuring and a reconfiguring of the facts so that something new can be brought about.

Renowned psychotherapist, Esther Perel (2018b:podcast), specialising in human relationships, speaks of using psychodrama, founded by Jacob Moreno, in her couple therapy. Perel explains that we have a tendency to get stuck in our role, in our own view of things and the way ‘I’ see us. A couple that has been together for a long time can recite the other person’s lines by heart. She uses roleplay to increase empathy and to enable couples to step outside of the narrowness of their own individual perspective. *“It gives people the opportunity to tell what they would actually like to hear from their partner”*. Through the improvised roleplay, the couple is so to say imagining and creating a myth, which gives new meaning and is cathartic. Myths provide a symbolic response at the cathartic level of imaginary plots, characters and representations, which calms our deep anxiety about our lived experience.



Furthermore, Kearney (2007:53) explains that myths address our even deeper anxiety, that of our origins and our endings. They offer not an answer, but a response, to our existential question of where we come from and where we are going. Additionally, myths enable us to experience things that were inexperienced, as a result of being too painful at the time. Therefore, we need to retrieve the inexperienced experience after the trauma event via narratives. In turn, these stories represent the trauma via imaginative experience, allowing us to find some indirect expression, ‘*as if*’ it was happening, which enables a channel for the expression of inhibited feelings which is a release and which brings forth healing. Freud had hinted at this in his writings of the *fort/da* scenario, where young Ernst performed his first therapeutic achievement in play-pretending to momentarily resolve a distressing reality (Freud 1920:14). As Schnell (in Kearney 2007:56) suggests “*the closest we get to answering the saddest questions life asks us, is to respond in the most beautiful language we can muster*”.

To put our most painful experiences into some kind of story somehow contributes to the slow process of healing. This was experienced by a holocaust survivor that was fortunate to make it onto Schindler’s list and she confessed that she was never able to reconnect with her experiences in the camps until she saw herself played by an actor in the Spielberg movie. It was only through the detour of fiction, ‘*as if*’ experienced again but this time from a safe distance as to grasp the meaning of the true horror ‘*as*’, that she could restore her pain and tell her story (Kearney 2017b:8). It is precisely this double response of truth (*as*) and fiction (*as if*) that liberates us from our habitual protection and denial mechanisms. Thus, what cannot be solved historically, can be resolved fictionally in terms of a structural balancing of opposites, real and unreal (Kearney 2007:54). At a therapeutic level, stories can become cathartic ways of revisiting blocked emotions of ‘pity and fear’, a pity too deep and a fear too huge to be dealt with at the time of the trauma event. Myths are thus machines for the purging of wounds, strategies for resolving, at a symbolic level, what remains irresolvable at the level of lived experience. Narrative therapy heavily relies on utilising our narrative imagination and, by doing so, transforms binding stories into freer ones, emancipating us from the straight-jacket of solipsistic fancy (Kearney 2002:45).



To summarise, myths do not provide rational answers to our irresolvable problems, but they do provide a symbolic response, which is cathartic. We find in them symbolic solutions to lived problems. Similarly, our cultural stories clearly seek to offer a response to the age-old question of identity: *Who are we?* When someone asks us who we are, we tell our story and, if someone does not ask you, you will ask yourself, “*For stories have always been ways in which people explain themselves to themselves and to others*” (Kearney 2007:57). The works of the great authors, such as Homer, Shakespeare and Joyce, are cases of recreation, reinterpretation and reinvention. The question is how these great works of literature might help us work through trauma. To answer this, I shall take a look at Kearney’s (2015 & 2016b) writing on Joyce, Shakespeare and Homer.

4.4.3 Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Homer’s *Odyssey* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*

“*The truth hurts but silence kills*” Mark Twain

James Joyce, in a letter to his brother in 1906, announces that he has started a new ‘short story’, *Ulysses*. He came up with the idea when he was mugged in Rome shortly before, after he had been fired from his job at the bank. As he was lying in the gutter, beaten up and bleeding, he remembered a previous mugging that occurred in 1904 outside the Abbey theatre in Dublin. There he was rescued by a man called Hunter, “*a cuckold Jew*”, who picked him up and took him to his home for a cup of cocoa. The repetition of woundings triggered a lost memory in Joyce, one of an immigrant Jew rescuing a wounded Dubliner, and so planting a seed of goodwill in Joyce’s imagination. When trauma visits us, we often remember previous traumas.

After the mugging in Rome, Joyce and his wife are invited to attend an opera, the librettist of which was called Blum. Joyce combines these moments of coincidence and births his paternal protagonist, Leopold Bloom, “*a cuckold Jew*”. *Ulysses* itself is a story that rewrites two other stories, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Homer’s *Odyssey*. All three are stories of fathers and sons traversing wounds on the way to healing - sons striving to be atoned with their fathers. In *Ulysses*, the son is Joyce's literary alter ego, Stephen Dedalus (Telemachus in *Odyssey*), and the father is Leopold Bloom (Odysseus). In the novel, Stephen and Bloom meet at the entrance of the National Library in Dublin. In this scene, Stephen makes known his theory of the father and son idea in *Hamlet*, explaining that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* the year his own son,



Hamnet, dies, and his father, John Shakespeare, was dying. Thus, according to Stephen Dedalus, Shakespeare wrote the book about himself in order to escape the melancholy of his father's, and of his son's, death, and to mourn properly, in a way that he could not do in the lived experience. Through this, Stephen is echoing his own father-son relationships with his paternal father, Mr Dedalus, and with his surrogate father, Bloom. This story within a story, is itself an imitation of Homer's father and son relationship, Odysseus and Telemachus. Kearney explains that we are dealing here with stories within stories within stories, of fathers and sons repeating, reliving and relieving trauma. All are types of storytelling that forever fails to cure, but never fails to try to heal, trauma (Kearney 2015:135). And here, in this very effort of trying to heal trauma, Kearney continues that there is the pleasurable purgation of Aristotle's pity and fear, discussed earlier.

Similarly, in *Hamlet* (Kearney 2016b:78), we find a symbolic working-through of an otherwise irresolvable crisis, in which a father, King Hamlet, asks his son, Prince Hamlet, to do something impossible, which is to remember something that cannot be remembered. Kearney expresses this double bind of trauma as: "*To speak is impossible, not to speak is impossible*". The ghost of the father, King Hamlet, asks his son to '*remember me, remember me...*' but, at the same time, he adds that he cannot tell the forbidden tales of secret crimes that he committed in his days of nature and for which he is condemned to purgatory. So, poor Hamlet, knowing his father is condemned to flames for a secret sin committed in his youth, is asked to remember that which cannot be told. In Hamlet's story we clearly see that trauma possesses us like ghosts. The son, Hamlet, inherits the double injunction of trauma, to remember what cannot be told, thus trauma being encrypted rather than being confessed. Furthermore, Hamlet never saw or touched the fatal wounds of his father, King Hamlet, whose body decomposed prematurely because of the poison administered by Claudius. Hamlet thus never saw the corpse of his father, just as Shakespeare, as Stephen reminds us, never saw the corpse of his son Hamnet. Felman and Laub (in Kearney 2016b:84) calls this a '*collapse of witnessing*', which postpones healing. Trauma always works by delay. Symbolically, when wounds are not witnessed as scars, it results in this collapse of witnessing that makes for traumatic delay (Kearney 2015:138,139). We are faced here with the silent wound of trauma versus the touched and told scar of trauma. Wounds remain timeless, invisible and harmful, while scars appear in time, are visible and can heal.



Trauma always remain a timeless wound in the unconscious. On the other hand, scars are carnal traces that can change and alter over time as we narrate them. However, they can never disappear (Kearney 2016b:83). Narratives of trauma are therefore attempts at bringing the timeless into time, to make the wound into a scar. Kearney (2016b:95) quotes Gislaine Boulanger on the plea to privilege narrative: “*Narrative is transfigured memory that, in its turn, if it is a living narrative, further transfigures memory. The importance does not lie in the memory itself but in the power to gather all the disparate impressions into a coherent whole, and in the rigorously intersubjective experience necessary to this process. In privileging narrative, we privilege the successive unfolding on increasingly complex experience. To privilege narrative is to understand that to relate a traumatic memory (or any memory) is to construct the memory, to formulate experience that has previously remained unformulated. That is, experience that may have been brought in bits and pieces into the margins of consciousness, only to be banished before it reached the level of coherent thought*”.

To privilege narrative, as Boulanger proposes, I shall take a brief look at *Odyssey* and *Hamlet*. In Homer’s *Ulysses*, the Latin name for Odysseus, we find the standard motif of Greek myth, i.e. that sons act like their fathers until the point that someone says ‘*stop*’. That someone is the true artist. The true artist shifts the negative repetition of trauma in life into a cathartic retelling in narrative (Kearney 2015:135). Only when Odysseus returns to Ithaca as a mortal beggar and a low cast, is his scar recognised, touched and told, and the repetition of trauma finally comes to an end. Thus Odysseus’ narrative identity is narratively revealed by the nurse, Ereclea, touching his scar. It is interesting to note that the word Homer uses for scar in the *Odyssey*, is *oulen*, a term often associated with trauma, meaning both trace and scar. While the wound is timeless, the scar appears in time, a bodily trace that can change over time but can never disappear. Scars are remaining marks, to be worked through by way of seeing, touching, telling and reading (Kearney 2015:136).

Narrative catharsis is thus a process of working through our bodily traces. The touching of the scar in Homer is simultaneously the recounting of Odysseus’ life. The symbolic touching of my scar in storying at Prynnsberg, was simultaneously the telling of my story. Prynnsberg acted as the catalyst that exposed and told my trauma wound. Trauma always works by delay. It took thirty-six years of muted delay to find the stimulus that unmuted my trauma wound so that my



narrative identity could finally be narratively constructed. The wound of trauma therefore finally became a scar that could be touched and told. It took five scenes in *Hamlet* for the fatal circle of repetition to come to an end, when Hamlet himself exposes, by way of telling, the wound in his body where the sword entered. The working-through of trauma always takes time and patience. And the only solution to this cycle of repetitive trauma is when the untold wound is converted into some form of telling. It is clear that trauma always needs to be storied so that healing can happen. It is only when Hamlet succeeds in abandoning his illusions about a perfect father and accepts that he, like his father, are mortal finite beings, that the repetition of cyclical transgenerational trauma, ends. Thus it is Hamlet's sacrificial surrender that enables the play's other fatherless son, Fortinbras, to live on and to survive the generational curse of kings killing kings and princes killing princes. The pinnacle of the tale, and what brings the final ending to the repetition of trauma, is when a dying Hamlet asks Horatio to tell his story. The story that could not be told is finally told.

Untouchable by Jacob Bellens

“Where the moon glows in your hair
And the rain falls down
On a ground that's cold and bare
Dripping from the clouds
Where I sing because I care
Till my lungs fall out
I'm asleep but well aware
That the word is out”

Freud (1920) explains in the *fort/da* scenario that we use words to work through trauma. Words make the untouchable, touchable. Joyce used the writing of *Ulysses* to work through his personal trauma, as did Shakespeare according to Stephen's hypothesis. Freud and Joyce witnessed the power of words and writing to work through wounds, as it possesses the ability to give a new future to the past. The cathartic storytelling at Prynnsberg was a personal working-through of my trauma wound, which remained encrypted for many years but, finally, when confessed, the wound became a scar and a new future became possible. My idiosyncratic journey at Prynnsberg caused the *remembering* of that which was previously unspeakable, and,

by extension, the *remembering* stopped the cyclical repetition of trauma, and guided my way to the resurrection of beauty in my life narrative. The wound became a scar, the story was told and the trauma could heal. Yet trauma narratives are open narratives that never end, rather than closed narratives that presume to wish away wounds in lieu of working through scars. Kearney (2015:143) writes that the great works of art are works of mourning and recovery, writings that translate wounds into scars, flesh into fiction. Just so does the storying of the traumatic events in our lives labour through them.

4.4.4 Big trauma

“You can kill a people but you cannot silence their voices”

History retold is fiction, in the sense that it is a narrative reconstruction of history. Imagination responds to the reality of the past in ethical terms, and poetics serves the ethical responsibility by way of remembering our debt to the dead. Historical imagination is both fiction and history acting as allies - when we fictionalize history, it makes us see, feel and live it more, ‘*as if*’ we were there (Kearney 1995:178). However, in cases of big trauma, such as genocide, rape and torture, cathartic narrative seems inadequate. Despite this, Kearney (2007:59) argues that it is important to continue telling the story and to seek some release, even though minimal, otherwise melancholy wins out over mourning, paralysis over sorrow, and oblivion over remembrance. We need a working-through of pain so that desolation can be transformed into grieving. This involves a process of therapeutic recollection, while always mindful that forgiveness is never forgetting (Ricoeur in Kearney 2018a:79). We must remember before we can forget, so that we can live again through healing imagination.

In Coetzee’s *The lives of Animals*, we find Helen Costello’s account of the horrors of the Nazi camps and the absolute necessary importance of narrative imagination for ethical sensibility. Costello writes of the horror of the killers refusing to think themselves into the place of their victims, and how they chose to close their hearts to sympathy, which is the very ingredient that allows us to be another (Kearney 2007:59,60). Kearney (2016a:25) explains Coetzee’s basic message that “*if we possess narrative compassion, we cannot kill. If we do not, we cannot love*”. In this instance, we might say that the narrative catharsis, performed and prescribed by the narrator, offers a singular mix of compassion and awe, whereby we experience the suffering



of other beings, strangers and victims, as though we were them. It is precisely this double response of difference/fiction (as if) and identity/reality (as) that provokes a reversal of our habitual attitude. We are then able to experience ourselves as another, and the other as ourselves. We can begin to understand an otherwise un-understandable suffering. Thus history needs story to bring the past to life again, and story needs history to make unspeakable wounds into visible scars (Kearney 2018a:79). It is a delicate balance between silence and speaking, invisibility and visibility (Kearney 2017b:7).

Another impressive cathartic narrator is Helen Bamber (in Kearney 2007:60:61), founding member of Amnesty International and one of the first therapists to enter the concentration camps after the war. She encouraged the survivors to convert their trauma into stories, and thereby find some form of release. Here she encountered the need people had to tell their impossible stories over and over again, which made her realise that what was most useful and important was for her to listen and receive these stories. Bamber (in Kearney 2007:60:61) writes: *“Holocaust stories, like all stories of deep trauma, fear and pain are to be understood less as tales of heroic triumph over adversity, than as truncated, wounded quasi-narratives that call out to be heard, impossible stories that the victims and survivors nonetheless have to tell... Without such conversion from inability to speak to testimony, from silent wounds to narrated words, the survivors could not survive their own survival. ...They could not pass from death back into life”*. She continues describing the almost tangible purging effect of a realistic Yiddish play, that was performed for remaining holocaust survivors by other survivors. And this is what Aristotle, originally in the *Poetics*, would have called the healing power of art by virtue of the purgation of pity and fear, by pity and fear. When we become readers or spectators of art, we may experience this cathartic release because the artful artificiality of mythos-mimesis detaches us from the action unfolding before us, affording us sufficient distance to grasp the meaning of it all (Kearney 2002:137-138). Kearney adds that the key to the deep power of release from the trauma that this basic mythos-mimesis allows for, is the fact that it balances the act of identification with a theatrical representation. This is so that the survivors can re-experience their pain from a safe distance, which was previously inexperienced as it was too unbearable to register at the actual time of the trauma, the distance being provided by the theatrical form and plot. Without this distance/detachment, one would be smothered by trauma – Aristotle’s *pity*, to the point of numbness – Aristotle’s *fear*. Various narrative testimonies in



cinema, theatre, literature and documentary, invite subsequent generations to remember the unspeakable events of big trauma ‘*as if*’ they were experiencing it for themselves. And even though these narrative representations do not give full justice to the horror, it allows us to remember what happened so that “*it may never happen again*” (Primo Levi in Kearney 2007:62).

