Ethically Valuable Failure?
Confession, Sacrifice, and Ethical Responsibility in Three Novels by J.M. Coetzee

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Albany Murdoch

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Abstract

This thesis explores impulses and resistances to confession in three novels by J.M. Coetzee: *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Disgrace* (1999), and *The Schooldays of Jesus* (2016). Specifically, it takes as its point of departure the apparent tension between confession and ethics in these novels, and in Coetzee's oeuvre generally. I find that, despite his repeated return in fiction to the ethically valuable experience of being impinged upon by the other, and his repeated representation of flawed and sexually violent male characters, Coetzee seems, in both his fictional and critical work, to rule out the possibility that confession might possess any ethical valences.

I analyse Coetzee's apparent disregard for confession's ethical value by reference to Michel Foucault, who from the mid-1970s developed a thoroughgoing critique of the role of confession in the power-knowledge nexus so central to his genealogies. I suggest that both rue confession's role in maintaining established power dynamics, particularly in judicial settings, as well as its potential to encourage a harmful relationship of the self to itself. This latter concern is explored by way of the sacrifice Foucault claims is entailed in confession, a concern I argue is borne out in *Disgrace* and *The Schooldays of Jesus*.

Judith Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005) provides a useful intervention into Coetzee's and Foucault's concerns. Drawing extensively from Foucault's account of subjectivation, and yet departing from his almost wholesale condemnation of the role played by confession in Western society, Butler finds in the inevitable failure of accounting for one's actions and who one is – and the experience of dispossession therein – grounds for the establishment of ethical responsibility. The dispossessing experience of giving an account, challenging as it does the idea of a sovereign subject, is thus seemingly intolerable to Foucault, but generative and foundational for Butler.

In applying Butler's work on giving an account to the three novels under consideration, I suggest that not only is failure inevitable when one attempts to confess, but that, far from constituting a reason to resist the interminable process of secular confession – interminability being a key concern in *Waiting for the Barbarians* – it may well be a source of ethical responsibility.

Contents

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Abbreviations used in this work

Judith Butler

GAA *Giving an Account of Oneself*. Fordham UP, 2005.

DPP *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Polity Press, 2013.

PL *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, 2004.

J.M. Coetzee

CDT "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky." *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, edited by David Attwell, Harvard UP, 1992, pp. 251-293.

D *Disgrace*. 1999. Vintage, 2000.

SJ *The Schooldays of Jesus*. Viking, 2016.

WB *Waiting for the Barbarians*. 1980. Vintage, 2004.

Michel Foucault

ABHS "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth." *Political Theory*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1993, pp. 198-227.

DI "About the Concept of the 'Dangerous Individual' in 19th-Century Legal Psychiatry." Translated by Alain Baudot and Jane Couchman. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, vol. 1, no. 1, Feb. 1978, pp. 1–18.

HOS *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Penguin, 2020.

WIC "What Is Critique?" *"What Is Critique?" And "The Culture of the Self,"* edited by Henri-Paul Fruchaud et al., translated by Clare O'Farrell, Chicago University Press, 2024, pp. 19–61.

Introduction

Michel Foucault finds much to criticise about the confession. His critique begins, perhaps most notably, in the first volume of his four-volume *The History of Sexuality* (1976) where he treats the nebulous speech act, its religious heritage, and its blossoming in the modern West with apprehension. For many, 'confession' will conjure images of antiquated boxes decorated with elaborate filigree screens in which one lowers one's head penitently to disclose one's sins to an obscured priest who will solemnly order the recitation of a combination of Hail Marys and Our Fathers before pronouncing absolution. The requirement to bear witness against oneself by divulging one's faults began around 350-400 AD and lives on, Foucault argues, in modern confession. He claims that, far from becoming a vestige in an emphatically secularised (Western) society, confession has become

> one of the . . . most highly valued techniques for producing truth. We have since become a singularly confessing society. The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. . . . [O]ne admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else, the things people write books about. (HOS 59)

One such writer of books with a strongly confessional bent is J.M. Coetzee, who in many ways shares Foucault's reluctance about confession, a reluctance which is made all the more intriguing by his persistent engagement with it in his fiction. From the publication of *Dusklands* in 1974 to the conclusion of the *Jesus* trilogy with *The Death of Jesus* in 2020,[1] nearly all of Coetzee's works have been read as confessions – whether his own (as in the autobiographical trilogy *Boyhood* (1997), *Youth* (2002), *Summertime* (2009), also published collectively as *Scenes from Provincial Life* (2011)), or those of his characters.

[1] *The Pole and Other Stories*, Coetzee's most recently published work of fiction at the time of writing, was released in 2023, but I am not aware of any critical studies of the role of confession in this novella and collected stories.

Coetzee has also engaged critically with confession, in a widely-cited essay, "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky", written in 1985 and later published in *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (1992). In this essay, Coetzee defines absolution as "the indispensable goal of all confession, sacramental or secular" (CDT 252). The problem secular confession runs into, as Coetzee (alongside many others) identifies, is the lack of an authority, or confessor, empowered to absolve and thus bring about the "*end of the chapter* whose attainment is the goal of confession" (252, emphasis in original). In the absence of such an entity, in Coetzee's thinking, the only way to bring about such an end is "to tell the truth to and for oneself" (CDT 291), an almost inevitably insurmountable task given the self's tendency to deceive itself.

The likelihood of self-deception is assumed in Paul de Man's essay "Confessions (Excuses)"[2] in which he offers a reading of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*. Rousseau offers an account of his life, suggesting that the shameful or unflattering events he recounts are a guarantee of the work's truth. One such scene has become known in critical studies of confession as 'the ribbon scene': as a young man working in the Lorenzini household, Rousseau becomes "tempted" (82) by a ribbon and steals it, blaming the theft on a young cook by the name of Marion. Rousseau's refusal to rescind his lie when questioned leads to the expulsion of both from the household. Rather than a story so shameful it can only be true, de Man reads Rousseau's anecdote as evidence of the more complex movements of guilt and shame. According to Robert J. Ellrich,

> De Man's intricately woven argument can be reduced to the following assertion: that Rousseau, in confessing his adolescent theft and the lie to which it gave rise, was interested not in purging himself of the shame and guilt resulting from the theft and the lie, but rather in holding on to these feelings through the creation of a perpetual *machine à excuses* possessing an exclusively rhetorical, rather than a performative, ontology. (1049)

"What Rousseau *really* wanted", de Man writes, "was neither the ribbon nor Marion, but the public scene of exposure which he actually gets" (285). The public scene of exposure, which

[2] De Man's essay, first published in 1977, was originally titled "The Purloined Ribbon," but was republished verbatim under this new title in *Allegories of Reading* (1979).

is not purely confessional but laced with excuses, provides Rousseau with a spiral of shame and revelation, which is found to be more satisfying than the revelation of truth itself:

> The more crime there is, the more theft, lie, slander, and stubborn persistence . . . the better. The more there is to expose, the more there is to be ashamed of; the more resistance to exposure, the more satisfying the scene, and, especially, the more satisfying and eloquent the belated revelation, in the later narrative [of Rousseau's], of the inability to reveal. (285)

Peter Brooks, in *Troubling Confessions*, concurs with de Man's assessment of Rousseau's account, elucidating the tantalising connection between confession of this kind and literature: "[T]his primal scene of exposure, shame, guilt, is absolutely necessary to the project of making a confession, and if the scene never occurred, one would have to invent something like it in order to motivate and perform the writing of the *Confessions*" (21).

Coetzee, in his own reading of Rousseau, dismisses de Man's claim to know "what Rousseau *really* wanted" as "perhaps naive" because not "historically knowable" (CDT 267), yet his reading of Rousseau's shame spiral accords with de Man's. Whereas for Rousseau, the despicability of a confessed act should be a guarantee of its truthfulness, for de Man, Brooks, and Coetzee, it may be part of a more complex operation of shame, which aims not, finally, at truth, but, like Scheherazade, at its own persistence.[3] Thus while the goal of the confessant is to bring about the "end of the chapter" (CDT 291), excuse, which frequently overtakes confession, seeks to avoid precisely this.

Foucault argues that the difficulty of telling something unpalatable about oneself functions in a similar way to de Man's analysis of the excuse, that is, one derives pleasure from overcoming the apparent repression hindering one's confession. Rather than freeing themselves through speech by confessing deep dark secrets, (very simply) confessants uphold the power of institutions which continue to seek confessions, as Krystof Dolezal explains:

> Foucault shows that the avowal follows a similar Christian confessional pattern; it constitutes a truthful discourse that enables the authority (the judge) to operate with

[3] The structure of many of Coetzee's novels suggests this, in a variety of ways.

> unquestionable knowledge and to punish. Nonetheless, unlike in Christian pastoral practices, the defendant confirms the already existent truth established by the court to legitimise a punishment. . . .The avowal shows how legal subjects are implicated and implicate themselves by veridiction in the social order and self-relations and how they co-produce them. (10)

Foucault argues that confession has morphed from its antecedents in the fourth and fifth centuries, and from its being made compulsory at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, into a societal (as opposed to religious) phenomenon. By confessing to doctors, judges, psychologists, teachers, romantic partners, and more, we make ourselves into individualized objects of knowledge within a heterogeneous power-knowledge nexus, which is perpetuated by just such confessions: "[I]nscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualization by power" (HOS 58-59), confession by Foucault's reckoning involves "an immense labor to which the West has submitted generations in order to produce . . . men's subjection: their constitution as subjects in both senses of the word" (HOS 60). I want to suggest that confession might be understood beyond this scepticism, that is, that it might encompass ethical valences not considered by those who lament its prevalence as a discourse in Western society. The term's use in everyday life seems not to reflect the somewhat structured and quite obviously religiously-derived definition provided by de Man, Hart, Coetzee and Brooks which can only be limited by its secular nature: that is, that its failure is not only inevitable but condemns the utility of any attempt to confess.

Indeed, not all confessional narratives involve a mournful spiral into uncertainty. At my local public library, novels bearing the title "confessions" are frequently not those of an Augustine or Rousseau, but emphatically more dramatic, more racy, often bearing dark, evocative covers and idealised, scantily clad figures.[4] This is perhaps the kind of 'confession' the Nobel Prize Committee had in mind when, awarding Coetzee the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2003, they declared that "[h]is intellectual honesty erodes all basis of consolation and distances itself from the tawdry drama of . . . confession"("Press Release"). And yet, against the Committee's summation, many of Coetzee's fictions do involve men lasciviously confessing

[4] This kind of confession is certainly not outside the ambit of Foucault's analysis of the pleasure derivable from confessional discourse in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge*, but it also seems to celebrate, rather than lament, the process of confessing, which is to say that it does not involve an interminable spiral into guilt and uncertainty. Of course, whether this kind of novel possesses the ethical value I am to suggest confession in Coetzee's fiction might entail is another question entirely.

their strange sexual desires, not to mention their unfortunate entanglements in violent colonial regimes, regrets as fathers or partners, and their impotence in every sense. Though these might not rightly be considered tawdry, to discount that they are confessions of a kind rules out a depth of critical insight that seems capable of overcoming the scepticism of those who judge that secular confession is or can be nothing more than a doomed project.

Confession, I argue, might have ethical valences which have nothing to do with divine authority (and in fact are by necessity distinct from divine authority), but with the likelihood of failure itself.

Such claims are made by Judith Butler in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005). In many ways taking up Foucault's mantle, and yet departing from his conclusions about the ramifications of a power-knowledge nexus, in this work Butler elaborates how a form of confession might serve as the basis for ethical responsibility. Far less tempted by the individualism espoused by libertarian thinking than Foucault, Butler combines the framework of Foucauldian subjectivation with an ethical approach aligned with the "first philosophy" of Emmanuel Levinas, as well as making "eclectic use" (GAA 21) of other theorists to expound their theory of giving an account. For Butler (as for Foucault), subjects cannot be constituted outside of the societal norms that might well, at times, constrain them. However, what Foucault seems to lament as an unforgivable constraint, Butler finds to be an ethically promising reminder of our relationality and dependency on others. The heterogeneity of these social norms renders giving a (full) account of oneself (a confession of who one *is*) impossible, but the attempt to do so provides fertile ground for the cultivation of ethical responsibility for Butler. The experience of giving an account is wont to fracture and dispossess one of a certain sovereignty, thus affirming one's status as one amongst others, and importantly serving as the basis for responsibility *for* those others.

I find just such a responsibility to be lacking in several of Coetzee's novels. A particular dynamic unites the three I have chosen for discussion in this thesis. In each, a man in middle age is pushed to confront his own sexually violent behaviour in an act of confession, and it is from this transgression that each of my readings proceeds.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), this confession takes the form of a written examination of the events and predilections that shape the life of the magistrate of a far-flung colonial

settlement (named only "the Magistrate") and raises questions about the (im)possibility of a hermetic search for the truth of oneself. Chapter 1 thus proceeds from the impasse ostensibly reached in secular confession: that without a confessor empowered to absolve one's confession, that confession threatens to be interminable. I begin by signalling the extent of the Magistrate's transgressions—notably, against the Barbarian Girl who receives his strange sexual attentions – which make up much of his confessional material. Then, using Butler's work on the dispossession encountered in giving an account of oneself to suggest the ethical valences of confession, I consider whether secular confession might yet be worthwhile pursuit in spite of inherent narratorial difficulties.

In *Disgrace* and *The Schooldays of Jesus*, however, the male protagonists' confessions are not, or not totally, self-initiated, but solicited in the course of judicial or quasi-judicial proceedings prompted by their sexual misconduct (and, in the case of Dmitri of *The Schooldays of Jesus*, murder). Thus, in Chapter 2, I turn to a consideration of an ostensibly more alarming problem, following Foucault's suggestion that the demand for confessions in judicial settings constitutes a "dreadful danger" (DI 18) to those from whom a confession is demanded. Following Foucault's assertion that there can be "no truth of the self without a sacrifice of the self" (ATHS 222), I consider the manifestations of sacrifice in these novels, both as an apparent constituent of confession, as well as something that might merit confessing *about*. Despite this, both Lurie and Dmitri resist making the confessions requested of them, ostensibly as a critique of the judicial demand that a defendant make a self-sacrificing confession. Yet, far from constituting effective Foucauldian critique, I argue, their unwillingness is emblematic of a refusal to be open to others, and disregards a distinction which may be drawn between harmful and ethically promising sacrifice.

My reading of these three novels differs in some measure from other studies on the role of confession in Coetzee's fictions because it departs from Coetzee's essay on confession to consider more widely the ethical valences of confession. As mentioned, Coetzee, like Foucault, is at best sceptical about secular confession. He finds it doubtful that confession might produce or reveal "the truth about the self" (CDT 252) or bear fruit in the form of more ethical behaviour towards others (whether human or nonhuman). This is an interesting tension, since Coetzee's novels contain much of the ethical in this regard as has been widely suggested, notably via appeals to Levinas; indeed, as my reading will suggest, they contain

many characters for whom self-examination and an acknowledgement of dependency on others would initiate a more ethical orientation.

“A Road That May Lead Nowhere”: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Failed Confession in *Waiting for the Barbarians*

“I have never seen anything like it” (WB 1), declares the Magistrate at the opening of *Waiting for the Barbarians,* initiating a novel-length confession which offers recurrent and mutating musings on sight, denial, opacity, and ignorance. What the Magistrate has “never seen” is the curious pair of dark spectacles sported by Colonel Joll, an officer of the mysterious Third Bureau, who has come to the frontier settlement to, in the Magistrate’s words, “find out the truth” (WB 3). As the Magistrate is soon to discover, this search for truth involves abhorrent violence against and torture of the ‘barbarians’ who live in the wilderness outside the fortified walls, and for whose invasion the settlement waits. It is a search from which, however despicable, he cannot fully exclude himself.

The Magistrate’s bold declaration, his awareness and ownership of his senses, actions, and beliefs (albeit here pertaining to a pair of sunglasses) are soon to falter as the paranoia induced by the Third Bureau takes hold of the settlement that he has called home for years. Amidst the cruelly rationalised violence of Empire, the Magistrate struggles to make sense of himself and his actions, particularly as these pertain to a tortured Barbarian Girl (named thus in the novel) whom he orders settlement soldiers to bring to his rooms. Here he proceeds to subject her to bizarre rituals with the apparent goal of finding her, and his own, truth. It is an enduring irony of the novel that, although he attempts to assert his difference from Colonel Joll and the Empire’s regime of violence and torture, a search for truth – both violative, if differently so – unites both men. As I will argue, however, the Magistrate moves, definitively if slightly, away from the self-perpetuating epistemology of Empire to an enduring experience of incoherence and uncertainty which, if offering little promise of the revelation of truth, nonetheless becomes important for the foundation of ethical responsibility.

To that end, this chapter will deal firstly with the nature of the Magistrate’s transgressions, particularly against the Barbarian Girl, and his inability to divine the extent of these transgressions despite an almost unwavering focus on his interactions with her in Parts II and III of the novel. His bizarre attention to the woman sexually and textually suggests his

intuition of a connection between sex, writing, and confession, all of which are united teleologically by the expectation of a particular kind of ending.

As the Magistrate's confession progresses, he begins to occasionally and paradoxically disavow his agency in certain events which show the most promise for his cultivation of more ethical conduct. In several key scenes, the Magistrate describes his dissociation from the narrated action, posing questions about the role of agency in confession, and problems for its narration. In considering this problem, I turn to Judith Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself*, and to studies of the promise of openness and abandon in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, to examine whether the Magistrate's claims to not be in control of his actions might, rather than spelling trouble for his confession, open his account up to the foundation of ethical responsibility.

* * *

From the beginning of his confession, the Magistrate struggles to disavow his similarity to Colonel Joll, wavering between a conciliatory attitude to the Barbarian Girl whom Joll has tortured, and an exploitative quest for the truth he believes the marks of this torture might reveal. The foot-washing that occurs after the Magistrate orders that the Barbarian Girl be brought into his private rooms offers itself as a salient example of this contradiction: ordering the woman to remove the bandages swaddling her feet, the Magistrate kneels before her and washes her injured feet in insistently biblical iconography. James Phelan makes the connection to Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, deeming the scene "an act of humility and respect . . . that acknowledges [the Barbarian Girl's] equality with [the Magistrate]" (235-236). However, the interaction to which Phelan refers, which appears in the Gospel of John, occurs in concert with a call to go and wash others' feet and the observation that "no servant is greater than his master," a reminder more of the importance of the master than the equality of the servant (*New International Version*, 13:16). Further, occurring after the Last Supper, this instance of foot washing is largely an attempt to have Judas Iscariot admit to his imminent betrayal of Jesus: rather than a scene of metaphoric prostration, then, it is presumably intended to create a sense of guilt in one of those whose feet Jesus washes. In fact, insofar as the foot-washing is undertaken to elicit the truth of a preconceived plot, its motivations (though not its gentleness) place it more in line with the torture undertaken by Colonel Joll, who seeks evidence of a barbarian uprising against the colonial settlement.

The Magistrate, as is to be discussed, is not innocent of this exploitative and potentially violent search for truth. Yet insofar as his washing the feet of the Barbarian Girl appears to be a legitimately conciliatory gesture, originating out of his shame for the damage inflicted upon her by the colonial regime to which he belongs, another biblical scene better suggests itself for comparison. With his prophetic status debated, Jesus visits the house of a sceptical Pharisee and is visited by a woman described as a "sinner" (Luke 7:37). The woman washes Jesus' feet with her tears, heightening the Pharisee's scepticism further: if he were truly a prophet, would Jesus not know the extent of the woman's sins and forbid her from washing his feet? The conclusion, that those with the most sins to forgive have the most love to offer their forgivers, is likely to be discordant with any attempt to attribute wrongdoing in the novel, given the physical torture carried out by Colonel Joll, who seems beyond forgiveness, or at the very least beyond seeking it. And yet, allying the Magistrate, however allegorically, with a sinner plagued by guilt and desperate for expiation and (ultimately) absolution rather than a messianic figure assured of his power seems a move more in line with the novel's dialectic of power, and with my analysis of its confessional form.

Coetzee's biblical allusions, which simultaneously suggest and elude direct comparison with scenes from the Bible, as the above discussion shows, mirror the Magistrate's oscillation between acknowledging and refuting his similarity to Colonel Joll in his quest to "find out the truth" (WB 3). The referential instability of the foot-washing scene portends a plethora of other such instabilities, extending to the Magistrate's confession and his use of the first-person pronoun, "I," as I will address later.

Although Phelan's connection of the Magistrate's curious prostration to Jesus washing the feet of his disciples is rather specious, he is surely correct in his analysis of the material effect of the Magistrate's acts. More than effecting any kind of reconciliation, it emphasises the Barbarian Girl's oppression. Rather than a humbling performance of subservience on the part of the Magistrate, then, the act is a reminder of their very inequality: her status as a captive, carried to his rooms by soldiers, and his as an official of Empire. This inequality, for both Phelan and for David Attwell, is further emphasised by the fact this washing soon encompasses not just the Barbarian Girl's feet, but her whole body. This has the effect of corrupting any pure focus on atonement, becoming instead about the bodily pleasures gained by the Magistrate: the "blissful giddiness" and "rapture" he derives from the ritual (WB 30,

31). These acts, "more suitable for the imperial bedroom," render the process, for Attwell, "ambivalent" in this regard ("New Footing" 61). Much about the Magistrate and his situation is ambivalent: his attitude to the Barbarian Girl herself, his relationship with Empire and its representatives, and, tying this all together, his approach to penning his confession.

