

‘THE TRUTH OF WOUNDED MEMORIES’:
THE QUESTION OF FORGIVENESS
IN SELECTED POST-APARTHEID TEXTS

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**MARIJKE VAN VUUREN DIED TRAGICALLY AND
UNEXPECTEDLY WHILE SHE WAS PREPARING HER STUDY FOR
EXAMINATION.**

THIS THESIS WAS SUBMITTED POSTHUMOUSLY.

ABSTRACT

(WRITTEN BY DAVID MEDALIE)

Apartheid may have ended formally in 1994, but its legacy endures in many aspects of South African society and in the lives of individual South Africans. One of the difficulties which post-apartheid South Africa has had to contend with is the question of justice for the victims of atrocities committed during the apartheid years, and the possibility of redress. The Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) was established in order to formalise a process whereby victims could tell their stories and have their pain recognized, and to grant perpetrators an opportunity to provide information and acknowledge their wrongdoing.

This thesis explores the possibility of forgiveness in relation to the complexities of guilt and victimhood. Forgiveness is posited as a powerful and viable response, which has the potential to free both the perpetrators and the injured parties from the stranglehold of the past.

The thesis draws on studies which approach the question of forgiveness from a moral and philosophical perspective. These include the work of historians and theorists such as Simon Wiesenthal, Hannah Arendt, Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricoeur. It then goes on to consider the ways in which a number of seminal post-apartheid texts, works of fiction and non-fiction, have dealt with forgiveness and its potential to heal. One chapter focuses specifically on texts which deal with the TRC and its aftermath, especially Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* (1999) and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's *A Human Being Died That Night* (2003). This is followed by an analysis of three important novels which foreground and problematise the issue of forgiveness: J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat* (published initially in Afrikaans in 2004, and then in an English translation in 2006), and Mark Behr's *Kings of the Water* (2009).

Nelson Mandela will not go down in history for the 27 consecutive years that he lived imprisoned without ever renouncing his ideas. He will go down in history because he was able to draw from his soul all the poison accumulated by such an unjust punishment. He will be remembered for his generosity and for his wisdom at the time of an already uncontrollable victory, when he knew how to lead so brilliantly his self-sacrificing and heroic people, aware that the new South Africa would never be built on foundations of hatred and revenge.

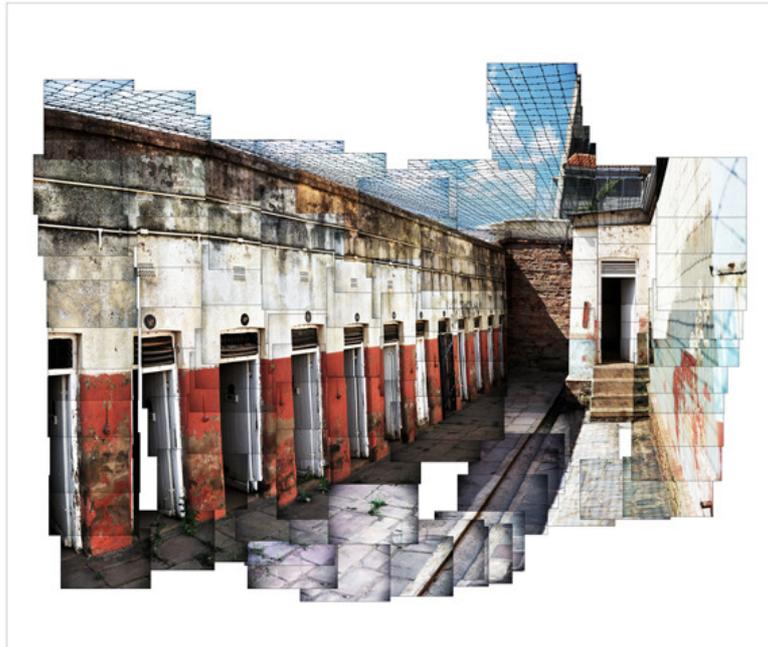
Fidel Castro¹

¹ In Asmal, Kader, *et al* (eds). 2003. *Nelson Mandela: From Freedom to the Future*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball. xviii.

ILLUSTRATION

CONSTITUTION HILL: FORMER SOLITARY CONFINEMENT CELLS
FOR MEN, NOW LEFT OPEN.

Photocollage by Marli van Vuuren. 2009.



CONTENTS

Abstract	p.3.
List of abbreviations; glossary	p.7.
Chapter One	
Introduction	p.8
1.1: The faces of guilt	p.10
1.2: The limits of forgiveness	p.14
1.3: Forgiveness	p.26
1.4: Guilt and forgiveness in selected post-apartheid texts	p.39
Chapter Two	
‘The truth of wounded memories’: Writing on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission	p.50
2.1: ‘Touching the leper’: Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela’s <i>A Human Being Died that Night</i>	p.78.
Chapter Three	
3.1: The Pastoral Solution? A note on the <i>plaasroman</i>	p.95.
3.2: Bearing the Sins? J.M. Coetzee’s <i>Disgrace</i>	p.99
Chapter Four	
‘It was my ... hanslam’: <i>Agaat</i> as a pastoral evocation of guilt and (possibly) forgiveness	p.125
Chapter Five	
‘Mercy! You sound like a woman’: Mark Behr’s <i>Kings of the Water</i>	p.140
Conclusion	p.164
Bibliography:	p.166
Appendix: The parable of the lost son:	p.184

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Bible translations:

KJV King James version.

NIV New International Version

RSV Revised Standard Version.

(All Biblical references are to the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.)

Books of the Bible:

Col: Colossians

Cor: Corinthians

Eph: Ephesians

Ez: Ezra

Gen: Genesis

Heb: Hebrews

Hos: Hosea

Is: Isaiah

Jer: Jeremiah

Jn: John

Lam: Lamentations

Lk: Luke

Mk: Mark

Mt: Matthew

Prov: proverbs

Ps: Psalms

Rom: Romans

Sam: Samuel

TRC Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

GLOSSARY

Hanslam A tame (pet) lamb

Plaasroman Farm novel

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

‘Forgive me or kill me!’ This melodramatic appeal comes from Gideon le Roux, one of two characters in Athol Fugard’s *Playland* (1992: 44)). The play was one of the first post-apartheid literary texts to raise the need for forgiveness in South Africa. Written in 1992, well after FW de Klerk had announced the advent of democracy on 2 February 1990, it is set a month before this watershed, at the turn of the decade: New Year’s Eve 1989.

The play’s only characters, a white ex-soldier and a black nightwatchman, are both troubled by their past. Both have killed. Gideon le Roux cannot get his life back on track after returning from the border war crippled by a burden of guilt (Fugard, 1992: 11). Martinus Zoeloe has done time for murdering the white man who raped Martinus’s wife. He feels no remorse for his deed, as he cannot forgive the man he murdered – and, indeed, would murder him again if that were possible. As a believer, he understands that he forfeits his salvation, his state of grace, by his refusal to repent – which is at heart a refusal to forgive. This he stoically accepts; his talk is all of judgement. Together these two dramatise, in a particular historical context, Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving servant, in which both the unforgiven and the unforgiving are ultimately imprisoned, the one for the debt he owes, the other for his refusal to give what he himself had received – mercy from his lord.

Though Fugard’s plays are nearly always concerned with interpersonal dynamics before being political, in this play the historical setting and the characters’ stories suggest that they are representative – they call each other ‘black man’ and ‘white man’ (47). The white man, sent to war, was subjected to all the disinformation of the apartheid state, which Fugard parodies in Gideon’s defence of taking human life: ‘What about self-defence? Or protecting women and children? What about Defending Your Country Against Communism? Those are all times when it’s all right to do it’ (18). Yet Gideon came to realise the true cost of the border war when he participated in flinging the corpses of enemy soldiers into a mass grave, watched by a silent woman, possibly a grieving mother. Later he will articulate, ‘What I had done

was a sin' (56). At the time he loses control, and is found by his fellows wandering in the bush – looking for the old woman, the watcher, who, he feels, is in a position to give him absolution for what he has done (57). He never finds her.

Returning home, he finds that his life is still arrested at that point, and no false cheer or New Year's resolutions can get him out of his captivity, out of Oshakati, his personal hell (35, 59). Now he seeks absolution from the 'watchman', Martinus Zoeloe. Martinus, for his part, feels that to forgive this man would mean to forgive the white man he still hates (whom he still calls, quaintly, 'Andries Jacobus de Lange, the deceased'). Though he has sympathy for Gideon, he cannot bring himself to do this. They have agreed to part on these terms when, unexpectedly, Martinus turns to Gideon to give him a new life by forgiving him on behalf of those wronged. Gideon, for his part, encourages Martinus to 'get out of that little room' where he waited years ago to kill Andries Jacobus de Lange – the point at which his own life was arrested, the choice of revenge (45, 60).

If this is Fugard's play for the pivotal 1990s, as its setting suggests, he appears to portray the advent of democracy in the light of the need for forgiveness, specifically of whites by blacks, for the crimes of the past. Gideon's words to Martinus, 'Forgive me or kill me' (58) starkly present the choice between forgiveness and revenge.

This play ends happily – both men get out of jail, as it were, and walk off together to get Gideon's stalled car going. (The car may itself be a metaphor for the state of society at the time.) But the question remains: is this solution not too easy? In the legal sphere the amnesty offered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) raised similar nagging questions. Should the guilty be allowed to get away with murder? And, to return to this discourse, is it not facile for a white playwright, despite his undoubted anti-apartheid credentials, to present the transformation of South Africa as a comedy of forgiveness?

In looking at the possibility of forgiveness, of grace, one enters a field of interrelated variables, in which the spoken word is unusually significant and powerful. Transgression – or omission – leads to guilt and debt. Individual guilt and collective guilt are distinguishable but in apartheid South Africa seldom wholly separable, as

with Gideon le Roux’s killing or De Lange’s rape of a black female employee – or, indeed, Martinus Zoeloe’s revenge. Acknowledged guilt can lead to remorse, contrition, repentance for the wrongful act, and confession. There is the question of accountability and retribution, the requirement of justice. Then there is the whole field of reparation, atonement, expiation, propitiation, and vicarious atonement, especially in the form of sacrifice. On the part of the one wronged the possibilities include mercy, forgiveness with or without justice – as these need not be mutually exclusive – and then the vexed question of vicarious forgiveness which Fugard dramatises and which Simon Wiesenthal (1998) so eloquently questions. At the other extreme from mercy lies revenge.

1.1 The faces of guilt

It is by now a truism that the past, and the crimes of the past, must be faced. On the delusion of impunity (‘the expectation that one can glide through/ history unpunished and rewrite one’s own biography’) Vaclav Havel writes:

Whoever
fears to look his own past in the face
must necessarily fear what is to come.
Lies cannot save us from lies. (In Ackermann, 1996:47)

Guilt for past deeds or omissions has different facets, and here we turn to Karl Jaspers’ four categories of collective guilt, from a lecture delivered after the Second World War, *The Question of German Guilt* (1947). Jaspers distinguished criminal, political, moral and existential guilt. He was in a unique position to examine such guilt, straddling the roles of perpetrator and victim as a German with a Jewish wife, who had narrowly escaped being deported together to a concentration camp (Villa-Vicencio, 1996:133).

It seems wise, at this point, to point to the difference between Nazi war crimes, including the murder of a third of the Jewish population of Europe, and the fundamental injustice and structural violence of apartheid. Though the policy was declared a crime against humanity by the United Nations, and though it spawned

unspeakable cruelties and atrocities committed by agents of the state, it was not on the scale of the Holocaust. There are nevertheless instructive parallels.

Jaspers' first kind of guilt is criminal guilt, over which, after World War II, the court in Nuremberg had jurisdiction. After the war, with the definition of crimes against humanity and the establishment of an international court at The Hague, there arose the concept of imprescriptibility, which both Jacques Derrida (2001) and Paul Ricoeur (2004) raise in relation to forgiveness. Prescriptibility is a legal concept which allows for the cessation of debt and the cancellation of the right, or duty, to prosecute, after the lapse of a prescribed time. (It differs from amnesty in that it does not erase the crime, but blocks the 'path back' to it, as Ricoeur [2004: 472] puts it.)

Imprescriptibility, attached to crimes against humanity, entails the definition of a guilt that can never be cancelled, that must be relentlessly and indefinitely pursued, because of the gravity of the act/s giving rise to it, and, as Ricoeur (2004:10) has pointed out, because 'these crimes themselves have long-lasting effects'.² It is the legal equivalent of the unforgivable – though Ricoeur cautions that the two concepts should not be confused ('justice must be done' [2004:473]). In chapter three I will examine the work of Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, who grapples with the unforgivable in relation to Eugene de Kock, a man convicted of so many apartheid crimes as to have been dubbed Prime Evil.

It is interesting that Ricoeur, in passing, ascribes criminal guilt to the politicians responsible for political crimes (2004: 476). In South Africa amnesty was given to the agents of crimes which could be proved to have been politically motivated, or committed under orders. The inference is clearly that the primary guilt was not theirs. Yet Colonel Eugene de Kock, commander of the notorious Vlakplaas unit which had committed state-sponsored crimes, was cut loose from his political masters and given a criminal trial (though he later received amnesty for a number of crimes from the

² Cf. the view of Vladimir Jankélévitch:

The time that dulls all things, the time that uses up sorrow as it erodes mountains, the time that favors pardon and forgetfulness, the time that consoles, settling and healing time, does not diminish (in) the least the colossal slaughter; on the contrary, it never ceases to revive its horror.... Crimes against humanity are *imprescriptible*, that is, the penalties against them *cannot* lapse; time has no hold on them (in Brudholm, 2008:123).

Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC]). Father Michael Lapsley, a letter-bomb survivor, reminds us that when the De Klerk government announced free elections, ‘there were no words of repentance or acknowledgement of evil’ (1996: 20). To date National Party leaders, with one exception, have not taken responsibility for crimes committed under their government and – perhaps in the spirit of reconciliation, or as the result of peace negotiations – have not been prosecuted. Gobodo-Madikizela points out that, whereas at Nuremberg ‘the Nazis never denied involvement in what they had ordered, supported and encouraged’ but had denied that it was criminal, South African nationalist leaders ‘never denied that killing and torturing ... activists was criminal’. What they denied, she writes, ‘was that they were ever involved in it or knew anything about it’ (2003: 66).

The highest-ranking member of the armed forces to stand by his men at the TRC was the Police Commissioner, General Johan van der Merwe, who later also stepped forward, with former Minister of Police Adriaan Vlok, to take responsibility when three officers formerly under his command went on trial in 2007 for the attempted murder of Rev. Frank Chikane (amnesty had not been applied for in this instance). As all traces of their culpability had been erased, these two men themselves supplied the evidence against them in a plea bargain, and were duly convicted with the others and given suspended ten-year sentences. Though the plea bargain enabled them to evade a jail term, this exception still showed up the rule of evasion among their colleagues.

Jaspers’ second category, political guilt, attaches to all ‘who belong to the political body in the name of which the crime was committed’ (Ricoeur, following Jaspers, 2004: 474) and is attributed by Jaspers to all who failed to resist Nazi injustice, and who therefore had to take political responsibility for the actions of the state. Ricoeur rejects the self-exoneration of those who claim to be unconcerned with politics, and quotes Jaspers’ categorical statement: ‘The ethos of politics is the principle of a state in which all participate with their consciousness, their knowledge, their opinions and their wills’ (1947:35; and in Ricoeur, 2004: 475). Political guilt is collective but not criminal: ‘the notion of a criminal people must be explicitly rejected,’ writes Ricoeur (2004: 474).

But Ricoeur raises a question about accountability for political guilt. Having pointed out that '(w)hoever has taken advantage of the benefits of the public order must in some way answer to the evils created by the state to which he or she belongs' (475), he asks before whom this responsibility should be exercised. Jaspers' answer to this, in 1947, was the victor. Ricoeur substitutes 'the authorities representative of the interests and rights of the victims and... the new authorities of a democratic state' (475). Yet he raises the problem that, either way, the new power relations will inevitably affect proceedings. In this regard, the establishment of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, representative of all population groups and political persuasions, was a generous gesture on the part of Nelson Mandela's newly elected government, avoiding victors' justice, as was the inclusion in the Commission's brief only of gross human rights violations, and those committed by all parties. The structural violence of apartheid, from which all whites benefited, was not included.

Political guilt is dealt with through punitive sanctions and reparation to victims, but more important than these, Ricoeur maintains, is 'the word of justice' (475) that establishes public responsibilities and the respective places of perpetrator and victim. In this regard we may compare the words of Terry Dowdall, a psychologist with the TRC, about the importance of breaking the 'culture of silence', because a distorted understanding of rights conferred by power must be corrected:

In many cases the primary message that has been absorbed is the 'process' message – that power confers the *right* to abuse. This is one of the reasons the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is so important to the country as a whole: left alone – just walked away from – the distorted visions absorbed during the period of repression remain unchallenged, uncorrected. The general public does not necessarily rethink its assumptions about the proper use of power.... It remains crucial that it is clearly stated that these things happened and that they are evil. (1996: 36)

Those who formerly assumed such a 'right' to abuse are then clearly shown to be perpetrators who are not above the process of justice.