The range of healing that stories possess depends on the combination of empathic imagination with a certain acknowledgement of the cause of the pain. Genuine cathartic witness hints at something deeper than mere information of facts. Telling the stories of horror and injustice is a way of never giving up on the dead, or those that continue to suffer from such injustices. It is important, as Paul Ricoeur (in Kearney 2016a:25) writes on what he calls the debt we owe to the dead, that we need to count the corpses and be struck by the pain that was endured. It is an acknowledgement of the truth, as well as a knowledge of the detail of it (Bamber in Kearney 2016a:24). We have a double-duty with these stories of trauma - our poetic duty is testimonial recognition (a witnessing) through the telling of the stories, and our ethical duty is the scientific knowledge and understanding (a responsibility) through empirical evidence and explanation. The better the historical explanation, the more struck we are by the narrative retelling, and the more we strive to understand it. Thus the narrative imagination causes thought, just as thought causes narrative imagination. The action of remembering the past takes on an ethical character of testimony, reiterating that we must never forget the horror attached to events (Ricoeur 1988 in Kearney 1995:179 - 180). Without the quasi-intuitiveness of fiction, the horror would remain mute and numb, as it is too intolerable to grasp. *‘Fiction gives eyes to the horrified narrator. Eyes to see and to weep’* (Wolin 1993 in Kearney 1995:180).

Catharsis is thus a matter of retrieving painful events through the opening that narrative imitation provides - the ‘*as*’ of history that involves cognitive knowledge through empirical evidence, and the ‘*as if*’ of fiction which is an effective empathy with the victims. We need history to know the collective violence which brought about the horror, and we need story to be struck by the evil of it. It is a way of making what is absent, present, by uniquely balancing compassion and dispassion, identification and contemplation, particular emotion and universal



understanding. Aristotle's catharsis is thus recognition which does not cure but always labours to offer some measure of healing (Kearney 2007:63).

4.5 Narrative and Catharsis through a Narrative Therapeutic Lens

The aim of this study is to uncover the workings of the narrative imagination in a healing cathartic way. I shall look at what the theory of narrative practice says about re-authoring, poetry and touch, with regards to achieving, healing and returning to a balanced life. When clients tell a story about their life, it turns it into a history, one that can be left behind, so that it is easier for them to create a future that they themselves design and prefer (Epston in O'Hanlon 1994:29). However, important to remember is that the construction of preferred stories goes hand in hand with, and extends from, the process of deconstructing the problem story (Freedman & Combs 1996:89). Re-authoring is the task of the narrative imagination that runs as follows: the story of a life continues to be reconstructed by all the experientially-lived and fictive stories a person tells about themselves. The reconstruction makes the life itself a cloth, woven of stories told by both the individual and their community or culture (Wolin 1993:246 in Kearney 1995:181). It is an ongoing process, as the stories proceed from stories, just as histories proceed from histories (Kearney 1995:182). Re-authoring work extends from our narrative imagination, and our clients are the privileged and imaginative authors.

Thus people, individual or communal, come to imagine and understand themselves in the stories they tell about themselves. Kearney (1995a:182) explains that Ricoeur represents the role of the narrative imagination in the history of a community by choosing biblical Israel: "*It was in telling the sacred narratives foundational to its history that biblical Israel formed the historical community that bears its name...an historical Jewish community drawing its identity from the reinterpretation of those texts it has itself created*". Kearney (1995a:183) continues that narrative identity thus recognizes that life is in quest of narrative, just as narrative is in quest of life. It is important to note that the narrative imagination needs to be supplemented by narrative will. Narrative can bring us to the door of action, but it cannot lead us through. Ricoeur (in Kearney 1995:184) concludes that action ultimately belongs to the reader, now the agent, to be the initiator of action and to choose among the multiple proposals brought forth by reading.



4.5.1 Re-authoring through a narrative therapeutic lens

Narrative therapists are under the influence of optimism, and they believe in possibility and hope (O'Hanlon 1994:28). It is an assumption that problems are social and personal constructions and are never 100% successful in claiming people's lives (Morgan 2000:58). Their social and historical context invite them to tell and remember certain stories and to leave others unstored (Freedman & Combs 1996:42). Michel Foucault brought us to the understanding that discourse causes this to happen (Karlberg 2005:1). Our stories are authored through conversation. The narrative therapist does not know where the stories of their clients will go. We can only co-author a story, a piece at a time, through a linguistic collaboration with the client (Freedman & Combs 1996:88). *"Each detail stands on the one before and can only be constructed as the one before begins to find form and definition"* (Tomm 1993 & White 1991 in Freedman & Combs 1996:88). Because we as therapists do not know where our client's stories will lead, and because we are not the principle authors, we use the subjunctive mood by asking questions such as *"Could it be that?"* or *"What if?"* as a way of introducing possibilities, but not prescribing them. This is to encourage our clients to participate and invent by employing their imagination (Freedman & Combs 1996:89). This process calls for curiosity and participation in each part of the story as it unfolds (Freedman & Combs 1996:88).

Furthermore, the therapist is interested in magnifying the different stories about people's lives and relationships, which always exists but are hidden. It is a conscious identification with other stories in one's life or, as described in Aristotle's *Poetics*, where we identify with the stories of others in order to produce greater meaning. As discussed before, the great arts and literature can be used as a necessary scaffolding process. They can participate in a reimagining of the familiar story, by bringing in other stories, with an emphasis of putting the *self* in touch with the discoveries about the written *other*, which is cathartic as it moves toward what might be possible forwards (White 2007b:vimeo). They encourage conversations that continually loosen and open up, rather than constricting and closing down, possibilities - a process of expanding and saying the *'unsaid'* by developing new themes, new stories and new histories through dialogue (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:381).

Because stories are so central to our lives, narrative therapy is understood as a re-authoring of the story of one's life. The *'unsaid'* does not exist, therefore we need to give it shape as we



converse with our clients (Freedman & Combs 1996:45). It is the process whereby the preferred story is birthed, and re-authoring starts. Re-authoring conversations that externalising conversations often make way for, contribute to the rich description of clients' lives and relationships as they step into the other experiences of their identity (White 2004a:126).

4.5.2 Unique outcomes

Stories consists of events linked in sequence across time and according to a plot (Morgan 2000:5). The narrative therapist will hear events that support the problem story, as well as events that contradict the problem story. The events that are outside of the problem's influence and that do not agree with the dominant myth, are known as unique outcomes. The term '*unique*' does not imply that it is a once-off event, but rather that the event is unique in the sense that it could not have been predicted by the oppressive dominant story (Nicholson 1995:24). Unique outcomes may be anything from a plan, action, feeling, statement, quality, desire, dream, thought, belief, ability or commitment, and they appear in the past, present or future. This falls in line with tracing the history of the problem and listening for when the problem had less, little or no influence over the person (Morgan 2000:54). Asking questions regarding these unique outcomes results in the rich description of the preferred and alternative story, shaping the process of re-authoring (Morgan 2000:51,52).

Sometimes clients offer unique outcomes directly, and at other times it is important to listen very carefully so as not to miss the mention of a unique outcome buried in people's descriptions of their problem stories (Lipchik 1988 in Freedman & Combs 1996:90). Sometimes we can observe our client's behaviour in therapy being quite the opposite of their description of their problem story, for example children behaving well in a therapy session although they are described as always misbehaving (Freedman & Combs 1996:90,91). As the therapist enquires about a particular event that opposes the problem, other events that are also free from the influence of the problem, become noticeable and accessible. However, most often, unique outcomes develop spontaneously as we enquire into the effects of the problem on their lives and their relationships, or when we ask about the influence of the person on the life of the externalised problem. Questions such as "*Describe how you have been able to resist the influence of the problem*" or "*Is the problem always with you?*", followed by a detailed enquiry into the effects of the problem, will lead to times when the client was able to elude the influence



of the dominating problem story. Each of these events lead to the opening of an alternative life story (Freedman & Combs 1996:91). Other hypothetical questions about different contexts and different time frames can be brought in to reconstruct the narrative of balance, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

As the person gains more distance from the problem-saturated description of the self, they become more able to notice aspects of their life that contradict that perception of the self (Nicholson 1995:24). When we connect all these moments that oppose the problem and join them together, we are re-storying our experiences. It is important to emphasise these events to our clients, as people place less significance on them, and they often go unnoticed (Morgan 2000:54). As therapists, we know that unique outcomes do not exist in isolation, but that there are other events across time that can be traced and linked with the specific unique outcome that was discovered (Morgan 2000:55). This opens opportunities for richly describing the unique events and it simultaneously leads away from the thin description that problems dictate. It is important to note, however, that it is the client that decides how significant these events are, not the therapist. Therefore it is important to ask questions about unique outcomes, such as “*Does this event interest you?*” or “*Did that behaviour surprise you?*” or “*Is this something you would like to have more of in your life?*”, so that our clients are invited to consider these events as preferable or not (Freedman & Combs 1996:92). Thus, a careful and slow enquiry, without pointing out positives, helps the therapist to leave the judgement of the importance of these specific events up to the person attending therapy (Morgan 2000:56). It is, however, important for the therapist to be curious, and explore various questions, to create a context about the unique outcome, as the person in therapy may at first not see it as particularly significant and thus render the event meaningless. Thus, we listen to our client’s existing narratives of their experiential worlds and orient ourselves to their values, customs, and preferred ways of relating (Freedman & Combs 1996:92).

Furthermore, unique outcomes need to be explored in detail, and their histories traced and linked, so as to understand what they mean to the person in therapy, in order to develop a new story. As more and more unique outcomes are traced, linked, given meaning and richly described, the new plot becomes more tangible, the new story enters the foreground and our clients become more accustomed to it. Simultaneously, it assists people to reconnect with their



preferences, hopes, dreams and ideas which, in turn, affect their future actions (Morgan 2000:59).

We should also bear in mind that stories usually include more than one person and that by telling these stories to other people, a performance of meaning occurs (Freedman & Combs 1996:93). Since we think about our realities as being socially constructed, including a number of characters in re-authoring makes sense. Here we can ask hypothetical outcome questions such as questions from others' points of view, as it reveals different details, different emotions, and different meanings (Freedman & Combs 1996:95). Freedman and Combs (1996:93) importantly note that *"In order to make the therapy conversation a 'ritual space' in which the performance of meaning can occur, we strive to maintain the kind of focused attention and mutual respect that will make it easy and natural for people to become experientially involved in the stories that they are telling. Ideally, people should be reliving the events as they tell them"*. And we can relive and remember much better when we recruit our imagination, much in the same way that good storytellers tell their story, or when we read a captivating novel or watch a compelling movie with details drawing us deeper into it. Stories become experientially vivid when we richly describe various aspects of the plot unfolding. Similarly, when people search for specifics of detail in memories, and discuss these details, they become experientially involved (Freedman & Combs 1996:94).

Bruner (in White 2007a:77,78) proposed that stories are principally composed of two landscapes – 'landscape of action', thus experience, and 'landscape of consciousness', thus meaning. The landscape of action is composed of the sequence of events that make up the plot, and the landscape of consciousness is composed of what meaning is derived from those involved in the action (White 2007a:78). To counter the effects of a problem-saturated story, the therapist goes back and forth, constantly consulting their client about the emerging story, who is involved in it, how it suits them and how it fits with their preferred way of being? (Morgan 2000:60). This is done by asking explorative and detailed questions regarding their preferred events in their life. Questions often begin with Who? What? Where? When? so that the particularities of the unique outcome in the landscape of action can be explored in small detail. While this term implies behaviours, in practice it consists of the clients' broader experience, which include both feelings and ways of conducting oneself. Once the unique



outcomes are identified, meaning is constructed from them, with questions such as “*what do these events suggest about yourself?*” or “*what different perspectives does it give about yourself?*” or “*how do these experiences influence the way you see yourself and feel about yourself?*”, thus moving from the realm of experience, to the realm of meaning (Nicholson 1995:24). White (1995:31) explains that the events that make up the landscape of action “*is constituted by experiences of events that are linked together in sequences through time and according to specific plots. This provides us with the rudimentary structure of stories. If we drop one of those dimensions out – experiences of events, sequences, time, or plot – then we wouldn’t have a story*”.

‘Landscape of action’ questions is therefore a process of exploring the unique outcome itself, tracing its history and the meaning made of it, as well as an enquiry into any other actions and events that may be linked to the unique outcome, for example events that led up to the unique outcome or occurred just after it. These stories are always potentially a part of our client’s life narratives, but often these events, from which the alternative narrative is constructed, lie disconnected in seldom-visited memories. To ensure that we invite our clients to include detail in their stories, we inquire about multiple modalities of experience, such as “*What were you thinking and what were you feeling?*” or “*What was his expression on his face when you told him?*” or “*What were you doing, seeing or hearing?*” (Freedman & Combs 1996:94,95). It is a process of bringing experience, sequence, time and plot together in our client’s stories.

The meaning that is made from a unique outcome leads us to the landscape of identity, which describes the person’s desires, their strengths, commitments, plans, characteristics, abilities and purposes. White (White 1995 in Morgan 2000:61) explains that “*As they talk about certain events, they will indicate what they think those events reflect about the character, motives, desires, and so on, of various persons in their social networks. They will also reflect upon what these events say about the qualities of particular relationships. So, the landscape of identity or meaning has to do with the interpretations that are made through reflection on those events that are unfolding through landscape of action*”. The therapist’s questions dance back and forth between the details of the events, and what meaning is made in terms of the persons beliefs and hopes.



Thus, in re-authoring work, our clients are invited to explore ‘landscape of action’ and ‘landscape of identity’ by way of reflecting on what the alternative events in the landscape of action might mean about identity (White 2007a:128). By determining which events in the landscape of action most reflect the preferred accounts of identity (characteristics of motives, beliefs, hopes, values and of strengths), an alternative landscape of action and identity are birthed (White 1995:31). Richly describing these events, and the meaning of the alternative events, leads to the construction of the non-problematic narrative and a preferred way of living. This process is enabled by hope and proclaims liberation and the new life of impossible possibilities, where the power of the dominating myth is broken (Meylahn 2012:61).

And finally, but just as important, giving the new alternative story a name (Morgan 2000:60,61). This naming is useful and provides a framework within which all future events or actions can be mapped (Morgan 2000:72). Additionally, naming the preferred story assists conversations that explore the effects of this counterplot, an evaluation of these effects and a justification of the evaluation. The articulation of its effects, both in the present and that which may become possible in the future, opens possibilities that continue to solidify the counterplot.

A unique outcome at Prynnsberg

In this chapter of re-authoring I will reflect on my experience at Prynnsberg, which precipitated a new view of myself and which lead to new possibilities and hope for my future. After my trauma event, I felt deep shame. Thereafter, and with shame as the main ingredient, I constructed an identity that was incapable of being authentically connected to myself and others. I assumed that it was the way I always was and always would be. Subjugated by this construction, my understanding of the world and relationships was critically impacted. Brene Brown (2011:TED) speaks of vulnerability and connection as an antidote to shame. When we share our shame with trusted friends and loved ones, it starts to dissipate. Shame kept silent only truly benefits its oppressors. We must talk about it to enable the wound of shame to become a scar that is seen, touched and told.

Prynnsberg represented my trauma narrative via an imaginative experience, and it allowed me to find some indirect expression, ‘*as if*’ it was happening again, which in turn enabled an



expression of inhibited feelings, which caused a healing release (Kearney 2007:53). Through the process of vicariousness - of being elsewhere, in a different place and time, imagining things differently, experiencing the world through the eyes of another - which storying at Prynnsberg enabled, I experienced catharsis. In this process of healing, I discovered a new identity, who acted in direct opposition to the thin description the oppressive storyline of shame dictated. This held remarkable significance for me and I wanted to participate more in this emerging identity. When we are able to notice aspects of our lives that contradict negative perceptions of the *self*, we are able to gain distance from the problem-saturated description of the self (Nicholson 1995:24). As I began having broader experiences of being, feeling and behaving that contradicted the problem narrative, I gained distance from the constraints dictated by the dominant story, and it provided an entry point to the development of the preferred story. My journey at Prynnsberg made it possible for me to explore new, and more preferred ways, of conducting myself. Meylahn writes that those excluded, unheard and marginal feelings and behaviours help us discern the restricting dominant myth (Meylahn 2012:60) and enables us to move from a realm of experience toward a realm of meaning. What do these broader experiences mean, what do they tell about me, and what possibilities are opened for me? As this gave me a new perspective on my *self*, I started viewing myself as someone that could deeply connect with authenticity and courage.