As the washing of the woman's body continues over days and weeks, it becomes more overtly akin to an episode in the kind of lusty romantic tale that the Magistrate denies in his insistence that "this is not what you think it is" (WB 29). His awareness of the colonial romantic script, however, does not prevent the Magistrate describing the "squeezing, stroking, moulding" and "caressing" involved as he washes "her legs, her buttocks, […] between her thighs, […] her belly, her breasts" (WB 32-33). And the Magistrate is closer to this script than he is willing or able to acknowledge, failing to factor the Barbarian Girl's captive status – if not within his rooms, then within the settlement as overseen by Colonel Joll – into his narratorial assurance of her consent to such erotic rituals. That the magistrate is not fully aware of his exploitative, even violative, behaviour is clear when he fails to terminate his bizarre rituals despite observing that the woman is merely "yield[ing]" to his attentions, and that she "stiffen[s] at certain intimacies" (WB 32).

The Magistrate's confession suggests that he is on some level aware of the thwarting effect of colonial captivity and torture on the Barbarian Girl's capacity for desire and intimacy, if unaware of the extent to which his own attentions recreate these very oppressions. He "watch[es] her as she undresses, hoping to capture in her movements a hint of an old free state" (WB 36). The Magistrate's use of the verb "capture" is ironic: it exemplifies his lack of awareness of his own role in the woman's captivity, as does the final sentence of this passage in which he repeats the verb "watch" to suggest the stifling nature of some indeterminate gaze upon the woman's "free state":

> Even the motion with which she pulls the smock up over her head and throws it aside is crabbed, defensive, trammelled, as though she were afraid of striking unseen obstacles. Her face has the look of something that knows itself watched. (WB 36)

When the woman does manage to achieve something of a "free state," in directing the Magistrate's hand between her legs and presumably eventually reaching orgasm ("the tension gathers in her body; she arches and shudders"), the Magistrate finds himself unable to derive

pleasure from it (WB 47). Despite the fact that this sexual act marks "the most collaborative act [they] have yet undertaken" – an implicit condemnation of the Magistrate's pursuit of pleasure which has heretofore not hinged upon the woman's enthusiastic consent – he "experience[s] no excitement" (WB 47). Waylaid from his liberal humanist project of "freeing" the woman by an insurmountable sense of exceptionalism, the Magistrate's inability to partake in her fleeting pleasure comes at the cost of her freedom. Underpinning these encounters is a critical disregard for her consent, and of the effect of her captivity on her ability to consent.

A potentially more egregious act of violation, because even further removed from the Barbarian Girl's ability to consent, is the Magistrate's use of her body as *text*. Critical readings of *Waiting for the Barbarians* are replete with the idea of the Magistrate "reading the body" of the Barbarian Girl, who bears the marks of a torturous colonial administration obsessed with extracting the "truth" of a barbarian plot against the settlement.[5] Indeed, this reading is performed by the Magistrate himself – but one marker of his complicity with the Empire – who reflects that his obsession with the Barbarian Girl is in part related to her status as a hermeneutic enigma: "it has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her" (33). The Magistrate's focus on the marks of torture as keys to the Barbarian Girl's elusive truth – and through it his own – recalls Foucault's figuration of torture and confession as "the dark twins" (HOS 59). In Foucault's reckoning, torture has "accompanied [confession] like a shadow" (HOS 59), there to achieve the extraction of truth when mere questioning fails. The Magistrate's attempt to read these signs betrays his own reliance on torture as a method for extracting truth. As I point out later in this chapter, both reading and writing in the novel are far from conclusive, especially when torture is involved: at this early stage of the novel, however, the Magistrate remains assured of his ability to decipher the marks on the woman's body, and to uncover the truth they supposedly obscure about her.

True to his title, the Magistrate establishes his status as arbiter of interpretation early in his interactions with the Barbarian Girl, claiming access to her thoughts and perceptions. Indeed, the beginning of his dubious "use" of her body in his private quarters is based at least in part

[5] For example Jolly 128; Wenzel 65. Marais (126) acknowledges this critical trend but signals his departure from it.

on his declaration that "she understands what I am offering" (WB 28). His assurance, as he draws the curtains on his firelit chamber, that "this is not what you think it is" (WB 29) not only potentially overestimates her knowledge of those tropes of seduction familiar to the Magistrate and the (implied) reader of his confession, but claims knowledge of what she is thinking. Importantly, the Magistrate assumes that this psychic ability is one sided, alleging that the Barbarian Girl "is oblivious of my swings of mood" (WB 35). This refutation of the woman's deciphering ability further deepens his assumed hermeneutic dominance, an assumption of interpretive power that has led him to claim knowledge of her perception that extends beyond her partial blindness:

> When she does not look at me I am a grey form moving about unpredictably on the periphery of her vision. When she looks at me I am a blur, a voice, a smell, a centre of energy that one day falls asleep washing her feet and the next day feeds her bean stew and the next day – she does not know. (WB 31)

This paltry attempt at self-examination through the (imagined) eyes of the Barbarian Girl cannot effect any change in the Magistrate's behaviour towards her, because at its core it is an act of interpretation based on his assumption of power, a power that derives from his complicity with Empire. And yet, this is the very assumption of power that enables him to persist with his (failed) "reading" of her body.

To be sure, the exploitative tenor of these acts does not go wholly unacknowledged by the Magistrate. Summarising his interactions with the Barbarian Girl, he relates, "I feed her, shelter her, use her body, if that is what I am doing" (WB 32). This summary suggests an attempt to justify exploitation by claiming a transactional approach to their relationship, whereby the Magistrate's "use" of the woman's body is warranted in return for the food and shelter he provides her. However, as he is later to learn first-hand, food and shelter are supplied even in the settlement's rudimentary prison, under the lock and key of Colonel Joll: the very figure he variously confesses and denies his similarity to, and the very figure responsible for the marks on the body of the Barbarian Girl that excite the Magistrate's hermeneutic passions.

Significantly, for Rosemary Jolly, the surface of the Barbarian Girl's tortured body holds not the key to any truth about her life but bears only the marks of Joll's "writing." The

Magistrate's attempts at reading, then, are a misguided search for a fixed truth, making his interpretive project inseparable from Joll's: "Both . . . turn the "girl" into an other whose person, outside of that figuring, is irrelevant to them. Both Joll and the magistrate violate the "girl" by treating her body as a means to a truth that lies beyond it" (Jolly 128). Both, therefore, objectify and even fetishise the girl: in fact, the only thing differentiating the Magistrate's fetishistic project from Joll's, Jolly argues, is the physical evidence of torture left by Joll – the marks the Magistrate is so fascinated by (128). Both approaches, in the end, necessarily "obliterat[e]" the body of the Barbarian Girl, as Jolly quotes Lucia Folena to illustrate: "reading the body must needs amount to destroying it in order to substitute for an empty signifier the plenitude of inquisitorial signifiedness" (qtd 128). The marks of torture on the woman's body, "written" by Joll, become little more than signifiers in a self-fulfilling prophecy of her guilt. For the Magistrate, self-assured of his interpretive power – as demonstrated in his claims to access the girl's perception and understanding – the "reading" of these marks is nothing short of a pernicious and exploitative violation which threatens the very body they appear upon, not least because the hermeneutic project is pursued against the woman's consent.

In Sue Kossew's reading, too, the Barbarian Girl exists to the Magistrate as one of three "keys" in the novel, promising, alongside the poplar slips he finds in the ruined settlement in the dunes and his bizarre dreams, to yield some kind of truth as a result of his concerted attentions: however, "each reveals only the impenetrability of the message" (91). Of course, it is not merely the message the Magistrate attaches to the Barbarian Girl that is impenetrable, but the Barbarian Girl herself, as evidenced by the Magistrate's insistent repetitions that he has not "entered" (WB 36) her, nor does he feel any "urge" (WB 46) to (though, in line with his habitual oscillation between opposing perspectives, he eventually does). These declarations are connected, for Barbara Eckstein:

> [The Magistrate's] pursuit of the girl's secrets (which he believes she wilfully withholds) and his sexual desire are one – or so he fears – and as the one is truncated, so is the other. Though he is attracted to the girl, he cannot consummate this sexual desire. (188)

The major manifestation of this conflation is the Magistrate's connection of his sexual and textual pursuits, both of which aim at uncovering an elusive truth. Sitting down to compose

an undefined document before leaving on his expedition, the Magistrate reflects that "it seems appropriate that a man who does not know what to do with the woman in his bed should not know what to write" (63). The connection he makes between the activities of writing and sex betray the Magistrate's intimate affinity with the ideology of Empire, which dictates, as Michael Valdez Moses argues, that civilisation is distinguished from barbarism by its written record of history (117). The implied extension of the Magistrate's reflection questions his masculinity, too: as a colonial agent unable to pen the history of the Empire (or himself), or perform sexual acts upon its subjects, by what measure might he call himself a man? This question is to be compounded when, later in the novel, the Magistrate is forced to don a woman's dress before being dangled from a tree when he himself undergoes torture at the hands of Joll's sidekick, Mandel. Before reaching this extreme, however, the Magistrate attempts to find a way out of his quandary by violating the body of the Barbarian Girl both sexually and textually, and in doing so produces a confession focused intently on his peculiar and frequently exploitative sexual proclivities.

Contrary to the suggestion of the narrator of Part 4 of Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), then, who claims that "bodies are their own signs," in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the body of the other is merely a canvas upon which to inscribe and subsequently interpret the signs of Empire (*Foe* 157). All that can be understood of the marked bodies of the barbarians, for Valdez Moses, is the power of the Empire that has marked them: "the power and skill of Empire, its *art*, lie in its capacity to generate and then interpret its own signs" (121). And the power of Empire to influence its subjects through this marked body is resonant: reviled by the damage done to the Barbarian Girl's body, the Magistrate yet comes to the realisation that "engrav[ing] [him]self on her" is his best chance at "mov[ing]" her as Colonel Joll has with his torturous practices (WB 148, 47). Without this violent (in)script(ion), the woman is an enigma who prompts, against the best efforts of his liberal consciousness, the Magistrate's "dry pity" for the torturers who attempt to "burn or tear or hack [their] way into the secret body of the other" (WB 46). Akin to the dreams he experiences and the poplar scripts he excavates from the sand dunes, the body of the Barbarian Girl both arouses and baffles the Magistrate's interpretive ability, simultaneously signalling his complicity with the imperial project and drawing his attention to its injustice.

The zenith of the imperial hermeneutic circle is reached when a convoy of barbarians are ushered into the settlement's square and, before the resident population, have the word

"*ENEMY*" (115) inscribed upon them by Colonel Joll before being brutally beaten. The scene is clearly a spectacle designed to pander to the visual economy of the settlement's residents and enforce the apparently empirical foundation of Empire: "everyone has a chance to *see* the twelve miserable captives, to *prove* to his children that the barbarians are real" (WB 113, my emphasis). Despite a visceral reaction experienced as the convoy approaches, in which his "heart grows sick," the Magistrate witnesses much of the performance from a philosophical distance at which he reflects on what he "ought" to do. When he does take action in an attempt to stop the prisoners being attacked with a hammer, it is seemingly in spite of, and at a distance from, himself:

> "*No!*" I hear the first word from my throat, rusty, not loud enough. Then again: "*No!*" This time the word rings like a bell from my chest. The soldier who blocks my way stumbles aside. I am in the arena holding up my hands to still the crowd: "*No! No! No!*" (WB 116)

Within the hermeneutic circle of the torturous Empire, in which meaning is at once arbitrary and imbued forcefully with the authority of Empire itself, the Magistrate's dissenting interpretations (which he cannot in any case fully divorce from the ideology of (logocentric, logic-centric) Empire in/to which he is subject) are bound to fail. He formulates a quasi-Cartesian, quasi-logical maxim to justify his withdrawal from the public flogging of the barbarians—"I cannot save the prisoners, therefore let me save myself" (WB 114)—and resorts to the idea of writing an account of events soon after suggesting he ought never to speak again. Further, this writing is intended to preserve him, for future readers, as an antithesis to the evils of Empire: "let it at the very least be said . . . if there is anyone in some remote future interested to know the way we lived, that in this farthest outpost of the Empire of light there existed one man who in his heart was not a barbarian" (114). The failure of the liberal conscience to combat the regime to which it is ostensibly opposed prompts merely a reification of its own ideology.

It is from this contradictory state that the Magistrate's personal record arises and remains linked to his sexual failures. In an aroused glow following time spent with the "girl" at the inn, whose company the Magistrate seeks more and more as his belief in his hermeneutic ability with regard to the Barbarian Girl wanes, he recalls that his sexual encounters with the Barbarian Girl leave him less fulfilled and less capable of performing his masculinity: "in the

middle of the sexual act I felt myself losing my way like a storyteller losing the thread of his story" (48). It is therefore not only the Barbarian Girl who endures his hermeneutic efforts, but himself – specifically, his own desire, as Attwell argues. The Magistrate is "a man whose desire is labile and unfocused, and who seeks to anchor and understand it" (Attwell, "New Footing" 56), a mission I argue he takes up through both sex and writing. And yet, true to the nature of desire, founded as it is upon a lack, neither pursuit brings the Magistrate the satisfaction he seeks. Attwell argues that the novel engages intimately with

> a philosophical conflict of [Coetzee's] own times, a conflict between, on one hand, semiotics and post-structuralism, and on the other, a romantic investment in immanent meaning; as he puts it in an especially revealing note, a conflict between the world as 'a labyrinth of signs' and 'the notion of Truth.' In this conflict, desire as a compulsion turns the subject's epistemology into a series of longings that can never be fulfilled. ("New Footing" 57)

Indeed, the lack of fulfilment experienced by the Magistrate, in either sex or writing, whether violative or consensual, is the point upon which Coetzee places the novel's final emphasis. After returning the Barbarian Girl to her people, and after the garrison has left the settlement, scared off by an apparently impending barbarian assault, the Magistrate "in effect resume[s] the legal administration that was interrupted . . . by the arrival of the Civil Guard" (WB 159), taking up his old quarters and leading the people of the settlement to cultivate food supplies for the coming winter. He also resumes his habitual dalliances with the women of the town, inviting his "old [friend]" (WB 165) Mai to his rooms, but finds that both pleasure and clarity elude him during their sexual encounters: "I am still search for something I want to say when I feel the climax come, far-off, slight, like an earth-tremor in another part of the world. . . . like a spark struck far away over the sea and lost at once" (WB 165-166). Ostensibly just as distant is his literary inspiration, as he judges the beginnings of the history of the settlement he begins to write "devious" and "reprehensible," and thinks, "I have lived through an eventful year, yet understand no more of it than a babe in arms. I am the one least fitted to write a memorial" (169). Thus, unable to find lasting pleasure with Mai and unable to compose a history that does not grossly misrepresent experiences at his outpost of the Empire, he confesses: "I leave it feeling stupid, like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere" (170). This comment underscores the extent

to which his belief in his hermeneutic capacities has waned, since we first encountered him at the start of the novel.

The clichéd metaphor of the road, coming as an anticlimactic end to the Magistrate's quest for truth, perfectly expresses the perceived failure of his writing project. As Kossew writes,

> The road-metaphor is the teleological thrust of both history and narrative, paralleling the magistrate's journey into the barbarian country to deliver the barbarian girl to her people, leading not to ultimate knowledge and understanding but merely to "nowhere." (95)

The persistent belief in a teleology leading to absolute truth, manifest in the Magistrate's testimony down to the final line, betrays his inability to separate himself from the epistemology of Empire. Empire, the Magistrate writes,

> has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe. . . . One thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era. . . . A mad vision yet a virulent one: I, wading in the ooze, am no less infected with it than the faithful Colonel Joll . . . . (WB 146)

Kossew's identification of the Magistrate's teleological approach to a journey which, he finally admits, "may lead nowhere" also bears significance for the contradictions inherent in making a secular confession. Narratively incapacitated by his "crisis of colonial identity," the Magistrate reveals his "authorial impotence" as he sits down to compose several documents prior to his expedition into barbarian territory and finds himself limited by the formal choices available to him (Kossew 95):

> Before I can leave there are two documents to compose. The first is to the provincial governor. . . . What the second document is I do not yet know. A testament? A memoir? A confession? A history of thirty years on the frontier? (WB 62)

The problem of form facing the Magistrate, is, conveniently, one Coetzee has given critical attention to. In "Confession and Double Thoughts," he draws on Francis R. Hart's distinction between different kinds of autobiographical writing. According to Hart,

> "Confession" is personal history that seeks to communicate or express the essential nature, the truth, of the self. "Apology" is personal history that seeks to demonstrate or realize the integrity of the self. "Memoir" is personal history that seeks to articulate or repossess the historicity of the self. ("Notes" 491)

As Hart's definition, and Coetzee's discussion, make clear, the Magistrate is on every level engaged in a search for the "truth," albeit that his confession ostensibly frequently foregoes a pure focus on his self and turns instead towards the body of the Barbarian Girl: as noted, he seems to believe it might constitute some kind of cipher for his own complicated desires. As Coetzee explains it, confession is one step in a sequence comprised of "transgression, confession, penitence, and absolution" (CDT 251). Motivated as it is by a desire for the truth, "the end of the episode, the closing of the chapter" granted by absolution can only be brought about by discovery of "the truth about the self that will bring an end to the quest for the source within the self for that-which-is-wrong" (CDT 251-252). And yet, as the closing sentence of his narrative reveals, the Magistrate has failed to achieve anything of the sort: the metaphorical road stretches out in front of him, potentially interminably; the search continues.

This is partly so because the Christian iconography conjured in several scenes in *Waiting for the Barbarians* offers but subsequently rescinds all hope of cohesion as it becomes referentially unstable, or out and out parodic. This is nowhere clearer than when, as part of his torture, the Magistrate is dressed in a woman's smock and hung from a tree by Joll's second-in-command, Mandel, in a perversion of Christ's crucifixion (WB 132-133). The Barbarian Girl might represent a messianic figure in the biblically-reminiscent tableaux of the Magistrate's bedroom, and there are certainly times at which his confession seems to be aimed at her, but she does not, and there is no hint that she could, grant him absolution. Amidst these gestures to biblical scenes of absolution which give way to nothing more than further confusion, the Magistrate's confession can only but be secular; and without the absolution granted by divine intervention, it threatens to be interminable. He can only hope that, as Attridge writes, his truth "emerges in the telling" (*Ethics of Reading* 145).

This understanding is underlined by Phelan's analysis of Coetzee's use of the simultaneous present tense, which, Phelan argues, "puts the magistrate in a narrative situation that deprives him of the distance from his experience necessary for his reflection to make coherent sense of it" (234). The Magistrate's sexual desire happens to be the main avenue down which he pursues the truth of himself, and yet, rather than knowing that this inner truth lies somewhere in the apparent indecipherability of this desire, he forges on along "a road that may lead nowhere" (WB 170), hopeful that his writing project "will reveal . . . why it was that I thought it worth the trouble" (WB 26).

In a sense, then, in making his confession, the Magistrate *waits* for the revelation of meaning. Although it comprises part of the novel's title, and critical references are frequently made to the C.P. Cavafy poem from which it takes its title, the idea of waiting in *Waiting for the Barbarians* has attracted far less attention than that other weighty word it contains, barbarians. In her comparison of the two texts, Maria Boletsi comes closest to giving "waiting" relevance as a concept:

> The progressive form of the verb in the title of the poem points to the lack of closure in the process of waiting. It is a process without a definite beginning or end, as the advent of the object of waiting is eternally deferred. (76)

The reference to narrative structure in Boletsi's analysis of the waiting at play in the novel mirrors Coetzee's analysis of the structure of confession: "absolution means the end of the episode, the closing of the chapter" (CDT 251-252). The need for this "sense of an ending" has been well established by Frank Kermode, who identifies in humans "a need in the moment of existence to belong, to be related to a beginning and to an end" (4) in order to make sense of that plodding middle in which the Magistrate finds himself trapped. Without the ending granted by absolution, he struggles on with a confession of which he readily admits losing track, and of which he fails to grasp the meaning. The same occurs when he eventually has sex with the Barbarian Girl. Lying in the dark of his tent, after finally consummating his relationship with her, he reflects that the reasons for his connection with the Barbarian Girl "remain as obscure to [him] as ever" (WB 70), and the second and final time they have sex, "[he] seem[s] to lose touch with her, and the act peters out vacantly" (WB 71). He nonetheless pushes commendably on with an interrogation of his desire, not

retreating from an unflattering portrait of his own actions, and yet remains unoffended by his self-reproaching confession, which in any case voids itself of meaning before his eyes:

> Is it then the case that it is the whole woman I want, that my pleasure in her is spoiled until these marks on her are erased and she is restored to herself; or is it the case (I am not stupid, let me say these things) that it is the marks on her which drew me to her but which, to my disappointment, I find, do not go deep enough? . . .is it she I want or the traces of a history her body bears? . . . No thought that I think, no articulation, however antonymic, of the origin of my desire seems to upset me. 'I must be tired,' I think. 'Or perhaps whatever can be articulated is falsely put.' My lips move, silently composing and recomposing the words. 'Or perhaps it is the case that only that which has not been articulated has to be lived through.' I stare at this last proposition without detecting any answering movement in myself toward assent or dissent. The words grow more and more opaque before me; soon they have lost all meaning. (WB 70)

As in the scene in the square, where the Magistrate dissociates from his preventative action against the brutal beating of the barbarians, and the more ethically hopeful waterbuck scene, to be discussed presently, the Magistrate in this reflection, by his own admission, fails to move himself to anything approaching an understanding of his own motivations in the process of confessing them.

Rather than deriving meaning, let alone anything approaching inner truth, from his undaunted confessions, the Magistrate plunges into denial: he is not the performer of those brave protests against Joll's brutality in the square, but merely an onlooker. Glimmers of self-knowledge are also, more regrettably, absent from his treatment of the Barbarian Girl: his inability to own his objectifying behaviour towards the woman ("is it she I want or the traces of a history her body bears?" he asks, as if she were another of his untranslatable poplar slips) places in question the possibility of improved conduct which might be brought about through his self-examining confession.