Jaspers' next category, that of moral guilt, extended to all 'who conveniently closed their eyes to events, or permitted themselves to be intoxicated, seduced or bought with personal advantages, or obeyed from fear' (Jaspers in Villa-Vicencio, 1996: 133). For

Ricoeur this includes the ‘individual acts, small and large, that contributed by their tacit or explicit acquiescence to the criminal guilt of the politicians and to the political guilt of the body politic’ (2004:476). This is the realm of the individual conscience and requires moral honesty, yet Ricoeur observes a ‘structure of entanglement between the private and the public’ (477). In this study moral guilt will be examined primarily in the chapter on Marlene van Niekerk’s *Agaat*.

The most interesting and perhaps controversial of Jaspers’ categories is that of metaphysical guilt, or guilt before God, in which, he argues, we all share by virtue of our common humanity – by implication, therefore, even the victim. Charles Villavicencio (1996: 133) suggests that to acknowledge such guilt is to acknowledge that we, too, could have committed these crimes. It is, one might say, that form of guilt which keeps us from casting the first stone, and it would seem that an acknowledgement of this fallibility can engender the grace to forgive – or at least to withhold judgement. It is especially evident in the writing of Desmond Tutu and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, and will be further discussed in this chapter together with theological aspects of forgiveness.

1.2 The limits of forgiveness

Two strong arguments for the limits of forgiveness have been advanced by Simon Wiesenthal and Jean Améry, both Holocaust survivors. Wiesenthal, who became known as the ‘Nazi hunter’ in his pursuit of Nazi war criminals after World War II, might be expected to take an uncompromising stand on the need for justice. But his autobiographical account of a haunting choice in *The Sunflower* (first published in 1969) is thoughtful, nuanced, and humane, raising the ethical dilemma vested in the question of vicarious forgiveness and the difficult question of the unforgivable crime.

Like Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, whose work is discussed in chapter 2.2, Wiesenthal provides a ‘case study’ in that he recounts his own experience, and his confrontation with a difficult choice. Gobodo-Madikizela’s choices, however, are made from a position of strength, once the state-sanctioned violence and the political philosophy undergirding it belong to the past, and her people are in power. Wiesenthal is asked for absolution while he is a prisoner in a Nazi death camp, a ‘Haftling’ or

‘predetermined victim’ (Levi, 1998:191), with only the belief that his tormentors and those of his people will meet justice, but no sign that this is forthcoming. Primo Levi speaks of a ‘world which was shaking on its foundations... in an atmosphere completely impregnated with crime. Under these conditions, it is not always easy, indeed it is perhaps impossible, to assign an absolute value to right and wrong’ (1998:191). Wiesenthal’s camp comrade Arthur also says, ‘But anyhow nobody who has not had our experience will be able to understand fully’ (1998:75). And Bosnian respondent Sven Alkalaj offers a similar view, concluding that ‘(t)his Bosnian generation (survivors of ‘ethnic cleansing’), as well as the generation that lived through the Holocaust, are among the only ones who have the right to give an answer to the question of forgiveness’ because they have ‘bodily gone through’ experiences others cannot imagine (1998:102).

In *The Sunflower* Wiesenthal recounts a day with a work party of Jewish prisoners at a makeshift hospital set up in the Technical High School in Lemberg, Poland. He is called aside by a nurse to the bedside of a dying young SS man, who tells him, at some length, of his need. Raised a Catholic by non-Nazi parents, the man, Karl, joined the Hitler Youth when he was sixteen, and was sufficiently indoctrinated to have volunteered to join the SS. Sent to the Russian front, he had seen some action before being required to take part in a sadistic mass murder of Jewish civilians. In the town of Dnepropetrovsk, abandoned by the Russians, Jews were herded together and driven into a house which had already been doused with petrol – Karl estimates 150-200 people, mostly women, children and elderly people. Another truckload of Jewish people was then brought, and they, too, were crammed into the same building. Soldiers were ordered to lob grenades into the house and to stand by with guns to shoot those who tried to escape the ensuing flames. As the young man recollects, ‘My God!... The screams from the house were horrible,’ he begins to sweat (Wiesenthal, 1998: 43). His memories are centred on one family: a father who appeared at a second-storey window holding his small child, his own clothes alight, his wife beside him. He covered the child’s eyes before jumping from the window, and his wife followed, as did other burning figures. The SS men kept firing.

‘I cannot die... without coming clean,’ Karl says. ‘This must be my confession. But what sort of confession is this? A letter without an answer...’ (1998:53) This is, as J.

M. Coetzee has pointed out, the predicament of the secular confessant – the absence of absolution. The young man has just spoken of his loss of faith (‘If I still had that faith I am sure death would not be so hard’ [53]), but now his confession has ‘no answer’. Unable to turn to God, unable to atone, unable to seek forgiveness from the dead, he has sought the closest he could find to the people he has murdered: a Jew to speak on their behalf. ‘I have longed to talk about it to a Jew and beg forgiveness from him,’ Karl says. ‘I know that what I am asking is almost too much for you, but without your answer I cannot die in peace’ (54). Wiesenthal is completely convinced of his ‘true repentance’ (53), yet he cannot comply with the request:

Two men who had never known each other were brought together for a few hours by Fate. One asks the other for help. But the other was himself helpless and able to do nothing for him....

At last I made up my mind and without a word I left the room. (55)

Deeply disturbed by the encounter and the choice required of him, Wiesenthal cannot leave the matter there, but raises it in discussion with different people and eventually leaves the question open to the end, when he asks his reader to consider, ‘What would I have done?’ (98) In later editions of *The Sunflower* the replies of a number of invited respondents to this question have been included in the text.

Wiesenthal raises a number of circumstantial factors, from conditions in Poland before the war, and the virulent anti-semitism which was officially tolerated, to the systematic persecution and murder of Jews, even small children, by the Germans. (When Karl speaks of events in Dnepropetrovsk, Wiesenthal knows what to expect: he has heard of two similar mass executions.) He mentions the sadism of camp guards and daily deaths of Jewish inmates. In fact, when he returns from the hospital, five men have been shot, and he considers not telling his friend Arthur about the encounter lest Arthur should say, ‘(H)e can’t forget a dying SS man while countless Jews are tortured and killed every hour’ (62).

Most of the prisoners have lost any faith they may have had, yet all long for an omnipotent God (50); it is the cynical Arthur who warms to the reported comment of an old woman in the Ghetto that God is ‘on leave’ (7-8). Within this numinous vacuum, the ethics of one’s faith seem suspended as well.

Then Wiesenthal employs telling imagery to create a context for the choice he is confronted with. On the one hand the passage of time, while he is in the ‘death chamber’ with the young German, is marked by the moving line between sunlight and shadow which he can see through the window. It is first described as ‘a boundary between light and dark, a defined boundary without any transition’ (33). But inside the room is ‘semi-darkness’: ‘I did not know whether this unreal scene was actuality or dream,’ Wiesenthal at first reports (26). This suggests that discernment will be extremely difficult where he finds himself, in the absence of clear moral boundaries or absolutes.

The sunflower of the title is taken from the view the prisoners have, on their way to the hospital, of a military graveyard in which each grave is marked by a single sunflower. Arthur’s realistic view is included in the narrative: ‘(F)lowers aren’t much use to those rotting under the earth. The sunflowers will rot away like them...’ (63). But to Wiesenthal they are like ‘periscopes’, connecting each of the dead with the ‘living world and butterflies to visit his grave’ (14). Living in the shadow of death, Wiesenthal envisages his own body being piled into a mass grave: ‘No sunflower would ever bring light into my darkness, and no butterflies would dance above my dreadful tomb’ (15). So close a companion is death, that this image continues to haunt him: at the crucial point of decision in the sickroom, Wiesenthal stands and, looking down, imagines that ‘there seemed to rest a sunflower’ between the young man’s folded hands (55). This detail threatens to detract from the story’s claim to authenticity,³ unless one accepts the context, already supplied, that the prisoners were ‘ready to see symbols in everything. It was a time rife for mysticism and superstition’ (36). The sunflower stands for an enforced difference even in death, even after death, with one marked and mourned, another flung into a mass grave like a beast. The single sunflower of the title is probably that imagined in the German’s hands. He would not be aware of the flower likely to be planted on his grave, nor, it must be said, could he be imagined to derive much comfort from the expectation. Yet what is evoked is an unequal society – of which this must be a supreme example – in which

³ The story is presented as autobiographical, but the artfulness of its presentation causes it to read as a short story. Christopher Hollis asks, for example, whether it is ‘wholly autobiographical or in parts fictional’ (in Wiesenthal, 1998:175).

the privileged can take for granted those benefits the excluded cannot hope to share. When Wiesenthal speaks of envying the Germans their sunflowers, he shows that the difference matters, especially here, where he will be treated as less than human.

Another detail concerns the child in the story, whose eyes are closed by the father to spare the little one from too much knowledge. It is this act of care in such extremity which probably forces the indoctrinated soldier to recognise his victims' humanity. But for Wiesenthal the child becomes a child he knew, who has a name: Eli; and in the night after the encounter he dreams of this child: 'During the night I saw Eli. His face seemed paler than ever and his eyes expressed the dumb, eternally unanswered question; Why?' (68) The family, who for Karl have given faces to the many Jews killed that day, are therefore, the child especially, even more personal for Wiesenthal. When he is asked to forgive, he is asked to speak not only for the many, but for the child who has, in his mind, a name and a face. And could one explain to such a child not only why such atrocities occur, but also why one has forgiven?⁴

This question coincides with the view of Wiesenthal's believing friend, Jozek, who feels that Wiesenthal had 'no right' to forgive 'in the name of people who had not authorized (him) to do so' (65). Jozek believes in *Haolam Emes*, life after death, and asks, 'Would not the dead people from Dnepropetrovsk come to you and ask: "Who gave you the right to forgive our murderer?"' (66).

Arthur, in saying ironically, 'A superman has asked a subhuman to do something which is superhuman' (66), perhaps inadvertently touches on a particular quality of forgiveness: it is superhuman not only because Wiesenthal is not qualified to forgive, but also because forgiveness is, even in less impossible circumstances, difficult, and said to be the province of God or dependent on divine grace. Arthur points out that the young man should have asked for a priest.

⁴ Jesus, source of the most demanding teaching on forgiveness, nevertheless reserves his harshest words for those who do eternal harm to children: 'Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea' (Mt. 18:6). Luke adopts this teaching but places it in the context of forgiveness, adding: 'Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, "I repent," you must forgive him' (Lk 17:3,4).

A later companion, Bolek,⁵ who was training for the Catholic priesthood before being arrested by the Germans outside the seminary, believes that the young man's 'genuine sincere repentance for his misdeeds' meant that he 'deserved the mercy of forgiveness' (82) – though he becomes less certain of his stance when the friends discuss the question. Lawrence L. Langer, who has written extensively on the Holocaust and Holocaust testimonies, comments: 'Perhaps unwittingly, Wiesenthal fills Bolek's mouth with questionable platitudes' and points out that words like 'misdeed' and 'wrong', which Bolek uses, minimise the scale and severity of the man's crime (1998: 188).

The difference between Jozek and Bolek is also reflected in the invited responses to the first edition of *The Sunflower*, as a later respondent, Dennis Prager, notes: 'I was intrigued by the fact that all the Jewish respondents thought Simon Wiesenthal was right in not forgiving the repentant Nazi mass murderer and that the Christians thought he was wrong'. Prager and other Jewish respondents point to the fact that in Judaism, one may forgive only offences committed against oneself ('only victims can forgive'). 'Therefore,' he stresses, '*people can never forgive murder*' (1998: 226), making murder unforgivable.⁶ Eva Fleischner believes that Christians misunderstand their own teaching: that the Lord's Prayer, 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us' should not be interpreted as an injunction to forgive 'those who trespass against others' (1998: 140).

While Wiesenthal himself writes, 'The crux of the matter is, of course, forgiveness' (97), the story raises a number of questions about forgiveness. Central, of course, is the question of vicarious forgiveness: whether anyone has the right to forgive on behalf of others, especially those who have died. There is the severity of the offence: are such atrocities beyond forgiveness? Is there a difference between the ways one responds to acts defined by Hannah Arendt as 'trespasses' and those that are so

⁵ By this time both Arthur and Jozek have died in the camps.

⁶ In fact, Prager argues – and this bears relevance to the question of the child in the story – '[e]ven parents cannot forgive the murderer of their child (to assume that parents can forgive a child's murder is to render children property rather than autonomous human beings)' (226). One assumes, however, that such parents can forgive the perpetrator for the pain they themselves have suffered through the murder of their child.

radically evil as to be defined as imprescriptible? There is the question of repentance: does this qualify the offender to be forgiven? And there is another matter Wiesenthal raises in discussion with his friends, and that is the need of the dying: is the responsibility greater to give peace to the dying (who can do nothing any more to atone for their crimes) than it is to those with the expectation of life? In fact, on this last question, Langer, examining the series of choices Karl made, asks ‘why he had to wait until he was dying to feel the time had come for repentance and forgiveness’ [1998: 190]. Yet in Karl’s own story, as conveyed by Wiesenthal, it is clear not only that the young man was deeply troubled, but also that he could not continue killing after this event. When next ordered to attack on the battlefield, the young man recalls, ‘I saw the burning family, the father with the child and behind them the mother – and they came to meet me. “No, I cannot shoot at them a second time”’ [51]. He froze, and so was struck by the shell which blinded him and would eventually kill him.

A striking aspect of Wiesenthal’s account is the pity he is able to feel for the German SS man, though at the time he is ‘himself persecuted,’ as Balic points out, ‘his very existence threatened’ (1998:109). But the German, too, is reduced to a bandaged, dying, desperate figure. When Wiesenthal wants to leave, Karl seems to sense this, dropping his mother’s letter and groping for Wiesenthal’s arm. ‘The movement was so pathetically helpless,’ Wiesenthal writes, ‘that all of a sudden I felt sorry for him. I would stay, although I wanted to go’ (35). (Eva Fleischner comments, ‘Simon was forced to come, he had no choice. But he chose to remain....’ [1998:139]). At one point Wiesenthal also waves away a bluebottle flying ‘round the head of the dying man’, as Karl is identified at this point. Though he cannot see the involuntary gesture, Karl whispers his thanks. ‘And for the first time,’ Wiesenthal recalls, ‘I realised that I, a defenceless subhuman, had contrived to lighten the lot of an equally defenceless superman, without thinking, simply as a matter of course’ (37). Though the subhuman-superman categories are retained, the reality is that both men are helpless, and in this instance Wiesenthal is the less helpless of the two – hence the spontaneous act of consideration for the other’s plight and even dignity.

Wiesenthal seems to say nothing in the entire encounter, but observes the young man closely and records his own fluctuating responses. One telling observation occurs when Karl forces himself to recount the sight of the doomed family and other burning

figures jumping to their deaths: ‘The dying man,’ Wiesenthal says, ‘held his hand in front of his bandaged eyes as if he wanted to banish the picture from his mind’ (43). This gesture, in a blind man who can nevertheless ‘see’, evokes some of the horror even as the most shocking events are told, and it is remarkable that Wiesenthal has the empathy at this point to observe and understand the sign.

Wiesenthal also touches on the questions of political and especially moral guilt, in mentioning the passive witnesses of injustice and suffering, the curious eyes observing their work party, the spectators at a public execution of Jews. After the war he goes out of his way to visit Karl’s mother, and finds both the city of Stuttgart, where she lives, and her street and home, in ruins. There is no sign that he rejoices in these observations.

Wiesenthal distinguishes between those Germans and Austrians who accepted the new regime, flourished in the ‘winners’ camp’ (91), and shared the political guilt, and those who, like Karl’s parents, did not, but felt powerless to oppose it. Of the Jews who used to live in her district, Mrs S says, ‘We are not responsible for their fate’ (92). Yet even Karl’s father, who suffered discrimination in the workplace for refusing to join the Nazi party, kept silent and was therefore morally guilty. Of the mother Wiesenthal writes, ‘Without doubt she must often have shown sympathy for the oppressed, but the happiness of her own family was of paramount importance to her. There were millions of such families anxious only for peace and quiet in their own little nests. These were the mounting blocks,’ he concludes damningly, ‘by which the criminals climbed to power and kept it’ (91). The vast majority of white families in South Africa under apartheid, those who actively supported government policy and those who did not, could be described in these words.