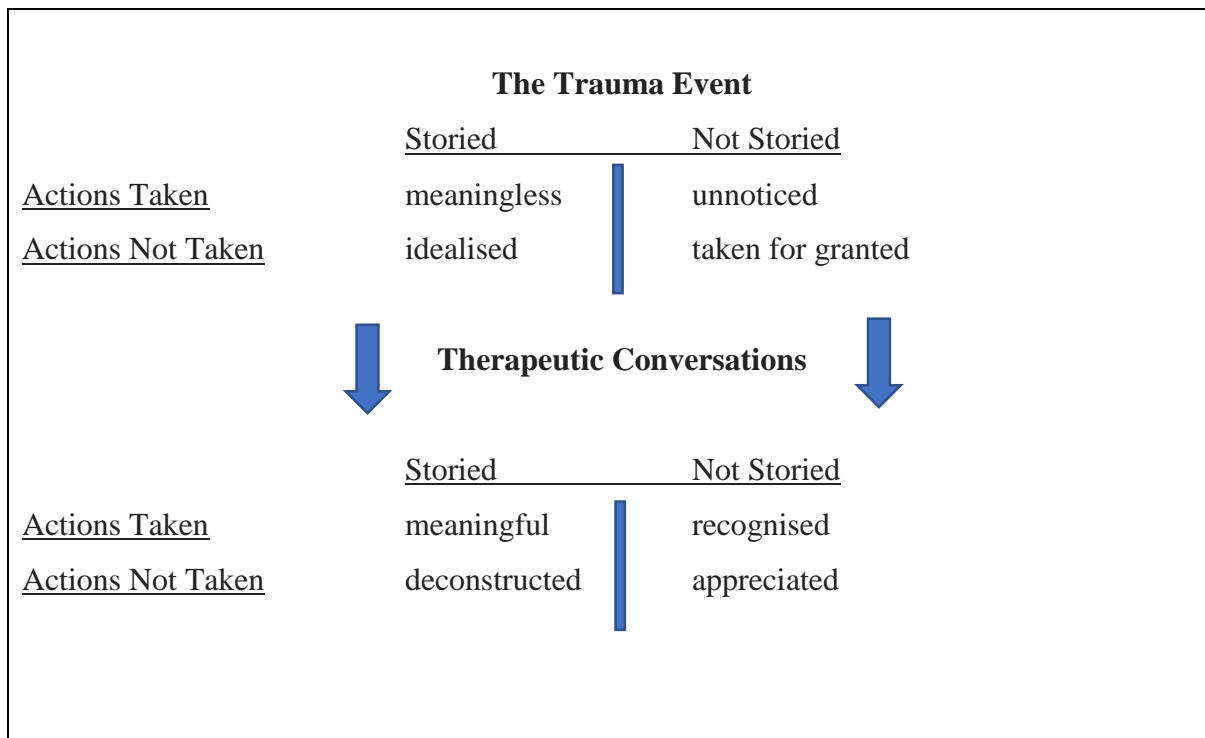
Prynnsberg was the womb that birthed Kuhaylah – Drinker of the Wind. The visual images that metaphors provide, helps to guide us. The metaphor of Kuhaylah formed the foundation of my preferred future narrative and enabled me to richly visualise and describe my desires, strengths, abilities, commitments and purposes.

4.5.3 Re-authoring in trauma

In trauma events, clients often iterate the traumatic event in a problem-saturated way that focusses on actions taken, yet perceived as ineffective, and actions not taken that are idealized. Both the many actions that were taken and not taken, therefore remain insignificant in the shadow of the dominating problem narrative (Beaudoin 2005:33). It is important to explore these actions in depth, and the stories rendered to it, to rebuild identity and to increase a sense of agency and competency. Marie-Nathalie Beaudoin (2005:32-50) proposes a model where

therapeutic conversations address four quadrants, namely actions taken and storied, actions taken and not storied, actions not taken and storied, and finally, actions not taken and not storied. All four of these quadrants need to be explored in therapeutic conversations to ensure the storying of an experience of choice, and an identity of agency. This provides clients with a much larger range of possible actions to consider in their meaning-making process. Additionally, it helps them to generate options that are congruent with their values, and to engage in these actions in ways that are more empowering than what they previously thought. Below, in Table 2, I explore the re-authoring process of Beaudoin’s (2005:33-48) four-quadrant model.

Table 2: Therapeutic Conversation that Fosters Re-authoring of Choice and Agency



Actions taken and storied

Beaudoin (2005:34,35) explains that clients suffering from trauma easily discount the value of the actions they did choose to take. Although meanings given to those actions do not come early in the therapy process, speaking about them does create space for the scaffolding of new perspectives. For meaning to begin to be ascribed to actions taken and discounted, the conversation can be initiated around three areas, as follows:



- *Obstacles.* Carefully-crafted questions can amplify the obstacles that the client had to overcome to generate the actions taken. When such obstacles become visible, the actions are less readily discounted, and they become more interesting to explore. Questions such as “*Did you understand what was going on immediately, or was there some misbelief?*” and “*How come you thought of this in the midst of disbelief?*” and “*What were other challenging aspects of surviving the situation?*”
- *Distinguishing one’s choices.* Clients that have endured sexual assault will often make negative identity conclusions, such as being a slut or a loser, or being weak because they feel they did not stand up for themselves. And these conclusions are often supported by dominant cultural discourses that influence the victims of sexual assault (Weedon 1997 in Beaudoin 2005:35). In the conversations of distinguishing the client’s choices it is important to emphasize that identity is determined by their own choices, responses, intentions, and by the harmony that it holds with their values, rather than that of culture or other people’s behaviours (Joy 1999 in Beaudoin 2005:35). Questions such as “*What determines your identity?*” and “*Is it your intentions and choices, or the other’s behaviour?*” and “*Who made all the decisions about this event?*”.
- *Ending.* Inquiring about what contributed to ending the traumatic event may provide important information that was either previously rendered meaningless, or that went unnoticed. Questions that can help discover significant actions are, as an example, “*How did it stop?*”, “*Was there a certain action you didn’t take that could unintentionally have prolonged the event?*”, and “*If you didn’t engage in prolonging the event, what actions did you take that contributed to the event ending sooner rather than later?*”.

Life is rich in lived experience and we are highly selective in the aspects that are rendered meaningful, taking these into the known and familiar storylines of our lives (White 2007a:219). However, when clients retell a trauma event, the description they give to their actions are thin. Usually they focus on the perpetrator’s actions. Thus, actions taken by the victim are minimized and interpreted as insignificant and meaningless. The therapist therefore invites their client to



re-evaluate the significance of their actions, as it can provide an entry point for the development of an alternative meaning.

Actions taken and not storied

No person is a passive recipient of trauma. People will always take action to minimise suffering, whether this is emotional, behavioural or intellectual. To obtain more information, therapist and client explore the actions taken that were initially discounted and therefore not storied. The ongoing psychological pain in response to trauma is a testimony of the violation of something that the person holds precious (White 2006:154). Many of the actions go unnoticed because of the intensity of the event and because people focus on the danger itself, rather than what is happening to them internally, resulting in many micro-actions being ignored (Durrant & White 1992 in Beaudoin 2005:37). It is important to evoke and acknowledge these actions, as they reflect the client's ability to generate vast numbers of options, some of which agree with their values and others which may have reduced the potential for suffering. It helps them to revise their sense of incompetence and be more self-appreciative.

Before a traumatic event, clients may recall that they were confident and independent, whereas after the event they feel fearful and insecure. They feel that they have lost what they value about themselves and they start wondering about their own integrity as people. The meaning they make from the trauma event makes them suspicious of their identity and they start questioning themselves, leading to disconnection from a sense of themselves and other significant people in their lives. When conversations in therapy make it visible that the actions they took are aligned with their personal values and beliefs, people start experiencing themselves as skilled and as having integrity. This may help them realise that their core identity still exists, rather than it having been erased by the traumatic event. To evoke this experience, one could ask questions such as "*When subjected to trauma, most people disconnect from themselves, and what you just told me makes me wonder if there was a little part of you that was still there?*". During this process of detailed enquiry, the therapist must remain cognisant and sensitive that the questions asked do not retraumatise their clients, but rather guides them to acknowledge that their core being was present, despite panicking and not remembering anything useful to them.



As therapy usually works with behaviours, thoughts and feelings, it is also important to include experiences relating to the body and its senses. When clients remain under the influence of the problem story of their identity, it is easier to invite them to give credit to their bodies as a first step, before they can acknowledge the *self*. Our physical bodies will instinctively act in ways to prevent suffering and increase self-preservation. This is when one can explore both the actions their physical bodies took, or the way their bodies reacted. For example, during a trauma event, a woman might take a micro-action to close her eyes or look away, which easily goes unnoticed. However, if this is made visible in therapy, one could render significant meaning to it - such that this bodily gesture reflects a value held. In such a case, perhaps looking away is making a silent statement of not taking part in, or manifesting her rejection of, the nature of the act of violence. Questions such as *“When you looked away, how exactly did you do this and why did you do this?”* could point the client to her value held.

Furthermore, trauma clients will often have flashbacks, triggered by either smell, sight, touch, hearing or taste, which are usually associated with distress but can also be explored as entry points to identifying acts of resistance. Further questions such as *“When you say the smell was horrible, how were you able to not be consumed by it? Did you imagine it being something else, or did you shut it out?”*. Sometimes there are also transitions in the storyline, whether generated by the client in the situation, or by an external factor, that indicate new actions. For example, a client may recall that, during the crisis, they heard something, and questions such as *“What effect did it have on you when you heard the door opening?”* allows for new actions that were taken, to be storied. Furthermore, in trauma, people react in a state of panic, and the panic may vary in duration. Most people, however, find some control over the panic, and respond in ways that extend beyond the panic. Therapeutic questions can explore what they did, despite the panic, such as *“At the level of your mind, panic prevented you from thinking, but at the level of your body you remained determined and kept on fighting?”*.

Clients may also notice other important aspects of their experience when an imaginary observer’s perspective is brought into the therapy process as it invites them to move out of their inner-focused thoughts and into an objective view of themselves. This can enrich the information that is available for re-authoring of a preferred narrative. Examples of questions such as *“If I were a fly on the wall, at what point might I have noticed a change in you, a*



decision to act or not act in a certain way?”. However, Beaudoin reiterates that it is important not to rush the process of asking clients to evaluate how they handled a situation, as it will only bring forth the minimising aspect of the problem. A lot of scaffolding of the actions is required before clients can acknowledge the helpfulness of the choices they made.

Actions not taken and storied

This area is important because people often get stuck in wishing that they had done something different that was not apparent to them at the time of the traumatic event. Additionally, popular culture supports heroic acts, where heroes accomplish the impossible. However, there is always a reason why they did not engage in the options that they generate after the event. When clients compare their performance to an idealised and unrealistic scenario, they will continue to discount their actual and realistic choices made at the time. It is therefore important to deconstruct the idealised scenarios by examining their origin and how the client came to these ideas, which provides them with more freedom in their perspectives of the choices they made. The steps taken in the deconstruction process are:

- *Discussing the effects of the media.* The therapist can explore a discussion on the effects of the media, which shapes people’s expectation of themselves and others. Questions such as “*Do you have images in your mind about things you should have done, or have you witnessed situations like yours being solved in such ways?*” and “*Does your experiences in life often fit with the scenes presented in movies?*” and “*What is the difference between an actor engaging in these actions and real people facing these experiences?*”
- *Naming the influence of history and culture.* The values and beliefs that we hold, which seem to be *normal*, are constructs of our cultural and historical contexts (Bullock 1999:25). It empowers and liberates our clients when the contribution that culture and history have, is made clear to them. They are able to better understand their experience in context and become less vulnerable to pathologising their identity (White 1995 in Beaudoin 2005:43). Often, women who suffered sexual abuse may see themselves as ‘damaged’ for life. Deconstructing this belief assists them to better understand, for example, the subjugation of patriarchy and the notion that men own women’s bodies,



which frees them from these negative identity conclusions (Weedon 1997 in Beaudoin 2005:43). Questions include “*What makes you think you are damaged?*” and “*If you think this, what effect do you think it has on your sense of hope for your future?*” and “*Would a woman that endured a similar experience as you a century ago also have this belief?*” and “*Would she believe it more, or less?*” or “*Do you think history and culture influence this belief?*” and “*If this were a cultural belief, what do you think caused this belief to survive?*” and “*If there is evidence that this is a cultural belief, would it change the way you think about yourself?*”.

- *Examining the meaning of the delay in response.* When people face a traumatic event, there is a common delay in their response because they are caught unprepared. It is useful to discuss and recognise this unavoidable confusion that people experience in the midst of trauma, and to assist one’s clients to move away from this sense of failure or the negative sense that they were not quick enough. Examples of questions are “*Do you think most people are taken by surprise when something like this happens to them?*” and “*How do you think being taken by surprise influences people’s response speed?*” and “*Is surprise more an effect of a person’s abilities or of the situation?*”. As deconstruction of these idealised outcomes evolve, more space is created to assign new meaning to the actions actually taken, or not taken, by them.

Actions not taken and not storied

The implicit actions that are not taken and remain un-storied, thus going unnoticed, reflect important values of the client. Values are important to discern because they provide a sense of identity, purpose and meaning (White 2000, 2004b in Beaudoin 2005:45). These non-actions, which really are actions, are supported by an invisible value that is so deeply woven into the person’s beliefs, that it often goes unnoticed. For example, for someone that struggles with a weakened identity post trauma, it can be liberating to recognise a connection with an honourable value they hold and the congruency of their behaviour with this value despite the crisis they found themselves in. This becomes apparent in conversations exploring why they did not give up. The approach is as follow:



- *Extract the justification for non-actions that were clearly helpful.* Non-actions can be identified in many realms of experience, including thoughts, feelings and behaviours. For instance, in the event of trauma, a person might consider fighting, back but acts compliantly to protect themselves, a younger sibling or a child from further harm. They carefully judged the situation and made a decision that was underpinned by a value. These decisions are often non-actions and are therefore not storied. Questions such as “*You told me that you often considered running away. What kept you staying?*”. This exploration may lead the therapist and client to the value held.
- *Extract the value and its implications.* Personal values often constitute the most profound aspect of *self* that is associated with esteem, worth and a sense of identity (White 1995 in Beaudoin 2005:46). It is a vital part of the process to make one’s client aware of the congruency of their actions, taken or not, with their values, as it strengthens their sense of selfhood. Questions such as “*Was it important for you to not give up?*” and “*What do you think that says about you?*” and “*What does it take for a person that is faced with your situation, to stay aligned and connected to their values?*”
- *Speculation.* Questions inviting the client to explore the outcome of the event, should they not have taken the ‘non-actions’ they chose, can create a space for meaning. This process should be carefully and respectfully done because one does not want to convey the damaging message that it could have been worse. It is rather an invitation to speculate on what would have happened if they had not made specific choices, for example questions such as “*What would have happened if you had not purposely chosen to stay calm and compliant?*”

The ramification of problems leaves clients’ experiences embedded in a problem-saturated sense of identity, which subsequently becomes a problem-saturated story (Beaudoin 2005:32). Therefore, Beaudoin explains, it is critical to integrate the information discussed in all quadrants, and to invite the client to reflect on the meaning of all initiatives discussed in each quadrant. It is thus a reorganisation of events, that forms part of the preferred narrative that emphasises choice and agency.



4.6 Key Reflections

When people consult therapists, they tell a story of events that they linked in sequence, that unfold through time, according to a theme or plot that often reflects loss, failure, incompetence, hopelessness or futility (White 2007a:61). These problem stories, and specifically trauma stories, can often cause people to struggle with a loss of their voice and of a sense of themselves (Durrant, Kowalski 1992, Penn 1998 in Beaudoin 2005:48,49). As a result, they experience isolation and disconnection from themselves and the important relationships in their lives (Morgan 2000:77). Without relationship we are deprived of *being*. We are human through other humans. When we are in relationship, we are constantly *becoming* and, to become, our imagination is employed to construct meaning in becoming. Kearney (2012c:interview) explains that our imagination is always at work, symbolizing and giving meaning to life. Yet, when we think about imagination, we presume it to be fictional, therefore fabricated and untruthful. But there are certain truths that can only be accessed through fiction.

Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, is our first philosophical account of the relationship between truth and fiction. This makes the point that it is not history that counts the facts and gives a chronicle of events that get to the truth of what happens, but it is the poets and artists who continue from the facts, aiming at the essence of events. And they do this by creatively imitating reality through a process of story and plot. So, there is a restructuring and a reconfiguring of the facts, such that we are able to see what is universal in human actions and human suffering. And that, for Aristotle, is only accessible through art - art understood as imitation of reality, thus fiction. By the detour of fiction, we can look at the most painful events in life and see them in a new way so that we can identify the pain in ourselves, but this time from a safe distance, which is cathartic. Fiction serves to bring out the truth that otherwise remains concealed. Fiction can tell real life in another way as to make the unbearable bearable (Kearney 2012b:interview). This is where poetry proclaims liberation and life (Meylahn 2012:61). Our histories thus need story to bring the past to life again and, for that to happen, we need narrative-plot (mythos-mimesis) to reconfigure past sufferings into a meaningful act of catharsis. Otherwise, there would be no reckoning, no purgation, no release. In other words, story and history need each other for invisible wounds to become visible scars that are touched and told (Kearney 2018a:79).



Narrative therapists are interested in developing new stories about people's lives and their relationships. We remain respectful of the slow process and are cautious to leave enough space for clients to reflect, evaluate and articulate their own personal experience by using their own choice of words (Beaudoin 2005:49). When we re-story our histories in therapy, we continue to develop and tell stories about our lives, but we include the neglected, but significant, stories that are referred to as 'exceptions' or 'unique' - outcomes that stand in contrast to the dominant oppressive storylines. It is these exceptions that provide a starting point for re-authoring, that develop by introducing questions that encourage people to recruit their imagination and to employ their meaning-making resources (White 2007a:61,62). White (2007a:128) explains that the process of re-authoring "*is the redevelopment of the subordinate storylines that provide people with a foundation to proceed to address their predicaments and problems in ways that are in harmony with the precious themes of their lives*".

In the context of trauma narratives, it is necessary to focus on survival strategies to foster the client's sense of agency (Beaudoin 2005:32). Therapist and client collaboratively re-author experiences of choice and agency along with exploring the numerous micro-practices taken by their clients (Beaudoin 2005:48). These stories begin with the events that oppose the problem narrative, as there are always moments that the problem is not entirely successful in claiming people's lives and their relationships (Morgan 2000:58). When clients start noticing all the actions they chose to engage in, despite the challenge of the trauma event, and how congruent their actions were with their values, they become more able to recognise and appreciate themselves as competent and capable individuals (Beaudoin 2005:49). Through this process, the externalised problem-narrative becomes deprived from its identity-shaping powers, with the focus shifting to clients' internal choices and agency handling the crisis (Beaudoin 2005:49). They are in a better position to separate themselves from the interpretations that eroded their preferred self, and they are able to live more satisfying lives (Beaudoin 2005:49).

Therapeutic interaction is a two-way phenomenon in that, when therapists are consulted by people who are challenging the effects of trauma in their lives, they themselves are personally confronted to challenge much of what they have been struggling with in their own lives as therapists. The therapist's story is *touched* by the client's story. And as therapists, we have a responsibility to honor the invitation that our clients extend to us by walking with them and



joining them, by making it our business to expose and challenge the injustices of our world (White 1995:7,8).

To heal, we need to poetically reimagine our histories and our relationships by way of the re-authoring process and, in this process, the act of telling stories, and listening to them, can have crucial significance (Kearney 2018a:75). I would like to end this chapter with Jerome Bruner's (1986:13) poignant quote: "*The imaginative application of the narrative mode leads....to good stories, gripping drama, believable...historical accounts. It deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course. It strives to put its timeless miracles into the particularities of experience, and to locate the experience in time and place. Joyce thought of the story as epiphanies of the ordinary*".

5 CHAPTER 5: The Preferred Narrative of Balance (Embracing, Listening - Vision)

5.1 Beauty Resurrected



Little Briar Rose by Charles Perrault

A mist. A great mist. It covered the entire kingdom.

And everyone in it – the good people and the not-so-good,

the young people and the not-so-young,

and even Briar Rose's mother and father fell asleep.

Everyone slept: lords and ladies, teacher and tumblers,

dogs and doves, rabbits and rabbitzen and all kinds of citizens.

So fast asleep they were, they were not able

to wake up for a hundred years.

I open this chapter by using the classic fairy tale of *Little Briar Rose*, better known as *The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods*, as a metaphor to extend the image of an awakening from a deep sleep. It is a reorientation from the disorientation, and an awakening to a new and preferred narrative of balance, just as Briar Rose awoke after one hundred years of sleep and entered a new story. The noetic quality of my experience at Prynnsberg refers to a sense of revelation. Meylahn (2012:62) describes the *embracing and listening* dance movement as a motion of new life-giving words that are poetically formed and inspired by the revelation. The narrative of balance is a process of revealing beauty as a life-giving, healing experience, and the rediscovery of the human spirit as a noetic spirit. Beauty is always an experience of expansion,



opening, and inclusion, which mysteriously clears the way for a type of connection that extends possibility. It's primary function is to connect our innermost being to the world (Ventura 2001:3), and when we re-connect, we can start to re-construct the preferred narrative for our life. By doing so, we simultaneously resurrect beauty in our lives. In this chapter, I explore the narrative therapeutic process of reconstructing a narrative of balance, or preferred narrative, as demonstrated in Susan Nicholson's (1995) *Dance Floor*, together with Johann Meylahn's (2012) fifth dance movement of *Embracing Listening*. Additionally, I shall reflect on, and incorporate, both Aristotle's hypothesis that art can heal and Richard Kearney's writings on the narrative imagination and catharsis, as discussed in Chapter 4. The aim of this chapter is to explore parallels between the above-mentioned writings and the narrative therapeutic practices of OWP (outsider witnesses practices) and IWP (insider witnesses practices).

5.2 Vision

"To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion, all in one." John Ruskin

In Chapter 4, the poetic processes of imitation, identification, internalisation, hope and possibility are established in the re-authoring process, as well as their mutual relationships with our sense of touch. Now, I shall open the door to the next dance step, that of *vision*. It is an exploration of making *visible* how the world *touches* us by embracing the new listening. This space, as Meylahn (2012:62) describes, is a space that is layered with hope of true transformation and true life, liberated from the dominion and death of the oppressive dominant myths.

In the beginning, when God created the heaven and the earth, He said, *"let there be light"*, and there was light (Genesis 1:1-3). To see clearly, there must be light. Ackerman (1990:230,281) describes that when we take the world in through our eyes, it becomes most densely informative, most luscious ... a tripwire for the emotions. The dance step of embracing listening, together with the engagement of the sense of vision, is supported by the retelling of the behaviours that do not fit the dominant plot, which represent the *"new/old story"* or hidden story (Hewson 1991 in Nicholson 1995:25). These behaviours represent the hidden narrative that exists in the shadows of the person's life, that extends into the construction of the narrative of balance. This process identifies, celebrates and explores the implications and possibilities of



the preferred narrative, and listens to and embraces the rich new story that flows into a visionary future script. The inspired words of the future script create a space in the present, and this space is filled with impossible possibilities, liberated from the subjugation of the dominating myth, and needs to be embraced, celebrated and lived to the full (Meylahn 2012:62). In this chapter we shall employ our sense of sight to create a visual perception of the narrative of balance.

5.3 Spiritual Disorientation and Reorientation

*“When we are no longer able to change a situation,
we are challenged to change ourselves.”* Viktor Frankl

I would like to briefly touch on a spiritual reorientation, as it shaped and influenced my personal journey in reconstructing my preferred narrative of balance. Benner suggests that spirituality invites us to the development and deepening of a meaning of life, not just a meaning of suffering (Benner 2011:2). However, he continues that for any such meaning to even have a chance of being strong enough to help us face all that life brings, is a meaning that will always have been fired in the hearth of suffering (Benner 2011:2). Every man, woman and child shall, at some time, face the abyss of being cut off from God, and this must be expressed in speech. However, everyone has wings assured to them, and that must also be spoken about (Deut. 33:27 in Brueggemann 1986:48).

In the testimonies of the Psalms, specifically that of King David, we discover the authentic and contemporary voice of a shared humanity, and a solidarity, in the human pilgrimage (Brueggemann 1986:16). Like the Psalmists, we find ourselves disconnected from God and forced into a state of despair (Brueggemann 1986:42). When we try to link our suffering to the will and power of God, we conclude that God is firm and immovable, and we take a fatalistic stance and an apathetic approach to our suffering (Louw 2014:3). But when we understand God as the co-suffering passionate God on the cross, the God that identifies with our suffering, an attitude of both gratitude and hope develops (Louw 2014:9), and it is in this hope that possibility exists. Louw (2014:8) continues that it is in the perfect tension between God’s power and his tragedy, the paradoxical image of God almighty, able of everything yet rendered powerless, disabled, limited and weakened on the cross, that solidarity is found with him. A new understanding of a God that identifies with our disability in life and its circumstances,



which is the reality of being human, drives us towards God, and not away from him (Louw 2014:6,9). The image of the cross, that displays an inclusive compassion, one that carries our burden of woundedness, also provides us with the image of the resurrection – a resilience to the death of injustice (Louw 2014:9). When God changes from the God in passion (on the cross) to the God in power and action (in the resurrection), we become aware of our own ability within our disability (Louw 2014:2-8). Our abilities give us a sense of agency which lays the foundation for the future narrative of hope.

When we stay in the equilibrium of life, we do not grow. It was precisely in the disorientation of my life that a free and honest voice emerged, one that could express my human experience and move into an open and frightening world of speech with the Holy One (Brueggemann 1986:22,29). We can move from suffering and disorientation to new meaning and reorientation. This relocation is always a surprise and a gift of graciousness; it evokes our gratitude because it comes from another source outside of self (Brueggemann 1986:22,45). Thus, the issue of God's identification with our pain and misery is of the utmost importance for a new understanding of Christian hope and spiritual healing (Louw 2014:5). Our life of faith always moves between the shattering of disorientation, and the gift of life. It is a movement with God, of being securely orientated, to being painfully disorientated and being surprisingly reorientated (Brueggemann 1986:16,47). Meylahn (2012:62) refers to this reorientation as a space "*filled with impossible possibilities of true transformation, true life, liberated from the dominion and death of the dominating myths*".

*'The singular quality of beauty is an awakening of,
and connection to, wonder'* Michael Ventura

Spirituality always has to do with connectedness (Brown 2011:TED), and the moment we connect, we experience beauty (Ventura 2001:3). From a Christian perspective, this connectedness is a relationship both with God in Christ, and with others. We therefore cannot be for God, and against man (Küng 1977:252). The triune God created humans to exist in relationship, not isolation, just as God exists in eternal relationship as Father, Son and Holy



Spirit (Brantley 2008:1). Yet the Psalms provide us with clear evidence that life does not protect us from the bottomless pit, i.e. the disconnection (Brueggemann 1986:44). Through life, and the experiences it serves us, we gradually change in a variety of ways: the manner in which we think, our capacity to perceive the perspectives of others, and the dividing line that indicates inclusion or exclusion of others. When life's events force us to relinquish the pain and move forwards to a deeper and broader understanding of God and our faith, which is directly linked to our identity and relationships, change happens. The response I had, as a young girl, to my trauma, was initially that of disbelief, anger, confusion and primarily a disconnection from myself and others. Yet, and by the grace of God, my life journey developed into self-examination, readjustments and reconnection (Fowler 1981:xii,xiii). When I thought it was impossible, God was at work, and my life became reconnected with others, my family, myself and with God. It fell into a pattern of wholeness (Brueggemann 1986:32). It is in the discovery of hope and possibility that life is astonishing, mysterious and beautiful. Meylahn (2012:62) speaks of this as a celebration of creative possibility. However, it needs to be embraced with the humble realisation that it is a vulnerable reality and, as we listen to the new emerging untold shadow story, we must remain open to the involvement of God without knowing where the journey will lead (Meylahn 2012:63,65).

5.4 Reconstruction of the Preferred and Balanced Story

“Heartbreak is how we mature; yet we use the word heartbreak as if it only occurs when things have gone wrong: an unrequited love, a shattered dream... But heartbreak may be the very essence of being human, of being on the journey from here to there, and of coming to care deeply for what we find along the way.” David Whyte

At the 1994 Family Therapy Networker Symposium, Michael White (in Nicholson 1995:23) commented that the role of therapy “...is to bring these alternate stories out of the shadows and to elevate them so that they play a far more central role in the shaping of people's lives.” David Epston wrote that every time the narrative therapist asks a question, a possible version of a life is being generated (Epston in Cowley & Springen 1995:74). The biggest difference is that the questions we ask are therapeutic, in that they aim to generate experience of preferred realities, rather than a gathering of information (Freedman & Combs 1996:113). “*There are some questions that linger in the minds of clients for weeks, months, and occasionally years,*

and continue to have an effect.” (Tomm 1988:14). As our clients gain distance from the subjugating description of self, they are more able to recognise aspects of their lives that contradict the problem narrative.

As discussed in Chapter 4, these events are called unique outcomes, and they fall within the realm of landscape of action. Unique outcomes are not predicted by the problem narrative, but rather embrace experiences that include both behaviours and feelings and once they are identified, meaning is constructed from them (Nicholson 1995:24). The meaning made from these events and actions are the ingredients that build the narrative of balance. As more and more unique outcomes are traced, linked and given meaning, the new plot emerges, and it is more possible for the alternative story to become richly described (Morgen 2000:59). Here, the therapist draws on direct experience questions such as “*What do you think this event tells you about yourself?*”, and indirect experience questions such as “*Who would be least surprised at you taking this step and what would they say it indicated about you?*” (White 1988:8-14). In the narrative approach, the therapist and client move across time, dancing back and forth between experience and meaning made from the experience (Nicholson 1995:24). The dance metaphor is a useful one, as it suggests a fluid process of gliding across, backwards and forwards in such a way that the total effect becomes more alive and meaningful than any of the individual steps (Nicholson 1995:28). This dance will be demonstrated by drawing on Susan Nicholson’s illustration of the reconstruction of the preferred narrative, as presented in Table 3 below (Nicholson 1995:24).

Table 3 Reconstruction of the Preferred and Balanced Story

Timeframe	Experience/Poetry	Meaning/Re-constructing
Past/History	1. Past Prediction	2. New/Old Story
Present	3. Unique Outcomes	4. Preferred Narrative Evaluate & Justify
Future	5. Future Steps	6. Future Script

Nicholson’s table (1995:24), above, demonstrates how dimensions of time are brought into the questioning process by beginning with the present, then moving to the past to explore a history



to the preferred narrative, and into the future to hypothesize future steps (Nicholson 1995:24). The entry point into the development of an alternative narrative begins with the identification of the behaviours that oppose the dominant problem story, i.e. the unique outcomes, that fall within the present/experience realm (item 3 in Table 3 above). Questions that explore the significance of these events births, and brings forth, the preferred narrative (item 4 – present/meaning). Thereafter, an exploration follows into the implications of the preferred narrative’s significance, which the client is asked to evaluate and justify (item 4) (Nicholson 1995:25). If the unique outcome, and the associated alternative narrative, are evaluated as preferred by the client, the therapist works to discover the history of these behaviours (item 1 - past/experience). Narrative therapy works on the notion that a history already exists, although unnoticed, rather than having to create a history. The aim here is to magnify the history of these hidden behaviours so that faith, trust and confidence in these behaviours can be developed. The therapist can then ask questions regarding the meaning that is made of these past behaviours, represented in item 2 – the new/old story. New/old is referred to as the stories that have always been there but that were hidden, or in the shadow of the person’s life. This is when the story starts flowing into a future narrative (item 6 – future script). When we explore what steps or actions could be taken to support the client’s new discoveries about themselves, we enter the realm of item 5 – future steps (Nicholson 1995:25). White believes that it is only with these more extended explorations of other knowledges and future practices of living, that a significant sense of personal responsibility can be embraced, and a sense of agency can be attained (White 2004a:128). It is necessary, as Nicholson (1995:26) importantly notes, to incorporate direct experience questions, for example “*How do you understand the importance of this event?*”, as well as indirect experience questions, such as “*What importance would you guess that I, or your family, or your children ... or your best friend might attribute to this event?*”. These questions add substance to the preferred narrative. Throughout this process, the client is asked to compare their life, as construed by the preferred story, to that of the life being dictated by the oppressive story, always listening for what one does not know (Nicholson 1995:26), and always asking ourselves “*What more do I need to know to step into this person’s shoes?*” (Freedman & Combs 1996:45).