Searching for meaning, waiting for absolution, anticipating the (narrative) end which gives effect to both of these, the Magistrate's actions both are and are not his own. In one sense, confessing them, he lays claim to them, is ostensibly willing to claim responsibility for them. As Attridge writes,

> For if to confess is to discover in language a truth of the self that had eluded one, that one did not know, and did not know one did not know, it would seem to involve a kind of *taking responsibility for* that truth. *It is* my *truth I confess, and mine alone. In giving it form, and thus bringing it into being as truth, I acknowledge it as true and as mine*. (*Ethics of Reading* 147)

And yet, by his own reporting, the Magistrate's actions are frequently not his own: in the manner in which he explains them, there is no small element of dissociation. As Josephine Donovan has argued, "nearly all of his reactions are visceral ones that he is unable to explain" ("Miracles of Creation"). Presumably the denial inherent in this activity can only but block any access to an "inner truth," opaque as the Magistrate's acts and intentions seem to be to himself.

Opacity is central to Judith Butler's work of moral philosophy, *Giving an Account of Oneself,* in which they make, in their own words, "eclectic use of various philosophers and critical theorists" to analyse the basis of ethical responsibility through theories involving the self's opacity to itself (21). The limits of self-knowledge – the opacity – central to Butler's version of an ethics defined by relations between an "I" and an "other" derive both from Foucault's theory of intersubjectivity and Nietzsche's "punitive scene of inauguration for the subject" (and, in the book's second chapter, from psychoanalytic accounts of an opacity deriving from an infancy inaccessible to one who attempts to give an account) (15).

There is much in this theory of ethics that invites further consideration of the Magistrate's confession as it relates to his status as an ethical subject and his ethical responsibility towards others. In order to more fully understand the relevance of Butler's moral philosophy to *Waiting for the Barbarians,* I would like to consider a scene from the novel in which a confrontation with an (non-human animal) other ushers in what has been interpreted by some as an ethical decision but which appears marred by a critical lack of intent on the part of the Magistrate. The waterbuck scene, in which the Magistrate finds himself subject to the gaze of a male waterbuck whom he is subsequently unable to bring himself to shoot, is, unlike many of the Magistrate's interactions with the Barbarian Girl, an instance of a praiseworthy – rather than ethically questionable – "decision" which is nonetheless motivated by some inscrutable force inaccessible (opaque) to the Magistrate's self-reflection.

The Magistrate, by his own reporting, has not consciously decided not to shoot the waterbuck he sees before him on an early morning hunting trip, just as he did not consciously intercept the torture scene in the square nor begin "caressing" the body of the Barbarian Girl "as if poleaxed" (WB 33). He falls victim to "an obscure sentiment lurking at the edge of [his] consciousness" which interrupts his habitual hunting movements: "I am barely attuned yet to my surroundings; still, as the ram lifts himself, folding his forelegs under his chest, I slide the gun up and sight behind his shoulder" (WB 42). In the suspension of time he then experiences, the Magistrate is able to reflect on his thoughts and desires as if from a distance: "evidently it is not important to me that the ram die" (WB 42). Despite the history of hunting written on his body – he wears "boots that have soaked in thirty years of grease," a "huge old bearskin," and possesses finely-attuned senses despite his age, "my eyes are sharp, my hearing is keen" (WB 42) – some change has occurred such that the Magistrate finds himself unable to carry out an action that is seemingly second nature to him as he falls under the gaze of the waterbuck.

For Mike Marais, the Magistrate's moments of abandon hold the most potential for the man's ethical development. In Marais' analysis, which draws from the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, the novel rejects the idea of the moral agent modelled on Western rational knowledge in favour of an embodied knowledge of – and thus corporeal obligation to – the other (here the waterbuck). The Magistrate's rational decisions, structured syntactically after Descartes ("I cannot save the prisoners, therefore let me save myself"), are frequently overridden by some force unknown to him, which Marais, taking his cue from Coetzee, names as "the authority of the suffering body" (129). The Magistrate's analysis of the possible outcomes of the situation – "either the proud ram bleeds to death on the ice or the old hunter misses his aim" (WB 42) – add credence to this interpretation.

In this respect, the waterbuck scene is "pivotal" for Marais, "stag[ing] a kind of nonrational ethical action that cuts across both cultural difference among humans and difference between animal species" (135, 136). Coming into a confrontation with the other, Marais avers, the Magistrate experiences a radical revision of his anthropocentric beliefs which make the killing of animals possible: he experiences "an ecstatic surrender of self and therefore of the ability to choose" (137).

This vision of nonrational – or, as Coetzee would have it, prerational – ethical impulse is also explored by Attridge, who argues that Coetzee's belief is that "any philosophical accounting for ethical responses [i]s . . . merely post hoc" ("Yes" 92). Such theories can only be used to shore up ethical actions after the fact, thus giving what is, in Coetzee's thinking, "something like a conversion experience" a falsely attributed rational bent ("Yes" 92). Levinas's "ethics as first philosophy" is an important touchstone for this idea: Coetzee elucidates his idea of the conversion with reference to a "mute appeal of the kind that Levinas calls the look, in which the existential autonomy of the Other becomes irrefutable" (qtd. Attridge, "Yes" 92). Importantly, Attridge notes, Coetzee extends the idea of the look beyond the human other theorised by Levinas to include the animal other, a concern that is evident in many of the conversion experiences in his fiction.

Impactful as his sudden ethical impulse to preserve the life of the animal other might be, the ease with which the Magistrate's agency is conscribed in such moments poses a problem for his confession. As Marais notes, the Barbarian Girl's response to the Magistrate's bewilderment at being unable to shoot the waterbuck "foregrounds the breakdown in intentionality that is here at stake, the fact that the Magistrate is not in control of his actions" (135). Whether the Magistrate is not in control, or not willing to admit his control, there remains a problem. How might the truth of the self – at which confession is said to aim – be attained, or even guessed at, when the self is so frequently 'absent' from the actions it undertakes? Disowning his actions, how can the Magistrate ever hope to discern the motivation, much less the truth, behind them in order to confess them?

The limits of self-knowledge are, as discussed above, integral to Butler's conception of ethical responsibility, which displaces the typical focus on the operation of free will in moral philosophy. Butler's formulation ushers in a tension, a paradox, even, between agency and passivity that might lead one to the conclusion that, contrary to Butler's postulations, ethical responsibility cannot be grounded in this conception of self-opacity (and which speaks to Marais's diagnosis of the Magistrate's "ecstatic surrender" (137)). Alyda Faber has identified a similar tension in Coetzee's essay on confession, in which Coetzee relays Tolstoy's scepticism about the possibility of self-willed transformation, observing that "the self is a site where the will goes through its processes in ways only obscurely accessible to introspection; thus, the self does not change . . . rather, a change takes place in the site of the self" (CDT

261). In both Butler's and Coetzee's thinking, then, there is in human conduct a passivity deriving from an inevitable lack of self-knowledge.

For Faber, as for Butler and seemingly for Coetzee, this apparent passivity does not spell the end of ethical agency or responsibility. Butler, following Foucault, observes that one's "self-crafting . . . always takes place in relation to an imposed set of norms" which are not all discernible by introspection (GAA 19). These norms, importantly, dictate the limits of what will be possible for a subject to think and do, and, although they are open to revision over time, one is never "fully free to disregard the norm that inaugurates its reflexivity" (GAA 19). (Ethical) agency, therefore, "takes place in the context of an enabling and limiting field of constraint" and "is neither fully determined nor radically free" (GAA 19). Nebulous (social, historical) norms operative at a given time and place, whose effects and origins can never be fully unpicked or singled out in an individual's conduct (thus making that conduct in part opaque to its agent), do not, in Butler's thinking, override individual ethical agency and make the grounding of responsibility impossible: in fact, they have the opposite effect. Understanding this requires one to relinquish the notion of active free will as the basis of ethical action.

Dispossession, the Butlerian term that encapsulates the feeling of alienation experienced by the Magistrate, is both inevitable in the process of giving an account of oneself and (therefore) key to the founding of ethical responsibility. In *Dispossession*, co-written with Athena Athanasiou, Butler speaks of this experience in terms that recall, though alter in giving a secular basis to, Coetzee's notion of "illumination from outside" (CDT 292): "The predicament of being moved by what one sees, feels, and comes to know is always one in which one finds oneself transported elsewhere, into another scene, or into a social world in which one is not the center" (DPP xi). In an encapsulation of the active/passive paradox, Butler and Athanasiou describe this as a kind of "responsiveness that gives rise to action and resistance, to appearing with others, in an effort to demand the end of injustice" (DPP xi). The political potential of dispossession, so defined, is clearly more pronounced in Butler and Athanasiou's work than in the Magistrate's daily life, and yet the feeling of being unmoored from the colonial ideology of which he is a representative recurs throughout the novel to arguably some ethical effect. It is, after all, in a state of dispossession (unaware and bewildered by the origins of his actions) that the Magistrate makes his protest against the brutalities committed against the barbarians in the square.

Importantly, Butler and Athanasiou note, dispossession is not an unambivalent good. Both share the belief that "a sovereign and unitary subject can be effectively challenged, and that the fissuring [i.e. dispossession] of the subject . . . proves central for a politics that challenges . . . sovereignty in specific ways" and thus both value "the forms of responsibility and resistance that emerge from a dispossessed subject—one that *avows* the differentiated social bonds by which it is constituted and to which it is obligated" (DPP xi). However, Butler and Athanasiou are "keenly aware that dispossession [also] constitutes a form of suffering for those displaced and colonized" (DPP ix). *Waiting for the Barbarians* encapsulates the face-off between these two definitions of dispossession, as the Magistrate, faced with the materially dispossessed Barbarian Girl, undergoes dispossession of the more existential or ontological (and thus politically and ethically promising) kind.

Overall, for Butler and Athanasiou the ontological dispossession that is central to Butler's conception of ethical responsibility in *Giving an Account of Oneself* is, as against the material dispossession experienced as a form of suffering, a net positive. Similarly aware of the tensions involved, Attridge notes that pre- or nonrational formulations of the ethical encounter with an other – such as "the look" formulated by Levinas and "unconditional hospitality" conceptualised by Derrida – involve risk. Attridge expands:

> The obvious concern that arises from references to the voice of God, prerational ethical impulses, conversion experiences, the call of the infinite, or mute appeals of the other is that they open the door to evil as much as to good; without the constraints of reason . . . *any* psychological event, however bizarre or destructive, could be taken as an ethical command by the one experiencing it. Can we accept [David] Lurie's defence [in *Disgrace*] that his forcing himself on Melanie was at the bidding of Eros? Isn't Dmitri's murderous act in *The Schooldays of Jesus* a response to the urgings of his heart? ("Yes" 102)

The seriousness of the possible defences of Lurie and Dmitri will be dealt with extensively in the following chapter. For now, I want to stress that the Magistrate's own behaviour towards the Barbarian Girl demonstrates the ambivalence of a concept that disavows reason. He is surely dispossessed by her, as his confession that he "cease[s] to comprehend what pleasure

[he] can ever have found in her" (45) shows, but his response to such dispossession cannot rightly be described as ethical, as my analysis at the beginning of this chapter shows.

That said, it is worth noting here the distinction Attridge draws between "mute appeal" and corresponding action. "[T]his opening to the other," he writes ". . . is *itself* an ethical good, irrespective of outcomes" ("Yes" 102). The Magistrate's sexual and hermeneutic violence towards the Barbarian Girl (which, I have argued, are linked), is not an inevitable consequence of her initiating his dispossession (to claim as much would be to suggest that rape is the fault of the victim), but is linked to his subjectivation in a colonial regime. As Butler argues, "The "I" is always to some extent dispossessed by the social conditions of its emergence" (GAA 8). This does not mean that the Magistrate is not culpable or should not account for his actions: indeed, it seems that his accounting, in some small way, increasingly moves him to dispossess himself of such presumptions to hermeneutic and physical authority over her body and person, even if this outcome, much like the account it is exposed in, is wavering, incomplete, and very likely to fail.

This dispossession, of both self *and* to some extent (and momentarily) the imperial obsession with reason, is clear when the Magistrate finds himself unable to describe the waterbuck encounter to the Barbarian Girl: "'Never before have I had the feeling of not living my life on my own terms'" (WB 43) he tells her. His admission is ironic, discounting the fact that his rapturous washing of her body, which brings him near a state of oblivion, suggests that he has been acted upon by the Barbarian Girl in a similarly inexplicable way. This explains why he describes the event as "uncanny" (WB 43). The uncanny, in Freud's formulation, "is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (244). Thus, if it is uncanny, the Magistrate's sense of passivity deriving from the experience before the waterbuck is not as uncommon as he would have the Barbarian Girl believe. The undesirable re-emergence of a feeling of passivity signals the Magistrate's adherence to a strict rationally-produced code of ethics which dictates the need for control over one's actions, and the ability to describe those actions *in rational terms* (in a post hoc manner, as Attridge has drawn attention to).

However, if the reduced sense of agency in the Magistrate's "conversion experience[s]" (Attridge, "Yes" 92) do not threaten the ethical potential or significance of these experiences,

the difficulty he has in narrating them must surely spell trouble for his confession. After all, how can a confession, which aims to divine the truth of the self, proceed past this rut of inexplicability, past the inability of the self to (fully) know itself? It is to the ramifications of this failure that I will now turn.

The inability to narrate fully is an inevitable consequence of one's attempt to give an account of oneself, according to Butler, for whom the relation to an other (or others) and the existences of both social norms and irretrievable personal/bodily histories are both formative parts of the attempt to give an account and also preclude its total success:

> When the "I" seeks to give an account of itself, it can start with itself, but it will find that this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration; indeed, when the "I" seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist. The reason for this is that the "I" has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation – or set of relations – to a set of norms. (GAA 7-8)

In addition to the social norms which prevent a full or comprehensive account of oneself are those attachments and experiences occurring in infancy, which are equally inaccessible. Thus, the use of "I" to reference oneself is far more fraught than generally assumed in common parlance – in fact, for Butler, its origins are irrecoverable, making clear the repeated reference to a "story" more than coincidental: "The irrecoverability of an original referent does not destroy narrative; it produces it 'in a fictional direction'" (GAA 38). Butler explains that the inevitable speculation entailed in giving an account of oneself means that "my narrative begins *in media res*, when many things have already taken place to make me and my story possible in language. I am always recuperating, reconstructing, and I am left to fictionalize and fabulate origins [of self and others] I cannot know" (GAA 39). The resultant opacity is, for Butler, necessary, however: it provides rich ground for the cultivation of ethical responsibility:

> This failure to narrate fully may well indicate the way in which we are, from the start, implicated in the lives of others. Although some would say that to be a split subject, or a subject whose access to itself is forever opaque, incapable of self-grounding, is

> precisely *not* to have the grounds for agency and the conditions for accountability, the way in which we are, from the start, interrupted by alterity may render us incapable of offering narrative closure for our lives. The purpose here is not to celebrate a certain notion of incoherence, but only to point out that our "incoherence" establishes the way in which we are constituted in relationality: implicated, beholden, derived, sustained by a social world that is beyond us and before us. (GAA 64)

The failure to confess, that is, to fully grasp and tell the truth of oneself, has ethical significance in Butler's philosophy, and, I argue, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. The failure is communicated not only by the feelings of stupidity and inability expressed by the Magistrate, but through the novel's formal features. The Magistrate's expressions of bewilderment and failure combine with the rhetorical devices employed by Coetzee to create what Attridge terms an "*event*" of reading (*Ethics of Reading* 40).

Uncertainty and incoherence are privileged in both Jack Dudley's analysis of the anti-epiphany at work in Coetzee's fiction and Philip Dickinson's study of negative capability in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Like Butler, each suggests the ethical valence of an aesthetic of failure or incompleteness. Dudley introduces idea of the anti-epiphany in Coetzee's work, constituted by moments of intensity where revelation is refused in favour of articulations of "profound disorientation" (110). The waterbuck scene is plainly one such instance where a moment which might be anticipated to resolve into an ecstatic Romantic understanding against the backdrop of the natural world instead recedes into befuddlement, but the text is fraught with such moments (notably the Barbarian Girl's orgasm, which is literally anti-climactic for the Magistrate). In a similar vein, Dickinson borrows the idea of negative capability – "that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" – from Keats (qtd. 11) and suggests that the refusal of reason and mastery on the part of the Magistrate is a rejection of colonial epistemology and (consequently) the root of his ethical progress (11). (I will return to just such refusals in my discussion of David Lurie and Dmitri in my next chapter.) This "ethically valuable stupidity" (15) is not, importantly, a refusal of knowledge, but a behest to recognise knowledge's lack of finality, Dickinson argues: "Coetzee and Keats both imply the importance of a feeling of the provisional nature of knowledge" (15). Suggestions of the provisional nature of knowledge are created by Coetzee's allusion to biblical scenes which

seem to promise direct parallels between the novel and the Bible, but which become unstable referents, and thus the reader's knowledge is confounded much like the Magistrate's.

The confounding nature of apparent (but misleading or unprovable) parallels between "word and world" (2) in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is discussed by Lois Parkinson Zamora. While insightful, her argument is perhaps limited by the extent to which her analysis is based on an account of the operation of allegory. She argues that writing from the medieval period right through to at least the nineteenth century operated on a relatively stable allegorical level such that referents were clearly discernible, while, in contrast, contemporary fiction utilises allegory to draw attention to injustice and fragmentation, thus muddying the referential relationship (2). Zamora brings this insight to bear in her discussion of *Waiting for the Barbarians* which, she argues, is Coetzee's most allegorical text. Because the magistrate is unable to interpret much of what occurs around him, the novel, when read as an allegory, provides "an ironic interplay between definitions of civilization and barbarism, and a depiction as well of the ironic distance between the ideals of empire and its reality" (6). Drawing on the contrast between the magistrate's vision of a cyclical, seasonal version of history and the Empire's vision of rise and fall, Zamora argues that "competing allegories of history . . . remain suspended within Coetzee's text, pointing to a reality which is as unresolved as the version which the magistrate presents" (7). Therefore, "unlike traditional allegory, the narration of this novel does not point to an ideal level of meaning where truth awaits interpretation. Indeed, it repeatedly calls into question the very possibility of interpretation, and hence, the most fundamental assumptions of allegory" (7). In Zamora's reading, allegory becomes a politically subversive tool when it parts with the conventional stability assumed between "word and world" and instead creates disorientation.

I believe it is preferable to understand the feature Zamora describes not as allegory, but as anti-allegory. As Attridge argues, "allegorical reading of the traditional kind has no place for this uncertainty and open-endedness, this sense that the failure to interpret can be as important, and quite as emotionally powerful, as success would be" (*Ethics of Reading* 48). Just as the magistrate's apparently epiphanic experiences are more accurately described as "anti-epiphany" by Dudley, for the fact that a clear understanding of self, world, and other is frustrated at precisely the moment lucidity is expected, the congruity between reality and abstraction is interrupted to further muddy simplistic interpretation.

An aesthetic of failure thus inheres in and unites the elements of the novel which deny easy interpretation: the persistence of religious symbols which seem nonetheless to have lost their finality or certainty as signifiers, the body of the Barbarian Girl, the Magistrate's dreams, and the Magistrate himself – that is, the "I" of his confession, which according to Butler is inevitably incoherent and indefinite, destined for referential instability due to the fact that the self cannot ever give a full and successful account of itself.[6]

For all this, it is clear that the conclusion to *Waiting for the Barbarians* does not share the tone of optimism present in the features of aesthetic failure discussed by Dickinson, Dudley and Zamora. The Magistrate might possess an "ethically valuable stupidity" (Dickinson 15), but his sense of himself as "stupid" in the final lines of the novel, combined with the image of potentially gruelling and likely pointless process or journey, more than mirroring his experiences as a bureaucrat in a colonial regime, suggests a never-ending spiral into guilt and self-hatred.

But if the Magistrate feels badly about his failure to capture this truth, his dismay might be understood as a marker of the project's secularity, and through this, its significance. Martin Hägglund defines finitude, "the sense of the ultimate fragility of everything we care about" (5) as key to secular faith. "To have secular faith," Hägglund writes, "is to be devoted to a life that will end, to be dedicated to projects that can fail or break down" (5-6). For Hägglund, finitude is integral to ethical responsibility in a manner that reflects Butler's conception in *Giving an Account of Oneself*: "To be finite means . . . to be dependent on others . . . I am finite because I cannot maintain my life on my own" (4). As discussed, Butler, too, avows the dedication to giving an account of oneself despite the inevitability that one will fail to do so fully or comprehensively.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, it is precisely the moments which evade any account the Magistrate attempts to give of them that possess the most ethical potential. Rather than posing a significant problem for his confession, however, this non-narratability accords with Butler's thesis that accounts of ourselves (or our actions, whether beneficent, banal or

[6] Indeed, "confession" itself is unstable, as my grappling with its meaning and significance for Coetzee's fiction likely shows. As Jeremy Tambling notes, "there is no essential form of words or actions called 'confession'; there may be varied confessional practices; but even this term of course runs the risk […] of essentialising the concept of confession" (2).

malign) cannot fully encapsulate the conditions of our emergence as subjects. We can never fully tell, confess, or give an account of ourselves—but nor should we avoid doing so.