Nevertheless, the author has no desire to punish Karl’s mother. Realising that her memories of her husband and son are all she has among the ruins of her life, he chooses to lie about his encounter with her son, taking his leave ‘without diminishing in any way the poor woman’s last surviving consolation – faith in the goodness of her son’ (94). His merciful choice is clearly born of pity for her suffering.

Of all the respondents, Hubert G. Locke is perhaps the only one to recognise the value of silence in Wiesenthal's encounters with the mother and her son. 'You gave,' he writes to Wiesenthal, 'silent assent to a dying man's truth about himself and... you kept the truth, by silence, about a son from his mother. In your silence, both revelation and concealment are made manifest; is it possible that you said more in your silence than if you had spoken?' (1998: 201). And to Wiesenthal's questions about the rightness of his responses, Locke again posits, against the 'arrogance to pose answers', silence: 'Silence, in fact, may be the better response – our silence to yours – in the hope that by listening quietly and more closely to your experience, we might learn from it, rather than moralise about it' (201).

Jean Améry (born Hans Meier or Meyer, for which Améry is an anagram) is less inclined than Wiesenthal to protect the morally guilty. Writing his collection of essays, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* ('Beyond guilt and atonement', published in English as *At the Mind's Limits*) in 1964-65, he was not faced, like Wiesenthal, with the ruins of post-war Germany, but with the attitudes of a thriving West German population two decades after the war. He addresses the German public's apparent complacency about the past, an attitude Theodor Adorno described in 1959 as 'wishing to turn the page, wiping it from memory' (in Brudholm, 2008: 90). I wish to examine Thomas Brudholm's work on Améry, *Resentment's Virtue: Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive*, and his comparative analysis of post-apartheid conditions and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He describes the context in which Améry wrote as one in which 'the criminal trials and political expurgations administered by the Allies immediately after the war were soon followed by amnesty laws and the release from jail, reintegration and rehabilitation of civil servants, lawyers, and other professionals and groups.... (Konrad Adenauer's) government's policies of amnesty and reintegration reflected... a massive popular wish to "let bygones be bygones" or to move on with a *tabula rasa*... that would leave behind painful questions about guilt and responsibility' (2008:90). Brudholm also points out that 'the seriousness that characterizes today's public German memory culture is the result not of a linear development, but rather of a contested debate that was for decades fought by a minority' (91). For Hannah Arendt, noting an 'apparent heartlessness', a 'deep-rooted, stubborn and at times vicious refusal to face and come to terms with what really happened', this was a second moral collapse (in Brudholm,

2008:92). (It need not be pointed out that the post-apartheid drive for reconciliation has left many white South Africans similarly in denial about collusion and complicity, political and moral guilt.)

In the context described above, Améry's essay, '*Ressentiments*' (translated as 'Resentments') seeks to clarify and justify the resentment he still feels, years after the end of the war. Yet he writes that the first post-war years were free of resentment, since 'those who had tortured me... were themselves an abomination to the victorious camp' (in Brudholm:112) and a sense of morality and trust in humanity was restored⁷. Améry's resentment or 'retrospective grudge', as he calls it, arose mainly from what came after that brief period.

According to Brudholm, post-atrocity resentment can arise from a number of factors which arise or remain after the period of trauma, as they did for both Amery and for victims of gross human rights violations in South Africa. Under the heading, 'Nested resentments', he writes of the layers of compounded violation of which the original hurt is only the first. The second, in post-apartheid South Africa, was the 'governmentally-sanctioned amnesty policy that obliterated the right of the victims or their relatives to seek redress in courts of law, both criminal and civil' (74). He quotes Steve Biko's widow, Ntsiki, who, with others, brought a lawsuit before the Constitutional Court seeking to keep the TRC's Amnesty Committee from indemnifying perpetrators of gross human rights violations: 'We all want reconciliation, but it must come with something. It must come with justice' (75). Then, thirdly, the 'powerful public celebration of forgiveness and restorative justice... often discouraged and diminished (victims and relatives') righteous resentment or indignation occasioned by the original offenses and the amnesty policy' (74). In fact, the pressure to forgive, what Brudholm calls the 'boosterism of forgiveness', and the diagnosis of unforgiveness as moral inferiority or psychological damage, compound

⁷ Brudholm (113,114) quotes Martha Nussbaum's account of Elie Wiesel's experience of liberation:

Wiesel was a child in one of the Nazi death camps. On the day the Allied forces arrived, the first member of the liberating army he saw (was) a very large black officer. Walking into the camp and seeing what was there to be seen, this man began to curse, shouting at the top of his voice. As the child Wiesel watched, he went on shouting and cursing for a very long time. And the child Wiesel thought, watching him, now humanity has come back. Now with that anger, humanity has come back.

the injury and, in the case of atrocities or imprescriptible crimes, may trivialise their seriousness. The pressure to ‘move on’, especially with the passage of time, falls into the same category. Vladimir Jankélévitch’s impassioned contribution to the 1965 French debates on statutory limits on war crimes (prescriptibility and imprescriptibility) is pertinent in this context:

The sentiment we experience is not rancor but horror – insurmountable horror over what happened, horror of the fanatics who perpetrated this thing, of the passive who accepted it, and the indifferent who have already forgotten it. This is our *ressentiment*. For *ressentiment* can also be the renewed and intensely lived feeling of the inexpiable thing: it protests against a moral amnesty that is nothing but shameful amnesia; it maintains the sacred flame of disquiet and faith to invisible things. (Jankélévitch 1996:572, in Brudholm: 107)⁸

Seen in this light, resentment can be a moral stance, a protest against the glossing over and putting away of terrible deeds for the sake not only of those who committed them, but also of those who allowed them to be committed and those who prefer not to be reminded of them.

For such deeds as imprescriptible crimes, is closure really possible? It is clear that such closure cannot be forced, but the question also remains whether there will not always be something unfinished about ‘the inexpiable thing’, as Jankélévitch calls it. In his preface Améry writes:

I had no clarity when I was writing this little book, I do not have it today and I hope that I never will. Clarification would amount to disposal, settlement of the case, which can then be placed in the files of history. My book is meant to aid in preventing precisely this. For nothing is resolved, no conflict is settled, no remembering has become mere memory. What happened, happened. But that it happened cannot be so easily accepted. I rebel: against my past, against

⁸ Cf. these South African responses, also quoted by Brudholm:

I refuse not to be angry and cannot forgive. What is still more difficult is to have someone tell me that I should not still feel like this. (Brian Mphahalele, in Brudholm: 36)

What really makes me angry about the TRC and Tutu is that they are putting pressure on me to forgive.... I don’t know if I will ever be able to forgive. I carry this ball of anger within me and I don’t know where to begin dealing with it. The oppression was bad, but what is much worse, what makes me even angrier is that they are trying to dictate my forgiveness.’ (A woman identified only as Kola, quoted first by Charles Villa-Vicencio, and by Brudholm, 54.)

history, and against a present that places the incomprehensible in the cold storage of history. (In Brudholm:89 and 94)

This refusal to accept past events, and even less to accept the present's attempt to do away with them, is not only understandable but a profoundly moral form of righteous outrage. Moreover, the damage done to human beings cannot be undone. Bernard Williams's concept of 'moral remainders' (quoted in Brudholm: 60), refers, then, to both unexpiated wrongs ('the things not made right', as Brudholm calls them) and the ongoing emotional cost to victims in residues such as remorse, shame, guilt, fear and the loss of an ability to trust.

Like Jankélévitch, Améry, although writing in German, uses the word *ressentiments*, deliberately conjuring up Nietzsche's characterisation of the 'man of *ressentiment*' in order to reassess that image of 'self-poisoning, hypersensitivity, deceitfulness, and emotions like vindictiveness, hatred, malice, spite and envy' (in Brudholm: 28). Like Jankélévitch too, he raises the 'inexpiable thing' and the ongoing burden of the past:

(Ressentiment) nails every one of us onto the cross of his ruined past. Absurdly, it demands that the irreversible be turned around, that the event be undone. *Ressentiment* blocks the exit to the genuine human dimension, the future. I know that the time sense of the person trapped in *ressentiment* is twisted around, dis-ordered, if you wish, for it demands two impossible things: regression into the past and nullification of what happened.... In any event, the man of *ressentiment* cannot join the unisonous peace chorus all around him, which cheerfully proposes: not backward let us look but forward, to a better, common future! (68f/128, in Brudholm: 121)

Words like 'ruined' and 'irreversible' express clearly what cannot be undone, but resentment nevertheless cannot accept that it happened at all.⁹ The trapped, crucified, lonely, blocked existence of the man or woman of resentment (not unlike the fate of the unforgiving servant) is presented not as a choice, but as that which the unacceptable has inflicted upon one. And, while Hannah Arendt will see forgiveness as the only way to undo what is otherwise irreversible, the only way of restoring a future, she, too, confines forgiveness to that which is forgivable, placing radical evil in the hands of an eternal God of Judgement, whose memory is not affected by the

⁹ Philip Fisher, quoted by Brudholm (125) writes, for example, of the state of mind of one who has witnessed or experienced a terrible crime: 'The imagination returns again and again to the possibility that this did not have to happen to the victim, who still, for a time, retains the full human reality he or she had prior to the crime.'

passing of time any more than that of the trauma victim (Fisher in Brudholm:123-124). Indeed, Arendt, like Jankélévitch and Améry, cannot reconcile herself to that which ought not to have happened:

We shall not be able to become reconciled to it, to come to terms with it, as we must with everything that is past.... Even the famous healing power of time has somehow failed us. On the contrary, this past has managed to grow worse as the years have gone by so that we are sometimes tempted to think: this will never be over as long as we are not all dead. (2003:55, in Brudholm:127)

Améry's views on the predicament of the victim and the justifiability of resentment, together with Brudholm's explication of the conditions which gave rise to his essays, two decades after the end of the Second World War, give caution to the South African reader, for whom similar conditions, similar blindness and denial in the post-apartheid years, are all too recognisable. To speak too glibly of forgiveness is to reduce, to trivialise both the offence and the anguished response to it. To do so when one has not only not experienced the violation of one's rights, but was a beneficiary of injustice, is indeed perilous. Yet this is what I must attempt to do.

1.3 Forgiveness

Since Hannah Arendt (1989), Derrida (2001) and Ricoeur (2004) relate the ethics of forgiveness to its religious source, Biblical teaching on forgiveness will be examined before their views are discussed.

The Judaic principle of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' set proportionate limits for the exercise of retribution in the name of justice. Justice, as Emmanuel Levinas (1998) has stressed, underlies much of Judaism – yet the Lord Yahweh is also known to be 'gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love' (Ps 145:8), and His compassion on occasion overtakes the demands of justice:

How can I give you up, O Ephraim!
How can I hand you over, O Israel!...
My heart recoils within me,
My compassion grows warm and tender.
I will not execute my fierce anger,
I will not again destroy Ephraim;

For I am God and not man,
The Holy One in your midst,
And I will not come to destroy. (Hos 11:8-9)

Mercy is a divine attribute, beautifully elaborated in Psalm 103, in which the God who ‘works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed’ (v. 6) nevertheless ‘does not deal with us according to our sins,/ nor requite us according to our iniquities’ (10) but ‘removes our transgressions from us’ (12).

Arendt, a Jewish philosopher trained in Christian theology, attributes the ‘discovery of the role of forgiveness in human affairs’ to Jesus of Nazareth (1989:238). Jesus draws on the Judaic revelation of a God who ‘desires mercy, not sacrifice’ (Hos 6:6; Mt 9:13, 12:7) and extends the demands of mercy and forgiveness to interpersonal relationships, demanding a humanly impossible standard from his disciples:

‘You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also...’ (Mt 5:38,39)

This is perhaps Jesus’ most radical demand, in that non-resistance entails the capacity to absorb offence without retaliation, and the turning of the cheek implies not only forgiveness without any sign of repentance from the offender, but the opening of the self to further violation. George Steiner has commented, ‘Christ’s ordinance of total love, of self-offering to the assailant, is, in any strict sense, an enormity. The victim is to love the butcher. A monstrous proposition. But one shedding fathomless light. How are mortal men and women to fulfil it?’ (In Holloway, 2002:71) This ‘enormity’ of self-offering is, I believe, dramatised in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, but complicated in that it is a white character, post-apartheid, who puts into practice this teaching of turning the cheek in the knowledge of past injustice. (And it is this aspect of the novel that has elicited howls of disbelief, and a general acceptance among critics that this example is conceptual only and not meant to be emulated.) Jesus’ injunction is made in the context of His teaching on grace: ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven’ (Mt 5:44, 45). Nothing less than divine mercy is expected: ‘You therefore, must be perfect,’ Jesus concludes this teaching, ‘as your heavenly Father is perfect’ (5:48).

It is perhaps for this reason that, as Ricoeur (2004: 467) points out, the great Pauline chapter on love, which is ‘not resentful’ and ‘keeps no record of wrongs’ (I Cor 13: 5,6) is placed within Paul’s teaching on the gifts (charisma: graces) of the Spirit of God. Divine grace would indeed be needed to meet this requirement.

Hannah Arendt’s explication of key terms in the original Greek of Luke 17:3-4 is elucidating. The sentence in question is: ‘And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.’ The terms are *aphienai*, *metanein*, and *hamartanein*. *Hamartanein* (‘trespass’ in the KJV, ‘sin’ in most later translations) is, Arendt writes, ‘very well rendered by “trespassing” in so far as it means rather “to miss,” “fail and go astray,” than “to sin” (1989:240). She herself confines her views on forgiveness to such ‘trespasses’. The word rendered ‘repent’, *metanoein*, denotes a change of mind and, as a rendition of the Hebrew *shuv*, to ‘return’ or ‘trace back one’s steps’. Rather than ‘repentance, with its emotional overtones; what is required is: change your mind and “sin no more”’, writes Arendt, ‘which is almost the opposite of doing penance’. The word rendered ‘forgive’, *aphienai*, means to dismiss or release (1989:240). This liberating nature of forgiveness is, as suggested below, conversely dramatised in the parable of the unforgiving servant, in the imprisonment of both parties.

What has attracted most debate is the reason for forgiveness, first sounded in Jesus’ manifesto, the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy’ (Mt 5:7). One who stands in need of divine mercy cannot, therefore, afford to be unmerciful in relation to others. This is unambiguously declared in the Lord’s Prayer (‘forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors’ [Mt 6:12]) and Jesus’ teaching on it:

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses’ (Mt 6:14).

This condition for divine forgiveness (which Martinus Zoeloe in Fugard’s *Playland* understands), the idea of a contract or exchange, has received criticism as being less than truly gracious. It is, perhaps, a last resort accommodating human frailty, for in the parable of the unmerciful servant the order of forgiveness is reversed:

‘Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, “Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.” And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, “Pay me what you owe.” So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you.” He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.’ (Mt 18:23-35)

Though it is hard to conceive that mercy, once given, can be retracted, this parable places the conditionality of divine mercy within the perspective that mercy must be given because it has *already* been received. Not to do so then becomes unthinkable – as is illustrated in the story by the deep distress of those who observe the forgiven servant’s unmerciful behaviour.

The scale portrayed makes this point tellingly: the first servant owes the equivalent of fifteen years’ wages for a labourer – an amount he cannot possibly repay in spite of his protestations – while the second servant’s debt is a day’s wage. Here we find Jaspers’ category of metaphysical guilt portrayed in its enormity. The New Testament atonement by the death of the divine Son also evokes the human impossibility of ever atoning for guilt before God, and the ineffable cost of redeeming the debt.

The fact that the first servant’s ruthlessness comes immediately after his own release from debt depicts him as one who forgets all too soon the state of grace in which he stands. This state, then, is the reason for forgiveness for those who wish to follow Jesus, for, as John puts it, ‘From his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace’ (Jn 1:16). If grace came through Jesus Christ (Jn 1:17), nothing less is required of his disciples.

The psycho-spiritual effects of unforgiveness are also shown in this parable. The second servant, the unforgiven, remains bound to the first, imprisoned, his life arrested. The first servant in the story, because of the scale of his debt, could legally be sold into slavery with his family to cover at least a small part of it, and could spend the rest of his life in labouring vainly to atone for the past. (Such slaves were released in Israel in every seventh year, the Jubilee – a very early indication, in law, of the requirement of mercy tempering justice.) His bondage, however, pales in comparison with the punishment meted out to him for his mercilessness: the Greek word for the jailers who take him into custody is correctly translated as ‘tormentors’. And the parable ends with a stern warning of equal torment for those who refuse to forgive. For both the unforgiven and the unforgiving, then, forgiveness would mean spiritual release (*aphienai*) and the restoration of a future.

