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IMAGINING JUSTICE: THE POLITICS OF POSTCOLONIAL FORGIVNESS AND RECONCILIATION

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

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IMAGINING JUSTICE

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (2004) McMaster University
(English) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Imagining Justice: The Politics of Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Postcolonial Literature

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NUMBER OF PAGES: xi, 154

ABSTRACT

Possibly owing to a spirit of millenarianism, discourses of forgiveness and reconciliation have emerged as powerful scripts of interracial and interethnic negotiation in states struggling with the legacies of colonialism. This study examines the representation and production of these discourses in contemporary fiction by J.M. Coetzee, Joy Kogawa, David Malouf, and Michael Ondaatje. It argues that although they disconcert or stupefy critics situated in postmodern contexts, the rhetoric and rituals that structure reconciliation processes may be crucial to a departure from colonialist and racist relations, and to the commencement of a more democratic future. Using a postcolonial methodology, *Imagining Justice* challenges assumptions that discourses of forgiveness and reconciliation necessarily entail a rush to closure, repression of memory, or recuperation by power. Ultimately it suggests that if the prerogative of oppressed groups to devise their terms is conceded, forgiveness and reconciliation may render radical revision to prevailing systems of violence and injustice imaginable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout the writing of this thesis, I have benefited from the support of many institutions and people. I have had the good fortune to have had truly *committed* committee members—people whose belief in this project and engagement with its ideas helped to sustain my interest and motivate me to write even when my inclination was otherwise. I wish first to thank my supervisor, Susie O'Brien, for shepharding the manuscript through its final stages, and for offering valuable suggestions and good advice when I needed them most. Daniel Coleman has long expressed interest in and excitement about this project, without perhaps knowing how much his enthusiasm has meant to me. His critical acumen, intellectual vibrancy, and ethical commitment have have set standards of academic engagement to which I hope to always aspire. Donald Goellnicht has pushed me to ask the difficult questions, as well as to practice the art of listening and an ethics of inclusion. I am deeply grateful.

The English Department at McMaster University has provided a wonderfully supportive environment, both morally and financially, in which to carry out my research.
In it, I have discovered an invaluable community of ideas, like-minded scholars, and friendship. The administrative staff, particularly Ilona Forgo-Smith and Antoinette Somo, has provided indispensable help on to many matters to list here. I am also deeply indebted to the Institute of Globalization and the Human Condition at McMaster for providing a research fellowship that enabled me to devote more time to this thesis than would otherwise have been possible. In addition to financial support, the Institute has provided a vibrant interdisciplinary community of young scholars, many of whom have contributed to this project by offering new perspectives and fresh ideas. I am especially thankful to the members of the Graduate Student Research Group for correspondence and conversations that have enriched my research in many ways. The Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (CACLALS) has provided a rich space of intellectual support for my work, as well as a meeting ground where new friends, colleagues, and critics were discovered. In particular, I would like to thank the participants of the 2002 session on "The Politics of Reconciliation" for pushing my own thinking on reconciliation in new directions.

Without the financial aid provided by SSHRC in the form of a doctoral scholarship this project may well not have been undertaken. As well, the travel scholarships provided by the McMaster GSA allowed me to travel to Halifax and Winnipeg to present parts of this thesis at conferences. Finally, the scholarship provided by the Edna Elizabeth Ross Reeves' family allowed me to undertake research on the Stolen Generations at the Australian National Library and Queensland University Library. For all of this help, I am thankful. I would particularly like to thank the library staff at ANL and Queensland, as well as the Interlending staff at Mills Library here at McMaster, for being so eager to assist.

It is always a pleasure to discover colleagues struggling with similar intellectual and ethical battles as oneself, and in the course of writing this thesis I have benefited enormously from conversations with others engaged in thinking about reconciliation. In particular, I would like to thank Ravi de Costa, Rosemary Jolly, Susan Spearey, and Gillian Whitlock for offering resources, ideas, questions, and critique. I am also thankful to David Jefferess, for thinking with me about reconciliation, and to Sabine Milz, for delightful company and conversation. For the interest that they have always shown in my work, and for their intellectual and personal support, I thank Teresa Hubel and Andrew Stracuzzi.

This thesis was written during a time in my family life that made me rediscover the significance of the community of love and affection that my loved ones provide me. My parents, Bert and Sharon McGonegal, have been there for me at all times, and have offered me a refuge from storms of various kinds. My siblings (there are too many of you to list here!) have been my closest and most cherished friends, and I thank them for allowing me to make all kinds of claims on them. My daughter Breanna, who came into the world mid-way through this project, has blessed my life with the joy and radiance that newness brings into the world, and must be credited with teaching me, finally, of the value of a life committed to caring for an other. Most of all, I wish to thank Peter McDonald, for nurturing me with good food and a loving environment, and for listening patiently when I was at my most doubtful and most obsessed.

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PREFACE

Possibly owing to a spirit of millenarianism, the rhetoric of forgiveness and reconciliation has recently come to constitute a distinguishing feature of national and international politics, with policy makers and political leaders virtually the world over pledging to redress the injuries suffered by victims of racist, colonialist, and sexist violence. Political essays and speeches represent a privileged cultural site where this rhetoric may be read, and it is by examining one particular specimen of this public and judicial discourse that I wish to preface my discussion. The establishment of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1995 as part of the negotiations leading to the official end of apartheid has prompted a rash of political statements and declarations that foreground the way in which forgiveness and reconciliation constitute a discursive field – that is, a field of significations, figures, social practices, and economic power.[1] In a speech written for the occasion of the first parliamentary debate on reconciliation, President Thabo Mbeki poses the rhetorical question of whether the everyday activities and practices of South Africans are commensurate with the country's project of national reconciliation. To this question, he responds emphatically in the negative. Essentially, Mbeki condemns the refusal of the overwhelming majority of white South Africans to address the reasons for black rage and despair, and fulminates against their resistance to the struggle for social and economic transformation. "It comes about," he observes, "that those who were responsible for or were beneficiaries of the past absolve themselves from any obligation to help do away with an unacceptable legacy" ("South Africa, Two Nations" 27). Predicting that the TRC will not achieve its objectives so long as those who gained from apartheid remain unprepared to relinquish their privilege, he calls specific attention to the uncooperative stance assumed by South Africa's business sector: that is, to the failure of white-owned corporations to register for tax purposes, their opposition to affirmative action, and their refusal to

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[1] Intended as a compromise between Nuremburg-style trials and blanket amnesty, the TRC strives to facilitate national reconciliation by creating a public archive of human rights violations. In a series of public hearings held by the commission in various regions throughout the country, two thousand victims testified about their experiences of abuse and persecution. Perpetrators, in their turn, appeared in a bid to gain amnesty, which was granted on the provision that the applicant fully disclosed the crimes committed and demonstrated their political motivation. While truth commissions are proliferating on a global scale, the South African example is by far the most widely known and cited, both because of its compass (applications for amnesty were not restricted to political or state leaders), and because the hearings were accessible to the public and their contents widely disseminated via live telecasts, radio broadcasts, and newspaper accounts. The nature and consequences of the TRC's alternative model of justice are a focus of my final chapter.

apply for amnesty. Confronted with Mbeki's invective, one is brought face to face with the limits and problems of policies of reconciliation that are not sufficiently accompanied by a politics of material reparation and redistribution. Mbeki suggests that without dramatic revision to the circumstances of black South Africans, the calls for reconciliation that have been resounding throughout South Africa are to no avail, and in some ways, his critique is a chastening one.

In other ways, however, Mbeki's publicly staged skepticism recycles the myth that the TRC constitutes an essentially regressive institution, and in this sense risks foreclosing on the potential benefits that it affords victims of apartheid. Referring exclusively to the shortcomings of the reconciliation process, Mbeki elides, among other things, the advantages that acts of testifying and witnessing provide, and refuses to acknowledge the value of narrating trauma for producing alternative and previously discounted truths. The questions he raises, moreover, about the obstacles and limits to reconciliation take on a profound irony in light of the fact that his response to the TRC's recommendations has, on the whole, disappointed (if not insulted) those victims they were intended to vindicate. In a final report released in the early months of 2003, the TRC urged the government to make wide-scale reparations to victims, and proposed that corporations that have benefited "financially and materially from apartheid policies" contribute to the process through the imposition of a special wealth tax. Yet Mbeki, in his turn, has opted to limit reparations to mostly symbolic gestures, offering meager financial support to victims, and that only to those whose needs are considered most "urgent".[2] Succumbing to the pressure of corporate interests, he has not only rejected the TRC's calls for a corporate tax, insisting that it would jeopardize investment and destabilize the economy, but also condemned the class-action lawsuits that have been filed in the United States against multinational corporations that supported apartheid.[3]

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[2] In its final report presented on March 21, 2003, the TRC recommended that the government pay roughly U.S. $375 million in reparations. On April 15, 2003, as he addressed the TRC's report, Mbeki said he had authorized a one-time payment of approximately U.S. $74 million -- $300 million less than the sum recommended by the commission – to more than 19,000 victims whose need was characterized as "urgent" by the commission (Michael, 2).

[3] Khulmani Support Group, an apartheid victims advocacy group based in Guateng, is currently suing twenty-one corporations – among them U.S. based companies JP Morgan Chase, IBM, Caltex Petroleum, and General Motors – for their alleged support of apartheid. Having filed charges in a U.S. Federal Court in Brooklyn, New York in November 2002, the group contends that the defendants "acted with deliberate indifference to the well-being of the African population." Its case is being considered under the U.S. Alien Tort Claims Act of 1792, precisely the legislation that enabled Holocaust survivors to successfully sue those Swiss Banks and German and Austrian companies that had profited from slave

In Mbeki's renunciation of these efforts, two agendas, the reconciliation process and integration with a global capitalist market, become crossed, cast in a battle that the latter seems bound to win given the African National Congress's extraordinary (and ironic, considering its historic alliance with socialism) commitment to neo-liberal economics.

Mbeki's rhetoric thus consists of a confused mix of signals: on the one hand, it productively foregrounds the imperative of social and economic transformation, and on the other, it evinces an inability to radically reconceive South Africa's future. In coupling the language of transformation with that of reconciliation, Mbeki raises the worrisome, yet almost certain, possibility that the latter operates, at least in this case, primarily in an instrumentalist fashion, that is, as a means of aiding South Africa's entry into a global economy. Is this yet another instance, we need ask, of the vocabulary of humanism functioning as a guise for what is an essentially unethical agenda? Certainly it is difficult, given Mbeki's political stance, to ignore the fact that the language of reconciliation has gained currency and credibility in the international economy of globalization.

Mbeki returns time and again in his reflections to concepts of shared humanity, anticipating the arrival of a new future in which racial divisions are, at last, transcended. Calling on South Africans to strive to realize reconciliation, he urges them to "celebrate" the prospect of a "shared destiny of democracy" (40). Yet Mbeki blends this rhetoric of common humanity with a politics of difference, referring to South Africa as a country of "two nations," and, as I have noted, fiercely promoting (however disingenuously) practices of reparations and redistribution. Mbeki attributes this tension in his thinking to a recognition that transformation and reconciliation must exist in what he calls a "dynamic equilibrium": "[I]t would be mistaken," he insists, "to treat these objectives as though they could be separated from one another, with one capable of being secondary to the other" (42). Yet this is a tension that is by no means unique to his position: it also distinguishes other discourses of reconciliation. I shall take one instance from among very many to substantiate the connection. Recounting his experiences as chairperson of the TRC in his memoir-cum-essay *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu adopts an intimate, even solicitous tone that bears little resemblance to Mbeki's. But Tutu's polemic departs from Mbeki's in other – and more significant – ways, as well. In particular, Tutu highlights the possibilities rather than the limits of South Africa's

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labour during World War II. Also being sued, in a separate set of cases, are Anglo-American, a major mining company, and De Beers, the world's leading diamond producer. These proliferating lawsuits suggest growing disenchantment among black South Africans with the failure of corporations to seek amnesty as well as dissatisfication with the ANC's subsequent decision to acquit South Africa's business community (which unlike the government does indeed have the resources to make wide-scale reparations) for their contribution to the maintenance of apartheid rule.

reconciliation process, defending the TRC against the reproaches and incriminations of its many critics. Articulating an essentially utopian vision, he insists on the emancipatory potential of the commission, especially its capacity to empower victims, or rather, as he writes, "to rehabilitate and affirm the dignity and personhood of those who for so long had been silenced" by providing them with an occasion for "telling their stories" (30). Though his emphasis on the therapeutic possibilities of the TRC might be interpreted as a form of psychologized conservatism, Tutu challenges his readers to consider the transformative possibilities of its alternative model of justice. Invoking a theological discourse that blends traditional Christian humanism with indigenous knowledge, he emphasizes the benefits of the concept of *ubuntu* and its relevance to the form of jurisprudence practiced by the TRC, glossing the term thus: "We are bound up in a delicate network of interdependence because, as we say in an African idiom, a person is a person through other persons. To dehumanize another inexorably means that one is dehumanized as well" (35). According to Tutu, the notion of reciprocity that lies at the heart of *ubuntu* is also a model of responsibility, one that involves an ethical and political imperative to reconcile. If this is a humanism that seems to border on the philosophically naïve, it is accompanied, as it is in Mbeki's discourse (though arguably to a lesser extent), by a politics of reparation. Citing the TRC report, Tutu stipulates that, "Without adequate reparation and rehabilitation measures, there can be no healing and reconciliation, either at an individual or at a community level" (58). His placement of conditions of possibility on reconciliation points to the role of the equivocal in discursive formulations of the concept: an awareness, that is, that reconciliation processes may impart to victims a profound sense of vindication, and yet a recognition, too, that they can also reinforce relations of domination if the material gains wrought are negligible, the political impact insignificant.

Another constitutive feature of reconciliation discourse that Tutu's (as well as Mbeki's) text foregrounds is the placement of a language of common humanity side by side with a politics of redistribution. While demands for redistribution inevitably emerge out of political processes of reconciliation, the concept of redistribution itself implies an engagement with the differences introduced into universal subjectivity by racist and colonialist practices. For this reason, some have come to see the universal vision of the human that figures so prominently in the TRC as profoundly at odds with the commission's insistence on materially redressing victims of apartheid (see John Noyes, "Nature, History, and the Failure of Language," 275). While I am not sure that this differentiation is contradictory, what is more interesting is that it restages, in another form, a trademark of postcolonial theory: the field's emphasis on unity and homogeneity, on the one hand, and its celebration of difference and heterogeneity, on the other. Thus, a crucial task for a specifically *postcolonial* consideration of discourses of reconciliation and forgiveness is engaging a dialectic that accounts for this simultaneity.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing Wrongs: Postcolonial Literature and the (Im)possibility of Forgiveness and Reconciliation

> *It is not really a matter of either/or. Difference, hybridity, and mobility are not liberatory in themselves, but neither are truth, purity, and stasis. The real revolutionary practice refers to the level of production. Truth will not make us free, but taking control of the production of truth will. Mobility and hybridity are not liberatory, but taking control of the production of mobility and stasis, purities and mixtures is. The real truth commissions of Empire will be constituent assemblies of the multitude, social factories for the production of truth.*
>
> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (155-156)

I. Imaginative Interventions: Postcoloniality, Narrative, History

Discourses of forgiveness and reconciliation have emerged in the past decade as one of the most powerful scripts for interracial negotiations in states struggling with the legacies of colonialism. This study examines the representation and production of these discourses in recent postcolonial fiction. Even more than the kind of political discourse which I have sampled above, literary texts meditate on the limits and possibilities of forgiveness and reconciliation. I will be concerned with engaging the competing perspectives on forgiveness and reconciliation that literature provides, and with exploring its potential to open up new perspectives and new worlds, to imagine alternatives, in other words, to normative conceptualizations of justice. I hope to profoundly rethink the way that justice is ordinarily conceived by contemplating its representation in the work of four novelists in particular: David Malouf in *Remembering Babylon* (1993), Michael Ondaatje in *Anil's Ghost* (1999), Joy Kogawa in *Obasan* (1981) and *Itsuka* (1992), and J.M. Coetzee in *Disgrace* (1999).

First, a note on methodology. By the term "postcolonial," I mean a range of things at once. I mean not only a field of literary criticism with which this study is in dialogue, nor merely the body of literature that has emerged from the former colonies of the British empire, though my use of the term does take into account these definitions. I also mean a more or less contemporary set of social, political, and cultural conditions and preoccupations that are being constituted in the present historical moment. In this, my thesis has an important precedent in the work of Stuart Hall, who counters debates about the spatio-temporal configuration

of the concept with the intriguing suggestion that what the idea of the "postcolonial"

> *may* help us to do is to describe or characterize the shift in global relations which marks the (necessarily uneven) transition from the age of Empires to the post-independence or post-decolonisation moment. It may also help us (though here its value is more gestural) to identify what are the new relations and dispositions of power which are emerging in the new conjuncture. (246)

While several critics have taken the term "postcolonial" to task for its putative complicity with the structures of global capitalism[4], Hall detects in such arguments a nostalgic desire to recover a straightforward politics of binary oppositions. If the field of political antagonism was once easily interpretable or reassuringly stable, that, he argues, is no longer the case. If, in other words, anti-colonial struggles appeared to take on a binary structure of representation in the past, then we are witnessing an important transition to a present when they can no longer be represented in such terms. While discouraging forgetfulness about the overdetermining impact of binary forms of representation on the colonial moment – he urges the postcolonial critic to attend to sameness and difference *simultaneously* – Hall makes the convincing case that it is the breakdown of clearly demarcated categories that the "postcolonial" marks. It is precisely this breakdown – this readjustment and reconstitution of colonial and racial relations of which Hall writes – that we are glimpsing in the processes of reconciliation unfolding on a global scale. In speaking, then, of a politics of *postcolonial* forgiveness and reconciliation, I am seeking to register the displacement and decentralization of power relations that these politics enact, as well as the complex and difficult questions that they raise given their operation in an open and contingent political field. This thesis represents a concerted effort at understanding the ethical and political stakes that a politics of forgiveness and reconciliation raise, not to mention an endeavour to consider its possibilities for social transformation.

It is this wish of mine to account for the liberatory potential of forgiveness and reconciliation that my deployment of the term "postcolonial" also signifies. Of course, one could argue that a politics of forgiveness and reconciliation is prematurely celebratory in that relations of domination have by no means disappeared, as several critics have argued of the idea of the postcolonial itself. I would argue, however, for a project that recognizes that postcolonial forgiveness

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[4] Arif Dirlik, for instance, has labeled postcolonial critics "the intelligentsia of global capitalism" (Dirlik 77). See Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism*. See also, Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*; Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial."

and reconciliation do not yet exist, but that sees some value nevertheless in working to bring them about (or, rather, in creating the conditions that might bring them about). In yoking the concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation together with that of the postcolonial, then, I am opting to envision the latter, too, as an anticipatory discourse; I am taking the label "post" not to mean the final closure of a historical epoch, as if colonialism and its effects are definitely over, but rather as the name for a state which is not yet fully present. There is thus a utopian, but nevertheless critical, impulse driving my intellectual practice, which takes after Fredric Jameson's insistence on dialectical thought as "the anticipation of the logic of a collectivity which has not yet come into being" (*Political Unconscious* xi). Thus, to the extent that I consider postcolonialism a reading strategy[5], I consider it more than simply an analysis of cultural forms that consider and question colonial and neocolonial relations; I also view it as an engagement with the capacity of literature to imagine alternatives to contemporary social and political conditions.

In the context of a field of study that increasingly disavows or downplays the opportunities for imaginative engagement with social and political interests that literature affords, my intervention into postcolonial studies takes the form of reaffirming such opportunities. Such an aspiration may strike some as disconcerting, given the frequent deferral of literature to theory, and the embarrassment, among postcolonial literary critics themselves, of what remains of their disciplinary affiliation. Whereas most postcolonial readings are, as Peter Hallward has recently noted, "brief, often insubstantial, [and] sometimes simply anecdotal" (335), the readings I provide in the chapters that follow seek to engage with postcolonial fiction more fully, with a view towards acknowledging its capacity to open up possibilities for critical and imaginative engagement. In *Absolutely Postcolonial*, Hallward objects to the pervasive suspicion among postcolonial critics of the creative dimensions of literature, arguing for its potential to disrupt inherited norms and expectations through the invention of new approaches, different ways of thinking. Literary works, he contends, provide an

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[5] Several commentators have suggested that postcolonialism refers to a specific form of textual analysis. For example, Bart Moore-Gilbert in *Postcolonial Theory* puts the case for postcolonial criticism as "a more or less distinct set of reading practices ... preoccupied principally with an analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge, or reflect upon ... relations of dominance and subordination." These relations, he continues, "have their roots in the history of modern European colonialism and imperialism," but they also "continue to be apparent in the present era of neo-colonialism." While this definition is useful for establishing the broader parameters of postcolonial criticism, it is somewhat too elastic to be relevant to more particular modes of postcolonial analysis, hence my decision to offer a somewhat more narrow interpretation.

effect of distance, a sense of "detachment" from "convention-bound routine" which enables one "to step back from representation, suspend its natural flow, and pay an 'artificial' attention to *how it works*" (333). It is, in part, this capacity of literature to engage us in rigorous exercises of scrutinizing and interrogating taken-for-granted concepts that I find productive about the cultural form. Even though it does not occupy as dominant a role in the cultural consciousness as it once did, literature remains an important site where it is possible to examine social and political realities, as well as a significant place for locating some utopian potential.

If it is too hasty and too dangerous, however, to foreclose on the possibilities of literary texts, to idealize literature as radically autonomous or unequivocally empowering is also, of course, to exaggerate its effectivity. I should clarify, at this point, that by no means am I suggesting, in my insistence on the possibilities of literature for an analysis of forgiveness and reconciliation, that fiction constitutes the means *par excellence* of expressing forgiveness and effecting reconciliation. On the contrary, as my readings will attest, calls for forgiveness and reconciliation emerge out of traumatic situations, scenes, and images that seem to escape linguistic formulation. One of the most powerful and challenging messages arising out of the texts under consideration is the limitations of language when it is called upon to testify – even heal – the trauma incurred by experiences of racial injury. In these texts, an impulse to recuperate loss through narrativization exists in marked tension with a recognition that loss itself is never fully recoupable. Without falling prey to a skeptical rejection of language, Coetzee and Kogawa, for instance, acknowledge that the challenge of narrativizing violence, pain, and injustice presents an ethical dilemma which is of essentially the same order famously noted by Theodor Adorno when he asked if poetry was still possible after Auschwitz. Coetzee, in particular, wonders about the possibility of realizing a nonverbal language, an alternative form of communication that would open the way to true forgiveness and reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. There are limits to the capacity of colonial languages to enable reciprocity that trouble him, not to mention potential for literary texts to contain their own sets of linguistic traps and dead ends.

Although none of the writers whose work I consider idealize fiction, however, as, say, an eminent expression of forgiveness and reconciliation, they nevertheless draw attention to the capacity of the medium to enable their possibility. In each of the four texts examined here, profound suspicion is cast on the potential for the sanitizing language of bureaucratic discourse to facilitate personal and social transformation. There is an underlying recognition that official documents alone cannot efficaciously mediate processes of reconciliation. Fiction, in this sense, supplements the public address (and redress) of grievance and pain with a form of discourse that recognizes the limits of legal remedy, and that inhabits an affective register that may well *aid*, at the very least, in the creation of a future in which forgiveness and reconciliation are possible. As Ingrid de Kok observes, reflecting on the vital role of aesthetic transactions in

post-apartheid South Africa, "the reparative capacity of government is limited and no work of mourning," whether at the subjective or the collective level, "can take place without other forms of mediation" (60-61). In a political milieu in which a grand concluding narrative to apartheid is sought, cultural artists and institutions, she maintains, face the difficult task of airing contradictory perspectives, of composing and recomposing partial versions and experiences. Her reflections are reiterated and extended, in ways that are especially relevant to this study, by the South African novelist André Brink. Brink, like de Kok, notes that the significant changes in South Africa's political circumstances have opened up a spectrum of possibilities for cultural texts, but he focuses, in particular, on literary texts, which are, he suggests, a condition of possibility for the efficacy of the TRC process: "Unless the enquiries of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are extended, complicated, and intensified in the imaginings of literature," he speculates, "society cannot sufficiently come to terms with its past to face the future" (30). Unlike the TRC, which is essentially concerned with producing a factual discourse of "truth," fiction, Brink insists, takes up the necessary task of imagining – rather than merely representing or reproducing – the possibility of reconciliation. His position offers a key point of departure, for obvious reasons, for an investigation of reconciliation in postcolonial fiction. It will be a central assertion of this study that fiction offers unique possibilities for imagining alternatives to the models of justice forwarded by secular modernity, allowing us to *think* the potentiality of a new and radically different future, a world beyond the politics of pain and despair enacted by colonialism and its various aftermaths.

Of course, fiction also addresses the past, and engaging the work of memory is imperative to the task of opening up the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation. Indeed, the texts in my study remember the past for the sake of rerouting the future, for the purpose of directing us towards justice. The centrality of recollecting the past in narratives of forgiveness and reconciliation raises questions, however, about the ethics of memory, particularly given its partiality and mutability. Though Kogawa and Ondaatje write novels that reanimate the past in order to fulfill, in the future, its betrayed possibilities, both are preoccupied with the abuses of memory. If memory is unfaithful to its commitment to truth, and if that infidelity is exemplified, in some senses, in the construction of plots – in the inevitable blindspots and silences of narratives – then how, they ask, is it possible to mobilize the past, through writing, in the interests of a better future? These texts bear out Paul Ricoeur's argument regarding memory, specifically that it modifies and revises the past in potentially positive ways, by signifying past events differently, in a way that "gives memory a future" (*The Just* 144). To reiterate, then, narratives are a place where the imperative to remember has to do with the construction of a different future. The narratives considered here recollect the past in an attempt to affect the future, in an attempt to bring about that which has not yet come. In other words, the utopian dimension of these texts (and my readings of them) seeks to reactivate and reproject unkept promises of

the past – promises of justice, of restitution, of an end to suffering and victimization.

In setting the stage for in-depth discussions of individual works in the chapters to follow, I shall pursue several interrelated tasks. I will begin by discussing the specific critical frameworks that have been established for analysing narratives of reconciliation, and that function, in some senses, as a foundation for my own critical work. Subsequently, by exploring a diverse range of critical and theoretical writings – among them, Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Wole Soyinka's *The Burden of Memory, The Muse of Forgiveness*, Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, and Jacques Derrida's *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* – I shall demonstrate the centrality of questions of mourning, remembrance, repentance, accountability, and authority in fiction about forgiveness and reconciliation. Of particular significance here is the question of responsibility. What I want to argue is that literary representations of projects of reconciliation foreground the imperative of formulating a *responsible response* to the wronged or victimized subject, and that in so doing, they also engage the privileged reader, such as myself, in a struggle to shape a responsible response to the text itself. In their preoccupation with the power relations that inform displays of guilt and regret, Malouf, Ondaatje, Kogawa, and Coetzee educate us about the potential abuses of discourses of forgiveness and reconciliation, particularly about their potential to reinforce positions of dominance by divesting the victim of authority. At the same time, however, these texts alert us to the capacity of these discourses to transform the conditions of the oppressed, and to impart to them feelings of triumph and vindication. One of the central objectives of my reading practice, in other words, is to consider the emancipatory potential of discursive formulations of forgiveness and reconciliation, a potential that critical analyses frequently threaten to foreclose.

A major aim of this project, then, is to intervene in the emergence of a critical discussion about the cultural politics of reconciliation. So far this discussion has focused almost exclusively on the context of South Africa and has been limited primarily to examinations of the narratives of testimony that the TRC process has produced.[6] Much critical attention has been spent on the difficulties inherent in the TRC's conceptualization of testimony, particularly as these relate to issues of trauma and memory. Drawing extensively on studies of the Shoah, and particularly on the psychoanalytic insights of Dominick LaCapra, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, and Cathy Caruth, among others, critics of the TRC hearings have invoked the argument that testimony can approach the site of trauma only imperfectly, maintaining that the hearings merely reproduce the chaos and distress

[6] While this study draws from a range of national contexts to conduct a comparative and synchronic reading, there remains much work to be done on the globalization of reconciliation processes and on the geopolitical differences between them.

haunting the victims without providing a narrative framework that the auditor can comprehend. In an essay, for example, that compares the turbulent history of apartheid to the Holocaust, Heidi Grunebaum-Ralph and Oren Stier contend that the discourse of reconciliation produced in the context of the TRC may function to "displace precisely that trauma" (151) that it seeks to relieve.[7] By imposing a narrative of healing and completion, the TRC, they suggest, refuses to acknowledge the victim's right to deferred closure, and disavows the fragmentary nature of memorial and recovery processes. Challenging the notion that healing is indeed possible, Grunebaum-Ralph and Stier construct a view of memory as anti-redemptive; the recollection of trauma, in their view, does not fit easily or neatly into a reconciliatory model. Without losing sight of the disruptive or inassimilable nature of traumatic memory, I would suggest that this critique, in focusing on the limitations of the TRC exclusively, may risk presenting a reductionist view of what is, in some ways, an innovative attempt to recover lost narratives. Is there not an ethical imperative, I wonder, to acknowledge not only the difficulties inherent in the TRC's promotion of testimony but also the benefits it has afforded many victims, for instance in the form of providing a space for the voices of those who have suffered? In other words, is it not important that we avoid overlooking, in our critiques of the TRC, the crucial pedagogic and memorial functions that truth commissions perform?

These questions might also be formulated in response to Michael Humphrey's adumbration of the limits of testimony in his analysis of the TRC. Even more so than Grunebaum-Ralph and Stier, Humphrey condemns the TRC on the basis of its advancement of the view that the recounting of suffering can be individually and socially empowering. Focusing exclusively on the "political limits of public testimony to pain in the project of national reconciliation," he questions, quite legitimately, the confinement of "the experience of suffering to the past history of apartheid" (10), and the "idea that healing is possible through revelation" (9). The project of revelation is a good deal more fraught, Humphrey points out, than the TRC lets on, since trauma is resistant to remembrance as well as narration. In his elucidation of the problems of a cathartic therapeutic model of reconciliation, Humphrey proceeds to make what is, to my mind, a crucial distinction: he argues, drawing on the work of Felman and Laub, that as a highly mediated narrative, testimony *produces* rather than *reveals* the truth, that it is a form of communication that "goes ahead of itself, proceeds cognition and thus engenders new awareness" (13). It is here that, unknowingly and unintentionally I suspect, Humphrey locates some transformative potential in the TRC's facilitation of testimony. For in allowing victims to produce a narrative that throws radically into question the claims of apartheid's adherents, the TRC operates, I would suggest, as a possible space of powerful resistance. In a rush to

[7] Grunebaum-Ralph and Stier also add the important caveat that apartheid cannot be compared unproblematically to the Holocaust, although the comparison is frequently drawn.

challenge the TRC's construction of truth, many postmodern critics have refused to acknowledge the importance of truth-telling to the creation of a democratic future. In foreclosing on the possibilities of reconciliation, these critics have failed to acknowledge that, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri note in *Empire*, "[i]n the context of state terror and mystification, clinging to the primacy of truth can be a powerful and necessary form of resistance" (155). While claims for the transformative capacity of truth are attacked as a matter of routine by postmodernists, Hardt and Negri remind us that the establishment of the truth of the past is an important precondition of democracy. Their concern, however, is not ultimately with whether truth is liberatory in and of itself. For it is the *production of truth* that constitutes, as they note, a practice of transformative potential. In proposing that testimony may be expressed in a wide range of forms, including fiction, I want to explore the contributions that various texts make to the resistance of racist and xenophobic regimes, and subsequently to the imagination of a democratic future. As testimonies of a certain kind, the fictional texts I examine make us bear witness to trauma, forcing us to recognize our own complicity and implication in the loss and suffering being narrated.

II. Theorizing Reconciliation

Postcolonial studies has generally neglected to address the politics of reconciliation, despite the recent emergence of reconciliation policies and movements in a wide range of national and international contexts. When critics in the field have considered this phenomenon, it has, more often than not, been to denounce or dismiss reconciliation as an inherently repressive or regressive idea. Even prior to the constitution of the field as such, Frantz Fanon, one of its key predecessors, insisted in his typically virulent fashion that "no conciliation is possible" in postcolonial societies (*Wretched of the Earth* 39). For Fanon, reconciliation is not only *undesirable* but also *impossible*: undesirable in that violence, in his view, is a purgatory force that releases the colonized from a state of melancholic apathy, and impossible in that once colonialism has officially ended, there would, he predicted, be no "interest" on the part of the colonizers "in remaining or in co-existing" (*Wretched* 45). What Fanon did not account for, of course, was that, for the sake of creating the conditions of a sustainable future, those on both sides of the colonial divide would have a stake in engaging practices of reconciliation.

Despite the hopes, however, that, since Fanon, have been invested in its possibilities, postcolonial critics frequently downplay or deny, in the same way he did, the potential political efficaciousness of a politics of reconciliation. Inveighing against what she perceives as the field's undue emphasis on consensus and negotiation, Benita Parry, for one, launches a heavyhanded postcolonial critique of reconciliation, which she contends entails a relinquishment of responsibility on the part of the dominant culture and a refusal to remember on the part of the marginalized. In her view, reconciliation is necessarily instituted by –

as well as in the service of – those who have committed heinous acts, and primarily for the purpose of promoting forgetfulness about the past. Referring to what she calls "the competing demands of reconciliation and remembrance" (88), Parry interprets the former as the imposition of a historical narrative that elides the invasive and expropriative terms of the imperial enterprise. She insists, moreover, that a project of reconciliation cannot unfold until such time as social and material transformation has already been effected. In an age of late capitalism, it is "premature" and also "inequitable" to advance an agenda of consensus and settlement: "our best hope for universal emancipation," Parry concludes, "lies in remaining unreconciled to the past and discontented with the present" (95). Yet must a politics of reconciliation necessarily exclude a critique of the contemporary condition? What I want to suggest is that it is precisely *because* of the prevalence of violence and injustice in the postcolonial era that working towards the possibility of reconciliation constitutes such a profoundly important project. Whereas Parry thinks that reconciliation prohibits radical social and material change, I argue that the conditions of inequality that structure postcolonial societies cannot be altered unless we venture to seriously engage an ethics of reconciliation, unless we strive to realize a time and space beyond violence. To realize that future it is necessary, certainly, to actively engage with the past, not in order to efface it from memory of course, but for the sake of reprocessing it into something new, of recuperating it as a resource for superseding the injustices of the present.

In proposing an alternative view of reconciliation, I want to interrogate, and in some senses challenge, the prevailing meanings and constructions of the term. First, I want to acknowledge that the very etymology of the word presents a problem, as it were, for postcolonial analyses of projects of reconciliation. For reconciliation suggests a return to a prior stage, a stage in which there was conciliation; yet for postcolonial societies there can in fact be no return, of course, to some past era of settlement or concord, for such an era never existed in the first place. I employ the concept here, then, more for its convenience as a terminological marker of recent political policies, processes, and movements, and out of an awareness that it renders a problematic temporality. I also employ the concept aware of the dubious aura that surrounds it, that is, cognizant that it comes equipped, to the mind of most, with little evocation of contemporary power relations. Indeed, in much the same way as "postcolonial," "reconciliation" is a theoretically and politically ambiguous term, one that is frequently considered incompatible with a politics of resistance. For in its English usage, the term can signify – particularly if the verb "reconcile" is followed by the preposition "to" – an attitude of resignation, surrender, or submission that precludes the possibility of struggle, antagonism, or opposition. Perhaps this explains the reluctance on the part of many postcolonial critics to concede the possibilities of a politics of reconciliation, since what the term conjures, almost immediately, is the image of oppressed and marginalized communities capitulating to the violent and unjust conditions of contemporary life. In other words, what the phrase "postcolonial

reconciliation" may at once seem to imply is the worrisome idea that disempowered people ought to acquiescently accept existing dominations, exploitations, and inequalities.

Of course, the suscipion of government policies and practices of reconciliation is well founded given that oftentimes they are devised primarily by state and government officials, without adequate consultation with indigenous groups and grassroots organizations. When one considers the program of reconciliation undertaken by the Howard government in Australia, for example, one is forced to admit that the discourse of reconciliation can operate more in the interests of national consolidation and less in those of indigenous compensation. Indeed, it is worth emphasizing that despite their internationalization, reconciliation movements are complex and differentiated, with some enabling very little in the way of social and political transformation. Without denying the political realities that often hinder projects of reconciliation, I wish in this thesis to maintain a commitment to reconciliation as an ethical ideal, and in so doing to put forward another possible interpretation of the concept, one that is somewhat more open, I hope, to its positive and enabling inflections.[8] I define reconciliation not as the reinforcement or reproduction of colonial or neocolonial relations but as the establishment of new conditions of interactions—conditions centred on the ideals of negotiation, collaboration, and reciprocity.[9] As I understand it, reconciliation involves something somewhat more than merely a "departure from violence" (282), which is how John Borneman defines it; it involves an entire, yet nevertheless ongoing and perpetually unfinished, project of completely transforming the brutal and violent conditions that are the legacy of colonialism.

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[8] In putting forward this definition of reconciliation, I want to register the various meanings of the term when deployed outside of an Anglophone context. While reconciliation is typically associated with resignation, consolation, and compensation in the English language, Michael Hardimon points out that one of the German equivalents of the term, *Versöhnung*, conveys a process of transformation: "When two parties become genuinely *versöhnt*," he explains, "they do not resume their old relationship unchanged. They become *versöhnt* by changing their behavior and attitudes in fundamental ways. Parties who have attained *Versöhnung* do not have to decide to get along together; their getting along is, instead, the natural result of their being in a new, transformed state" (85).

[9] I should note that although political projects of reconciliation might, given their goals of concord and unity, be interpreted by postmodern critics as potentially pernicious attempts to discipline, homogenize, or devalue some other (e.g. race, class, culture, or gender), reconciliation as I conceive it here is not an attempt to exclude or overcome otherness but rather to overcome the systems of violence which arise in response to categories of otherness.

Far from being opposed to resistance, then, reconciliation, as a conceptual ideal, entails precisely a radical revision to existing relations of inequality.[10]

A caveat or two is in order: first, reconciliation, properly and practically speaking, cannot be forced or imposed by those occupying positions of power. Rather it must, if it is to have any efficacy at all, be a consensual process in which the "work," as it were, of reconciling is not assumed only, or even primarily, by those who have been wronged. Furthermore, by no means is reconciliation antithetical to the aims of justice, although some critics have suggested as much. Rather, to aspire to and engage in a politics of reconciliation is to strive, relentlessly and indefatigably, to bring about a state of justice such as has never existed before. The notion that the project of reconciliation is fundamentally an exercise in preventing justice is built on the problematic assumption that retributive justice is the form of justice *par excellence*. Thus Mahmood Mamdani, perhaps the TRC's most vociferous critic, is operating, I suggest, from a narrow and ultimately unimaginative concept of justice when he contends that reconciliation diminishes justice: "To reconcile is to restore," Mamdani announces, "to return to a status quo ante" ("Reconciliation without Justice," 182).[11] In a recent collection of essays entitled *The Burden of Memory, The Muse of Forgiveness*, Wole Soyinka launches a similar – and, in my view, similarly limited – attack on frameworks of justice that prioritize reconciliation. Casting doubt on the capacity of truth telling procedures to benefit victims, Soyinka proclaims that, "the problem with the South African choice is its implicit, *a priori*

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[10] The proliferation of reconciliation processes might be interpreted as a symptom of contemporary political malaise, as if the era of resistance – which many think limited to the 1960s – is now definitely over. In other words, the redirection of political conflicts into processes of reconciliation may be seen as the emergence of a form of politics that places a greater priority on preserving and integrating the nation than on altering the material conditions of oppressed and marginalized groups. Yet reconciliation by no means does away with resistance, and in fact, in many cases, marginalized collectivities pursue reconciliation processes as a means of forcing those in positions of power to assume responsibility for the violence of colonization, racism, or sexism.

[11] While I question Mamdani's claim that processes of reconciliation foreclose the possibility of justice, I am nevertheless sympathetic to his argument that their efficacy is severely undercut when the focus is not on the beneficiaries of systems of oppression, but merely on the obvious perpetrators. Mamdani takes the architects of South Africa's TRC to task for failing to define justice outside of a narrow legal framework, such that reparations are only available to "those who suffered jail or exile, but not for those who suffered only forced labour and broken homes" (25). As powerful and important as his critique is, however, it denies that the TRC was devised out of a political compromise that would not have come about were the boundaries of justice defined more widely.

exclusion of criminality, and thus responsibility." The TRC's refusal to perform "the rites of vengeance," as he calls it, is, according to Soyinka, a fundamental oversight, for punishing perpetrators would, he assumes, provide a "sense of closure" or a form of "catharsis" to victims by pressing the wrongdoers "into service in a reversal of roles" (33). To this claim, I would ask: Is it possible for the crimes committed by the perpetrators of apartheid to be accurately recorded and tallied up to create a sum total of meanings? And does reckoning with violence through retribution necessarily restore to victims that which has been lost? If survivors opt not to punish their perpetrators, does that then mean that they are essentially ignorant or careless of the ramifications of their decision?

What I wish to suggest, by way of response, is that although they may disconcert or stupefy those of us situated in postmodern contexts, the rhetoric and rituals that structure reconciliation processes may be crucial to a departure from colonialist and racist relations, and to the commencement of a new, more equitable, future. Indeed, it is a central premise of mine that paradigms and practices of reconciliation may, despite their defiance of dominant juridical categories, constitute important, albeit hitherto discounted, alternatives to modern conceptualizations of justice. In arguing for a consideration of the possibilities of reconciliation that acknowledges the validity of indigenous notions of justice, I am following the provocative lead of Rosemary Jolly, whose advocacy of the TRC takes the form of acknowledging and affirming the terms of resistance selected by marginalized communities. Questioning the assumption of many postmodern critics that the TRC's invocation of Christian rituals of confession constitutes a colonialist imposition, Jolly observes that "Our familiarity and comfort with modern judicial rituals can leave us uncomfortable with rituals that defy the secular claims of modernity" (696). This uneasiness with models of justice that do not conform to a secular, rationalist framework is problematic to the extent that it tends to reinscribe a Western developmentalist narrative that casts South Africa as irrational and backward. Jolly explains:

> The Western press's predominant dismissal of the TRC may appear to emerge from a sense of concern for the denial of human rights in those countries of the world considered to be undemocratic by Western European and North American standards. Acceptance of this appearance rests on the notion that the industrial or postindustrial countries of the West have the knowledge and right to export their particular notion of the subject and her or his rights as part and parcel of the benefits of the processes of globalization. (698)

Jolly's comments are a salutary reminder that we need to be particularly vigilant about the problems of dismissing reconciliation processes out of hand, for what may lurk in our apparent concern that "justice be done" is the unspoken belief that the civilized West has the exclusive rights to the definition of justice and its

modes of operation.[12] There are serious dangers, then, to viewing only those models of justice authorized by secular modernity as legitimate and authoritative. In this thesis, I take seriously those dangers, offering a sustained consideration of the possibilities of those reconciliatory models that enable marginalized communities to be their own agents of change, and subjecting the notion that retributive justice is the only solvent to postcolonial crimes to rigourous scrutiny.

In asking for a critical reevaluation of the politics of reconciliation, I am calling deeply into question the commonly held view that justice is reducible to the punishment of evil. Reckoning legally with violence through retribution is, I propose, not the only possible, nor even always the most viable, form of response to the infliction of racial and (post)colonial injuries. While some have argued that retributive justice is an important precondition to reconciliation that vindicates victims through a kind of quid-pro-quo settling of accounts, I suggest that this assessment not only discounts the views of those victims who decide not to pursue criminal and civil remedies but also a priori assumes that legal accounting can recuperate the losses suffered by survivors. With Pal Ahluwalia, I propose that reconciliation offers a potential alternative to the cycle of revenge that characterizes many postcolonial societies, and I ask how postcolonial theory might be developed in the interests of reconciliation. While he does not consider the implications of his proposal for the notion of forgiveness, Ahluwalia suggests that the attendant cycle of revenge and counter-revenge might be broken through the gift, and makes the argument that postcolonialism is instructive for examining processes of reconciliation, as it attempts to reimagine the past and the present. Pointing to such prominent African leaders as Nelson Mandela and Jomo Kenyatta, he focuses on the possibilities they symbolize for national reimagination and reconstruction: "They emerge from prison," he observes, "not with a sense of revenge, but with the intention to break the cycle of revenge" (198). But as much as "founding fathers," as Ahluwalia calls them, are important for the symbolic import they lend reconciliation movements, grassroots organizations are possibly even more important, to the extent that they create the conditions for reconciliation at the local level. Without the initiatives of the Aborginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in Australia, for example, or the various community-based organizations in the north and south of Sri Lanka, reconciliation would not even be a possibilty.