Thus, despite Coetzee's scepticism about the efficacy of secular confession, which stems largely from the absence of divine intervention (or "grace" (CDT 291) rendering it interminable, the Magistrate's commitment to an account of himself, although he feels it "may lead nowhere" (WB 170) is ethically promising. His experiences at the limits of narratability may not provide the earth-shattering revelations expected by a believer, but nonetheless ground him deeply in an experience of dispossession which shatters his sense of a sovereign self and thus, for Butler, is the basis of not only intersubjective connection, but ethical responsibility:

> . . . the very meaning of responsibility must be rethought on the basis of this limitation [non-narratability]; it cannot be tied to the conceit of a self fully transparent to itself. Indeed, to take responsibility for oneself is to avow the limits of any self-understanding, and to establish these limits not only as a condition for the subject but as the predicament of the human community. (GAA 83)

The failure – or, at least, the improbable success – of the Magistrate's confession, staged rhetorically by Coetzee through interrupted biblical allusion and anti-allegory, does not pose an insurmountable challenge to secular confession, but fits it with an inescapable reminder of the intersubjectivity upon which ethical responsibility is founded. If complete and utter transformation of oneself through this kind of confession is improbable, there is at least ethical potential in the Magistrate's dispossession, which in shattering his sense of self-sovereignty returns him to a predicament shared by the human community at large. This slow erosion of his certainty is not, however, unambivalently good: there is no way to know, for example, if the Magistrate's treatment of the Barbarian Girl (physically and hermeneutically) would become more enlightened, more consensual, as a result of his lengthy confession. Even so, it is the dispossession he encounters because of this failure of certainty that initiates his break, however temporarily, with the epistemology and hermeneutic dominance of Empire that influenced his exploitative treatment of the Barbarian Girl in the first place. If there is hope for the Magistrate's ability to continue to foster ethical responsibility amidst the violence of Empire, it lies in his continued acceptance, however begrudgingly, of becoming dispossessed through the attempt to give a confessional account of himself. It is to the

dangers of refusing this kind of attempt, and all that it entails, that I will turn in the next chapter.

Crimes of Passion: Failing to Confess in *Disgrace* and *The Schooldays of Jesus*

Both *Disgrace* and *The Schooldays of Jesus* feature the legal or quasi-legal trials or hearings of men charged with abuse and violence against women. The crimes of these men betray their unwillingness to acknowledge the claims of others, and this unwillingness is replicated in their refusal to *confess* to their jurors or judges, despite admitting their crimes. (Much turns here on the nature of the confession that is demanded from or expected of them, as I will discuss.) It is my contention that in *Disgrace* and *The Schooldays of Jesus*, despite their suggestions that the demand to confess entails a kind of self-sacrifice, a more concerning sacrificial logic is at play in the protagonists' treatment of women, and further, that – Coetzee's expressed reservations about the efficacy and role of secular confession notwithstanding – the (self) sacrifice entailed in the confessions demanded of these men is imbued with some ethical value, insofar as it demonstrates an openness to transformation and to the concerns of others.

My claim, so directly stated, begs several questions. The first of these is, what kind of performance of confession (or confessional performance) is demanded of these men by their judges and, relatedly, what are the ethical valences of their refusal to perform as expected? Secondly, what motivates their refusal to confess, or perform confession? Does this equate to a critique of the confessional modus operandi akin to that of Michel Foucault or a refusal to behave ethically? Third, to what extent is (self) sacrifice (or a lesser form, yielding) considered relevant to ethics in *Disgrace*/*The Schooldays of Jesus*?

Before directing my attention more explicitly to these novels, I will turn to one of the most well-known critiques of confession, begun by Michel Foucault in the mid-1970s with the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, and continued in his later work, in order to draw out some of the concerns surrounding solicited legal confessions which inevitably must be weighed against the proposed ethical benefit of confession (and the self-sacrifice it entails). The critique of confession is a fundamental element in his account of power/knowledge, as David Tell asserts: "confession [for Foucault] is a sine qua non of modern power – it is an essential component without which modern power could not be exercised" (98).

The History of Sexuality is by no means the only entry in his extensive oeuvre in which Foucault discusses confession. In "About the Conception of the 'Dangerous Individual' in 19th-Century Legal Psychiatry," Foucault extends his critique by discussing the emphasis given in modern juridical contexts to the question of *who* an accused person is rather than simply *what* they have done. He identifies this as a "dreadful danger" from which could emerge a "horrifying society," but nonetheless argues that "the judicial machine ceases to function" without some understanding of an accused's character, revealed via confession (DI 18):

> Beyond admission, there must be confession, self-examination, explanation of oneself, revelation of what one is. The penal machine can no longer function simply with a law, a violation and a responsible party. It needs something else, a supplementary material. The magistrates and the jurors, the lawyers too, and the department of the public prosecutor, cannot really play their role unless they are provided with another type of discourse, the one given by the accused about himself, or the one which he makes possible for others, through his confessions, memories, intimate disclosures, etc. (DI 2)

Tell elaborates: "it is no longer the 'crime or offense exactly' against which power is directed but rather crime's double: the life behind the offense, the criminal behind the crime, the delinquent behind the offender—in sum, the cause inserted ex post facto behind the effect" (105).

The reason for this increased interest in the individual over and above their crimes, which Foucault identifies as occurring in the West from the early 19th century onwards, was the need to deal with "great crimes without reason" (DI 17) committed by those who showed no evidence of insanity (as it was then understood) combined with a drive to introduce greater rationality into penal practice. Whereas punishment had previously befitted the crime, it now came to befit the criminal through a growing awareness that the exercise of power through torture and exile did not reflect the vision of a just, rational society. This adjustment required knowledge of *who* the criminal was:

> . . . all this implies that punishment bears on the criminal himself rather than on the crime, that is on what makes him a criminal, on his reasons, his motives, his inner will, his tendencies, his instincts. In the older systems, the horror of the punishment

> had to reflect the enormity of the crime: henceforth, the attempt was made to adapt the modalities of punishment to the nature of the criminal. (DI 8-9)

Foucault describes this modern transformation of criminal law, its change in emphasis on criminal rather than crime, as "insidiously […] taking shape" (DI 18). Throughout his body of work, Foucault is sceptical about confession, viewing it as a mandated self-sacrifice demanded of an individual by an institution with comparatively greater power. He finds in the proto-confessional practices of early Christianity (namely, *exomologesis* and *exagoreusis*) that the "hermeneutics of the self implies the sacrifice of the self": thus there can be "no truth of the self without a sacrifice of the self" (ABHS 222). As a result, he diagnoses that "one of the great problems of Western culture has been to find the possibility of the hermeneutics of the self not, as it was the case in early Christianity, on the sacrifice of the self, but on the contrary, on a positive, on the theoretical and practical, emergence of the self" (ABHS 222). Concerned with care of the self, Foucault rejects the fact that, under these Christian practices (and evidently under criminal law in the 19th and 20th Centuries), one is obliged "to bear witness against himself" in acts of confession (ABHS 211).

Foucault notes that his desire to found a hermeneutics of the self on something other than the early Christian penitential rites has not been fully realised. Instead, confession as an exposure of oneself to another or others is all-pervasive in the Western world, and has become "one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth. We have since become a singularly confessing society. The confession has spread its effects far and wide" (HOS 59).

As the reference to "producing truth" suggests, one does not free oneself through confessing, according to Foucault, but becomes an object of knowledge. Through the (apparently imperceptible) incitement that one "[confess] one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles" (HOS 59), Foucault argues, "[t]he truthful confession was inscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualization" (HOS 58-59). The topics of confessional discourse Foucault identifies align with the points of the power-knowledge nexus inciting them, for the confession (increasingly since the 18th and 19th centuries) now "plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations" (HOS 59). It has "gradually lost its ritualistic and exclusive localization" (HOS 63) in Catholicism and now finds a place as part of a heterogeneous power network inciting confessions of "the most ordinary affairs of everyday life" (HOS 59).

As such, it would be mistaken, Foucault argues, to proclaim that the truth – obtained through confession – will set one free. He counters: "truth is not by nature free . . . its production is thoroughly imbued with relations of power. The confession is an example of this" (HOS 60). In modern, secular confessions, Foucault argues, the confessant is not divesting themselves of some deep, troubling guilt, but shoring up diverse and intractable power relations which constrain the subject as an object of knowledge. Confessional discourses for Foucault comprise "an immense labor to which the West has submitted generations in order to produce . . . men's subjection: their constitution as subjects in both senses of the word" (HOS 60). This is because "one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession" (HOS 61). The illusion of freedom, the sense that 'the truth will set you free, then, is simply emblematic of the totality of this power: "The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us" (HOS 60).

Ostensibly, however, the unfreedom entailed in the demand to confess is perceptible – at least to some. In both *Disgrace* and *The Schooldays of Jesus*, the protagonists attempt to avoid becoming *known*, in Foucault's sense of the term. In what follows, I will discuss David Lurie's and Dmitri's crimes and their resistance to confession before an authorised body before considering the ways sacrifice plays out in the novels, both as part of and outside of confessional discourse. Making use of Judith Butler's concepts of "dispossession" (DPP xi) and becoming "undone by each other" (PL 23), I will suggest that David Lurie and Dmitri's do not display a refusal to sacrifice *tout court*, but demonstrate an unhealthy pursuit of mastery that is counter to ethical accounts of intersubjective relations. The refusal to account for their violence manifests as an invulnerability to others, and it is to this refusal that I will now turn.

Disgrace

In *Disgrace*, despite his smug proclamation that he has "solved the problem of sex rather well" (1) for a fifty-two-year-old divorcé, adjunct professor of Communications David Lurie is brought to hearing before a committee of inquiry at Cape Technical University for the sexual harassment of his student Melanie Isaacs. Overseen by Manas Mathabane, Professor of Religious Studies, and void of any power but the ability to "make recommendations" (47),

Lurie's hearing appears to allude to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which took place as Coetzee wrote the novel.[7] South Africa's TRC was the twenty-first 'truth commission' to be established since the 1970s. Such commissions place the determination of historical 'truth,' derived from the individual testimonies of perpetrators and victims of politically-motivated crimes, at the centre of attempts to create new national narratives focused on peace rather than historic violence and division. It was a new kind of truth commission, however, as Deborah Posel states: "South Africa's TRC was the first to grapple with the problem of truth by installing a public confessional at the heart of the project" (120). She continues:

> Writing the truths of past suffering is seen as a way to produce a historical subject who is both ethically and psychologically redeemed, as both a "good" and "whole" human being. And it is in the confessional that these links between the epistemological, normative, and psychological modalities of the past and present are constituted. (120)).

There have been many criticisms of this restorative justice project, not least because it attempted to create an official record of the national, collective past based on voluntarily-voiced individual stories. Francesca Mussi finds that the assumptions upon which the TRC was based were straightforwardly expressed, but replete with problematic epistemological and ethical assumptions: "first, the truth about the past was recoverable; second, the establishing of the truth [via individual confession or testimony] would heal the wounds of South Africa by also facilitating reconciliation between 'victims' and 'perpetrators'" (107). Epistemological scepticism about the possibility of ever attaining an objective 'truth' combines, too, with questions about the motives of individual confessants (especially those who sought political amnesty in exchange for confessing). The South African TRC is the only truth commission to have offered individual amnesty from prosecution, in exchange for perpetrator confessions, as part of its process. One of the key criticisms of the commission is that it sacrificed justice (which would see perpetrators punished and victims offered

[7] The TRC was introduced into law by the *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act* No. 34 of 1995, and the first hearings were held in April of 1996. According to David Attwell, Coetzee began drafting *Disgrace*, amongst other projects, in December 1994 (*J.M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing* 196).

reparation) to promote the 'truth'-telling of individuals for the social purpose of national reconciliation.[8]

Confession is of course utilised in both religious and legal practice, and the role of religion, namely Christianity, in the TRC also opened it to criticism. Coetzee, in a concise statement on the role of Christianity in the TRC, suggests as much in an interview with Jane Poyner: "In a state with no official religion, the TRC was somewhat anomalous: a court of a certain kind based to a large degree on Christian teaching and on a strand of Christian teaching accepted in their hearts by only a tiny proportion of the citizenry" (Poyner 22). A similar reservation could be raised against David Lurie's committee of inquiry, with Archbishop Desmond Tutu replaced by Professor of Religious Studies Manas Mathabane who also counsels Lurie on how to achieve amnesty of a kind. Lurie makes it clear that he has "reservations of a philosophical kind" (D 47) regarding the committee and its aims and methods, but these reservations are quickly and uncomfortably skirted by the committee who wish to constrain the proceedings strictly to "the legal sense" (D 48).

Yet Lurie's almost instant acquiescence to the charges "in the legal sense" is not deemed satisfactory, suggesting the theological expectations of the committee extend beyond its chair, the Religious Studies professor. Lurie's stolid statement of guilt – "I plead guilty to both charges. Pass sentence, and let us get on with our lives" (D 48) – does not meet with the committee's approval. In similarly salvific discourse to Dmitri's judges in *The Schooldays of Jesus*, they insist they wish to "hear both sides of the case" (D 48) before making a recommendation to the university rector regarding disciplinary measures. Lurie's repeated refusal to offer up anything more than a reiteration that he is guilty "of everything Ms Isaacs avers, and of keeping false records" (D 49) leads to a break in proceedings as the committee members, faced with Lurie's recalcitrant refusal to speak of his misconduct, recess to discuss the plea. So far, Foucault's assertion that, without the full-blown confession of the accused "the judicial machine ceases to function" (DI 18) appears to hold true. Despite his bald admission of guilt, Lurie steadfastly withholds that which Foucault suggests is demanded of "dangerous individuals" so as to *know* them as such: "confession, self-examination, explanation of [themselves], revelation of what [they are]" (DI 2). Lurie refuses to give such an account of himself.

[8] See Cole 172; Boehmer 344-345; Saunders 101; Mamdani 37.

Lurie has been characterised as resisting 'legal' proceedings during his committee hearing, but hypocritically pushing for them later in the novel when three men break into his daughter's house, attack him and rape her. However, he is willing to follow a legalistic process in his own 'trial' before the committee even if he does not respect its authority or concerns. What he appears to resent, then, is not the legal process itself, but the lengthy confessional discourse expected within it. In both cases, his own 'trial', and the wished-for trial of the men who attacked him and raped Lucy, he wants a quick and efficient guilty plea followed by something of a *coup de grâce*, rather than a lengthy speculation about his (or their) deepest feelings and motivations. It is thus no surprise that he becomes involved with euthanising animals later in the novel: he favours the quick and painless exit to the very end. In rejecting the committee's expectation of a heartfelt confession, Rebecca Saunders argues, Lurie "tacitly contends that the interrogation itself is more punitive than the penalty" (105). In an appropriately canine metaphor, the committee's bark is worse than its bite, as its inability to do more than demand a confession and offer recommendations, similarly to the TRC, renders it basically impotent. (It is a matter of contention and considerable concern for some that many of the individuals who confessed to committing heinous crimes during the TRC hearings were never punished.)

The committee's efforts to eke a confession out of tight-lipped Lurie are redoubled when the group reconvenes after the break in proceedings. Dr Farodia Rassool (a caricature of a hardline feminist) objects to Lurie's "fundamentally evasive" behaviour and "subtle mockery" which suggest "that he accepts the charges [laid against him] only in name" (D 50). The committee, Rassool claims, has a duty to be "crystal clear" about what it is that Lurie is being "censured" for (D 50). Chair of the "university-wide committee on discrimination" (D 40), Rassool is quick to note the "overtones" (D 50) of the case – and Lurie is just as quick to baulk at these allusions. As he becomes more and more mocking about what transpired between himself and Melanie, the apparently legalistic committee dissolves into a debate about confession, contrition, and sincerity.

Lurie insists that "what you want from me is not a response but a confession. I put forward a plea, as is my right. Guilty as charged. That is my plea. That is as far as I am prepared to go" (D 51). In this way he denies the apparent desire of Farodia Rassool that he "shed tears of contrition" (D 52). The most he is willing to offer is a parody of confession, as he backtracks

mockingly on his refusal to offer an explanation of what transpired between himself and Melanie:

> 'Very well,' he says, 'let me confess. The story begins one evening, I forget the date, but not long past. I was walking through the old college gardens and so, it happened, was the young woman in question, Ms Isaacs. Our paths crossed. Words passed between us, and at that moment something happened which, not being a poet, I will not try to describe. Suffice it to say that Eros entered. After that I was not the same. . . . I was not myself. I was no longer a fifty-year-old divorcé at a loose end. I became a servant of Eros. . . . You want a confession, I give you a confession. As for the impulse, it was far from ungovernable. I have denied similar impulses many times in the past, I am ashamed to say.' (D 52)

Lurie's explanation of events is something of an anti-confession, disavowing his agency in initiating sex with Melanie. His claim that "I was not myself. . . . I became a servant of Eros" refuses the committee access to the truth of *him*self, or what Tell, referring to the way the law translates confessant into criminal, describes as the "life behind the offense, the criminal behind the crime, the delinquent behind the offender" (105). Lurie displaces the blame, refuses to reveal his interiority, and takes no ownership of what were ostensibly his actions.

The essence of what the committee – or at least some of its members – seek from Lurie's performance emerges when Farodia Rassool, growing tired of his refusal to take responsibility for that which only she is willing to call "abuse" (D 53), loses her patience and demands that rather than parroting a preconceived admission of guilt, he express himself "in his own words" so that they might "see if [the confession] comes from his heart" (D 54). In other words, the committee – in particular Farodia Rassool – demands of Lurie not just an acceptance of his charges, but a particular performance of a self in need of discipline and transformation, and the success of this performance is to be judged by the committee in its process of making recommendations regarding Lurie's future at the university.

The hearing, rather than being focused on the (im)morality or (il)legality of David's sexual harassment of Melanie, turns on differing, even dissonant, understandings of the term "performance". Catherine M. Cole lays out the "multifaceted meanings of 'performance'": "to accomplish an act, to make a public presentation, to use embodiment as a central

instrument of communication, and to simulate or represent (i.e., to 'act')" ("Performance" 178). What kind of performance does a confession require? The committee, Lurie sceptically suggests, expects nothing short of a dramatic performance, combining the latter definitions laid out by Cole: "[t]hey wanted a spectacle: breast-beating, remorse, tears if possible. A TV show, in fact" (D 66). As part of this performance, Saunders argues using appropriately theatrical language, Lurie is expected to provide a "spectacle of deliberation" (100). In Foucault's genealogy, a "spectacle of deliberation" provides a guarantee of truth: confession constitutes, in part, "a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated" (HOS 62). More than this, Saunders argues, the committee expects a display of "visceral[ity]" (100) as a guarantee of the sincerity of his confession and the apology by which it is to be followed.

Lurie's own stonily contractual approach to "going through the motions" (D 51) and "accept[ing] the charges" (D 50) provides nothing of this expected viscerality, instead recalling the TRC's amnesty hearings, which made no demand for a display of remorse from perpetrators, and as such were criticised for preferring truth (details of the perpetrators' crimes) to justice, as Saunders claims: "Indeed it was this spectacle of perpetrators eviscerated of remorse and shame, if not humanity itself, that led some South Africans to regard the TRC's 'truth for amnesty' deal as essentially exchanging justice for truth, or as merely cancelling debts rather than exacting payment for them" (101). As Saunders points out, however, Lurie's stance becomes untenable when he is presented with a variation on his conception of justice as the discharging of debts by both Lucy and Petrus, her self-appointed protector (in exchange for her land). Seeking information about Lucy's attackers from a tight-lipped Petrus, Lurie is informed that "the insurance will give you a new car" (66); thus (according to Petrus) there is no need to punish the car thief and attacker. Further, Lurie abhors Lucy's suggestion that the men who raped her were "debt collectors, tax collectors" (158). Lurie is thus forced to realise how unsatisfactory such an eviscerated and calculated approach to 'justice' is, particularly for one's victims. This suggests that confession needs to do more than merely *claim* an acceptance of charges, but to *actually accept* them.

Like many others, Cole connects the discipline of performance studies with J.L. Austin's theory of performative speech acts. Offering the utterance "I do" at a marriage ceremony, or the statement "'I give and bequeath my watch to my brother'" as it occurs in a will as examples, Austin describes a performative speech act as a statement whose purpose is not "to

describe my doing . . . or . . . to state that I am doing it: it is to do it" (6). That is, "the issuing of the utterance *is* the performing of an action" (Austin 6, my emphasis). Such a connection between saying and doing is integral to performance studies, Cole notes: "there must be a connection between *saying* something and *doing* something for words to construct reality" (*Performing* xi). The Austinian examples reproduced here are both contractual, in the sense that they involve a legal agreement between two or more people brought about by the performative utterance. A legally enforceable promise inheres in the statement "I confess," too, in that under oath one pledges not to lie (to make a false confession), but its performative aspect is broader than this. Peter Brooks argues that confession, as a speech act, has the double aspect of stating the sins or crimes one has committed (the constative aspect, in Austinian terms) *and* of performing one's request for absolution (21). Confession thus requires more than the confessant's bald acceptance of charges. This is suggested by those present at Lurie's committee of inquiry when they propose that, more than an acceptance of charges (and thus guilt), Lurie's confession must demonstrates his readiness to change himself: they seek a confession that performs a transformation. This accords with Foucault's definition of confession as "a ritual in which the expression alone . . . produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it" (HOS 62).

Now superseded by modern forms of confession, the proto-confessional practice of *exomologesis* dramatically staged just such a transformation. Foucault draws from Tertullian's writings to describe how, in the final part of the penitential rite, as part of their reintegration into the community, sinners in the 4th and 5th centuries would show themselves in public, in dirty clothes and smeared with ash, prostrating themselves before a priest. *Exomologesis* involved "somatic expressions and symbolic expressions" intended "to rub out the sin . . . by showing the sinner as he is in reality – dirty, defiled, sullied" (ABHS 214). The rite was not simply a manifestation of one's defilement, however; in seeking penance through *exomologesis*, one represented one's death as a sinner. Thereafter, one could join one's community anew.