Curiosity and agency are central to this model in which the therapist’s stance is curiosity, rather than certainty, with a focus on assisting the client in gaining agency (Amundson, Stewart and Valentine 1993 in Nicholson 1995:24). In the process of reconstructing the preferred and



balanced narrative, we need to take on a posture of intent listening and warm embrace so that true transformation can be celebrated.

5.5 Listening and Embracing

People who have experienced trauma in their past, or present, always hold special knowledges, skills and expertise (Morgan 2000:115). White (2011:3) writes of the value of placing crucial importance on the decentralisation of the voice of the therapist, as it has the effect of bringing to the centre of the therapeutic endeavour the knowledges and skills honed by the living of the people that consult them. For this to happen, both therapist and client listen attentively and embrace the new life-giving stories that speak of these competencies and which ultimately shapes the preferred future narrative. Furthermore, it is important to richly describe and develop the preferred and alternative story, so that it can become more and more vivid in the imaginative minds of our clients, and to enable them to experience themselves in new ways. When people are faced with a problem narrative, they often withdraw and become isolated and disconnected from important relationships in their lives (Morgan 2000:77). As therapists pay close attention to their client's stories, they intervene by asking story-development questions that invite clients to relate the process and details of their experience, and to connect it to a timeframe, a particular context and, most importantly, to other people (Freedman & Combs 1996:131). Dominant problem stories are successful in minimising certain relationships and histories in a person's life. The process of remembering or repopulating conversations is intended to compensate for this and to powerfully absorb and include the contributions from people who are significant in the lives of those seeking therapy (Morgan 2000:77). When an experience is expanded in space and time, and is repopulated, it becomes possible to re-experience it in a detailed way, and this experience becomes the new story (Freedman & Combs 1996:131). Edward Bruner (1986:11) wrote that it is in the performance of an expression, that we re-experience most affectively, and it is this performance itself, not some former meaning, that brings the experience into existence. These performances are powerful rituals in assisting people in the reclamation or redefinition of their identities (Morgan 2000:121). It is important to note that these stories can be constructed from actual events, or from hypothetical ones (Freedman & Combs 1996:131).



Listening is not a passive activity as, when we listen, we always interpret (Freedman & Combs 1996:45). Our current narratives provide the words that describe our realities, and this makes our destinies either opened or closed, possible or impossible, in terms of the stories that we construct to understand our experiences (Goolishian in Freedman & Combs 1996:77). The stories that are brought to therapy will comprise of events that fit with the influence of the dominating problem story, as well as events that contradict its influence (Morgan 2000:51). The narrative therapist's listening shifts from gathering information about all of the various events, to generating an experience that supports the events so that a preferred way of living can become more real (Freedman & Combs 1996:119).

“Fiction has taught us that truth can be found in descriptions of events that never occurred” Freedman & Combs

Eduard Bruner (1986:18) reminds us that “...stories serve as meaning-generating interpretative devices which frame the present within a hypothetical past and an anticipated future”. When we hypothetically story an event, it becomes the basis for actual, present and future events (Freedman & Combs 1996:99). We can extend our stories into the future by enquiring about how the emerging new story influences our client's ideas about their vision for their future (Freedman & Combs 1996:101). These conversations can be powerfully expanded by inviting an audience to witness a person's achievements that reflect special abilities, competencies and the person's preferences and dreams that they have for their future (Morgan 2000:118).

As we collaboratively perform our preferred stories, and speak about them, they become transformative. Our conversations, whether in groups or one-to-one, are aimed at enabling our clients to enter different realities than the ones they usually inhabit (Freedman & Combs 1996:116). Experience is not simply what happens, but it is coloured and shaped by the meaning people make of it. It is therefore crucial to assist in the elaboration of the meaning made in therapy. I explore below the various types of questions that enrich the process of meaning which, in turn, supports a thickly reconstructed version of the preferred narrative:

- *Hypothetical experience questions.* These types of questions create an opening for an alternative story. When people find it hard to identify unique outcomes



in their lived experience, hypothetical experience questions might help them imagine those experiences (Penn 1985; Penn & Scheinberg 1991 in Freedman & Combs 1996:126). For example when people can imagine themselves doing something that contradicts the dominant myth, they are able to look at their past, through the imagined experience, and make new meaning from it (Freedman & Combs 1996:126). Hypothetical experience questions add layers and substance to the preferred story.

- *Point of view.* When clients live in a problem-saturated story, it blinds them to the recognition of unique outcomes. Sometimes, questions that point out rich descriptions of people's skills, commitments and beliefs, can be asked through the eyes of the *other* (Morgan 2000:69). People who stand outside of the client's story are better able to make different meaning of the events our clients experience. As people consider the meaning from someone else's perspective, they can adopt the meaning as their own, and it may provide the opening for the alternative story (Freedman & Combs 1996:127).
- *Different contexts.* When people are faced with a problem, they more often than not experience isolation and disconnection from important relationships (Morgan 2000:77). If someone lives a story dominated by disconnectedness, they probably think of themselves as being socially inadequate. Even though there are many events that contradict this identity conclusion, they may continue to believe this about themselves. These problematic stories often blind people to the significance of context, resulting in a loss of knowledge about preferred aspects of their identity. Significant people in the life of the person seeking therapy, often hold memories of different contexts in which they perceive the person seeking therapy displaying skills and actions that contradict their fixed identity conclusion (Morgan 2000:78). Conversations around these contexts are vital, as they loosen the validity of the problematic identity conclusion. Since problem narratives are constructed in, and supported by, particular context, unique outcomes can often be formed by asking questions about other contexts,



or about significant others' perceptions derived from different contexts (Freedman & Combs 1996:127).

- *Different time frames.* In narrative therapy, the dimensions of time play a vital role in the questioning process. Beginning with the present, we move to the past to explore a history and then into the future to hypothesize (Nicholson 1995:24). Our problems are never the entirety of who we think we are and what experiences we come from. Questions that develop unique outcomes enquire about the time in a person's life when the problem had less, or no, influence. An exploration of particular incidents or circumstances that may have caused the problem, might pave the way to identifying unique outcomes.
- *Repopulation or re-membering.* Repopulating conversations are shaped by the idea that identity is built on an 'association of life' (White 2007a:129). Most stories have more than one protagonist, and various people always play important roles in stories. Meaning is constructed socially, therefore it is beneficial to repopulate our stories. Michael White writes that the process of re-membering conversations, is shaped by the understanding that identity is socially constructed, thus built on significant people in a person's past, present, and projected future. These members' voices are influential in the construction of the person's identity. People can revise these memberships and decide who will be upgraded or downgraded. They can honour some of these voices and cancel others, or grant authority to some and disqualify others. White continues that these people do not have to be directly known by our clients to be significant; they can consist of authors of books that have played a role in the person's life or characters from novels or movies, or even stuffed childhood toys or a favorite pet (White 2007a:129). Significant meaning could be made from these characters through the process of vicariousness; an experience that is constructed in the imagination through the feelings or actions of another person or character, also discussed in Chapter 4. Repopulating contributes to the richly described development of a multi-voiced sense of identity that shapes life



in a way that extends back in the past and moves forwards into the future (Myerhoff 1982:111 in White 2007a:137). White (2007a:139) notes that remembering is not a passive recollection of one's past relationships, but a deliberate re-engagement with significant others that form part of one's history and, by extension, form part of one's future. The questions here invite our clients to recollect the cast of characters contributing to an emerging story, or to explore how particular people could play a role in the development of a preferred narrative. Additionally, the client is invited to consider the effects of the preferred story on the lives of other significant people in their life, leading to even richer meanings (Freedman & Combs 1996:134,135). White (2007a:137) importantly notes that "*remembering practices are generally relevant to therapeutic conversations because they open opportunities for people to challenge what has been so isolating for them...Western social and cultural forces that promote isolated, single-voiced identities actually provide the context that generates many of the problems for which people seek therapy*". Thus repopulating people's lives provide an antidote to this powerfully isolating understanding of identity, and it opens alternative ways for clients to understand themselves and their identity as a social formation (White 2007a:137,162). Repopulating practices paved the way for the practices of outsider and insider witnesses, and will be discussed later in this chapter.

- *Hypothetical event questions.* We can construct stories with our imagination. Imaginative details, times, contexts, processes and people can be added to these stories to establish a hypothetical history or future. Thereafter, we can explore the impact that these hypothetical scenarios would have had, or will have, on our client's lives. These stories, that explore the implications of the preferred narrative continuing in the way that is hypothesized, flow into the future script (Nicholson 1995:25). These hypothetical pasts and futures, although experienced in the imagination, often have real effects on people's present lives (Freedman & Combs 1996:135,136).



- *Letters.* Letters from therapists to their clients have been used successfully in therapy for some time. Letters help therapists to reflect on, and refer back to, the therapy sessions, often bringing forth new ideas. They also summarise therapy conversations into selected and edited versions. People that never attended meetings can also be included when writing letters. The idea of having a team of people to assist clients in standing against the impact of a problem, evokes many possibilities (Morgan 2000:117). These letters thicken the emerging story and it helps clients to remain immersed in the new story. It also benefits therapists as it involves them more thoroughly in the co-authoring process, giving them an opportunity to think about the language they use and the questions they ask (Freedman & Combs 1996:208,209). Our clients can also be asked if they would like to be involved themselves in writing letters or responding to our letters. Penn and Frankfurt (1994:217-231) wrote that, in their clinical experience, they have found that “*writing slows down our perceptions and reactions, making room for their thickening, their gradual layering. And that this process, which could be described as poeticizing, encourages us to develop many different readings of our experience. Finally, the writing, something to keep, to study, to revise, to show, enables us to hold our many stories in tension. ...The participant text as the vehicle for therapy transfers new knowledge from the inside of the sessions to the outside, as well as from the outside to the inside. This movement has an integrative function, sowing possibilities between our lives and our therapy, and giving voice to our many-faceted selves.*” White and Epston (1990 in Morgan 2000:101 - 109) introduced a variety of therapeutic letters, including letters as a summary of a therapy session, letters to invite significant people to attend meetings and build relationships, letters that state a certain action not being necessary or needed any longer, and letters of reference containing accounts of a person’s developing identity. Letters act as a contributing factor to the thickening of alternative stories and they provide reflections that can be referred to at any time (Morgan 2000:110).



- *Documents.* As people reconstruct their preferred ways of living, certain knowledge and preferences become clearer. Therapeutic documentation records this knowledge and these preferences so that they are available for people to access at any time (Morgan 2000:85). Furthermore, it is easy to lose important intentions and achievements that clients make because there are so many possibilities, experiences and interpretations of events discussed in therapy. It is valuable to remember and celebrate these commitments and accomplishments by way of producing a certificate or declaration. Often these documents remind people of their adequacy, their worthiness, or what they would stand up for in their lives (Freedman & Combs 1996:222). Having a written document that records their commitments with them, easily available, helps them to reclaim their lives from the influence of the problem (Morgan 2000:86).
- *Spreading the news.* The meanings, that take a great deal of effort to acquire in therapy, need to be said, painted, danced, dramatized, and put into circulation (Turner 1986:37). Michael White (1988b:10) wrote “*As ‘self’ is a performed self, the survival of alternative knowledge is enhanced if the new ideas and new meanings that they bring forth are put into circulation*”. If people perform their preferred selves, there need to be audiences to witness those stories. These audiences are valuable in that they construct and circulate the new knowledge and they provide new lenses through which new experiences can be interpreted (Freedman & Combs 1996:237). The ideas discussed by the audiences often motivates people to initiate and execute them (Freedman & Combs 1996:238). Madigen and Epston (1995 in Freedman & Combs 1996:237) propose that these audiences are ‘communities of concern’. The externalizing and anti-pathologizing practices of narrative therapy, empower clients, and they are often very enthusiastic about including other significant people, or even strangers, into the process of therapeutic development (Freedman & Combs 1996:237). As people experience themselves in new ways, they are keen to show others what they have been up to. A ritual, or a celebration, with significant others is a noteworthy step in the journey away from the problem story towards a more preferred version (Morgan 2000:111). Therapist and client explore together the



identification and recruitment of the audience. Some significant people may not be available in the present moment, however it is helpful to make them an audience member via the imagination. Even if the conversation does not actually happen, in other words the audience is developed in a person's imagination, it has the capacity to constitute real experience of support and appreciation (Freedman & Combs 1996:237).

- *Abuse teams versus nurturing teams.* Michael White speaks of 'nurturing teams' that serve as a counterweight to the 'abuse teams' that have been at work in the lives of people subjected to severe abuse. People that have suffered from such maltreatment view themselves as having dependent natures and criticize themselves for having such natures. It is important to inquire about these abusive teams and identify who the members are, for how long they have been around, at what level of intensity each member is active and to what degree they have been successful in their abuse. White approaches these inquiries with a process of calculating the weight of the abuse by multiplying the number of team members by the number of years per member by the level of intensity per year. White continues inquiring into what might serve as a counterweight to the abuse, and proposes the idea of a nurturing team, its members and what amount of time such a team would need to balance the effects of the abuse team. People can then invite those that they have been dependent on for support in their inner circle, and others that they believe would want to be part of the nurturing team. White (1995:104-106) explains that such a meeting would look as follows:

Firstly, the person who sends the invitations out to the nurturing team members, describes the abuse team's members, their activities, the duration of the abuse and the effects thereof. A discussion proceeds on how the nurturing team can counter the work of the abuse team. It is important to acknowledge the nurturing team's existing support and its effect. A discussion then follows on what sort of work the nurturing team can contribute to challenge the work of the abuse team without it being burdensome. And lastly, the person that called the meeting reflects and responds to their nurturing team's suggestions and further proposes what might be helpful going forward. These teams are



valuable in that they play a crucial role in creating a new culture in which the preferred story may flourish. In this exercise we may also invite people that are no longer present, but are hypothetical members giving hypothetical insights that are constructed in the imagination of our clients (White 1995 in Freedman & Combs 1996:245, 246).

- *Reflecting processes.* In therapy with families, couples or groups, we talk to one person at a time, while we invite others to act as a reflecting audience. This process helps to spread the story from self-knowledge to partner, family or group-knowledge, thereby allowing an audience to acknowledge victories when achieved. Freedman & Combs (1996:249) explains that “*The structuring of conversations so that one person talks while others listen to his story, and the listeners then reflect on the talker’s story, maximises the possibility that each will serve as a witness or audience to the other and minimises the chances that people will dispute or contradict each other’s stories.*” Therapists can also introduce formal reflecting teams. These teams consist of members that do not continue to be present in the lives of people whose stories they reflect on, but who plant powerful insights into the hearts and minds of the person in therapy. Clients often mention that they wonder what the team, or a specific team member, would think of certain ideas, skills or bravery reached by clients in between therapy sessions. Instead of a ‘blind panel’ of experts, these reflecting teams are individuals participating in the emerging preferred stories of clients seeking therapy (Freedman & Combs 1996:249). Additionally, a document, that informs a team about turning points or goals achieved, can be distributed to let the team in on what type of audience the person needs that would be most helpful to them going forward (Freedman & Combs 1996:250).
- *Witnessing groups.* People that struggle with similar problems in their lives may become meaningful audiences to each other through therapy groups. Janet Adams-Westcott and Deanna Isenbart (1995:335) writes of their work with various people who experienced child sexual abuse: “*We invite group members to develop connections and create a community that supports each participant’s personal journey of change. This community provides an audience for members*



to; develop their own self-knowledge, to practice more validating stories about self and incorporate preferred narratives into their lived experience.” Therapists have identified audiences as one of the curative factors in therapy. Group participants, who form the audience for the telling of stories in a safe setting where there is validation, commonality, and affirmation about how problems become dominant influences, help each other transform their tales. The commonalities in these various members’ stories help them to more effectively discover and notice exceptions and differences, which becomes meaningful to each member of the group (Freedman & Combs 1996:255). The ideas that people come up with can also be gathered and circulated to other audiences with similar challenges by means of tapes, letters, or verbal communication. To be able to contribute to helping others simultaneously, brings great satisfaction to those in therapy (Freedman & Combs 1996:256).