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[12] While not all detractors of the TRC are situated in the postmodern West, there is an overwhelming tendency in the Western press to dismiss the institution's aims and practices. This is not to deny that some of the most scathing critiques of reconciliation projects have been developed by non-Western critics, or that indigenous positions on these projects (as my citation of Wole Soyinka shows) can be immensely varied; rather, it is simply to suggest that Western critics have often been too hasty in their evaluations of reconciliation movements, particularly in the case of South Africa, where a Christianized language of repentance and forgiveness is the dominant idiom.

In turning to the concept of reconciliation in the hopes of moving beyond violence and hostility, these organizations emphasize that no compensation can ever adequately redress wrongs, and that the losses suffered by victims can never be fully recovered. A complete recuperation is impossible no matter what route to justice is sought. That said, in relinquishing the right to resort to the rule of law, victims may not be passively authorizing or assenting to their oppression; rather their decision may well arise out of, for example, a perception of the stakes involved in the consolidation of democracy, or out of an attempt to create a new start by breaking a cycle of rebounding violence. Let me propose, then, that to subscribe to a politics of reconciliation – to opt not to endorse principles of punishment or retribution – is perhaps to place one's wager on the future, to take up the challenge of beginning anew without denying an ongoing sense of loss. This task is paradoxical by definition, for it involves creating an end that one knows to be fundamentally fictional in character (Borneman 284). Certainly my own analysis of reconciliation is characterized by an unceasing awareness that the vision underlying it may seem Janus-faced in that it assumes both the prevalence of power relations and the possibility of their reconstitution. But this tension may be a crucial condition, after all, of any vision of reconciliation that confronts the challenge of the project: to make possible the impossible: to recuperate losses that are fundamentally irrecoupable.

In attempting this challenge, I bear in mind throughout this study that for victims of colonialist and racist violence, there can ultimately be no complete recovery, no absolute resolution of loss.[13] While those victims who opt to reconcile with their wrongdoers may, as a result, be able to reclaim a sense of selfhood and dignity, the loss that they have suffered – whether it derives from, say, the death of loved ones, or from the damage inflicted on their own psyche – obstinately remains. Because traumatic loss is experienced repeatedly and retrospectively, as Cathy Caruth has famously noted, complete recovery can only be worked toward, never definitively achieved. Because, in other words, the traumatic event or some aspect thereof is not registered at the actual time of occurrence, and is never fully apprehended by the victim, reconciliation can never happen "once and for all" but only as the perpetually deferred outcome of a long mourning process. Reconciliation may inaugurate the task of mourning but that task is never quite finished, never completely fulfilled; oddly, a recovery that might be a reconciliation only becomes possible, as John Borneman has suggested, through the relentless mourning of loss (284). Another way of saying

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[13] While my definition of reconciliation takes into account both the political and psychological registers of the term, I by no means want to confuse or conflate these registers by suggesting, for example, that the aftereffects of trauma on colonized cultures are reducible to those experienced by the traumatized individual. Rather I heed David Lloyd's warning that there is no simple way of mapping "the psychological effects of trauma on to the cultures that undergo colonization" (212).

this is that victims of postcolonial trauma are perpetually beset by a melancholia that might be alleviated, but certainly not stopped or defeated, through acts of memory and narration.

The endlessness of mourning must, I think, be kept constantly in mind, else we risk assuming, as Paul Ricoeur has, that mourning has reconciliation as its teleological end. Drawing on Freud's famous distinction between melancholia and mourning, Ricoeur suggests that whereas melancholia forecloses the possibility of reconciliation, mourning is, in fact, tantamount to reconciliation.[14] Melancholia, he writes, consists of "a longing to be reconciled with the loved object which is lost without hope of reconciliation," while "mourning," by contrast, "is a reconciliation," a process that results in the recuperation of loss ("Memory" 7). In assuming that it offers the victim the possibility of a normalizing closure, a definitive end to melancholic grief and ambivalence, Ricoeur forgets the paradoxical character of mourning and, subsequently, of reconciliation. Is not mourning, if nothing else, a process of striving towards, yet never entirely realizing, reconciliation with the lost other? It is only through relentless mourning that the promise of release from suffering and recuperation of the other emerges, as Derrida, in his reflections on the impossibility of reconciliation, suggests. Derrida challenges the myth of reconciliation between the mourner and her lost object by insisting on the interminability of the mourning process. Questioning the successful, introjective mourning prescribed by Freud, he reflects on the ethical difficulties posed by the discourse of "self-restoration," and speculates that "the most distressing, or even the most deadly infidelity" might be that "of a *possible* mourning" (*Memoires* 6). Calling for an impossible mourning, he further suggests that the promise of reconciling with the other is what gives mourning a chance. It is this hope of reconciliation that mourning offers, as well as the dream of forgiveness of which Derrida also writes, that should propel us, I believe, to engage in the difficult work of imagining a different future, an alternative to the violences of colonialism, racism, and sexism.

III. Theorizing Forgiveness

While the language of forgiveness is routinely articulated alongside that of reconciliation, conceptually these terms are fundamentally different and must be held apart. Far more so than reconciliation, forgiveness is essentially a transcendent concept rooted in religious practice and experience, and particularly in the Judaeo-Christian theological tradition. It is also an intensely individualized

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[14] Freud defines mourning as the process whereby one gradually withdraws libido from a lost object, so that in time one declares that object dead and invests energy in new objects, and melancholia as the pathological repudiation of resolution. In recent years his distinction has been thrown into question by several critics. See, for instance, David L. Eng and David Kazanjian,

concept that, unlike reconciliation, does not seem capable of extension to collective action, despite its entrance into public and political life.[15] Nonetheless, forgiveness is implicated in the same issues of power and dominance as reconciliation and, from a postcolonial standpoint, the questions of who has the right to forgive, what the conditions of forgiveness are, and what constitutes the forgivable, are paramount. These questions assume particular urgency given the proliferation of scenes of forgiveness in contemporary politics and the potential abuse of the term, as a result, by those in positions of power. Out of a commitment to contesting the perversion of the language of forgiveness, in this study I use the term in a very limited sense: only those who have been subjected to victimization and marginalization can forgive, and only those who have practiced domination and exploitation can be forgiven. It is, I maintain, ultimately the prerogative of the victim to grant or refuse forgiveness, to establish its conditions of (im)possibility, and to set the boundaries of the forgivable. I thus exclude the possibility of self-forgiveness from my conceptualization of forgiveness, and urge suspicion about any attempt to attain absolution without the consent of the victim. Following Hannah Arendt's lead in *The Human Condition*, I suggest that the practice of forgiveness "depend[s] on plurality, on the presence and acting of others" and that forgiving "enacted in solitude or isolation remain[s] without reality" (237).[16]

In what is a timely and welcome intervention given the emergence of forgiveness as a worldly practice in post-Shoah history, Arendt insists on the potential advantages of appropriating an essentially religious concept for secular purposes. In a concern to anchor forgiveness in everyday action, she acknowledges Jesus of Nazareth, whom she introduces as a historical rather than a religious figure, as the discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the domain of human affairs. The significance of his discovery, she notes, is that it does not

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[15] Lance Morrow clarifies the differences between forgiveness and reconciliation when he insists upon the more ethical as well as interpersonal and intersubjective nature of the former. Whereas reconciliation is an act that can take place between nations, as what Derrida would call a kind of "national therapy," forgiveness, Morrow claims, has ethical stakes that are much higher and that may rest on impossibility. As well, because forgiveness is restricted to acts between individual people or between a person and God, "one recoils at the idea of collective absolution" (181), according to Morrow.

[16] I make this exclusion because of the intersubjective nature of the violence my thesis addresses. It seems to me that self-forgiveness, though it is a very important concept in a psychological/spiritual sense, and often for victims, who frequently "blame" themselves for being accessories or passive participants in violence, is a potential danger insofar as those in positions of power can use it to alleviate their responsibility to affect restitution.

restrict forgiveness to the realm of the divine but rather insists against the "scribes and Pharisees" that the power to forgive "must be mobilized by men towards each other" (239); the fact that this "discovery was made in a religious context and articulated in religious language" is insufficient reason, she argues, to "take it any less seriously in a strictly secular sense" (238). Thus Arendt has no interest in conferring religious attributes on practices of forgiveness nor in formulating a political theology of forgiveness; instead she is interested in secularizing the practice of forgiveness as a means of exploring its normalizing potential as a structural precondition for survival and ongoing life. For social and political relations to resume themselves in the face of the innumerable minor offences that constitute everyday life, forgiveness, according to Arendt, is not simply desirable but absolutely necessary. Forgiveness is an exceptional practice in that it liberates people from the consequences of actions from which they would otherwise never recover: "The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility – of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing – is the faculty of forgiving" (237).[17]

To her consideration of the necessity of forgiveness to the continuance of social life, Arendt adds an important caveat: forgiveness, if it is to be given, must be addressed to the offender rather than the offence. It is out of our love for the other that we forgive, Arendt writes, and as an act that considers the other, forgiveness, unlike judgment, emphasizes the inequality between people. Yet despite this difference, forgiveness and judgment are nevertheless "the two sides of one and the same coin" in so far as "every judgment is open to the possibility of forgiveness" (238). It is in this context that, as Julia Kristeva suggests in her reading of Arendt's theory of forgiveness, we ought to read the political philosopher's decision, expressed in Arendt's book on the Nazi war criminal's trial, not to forgive Adolf Eichmann: for her refusal stems, Kristeva observes, from her realization that the man whose trial she is reporting is "a non-person, an absence of *who* or of 'someone,' an automaton" whose inability to judge his actions "exclud[es] him from the sphere of forgiveness" (Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, 80). Yet Arendt's refusal also indicates her conviction that the unpardonable exists, that there are actions whose excesses defy any imperative to

[17] While Arendt's theory appropriately limits the possibility of forgiveness to insist on its specifically religious formulation, from the perspective of semiotics, her approach raises a significant problem: If signs have meaning when speakers and listeners share a convention of meaning-making in common, then how can we ensure forgiveness is commonly understood between forgiver and forgiven if it is divorced from (religious) context? The communicative context, and the assumptions of each party about the meanings possible within that context, are absolutely key, as Derrida insists in his reflections on the subject.

forgive.[18] Arendt is strictly concerned, after all, with those banal, insignificant acts of "trespassing" that constitute "everyday occurrence[s]," and in a form of forgiveness that releases people from such trespasses for the sake of allowing "life to go on" (240), for the purpose of ensuring mutuality and continuity. Thus while forgiveness represents a powerful, even astonishing, act of reversal and renewal, its power cannot be extended, in her view, to include those acts that "dispossess us all of power" (241). Those acts that Kant calls "radically evil" fall outside the realm of punishment as well as the realm of forgiveness, Arendt argues; for in so far as they surpass even the most committed effort at comprehension, they prevent the possibility of any adequate response. Arendt can only defer the judgment of atrocity and mass violence to some final apocalyptic moment, then, to the biblical Last Judgment that transcends current political and legal procedures, and that delivers a form of retribution that cannot be imagined or imposed in real time. It is here, I think, in her refusal to consider forgiveness in the context of radical evil, that we encounter the limits of Arendt's theory for a consideration of the contemporary proliferation of requests for forgiveness in national and international politics; after all, those actions for which we frequently hear forgiveness being requested – rape, genocide, dispossession – certainly constitute that which can only be referred to as the "unforgivable." If, following Arendt, we completely exclude the concept of the unforgivable from our conceptualization of forgiveness, how can we begin to account for the decision on the part of some victims to heed such requests, to pardon their perpetrators for acts of immeasurable cruelty?

In contrast to Arendt's exclusive concern with the normalization and structural necessity of forgiveness, Kristeva largely refers, in her discussions of the concept, to traumatic or catastrophic experiences. Using Arendt's appropriation of the religious practice of forgiveness as a means of extending its ethics to psychoanalytic interpretation, Kristeva modifies the former's definition accordingly; for her, forgiveness constitutes the creation of a narrative that allows the culpable subject to begin anew. As she maintains in her earliest published reflections on the subject in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, to forgive is "to give the depressed patient (that stranger withdrawn into his wound) a new start, and give him the possibility of a new encounter" (189). Rather than purging him of past actions, forgiveness enables the patient to encounter a loving, non-judgmental other, an other whose commitment to identification permits the principle of renewal. The task of the analytic listener, then, is to suspend

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[18] Kristeva neglects to point out that in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt considers the limitations of legal remedy as a means of providing justice for victims. In this book, published five years after *The Human Condition*, Arendt substantially revised her notion of evil as well as pondered the failure of the law to deliver justice. Although this is "the most far-reaching issue in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*" according to Sigrid Weigel, "it has been overshadowed by the scandal around Arendt's formula 'the banality of evil'" (322).

judgment and rationalization so as to "untangle and reconstruct" (206) the reprehensible act in terms that will enable the perpetrator to take up a different future. In other words, through an act of countertransfer the analyst *gives* meaning to the subject's crime in a gesture that is equivalent to *forgiving* in that it banks on a new departure beyond melancholia, abjection, and horror. The notion of the analyst as the bearer of a gift is crucial to Kristeva's theorization of forgiveness, for in forbidding judgment and making available the bond of love, the analyst releases the other from their lack or wound by offering a "protect[ion] against depression" (216). While this form of human forgiveness is not to be confused with the divine act of mercy of which the theologian speaks, there is an almost mystical, transcendental function to the analyst's role according to Kristeva's description of it: citing Thomas Aquinas's reflection that "a pardon is a sort of present; forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you," she suggests that the analyst gives "an additional, free gift" (215-16), allowing the other to be born again in an act of sacrifice evocative of the Christian crucifixion.

In a chapter of *Black Sun* devoted to a reading of Dostoyevsky's novels, Kristeva dissuades her readers, in a manner reminiscent of Arendt, from repudiating an ethics of forgiveness on the grounds of its religious associations. Speculating that the nihilism of the contemporary reader instills in her a palpable discomfort with Dostoevsky's aesthetics of forgiveness, especially given its moorings in orthodox Christianity, Kristeva reflects that, in the modern era, forgiveness is confounded with degradation, pacificism, or a refusal of power—that is, with what Nietzsche dismissed as the "perversions of Christianity" (qtd. in Kristeva 190). In advancing another view of forgiveness, Kristeva urges us to reconsider it in light of its function in the theological tradition and in aesthetic experience: to identify with abjection for the sake of overcoming it, for the sake of enabling psychic rebirth. This reminder that the religious connotations of forgiveness in no way delegitimizes it as a modern act of interpretation serves as an important warning to those of us who might denounce any invocation of the language of forgiveness within the postcolonial context as essentially colonialist, as an acceptance, on the part of marginalized peoples, of unjust conditions.

Although Kristeva is primarily interested in the connections between the Judaeo-Christian concept of forgiveness and the psychoanalytic cure, in *Black Sun* she focuses her attention on forgiveness as an aesthetic activity. Indeed, it is by way of her investigation into the Christian themes of Dostoyevsky's novels that she arrives at her view that interpretation in analysis facilitates forgiveness. In the work of Dostoyevsky, Kristeva observes, forgiveness functions to inscribe the unconscious in a new narrative, and in so doing to refashion or reconstruct it. For Dostoyevsky, forgiveness means: "Through my love, I exclude you from history for a while, I take you for a child, and this means that I recognize the unconscious motivations of your crime and allow you to make a new person out of yourself" (204). Using Dostoyevsky's representation of forgiveness to develop her own theory, Kristeva claims that forgiveness stays historical time in the name of love. It is in the act of writing that this atemporality – this time outside of time

– is accomplished: because in writing one is "separated" from one's own "unconscious through a new transference," one is "able to *write*," and presumably rewrite, an experience of "unforgettable violence and despair" (206). Rather than erasing the crime, writing resignifies it through forgiveness, which "remembers abjection and filters it through the destabilized, musicalized, resensualized signs of loving discourse" (206). To this extent, forgiveness is essentially an aesthetic activity, and the religious, philosophical, and ideological discourses related to forgiveness are inseparable from the realm of aesthetics. As a gesture invested in the postulate that "*meaning exists*" – as a displacement and transformation of melancholia and abjection – forgiveness involves the creation of form: "It has the effect," Kristeva reflects, "of an acting out, a doing, a *poesis*. Giving shape to relations between insulted and humiliated individuals—group harmony. Giving shape to signs—harmony of work, without exegesis, without explanation, without understanding" (206-207). As an act of forgiving, the work of literature symbolically reconfigures, in language, the emotional impulses (compassion, mercy, etc.) of forgiveness: by "caus[ing] the *affect* to slip into the *effect*," writing performs the miraculous act of creating an imaginary and symbolic bond. Writing, in this early version of Kristeva's formulation, is a transformative and transpositional act of forgiveness.

In a recent interview on the subject of forgiveness with Alison Rice, Kristeva relaxes this emphasis on the forgiving potential of aesthetics. Adopting what is, in my view, a far more realistic position on the role of literature, she insists that while literary texts *can be* transformative, they are not *necessarily* so. While the literary experience can offer "a way of coming out of the trauma," Kristeva acknowledges that it can also "complacently repeat the trauma without going beyond it in the slightest," in which case "there is no possibility for forgiveness or renewal" (287). Yet notwithstanding this important caveat, Kristeva does suggest that literature can have a meaningful role to play in quests for forgiveness: after all, to forgive, as she sees it, is to create a narrative that permits renewal and rebirth, or as Paul Ricoeur succinctly puts it, to "renarrate the past" in a way that "gives memory a future."[19] Elaborating on her earlier argument in *Black Sun* in light of Ricoeur's assertion, Kristeva defines forgiveness as an interpretation that does not rationally reconstruct the criminal act but interprets it in a manner that opens up the possibility of moving beyond it. By interpretation, Kristeva means an act of "attributing meaning" that differs from "signification," or the creation of univocal meaning, in that it perceives "intonations, metaphors, affects, the entire panoply of psychic life" (281). By concerning itself with the semiotic realm, and not with dogmatic rationality,

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[19] One can find scattered references to forgiveness in recent articles published by Ricoeur on the subject of justice; in these, he insists on the capacity of forgiveness to transform the future by recollecting the past, not in any straightforward fashion but in a way that recognizes the mutable yet nevertheless emancipatory qualities of memory.

forgiveness, she argues, enables a partial, temporary identification with the subject who seeks pardon. In its accounting for the role of language, narration, and interpretation, Kristeva's set of reflections have important implications for a consideration of the conjunction of forgiveness and literature. Her emphasis on forgiveness as a hermeneutic exercise reminds us that literature and literary criticism constitute significant places in which forgiveness is produced and represented.

Despite her allowance, however, that forgiveness enacts an interpretation that expresses itself in works of art, Kristeva believes that forgiveness is ideally accomplished in the psychoanalytic realm. Kristeva's privileging of the psychoanalytic context relates to her conviction that forgiveness belongs exclusively to the private sphere. As for Arendt, so too for Kristeva, it is in the interests of the social collectivity that the social sphere remain the place of judgment and condemnation:

> I think that a community cannot maintain itself unless it gives itself laws that are impossible to transgress: for it is founded on law and punishment. We can, of course, vary punishments and open them up to therapy, accompanying prison sentences with psychoanalytic therapy. We can thus introduce the private sphere I just spoke of, notably psychoanalysis, but the idea that the social sphere would deprive itself of jurisdiction and punishment seems to me unbearable. (282-83)

Despite allowing the possibility of forgiving the unforgivable, then, Kristeva insists that this "radical position" can only be maintained in the context of "strict privacy, notably that of the analytic cure" (281). It is out of her conviction that forgiveness cannot inscribe itself in the social arena that Kristeva maintains the atemporality of forgiveness: "The social sphere," she asserts, "is the sphere of history; there is a past, a present and a future. In that field, forgiveness must simply follow judgment and condemnation" (285).

There are several problems with Kristeva's position, as I see it, perhaps the most significant being that in rejecting as unacceptable those scenes of forgiveness that unfold in the public sphere – in, for instance, the truth commissions in South Africa, Chile, and Argentina – it also rejects as unacceptable the decisions of some victims to forgive their perpetrators. Are these acts of forgiveness really any less valid on account of their public context than those that unfold in the psychoanalytic encounter? In suggesting as much, Kristeva may be refusing to grant the victim the prerogative to forgo the route of judgment and punishment, not to mention the right to select the space of forgiveness.[20] In other words, in dismissing Derrida's vision of forgiveness as too

[20] A significant problem with Kristeva's theory of forgiveness as far as the victim's right to forgive is concerned is that it assumes without question that the

"generous" (283), Kristeva may be inadvertently dismissing the generosity of those victims who have resolved to forgive their perpetrators.

Kristeva's insistence on reserving forgiveness for the private sphere is a response, in part, to what she perceives to be Derrida's "utopian" (in the pejorative sense) vision of forgiveness. In published portions of a seminar on pardon and repentance delivered between 1997 and 2000, Derrida maintains that forgiveness is bereft of meaning unless it engages the unforgivable. Reflecting on the globalization of a secularized version of Abrahamic forgiveness,[21] he speculates that in the realm of politics and law the concept has been compromised by its entanglement in calculated transactions and conditions. In an effort to salvage the principle of unconditional purity that he understands as integral to forgiveness, Derrida declares that forgiveness is only possible – and thus ultimately impossible – in the context of the unforgivable. In other words, the very idea of forgiveness no longer exists for Derrida the moment that one reduces it to a set of conditional imperatives: forgiveness only has meaning when it is stripped bare of every possible condition. Pronouncing that the only forgiveness that is worthy of the name is that which forgives the worst crime, what in religious language is called the mortal sin, Derrida sets forth the following injunction: "forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable" ("On Forgiveness" 33). This aporia also characterizes the gift according to Derrida, and in noting the etymology of the word forgiveness, he himself has suggested that as a gift of a certain kind forgiveness too announces itself as an impossibility.[22]

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analyst can forgive on behalf of the victim. That Kristeva does not address this problem is peculiar given that she strongly contests any form of forgiveness that would violate the victim, insisting on remorse and reparations as conditions of possibility.

[21] The language in which forgiveness is sought, Derrida notes, is essentially Abrahamic, by which he means that it accumulates within it the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. That this language is now entering cultures that are not of these traditions is evidence, he claims, of the globalization of "a process of Christianisation which has no more need for the Christian church" ("On Forgiveness" 31). With this observation I would largely agree—the virtual universalization of the discourse of forgiveness represents the adaptation of a religious heritage to an ostensibly secular age. I would hasten to add, however, that there are other heritages, aside from the Christian (or Judaic or Islamic) in which forgiveness also plays a central role—Buddhism being one that I cite in the course of this thesis.

[22] In his opening to "To Forgive: The Unforgivable and the Imprescriptable," an article published separately from his seminar excerpts, Derrida notes that in the Latin origins of the word "pardon" and "forgiveness," one finds reference to the word "gift." In *Given Time*, Derrida considered the

In describing forgiveness as impossible, Derrida is advancing the incredible proposition that acts of forgiveness are invalidated the moment they are fraught with aims or objectives, with any motive in the least. Thus Derrida throws radically into question the conditional logic that informs forgiveness, the presumption that forgiveness can only be granted if the guilty party displays repentance for the wrongs committed, or promises to make reparations for the injury suffered by the victim. As soon as such conditions are placed on forgiveness, forgiveness itself becomes that which it should not and can never, properly speaking, be: an economic transaction. In his demand for an unconditional forgiveness, Derrida insists that forgiveness should never have an agenda, and that in this sense, it cannot be conflated with atonement, which in religious terms is about the transformation of the sinner, nor with reconciliation, which in political terms is about the survival of the nation. Whenever forgiveness is "at the service of a finality" or "aims to re-establish normality," the concept itself is degraded; forgiveness, Derrida contends, "is not, it *should not be*, normal, normative, normalizing. It *should* remain exceptional and extraordinary, in the face of the impossible: as if it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality" ("On Forgiveness" 32). If the purity of forgiveness is to be preserved, if its heterogeneity to politics and law is to be respected, then forgiveness cannot operate in the service of psychological closure or in the interests of political stability.

In the hope of keeping forgiveness pure, Derrida outlines several obstacles to the achievement of true forgiveness. First among these is the mediation of a third party or a tertiary institution. Calling into question the public manifestations of forgiveness, Derrida insists that forgiveness can only be asked or granted in one-to-one situations. Not only are requests for collective forgiveness meaningless, he suggests, but so too are requests for forgiveness that are facilitated by an outside party, whether that be, for example, an institution such as a truth commission or government, a religious or community organization, or representatives or descendants of the victims. Further, forgiveness cannot properly occur without the victim and the guilty sharing the same language. By this Derrida means that not only must a national language or idiom be held in common but also that there must be an agreement concerning the particular meanings of words, their aims of reference and rhetoric. Given the radical incommensurability of language in a postcolonial era, this stipulation appears to render forgiveness impossible indeed. But if forgiveness were not assuredly impossible already, it is made more so, in Derrida's formulation, in so far as it inevitably involves what he calls the "affirmation of sovereignty" ("On Forgiveness" 58). Forgiveness, as Derrida notes, is frequently conferred in a hierarchical fashion, such that it assumes a power or force. But, far worse than

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problems and aporias of the gift, and in "To Forgive," he points to their analogies in forgiveness. Without conflating giving and forgiving, he suggests that they share in common, among other things, their unconditionality of principle.

this, forgiveness sometimes effects "an absolute victimization which deprives the victim of life, or the right to speak, or that freedom, that force and that power which *authorizes*, which permits the accession to the position of 'I forgive'" ("On Forgiveness" 58-59). Certainly, as I have suggested previously, in situations of power and domination claims to forgiveness are contestable at best. For Derrida, however, the possibility of forgiveness is not merely foreclosed in particular situations or under certain circumstances; forgiveness is always already impossible, for the limit case of the unforgivable haunts every act of forgiveness, no matter how "pure," how genuine.

Nonetheless this insistence of Derrida's on the unconditional principle of forgiveness exists in tension, at all times, with his recognition that the practice of forgiveness is inevitably and irretrievably conditional. The logic of forgiveness, Derrida concludes, is divided between these two poles: between an ethical order in the Levinasian sense of infinite responsibility and a pragmatic order of historical, legal, and political conditions. This conflict results in a noticeably self-divided attitude toward forgiveness on Derrida's part: "I remain 'torn'," he admits, "(between a 'hyperbolic' ethical vision of forgiveness, pure forgiveness, and the reality of a society at work in pragmatic processes of reconciliation)" ("On Forgiveness" 51). Rather than decide between the two (between what might be called "ethics" and "politics"), Derrida accepts as inevitable this tension at the heart of forgiveness. It is important to note that, for him, the poles of the unconditional and conditional remain indissociable despite being irreducible to one another. It is in the negotiation between these two poles that responsible political action and decision-making occurs. On the one hand, if political or legal action is not going to be reduced to a form of instrumentalism, then it must be committed to the ideal of unconditionality; it must exceed the pragmatic demands of the specific context. Yet, on the other, such unconditionality must not, Derrida insists, be allowed to determine political action, for decisions cannot be algorithmically derived from ethical principles. Thus founding a law or politics on forgiveness is out of the question ("On Forgiveness" 39). Nevertheless the possibility of justice – and by justice Derrida means something which exceeds rather than constitutes the law – is only available so long as there is a commitment to a form of forgiveness that forgives the unforgivable.

Although Derrida moves us far beyond the narrow constraints of Arendt's and Kristeva's theories of forgiveness, allowing us to reflect upon forgiveness in the context of horror and atrocity, his commitment to the concept of the unforgivable poses, in my view, some formidable problems. Specifically, Derrida fails to consider the practical ramifications of this central part of his thesis. Yet what are the consequences for victims of racist, sexist and other kinds of violence of privileging – perhaps even idealizing – an unconditional forgiveness? For while Derrida makes the persuasive argument that forgiveness must not further victimize the victim, what he does not consider in his elaboration of the concept of the unforgivable is its contradiction of the prerogative of the victim to set forth the conditions of forgiveness. As tantalizing as Derrida's idea of the unforgivable

is, then, I wonder if it does not inadvertently undermine the victim's right to withhold or grant forgiveness. I wonder if it is not unacceptable, perhaps one could even say deplorable, to discount as "impure" those acts of forgiveness which victims perform on the account of certain conditions having been met. I am worried, in other words, about the dangers of imposing a definition of forgiveness that discredits the victim's forgiving attitude on the grounds of its failure to conform to an abstract, unachievable ideal of what forgiveness is. While this is obviously not Derrida's aim, his theory runs the risk, I fear, of forfeiting the victim's right to set the conditions of forgiveness. It is respect for this right that must constitute, I argue, the single most important imperative of any project committed to an ethics of forgiveness.

IV. Reading, Representation, and the Realm of the Possible

I turn now to chapter-length discussions of the complex representations and conceptualizations of forgiveness and reconciliation in the work of four novelists. Before proceeding, however, let me note that although my readings attend carefully to the semantic refinements and differences between forgiveness, reconciliation and an array of related terms – e.g. apology, confession, reparation – I have found it impossible to treat these concepts as self-contained, isolated, or discrete units of meaning. In other words, without confounding or confusing forgiveness and reconciliation with one another, or with related discourses, my readings acknowledge, as do the texts I examine, that these discourses cannot be analysed separately, that they are fundamentally entangled in one another.[23] Thus whereas Derrida argues for a radical separation between forgiveness and the themes with which it is frequently associated, I find myself unable to divorce the concept from its cognates without developing a theory that is divorced from practice. Indeed, perhaps because the proliferation of scenes of forgiveness and reconciliation represents, in part, the globalization and secularization of Judaeo-Christian traditions, they cannot be analysed apart (at least not usually) from a

[23] One of the related discourses that assumes particular priority in this thesis is that of redress, which I understand to refer to possible methods to amend past injustices. These methods typically include restitution or reparations, with the former involving the return of objects (e.g. land, art, and ancestral remains) that were seized or stolen, and the latter to material recompense for that which cannot be returned (e.g. human life, a flourishing culture, and identity). I borrow these definitions from Elazar Barkan, who interprets the proliferation of restitution cases as an effect of the development of a new international morality. While Barkan's discussion provides a helpful overview of the internationalization of restitution, one of its limits in my view is that it reduces reconciliation movements to economic investments on the part of national governments.

host of other scenes—scenes of atonement, repentance, expiation, salvation, transformation, etc.

My focus in what follows is nevertheless on discourses of forgiveness and reconciliation in particular, in large part because of the prominence these have achieved in a vast range of contemporary geopolitical and cultural contexts. My hope is to challenge the assumption of many postcolonial and postmodern critics that forgiveness and reconciliation necessarily entail a rush to closure or consolation, a repression of memory, or a recuperation by power. In my wish to offer a critique of conventional considerations of forgiveness and reconciliation, I have selected texts that are dedicated to inventing or considering alternative ways of conceiving justice. Rather than retreating to the position that justice is unimaginable after the horrors of colonialism and ethnic strife, the texts I examine here demonstrate a commitment to envisioning the possibilities that forgiveness and reconciliation open up. Malouf, Ondaatje, Kogawa, and Coetzee are, to greater or lesser extents, all invested in an ethics of forgiveness and reconciliation, even as they are aware of the difficulties of translating such an ethics into action. While engaging with the anticipatory possibilities of forgiveness and reconciliation, in other words, these novelists keep ever in mind the potential for these discourses to be mobilized in the interests of reinforcing and reproducing prevailing power relations.

In *Remembering Babylon*, David Malouf alerts us to the dangerous prospect of a rhetoric of reconciliation propagating and sustaining a settler project of occupation. Published in the same year that Australia's official policy of reconciliation was formulated, Malouf's novel foregrounds the settler preoccupation with territorial possession and dispossession that haunts the national discourse of reconciliation in Australia. Reading *Remembering Babylon* in view of Australia's reconciliation movement in my first chapter, "Unsettling the Settler Postcolony," I suggest that the indigenization of the novel's key figure, Gemmy Fairley, offers the possibility of an autochthonous white identity, with his integration into the settlement life of the novel functioning as a strategy by which a sense of belonging and legitimacy might be attained. In the context of Australia's contemporary project of reconciliation, Gemmy's indigenization reminds us that this enterprise might also constitute a strategy of legitimizing and consolidating white ownership and domination. It also suggests that although reconciliation might be intended to alleviate settler insecurities, it may merely exacerbate a settler condition of unsettlement. In my reading of *Remembering Babylon*, I suggest that the fear and envy that indigeneity – in the form of Gemmy – generates among the settlers implies that reconciliation must remain for the time being an unrealizable category, an unfulfilled and unsettled possibility. But I also propose, in my reading of the novel's final scene, that the novel suggests a refusal to give up on the task of radically transforming racial relations in Australia. Malouf's invocation in the final pages of the novel of the word "love" – a relinquishment of the quest to possess according to Emmanuel Levinas and a

precondition of forgiveness according to Arendt – gives us some hope yet, I believe, that reconciliation is not an unachievable aspiration.

In *Anil's Ghost*, Michael Ondaatje also refuses to rule out the possibility of reconciliation, despite the despondency of the Sri Lankan war of which he writes. In my second chapter, "Vigils Amid Violence," I explore Ondaatje's engagement with the difficult task of imagining reconciliation in a context of apparently limitless, inexhaustible ethnic strife. In his refusal of the helpfulness of any simple intervention into a cycle of desperate violence, Ondaatje, I argue, offers a powerful critique of the frequent recourse to retribution in international policy making, suggesting that the belief in the value of conviction and sentencing is not necessarily universally shared, despite the assumptions of the United Nations and various human rights organizations. Calling into question his protagonist's determination to expose and hold accountable the Sri Lankan government, Ondaatje contemplates the problems of taking for granted the efficacy of principles of legal judgment and persecution. In a situation in which the scale of atrocity confounds the calls for punishment, and in which the traumatic impact of war on survivors is overwhelming and enduring, a dogmatic insistence on retribution is, he suggests, shortsighted and potentially dangerous. In my reading of his novel, I explore the alternatives to conflict and conflict resolution that Ondaatje imagines—alternatives that are distinguished, I suggest, by an ethics of caring for the other. In particular, I consider the role of archaeological excavation and artistic creation in inaugurating mourning and reconciliation in *Anil's Ghost*, and examine the potential for the identification and reconstruction of fragments and remains – bones, statues, etc. – to enable an elegiac project of commemorating the dead. Throughout, I emphasize the capacity of artistic transactions to facilitate reconciliation, positing that although they may not restore loss, they can nonetheless constitute powerful forms of resistance, recomposition, and reflection.

In my third chapter, "The Future of Racial Memory," I continue to explore the innovative and progressive potential of reconciliation, though I focus to a greater extent on forgiveness and particularly its relation to memory. Reading Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* in the first half of the chapter, I pursue its disarticulation of the (presumed) relation between forgetfulness and forgiveness. As a meditation on the traumatic effects of internment on Japanese Canadians, Kogawa's text dissociates forgiveness from amnesia of any kind—for instance, a willful dismissal of an essentially embarrassing national past or an involuntary erasure from memory of events too painful to recall. While accounting for its cultural specificities, Kogawa insists on forgiveness as a renarration rather than repression or replication of the past. Forgiveness, as she represents it, anteriorizes the future, modifying and revising the past for the sake of interrupting the trajectories of the present and opening up new possibilities. In *Itsuka*, Kogawa's sequel to *Obasan* and the focus of the latter part of my chapter, this construction of temporality is extended to the redress movement. For Kogawa, this movement represents a tribute to those who suffered internment without having their suffering

acknowledged or addressed, with Obasan and Uncle – members of the older generation of Japanese Canadians – as the absent presences or political unconscious of the text itself. Although plagued by a range of problems, particularly internal dissension, the redress achievement, Kogawa suggests, is a gift to the future that seeks to endow it with the justice the present lacks. I interpret the euphoric terms in which this achievement is represented as deriving from the realization that it signals the possibility of transformation in its production of a truth that had been disavowed and rejected by dominant Canadian society.

While Coetzee is considerably more skeptical than Kogawa about the liberatory potential of truth telling, his recent novel, *Disgrace*, contemplates the capacity of confessional discourse to enable ethical and political responsibility. In my fourth and final chapter, "The Agonistics of Absolution," I consider *Disgrace* as a metafictive representation of the TRC that explores the meaning and consequences of postmodern self-consciousness and self-doubt for South Africa's project of national reconciliation. By means of a tribunal established in response to the charge of sexual harassment laid against David Lurie, the novel's protagonist, Coetzee examines not only the unintentional and insidious effects of confessional rituals but also their potential to enable absolution and redemption. This ambivalent and contradictory stance towards confession also characterizes Coetzee's take on forgiveness, which exhibits the exasperated tension displayed by Derrida in his writings on the subject. In particular, Coetzee struggles in *Disgrace* between a concern about the authority and power that forgiveness seems to entail and a recognition that the refusal to pursue forgiveness might, for those in positions of power, constitute an evasion of responsibility. In reading several scenes in *Disgrace* in which forgiveness (ostensibly) takes place without the consent of the victim, I explore Coetzee's concern that forgiveness itself might marginalize, silence, and sacrifice the oppressed by placing on their shoulders the burden of South Africa's reconciliation efforts. Coetzee raises the worrying prospect that, in an attempt to disavow responsibility for their suffering, those in positions of power may construct the marginalized – women, animals, etc. – as exceptionally forgiving. In reading Lurie's sacrifice of various victims – including Melanie, his former student, and later, a stray dog – I suggest that the condition of disgrace registered in the novel's title refers to what Derrida calls the exercise of the "right of grace" – that is, the deprivation of the victim's right to accede forgiveness. But rather than read Coetzee as refusing the possibility of forgiveness on the grounds of the victimization it can enact, I suggest that his novel attests to his vision of "forgiveness without power" (Derrida, "On Forgiveness," 59).

Collectively, the chapters that follow suggest that while it might be too soon for the beneficiaries of colonialism to be absolved of their crimes, and for reconciliation between erstwhile foes to be finalized, the twenty-first century promises to be an era when a politics of forgiveness and reconciliation is – perhaps for the first time in history – possible. If such a politics is to be the cause

for hope that I interpret it as, it must be committed to contesting those relations of domination that would refuse the survivors of colonialism and its aftermaths the right to determine the conditions of reparation and rapprochement. Only if the prerogative of oppressed groups to devise the terms of forgiveness and reconciliation is conceded will a radical revision to prevailing systems of violence and injustice be imaginable.

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CHAPTER ONE

Unsettling the Settler Postcolony: Uncanny Pre-occupations in David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*

> *Love would not stoop to mere tolerance; it wants solidarity instead – and solidarity may mean self-denial and self-abnegation ... Love does not mean, nor does it lead to, 'grasping', 'possessing', 'getting to know', let alone getting mastery over the object of love or getting it under control. Love means consent to a mystery of the other which is akin to the mystery of the future.*
>
> -Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society*, 168

> *[Reconciliation is] the process by which, as settlers and latecomers, we have begun to come into full possession of the place ... Of course we already possess it in fact, through occupation or conquest, and that possession is legitimized by law. But there is only one way that we can truly possess the land ... that is by taking it into ourselves, interiorising and reimagining it as native people have done.*
>
> -David Malouf, "A Writing Life," 705

I: A Contemporary Babylon? Speaking to the Ghosts of Australia Past

Although set in the early nineteenth century, in a settlement of Scottish immigrants, David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* is profoundly relevant to postcolonial considerations of the contemporary Australian condition. Published in 1994, one year after the watershed trial *Mabo vs. Queensland* overturned the common law precedent that Australia was *terra nullius*, and in the same year that the Australian government devised an official policy of reconciliation, the novel provides a key point of departure for examining a politics of postcolonial reconciliation—its problems, challenges, and possibilities. In foregrounding the themes of settler envy, settler estrangement, and settler fantasies of authentic belonging—themes that have always lain beneath the Australian national imaginary but that in recent years have become more emphatic—the novel raises important questions concerning the issues of postcolonial possession, dispossession, and repossession that haunt a nation intent on coming to terms with the ghosts of its past through a policy of reconciliation.[1] Among these questions:

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[1] While I use the designation "settler" throughout this chapter to refer to those (predominantly white) Australians who colonized the continent, and who

How is it possible to invest hope or faith in the ideal of reconciliation given that, practically speaking, it constitutes, at least in part, a project of consolidating settler ownership and occupation? How is reconciliation feasible, let alone imaginable, given the continuation of non-indigenous racism in Australia and other settler colonies, given the troubling persistence of indigenous oppression and suffering?

Remembering Babylon attests to the problems that face the project of Australian reconciliation, particularly the danger of it giving rise, as did *Mabo*, to fears of dispossession on the part of non-indigenous Australians cognizant of constituting an illegitimate national presence. These fears, Malouf suggests, can potentially overdetermine discourses of reconciliation, and his novel operates as a kind of warning against translating the rhetoric of reconciliation into its actual achievement. *Remembering Babylon* centers on Gemmy Fairley, an indigenized white figure whose return after twelve years spent among a local tribe raises anxieties about race, possession, and belonging for the members of a small settler community. These anxieties seem to render the possibility of reconciliation that Gemmy represents structurally *impossible*. The attempt on the part of some of the settlers to "own" him, to assume proprietorial control over him—and in this sense to become "reconciled" (in a perverse sense) to the indigenes with whom he has ties—suggests that a project of reconciliation that emerges out of an unacknowledged desire to possess, control, or master the other preempts the pursuit before it has even begun. When read into the contemporary Australian context, this quest for possession affords the knowledge that reconciliation is an always already failed project if it constitutes merely a practical strategy to consolidate white ownership and domination.

In this chapter I discuss *Remembering Babylon* as a powerful critique of the contiguity between the settler project of occupation, on the one hand, and the discourse of reconciliation, on the other—in other words, the use of the rhetoric of reconciliation not as the rationale for material restitution, social justice, or even peaceful co-existence but as a (failed) project to legitimize settlers' presence. I also suggest that despite providing this critique, Malouf's novel encourages an instrumentalist view of indigeneity that has hindered the possibility of reconciliation. Malouf's mobilization of a figure of white indigeneity mediates access for the settler to indigenous claims of belonging to the land in what is an attempt, I think, to lend credence to settler claims of sovereignty and ownership. In other words, I interpret Malouf's indigenization of whiteness as an effective legitimization of the presumption of sovereign right that some critics would argue lies at the heart of the (post)colonial project of reconciliation. Considered in the context of the contemporary movement for reconciliation, his novel's

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continue to occupy the land in a manner that marginalizes its original inhabitants, I also recognize that the term operates euphemistically by enacting a slippage between "peaceful settler" and "invader" which potentially elides a context of colonial violence and genocide.

appropriation of indigenous ways of being in the world raises the difficulty that the Australian policy might, in truth, conceal a project to expedite settler ownership of the land by supplementing territorial possession of the continent with a form of "spiritual" possession that indigenous Australians are presumed to enjoy.

However, although *Remembering Babylon* represents and reproduces the problems and limits of reconciliation, it would be disingenuous to interpret the novel as confirming the view that the Australian pursuit of reconciliation is reducible to pure self-interest or egoism, albeit unconscious, on the part of white Australians. Rather a careful reading of Malouf's novel discourages an out-of-hand dismissal of reconciliation as, for instance, a merely conservative movement void of any transformative capacity. *Remembering Babylon* suggests that although the Australian reconciliation process will certainly not provide an absolute, complete, or finalized reconciliation, it may facilitate prosaic "episodes" or "moments" of reconciliation and thus bring into view a horizon of future justice. In interpreting the invocation of the word "love" in one such "moment" at the end of the novel, I suggest that *Remembering Babylon* reveals the power of a nonteleological, nontranscendent vision of reconciliation, thus functioning as a relevant reminder of the dangers of prematurely foreclosing on the possibilities of the contemporary Australian endeavour. Malouf suggests that although the impetus to reconcile might emerge, for some non-indigenous Australians, out of a wish to secure a situation of control and mastery, it can alternately manifest a wish to bring an end to that situation, to give up power and possession in an act of the "love" that Hannah Arendt has suggested is integral to the quest for forgiveness. At the heart of his text, then, lies a crucial tension between, on the one hand, a recognition that the wish on the part of the settler for reconciliation all too often issues out of a wish to preserve a system of domination and, on the other, a vision of reconciliation as an end to this system and the establishment, in its stead, of a just society.