Implicit in the performance of *exomologesis* and subsequent forms of confession is an expectation of transformation, which in Foucault's thinking comes about only through self-sacrifice. Foucault has concerns about the costs of such a transformation for the self. In his analysis, the defilement enacted in *exomologesis* is not conducive to a positive self-relation ("self-care"), for not only does one represent oneself as a "dirty, defiled" sinner, but in

renouncing that status, brutally represent one's own death in performing "the theatrical representation of the sinner as willing his own death as a sinner" (ABHS 214). Foucault characterises this renunciation as "an act of violent rupture": "self-revelation in *exomologesis* is, at the same time, self-destruction" (ABHS 215). Transformation in the wake of a sin or crime in the Foucauldian understanding thus portends self-sacrifice: a cause for concern.

Such a demand for transformation through sacrifice is seemingly made of and mocked by Lurie when, in response to the Dean of Engineering Desmond Swarts's request that he make a public statement declaring his mistakes, he retorts, "You mean, will I humble myself and ask for clemency?" (D 54). David Attwell's work on the Coetzee archive reveals that this sardonic interpretation is at least in part shared by Coetzee himself, who began drafting the novel at the end of 1994, as plans for the TRC were developing. The notebooks in which early drafts of *Disgrace* were penned reveal that "Coetzee was distinctly unimpressed by the moral climate in South Africa. He feared that it was anti-intellectual and potentially tyrannous" (Attwell, *Life of Writing* 197). Specifically, Attwell writes, "Coetzee was registering misgivings about whether ordinary people were capable of living up to the spirit of moral triumph that was taking hold of the nation" (*Life of Writing* 197). Attwell reveals that Coetzee felt that the buoyant collective optimism about the future of the nation had undesirable political implications, not least the demand for people to verbalise their 'sincere' guilt: quoting Roland Barthes, he wrote in a 1997 notebook that "fascism does not prevent speech, it compels speech […] They want to demand a certain speech (confession) of [David Lurie]" (qtd. Attwell, *Life of Writing* 198). Such comments are bolstered by Attwell's observation that Coetzee, in a rather Foucauldian manner and "very much against the grain," read the TRC as "an exercise of power in the hands of those in authority" (*Life of Writing* 191). Coetzee shares with Foucault a characteristic mistrust of the demand to confess, with all it suggests about the exercise of institutional power over an individual: this mistrust, I argue, is replicated in Lurie and in Dmitri of *The Schooldays of Jesus*.

While it is clear that a certain confessional performance, or performative speech act, is expected of Lurie, many theorists of forgiveness have fewer reservations than Foucault (and, it seems, Coetzee) about such a practice. Charles Griswold is exemplary. He argues that an injured party requires reasons to forgive their wrongdoer, and identifies six such reasons. The first two recast Foucault's criticism of performed *exomologesis* and later forms of articulated confession – that there is "no truth of the self without a sacrifice of the self" (ABHS 222) –

simply as requirements for forgiveness, rather than concerning manifestations of a power-knowledge nexus. According to Griswold, the wrongdoer must, to begin with, "demonstrat[e] that she no longer wishes to stand by herself as the author of these wrongs. That is, she must acknowledge, first, that she was the responsible agent for the specific deeds in question" (49). Lurie makes such a move by pleading guilty to the two charges laid against him, though his facetious suggestion that he was "a servant of Eros" (D 52) goes some way in denying his 'authorship.' Secondly, and crucially, Griswold argues, a wrongdoer "must repudiate her deeds (by acknowledging their wrongness) and thus disavow the idea that she would author those deeds again. That repudiation (assuming it is sincere) is a step toward showing that one is not simply that 'same person' who did the wrong" (50). Lurie's admission that he has "denied similar impulses in the past" (D 52) suggests a wavering willingness to change his ways: he makes no indication that he is not the "same person."

Griswold's is a perfectionist account: people can and do change; they can become "better," more moral than they were in the past. However, they remain "the same" in ways that are not numerical but diachronic (in the way that we say an acorn and the mature oak it becomes are "the same.") He summarises: "One takes responsibility for having done X, and one repudiates the self that did X" (50). Importantly, Griswold does not envision in this repudiation the self-destruction inhering in Foucault's characterisation of confession: instead, he argues, "the core of the repudiation in question actually depends on a recognizable continuity of self" (50).

What is required of the sinner in Griswold's formulation is that he repudiate an aspect of his past self, without annihilating himself as a unique self that is continuous through time (this would render the confession untenable). As much is suggested at the committee meeting by Desmond Swarts, who responds to Lurie's question, "Then what do you advise me to do? . . . Shed tears of contrition?" (D 51-52), by stating: "We all have our weak moments, all of us, we are only human. Your case is not unique. We would like to find a way for you to continue with your career" (D 52). Swarts continues, "Don't you think . . . that by its nature academic life must call for certain sacrifices? That for the good of the whole we have to deny ourselves certain gratifications?" (D 52).

In this context, the "sacrifice" referred to is that of Lurie giving up his self-gratifying "abuse" (D 53) of much younger, "unequal" (D 53), female students, an abuse which I will argue is itself a kind of sacrifice. But perhaps Coetzee is gesturing to something more: the "sacrifices"

that characterise confession in the Foucauldian imagination. Lurie's resistance to confession before the committee entails a refusal to make just this kind of sacrifice. While I will later touch on the validity of a critique of confession carried out through silence or refusal, it bears noting that, for Judith Butler, the ethical import of "giving an account of oneself" comes from being dispossessed of what they term "the self-sufficient 'I'" (GAA 136). In what follows, I will discuss the ethical valences of this kind of sacrifice, which is both integral to confession and, as Swarts suggests, more ethical conduct. First, however, I will briefly turn to *The Schooldays of Jesus* to elaborate my discussion so far.

The Schooldays of Jesus

The Schooldays of Jesus is the second of three instalments in Coetzee's *Jesus* trilogy. It follows Simón and his adoptive son Davíd (who, although he is never described explicitly as such, is the top candidate for the titular Jesus) following their arrival by sea in a foreign land washed clean of memories, and, with the addition of Inès as Davíd's mother, their struggles to secure a suitable educational situation for the precocious youngster. Finally, with the help of three wealthy sisters, Davíd is enrolled in the Academy of Dance in the town of Estrella, run by Juan Sebastián Arroyo and his beautiful wife, Ana Magdalena, with whom Davíd is from the first enamoured. However, in true Christlike fashion, Davíd also has a penchant for unkempt and morally dubious characters: in *The Schooldays of Jesus*, the grimy Daga of *The Childhood of Jesus* is replaced by a new friend, Dmitri, on whose crime, trial, and punishment the novel in large part focuses.

Dmitri is an employee of the Estrella art museum, where he carries the self-professed "grand title" (SJ 46) of Principal Attendant, though he is relegated by Simón and Inès to the roles of "museum guard" (SJ 47) and "doorman" (SJ 48). Thanks to the museum's proximity to the Academy of Dance – where everything, including mathematics, is taught through dance – Dmitri has become a sort of self-appointed school guardian. He greets the children on their arrival at the school and, to their elation, distributes lollies to them at the end of the day. In addition, as Simón is to discover, Dmitri performs other menial tasks around the Academy. This voluntary occupation conveniently keeps Dmitri close to Ana Magdalena, with whom he may or may not be having an affair, and whom, in a simile favoured by Lurie, and borrowed from Kafka's *The Trial*, he professes that he has "followed . . . like a dog" (SJ 55) from the moment he witnessed her "unearthly" beauty (SJ 55). Such openness renders Dmitri likeable

to Davíd and the other children of the Academy of Dance, with whom Dmitri shares his desires – both sexual and suicidal – and his collection of pornographic images. For these reasons, Dmitri is abhorrent to Simón, who tries repeatedly and unsuccessfully to banish Dmitri from their lives and yet, by some measure, remains fascinated by Dmitri's "talk of extravagant, unrequited love" for Ana Magdalena (SJ 119).

Upon meeting the man, Davíd makes the foreboding assertion that "Dmitri sounds like scimitar . . . to chop off your head" (SJ 48). Davíd is as fascinated by this sense of Dmitri's latent violence as Simón is repelled by it, and Simón's concerns about Dmitri are tragically vindicated when Dmitri is convicted of the rape and murder of Ana Magdalena, an event which provides much of the drama of the novel and enables a continuation of Coetzee's exploration of confession – specifically, the demand to confess. It also facilitates a lengthy philosophical rumination – more like a Socratic dialogue – on the tensions between passion and reason, and crime and forgiveness.

The Schooldays of Jesus extends Coetzee's rumination of the role of performance in a legal or quasi legal confession rather blatantly: Dmitri's hearing is held in Estrella's largest theatre, the Teatro Solar, because of that building's capacity to accommodate a large audience. And an audience it attracts: Estrella locals "press in . . . till [Simón] is jammed tight against the rail. Below, people are sitting in the passages" (SJ 145). Estrella is clearly distinct from the South Africa of *Disgrace*: the local paper reports such crimes as "the theft of a lawnmower from a shed (unlocked) and vandalism at a public toilet (a washbasin smashed)" (SJ 56). Estrella's citizens, unused to (and yet stirred by) the commission of rape and murder in their midst, have their interest piqued by such a magnitudinous crime.

More than a satire of theatricality in line with Lurie's critique of the performance expected of him, the setting of Dmitri's trial appears to directly allude to the TRC hearings, which often took place on stages in town hall settings – a fact which caused some consternation and delay at the first hearing of the Amnesty Commission, as Antjie Krog relates in her (autobiographical) account of the hearings, *Country of My Skull*:

> 'What is the problem?' I ask somebody in the hall. The problem is the seating arrangements. The judges are used to such matters being resolved by the architecture of a courtroom. Now they have an ordinary hall, and it seems from the human rights

> hearings that you make a Statement with your seating arrangement. You project a symbolic message. Yes, you impact on the psychological disposition of the entire audience. In a nutshell – the site of a seat can influence amnesty!
>
> Now where should the perpetrators sit? On the same raised level as the judges? (59)

The suggestion of an imminent (theatrical) performance does not end with the trial being set upon a stage and before an audience. The performance implied by the literal staging of the trial is coupled with several clichéd false starts which lend a metatheatrical edge to the proceedings: firstly, Dmitri emerges from the wings, ankles shackled, and stops, blinded by the stage lighting. Subsequently, the judge-in-chief speaks inaudibly into the microphone until Dmitri's guard scrambles to turn it on. These events augment one's anticipation of the performance about to unfold – and its very staged-ness. Further, Dmitri's theatrical outbursts seem to pander to the setting and the expectations of the audience. Indeed, his hearing becomes engrossing to the audience, who pack into the theatre, filling even the aisles, and who become so enraptured by the action that they seem to mistake it for a piece of drama rather than a legal proceeding, and infrequently interject in the proceedings, such that the presiding judge has to command silence with his gavel: "'Silence! . . . This is not an entertainment! Bethink yourselves!'" (SJ 151). This recalls the problem of architecture discussed in Krog's commentary on the first TRC Amnesty Hearing: some of the audience, piled onto the balconies, find themselves elevated above the proceedings, overseeing the trial in the typical position of judges. However, it will be Dmitri, the man they watch with bated breath from the aisles and balconies, who performs most assiduously, determined to have the final word on his judgment.

Like David Lurie, Dmitri "has, from the first, admitted his guilt" (SJ 140). Although the bar is set rather low, Dmitri has made his admission more effusively than Lurie, providing "not one but three confessions, each more copious than the previous, relating in detail how he violated and then strangled Ana Magdalena Arroyo" (SJ 140). Like Lurie, Dmitri refuses to plead any mitigating factors, denying suggestions that he was drunk or insane when the crime was committed, or that it occurred in the course of erotic play. And like Lurie again, his trial stalls when he refuses to supply a reason for his crimes: "what he must say is *why* he did what he did. That is the point at which the third confession comes to an abrupt stop. 'The accused

refused to cooperate further,' report his interrogators. 'The accused became foul-mouthed and violent'" (SJ 140). His judges run up against the same resistance during Dmitri's sentencing, when they beseech him to "Tell us more fully what happened that day." In response, Dmitri replies "Sentence me! . . . Be over with it!" (150). For Dmitri, as for Lurie, punishment (exile or imprisonment) is preferable to the performance of a detailed confession of his inner workings – his *self* – at the time of Ana Magdalena's death.

Dmitri's calls for retraction of the demand for confession are ignored, leading him to plead for death. "'Judge me now!' cries Dmitri. 'If you don't, I will cut my throat. I will hang myself. I will beat my brains out. You won't be able to stop me'" (SJ 148). Several pages later, his refusal to participate in the judges' quest for his confession erupts again: "'I belong to a foreign species,' he yells. 'Do away with me. Kill me. Grind me under your heel'" (SJ 154). Although his rhetoric evokes the defilement of the sinner during *exomologesis*, there is little to suggest that Dmitri is serious about wishing his own death, whether actually or metaphorically – not least because, although he escapes captivity in the psychiatric ward to which he is subsequently sent, he does not commit suicide. Like Lurie, his borderline-parodic calls seem to signal a desire to avoid being interrogated, suggesting that death or hard labour would be preferable to self-revelation (and thus self-sacrifice) before his judges; however, his evasive actions later in the novel show that he is not sincere about committing to this form of punishment, either.

Dmitri's interrogation, even more than Lurie's, recalls the criticism that the TRC Amnesty Hearings prioritised truth over justice. More so than they are committed to the enforcement of justice by ensuring Dmitri's sentence is carried out, the judges are focused on the *truth* behind the crime, ostensibly so that they can move forward with, in an echo of the TRC's motto "Truth: The Road to Reconciliation" (qtd. Saunders 104), the "recovery, rehabilitation and salvation . . . of offenders" (SJ 140). As such, they ask Dmitri repeatedly what motivated him to murder Ana Magdalena, and their line of questioning suggests that they (and the legal system as a whole) operate under the belief justice (and reconciliation) will flow from the revelation of truth: "'[W]e are men,' the judge-in-chief urges, 'entrusted with the task of achieving justice or at least an approximation to justice. Join us in that task. Put your trust in the law, in the tried and tested protocols of the law. Tell us your story, beginning with the deceased Ana Magdalena. Who was Ana Magdalena to you?'" (SJ 149). They push further, indicating that what they want from Dmitri is precisely to understand his motivations: "You

venerated Ana Magdalena, you worshipped her, yet you raped her and strangled her. We find that hard to comprehend. Help us" (SJ 150). This, not the completion of a court-ordered sentence, seems to be the judges' main concern: after all, Dmitri later escapes from the psychiatric ward with little difficulty. The focus on truth over justice (whether that justice is to be retributive or restorative) recalls the fact that, as long as perpetrators participating in the TRC Amnesty Hearings could justify the political nature of their motivations, they were granted amnesty and were not required to make further amends for their actions.

However much Dmitri's judges, like those participating in the TRC Amnesty Hearings, declare that truth is their priority, they turn out not to be immune to the confusion that resulted from such a mandate in the TRC. A full confession of involvement in past crimes was a requirement for perpetrators being granted amnesty, but neither remorse nor apology were required in the transmission of this confession (Hayner 29). Nevertheless, Mark Sanders writes, there was "confusion between the legal requirement of perpetrators to make a full disclosure and the unlegislated moral pressure to express remorse, make repentance, and even ask forgiveness of victims" (370). True to this confusion, in making their closing statements, the judges condemn not Dmitri's refusal to provide a truthful account of his motivations for the murder of Ana Magdalena, but his lack of remorse: "In your demeanour there is no sign of contrition. To the bereaved husband of your victim you have offered no word of apology" (SJ 155).

Dmitri's lack of remorse and apology are emblematic of a refusal to sacrifice (or repudiate) something of the self through confession. While Dmitri is willing to stand by himself as, in Griswold's terms, "the author of [his] crimes," it is less clear that he intends to take responsibility for the repudiation of such an act by renouncing (parts of) himself, calling instead, like Lurie, for his own death. It is an extreme response that, likely against the men's intentions, makes the request for the repudiation of an erring self expected in confession seem rather reasonable, particularly when that repudiation is explored in less alarmist terms and found to constitute the basis of relations with others and the ethics entailed therein.

Sacrifice

That confession entails a sacrifice of (aspects of) self is well established; the seriousness of a demand for such confessional self-sacrifice is not. As has been seen, Foucault's suggestion

that such a request is somehow injurious is not unanimous: Griswold's account of the steps one must take to achieve forgiveness treats repudiation of certain parts of oneself as a simple necessity. Thus, further distinction must be made between the varieties of sacrifice here discussed in order to suggest the validity of Dmitri and Lurie's refusal to sacrifice through confession before their jurors which turn on their sense that they themselves are being sacrificed to the legal (or quasi-legal) systems that demand their confessions.

Jeffrey A. Ellsworth writes that the meaning of 'sacrifice' depends "on whether the word 'sacrifice' is understood to function as an abstract noun or as a verbal noun. The difference is whether sacrifice means the object (sacrificed) or the act (to sacrifice)" (169). René Girard underlines both the violence inhering in this dual sense of the word and the relevance of sacrifice to the law, claiming that judicial systems, like sacrifice, aim to staunch an interminable cycle of vengeance – perhaps just as violently, although more effectively – by punishing an offender (23). Comparing modern judicial systems to primitive religions, Girard writes, "Primitive religion tames, trains, arms, and directs violent impulses as a defensive force against those forms of violence that society regards as inadmissible. It postulates a strange mixture of violence and nonviolence. The same can perhaps be said of our own judicial system of control" (20).

But if modern judicial systems in a sense replace, or at least update, primitive sacrificial systems, by redirecting sacrificial violence away from a scapegoat and towards the actual offender, it is also the case that these systems might be sacrificed themselves. This much is made clear in Ellsworth's reading of the sacrifice of the rule of law (the precept, integral to the functioning of a legal system, that everybody to is subject to and equal before the law) by conspiracy theorists who opt out of legal narratives, claiming to be above or beyond the law. In a sense Dmitri and Lurie perform this kind of sacrifice, in their refusal to submit to a judicial (or quasi-judicial) demand for self-sacrificial confession. To elucidate my own concept of sacrifice at play in *Disgrace* and *The Schooldays of Jesus,* I will now turn to Moshe Halbertal's *On Sacrifice* before asking whether it is appropriate to consider David Lurie and Dmitri "sacrific[es] *to*" (Halbertal 1, emphasis added) the legal or quasi-legal systems demanding their confessions (and thus whether such a demand for their confessions is unjust, unethical, or asks too much—or whether there is more to consider).

In *On Sacrifice*, Halbertal distinguishes between "'sacrificing to' and 'sacrificing for'" (1). The first sense denotes religious sacrifices, offered from the human realm to the divine. Sacrifices *to* are typically not sacrifices of self, but involve substitution or substitutes, such as sacrificial animals (as in the practice of scapegoating), or, in the biblical case of Abraham, one's own son (2). In this understanding of sacrifice, there is little agency on the part of the sacrificial victim: Isaac (or indeed the ram that replaces him) has no say in his becoming an offering to God. This, I argue, is the kind of sacrifice Dmitri and David Lurie, and perhaps behind them Coetzee and Foucault, suggest is taking place during the solicitation of confession during legal or quasi-legal trials: through confession, a sacrifice of self is demanded to keep the "judicial machine" well-oiled.

Sacrificing for, on the other hand, engages the moral and political, as opposed to religious, realms (Halbertal 4). Rather than sacrificing a substitute such as an animal to a deity, sacrificing for often involves a self-sacrifice, whether for another individual, or for a more abstract value. Rather than being sacrificed by another, one decides to perform this kind of sacrifice, "to giv[e] up a vital [self] interest for a higher cause" (Halbertal 1). He elaborates: "[s]omeone may sacrifice his property, comfort, limb, or even life for his children, country, or in order to fulfill an obligation" (1). Far from constituting a betrayal of ethics as such theorists as Jacques Derrida in *The Gift of Death* (59, 67), and, following him Martin Hägglund in *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom* (151) argue that religious sacrifices—such as the one performed by Abraham—do, however, Halbertal argues that sacrificing for "seems key to much of ethical life" (4).

The suggestion that sacrifice is the basis of much of ethical life accords with Butler's postulation that dispossession forms the basis of ethical responsibility. Dispossession, Butler and Athanasiou posit, involves "being . . . or letting oneself become . . . moved to the other and by the other – exposed to and affected by the other's vulnerability" (*DPP* 1) in a manner that recalls Butler's declaration in *Precarious Life*: "Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something" (*PL* 23). That something turns out to be ethics, as Butler elaborates in *Giving an Account of Oneself*:

> . . . we must think of a susceptibility to others that is unwilled, unchosen, that is a condition of our responsiveness to others, even a condition of our responsibility *for* them. It means, among other things, that this susceptibility designates a nonfreedom

> and, paradoxically, it is on the basis of this susceptibility . . . that we become responsible for others. (GAA 88)

In Butler's figuration, ethics requires a sacrifice of the "self-sufficien[cy]" (GAA 136) which in any case belies the "very formation"—through social norms— "[that] implicates the other in me" (GAA 84). It involves a giving up of mastery, which is in any case a fiction.

There are thus versions of 'sacrifice' that need not stir alarm in the same manner that Abraham raising the knife above his son might. Whether or not Foucault intended to create panic with his lamentation that there can be "no truth of the self without a sacrifice of the self" (ABHS 222"), his conception does not seem to leave room for an ethically promising version of sacrifice of the kind signalled by Halbertal and Butler.

With this distinction in mind, I will now consider the ways in which Dmitri and Lurie figure themselves as "sacrifices to" the law, thus justifying their refusal to confess, before discussing their blindness to their own sacrificial logics which see them make victims of others, and which need to be sacrificed *for* the good of others.