Richard Holloway grapples with conditional forgiveness as well as with the injunction to forgive, then moves beyond both to ‘creative forgiveness’, which he sees portrayed in the parable of the lost son (Lk 15:11-31; appendix). This story is usually read as ‘an example of conditional forgiveness at work’ (2002:60) – the condition for forgiveness in this case being the offender’s repentance – as the son comes to himself and returns to the father he has grieved, armed with appropriately repentant words. But in another, radical reading, Holloway sees the central act as ‘the running of the father to greet the returning sinner’ (2002:80):

According to the code which he has already abandoned, he is no longer part of the community he walked out of so contemptuously. If the elders see him enter the village, they will break an earthenware vessel over his head as a sign that he has shattered his covenant with the community and may henceforth be given no succour, no food, no water, no shelter: he is already dead to them and they to him. The pining father sees him before anyone else and runs to meet him. This was in itself an extraordinary breach of the patriarchal code.... The strong love of the waiting father has no interest in his own dignity or status. He rushes out to meet and embrace his disgraced child. It is this abandonment of code and conditionality that is the scandalous heart of the story. The son is clearly forgiven by the father before he can get a word out... (2002:81, 82)

According to this reading, the divine Father, too, loves and forgives unconditionally – because this is His nature. Hosea’s God of compassion, He is moved by pity (v. 11) to

embrace his son and forestall his condemnation.¹⁰ Only in this spontaneous grace (the gift) is Derrida's 'pure' forgiveness (discussed below) to be found for Holloway. Such a gift of creative forgiveness has the potential to restore and change the recipient, and Holloway (2002) notes that in the story the son does not complete his prepared speech, omitting a planned opportunistic request.

Yet it must be added that the New Testament covenant of grace does not abandon the code of justice, but meets its requirements in the sacrificial death of the Lamb, through whom forgiveness is then freely given. God Himself in the Person of the Son provides the propitiation for sin and guilt, 'in his body of flesh by his death', to render believers 'holy and blameless and irreproachable before him' (Col 1:22). This is also the foundation for interpersonal reconciliation.¹¹

As indicated earlier, Hannah Arendt concerns herself with the forgiveness of 'trespasses' which, by definition, are less serious offences. Of Jesus' teaching, from which she quotes extensively, she writes, 'The reason for the insistence on a duty to forgive is clearly "for they know not what they do" and it does not apply to the extremity of crime and willed evil... Crime and willed evil are rare... according to Jesus, they will be taken care of by God in the Last Judgement... and the Last Judgment is not characterised by forgiveness but by just retribution (*apodounai*)' (1989:239-240). Yet, while it may be true that those who crucified Jesus did not see Him as the Son of God, if one considers that His words, 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do,' were uttered on the cross, and pertained to all who had contributed to His death, including the religious leaders who had plotted to kill an innocent man and had achieved this through an illegal night-time trial, and who were at this point

¹⁰ Eva Fleischner points to the roots of Jesus' teaching in that of the rabbis, quoting this story from Pesikta Rabbati, 184b-85a:

A king had a son who had gone astray from him on a journey of a hundred days. His friends said to him, "Return to your father." He said, "I cannot." Then his father sent a message to him saying, "Return as far as you can and I will come the rest of the way to you." In a similar way God says, "Return to me and I will return to you." (1998: 140)

¹¹ This is clarified in Paul's teaching of the reconciliation between Jewish and Gentile believers, and can, with a mind to the parables already dealt with, be applied to forgiveness:

'For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of codes and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in the place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end' (Eph 2:14-16).

still taunting Him, and if one considers the enormity of shedding blood, which from the death of Abel calls for divine vengeance, it would seem to me that no crime is beyond forgiveness.

Yet forgiveness need not exclude the course of justice, as amnesty does: the victim of a crime, for instance, can forgive the perpetrator even as legal retribution is exacted by the state. Such an offender is released from the moral, but not the legal burden of the crime. This occurred when victims and survivors forgave perpetrators of crimes before the TRC, quite independently of the Commission's decision on the recommendation of amnesty.

The question raised by Arendt and others – and one thinks of Ntsiki Biko and her co-petitioners – of the just requirement of retribution for 'crimes and willed offences' is an important one. Her concept of crimes being the province, in Jesus' teaching, of divine judgment is in line, interestingly, with the views of two therapists writing for survivors of child abuse. Hancock and Mains, having made the point that forgiving is not excusing and that child victims sometimes need to understand the offence against them, then posit as the first step in a process of forgiveness, the transfer of one's case to a higher court (1987:65). Whether such authority is a court of law or, for believers, the possibility of divine judgement, the victim of the offence gives up the right to exact revenge, on the understanding that justice will be done. This is in line with the prophet's word: 'Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the LORD' (Romans 12: 19). In this view the requirement of justice, far from being in conflict with the ethics of forgiveness, is acknowledged and not abandoned so much as yielded to a higher authority as an aid to forgiveness.

Struggle theologian Willa Boesak reminds readers in his 1995 text *God's Wrathful Children*, that the divine right of judgement, elucidated in Romans 12 in the context of teaching on mercy, is also said to be delegated, immediately after this, to 'governing authorities' (Rom 13:1); such authority is 'the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer' (v.4). Boesak comments, 'The civil authorities become God's avenger, bringing God's wrath on the transgressor.... The apostle does not postpone the vindication of God's angry children to some exclusively future, heavenly realm.' (1995:198-99). In a paper published in the following year, Boesak argues that

a failure by just civil authorities to execute such judgement leads to ‘God’s wrathful children’ taking revenge themselves. ‘The violence entrenched in our society seems senseless,’ he writes, ‘but is in fact a consequence of centuries of colonial oppression, alienation and extended suffering.... Understanding God’s wrathful children in our context requires the ability to see within their deeds of despair and hear within their cries of rage the cry of justice’ (1996:66-67). He therefore argues for punitive and reparative justice. ‘A theological ethic of vengeance and wrath cannot be built on a distorted notion of forgiveness in which the tie between punitive justice and the goal of reconciliation has been severed,’ he writes, arguing not for the indictment of apartheid criminals so much as of ‘those at the top level who gave the orders’ (1996:67-68). I believe this failure of accountability and its consequences is dramatised in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*. This will be further discussed in chapter three.

One of the apartheid state’s victims, Catholic priest Michael Lapsley¹², stresses that forgiveness may never be cheapened by a lack of accountability:

Forgiveness, yes – that is always the Christian calling – but no one should suggest that forgiveness is glib, cheap or easy. What does it mean to forgive those who have not confessed, those who have not changed their lives, those who have no interest in making it up to the relatives and victims and the survivors of their crimes? If you forgive a murderer, does that mean there should be no justice? (1996:22)

And Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, who is sometimes seen as too easily advocating forgiveness, stresses the importance of acts of reparation: ‘Spurious reconciliation can bring only spurious healing,’ he writes, quoting Jeremiah on ‘healing the hurt (of God’s people) lightly’ (1999:218).¹³

¹² Lapsley came to South Africa from New Zealand in 1973, soon joined the resistance movement, and was expelled from the country in 1976. In Harare, in April 1990 (after the De Klerk announcement of the ANC’s unbanning) he received a letter bomb hidden in a religious magazine. He lost both hands and the use of an eye in the attack. Craig Williamson confessed at the TRC to having sent the bomb.

¹³ Tutu seems mindful of his role as priest, for this is taken from the indictment against prophets and priests who ‘deal falsely’ and do not bring about true reconciliation:

They have healed the wound of my people lightly,
Saying, ‘Peace, peace,’
When there is no peace (Jer 6:14).

The requirement of justice needs to be carefully distinguished from revenge, another form of retribution. Hannah Arendt sees vengeance as the ‘natural, automatic reaction’ to an offence, which keeps everyone ‘bound to the process, permitting the chain reaction contained in every action to take its unhindered course’ (1989:240-241). While revenge is a predictable re-action, forgiveness, its ‘exact opposite...acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven’ (240-241) – much as is dramatised conversely in the parable of the unforgiving servant. Both forgiveness and its alternative, punitive justice, bring a matter of offence to an end. In a circular argument, she sees unforgivable offences as those that are so radically evil that they cannot be punished (‘men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and... they are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgivable’ [241]). This, then, is in line with the legal concept of imprescriptability, as there is no appropriate or proportionate punishment for offences so defined.

While noting the liberating effect of forgiveness on both perpetrator and victim, Arendt stresses its capacity to restore a future to the trespasser in particular: ‘The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility – of being unable to undo what one has done...– is the faculty of forgiving.... Without being forgiven, released from the consequence of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to a single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer’s apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell’ (1989:237). (The fact that Arendt’s use of the first person, ‘we’, places her in the camp of the guilty is significant, when one considers that she could speak equally as a holocaust survivor.)

No Future Without Forgiveness is the title Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has chosen to give to his memoirs on the TRC. The restoration of a future is also touched upon by several of Wiesenthal’s respondents, who mention the importance of forgiveness not only for the perpetrator but for the one forgiving as well. ‘One should forgive,’ writes Matthew Fox, ‘not out of altruism but out of the need to be free to get on with one’s life’ (1998:148). Harold Kushner also argues that forgiveness is ‘not something we do for another person’, but sees it as a ‘letting go of the sense of grievance, and perhaps most importantly a letting go of the role of victim’; it is

saying, 'I refuse to give you the power to define me as a victim' (1998:186). Sven Alkalaj, A Jewish Bosnian who witnessed the genocide in his country, is perhaps the most eloquent. Like Boesak, he argues that genocide cannot go unpunished: 'It cannot be stressed enough that the punishment of the guilty and some measure of justice are absolutely necessary for forgiveness or reconciliation even to be considered' (1998:104). He will consider forgiveness 'if there is a genuine recognition of guilt', and concludes that 'reconciliation must be the end goal for a return to the inherent beauty of living' (105).

Like Hannah Arendt, Jacques Derrida also notes the unexpected nature of forgiveness. He has called forgiveness a 'madness of the impossible'. True to his ethics of 'haunting' consciousness with the highest ideal, Derrida writes, 'It (forgiveness) can only be possible in doing the impossible. For, in this century, monstrous crimes ("unforgivable" then) have... been committed' (2001:33). In this he differs radically from Arendt. Yet, in spite of its impossibility, forgiveness 'arrives ...surprises, like a revolution, the ordinary course of history, politics, and law' (2001:39). Derrida draws on the Abrahamic tradition (so including three religions) to posit 'pure' forgiveness, pure because unconditional. For Derrida, the amnesty offered by the TRC in the service of reconciliation is not 'pure' forgiveness because it serves another interest: 'each time forgiveness is at the service of some finality, be it noble and spiritual (atonement or redemption, reconciliation, salvation), each time that it aims to re-establish a normality (social, national, political, psychological) by a work of mourning, by some therapy or ecology of memory, then the "forgiveness" is not pure' (2001: 31-32).

Unlike Arendt and Améry, Derrida states axiomatically that 'forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable' (2001:32) and should be unconditional in order to be pure – not dependent, for example, on repentance on the part of the offender. He criticises a logic of exchange (repentance for forgiveness), using a similar lexicon to that of Paul Ricoeur, who describes the 'economy of grace' as 'characterised by the logic of abundance, which distinguishes the logic of forgiveness from that of reciprocity belonging to justice' (2000:18, my translation).

Ricoeur, in a 2002 lecture, speaks of forgiveness in the context of nations as well, in terms of the possibility of healing. Yet he concludes elsewhere, ‘regretfully’, that peoples cannot forgive (2004:485): forgiveness cannot be institutionalised, and attempts to do so create only a ‘caricature of forgiveness’ in amnesty, ‘the institutional form of forgetting’ (2004: 488). But for the individual, forgiveness, though difficult, is attainable: ‘the impossibility of forgiveness replying to the unpardonable nature of moral evil’ (2004: 458).

Ricoeur relates forgiveness to a form of work, of labour – it would seem almost of travail – in the context of healing: ‘I would like to place forgiveness at the culmination of labour that begins in the sphere of memory and proceeds into that of forgetting’ (2000:13, my translation). Borrowing the German philosopher Koselleck’s vocabulary, he speaks of a relationship between the ‘space of experience’ and the ‘horizon of expectation’. Our inheritance, the filtered traces of our past, form the basis of all we anticipate, both good and bad. Musing about the possibility of an excess of memory in some nations, and a paucity of remembering in others (mentioning as examples French forgetfulness about the Vichy government and Algeria), he quotes a 1914 study by Freud on compulsive repetition as a defence against memory, where ‘acting out’ takes the place of the act of remembering. He turns to Freud’s labour of ‘working through’ (*Durcharbeitung*), which entails the courage to dredge up suppressed memory and own its hurt or sickness. This is possible in the act of telling: ‘memory becomes language in telling’ (2000:15). (One assumes such *Durcharbeitung* on the part of the victim, but the perpetrator needs to return to the pain of facing past acts as well.) Ricoeur makes the point that learning to tell the story from the position of the other facilitates communal memory.

Working through, then, has a dual effect: as it moves from remembering into the sphere of forgetting, the project changes. Quoting Raymond Aron on the ‘retrospective illusion of fatality’, Ricoeur (2004: 382) rejects the notion that, in contrast to the openness of the future, the past is fixed and closed. The facts of past events, he concedes, cannot be changed, but the meaning we give to them can – not only our interpretation, but the moral burden of the past can be changed, as occurs in release from guilt. Significantly, this retroactive activity also comes into play when we try to tell the story from the perspective of the other. (This possibility is raised in

Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat*, and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela provides a case study in recovering the story of the other.)

Choosing to forget, then, is the antithesis of the earlier escapist forgetting – it is active and liberating. Ricoeur now links Freud's concept of the labour of remembering to his work of mourning, which is a process of letting go of the loved – and also hated – object. It is at this conjunction between remembering and forgetting, retrieving and letting go, that Ricoeur places forgiveness – in forgetting the blame, not in letting go of the memory. What forgiveness adds to this work – for forgiveness itself, Ricoeur maintains, is not labour – is grace; it is generosity. 'Forgiveness asked is not forgiveness owed' (Ricoeur quoted in Antohi, 2005: 18); it is a gift.

While guilt can be collective, forgiveness is inter-subjective: it is an individual act of will. And then only people (not systems) can be forgiven, and it is the person, not the deed, we forgive (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003: 95). Arendt speaks of the relationship established by forgiveness as an 'eminently personal one...what was done is forgiven for the sake of *who* did it' (1989:241).

Forgiveness is a choice, yet therapists stress that survivors of wrongs inflicted may never be pressed to forgive, though authentic forgiveness would be an important step in their healing process. (In another context, José Hobday, a Native American, quotes the words of his Seneca mother, 'Go to an elder and ask for the medicine that will turn your heart from bitterness to sweetness. You must learn the wisdom of how to let go of poison' [1998:174-175].) In a practical guide for survivors of child abuse, Hancock and Mains (1987:65-66) outline 'steps' in the process of forgiveness, which have links with Ricoeur's more scholarly description, and which I will paraphrase and comment on briefly. The first, already mentioned, is that of acknowledging the injury done to one, and transferring the case to a higher court, so forgoing the right to exact vengeance oneself. The second, related step is giving up resentment as an act of will. The third, which to my mind is the most profound, is a willingness to take upon oneself the pain inflicted, to 'own' it (much as Jesus did in claiming to lay down His life willingly, though in the gospel account He is predominantly the victim of others'

actions¹⁴). It is this absorption of pain, replacing resentment, which is suggested by the metaphor of the turning of the cheek. It is also this choice, I believe, which liberates the injured person from the perpetrator's power and from victimhood. Hancock and Mains' last phase is a waiting stage, allowing release to follow as grace takes effect.

Forgiving is not excusing. Desmond Tutu (1998) stresses that the act must be named and its wrongfulness acknowledged by the perpetrator seeking forgiveness. This is the act of confession, secular counterpart of a church sacrament. 'The words are what the victim wants to hear, to touch,' writes Gobodo-Madikizela. '*The words themselves*' (2003: 131). (Her description of an effectual apology is outlined in chapter 2.1.) The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was founded on the notion that such truth-telling, in so far as it was possible, was essential for survivors and for the nation.

What is sometimes overlooked is that confession, saying that it is so, is equally important for the victim as for the transgressor. The importance of naming the wrong done to one, speaking, even much later, what Justice Mahomed has called 'the truth of wounded memories' (in Tutu: 1999:29), is an important step in the healing process. When Ackermann (1996: 54) quotes Solle on the stages of suffering, the first is one of muteness, incomprehension. The second phase is lament, or speaking, crying pain. This stage is vital for healing and release to follow.

If forgiving is not excusing, neither is it tantamount to forgetting. Ricoeur speaks instead of the 'appeased memory': 'The appeased memory does not seek to forget the evil suffered or committed. It seeks to speak of it without anger' (2004:11). In fact, most of Wiesenthal's respondents understandably emphasise the importance of not forgetting, not silencing past atrocities. 'What you and I went through,' Jean Amery replies to Wiesenthal, 'must *not happen again, never, nowhere*' (1998:108).

¹⁴ 'No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord' (Jn 10:17-19).