II: Australian Reconciliation: Notes on a Movement

While the decisive trend towards the creation and mobilization of reconciliation movements has generally gone unnoted and unanalyzed in postcolonial studies, when scholars in the field have broached the subject it has generally been to denounce reconciliation as an either dangerously regressive or politically naïve idea. Perhaps this frequent denunciation of reconciliation processes is related to the meaning of reconciliation itself, which in anglophone cultures at least, is associated, even etymologically, with surrender and resignation. Postcolonial reconciliation, in this sense, is taken to mean that the oppressed are expected to become "reconciled to" their situation of disempowerment and marginalization. Thus if the globalization of reconciliation has generally been ignored or overlooked by postcolonial critics, when it has been addressed, it has often been assumed to deny the possibility of revolutionary

transformation and to entail the abandonment of a radical agenda in favour of suppressing political conflict and social protest. In this formulation, reconciliation is—in the same way as, say, multiculturalism—a problematic notion, to say the least, one that refers in essence to a state-sanctioned policy of preserving the status quo rather than effecting progressive change.

Consider, for instance, Benita Parry's claim that the pursuit of reconciliation is incommensurable with a radical restructuring of the social, economic, and political conditions underlying postcolonial existence. For Parry, reconciliation seems to be essentially tantamount to the absolution of those who have committed violent crimes and atrocities, and to an elision from collective memory of the suffering that the commission of such injustices involved. What reconciliation enacts, she maintains, is merely the replacement of the narrative of colonialism—in which conflict and strife are the characteristic features of the relations between opposing factions—with a narrative of intimacy and negotiation. This revision of "an historical project of invasion and expropriation" in a manner that disposes of "an oppositional grounding system" (95), reflects what she perceives as a discursive privileging of consensus and settlement endemic to postcolonial criticism as a whole. Maintaining that it is too early as yet to promote concord and cooperation given that the conditions making for discord and division remain intact, Parry, it would seem, forecloses on the possibilities of reconciliation entirely.

Parry's position emerges, of course, out of an admittedly legitimate concern that the demand for reconciliation might deprive oppressed subjects of the authority to decide what forms resistance to racist and colonialist structures ought to take, as well as of the license to govern and regulate the process through which change is enacted. In the particular context of the Australian reconciliation movement, this concern appears especially legitimate, as does the tendency among many critics to cast aspersions on the movement's efficacy and integrity. But although the problems with the reconciliation process as it has unfolded in Australia make it understandable why most analyses refuse to grant that it might signal some capacity, at least, for social transformation, the sustained and heavy-handed critique that has been launched against it ultimately fails to account adequately for the possibilities that the process opens up for the creation of a radically different and more democratic future.

Critics of Australia's bid for reconciliation consistently refer, as a rationale for their disavowal of its possibilities, to its patently nationalist agenda. The official policy of reconciliation, they note, is a nation-building project that aims, above all, to readjust Australia's national self-image.[2] As evidence, they

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[2] The official policy of reconciliation was first formulated in response to the investigation of the 1991 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and its proposed political support for "reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in Australia" (Commonwealth of Australia, 65). The proposal also resulted in the ratification of the Aboriginal Reconciliation Act in

point to the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, whose mandate is to facilitate a process of producing a "united Australia" (Council 1993, 1), and whose first major report enthuses about the "marvelous opportunity" reconciliation provides for "all Australians to be participants in a worth-while nation-building exercise" (Council 1994, ix). While the critique of reconciliation as governed by nationalist interests emerges out of the concern that indigenous interests are not a priority, dismissing the project on this basis overlooks, I suggest, the larger opportunities its existence affords. In this case, such a critique discounts the pedagogical aims of the Council entirely and refuses to acknowledge that there might be some benefits to educating a non-indigenous Australian public of an historical record of (post)colonial genocide and dispossession.[3] While remaining cognizant of the serious limitations posed by the nationalist agenda of Australia's reconciliation movement, I would propose that restructuring non-indigenous Australians' perceptions of the nation to include the injustices perpetrated against an indigenous population might well further the possibility of, for instance, significant land reform and redistribution of resources. Indeed, one of the more convincing reasons cited for dismissing Australia's policy of reconciliation has been the unwillingness on the part of non-indigenous Australians to improve in any substantive way the material conditions of indigenous Australians' lives. The rhetoric of Australian reconciliation has, as critics such as Ravi de Costa and Anthony Moran rightly observe, been unaccompanied by change in the social, economic, and political circumstances of indigenous people: that is, symbolic recognition of indigenous Australians' positions has not, in the period from 1993 to the present, been supplemented with material recognition. Despite the seriousness of this failure, however, no redistribution of benefits will take place in Australia until such time as the beneficiaries of colonialism recognize and accept accountability for their complicity in the exploitation of indigenous people. In other words, the policy of reconciliation has not, by any means, resulted in an improvement in the social and economic conditions of indigenous life, but its pedagogical practice of exposing non-indigenous participation in the commission of injustices against indigenous Australians may be the precondition for the reallocation of resources of which critics speak.

This process of bringing to light the extent of non-indigenous responsibility for indigenous suffering was arguably begun with the release of the

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1991, which in turn led to the creation of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

[3] The Council has published an array of educational documents. Supplementing these are study kits that any member of the Australian public can use as a basis for a 'Reconciliation Study Circle'. Encouraged by the Council, small groups of settler Australians come together to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' culture, their experiences of colonization, and indigenous contributions to the nation.

Bringing Them Home Report (1996). The document, produced by the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), records the forcible removals of Aboriginal children from their families and communities between 1910 and 1970, and presents some several hundred first-person testimonies of members of the "Stolen Generation," as it is known.[4] These testimonies register the terrorizing experience of abduction, the exploitation suffered during captivity, and the fear and rage of those communities from which the children were taken: among non-indigenous Australians, they generated such melancholic affect as outrage, shame, and regret. *Bringing Them Home* became the centerpiece of the reconciliation movement and the best-selling government publication in history. On the recommendation of the report that reparation for the atrocities committed involve symbolic gestures of atonement from non-indigenous Australians in the form of personal acknowledgements of responsibility, numerous community groups and individual non-indigenous Australians issued apologies for their role—whether direct (in the form of the removal and custody of children) or indirect (in the form of complicity)—in the suffering and oppression of indigenous Australians. These apologies were expressed, for the most part, through the medium of "Sorry Books," a mechanism that profoundly inspired the imaginations of settler Australians. Circulated in schools and university campuses, state institutions such as museums, parliaments, and municipal offices, and private enterprises such as bookstores and shopping malls, the books became a popular means for non-indigenous Australians to express their support for reconciliation. Supplementing them was a "Sorry Day," a national memorial occasion that offered Australians an opportunity to commemorate those affected by removal, to express regret for the pain suffered as a result of past and present racial injustice, and to celebrate the possibility of achieving reconciliation.

One could easily interpret the reactions that the testimonies generated among non-indigenous Australians as a self-indulgent display of sentiment on the part of the socially privileged or as a narcissistic performance of guilt, pity, and remorse. It is worth questioning, however, whether reductively interpreting the testimonies as having afforded no "real" benefit to indigenous people's lives ultimately denies or at least diminishes the significance of their impact. Without wishing to exaggerate their effect, I would conjecture that, despite the tendency among critics to ignore their educative potential, for many non-indigenous

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[4] For an analysis of how the *Bringing Them Home* testimonies implicate non-indigenous Australians, as witnesses in the narrative transactions, in the history of colonialism which they record, see Gillian Whitlock's essay, "In the Second Person: Narrative Transactions in the Stolen Generations Testimony." Whitlock conducts a comparative reading, examining the Inquiry's report alongside South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings as part of a "struggle to shape an ethical response to these testimonies in the non-indigenous Australian community" (202).

Australians the narratives of the Stolen Generation forced the realization that the oppression of indigenous people is recent and ongoing, and not located in some distant colonial past. In other words, these narratives gave the lie to the myth of non-indigenous innocence, uncovering the illusion of white benevolence towards indigenous Australians by exposing practices of state-sanctioned abduction and cultural genocide. Further, while the lack of material reparation has rendered symbolic gestures such as apologies for postcolonial wrongdoing significantly less meaningful than they otherwise would have been, it would be amiss to dismiss the apologies issued by non-indigenous Australians as merely expedient, or as a mockery of the redress process. Some critics have suggested that the apologetic acts that *Bringing Them Home* prompted foreclosed the possibility of reconciliation, enabling non-indigenous Australians to relieve their own sense of liberal guilt without taking responsibility for acts of colonialist aggression. In her analysis of the apologies issued by non-indigenous Australians, Eva Mackey, for instance, rejects the ambiguity of dictionary definitions of apology, which she claims obviate the issue of who benefits from the speech act, out of a preference for an "anthropological" definition of it as a "diplomatic or political act" (66) through which one secures one's own interests by affecting concern for the interests of others. In the Australian instance, she contends, the apologies issued by non-indigenous Australians reinforced power relations by easing a guilt-afflicted settler conscience. While Mackey's wish to support marginalized communities by denying the importance of the apologetic speech-act is understandable, the importance of the apologies for many indigenous Australians is indisputable. It was indigenous organizations, after all—the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in particular—that insisted on the apology as one of the essential conditions of reconciliation during policy negotiations. Moreover, while the issuing of apologies by non-indigenous Australians has by no means radically transformed the present situation of indigenous Australians, recompensed them for their losses, or atoned for past injustices, and while it has certainly not resulted in reconciliation "once and for all," it has furthered the possibility of attaining some measure of social justice.

In pointing out some of the possibilities that the process of reconciliation opens up, I do not mean, as I hope is clear, to deny or downplay the serious limitations from which it suffers, nor to suggest that, on its own, the reconciliation movement carries the capacity to entirely transform racist and colonialist structures: I do mean, however, to suggest, that it does offer some potential, which has hitherto been overlooked, for enabling a different, more racially just future in Australia. It would be difficult to argue, nor would I want to, that the marginalization and disempowerment of indigenous Australians has disappeared or even diminished with the onset of Australia's reconciliation policy. Rather, as Haydie Gooder and Jane M. Jacobs argue in what is one of the most persuasive and theoretically astute critiques of Australian reconciliation, the period of reconciliation has been concomitant with a period of post-native title backlash in which some settlers have fabricated the myth that it is they, not indigenous

Australians, who are persecuted and oppressed in the national order. Observing the convergence between a national policy of reconciliation, on the hand, and a consolidation of settler racism, on the other, Gooder and Jacobs explore the range of melancholic affect—loss, beratement, fear, and guilt—that the potentiality of reconciliation creates in some settlers. If the policy of reconciliation was strategically implemented as a means of ensuring that all Australians, settlers and dispossessed indigenes alike, come to feel that they belong in the nation, then they maintain that it has curiously had the opposite effect: it has afflicted both with a profound sense of unsettlement. For indigenous Australians reconciliation has meant very little in material terms, possibly because it has consolidated the perceptions of many non-indigenous Australians that it is in fact they who are dispossessed and disempowered, that they lack power in relation to Aborigines. In the face of overwhelming evidence according to virtually any index (indigenous health, housing, education, etc.) that the material conditions of indigenous peoples are drastically inferior to those of non-indigenous peoples, many settler Australians have come to view the latter as somehow possessing more than they rightfully should—more history, more land, more "special" privileges. These sentiments have included an intensified racism against indigenous Australians, which is perhaps most evident in the notorious emergence of Pauline Hanson's racist One Nation Party, with its explicit commitment to the idea of a "pure" and "undivided" Australia.

Gooder and Jacobs's analysis constitutes a powerful and convincing indictment of the reconciliation movement, and I will draw on it, to an extent, in my explication of Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*. However, I also want to note that the project of reconciliation is not as unproductive or unpromising as most accounts, Gooder and Jacobs included, allow, and to suggest that it is too simple and too dangerous to foreclose on the possibilities of reconciliation completely. If the project of reconciliation has intensified racism among some settler Australians, then it has also prompted in others a wish to radically transform a system defined by indigenous poverty and suffering. While there has indeed been a post-native backlash on the Australian right of the nature that Gooder and Jacob describe, there has also been an important and sustained assault on a racist Australian state by a grassroots protest movement demanding that the conditions essential for genuine reconciliation (such as land reform and resource redistribution) be instituted, both through legislation and through other, less formal, means. This movement has both formed out of, and in reaction against, the official policy of reconciliation promulgated by the Australian movement, and it constitutes a powerful resistant force that critical accounts have overlooked.

III: Between Babylon and Belonging

Through the dialogic approach that its textuality affords, through its capacity to incorporate competing perspectives and differing interpretations, Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* enables an analysis of reconciliation that moves

beyond the rigidity of dogmatic arguments or singular viewpoints. The novel permits, in other words, an approach to Australia's aspiration to reconciliation that is open, in a way that social and anthropological literature on the subject does not seem to be, to the full range of both its limits and the possibilities—that accounts, that is, both for its entanglement in prevailing power formations and its promise of emancipation from those formations. For Malouf's text exposes reconciliation as a potentially fraudulent undertaking predicated on reinforcing non-indigenous domination, yet it also struggles to envisage a future in which reconciliation, in the sense of social transformation, is realizable.

The full complexity that *Remembering Babylon* brings to bear on an examination of reconciliation is evident in the text's very first pages. Here Gemmy emerges, into the narrative and the settlers' everyday lives, in the act of literally crossing an essentially figurative threshold between settler and indigenous zones; described ambiguously at first as "neither one thing nor another" (2), he appears hovering on a fence bordering the McIvor property, a farm located on the absolute edge of indigenous hunting grounds. In his transgression of this liminal boundary separating the space of the settlement from "a world over there beyond the no-man's-land," Gemmy represents, from the very beginning of *Remembering Babylon*, a potential rapprochment between the newly immigrated settlers of the continent and its indigenous occupants. Yet although his contestation of boundaries signals his embodiment of the promise of future possibilities, including the postcolonial capacity for reconciliation, on the one hand, it also points to the troubling resilience of (post)colonial relations of power that work against that capacity, on the other. In other words, and in the same ways as Malouf's narrative itself, this figure's transit between communities not only affords an elusive glimpse of a future humanity beyond strife and opposition, but also points to the challenges that presently prevent this possibility from being realized, particularly the power of postcolonial possession. The fence that Gemmy transgresses spatially marks, of course, a claim to white ownership, a claim that his "transgression" is interpreted as threatening. His presence thus conjures fears and evokes aggression among those settlers who anticipate him bringing about a loss to their physical security, and to this extent points to ways that the postcolonial quest for possession and domination threatens to disappoint the possibility of reconciliation.

But Gemmy's hybridized status is also interpreted, at least at first, as potentially bringing an end to settler insecurity precisely by securing a claim to legitimacy and belonging. By virtue of having gone through a process that Terry Goldie has called "indigenization," Gemmy promises to unproblematize the settlers' mediated claim to national identity, to render Australia not the place of exile represented by the biblical Babylon registered in the novel's title but a place of genuine belonging. Indeed, were it not for his potential to facilitate a process of reconciliation between the settlers and the indigenes on account of his hybrid nature, it seems that several members of the settlement would not tolerate his uncanny presence in the settlement, which in the end only intensifies their

sentiments of fear, alienation, and negativity. The decision to allow Gemmy to remain is premised, however, on the logic that his indigeneity will establish a sense of proper belonging that will render the unfamiliar familiar for settlers afflicted by a profound sense of estrangement. Here it is useful to recall Gooder and Jacobs' argument that while the project of reconciliation seems to have increased settler perceptions of not properly belonging, it was paradoxically undertaken for the primary aim of legitimizing the illegitimate presence of non-indigenous Australians. This crisis of illegitimacy gives rise, they maintain, to the illusion on the part of some settlers of alienation from a category of being-in-the-world—indigeneity—which is ironically envied for its presumed legitimacy (even when settlers realize that actual indigeneity does not provide material advantage, whether in the form of access to traditional homelands or an empowered position in the nation).[5] Because of a perception of constituting a lack or negativity in the national imaginary, as well as a wish to properly belong or possess a kind of indigeneity, some settlers seek out the presumed positivity of the figure of the indigene, who is seen to possess precisely what the former does not have: authenticity, tradition, connection to the land. Indeed, for the settlers in *Remembering Babylon* the achievement of a kind of indigenous equivalence that Gemmy promises to provide offers a means by which to attain a sense of national selfhood. In order to relieve themselves of a sense of dispossession, to divest themselves of any illegitimacy for having arrived belatedly, the settlers look to Gemmy as a useful and readily available model of indigenous ways of being in the world. While Gooder and Jacobs cite as a typical template of authentic belonging the figure of the "traditional indigene," then, Malouf offers a less typical template, but no less meaningful a figure in settler fantasies: the indigenized immigrant, or settler "gone native."[6] As an indigenized white man

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[5] A similar argument has been articulated by Anthony Moran, whose work also examines the reconciliation process as a phenomena that emerged out of settler perceptions of national illegitimacy, on the one hand, and settler sentiments of shame, guilt, and envy, on the other. Moran notes that the policy of reconciliation was essentially formulated by non-indigenous leaders to the exclusion of Aboriginal communities as a coping strategy for feelings of not truly belonging to the land and for fears of occupying the category of the dispossessed.

[6] While Gooder and Jacobs claim that the phenomenon of the delegitimized settler is peculiar to the era of reconciliation, and that it is, indeed, the nation's adjustments of itself in the name of reconciliation which have dislodged the presumption of sovereign right, I would suggest that the settler perception of alienation, not to mention the aspiration of reconciliation, have long been part of (post)colonial aspirations. Indeed, reconciliation, albeit now more than ever, has been at the core of settler ambitions since the originary moment of colonialism: as a potential means of suppressing resistance, reconciliation—in the pejorative sense of "negotiation" and "settlement" for the sake of continued

Gemmy assembles a kind of indigenous equivalence by which these "dispossessed" settlers might disavow their status as belated arrivals and divest themselves of an attendant sense of illegitimacy. As a figure that has enjoyed intimate association with the land, he forms the centerpiece of settler fantasies of authentic belonging, and offers a paradigm for indigenous ways of being in the world that imagines away feelings of displacement, insecurity, and anxiety.

Because they imagine that Gemmy will offer the possibility of a true autochthonous white identity, one that will not only create a sense of national selfhood in the place of a sense of national loss or illegitimacy but also ensure the domestication of the native other, many of the settlers finally assent to his integration into the community. Gemmy's assimilation into settlement life is, in part, a strategy by which the settlers might come to feel that they properly belong in the nation, by which they might experience the psychic security that presumably flows from the authority of colonial possession. Thus although his presence ultimately only further destabilizes settler claims to belonging, it promises, at first anyway, to resolve a settler crisis of perceived illegitimacy. For whereas the settlers are fundamentally alienated, both from their homeland and their new found home, Gemmy not only belongs—despite being an outsider in the context of the settlement—but also appears to have an unreserved right to belong.

Because he constitutes an object of settler fantasies of inheriting indigenous "rites" to the land, Malouf's figure of white indigeneity enacts a slippage between the settler's wish to possess the land and the indigene's rightful claim to the land. More specifically, this figure facilitates a form of racial appropriation whereby the settler dilemma of lacking a spiritual or genealogical connection to the land is resolved. In this sense *Remembering Babylon* seeks to unproblematize settler identity by envisioning a new identity, one that, as a result of its indigenization, will enable the settlers to assume inheritance of the Australian land; by indigenizing whiteness, Malouf offers the settlers, in the form of Gemmy, the connection to their surrounding environment that they presently lack. Thus the text's vision of the possibility of a truly autochthonous white identity includes not only physical but also spiritual possession of the land. For although the white settlers have physical ownership of the land, although they have military strength and political and economic advantage, the unease that they feel arises out of something less tangible: namely out of their perceived lack of sacred ties to the land. Gemmy's arrival in the settlement heralds the beginning of Malouf's dangerous experiment with the idea that indigeneity can offer white settlers irrefutable control and possession—both physical *and* spiritual—of the

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colonialist dominance—has for centuries been looked to as a potential antidote to settler feelings of unsettlement and out-of-placeness. This legacy to which I am referring is witnessed, for instance, in the colonial policy pursued throughout the nineteenth century in Australia. For a discussion of this policy, see Henry Reynolds' *Aboriginal Sovereignty: Reflections on Race, State and Nation*.

land. *Remembering Babylon* thus manifests a troubling wish to consolidate settler dominance and territorial control by making, via Gemmy, a spiritual claim on the land in addition to already established legal and judicial claims.

For the settlers in *Remembering Babylon*, lack of indigeneity is inherently connected to a sense of *unheimlich*, to feelings of utter alienation from the land and culture of their new found home. Though the political and economic beneficiaries of a colonized Australia, the settlers experience not only physical and social alienation, distant as they are from their originary homeland, but also spiritual and genealogical alienation as a result of their repressed knowledge that not they, but indigenes, have a prior claim on the land. This knowledge is in turn projected onto a colonial space that is routinely, even repetitiously, characterized as a void, absence, or negativity. In the first pages of *Remembering Babylon*, Gemmy is described, from the perspective of the McIvor children, as having emerged from "the abode of everything savage and fearsome," as a place "of nightmare rumours, superstitions, and all that belonged to the Absolute Dark" (2-3). The settlers, it would seem, view the outlying regions of the settlement as a ghostly, haunted zone, as an alien and vacant expanse of land, and imagine themselves threatened by the possibility of subjective incoherence and possibly even destruction in the face of the unknown landscape. The settler subjects are disarmed, their previous assurances or certainties stripped away by the knowledge that there exist remnants of the earth that have yet to be colonized, "tracts of land that no white man had even entered" (8). Ellen McIvor, for one, reflects on the fear that the "openness" of the country evokes in her, on the fear of subjective disorientation that endless stretch of land creates: "[I]t was easy here," she thinks, "to lose yourself in the immensities of the land, under a sky that opened too far in the direction of infinity" (110).

The persistent trope of emptiness, immensity and infinity in *Remembering Babylon* is constitutive, of course, of a larger discursive repertoire in colonial narratives in which uninhabited land is figured as lacking in presence and therefore threatening. Colonial space is, as Dorothy Seaton points out in "Colonising Discourses: The Land in Australian and Canadian Exploration Narratives," characteristically figured in colonizing discourses as a place of non-place or non-meaning, as a realm of chaos that threatens to engulf or fragment the subject. In this sense, Seaton claims, colonial experience is deconstructive of the coherence of European epistemology. It was on epistemological grounds, in addition to professional ones, that the colonial explorer would empty the land of all prior signification, that he would name the already named and discover what was already known. It was also partly on epistemological grounds that the settler would empty the land, that he would render it ready for settlement, occupation, or invasion, ready to be filled with cattle and colonial discourse. The emptying of land, as the *Mabo* case recognized, can also be strategic in ethical or legal domains: the doctrine of *terra nullius*, the view that Aboriginal people were "not here," the view that they were an absent presence in Australia not only in terms of their person but also in terms of property rights, was precisely what enabled white

settlers to establish themselves as "properly" belonging and hence legitimately in possession of the land.

In *Remembering Babylon* the epistemological crisis signaled by the representation of the land as lacking in presence is accompanied by an ontological crisis in which the settler subject also experiences him or herself as a negativity. Here the empty and barren qualities associated with the landscape are projected onto the settler subject and manifested in, for instance, a decentered and destabilized state of mind. Throughout Malouf's text, the settler is consistently represented as lacking in presence, as spectral, death-like, and "bone-white" (10) as a result of cultural and spiritual emptiness.

The overwhelming desolation that the land is imagined to contain (or, more accurately, fail to contain) translates into a metaphysical emptiness: the narrative registers, for instance, the settlers' "sense" of "being submerged, of being hidden away in the depths of the country" and of being desperately "lost" (9). It is in the settler's displacedness, or sense of loss of place, that we find the kind of melancholia that Judith Butler describes in relation to the psychic life of power in processes of subjection. Butler adapts the Freudian diagnosis of melancholia in order to adumbrate the way in which it establishes itself in relation to the loss of an external object or ideal. In the melancholic response, there is a refusal to break the original attachment to this object/ideal, the trace of which becomes internalized, drawn into an ego that absorbs the love and rage felt towards it. This modification of the "topography of the ego" results in self-beratement and aversion. In this sense, melancholia substitutes "for an attachment that is broken, gone, or impossible." The melancholic condition of the settler in *Remembering Babylon* results from a lost attachment to the originary homeland, from the loss of an environment imagined as "more alive and interesting, more crowded with *things*, with people too" (54), even by a generation that had not been born there. The settlers attempt to resolve their melancholia by replacing the internalized loss of the homeland with an external, more readily available ideal/object in the form of an indigenized figure of national belonging.

Gemmy's indigeneity, his insider/outsider status, casts him as a figure with the capacity to translate the spiritual knowledge of the indigenes to the settlers, thereby affording them, as I have been suggesting, a new, legitimized claim to belonging, a new way of living their settler identity that is different from the empty negativity they experienced previously. As an embodiment of indigenous mysticism, Gemmy provides the settlers, then, with potential access to the extra-phenomenal realm of the other, to the spiritual consciousness of the indigene, and hence to the spiritual power of the land. He imparts to them metaphysical knowledge, or an indigenous belief system, that seems to elude the capture of white semiosis: he grasps, for instance, that "There was no way of existing in this land, or of making your way through it, unless you took it into yourself, discovered your breath, the sounds that linked up all the various parts of it, and made them one. Without that you were blind, you were death, as he had

been" (65). Gemmy's indigenization, and his concomitant spiritual attachment to the land, operates as a catalyst of sorts by which various members of the settler community, and in particular members of the McIvor household, experience moments of remarkable, preternatural connection to the natural world, to the realm of the sacred. As a result of his presence in the settlement, Jock McIvor, for instance, goes through a process of transformation in which he reaches through to a "form of knowledge" that is "unnamable" and yet "exhilarating" (107). In elegiac prose Malouf describes Jock's newfound attentiveness not only to the minutiae of the natural world—to the "iridescent backs of insects," for instance, and to the beak of a bird and the "long silver threads of water" (107) drawn by it—but also to the harmonious totality that these things form. The otherworldly, transcendental consciousness that Jock attains finds a counterpart in the epiphanic moment that his daughter, Janet, experiences while tending to Mrs. Hutchence's beehives, a moment in which she "was not herself," in which she comes out of herself and "s[ees] it," a reborn self which she glimpses "through Gemmy's eyes" (144). It is also accompanied by Gemmy that the minister Frazer, a botanist intent on discovering and domesticating indigenous plants, glimpses the redemptive possibilities of the settlers' occupation of Australia. His imperative to erect Jerusalem in the stolen land of Babylon—an imperative registered in one of the novel's epigraphs, a quotation from Blake's *The Four Zoas* that reads "whether this is Jerusalem or Babylon we know not"—seems central to Malouf's text as a whole. It is an imperative signaled by the repeated experiences of transformation of the kind undergone by Jock and Janet. And it is Gemmy, of course, who mediates this process whereby the settlers achieve a new form of identity, a transubstantiated self premised not on a sense of illegitimate or lost belonging but on an affirmation of connection to place.

But it is only through his contact with the indigenes, or with indigenous ways of being in the world, that Gemmy is capable of this mediation. Through this contact he is able to move beyond the non-identity or negativity of the settler toward the positivity of native spirituality: the period that he spends among the settlers, "among these ghostly white creatures," threatens to render him as void and empty as they are; this threat temporarily disappears with a visit from indigenes during which he is "reclaim[ed]," his spirit prevented from "slipp[ing] back into the thinner world of wraiths and demons" (118). Through the indigenes Gemmy is "reclaim[ed]," provided with a "second birth," a birth in which it is the land that "mother[s]" him and grants him a sense of belonging (118). *Remembering Babylon* suggests that by means of indigenization all settler Australians can ultimately be reclaimed by the land, given a second birth that will intimately connect them—by granting them a secure sense of proprietorship of the territory—to their new homeland.

This troubling celebration of Gemmy's indigenization as a powerfully interruptive force alerts us to the susceptibility of reconciliation to precisely the same critique that has been consistently leveled at hybridity. For while Malouf heralds Gemmy's hybridity as conducive to reconciliation between indigenes and

settlers, that hybridity, as many postcolonial critics have suggested of the concept itself, is arguably a means of securing control on behalf of the dominant culture. Indeed, the concept of hybridity that has been so central to postcolonial studies as a whole has been frequently charged with involving an assertion of subversive potential that contradicts its refusal of the possibility of a coherent discourse of resistance. It has been suggested, moreover, that the hybrid nature of subject social formations was used to legitimate the imposition of a dominant power as a "unifying" force. A similar indictment could easily be launched against the concept of reconciliation. Its deployment as an alibi for a project of colonial possession in *Remembering Babylon* draws attention to the potential that exists for the discourse of reconciliation to operate in the interests of the dominant power while masking a project that is hegemonically recuperable, easily absorbed as a means of soliciting the consent of the marginalized and oppressed to their position of disempowerment. Indeed, although it does not carry the postmodernist associations that hybridity does, reconciliation is also a term that, left in the wrong hands, could engineer a false claim to a liberatory capacity. While remaining committed to an openness toward the possibilities that reconciliation offers for social transformation, it is nevertheless important, I suggest, to maintain a vigilant awareness of the potential for the term to be mobilized, through certain rhetorical maneuvers, for the sake of reinforcing and reproducing prevailing power structures.

IV: After *Mabo*: Postcolonial Possession, Dispossession, Repossession

In the Australian case one witnesses the risk, at least, that discourses of reconciliation merely obfuscate and legitimate a program of maintaining the status quo. The project of reconciliation that has been unfolding in the country for the last decade now admittedly seems to involve, to some extent, the authentication of settler claims to belonging. Some non-indigenous Australians perceive reconciliation as providing access to indigenous ways of belonging. Indeed, it does not seem implausible that some non-indigenous Australians have supported the policy of reconciliation on the grounds that it will validate their physical possession of the land by supplying a form of spiritual or mystical possession equivalent to what indigenous Australians, at least in theory, already enjoy. The project of national reconciliation, from this perspective, may well constitute a dangerous strategy of enabling the settler subject to come into complete possession of the Australian territory, thereby pushing indigenous people even further to the margins of the nation.

Perhaps it is not particularly surprising, given the implications of his narrative of reconciliation in *Remembering Babylon*, that Malouf's own published reflections on contemporary Australian reconciliation supply evidence of a kind that this strategy underlies and perhaps motivates the project. Consider, first of all, his endorsement of reconciliation in a recent interview published with Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais. After acknowledging that in his writing he

attempts to "settle the place." Malouf notes that whereas the "physical setting has already happened" for non-indigenous Australians, there is "another setting that has yet to take place in an interior way, spiritual and symbolic." In order that non-indigenous Australians might recognize that "the way that the aborigines relate to the land may be helpful to us in finally relating it to ourselves" (172), Malouf advises support for the reconciliation process. He articulated a similar logic for supporting reconciliation in his 2000 Neustadt Lecture: here he endorsed reconciliation as "the process by which, as settlers and latecomers, we have begun to come into full possession of the place." While admitting that "we already possess it in fact, through occupation or conquest," Malouf lamented the failure of non-indigenous Australians to "truly possess the land [...] as native people have done" (705). From this perspective, which is by no means Malouf's alone, reconciliation is primarily about further guaranteeing the authority of (post)colonial possession, not about redistributing rights or property more equitably. Given this troubling and mendacious strategic deployment of the concept, we might justifiably ask ourselves the following question: is reconciliation not in truth an odious and obscene term, one that allows those who deploy it to reproduce relations of dominance while simultaneously professing to undercut them?

This crucial question is made more urgent when we examine the first draft of the National Declaration of Reconciliation, a document co-written, in fact, by David Malouf and Aboriginal activist Jackie Huggins. Although the Howard government rejected the declaration—mainly on the grounds that it insisted that non-indigenous Australians issue an apology—it became a focal point around which Australian civil society rallied for reconciliation. In the document's "ten steps" toward reconciliation, many of the connections I am forming between the discourse of reconciliation and the representation of Australian Aboriginality are given a more concrete form:

1. Speaking with one voice, we the people of Australia, of many origins as we are, make a commitment to go on together recognising the gifts of one another's presence.
2. We celebrate the fact that Aboriginal culture is the oldest living continuous culture on the planet. That culture is still alive. It is sacred, spiritual and practical, a unique way of living in harmony with the land. Through the land and its first peoples, newcomers to this country may taste that spirituality and rejoice in its grandeur.
3. We acknowledge that Australia was colonised without the consent of the original inhabitants.
4. Our nation must have the courage to own the truth and heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves.

5. We hereby take this step: as one part of the nation expresses its sorrow and profoundly regrets the injustices of the past, so the other part accepts the apology and forgives.
6. Our new journey then begins. We must learn our shared history, walk together and grow together to enrich our understanding.
7. Until all Australians have an equal chance to achieve their aspirations, and an equal voice, we will be a diminished nation.
8. We pledge ourselves to stop the injustice and address the disadvantage that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face in their lives.
9. We respect the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to remain responsible for their own destinies.
10. We can stand proud as a united Australia that respects this land of ours, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and provides justice and equity for all. (np)

There is a whole range of problems with the discourse of reconciliation that this declaration brings to the surface. Observe, for instance, that the most overriding and overdetermining aim of reconciliation, as it is represented here, is the production of a united and indivisible Australian nation. Australians everywhere are represented as speaking with "one voice" rather than with multiple and contradictory voices, some of which continue to exert more than their share of power in a national milieu where others are marginalized or silenced. There is no self-consciousness about the use or function of the nation for reconciliation, no consideration of whether it entails transcending or consolidating national boundaries further, and no interrogation about what function the category of the nation fulfills or whose interests get served by this particular nation-building project.

Observe as well, and along similar lines, that the forgiveness of the indigene is taken, without consent or sanction, as a means of restoring the settler's sense of national belonging. In other words, the movement from apology to forgiveness takes place without delay, without the response of forgiveness being awaited. This "forgiveness," if that it can be called, is compromised, then, not only by its aim of re-establishing national normality by way of a therapy of reconciliation but also by its deprivation of the victim's right (not) to forgive. For forgiveness, as I discuss in some detail in my last chapter, must be *given*: forgiveness that is assumed or acquired without consent constitutes what Derrida calls the "impardonable" or the "unforgivable," the crime against forgiveness itself. In this document, we witness the imitation of a scene of forgiveness and thus the commission of yet another crime against indigenous Australians. It seems then that the atoned nation that is presented in the declaration is one where the old (colonial) order has indeed been reasserted.

But the issue that most concerns me, for my purposes here, is that of the relationship, validated and consolidated by this document, between the quest for

indigenization, on the one hand, and reconciliation, on the other. The ideology of reconciliation to which the authors of the text are so strongly committed emerges out of the myth that it is by accessing the consciousness of the indigene that the spiritual power of the land can be tapped. The declaration thus displays the white impetus to affirm the settler claim to the land by somehow accessing, through the other, otherwise inaccessible mystical insights. Indigenous people, in this framework, are designated the "unique" role of resolving the settler crisis of legitimacy, namely by making available for consumption by the settler their particular forms of knowledge and ways-of-being-in-the-world. This "special place in our nation" narrative, so foundational to liberal theories of difference, views Aboriginality in strictly functionalist terms, as instrumental to "our" needs: in this narrative Aboriginals exist here for "us," with "us" as the dominant white center of the nation. However benign this model might appear from the standpoint of the critique of (Western) consumerism, its impact on the complex actualities of the political and social conditions of most Aboriginal people is cause for concern. For the dominant discursive structures within which indigenous peoples have been represented throughout the reconciliation process have not afforded them any evident material advantage. Indeed the spiritual claim that the indigenous have been able to exercise throughout the reconciliation process is ultimately dependent on (often volatile) non-indigenous sensibilitities, as the rise of Hansonianism and the Howard government's response to the Wik "crisis" demonstrate (see Moran). From this perspective, we might legitimately question the motives underlying the dominant construction of Aboriginality. To what extent, after all, do images of the primordiality of Aboriginal culture or of the timelessness of the Aboriginal dreamtime translate into any improvement in the political and social position of contemporary Aborigines?

Both Gareth Griffiths and Alan Lawson have examined in some detail the effects of mediating representations of Aboriginality through dominant discourses. Their concern with the consequences of constructions of indigeneity grounded in white desire, and not indigenous practice, provides a key opening for considering the appropriation of Aboriginality in discourses of Australian reconciliation. What, Griffiths and Lawson ask, is the result for indigenous peoples when their voices are overwritten and overdetermined by the disabling discourse of the oppressor? Their response is to suggest that by inscribing themselves upon the Australian Aborigine white settlers may be displacing the legitimating modes of representation employed by Aboriginal people themselves. That such an inscription might be to the detriment of Aborigines themselves is suggested by the recent handling of the Lands Rights issues in *Mabo* and the Native Title Act. If these cases represent successes in a purely pragmatic sense, in their deployment of the notion of authenticity they arguably disenfranchise indigenous people in the long term. The *Mabo* decision, for instance, designated Aboriginality as "traditional," and in so doing cancelled out the land rights of

many indigenous people.[7] The obsession of white settler society with the pure and the authentic, with its own crisis of identity, may, then, ultimately work to the disadvantage of Aborigines, namely by positioning them in a space that is dominated by the insidious structures of the oppressor's discourse.

The narratives of psychic encounter and indigenization through which the settler translates his/her desire for the land into a desire for Native authenticity represents, according to Lawson, a far more dangerous form of mimicry than the theories of Homi Bhabha have suggested. By responding to a sense of incompleteness or lack through mimicking and appropriating the authority of the indigene, the settler engages in a form of behavior that is "not quite" as benign, let alone transformative, as Bhabha's theories might have us believe. Lawson outlines a double teleology intrinsic to what he calls the "Second World" narrative (by which he means narratives produced by settler cultures): first, containment or effacement of the Indigene and, second, indigenization of the settler. Concerning the latter, Lawson insists that in the process of projecting his settler self onto the space of the indigene, the settler approximates indigeneity without ever actually touching it. The settler, in this way, is characterized, Lawson says, by an anxiety of proximity that is motivated by a need to "displace" rather than "replace" the other, and by this he means, if I read him correctly, that the settler subject wishes to assume the "authentic" and "legitimate" place of the indigene without actually taking on the identity of the indigenous other. The narrative of indigenization thus involves simultaneous desire for and disavowal of the indigene.

The tension that this simultaneity produces is very much in evidence in Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*. Because the white indigeneity that Gemmy represents always threatens the settler subject with the specter of his own dispossession and disempowerment, Malouf's novel, bound up as it is in narratives of reconciliation, is constantly tempted to push the indigene to the boundaries of the text: for in the same instance that the settler, in this text, turns to the indigene in hopes of discovering a sense of settlement, his sense of belonging—which he paradoxically needs the indigene to affirm—is (again) experienced as under siege. Thus, after incorporating him as a mediating force in the settler quest for legitimacy and possession, the text, as I discuss next,

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[7] By making native title contingent upon the maintenance of traditional customs and practices, the *Mabo* decision demanded that indigenous peoples' identifications and desires converge with the interests of the national imaginary. In this sense the watershed case testifies, according to the anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli, to the problem of accommodation underlying multiculturalism. In its pursuit of its own redemption, Povinelli claims, the High Court failed to extend reparation to the indigenous peoples around whom it structured the nation's shame, namely by confining its ruling to a legal recognition of only those traditions covered by common and statutory law. For her essay, see "The State of Shame: Australian Multiculturalism and the Crisis of Indigenous Citizenship."

displaces him altogether—a displacement that is emphasized by his white indigeneity.

V: Unsettled Tensions: Between Division and Reconciliation

Several of the settlers in *Remembering Babylon* integrate Gemmy as part of a strategy to, first, gain access to knowledge about the locations and resources of indigenous tribes and thereby alleviate fears of retaliation and retribution and, second, eventually subordinate the indigenes further by enslaving them in a system akin to what was underway in the Americas. While one sole member of the settlement urges a policy of militaristic warfare and genocide against the indigenous tribes, the others, in their dream of a "settled space in which they could get on with the hard task of founding a home," secretly fantasize that the natives will "be drawn in, as labourers, or houseservants," and envision "plantations with black figures moving in rows down a field, a compound with neat whitewashed huts, a hallway, all polished wood, with an old grey-haired black saying 'Yessir,' and preparing to pull off their boots" (62). If the realities of working class life dampen this vision for most of the settlers, they nevertheless anticipate that, if Gemmy does not facilitate the process of the natives's enslavement, he will at least mitigate some of their panic and hysteria by serving in the role of native informant. The settlers are repeatedly described as "haunted" by the thought of becoming entangled in a potentially endless series of violent encounters with the indigenes, and as looking to Gemmy to eradicate, or at the very least moderate, this excessive fear. But because the settlers imbue him with the ghosts of unknown "Aboriginal" presences, his presence only haunts them further. While Gemmy's incorporation into the settler community is meant to facilitate reconciliation in the sense of "settling the settler down," it instead produces a range of anxieties in non-Aboriginal Australians about the security of their place in the colonial landscape: while his assimilation is intended to vanquish fears of indigenous "possession" by introducing and containing it, in other words, it merely affords the settlers the uncanny sight of the prospect of their *own* illegitimacy, their own strangeness and alienness.

The promise of reconciliation that Gemmy affords this nineteenth-century settlement, like the promise of reconciliation articulated in the dominant discourses of Australia in the late twentieth century, produces a destabilizing effect in the settler community precisely by unsettling the boundaries between indigenous and non-indigenous ways of being in the world. When Gemmy is described for one of the first times it is as a "parody of a white man": his presence is profoundly menacing for the community he enters because it represents an "imitation gone wrong," a form of mimicry that exposes the reification of whiteness, and in so doing, threatens to dissolve the categories of insider/outsider. It is his evocation of the indigenous other within the settler self, of the unfamiliar within the familiar, "of monstrous strangeness and unwelcome likeness" (41), that renders Gemmy such an uncanny force, in Freud's sense, of

persistent desire and disturbance. This doubling effect produces a range of unsettlements in the settler subject in that it suggests the "dark" possibility of an epistemology and ontology outside of familiar structures of knowledge. In one passage, for instance, the haunting effect that Gemmy has on the settlers is ascribed to his elusion, as an absent presence, of definition or comprehension:

> Even those who were well-disposed to the fellow found him unnerving. He wasn't all there, that's what people said; they meant he was simple. But there was some among them for whom the phrase, light as it was, suggested something darker: that when he was there, in full sunlight, refusing to meet your gaze but engaged, as far as he was capable of it, in conversation, he was halfway gone, across a line, like the horizon, that was not to be fixed in real space, and could begin anywhere (38).

In another passage the fear that this elusiveness triggers in the settler subject is attributed precisely to the prospect of 'return of the sacred,' that Gemmy represents—to the possibility, that is, that proximity to indigenous ways of being in the world might lead to total indigenization and thus otherness: here the specter of the indigenous other that Gemmy calls up is essentially the specter of becoming the other:

> His very way of moving was a reminder. He could be in a room before you knew it, his feet scarcely whispering over the hard dirt floor. Your hand would go to the back of your neck as if a fly had lighted there. But there was no fly. You wheeled around and it was *him* [....] It brought you slap up against the terror you thought you had learned, years back, to treat as childish: the Bogey, the Coal Man, Absolute Night. And now here it is, two yards away, solid and breathing, a thing beside which all you have ever known of darkness, of *visible* darkness, seems but the merest shadow [...] And the horror it carries to you is not just the smell, of a half-forgotten swamp world going back deep in both of you, but that for him, as you meet here face to face in the sun, you and all you stand for have not yet appeared over the horizon of the world, so that after a moment all the wealth of it goes dim in you, then is cancelled altogether, and you meet at last in a terrifying equality that strips the last rags from your soul and leaves you so far out on the edge of yourself that your fear now is that you may never get back. (41-43)

As a "reminder" of the possibility of equivalence between the indigene and the settler, Gemmy's presence—despite promising to settle the unsettled settler condition—only further "unsettles" the cartography of the settlement, just as it

undoes the "properness" of settler "property." For the more strenuously the settler nation is defined, the more it seeks to contain its 'others,' the more it shores up destabilizing forces within its boundaries and limits—thus inciting a reemergence of the Aboriginal sacred which Ken Gelders and Jane Jacobs have named as the uncanny.