Sacrifice *to*

David Lurie's sense that he is a sacrifice *to* the 'law' (or committee of inquiry process) is ironically underscored by his daughter Lucy's suggestion that he is a "scapegoat" (D 91), albeit that he dismisses her suggestion. His contention is not that he is not a sacrificial 'animal,' but that, perhaps regrettably, he and Lucy find themselves in a "[p]ost-Christian" (D 32) world where animal sacrifices lack the impact they once had. Although Lurie seems to lament the loss of the "religious power" (D 91) which gave effect to such practices as scapegoating, he seems to share, perhaps, Coetzee's sentiment that "I am not a Christian, or at least, not yet" (*Doubling the Point* 250). In fact, perhaps it is more accurate to suggest that it is not the religious power or moral guidance imposed by the transcendent ideals of Christianity that Lurie yearns for, but the relative ease of its rituals undertaken prior to the 'death of the gods' compared to the strictures of modern "cleansing.": His musings on this are given by the narrator in free indirect discourse:

> Then the gods died, and all of a sudden you had to cleanse the city without divine help. Real actions were demanded instead of symbolism. The censor was born, in the

> Roman sense. Watchfulness became the watchword: the watchfulness of all over all. Purgation was replaced by the purge. (D 91)

This is an ironic observation for a man who seems, despite his denial of such, to see himself as a scapegoat, a "womanizer" (D 7) "out of place" in an "emasculated institution," where, with "his colleagues from the old days" he finds himself "burdened" with an "[upbringing] inappropriate to the tasks [he is] set to perform" (D 4). In other words, he believes he is an easy target in the course of the "great rationalization" (D 3) of the university, a member of the old (masculinist, patriarchal) regime sacrificed against his will in (or rather *to*) the name of progress (3). However, this hypothetical reading of Lurie's self-conception is undermined by the fact that he is *offered* purgation by the committee, a kind of cleansing or purification enacted through "re-education. Reformation of the character. The code-word was *counselling*," (D 66) as he tells Lucy. Instead he opts for "the purge," with its connotations of expulsion or elimination, by resigning from his (adjunct) professorship instead. Perhaps, then, he undertakes "real actions" (by resigning) instead of "symbolism" (in this case an insincere public apology) in response to his sanction, but the effects of this are inconclusive, and arguably ineffective at repairing the harm he causes Melanie. He gives up an academic role he believes is diminished under the pressures of neoliberalism and no longer as robustly intellectual, rather than renouncing the erring parts of himself through confession.

Margaret Herrick suggests a further means by which Lurie understands himself as a sacrifice, or burnt offering (repurposing both the terminology used by Abraham to refer to the lamb substituted for Isaac at the last possible moment, and the vision of Lurie singed by flames after both his relationship with Melanie and his attack by the three men on the farm). Although readers might understand Melanie as a sacrifice by Lurie to the gods, or god Eros, Herrick argues that "Lurie does not figure Melanie as the sacrifice; he figures her as the instrument of sacrifice *of himself*. . . In his mind *he* is the one who is, if not burnt up, then at least burned. He does not see her as a person who was badly hurt by his behaviour" (88). Lurie's refusal to see Melanie as being harmed by his behaviour is tied up with his refusal of self-examining (and self-renouncing) confession. If Lurie thinks that *he* is a sacrifice, it is only on the most flimsy of terms, and is based on a misreading of (or refusal to read) his own actions and motivations, as well as a refusal to submit them to the scrutiny of others.

Dmitri also appears to see himself as a sacrifice to the courts of Estrella, who "have as their mandate the recovery, rehabilitation and salvation (*recuperación, rehabilitación y salvación*) of offenders" (SJ 140). True to this mandate, Dmitri is pressed at his hearing, perhaps more insistently than he would be in any other justice system, to take up the opportunity to "exculpate [him]self" and the "opportunity to plead in mitigation" (SJ 146). His refusal to do either, and his continued assertion of his guilt, provokes this statement from one of the judges:

> 'I ask: who are you to pre-empt these proceedings and decide the question before this court, which is precisely the question of your guilt? […] You stand before us today and assert your guilt. You claim your guilt is undeniable. But what if, at the moment when you make that claim, you are not yourself or fully yourself? These are only some of the issues which the court has a duty to raise and then settle. It is not up to you, the accused, the man in the very eye of the storm, to seal them off.' (SJ 147)

The Courts' insistence upon reconstructing the psychology behind Dmitri's crime is certainly in line with Foucault's analysis of modern justice systems as machines lubricated by the self-exposing confessional narratives of the accused. The judge outlines what he insists is a three-pronged responsibility held by judicial officials: to "save" not only society (from criminals) and defendants (from false judgment) but the law *itself*:

> 'You say further that you do not want to save yourself. But your salvation is not a matter that rests in your hands. If we, your judges, do not do our best to save you, following scrupulously the letter of the law, then we will have failed to save the law. Of course we have a responsibility to society, a grave and onerous responsibility, to shield it from rapists and murderers. But we have an equal responsibility to save you the accused from yourself, in the event that you are or were not yourself, as the law understands being oneself to be. Am I clear?' (SJ 147)

Despite their insistence on their desire to save Dmitri from himself, the judges make clear that their overriding obligation is to "save the law." Dmitri is, finally, only instrumental in this process: the judges will do their best to save him only in order that they may uphold the law's effectiveness. The rule of law requires that citizens– Dmitri included– must see themselves as subject to its processes, confession included. Unsurprisingly, the judges'

understanding of saving Dmitri from himself is firmly influenced by a legal definition of personhood as self-continuity through time: that one is only guilty if one's abhorrent behaviour is the truth of *oneself*, not an act that one committed when one was not, in the words of Dmitri's judges, "[one]self, or fully [one]self" due to madness, illness, drugs, or alcohol. In this dynamic, per Foucauldian thinking, the confession demanded of Dmitri would constitute an avowal not only of his role in the commission of the crime, but of his being *himself* when he did so. Only in this way can the court find *him* guilty of *being* a criminal, a "dangerous individual." They seek truth not about the act but about his person. It is in this way that the men (and Foucault) understand confession to entail a sacrifice of *self* made in order to maintain "the judicial machine" (DI 18), in other words, to justify and to continue to justify the extraction of confessions from others who come before the court. Ellsworth, and other legal theorists, might simply call this the rule of law, but for Foucault and, it seems, Dmitri and Lurie, the double meaning of "rule" here ostensibly suggests a sinister edge.

Dmitri resists the judges' quest for understanding whether his particular constitution during the commission of the crime was consistent with his constitution more generally, becoming violent when a confession to this effect is requested. His protestation that "I am guilty. Judge me. Sentence me. Come down on me with the full weight of the law" (SJ 146) mirrors Foucault's assertion that "it is not enough for the accused to say . . . 'I am the author of the crimes before you, period. Judge since you must, condemn if you will'" (DI 2). What is required, Foucault argues, is "confession, self-examination, explanation of oneself, revelation of what one is" (DI 2). The judges assume that such a sacrificial confession will follow from an interrogation into Dmitri's motivation for murdering Ana Magdalena:

> Dmitri has, from the first, admitted his guilt. He has signed his name to not one but three confessions, each one more copious than the previous, relating in detail how he violated and then strangled Ana Magdalena Arroyo. He has been given every opportunity to minimize his transgression (*Had he been drinking on the fatal night? Had the victim died by misadventure in the course of erotic play?*) but has refused them all. What he did was inexcusable, he says, unforgivable. Whether what he did is forgivable or unforgivable is not for him to decide, reply his interrogators; what he must say is why he did what he did. This is the point at which the third confession comes to an abrupt stop. 'The accused refused to cooperate further,' report his interrogators. 'The accused became foul-mouthed and violent.' (SJ 140)

The judge's suggestion that Dmitri must be "protected" echoes Farodia Rassool's suggestion to Lurie that "'This is all very quixotic, Professor Lurie, but can you afford it? It seems to me we may have a duty to protect you from yourself'" (D 49). Of course, this would entail "giving up" the mastery of self – the capacity to self-author with absolute authority (what Butler calls the "self-sufficient 'I'") – which both men hold on to as central to their psyches, and which, I argue, plays no small role in their crimes.

For Girard, judicial systems cannot be said to have replaced sacrificial systems, but the two share the goal of stemming revenge (18). Whereas sacrificial systems sought to stem revenge by substitution, judicial systems take direct aim at the wrongdoer. In this sense, the former creates victims, and the latter might be said to act on their behalf. This accords with Halbertal's stress on the fact that the modern Hebrew term *korban* communicates both "sacrifice" and "crime victim" (33). Any claim that Lurie and Dmitri are victims sacrificed to the law must, I argue, be tempered against this confluence of meaning, which suggests that their own victims might well be considered sacrifices—and it is to this that I will now turn.

David Lurie's Sacrifice

The above explored the possibility that a certain kind of sacrifice is entailed in the confessions demanded of Dmitri and Lurie in the legal or quasi-legal systems in which they find themselves enmeshed. As discussed, Foucault's work raises the concern that, through providing the confession demanded of them, a defendant might become a sacrifice to keep the "judicial machine" functioning. My discussion of Lurie and Dmitri as sacrifices has already suggested the links between sacrifice and victim, meanings which collide in the Hebrew term *korban* which denotes "not only an offering but also a victim of a crime" (Halbertal 2). Victimhood certainly applies more clearly to the women raped and killed in *Disgrace* and *The Schooldays of Jesus* than to the men who perpetrate these crimes and are subsequently asked to give an account of their actions.

Thus I now wish to discuss the ways in which David Lurie and Dmitri sacrifice others, in the sense that they offer the women they harm up to a transcendent ideal, and, in doing so, create victims. These sacrifices are, in a similar vein to the biblical sacrifice of Isaac, sacrifices of another which threaten the livelihood of that other and consequently the ground(s) for ethics. This will contribute to my later discussion of the value of confession, insofar as it entails that

one self-examine and augment one's self-knowledge, but also negate one's sovereignty in crucial ways. I will suggest that it is possible to reframe what Lurie and Dmitri are being asked to do by their judges as giving *up* or sacrificing *for* – and as such, that the sacrifice enacted by confession might have ethical valences which encourage care and caution for others – and that if there is a cost to this, it is merely the loss of a kind of solipsistic individualism.

Lurie's justification for his treatment of Melanie, shrouded in an appeal to Romantic reasoning, eschews the (self-)critical eye required to own or apologise for his actions. Lurie refuses to yield to Farodia Rassool's demand for contrition, characterising it, in his sardonic manner, as a ludicrous and superfluous measure, and likening the committee's other recommendations for reparations to Maoist demands for "re-education. Reformation of the character" (D 66). Rather than this, he thinks (an insight gleaned via free indirect discourse), he "would prefer simply to be put against a wall and shot" (D 66). In other words, Lurie would prefer the "simple" sacrifice of his life – which, in his goading voice, we can almost hear him liken to a martyrdom for the god Eros – to a sacrifice of those parts of himself which practice and justify lechery or worse, rape. "Hav[ing] done with it" (D 66) – being shot, dying – offers Lurie an easier road out of his mess than an examination of and progression past his flaws or *himself*. Ultimately, Lurie's refusal to offer up a confession implies that he believes he is not vulnerable to those sitting around the boardroom table, a belief that accentuates his lack of regard for Melanie's vulnerability to harm at his hands.

In her reading of the novel, Lucy Graham does not discuss the (non)sacrifice of Lurie but identifies two key images of sacrifice in the novel: that of Driepoot, the dog whose sacrifice via euthanasia gives the novel its final heart-wrenching blow, and that of Melanie Isaacs, whose surname, Graham points out, ties her to one of the most important biblical sacrifices, that of Abraham's son Isaac. It is the sacrifice of Melanie which is most important to me here given my focus on Coetzee's portrayal of female harm in so many of his novels. Graham, drawing on Derrida's *The Gift of Death*, writes of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac as a "betrayal of ethics" brought about by "responsibility to an absolute Other" which "inspire[s] Abraham to hate that which he loves, his own family" (7). Responsibility to a transcendent entity (such as God), in this reading, brings about the abnegation of responsibility to one's earthly

companions (and, perhaps most shockingly, one's family).[9] In *Disgrace*, Graham argues, it is not the Christian god to whom Melanie Isaacs is sacrificed, but a "transcendent other," who might well, if Lurie's suggestion is to be taken seriously (and I will consider that it might not be), be "Eros" (Graham 7; D 89). Abraham's knife thus becomes, through Lucy Lurie's analogy, David Lurie's penis. She says to her father,

> You are a man, you ought to know. When you have sex with someone strange – when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her – isn't it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in; exiting afterwards, leaving the body behind covered in blood – doesn't it feel like murder, like getting away with murder? (D 158)

Returning to Derrida to explain the cost of such sacrifice – which is already, on some level, viscerally felt by the reader of Coetzee's graphic description, voiced by Lucy – Graham notes that "In such sacrificial systems of responsibility, Derrida observes that one is required to give up an 'earthly salary', and this is only done 'by breaking with, dissociating from, or rendering dissymmetrical whatever is paired with the sensible body'" (7). The body is of such importance to Coetzee that, in his own opinion, it is the "standard" implicit in and uniting his fiction, as he explains in an interview with David Attwell: "I see a simple (simple-minded?) standard erected. That standard is the body" (*Doubling the Point* 248). There is a keen irony, then, in Lurie's careful attention to the insensible bodies of dead dogs, especially as he disregards the bodily consequences of his encounters with the living, sensible Melanie. David's sacrifice of Melanie is a problem for ethics as it fails to view her as an end in herself. "[R]endering dissymmetrical whatever is paired with [Melanie's] sensible body", Lurie ignores not only her resistance to sex with him, but her susceptibility to what Graham, following Barry Smart, calls "the physical consequences of sexual relationships" (7) such as pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Lurie's adherence to a transcendent ideal, to which he mockingly gives the name "Eros," but for which might be substituted "his idea of the world", thus comes at the cost of ethical responsibility for other earthly, embodied beings.

Lurie's (ostensible) obedience to the transcendence he names "Eros" (and his disregard of the other's sensible body in this name) is demonstrated by his comments in his undergraduate

[9] Martin Hägglund, in *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom*, also reads Isaac's (near) sacrifice by Abraham as a betrayal of ethics.

class on Romantic poetry which of course find troubling parallels in his behaviour. His pronouncements about the use of the "perfective" in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, which are seemingly incomprehensible to his students, expose his epistemically violent refusal to engage in reciprocal relationship with the world (and sensible bodies) around him:

> *Usurp upon* means to encroach or intrude upon. *Usurp*, to take over entirely, is the perfective of *usurp upon*; usurping completes the act of usurping upon […] Usurpation is one of the deeper themes of the Alps sequence. The great archetypes of the mind, pure ideas, find themselves usurped by mere sense-images. (D 21-22)

"[T]o encroach or intrude upon" is of course exactly what Lurie does to Melanie, when he "thrusts himself upon her" (D 24) while she is alone in her flat, ignoring her protestations. His students, however, have no knowledge of the extent of his thrusting tendencies outside the classroom, and faced with their "[b]lank incomprehension" (D 22), Lurie pivots:

> 'Like being in love,' he says, 'If you were blind you would hardly have fallen in love in the first place. But now, do you truly wish to see the beloved in the cold clarity of the visual apparatus? It may be in your better interest to throw a veil over the gaze, so as to keep her alive in her archetypal, goddesslike form.' (D 22)

Aligned with the "pure ideas" of the mind, the "archetypal, goddesslike form" can only be spoiled (usurped upon) by what is true or accessible in the cold hard reality of the "sense-images" (D 22) of the body seen in the hypothetical bedroom unless one "throw[s] a veil" – such as that of the Romantic sensibility – "over the gaze." This claim, for Melinda Harvey, ruptures the possibility of a reciprocal relationship: for Lurie, she states, "being in love is rather like the Wordsworthian sublime: it requires a voluptuous object, an instant of recognition and the freedom of the imagination to do its own thing. It is a state of imposition, not relation" (100). Even if Lurie's simile is facetious, and it surely is, it is undergirded by the seriously concerning perspective Harvey identifies in him. Thus, for Harvey and for Graham, there no denying a connection between this Romantic tendency (at least as Lurie defines it, as the sublimation of the real, sensible, or seen to the "archetypal" ideal) and rape. In the economy Lurie espouses, the real body can thus be sacrificed to the ideal (Eros).

Although his commitment to Romanticism as he interprets it is evident, it is hard to know whether Lurie is serious about his commitment to Eros, mocking as his tone tends to be. Attridge recognises as much: "There is little to suggest that at the time he makes it Lurie intends his stand as a principled challenge to the entire establishment in the name of desire"; instead, "in its emotional resonance it seems more like a matter of pique, irritation, and hurt pride leading him willy-nilly down a road whose destination is obscure" (*Ethics of Reading* 169). Lurie seems, in the same manner as Dmitri, to say, "Don't believe everything I say. It is just air, air that blows where it listeth" (*SJ* 173). Just as he is not willing to own his behaviour, he – like Dmitri – is ambivalent about owning or committing to his grandiose rhetoric. Even if his belief in his being "a servant of Eros" is authentic, his impulse to sleep with Melanie, he soon adds, "was far from ungovernable," rendering his servitude, or Eros's mastery, weak at best (D 52). Nonetheless, "Eros" serves as one name given to the transcendent, Romantically-derived ideals to which Lurie sacrifices Melanie, and later Driepoot.

Dmitri, too, can be read as sacrificing Ana Magdalena to a transcendent ideal deriving from Western art – not literature, like Lurie, but sculpture. The sensibility, the fleshiness, of her body, like Melanie's, is disregarded in order to aestheticise it as statuesque, recalling Derrida's statement about "breaking with, dissociating from, or rendering dissymmetrical whatever is paired with the sensible body" (101). The contrast between the concrete, static form of a sculptured body and Ana Magdalena's chosen bodily art form, the fluid movement of dancing, is significant. As Coetzee has argued, responding to Catharine MacKinnon's critique of pornography, bodies are not intrinsically or merely fleshy objects to be gazed at (although they may be when aestheticised in "negative" ways):

> It does not follow that the naked body, when looked at, is of necessity a thing, an object. In Sartre's account the looked-at body has an aesthetic dimension. The negative pole of the aesthetic dimension is the obscene, the positive pole the graceful. The obscene extreme is reached when under the assaults of sadistic pain the subjecthood of the Other retreats, annihilated, into the facticity of flesh. The positive extreme is attained when the body moves in a state of freedom. ("Harms" 71)

Ana's freely-moving, "graceful" dancing body might be seen as an expression of this positive extreme. For the men of the novel, however, it is only after Ana Magdalena's death that the seriousness of this spectrum from obscenity to grace is apprehended, as Jana M. Giles writes: "Only with the sacrifice of her death on the altar of Western transcendence does Simón begin to grasp her artistic reconciliation of body and mind through 'music-dance'" (89). While gracefulness is evoked by Ana Magdalena's dancing, the idealised marble bodies of women held at the museum, Giles argues, "aestheticiz[e] the sexual objectification of women" and elevate them to "the Western ascetic tradition of transcendence that treats the body as a disposable obstacle or a means to transfiguration" (97, 100). The violence inherent in this "misogynist aesthetics" (Giles 89) is highlighted by the fact that the statues of naked women are roped together in the museum basement, presumably by Dmitri, demonstrating their objecthood, rather than their beauty, as their defining feature. In contrast, Ana Magdalena is revealed to lack the qualities of cold hard marble; her body is of bruisable, assaultable flesh.

The aestheticization of Ana Magdalena's body as statue renders it insensible so that it can be appreciated by men (both Dmitri, and Simón, who is the one to compare it explicitly to a statue), just as David Lurie's ostensible Romanticism disregards Melanie's sensible body as something to thrust himself upon and into rather than relate to or recognise reciprocally. In both cases, the women have artistic outlets of their own (Ana Magdalena dance, Melanie theatre) that rely strongly on the sensibility, grace, and freedom of their bodies, but that are sacrificed in favour of an aestheticization that leads to stasis[10] and harm.

Unwilling or unable to sacrifice their visions, or confess (and so sacrifice) themselves, both men make victims of women. Their aestheticized view of the world apparently cannot tolerate that which is paired with the sensible body, and thus leads them to sacrifice these bodies *to* a transcendent aesthetic or divine ideal. Such deeply entrenched views are no doubt difficult for these men to question; but, I argue, the self-examination and self-repudiation entailed in confession would go some way towards tempering, even changing them. Unlike the sacrifices asked of Lurie and Dmitri in their hearings, this sacrifice completely conscribes the agency of Melanie and Ana Magdalena. Lurie and Dmitri, however, resist becoming

[10] Ana Magdalena is rendered inert by her murder, and Melanie takes on the characteristics of death when she appears to "go slack, to die within herself for the duration" (D 25) of her rape.

sacrifices of the kind they understand themselves to be, through misdirection, insubordination, or an outright refusal to confess. It is to this resistance that I will now turn.

Dmitri and the Difficulty of Confession

As noted, both Dmitri and Lurie are obtuse about the reasoning for their crimes of passion, refusing to make a confession of the kind demanded. I will now discuss the suggestion that an explanation for Dmitri's murder and potential rape of Ana Magdalena is impossible, focusing on the ramifications of such a claim as regards real-world intimate partner violence statistics and Butler's conception of ethical responsibility.