1.4 Guilt and forgiveness in selected post-apartheid texts

A number of early and later post-apartheid texts deal with questions of guilt and forgiveness. As might be expected, white writers in particular have been preoccupied with these themes. Where they occur in the work of black writers, guilt often takes the form of having caused suffering to others in the cause of the struggle against apartheid. The extreme example of this must be in John Kani's play, *Nothing but the Truth*, in which a struggle hero exploits and betrays his brother's loyalty and support, while Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* touches on the open secret of the exploitation and abuse of women during the struggle. In Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* (2000), on the other hand, the focus is on the guilt incurred by black PAC-aligned youths who killed exchange student Amy Biehl, and Magona tries not to excuse or minimise guilt, but to create a fictional backdrop for understanding the environment that can create such hatred and violence – much as Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela tries to understand the society that created Eugene de Kock.

When Kani's *Nothing but the Truth* was first performed in 2002, it was hailed by critic Darryl Accone as the play South Africa had been waiting for (in Kani, 2002: v). Having co-authored the influential struggle plays *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972) and *The Island* (1973), Kani was now seen as making a contribution to a form of theatre which enacts the possibilities of reconciliation.

In the play Sipho Makhaya's daughter Thando is working as an interpreter at the TRC. But Sipho is strangely reticent about the past. He has arranged to bury his brother Themba, a former struggle activist and local hero, who has died in England after not returning from exile. To his consternation Themba's daughter Mandisa arrives with her father's ashes instead.

Mandisa is appalled after spending a day at the TRC amnesty hearings with Thando. '(S)omebody must be made to pay,' she protests (29), but Thando defends the process: 'If all those who suffered can forgive, then so can you' (30). 'Oh, please!' Mandisa exclaims. 'That's the attitude my father always talked about. "The generosity of the African people." I call it giving in too easily.' 'I call it African humanity,' Sipho counters.

But Siphó's own adherence to *ubuntu* is tested, as the job he has deserved for some time, that of chief librarian, is given instead to a young man from Johannesburg with the right political connections. Yet, as Siphó says later, 'I was part of the Struggle. I too suffered as a black person. I went to the marches like everyone else.... The thousands that attended those funerals on Saturdays, that was me. The thousands that were tear gassed, sjambokked by the police, mauled by Alsatian dogs, that was me.... I WAS THOSE THOUSANDS! I too deserved some recognition, didn't I?' (51-52). His belief that his 'time has come' with Mandela's release (51), as has that of the other faceless thousands, is cruelly betrayed by a policy of rewarding ANC loyalists. At the end of the play he resolves to write to President Mbeki: 'I want to remind him that I voted for him. I put them in power. I paid for this freedom. I paid with my son's life.... They must never forget the little people like me.... We have dreams too.... It is our time now' (58). The name Siphó ('gift') is fairly common, suitable for the representative of the 'little people' he speaks for. In raising the needs and expectations of the struggle's footsoldiers, and the betrayal of their dreams for political expediency, Kani is perhaps the first to touch on what was to become an enduring issue under ANC rule.¹⁵

Siphó, a little drunk, finally reveals those aspects of the past he has not wanted to revisit. 'It's time,' he says (35). As Themba was their father's favourite, he has always had to defer to his younger brother's needs and wants. He could not attend university himself, but when his father sent Themba, Siphó worked to help support his brother. Themba repaid them both by taking 'five wonderful years' (33) and not working after graduation, so that Siphó continued to support the family, while Themba took to activism at no personal cost to himself: 'Calling for stayaways when he himself was unemployed.... He supported the schools boycott when he did not have a child at school. Called for consumer boycotts when he knew who bought the food he ate.... Proposed rent boycotts when he did not have a house. He stayed with me in my house' (47). Yet Siphó's son Luvuyo is taken in by Themba and as a result is killed in the struggle. The litany of loss and theft continues, for it transpires that Themba also seduced Siphó's beloved wife, causing the break-up of their marriage.

¹⁵ The possibility had, however, been raised by Zakes Mda long before the end of apartheid, in his play *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* (1979).

Sipho finally faces Luvuyo's death and wants to know who killed his son. He rehearses all the steps required for retribution in the new South Africa. Only when the law has taken its course, can a guilty man apply for amnesty from his prison cell. When Thando challenges Sipho about the possibility of forgiveness, he says, 'You don't get it, do you? This whole fucking country doesn't get it. It's not about me.... It's about justice. So that my soul can rest. So that I can say to myself "yes, justice has been done"'. (54) The TRC process which shadows the play is seen at this point to sacrifice justice to mercy. The play continues to merge the conflict between the brothers with the larger political struggle and the choice between justice and forgiveness. Both come to a head in the responsibility for Luvuyo's death, for which, until now, Sipho has chosen to blame Themba. 'If I can forgive all the white people for what they did to us,' Sipho concludes, 'how can I not forgive my own brother?' (56). His desire to have Themba stand before him and say 'I'm sorry, my brother' is fulfilled vicariously by Mandisa, who apologises on her father's behalf. When he is alone, Sipho picks up the urn with Themba's ashes and is able to express his love for his brother (59). Here, as elsewhere, the spoken word is the medium for remembering, apology and forgiveness.

Kani therefore dramatises the conflict between two brothers in the struggle, and also raises questions about the new injustices occurring post-apartheid. While Sipho's choice to forgive is not substantiated as eloquently as is his need for justice, the importance of remembering and facing the past, with its 'whole truth', is seen to be a painful but potentially healing experience.

Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2001) is perhaps the most complex examination of the entangled strands of guilt and retribution, where those related to a political activist, Silas Ali, pay a price for his part in the struggle for justice. A security policeman, Du Boise, rapes Ali's wife Lydia when taking Ali into custody, and she continues to bear the psychological scars. Lydia 'acts out' her repressed memory when she is reminded of the rape years later, by trampling on broken glass. Their only son, Mikey, discovers, by reading his mother's diary while she is in hospital, that he is the child of

that rape, and goes in search of du Boise¹⁶ in order to take revenge. Though the former security policeman is dying of cancer, Mikey shoots him before leaving the country himself. This novel presents post-apartheid South Africa as a country where, on the one hand, former activists have government posts (Ali works for the ministry of justice), but on the other, former security men are also still walking free. Mikey will not allow the man who raped his mother to die a natural death, but commits patricide to avenge the wrong done to his parents and himself – as though cleansing himself of the taint of rape and its historical context. Ali's bitter fruit includes the loss of his wife, who leaves him, and his son.

Shane Graham has pointed out that the novel's three section headings, 'Memory', 'Confession' and 'Retribution', set out to suggest, but finally subvert, the trajectory envisaged in the TRC: 'memory is damaged, confession is always hampered and embittered, and reconciliation is undercut by revenge' (2009:94). Silas, who works at the TRC, is thought to be 'good at his job, helping the country to forget and therefore to forgive, a convenient kind of amnesia' (Dangor, 2001:110; Graham, 2009:96). Though amnesty and amnesia share the same root, amnesty is not amnesia any more than forgiveness is grounded in denial – yet the possibility that the past might be suppressed in the very act of memorialising, in being archived in order 'not to keep it alive, but to keep it contained', as Graham has put it (2009:96), is reflected in Silas's work for the TRC. Paul Ricoeur's views on memory and history support this: 'True testimony... is a living voice,' he writes (Ricoeur quoted in Antohi 2005:12). '(A) document is already a rupture with memory, since it is written and since the voices have already turned silent.... (M)emory is oral.... (a)nd the reduction of memory to writing marks the turning over of memory to history' (2005: 11-12). At a time when leaders like Mandela and Tutu were advocating reconciliation, Dangor therefore seems to warn against a too easy forgetfulness, a too hurried putting down and putting away of the past, reminiscent of Améry's refusal to consign irreparable wrongs to the 'cold storage of history' (quoted in Brudholm 2008: 72).

¹⁶ The unusual surname stresses not only the policeman's European heritage, but is a disguised form of 'from the bush': an ironic inversion of racist whites' aspersions on levels of civilization amongst Africans, and a reflection of the barbarity involved in du Boise's abuse of unjust power.

J.M. Coetzee is quoted on the back cover of the Kwela publication of *David's Story* by Zoë Wicomb (2000), as saying that Wicomb shows what the 'literature of the new South Africa will look like'. Wicomb had certainly shown the way in her earlier short story cycle, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), which, although published in the apartheid years, had envisaged a new society, the re-appropriation of the land, its symbols and language by the dispossessed, and the psychological liberation from the effects of apartheid. But *David's Story*, set in the transition years, is a disappointment, its complication of narrative point of view, in the use of a frustrated amanuensis, leading to obscurity. David Dirkse, a commander in the anti-apartheid movement, relates his story to her but seems to retain narrative control through concealment – a possible reflection of the silencing of the darker aspects of the struggle. David suffers guilt, but the source remains murky. Nor is it clear whether or why he seems to fear agents of his movement as much as he does agents of the old state apparatus. The lines are equally blurred in the identity of the agents responsible for the torture of his comrade Dulcie Oliphant, though guilt within the movement is strongly suggested. David dies in what may be a suicide or a murder. Wicomb has not set out to write a realistic novel, but seems merely to emphasise that the 'truth' about the past will always be someone's construction (depending, possibly, on who gains the ascendancy in the jostling for power characterising the transition). It is as difficult to come by as the truth about the uneasy present of the transition period. Her courage in pointing out that the struggle against apartheid could not be entirely innocent, as events at the ANC's Quatro camp (mentioned in the novel [2000:100]), and especially the abuse of women, testify, deserves mention, as does her apparent caution against a new nationalism, a new heroic myth in the recovery of history, in this case that of the indigenous Griqua people.¹⁷

Far more accessible is Wicomb's later novel *Playing in the Light* (2006). Here the site of guilt is not in the struggle; instead, guilt takes the form of collusion with an unjust system – a temptation faced by coloured people under apartheid, caught in the margin between black and white, but 'classified' as black. Marion Campbell, the owner of a successful travel agency, is troubled by nightmares which point to the origin of her own deep inhibitions: her parents' having 'played for white', betraying their relatives

¹⁷ I am indebted to Dr Sopelekae Maithufi for this suggestion.

and living with secretiveness and its concomitant anxiety, which Marion has unknowingly absorbed. While her parents have justified their actions as being ‘for the sake of the child’, and the daughter has indeed enjoyed the advantages of apartheid’s beneficiaries, her life is nevertheless blighted. The contrast between a post-apartheid perspective (Marion and a librarian burst out laughing in trying to make sense of the wording of the Population Registration Amendment Act of 1962 [2006:121]), the freedom with which Marion is able to investigate her past, and her parents’ nervous, ever watchful project of avoiding disclosure and shame under apartheid, reveal Wicomb’s sensitivity to the realities of the past. John Campbell, the surviving parent, cannot be brought to reveal what he has for so long suppressed; though Marion is angry she cannot blame him outright. Moreover, she remembers her own betrayal of a childhood friend whose father transgressed the Immorality Act. It is Marion’s employee and friend Brenda, who still lives with the disadvantages but also within the warmth of a poor Coloured community, who befriends John Campbell and tries to understand his story – and it is she who at the end of the novel comes to be most closely associated with the narrative point of view. The novel is therefore more an indictment of the system and its effect on people than of those who, with limited freedom of choice, paid a heavy price for colluding with it.

Guilt in the work of white writers lies on the other side of the divide. In Damon Galgut’s *The Good Doctor* (2003), the first person narrator’s life is arrested by the guilt he incurred as a young doctor conscripted into the army, in having colluded in and remained silent about the torture of a political prisoner. A minor character, the former ‘commandant’ who had been responsible for interrogations, and whose direct guilt is far greater, seems to suffer no such consequences. He may epitomise Arendt’s ‘banality of evil’ (her conclusion about Eichmann), a term that seems to point to an absence of the sympathetic imagination required to comprehend fully the nature of the wrong one has done to others. It is the man of conscience whose life is blighted, in the absence of any absolution.

The notion of sacrifice, of vicarious atonement for the sins of the past, is found in another early post-apartheid text, Etienne van Heerden’s *Leap Year* (1997) (translated from *Die Stoetmeester*, 1993). Biblical messianic overtones are introduced in the centrality of a flock of fall-goats, sacrificial goats which faint at the slightest shock,

and so are kept with a flock or herd as an easy quarry for predators to save the lives of the other animals. When the novel's narrator, the lawyer Seer Wehmeyer, is killed by white supremacists, his death becomes a catalyst for possible reconciliation between polarised racial groups. The sacrificial nature of his death is underscored by the blood of a fall-goat kid – both a scapegoat, in the Old Testament code of justice, and a Passover lamb, looking forward to the new covenant – on the lintel of his door (330, 356). This is the New Testament reconciliation of the claims of both mercy and justice, although the latter claim is satisfied vicariously.

The guilt of complicity is explored in Galgut's *The Impostor* (2008). Adam Napier, retreating to a small Karoo town, becomes the unwilling confessor to his neighbour, whom he knows as Blom. 'Blom' is the man's adopted name, as he seems to have been an apartheid operative, who has undergone a religious conversion and is now in the witness protection programme. 'That the dark and dirty past of South Africa should have taken form and come to visit Adam at home, wanting absolution... well, it's too much' (161-162). With Blom's hand on his knee, Adam listens, thinking, '*with that hand. You did it all with that hand*' (159; author's emphasis). When he breaks free, it is 'more to break free of the hand than the words' (159). Yet his repudiation of Blom's deeds rings hollow when the perpetrator reminds him, 'Everything I did, I did for you. And other people like you' (160). Like other beneficiaries of apartheid, Adam is drawn into collective guilt, and chooses to deny it.

Adam's brother also reminds him that people who committed atrocities were '(o)rinary guys, just like you or me' (162). Though Adam believes himself to be a moral person, he finds himself contemplating the murder of a friend, Kenneth Canning, when tempted by Canning's wife, with whom he is already having an affair. He resists the temptation, but is faced with a second crucial choice when he is warned that he is to be murdered because he knows too much about Canning's corrupt business dealings, involving international criminals and local politicians. He realises that the assassin will be sent to Blom's house instead, but leaves without warning Blom, who is killed in his place. Once he has resumed a middle-class existence in Cape Town, he reflects on this chapter of his life as being, thankfully, 'all very much in the past' (227). (Blom's fate is revealed, in passing, just after this.)

Adam also finds himself indirectly responsible for the fate of an elderly black couple, Grace and Ezekiel, who have worked for Canning's father and the son all their lives. They are summarily fired on spurious grounds by Canning's wife, after Grace has inadvertently discovered her affair with Adam. Ragged, cold and hungry, they arrive at Adam's door. In this case he tries to atone, cursing the fact that he has no money to throw at the problem. He takes them in, cooks and cleans for them, and sleeps on the floor while they sleep in his bed – but he insists that they leave with their son, who has even less room for them, arguing that, as their son, Lindile is now responsible for them. His moral awareness and sense of debt clearly have their limits.

To Lindile, who harbours resentment for the past, Adam says, 'Oh, come on.... For God's sake. The whole country's moved on since then. Everything's changed. Can't you move on too?' (210). Lindile's reply, 'No. I can't move on,' is reminiscent of Améry's notion of *ressentiment*, resisting societal pressure to let go of outrage with the passage of time.

Change and attempts to erase the past shadow the novel. The small Karoo town has a new name, as yet incomplete in white stones on a hillside, as though reflecting an imperfect transition. While little has changed for its coloured residents, who remain poor, jobless, and without hope, its white residents bemoan the effects of a new road passing the town, which should bring prosperity but has also increased prostitution and crime. (The old road is in ruins and, with its collapsed bridge, is a possible metaphor for the old South Africa.) The new road is a commercial venture, a toll road built by Liberty Vision, a company whose forward-looking name belies its corrupt nature. (It has also, quite cynically, created the New Hope settlement to provide labourers for its projects.) Various characters have changed their names and reinvented their lives: Canning's wife Baby, Adam's neighbour Blom, and a criminal sought by the law in several countries, now known as Genov.

But the attempt to wipe out the past is most spectacularly, vulgarly evident in Canning's revenge on his hated father. Having inherited his father's game farm, Gondwana, which was Canning senior's attempt to realise his lifelong dream of a return to the past of natural history, the younger Canning sets about destroying a potential national heritage site. Gondwana is a small Eden, a green oasis in the midst

of the Karoo, housing both a paleontological site and Bushman paintings. Circumventing environmental laws and tender procedures, Canning and his cronies summon an ‘army’ of workers and a ‘battery’ of machines to destroy the exquisite natural environment and create an upmarket golf course (which will risk the area’s limited water supply) and a dinosaur theme park. It is in this atmosphere that Adam reflects, from the height of a hovering helicopter, on the relativity time brings to both suffering and morality: ‘up close, human life is a catalogue of pain and power, but when enough time has gone past, everything ceases to matter. Nothing that people do to each other will carry any moral charge eventually.... Murder and rape and pillage – in the end, they are just colourful details in a story’ (185-186). The fruit of this reflection is evident in Adam’s later choice to sacrifice his neighbour’s life to save his own.