It is in the sense too of reminding us of the condition of unsettlement at the heart of the settler project of occupation that the figure of Gemmy embodies the uncanny. For the more the settlers appropriate Gemmy as a means of quieting their own fears about physical and ontological loss and dispossession, the more they imagine that he poses a threat, through his connection with indigenes, to their small measure of security. Once Jim Sweetman witnesses Gemmy in the company of two indigenes on the outskirts of the settlement, the fear and anxiety that the settlers had already become accustomed to projecting onto the newcomer reach unprecedented heights. For while the settlers had already suspected Gemmy of collusion with the indigenes, the "wave of panic and suspicion" that "runs unchecked" (113) throughout the settlement following his meeting with members of the tribe eventuates in the decision to expel him from the community. Gemmy vanishes from the text and from the landscape. The McIvor children later suspect that he is one of the victims of a massacre of Aborigines so discounted and downplayed in Australian colonial historiography as to be referred to merely as a "dispersal."

On the one hand, Gemmy's disposal at the hands of Malouf's text seems to implicate the text itself in an approach to reconciliation that ultimately does not have indigenous interests in mind. If we read the fate of Gemmy in *Remembering Babylon* as consistent, in other words, with Malouf's own reflections on reconciliation, then the novel seems to advocate the kind of instrumentalism immanent, in some respects, to the contemporary project of Australian reconciliation. In other words, *Remembering Babylon* might be interpreted, from one perspective, as mobilizing a figure of white indigeneity merely for the purpose of legitimating the illegitimate territorial possession of Australia by non-indigenous Australians. Interpreted another way, however, the failure of the settler community to come to terms with Gemmy's difference, let alone the possibility of indigenous and non-indigenous co-existence, might be seen as manifesting a valid skepticism on Malouf's behalf, as indicating that complete reconciliation, for him, is still beyond reach. Indeed Malouf's exposure of the radically destabilizing effect of Gemmy's presence in the settlement appears to constitute a critique of an Australian society generally incapable of pursuing genuine reconciliation, of existing in a relationship of mutual reciprocity and recognition with the indigenous population. It could be presumed, given the failure of reconciliation in this text, that *Remembering Babylon* essentially makes the case that it is premature to believe that the gaping wound of black-white division in postcolonial Australia not only could be healed but also in some sense already has been. The text's narration of the exorcism of Gemmy from the settlement, not to mention its reference to the extermination of indigenes on a

massive scale, suggest, then, that reconciliation remains as yet an unrealizable category.

But the exclusion of Gemmy, and the suggestion that his fate, like the fate of many Australian indigenes, was genocide at the hands of extermination parties is also counterbalanced, at the end of the novel, by Janet McIvor's invocation of the word "love": reflecting on these events years later, Janet declares to Lachlan, "'he was someone we loved'" (194). It is difficult to know how to read Malouf's invocation of this powerful, enigmatic word, a word that he himself has admitted is intended "to come"—given its banality in everyday life, on the one hand, and its exceptionality and extraordinariness, on the other—"as a kind of shock" ("Languages" 90). For it would seem, alongside the images of reconciliation evoked in the prayerful prose of the novel's meditative closing lines, to suggest the possibility of peaceful co-existence in (post)colonial Australia—a possibility that the overall direction of the novel's plot contradicts. Given, moreover, that love inspires the self to accept the intentions of the other as its own objectives, at least if we go by, say, the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas or the theory of Zygmunt Bauman, how do we make sense of the impetus in Malouf's novel of the blurred distinction between the settler desire for land, on the one hand, and the settler desire for reconciliation with the indigene, on the other. If "love," as Bauman writes, "does not mean, nor does it lead to, 'grasping', 'possessing', 'getting to know', let alone getting mastery over the object of love or getting it under control" (168), how do we explain the "proprietary right" (34) that Lachlan, among others, feels he has to Gemmy, to say nothing of the desire to possess, through him, the entirety of the Australian continent? And if love essentially entails "*consent to the mystery of the other*" (64), as Levinas avows, how do we interpret the impetus to decode Aboriginal mysticism—to contain and appropriate it—which lies at the heart of the discourse of reconciliation produced and disseminated not only by Malouf's text but also by the dominant Australian culture as a whole?

We might respond that the use of the word "love" points toward a problematic attempt to alleviate settler guilt precisely in a manner that further thwarts genuine reconciliation. For Lachlan, at least, is not ultimately seeking reconciliation with an other, in this case Gemmy, but rather with his own self. For him, there is merely an attempt "to reconcile [...] some kind of guilt he feels for having betrayed Gemmy," as Malouf acknowledges in an interview. If, however, the experience of "love" for an other seems beyond Lachlan, it properly "belongs to [Janet's] vocabulary" ("Languages" 90). In pronouncing the word, she opens up the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation that Lachlan seems to foreclose. For if, as "one of the rarest occurrences in human lives" and a phenomenon that "possesses an unequaled power of self-revelation and an unequaled clarity for the vision of *who*" (*The Human Condition*, 242), love is a precondition of forgiveness, as Hannah Arendt suggests, then Janet's quiet yet meaningful avowal gives readers some hope yet.

But while the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation is put forward in *Remembering Babylon*, it is an unsettled and unfulfilled possibility, one that co-exists uneasily alongside their impossibility. The impulse in the novel, as well as the impulse in the contemporary reconciliation movement in Australia, is towards reconciliation at one moment and division at another. The constant vacillation between these two positions, between what is 'ours' and 'what is theirs' suggests that the issues of place and possession are indeed definitively unsettled in the settler (post)colony.

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CHAPTER TWO

Vigils Amid Violence: Mourning the Dead and the Disappeared in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*

> *[I]t would be the height of injustice to say that mourning the dead reconciles me to them in* full. *But the dream that someday I may be reconciled to them is what keeps us mourning all the harder. It is what prompts us to keep digging further and further beneath the surface, even if we are simply sifting through ashes and dust.*
>
> -Mark Dooley, "The Catastrophe of Memory," 255

> *I hope* Anil's Ghost *is seen as a communal book, in a time when there seems to be little chance of a solution to acts of violence, on all sides. Pacifism, reconciliation, forgiveness are easily mocked and dismissed words. But only those principles will save us.*
>
> -Michael Ondaatje, "Remarks," 13

I: Impossible Dreams: Imagining a Departure from Violence

In their articulation of the hope that forgiveness and reconciliation are possible even in the midst of overwhelming and boundless violence, these words by Michael Ondaatje apropos of his latest published novel, *Anil's Ghost*, may at first seem radically at odds with the vision of the work itself. For in capturing the despondency of a war to which there seems no foreseeable end, and in which violence begets violence in an apparently infinite fashion, Ondaatje exposes the intractableness of a conflict that arguably rules out the possibility of a different, more peaceful, future. At the center of his text is Anil Tissera's return as a forensic anthropologist to a Sri Lanka ravaged by civil war, and her intent on discovering, on the behalf of the human rights organization that sends her, the source of the campaigns of murder that besiege the island. But this conviction that guilt for the damages sustained in war can ever be properly located, and that punishment for the violations perpetrated can ever adequately restore loss, is tested in the course of *Anil's Ghost* by a text that bears witness to the profound despair suffered by those whose everyday lives are inextricably caught in a cycle of what Maurice Bloch calls "rebounding violence."

In a situation in which the search to recuperate loss takes the form of the reenactment of further losses, how, Ondaatje queries, is it ever possible to reach an end to violence and distrust? If war has become its own *raison d'être*—if "*the*

reason for war was war" (43), to borrow a phrase from his novel—how is it possible to imagine a time when war is no longer? Further, is a politics of non-repetition conceivable when there is no potential to reckon with violence legally, when all that remains of law is the principle of revenge? Rather than embrace a vision of forgiveness and reconciliation naively, out of a desperation for answers or a simple yearning for resolution, Ondaatje struggles in *Anil's Ghost* with these tremendously obstinate questions. His avowed refusal to endorse "easy solutions" ("In Conversation" 6) to the crisis that besets his homeland takes the form of alerting readers to the mad persistence of a politics of revenge, to its frustrating dedication to a present characterized by trauma and loss. If reconciliation might be defined simply "as a project of *departure from violence*" (Borneman 282), as a radical temporal break that creates the sense of an ending and an alternative beginning, then Ondaatje faces up to the sheer difficulty, given the bleakness of the Sri Lankan situation, of committing oneself to a project of imagining the possibility of reconciliation.

As part of his resistance to facile solutions and his denial of the efficacy of any simple intervention into a cycle of unappeasable violence, Ondaatje launches an important critique of the frequent recourse, particularly by the postindustrial countries of the West, to punishment and retribution as *the* answer to conflict resolution. If there is no innocent party, if guilt and responsibility are shared to such an extent that no one is ultimately exempt, then it may not be possible, he suggests, to settle accounts through legal judgment. And it may not be desirable given that the belief in the value of conviction and sentencing is not necessarily shared, despite the assumptions of the United Nations and various human rights organizations, by certain indigenous epistemological systems and practices. Anil's insistence on the transparency and transformative capacity of truth not only betrays the complexity of the Sri Lankan crisis, then, but it also points to an unabiding faith in punishment and retribution that assumes—incorrectly—that retributive justice necessarily inaugurates reconciliation. Through its exposure of the problems with such assumptions, *Anil's Ghost* manifests a determination on Ondaatje's part to remain open to alternatives to the present violence while also remaining painfully aware of the complexity of civil war, its elusion of any immediate remedy. The power of *Anil's Ghost* lies in its capacity to dream the vision of forgiveness and reconciliation while nevertheless respecting the intricacy and ambiguity of the Sri Lankan situation.

Fiction, Ondaatje would confirm, is particularly up to this challenge of respecting intricacy and ambiguity by virtue of its potential to examine political and historical situations from multiple positions and perspectives. What he calls "the morality of cubism" intrinsic to the novel enables him—through various voices, through suggestion, juxtaposition and collage—to capture the complexity of the Sri Lankan situation in a way that formal documents cannot, to present the conflict from several points of view rather than one privileged vantage, and to thus reveal the face of war from alternative angles simultaneously. But the meditative capacity of fiction also permits Ondaatje to narrate the unofficial,

unauthorized, and disqualified stories of war—stories of people's unremitting engagement with violence in everyday life—that are left untold in contemporary journalistic accounts of the Sri Lankan conflict.

By tracing the impact of traumatic loss on people's day-to-day lives, Ondaatje's text looks at what happens when the grounds on which networks of trust are built give way to unrelenting suspicion and hostility between individuals and communities. How, it asks, is violence routinized and internalized, played out in intimate, personal relationships between brothers, lovers, friends? At a deeper, existential level, moreover, how do victim-survivors of war respond to the suffering of traumatic loss? Through the inner lives of the novel's characters—Anil, Sareth, Gamini, Palipana, Lakma, Ananda—*Anil's Ghost* examines what reconciliation as a "*departure from violence*" means for subjects whose experience of trauma is ever-present, whose encounter with the consequences of violence is ongoing, and whose efforts to recuperate or redeem loss are always incomplete. If reconciliation might, on a more subjective level, also be defined as a project of recuperation from traumatic loss, then Ondaatje's portrayal of the experience of mourning as relentless and unending would seem to suggest the absolute impossibility of reconciliation. For if trauma resists solution, then reconciliation in the sense of recuperation is ultimately unattainable. Indeed, taken together with his exposure of the limits of retributive justice, Ondaatje's respect for the limitlessness of the mourning process might lead one to think that *Anil's Ghost* exhibits a profound lack of hope, on his part, concerning the possibility of reconciliation.

Without imposing telos on the process, however, the novel locates this possibility, I suggest, in alternatives to conflict that articulate principles of care, with Ondaatje subscribing to what might be called an *ethics of caring for the enemy*. Moreover, while acknowledging that the suffering of traumatic loss cannot be overcome by, for instance, a return to a prior state of innocence, Ondaatje suggests—in a view of mourning that is more akin to Freud's melancholia—that reconciliation is only possible if the loss suffered is persistently mourned and mourned. Analysing the images of archaeological excavation and aesthetic reconstruction that abound in *Anil's Ghost*, I explore towards the end of this chapter the role of art in mourning and reconciliation processes. In particular, following Ondaatje's lead, I challenge the assumption inherent in much scholarship on the subject that reconciliation is a project to be undertaken only once a conflict has been resolved, not a project that works toward the possibility of such resolution. By providing a "vigil for the dead" (np) that does not heal the living but nevertheless facilitates the mourning process, aesthetic endeavours can, Ondaatje suggests, bring reconciliation further into the realm of the possible. Importantly, though, reconciliation is, in the same way as mourning, an always incomplete process; yet that is not to say that it is merely redundant or repetitive in the way revenge is. Whereas revenge forecloses on the possibility of reconciliation by reenacting the violent encounter again and again, mourning opens up such a possibility by giving rise to elegiac transactions that

interrupt the recurring traumatic event. Both mourning and reconciliation are perpetually unfinished projects: in this sense, they are also both fundamentally paradoxical projects, for they continually attempt, out of hope for the future, to recuperate a loss that is never fully recoupable.

II: "Only Mad Logic Here": A Chronicle of a Crisis

What are the underlying conditions of the Sri Lankan civil war that make the act of imagining the possibility of reconciliation so fraught with difficulties? What is it about the nature of the conflict itself that makes envisioning an end to continuous violence such a demanding and ambiguous task? To examine the unstable forces and indeterminate discourses at work in Sri Lanka is to also realize that any attempt to resolve the situation in an immediate or straightforward sense must necessarily fail. Here I outline by way of a genealogy of the country's travails the specific contours of a conflict that remains peculiarly resistant to solution: for since independence, the Sri Lankan state has been entangled by an uncompromising Sinhala nationalism, on the one hand, and a similarly uncompromising Tamil nationalist resistance, on the other. It is the vehemence of these two nationalisms, their incompatibility and unwillingness to compromise, their refusal to acknowledge other social groups as participants in any conversation about peace, that make the possibility of reconciliation in Sri Lanka seem difficult, if not impossible, at this moment in history.

These nationalisms have antecedents before independence, in a divide-and-rule policy imposed by a colonial system that privileged a Tamil "minority" at the expense of a Sinhalese "majority."[1] Whereas British colonialism effectively contained the ethnic tensions that it effectively fostered, its official end gave rise, as it did in countless other regions, to a groundswell of previously repressed resentment, hostility, and aggression. That Sri Lanka would bear the traces of colonialism for some time rather than fulfill the nationalist dream promised by its outgoing foreign rulers perhaps first became concretely evident with the 'Sinhala Only' language movement and the violence that followed in the 1956 race riots. It also became evident with the passage in 1972 of a national constitution that afforded Buddhism and Sinhalese privileged status; with a redistribution of benefits in favour of the Sinhalese; and with a government-sponsored Sinhalese resettlement program. Virtually since the moment of independence, then, the Sri Lankan state has been captured by a Sinhala nationalism that has oppressed, sometimes brutally, and in the multitudinous ways available to the state, the Tamil community.

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[1] In placing the terms "minority" and "majority" within quotation marks, I am registering my awareness of the problematic conception of the social within these terms. The very minority-majority distinction is, as Qadri Ismail explains, a concession to the Sinhalese nationalist argument that the minority cannot, by definition, aspire to equality. See Qadri Ismail, "Speaking to Sri Lanka."

The armed Tamil nationalist resistance, in its current mode in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), has reacted to this oppression by launching an insurgent operation for Tamil independence, while the state, in its turn, has responded by engaging in further acts of genocide against ordinary Tamil citizens. Such an apparently endless cycle of violence and more violence was firmly intact by the 1980s, when the Sinhala government condoned and even orchestrated the direct intimidation of Tamils. This ethnically inspired violence, which culminated in the well-known 1983 communal riots or 'pograms' in which thousands of Tamils were killed and tens of thousands rendered homeless, was avenged by the LTTE by means of what had by then already become a formidable apparatus of war: from then until the present day, the separatist enterprise has made regular and unreserved recourse to guerilla strategies, terrorism of political leaders, assassination of Tamil (non-LTTE) leaders, bombing of symbolic and military targets, hit-and-run-raids, etc.

The possibility of peace, even in the narrow sense of a mere end to outright war, has only become bleaker in recent years. Since the late 1980s, when the Indo-Sri Lankan Accords failed utterly after the Sri Lankan government decided to arm the LTTE in order to subdue nationalist unrest over the presence of Indian peace enforcers (charged with disarmament!), Sri Lanka has been trapped within a present of permanent, brutal, and apparently necessary violence. What has emerged is a seemingly uninterruptible and thus unpromising pattern—all too familiar to observers of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—of half-hearted peace talks, followed by intermittent ceasefires, followed by renewed violence.[2] If ever the possibility of real resolution to the conflict appears within reach—if, for instance, there is serious headway made in negotiations—then this possibility is soon made to appear very nearly impossible. For when peace overtures are made, there is often a response, on both sides, of escalating violence—almost as if peace itself would deprive the movement of its *raison d'être*. This is particularly true of the last ten years of the conflict, which have been characterized by a hitherto unprecedented scale of aggression and atrocity. An almost unwavering commitment to war and virtually unparalleled intensity of militarism has given rise to the suggestion in much of the current social science literature on the subject that to imagine *any* solution to the crisis, to venture to *think* the possibility of reconciliation between opposing factions in this case, is to engage in a naïve utopian fantasy that denies the severity of the crisis.

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[2] For analyses of the ethnic violence that besets Sri Lanka, and particularly of how the practices of the nation-state invade the lives of the country's citizens, see Bruce Kapferer, "Ethnic Nationalism and the Discourses of Violence in Sri Lanka"; Jonathan Spencer, "On (Not) Becoming a 'Terrorist': Problems of Memory, Agency, and Community in the Sri Lankan Conflict"; and especially, Daniel E. Valentine, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence*.

Given the continuous reproduction of war in Sri Lanka, the dangers of an overly optimistic reading of the situation would certainly be calamitous. It is difficult not to lose hope in the possibility of meaningful resolution to the country's conflict, not to become completely disenchanted with the present state of affairs, especially when one notes, with Salman Rushdie, that there "it is the voices of peace and conciliation who are getting murdered" (qtd. in Jayasinghe, 216). Nonetheless, the implications of this reading of the Sri Lankan crisis—the consequences of an entirely negative vision of the future of Sri Lankans—are, to say the least, also absolutely devastating. How, though, might one rise to the challenge of adopting a more positive vision without at the same time denying or repressing the specter of violence that haunts Sri Lanka? How is it possible to consider the idea of reconciliation in a context of stalled peace negotiations and unfulfilled government promises of a 'peace dividend'?[3] These are the questions that community-based organizations committed to reconciliation find themselves asking. At recent workshops held in the Tamil heartland of Jaffna and the national capital of Colombo, representatives of these organizations questioned the efficacy of teleological interpretations of reconciliation, and of moral-ethical imperatives of forgiveness, in the context of contemporary Sri Lanka.[4] In their perspective, reconciliation must be viewed in pragmatic, process-oriented terms, and must focus on what might be described as "interim reconciliation measures"—on practical initiatives to promote to relations of trust and reciprocity, and to deconstruct structures of inequality.[5] According to this

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[3] Although an internationally brokered ceasefire agreement has been signed, peace talks aimed at negotiating an end to the dispute have been stalled for almost a year following a breakdown in "final status" peace negotiations. With the exception of an absence of armed hostilities, there has been a lack of progress in relation to realizing the 'peace divided' promised to the population as a result of the cessation of the fighting.

[4] The workshop series was convened by the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) in February 2004 and offered a forum for representatives from a range of community-based groups to discuss the relevance of practical measures for achieving reconciliation in relation to their situation. For IDEA's summary of the workshops, see Mark Salter, "Good Fences Make Good Neighbours."

[5] This perspective was reportedly particularly evident among representatives of the Tamil community. Their difficulty with the idea of reconciliation is a result of their concerns with the heavy military presence in the north of Sri Lanka, with the lack of official progress on the campaign to return displaced persons to areas occupied by the army during the war, and most critically, with the absence of a 'peace dividend' for the vast majority of people in both the Tamil and Sinhalese communities.

interpretation, although a finalised version of reconciliation is not possible in Sri Lanka in the foreseeable future, interventions directed towards this goal constitute a crucial arena of political reflection and action.

III: Deconstructing Justice: The Limits of Revenge and Retribution

Rather than shirk the immensely difficult task of imagining a project of reconciliation in a period of revenge, Ondaatje faces openly in *Anil's Ghost* the challenge of envisioning a different future at a time when the threat of violence hovers on the horizon. While Ondaatje confronts the current perpetuation of violence that would seem to make any break from the present improbable, he also invests hope in the possibility of a departure from violence.[6] His novel confronts readers with a situation in which settlement and compromise are more feared than a continuation of the conflict, in which the discontinuation of war appears more threatening to many than does its continuation. Through such statements as "the main purpose of war had become war" (98), Ondaatje registers that war in Sri Lanka has become an end in itself, a pursuit that is considered justified in itself. Indeed, the plot of *Anil's Ghost* unfolds against a background of the banalization of war and the celebration of it as an ethical instrument. Whatever the causes that initially produced Sri Lanka's conflict, it is now the consequences, Ondaatje suggests, that drive it forward. Of this conflict, he writes: "It was a Hundred Years' War with modern weaponry and backers on the sidelines, a war sponsored by gun- and drug-runners. It became evident that political enemies were secretly joined in financial arms deals. '*The reason for war was war*'"(56). He could, of course, be referring as much to the Gulf War, the recent War on Iraq, or any number of other contemporary wars as to the civil war in Sri Lanka, but his point nevertheless stands: In the current conceptualization of war, revenge is almost universally interpreted—despite or perhaps because of the role of militarism in supporting the interests of capitalism—as ethically grounded.[7]

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[6] Christian Bök has argued that whereas Ondaatje represents violence as an aesthetic virtue in his early works without addressing the possible dangers of such glamourization, as his career progresses he begins to express concerns about the ethics of graphic depictions of aestheticized brutality. In its scrupulous evaluation of the ethics of violence, *Anil's Ghost* seems to bear out Bök's observations. With this latest work, I suggest, we have a text that demonstrates an alertness to the problematic of representing violence that exceeds what is found in any of his other texts. For Bök's argument, see "Destructive Creation: The Politicization of Violence in the Works of Michael Ondaatje."

[7] Writing of the contemporary resurgence of the concept of "just war" in *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggest that today the concept is fundamentally different from ancient or medieval notions in one important way:

But while reconciliation might seem to be a foolish aim or impossible ideal given this prevailing logic of justified war, Ondaatje suggests that it may actually be revenge that is anchored in impossibility. Revenge is exposed in his text as what John Borneman calls "an attempt to do the impossible" (287): as an attempt to recover a loss through the righting of a wrong that cannot be corrected, to annul a crime by committing another crime against another innocent subject. The "logic" of revenge is "mad" (186), Ondaatje suggests: it presents no possibility of resolution, only repetition. By registering the futility and hopelessness of a politics of revenge, of the impossible attempt to restore an irrecoverable loss through a kind of turn taking in violent acts, he calls attention in his novel to the importance of pursuing alternatives to the present. But rather than express an enormous amount of confidence in the potential to achieve such alternatives, Ondaatje, as I have been suggesting, approaches the work of imagining reconciliation very tentatively, evidencing a painful awareness of the tremendous power of revenge in Sri Lanka, its resistance to any end to violence. If his novel evinces a belief in the possibilities of a politics of reconciliation, then it also displays an awareness of the extent to which a politics of revenge threatens or limits the actualization of these possibilities. Ondaatje reminds his readers in *Anil's Ghost*, in the same way that Sarath reminds Anil, that violence in this instance has the potential to go on endlessly, that everyone is bound to the process, and that the prospects for intervention are bleak indeed. Because there is no recourse in the country to legal judgment and accountability, because the state exacerbates revenge motives by committing murders and inflicting torture, the promise of reconciliation may, he suggests, go tragically unfulfilled for some time. It may be, given that "all that [is] left of law [is] a belief in an eventual revenge towards those who had power," that the terrifying cycle of death, grief, and trauma will continue into the foreseeable future. It may even be, Ondaatje at one points goes so far as to suggest, that the only hope for an end to the crisis is the self-destruction of those engaged in acts of atrocity, that the "only chance" for a break from the cycle of violence is "that the creatures who fought would consume themselves" (56).

Yet Ondaatje also makes clear that a politics of revenge permits no innocent victims, that it is founded on a fantasy of role reversal that imprisons even the (initial) victim in the bounds of the perpetrator's violence. Indeed, the repetitive logic of revenge functions to blur the categories of victim and perpetrator, since it involves the victimized being, or hoping to become, perpetrators at some point in the cycle. The parameters of revenge are so

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whereas a just war once constituted "an activity of defense or resistance," it has now become an activity that is "justified in itself" (13). In this innovation, military interventions are legitimized as a moral means to achieving peace and stability. The Gulf War – the example Hardt and Negri cite – is clearly one of the more obvious instances of this readjusted conceptualization of just war, but other examples, including the Sri Lankan one, abound the world over.

extensive, then, as to leave no one unscathed, as to make everyone in some sense culpable. In response to Anil's question of who killed Palipana's brother, Sarath observes, "'we all have blood on our clothes'" (48). His response prompts the question: If there is no innocent party, if every party bears some share of responsibility for the horror and degradation of war, then how can it be possible to ascribe guilt and blame? Ondaatje suggests, quite simply, that it is not. There is no "outside," as Sarath elaborates, in a conflict as widespread, as pervasive, as Sri Lanka's:

> 'The bodies turn up weekly now. The height of the terror was 'eighty-eight and 'eighty'nine, but of course it was going on long before that. Every side was killing and hiding the evidence. *Every side*. This is an unofficial war, no one wants to alienate the foreign powers. So it's secret gangs and squads. Not like Central America. The government is not the only one doing the killing. You had, and still have, three camps of enemies—one in the north, two in the south—using weapons, propaganda, fear, sophisticated posters, censorship. Importing state-of-the-art weapons from the West, or manufacturing homemade weapons. A couple of years ago people just started disappearing. Or bodies kept being found burned beyond recognition. There's no hope of affixing blame [...] What we've got here is unknown extrajudicial executions mostly. Perhaps by the insurgents, or by the government or the guerilla separatists. Murders committed by all sides.' (17-18)

What Sarath realizes, as a witness to the extraordinary vicissitudes of the Sri Lankan conflict, is that in a situation in which "*every side*" is engaged in killing, it may not be feasible to evoke the ordinary principles of the rule of law. Where violence is exercised by all, in the most arbitrary and narcissistic ways, it may be that the ideal of settling accounts through investigation and prosecution is simply not possible, that the crisis overwhelms any search for conventional solutions.

Unlike Sarath, Anil is fully committed to a Western narrative of justice, convinced of the capacity of truth to vindicate victims, of the potential for retribution to redress wrongs. Having left Sri Lanka at the age of eighteen to pursue an education in the United States and then Britain, she returns fifteen years later when a "half-hearted" (16) application to the United Nations' Center for Human Rights sends her back as a forensic specialist charged with the task of investigating the complaints of government-sponsored murders that have been filed by Amnesty International and other human rights organizations. In the time of her absence, Anil has become almost completely disconnected from her country of origin. Claiming to have "court[ed] foreignness" during her time in North America and Europe, to be "at ease whether on the Bakerloo line or the highways of Sante Fe," and to feel "completely abroad" (54), she is unfamiliar with the extremity of violence that has been unleashed on Sri Lankans during her

absence, unaware of the extent of their efforts at survival. The result is that she subscribes dogmatically to a politics of retribution, insisting on the importance of indicting the government for the atrocities it has committed without a recognition of the repercussions of truth-saying in Sri Lanka, or an apprehension of the West's own implication in the political, social, and economic contexts that shape the country's ethnic conflict.

Throughout *Anil's Ghost*, Anil displays an unwavering belief in the power of truth to hold accountable the government of Sri Lanka for state-sponsored murders. Despite her realization that the government agreed to the intervention of the United Nations only "under pressure," and out of a desire to "placate trading partners in the West" (16), she holds tenaciously to her conviction that public transparency will facilitate legal accountability. Despite her awareness "that forensic work during a political crisis was notorious [...] for its three-dimensional chess moves and backroom deals, and muted statements about the 'good of the nation'" (28), and her knowledge that "early investigations had," in this case, "led to no arrests, and protests from organizations had never reached even the mid-level of police or government" (42), she is unfailingly confident that her forensic work on behalf of the United Nations can bring about an end to the desperate cycle of violence in which the island is caught. In short, even though "no one at the Centre," let alone in Sri Lanka, is "very hopeful about it" (16), Anil is uncritically optimistic that that the seven-weeks long human rights project in which she is involved has the ability to resolve as complicated a conflict as Sri Lanka's.

With the discovery of a relatively new body buried among the excavations of a sixth-century archeological preserve on government-access-only property, Anil becomes even more convinced of the capacity of truth recovery to solve the crisis that overwhelms her birthplace. Heedless of Sarath's reluctance, she insists on taking protective custody of the skeleton, which she names "Sailor," in a bid to build a case against the government. In makeshift laboratories far from Colombo, the two seek to reconstruct both the identity of the man and the circumstances of his death by means of soil samples, pollen samples, and bone distortion patterns, with Anil becoming increasingly obsessed with the project, paranoid about what she suspects is Sarath's collusion with the government, and adamant about the capacity of scientific reason to serve the interests of justice. Having come to "expect clearly marked roads to the sources of most mysteries" (54), Anil thinks that by solving the mystery of Sailor's death, she can also solve the mystery of the several thousand other murders committed in Sri Lanka, and through such exposure of political secrets begin the process of restoring the rule of law.

But her belief in the power of truth to reckon with evil is challenged by Sarath's consideration of the particularities of truth in the Sri Lankan conflict, which he sees as exceeding standard conceptualizations of justice. Whereas Anil argues for a notion of truth as not merely transparent but also transformative, he understands that truth does not always yield a simple, satisfactory response to injustice. In response to Anil's observation that he prefers vagueness and

imprecision to their opposites. Sarath registers the view that "clarity is [not] necessarily truth" (259), and thinks, with his mentor Palipana, that truth does not inherently possess an emancipatory capacity. While Anil professes an almost fervent faith in the dictum that "'*The truth shall set you free*'," and insists that her forensic work uncovers facts that in turn make people free, Sarath and Palipana are suspicious of the liberatory aura that surrounds the concept of truth, maintaining, in the words of the latter, that "'We never had the truth. Not even with [Anil's] work on bones,'" and that "'Most of the time in our world, truth is just opinion'" (102). Ondaatje plays out this dispute between characters not merely for the sake of rehearsing a conventional and rather tired debate between humanist and postmodernist conceptualizations of truth, but in order to pose the question: In whose interests, and with what consequences, is truth pursued as a route to justice?

Ondaatje suggests, by way of response, that although the West privileges blame and retribution, interpreting them *qua* justice, and seeing them as worthy ends in the search for the truth, it would be amiss to assume that this stance is necessarily shared by non-Westerners.[8] While Anil advances the typical justice agenda of the West, crusading rather blindly for investigation and prosecution of the government, Sarath advises her against prescribing punishment as a solution to the crisis from a position of relative ignorance: telling her that, "'I'd believe your arguments more if you lived here,'" and that "'You can't just slip in, make a discovery, and leave,'" he insists that she should come "'to understand the archaeological surround of a fact,'" in order to avoid becoming "'like one of those journalists who file reports about flies and scabs while staying at the Galle Face Hotel. That false empathy and blame'" (44). Operating within a discourse of justice produced from outside the country, Anil is largely oblivious, Sarath suggests, to the day-to-day realities that render any open or full disclosure of political secrets dangerous, if not impossible. Her naïve insistence on exposing state-sponsored crimes comes without an attentiveness to the state of fear in which Sri Lankans live, without an awareness of the stakes of survival in the country: "'You don't understand how bad things were,' Sarath explains, "Whatever the government is possibly doing now, it was worse when there was real chaos. You were not here for that—the law was abandoned by everyone ... Terror was everywhere, from all sides. We wouldn't have survived with your

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[8] As Antoinette Burton observes, Ondaatje's novel questions the paramounce of Western forms of knowledge over indigenous epistemological systems, particularly through the dialogue he plays out between Anil and Palipana: "Ondaatje uses Palipana's story expressly to set up a dichotomy between western epistemological presumptions and practices – to which Anil is so attached – and those derived from non-western experiences and sources" (44-45). Elaborating, Burton describes Palipana as a kind of "Subaltern Studies scholar" whose aim it is to provide a counter narrative to the Western faith in positivism and rationality.

rules of Westminster then" (155). Advising that she give some thought to what the consequences of her investigation might be in a context in which law and power are more aligned than law and truth, he suggests that there are fundamental problems with any unequivocal endorsement of retributive justice. There are not merely limits, but real dangers, he warns, to transposing Western paradigms of justice to non-Western contexts without a consideration of the implications involved, the risks entailed. Indeed, by imposing a narrative of justice that discounts indigenous interpretations of the conflict out of a dogmatic insistence on the need for punishment and retribution, human rights workers often preempt the possibility of *any* measure of justice. (One might think here, for instance, of the United Nations' eagerness to prosecute the soldiers of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) at the conclusion of Sierra Leone's eight-year civil war, despite the government's wish to exonerate war crimes in the interests of preventing renewed conflict and promoting national peace and reconciliation). Ondaatje launches a powerful critique of this automatic recourse to retribution, suggesting that an unswerving allegiance to what Charles Taylor calls "the Western imperative to punish historical wrongdoing" (20) not only takes for granted that the principles of legal accountability and prosecution are universally attainable and desirable, but also presumes that they will necessarily enable a departure from, rather than recurrence of, violence.

In exposing the limits of retributive justice, *Anil's Ghost* forcefully challenges the general tendency among scholars situated in the West to defend retribution as an inherently efficacious response to wrongdoing. In a trend that has been evolving largely in the field of philosophy, though also in the disciplines of law, sociology, and political science, critics have recently been upholding Kantian retributivism, insisting on a commitment to the ideal of retribution out of a belief that it corrects wrongdoing through the delivery of blame and punishment.[9] In a recent article, John Borneman, for instance, adopts the common position that retribution symbolically affirms the distinction between right and wrong by negating the benefits accumulated by the wrongdoer and vindicating the value of the victim. What is particularly interesting about Borneman's position is that it assumes a practical and necessary linkage between retribution and reconciliation, a linkage that is grounded, he suggests, in their common dependency on practices of truth-telling. For Borneman, reconciliation and retribution essentially exist in a relationship of mutual reciprocity: without reconciliation, there can be no retribution, and vice versa. Establishing an equivalency between the two, he argues that both reconciliation *and* retribution involve "*a departure from violence*," the start of the possibility of mourning

[9] Many critics uphold punishment as a categorical imperative of the state, one that places limits on violence by providing a corrective to criminal activity. See, for example, Angelo Cortlett, *Responsibility and Punishment*; Jean Hampton,"The Retributive Idea"; Jeffrie G. Murphy, "Hatred: A Qualified Defense," *Forgiveness and Mercy*.

losses, and thus, the enactment of a new beginning. From this perspective, it is only through an eventual settling of accounts that an end to the cycle of rebounding violence can occur: it is only through the punishment of evil and the rewarding of good that an end to revenge can take place.

What, however, of situations in which guilt and blame are impossible to locate, where the scale of atrocity far confounds the calls for punishment, where the number of perpetrators and victims overwhelms the search for retribution? More importantly, what of situations in which principles of accountability are absent, in which there are no regulatory mechanisms through which to render judgment? If there is no hope of deferring to legal investigation and prosecution as a means of coping with mass violence, then it may be far too simplistic, Ondaatje suggests, to cling uncompromisingly to a politics of legal retribution. Rather than propose, however, that reconciliation is impossible in contexts in which there is no chance of retribution, he struggles against the assumption that the two—reconciliation and retribution—are necessarily and inextricably bound up in one other. Insisting on retribution as *the* condition of possibility for a politics of reconciliation involves, he posits, a rather careless and irresponsible assessment of an ethnic conflict that, in fact, resists recourse to the principles of truth-telling and judgment. Noting that the sheer complexity of most civil wars precludes any search for definitive or authoritative explanations, Ondaatje questions the predisposition of the Western observer to confidently prescribe answers to other countries' conflicts. In an interview with Maya Jaggi, for instance, he acknowledges that *Anil's Ghost* constitutes a critique of the attempt of the elite strata of North American and European countires "to grab 'the truth' ... as though we know we can solve the dilemma: we know how to fix it" (7); in another interview, this time with Peter Coughlan, he again asserts that his novel is an attempt to throw radically into question the basic assumptions of Western foreign policy:

> One of the things that I wanted to get at was that we in the West have a tradition of believing that there are always answers, always solutions. American foreign policy is based on that belief. You can bomb your way to victory if you want, or you can bomb your way to having your truth accepted in another country. (par. 63)

It is not merely a problem of Western policy makers adopting a sanctimonious attitude towards countries engulfed in warfare that is the problem, of course; the matter for concern extends far beyond that, for Ondaatje, to include the readiness in this part of the world to endorse (and sometimes impose) punishment, retribution, sometimes further violence—as his reference to U.S. bombings implies—out of a determination to enforce on the citizens of other countries one particular, and not necessarily shared, conceptualization of justice.

That the human costs of this imposition can be severe indeed is made evident by Ondaatje in the conclusion to *Anil's Ghost*. Having refused to heed

Sarath's words of caution. Anil makes a public presentation of their research findings, only to discover that the Sri Lankan government is determined to undermine her claims completely. Knowing that their lives are possibly at stake, Sarath, as a member of the audience, seeks to discredit her report that "some government forces have possibly murdered innocent people." When she reprimands him with the statement, "You as an archaeologist should believe in the truth of history," he retorts, "I believe in a society that has peace, Miss Tissera. What you are proposing could result in chaos" (275). Neither peace nor reconciliation will be forthcoming in Sri Lanka, he suggests, if the government is spurred, through an exposé of its crimes, to more tortures, more killings; for at this moment in history, at least, the pursuit of truth and retribution will result not in a departure from violence but a guaranteed escalation of it. His point is tragically born out when days, if not hours, following the delivery of Anil's report, more violence occurs, this time directed at Sarath himself, a man who allowed Anil to flee the country without any incriminating evidence. His death forces the recognition that the logic of retributive justice promulgated by Western human rights discourse has, without question, potentially devastating consequences.

That the novel presents us, in the end, with the haunting image of Sarath's violated body, and not, as it might have, with Anil's triumphant return to the United States, confirms Ondaatje's dedication to confronting, in the terms of his own narrative, the unfinished quality of any project of reconciliation. It is significant, in this sense, that the last time the novel focuses on Anil, it is to have her recall Sarath's brother, Gamini, articulating the problems with which imperialist narratives of Western intervention are fraught:

> 'American movies. English books—remember how they all end? ... The American or the Englishman gets on a plane and leaves. That's it. The camera leaves with him. He looks out the window at Mombasa or Vietnam or Jakarta, the someplace now he looks at through the clouds. The tired hero. A couple of words to the girl beside him. So the war, for all purposes is over. That's enough reality for the West. It's probably the history of the last two hundred years of Western political writing. Go home. Write a book. Hit the circuit.' (286-287)

Self-conscious of the potentially problematic consequences of his own ambivalent relation, as someone having lived much of his adult life in Canada, to his country of origin, Ondaatje subtly registers in this passage his wish to avoid reproducing a discourse or "fiction" of the Sri Lankan conflict that discounts the stories of those actually engaged in the work of surviving in a country characterized by unremitting violence. Wary of imposing telos on a process he knows to lack closure, he is evidently at pains not to contribute to a conceptualization of reconciliation that denies, out of a preference for representing it as "once and for

all," its ongoing, incomplete, and partial aspects. Indeed, it is the assumption that the conclusion to non-Western conflicts is concomitant with the departure of the West from the country in question that Ondaatje is subjecting to rigourous scrutiny in invoking the scene, instantly recognizable, of the American or British foreigner triumphantly taking his leave. What Ondaatje suggests, here and in various places in his text, is that the self-righteous posture assumed by the West towards countries embroiled in civil war denies that the responsibility for war itself extends beyond the space in which the conflict is most obviously playing itself out to implicate other regions as well. Although the citizens of Western countries assume a critical distance from the Sri Lankan crisis, then, they nevertheless play a role, not only in so far as they manufacture weapons and produce political propaganda, but also simply in as much as they *know* of the horror and suffering. Ondaatje ponders: "We are often criminals in the eyes of the earth, not only for having committed crimes but because we know that crimes were committed" (54). It is (among other things) this specter of guilt that haunts the conscience of the Western-situated reader that the title of Ondaatje's novel registers.

Ondaatje's refusal to exempt the Western reader from responsibility for the situation in Sri Lanka recalls Slavoj Žižek's argument for bringing down the arbitrary frontier that the Westerner erects to separate the 'them' from the 'us'. Recounting a lecture on Hitchcock that he delivered at an American campus, Žižek recalls a member of the audience asking how he could speak about such a trivial object given the trauma engulfing his ex-country of Yugoslavia. Using this anecdote to launch a critique of the *expectation* that the citizens of countries engulfed in war behave differently—an expectation that has been imposed on Ondaatje in the form of expressed disappointment with the perceived "apolitical" quality of his novels[10]— Žižek suggests that what is unbearable to Westerners is not that there is a difference that is violated by 'them' acting like 'us,' but that in a sense "*there is no difference*." By this he means that what perturbs the equanimity

[10] Prior to the publication of *Anil's Ghost*, critics faulted Ondaatje for refusing to take up in his writing the ethnic violence that was devastating his homeland, and for attempting, as Chelva Kanaganayakam lamented, to "distance himself from ideological issues that he [presumably] did not feel strongly about" (35). This refusal to address the crisis unfolding in Sri Lanka was interpreted as evidence of a kind of pathological solipsism, with Arun Mukerjee, in what was perhaps the most severe reproach of his work, complaining that Ondaatje "does not get drawn into acts of living, which involve the need to deal with the burning issues of his time" (34). While *Anil's Ghost*, in its foregrounding of the war, has not been censured to the same degree on this count, some reviewers have nevertheless suggested that the austerity of Ondaatje's prose is inappropriate to his subject matter, while others have interpreted his insistence on integrating different voices and perspectives as an unfortunate attempt at staking out a politically neutral position. For examples, see Alan Davis and Michael Gorra.

of the Westerner, in this case epitomized by his audience member, is the recognition of the *illusion* that "we" live in a condition of "peace" of which the "exotic, bloodthirsty" "they" are incapable. For the moment we in the West take note of this illusion and recognize it for what it is, we can no longer "draw a clear and unambiguous line of separation between us who live in 'true' peace and the residents of Sarajevo [or Colombo, Baghdad, Tel Aviv, etc.] who pretend as far as possible that they are living in peace—we are forced to admit that in a sense we also imitate peace, live in the fiction of peace" (2). It is this fiction of separation that Ondaatje is daringly exposing to the view of the Western reader of his novel when he makes reference to the Western "hero" who, in departing for home, seeks to preserve the safe distance of the external observer, and to forget the horrors he witnessed out of a wish to elude the "gaze" that Žižek claims "makes us all guilty" (211).

IV: Excavating Lost Remains: Works of Mourning, Works of Reconciliation

Recollecting a report from a war-besieged Sarajevo that journalists were vying with one another in order to find the most repulsive images, Žižek goes on to note, in *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, that the media produces fantasy images of otherness in order to render the Western gaze more bearable to itself. Rarely does one witness, in the West, stories of how the residents of war-torn countries desperately endeavour to maintain the semblance of normal life: yet the tragedy of war is, in truth, exemplified in, for instance, "an elderly clerk who takes a walk to his office everyday as usual, but has to quicken his pace at certain crossroads because a Serbian sniper lurks on a nearby hill," or "in a disco that operates 'normally,' although one can hear explosions in the background" (1-2). Ondaatje's concern in *Anil's Ghost* is with these unofficial, untold stories of war, of people's day-to-day attempts to live their lives in a state of constant combat. For the reclaiming of such stories is, for him, an essential function of fiction: noting that "our newspapers are full of official stories," he asserts that novels offer an alterative "complicated view" ("In Conversation" 6) of the world that formal documents do not. His aim, then, is to provide readers with a depiction of life in Sri Lanka that does not preserve the immobilizing fantasy image that, to borrow loosely from Žižek, stigmatizes the victim *qua* victim. *Anil's Ghost* opens with Anil noting, upon her return to Sri Lanka, that although "the darkest tragedies" were unfolding in the country, "The streets were still streets, the citizens remained citizens. They shopped, changed jobs, laughed" (11). Ondaatje takes it upon himself to explore in the text how everyday life persists in a context of violence, revealing the ordinary as uncanny in the process. We therefore witness characters' unremitting engagement with violence in their daily lives, the ways that their subjectivity is produced in a context in which brutality and atrocity have become routininized and domesticated.