If Robert B. Pippin's suggestions about the murder committed by Dmitri are followed, a confession is impossible because Dmitri has no reason for his crime, or at least not one he is willing to countenance as his own. Pippin charts the differing explanations Dmitri gives for his crime and suggests this is evidence of the man's unreliability, but for some reason takes seriously Dmitri's claim to having no reason at all. This seemingly brings him in line with the criminals analysed in Foucault's "Dangerous Individual" essay, who brought the 19th-century legal system into crisis because they committed crimes ostensibly "without reason . . . without profit, without passion, without motive" (DI 5). Foucault explains that these "great crimes without reason" became a problem because they were not foreshadowed by any hint of the violence to come, for example through displays of depravity or insanity. However, as his analysis of the crimes he discusses makes clear, Foucault believes passion itself is an animating force behind "great crimes." David Lurie cynically displays this reasoning in his claims to have become "a servant of Eros" (D 52) and Dmitri (albeit referencing the apparently consensual part of his relationship with Ana Magdalena) claims that there is "no escaping the thunderbolt" of sexual desire (SJ 172). Of course, despite the ubiquity of the phrase "crime of passion" in common parlance, "passion" is in a wholly unsatisfying explanation for violent crime. As much is expressed by Consuelo, one of the sisters sponsoring Davíd's education, when Davíd claims that "passion made [Dmitri] kill Ana Magdalena": "Passion is no defence . . . We all feel passion at one time or another, but we don't go killing people because of it" (SJ 237).

Tracing the novel's Socratic dialogue on the advantages and disadvantages of passion and its contrast with reason, Pippin understands Simón as the solemn upholder of reason in the

trilogy, the foil to Dmitri as the archetype of passion. However, Attridge suggests that an inconclusively resolved, or indeed irresolvable, oscillation between apparently dichotomous positions is characteristic of Coetzee's fiction, and thus it is not accurate to treat passion and reason (nor their representatives) as binary opposites. Attridge treats the trilogy as a whole to reveal that Simón is not the hardheaded rationalist that some critics claim him to be in some figurations of the passion/reason divide, but instead adapts to the situation he finds himself in and, importantly, to the guidance he feels his adopted son requires. In Novilla, Attridge recalls, Simón was "the spokesman for passion" in many of his interactions, feeling himself to be "the only one with 'secret yearnings' and 'hankerings after another kind of life'" ("Reason and Its Others" 407). Most notably, Simón's election of a stranger, Inés, to the position of Davíd's mother is far from rational, but based on an obscure intuition. It is not implausible to suggest, then, that Dmitri possesses some reason in his passionate approach to life. Indeed, as I will suggest, his interactions with Simón betray a cunning, instrumental use of apparent truth, in order to get what he wants. His rejection of the demand to confess, too, demonstrates a concerted use of reason to avoid a sacrifice of his own mastery, a mastery which concerningly underpins not only his refusal to yield to his judges, but, I argue, might well undergird his murder of Ana Magdalena.

To defend his claim that Dmitri has no reason for his crime, Pippin pays particular attention not to Dmitri's proclamations, but to Simón's fear that Dmitri "*killed [Ana Magdalena] for no reason*" (SJ 193). However, this suggestion is but one in a string of hypotheses Simón advances, some of which are mutually exclusive: "*He killed her because he felt like it*" and "*He killed her to see what it was like strangling a woman*" (SJ 193). Taken together, I argue, these do not meet the criteria of "no reason," and in fact suggest manifestations of gendered violence that are elided in Pippin's analysis.

In fact, Pippin seems to vacillate about whether the murder is completely without reason (as is suggested in the comparison he draws between the murder and Bengi gravely injuring the duck at the beginning of the novel), or whether it is simply cannot be comprehended by any number of those attempting to interpret it: "there is something to explain, but it cannot be explained" (79), suggests Pippin. Pippin's reference to Cora Diamond's paper "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy" (2003) suggests that he wants to argue the latter – there *is* something to explain, but it is impossible to explain it. This is also the conclusion made by Judith Butler in *Giving an Account of Oneself*: because we are shaped by

diverse and often inscrutable social norms, it is impossible to fully explain oneself (or, it seems, one's actions).However, for Butler, the impossibility of giving such a full account, rather than a reason to avoid trying to give a reason (or an account), is precisely the constitution of ethics and thus the reason to try.

Clearly, I am not convinced that there is no reason at all for Dmitri's murder of Ana Magdalena, or, more importantly, that attempting to determine a reason is not a worthy pursuit. There not being a reason, and that reason not being easily decipherable, are two different things. Further, the difficulty or impossibility of deciphering that reason is not a reason not to try: to refuse to try, in Butler's thinking, might imply a rejection of ethics. An unwillingness to give an account of oneself, including proffering reasons for one's actions, suggests an unwillingness to interrogate the norms by which one is conditioned – and so risk dispossession, the foundational experience of ethical responsibility.

As I have suggested, an interrogation of their harmful treatment of women, stemming from concerning (if also normalised) aesthetic beliefs, would prove ethically useful to both Dmitri and Lurie. And when it comes to intimate partner violence – for this is what occurs between Dmitri and Ana Magdalena, as jarring as it might seem to apply a real-world term to a novel with decidedly non-realist, fabular or parabolic qualities (as Pippin discusses) – to continually disavow the ability to explain Ana Magdalena's murder is irresponsible because blind to the dynamics around gendered violence (in particular) that is so evident in Coetzee's other fiction.

Not only does Pippin's claim disregard without consideration anything that Coetzee reveals about the relationship between Dmitri and Ana Magdalena as potentially related to the murder, but it disregards a globally observable and undeniably gendered dynamic present in the commission of intimate partner homicides. A 2013 World Health Organisation (WHO) publication reported that "approximately 13% of all murders, 38% of all female murders and 6% of all male murders" are committed by an intimate partner ("Global and Regional Estimates" 29). Intimate partner violence is not only a leading cause of death for women; it disproportionately affects women.

The move to emphasise Dmitri's obscure or absent reasoning for the murder is in line with the one made by those who do not consider Lurie's sex with Melanie "rape," but frame it as

an “affair” or as a mildly uncomfortable event in the course of a consensual relationship. As Graham argues of the rapes in *Disgrace*, “to relegate rape to a realm beyond discourse and imagination would be to contribute to a much wider and more problematic phenomenon of silencing” (13). Although Dmitri’s alleged rape of Ana Magdalena is unlikely, though not impossible, given the evidence of mutual desire contained in their letters, Ana Magdalena’s death is a form of intimate partner violence. To suggest that it is beyond explanation is to relegate it to the realm (“beyond discourse and imagination”) identified by Graham, and thus to preclude discussion of the very real existence of gendered violence both in the world and in Coetzee’s fiction.

Dmitri’s most concerted effort at confessing the reason for his apparently inexplicable crime comes following his first escape from the hospital, when he offers this explanation to David:

> Why did I stop her heart? I’ll tell you. We were together, she and I, when suddenly a thought came into my head – popped into my head and wouldn’t leave me. I thought: *Why not put your hands around her throat while she is, you know, in the throes of it, and give her a bit of a throttle? Show her who is master. Show her what love is really like*. (SJ 168)

Although Pippin considers this a “parody of ‘explanation’” (80) from a character who seems to be “all irony all the time” (79), Dmitri’s claim to mastery is not isolated. He assures Davíd following his hearing that he is still “master of his fate” (SJ 156) and his refusal to submit to court-ordered confession or psychiatric rehabilitation bear this out.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that these assertions come after the death of Ana Magdalena, whose love of him, by his own assertion, he cannot explain:

> If I was indeed unworthy of her, as I am sure I was, what was she doing in bed with me? The answer, Simon, is: *I truly don’t know*. What did she see in me when she had a husband a thousand times worthier of her, a husband who loved her and proved his love for her, or so she said anyhow? (SJ 220)

As his reference to Juan Sebastian makes clear, when it comes to Ana Magdalena (at least when she is alive), Dmitri is not master of his fate, or of Ana. She remains with her husband

and his children, and thus Dmitri's time with her is relegated to stolen minutes in secret locations. Perhaps this is why Dmitri plans to "run away [with her] . . . to become gypsies" (SJ 122), a plan he mentions to Davíd, who reports it to Simón. The abscondment plan as reported smacks of fantasy, or a fanciful story told to a child, especially because of the reference to "gypsies," but running away would present Dmitri with a way to be with Ana Magdalena full-time; to master her, we can imagine him saying. But what if she denied him this abscondment? It is entirely conceivable that Ana Magdalena's murder represents Dmitri's attempt to take control of the uncertainty that she is willing leave her marriage, or indeed to conquer his inability to fathom her attentions in the first place.

Giles points to another convincing rationale for the murder which is in line with Dmitri's lamentations of unworthiness and gratitude. It was a failure of gratitude, Dmitri suggests, that led to Ana Magdalena's murder: "I was grateful to Ana Magdalena until one day – *boom!* – I turned ungrateful" (SJ 220). Ingratitude, he laments, "is a terrible sin . . . perhaps the worst of the lot" (SJ 220). As Giles points out, its inverse might plausibly be accompanied by no small amount of shame: "Gratitude makes us feel beholden and weak. Ana Magdalena's otherworldly beauty makes Dmitri feel ashamed of his lack, a shame that cannot be overcome aesthetically," claims Giles, but must be dealt with physically – as such, "Dmitri's beating disfigures Ana Magdalena, lowering her to his bestial level as broken animal flesh" (99). Tragically, it also preserves her statuesque qualities: cold, unmoving, unconscious.

Dmitri's feeling of unworthiness derives at least in part from his own lack of beauty – like Lurie, he is a middle-aged man, forty-four to Lurie's fifty-two – which is nonetheless evidence of his embodiment; something denied Ana Magdalena in her elevation to the statuesque. Like Lurie, age has eclipsed whatever existed of Dmitri's youthful attractiveness, leaving him with "whiskers and a big belly and a bad knee" (SJ 117). It is revealed, through Simon's disapproving perspective, that Dmitri is greasy and unkempt, a contrast to Ana Magdalena's "perfect features, perfect skin, perfect figure, perfect bearing" which earn her the distinction of being like "*alabastra* . . . a statue that has come to life" (SJ 74, 43). Ana Magdalena's beauty prompts both erotic desire and a feeling of insecurity as Dmitri's unattractiveness is brought into harsh relief. Her statue-like qualities – "bloodless, sexless, lifeless" (SJ 74) per Simón's judgment – elevate her into the realm of the aesthetically beautiful, but deny her embodied reality. It is only in dance, and in death, with her face blue and black and her lip "drawn back in a snarl" (SJ 128) that the fleshy embodiedness

connecting her to the earthly realm is restored, all too late. This paradox is a tragedy, but it remains true to Butler's understanding of the aporia of embodiedness, inherited from Levinasian ethics, as they explain in an interview with Thomas Dumm: "Embodiment carries with it an exposure to sudden harm or illness that cannot be fully or effectively contained. If we were able to contain or neutralize that exposure, we would not be embodied [alive]. To be embodied is to be exposed to unwanted or unanticipated modes of address" (qtd. Dumm 98-99). It is also to be exposed to the demand to adhere to certain scenes of address. Confession is one of these, and in resisting it, Dmitri (and Lurie) deny the vulnerability which is central to Butler's conception of ethics – even as, paradoxically, they affirm it through their crimes against women.

That Ana Magdalena died by strangulation further emphasises the gendered dynamic present in Dmitri's crime, even as it makes his intentions ambiguous. Did he intend to kill Ana Magdalena, or did she die, as the judges suggest, the result of "*misadventure in the course of erotic play?*" (SJ 140). Erotic asphyxiation is a highly contested legal issue in many Western countries and has become prominently debated following a number of high-profile cases in which the "rough sex defence" was used by a male defendant in order to avoid a murder conviction. In Coetzee's adopted nation of Australia between 2010 and 2018, asphyxiation by suffocation or strangulation was the second most common cause of death for women killed by a male intimate partner ("Australian Domestic and Family Violence" 29). Research shows that strangulation is highly gendered, that perpetrators of this kind of violence often rely on the "blurry" concept of consent, as it is often perceived, to justify its use, and that after a partner has been strangled once, they are at a heightened risk of serious harm or fatality by strangulation in the future. Further, there is overlap between the increasingly widespread use of strangulation during the sexual act and the viewing of pornography, as Susan Edwards affirms:

> Male violence against women and the ubiquity of grabbing a partner's neck must always be very carefully scrutinised. As to the question of erotic asphyxia there is no evidence that it heightens women's sexual libido but there is evidence that men routinely use strangulation as a method of assault, that it is a trope and a reality in pornography, that women die in the course of it and that it is part of . . . misogyny narratives.

Suggestive parallels between pornography and sexual violence are present in *The Schooldays of Jesus*: Dmitri possesses pornographic imagery that he is all too happy to show to Davíd and his young (and presumably male) friends. This is not Coetzee's "[serious]" (73) pornography," as theorised in "The Harms of Pornography," but a signifier of Dmitri's attitudes towards women, as the photographs Simón uncovers show: "the first picture is of a blonde woman with garishly red lips sitting naked on a sofa with her legs apart, gripping her rather large breasts and thrusting them forward. . . .There are another half-dozen pictures of the same kind" (SJ 159). As I have discussed elsewhere,[11] Coetzee is critical of Catharine MacKinnon's call for the wholesale "delegitimization" of pornography which he argues is "totalizing in its ambition" ("The Harms of Pornography" 72). His portrayal of Dmitri nevertheless suggests a concern for the representation of women in pornography and the expectation of submission and acquiescence of a female sexual partner ("The Harms of Pornography" 72). In this light, Dmitri's claims to "mastery" are far from parodic – and Coetzee invites his readers to recognise this – just as his crime is not totally "without reason" and thus beyond explanation. It accords with real-world violence against real female bodies.

The Problem of the Other

Understanding *Othello* as an intertext in *The Schooldays of Jesus* brings into sharper relief the references to Ana Magdalena being like a marble statue. It also augments the implication of (female) submission inherent in the mode of killing. Othello famously asphyxiates (by smothering, not strangulation) his beloved Desdemona, who like Ana Magdalena, has statuesque qualities. Othello's rationale for this method of killing seems to be a desire to preserve this beauty and also avenge what he perceives as her betrayal:

> Yet I'll not shed her blood,
> Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
> And smooth as monumental alabaster.
> Yet she must die . . . (V,ii, 3-6)

[11] "'Lacking Members of Play': Sexual/Textual Politics in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*." *ARIEL*, forthcoming.

Stanley Cavell argues that, in preserving Desdemona's statuesque beauty, but ending her life, Othello gives her "a stone heart for her stone body" (40). Othello's actions, for Cavell, reveal "a kind of epistemological problem . . . the problem of the other" (33). As Cora Diamond expands, what Othello cannot tolerate, according to Cavell, is Desdemona's "separateness . . . 'The content of his torture is the premonition of the existence of another, hence of his own, his own as dependent, as partial" ("The Difficulty" 16). Or, in Giles's terms, Ana's separateness, signifying all that Dmitri cannot "master," leaves him feeling "beholden and weak." For Butler, this realisation that the self is not sovereign is precisely the ground for ethics:

> . . . we must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human. To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance – to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient "I" as a kind of possession. (GAA 136)

In their deferral or outright refusal of the demand for confession, Dmitri and Lurie continue to substitute others as objects to be sacrificed, rather than committing to their own self-sacrifice. This sacrifice of self accords with a *yielding* to, or being undone by, others that is necessary for ethical relationships based on mutual recognition. This refusal is manifest both in their refusal of confession and the sacrifice entailed therein, but also in more material refusals of the options offered for the atonement for their crimes. In refusing the power of the law (or its lesser, the code of conduct of the Cape Technical University), per a Girardian reading, to put an end to their violence, Dmitri's and Lurie's evasions of confession in pursuit of mastery threaten to persist interminably.

Evading Sacrifice

Dmitri, dramatically vocal in asserting his guilt (in the legal sense) for the murder of Ana Magdalena, consents at first to the imposition of punishment as his judges see fit: "I am guilty. Judge me. Sentence me. Come down on me with the full weight of the law. I will not murmur, I promise" (SJ 146). However, he later escapes from the psychiatric ward to which

he is sentenced, deeming psychiatric care an ill-fitting punishment, and decides instead to serve his term in the salt mines, originally proposed as the alternative to his institutionalisation. In a rushed meeting with Simón and Davíd in the post-hearing hubbub, he pledges: "'No, it's not the salt mines for me, it's the madhouse. But I will escape, never fear. I'll escape and catch the first bus to the salt mines. I'll say, *Dmitri here, reporting for duty, sir*. They won't dare to refuse me. So don't worry, young man. Dmitri is still master of his fate'" (SJ 156). Dmitri's assertion that he is "still master of his fate" indicates his refusal to submit, to give himself up to the authority of his judges and to the wider community awaiting his confession. In fact, he declines the judges' authority altogether, substituting Davíd as overseer of his punishment.

This pursuit of mastery is confirmed when Dmitri reveals that it is not the appropriateness of the hard manual labour he will undergo at the salt mines that draws him to them, nor the biblically-endorsed purifying properties of salt itself, but the prospect of living his life on his own terms, as he tells David and Simon on his first escape from the hospital: "It's worse than the salt mines, being in the mad ward! Just getting through twenty-four hours is like wading through mud. Tick tock tick tock. I can't wait to start living again" (SJ 170). Thus, despite his assurance that "the salt mines will cure me for good of my badness, my rages and my murderousness" (SJ 172), Dmitri's chief objective is seemingly not his own purification or atonement for his crime, but freedom from the institutions of mental health and law. This appears to be confirmed when he again escapes the hospital, visits Simon, and pledges that he will "consign [him]self to the salt mines": "that is my decision, my final decision" (SJ 217).

More than Lurie, Dmitri acknowledges the link between giving an account of oneself and the ontological value of being recognised by others. After pledging to escape the psychiatric ward to which he is sentenced, he ostensibly opens up to Simón, whom he designates as one of "only two men of intellect in this benighted town" (SJ 218). In so doing, he admits, ""If I don't talk, if I don't explain myself, who am I? An ox. A nobody. Maybe a psychopath. Maybe. But certainly a nothing, a zero, with no place in the world" (SJ 218). Echoing Foucault's diagnosis of those in the West as "confessing animal[s]" (HOS 59), Dmitri continues: "I want to be human, and to be human is to be a speaking animal. That is why I am telling you [Simón] these things: so that I can be human again, hear a human voice issuing from this breast of mine" (SJ 219). However, Dmitri's revelation of truth, which brings him nearly to tears – he opens up to Simón about his sense of the "cosmological" (SJ 219) error of

his ugliness as against Ana Magdalena's beauty, and his eventual ingratitude leading to her death – turns out to be simply a way to convince Simón to provide him with food, clothing, and a bed for the night. Dmitri finds thus value in confession (or rather a cheapened substitute) not for ethical reasons, but for its ability to gain him food and shelter: like the Magistrate of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, he learns the value of "sing[ing] for [his] keep" (WB 139).

Dmitri initiates the scene of confession several times at the end of the novel, mirroring De Man's discussion of Rousseau's desire for exposure in his *Confessions*. As I have already asserted, De Man famously claims that "[w]hat Rousseau *really* wanted"

> is neither the ribbon [he stole] nor Marion [the girl he loved], but the public scene of exposure which he actually gets. . . . The more crime there is, the more theft, lie, slander, and stubborn persistence in each of them, the better. The more there is to expose, the more there is to be ashamed of; the more resistance to exposure, the more satisfying the scene, and, especially, the more satisfying and eloquent the belated revelation . . . of the inability to reveal. (285)

The scene of exposure, for Dmitri, becomes a kind of currency which he tries unsuccessfully to trade for his freedom. After promising Simón that he will never bother him again, Dmitri ambushes Simón and Davíd in the street complaining of "something pressing on [his] mind, namely repentance" (SJ 240). He needs Simón's help to repent, he claims, and admits that he has not yet presented himself at the salt mines, that "place of penitence" (SJ 240) as he promised he would do. Denied the opportunity to repent to Simón and Davíd, he crashes a debate between Juan Sebastián Arroyo and Javier Moreno just as the latter responds to a question about the place of mercy in the law, suggesting that "The offender owes a debt to society. Forgiveness of his debt must be earned by a labour of contrition" (SJ 247). Dmitri, mounting the stage, begs for Arroyo's forgiveness before turning to the audience and declaring his demand once more: "'Yes, I beg this man's forgiveness'" (SJ 247). Dmitri proclaims that he "has no shame, he is beyond shame" (SJ 248) before admitting to Arroyo that "never will I be free until the burden of guilt is lifted from my shoulders" (SJ 248). He does not trust the law to do this, he says, because "[t]he law takes no reckoning of the state of a man's soul. All it does is make up an equation, fit a sentence to a crime" (SJ 248). No

court-ordained punishment, Dmitri declares, could make up for his murder of Ana Magdalena. Thus, he addresses his demand to Arroyo:

> 'I am guilty, Juan Sebastián. You know it and I know it. I have never pretended otherwise. I am guilty and in great need of your forgiveness. Only when I have your forgiveness will I be healed. Lay your hand on my head. Say, *Dmitri, you did me a terrible wrong, but I forgive you.* Say it.' (SJ 248)

Met only with Arroyo's disgusted expression, Dmitri continues,

> 'What I did was bad, Juan Sebastián. I don't deny it and don't want it to be forgotten. Let it always be remembered that Dmitri did a bad thing, a terrible thing. But surely that doesn't mean that I should be damned and cast into the outer darkness. Surely I can have a little grace extended to me. Surely someone can say, *Dmitri? I remember Dmitri. He did a bad thing but at heart he wasn't a bad fellow, old Dmitri.* That will be enough for me – that one drop of saving water. Not to absolve me, just to recognize me as a man, to say *He is still ours, he is still one of us*. . . It is only you, Juan Sebastián, who can draw me up from the deep well of my misery, because you are the one I wronged.' (SJ 249)

Although Dmitri's lengthy soliloquy suggests he feels beholden to Arroyo, it eventually demonstrates little promise as he simply repeats the use of a deep, humiliating utterance as currency for demanding what he actually wants. Further, Dmitri's demand that he be forgiven, his self-inflicted exposure before the crowd of attendees at the debate, ends simply with what de Man calls, in reference to Rousseau, a "belated revelation . . . of the inability to reveal" (285). Thus despite his stated desire to remain part of his community ("'*He is still ours, he is still one of us*'"), Dmitri leaves no room to be 'read' by the audience, claiming to state conclusively both what is wrong with him and how his journey to forgiveness should proceed. Not, it seems, with any openness to the wishes of the community itself, but with only a demand for forgiveness at the (literal) hands of Arroyo. Thus, despite his acknowledgement that giving an account of himself might enable a scene of recognition, such an ethical scene is foreclosed by Dmitri's inability to give up his mastery, that is, "to vacate the self-sufficient 'I' as a kind of possession" (Butler, GAA 136).