The amoral environment which, from a certain perspective, the new South Africa has spawned provides a fitting background for this fall. The novel opens with Adam’s refusing to pay a bribe to a traffic policeman, and ends with his appearance in court for his failure to pay his fine. His moral indignation, which briefly and now rather incongruously flares up again, fades as the day in court wears on, and, now with money at his disposal, he simply pays the fine. This is a country where a criminal kingpin, protected by the apartheid government, can simply befriend the new breed of politicians and continue to sow death and corruption, aided by politicians who are cleared by commissions of enquiry.

The remainder of this study will explore both non-fictional texts and three novels. The second chapter, which examines representations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and in particular the work of Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and her reflections on her dialogue with Eugene de Kock, is intended to serve as a transition between the first chapter and the final three. What emerges from these texts is often the difficulty – even impossibility – of giving voice to traumatic experience, and the cost of doing so. This has implications not only for the process envisaged in the search for truth and, possibly, reconciliation, but also for a communal historiography. Gobodo-Madikizela provides an exercise in telling the story from the position of the other (as envisaged by Ricoeur), and provides valuable comment on the question of forgiveness even as she exercises her own capacity for empathy and mercy.

The three novels discussed in the final chapters, though not selected for this reason, all fall into the genre of the farm novel. The *plaasroman* or pastoral story of an Afrikaans family has a particular and politicised history in South Africa, and an introductory note on the genre is included.

Disgrace (1999), the first of the three novels to be discussed, created a stir when it was first published, shortly before J.M. Coetzee emigrated from South Africa. (After reading the novel, many white South Africans felt like following him.) The absence of grace in public affairs, and the blight of guilt, denial and revenge seemed to be portrayed remorselessly. The novel's apparently unremitting pessimism, its bleak portrayal of the new South Africa, the play on words (though devoid of etymological substance) in the title ('dis/grace'), created a minor storm in the popular media and a growth industry in literary criticism. This study will examine the profound ethical dimension which nevertheless pervades the novel, and its repudiation of cheap answers to or superficial atonement for historical injustice. The intertext of the Biblical account of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac will be related to the novel, together with Derrida's and Girard's views on the story.

Agaat (2006), the second *plaasroman*, was first published in Afrikaans in 2004. It has received numerous awards and has been widely acclaimed. The novel was also considered untranslatable, but Michiel Heyns, in 2006, provided a creative translation which has itself won awards. *Agaat* tells the story of a rich white woman who adopts a disabled and abused coloured child, then sets out about playing fairy godmother, only to relegate the child, named Agaat, to servanthood when her own child is about to be born. The novel is set many years later, in the post-apartheid era, when the mistress, Milla, is paralysed and terminally ill, and is cared for by Agaat, who, using Milla's diary, confronts her mother/mistress/patient with her past choices and actions. Though her intention is to accuse, to call to account, Agaat, perhaps unwittingly, dredges up her own suppressed memories and, in reading aloud from Milla's diary, learns to tell the story from the perspective of the other – and she is changed by the experience. The analysis will consider the ways in which the novel situates questions of guilt and forgiveness in a pastoral setting, which in turn draws on the Biblical

pastoral, relating the possibility of forgiveness to Ricoeur's description of the process and Derrida's notion of pure forgiveness.

The underlying question in the farm novel, that of land ownership and the correction of colonial and apartheid injustice, is 'resolved' in both these novels with land ownership being transferred to black South Africans.

The third novel, Mark Behr's *Kings of the Water* (2009), is skilfully written but does not punch with the same moral weight as the first two, groundbreaking novels. It employs what has become a common plot motif in recent South African fiction: the return to the family farm, and the juxtapositioning of then and now, with questions of memory and identity, as well as the attribution of guilt and the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation, the last of which occurs mainly between family members. The motif of the prodigal son's return is overtly employed, and Holloway's views on this parable are brought into the discussion. Insofar as racial and economic injustice is raised, it centres on the figure of a female farm worker who has had all the odds stacked against her. The fact that she is resilient and generous-spirited, and warmly receives the protagonist, provides this novel with an evasion rather than a resolution of historical guilt, though the question of land ownership, which is always present in the South African pastoral genre, is foregrounded here.

CHAPTER TWO

‘The truth of wounded memories’: Writing on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

There was a long table, starched purple vestment
And after a few hours of testimony,
The Archbishop, chair of the commission
Laid down his head, and wept.

That’s how it began.

Ingrid de Kok, ‘The Archbishop chairs the first session’ (2002:
22)

During a preparatory outreach meeting for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the Eastern Cape, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, a psychologist with the TRC, noticed a woman sitting with her back to the stage and the speaker. When the psychologist approached her, the woman got up and walked out. Once outside, she began to cry and asked, ‘Have you come here to hurt us? ...Have you come here to open our scars?’ Through her tears she denounced the TRC as a pointless exercise – she had forgotten her pain, she insisted, and had ‘put grass over it....And now you want us to remember? Will this bring my son back?’ she asked (2003:87).

Gobodo-Madikizela offered to take the woman, Mrs Plaatjie, home. Mrs Plaatjie invited the psychologist into her two-roomed home, offered her a chair, and sat down herself facing the window. ‘Then,’ Gobodo-Madikizela recounts, ‘she began to tell her story.’

‘My son was eleven. He came home during school break at ten o’clock. I was sitting there where you are sitting, just exactly where you are sitting in that chair. He walked in dressed in his school uniform and went to the cupboard over there and cut himself a slice of bread. He is doing all of this in a rush. He is like that when he comes home during break. He spread peanut butter on it and then put the rest of the bread back, leaving the crumbs all over the cupboard, and the knife, still smudged with peanut butter. He ran out. He is still chewing his bread and holding it in his hand. It wasn’t long – I heard

shots outside. Some commotion and shouts. Then I'm hearing, "*uThemba, uThemba, nank'uThemba, bamdabule!* [This is Themba. They have shot Themba!]" and then someone calling out for me: "*mama kaThemba!* [Themba's mother!]." I went flying out of this house. Now I am dazed. I ran, not thinking. My eyes are on the crowd that has gathered. Here is my son, my only child. It was just blood all over. My anguish was beyond anything I ever thought I could experience. They have finished him. I threw myself down. I can feel the wetness of his blood – I felt his last breath leave him. He was my only child.' (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003: 88-89)

It was a police bullet that killed eleven-year-old Themba Plaatjie in Mlungisi township that morning in 1986. Gobodo-Madikizela's concern now, more than ten years later, is for the bereaved mother who relives the events, gesturing with her hand, lapsing into the present tense, so that past events become vivid, here and now: 'I was sitting there where you are sitting'; 'He went to the cupboard over there.' 'He is doing all of this in a rush. He is like that when he comes home during break... He is still chewing his bread and holding it in his hand.'

Briefly, Themba is alive again. Then his death, too, becomes present: 'Now I am dazed.... My eyes are on the crowd that has gathered. Here is my son, my only child.' Gobodo-Madikizela calls this 'the timelessness of traumatic pain' (89). 'The traumatic past,' writes Shane Graham of the TRC process, 'cannot be assimilated into memory and consciousness as other events normally are, because the trauma survivor continues to be haunted by the past and is compelled to relive it literally...' (2003:13). It is clear from the mother's story that the crumbs of bread, the knife still smeared with peanut butter, take on a new significance after Themba's death, as she includes these details in reconstituting the events. In *Narrating our Healing* (Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008: 31), Gobodo-Madikizela writes, 'In a sense, the cupboard, the bread, the peanut butter, the knife are all crumbs, pieces that no longer fit into a coherent whole or life story. But these crumbs and pieces are recalled because they are the only things in her memory of that day that are not spattered in blood – to be buried under the grass.' Because trauma shatters one's life narrative, she argues, fragments are 'shored against the ruins' of one's life, and these are the images more easily recalled. 'Deep memory', on the other hand, where unspeakable pain lies buried, cannot be accessed without a 'second wounding' (34; the term is taken from Cathy Carruth's *Unclaimed Experience*). Yet, she argues, following Carruth, that

‘trauma will out’ because its psychic imprint remains present (30) – hence Mrs Plaatjie’s ‘exploded silence’ (31)

Nevertheless Mrs Plaatjie’s original question remains valid. Could anything be achieved by revisiting past events a decade later, making them once again so painfully present? Was there any point to re-opening scarred wounds and buried experience, re-opening graves, as it were, that had ‘grass put over’ them – and in all this asking survivors to revisit unspeakable pain, wounding them once again? Doing so could not, as Mrs Plaatjie had said, bring back her son. The true cost of the Truth Commission must be measured in the vulnerability of the wounded, revisiting shock, pain, torture, humiliation, helplessness, loss and bereavement.

South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission was the product of negotiations for a new political dispensation, which led to the country’s first democratic election in 1994. This election belatedly but effectively decolonised the country and brought to power, with an overwhelming majority, the representatives of the previously disenfranchised black population. Those who had been marginalised, in many cases through imprisonment and exile, now formed the government and held the centre. Though there was, for a few years, a government of national unity, the election effectively ushered in a complete transformation, an overturning of power relations in the country.

The TRC became the country’s foremost passage rite. It was flawed from the outset by the very compromises that had made the settlement possible, and by the tension implied by its brief, which was both to reveal truth and to effect reconciliation. It offered, not blanket indemnity, but qualified amnesty to perpetrators of gross human rights violations between 1960 and 1994, provided the acts had been politically motivated and were not disproportionate to their objective, and on the condition of full disclosure.

Paul Ricoeur has criticised the concept of amnesty in that it ‘prevents both forgiveness and justice’: ‘amnesty is organised forgetting, and it has nothing to do with the pacification that forgiveness can bring between two consciences. The institutions of amnesty... constitute a forgiveness that is public, commanded, and that

has therefore nothing to do with... a personal act of compassion. In my opinion, amnesty does wrong at once to truth, thereby repressed as if forbidden, and to justice, as it is due to victims' (Ricouer quoted in Antohi 2005:10). Some survivors, like Mrs Limpho Hani, widow of the murdered leader of the SA Communist Party, Chris Hani, and Steve Biko's widow Ntsiki, have resolutely opposed amnesty for perpetrators of these crimes.

The trade-off of amnesty for disclosure was, in the words of Chief Justice Ismail Mohamed, a source of 'grave discomfort'. He nevertheless defended the compromise:

Much of what transpired during this shameful period is shrouded in secrecy and not easily capable of objective demonstration and proof. Loved ones have disappeared, sometimes mysteriously, and most of them no longer survive to tell their tales... Records are not easily accessible, witnesses are often unknown, dead, unavailable or unwilling. All that often effectively remains is the truth of wounded memories of loved ones sharing instinctive suspicions, deep and traumatising to the survivors but otherwise incapable of translating themselves into objective and corroborative evidence which could survive the rigours of the law. (In Tutu, 1999: 29)

Hearings were held by the Commission, travelling from centre to centre, for both perpetrators seeking amnesty and for victims or survivors seeking reparation, or simply seeking to have their stories recorded and validated.

Former constitutional court judge Albie Sachs, himself a former exile and car bomb survivor, has defended the TRC process against accusations that its 'truths' were legally untested, by referring to victims' testimonies as 'experiential truth': '...when you want to hear the voices, when dignity consists not only of the findings, but of the right to speak and be heard, of the right to be acknowledged, of personal pain becoming the pain of the nation, then the experiential side becomes predominant and very important' (Sachs: 2005). And indeed, personal pain did become the pain of the nation in what Sachs has called 'this deeply engaging, profoundly affecting, brilliant, difficult, dark, intense process that we all participated in and watched and argued about' (2005). In Paul Ricoeur's view, 'the hearings truly permitted the public exercise of the work of memory and mourning, guided by an appropriate process of

cross-examination. In offering a public space for complaints and for the recounting of suffering, the commission certainly gave rise to a shared *katharsis*' (2004: 483-484).¹⁸

The TRC's brief was criticised by some, however, who felt that there should have been a moral distinction between those fighting for freedom and those who believed they were defending the state, especially since the policy of apartheid had itself been declared a crime against humanity by the United Nations. Others pointed to the failure of the pre-democracy political leaders to take responsibility for the atrocities committed under their government. Theologian Willa Boesak (1996) has argued for the discourse of forgiveness to take cognisance of the many faces of justice and vengeance; besides the restorative justice which defined the TRC process, retributive justice, he insists, should be enacted. Retribution needed to be effected, in Boesak's eyes, on those responsible for apartheid and its injustices: 'at least those at the top level who gave the orders' (1996:68). When the National Party delegation, led by the then President F.W. de Klerk, denied knowledge of wrongdoing, Tutu wept.

Yet for victims and survivors like Sachs – and perhaps Mrs Plaatjie too - it was also important to speak of state-sponsored terror, which had been kept secret and lied about, its perpetrators even decorated, because the silence needed to be broken. Terry Dowdall, a psychologist with the TRC, has written about the importance of breaking the 'culture of silence', and I quote his words again, more fully:

The 'culture of silence', then, is not just an absence of speaking out against intimidation and repression. It is a complex mix of fear, avoidance and compromise that is often entangled with confused ideas from the regime's propaganda. In many cases the primary message that has been absorbed is the 'process' message – that power confers the right to abuse. This is one of the reasons the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is so important to the

¹⁸ *Katharsis* was sometimes experienced by individual witnesses. In fact, another commissioner, Piet Meiring, recalls the incident of Tutu's weeping at the first Human Rights Violation hearing, after the difficult testimony of 'one of the unknown, practically forgotten witnesses' – an old, bereaved mother who is not named even in his account. Seeing the witness again during the lunch break, Meiring hesitantly asks her if her testimony was 'worth it'. He recollects her reply:

It was difficult to talk about all these things. But tonight, for the first time in sixteen years, I think I will be able to sleep through the night. Maybe tonight I will be able to sleep soundly without having nightmares. (Meiring, 1999: 25)

country as a whole: left alone – just walked away from – the distorted visions absorbed during the period of repression remain unchallenged, uncorrected. The general public does not necessarily rethink its assumptions about the proper use of power; the survivors are left with the ache, the burden and confusion of the past and the sense of lessened value... Much has been written about the cathartic effect upon the nation of telling the truth about the abuses of the past.... It remains crucial that it is clearly stated that these things happened and that they are evil. (1996: 32, 36)

While Dowdall's emphasis is on correcting the acceptance of an abuse of power by the state, other abuses were brought to light as well. The revelation of truth was equally important to Bishop Peter Storey, a witness in the investigation into the activities of Mrs Winnie Mandela and the so-called Mandela Football Club, who, with Mrs Mandela as their patron, had sown terror in Soweto with their thuggery and whose members had been convicted of three murders, one of a child. Testifying after other witnesses had clearly been too intimidated or loyal to the Mandela name to speak openly about her part in a number of murders (Krog, 1999:383), Storey said:

To dispel the suffocating fog of silence is very important for the future of this country. This tragedy has wounded, it has hurt, it has destroyed people's ability to know the difference between right and wrong. It has shown that it is not enough to become politically liberated, we must also become human. (In Meiring, 1999: 310, quoted in different words by Krog, 1999: 374-375.)

Both sources emphasise the discernment of good and evil, not only for the perpetrator, but for the victim too, who can be dehumanised by brutal oppression. Storey speaks of apartheid as the 'primary cancer' of the body: 'But secondary infections have touched many of apartheid's opponents and eroded their knowledge of good and evil. And one of the tragedies of life is it's possible to become that which we hate most – a ruthless abuse of power and a latitude that allow our deeds to resemble the abuses we fought against' (in Krog, 1999: 374). The healing process, the rehumanisation of a traumatised nation, requires a reformulation of values. Archbishop Tutu's words, in his memorable plea to Mrs Mandela, capture this new struggle: 'We are struggling to establish a different dispensation characterised by a new morality, integrity. Truthfulness. Accountability.' (In Krog, 1999:390)

I have mentioned that the TRC process was hampered by its 'bi-polar' brief, to reveal truth, and to effect reconciliation: in fact some of the worst truths disclosed made

reconciliation seem increasingly out of reach. Two Zapiro cartoons from the period illustrate this predicament. In the first, Archbishop Tutu, chairman of the Commission, leads a group representing victims, perpetrators and the media, to the edge of a chasm. His side is marked Truth, the other, Reconciliation. Map in hand, the archbishop nevertheless has no bridge to reach the other side (*Sowetan*, 26-5-92, reprinted in Verwoerd and Mabizela, 2000: 133). A later cartoon, produced well into the TRC process, features a map as well, but this time it is of a maze, with the archbishop trying to lead a disgruntled black man and white man through a poorly lit underground labyrinth, on an impossible path to reconciliation (*Mail and Guardian*, 30-7-96, reprinted in Verwoerd and Mabizela, 40).

