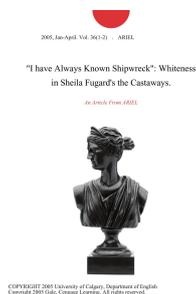


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## I HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN SHIPWRECK WHITENESS IN SHEILA FUGARD S THE CASTAWAYS EBOOKS 2019



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Despite winning two prestigious literary awards in the year of its publication--the Olive Schreiner Prize and the CNA Literary Award--Sheila Fugard's novel *The Castaways* has suffered a history of critical neglect. While scholars in passing have mentioned the work, there has been no sustained analysis of its account of white South African identity. We might posit any number of reasons for this oversight. Published in 1972 (in paperback in 1974 and again in 2002), when South Africa was on the verge of a widespread insurrection that would culminate in the civil war of the 1980s, this agonized interior monologue of a white patient confined in the "Port Berkley Mental Hospital" probably seemed little more than settler solipsism, another self-involved exploration of colonial guilt, alienation and fear for the future of white South Africans. The 1970s and 1980s, as various debates and manifestoes of the time attest, (1) saw increased demands for 'committed' writing in a social realist mode, which, it was generally held, was best suited to contribute directly to the project of political liberation. *The Castaways* presents, in its modernist experimentation, a colonial allegory in different voices, its fractured surface expressing the unresolved antinomies of white South African identity. Political action requires a commitment to a particular representation of moral certainty with strategic implications. The indeterminacy of *The Castaways* precludes any such possibility. The text did not, in other words, relate to the Zeitgeist of a society undergoing a radical transition. The political in South Africa has, in some senses at least, been resolved. This resolution has made it possible for us to return to elided texts such as Fugard's to undertake a more detailed examination of the schema through which South African existence has been interpreted in the literary imagination. In this article, we are concerned with analyzing *The Castaways* as an example of "white writing," writing which is, as J M Coetzee suggests, "generated by the concerns of people no longer European, not yet African" (11). The protean settler identity we will explore is, in Coetzee's logic, transitional; it is marked by an interminable instability and, in its being-in-transition, is defined by an 'unsettled' or 'unhomely' lack. It behoves us, since we live post-1994, post-apartheid, with the ongoing echoes of white postcolonial vulnerability, to unravel the practices of meaning entailed in this lack. While the subject of our critique, a seemingly marginal novel published more than three decades ago, might seem belated, we would argue that South African whiteness remains significantly under-theorized. As intellectuals set out to unravel the relational complexities of post-apartheid histories and identities, we cannot afford to leave the history of an agonized centrifugal whiteness behind us.

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