Ethically Promising Sacrifice?

Both Graham and Herrick read David Lurie's "giving up" of Driepoot not as an ethically promising relinquishing of his own desire for companionship with the dog in favour of the dog's own comfort, but as a continuation of the selfishness that characterised his sacrifice of Melanie. We should not trust wholeheartedly the sense of ascetism that characterises David Lurie's life at the end of the novel, Herrick argues, naming the loss of his job, his apartment, his fatherly relationship to his daughter. Driepoot, too, is sacrificed in the name of Lurie's own "idea of the world" (*D* 90). Graham writes,

> It is important to stress . . . that Lurie's work in the service of dead dogs is not redemptive in itself, and that the sentimentality of his gesture should be mistrusted. His care for dead dogs is ineffectual, even self-indulgent, as he is possibly the only one who benefits from his fussiness about the treatment of dog corpses. His care for the dogs could be seen as his own attempt to recover redemption, or the grace that he feels he has lost. In other words, one could read Lurie's care as further evidence of the selfish nature of a human being. (11)

For Herrick, this selfishness is typified by David Lurie's possessive language: despite his acknowledgement that the dog "is not his in any sense; he has been careful not to give it a name" (D 215), his final pronouncement suggests his possession (thus mastery) of the dog: "Yes, I am giving him up" (D 220). I would add, too, that Driepoot's death does not occur because the dog is in pain (though he drags one ineffective limb behind him when he walks), or because he is evidently near the end of his natural life, but because "no visitor has shown any interest in adopting it. Its period of grace is almost over" (D 215). The dog's death is thus not brought about in the name of an ethics of care, in order to alleviate its pain, but to make space for the steady procession of ownerless dogs who walk into – but not out of – Bev Shaw's clinic. There are plenty – too many – dogs to go around, an inversion of the problem of a shortage of *things* facing South Africa, as Lurie identifies it, generally: "Not enough to go around, not enough cars, shoes, cigarettes. Too many people, too few things" (D 98).

It seems far from obvious that Driepoot could not be extended some grace by Lurie, the human figure it is suggested Driepoot would "die for" (D 215). This refusal, inherent in the giving up of Driepoot, and Lurie's refusal to mobilise his fondness for the dog into naming it,

are markers of his resistance to sacrifice his own current or future discomfort in favour of an easier option. Just as he would prefer to be shot for his transgressions against Melanie, Lurie again uses death as a way to avoid meaningful encounters with other beings.

Even though they acknowledge the sacrifice of Driepoot as more ethically promising than Herrick and Graham, Chris Danta's and David Attwell's readings of the novel's final scene might also be subject to the same logic. If Driepoot's death is one measure by which Lurie comes to terms with his own finitude, the dog is still sacrificed by Lurie for his own benefit. "In putting the dog to death," Danta writes, "Lurie becomes aware that he too experiences the disgrace of dying, that the corpse he so consigns to the grave is in some sense his own" (184). And yet, this is not the first time Lurie has suggested a preference for death – as I have noted, he, albeit perhaps jocosely, mentions that he would rather be shot than undergo counselling. Coetzee, Attwell notes, had Lurie consider or commit suicide in several draft manuscripts of *Disgrace*, and thus:

> The novel's final scene, in which David puts down the dog he has befriended, is a residue and displacement of his own suicide, a self-sacrificial gesture in keeping with the self-destructive tendency that was present all along in his surrendering to Eros and the erotic fire ignited by Melanie, but that has now become more dire. (*Life of Writing* 207)

However, I argue, what Attwell manages to make sound faintly heroic is in fact a refusal to self-sacrifice in the terms suggested by Butler: to allow himself to be dispossessed. Read in this way, it is a refusal to engage with, to be open to, others on terms other than his own: to be undone or dispossessed by them. Put another way, he will not sacrifice his own will or interests in situations where another being stands to be harmed by his actions (to sacrifice *for*, in Halbertal's distinction), particularly where that sacrifice might augment, even if in an always incomplete way, his self-knowledge.

Critique

It is important to stress that, though endorsing Butler's vision in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, I am not suggesting that confession is a net good, or that it is purely helpful to the confessant. Nor do I wish to deny its enmeshment in the knowledge-power nexus exposed in Foucault's work. Confession might very well constitute an appropriate target of Foucauldian

critique of institutionalised power. For Foucault, critique is "the art of voluntary insubordination" (WIC 47), through which one endeavours to discover "how not to be governed *like that*, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them" (WIC 44). These are all seemingly valid concerns raised by the recalcitrance of Dmitri and Lurie to their respective interlocutors. And the near-insidious role of confession in society as Foucault assesses it seems to merit such resistance. Krystof Dolezal emphasises the means by which one is turned into an object of rational, scientific knowledge, and through this guided to submit to the rules of a governing authority, according to Foucault's genealogy of confession:

> The appropriate confessional act [much like the Panopticon] incites subjects to establish the possibility of self-interpretation and self-control while learning the rules of subordination. The authority collects subjective enunciations and subsequently governs them through hermeneutical intervention and independent interpretation, deciphering and formulating the complete truth about the subject. (13)

Critique is envisioned as a creative counter to this operation of power over the subject; it is the way in which the subject re-negotiates the way in which they are constituted, or subjugated, by governmentality, Foucault argues:

> And if governmentalization is indeed this movement through which individuals are subjugated in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to a truth, well, then! I will say that critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth. (WIC 47)

The *demand* to confess might inflict a sort of violence on a confessant, and as such it is no surprise that one might want to resist a solicited confession: as much is suggested by Girard in his analysis of the violence inhering in judicial systems. Indeed, in *Troubling Confessions* Peter Brooks demonstrates the sort of violence that goes into extracting confessions – the phrase itself conjures viscerally the violence it entails, as if one brandishes a scalpel in the pursuit, and takes something from the body of a confessant – in the American judicial system. Beyond physical violence, there is what Butler, following Adorno, terms "ethical violence" (GAA 6). For all the ethical import giving an account of oneself carries, Butler is willing to

acknowledge that the *imperative* to confess might inflict a kind of violence on the confessant. This potential for violence does not, for Butler, deny the importance of a scene of address in which one gives an account, although it does suggest the importance of realising the inevitability of one's inability to give a comprehensive account of oneself: "Suspending the demand for self-identity or, more particularly, for complete coherence seems to me to counter a certain ethical violence, which demands that we manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require that others do the same" (GAA 42).

Nonetheless, there is also a sense in which the inducement to confess, in certain situations (excluding, of course, the real violence and torture which sometimes accompany this inducement) might counter the violence enacted by the commitment to mastery shown by Dmitri and Lurie. "If violence is the act by which a subject seeks to reinstall mastery and unity," Butler writes, "then nonviolence may well follow from the persistent challenge to egoic mastery that our obligations to others induce and require" (GAA 64). Butler's ethics rests on the failure to offer a complete account of oneself, a failure which abrades one's sense of complete mastery and in turn enmeshes one in an experience of dispossession which invites recognition of the vulnerability we share with others. Denying the challenge to "egoic mastery" is thus to deny the ethical potential of dispossession:

> When we claim to know and to present ourselves, we will fail in some ways that are nevertheless essential to who we are. We cannot reasonably expect anything different from others in return. To acknowledge one's own opacity or that of another does not transform opacity into transparency. To know the limits of acknowledgement is to know even this fact in a limited way; as a result, it is to experience the very limits of knowing. This can, by the way, constitute a disposition of humility and generosity alike: I will need to be forgiven for what I cannot have fully known, and I will be under a similar obligation to offer forgiveness to others, who are also constituted in opacity to themselves. (GAA 42)

Critique is implicated in ethics, for Butler, through the parallel they find between Foucauldian "desubjugation" and their own concept of "dispossession," or being "undone." Foucault notes that "[c]ritique would essentially insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth" (WIC 47). By calling into question the norms through which one is interpellated, one must also question oneself. Butler

elaborates: “Critique is not merely *of* a given social practice or a certain horizon of intelligibility within which practices and institutions appear, it also implies that I come into question for myself” (GAA 23). Thus, Butler writes, “[s]elf-questioning becomes an ethical consequence of critique for Foucault” (GAA 23).

Thus in Butler’s *Giving an Account of Oneself,* paradoxically, where critique concerns confession, the two are far from diametrically opposed. After all, critique is bound up with the task of giving an account. “[W]hen the ‘I’ seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence,” writes Butler, “it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist” (GAA 8). Through Butler’s expansion on the ethical value of giving an account, Foucault’s postulation that “[t]here is something in critique which is akin to virtue” (WIC 43) becomes clearer.

If what Dmitri and Lurie are attempting to perform is a critique of the institutional demand for confession, it seems uncontroversial to say that is an unsuccessful critique, one that avoids the self-questioning integral to Butler’s giving an account, a practice which is itself a variety of critique – indeed, one more virtuous, and more ethically promising, than Lurie’s and Dmitri’s. There is something to be said for the effect of the men’s insubordination, as the “power-knowledge network dries up” to an extent, without the “endless confessional enunciations [that] facilitate power irrigation” (Dolezal 13). Dmitri is allowed, in a sense, to float through Estrella on his own terms, reappearing in *The Death of Jesus,* the final novel in Coetzee’s trilogy, free from the institution to which he has been sentenced (and free from the salt mines to which he has claimed to sentence himself). Lurie, not dissimilarly, takes up an uncertain exile in the Eastern Cape, showing signs of possession in its various manifestations: possession of Driepoot as signalled by Herrick, and possession of the (“full”) confession he resists giving to the committee of inquiry. Neither man interrogates the extent to which his own ideology reinforces a particular power dynamic with regard to women; neither, apparently, is willing to sacrifice such a view. If the men are able to escape the institutional demand for confession through an insubordination akin to critique, then, it is unclear that they have achieved something of ethical significance in so doing.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how a refusal of confession might amount to a refusal of ethical responsibility, and how ethical responsibility might be fostered through, in Butler's terms, "giving an account of oneself," a practice akin to confession. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler goes some way in minimising Foucault's concern, in "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Subject" and elsewhere, that there can be "no truth of the self without a sacrifice of the self" (ABHS 222).

Coetzee's resistance to such an implication is suggested by the parallels between *Disgrace* and *The Schooldays of Jesus* and the South African TRC, a national confessional project about which he has registered serious misgivings. His misgivings, about both the TRC and the operation of confession more generally, find manifestation in the legal and quasi-legal settings of the two novels, in which the recalcitrance of those asked to confess casts aspersions about the exercise of power over a subject. Although the dramatic nature of Lurie and Dmitri's (limited) confessions suggest that there is an inherently theatrical (and thus somehow insincere) aspect to confession, I find that when confession is understood as a performative speech act which must meet certain conditions, insincerely playing the role of the guilty party is insufficient. Transformation, which entails a sacrifice of the erring parts of one's character, is key to the kind of confession demanded of these men– and, indeed, to better conduct.

Nevertheless, the operation of the kind of unfettered self-examination that would initiate this kind of transformation is interrupted, I have argued, by the men's sense that they are being sacrificed against their will to the operation of a sinister "judicial machine" as Foucault characterises it. While I credit that there is validity in an interrogation of the demand to confess, and specifically the form it takes in real-world contexts, I have argued that the men perform an unsuccessful critique of this demand, for such a demand would entail self-examination of a kind that is not carried out by either. Their critique of confession I find remiss on the basis that it does not actually, in any meaningful sense, enact a searching critique of the demand for confession, but is merely emblematic of their own denial of others' vulnerability and embodiedness. This is clearly manifest in the crimes they commit against women, initiating the demand for confession in the first place.

This refusal to recognise that others may be harmed in the pursuit of self-mastery – bruised, throttled, thrust upon and into with the penis-knife – I have argued by way of Butler, is a denial of ethics. In the first instance, this is because it signals an egocentric disregard for the concerns, desires, and bodies of others who are vulnerable to violence, one's own or that of another. Relatedly, and key to the foundation of ethical responsibility, it signals the men's inability to be moved, undone, and dispossessed by others. Instead, it upholds an ideal of a hermetic self-sufficiency that has no need of networks of relation and dependency – against, Butler argues, the reality that we are all implicated in such networks which precede and exceed us (and which inevitably preclude a comprehensive account of oneself). It is the dispossession arising from this realisation that is the basis for ethical responsibility in Butler's thinking.

Thus, I have argued that confession, more than merely a transactional act used to gain favour or advantages by way of a performance on the part of an insincere perpetrator and, on the other hand, more than merely an exercise of power over and extraction from (in all senses) an individual, might be able to initiate and enact self-examination and transformation. Such an examination and transformation, I have argued, willingly undertaken, is a ground for ethics. This potential hinges on the inevitable failure of secular confession, and the consequent likelihood of one's becoming dispossessed or undone in the telling of one's account, or, as Butler phrases it, "I become dispossessed in the telling, and in that dispossession an ethical claim takes hold" (GAA 132). This ethical potential is stunted by Dmitri and Lurie's insistence on mastery, which sees them sacrifice the interests – and, in the case of Dmitri, the life – of others.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have grappled with an enduring tension in J.M. Coetzee's writing: that between the impulse to confess on the part of certain protagonists (and possibly the author), and the pull to ethics figured as responsibility to and relationship with others that involves a necessary abdication of self-sovereignty. Despite his repeated return to the experience and ethical value of being impinged upon by the other, and his repeated use of flawed male characters who frequently abuse women (and racial others), there appears to be no place in his oeuvre for confession as a potentially ethical encounter between self and other.
In his 1985 essay "Confession and Double Thoughts", Coetzee expresses doubt about the potential of secular confession to provide the confessant with anything approaching absolution or relief given the absence or unavailability of "faith and grace" (CDT 291). Without these, Coetzee suggests, secular confession comprises only a "sterile monologue of the self" (CDT 291). This concern is borne out by the Magistrate's sense, at the end of *Waiting for the Barbarians,* that his confessional outpouring has failed to reveal anything and that, as such, he is "press[ing] on along a road that may lead nowhere" (WB 170). On the contrary, I have suggested that secular confession gains important weight precisely because of its susceptibility to failure in the absence of any absolvitory authority.

Coetzee's concerns about confession, conveyed both through his critical work and his fiction, share common ground with Foucault's work on confession: namely, the concern that confession encourages a harmful relationship of the self to itself, and contributes to the propping up of a power-knowledge network perpetuated particularly by institutions who demand self-revelation as a matter of course in the process of disciplining or diagnosing individuals. It is my contention, however, that a generalised distaste for confession might well promote a sense of individualism that is at odds with the cultivation of more ethical behaviour towards others (where ethical behaviour is understood as responsive, responsible and relational). This much is suggested in *Disgrace* and *The Schooldays of Jesus*, in which, I have argued, the protagonists' pursuit of mastery at all costs (which manifests as a refusal to offer their confessional self-narrative up to others) might well negate the grounds for ethical responsibility.

Like Coetzee and other thinkers who consider secular confession, Judith Butler proceeds from the inevitable failure of a confession given without hope of divine absolution. They

share much with Foucault in their assertion that, because of the diverse and intractable origins of a subject (subjectivation), what Francis R. Hart refers to as "the truth . . . of the self" (491) is inaccessible; but unlike Foucault, Butler does not dismiss confession in its modern form as necessarily, or only, harmful to the subject. The phrase Butler uses to denote confession is "to give an account of oneself" – that is, not just to tell one's story, but to assert one's *accountability* for one's behaviour and actions; to acknowledge oneself as *accountable*. Although an account of oneself is likely to fail because necessarily incomplete, argues Butler, the fact that it leads one "to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me [for the norms involved in subjectivation are not of, or only of, the subject], but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient 'I' as a kind of possession" (GAA 136) means that it constitutes the very ground for ethical responsibility. The fracturing, dispossessing experience of giving an account to another, challenging as it does the idea(l) of a sovereign subject, may be intolerable to Foucault, but is generative and foundational for Butler. If confession involves a "double thought," or a "doubling back of thought" (CDT 282), as Coetzee claims, then, it might well constitute an acceptance both of the account's failure, and of its ongoing value.

It follows, I argue, that, notwithstanding instances of torture or violence, the refusal to confess might well constitute a denial of ethical responsibility rather than a heroic attempt to resist sacrifice. This is the case in *Disgrace* and *The Schooldays of Jesus*, where Lurie and Dmitri refuse any and all behests that they provide a confession for their respective crimes. To be sure, they "confess" in the sense of admitting guilt, but resist confessing as "giving an account" of themselves – explaining or sharing their inner desires and motivations. Their recalcitrance manifests not only as a disregard for the vulnerability and injurability of others, but as a refusal to be moved by others. It reaches a peak when each man calls for his own death, indicating a preference for abdicating earthly (embodied, injurable) life over giving an account of oneself to others, and thus affirming a shared relationality. It is possible to understand this behaviour as perpetuating a harmful sacrificial logic shared by Dmitri and Lurie, one that upholds self-mastery at all costs, and would, like Abraham, sacrifice relationships with (embodied) others in favour of (or *to*, in Halbertal's distinction) a transcendent ideal.

In claiming that secular confession is not only bound inevitably to fail, but that this failure is precisely the source of its ethical potential for the confessant, I have moved away from

Coetzee's focus, in "Confession and Double Thoughts," on absolution as the "indispensable goal of confession, sacramental or secular" (CDT 252). Absolution, Coetzee argues, "means the end of the episode, the closing of the chapter, liberation from the oppression of the memory" (CDT 251-252) and can only be brought about by "tell[ing] the truth *to and for oneself*" (CDT 291; my emphasis). While the truth of the self ostensibly remains the (always already unattainable) goal of confession, confession's ethical import comes not from the possibility or promise of absolution, but from ongoing commitment to one's connection with other embodied beings through the recognition of shared vulnerability. This may well be the opposite of absolution, which, as "the end of the episode, the closing of the chapter" (CDT 251-252) could imply a release from earthly obligation.

Lucy Lurie's retort to her father, "This is the only life there is. Which we share with animals" (D 74), provides a concise summation of the ethical vision uniting the work of Butler and Martin Hägglund.[12] In the "[p]ost-Christian" (D 32) world of these novels, secular confession is the only variety of confession available, and this has significant consequences for those faced with the task of giving an account of themselves. The idea of "closing . . . the chapter" (CDT 252) is ultimately discordant with the kind of commitment needed to maintain the lived relationality Lucy avers. Hägglund upholds finitude, the defining feature of secular faith, as integral to responsibility for others. For Hägglund, "To have secular faith is to be devoted to a life that will end, to be dedicated to projects that can fail or break down" (5-6). Further, he declares, "secular faith – my ability to hope for the future – relies on others who recognize me, as well as on my own ability to recognize myself" (140), despite changes to that self through time. Such recognition is integral to the scene of address in which one attempts to give an account of oneself, in Butler's thinking. And to commit to an account of oneself, Hägglund argues, in terms recalling Butler's, is to affirm one's imbrication in a shared world, the basis of one's ethical responsibility, as well as one's fragility:

> To have a life-defining commitment is to acknowledge that I am not self-sufficient but essentially a relational being. My identity is not given but relies on forms of recognition that must be upheld or transformed and that remain fragile at their core. My life-defining commitments give me a world and an identity, but they also

[12] Lucy's statement refers specifically to nonhuman animals, but I take it here to extend to all animals, human and nonhuman.

> underline my finitude and the risk that my world can break down. . . . My very life is at stake in my finite relations. (Hägglund 141)

Confession in Coetzee's work poses a constant challenge to mastery and unity, perhaps not just for the confessing characters, but also for the author, whose body of work reveals an enduring uncertainty towards confession's harms and, perhaps more indirectly (as I have indicated through my own reading), its ethical valences. Although he is sceptical about its efficacy for the confessant in the fiction of others – namely Rousseau, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky (in "Confession and Double Thoughts") – Coetzee returns to the confession again and again in his own body of work: in *Dusklands,* Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee divulge their horrible transgressions; *In the Heart of the Country*, Magda confesses troubling murderous fantasies; in *Foe,* Susan confesses to her desire to master not only Friday but assert herself by appropriating Foe's "pen"; in *Age of Iron*, Mrs Curren attempts to commit to paper an account of herself to her estranged daughter; and in the autobiographical trilogy comprising *Boyhood*, *Youth*, and *Summertime,* Coetzee makes his own confessions (or invites readers to think he does). Despite this prolonged engagement with the form, over a period of nearly fifty years, the 'truth' of confession is repeatedly undermined and challenged in Coetzee's work. I have suggested this through my analysis of the various confessions (self-motivated and solicited; meandering and stunted) in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Disgrace* and *The Schooldays of Jesus*.

Perhaps, then, Coetzee's continued preoccupation with confession might be considered a sort of confession itself. In returning to it constantly, Coetzee signals the difficulty of fully working through its complex machinations. [13] As I have argued, however, confession need not be a hermetic exercise: in fact, it is intrinsically relational and performative, capable of affirming the sustaining (and sometimes threatening) web of relationships with others within which we live. Thus, I would venture, this continuing engagement with confession, and all the sacrifices and ethical potentialities it entails, signals Coetzee's refusal to say of these (real and fictional) others, who possess the potential to harm, beguile, and dispossess, but also to recognise one in one's finitude:

"Yes, I am giving [them] up."

[13] I am grateful to Dr Kim Worthington for this incisive observation.

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