- *Definitional ceremonies.* Definitional ceremony was the term employed by Barbara Myerhoff (1982,1986 in White 2007a:180) to describe the forums in which community members would have the opportunity to tell and retell their stories. White writes that when therapists structure therapy sessions as definitional ceremonies, it provides a context for rich story development. These ceremonies are rituals that acknowledge people’s lives, in contrast to being measured up against socially-constructed norms which degrades their identities to be incompetent and disordered. Meyerhoff (1986:267) asserts that “*Definitional ceremonies deal with the problems of invisibility and marginality; they are strategies that provide opportunities for being seen and on one’s own terms, garnering witnesses to one’s worth, vitality and being*”. The central significance of the contribution of the audience in definitional ceremonies is that of the prominence given to collective self-definitions, appearing before others, gathering witnesses to one’s worth and vitality, and to proclaim an interpretation to an audience not otherwise available (White 2007a:183). Definitional ceremonies are divided into three distinct stages: firstly, the telling of the significant life story by the person for whom the definitional ceremony is for; secondly, the retelling of the story by the people invited to be outsider



witnesses; and thirdly, the retelling of the outsider witnesses' retelling by the person for whom the definitional ceremony is for (White 2007a:185). Thus, definitional ceremonies provide people with the option of telling or performing their stories before an audience of specifically chosen outsider witnesses. Secondly, by the witnesses' retelling of the stories they heard, it most powerfully authenticates the identity claims expressed by the person's stories they listened to (White 2007a:184). The formal practices of OWP (outsider witnesses practices) and IWP (insider witnesses practices) is a natural development from the practice of definitional ceremonies, and will be thoroughly explored in the following pages.

5.6 Outsider Witnesses Practices (OWP) and Insider Witnesses Practices (IWP)

"Collectively, we can remake history by imagining otherwise." Richard Kearney

In this section I explore the role of stories, in the therapeutic practices of OWP (outsider witnesses practices) and IWP (insider witnesses practices), to reveal beauty as a life-giving, healing experience and a rediscovery of the human spirit as a noetic spirit. As part of this exploration I shall integrate Aristotle's hypothesis that art/stories can heal and transform us into better citizens. We know that stories bring balance - they are cleansing and healing. And in this practice of outsider and insider witnesses, stories are shared and interpreted by way of telling and retelling. In these retellings, the narrative imagination is employed to bring about a twin therapy of word and imaginative vision that triggers a transfer of empathy to both speaker and listener and which deepens their shared humanity and compassion and bind their human identity (Kearney 2017a:182).

OWP and IWP, conceived by Michael White and David Epston, are therapeutic practices associated with definitional ceremonies. Initially, Michael White (2007a:194) came to the practice of OWP when exploring the work of the philosopher of science, Gaston Bachelard (1969), which involves the concept of image and resonance. Another concept that White found influential in his work with OWP, was the classical understanding of *katharsis* as a phenomenon that a person experiences in response to the performance of Greek tragedy. Aristotle reminds us in the *Poetics* that tragic drama consists of plot and imitation (mythos-



mimesis), with the purpose to arouse pity and fear. The poetic role of plot and imitation (mythos-mimesis) is to story our heroic desires, even though they are impossible, which achieves catharsis. Aristotle continues and defines the function of catharsis as a purgation of this pity and fear which was aroused through the tragedy. Thus, in the effort to tell the story, there is pleasure – Aristotle’s pleasurable purgation *of* pity and fear *by* pity and fear, which heals (Kearney 2017b:3). The key to the deep power of release from trauma, which this basic mythos-mimesis allows for, is that it balances the act of identification with a theatrical representation such that the survivors can re-experience their pain from a safe distance, which was previously inexperienced as it was too unbearable to register at the actual time of the trauma, the distance being provided by the theatrical form and plot (Kearney 2002:137-138). Without this distance/detachment, one would be smothered by trauma – Aristotle’s *pity*, to the point of numbness – Aristotle’s *fear*. According to Aristotle, catharsis makes for healthy citizens with purged emotions that lead to practical wisdom (Kearney 2017b:3). And this is what Aristotle, originally in the *Poetics*, would have called the healing power of art/stories by virtue of the purgation of pity and fear by pity and fear, which results in healing.

White incorporated the phenomenon of catharsis into his witnessing practices as the experiences in response to observing powerful expressions of stories. It is a conscious identification with other stories in one’s life or, as described in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, where we identify with the stories of others in order to produce greater meaning. The catharsis is expressed through vicariousness - of being elsewhere, in a different place and time, imagining things differently, experiencing the world through the eyes of another, the stranger. It is the ability to sympathise with suffering, while acknowledging healing taking place through this process of vicariousness. For White (2007a:195), an experience is cathartic if one is moved emotionally, and when one is transported to another place in which one might:

1. Achieve a new perspective on one’s life and identity
2. Re-engage with neglected aspects of one’s history
3. Reconnect with one’s values and purposes
4. Make new meaning of experiences that were not previously understood



5. Becoming familiar with one's knowledge and skills that one was previously not aware of
6. Initiate new steps in one's life that were previously not considered
7. Think broader than what one routinely thinks

White continues that the catharsis happens when our imaginations are captured and we are drawn to, or identify with, certain expressions of life. Witnessing practices are an inquiry into the identification of the ways in which one has been transported by the stories of people whose lives are at the centre of the definitional ceremony, and it encourages an acknowledgement of the powerful way that their stories changed the observers by taking them to another time and place.

Furthermore, the practices of definitional ceremonies provide an audience to people's stories with the aim to contribute to rich story development, thick identity conclusions and expanding preferred outcomes in the lives of people requesting therapy (White 2007a:184). These audiences are made up of specifically chosen outsider witnesses (OWP) and insider witnesses (IWP), that reflect and respond to these stories by retelling what resonate with them personally and by acknowledging aspects of the stories told. White (2007a:174) writes that when people are an audience to an important story, and when they have the opportunity to respond to it, they often embark on a journey into their own lives. And in this act of vicariousness, where the audience reflects on, resonates with and acknowledges aspects of the telling, the story told is being richly developed. The practices of OWP and IWP stems from the awareness that personal narratives are shaped by the socially constructed norms and institutions of culture, and the power relations of these institutions (White 2007a:179). Therapeutic conversations would often contradict these socially assumed truths, and White explains that an audience, that verifies the contradictory personal narratives, plays a very important part in healing (White 2007a:179). In these practices, clients have an opportunity to reappear on their own terms in front of community members, experience an acknowledgement of the identity claims expressed in their stories, experience the authentication of these identity claims, and shape their lives in ways that are in harmony with what they value (White 2007a:184). The responses of these witnesses are



not based on a summary of what they heard, neither on their opinions, evaluations, affirmations or congratulations, but rather an engagement between one another about the expressions of the telling that they were drawn to, that touched them and the images that these expressions evoked. The aim here is that the retelling exceeds the boundaries of the original telling in a significant way (White 2007a:186). These practices are not about empathy and sympathy, as this can cause clients to feel patronised and mocked, but rather it is about resonance that thickens the authentication of a preferred way of living (White 2007a:188). The resonances and acknowledgements in the retellings have powerful effects in richly describing the preferred ways of living that people arrive at in therapy (White 2007a:165,166).

The intention of OWP and IWP are very similar. The difference is that, in OWP, the acknowledgments are given by outsiders comprising of family members and caring friends, or strangers, and in IWP, the regard is conveyed by an intimate other within the context of therapy, for example the person's therapist (Bakhtin 1993; Carlson & Haire 2014; Levinas 1981 in Epston & Carlson 2017:19). Both OWPs and IWPs are descendants in a long line of similar performative narrative practices of consulting your consultant, co-research, the articulation and archiving of insider knowledge, performative letter writing, relational accountability in couples, etc. (Epston & Carlson 2017:19).

5.6.1 OWP (outsider witnesses practices)

Outsider witnesses practices create a platform for new possibilities which were previously unknown to clients, or hidden from them. Clients have the opportunity to hear what caring others hear, and see what supportive others see. In experiencing the retellings, clients become clearer about the strategies of their problems and it becomes more possible for them to visualise a future that is free from their problems. These conversations fuel hope. As clients experience validation in the retellings, they feel a sense of release from their burden of failure and guilt. They are inspired by the brave initiative that outsider witnesses take when speaking of their own challenges regarding some of the issues discussed and this, in turn, enables the person with the predicament to give voice to what they had never voiced before. There are four very distinct phases of witnessing practices and they are organised as follows (Morgan 2000: 122-126):



1. The process starts with the person, who the ceremony is being held for, and the therapist, joining together in a re-authoring conversation. The witnesses observe this conversation and listen carefully to the story being told.
2. Thereafter the process continues with a retelling by the witnesses about what they heard. The witnesses so to say swop places with the person who told their story. The client and the therapist now sit behind an invisible screen and are able to watch and listen to the witnesses' retellings of what they just heard. The conversation of the witnesses is guided by the therapist's preparation guidelines that were described to them.
3. The third part of this process provide an opportunity for the person consulting therapy to comment on the retellings of the witness group. An inquiry into the client's response to the retellings is explored, for example what interested them most or not that much, and they are invited to speak generally about their experience of being an audience to a conversation about their life and how they predict this might have an impact on their future.
4. Lastly, after the client has commented on the retellings, the witnesses are invited to join the therapist and the client and jointly reflect on the first three parts of the process. Everyone is invited behind the scenes of the therapy, so as to make the therapeutic conversation transparent. The client may or may not wish to contribute to this discussion.

These four stages thus comprise a witnessing process of the re-authoring conversations, and then a retelling of what they have heard in ways that contribute to rich descriptions of the preferred narratives and identity conclusions of people's lives. The shifts between the telling, the retelling, and the retelling of the retelling, are distinct. For example, when engaging in the retelling, it is important that the witnesses do not bring the client into their circle and do so by not directly addressing the client. Instead, they engage in a conversation with each other about what they heard in the retelling (White 2007a:198). These practices contribute to profound developments in the rebuilding of people's lives (Morgan 2000:126,127).



Another variation may be appropriate when the person in therapy has experienced profound catharsis in the conversations of the witnesses. This usually happens when clients have a severely reduced sense of personal agency, on account of the abuse they endured, and they feel irrelevant, desolate and powerless. At the same time, the witnesses' acknowledgement of their personal experience of catharsis on account of being present to, and transported by, the stories they heard, can be a potent antidote to the client's feelings of irrelevance. Discussions can be held about the possibility of extending the performance of catharsis, by inviting witnesses to acknowledge the continuing effects of the catharsis on their lives in the form of notes, video clips or letters to the person whose life was at the centre of the process (White 2007a:199). Extended performances of catharsis can be particularly significant for people who have been subjected to trauma, as they often hold on to a secret hope that all that they have endured wasn't for nothing and that it may relieve the suffering of others (White 2007a:201).

White writes that the contributions in these sorts of practices far outweighs any contribution he could make in his role as a therapist (White 2007a:177). However, he continues that the outcome relies on the preparation that the therapist undertakes to develop effective questions to structure the audience's retellings. Below I discuss the necessary steps that must be taken in this consideration.

Outsider witness selection

Outsider witnesses are collaboratively gathered by therapist and client. They can be drawn from people's family, friends, workplace, and the wider community such as neighbours, work colleagues etc. Therapists in training, or consultation, may also be invited as outsider witnesses. White (2007a:202) notes that, in his work, he has increasingly drawn from his register of people who previously sought consultation, and volunteers, to join in his work with others who might face the same challenges that they have faced. These people often had the experience of outsider witnesses in their own stories and understand the powerful impact these sessions have. They are enthusiastic about contributing to the life of others and they know that it carries profound potential.



Preparing the outsider witnesses

In the practice of OWP it is very important to prepare the outsider witnesses before they participate in the meeting. In the preparation, White (2007a:189) invites the witnesses to:

- play a part in a tradition of acknowledgement;
- engage in retellings that are the outcome of close and attentive listening to what they were personally drawn to in the stories;
- not be forceful in their expressions of the retellings;
- respond personally to why they were drawn to certain aspects and how it affected them; and
- step back from giving advice or opinions, or making judgements.

It is important for therapists to negotiate with the witnesses the option that the therapist will interject questions to contribute to richer story development, where they feel it necessary. This is not to restrict the audience participation, but more to ensure an ethical responsibility for the consequences of the audience participation, and it reduces concerns the witnesses might have about the task ahead (White 2007a:189,190).

White (2007a:190 - 192) engages in four categories of inquiry that shapes the interview with the outsider witnesses. These are:

1. The focus is on the expression of what caught their attention and captured their imagination. What did the client express that gave them a clue to what the client gives value to in life? The expressions they were most drawn to should be expressed in a way that reflects a particular and distinct interest in the person's life, rather than a general human or global perspective.
2. The focus is on describing the image that came to their minds as they listened. These are the images that were evoked by the expressions that they were drawn to and may be metaphors or mental pictures of the person's identity. After a description of these images, the therapist will encourage the witnesses to speculate on what these



images might tell about the person's life, their identity, purposes, hopes, beliefs and values.

3. The focus is on personal resonance - an inquiry into why the witnesses were drawn to the expressions, with the focus on what resonated personally in their own stories and their own histories. It is important that it is a personal and engaging interest in the expressions, and not a distant interest.
4. The focus is on transport, where the witnesses are invited to identify and speak of the ways they were moved on account of being present to witness the person's life stories. This is the catharsis Kearney speaks of in the context of narrative imagination. It is catharsis through the process of vicariousness, of being transported to a different place and time and imagining things differently by way of experiencing the world through the eyes of another. It is impossible to be an audience to the powerful stories of people's lives without being touched and moved. This *moving* is what White refers to as *transport*. This process involves questions about where the experience had taken the witnesses with regards to their own thoughts, reflections and understandings of their own lives. It could also be where this experience had taken them with regards to their own relationships, or about options for actions with regards to their own predicaments in their own lives. It is a telling and an acknowledgement of how their lives have changed on account of being witnesses to these stories. White (2007a:192) notes that these sorts of acknowledgements by the witnesses could further lead to an exploration of the ways this has contributed to the witnesses becoming other than who they were before they witnessed the person's expressions and had the opportunity to respond to them. It thus brings an awareness to the idea that the stories told in OWP sessions brings vicarious pleasure to the witnesses, Aristotle's pleasurable purgation of pity and fear, and, bringing pleasure to the audience in turn leads to greater meaning made for the person who is at the centre of the discussion.



Therapeutic responsibility

The therapist assumes responsibility for the shaping of the retellings, regardless of the source of the outsider witnesses. Common tendencies for outsider witnesses is to commence their retellings with superlative praise for example “*Wow Mary, I think you have extraordinary resilience*”. In such a case it is important for the therapist to refocus the witnesses to what they heard in the story that shaped the impression of Mary’s resilience. Another tendency is for the witnesses to become autobiographical when acknowledging resonance, which leads to advice-giving. When this occurs, the therapist can encourage the witnesses to rather describe the actual experience of resonance itself, bringing the focus back to the expressions of the person who is at the centre of the discussion, by asking which aspects of the story created this powerful impact on them. Another common tendency is to respond in a way that constructs a heroic identity of the person whose life is at the centre, which has a very isolating effect on the client as they might feel awkward and alienated when they are construed as heroes (White 2007a:208).