The extreme contingency and vulnerability of life itself in conditions of war is perhaps most dramatically captured in the novel in the descriptions of Gamini, Sarath's brother and a medical surgeon in the so-called "war rooms" of a Colombo hospital. As someone who constantly bears witness to the torture and cruelty perpetrated in war, and whose only "reasonable constant was that there would be more bodies tomorrow," Gamini becomes addicted to a regimen of drugs in an attempt to attend his patients constantly, "taking pills with a protein drink so he could be continuously awake to those dying around him" (209). His confrontation with death on an everyday basis, his daily encounter with catastrophe and trauma, mean that Gamini bears, as he himself recognizes, the impact of that trauma. Observing that his life has degenerated into "'just sleep and work,'" and that his marriage has "'evaporated,'" Gamini contemplates the sense of futility that attends one in a state of war, asking Sarath: "'What the fuck do my marriage and your damn research mean?'" (132). His question points to the feelings of meaninglessness and despair that haunt those who live out lives in zones of war, who carry out existence without the possibility of extrication from the unrelenting political invasion pressing upon them. For lives bent and distorted—as Gamini's and Sarath's are—by the powerful forces of violence, there may seem no end to grief and suffering, no possibility of a departure from violence.

Rather, if one inhabits violent conditions, violence itself is likely to become absolutely inextricable. In other words, the violence of war assimilates itself, Ondaatje shows, into everyday life, such that there is no potential escape from horror and suffering. Separation and alienation seem to constitute the thematic thrust of *Anil's Ghost*, with its multiple narratives of estrangement between lovers, brothers, husbands and wives. Indeed, that there is no possible retreat from brutality is an idea that lies at the very heart of the book, and one that Palipana sums up, in startling directness and simplicity, when he reflects that "'There has always been slaughter in passion'" (103). Anil also ponders the pervasiveness of conflict, its imposition on day-to-day lives and face-to-face relations, when she recalls having stabbed her lover in the arm and wonders, "If two lovers felt they could kill themselves over loss or desire, what of the rest of the planet of strangers? Those who were not in the slightest way in love and who were led and swayed into enemy camps by the ambitious and vainglorious" (202). Rather than constituting mere parables or analogies of the civil war, however, such scenes of abuse and violence between people that the novel recounts illustrate that the trauma of war is tied up in the trauma of individual lives, in the wounds people inflict on one another in private encounters. In the "secret war" (221) between Gamini and Sarath, for instance, "between whom there had never been a tunnel of light" (289), the reader bears witness to the profound, albeit rather enigmatic, ways that the effects of war extend beyond war itself to wreak damage on personal lives. Without establishing a relationship of causality between the violence of civil war and the violence that governs personal relationships, Ondaatje suggests, then, that although the full impact of war is not

fully known, the violence of war nevertheless exceeds itself. The intricate relation that *Anil's Ghost* establishes between the public face of war and its more private effects reveals that, without question, those who live in the midst of war are inherently and inescapably bound to its impact.

At a deeper, existential level, however, the novel also explores the struggles of victims whose stakes are much higher than survival, who suffer the inconsolable grief and agony of the unbearable loss of loved ones. For victims who encounter such profound loss, the prospect of a complete departure from violence seems particularly bleak, Ondaatje suggests, since the loss itself is never fully recoupable. The narrative of Lakma's ordeal, for instance, bears out the problem that because of the nature of traumatic loss, which is experienced as a temporally delayed and repeated suffering of events that can only be comprehended retrospectively, recuperation is impossible (see Caruth). At the age of twelve, Palipana relates, Lakma witnessed the killings of her parents. When she was taken to a government ward run by nuns, it became evident that the traumatic event was one that she would not be able to simply leave behind. Recounting the peculiar and sometimes uncanny ways that the event symptomatically reenacts itself for Lakma—through, for example, immobility, muteness, a severe fear of sudden sounds, terrifying nightmares, insomnia, and a perpetual sense of real endangerment—Palipana explains that it "touched everything within her," leaving behind only a shadow of the person she once was (103). In Lakma's story, we recognize that there can never be any complete recovery of loss, particularly since loss itself is not registered by the victim at the time of occurrence, but rather manifests itself belatedly, repetitiously, and continuously.

Ananda's story permits the same understanding. With Anil and Sarath, who hire him to reconstruct the face of Sailor, we learn that Ananda's wife, Sirissa, disappeared at the height of a campaign to wipe out insurgent rebels. Since the time of his wife's inexplicable absence, Ananda seems to have struggled with the grief and agony of his loss, developing a chronic addiction to alcohol and attempting, at one point in the novel, to end his own life. As "'one of those who try to commit suicide because they lost people'" (196), to borrow Sarath's words, Ananda suffers from the disconsolateness of not being able to die, of surviving the death of a loved one, and hence having to confront the unbearable undertaking of dealing with ever-present loss. Through his plight, and Lakma's, Ondaatje registers the impossible nature of the inevitable task of redeeming loss that, unless they commit suicide, awaits survivors. Because some sense of the loss must continually remain, because of this remainder, survivors inhabit what Ondaatje depicts as a condition resembling melancholy, unable to apprehend, let alone articulate, the actuality of their loss. For given that some aspect of the loss escapes recognition at the actual moment of occurrence, it is impossible for mechanisms of the symbolic order to register what is often referred to as the "unspeakable": it is impossible, as Anil comes to see, to "give meaning" to the traumatic event, at least not without the "distance of time," since those "slammed

and stained by violence los[e] the power of language and logic" (55-56). If the loss cannot be spoken, however, if the event can only be grasped, if ever, as a horrifying silence, then how is it possible, we might ask, for the victim to experience an end to despair? For if trauma resists solution, as Ondaatje suggests, if there can be no return to the time before loss, does this not make reconciliation an inherently and constitutively impossible project?

Certainly for Ondaatje, mourning does not enable reconciliation *toute court*. Rather, there is no definitive end to mourning, and the promise of reconciliation must remain precisely that: a promise. Unlike Paul Ricoeur, for whom mourning enables reconciliation in the sense of a recovery of an object or person of love, Ondaatje suggests that mourning simply facilitates the *process* of reconciliation, that it enables a movement towards a departure from traumatic violence, without enabling an actual end to that violence. Ricoeur refers to two essays by Freud from 1914 in order to make the case for reconciliation as a balm or antidote to what he calls "the wounds and scars of memory" ("Memory" 6). The first of these essays is "Remembering, Repetition, and Working Through," which relates an incident wherein a patient continually repeats the symptoms of trauma, and whose progression towards remembrance is therefore prevented. What Freud prescribes is patience concerning the symptoms, which will enable the patient, he claims, to become reconciled to the impossibility of immediately accessing the truth, and allow her to anticipate a time when she will become reconciled with the past. Noting this, Ricoeur suggests, after Freud, that reconciliation entails what the latter calls, in his title, "working through" (*Durcharbeiten*)—that is, working through memory, or put differently, performing the work of memory. Turning next to Freud's well-known essay "Mourning and Melancholia," Ricoeur goes on to propose that not only the work of memory, but also the work of mourning, constitutes a version of reconciliation. Observing the clear distinction that Freud forges between mourning and melancholia—that is, of his opposition of "normal mourning" to the melancholic refusal to admit closure—Ricoeur maintains that whereas melancholia forecloses the possibility of reconciliation, mourning is, in fact, tantamount to reconciliation. In other words, whereas melancholia, in so far as it derives from an inability to resolve grief and ambivalence, consists of "a longing to be reconciled with the loved object which is lost without hope of reconciliation," "mourning is a reconciliation" to the extent that it recuperates or redeems the loss that had given rise to the melancholic condition ("Memory" 7).

To Ricoeur's conclusions, one might object: How can reconciliation be undertaken, given the conditions he lays down for it, if memory is unfaithful and mourning inevitably unsuccessful? For as Ondaatje illuminates, particularly through the amnesia of Anil's friend Leaf, the task of remembrance is a deeply fraught one. And mourning, moreover—and in an important departure from Freud, in whose view openendedness in mourning was pathological and distinguished by the term "melancholia"—entails striving towards, yet never entirely realizing, reconciliation with the lost other. Recognizing that the task of

reconciliation is fundamentally paradoxical, that it is only through relentless mourning that the promise of release from suffering and recuperation of the other emerges. Ondaatje refuses the possibility of normalizing closure in favour of incompleteness. In facing up to the interminability of mourning, Ondaatje confronts, in the same way as Derrida does in his reflections on the subject, the impossibility of reconciling oneself entirely to the loss of the object. Derrida wonders not only whether the successful, introjective mourning prescribed by Freud is *possible* but also whether it is *desirable*. In *Memoires for Paul de Man*, he worries about the ethical difficulties posed by the discourse of "self-restoration," and speculates that "the most distressing, or even the most deadly infidelity" might be that "of a *possible* mourning"—by which he means a mourning that claims to be in the memory of an other, when it is only one's own memory that avails (6). Calling for an impossible mourning, Derrida suggests that the promise of reconciling with the other is what gives mourning a chance. It is this hope of reconciliation that mourning offers, the dream of forgiveness of which Derrida writes, that prompts Ondaatje, too, to engage in the difficult work of imagining a departure from violence.

It is fitting, apropos of Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*, that in interrogating the impossibility of mourning, the paradox of reconciliation, Derrida invokes an archaeological language of excavation, bodily remains, and graves. Mark Dooley, in the introductory epigraph to this chapter, eloquently captures this language in his gloss on Derrida's reflections on forgiveness. Allow me to cite that passage again:

> [I]t would be the height of injustice to say that mourning the dead reconciles me to them in *full*. But the dream that someday I may be reconciled to them is what keeps us mourning all the harder. It is what prompts us to keep digging further and further beneath the surface, even if we are simply sifting through ashes and dust. ("The Catastrophe of Memory" 255)

Ondaatje conveys this imperative of digging for the dead, of searching beyond the surface in the work of mourning and of reconciliation, in the first pages of his text. For *Anil's Ghost* opens with Anil investigating the Guatemalan "disappearances," as they are called, labouring alongside other forensic anthropologists to identify bodies, to give the dead back their names. Working "as if to ensure that the evidence would not be lost again"—"as if" because the evidence is never fully recoverable—Anil and those working with her seek to testify on behalf of the dead, to provide "a vigil for the dead" (np) that will bear witness to their loss and to the memory of their lives. While the excavation and identification of the dead body cannot possibly restore the loss completely—cannot, contrary to what Anil believes, enable a complete reconciliation—they can nevertheless inaugurate the mourning process that is integral to any project of

reconciliation.[11] For if mourning essentially consists, as Derrida says, of an attempt to "ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead" (*Specters of Marx* 9), then Anil's travails constitute an attempt to enact rituals of mourning. Indeed, it is, in part, because of her wish to initiate the mourning process that Anil obsesses over solving the mystery of Sailor's death, over resolving the uncertainty of *who* he is and *where* and *how* he died; for she knows that, to borrow from Derrida one last time, "[n]othing is worse" for the work of mourning than "doubt or confusion" (9) over where the body was buried or whose body it is. Behind the idea of naming the dead lies, then, an awareness of the importance of identifying bodily remains to the tasks of mourning and reconciliation. The images of depth, of movement beyond the surface—into graves but also mines and pools of water—that abound in *Anil's Ghost* affirm the value of indefatigably attempting, despite the constraints of temporality and history, to recover the dead, to bring them home, with Anil's determination to keep digging, even on the brink of exhaustion ["*I wouldn't want someone to stop digging for me*" (34)], animating the spirit of the novel itself.

In the face of Anil's remarkable attempts to restitute the remains of bodies, however, it needs asking: What if no remains are discovered? What if there is no recourse to actual burial and restitution? Without the return and reburial of the bones of the beloved, how might the process of memorial integration and personal reconciliation begin? Through Ananda's tireless devotion to the task of revering the ghost of his lost wife, Ondaatje reminds us of both the need and the possibility for symbolically creating sites for memory and mourning. Anil observes that Ananda, charged with the task of reconstructing

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[11] That the search for, and restitution of, the remains of the bodies of the "disappeareds" is central to the potentiality of self-reconciliation became particularly evident in the human rights violations hearings of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). During the hearings, victims frequently requested the return of bones of the missing and answers to questions concerning a family member's disappearance. In the discovery and exhumation of remains performed by the TRC's Investigative Unit, Heidi Grunebaum-Ralph and Oren Stier detect the importance of the reclamation of bones in enabling the imperative to grieve and in inaugurating a memorial and mourning process. Claiming that the return and reburial of bones permits the possibility of reconciliation by providing a form of provisional closure, they cite, by way of example, the testimony of Nocdiwe Mfeti, who articulated her "interest in the commission in making a thorough investigation ... even if it is his remains, if he was burnt to death, even if we could get to his ashes, the bones belonging to his body, because no person can disappear without a trace. If I could bury him, I am sure I could be reconciled" (qtd. in Grunebaum-Ralph and Stier 150). See Heidi Grunebaum-Ralph and Oren Stier, "The Question (of) Remains: Remembering Shoah, Forgetting Reconciliation."

Sailor's skull, takes apart his work at the end of each day, breaking up the clay that he had painstakingly fashioned only to piece it back together again the following afternoon. What she finally realizes, when Ananda invites her and Sarath to view his work, is that he has been reconstructing the face not of Sailor but of Sirissa, attempting to redeem the spirit of peacefulness he "had known in his wife, a peacefulness he wanted for any victim" (187). Though Ananda's attempts to redeem this lost spirit are unceasing, never quite affording him a deliverance from despair, from wishes for death, they nevertheless allow him the experience of mourning, of dreaming the dream of reconciliation with his loved one. Indeed, we might understand his act of memorialization, particularly in its articulation, as elegiac, that is, as a kind of interrogative mourning process. In positing elegiac reconstruction as an act of aesthetic reconstitution, Ingrid de Kok has contemplated the role of elegy in memorial reconstruction, suggesting that "In effect [elegy] brings back into our presence the disappeared, in a newly refigured form" (de Kok 62).[12] Pondering the possibilities of elegy in a post-apartheid, post-TRC context, de Kok draws on the work of Peter Sacks, who defines elegy as more than merely a literary form: elegy, he maintains, is a cultural practice that has "its roots in a dense matrix of rites and ceremonies, in the light of which many elegiac conventions should be recognized as being not only aesthetically interesting forms but also the literary versions of specific social and psychological practices" (qtd. in de Kok 62). We witness this potential for artistic transactions to perform the elegiac function of which Sacks writes in Ananda's ceremonial attempts to commemorate his lost wife. Though these transactions cannot and do not function to restore loss, they can, Ondaatje suggests, allow an interruption in the otherwise perpetual recurrence of the traumatic event, and thus bring reconciliation or renewal into the realm of the possible. In this sense, that art is accorded little purchase, if any, in assessments of "solutions" (again that unfortunate word!) to ethnic and civil war suggests that reconciliation is typically defined and imagined in only the most limited of ways.

Ondaatje's wish to affirm the importance of aesthetic experience for the work of reconciliation is confirmed in the second of the two seemingly random events that frame the end of the novel. In the first of these two events the President of Sri Lanka is assassinated by a man who approaches him with a pack of explosives tied to his chest. Whereas this event confronts the pervasiveness of violence in Sri Lanka, the one that follows it imagines the possibility of a departure from that violence—thus revealing, once again, a vision of reconciliation on Ondaatje's part that respects the fundamental paradox of the task. In this second event, which takes place in the killing fields and burial grounds of rural Sri Lanka, workers painstakingly rebuild an immense statue of

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[12] In order to develop her notion of elegy as a disjunctive memorial process, de Kok makes recourse to Sacks's idea that it is within spaces of loss and absence that imagination operates most powerfully, namely through a "dialectic" between language and the grieving psyche (62).

Buddha that had recently been destroyed in a bombing of the region. The months of labour expended in the meticulous reconstruction and reconstitution of this statue that had "seen wars and offered peace" to the "dying"(305) is immanently symbolic of the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation, suggesting Ondaatje's refusal to give up on the hope of a different future, of a time when Sri Lanka might also be reconstructed or reconstituted.

This hope that the novel holds out for an alternative to a present of violence is located, however, not only in acts of aesthetic construction and archaeological reconstruction but also, at another level, in relations of affinity marked not by rebounding violence but by trust and care. Thus, if we turn to the final lines of the novel, it is to witness Ananda, as the artist commissioned with the ceremonial task of painting the statue's eyes, aided in his efforts by a child, and registering "the boy's concerned hand on his," which he interprets as a "sweet touch from the world" (307). In this small yet powerful gesture, Ondaatje establishes an alternative to violence in principles of care and networks of trust, in practices that affirm intersubjectivity. And indeed, he also directs us, in the course of the novel, to Lakma's and Palipana's acts of intimacy and trust that allow each to survive (105-107), to Ananda's gesture of tenderness towards a disconsolate Anil (187), and to Gamini's embrace of his dead brother in a "pietà" that is the "end" but also possibly "the beginning of permanent conversation with Sarath" (287).

In investing hope in acts of care as responses to loss, Ondaatje suggests, then, that reconciliation calls for an ethics of *caring for the enemy*[13] or *caring for the other*. Such an ethics might seem insufficient or inadequate given the magnitude of Sri Lanka's civil war, given the scale of brutality and atrocity to which the residents of the country are continually subject. Yet as Ondaatje powerfully reminds us, it would be unwise, if not dangerous, to wait for an official end to the conflict, for yet more murders and more tortures, to begin the challenging and paradoxical work of reconciliation.[14]

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[13] I borrow this felicitous phrase from John Borneman. Borneman likewise suggests that "possible alternatives to ethnicization would subscribe to more inclusive forms of affiliation" (287). However, he contends that these alternatives can only play out in the aftermath of ethnic cleansing, whereas I would suggest, following Ondaatje's provocative lead, that they are precisely what enables one to imagine a departure from violence in a present in which violence seems omnipresent.

[14] While South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established only in the official aftermath of apartheid, it would be mistaken, I think, to assume that the process of reconciliation must wait until the conflict has been resolved. Indeed, with James Thompson, whose work is on the contribution of theatre to Sri Lankan reconciliation, I question whether the work of reconciliation ought to be restricted to post-conflict situations alone.

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CHAPTER THREE

The Future of Racial Memory: Redressing the Past in Kogawa's *Obasan* and *Itsuka*

> *Forgiveness is a sort of healing of the memory, the completion of its mourning period. Delivered from the weight of debt, memory is liberated for great projects. Forgiveness gives memory a future.*
>
> -Paul Ricoeur, *The Just*, 144

> *I know that before our collective story is ended, we will all be requiring of ourselves and of each other forgiveness of many kinds...As we move towards the naming of our public friends and our public enemies, I trust and believe that the energy for healing, for reconciliation, for forgiveness and for mutuality are endlessly, endlessly accessible to us.*
>
> -Joy Kogawa, "Is There A Just Cause?," 24

I: After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness?

These statements by Paul Ricoeur, a French philosopher, and Joy Kogawa, a Canadian fiction writer, might put a postmodern academic audience familiar with the problems of humanism extremely on edge. Both thinkers express faith in the possibility of forgiveness at a time in history when such faith might seem naively optimistic at best and dangerously self-deceptive at worst. After all, the conceptual apparatus of forgiveness, to the extent that it involves recollection of and reflection on the past, is patently imbricated with notions of truth and memory; yet a virtual axiom of twentieth-century postmodern epistemologies was that the latter is partial, fragmentary and intensely subjective in nature. How, we might object, is forgiveness at all possible when accurate and reliable memory is not? And as if this objection were not serious enough on its own, we could also ask if forgiveness is even desirable—if, in light of the violence of colonialism and its ugly aftermath, we should not adopt Nietzsche's position that forgetting is by far the better option. Along the same lines as Theodor Adorno's statement that "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," then, we might object that for oppressed peoples to forgive after cultural and racial genocide—indeed to even presume that forgiveness of such genocide is possible—is barbaric, that it is evidence of the total reification of society of which Adorno wrote. For when amelioration and negotiation are enjoined in the face of social formations

premised on division and discord, is it not premature to enjoin atonement, absolution and appeasement?

Kogawa's *Obasan* and *Itsuka* forcefully communicate the critical strength of these objections: yet these two novels also suggest that not only might forgiveness still be possible, it might provide the possibility of a different future. In the process of foregrounding the catastrophe of the Japanese-Canadian internment and its aftermath, they strive to envision the possibility of a future through forgiveness while simultaneously retaining the memory of atrocity. Along the lines of Ricoeur's claim that "forgiveness gives memory a future," they suggest that forgiveness represents the accomplishment of mourning, that it creates an afterlife for memory, and that it is hence the aim—if always unachieved—of libratory politics. Contrary to Kristeva, then, who maintains that forgiveness is atemporal, Kogawa suggests that forgiveness is rooted in temporality. Specifically, Kogawa figures the forgiveness as what I refer to henceforth as the "future anterior": that is, she insists that forgiveness operates through the past and anticipates the future, that it recollects and renarrates the past in order to redirect the future, interrupt its trajectories, and open up new possibilities. Which is not to say that forgiveness does not inhabit the present: on the contrary, it is precisely through its inhabitation of the now that forgiveness enables a kind of commitment to its own possibility. The future anterior is not, however, finite or complete, and in using the term in relation to Kogawa's texts I am seeking to distinguish her representation of forgiveness from Ricoeur's views that it permits an end to mourning. While *Obasan* and particularly *Itsuka* imaginatively affirm redress as the means *par excellence* of constructing a profoundly different future, they nevertheless register uncertainty about whether this new future is realizable or desirable. In encountering through memory the magnitude of the crimes and atrocities committed against Japanese Canadians during and after the Second World War, Naomi, the protagonist of both texts, remains deeply ambivalent and uncertain about Aunt Emily's assertion—echoed by Kogawa in her critical writing ("Just Cause")—that reconciliation can be attained through "mutual recognition of the facts" (201).

Surely her ambivalence and uncertainty is well-founded, given that an official rhetoric of facts underpinned the Canadian government's official programme, during the Second World War, of evacuating, interning, and dispersing more than 21,000 Japanese Canadians, most of whom were Canadians by birth or naturalized citizens then settled on the West Coast.[1] It was in the name of facts that, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, the Canadian

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[1] My brief overview of the internment is indebted to several rich and extensive historical studies. See Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians*; Barry Broadfoot, *Years of Sorrow, Years of Shame: The Story of Japanese Canadians in World War II*; Peter Ward, *The Japanese in Canada*; Toyo Takata, *Nikkei Legacy: The Story of Japanese Canadians from Settlement to Today*.

government was able to implicate Japanese Canadians in crimes of sedition and treason that they had neither committed nor given any evidence of attempting to commit. It was in the name of "facts" that the Canadian state could purport that Japanese Canadians constituted a threat to national security, when in actuality they represented a perceived threat to the racial and economic security of white British Columbians and thus nourished Orientalist fears. It was also through an appeal to facts that Japanese Canadians were forcibly taken from their homes, had their property confiscated, and were contained in converted cattle pens in Hastings Park, Vancouver, in devastatingly poor living condition. And then, through an execution of an erstwhile colonialist strategy of "divide and rule," they were flung to various regions throughout Canada, coerced into labour in deserted mining towns and road-camps in British Columbia and on farms in Alberta and Manitoba, or, in cases where they refused or had resisted evacuation or curfew orders, sent to concentration camps in Angler and Petawawa, Ontario. Even after Prime Minister Mackenzie King corrected the historical record and acknowledged that "it is a fact no person of Japanese race born in Canada has been charged with any act of sabotage or disloyalty during the war," the War Measures Act was implemented, a national piece of legislation that forced Japanese Canadians to leave British Columbia or otherwise "repatriate" to Japan, a foreign country to most of them. It was not until the war was well over, in 1949, that Japanese Canadians were permitted to return to the West Coast; but by then their properties had already been seized and sold, by then the policy of dispersal had already effectively scattered and separated what had been a cohesive community. It was not until nearly forty years later that, in 1988, after much lobbying by the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC), redress for the internment was achieved: the Canadian government acknowledged and apologized to the survivors, offering them each $21,000 as symbolic compensation for their injuries.[2]

But while redress gave the lie to the myth of Japanese-Canadian betrayal and treason, and therefore provided an important corrective to the falsehoods produced in the name of facts, it might be argued that it has made a mockery of the catastrophe and suffering experienced by internees. It might be judged a theatrical display of national benevolence and sovereignty performed for the sake of an auto-regulatory global gaze, as well as an event that enabled the Canadian nation-state to further promulgate the multiculturalist myth that racial justice has already been realized. But perhaps the most damning charge of all, articulated recently by Wendy Brown against feminist movements for redress, is that it "implicitly assumes the relatively unproblematic instrumental value of the state

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[2] For detailed historical accounts of the redress movement, see Diane Kadota, *Justice in Our Time: Redress for Japanese Canadians*; Roy Miki and Cassandra Kobayashi, *Spirit of Redress: The Japanese Canadian Redress Settlement*; and Maryku Omatsu, *Bittersweet Passage: Redress and the Japanese-Canadian Experience*.

and capitalism in redressing [political, social and economic] inequalities" by fashioning a "narrow and predominantly economic formulation of equality" (10). While Brown's position that redress movements are essentially derivatives of Nietzschean *ressentment* is rife with its own set of problems, it does raise several questions that require careful reflection: How, if at all, has Japanese-Canadian redress repaired the losses that were sustained because of the internment? And if, as is frequently the case, redress is intended to repair a split and fragmented sense of nationhood, does it not ultimately rely on a problematic valorization of the nation? What is the relationship, exactly, between redress, the nation, forgiveness and reconciliation? Perhaps more importantly, in the face of such knowledge as I have recounted here—admittedly in a way that mitigates its affective impact by relying on factual discourse, on "lifeless figures, files, and statistics" that Kogawa would maintain "could never measure the depth and outrage" (*Naomi's Road* 12)—is it possible to even speak of forgiveness and reconciliation? After such knowledge, what forgiveness? What reconciliation?

Analysing the final scene of *Itsuka* toward the end of this chapter, I focus on Kogawa's representation of the prime ministerial apologetic address to Japanese Canadians for what it provides in the way of responses to these questions. While her representation of this address manifests the idealization of the sovereign power of the nation-state that Judith Butler has critiqued in *The Politics of Performativity*, I maintain that it nevertheless takes place on what the latter calls the "borders of the unsayable," a liminal locutionary space that enables us to "think about worlds that might one day become sayable, thinkable" (41). In other words, the apologetic utterance specifically (as well as redress more generally) does not fulfill the possibility of forgiveness or reconciliation but rather brings that possibility into the realm of imagination.

II: Contested Terrains: Revolution or Resolution?

Because Kogawa's novels imagine a future that is made possible by forgiveness and reconciliation, they raise the issues of the politics of these transactions and their conditions of possibility in a postcolonial era. Indeed, if postcolonial and critical race studies, whether deliberately or not, have peculiarly evaded examining discourses of forgiveness and reconciliation in any direct or sustained fashion, Kogawa's novels have nevertheless provided one of the few contexts in which these fields of inquiry have reflected on their import for struggles for racial justice. But while *Obasan* and *Itsuka* have enabled a critical encounter with the politics of postcolonial and racial forgiveness and reconciliation, the nature of this encounter has thus far been rough and unfinished, not to mention deeply divided. Critical readings of these texts reproduce, I suggest, the oppositional model that structures many contemporary debates on the meaning of public forgiveness and collective reconciliation: they view these processes as either, on the one hand, positively resolving racial tensions and diffusing racial conflict by avowing the multicultural ideals of tolerance and

progress or, on the other, as regressively transmuting anger and opposition about racial injustice into quietude and resignation. In other words, whereas some readings of *Obasan* and *Itsuka* assert and affirm the texts' resolution of historical contradictions through the production of transcendent values, other, often more recent, readings see this construction of resolution as evidence of the potential that even seemingly "radical" and "minority" texts—or at least the criticism they generate—have for complicity with such illusory Western promises as universality and progress.[3] But Kogawa's novels eschew these approaches in favour of representing forgiveness and reconciliation as fraught and contested discursive terrains, and not, to borrow Roy Miki's terms, as unequivocally "revolutionary" or "resolutionary."

It is important to note that Miki constructs these terms as a way of spelling out the hidden hegemonic operations that explain, at least in part, *Obasan*'s immense popularity in Canadian literary studies. In numerous essays, many of which are collected in *Broken Entries*, Miki has noted "the escalating cultural capital for texts of colour and for academic studies of such texts" (*Broken* 168), and has investigated the processes of appropriation and domestication that transform racialized texts into chic intellectual commodities for the Canadian literary marketplace. His construction of the categories of resolutionary and revolutionary aesthetics must be located, then, in this context: that is, as explanatory labels that allow him to explicate the canonization of *Obasan* and the corpus of published scholarship it has generated in relation to capitalist structures of inclusion. But while Miki maintains that the critical consensus on *Obasan* is resolutionary insofar as it contains the text's potentially disruptive energies, he also suggests that the text invites this consensus by accommodating the expectations of dominant white readers. He writes: "*Obasan* both constructs and is constructed by critical approaches that open pathways of least resistance for the majority 'we'" (144).

Miki's categories of resolutionary and revolutionary aesthetics clearly serve the important polemical function of disabling self-congratulatory and triumphalist nationalist responses to *Obasan* that impose on the novel what Guy

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[3]Here I am categorizing, in sweeping fashion, an internally varied body of criticism. For earlier critical readings of *Obasan* which interpret its thematics of forgiveness and reconciliation as performing valuable resolutionary work, see Erika Gottlieb, "The Riddle of Concentric Worlds in *Obasan*"; Marilyn Russell Rose, "Politics into Art: Kogawa's *Obasan* and the Rhetoric of Fiction." Critical work on both *Obasan* and *Itsuka* that comes to similar conclusions include articles by Rachelle Kanefsky ("Debunking a Postmodern Conception of History") and Minh T. Nguyen ("It Matters to Get the Facts Straight"). For critical work that views either these interpretations or *Obasan* itself as symptomizing a problematic need for closure, see, in addition to Miki and Kamboureli, David Palumbo-Liu, "The Politics of Memory."

Beauregard calls "an 'aberration' model of racism in Canada" (9). But to the extent that they refer to the inner dynamics of the text itself, these categories might, I think, risk instituting a dichotomy that *Obasan*—as well as *Itsuka*—resists and interrogates.[4] Categorizing the text of *Obasan* as resolutionary (and not revolutionary) might, that is, instate an overly static and antagonistic set of terms that reduces its narrative complexity to a reified dualism. And certain assumptions, to my mind, inhere in this dualism that Kogawa's novels throw radically into question. One of these assumptions is that the thematics of forgiveness and reconciliation compromise any potential that narrative might have for resisting racist structures by domesticating issues that would otherwise threaten the psychic and political stability of the white majority. This is a view that has been recently expressed by Smaro Kamboureli: she builds on Miki's distinction in order to argue, admittedly "to some extent contrary to the author's intention," that *Obasan*'s imagery of forgiveness "is hardly a political answer to the ravages of the past"(176) and that Naomi is "a product of the kind of pedagogy that aspires to reconciliation for the sake of the presumed comfort that comes with imposing a telos on things" (220). This criticism of *Obasan*'s thematics of forgiveness and reconciliation as an essentially naïve search for consolation and closure is understandably concerned to rectify other criticism that strips it of its resistant force by appropriating it in the service of dominant ideology. Yet the relegation of *Obasan*'s thematics of forgiveness and reconciliation to the status of a regressive belief that loss can be restored overlooks Kogawa's imaginative reinvention of the concept of reconciliation. From Kogawa's perspective, forgiveness and reconciliation do not necessarily impose telos on a process that lacks closure, nor do they inherently affirm universality in the absence of shared values or permit a false sense of consolation that represses racial memory. Rather, as I will show in what follows, she challenges these conventional approaches to forgiveness and reconciliation and invests hope in their possibility.

Of course, forgiveness and reconciliation might be seen as premature and disempowering for women and racial minorities, as foreclosing the possibility of agency for subjects whose sense of personhood is already jeopardized. Kogawa

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[4] While Miki suggests that the text plays some role in inciting "resolutionary" readings, he is unclear as to the extent of this role. Nonetheless, I suspect that the caveat with which David Palumbo-Liu prefaces his thinking on the same subject (in the context of the United States) also applies to Miki's essay. He writes: "I am not accusing the authors of the novelistic texts I treat of consciously setting out to construct texts that prop up dominant ideologies. Rather, I want to point out that a particular formula of subject construction has evolved and been naturalized as a central component of popular Asian American literature" ("The Politics of Memory" 396).

admits as much herself in an essay she penned on the topic of reconciliation for presentation to the Canadian Caucus On Human Rights. Qualifying her statement that "Our wholeness comes from joining and from sharing our brokenness," she writes:

> Many feminists would say that the imagery of inadequacy and brokenness are inappropriate ones for women and do not assist us to the kind of transforming strength which is now needed. It is true that doubt and ambivalence can sometimes so immobilize us that in the end we serve to maintain oppressors in their positions of power. But healthy doubt is also that which prevents us from succumbing to the demonic power of an unthinking trust. ("Just Cause" 20)

What is as interesting as Kogawa's defense of reconciliation is the reconceived terms in which she imagines it. For she throws into question the commonplace view that it is based on unproblematized notions of conviction, certainty, and solidarity by suggesting that its achievement may actually arise out of disparity and difference, thus resisting the view that projects of reconciliation are necessarily humanist in the worst kind of way. I discuss this reconceptualization later on, however; now it is her defense that interests me. It implies that underestimating the importance of reconciliation for marginalized groups can also be a way of imposing dominant notions of justice on those who may not share them as well as overlooking entirely conceptualizations of agency and liberation that fall outside of mainstream definitions. In other words, the claim that the only acceptable forms of resistance are those approved of by secular modernity suggests that racialized subjects and collectivities are not authorized to select their own terms of resistance. This claim does not account for the ways that forgiveness and reconciliation constitute concepts and practices structured by culturally specific meanings and modalities, nor does it allow that marginalized cultures and communities—such as Japanese Canadians—might grant them a significance that we should not dismiss merely because it defies their devalued status in Western legal and judicial institutions. Indeed, regarding the quest for forgiveness and reconciliation in Kogawa's novels as the "sell-job" of an essentially colonialist ideology discounts alternative responses to injustice, including reconciliation, that lack currency in mainstream judicial systems and assumes the inherent inferiority of alternative conceptions of social justice.

Obasan and *Itsuka* discourage these views and press us to suspend our (postmodernist) assumptions that forgiveness and reconciliation are concepts necessarily complicit in modernity's logic of universal morality and teleology. These texts are useful for considering alternative approaches to these concepts because they do not elide or confuse them with amnesia, closure, submission, acquiescence, or transcendence, nor do they equate them with repression, consolation, or sentimentalization. Instead, they suggest that it may be time to

interrogate reductive dualisms that insist on the incompatibility of resistance and reconciliation. In this way, they reject, for example, Frank Chin's position that the Asian American subject must "choose" between discrete and mutually exclusive options: between racial and religious identities, between an "authentic" Asian American tradition of combat and revenge and an "inauthentic" non-Asian Christian position of confession and submission, and between writing that counters authority and writing that accepts it. Kogawa's texts refuse his suggestion that reconciliation is ultimately a sign of personal weakness and political immobility, and move us beyond such limiting and unhelpful logic.[5]

Because *Obasan* and *Itsuka* invite an admission and analysis of the role that forgiveness and reconciliation can play in misdirecting, obfuscating, or diffusing responsibility for racist actions, but nevertheless discourage their conflation with self-contempt, self-annihilation, or racial genocide, they can direct us toward alternative approaches to racial oppression and injustice that are too often devalued and dismissed, in part because they originate from social and national margins. If we are to come to terms with the complexity of the several scenes of forgiveness and reconciliation—personal, maternal, communal, and national—in these two novels, then we will need to dispense with certain platitudes and presumptions, and resist the critical inclination to approach Kogawa's work through ready-made categories. We will need to question the third term in the sequence of *remembering in order to forgive and forget*, as well as to theorize a different relationship between remembrance and forgiveness—an urgent task that has not yet been adequately undertaken despite the wealth of recent critical work on memory and trauma. We will also have to question the opposition between forgiveness and vengeance that, in literary criticism on *Obasan*, takes the form of associating Obasan with the former and Aunt Emily with the latter.[6]

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[5] King-kok Cheung critiques Frank Chin's dualistic categories in her article, "The Woman Warrior versus the Chinaman Pacific." More recently, Patricia Marby Harrison has also thrown Chin's categories into question in her reading of Kogawa's *Obasan*, arguing that the novel challenges his perceived incompatibility between Christianity and Asian masculinity. While demonstrating that *Obasan* implicitly deconstructs Chin's categories, Harrison unfortunately concludes that Nakayama-sensei "at length succeeds in his attempts at resolution, healing, and redemption" (165), thereby falling back on the conflation of reconciliation and resolution by merely attributing to them a positive sign where Chin read a negative one. See Harrison, "Genocide or Redemption?"

[6] Heather Zwicker, for example, promotes this oppositional framework when she maintains that "Against Emily's Old Testament credo, the interned community [in *Obasan*] rely on the forgiveness phrase of the Lord's Prayer" (152). Zwicker constructs this opposition as part of a larger claim that Emily's valorization of speech is opposed to Obasan's preference for silence. While the

Lest my dissociation of "resolution" and reconciliation be mistaken for an inversion (rather than a displacement) of Miki's scheme, one that undoes this correspondence only to then align the latter with "revolution," I should also register my suspicion of the overwhelming number of critical responses to *Obasan* which merely collapse the categories that Miki constructs. These readings frequently interpret the final scene of personal and maternal reconciliation as constituting the culmination and thus the closure of Naomi's plight, as providing release and relief from racial injustice, and as precluding the necessity for anti-racist struggle. Indeed, interpreting this scene in ways that do not reduce it to either a redemptive transcendence of racial trauma or a regressive foreclosure of resistance helps to explain why *Itsuka*, which goes on to narrate Naomi's involvement in the movement for Japanese-Canadian redress, has been overwhelmingly neglected. When this novel has been attended to, its promise of social transformation has either been rejected as unfulfilled, incomplete, and unsatisfactory or affirmed as plentiful and progressive. In playing out, yet again, an overly polarized and antagonistic academic debate about the precise nature of Naomi's experience, these critical responses reveal once more the dualistic logic that structures many critical responses to discourses of forgiveness and reconciliation: but neither discounting these discourses as regressive nor valorizing them as radical deals adequately or convincingly, I think, with their possibilities or problems. If my position, then, is more ambivalent, evidencing a philosophical determination to hope for the possibility of public forgiveness and collective reconciliation as well as an awareness of (at least some of) what is at stake in such a decision, then I hope that this determination may be taken as some measure of my commitment toward resisting, or at least interrogating, the alternately disparaging and nostalgic pressures that abound when forgiveness and reconciliation cross into the contexts of racial, cultural, and gender conflicts.

It is a commitment that Kogawa would seem to share. Even as her novels aspire to imagine the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation in the name of the future, they recognize that these concepts can be abused and exploited at the expense of those whom they should ideally most benefit. I ask, then, for a reading of *Obasan* and *Itsuka* that does not presume from the start that Kogawa's invested hope in the possibilities of forgiveness and reconciliation represents a desire to achieve racial harmony at all costs, while it nonetheless maintains that these texts are unwilling to grant their achievement at the expense of acknowledging the ongoing effects of power imbalances on the lives of marginalized peoples, that is, that they ultimately reject any conceptualization of forgiveness and reconciliation

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claim that forgiveness and vengeance are opposites is somewhat commonplace—one found, for instance, in Hannah Arendt's famous reflections on the former—it runs the risk, I think, of sliding into dangerous suggestions that pursuits for redress and restitution are antithetical to forgiveness, that they derive, for instance, from selfish individualism and futile vindictiveness. See Heather Zwicker, "Canadian Women of Color in the New World Order."

that entails repression of knowledge about the continuation of asymmetrical power relations. For Kogawa, these practices do not constitute rituals of surrendering to the dominant culture, of renouncing a commitment to racial struggle, or of excusing the history of the present. In the final analysis, she illustrates the ultimate inapplicability of Derridean notions of forgiveness to pragmatic attempts to address and achieve forgiveness in a public, postcolonial context—an inapplicability that Derrida himself would certainly be the first to concede. Kogawa's insistence that forgiveness and reconciliation are conditional is particularly evident in *Obasan*, where the possibility of national reconciliation is emphatically withheld: as David Palumbo-Liu has recently remarked, "The last page of the novel does not end with reconciliation and forgiveness, as we might expect from the back cover" ("Model Minority Discourse," 224).

If *Obasan* ultimately displaces the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation, however, what are the conditions of this displacement? Alternately, given that *Itsuka*, on the contrary, accepts this possibility, what are the conditions of this acceptance? Juxtaposing these two novels may furnish us with some answers to these unexplored questions. Analysing *Obasan* first, I maintain that this novel suggests that when the nation shows no remorse, when it makes no reparations for its racist actions, the extension of forgiveness on the part of those oppressed might be a sign of the power hegemony has to thoroughly interpellate racialized subjects. It is precisely the failure on the part of the Canadian nation-state to express regret or atone for its racist actions that leads to Kogawa's deferral of the possibility of collective forgiveness or national reconciliation. Despite its expression of a measure of faith in the Japanese-Canadian movement for redress, *Itsuka* also suggests that redress—to say nothing of forgiveness and reconciliation—is absurd, even scandalous, in the context of a crime as atrocious as the internment without the existence of certain provisions, without, say, a genuine apology or significant compensation. An examination of these two texts can, then, provide some answers to what is, I think, the pivotal question: if it is worth investing hope in the project of righting wrongs, how might this project be enacted, or at the very least, begun?

III: Conditions of (Im)possibility: Affective Renarration, Rational Reconstruction

I want to turn now to *Obasan*, where I think we can begin to identify some tentative responses to this question. For this text itself alternately displaces and fulfills the promise of reconciliation; that is, it defers the possibility of national reconciliation but nevertheless actualizes the possibility of maternal reconciliation. This disjunction between *Obasan*'s maternal and national storylines, what I wish to take as my point of entry into the novel, can also help to illuminate those conditions of forgiveness and reconciliation that Kogawa views as felicitous and transformative. More specifically, the narrative description of Naomi's reconciliation with her displaced mother might be read for what it says

about how and under what circumstances reconciliation on a larger, more collective scale might still be possible. While the fabric of this description is imagistic and ambiguous, it establishes with a measure of clarity that reconciliation is essentially contingent on a genuine openness to the position of the other, on what Kogawa might refer to as "mutual recognition" or "mutual vulnerability." In other words, the scene suggests that reconciliation—which Kogawa suggests is an endless process—depends on a willingness to suspend one's own version of events and to listen attentively to another interpretation. Maternal reconciliation only enters into the realm of possibility once Naomi displays a profound capacity for non-dogmatic and non-coercive communication, when she says, simply and unequivocally, "Mother, I am listening. Assist me to hear you" (264).

