Liliana Zavaglia. *White Apology and Apologia: Australian Novels of Reconciliation*. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2016. 288pp.
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Liliana Zavaglia's *White Apology and Apologia: Australian Novels of Reconciliation* uses the trope of the double movement of apology and apologia to analyse a number of recent, culturally significant novels of reconciliation—determined interventions of literary activism—by white (liberal) Australian authors: two of Alex Miller's novels—*Journey to the Stone Country* (2002) and *Landscape of Farewell* (2002); Andrew McGahan's *The White Earth* (2004); Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005); and Gail Jones' *Sorry* (2007). Zavaglia's analysis is book-ended by two non-literary texts, the Mabo Judgement of 1992 and Kevin Rudd's 2008 'Apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008,' representing the two key events that flank the publication of these novels.

This is an interesting idea. The double movement to which Zavaglia refers is of an ambivalent, although I would argue not quite paradoxical, cultural tension—expressed in the shared etymology of both apology and apologia that moves between an expression of sorrow and regret for Indigenous historical losses and a defensive desire to be redeemed or saved from the ongoing demands of living with the reality of a violent settler history and its implications.

The introduction does a very good job of situating the novels, and the book's analysis, in their historical context, providing an overview of the Reconciliation process, the Mabo and Wik Judgements, Native Title, and the publication of the *Bringing Them Home* report. It also locates these texts as responses to the backlash against reconciliation during the years of the Howard Government, the rise of Hansonism in the late 1990s, and the History Wars. But this book's analysis is firmly targeted at liberal white discourses, in which this double movement is most clearly demonstrated.

Theoretically, the book is informed by Dominick LaCapra's theorisation of historical trauma, and particularly perpetrator trauma (hence the book's primary focus on white narratives) suggesting that LaCapra's call for 'empathic unsettlement' is one way to produce 'narratives that do not confuse one's own voice or position with the victim's, nor seek facile uplift, harmonisation or closure.' La Capra suggests that reckoning with historical trauma for the descendants of both victims and perpetrators requires capacity to tolerate historical losses, advocating working through rather than acting out the pain of the past. But, as Zavaglia's analysis shows , much contemporary writing by white Australian authors can often be read as foreground healing for the perpetrators rather than for the historical victims of invasion and settlement.

The bulk of the book is devoted to analyses of specific novels. Chapter two scrutinises the 'white self-recuperations' of Miller's *Journey to the Stone Country*, although ultimately arguing, as Zavaglia does again in relation to *Landscape of Farewell* in Chapter six, that the 'polyphonic narratives" produce the conditions of an "empathic unsettlement.' Miller's later novel, *Landscape of Farewell*, Zavaglia suggests, also performs reconciliatory gestures, only to have these troubled by the collapsing of the categories of perpetrator and victim.

Chapter three supplements La Capra's work with Ghassan Hage's work on white discourses in order to illuminate McGahan's *The White Earth*. Zavaglia argues that McGahan's novel demonstrates Hage's point that both liberal and conservative discourses serve the purpose of controlling and managing national space. But again, Zavaglia suggests that the child character at the centre of the narrative provides an exemption for whiteness, producing the double movement of defence and regret. Chapter four, likewise, seeks out and finds a similar double movement in Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*. Zavaglia reads both the novel's 'reconciliatory potential' as well as the 'familiar confusion of victimhood' which undercuts that potential.

Gail Jones' *Sorry* provides a clear instance of a literary reckoning with apology, and chapter 5 draws on Jones' Foucauldian-inspired elaboration of heterotopic spaces in order to unpack the ways in which local knowledges disperse the authority of colonial metanarratives. But Zavaglia finds a confusion of victimhood in this novel as well through a representation of messianic blackness that offers itself as a sacrifice for whiteness.

Chapter one and the book's Afterword both take non-literary texts to demonstrate the ways in which this double movement that the book elaborates upon in its readings of novels permeate some of modern Australia's most momentous historical events—the Mabo judgement and the Apology. Zavaglia draws upon Elizabeth Povinelli's work to perform a literary reading of a legal ruling arguing that Mabo 'enacts a neo-colonial movement whereby the land is resecured in white hands in the attempt to address Indigenous dispossession' (18). Similarly, as Zavaglia demonstrates, the Apology expresses both sincere regret, and employs a narrative of redemption for the nation, although it is hard to say how such a political and rhetorical event could have been otherwise. These chapters, while thought-provoking, seem to presume some potential ideal state where justice for historical wrongs can be fully and unambiguously delivered, with existing states falling short. What is not fully accounted for in this critique of liberal whiteness—particularly in its state-sponsored manifestations—is that both of these events were also negotiating a vocal, frightened and angry conservative whiteness, which expresses neither regret nor retreat. In the current political climate, one might argue both the Mabo judgement and the National apology, in spite of their limitations, stand as testimonies to more hopeful times.

White Apology and Apologia is often beautifully written, in clear and evocative language, yet its genesis in a PhD project is, at times, too obvious—indeed, Zavaglia at one point refers to the text as a thesis. What starts as an astute idea becomes quite laboured. Although there are a number of really insightful readings of the individual texts within each chapter, ultimately, because novel after novel is considered through this lens of the twin desire to express both regret and retreat, the analysis begins to feel reductive and rehearsed—the danger, I suppose, of setting up an initial framework through which everything that follows will be read; a framework appropriate to a thesis perhaps, but less rewarding in a monograph.

It is also unclear where Zavaglia sits herself within this analysis—given its focus on whiteness, and the ambivalent desires and anxieties of whiteness, it would have been interesting to get a sense of how the author negotiates this tension herself, but her own position is difficult to find. It is a curiously impersonal analysis that does not engage with the dynamics of story-telling within cultures. Would a non-ambivalent narrative of historical reckoning even be possible, let along desirable? What would such a narrative look like? It is only in the final pages of the book that Zavaglia acknowledges the inevitability of ambivalence in attempts to write and rewrite national stories, suggesting that these novels are 'a hopeful development for it attests to the increased ability of non-Indigenous Australians to tolerate their own past' (216).

Zavaglia's *White Apology and Apologia* is a welcome addition to the field of Australian literary studies, and particularly the study of fictions of reconciliation and what they have to say about the riven culture out of which they emerged and the hopes, desires and denials that operate in contemporary white Australian literary fiction.

Maggie Nolan, Australian Catholic University