Often, outsider witnesses respond to expressions of anguish instead of the values and hopes that are implicit in the anguished expressions. For example, when an outsider witness responds to the expression of pain, the therapist can encourage them to speculate about what this might tell about what the person holds dear. This is what White (2006:154) refers to as the “*absent but implicit*”. It can be understood by assuming that if pain is a testimony to the violation of the values and hopes of a client, then the intensity of the pain experienced can be considered to be a reflection of the degree to which those values and hopes are held precious and was violated in their trauma. The idea is to guide the conversation to discover what these moral principles might be and what they tell about the client. White speaks of these values that exist as being, in themselves, an extraordinary tribute to the person's refusal to part with what was so powerfully disrespected in the context of the trauma (White 2011:125). It is therefore important for therapists to refocus the conversation and encourage the witnesses to speculate about what this might be a testimony to, in terms of what the person holds precious.

In OWP practices it is vital for therapists to guide the conversation by focussing on drawing the implicit meanings of expressions out. White explains that, in drawing the implicit out, “*the*



therapist is not endeavouring to reduce the intensity of people's expressions of frustration or pain...Rather, the therapist is being consistent with the assumption that life is multi-storied and with the intention of reproducing the tradition of acknowledgement that promotes rich story development" (White 2007a:213).

5.6.2 IWP (insider witnesses practices)

"The arts of existence are those reflective and voluntary practices by which people not only set themselves rules of conduct, but seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make of their life into a work of art" Michel Foucault

Foucault's words remind us to make our lives into works of art. What I discuss in this section is the notion that, only when life is experienced as an artwork or a dream and from a place of outsidership, can a person achieve the status of an author - the true artist of the story of their life (Epston & Carlson 2017:24). Performative narrative practice (IWP) has been 25 years in the making (Epston & Carlson 2017:19). In exploring IWP, I lean largely on the writings of David Epston and Tom Carlson. As I researched the practices of IWP, a bell of familiarity rang – Aristotle, and his writings on the healing ability of art, and Richard Kearney's research on the narrative imagination and catharsis, both discussed in the previous chapters. The author, being the creator of the story, has the freedom to construct the protagonists. As the author creates the world, they find themselves in the position of living outside of the world, and the characters they create live inside the world. If narrative therapy claims to be a re-authoring therapy (White 1995), it firstly makes sense that it must take place outside of a person's own story and, secondly, that it calls on a type of *narrative art* for inspiration (Epston & Carlson 2017:23). In the daily living of our lives, we live inside our stories, and we therefore experience ourselves not as authors, but as characters of an already-written story (Morson 1994:89 in Epston & Carlson 2017:23). As a character of the story, we have limited freedom and influence apart from what the author of the story provides us with. Morson argues that narrative art is required so that people can transport themselves from being an already-finalised character, to the author with the pen in their own hand, creating the character. This notion of being outside the story enables people to experience themselves as unfinalised. And this 'outsiderness' is the key concept of IWP.



Insider witnesses practices (IWP), in conjunction with outsider witnesses practices (OWP), draws from the literature of performance studies. It represents a dramatic reimagination, through the use of performance. David Epston and Tom Carlson (IWP workshop summary:n.d.) describes IWP as the counterpoint to Michael White's OWP in that it returns "*narrative therapy to its very beginnings; a history for the future... Through a one-session performance, clients become witnesses to a hope-biased portrayal of their lives as performed by their therapist. This portrayal is intended to situate the significant events of clients' lives within rich story lines that serve as a revelation of their moral character as persons. As a result, clients become both an insider and outsider to their own lived experiences and are afforded the unusual opportunity to experience their own selves as if they were an 'other.'* From this insider/outsider vantage point, they are able to experience heightened levels of meaning making, self-compassion and self-appreciation." In short, IWP is a performative narrative practice whereby the client's thoughts, actions, aspirations and feelings are divided into two distinct versions: the problem story and its counter story, as told by an intimate other such as their therapist (Epston & Carlson 2017:19).

In 1995, David Epston chanced on a book entitled "*Passage to Anthropology*" by Kirtsen Hastrup. In this book, Hastrup (1995:127,129 in Epston & Carlson 2017:20) tells how the Copenhagen theatre group approached her with an unusual proposal to create a theatrical performance of her life story. As Hastrup was chosen as the central character in the play, she realised that the request to supply the theatre company with her autobiography provided her with the exciting excuse to reinvent herself. She started meeting regularly with the cast of the theatre company. To describe her character vividly to the actors, Hastrup answered many questions, through which she noticed something important - in her descriptions of herself and the important events of her life, she constructed herself both as a *story* and as a *person*. When she was finally invited to attend a rehearsal, she watched herself in all too familiar situations which allowed her to enjoy feelings she would not normally permit herself to enjoy. Although familiarity was contradicted because the context was foreign, the dramatic effects, used to magnify particular points, transcended her imagination.

Most relevant to IWP, is that emotions welled up in Hastrup as she watched herself being represented by another woman telling the 'truth' about her, although it was not her (Hastrup 1995:131-134 in Epston & Carlson 2017:20). Although Hastrup's (Epston & Carlson 2017:21)



first response to seeing this representation of herself was that of surprise, she describes that, after watching more rehearsals, she was overwhelmed at the precision of the actors reflecting the essence of her stories that they had grasped. The fact that the performance was not-real and not-not-real, at the same time, expanded her imagination. Hastrup (1995:136 in Epston & Carlson 2017:21) writes that “*Through the selective fiction of not-me, my reality became focused...It made me see myself more clearly than before*”. This is what Kearney (2012c:interview) describes as the certain *truths* that can only be accessed through fiction, and makes the point that it is not history that counts the facts and gives a chronicle of events that get to the truth of what happens, but it is the poets and artists who continue from the facts, aiming at the essence of events. The performative anthropologist, Victor Turner (1986:75 in Epston & Carlsson 2017:21), compellingly wrote “*The explicit focus on performance emphasizes the inherent reflexivity of the event. The performance arouses people’s consciousness of themselves; it reveals them not only to the world but also to themselves*”. In this performance, Hastrup concludes that she became an invention to herself, and possibly more of a character that led her to courses of action that she would not otherwise have considered possible (1995:144 in Epston & Carlson 2017:21).

Epston writes of another metaphor, of portraiture, that he was drawn to in his work with IWP. Portraits are both familiar and exotic, so that when viewing, they introduce people to a perspective that they did not consider before. Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (1997 in Epston & Carlson 2017:22) speaks of her experiences when sitting for portraits, finding that the portrait does not capture her in the way she sees herself, but rather that it would capture her essence, certain qualities of her character and history, some of which she would be unaware of, or even resist, and some of which she was deeply familiar with. What is powerful here is that the artist’s translation of the image, through generosity and careful investigation, is probing and interpretive. Additionally, the relationship between the artist and the person sitting for the portrait, shapes the perspective of the artists’ expression. Similarly, in IWP, the connection between the therapist and the client, who is sitting for the portrait in a manner of speaking, shapes the hope-biased perspective of the therapist’s expression. IWP is, so to say, the story of someone’s life that comes close to painting with words (Lawrence Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis 1997:5,6).



Epston writes that the above-mentioned metaphors of Hastrup and Lawrence Lightfoot are both examples of inspiration to aspire to similar respectful characterisations of the people portrayed in IWPs. In this practice, therapists should encourage their clients to develop a freedom within themselves to become a master of their own life narrative. What freedom and mastery can achieve, is more important than the story itself (Kurtz & Coetzee 2015:14).

Time also has an influence on meaning-making. Morson (1994) explains that the author/artist exists in a different timeframe to that of the character. The author's timeframe sees the entire life of the character condensed, as if in a moment, whereas the character, acting and living in real time, is not permitted the luxury of that perspective (Morson 1994:89-90 in Epston & Carlson 2017:23,24). This allows the author to give meaning to the events unfolding in the story. Thus, only when life is experienced as an artwork and from a distance, can a person achieve the status of an author of the story of their own life. The question is how to turn therapy into a work of art - how can a character become an author, with paramount privileges of having an expansive view, having open time, and standing in a place of outsidership. For this to occur in a meaningful way, the client needs to simultaneously be both the author of, and a character in, the story of their life (Epston & Carlsson 2017:24).

Furthermore, in IWPs, the client is not only the author and the character, but also becomes the audience to their own life story. Epston & Carlson notes that by engaging an audience in a performance of the real lives and experiences of others, the audience members are invited into relationship with the *other*, and are able to experience a deep sense of the *other*. They are moved emotionally - brought to tears, Aristotle's pity, and moved to anger, Aristotle's fear - and they are called to some response (Conquergood 1985 in Epston & Carlson 2017:24). The client is thus invited into relationship with themselves as the *other*, whereby they are emotionally moved by *themselves*, which leads to the taking of actions that they may never have taken before.



The Practice of IWP: Act 1

“Narrative therapy might best be thought of as the means by which the moral character of another is revealed to all concerned” David Epston

The insider to the story of the life of the person seeking therapy, is the therapist themselves. They have journeyed with their client through challenges and triumphs and have vast insight and knowledge of their client’s story. In Act 1, the therapist *becomes* their client and is interviewed by an external therapist. This interview is not intended to be a roleplay. It is intended to be narrative art, as if the therapist is painting a portrait of their client that is prejudiced by their hopes for their client, and is intended to reveal the essence of the moral character of their client by entering into unusual stories of their client’s lives. It is performed and recorded with the client’s consent, but without the client being present, and is approximately 45 minutes in duration. Soon after, but no longer than two weeks, the recording is shown to the client in the presence of the therapist and the interviewer. As with a work of art, the therapist, who is the portraitist, has the freedom to respond in novel ways. Drama plays a vital role here and the interviewer guides the conversation to places that the therapist and client have not gone before. As the interview is intended to be dramatic, it recasts the client’s story in a compelling way that captures their imagination and invites them into relationship with their own *self* that is informed by grace, generosity, dignity, self-compassion, and promise (Epston & Carlson 2017:26). Act 1 is thus an artistic or poetic imitation, aimed at the essence, and not a mere copying of events (Mattingly 1998 in Epston & Carlson 2017:26).

It is a performance that forsakes to problem-solve and rather enters a dramatised version of the person’s life that holds a tension with the exciting and striking qualities of theatre. It is a transition from narrative therapist to narrative artist. The questions are explorative and reveal what could have been, or what is yet to come (Morson 1994 in Epston & Carlson 2017:27). Because IWP interviewing works in the realm of performance, it allows for the interviewer to be bold in their inquiries. The questions constitute mystery, speculation and suspense, causing the reader or client to have a wondering or not-knowing experience of what will happen next (Epston & Carlson 2017:27). The purpose of the questions is speculative, and they are daringly designed to invite the client to respond and to consider options that they were not able to consider previously. Additionally, for our clients to view the entirety of their lives, as if in a



moment, Act 1 must deliver the alternative, or counter-history, by asking questions that extend beyond what is already known about the counter-history. Hereby, a rich history is created of the counter-story that invites people to live in it.

The Practice of IWP: Act 2

The showing of Act 1 is the starting point for Act 2. In this second act, the client is invited to be the audience of the recorded hope-biased representation that was performed on their behalf in Act 1. The interviewer also pauses the recording at key points so that the client has time to grasp the meaning of the various novel storylines performed by their therapist in Act 1. Additionally, the process is slowed down so that the interviewer can detect a lack of agreement between the therapist's portrayal and the client's problem story. When the hope-biased story of the therapist, and the problem story of the client, are juxtaposed, the drama is multiplied and new meanings are given. Mattingly (1998 in Epston & Carlson 2017:28) importantly notes that *"narrative drama is heightened through disparity between the narrator's point of view and that of any character"*. Stories are built on different understandings. Pausing the recording at these contrasting moments helps the client's attempt at resolving the hope-biased portrait painted of them by their therapist and enables them to claim the portrait for themselves, and to start living within it. In this way, Act 2 is a dramatic co-performance, in which the client is simultaneously the audience and a character in the portrayal of the portrait. The impersonated performance in Act 1 becomes a real-life performance in Act 2, allowing the client to become an outsider and an insider to their own story. As a result, the client is not just a character with an already-created script, but becomes an author of a new story that holds the potential and possibilities of the story as performed in Act 1.

To summarise, at the beginning of Act 2, the client is the audience who watches the recorded performance of Act 1. As the process develops, and through a series of queries from the interviewer, the client slowly swops position with the therapist and, by the end of Act 2, the client has completely migrated to centre-stage, and the therapist and interviewer have become the audience watching the client being the performer of their life again. Act 2 is not a repetition of Act 1, but rather extends Act 1 by engaging the imagination of the client, therapist and interviewer. The client authorises Act 1 and unravels Act 2. As a consequence, the client has the final word between the two versions of their life story – the problem story versus the



alternative story. Thus, by the end of Acts 1 and 2, the client has the opportunity to be both an insider and an outsider to the ongoing story of their life.

What becomes possible as a result of this in-and-outsider position, are three main findings:

1. *Heightened experiences of self-endearment due to distancing effect*

One of the unique effects that a performance has on their audience, is that they experience suspended disbelief because they know that the performance is not real but yet, at the same time, they allow themselves to feel and respond to what is not real, as if it were real. These two opposing stances, subjective and objective, attached and detached, proximate and distant, is what Aristotle suggests as the balancing quality of the great arts. And it is this balancing act of stories, that results in catharsis – a getting rid of, release or healing. Performance is a restructuring and a reconfiguring of the facts such that we are able to see what is universal in human actions and human suffering, and it brings forth authentic expressions of compassion (Aristotle's proper way to be near to pain) and serenity (Aristotle's proper way to be far from pain). And that, for Aristotle, is only accessible through imitation of reality. By the detour of fiction, we can look at the most painful events in life and see them in a new way so that we can identify, but this time from a safe distance, which is cathartic (Kearney 2012b:interview). This is precisely the reason that performance is such a valuable research methodology for the representation of information known or assumed (Conquergood 2013 in Epston & Carlson 2017:29). IWP draws from the power of performance and multiplies its effects for the client by placing them simultaneously as an outsider and insider, which creates the safe distance needed to grasp the meaning of all that is being acted out. The distancing effect within the conundrum of *not-real* and *real* at the same time, allows the client to experience self-regard, self-compassion and self-love that was not available before. To place our most painful experiences into some kind of story, somehow contributes to the slow process of healing, such as the holocaust survivor, mentioned in Chapter 3, who was fortunate to make it onto Schindler's list. She confessed that she was never able to reconnect with her experiences in the camps until she saw herself played by an actor in the Spielberg movie. It was only through

the detour of fiction, experienced again but this time from a safe distance, that she could grasp the meaning of the true horror and that she could restore her pain and tell her story (Kearney 2017b:8). Epston and Carlson (2017:32) explains that the level of detachment that IWPs make possible “*allows people to see and relate to themselves as if they were seeing and relating to themselves as an ‘other’ which is strangely but endearingly familiar*”. To illustrate the significance of the distancing effect, below follows an excerpt from a client’s experience in Act 2:

“During the Act 2, I felt that a level of detachment occurred for me. I was looking at someone else’s story. I felt differently about my own story because it didn’t feel like it was me. Seeing myself this way allowed me to feel compassion for myself even though it wasn’t me. It was my story, so how can I not let the compassion transfer over to the real me”.

During the process of IWP, clients find themselves becoming accepting of the therapist’s representation of themselves and conclude therefore that they can also become accepting of their own selves and be free of their usual self-criticism.

2. *Becoming more of a character*

Character is usually described as strength and originality in a person's nature. Richard Sennett’s (2004 in Epston & Carlson 2017:33) definition is “*the capacity to move another*” and refers to it as “*expressive exchange*”. In IWP, the exchange is expressed by the therapist’s portrayal and, in return, the portrayed client reciprocates by doing something similar for themselves which, in turn, touches the therapist and the interviewer. The powerful question arises of “*what is it about me that can move another person?*” or the powerful realisation that “*I moved my own self to tears*”. The client, so to say, is being doubly moved - first by the moral character of the performed other and then by the realisation that the performed other was themselves. This is when everyone involved, namely client, therapist and interviewer, experience being re-authored by beauty (Samuel 2015 in Epston & Carlson 2017:34).