Borrowing from King-kok Cheung, we could specifically characterize this mode of communication that constitutes a condition of reconciliation for Kogawa as "attentive silence." Cheung makes use of the term to register the positive vectors of silence present in *Obasan* that are specific to Japanese culture, and particularly a Japanese maternal tradition, but are critically overlooked as a result of recourse by literary scholars to a Eurocentric framework. Because it formulates a hierarchy between speech and silence which devalues the latter as well as ignores its heterogeneous significations, this framework, she persuasively argues, is inappropriate to Kogawa's novel: here, despite critical conclusions to the contrary, silence is not an ineluctable sign of capitulation to racial oppression. Cheung's observations can be relevantly extended, I think, to an analysis of the conditions of forgiveness and reconciliation in *Obasan*: they can enable the insight that the novel contests the prevailing assumption in dominant culture that these practices are primarily discursive phenomena, that their crux is the act of enunciation. Attentive silence constitutes an important condition of reconciliation for Kogawa, one that challenges and resists dominant forms and visions of these practices that in privileging the speech act overlook their culturally specific modalities. Indeed, *Obasan* suggests that the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation emerges when the wish to speak—and specifically "speak for" or "speak over"—is renounced (though the implications of that renunciation depend, of course, on the precise configurations of power in a relationship). Naomi enables reconciliation to enter the realm of possibility by attending silently to her mother's version rather than dogmatically imposing her own interpretation. Her genuine attentiveness to her mother's version is what enables the mythopoetic "stone to burst with telling" and "the seed to flower with speech" (np): it is what allows for personal renewal and rebirth to emerge, however surprisingly and ephemerally, in the midst of horror and devastation. Put differently, practicing attentive silence is how Naomi makes possible the process of rebirth and recovery from (maternal) loss: it is how she finds release from her melancholia and takes up, at last, the task of mourning. In short, it is only by recollecting and exercising this form of listening which is, somewhat curiously, her maternal inheritance that she is able to make possible maternal reconciliation, only by recovering a

maternal mode of communication that privileges listening, that she is able to recover memory, or traces of memory, of her deceased mother.

In reclaiming attentive silence, Naomi is reclaiming what is, according to Cheung, a maternal tradition. But if, as I am suggesting, attentive silence constitutes an important condition of forgiveness and reconciliation, is that to imply that these practices are peculiarly feminine? While this might seem a dangerously essentializing claim to make—that forgiveness is the specific provenance of women, that the performance of acts of forgiveness are specific to women— it of course only becomes dangerous if the cultural formations which produce such claims are elided. Indeed, we cannot afford *not* to acknowledge that forgiveness always operates and is imagined in a gendered manner. Certainly we witness this gendering of forgiveness in *Obasan*. A whole range of critics have already commented at length on the gendered terms of attentive silence in the text, often associating it with Julia Kristeva's semiotic (a term which designates the preverbal realm that precedes entry into the symbolic economy of language) on the basis that the semiotic codes of this mode of communication belong to the ministering rhythms, tones, and movements of motherhood and the maternal body. Without belabouring the Kristevan connection here, I wish to suggest that there are areas of subtle overlap between forgiveness, femininity and Kristeva's semiotic.

These connections that I am attempting to draw become less tenuous if we consider the similarities between Kristeva's concept of the semiotic and her reflections on the subject of forgiveness. In these reflections, most of which are articulated in recent interviews, she considers practices of forgiveness as mediated by acts of "attributing meaning." By this she means that granting forgiveness is a matter of providing an interpretation of events that is less an act of rational reconstruction and more an enabling of release or renewal from suffering. More specifically, she says that this interpretation is rendered through an analysis of the "intonations, metaphors, affects, the entire panoply of psychic life" (282), thus drawing upon the same vocabulary that she has used to describe the semiotic. To offer forgiveness is thus to offer an attentiveness to the subtext of the semiotic, which perhaps helps to explain why the realm of the symbolic or the Law of the Father seems often impervious to, even incapable of, practices of attributing meaning.

Kristeva's assertion that forgiveness—and its corollary in the form of attributing meaning—is largely limited to the private sphere is also the case in *Obasan*, though Kogawa herself objects to this limitation. Significantly, I think, acts of attributing meaning are especially associated in this text with the mother's body. So when Naomi's mother attributes meaning to the scene of a hen murdering her chicks, she conveys the meaning itself through body language rather than the language of law and reason: "'It was not good, was it,' Mother says. 'Yoku nakatta ne.' Three words. Good, negation of good in the past tense, agreement with statement. It is not a language that promotes hysteria. There is no blame or pity. The hen is not responsible" (64). Toward the end of *Obasan*,

we witness Naomi also attributing meaning to events that would otherwise remain too horrifying to achieve explication as a form of response to Grandma Kato's extant letters relaying the catastrophe of her mother's life in Japan. By reconstructing through identification the suffering her mother experienced there, Naomi "captures the suffering," to borrow from Kristeva again, "and opens it up to something else" (282): in other words, she frees herself and her mother from an oppressive, unspeaking silence, a silence derived from the positivist logic which prompted Naomi to presume the reasons for her mother's refusal to speak in the first place. Her eventual supplication to her mother to speak marks her reclamation of a maternal tradition of what we could call forgiving interpretation, her recuperation of a mode of communication that privileges listening that is neither literal nor logocentric, and that is therefore capable of rendering silence audible and articulate. But, unlike the semiotic, this maternal tradition is not essentially female; indeed Naomi's almost mystical hermeneutic communion with her mother takes place through a series of layered transpositions, with Nakayama-sensei, an Anglican minister and family friend, orally mediating Naomi's mother's words, which are themselves filtered through the written text of her grandmother's letters.

These layered transpositions, which indicate that reading and writing can be forms of attentive silence, suggest that to forgive and to reconcile is also to reinterpret or renarrate. Reconciliation and forgiveness are thus possible for Kogawa, but they depend on a willingness to engage another perspective, namely by making a committed effort to listen to another version and by allowing the difference of that version to alter the prior univocality of one's viewpoint. If there seems an element of madness or absurdity in the idea of listening to the voice(s) of the dead, *Obasan* suggests that it is possible but requires giving up the belief that collective and social energy is containable, and autonomous and authoritative interpretation achievable. In short, it is only through a listening relationship in which the listener for her part relinquishes her hold on an accepted version of events that, *Obasan* suggests, reconciliation can come out of social wreckage.[7]

Using the scene of maternal reconciliation as a way of speculating outward on Kogawa's view of reconciliation generally—as a way of gaining insight into her perception of how this apparently fantastic and spectacular ideality might become an actuality—points toward what is an important reason for *Obasan*'s refusal of the possibility of reconciliation at a national level. For whereas the Canadian nation-state does not heed the requests of Japanese

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[7] I will readily concede that there are certain problems in extrapolating from the maternal plot to the national one in such a fashion, that nation-states cannot reconcile with subjects whom they have marginalized simply by exhibiting an openness to marginalized narratives, and that national reconciliation *must* entail a radical restructuring of society from the perspective of material redistribution. But the criterion of listening is nevertheless an important (and in the present case) absent condition of national reconciliation.

Canadians, does not listen to their silenced voices. Naomi does her utmost to make out her mother's voicelessness. This narrative discontinuity in *Obasan* between, on the one hand, the positive manifestation of silence in the form of Naomi's solicitous strivings to truly *hear* her mother speak, and the profoundly negative manifestation in the form of the Canadian government's *deafness* to the voices of interned and dispersed Japanese Canadians, on the other, suggests again that attentive silence constitutes an essential condition for forgiveness and reconciliation. If *Obasan* ultimately disappoints the possibility of national reconciliation, as I suggest it does, then it is because the imperative of attending to the voice of the other is noticeably and significantly absent from state-directed attempts to address the internment issue, as the materiality of the government document that appears in the very last pages of the text attests.

This document, a memorandum produced by the Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians for the Canadian House of Commons and Senate, forestalls the movement toward resolution that Naomi's symbolic reconciliation with her mother inaugurates by compounding a situation of enforced silence and invisibility for Japanese Canadians. It neither indexes names of Japanese Canadians who were impacted by the internment and resettlement processes nor registers their anger, outrage, and humiliation at being subjected so thoroughly to the insidious structures of Canadian racism. Because of its discourse of dogmatic rationality and univocal meaning—characteristics that would lead Kristeva to invoke the word "signification," her counter-term to "attributing meaning"—this document forecloses the possibility of forgiveness or reconciliation. By exhibiting a lack of comprehension of the other, a failure of openness to the voices of Japanese-Canadians, the text of this document ultimately disappoints the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation that Kogawa's text holds out. In its negation of the affective and political aspects of internment survival, it uncannily resonates with the "carnivorous" speech uttered by the specter-like figure of the Grand Inquistor, a speech that signals both "a judgment and a refusal to hear" (250). Indeed, the Grand Inquisitor stands in for a nexus of power relations that speaks a distant and disembodied speech, that issues utterances that signify a seeming indifference to real human suffering. The production of this mode of speech would certainly constitute a vain labour and an ineffectual exercise to Naomi, for whom Emily's collection of data and official records constitutes white noise or meaningless speech that does not capture or resonate with the actual ordeal endured by her family and community: "All of Aunt Emily's words, all her papers, the telegrams and petitions are like scratchings in the barnyard," she reflects, "the evidence of much activity, scaly claws hard at work. But what good they do I do not know ... They do not touch us where we are planted here in Alberta" (208). At the source of Naomi's distrust of official records and documents is her conviction that they exclude the felt specificities of survivors' own experiences of internment and its aftermath.

Her distrust suggests that even as she ultimately affirms the potential value of epistemic "truth" and "reality," she also has deep misgivings about the

"objectivity" of apparently factual information that through its "cool print" (208) or sanitizing language undermines the full affective range (including bewilderment, anger, abjection, frustration, etc.) of Japanese Canadians' responses to internment. Naomi's insights into the complex workings of language complicate, I think, a somewhat simplistic and exaggeratedly polarized critical debate on *Obasan*'s putative postmodernism or supposed humanism. If Naomi ultimately disavows the potential disillusionment, or even nihilism, of a radically postmodern position and avers Emily's humanist credo that "It matters to get facts straight," and that "Reconciliation can't begin without mutual recognition of the facts" (201), she nonetheless retains an indispensable suspicion of the relevance of factual discourse for reconciliation on the basis of its potential insufficiency or even ineffectualness when unsupplemented by other forms of discourse. Because they register a failure to listen and a shortage of social feeling, official documents alone do not and cannot efficaciously mediate the processes of forgiveness and reconciliation, processes that, *Obasan* suggests, must follow genuine attendance to the repressed and marginalized voices of those who were (and may still be) wronged.

IV: Cultures of Hegemony, Cultures of Forgiveness

While Kogawa's novels ultimately manifest a certain degree of confidence in the possibility of reconciliation and forgiveness, they nevertheless display a conditional logic insofar as they insist that that possibility depends on a scene of repentance as well as, we shall see, a promise to pursue restitutive measures. While such logic might seem to compromise the concept of "authentic forgiveness" that Jacques Derrida seeks to maintain, as it neither reserves authentic forgiveness for aneconomic transactions nor preserves the Abrahamic tradition of reconciliation against widespread contestations of the unconditionality of forgiveness, Kogawa believes, quite rightly I think, that in light of the serious lack of expressed desire for social transformation, unconditional forgiveness is simply not viable at this point in what has perhaps prematurely and problematically been labeled *post*colonial history, not without the further victimization of already victimized people. If *Obasan* is an accurate indication, then Kogawa maintains a strong degree of critical distance from claims of forgiveness that are extended when neither remorse for wrongdoing has been expressed nor projects of restitution enacted. To this extent she accords with Kristeva's view, pace Derrida, that forgiveness that is offered in the face of no repentance and no promise of change, is problematic at the very least, and may not even qualify as forgiveness in the first place. "Those who call on an absolute forgiveness without repentance are in an *oblativité*" ("Forgiveness" 283), Kristeva maintains, and by this she means that their generosity, while extraordinary, too easily lifts the prohibitions and limits that define social relationships. But while Kogawa and Kristeva both express profound suspicion and unease toward practices of forgiveness and reconciliation that take place in the absence of such

related rituals as repentance and reparations, whereas the latter rejects the possibility of forgiveness *tout court*, irrespective of who enjoins it, the former considers how the political and social meanings of forgiveness turn on the question of *who* forgiveness is *for*.

Kogawa's attention to the politics of identity does not prevent her from exploring, through the ruminations of Naomi, the possibility that forgiveness and reconciliation may become potentially fetishized claims that out of a wish for closure offer absolution at the cost of restitution. Naomi responds with skepticism and uncertainty to the prayers for/of forgiveness of Nakayama-sensei, Obasan, and Uncle—prayers that seem inadequate from her perspective to the extent that they include offers of forgiveness that precede expressions of contrition. As a way of registering her feeling that these prayers are unbearable, even odious in their refusal to acknowledge the crimes committed against her family and community, Naomi, who is "not thinking of forgiveness," "stand[s] up and abruptly leave[s] the room" (263) as they are articulated. Her position does not seem unreasonable: in the immediate aftermath of learning for the first time of her mother's traumatic experience, these prayers, despite their cathartic energy, appear to suggest that oppressor and oppressed equally require exoneration, thus dismissing the need for collective accountability on behalf of the dominant culture and denying the power relations that profoundly and immeasurably impact the lives of Japanese Canadians. In their intimation that Japanese Canadians are partly answerable for their own mistreatment, these prayers seem to placidly defer rather than demand racial justice, thereby accepting a process whereby responsibility for racial crimes and their exoneration is transferred onto the shoulders of the victims themselves. This deferral of racial justice is also witnessed in Nakayama-sensei's earlier speech urging co-operation that "sounds half-like an apology, as if he were somehow responsible" (130), in Obasan's almost incantatory statements exhorting forgetfulness, and in Uncle's entreaties to Aunt Emily that gratitude, not anger or dissatisfaction, be shown for putative Canadian benevolence and goodwill. In these instances, what poses as forgiveness might instead be an expression and effect of hegemony, of a situation whereby the oppressed complicitly disavow the full extent of dominant society's responsibility for racial crimes committed, and even more problematically, erroneously bear that responsibility themselves.

But to attribute these responses to a complicitous attitude alone would be to account only partially for the readiness and consistency with which various *issei* in *Obasan* make recourse to invocations of mercy and compassion. The prayers for/of forgiveness on the part of the older generation raise the question of what forgiveness means when it is *for* the wronged rather than the wrongdoer: for whereas the conditions of contrition and restitution constitute absolutely primary conditions in the latter situation, in the former, the specific conditions (and indeed whether conditions exist at all) are the prerogative of the oppressed. Indeed, what Kristeva fails to consider, but Kogawa does not, is that determination not to be imprisoned in the category of the victim can motivate the pursuit of forgiveness

on the part of the wronged, and that this wish to defuse the power of the oppressed constitutes a form of agency that should not be overlooked out of a dogmatic insistence, however justified, on judgment and punishment.

Such an insistence can also be problematic when, as I have been suggesting, it uncritically adheres to mainstream definitions of justice without considering how these definitions are socially and culturally produced. For, as an examination of the role conventionally played by reconciliation in Japanese culture reveals, the contrite disposition displayed by Nakayama-sensei, Obasan, and Uncle points to the critical exigency of accounting for the role of cultural difference in paradigms of apology and forgiveness. Along these lines, we might ask to what extent the complexities of cultural provenance affect the varied modes and meanings of these paradigms. Do expressions of contrition enjoy a symbolic and practical import in 'non-Western' cultures that they lack in 'Western' ones? How, in other words, might traditional Japanese cultural codes convey and conceive of apology and forgiveness differently? Certainly apologizing plays (or *did* play, a generation or two ago) a far more constitutive role in Japanese culture—the apologizing culture *par excellence*—than it does in most others. Unlike their Western counterparts, Japanese corporations and bureaucracies are, according to Takeo Doi, likely to be active participants in the moral economy of the apology. Whereas there is often no moral imperative to apologize in Western dominant culture, apologies generally fulfill an important social regulatory function of repairing harm and restoring harmony in Japanese culture. And whereas apologies in Western dominant culture do not discharge offenders of their obligations or responsibility, in Japanese culture they render one unaccountable through their context of dependency. In other words, as Doi explains, because apologies generally emanate from fear and guilt in Japanese culture, the apologizer's dependent status is crucial for the achievement of an efficacious apology. In the context of Japanese-Canadian immigrant cultures, we might wonder if the fear and guilt that typically motivates the apology in Japanese culture becomes *racial* fear and guilt—that is, if the apology uttered by, say, Obasan to Mr. Barker emerges out of a nexus of asymmetrical power relations, in which case the apologetic gesture temporarily provides a sense of alleviation and agency without actually transforming the system that produces such power relations. For if the apology constitutes a proclamation of defenselessness and vulnerability in the Japanese context, or what Doi phrases "a child-like plea to the other party" (qtd. in Tavuchis 41), in the Canadian context it inadvertently aids in the production of white fantasies of Asian dependency and vulnerability.

In other words, performative displays of dependency and vulnerability unfortunately operate, in a North American context, to supplement circulating stereotypes that imagine Asians, and particularly Asian women, as childlike and submissive. These stereotypes gain further cultural power when apologizing routinely and almost ritualistically is a reflexive response to racial marginalization and social subordination. Thus apologetic and forgiving attitudes can be, as they are in *Obasan*, evidence of responses wrought by hegemony and by culture that

cross over and reinforce each other in detrimental ways. If, as sociologist Nicholas Tavuchis suggests, oppressed individuals and collectivities apologize "promiscuously and excessively" and as a "defensive and propitiatory reaction" (40) to an unrecognized and unstable subjectivity, then a strange and unfortunate double-bind confronts Japanese Canadians who have retained Japanese cultural practices of apologizing frequently and emphatically. This double-bind is witnessed in, for example, the ways that Obasan's apologetic gestures unintentionally collaborate with Japanese cultural practices of apologizing to reinforce her subordination, a situation that uncannily resembles the ways that Mr. Barker's expression of regret for the violations committed against Japanese Canadians successfully reinforces his domination.

V) Forgiving and Remembering

If Kogawa's treatment of apologies and forgiveness in *Obasan* suggests that these practices are unsatisfactory or suspect when they function, intentionally or not, to reinscribe ideological messages about the racist operations of power in Canadian society, it also suggests that one of the problematic messages they can relay is that racism in Canada belongs to a putatively discontinuous past. Thus the past tense, the "we did," of Mr. Barker's articulation of remorse cannot initiate genuine forgiveness because it remembers the internment for the sole purpose of isolating it from a multicultural present, of containing its potential to disrupt comforting nationalist illusions about the achievement of racial harmony. But genuine forgiveness is also not enabled by, say, Obasan's prayerful utterances or acts of hospitality, for forgiveness itself does not and cannot constitute a negation or annihilation of the past, an excision from collective and individual memory of racial pain and suffering. Genuine forgiveness, according to Kogawa's pedagogy, must be dissociated from amnesia of any kind, for it is neither a willful dismissal of an essentially embarrassing or self-contradictory past nor an involuntary erasure from memory of events too painful to recall.

Yet if, as Kogawa suggests, forgiveness entails remembrance, how is forgiveness possible when trauma and catastrophe give rise to collective and individual memory loss? And if forgiveness necessitates revisitation of the past, is its achievement even worth the psychic agony of recollection? By having Naomi answer the latter question in the negative, at least initially, Kogawa accounts for the possibility that forgiveness, to the extent that it requires remembrance, may not be as affirmative or desirable as is often thought. Thus a few pages after her reflection on the excruciating experience of retrieving traumatic memories, described in intensely visceral language as "memory drain[ing] down the sides of my face [...] pull[ing] the growth from the lining of my walls" (214), Naomi considers that the benefits of mourning, as well as its attendant possibilities in the form of closure and healing, may be overrated given that no amount of remembering can provide an adequate or equivalent return to the past:

> In time the wounds will close and the scabs drop off the healing skin. Till then, I can read these newspaper clippings, I can tell myself the facts. I can remember since Aunt Emily says that I must and release the flood gates one by one. I can cry for the flames that have cracked in the dryness and cry for people who no longer sing. I can cry for Obasan who has turned to stone. But what then? Uncle does not rise up and return to his boats. Dead bones do not take on flesh. (219)

Naomi's sense of the potential futility of engaging the tasks of remembrance and forgiveness—her awareness that they can provide neither adequate restitution nor complete reconciliation since they cannot return the most victimized victims, victims on whose behalf it may seem presumptuous, if not irrelevant, to forgive—calls into question the common equation of remembering and revealing with healing. *Obasan* thus registers, through the musings of Naomi, a heightened degree of self-consciousness about its own narrative project of recollecting history, for Kogawa is intensely aware of the attractions of a Nietzschean preference of forgetfulness to forgiveness. Forgetfulness, as Naomi speculates, provides a sought-after avoidance of affect, a welcome relief from the oppressiveness and grief of racial memory:

> Some memories, too, might be better forgotten. Didn't Obasan once say, "It is better to forget"? What purpose is served by hauling forth the jar of inedible food? If it is not seen, it does not horrify. What is past recall is past pain. Questions from all these papers, questions referring to turbulence in the past, are an unnecessary upheaval in the delicate ecology of this numb day. (48)

To the extent, then, that Naomi articulates the objection that racial paralysis may be preferable to racial pain, and that remembrance may actually further injure racially injured subjects, Kogawa thinks arguments in favour of forgetfulness sufficiently substantial and compelling to deserve consideration.

Yet Kogawa's narrative eventually works against the logic of amnesia insofar as it favours recollecting the past to the alternative of having it dismissed, denied, or discounted in dominant versions of history. Through the experience of Naomi, *Obasan* bears out Kogawa's claim, asserted in interviews and critical writings, that "we must not ever forget lest we repeat the evils of our ancestors ...To embrace that and to demand of ourselves a refusal to repeat that history is a great calling" ("Interview with Jeanne Delbaere" 465). So while Kogawa seems to sympathize with the inclination to remember the past with the aim of eventually escaping it—with Naomi's recourse to remembrance as a way "to get away from all this...from the memories, from the deaths, from the heap of words"

(201)—she nevertheless discourages an approach to remembrance that recollects only in order to forget. But Kogawa's narrative defense of recollecting as opposed to effacing the past is not made without rigourous interrogation of the meanings and purposes of remembrance, and of the possibilities and problems of accessing memory as a coping strategy for dealing with the present.

Kogawa's thoughtful reflections on the import and uses of memory have been peculiarly overlooked in the overwhelming majority of literary criticism on *Obasan*. This criticism is often curiously unreflective about *Obasan*'s narrative relation to the past, which it assumes is remembered for the sake of the presumed forgetfulness that comes with forgiveness. By situating the novel in a developmental nationalist narrative that follows a linear and progressive trajectory from Canada's regrettable racist "then" to its putatively tolerant and harmonious "now," this criticism demonstrates the existence of deep and disturbing convergences between Canadian cultural and political institutions. Several critics have recently noted these convergences and suggested that Kogawa criticism operates as containment strategy that severs Canada's embarrassing past from its (strangely) internationally admired present. Amoko O. Apollo, for example, notes "an ambivalence between memory and forgetting" in interpretations of *Obasan*, which is indicative, he proposes, of the implication of textual scholarship in an official multiculturalism that "asks Canadian national subjects to have already forgotten the legacy of racial injustice it expects they will naturally remember" (54). Guy Beauregard has similarly observed that *Obasan* is the site for several critical revisitations of Canada's racist past, and maintains that these visits symptomize the malaise of a Canadian ideology of multiculturalism that does not engage seriously, if at all, with questions about "why and how we remember—for what purposes, for whom, and for what position we remember" (Yoneyama qtd. in Beauregard 15). The lack of critical engagement with such questions is especially troubling given Kogawa's profound commitment to narrative interrogation along such lines. When critical readings interpret *Obasan* as aiming to "get over" the past of Canadian racism in order to "get on" with a present in which racism is still going strong, when they see Kogawa as extending a form of forgiveness by proxy to an ostensibly redeemed Canadian nation, they curiously disregard Kogawa's own pedagogy of forgiveness. For to imply that *Obasan*'s exhortation of remembrance enables a form of forgetting is to miss its critical point, articulated by Naomi, that "the present is shaped by the past" (25).

But if *Obasan* ultimately privileges the relation between forgiveness and memory, it nevertheless demonstrates a considerable awareness of the impartiality and mutability of the latter. Naomi's reflection that "the present is shaped by the past" is located in a passage that constitutes a larger meditation on the ontological nature of memory and on its potential to render epistemological claims about the certainty of truth suspect: "All our ordinary stories are changed in time," she thinks, "altered as much by the present as the present is shaped by the past" (25). Her observation asks us to consider what it means for the possibilities of forgiveness and reconciliation when meaning can be contentious and conflictual,

when contradictory interpretations of events are ubiquitous, when competing versions of history vie for authority, and when "memory is not always on the side of the angels" (Kearney 26). In other words, if forgiveness requires a relation to the past, if reconciliation requires remembrance, are the former viable or realizable aims given that, as Naomi knows, narrative memory can be inaccessible, uncertain, and subjective? The question is all the more vexed because Kogawa's novels and critical writings share Ricoeur's view that "Forgiveness is a sort of healing of memory" (*The Just* 144) even as they demonstrate a profound awareness that memory itself can be unstable, indeterminate, and unreliable. Indeed, the tension in Kogawa's work between a humanist perspective and a more postmodern one—between an awareness of the importance of such currently devalued conceptual entities as truth, history, and memory, on the one hand, and an understanding that these entities are not always as reliable and responsible as we might like, on the other—has created a sharp divide in literary criticism on the novel, with critics such as Rachelle Kanefsky and Minh T. Nguyen strongly contesting Donald Goellnicht's claim that *Obasan* demonstrates "that history is not fixed, but discursive, a 'form of saying' founded in language, which is always in a state of flux" (294). Yet Kogawa's suggestion, conveyed through the medium of Naomi, that truth can be "more murky, shadowy, and grey" (33) than Aunt Emily's intensely literalist approach allows does not, it seems to me, contradict or negate her humanist aspirations to develop, *à la* Paul Ricoeur, a "culture of just memory" ("Memory and Forgetting" 11). Indeed, were Kogawa to adopt a purely immanentist perspective, were she to suggest in radically postmodern fashion that past events remain trapped in their pastness, then it would seem that the only position on forgiveness that would be available to her would be one that insisted on a Nietzschean forgetting. Yet she rejects this position and adopts the view—similarly adopted and elaborated by Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative*—that the past is only available through memory, and that while this does not eliminate the ontological inviolability and irretrievability of pastness, it does mean that the original past is open to modification and revision. Forgiveness and reconciliation, from this perspective, do not undo the past but strive to renarrate it. They are not a forgetting of events themselves, but a different way of signifying, a way of signifying that "gives memory a future" (Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 13).

While the view that forgiveness and reconciliation constitute a form of renarration that recollects the past while simultaneously opening up possibilities for a future resonates profoundly with Kristeva's argument that forgiveness entails "attributing meaning" to events that thwart the possibility of rational reconstruction, there is a crucial difference between Ricoeur's and Kristeva's theories: whereas the former seems to adopt an Arendtian view that forgiveness and reconciliation are temporal and historical, the latter insists on their atemporality and ahistoricity. Kristeva strategically holds onto her assertion in *Black Sun* that forgiveness exists outside of the time of scansion, that "pardon is ahistorical. It breaks the concatenation of causes and effects, crimes and

punishment, it stays the time of action" (200), in order to argue that forgiveness cannot force its way into the public realm. As she explains in an interview, "I insist on this phenomenon of the atemporality of forgiveness because it helps us understand why forgiveness cannot inscribe itself in the social arena. The social sphere is the sphere of history: there is a past, a present, and a future. In that field, forgiveness must simply follow judgment and condemnation" ("Forgiveness" 285). For all the similarities between Kristeva's and Kogawa's views on forgiveness, where their positions clearly part ways is in the question of temporality: for Kogawa, forgiveness is strongly rooted in the temporal, and is precisely what, as Hannah Arendt would say, ensures the continuity of time. Whereas Kristeva's insistence that forgiveness is atemporal derives from her position that it belongs to the private realm alone, and ideally to the psychoanalytic scene, Kogawa's suggestion that it is temporal obtains from her view that "[t]he private and the public, the personal and the political, the internal and the external are all co-extensive" ("Just Cause" 20), and that consequently, forgiveness and reconciliation ought not be limited to one-to-one interactions alone.

VII: "Back to the Future": On Temporality[8]

Kogawa's notion that forgiveness is very much a temporal concept applicable to collective contexts is witnessed, to varying extents, in *Obasan* and *Itsuka*. Specifically, these texts configure the temporal constitution of forgiveness, and particularly its cognates of reconciliation and redress, as the future anterior. In other words, they suggest that the teleology of forgiveness and reconciliation "is not unlike determinism, but it is dispersed rather than operationalized through linear causality. The future inhabits the present, yet it has not yet come" (Fortun 196). From this perspective, how the past is recollected in the present affects the future, for events that occur in the now draw the fullness of their meaning from what will occur henceforth. While the future can be folded back in negative ways, as when the past merely replicates the future,

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[8] My citation of the movie title *Back to the Future* echoes its earlier appropriation by the organizers of a 1987 national conference on Japanese-Canadian redress. I use it here to register the way that, Kogawa's views on temporality aside, redress itself is motivated by the recognition that the future is anterior, that it operates through retroaction. Such recognition is articulated by Cassandra Kobayashi and Roy Miki in their editorial preface to a collection that presents the conference proceedings: they explain that the conference theme was indicative of "the desire to use our knowledge of the past" both to recuperate a community traumatized by the internment and "to ensure a strong community in the future" (7). See Cassandra Kobayashi and Roy Miki, *Spirit of Redress: Japanese Canadians in Conference*.

reconciliation and redress, Kogawa suggests, anteriorize it positively, by redirecting it toward new possibilities: they thus render interpretation incomplete and responsibility infinite, always ahead of themselves, aware of how the present generates the future. Kogawa posits reconciliation and redress, then, in terms that account for the temporal boundedness of past and present, envisioning them as resignifying the former in ways that enable positive intervention into trajectories already in motion.

Obasan, for example, works against Naomi's relentless speculations that redress is temporally out of joint, unhinged from time altogether. It counters her logic that to seek redress is to unnecessarily excavate a past that "belongs to yesterday" when "there are so many other things to attend today" and ultimately avers Emily's axiomatic statement—made in response to Naomi's conjecture that because the "past is so long," perhaps "we should turn the page and move on"—that "the past is the future" (45). In other words, the text confirms the latter's perspective that redress pulls the past into significance for the sake of rerouting the future, that it recollects and renarrates the past for the purpose of opening up new possibilities. Uncle's almost incantatory enunciations of "itsuka," a word that translates as "someday," is highly relevant in this sense. The term, which is consistently invoked in the context of the possibility of recuperation or reconciliation, is clearly structured on a logic of deferral—"someday" indefinitely suspends the future even as it looks steadfastly toward it. To the extent that the term is only partially present, dependent on a dialectical tension between present and future, it speaks directly to Kogawa's dedication to conceptualizing reconciliation and redress as anticipating new possibilities that have not yet come.

Kogawa's commitment to exploring the possibilities of redress for enacting a libratory future lays the narrative groundwork of *Itsuka*. The title itself cues us, of course, to this commitment, as well as, I think, directing us toward her notion that reconciliation and redress are never definitively achieved but always *not quite* or *in process*, always perpetually forestalled, as it were, yet nevertheless within the realm of imagination. Yet criticism on the text has overlooked the openness and incompleteness of *Itsuka*'s representation of the so-called "achievement" of redress by ineluctably interpreting its final scene as fulfilling rather than deferring reconciliation and resolution.[9] Redress in *Itsuka* does not, I

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[9] While *Itsuka* has been relatively ignored by critics, when it has been examined, its narrative reconstruction of the Redress Settlement has been inevitably interpreted as providing closure and resolution. Rachelle Kanefsky, for instance, argues that the text "fulfil[s] the dream that '*itsuka*,' someday the better day will come," and maintains that readers witness how the "struggle for historical legitimacy is finally won" (28), while Elizabeth Kella maintains that "the coda of *Itsuka* functions as a mark of closure, integration, and resolution" (208) by "imaginatively and optimistically resolv[ing] what might be called a crisis" (189). On the grounds that the text represents redress as concluding

argue, represent a precipitate rush toward the telos of racial harmony but a symbolic starting point for the not-yet realizable yet nevertheless worthwhile project of striving toward reconciliation. Indeed, in this text, more so even than in *Obasan*, we encounter Kogawa's view that redress exceeds the present by encompassing both the past and future.

It is because the text is keyed to the anteriorization of the future that Naomi narrates in detail her experience of Obasan's physical and mental decline and gradual death: for while this sequence of events might seem anomalous in a book that is otherwise preoccupied with describing the former's involvement in the redress movement, it suggests that the movement itself emerges out of an awareness that the future has a provenance. It is significant, in this sense, that Uncle repeats "itsuka" again and again in *Obasan* and that the title character of the former novel almost ritualistically invokes the same refrain in *Itsuka*: for in many ways what we might call the travail of redress functions as a tribute to those who suffered the internment without ever experiencing an official apology or acknowledgement of the wrongs committed against them. The specters of Obasan and Uncle emerge, then, as "the dead [who] stand with their feet in doorways, asking not to be forgotten" (149), as the "political unconscious" or the absent presences of *Itsuka* specifically and the redress struggle generally. They rest beneath the surface of Kogawa's prose, haunting it as ghosts that render thinkable the principle of responsibility that inheres in redress. If ethical and political imperatives are to seem possible, ghosts, as Derrida maintains in *Specters of Marx*, must be spoken of; ghosts must be spoken *to* and *with*: as the "*non-contemporaneity within itself of the living present*," ghosts enable the "respect for justice concerning those who are not there, of those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living*" (xix). In this light, the spectral presences of Obasan and Uncle may be said to produce, or at least symbolize, the *raison d'être* of the redress struggle in which Naomi finds herself increasingly involved, a struggle that, to borrow from Derrida again, "proceeds from [provient de] the future" which it is also "going toward" (xix).

But Kogawa's narrativisation of the redress movement in *Itsuka* also suggests ways that Derrida's somewhat abstract and ahistorical reflections on the future anteriority of responsibility and justice might be historically and culturally situated. For if the movement, as Kogawa represents it, is marked by a sense of the future anteriority of time, this sense of time is, to an extent, inherited from the *issei*. What the text's working and reworking of time suggests, I think, is that the

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struggle rather than enabling it, Davina Te-Min Chen borrows from the liberation theory of Gustavo Gutierrez in order to argue that it reveals "how hegemonic forces may define even the modes of resistance to oppression and thus preclude the authentic liberation of 'continuous creation, never ending'" (100).

issei conceive of temporality in radically different terms than does the dominant culture: as Naomi notes, whereas the former understand the present as modified by cuts and projections, the latter generally perceive it in a rigid, narrow, and overdetermined manner. Observing, for example, Pastor Jim's profound incapacity to communicate with (and thus convert) the *issei*, she reflects that

> The difficulty Pastor Jim has with the issei has something to do with time. For Pastor Jim, the moment is "now." "Now," he says, "is the hour of decision." The past with its sorrows is to be redeemed in the present. Truth is spontaneous. We are to stand straight, look forthrightly in each other's eyes, and the more transparent our feelings, the more we're to be trusted. But the issei! To them such demonstrations are aggressive, arrogant and, at the least, extremely rude. Pastor Jim, I suppose, must think they are mentally retarded or emotionally dead. I know, however, that they are acutely sensitive and that their feelings are all the more intense for being contained. It isn't that their emotions are denied in the present. It's that they're not being squandered. The moment's joy is being attended to in the light of time's healing. Itsuka, someday, things will be all right. We can endure. The slow-rolling locomotive of their emotions bears a "made in Japan" label on it. (31)

Where Pastor Jim possesses an absolutist view of the now, one that cannot account (however paradoxically for a man who spends his life seeking to cast out demons!) for the possibilities of ghosts, inheritance, and generations, the *issei* have retained a Japanese perception of time that accounts for the temporal excess of the present, for its inclusion of those who are *not yet* and *no longer*.[10] But the latter's recognition that the present exceeds itself also emerges out of their experience of oppression as outsiders in Canadian society. Not unlike other ethnicized groups that have immigrated to North America, the *issei*, Kogawa suggests, view their racial suffering and hardship in the present as palliating or even eliminating suffering and hardship for future generations. In other words, as victims of racist and nationalist violence, the *issei* endow the future with the justice that the present lacks. Naomi recalls Nakayama-sensei explaining that, "issei immigrants were people of sacrifice. They came to the new land only to perish in the culture clash. 'Itsuka,' he'd say, 'your sacrifice will someday be known ... They endured for a future that only the children will know. Their endurance is an act of faith and love'" (241). If the movement for redress views

[10] For recent sociological and anthropological studies of Japanese constructions of temporality, see Eyal Ben-Ari, "Time, space and person in Japanese relationships" and Kazue Fujinuma Larson, *Temporality in Modern Japanese Narratives*.

the present as a "sacrifice," a responsibility, or better yet, a gift to the future that is proffered out of a faith in its possibility, then this view, as we see here, follows forth from a concept of time as anteriorized by the future that marginalized groups such as the *issei* have generally tended to construct.

Now, it would be misleading to suggest that the redress movement draws strictly and rigidly from Japanese constructions of temporality. For while Japanese Canadians (particularly *issei* but also *nisei*) have a strong sense of the anteriority of the future, Kogawa suggests that they often have disjunct views on what the future looks like and how it ought to be achieved. Without wanting to essentialize *Itsuka* as a necessarily accurate or authentic representation of the redress movement, then, I would suggest that it does point up some of the contradictions and differences between the conceptual frame of temporality suggested by redress and the concept of time ascribed to by many *issei*. For if the ideology of redress purports that a libratory future in the material world can be made possible through political struggle, to many *issei* such struggle simply cannot be afforded and justice in the future must merely be awaited. That these potentially incompatible configurations of the future structure *Itsuka* can be seen in the split that runs through the motif of "itsuka" or "someday": for while the text itself seems to offer and draw energy from the possibility that "someday" represents a just future that can be made possible (or at least more possible) through political agitation, when the word itself is invoked by Obasan and Uncle, for example, it is alternately as an acquiescent expectation of return to pre-internment conditions, an admission of capitulation to forces that one can presumably not control, and an appeal to eternal transcendence. In other words, while "someday" represents an attempt to make realizable what is unreal in the context of redress, it also represents, as Naomi speculates it does for Obasan, an attempt to "make realizable what is real" (*Obasan* 49). For *issei* such as Obasan whose familiarity with the intensely repressive and racist policies of the Canadian nation-state has convinced of the impossibility of productive resistance, recourse to the promise of a transcendent future seems to provide some form of consolation in the face of overwhelming oppression and suffering. To this extent, *issei* cultural perceptions of temporality as future-oriented problematically facilitate, validate, and reinforce the agenda of the dominant culture.

Indeed, *Itsuka* illustrates how, in the context of the Japanese-Canadian movement for redress, cultural perceptions can collaborate with and perpetuate the hegemonic formations of institutionalized structures of racist power. By drawing attention to the particular ways that Japanese notions of mutual and partial responsibility for conflict and conflict resolution play out in the context of redress.[11] Kogawa reveals that even as these notions open up the possibility of

[11] In her more properly historical account of the role of Japanese cultural values and conventions in the struggle for redress, Maryka Omatsu explains that "Traditionally Japanese hold everyone involved in a conflict partly responsible for it. There is a common saying that even a thief is thirty per cent right. To this day,

political struggle, they nevertheless operate to produce internal resistance to it. For if *issei* like Obasan are deeply suspicious of the movement, preferring instead to cooperate with the political process rather than work in opposition to it, that has not only to do with their concept of time, but also, and perhaps more, Kogawa shows, with their preservation of such cultural values as compromise and negotiation. While these values might be said to have enabled redress in a part of the world where collective entities are generally sociopathic,[12] where institutions and bureaucracies have, until very recently, been viewed as incapable of regret, remorse, or affect generally (Tavuchis 43), for many *issei*, these values overlap with and reinforce the concepts of tolerance and harmony that the myth of multiculturalism has put into cultural circulation. Naomi, for her part, registers the convergences between the Japanese concept of "wagamama"—a term that translates as "selfish individualism"—and Canadian multicultural illusions when she imagines that "Obasan would probably say that redress was wagamama. After all and after all, Canada was a wonderful country" (147). Her speculation suggests that the concept of the collective good in Japanese culture can and has been oddly reconfigured, through the machinations of hegemony, to produce complicity with the dominant white culture. The problematic interplay between cultural values of cooperation and harmony, racial affect such as fear and shame, and nationalist discourses of multicultural diversity and tolerance, becomes more and more evident as Naomi's account of the redress struggle becomes more detailed, more focused on the internal rivalries that constituted that struggle.

Indeed, much of the latter part of *Itsuka* constitutes a sustained critique of that elite fraction of the redress movement that worked in opposition to the NAJC by exploiting *issei* values of cooperation and harmony, using them to elicit feelings of racial abjection and guilt for the sake of mobilizing support for a profoundly inadequate compensation package. (While realizing that all compensation is necessarily inadequate, from the vantage point of the NAJC, it is all the more inadequate when it is nonexistent, gratuitous or insignificant). The dark twists through which this more politically legitimized group manipulated the *issei* emphasis on harmony into a tool for the production of complicity are observed by Naomi: "Some of the strongest, the most political conscious, are bowed down by a sense of shame. Their deepest belief in harmony has been completely distorted. [The] effort to organize people in their eighties and nineties, and to separate them out of the community, is unforgivable" (241). Certainly

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it is through mutual apology and compromise that the Japanese strive to avoid the public notoriety of a law suit" (111).

[12] The Japanese-Canadian and Japanese-American redress movements are generally recognized as the first (successful) movements for official redress in Canada and the United States, such that social scientists researching redress movements speculate on the potential efficacy of those movements in instigating further successful redress settlements.

drawing on disempowered people's cultural beliefs in social harmony to generate self-guilt and shame constitutes a pernicious rhetorical strategy, particularly when that strategy is actually intended to shut down potential sites and modes of enabling some sense of such harmony. But this rhetorical strategy becomes more pernicious still when it establishes an uncritical equivalence between Japanese and Canadian values of harmony, tolerance, and the pursuit of collective good in order to establish a false contradiction between these values and the project of redress. Such a strategy is at work, for example, when Nikki maintains that "people [i.e. Japanese Canadians] want to be cooperative" and "want forgiveness," that "the idea of individual compensation is the real sell-out" not only for this reason, but also because "'Canada has always put the group ahead of the individual. We're not Americans" (217). In this problematic formulation, the selfish and ungenerous motivations behind the government's refusal to provide individual compensation are transmuted into the selfishness and ungenerousness of those Japanese Canadians seeking compensation; moreover, the latter are represented as opposing, betraying, and possibly even threatening, once again, the 'altruistic' and 'benevolent' Canadian nation. We encounter more of this hegemonic logic in Dr. Stinson's claim that "What we need in this country right now is co-operation. Not greed" and that "your [the Japanese-Canadian] community doesn't need any money. If you were sincerely interested in justice, you'd concern yourselves with the genuinely disadvantaged" (221). Through recourse to the model minority myth, this logic seeks to displace the responsibility for Japanese Canadians' success or failure within the dominant order squarely on their own shoulders. It does so by reasoning, very speciously, that it is those Japanese Canadians seeking redress, and not the dominant white order that interned and dispersed them, who idealize an individualist ideology. This reasoning erases the political and elides the material history of the internment by drawing on "an ideology of depoliticized self-healing" (Palumbo-Liu 396) that deflects attention away from serious social critique. So while invocation of the model minority myth may produce persuasive arguments against compensation—as Naomi admits Dr. Stinson's position "is hard to dispute. Japanese Canadians are not needy. We're middle-class, law-abiding citizens. A model minority" (177)—in truth they rely on a model of assimilation that suggests that the traumatized and marginalized are themselves responsible for their own psychological and material adjustment.