What bridged the divide between truth and reconciliation, in some truly remarkable instances, was pure grace: the surprising gift of forgiveness.

The TRC chairperson, Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu, and his deputy, Dr Alex Boraine, were both clergymen, and for many the TRC process was perceived to become a Christian sacrament of confession and, sometimes, absolution on the part of victims – quite apart from the amnesty which was in the commission’s power. But for Antjie Krog, a writer who covered the TRC as a journalist and wrote a personal account of the experience, another ethos was at work: the African philosophy of *ubuntu*, which is roughly translated as humaneness. It is a communal ethos summed up in the words *I am a person because of other people*.

Krog quotes the words of another mother, Cynthia Ngewu, whose son, Christopher Piet, died in March 1986 of multiple bullet wounds (twenty-five, in fact). He and six other youths killed on that day in a police ambush became known as the Gugulethu Seven. Ngewu found and identified her son in the morgue, then saw news coverage of Christopher being dragged behind a police van. Her testimony was recorded before the TRC:

During that time, when all this happened, I was too weak. What I – what I knew was that I didn’t want to see any white man in front of me, because I

was – I was full of hatred at that time, because of the way my son was killed.
(In Krog, 1999: 292.)¹⁹

Yet this same, remarkable woman, when confronted years later with the man who killed her son, is able to say:

This thing called reconciliation... if I am understanding it correctly... if it means this perpetrator, this man who has killed Christopher Piet, if it means he becomes human again, so that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back... then I agree, then I support it all. (In Krog, 1999: 164)

Ngewu provides a profound statement on reconciliation, and essentially on the forgiveness that breaches the divide. It rehumanises, not only the guilty, but his victim – and more: when this mother says that ‘all of us get our humanity back’ she understands at a profound level that an injury to one damages, diminishes, dehumanises *everyone*. It is this sense of community, and of taking responsibility for community, that characterises *ubuntu*. Cynthia Ngewu also understands that she has the power, through the spoken word, to heal the body. That forgiveness entails strength, too, is evident in her words that, earlier, she was ‘too weak’.

Desmond Tutu describes *ubuntu* as that which ‘constrained so many to choose to forgive rather than to demand retribution....Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum* – the greatest good,’ he writes of the African world view. ‘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.’ This surprising statement is then explained: ‘What dehumanises you, inexorably dehumanises me. Forgiveness gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanise them’ (1999: 34,35).

¹⁹ A word of caution should be included here: Catherine M. Cole has pointed out that a number of secondary renditions of TRC testimonies, including Krog’s, are too easily treated ‘as though these sources are primary evidence from the Commission itself’ (2010:82). A notable example of this, which she discusses at some length, is the testimony given by mothers of the Gugulethu Seven, and in particular that of Cynthia Ngewu, whose testimony, she says, ‘Krog reproduces, apparently verbatim and without commentary’, in an account which is in fact ‘highly compressed and edited’, shaped ‘to suit the narrative thrust of both the chapter and the book’. She concludes that ‘Krog manipulated victim testimony’ (82). Krog’s material is not untrue, but is not acknowledged to have been edited. (Cole’s portrait of Ngewu is of a far more forceful and vigorous, articulate woman than seems to emerge from Krog’s account.)

To speak forgiveness, then, is to set free both perpetrator and victim. '(M)emory becomes language in telling', writes Ricoeur (2000:15). But the power of the spoken word is also finite. The struggle to put unbearable trauma into words is captured by Ingrid de Kok in 'Tongue-tied' (2002: 24):

'Do you promise to tell the truth,
The whole truth and nothing but the truth?'

Someone's been hurt.
But she can't speak.
They say she's 'tongue-tied'.

Like an umbilical neck throttle.
No spit, sound, swallow.
Voice in a bottle.

Now she's speaking underwater,
To herself, to drowning,
To her son, her lost daughter.
Her tongue's a current
Washing over dead fish,
Abandoning rope and tackle:

'They came for the children, took, then me,
And then, then afterwards
The bucket bled. My ears went still.
I'm older than my mother when...'

The gull drags its wing to the lighthouse steps.
'That's the truth. So help. Whole. To tell.'

With marine imagery De Kok evokes the impossibility of making oneself understood underwater, mouthing vainly, as the witness 'drowns' in the attempt to recapture a wounding memory which overwhelms her. She becomes incoherent when she leads up to unbearable events: '...then me/ And then, then afterwards/ The bucket bled.' Even an attempt to approach the event differently, creating distance through placing the trauma in the context of generations, tails off as the horror still cannot be spoken: 'I'm older than my mother when...'. At the centre of her experience lies the unspeakable, the 'abyss': for trauma victims, write Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, 'a crucial matter is the abyss between the time before and after the trauma, an abyss that has destroyed all feelings of continuity and order' (2008: 6). Without the control of 'rope and tackle' the woman's tongue, first tied in muteness,

follows its own futile course, a ‘current/ Washing over dead fish’. Her isolation from her listeners is emphasised by ‘voice in a bottle./ Now she’s speaking underwater,/ To herself.../ To her son, her lost daughter.’ The poem’s last words, ‘To tell’, isolated among incoherent fragments, underscore her futile effort.

This woman is not named; she is ‘someone’, one of the many who have ‘been hurt’. Her pain is still too great to articulate, its fragmentary presentation in itself a symptom of the limitations of memory. Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela point out that extreme trauma causes a ‘psychic rupture, a tearing apart of the integrity of the self’ which affects the way it is remembered: ‘Memories of trauma... are stored in dissociated and fragmented form’ (2008:25); they are the ‘unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences’ (quoting Van der Kolk: 56). This is what makes it both difficult and painful to try to bear witness to traumatic events.

De Kok’s fragmentary representation of these ‘unassimilated scraps’ of the memory of trauma (also called ‘deep memory’) is telling in itself. The ‘double gesture of fragmentary writing,’ Saul Tobias writes, ‘its seeming invitation to, and suspension of, closure, takes on an ethical dimension when the fragment marks the place of a lost or inaccessible life or memory which seems at one and the same time to demand acknowledgement but would hold any appropriation of its singularity and uniqueness to a common order of understanding to constitute a betrayal’ (Tobias, 1999: 8). De Kok, in maintaining the elisions, the halting, incoherent narrative, leaving a hole at the centre of the account, follows the speaker in marking that place of a lost life or irrecoverable memory, conjoining, in the words of Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, ‘the functions of the monument and evocation’ (quoted in Tobias, 1999: 14).

In a recent text, *There Was This Goat* (2009), Krog, Mpolweni and Ratele return to the incoherent testimony of Notrose Konile, the mother of one of the Gugulethu Seven, to make sense of the piecemeal presentation of her story, in which details and images appear out of context and little narrative thread is to be discerned. Mrs Konile’s experience eludes assimilation, integration – and understanding. When asked what she would want to say to the perpetrators, what she would want to have done for her, she answers, ‘I wouldn’t know. I would never be able to say what – I can never tell them what to do. I’ve just given up everything, I don’t know. I don’t know

anything' (2009:17). What is evoked is the tension between, on the one hand, the incomprehensible – even unbelievable – aspect of traumatic experience, and, on the other, the limitations or failure of language in seeking to describe it, so restoring some continuity and coherence, and with it greater control.

Traumatic experience defies description: 'Extreme trauma is "unspeakable" precisely because of the inadequacy of language to fully convey victims' experiences,' write Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela (2008:25-26). 'Our language lacks words to express this offence,' Primo Levi said of Nazi atrocities (quoted in Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, 26).

Krog mentions the testimony of Nomonde Calata, who, aged twenty at the time, visited Nyameka Goniwe after both their husbands had been killed:²⁰ '...(S)o I was taken to Nyami's place (cries loudly while interpreter finishes) and when I got there Nyami was crying terribly... it affected me also....' Krog intersperses extracts from Calata's testimony with the later comments of a Professor Kondlo, who remembers Calata's actions: '(S)he threw herself backwards and that sound... that sound... it will haunt me for ever and ever.' Kondlo comments more fully on the significance of this terrible cry. 'It is significant,' he continues, 'that she began to cry when she remembered how Nyameka Goniwe was crying. The academics say pain destroys language and this brings about an immediate reversion to a prelinguistic (sic) state – and to witness that cry was to witness the destruction of language... was to realise that to remember the past of this country is to be thrown back into a time before language. And to get that memory, to fix it in words, to capture it with the precise image, is to be present at the birth of language itself. But more practically, this particular memory at last captured in words can no longer haunt you, push you around, bewilder you, because you have taken control of it... so maybe this is what the Commission is all about – finding words for the cry of Nomonde Calata.' (In Krog, 1999: 63-64)

²⁰ Matthews Goniwe and Ford Calata were well-known activists, who were killed with two others by agents of the state. They became known as the Cradock Four.

The failure of language is the subject of another De Kok poem, ‘Parts of Speech’ (2002: 21), which begins, ‘Some stories don’t want to be told’ – as though pain refuses to be converted to language:

Some stories don’t want to be told.
They walk away, carrying their suitcases
held together with grey string.
Look at their disappearing curved spines.
Hunchbacks. Harmed ones. Hold-alls.

Some stories refuse to be danced or mimed,
Drop their scuffed canes
And clattering tap shoes,
Erase their traces in nursery rhymes
Or ancient games like blindman’s buff.

And at this stained place words
Are scraped from resinous tongues,
Wrung like washing, hung on the lines
Of courtroom and confessional,
Transposed into the dialect of record.

Why still believe stories can rise
With wings, on currents, as silver flares,
Levitate unweighted by stones,
Begin in pain and move towards grace,
Aerating history with recovered breath?

Why still imagine whole words, whole worlds:
The flame sputter of consonants,
Deep sea anemone vowels,
Birth-cable syntax, rhymes that start in the heart,
and verbs, verbs that move mountains?

De Kok’s poems on the Truth Commission are collected under the subtitle ‘A Room full of Questions’. The questions raised in this poem, ‘Why still believe...?’ (l.16) and ‘Why still imagine...?’ (l.21) are left open. Why indeed, as there must be a reason to believe in the power of words to ‘move mountains’ – ‘still’, after time has elapsed, after everything that has been heard. The poem’s ‘stained place’ could be the site of memory, but in this context is primarily the TRC hearing, where the words are ‘scraped’ (l.12) from the tongue, ‘wrung’, (l.13), then ‘hung’ (l.13) out for all to see, and finally ‘transposed into the dialect of record’ (l.15). What is evoked is the violation of the traumatised witness and of private grief, through language, as pain is

voiced in halting words, then translated by interpreters into English – a process which can never be complete or accurate – to become part of official records in an impersonal version removed from the lived world of the victims and reductive of their experience. Neither ‘whole words’ nor ‘whole worlds’ can be achieved.

A single word, ‘confessional’ (l.14), evokes the damaged life of not only the victim, but the perpetrator, and could also suggest the guilt experienced by survivors and the bereaved. The private space of confession and absolution is negated in the ‘hanging out’ of such memories.

Behind all this, De Kok implies, is the belief that truth will set free; through the power of language it will dance and fly and shine, moving from pain into grace. This belief is questioned most eloquently in the jarring contrast between the images of dance and play, like tap shoes, and the reminders, through the imagery used, of the shuffling poverty of those who have suffered: the grey string holding a suitcase shut, the ‘scuffed canes’ (l.7) of tap dancers, but also of maimed and elderly witnesses. Indeed, these people, it is implied, have the right to refuse to have their stories made public record. The stories themselves merge with the damaged people in the image of bent individuals walking away, suitcase in hand:

Hunchbacks. Harmed ones. Hold-alls. (l.5)

The hold-all, the suitcase with its contents, is both the person withholding information and the story refusing to be told. Yet the price of walking away is that of having to ‘hold all’ indefinitely, without relief, permanently maimed by a memory which imprisons as much as it is contained.

Auschwitz survivor Charlotte Delbo uses the term ‘deep memory’ to distinguish the memory of severe trauma, which ‘resists formulation and narration’, from ‘external memory’, over which one has more control through language. She writes of sloughing off the ‘old skin’ with its ‘visible traces of Auschwitz’. But deep memory is different:

‘How does one rid oneself of something buried far within: memory and the skin of memory. It clings to me yet. Memory’s skin has hardened, it allows

nothing to filter out of what it retains, and I have no control over it.’ (Delbo, *Days and Memory*, 1990:1, in Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008: 67-68)

Eli Wiesel testifies to the same barrier:

‘Ask any survivor; he will tell you, he who has not lived the event will never know it. And he who went through it will never reveal it, not really, not entirely. Between his memory and his reflection there is a wall – and it cannot be pierced.’ (In Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008: 34)

This is the prison of the ‘hold-all’, defying articulation even when language would have been the only channel for seeking some meaning, some continuity, restoring wholeness to one’s interrupted, shattered identity and life story, and the only means of breaking through isolation and restoring human fellowship. This hardened skin, this wall, points not to an unwillingness, but a frightening inability to return to such extreme pain and loss, with its psychic defences. De Kok’s poem about stories that ‘don’t want to be told’ poignantly evokes deep memory and the conflicting inclinations of silence and disclosure.

The poem therefore seems wistful about the unburdened, ‘unweighted’ flight of language into grace and simultaneously questions its efficacy to breathe such new life into history. ‘Parts of speech’ are finite, fallible means, even for those (like poets, knowing the ‘birth-cable’ of syntax) who believe in their power.

The dilemma posed by deep memory also concerns Saul Tobias, who sees the silences and fragmentary presentation of such memories as resisting assimilation into a shared historiography. ‘The TRC,’ he writes, ‘was, to a large extent, an attempt to tell a story about South Africa’s recent past’ (1999: 3). This is possible, he argues, in terms of what Holocaust historians have called ‘common memory’, which ‘functions to reinsert (individual) experiences into a shared knowledge that provides the survivor with some measure of... control over her experiences’ (2).²¹ Historian Lawrence Langer calls common memory ‘heroic memory – the memory of survival’ (Tobias,

²¹ Compare the wording of the TRC Final Report: ‘the Commission... assisted in the creation of a “narrative truth”. In so doing, it also sought to contribute to the process of reconciliation by ensuring that the truth about the past included the validation of the individual subjective experiences of people who had previously been silenced or voiceless’ (quoted by Tobias, 1999:4,5).

1999: 2). Deep memory, on the other hand, is ‘not the memory of survival, but the memory of loss,’ Tobias writes – and one is reminded again of Mrs Plaatjie’s loss, and her buried grief. For Delbo, such memory resists ‘formulation and narration’; it is not surprising, therefore, that it also ‘resists assimilation into a broader historical perspective’ (Tobias, 1999:2) and consequently remains outside of common memory.

The TRC’s aim to ‘tell a story’, to provide a shared historiography, attempted to bring a measure of closure on a painful past.²² Tobias writes that ‘the TRC initiative bears many of the characteristics which historians associate with the production of common memory: features such as the orientation towards common understanding, cohesiveness, closure, and what Saul Friedlander has described as a “redemptive stance”’ (4). He speaks of a ‘genuinely “common” memory’ as one which includes the experiences and voices of those previously neglected. Friedlander’s redemptive stance is movingly elucidated by Tobias (1999): ‘For the theological idea of redemption points precisely to the expectation that those who are most lost, most abject, most without hope, will come to resume their place in a common humanity, free of division and suffering. Redemption is not for one, but for all, for the redemption of the forgotten means, simultaneously, the redemption of those who forget – the closing of the hermeneutic circle, the restoration of humanity, or at least, a community, to its wholeness’ (4). This redemptive ideal is also worded in Archbishop Tutu’s Chairman’s Report on the Commission’s work, which emphasises liberation for all:

We are sisters and brothers in one family – God’s family, the human family. Having looked the beast of the past in the eye, having asked and received forgiveness and having made amends, let us shut the door on the past – not in order to forget it but in order not to allow it to imprison us (as quoted by Tobias, 1999: 5-6).

(One could counter, here, that forgiveness was not always asked for or given, amends were seldom made, and that that restitution has often lagged and been found wanting. More especially, ‘those who forget’ – the many who supported and benefited from

²² The TRC aimed, according to Tobias, at the ‘production of a common memory in which these individual memories could find their place, and their owners, hopefully, some solace....It is, broadly speaking, the story of a movement from division to unity, from fracturedness to wholeness, from confusion to clarity, from ignorance to understanding’ (1999: 4). (Yet deep memory resists all these outcomes.)

apartheid – often preferred amnesia and failed to become part of the TRC’s redemptive project. Tutu’s ideal is nevertheless laudable and infinitely gracious.)