3. *Experience of time-travel due to the suspension of time*

A performance has the effect of making the audience feel suspended in time. When a person is both an audience and a central character of that performance, the effect is even more dramatic. Clients refer to metaphors such as time-travelling, leaping through time, propelled into the future, travelling at the speed of light, and so on. This is because the client is afforded a view of their life from a position of outsideness, as if they can see the entirety of their life condensed in a moment. It is looking backwards and forwards simultaneously (Epston & Carlson 2017:34). This reminds me of the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, when he spoke of life being understood backwards but simultaneously needing to be lived forwards. In this position of detachment, looking backwards and forwards at the same time, possibilities emerge as the client gains a new understanding of the past, which leads to a new meaning for the future. They see a new possible future that they were not able to imagine before.

Epston and Carlson notes that, because the problem story and the counter story are often very contradictory, in some cases it can take some months for clients to reconcile the two versions of their life and, in other cases, reconciliations take place during Act 2. Regardless of when it occurs, clients do choose between the two stories with a sense of good judgement. Performance, representation or imitation serves to bring out the truth that otherwise remains concealed (Kearney 2012b:interview).

In summary, IWP is an invitation to the person being portrayed to become an audience member of a portrayal of their life as performed by their therapist, who is unashamedly biased by the promise that they hold for the near future of the portrayed person and, by extension, brings healing to both client and therapist (Epston & Carlson 2017:25, 26).



5.7 Key Reflections

“A psychology of beauty must somehow grope its way towards experiencing the other as part of the beauty of the natural world – a beauty to which, in relationship, we have privileged access.” Michael Ventura

Narrative, explained by Roland Barthes (Barthes 1966 in Dowling 2011:37), *“begins with the very history of humanity; there is not, there never has been, any people anywhere without narrative”*. And, when we tell our narratives, we appreciate our social inheritance and the intersubjective elements of personal identity; we are authors of others’ stories, and they are authors of our stories. More so, narrative has healing power. We therefore cannot attempt to heal if we do not speak and tell our stories. When a story is told, both the speaker and the listener heal by way of experiencing beauty in their shared humanity. Furthermore, in this telling and retelling, fiction and imagination spontaneously come into play. This is because fiction is as deep as life itself, and imagination is an art hidden in the depths of our nature and our human soul (Kantian conviction in Kearney 1995:173). It is in these tellings of both the forgotten stories and the new imaginative stories, that magic happens - it becomes possible for us to profoundly experience qualities of our identity that we have not been able to do before. And there is always beauty to be found in the psychology of experience (Ventura 2001:5).

Narrative therapy is a therapeutic endeavour that aims to bring healing through the telling and retelling of stories. Yet, the acclaimed professor in narrative therapy, Tom Carlsson (2017:22), wrote that he always believed that therapy was capable of much more than what it proposed. In my research on the healing ability of art, many questions arose, such as: What is the role of the great arts in this process of reconstructing one’s life story? In therapy, how might art enable a *“working through”* or *“writing through”* of problem narratives? and What is the connection between the use of the arts and narrative therapy? More specifically: How does art facilitate, inspire and provide us with the necessary imagination in the process of rewriting a narrative of balance?

To address these questions about art in therapy, and its abilities to heal, I return to the artist to find an answer. When we tell our problem stories, we *re-present* them from the restriction of an internal perspective. This is because we, typically, live inside our stories, and we experience ourselves as characters of an already-written script, thus having limited freedom. To become



liberated from the fixed insider position of a story, the character needs to move outside of the story and become the author freely shaping the story. Thus, we need to appoint ourselves as the artist that creates the story from the position of living outside of the story.

This is when the question evolves into a new uncertainty - how can we achieve this status of being an artist living outside of our own stories? In searching for a way outside of my story, I returned yet again to the artist that suggested a remedy through the process of vicariousness; through representation or performance, the feelings or actions of your own or another person is experienced in the imagination, which produces a release of pent-up emotions. Aristotle significantly emphasises that this representation is not simply the imitation of some pre-existing reality, but rather a creative imaginative reconfiguring where “*meaninglessness threatens the meaningful*” (Ricoeur in Newsom 2003:103). In every narrative we find contradiction, which is most frequently negative. Yet, Newsom (2003) importantly notes that it is not their negative quality that is of essence, but rather the way in which their presence initially disturbs the sense of harmony. They are events in which, as Ricoeur reminds us, disagreement threatens agreement. Although in life contradiction may overthrow harmony, it is the task of narrative art to incorporate the contradiction within the harmony (Newsom 2003:103), harmony being referred to as the preferred narrative of balance. We are never finalised in narrative art. We are constantly able to make choices that will render untrue previous definitions of ourselves (Morson 1994 in Epston & Carlson 2017:23). Reconfiguring ourselves therefore calls our attention to this narrative art, that is brought about in performing our stories, to incorporate the problem story within the preferred story.

As I further explored these questions in the context of reconstructing a preferred narrative of balance, my research naturally migrated to the therapeutic practices associated with definitional ceremonies - outsider witnesses practices (OWP) and insider witnesses practices (IWP). These practices contribute to a tradition of acknowledgement that powerfully suggests new possibility to the people at the centre of these discussions. In OWP and IWP, we encounter various creative representations of the person in therapy. In OWP, a platform is created from where the client has the opportunity to witness the retellings of their life story by an audience, consisting of caring and supportive others. The audience performs the retelling by reflecting on what personally resonated with them when they listened to the story of the person in therapy which,



in turn, creates new meaning and promotes rich story development for the person at the centre of the ceremony. In IWP, the therapist of the client is interviewed, as if they are their client, by an external therapist. A creative imitation of the person in therapy is performed by their therapist, biased by the hopes and dreams that the therapist has for their client, and is later shown to the client. In this process of the client being the audience of her own life story, powerful new meanings are made. The client is so to say being doubly-moved, first by the moral character of the performed other, and then by the realisation that the performed other is themselves. And this is when everyone (client, therapist and interviewer) experience being re-authored by beauty (Samuel 2015 in Epston & Carlson 2017:34). Beauty always appreciates and teaches an aesthetic of experience. These *artistic* performances, acted out during OWP and IWP in narrative counselling, holds considerable possibility, the outcome of which is rich story development, the expansion of personal agency and a reconnection with what is beautiful in clients' lives (White 2007a:218).

Thus, through telling and retelling of alternative stories by way of performance, as we see in the practices of OWP and IWP, we produce narrative art that, in turn, breeds new meaning. OWP and IWP undertakes to transport people at the centre of therapy, from a position of being a fixed character, to the standpoint of being the artist of their own life story. The true artist, as Kearney (2012a:e-lecture) reminds us, is the one who reverses the ongoing repetition of trauma in the lived experience, into a cathartic repetition in narrative telling and retelling. The freedom to be the artist of your own life narrative is what the re-authoring of a new preferred *self* is all about, and this is the healing balm of narrative therapy. The new meanings made, from this process of listening to new and preferred stories, need to be embraced, lived to the full and celebrated (Meylahn 2012:62). When the performed preferred narrative themes and plots can continue to be stronger than our lived experiences, they can co-exist with the problems of our lives. I suggest that this is precisely the *more* that Carlson suggested therapy was capable of.

The consulting room attends to what the world devalues and ignores, it is a space that values and embraces beauty (Ventura 2001:7). And it is in this new meaning-making aesthetic endeavor that catharsis is experienced - it reveals beauty as a life-giving healing experience. It is not a decorative beauty, but rather a type of beauty that has the primary function of reconnecting our innermost being to the world. And it is this lack of connection that afflicts so



many (Ventura 2001:3). Beauty inspires us to continue to address the problems of our lives. We therefore cannot leave beauty unaddressed, when so many long for it and are dying for the lack of experiencing it (Ventura 2001:5). White (2007a:218) writes that *“Of all the practices that I have come across in the history of my career, those associated with the definitional ceremony have the potential to be most powerful. Time and time again I have observed outsider witness retellings achieve what is quite beyond my potential to achieve in my role as a therapist”*.

I would like to suggest that OWP and IWP might be compared to, as Kearney speaks of, a homeopathic remedy, which finds the antidote within the disease. Last, but by no means least, according to Aristotle, healing through the telling of stories makes for healthy citizens with purged emotions that lead to practical wisdom (Kearney 2017b:3).

6 CONCLUSION



Bird Girl by Anthony and the Johnsons

I am a bird girl now
I've got my heart
Here in my hands now
I've been searching
For my wings some time
I'm going to be born
Into soon the sky
'Cause I'm a bird girl
And bird girls go to heaven
And bird girls can fly

Research reveals that the effects of trauma experienced in a person's childhood can be passed on to their children. Our children and grandchildren are shaped by the genes they inherit from us (Henriques 2019:e-article). Freud (1920:14), however, reminds us in the *fort/da* scenario that when we speak of our trauma, we experience a release, which is healing. Speaking therefore, heals the wounds of trauma experienced in our own lives and thereby brings an end to it being echoed further down the generations.

"The unnarrated life is not worth living." Socrates, rephrased by Richard Kearney



All conclusions about identity begin as identity claims that are socially constructed. Through our repetitive, co-operative and collective conversations we determine what is *true* about ourselves, and so we create structures of power that either serve, or control, us. The values and beliefs that we hold, that seem to be ‘normal’ and ‘common sense’, are constructs of the organisations and institutions that are shared through language (Bullock 1999:25). It is therefore through language that we collectively construct our emotional, ethical, social and cultural realities that influence our thinking and our behaviour. Trauma means *wounded*, and the effects of it remain with us for a very long time, leaving us with identity conclusions fuelled by discourses such as that of being ‘fragile’, ‘messed-up’ and ‘damaged’ (Retief 2009:22,23), for it is the component of our identity and our understanding of *self* that is largely at stake when we are subjected to traumatic experiences.

There are various possibilities to the issue of understanding identity. The problem, however, with understanding the *self*, originates from the difficulty in answering the introspective question of “*Who is that person that is I?*” (Samuel 2015:2). How do we remain holding on to a sense of *self* in relation to the various alternatives and influences regarding the construction of our identities? Socrates gives us a clue when he reminds us of the worth there is in examining our lives. The process of examining, for Ricoeur, is through narrative configuration and refiguration (Ricoeur 1991 in Samuel 2015:3). We can retain our identity, through the telling of stories, as we live with each other in a world of conversational narrative, and as we understand ourselves and each other through changing stories and self-descriptions (Anderson & Goolishian, in Hart 1995:184). Kearney (2002:3) writes that “...*stories are what make our lives worth living. They are what make our condition human*”. For Ricoeur, the storied *self* exists between the various alternatives, providing a sense of coherence and unity, even through the unpredictabilities and discordances of life (Samuel 2015:3). Hence, even in the midst of a crisis of *self*, one can still make the confident statement and tell the short story of “*Here am I*” (Samuel 2015:3). When we narrate where we came from, who we are now and where we are going, it helps us to enter our imagination and try out various ways of being-in-the-world. Stories provide a strategy for describing what is possible, and what is ‘possible’ is an essential component in self-understanding. Thus, our infinite possibilities are intrinsically linked to who



we essentially are. It is therefore each person's responsibility to explore, examine and narrate their life by way of finding an answer to the 'Who am I?' question.

Furthermore, one of the most important roles of stories is their ability to project fictive experiences of time, which allow us to orient ourselves to time, in the sense of reckoning with our past, present and future (Ricoeur in Wood 1991:50). Kearney (2002:3) explains that when the random and unplanned events of life are transformed into story, thus made memorable over time, we become full agents of our history. More so, stories do not only refer to reality (imitation and plot), but actually *remake* it, and this new reality is not less real, but more real, than the things they represent (Ricoeur in Wood 1991:49). Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, defines mythos-mimesis as a creative representation and reinterpretation of the world such that previously-unexplored meanings can unfold (Kearney 2002:12). As Winterson (2005) poignantly reminds us: "*Storytelling is a way of navigating our lives, and to read ourselves as fiction is much more liberating than to read ourselves as fact. Facts are partial. Fiction is a more complete truth. If we read ourselves as narrative, we can change the story that we are. If we read ourselves as literal and fixed, we find we can change nothing. Someone will always tell the story of our lives - it had better be ourselves*". Fiction thus accepts this double role of imitation and plot, which corresponds to our imagination as a type of power to redescribe our world. And when we are invited, by way of engaging our imagination, to see the world from a new perspective, we experience catharsis - Aristotle's pleasurable purgation of pity and fear.

In the context of trauma, stories cannot cure, but will always try to heal. When we become spectators of art, we gain sufficient distance to grasp the trauma displayed in front of us in a way that is not possible in the lived experience, thus enabling us to make new meaning, which is healing. Narrative imagination labours to produce in us a double vision of empathy with the characters in the story who act and suffer, as well as an aesthetic distance, or outsidersness, whereby we are able to discern the events unfolding (Kearney 2002:12,13). We are, so to say, on the one hand attached, aware, in the experience and conscious and, on the other hand, detached and observing from a distance. The beautiful balance that the narrative imagination brings about, comes into play in between these two stances - that of being both close and far at the same time. It is this merging of empathy and detachment that enables us to journey beyond the closed ego towards other possibilities of being in the world (Kearney:2002:13), as with the



story of the woman who could not cry when she saw the corpse of her husband. A week later, when she saw a play wherein a widow could not cry when she saw the body of her deceased husband, the woman cried freely. She was able to finally mourn, and thereby heal. Thus, what is intolerable in the real, lived experience, gives rise, through the narrative imagination, to new understanding and meaning, which is healing.

“The mind, once stretched by a new idea, never returns to its original dimensions”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The power of storytelling makes a critical difference to our lives (Kearney 2002:14). To tell my story, I used the metaphor of a dance, whereby my thoughts drift back to Martha Graham’s words in the 1994 documentary *The Dancer Revealed*: *“I have spent all my life with dance and being a dancer. It’s permitting life to use you in a very intense way. Sometimes it is not pleasant. Sometimes it is fearful. But nevertheless, it is inevitable.”* Meylahn (2012:56) speaks of dance as a repetitive and circular movement, not necessarily following each other in the exact same order, but sometimes two steps ahead and three back. It is the creativity of dance that captures something of being on a journey. Prynnsberg volunteered to dance with me and thereby made available a heuristic journey which gave me the sufficient distance to grasp my personal trauma, thus enabling me to discover, learn and make new meaning. The various narrative testimonies that I used while storying at Prynnsberg, that of Vasalisa, Kuhaylah, Dante, Shakespeare, Homer and Joyce, invited me to remember and re-story, in however a flawed or fractured manner, the unspeakable event of my own trauma (Kearney 2016a:24). Narrating stories of trauma is a way of never giving up. It guides us to acknowledge the truth and to understand the pain (Ricoeur 1988 in Kearney 2016a:25).

It is precisely this heuristic dance that brought my attention to the therapeutic practices of outsider witnesses (OWP) and insider witnesses (IWP), which contribute to a tradition of acknowledgement from an in-and-outsider position, and that powerfully suggests new possibility to the people at the centre of these discussions. Specifically, in IWP, clients who have participated have evaluated the Act II in IWP, on average a 90-minute interview, to be equivalent in value to at least 15-20 sessions of the narrative therapy they had previously received (Epston & Carlson 2017:4). The creative imitation of the person in therapy, that is



performed by their therapist who is biased by the hopes and dreams that they have for their client, gives the client the powerful opportunity to be an audience to their own life story. These stories that are performed, have a double response, one of truth ‘*as*’, and the other of fiction ‘*as if*’. And it is precisely this double response that liberates the client from their habitual built-in protection devices and denial mechanisms (Kearney 2017b:8). They suddenly experience themselves as another, and the other as themselves, and thereby begin to understand otherwise incomprehensible pain with empathic compassion toward the *self* (Kearney 2016a:25). Clients are afforded the opportunity to see a certain kind of hope that does not experience fear, nor shame, but opens possibilities that were not available or recognisable before, and that lead to a preferred way of being in the world. It is a type of hope that embraces the *self* and sets the *self* free. In the narrative artistic performances of OWP and IWP, the client’s own life is, so to say, re-storied by beauty – it is a rediscovery of their human spirit as a noetic spirit.



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