VII: Producing Truth, Narrating Redress

Naomi's admission indicates, on its own, the troubling power that hegemonic discourse has to inaugurate (racially and other) marginalized subjects who disavow their marginalization. Her initial response to the redress effort—her claim that it "is rather inconsequential if you consider what's going on in the world" (102)—is a testament of sorts to the efficaciousness of anti-redress and anti-resistance rhetoric, to its potential to foreclose the agency of those who are

most subjected to its adverse material effects. Yet the narrative trajectory of *Itsuka* traces, in a mere fifty pages, Naomi's movement from profound suspicion and distrust of redress to an affirmation of it: if she discloses to readers that "I'm not a true believer in redress. I'm not a true believer in anything much" (154), she soon recants this statement, asserting that, "We all know we are a people who were wronged. It's time to stand up. It's time" (203). In the context of the refusal of the Canadian and other so-called democratic governments to acknowledge responsibility for the commission of atrocious acts, Naomi realizes that the redress struggle, to the extent that it might demystify the myth of multiculturalism by refuting the putative truths that official discourse seeks to "pass off" as facts, could enable a libratory future. She throws support behind Aunt Emily's position that

> The lie is alive in the world. It was there in Nazi Germany. It's in South Africa. In Latin America. In every country in the world. This is why redress matters. Because there are many people intent on defending the oppressor's rights no matter what the truth, and they are in places of power. Not one of us, not a single one of us was ever found guilty of a disloyal act against Canada. But the accusation remains. (222)

How, we might ask, are we meant to reconcile this new affirmation of truth with Naomi's earlier insistence, in this novel as well as *Obasan*, that truth is intensely fragmented, subjective, and self-referential? After all, even in Kogawa's critical writings on reconciliation, there is an intense awareness and open acknowledgement that subjects and collectivities alike are, to borrow her own terminology, "broken" and "inadequate." And even Aunt Emily, arguably a humanist *par excellence*, concedes that "There are as many stories [of redress] as there are individuals" (239). While the most obvious response would be that for Aunt Emily, as perhaps for Kogawa, there are several versions of essentially singular (if extraordinarily impenetrable) truth, I would also suggest that it is the case that Kogawa affirms redress because, in the manner theorized by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, it constitutes a "real revolutionary practice" to the extent that it "takes control of the production of truth" (151). To this extent, to quote that earlier passage from *Itsuka* again, redress is about taking over the production of truth from those "intent on defending the oppressor's rights no matter what the truth" who "are in places of power" (222). From this perspective, while there may be many narratives of internment and its aftermath, the issue at stake is not so much accessing the most authentic narrative (as Emily's response to the suggestion that she write the 'real' story of redress implies), but controlling the production of narratives. Similarly, as Kogawa's critical reflections on redress also imply, brokenness and inadequacy will certainly not provide the basis of any kind of libratory politics, but we could say, after Hardt and Negri, that taking control of the production of brokenness and inadequacy will.

It is precisely because the official apology for the internment and its aftermath includes an acknowledgment of wrongdoing—and hence a corrective to the falsehoods produced by the dominant culture—that Naomi's reaction to the achievement of redress is almost fulsomely euphoric. The moment of apology is described in a language of overflow. The apology itself clearly moves her. Its transformative capacity is registered in her description of it as "[t]he magic of speech" and a "ritual thing that humans do, the washing of stains through the speaking of words" (274). It is perhaps particularly registered in her fascinating suggestion that through its locution, she returns to an originary or pre-symbolic state: "I laugh. I am whole. I am as complete as when I was a very young child" (276). But while the apology might seem to contain a mystificatory power, its power, I suggest, actually lies in its potential to demystify, to tell a truth that was previously repressed or denied. In other words, if apologies are "illocutionary acts"—acts that, according to J.L. Austin, in saying do what they say, when they say—what apologies *do* (at least what efficacious apologies do) is reveal a formerly repressed truth. After all, it is the apology that acknowledges a formerly unacknowledged version of events that is felicitous: apologies that do not include a full confession insult those who receive them, if they have an affective impact at all. Apologies are, as we see in *Itsuka*, acts of revelation. That is why Naomi calls them "magic" and why the sociologist Nicholas Tavuchis says that they are "transformative" (5). They transform because they take hold, in a positive or liberating way, of the production of truth.[13]

But while the apology provided by redress enables a certain degree of control over the production of truth, we might find ourselves asking just how much control it allows. After all, in the case of the Japanese-Canadian internment, a single subject—the then Canadian Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney—uttered the apology. Was it him, the state, or Japanese Canadians who took control of the production of truth on September 22nd, 1988? Without supplying any ready answers to such a question, Roy Miki, in writing about that day of so-called "victory," and specifically about the politics of the Canadian Prime Minister's apologetic speech to Japanese Canadians, registers the readiness with which an anti-racist struggle was recuperated and contained by racist discourse. Noting the implications of the ways that the scene of apology was spatially configured—the Prime Minister became the star actor on a national

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[13] The extent to which apologies are potentially transformative or viewed as such is also a matter of culture. The legal scholar Eric Yamamoto considers the role of culture in his discussion of conflict and resolution in American racial relations. He notes, for example, that whereas in Western legal culture a genuine apology is viewed as "an admission of liability" rather than "a legitimate legal remedy" or "a component of justice" (193-94), in the Japanese legal system, compensation is perceived as less important than reparation and an apology for wrongdoing plays a central role in repairing group harmony. See Eric K. Yamamoto, *Interracial Justice*.

stage, while Japanese Canadians were consigned to the role of spectators and guests in the parliamentary gallery—Miki notes the expedience with which an occasion that should have been about recognition of racial difference was converted into an event for promoting the nationalist multicultural ideology of diffusion of difference. With one exception—the reading of an excerpt from *Obasan* by the New Democratic party leader at the time—Japanese Canadian voices were, Miki claims, strikingly silent (or rather silenced) during that moment:

> "Japanese Canadians" were re-presented through the handful of subjects in the guest gallery above the politicians, but the official discourse was managed by the translation of "Canadian of Japanese ancestry" from surviving "victim" to exemplary "citizen." In this moment of closure, the narrative of JCs was re-written by the larger political system as a national story of resolution. No longer the outsider wronged by the state, the "Japanese Canadian" subject is redressed—in metaphoric terms, dressed anew—in the garment of reconciliation and resolution—in the garment of citizenship. In the process, the nation to which the redressed subject belongs is redeemed. (*Broken Entries*, 197)

If reconciliation, to be effective, should be conceived as an ongoing relational process that may be initiated in a ritual, but that is not completed in any one moment, then Miki points to the power of the state to circulate and validate the notion that reconciliation is closed in the same moment that it is commenced. For Miki, the problem lies in the nation-state's erosion or neglect of boundaries, or rather its perception of boundaries as places of endings rather than beginnings.

If Miki calls into question the degree of control that redress provided Japanese Canadians over the production of truth, then Naomi's account, rendered as it is in understandably excited discourse, is disappointingly uncritical of the imbrication of redress in institutional structures of power. Her reaction seems to idealize that power as sovereign, or at the very least, to idealize the speech act associated with it as sovereign. In this sense, Naomi's response to the prime ministerial apology constitutes, I think, the overdetermination of the scene of utterance that Judith Butler painstakingly theorizes in *Excitable Speech*. Fantasizing or figuring power vis-à-vis a culpable subject (even when that subject stands in for the state) who is imagined as speaking with the forceful voice of that power exhibits, according to Butler, "a wish to return to a simpler and more reassuring map of power, one in which the assumption of sovereignty remains secure" (78). In other words, establishing language as the site of politics resurrects an old political terrain in which power was a sovereign formation at a time when globalization, as Hardt and Negri point out, and Butler confirms, is dispersing and deterritorializing power. Butler's meditations, while they concern hate speech, enable many insights apropos of public apologies. Specifically, her suggestion that to reduce elaborate institutional structures to the actions of the

subject is to undermine the agency of power warns us against interpreting redress as Naomi seems to: that is, as an act that entirely restores agency to disempowered subjects.

Rather than interpret redress as unequivocally empowering, I would suggest that we need to realize that it can comply with and facilitate nationalist discourse. While this might not be problematic on its own, it becomes problematic when redress enables the perpetuation of multiculturalist myths based on illusions of racial justice. Perhaps, however, we might read the official document that closes *Itsuka* in the same way that we read the official document that closes *Obasan*—that is, as a text that does not affirm the ideology of the dominant white culture *tout court*, but that in some important ways resists it. In *Itsuka*, this document contains a section that reads: "Canadians commit themselves to the creation of a society that ensures equality and justice for all regardless of race and ethnic origin." It also contains an article that claims that on behalf of Canadians, the Canadian government "recognize[s], with great respect, the fortitude and determination of Japanese Canadians who, despite great stress and hardship, retain their commitment and loyalty to Canada and contribute so richly to the development of the Canadian nation" (np). Considering *Itsuka*'s narrativisation of the Canadian government's repeated and protracted attempts to circumvent the issue of redress, how else can we read the placement of this document at the end of the text except ironically? And what should we make of the explicit reference to Japanese-Canadian "loyalty and commitment" to the Canadian nation? Might it suggest that as a so-called "model minority," Japanese Canadians are more "worthy" of an apology and reparations than other groups (e.g. Native Canadians or Holocaust survivors), that practices of "good citizenship" reap "rewards"?[14] I formulate these questions not to discount the importance of the redress struggle and achievement, but to suggest that uncritically praising them as unequivocally emancipatory may encourage the perpetuation of multiculturalist "lies" that the redress movement and *Itsuka* set out to perforate.

Neither the redress struggle nor the text of *Itsuka* constitutes the redress achievement as actually "achieved." Kogawa's novel, in particular, recognizes that the structures of institutionalized racism in Canada (and elsewhere) are far

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[14] Yamamoto raises this possibility in his interrogation of whether or not redress is indeed a radical project. Asking if Japanese-American redress was only about reparations for a minority viewed as cooperative and consequently deserving, he speculates on whether redress means the redistribution of wealth, power, and justice for all or if it only concerns those minorities who fit into the "patriot/supermodel minority." Without providing any definitive conclusions, he seems to suggest that redress is more about an alleviation of white guilt than a radical reorganization of structures of power that privilege whiteness. See his article "What's Next?: Japanese American Redress and African American Reparations," *Amerasia Journal* 25 (1999): 1-17.

too complexly interwoven into the fabric of people's daily lives to be eliminated or diffused in a single moment in time. Even if it refers to the national apology, as well as redress generally, as "a promise fulfilled, a vision realized" (275), *Itsuka* nevertheless suggests that these attainments, however significant, remain unfulfilled, unrealized. Indeed, despite the language of plenitude, completion, and closure that characterizes the text's final pages, Kogawa ultimately suggests that redress does not close the past and the present but rather opens up the future. It is to an anti-transcendent horizon of justice and hope that the title of *Itsuka* most refers, I think, a horizon towards which Miki gestures when he writes that "For a collective struggle supplemented by the impossibility of full ethical engagement ... the future is always around the corner; there is no victory, but only victories that are also warnings" (199). While Naomi conceives the redress "victory" less as a warning and more as a beacon of sorts—referring to the official apology as "a distant sun, an asterisk to guide us through the nights that yet must come," as an act that will "feed us with hope tomorrow" (274)—she does imagine it in the same open-ended terms that Miki does. Insofar as it "exposes the vacillating boundaries of speech" by revealing the limits of sovereignty while nonetheless pointing toward a "new form of speaking" that opens up rather than forecloses "new kinds of worlds," the official apology to Japanese Canadians represents what Butler refers to as "the kind of speaking that takes place on the border of the unsayable" (41) but what Kogawa simply calls "someday." From what *Itsuka* ultimately suggests, the achievement of redress does not represent "someday," but it could help to draw it, in the form of forgiveness and reconciliation, further into the realm of the possible. Kogawa confirms this much in an interview in which she was asked how the concept of forgiveness in *Itsuka* can be instituted in the political realm. She responded thus: "What is healing for a community is more than just a solution of a political kind. What heals is a process of empowerment" ("Literary Politics" 15). Someday may then be a series of moments, moments that reinvigorate time itself by bringing into view the possibility of a future that enables new forms of utterances, other kinds of relationships.

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CHAPTER FOUR

The Agonistics of Absolution in a Post-Apartheid Era: Sacrificial Ritual and Responsibility in Coetzee's *Disgrace*

> For, if a pure forgiveness cannot, if it *must not present itself* as such, and thus exhibit itself in consciousness without at the same time denying itself, betraying or reaffirming a sovereignty, then how to know what is an act of forgiveness, if it never takes place, and who forgives whom, or what from whom?
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> Jacques Derrida, "On Forgiveness," 48-49

> To the extent that I am taken as a political novelist, it may be because I take it as a given that people must be treated as fully responsible beings: psychology is no excuse. Politics, in its wise stupidity, is at one with religion here: one man, one soul: no half-measures. What saves me from a merely stupid stupidity, I would hope, is a measure of charity, which is, I suppose, the way in which grace allegorizes itself in the world.
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> J.M. Coetzee, "Interview"

I: Obscene Forgiveness: Questions of Autonomy, Questions of Authority

On the surface the first novel written by J.M. Coetzee in the aftermath of apartheid is remote from, and possibly even irrelevant to, the enterprise of national rehabilitation and reconciliation that South Africa has undertaken as part of its negotiated transition to democratic governance. But although *Disgrace* refuses to foreground its complex and at times bafflingly oblique relation to its own historicity, leaving readers with the task of reading the text into its context, its contemplation of the possibility of recognition, forgiveness, rebirth, and restitution constitute complex engagements with the themes currently dominating the South African situation. Indeed, *Disgrace* is haunted, and perhaps motivated, I suggest, by the question of how to absolve guilt after apartheid, how to compensate for the unspeakable horror committed, and how to seek redemption and forgiveness for the atrocities perpetrated. Does the violence caused by apartheid, along with other brutalizing systems with which it is entangled, such as colonialism and patriarchy, constitute the unforgivable? Are there certain powers and histories, in other words, that pose an insurmountable stumbling block to any ethics of generosity? Is it possible, moreover, for forgiveness to show itself in situations of ongoing domination without at the same time undermining or

reinforcing sovereignty? With these troubling questions lurking in its subtext, *Disgrace* meditates on whether the yearning for forgiveness leads to the exercise of responsible agency or the sinister recuperation of authority in contexts of postcolonial and racial trauma.

Despite its commercial success and international literary acclaim—the novel was the 1999 recipient of the prestigious Booker Prize—*Disgrace* has drawn censure partly for what is seen as its profound disengagement with the extraordinary vicissitudes of South Africa's reconciliation process. Commentators have questioned the social and political efficacy of a book that appears to undermine and discredit the aspiration of reconciliation that guides the interventions of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). During the Human Rights Commission hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), for example, the African National Congress alluded to *Disgrace* as a means of demonstrating the racist assumptions that impede the process of national reconciliation. Dionne Brand is not alone in thinking that "*Disgrace* rejects a communal remedy or any possibility of change" and that "the novel is ultimately pessimistic" because "Coetzee doesn't offer any other choices except death" (131). As Derek Attridge notes, "*Disgrace*'s negative portrayal of the relations between communities, coming from an author widely read in South Africa and internationally, can be seen as a hindrance, not a support, of the massive task of reconciliation and rebuilding that the country has undertaken." For this reason, he speculates that "even readers whose view of the artist's responsibility is less tied to notions of instrumentalism and political efficacy [...] may find the bleak image of the 'new South Africa' in this work hard to take" (99-100). If Coetzee's fiction was already perceived by several critics as disengaged from material concerns and disillusioned about the prospect of social and political transformation, then from most critical accounts of the novel, that perception has deepened significantly with the publication of *Disgrace*.[1]

But the view that this text disqualifies or repudiates the possibility of transformation has, I think, been formulated overhastily and somewhat incorrectly, without attention to its deployment of such strategies of irony and self-consciousness that are characteristic of Coetzee's fiction generally. Without disputing the imagery of bleakness and despondency in the novel, I contend that in the course of exploring their conditions of emergence, *Disgrace* composes a vision of a forgiveness and reconciliation as the fragile horizon of ethical

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[1] The argument that Coetzee's fiction lacks transformative capacity or emancipatory potential has been most famously articulated by Benita Parry and Abdul R. JanMohamed. Curiously, these arguments assume that because his writing lacks any overt historicity, it constitutes the disavowal of any project of resistance to colonial power formations, and is even unintentionally complicit in colonial practices. See Benita Parry, "Speech and Silence in the Fictions of J.M. Coetzee"; Abdul R. JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*.

relations. Coetzee's "posthumanist humanism," to borrow Samuel Durrant's term[2], orients his text toward the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation even as it wakens it to the problems and limits that would seem to make these ideals positively impossible. In other words, *Disgrace* is attracted and committed to an ethic of forgiveness but is nevertheless scrupulously conscious and concerned about the difficulty of translating this ethic into action.

To this extent, the novel displays, I think, the ambivalent and even contradictory stance toward forgiveness that also characterizes the published portions of Derrida's seminar entitled "On Forgiveness." *Disgrace* exhibits, that is, an exasperated tension, a sense of being "torn," as Derrida admits he is, "between a 'hyperbolic' ethical vision of forgiveness, pure forgiveness, and the reality of a society at work in pragmatic processes of reconciliation" (51), for at the core of the novel is both the wish to retain an unconditional concept of forgiveness and the knowledge that the attainment of such unconditionality is unavailable in practice. While indexed, however vaguely, toward a future enabled by forgiveness, *Disgrace* plays out several scenarios in which forgiveness effaces itself in the moment of its appearance. In so doing, it registers a range of impediments to the achievement of decisively pure, disinterested forgiveness, many of which are adumbrated by Derrida; among these are the lack of a universal language in which to call upon forgiveness, the theatricality of the scene of forgiveness, the mediation of a tertiary institution or third party, the silencing of the victim's voice, and, concomitantly, the affirmation of authority, sovereignty, and power. It is this latter problem in particular – the problem of the aporia of sovereignty that frames the moment of forgiveness – that poses a potentially insurmountable obstacle to the attainment of forgiveness for Coetzee, and it is a problem that is also at the center of Derrida's struggles with the

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[2] Durrant's deployment of this term is intended to suggest that even as Coetzee's novels testify to his skepticism towards liberal humanism, they nevertheless indicate his awareness that the language of humanism remains the only possible language to oppose acts of injustice. To be a "posthumanist humanist," Durrant says, is to occupy "an agonistic position" that is nevertheless the "only tenable ethical position available" (457). Through readings of Coetzee's novels up to and including *Foe*, Durrant shows that Coetzee is committed to bearing witness to the suffering of apartheid – thus performing the work of mourning that would later be assumed by the TRC – but is nevertheless insistent in his refusal to translate this suffering into a narrative available for readers' consumption. Contrary to those neo-Marxists who have dismissed Coetzee's work on the grounds of its putative failure to address the material conditions of apartheid, Durrant, rightly I would suggest, maintains that Coetzee's novels testify to his belief that it is only through the remembrance of past injustice that the cause of future justice can be taken up.

concept.[3] Throughout *Disgrace* Coetzee imagines scenes of forgiveness that do not seem worthy of that name, scenes in which Lurie's pursuit of forgiveness appears to operate prophylactically, inhibiting the justice and egalitarianism that it entreats. Because Lurie's (re)quests for absolution occur in the absence of the victim's voice, they register the "unbearable, or odious, even obscene" (58) characteristics that Derrida argues forgiveness assumes in situations of force and power. How, in light of the nonappearance of the victim's consent, should we read these (re)quests? Is Coetzee implying, as Derrida does, that forgiveness is "apparently impossible" (59) because it presumes a sovereign, autonomous conception of selfhood? Rather than read these scenes as evidencing a refusal on Coetzee's part of the possibility of forgiveness, we might alternately read them, I suggest, as manifesting Coetzee's vision, to borrow from Derrida again, of "forgiveness without power: *unconditional but without sovereignty*" (59).

Coetzee wagers on forgiveness with an awareness of the stakes involved, with the troubling knowledge that as much as sovereignty and autonomy introduce intractable difficulties into the matter, forgiveness itself appears conceptually impossible without the construct of the autonomous subject. In *Disgrace* he exploits the possibilities that fiction offers for exploring philosophical problems from multiple perspectives, using the medium as a means of creatively engaging with the immense tensions that the problem of sovereignty presents for forgiveness; the text struggles, as do its readers, with the question of just how much sovereignty acts of forgiveness can assume before we can no longer legitimately speak of them as acts of forgiveness. *Disgrace* is disturbed, in other words, by the notion of autonomous selfhood that precedes, and perhaps inspires, the proliferating calls for public confession, contrition, and forgiveness; while undermining and interrogating this notion of selfhood and the context of intense bureaucratization and instrumentality it inhabits, Coetzee also grapples here with the problem of its centrality to the assumption of responsibility that inheres in genuine forgiveness.

As much as intensive individuality seems to preclude, or at least inhibit, the potential for the identification with the other that forgiveness requires, the illusion of autonomous individuality is necessary, the novel would seem to suggest, for the task of taking responsibility for the other that forgiveness entails. Here, perhaps, is a point on which Coetzee differs from Derrida: for whereas the

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[3] I am employing the term sovereignty here in both an individual and collective sense, as Derrida does in his reflections on forgiveness. In insisting that forgiveness necessarily involves an exercise of sovereign power, Derrida highlights the less positive associations of sovereignty, for instance a confirmation of one's own power at the expense of a victim as well as the limitation in the name of human rights of a less powerful nation's right to self-determination. His use of the term thus encompasses both "the sovereign power of a strong and noble soul" and "a power of State exercising an uncontested legitimacy" ("On Forgiveness" 59).

former implies, in his critical writings as well as in *Disgrace*, that forgiveness *must* relate to responsibility, the latter maintains the radical separateness of forgiveness from atonement, redemption, responsibility, etc. In this sense, Coetzee does not seem to accede to Derrida's radical position that the moment forgiveness has a meaning, the moment it is meaningful, it is no longer forgiveness in an authentic sense. *Disgrace* moves back and forth between, on the one hand, a dissatisfaction with the display of authority and power that forgiveness seems to entail and, on the other, an emergent and troubling recognition of how the refusal to pursue forgiveness might constitute a cynical evasion of responsibility. If the attainment of true forgiveness entails the suspension of all meaning, of all possible intelligibility, then does this not, the novel queries, permit the avoidance of responsibility that the admission of wrongdoing and quest for forgiveness would have to involve?

Rather than represent and verify Coetzee's own presumed postmodernist validation of doubt over faith, deferral over closure, and confession over absolution, Lurie's interminable self-analysis and skepticism represents, I suggest, Coetzee's own confrontation with deconstruction from the perspective of accountability. The text, in other words, constitutes its author's attempt to think through what the consequences are of his postmodern perceptions regarding truthfulness for matters of individual, social, and political responsibility: it represents Coetzee's effort to confront the issue of what the heightened level of self-awareness and self-doubt that characterizes the postmodern context, of which his own fiction is a part, means for participation in the processes of forgiveness and reconciliation presently underway in South Africa. To this extent, it is not merely aleatory that, as critics of *Disgrace* have observed, the novel has autobiographical resonances that are absent in Coetzee's other, earlier fiction; that there is an almost uncanny resemblance between Lurie and Coetzee himself in this text points to its intensely metafictive quality, to the ways it draws on and explores the fictions constructed by itself, the self, and society, and to the problems of deception and self-deception that haunt subjects as well as collectivities. The position of Lurie is specifically intended, I think, to dramatize persistent problems regarding truthfulness,
self-awareness, and responsibility.[4]

If Coetzee is intensely preoccupied in *Disgrace* with problematizing the discourses of forgiveness and reconciliation, he is nevertheless aware that his intense preoccupation with their problems may actually hide and facilitate a resistance to the process of acknowledging and assuming postcolonial responsibility. More specifically, Coetzee realizes that an "unconscious"

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[4] This problem is foregrounded in Coetzee's latest novel, *Youth*, in which the exasperatingly endless spiral of self-consciousness isolates and immobilizes the protagonist completely, preventing him from taking up the task of writing that constitutes the source of his self-absorbed fantasies of acquiring fame and repute as an author.

knowledge of extreme guilt may persuade the beneficiaries of white and male privilege to divert attention towards the problems and impossibility of complete confession—as well as a host of related problems and impossibilities surrounding forgiveness and reconciliation—since to acknowledge that guilt would seem to involve taking some form of responsibility for it. While this realization raises several complications on its own, Coetzee's concerns in *Disgrace* are more complex yet. Given that confession is an indispensable component of reconciliation and responsibility-taking, and given also that the act of confessing constitutes an admission and enunciation of the truth, how, the novel asks, can such a task be accomplished when a full and complete truth-telling will always remain impossible? Further, even if it were possible for the truth in its entirety to be told, how would one even begin to bear responsibility for this truth? How, in other words, could one even begin to compensate, or to seek absolution or redemption, for actions that in truth appear uncompensatable, unabsolvable, and irredeemable?

Disgrace raises a full range of questions, then, that have plagued South Africa in the post-apartheid era, interminable and never fully answerable questions about guilt, shame, confession, reconciliation, and responsibility. By having Lurie evade the meaning of his own actions for the course of almost, if not the entire, novel—and then having him seek to cope with this meaning through recourse to the sacrifice of another creature in an act of arguable self-forgiveness—Coetzee asks us to think not only about the profound difficulty of facing up to the meaning and impact of the violence of racism and patriarchy, but also about the further violence that the attempt to expiate patriarchal and racist violence might inflict. In this way, *Disgrace* examines the intersections between giving, forgiving, and "giving up," or, less vaguely, the sacrifice that the gift of forgiveness, of one's self or of another, seems to ineluctably entail. As a meditation on the many ontological, metaphysical, and political quandaries posed by the tasks of forgiveness and reconciliation, the novel takes seriously the possibilities they offer for bringing to an end the potentially endless cycles of violence and retribution.

II: The Truth Rooms: The Power of Confession

Yet the pathway or process of reconciliation, rather than its final attainment or actualization, is Coetzee's foremost concern in *Disgrace*. Coetzee's text takes us through the difficult trajectory of each of the constituent elements in the conventional process of reconciliation, including transgression, confession, contrition, and, of course, forgiveness. But Coetzee focuses on the element of confession in particular in *Disgrace*, perhaps because confession is particularly bound up in the questions of truth and power that have fascinated and troubled him from very early on in his career. Conventionally Coetzee has focused on the impossibility of an accurate confession in the context of colonialist practices in which the confessional ritual operates not as a means of revealing truth but of

creating state power and authority. In a novel such as *Waiting for the Barbarians*, for instance, he explores confession as an act in which the power to forgive and reconcile, if one thinks those the correct terms, lies exclusively with the emblematic colonizer, Colonel Joll, torturer and interrogator of colonial prisoners. Here the power to extort confession from individuals is a performative act that serves, in the way outlined by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, to imbue the oppressor rather than the oppressed with paradigmatic power: "The confession is a ritual of discourse [...] that unfolds within a power relationship," Foucault writes, "for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocuter but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile" (52). Contrary to the notion afforded by Christianized discourses of morality and theology, confession, Coetzee shows in his early fiction, is not always an essentially emancipatory ritual; indeed, given that confession is an instrument in colonial regimes that isolates the subject from the community, it can be an emphatically repressive form of rhetoric.

That most of Coetzee's fiction has focused more often than not on the repressive aspects of confessional rhetoric has to do, of course, with its production in the context of South Africa's apartheid regime, in which the most prominent form of confessional discourse was coerced judicial confession. The scenes of ritual dehumanization in a text like *Waiting for the Barbarians* constitute fictional explorations of the individual and social suffering inflicted by what Susan Gallagher calls the "dark twins" of torture and confession that prevailed under apartheid. In what were ironically termed "the truth rooms," Gallagher explains, confessions were extracted by police officers, security forces, and police interrogators in an attempt to contort and confuse rather than clarify the truth perceived by detainees (*Truth and Reconciliation* 39-41). Given that under apartheid rule confessional rhetoric often damaged, if not altogether destroyed, the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation, the idea that confessions, in the current post-apartheid era, constitute an important condition for that possibility can only seem a peculiar reversal.

While confession as it operates in the TRC process offers perpetrators amnesty and does not imply forgiveness or reconciliation, the commission does draw substantially, in a radically hybridized fashion, on Christian humanist and African rituals that treat confession as an enabling condition of forgiveness and reconciliation.[5] Regarding the latter, the TRC is predicated on a central feature of

[5] While there has been a great deal of slippage between immunity and forgiveness in the context of the TRC, that the distinction between the two be maintained is crucial: the commission, as legal professor Martha Minow asserts, may encourage but by no means mandates apologies or forgiveness. See Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*.

the African *Weltsanschauung*, known as *ubuntu* (in the Nguni languages) or *botho* (in the Sotho languages) which captures the idea that the humanity of one is the humanity of all, that the individual members of a community are inextricably bound in a delicate network of interdependence.[6] From the perspective of *ubuntu*, to confess and forgive is not to accept or acquiesce to the atrocities of apartheid; rather, as Desmond Tutu explains in *No Future Without Forgiveness*, it is to ward off the possibilities of revenge and retribution which are inherently destructive of not only individuals but also of the communities of which they are a part. In the case of *ubuntu*, then, communality is effected through an ethical imperative to confess and forgive, and the act of telling stories—whether those containing confessions or offering forgiveness—re-enacts the social bond that is lodged conceptually in the dictum *I am because we are*.

Insofar as it facilitates the production of a discourse of forgiveness, the TRC invests faith in the possibility of whether the social sphere can indeed constitute a sphere of forgiveness. Forgiveness, guilt, and testimony have intersected in forceful and often contentious ways in the context of the TRC as it mediates the construction of a markedly new national image. While the TRC could not demand responses such as repentance and forgiveness from its participants—neither, after all, can be legally mandated or objectively judged—it nevertheless promoted and facilitated responses of this kind. At the first meeting of the TRC, Chairperson Bishop Desmond Tutu explicitly foregrounded the Christianized terms of the commission's objective in his opening address: "We will be engaging," he said, "in what should be a corporate nationwide process of healing through contrition, confession, and forgiveness" ("Address"). As the hearings unfolded, the language and ethic of confession and forgiveness saturated the speeches of many commissioners, not to mention the testimonies of

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[6] Without denying the problematic of incommensurability that comes into play when attempting to translate radically different worldviews and languages, Desmond Tutu, in characteristically informal prose, glosses *ubuntu* thus: "[*Ubuntu*] speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want ot give high praise to someone we say, "*Yu, u nobuntu*"; "Hey, so-and-so has *ubuntu*." Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. It is to say, "My humanity is inextricably bound up, in yours." We belong in a bundle of life. We say, "A person is a person through other persons." It is not, "I think therefore I am." It says rather, "I am human because I belong. I participate. I share" .... Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum*—the greatest good. Anything that subverts, that undermines this sought-after good, is to be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good. To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. What dehumanizes you inexorably dehumanizes me" (*No Future*, 31).

perpetrators and victim-survivors alike: it also infiltrated the public realm through the reportage of the national and international press as well as through the production of dramas, visual artworks, films, memoirs, autobiographies, and fiction. What became increasingly evident as the TRC process evolved, then, was its reliance on the notion, harshly criticized by many of its observers, that confession constitutes a form of revelation that lays the groundwork, at the very least, for the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation: from this point of view, confession potentially enables some measure of personal and social transformation through providing an occasion for testimony that promotes the symbolic rebirth of subjects and collectivities.

The meanings and implications of the notion of confession forwarded by the TRC process and incorporated into South African national narratives are registered in Coetzee's first post-apartheid novel; *Disgrace* considers the prospect that confession and forgiveness might affirm rather than foreclose ethical identification with the other. Yet if the novel constitutes a significant transition in Coetzee's thinking on confession, it does not constitute a sudden or simple transition, that is, a linear and progressive movement from a negative to a positive approach to it. The approach to confession that *Disgrace* offers is more complex, cautious, and ambivalent than that: Coetzee's wish to think the possibility of truthful confession in this novel while simultaneously remaining skeptical of that very possibility represents, I believe, his attempt to consider the ramifications of confession more fully than either apartheid or post-apartheid South African regimes have done (and, indeed, to question the concept of temporality implied by the "post" that now precedes the term "apartheid"). Specifically, *Disgrace* considers how confessions which are intended to liberate, or at the very least, compensate, the oppressed can in truth have the effect of furthering the authority of the oppressor, thus exploring one of the unintentional and insidious effects of the confessional rituals that play out in the context of the TRC. When the confessional act is drawn out endlessly, when the confessor perpetually defers enunciating the "deeper truth," and perhaps most crucially, when the confessional utterance is unaccompanied by contrition or repentance, it can reinforce and recreate previous situations of power relations. In a yearning to consider reconciliation as a potentially constructive process while nevertheless remaining aware that this yearning may constitute a longing for authority, Coetzee explores in fiction how confession might result in absolution rather than further deception and self-deception. While *Disgrace* offers yet another instance of Coetzee's ability to bring the tortuous formulations of deconstruction to his fiction, I maintain, then, that the novel explores the possibilities but also the eventual limits of a deconstructive approach to questions of confession and forgiveness.

III: The Specter of the Confessing Machine

How it is that *Disgrace*'s fictional forays into philosophical questions about confession and forgiveness are relevant to the discursive production and

performance of these rituals in the immediate context of post-apartheid South Africa is not immediately apparent. In part this is because *Disgrace* is much like Coetzee's other fiction in that its concern lies more with drawing attention to the implications and outcomes of representations than with accurately capturing the surface of reality as such. The novel subdues the racialized elements that inform confessional discourse in post-apartheid South Africa, transmuting them into questions of gender. This muting of race does not, in my view, indicate a disengagement with racial politics on Coetzee's part but rather his concern to examine confessional discourse metafictively, that is, to examine its conditions of possibility and its constitution of subjects.[7]

The opening chapters of *Disgrace* present a middle-aged, middle-class white man, David Lurie, a professor of Communications, and his self-perception of disempowerment and impotence in the context of post-apartheid South Africa—a perception that derives not, it seems, from the transition of political power in the country but from the withering influence he has over his students and over women. Lurie represents himself as playing a marginal, meaningless role in an increasingly rationalized, bureaucratized world, a world in which the Classics and Modern Languages department ceases to exist, and in which Cape Town University has accordingly been renamed Cape Technical University. In "this transformed and emasculated institution of learning," Lurie maintains that "he is more out of place than ever" (4): not only does he ostensibly "make no impression on his students," whom he claims "look through him when he speaks" (4), but his "powers" as a womanizer have, he says, "fled": Lurie imagines himself as a "ghost," as an invisible man who must "pursue" and even "buy" (5) women as a means of meeting his sexual needs. To his mind, he is figuratively castrated, and merely requires, he half-seriously, half-mockingly reflects, literal castration: "At what age, he wonders, did Origen castrate himself? Not the most graceful of solutions, but then aging is not a graceful business" (9). Lurie's answer to what he perceives as "the problem of sex" (3) involves weekly visits to a prostitute named Soraya. But when she resists his increasingly intrusive encroachments into her private life, he pursues Melanie Isaacs, one of the young female students enrolled in his Romanticism class, who is, like Soraya, implicitly racialized, marked by an eroticized, orientalized appearance. In his relation to these women, Lurie is evidently not the powerless figure he represents himself as, though he persistently thinks of himself in these terms.

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[7] While Coetzee's allegorical scheme does work to abstract his meditation on forgiveness and victimization from the immediate scene of the TRC, it also arguably replicates the age-old sex-gender for race/nation trope that many feminists of colour have criticized in anti-colonial and anti-racist cultural politics. Bell hooks, Avtar Brah, Dionne Brand, Michelle Wallace, Chandra Mohanty and many others have argued that this metaphor reinscribes women's bodies as the ground upon which the "ethics" of masculinist-assuming politics are contested.

When he is brought before a university tribunal as a result of charges of sexual harassment filed against him by Melanie, Lurie refuses to meet its confessional requirement, presenting himself as a scapegoat figure whose blood—if we draw on the metaphor of the crucified Christ-figure that underpins the text—has been shed so that the fantasy of innocence that is constitutive of the social imaginary will be maintained. As a metonym of the TRC, this tribunal provides Coetzee with a fictional forum through which he can query the philosophical issues raised by the production of a national discourse of confession in South Africa.[8] Thus Lurie formulates a whole range of principled objections to the requirement of confession, claiming at the opening of the hearing that he has "'reservations of a philosophical kind'" (47) to its formation; he then proceeds to refuse the advice that he seek legal representation, the recommendation that he undergo counseling, and, of course, the expectation that he stage a scene of confession. Declining to perform the act of self-exposure the committee seeks, he decides to "'accept whatever it is that Ms. Isaacs alleges'" without so much as reading the statement against him, a decision that one of the committee members condemns as being "'fundamentally evasive'" in its concealment of information that "'the wider community is entitled to know'" (50). While he does, in time, provide a confessional narrative on the advice of colleagues who wish the mitigation of possible sanctions against him, the confession he offers is hardly efficacious, lacking as it does both an avowal of wrongdoing and a display of contrition. Here is the full extent of what he says:

> 'The story begins one evening, I forget the date, but not long past. I was walking through the college gardens and so, it happened, was the young woman in question, Ms. Isaacs. Our paths crossed. Words passed between us, and at the moment something happened which, not being a poet, I will not attempt 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.' (52)

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[8] In making the argument that Lurie's hearing in *Disgrace* is a symbolic representation of the TRC, I am following the lead of Jane Poyner, who maintains that the same issues raised by South Africa's reconciliation process are "reformulated and revised within the context of a post-apartheid age" (67) in Coetzee's novel. But whereas Poyner reads Lurie's objections to the confessional mandate as synonymous with Coetzee's own moral and ethical stance—such that, for example, the former's rejection of institutionalized confession for a more private form of reconciliation is seen as "reflecting Coetzee's own suspicion of, and interrogatory stance towards, state control" (74)—I read the novel as exhibiting a more (meta)critical stance towards Lurie's confessional discourse, as exploring, that is, its discursive aporias, contradictions, and conditions of possibility.

By framing his speech as a "story," Lurie draws attention to the narratological aspects of confessional discourse, aspects that are also emphasized by the contrasts between this telling of the encounter and the initial telling. In this sense, he registers the inventedness of confessional narratives, a predominant theme in discussions of the TRC, which arguably assumes the availability of transparent, referential truth.[9]

But aside from interrogating the idea, arguably advanced by the TRC, that confessional speech reveals rather than produces truth, Lurie's speech also critiques the myth of sovereign, willful individuality that the imperative to confess perpetuates. Both here, in attributing his reason for pursuing Melanie to an inexplicable impulse, and at other moments in the text, Lurie undermines the notion of individual intentionality and responsibility assumed by the instrumental logic of an increasingly bureaucratized world. In suggesting that the concept of voluntariness assumed in legal contexts is severely limiting, failing, as it does, to capture or compute more complex explanations of motive and agency, Lurie critiques the individualized notion of truth and responsibility assumed by the architects of the TRC.[10] By explaining his relationship to Melanie in terms of impulse rather than intention, that is, Lurie questions the idea that the act that incites the call for confession, and also the confessional act itself, is voluntarily

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[9] The TRC's rationale that the full truth of individual and collective suffering can be revealed, and that its telling will result in catharsis and healing (the motto of the commission was "revealing is healing"), has generated critique and condemnation from many observers. In *Country of My Skull*, for example, Antjie Krog displays an attitude of stupefaction and bewilderment toward the TRC's faith in truth telling—an attitude that also characterizes much academic writing on the commission. The accepted wisdom in much of this writing is that the TRC incorrectly assumes that full disclosure of the 'truth' of individual suffering is possible, when in fact the process of truth telling is partial and fragmentary; accordingly, the TRC allegedly inflicts a form of violence by imposing closure on the narratives of victims. See, for example, Michael Humphrey, "From Terror to Trauma: Commissioning Truth for National Reconciliation"; Brandon Hamber, "'Ere their Story Die'": Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation in South Africa."

[10] Mamhood Mamdani has most vociferously critiqued the TRC on the basis of its assumption of an individualized notion of truth and responsibility. Mamdani questions the view, which he argues the TRC promotes, that reconciliation and forgiveness is a foregone conclusion, arguing that their ethical and political basis must be founded on a restructuring of the system that has given rise to the call for such Christian imperatives. For his argument, see "Reconciliation Without Justice."

performed, that individuals are unproblematically responsible for their own actions, intentions, and thoughts, and for the acts of speech that expose them.

This critique of modern ideas of subjectivity involves a refusal to stage a scene of contrition during the act of confession, to adopt the anticipated posture of sincerity and sorrow. To a colleague's insistence that he prove that "'the statement comes from his own heart,'" Lurie responds thus: "'I have said the words for you, now you want me to demonstrate their sincerity—That is preposterous'" (55). In flouting the expectation that he demonstrate the affect demanded by the confessional scene (e.g. repentance, shame, regret, abjection), he problematizes the cultural expectation that confessions reveal guilt in the confessant, challenging the notion that he can verify the authenticity of his confession by displaying contrition, and thereby illuminating the problems raised by the performative expectation that accompanies confessional discourse. The rehearsal and repetition of guilt, his rhetorical questions suggest, cannot possibly operate as a reliable marker of authenticity: "'What do you advise me to do?,'" he asks in response to the demand that he display repentance, "'Remove what Dr. Rasool calls the subtle mockery from my tone? Shed tears of contrition? What will be enough to save me?'" (53). The possibility of generalized transparency insisted upon by contemporary culture, the view, that is, that individuals are fully open to one another without pretense or dissimulation, is, he argues, ultimately flawed.

In the course of demystifying the illusion of transparency that surrounds the confessional utterance, Lurie also objects to the public spectacles that these utterances become, to the theatricalization of scenes of disclosure, guilt, and shame. In many ways the sense of the ridiculous surrounding Lurie's hearing—which, as one committee member observes, "'has received a lot of attention ... [and] acquired overtones that are beyond control. All eyes are on the university to see how we handle it'" (53-54)—parodies the alternating responses of fascination and revilement to confessional discourse, which was commodified and consumed in potentially problematic ways in the context of the TRC. *Disgrace* registers the newsmongering and gossip that the hearing generates, suggesting that there may be an embarrassing, shameful element in our reactions, as a society, to displays of shame, displays that are often socially demanded in the first place. In a scene rife with absurdity, Lurie is chased down by a barrage of journalists and photographers at the conclusion of the hearing; the following day a snapshot image of his face—"eyes cast up to the heavens, reaching out a groping hand toward the camera" (56) in a comically rueful pose—glosses the front page of the university's student newspaper. In such instances, the hypocrisy that underlies the confessional requirement, the mimicry and simulacra that "invite parasites to the ceremony of culpability" (Derrida, "On Forgiveness," 29) come forward for our uneasy inspection. Lurie's confession before the tribunal degenerates into a ridiculous spectacle, demonstrating that its "presiding principle"—as he himself notes as a spectator of "a comedy about the new South Africa" (a play in which Melanie is performing)—is to "achieve catharsis" (23). But whereas "all the

coarse old prejudices" are "washed away in gales of laughter" (23) in the theatre of the play, in the theatre of the hearing, they are, Lurie suggests, displaced onto a single, isolated individual. Yet common to both performances is a social quest for purgation that indicates a troubling refusal to face collective responsibility for racial and sexual trauma.

Although Lurie realizes that by satisfying the demand for a spectacle he will save his job, he refuses to oblige, forbearing to stage the scene of abjection out of a professed belief that such quasi-sacrificial rituals are irrelevant and futile in an age of secularism. To Lucy he later says:

> 'Scapegoating worked in practice while it still had religious power behind it. You loaded the sins of the city on to the goat's back and drove it out, and the city was cleansed. It worked because everyone knew how to read the ritual, including the gods. 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 with the purge.' (91)

If the gods have died, his diatribe asks, if we inhabit an age of incredulity toward symbolism, then how can the aim of absolution previously met by religious ritual now be achieved? In his vehement disapproval of the incursion of religious rhetoric into secular spaces (he protests, for example, to a colleague's plea that he placate the university administration and display repentance by insisting that "'Repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse'" [58]), Lurie reviles our social recourse to ritualistic acts. In a context that lacks a socially defined sacred, and in which there is, say, no Roman Church to offer absolution, he maintains that the confessional requirement is inappropriate and misplaced—as, indeed, many observers suggest the TRC's invocation of Christianized rhetoric and ritual is.

In an age of ever-increasing skepticism, a skepticism well-nourished by Lurie, the demand for transparency is not met by a promise of absolution—unless by absolution one means a pardon given for purely instrumental reasons, in order to ensure the relatively smooth operation of day-to-day institutional procedures. Exasperated with this instrumentalism, resenting the social refusal to accept opaque forms of truth, and yearning for the ritual privacy that sociologist Richard Sennett argues contemporary urban civilization has lost, Lurie retreats to his daughter's smallholding in the second half of the novel in a move that perhaps aligns him with Byron, the Romantic poet whose life he is researching. Faced with his protests and objections, and with his pursuit of solitude, we are left speculating: is Coetzee suggesting that the confessional imperative is essentially reprehensible, that by invading the private self it promotes disgrace and abjection, thus constituting, as Peter Brooks proposes, a "violation of human dignity" (9)?

Indeed, the series of objections that Lurie formulates to confessional discourse recalls Brooks's poststructuralist interpretation of confessions in *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature*. Here Brooks focuses on the unsettling perpetuity of confessions, their apparent incapacity to reach an end, arguing that they do not promise the revelation of truth, and thus emphasizing, rather, the insight they offer into the performance of truth. According to Brooks, the anticipation that confession will lead to absolution prevents us from understanding them as he does: that is, as speech-acts that generate creativity by blurring the boundaries between truth and lies, as utterances ineluctably fraught with certain uncertainties and ambivalences or, put another way, locutions unable to sustain their claim to authenticity. Motivated by his vexation over contemporary culture's insistence upon transparency in its handling of confessional speech, Brooks turns to Paul de Man's distinction between the constative and performative aspects of confessional speech in order to argue that we should privilege the latter over the former. This distinction allows him to propose that the very act of confession may produce the affect that the confession is intended to generate: the desire for self-accusation, propitiation, expiation, shame, guilt, disgrace, and self-loathing. Brooks's fundamental point, then, is that confessions do not actually function to alleviate guilt, but to produce it, to rehearse and repeat it. Indeed, the confessing subject does not confess for the sake of achieving absolution from guilt so much as to produce the guilt that will *then* provide absolution or exoneration. Brooks writes: "The false referentiality of confession may be secondary to the need to confess: a need produced by the coercion of interrogation or by the subtler coercion of the need to stage a scene of exposure as the only propitiation of accusation, including self-accusation for being in a scene of exposure" (21). What the self-satisfaction provided by confession creates, it follows, is the prospect of eternal confession, the predicament whereby the pleasure generated by the acknowledgement of guilt results in a confessing subject who becomes in time a confessing machine.

For Brooks, contemporary subjects confess for the sake of confessing, that is for the sake of creating guilt rather than for the sake of accepting responsibility and enabling reconciliation. They refuse, in other words, to bring the confessional process to an end, so caught up are they in a potentially infinite process that, if taken to extremes, arguably involves a masochistic desire for shame itself. This potentially infinite confessional act troubles, if not delegitimizes entirely, Brooks argues, the illusion of a rational free will on which mainstream legal and judicial practices are founded. While the law must invest in this illusion, must abide by notions of individual responsibility for pragmatic reasons, psychoanalysis can observe post-Freudian and post-Foucauldian paradigms of subjectivity. In the same manner as Kristeva, Brooks thus reserves the possibility of efficacious confession and forgiveness exclusively for the psychoanalytic situation, maintaining it alone respects the motivational discrepancy and doubleness of the confessional utterance. In its respect for the transferential and transactional nature of truth, psychoanalysis allegedly has a

unique capacity to produce a truly affirmative model of confession and forgiveness. The psychoanalytic context is therefore the context par excellance, in Brooks's view, for an admission that obtains the promise of absolution, whereas the legal, judicial context must restrict itself, for reasons of social regulation, to the meting out of punishment and retribution.[11]

While Brooks and Coetzee share some of the same ambivalence toward confession and forgiveness, with each exploring problems around the performance of these illocutionary acts, their thinking on the subject patently differs in several important ways. These differences emerge most markedly through a comparative analysis of Brooks's *Troubling Confessions* and Coetzee's "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky," an essay first published in 1985. In contrast to Brooks, Coetzee preserves a more traditional concept of truth and subjectivity, for which he was taken to task by the former in his more recent consideration of confession. In defense of Coetzee's thesis, however, which is all too open to attack, it derives from a recognition of the profound difficulties of a potentially infinite confessional discourse, not to mention from a well-founded suspicion of the evasion of agency and responsibility that this infinity might involve. In his readings of confessional discourse in Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, and Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, *The Idiot*, and *The Possessed*, Coetzee focuses on the potential digression of these discourses into further deception and self-deception. Characterized by a problem of closure, these texts, he observes, reveal the difficulty of transposing confession from a religious to a secular context: namely, the lack of an interlocuter authorized to absolve. The prospect of infinity is further complicated by the failure of the narrator to question, comment, or reflect upon on the confession of the protagonist. These confessional fictions thus pose a hermeneutic impasse, according to Coetzee, in that they present a narrative, an interpretation of truth, and do not admit that there

[11] There are several problems with Brooks's reservation of confession and forgiveness for the psychoanalytic setting, but perhaps the most serious, in my view, is that it derives from the notion, also articulated by Kristeva, that they cannot be integrated in any affirmative way into the public realm without society becoming primitive, without "civilized society," as the former calls it, falling by the wayside. This thesis that retributive justice is essential to the preservation of civilization implies that only those forms of justice dictated by secular modernity are legitimate, that those legal and judicial models not approved of by the West are regressively naïve and dangerously outdated. In my suspicion of this implication, I am aligned with Rosemary Jolly who, in observing the propensity among academics located in the West to dismiss the TRC as a disingenuous invocation of Christian rhetoric and ritual, expresses concern about an apparent predisposition not to recognize the forms of resistance selected by marginalized communities as authoritative.

could be problems with this interpretation: instead the texts are plagued with gaps, silences, and contradictions.

Rather than make the radical argument that rereadings of these texts reveal an infinity of supplementary interpretations, Coetzee suggests that the confessional utterance in these texts is merely constitutive of a "double" meaning or interpretation that reveals another deeper "truth" behind the ostensibly true confession, and that this doubleness is specific to the confessional genre. In the case of Rousseau's and Dostoevsky's texts, for example, one detects a movement from the confession of the crime, to a psychological proposal or explanation, and then a reinterpretation that identifies a "truer" explanation. This movement produces questions about the nature of the confessant's reaction to the corrected version of the confession. Indeed, acknowledging the truthfulness of the new and "deeper" truth presents the confessant with a predicament because it necessitates recourse to two options : 1) admitting that one was cognizant of the deeper truth but concealed it, in which case the act of deception itself will be cause for shame; 2) claiming that one was unaware of the deeper truth, in which case the seeming incompetence to confess will be cause for shame. Either way, if one discloses a 'new' and deeper meaning, the result is the experience of shame, humiliation, and disgrace. The extent to which this disclosure destabilizes confessants' identities ultimately depends, however, on the extent of their commitment to the originally avowed truth and the degree to which this truth had been incorporated into their concept of selfhood.

But confessants can also claim to engage in the confessional act with an "open mind," granting from the very beginning that what they purport to be the truth might not actually be the truth; this approach, however, is "literally shameless," Coetzee maintains: to acknowledge that one lacks awareness of the extent of one's transgressions is, on its own, a matter for shame and confession. To proceed from this position, from the position of "openmindedness" endorsed by Brooks, is to draw out the confessional act endlessly in an eternal cycle of unbounded self-awareness and self-doubt. This cycle is the trap in which the contemporary psyche finds itself, for the problem of constantly delaying the end of the confessional process is, according to Coetzee, particular to an era of hyperconsciousness, an era in which the confessing creature becomes, as it were, a confessing machine. Lacking any sense of certainty, this figure is ultimately immobilized, prevented by psychic paralysis from ever attaining absolution or reconciliation. Writing of this hyperconscious figure in Dostoevsky's novel—which would later become a paradigmatic text for Coetzee's own fictional exploration of the potentially endless confession in *The Master of St. Petersberg*—he notes that

> The 'laws of hyperconsciousness,' which dictate an endless awareness, make the hyperconscious man the antithesis of the normal man. Feeling no basis in certainty, he cannot make decisions and act. He cannot even act upon his self-consciousness

> to freeze it into some position or other, for it obeys its own laws. Nor can he regard himself as a responsible agent, since accepting responsibility for oneself is a final position (274).

While the endless performance of confession might seem to constitute a genuine search for truth, the contrary might be true: in other words, the process of perpetual self-exposure may, Coetzee elaborates, point to the existence of a self-interested fiction that the confessant constructs in order to "*be a particular way*" (280), that is, in order to evade examination and avoid accountability. As readers of fiction, however, how are we to know whether a confessional fiction constitutes a genuine confession or merely a "lying self-serving fiction" (280)?

For Coetzee, confessional discourse functions within an economy that enables a second interpretation, an interpretation that investigates instances where the repressed truth, apparently unintentionally, manifests itself. Where the repressed truth manifests itself is in the "strange associations, false rationalizations, gaps, and contradictions" (257) that invariably slip out in the confessant's speech. These moments of conflict and contradiction within the act of enunciation enable us to verify and validate, or rather, to "test" the truth of the confessing narrator. If there is a deeper yet disavowed truth, it will erupt in unguarded statements, statements made when the utterer is vulnerable, susceptible to affect such as anger, anxiety, or abjection. In other words, if the confession is a deceitful, duplicitous invention, we can expect, Coetzee anticipates, that repressed truth will "break through its surface, particularly in moments of stress, in the forms of stirrings of the heart, intimations of the unacknowledged, utterances of the inner self, or that the truth should soon be repressed again" (281). For this reason, confessional discourse must be read as profoundly ironic, that is, as a discourse that articulates a claim very different from what it claims to articulate.

Coetzee's delineation of criteria for judging what a *true* confession is implies a dissatisfaction and disillusionment on his part with the perpetual self-interrogation of the confessing consciousness, a wish to exceed the impossibility of confession introduced by poststructuralist views of language. Indeed he explicitly distances his own critical position on confession from a Derridean position, calling into question the notion that confessional discourse constitutes an endless series of supplements, that it functions as a kind of "blind spot" toward which the confession moves in a process that continually defers truth. In an aim to approach confession in a manner that is more restricted yet also more productive, Coetzee maintains that confessional discourse must find an end to itself for political reasons, for reasons of political responsibility. In adopting this line of reasoning, he does not deny the specter of an endless process of confession but he does deny the efficacy of such a process, suggesting that to tolerate this specter of endlessness is to refuse the burden of responsibility that the project of reconciliation entails. Because eschewing the possibility of genuine confession would seem to negate the hope of assuming responsibility and achieving

reconciliation. Coetzee suggests that it may be imprudent and irresponsible to relinquish entirely a traditional notion of truth.

While in a religious context this retention of truth in the conventional sense of the term is acceptable, it is not acceptable, or at least not usually considered acceptable, in a secular, postmodern context. Thus if a religious author such as Dostoevsky can legitimately invoke a Christian tradition of absolution as a means of refusing the prospect of the endless confession, if he can propose the possibility of the intercession of grace in the world, it would seem, Coetzee reflects, that an avowedly secular author such as himself has no alternative but to accept that prospect. Surprisingly though—surprisingly because he is frequently accused of engaging in cynical and irresponsible writing, of evading or refusing truth-oriented writing—Coetzee steadfastly preserves the possibility, at least, of secular grace and redemption. Without denying the conspicuous problem that the secular confession provides no confessor authorized to absolve—merely an audience, whether fictional or real—and without disavowing the problem (of interpretation) created by acts of self-forgiveness, Coetzee refuses to acquiesce to the prospect of confession *ad infinitum*. While admitting the carelessness of adopting essentially sacred concepts to secular settings, he carries out this line of thinking, as becomes evident in an interview with David Attwell, through recourse to an analogy between religious and political positions. Here I am referring to the comment by Coetzee, cited at the very beginning of this chapter, in which he maintains that the basic agreement between religion and politics is the importance of insisting on the responsibility that psychoanalysis denies. Allow me to cite it again:

> To the extent that I am taken as a political novelist, it may be because I take it as a given that people must be treated as fully responsible beings: psychology is no excuse. Politics, in its wise stupidity, is at one with religion here: one man, one soul: no half-measures. What saves me from a merely stupid stupidity, I would hope, is a measure of charity, which is, I suppose, the way in which grace allegorizes itself in the world. (249)

Preferring the process of soul-searching advocated by certain religious traditions to the process of self-psychologizing promoted by the psychoanalytic tradition for the reason that the latter accepts the process of endless confession whereas the former is oriented toward the hope of absolution, Coetzee suggests that political interventions, in their simple affirmation of the need for generosity and responsibility, also permit the emergence of "grace."

"Grace" is a term that he repeatedly invokes in his critical and fictional writings, and in his interview with Attwell he distinguishes it from "cynicism," maintaining that while the former designates "a condition in which the truth can be told clearly, without blindness," the latter signifies "the denial of any ultimate basis for values" (*Doubling The Point*, 392). In *Disgrace* he complicates this

distinction, suggesting that to arrive at a condition in which truth is available and unmistakable is a manifestation of "mercy" or "clemency" inasmuch as it permits absolution, forgiveness, or rebirth, whereas to exist in a state of overwhelming doubt and skepticism is cause for "shame" and "dishonour" (see *OED*) inasmuch as it denies the possibility of transformation. While the very title as well as the content of *Disgrace* may appear to point to what literary critics have suggested is Coetzee's profound cynicism—a cynicism that is believed to deny the discourses of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation currently in circulation in South Africa any legitimacy—the novel does not foreclose the prospect of grace but rather explores the difficult question of how one moves toward or into "grace" from a position of "disgrace." In other words, the novel asks how it is that truth can be accessed and articulated in a social and political milieu immersed in deception and self-deception. *Disgrace* is a working-through of the problems of cynicism and complacency, an attempt to capture the grace, the elusive truth, which is integral to processes of forgiveness and reconciliation. Thus Lurie's heightened skepticism, I suggest, elaborates the problem whereby those most responsible for narrating the truth about apartheid, for placing forgiveness and reconciliation within the realm of the possible, are incapacitated by their own malaise, by their own complacency about and disinterest in coming to terms with their power and privilege.

IV: Disgraceful Disclosures: Deception and Self-Deception

Although first published in 1985, Coetzee's analysis of confessional fiction is nevertheless still relevant to *Disgrace*, offering a way into an examination of the intersections between discourses of confession and absolution, on the one hand, and situations of authority and authorship, on the other. In its preoccupation with problems of deception and self-deception, the novel demonstrates discernible continuities in its author's thinking, with Coetzee's critical reflections on the subject of confession coming to bear on this novel in significant ways, interrupting and informing the discourses of forgiveness and reconciliation that have gained currency in post-apartheid South Africa. It would certainly be incorrect, then, to conflate Lurie's views of guilt, confession, and forgiveness in the 'new' South Africa with Coetzee's, and indeed, there are several moments when Lurie's confessions fold back on themselves, revealing another truth—about fear of loss of power—that he would prefer (us) to disavow.

Essentially, I suggest, Lurie represents the 'hyperconscious figure' that Coetzee has traced to Dostoevsky, one of his key influences. As the skeptical, agonistic man *par excellence*, he epitomizes the secular mindset toward confession, engaging in the confessional act from a liberal, detached perspective of heightened self-awareness and self-doubt. Although *Disgrace* is focalized through Lurie, offering a view of the world from his perspective while providing neither a commentary on that perspective nor extensive access to Lurie's internal mind, by attending to the "strange associations, false rationalizations, gaps, and

contradictions" ("Double Thoughts" 257) in the narrative, it becomes possible to arrive at a reading of Lurie's refusal to confess efficaciously other than the confession he himself offers. Moreover, it is possible to read the textual gaps and silences that plague *Disgrace* as an exploration of the aporias that entangle the language and practice of forgiveness. Ultimately, however, there is no radical deferral of truth in the novel, merely a "second interpretation," an ironic confession and forgiveness, of the kind Coetzee has observed in the confessional fiction of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, in which the truth that is confessed is actually very different from what the protagonist believes. In rereading Lurie's narrative, emphasizing the absences and contradictions rather than the apparently rational articulations and logical arguments, I suggest another interpretation of his refusal to confess efficaciously.

This other interpretation emerges most clearly when, in a conversation with Lucy after the hearing, he rationalizes his refusal to oblige the committee's wishes as an objection to its demand for a spectacle. It is not this particular statement that is interesting for my purposes, however, but an unspoken reflection he has immediately afterwards in one of the few moments of access we get to Lurie's inner mind. It reads: "He was going to add, 'The truth is, they wanted me castrated,' but he cannot say the words, not to his daughter" (66). The fear of castration, references to which are scattered throughout the novel, is, it appears, the 'real' underlying reason for Lurie's unyielding posture of unrepentance and self-assurance before the committee. His refusal to adopt a repentant demeanor has less to do with judicious and impartial "philosophical reservations" than with his determination not to subject himself to further disgrace and shame—hence his staunchly unapologetic, even arrogant stance not only during the hearing, but also afterwards, when he superciliously replies "'No, I was enriched by the experience'" (56) to a reporter's question of whether he is sorry. While he ostensibly refuses to fulfill the confessional requirement out of a principled objection to what he alleges is a social "thirst for abasement," describing himself as "a strange beast" who has been cornered by "hunters" (56) eager to destroy his dignity, the text also raises the possibility that Lurie seeks to preserve his dignity at the further expense of Melanie, the absent yet actual victim.

If Lurie, as he claims, is indeed the "monster" of Byron's poetry, the figure of Lucifer reborn, and a "being with whom there is something constitutionally wrong," to borrow from his own exposition of the poem "Lara," then he intentionally thwarts attempts "to understand and sympathize," casting himself as "not one of us" (33-34) out of a preference for self-ostracization and isolation over demonstrations of shame and guilt. In his wish to avoid any admission of damage to his identity, any diminishment in his autonomy and authority, Lurie repeatedly resists any "reformation of character," explaining to Lucy that he refused the committee's recommendation of counseling because "It reminds me too much of Mao's China. Recantation, self-criticism, public apology. I'm old-fashioned, I would prefer simply to be put against a wall and shot. Have done with it'" (66). While this resistance is arguably a justifiable

objection to the experience of humiliation and abjection, we are nevertheless left wondering if it is not merely more evidence of his self-aggrandizing attitude, of his resolve to hold tenaciously to his power and authority and to refuse to bear witness to Melanie's suffering. Lurie's refusal to fully confront Melanie's position of vulnerability, his self-serving insistence on denying the violence he inflicts on her, and his repeated assertions of his diminished power and authority, destabilize and undercut his otherwise convincing objections to the committee's confessional requirement.

In the face of the reminder of Melanie's violation, of her rape by Lurie, his articulate arguments against the invasion of his privacy and the problems with notions of intentionality and voluntariness ultimately seem further denials of her suffering. With Melanie's absence haunting the hearing and drawing attention to Lurie's absence of care for her -- to his masquerade and manipulation of the role of paternal caregiver -- his well-formulated reasons for refusing the confessional imperative appear as nothing more than pathetic attempts to evade the burden of responsibility. Although there are occasions when Lurie does seem within reach of acknowledging his violation of Melanie, as when he notes that she does not "dignify" his claim to "have responsibilities" (35) with a response, for the most part he misrecognizes her pain, remaining largely oblivious to her situation. For the most part, then, he remains devoted to manufacturing a range of reasons for not taking responsibility, interpreting himself, even after the hearing is over, as a castrated figure, as a person disempowered and dispossessed in the new South Africa.

If *Disgrace* positions the commission hearing as slightly farcical at the same time that it implicitly condemns Lurie for not cooperating with its procedures, it is, I suggest, because Coetzee shares many of his protagonist's reservations to the confessional mandate even as he suggests that refusing to confess on philosophical grounds might well represent a refusal to assume responsibility. Engaging in self-doubt and skepticism with equanimity may, as Coetzee has suggested before, indicate disdaining rather than accepting accountability. With Rosalind, Lurie's ex-wife, we are ultimately left with the realization that Lurie is "a great deceiver and a great self-deceiver," and wondering, to borrow her metaphorical language, if "it wasn't just a case of [him] being caught with [his] pants down?" (188), if the hearing, that is, did not simply present him with the penultimate threat, the threat of losing power and authority.

If the confessional scenes being witnessed in the reconciliation process now underway in South Africa expose the practice of avowing one's innocence as the coping strategy of a society pathologically involved in self-deception (Jolly), Lurie's hearing dramatizes the threat that self-exposure implies to privileged South Africans, hinting obliquely at the menace that the confessional requirement poses to a dominant white culture fearful of losing of its autonomy and authority. While Antjie Krog argues in her powerful book *Country of My Skull* that "people can no longer indulge in their separate dynasties of denial" (112-13) as a result of the confessional narratives mandated by the TRC, Coetzee gives some indication

in *Disgrace* of the difficulties that the movement from denial and deception to recognition and admission of culpability may entail, given the commitment of many white South Africans to the myth of their own innocence.

V: "Now That We Are Sorry": The Politics of Atonement

Lurie's perceived threat of disempowerment and dispossession augments rather than diminishes in the second half of *Disgrace*, in which he withdraws to his daughter's farm in the search of the solace of privacy. His fear of metaphoric castration, as it were, heightens in the face of the threat that Petrus, Lucy's "dog-man" and hired help, poses. If Lurie self-denigratingly suggests at the beginning of the novel that all he requires to complete his powerlessness is the "simple enough operation" of castration that is "do[ne] to animals everyday" (9), Petrus, he imagines, is the male aggressor figure, threatening to symbolically castrate him by usurping his paternity and his daughter's property. His anxieties intensify when three black men attack him and rape Lucy in an act in which he suspects Petrus is complicit. When Lurie next encounters Petrus he laments his loss of power in the "new world they live in, he and Lucy and Petrus," and reflects nostalgically that "In the old days one could have had it out with Petrus" (117). Unable, however, to send Petrus away, Lurie wishes to "force out of him" the word "violation": he "would like to hear Petrus say," he thinks, that the rape of Lucy "*was an outrage*" (119). The irony of this wish in the context of his failure to consider his treatment of Melanie as anything more than a disgrace, a violation of his own dignity, as well as the similarities between Melanie's and Lucy's positions seem lost on Lurie, however, who never seems quite capable of respecting the otherness of either woman.

Whereas Lurie propels the cycle of violence and retribution between blacks and whites, wreaking revenge on one of Lucy's rapists, Lucy is "'prepared to do anything, make any sacrifice, for the sake of peace'" (208), including marrying Petrus, a decision Lurie deplores as abject capitulation to monstrous violence, as an acceptance of the shame and disgrace that her rapists intended to impart, and as a naïve search for absolution for centuries of white domination and exploitation in South Africa. But Lucy decisively rejects her father's interpretation, steadfastly maintaining her right "not to have to be put on trial like this, not to have to justify myself" (111). Given Lucy's refusal to translate her motives to Lurie, how, as Gareth Cornwell asks, are we to read Lucy's decision? Are we meant to read it as a form of peaceful intervention in a cycle of violence and domination, as a gesture of atonement, or as an instance of the refusal of retribution that renders the Cruxificion such a powerful symbol for Coetzee (*Doubling the Point* 337)? Or is her reaction to her plight an allegory of the importance in the new South Africa of expiating white guilt? Is Coetzee implying that it is only through acts of self-degradation and humiliation that genuine reciprocity and reconciliation can transpire in a society so exceedingly fragmented along racial lines?

Although, allegorically speaking, we might read Lucy's fate in any one of these ways, by her own admission her behavior is not motivated by metaphysical "'abstractions'" such as "'guilt and salvation'" (112). Rather Lucy aims at what Benita Parry calls "pragmatic rapprochement," which she suggests—in an argument that recalls both Parry's and Derrida's reflections on the subject—must be held apart from the metaphysical and transcendent concept of forgiveness. Discouraging her father's interpretation that it is "'some form of private salvation'" she is searching for, Lucy explains in unequivocal terms that what she is accepting from Petrus is essentially a strategic alliance, a "deal" or calculated exchange in which "'I contribute to the land, in return for which I am allowed to creep in under his wing. Otherwise, he wants to remind me, I am without protection, I am fair game'" (203).

If, however, there is a radical separateness between Lucy's essentially strategic calculation and a hyperbolic ethics of pure forgiveness, to use Derridean vocabulary, at issue in both, Coetzee suggests, is the question of sacrifice on the part of those already marginalized in the first place. For in the same way that Lucy sacrifices all that she has—"'start[ing] at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity'" (205)—for the sake of the survival that reconciliation with the erstwhile enemy will presumably provide, her actions suggest that it is often the marginalized themselves (e.g. women, animals) who make conciliatory gestures, that such gestures are frequently performed, that is, from a position of marginalization, if they are not assumed or taken (if that is conceptually possible) without their consent. What Lucy and Melanie share in common aside from their experience of rape is that both make or are sacrifices—the former for the truce between her and Petrus, for the consensus to reconcile for purely pragmatic reasons, the latter for Lurie's apparent achievement, whether legitimate or not, of forgiveness for the 'trespass' of rape. Whether one considers Lucy's assurance to Lurie that "'Perhaps, looking back, she [Melanie] won't think too harshly of you. Women can be surprisingly forgiving.'" (69) or Bev's assurance to Lurie that "'Women are adaptable. Lucy is adaptable'" (210), it is the already victimized who make, sometimes without their knowledge or consent, compromises and concessions for the aims of peace, concord, expiation, and redemption. Thus Lurie's betrayal of Melanie raises the objection to forgiveness that Byron – the poet who he is studying – raises, for instance, in *Cain*: this being that the redemption that forgiveness provides is often only achieved through the sacrifice of others, and to this extent constitutes an inauthentic form of atonement.[12]

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[12] Coetzee has Lurie frequently refer to Byron's works throughout *Disgrace* as a means of bringing into play complex questions about guilt, forgiveness, and the possibility of redemption. There are also evident parallels between Lurie and Byron's Don Juan, a libertine figure that trips guiltlessly, as does Coetzee's protagonist, through an endless series of affairs with women. Lurie might also be likened, moreover, to Manfred in Byron's play by that name,

Byron's Cain refuses Adah's suggestion that through atonement post-Edenic falleness is possible and refuses to partake in his brother's sacrificial offerings, protesting that forgiveness is obtained from God only through a "sacrifice of the harmless for the guilty": his objection, ironically articulated not long before his murder of Abel, resonates profoundly, of course, with Lurie's own sacrifice of such "innocents" as his former student. But whereas Abel cries out for forgiveness of his brother in Byron's *Cain*, Lurie's violation of Melanie is only furthered by his denial of her right (not) to forgive. If then, as Lucy Graham suggests, *Disgrace* plays out the scenario of Abrahamic sacrifice in which paternalistic bonds of responsibility are surrendered in the absolute betrayal of ethics, Coetzee suggests that to sacrifice the other's right to extend or refuse forgiveness constitutes the ultimate betrayal of an ethics of responsibility.

Although the reasons for his plea for forgiveness from Mr. Isaacs are essentially inscrutable, closed off to readers, what evidence of Lurie's motivations we do have contradicts his claim to have undergone an experience of conversion and reformation. The plea itself takes place only moments after he has fantasized himself in bed with Melanie and her sister—what he imagines would be an "experience fit for a king" (164)—thereby implying the continuing persistence of his desire for sovereignty and power. Lurie continues to misrecognize his sovereignty, and to interpret himself as lacking in agency and autonomy, emphasizing his state of abjection and disgrace to Melanie's father without considering what abjection or disgrace Melanie may (have) suffer(ed) as a result of him, and attributing the failure of their relationship simply to his "'lack [of] the lyrical'" (171). Here again, then, Lurie's self-consciousness spurs an instance of treacherous self-deception.

For what else are we to make of a scene of forgiveness that takes place between two patriarchs, Lurie and Mr. Isaacs, in which the real victim, the female lover and daughter, is absented entirely? While Mr. Isaacs suggests the importance of conditions on forgiveness—replying to Lurie's request with the reflection that, "'The question is not, are we sorry? The question is, what lesson have we learned? The question is, what are we going to do now that we are sorry'" (172) in a series of queries that recall the failure of the South African reconciliation process to redistribute material wealth between races—he nevertheless assumes the prerogative to forgive on Melanie's behalf, never once indicating that what one ought to *do*, to borrow Mr. Isaac's own rhetoric, is grant

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a figure who seeks self-oblivion for sins already committed. In the end, Manfred is condemned, as Lurie arguably is, to increased self-awareness and he accepts, ironically, full responsibility for his actions. Internal suffering, Manfred claims in protesting a priest's call to penitence, is far more difficult to endure than the public shame that accompanies social punishment. Critics have noted the resonances of Wordsworth in *Disgrace*, as well as connected Coetzee's Lucy to the Lucy of Wordsworth's poetry, but have yet to analyse the novel's Byronic undertones.

the victim the authority (not) to forgive. The scene of Lurie's plea is haunted, as are his classes, his hearing, and indeed the entirety of his narrative, by Melanie's absence, so that she remains the "slack," "far away" (24), "marionette" (25) creature she was during the rape, the "ghost" that Lurie mistakenly perceives himself to be, serving to illuminate the absurdity of his illusion of disempowerment and dispossession.

Melanie's absent presence throughout the narrative, most noticeable in the scene of forgiveness that takes place between Lurie and Mr. Isaacs, asks us to consider if forgiveness can legitimately take place through an act of mediation or whether it in fact calls for face-to-face interaction. Once the intervention of a third party occurs, according to Derrida, one has amnesty, reconciliation, or reparation but not forgiveness in an authentic sense. Citing Tutu's recollected translation of a black woman who asserted during her testimony of her husband's assassination that "'A commission or a government cannot forgive. Only I, eventually, could do it. (And I am not ready to forgive.)'" (43), Derrida maintains that the right to forgive is ultimately the victim's alone, the absolute victim's. While I remain wary of the ease with which he differentiates between "absolute" and "not-so-absolute" victims, and would wish to discriminate between different kinds of victims and their various rights to forgive more cautiously than Derrida does, his respect for the "never absolutely present" (44), for the disappeared victims, and his wish that their right to forgive not be forfeited is, I think, worthy of attention.

In forfeiting precisely this right, Mr. Isaacs arguably assumes the "right of grace" that Derrida traces to the theological tradition in the West that accords the sovereign the exorbitant right to forgive on behalf of others. The right of grace, which has been incorporated into the republic legacy along with the notion of sovereignty, enables the monarch "by divine right, [to] pardon a criminal; that is to say, exercise in the name of the State a forgiveness that transcends and neutralizes the law" (45). In Coetzee's novel, the exercise of the right of grace creates the condition of disgrace that is registered in the title, with Lurie essentially appropriating Melanie's prerogative to forgive in an act that affirms his own sovereignty while appearing to undermine it, and refusing to acknowledge this sovereignty or its consequences. Ultimately Lurie assumes the "right of grace" at the expense of the victim by seeking not her forgiveness but the forgiveness of another patriarchal figure, her father, thus once again denying responsibility for her suffering, and authorizing, along with Mr. Isaacs, his own absolution.[13] By granting and accepting Melanie's forgiveness without her

[13] While Lurie performs a gesture that would appear to represent a plea for forgiveness in the presence of Mrs. Isaacs and Desiree, her daughter—"get[ting] to his knees and touch[ing] the floor" with "careful ceremony" (173) in a supplication for pardon—his gesture is questionable on several grounds. Most important among these is that it is enacted in a chivalric, essentially patriarchal, fashion (in which grace is associated with the masculine display of "honour," or

consent, both Lurie and Mr. Isaacs commit what Derrida contends is the absolutely unforgivable: the "absolute victimization which deprives the victim of the right to speak, or that freedom, that force and that power which authorises, which permits the accession to the point 'I forgive'" (57).

This accession of the right to forgive and consequent further marginalization and silencing of victims also occurs in *Disgrace* through the sacrifice of animals, through the sacrifice of their prerogative to authorize their victimizer's forgiveness. Coetzee's novel illuminates that those creatures viewed as somehow more sacrificable are also viewed as more forgiving, attributes that are arguably ascribed to them in an attempt to disavow responsibility for their suffering. As Elizabeth Costello did in *The Lives of Animals*, *Disgrace* questions the categorization of species into the sacrificable and the non-sacrificable, proposing the possible need for an expansion of the decree 'thou shall not murder' to include animal rights. More specifically, *Disgrace* considers how the notion that practices of punishment and retributive justice belong almost exclusively to the human animal might serve as alibis for our betrayals of responsibility towards non-human animals, with their presumed generosity and kindness serving as self-justifying rationalizations for all kinds of abuses and violations. Thus Lurie silently ridicules Bev's comment that "'we eat up a lot of animals in this country...I'm not sure how we will justify it to them,'" and thinks to himself, "'Justify it? When? At the Great Reckoning?'" (82). Although he begins, unexpectedly, to develop feelings of aversion to animal sacrifice, recoiling from the prospect of feasting on the two sheep that Petrus is feeding for a roast, Lurie does in the end consume the animals, but with the plan to "ask forgiveness afterwards" (131). In this sense, he continues to deprive forgiveness of meaning, using it as a means of gratifying his own selfish and egotistical aims without, it seems, the nuisance of guilt or shame.

How, in light of Lurie's invocation of the term 'forgiveness' for purely interested, instrumental purposes, should we read the final scene of *Disgrace*? How are we being invited to read his decision to 'give up' to death a dog with whom he has achieved affinity of a kind? Is it an act performed, as he says, out of genuine 'love' for an other, or is it rather another exemplary instance of the violation of the responsibility one bears for the suffering of others, an attempt at achieving absolution through the sacrifice of another creature in what Rene Girard calls the "violence of the sacred"—the violence that sacrifices themselves inflict as a result of the partially paradoxical endeavour to purge collectivities of violence itself? If the TRC constitutes a series of quasi-sacrificial rituals, the novel implicitly asks, who is being sacrificed and for what purpose? Certainly Lurie's sacrifice of various victims (e.g. Melanie, a stray dog) in his pursuit of absolution would seem to operate as an oblique critique that the process of reconciliation now underway in South Africa sacrifices the oppressed by placing

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rather, domination), and it does not generate (or await) a response, or to the extent that it does, it receives the non-response of silence and immobility.

on their shoulders the burden of forgiveness and reconciliation. Indeed, it is the implications of Lurie's ostensibly "sacrificial" act that leaves readers with the distinct impression, I think, that Coetzee is ultimately offering an emphatically bleak commentary on the process of national reconciliation in South Africa.

There are no obvious gaps or contradictions structuring this last scene—which, as Lurie says of the act itself, seems "little enough, less than little: nothing"(220) as a conclusion to his endless games of deception and self-deception. We might well speculate that it constitutes Lurie's forgiveness of himself, but if that is the case then it involves, as Coetzee notes elsewhere of self-forgiveness generally, "the closing of the chapter, the end of the downward spiral of self-accusation whose depths can never be plumbed because to decide to stop at any point by an act of will, to decide that guilt ceases at such-and-such a point, is itself a potentially false act that deserves its own scrutiny" ("Double Thoughts," 290). In other words, if Lurie's sacrifice of the stray dog represents an act of self-absolution, then along with Coetzee, we are left pondering the question of "How to tell the difference between a 'true' moment of self-forgiveness and a moment of complacency when the self decides that it has gone far enough in self-scrutiny" (290). Given Lurie's pathological self-deception throughout the novel, as an act of self-forgiveness, it is difficult not to read this act pessimistically, as yet another instance of his bringing the full, suffocating pressure of his sovereignty to bear on the other, this time in an act that results in the other's death for the sake of his ostensible salvation.

Yet there is another possible reading available to us, I think, one that reads Lurie's act as an instance of identification and sympathy with another creature, as the beginning of a potential emergence out of the depths of isolation, the start of a movement toward the horizon of ethical relations motivated by the aim of genuine reconciliation. Although there can obviously be no exchange of human language between Lurie and the dog—thus raising the prospect of *forgiving for* as a variant of the postcolonial problem of *speaking for*—*Disgrace* raises the possibility that the language of true forgiveness might involve an abandonment of the process of verbalization, an encounter with the raw, indigestible materiality of suffering produced by apartheid and other systems of domination, and an attempt to realize a nonverbal language that does not subsume difference. At the very beginning of the novel Lurie concedes that he does not agree with the claim of his department's Communications 101 handbook that the communication of thoughts, feelings, and intentions occurs through human language, conveying instead his own view that communication occurs through music, that "the origins of speech lie in song, and the origins of song in the need to fill out with sound the overlarge and rather empty human soul" (4). In the very last pages of *Disgrace* he devotes himself almost exclusively to the composition of a chamber opera which is meant to be about Bryon's life but which, through creative inspiration, ultimately becomes about Teresa, the lover who is usually the present absence in Byron's biographies. Lurie's relation of sympathetic identification with and love for the stray dog he sacrifices also develops through their shared love of music.

Although Lurie rules out the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation between Petrus and himself because of the inability for either to know the other as a result of the reductions imposed by the translation of colonial languages into English, he nevertheless envisions a language that is common and universal. English, as Lurie thinks in what seems an oblique reference to the problem of translation that has undercut the reconciliation process in South Africa from its very beginning, is "an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa," for although he "would not mind hearing Petrus's story one day," the possibility of reconciliation being achieved through narrative between people fragmented along racial lines generally, is crippled, in his view, by the "arthritic" (117), impoverished condition of translated languages. While *Disgrace* expresses the anxiety that the English language in which the writer writes cannot make possible reciprocity, that it cannot resolve the problem of the "failure of love" ("Jerusalem Prize," 97) in South Africa about which Coetzee has spoken so eloquently, the novel nevertheless ultimately imagines an alternative to the "aporia" of language that concerns Derrida, conceiving as it does the possibility of a language that provides an alternative to the latter's quandary of the impossibility of forgiveness. In other words, *Disgrace* imagines an alternative mode of communication that moves beyond the limits of colonial languages, namely beyond the limits of English and its entanglement, exemplified by the Romantic literature Lurie studies, with systems of power and domination.

But given that *Disgrace* is written, after all, in the English language, how, one must at this point ask, should we reconcile an awareness of this fact with the novel's suggestion that forgiveness can only take place by abandoning human language? By way of response, I would say that Coetzee realizes that English language and literature are bound up in relations of domination, contestation, and subjugation, without at the same time denying their extraordinary potential to imagine and invent an alternative future in which reciprocity is possible. Without ever elevating fiction as the medium of forgiveness *par excellence*, and fully conscious that literature contains its own linguistic traps and opportunities for self-deception, Coetzee apprehends, I think, that in its liberating capacity, in its ability, that is, to move beyond the monologic discourse of criticism and to play with possibilities, fiction may well aid in the creation of a future in which forgiveness is conceivable. Fiction may not provide a way out, for the present, of the problems of transparency and intentionality that encumber the possibility of pure forgiveness but can, and in the case of *Disgrace* does, envision an end to the depressing shadow that they cast over that possibility.

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EPILOGUE

This project has unfolded in the context of the U.S.-led War on Iraq, and while that war has been peripheral to the explicit content of this study, it has shaped its driving ideas and values in immeasurable ways. As I prepare now—in May of 2004—to submit this thesis for defense, that War is by no means over, despite the claim to the contrary of the U.S. government well over a year ago, and its plan to evacuate Iraq in little less than a month hence. In fact, the last few weeks have given rise to some of the most sordid acts of violence that the conflict has possibly produced, some of the "ugliest distortions of humanity" (to borrow Ken Wiwa's words, which stare out at me this morning from my copy of *The Globe and Mail* [A21]), indeed some of the most tragic signs of the perverseness of a politics of revenge and retribution. The photographs from Abu Ghraib prison, recently published around the world and now the topic of investigation for a Bush-organized committee of inquiry, were followed, a few days ago, by yet another set of repulsive, mind-searing images, this time of a young American civilian by the name of Nick Berg and the moments shortly before and after his decapitation by five masked men with ties to al-Qaeda. The latter atrocity was performed, according to the executioners, in order to redeem "by blood and souls" (Freeman, A1) the dignity of Muslim men and women; but the grieving parents of the victim hold George Bush and Donald Rumsfeld responsible, and purport that it is "for the[ir] sins" (McCarthy and Freeman, A1) that their son died. The rhetoric of atonement that has marked the politics of American intervention in the Middle East and that has gone on for quite some time (in truth, long before 9/11, despite the momentousness of that event), is, then, showing no signs of abating; on the contrary, it has become the *raison d'être* for an endless spate of crimes, on both sides of the conflict. The torture at Abu Graib and the death of Nick Berg are another round in what has become, it seems, a potentially infinite series of reprisals, and bring to mind, once again, all of the circumstances that can conspire to limit a postcolonial politics of forgiveness and reconciliation.

For the Western viewers who were its intended witnesses, the beheading of Nick Berg played to the host of stereotypes of the Arab, as well as into precisely those fears of the terrorist-other that a beleaguered Bush-administration requires to legitimate its campaign in Iraq, which is finally coming into question by more than a minority of the American population. For Iraqi civilians, the execution effectively diverted attention, once more, from their own genuine grievances and aspirations, which have arguably never been the concern of those for whose crimes they are now paying. Already, more than 10, 000 Iraqis have died in the War on Terrorism, as it is called, though those deaths—unlike that of Nick Berg's, which has become a major news item in the international media—have not been reported, recorded or mourned in this part of the world. More are bound to die in the near future, as the Bush administration pledges to capture Mr. Berg's murderers, and plans to do so, apparently, by continuing to beset Iraq's cities with F-16s and AC-130 gunships.

As the violence and injustice mounts for Iraqis, the necessity of an end to the deaths and the suffering seems all the more urgent, and yet all the more unattainable. Instead of a commitment to an end, what we witness more and more is a steady stream of accusations and incriminations, with (to borrow the religious language that has become ever more prevalent in the days since 9/11) George Bush et al insisting, on the one hand, that Iraqi lives are the necessary sacrifices for the "original sin" of Saddam Hussein and many of his detractors suggesting, on the other, and in the same vein as Nick Berg's father, that it is in fact the "sins" of Bush himself for which the victims of the War are now atoning. What has become lost in this interminable apportionment of blame is the search—which is perhaps more crucial now than ever—for a way to move beyond the cries for revenge. As I witness the proliferation of these cries and their tragic fallout, I find myself becoming even more convinced than I was at the outset of this project of the *impossibility* of our carrying on with status quo ideas of violent retribution and "justice," and the *necessity*, as it were, of a politics of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Yet I must admit that I also find myself becoming more and more disillusioned with the language of forgiveness and reconciliation; with the way that language is contorted and abused in the field of international politics. Derrida is right, of course, to note that that language (though he speaks of forgiveness exclusively) is contaminated in the context of politics *by that context*—that is, by "the simulacra, the automatic ritual, hypocrisy, calculation, and mimicry" ("On Forgiveness" 29) that generally characterize the political realm. One need only think here of British Prime Minister Tony Blair's recent claim before a joint session of the United States Congress that "history will forgive us" (with "us" presumably referring to the British and American governments) if weapons of mass destruction are never found on Iraqi soil (which they undoubtedly will not be). Blair's claim is an eminent instance, if ever there was one, of the common conflation of forgiveness with a host of related concepts, among them excuse and regret. One wonders about his substitution of the abstraction of "history" for the actual victims—those Iraqis who have lost their lives or their livelihoods to the War—whose forgiveness is not sought, and who are given no opportunity to speak. And more than that, one wonders how forgiveness can be spoken of at all in a context in which those lives and livelihoods continue to be destroyed, and in which there has been no acknowledgement of fault, no assumption of responsibility, and no confession of culpability on the part of either the United States' or British government. Especially though, one wonders at the presumption that forgiveness will one day be granted; for this is a presumption that engages a self-forgiveness that can only seem reprehensible, operating as it does to absolve the actions of the United States and its allies *avant le lettre*. In making this presumption, Blair might be said to have committed what Derrida calls the impardonable: he assumes the right of the people of Iraq to (not) forgive their invaders.

According to Derrida, it is because of the impurity and self-interestedness of the language of forgiveness as it plays out in the realm of politics that forgiveness is prevented from ever being able to enter (conceptually, that is) the juridical realm. For Derrida, because "all sorts of unacknowledgable 'politics', all sorts of strategic ruses can hide themselves abusively behind a 'rhetoric' or 'comedy' of forgiveness" ("On Forgiveness" 50-51) forgiveness must limit itself to private relations. I disagree, and it is upon this disagreement with Derrida that much of this thesis rests. With Ken Wiwa I wonder "how sustainable is all this," and by "this" I mean a politics that is predicated entirely on revenge and retribution and not at all on an ethics of forgiveness and reconciliation. As Wiwa asks:

> How many more U.S. military bases will it take to win the seemingly endless war on terrorism? How many prisoners must be held and interrogated in detention centres, how many innocent individuals will be eliminated to terrorize the rest of us? How many puppet governments and unpopular regimes must be propped up against the will of increasingly angry and impoverished people? How many lies will have to be told to justify the whole fraud? (A21)

I realize that it may seem outrageous and perhaps even contemptible to suggest forgiveness and reconciliation as possibilities at a time when Iraqis are (rightfully) more enraged than ever at the occupation of their country by a militaristic government. But I also realize that to refuse to imagine forgiveness and reconciliation as possibilities—whether out of a belief in the inherent impurity of the political realm, or out of a sense that such things as Abu Graib can never be put right (and never should)—is to foreclose on the promise of justice altogether. For only by imagining forgiveness and reconciliation will it be possible to make good on this promise.

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