Yet ironically, these ideals of a shared, inclusive history are incommensurable with deep memory – those ‘dimensions of past lives and experiences which are inaccessible to historical reconstruction,’ Tobias argues (7). What responsibility does history bear, then, towards the dead, whose stories cannot be recovered, and the living whose memories cannot be articulated, and which therefore, in Tobias’s words, ‘by virtue of their obstinacy, obscurity or sheer irrecoverability do not contribute to understanding?’ (7). For history, in as much as we can reconstruct it, ‘cannot be separated from our desire... to make sense of our humanity’ (6). In fact, trying to force such stories into a coherent whole could be a travesty: Tobias argues that ‘the impetus to understanding... and to the construction of common memory risks the betrayal of what is most intimate and inexpressible in the lives and experiences of victims’ (9). While Friedlander sees fragments of irrecoverable memory as capable of being included in a ‘full historical restitution or recognition’ (Tobias, 2), he nevertheless expresses the hope that art and literature may sustain some elements of deep memory.

In terms of the dilemma of representing deep memory, Tobias sees Antjie Krog’s *Country of My Skull*, in its use of separate fragments of testimony, and its own fragmentary presentation, as sustaining an obligation to ‘what is most intimate and opaque’ (Tobias, 1999: 9) in victims’ stories, by maintaining their incompleteness. It might be added that her co-authored later text, *There Was this Goat*, tries to recover and make sense of one such fragmentary and incoherent testimony, that of Notrose Konile (which has been discussed earlier). Ingrid de Kok’s ‘Tongue-tied’ is perhaps the best example of recording deep memory without violating the singularity of the experience, in that it speaks of the suffering that has been experienced in the same fragments without disclosing the unspeakable, so, in the words of Maurice Blanchot, keeping ‘watch over absent meaning’ (in Tobias, 14).

The assumptions on which the redemptive view of common memory are based are, firstly, that it is inclusion in the common record that validates and accords dignity to the experience of the individual. Following from this, it is assumed that history has an

obligation to record such experience, to be fully inclusive. The dilemma for Tobias, who himself seems to question historians' assumption of 'the self-evidence of the validity of the historical task of assimilating deep to common memory' (3), is, then, how this obligation should be fulfilled without violating the uniqueness – and, I would add, privacy – of such experiences. My own view is that there is a place for silence, for restraint, particularly where indescribable suffering is concerned. Its intense privacy calls for reticence. History and the community have no right to it. Only when a victim or survivor feels prepared to dredge up pain, is speech appropriate – but even then, the individual may prefer not to have his or her story made a part of a common, public record. Those who testified before the TRC were prepared to revisit suffering, some in honouring the memory of those who had died, and to have their testimony recorded. But, as Ingrid de Kok puts it, where words are 'scraped from resinous tongues,/ Wrung like washing, hung on the lines,' before being taken up in a public record, it remains doubtful whether such witnesses were always fully prepared for the public appropriation of their most painful memories.

Walter Benjamin's view is, in Tobias's words, 'messianic' in its redemptive stance:

One could speak of an unforgettable life or moment even if all men had forgotten them. If the nature of such a life or moment required that it not be forgotten, that predicate would not contain a falsehood but merely a claim that it is not being fulfilled by men, and perhaps also a reference to a realm in which it is being fulfilled: God's remembrance. (In Tobias, 13)

Benjamin, who sees a truly redemptive history as all-inclusive ('nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history'), nevertheless recognises its impossibility (Tobias, 13). His consideration of the divine realm, in which, as the psalmist puts it, tears are gathered in God's wineskin ('Are they not in thy book?') (Ps 56:8), is of comfort, however, only to those who believe in divine remembrance and justice – and, indeed, mercy.

Yet there were also narratives of suffering at the TRC which, in their emotive content, were anything but incoherent and even tended toward the lyrical. One account given before the TRC, that of an illiterate shepherd, so moved Antjie Krog, herself a poet, in

its poetic simplicity that she presents it as verse. She calls it ‘The Shepherd’s Tale’.

An extract follows:

LEKOTSE: Maybe you’re right – you know my problem is

I was a shepherd.

I cannot write

and I forget all these days, but still...

Now listen very carefully,

because I’m telling you the story now.

On that day

it was at night,

a person arrived and knocked.

When I answered the door just opened

and I said, ‘Who’s knocking so terribly?’

He answered, he said: ‘Police.’ (Krog, 1999:321)

Krog’s personal account of the TRC hearings, *Country of My Skull*, first published in 1998²³, became one of the most-read TRC texts, translated into many languages and converted into a film – and it has invited its share of controversy. Krog’s role during the hearings was an important one: as a reporter for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), using her married name, Antjie Samuel, she was heard almost daily by South Africans, and transmitted moving and terrible accounts from the hearings into the lives of many. Radio is the medium reaching the greatest number of people in South Africa. Because of the noted absence of white South Africans at the hearings (a factor which will be discussed more fully later), her broadcasts became a vital conduit. The fact that she was a celebrated poet of the Afrikaans literary establishment made her contribution especially significant (she records hate mail that she received from right-wing Afrikaners).

In the Free State, where she grew up, she walks to the local Co-op to get an impromptu interview with one of the locals, and asks a farmer, ‘Sir, how do you feel about the Truth Commission’s visit to Ladybrand?’

²³ The American edition was published with the subtitle, *Guilt, Sorrow and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa* (2000).

He stops in his tracks. He looks me up and down, while his lip curls in disgust. ‘The SABC and the Truth Commission. *Fokof!*’ he explodes with such venom that passers-by look in our direction.

‘*Fokof! Fokof!*’ he screams as he storms into the Co-op.

I find myself on the pavement, my blood thick with humiliation. God, has nothing – nothing! – changed? (1999:327)

It is Krog’s personal involvement in her account – often presented in physical terms, as here, in the reference to blood, and in her title – that lends a particular strength to the telling. She describes, for example, her conflicted emotions about the Afrikaner policemen applying for amnesty: they are familiar as brothers and yet alien in their values and actions. It is her face that appears on the South African paperback’s front cover, and it is her story on its pages (‘The land belongs to the voices of those who live in it. My own bleak voice among them’ [1999: 319]).

Krog admits to some conflict about writing this story at all. During a period at home she finds herself numb, suffering a breakdown from covering the TRC hearings. In this context she writes:

No poetry should come forth from this. May my hand fall off if I write this.

So I sit around. Naturally and unnaturally without words. Stunned by the knowledge of the price people have paid for words. If I write this, I exploit and betray. If I don’t, I die. (1999:74)

Consciously invoking Adorno’s words that no poetry could be written after Auschwitz, Krog also recontextualises her mother’s earlier, rather melodramatic, outpouring of Nationalist fervour:²⁴ After the assassination of Dr Verwoerd (known as the architect of apartheid), Dot Serfontein had written:

And I prayed that my hand should fall off if ever I write something for my personal honour at the cost of my people and what has been negotiated for them through years of tears and blood; that I will always remember that to write in Afrikaans is not a right but a privilege bought and paid for at a price – and that it brings with it heavy responsibilities. (Quoted by Krog in *Country of My Skull*, 1999: 148)

²⁴ Krog’s mother is Dot Serfontein, an established Afrikaans writer, and a powerful figure in her life. Some estrangement seems to have occurred between the two when Krog joined the ANC.

But Krog moves in an opposite direction: her dedication of the text is to ‘every victim that had an Afrikaans surname on her lips’, and she invokes the suffering (through ‘years of tears and blood’) of the disenfranchised people of South Africa under colonialism, then the apartheid policies and party of the same Dr Verwoerd. And, though she writes *Country of My Skull* under her maiden name, Krog, the ‘signature’, as Carli Coetzee (2001:686-687) has argued, of the successful Afrikaans poet, the name of the father, she chooses to write in English, so departing from what she has called the ‘language of the heart’ (2003:249) – which is also the language of her ancestors. Krog has been commended for not absolving herself from guilt – as some white writers have tried to do – and for recording her own journey (traced by Carli Coetzee) of departure from the establishment of her youth and heritage. The question which nevertheless comes to mind is: Why does it have to be about Afrikaners? Certainly, Afrikaner nationalism sustained the apartheid state, was inculcated into Afrikaans children by church, school and state – and, as Krog testifies, in many families. Certainly, many of the perpetrators who applied for amnesty came from this background. But political and moral guilt had its roots in colonialism, and extended across the spectrum of South African white people. More importantly, of a book overtly dedicated to the victims who testified at the TRC, one praised for giving a voice to those who had been silenced, Shane Graham warns, ‘Krog’s narrative thus threatens from the outset to expropriate the stories of victims for her own narrative of being displaced from her country and traumatized by the knowledge of the horrible deeds committed in the name of her people’ (2009: 56). I believe that this is exactly what Krog does.

Krog’s dilemma, her being torn between the compulsion to write and the fear of exploitation should she do so, is resolved later when, after the commissioners have weathered their umpteenth crisis, she pays tribute to the Commission in a wave of tenderness and decides to write:

With all its mistakes, its arrogance, its racism, its sanctimony, its incompetence, the lying, the failure to get a reparation policy off the ground after two years, the showing off – with all of this – it (the TRC) has been so brave, so naively brave in the winds of deceit, rancour and hate. Against a flood crashing with the weight of a brutalizing past on to new usurping policies, the Commission has kept alive the idea of a common humanity.

Painstakingly it has chiselled a way beyond racism and made space for all of our voices. For all its failures, it carries a flame of hope that makes me proud to be from here, of here. But I want to put it more simply. I want this hand of mine to write it. For us all; all voices, all victims. (1999: 422)

Krog's eloquent tribute highlights the TRC's lasting legacy. To preserve this, it seems, she wants her hand, previously kept from writing, to put it down – and it is clear that this will be a deeply personal account. Her resolve to write 'for us all' and especially for 'all victims' – in itself highly contentious – issues in an untitled poem:

because of you
this country no longer lies between us but within

it breathes becalmed
after being wounded in its wondrous throat

in the cradle of my skull it sings, it ignites
my tongue, my inner ear, the cavity of heart
shudders toward the outline
 new in soft clicks and gutturals

of my soul the retina learns to expand
daily because of a thousand stories
I was scorched

a new skin

I am changed for ever. I want to say:
 forgive me
 forgive me
 forgive me

you whom I have wronged, please
take me

with you.

Krog pays tribute to the victims, whose willingness to allow their pain to become the pain of the nation itself, has 'scorched' (l.11) her but also healed her (giving her 'a new skin' (l.12) – possibly darker, or unmarked by the skin colour which excludes her from the larger community) and has given her a new, inclusive, more African language, 'soft in clicks and gutturals' (l.8). In stilted diction ('it breathes becalmed/ after being wounded in its wondrous throat' [ll.3-4]) the wounded nation, at first unable to speak, is now seen to sing within her, moving her heart, her ear, her tongue

to give expression to a shared narrative. (This physiological imagery of internalised experience is characteristic of *Country of My Skull*.) It is the victims who have made this happen: the country that was torn ‘between’ blocs wrestling for possession, can now lie within. In taking the country into herself, Krog also takes responsibility for the sins of the past, and responds personally to those who have been wronged:

forgive me
forgive me
forgive me

It is the victims of apartheid who can, through the power of forgiveness, make her a part of the nation, taking her ‘with them’.

Yet my slight uneasiness with the self-absorption of this sometimes turgid poem is more pronounced when it comes to other aspects of the text Krog has produced. Having taken upon herself first the role of the faithful reporter, followed by her assumption of the questionable burden of making the victims’ stories known – thereby electing herself to speak for the other – Krog then shifts roles. Graham mentions that, when Krog was first asked to document her experience of covering the TRC, she refused, ‘because when you tackle something as a writer rather than a journalist, you become a vulture. Journalists are also vultures to a certain degree, but there are journalistic ethics’ (Graham, 2009: 55). And she was right: journalistic ethics protect both the subject from exploitation, and the journalist from stepping over the line into misappropriation. Yet she shifts roles. As Antjie Samuel, journalist, she had become a familiar and trusted voice to many. But her memories are recorded under her pen name, Krog, which enables her to bring her lyrical powers to bear on her telling. As a writer she questions the notion of truth, so central to the process she has reported on, and subverts it. Truth was already an embattled concept legally, as the testimonies before the TRC were not tested by cross-examination and were therefore not legally valid. Krog herself praises the Commission for having ‘its teeth firmly in the jugular of the only truth that matters’ (1999:259). But the writer, who includes much verbatim testimony from witnesses – a great deal of it without attribution – also provides her own post-modern improvisations in her text, and tells her reader so:

‘Hey, Antjie, but this is not quite what happened at the workshop,’ says Patrick.

‘Yes, I know, it’s a new story that I constructed from all the other information I picked up over the months about people’s reactions and psychologists’ advice. I’m not reporting or keeping minutes. I’m telling. If I have to say every time that so-and-so says this, it gets boring. I cut and paste the upper layer, in order to get the second layer told, which is actually the story I want to tell. I change some people’s names when I think they might be annoyed or might not understand the distortions.’

‘But then you’re not busy with the truth!’

‘I am busy with the truth... my truth.’ (1999:259)

The ‘story I want to tell’; ‘*my truth*’ (the first person pronoun recurs throughout) – these are telling statements, anathema to a journalist, as is this entire passage: ‘a new story I constructed’; ‘I’m not reporting’; ‘I cut and paste’; ‘I change’. Freedom of speech is founded on the public’s right to know – to know the truth, however much a site of contest that might be. Journalists know that their stories, as a ‘first draft of history’, are reconstructions, based on the fallible perceptions and memories of subjective and unreliable sources, yet, like courts of law, they strive for the functional truth of the most comprehensive and accurate reconstruction possible. They know that they themselves are neither neutral nor objective. Krog explains that her material is ‘(s)een from my perspective, shaped by my state of mind at the time and now also by the audience I’m telling the story to. In every story there is hearsay... there are assumptions...’ (259) But for all these reasons journalists strive to serve truth through a rigorous discipline of verification, and nitpick for accuracy down to the correct spelling of a subject’s middle name – because the credibility that their profession lives by is at stake. ‘*Truth is mos jou job*,’ Krog quotes a colleague as reminding her earlier (1999: 36) (After all, truth is your job). In manipulating and fabricating material so as not to be ‘boring’, she has grievously betrayed her journalistic ethos. ‘What gives the story its real character is the need to entertain – to make the listener hang on your lips,’ she purportedly tells Patrick. But to ‘bend’ truth at all to make a story more interesting is taboo for the journalist. Krog was also prepared to accept the *Sunday Times* Alan Paton Award for non-fiction for *Country of My Skull*, again blurring the boundary between truth and fiction.²⁵

²⁵ Although selection and unreliability scupper any claims that non-fiction might have to being ‘the whole truth and nothing but the truth’, a book that openly subverts truth was a dubious choice for a non-fiction prize, in spite of its undoubted quality in other respects, and its historical importance.

More importantly, Krog's licence with the material she, as Samuel, had reported on undermines the veracity of her entire enterprise – in which she has appropriated throughout the lived experience, often deeply painful, of the victims whose stories she wanted to write. For Krog to undermine her own story is her right. For her to quote TRC testimonies is unproblematic: the TRC report is a matter of public record. But for her to merge these revisitations of trauma into her own project and then to subvert its veracity – in a text dedicated to victims – becomes the very thing she first feared: abuse and exploitation, cheapening testimonies recounted at great personal cost (what she herself calls 'the price people have paid for words'). 'One has no right to appropriate a story paid for with a lifetime of pain and destruction,' she herself has argued (quoted by Tobias, 1999: 9). So, while Tobias praises her work as 'exemplary' for its sensitive treatment of deep memory – for not violating victims' pain in her representation – it is nevertheless the case that she exploits and betrays their testimony in her subversion of the concept of truth, making the entire concept more relative than it need have been.

Shane Graham argues, however, that Krog's concept of truth is 'considerably more nuanced than what many of her critics would allow' (2009: 54). He warns, on the one hand, that Krog 'embraces a conception of truth that threatens to play into the hands of the very right-wing forces who wish to cover up the crimes of the past under a convenient veil of relativism' (51), quoting her confession, 'The word "truth" still trips the tongue....I prefer the word "lie."....Because it is there... where the truth is closest' (Krog 1999:36, quoted by Graham, 51). Yet, on the other hand, he understands Krog to be questioning consciously the notion of a 'recoverable', empirical truth, and in this spirit, for example, deliberately presenting different versions of a Vlakplaas murder. (This phenomenon of different versions of the same event is familiar in media ethics and is known as the 'Rashomon effect'²⁶; it is countered by a rigorous attempt to gather as much evidence from as many sources as possible.)

²⁶ The name, the Rashomon effect, is derived from the title of a 1951 Japanese film, which 'explores the different views, reactions, and perceptions of four people who are all involved in the same moment of violence. "The Rashomon effect is an informal term taken to mean a case where the viewpoints of the participants color their interpretations of events to such an extent that sifting out a 'fair' representation is all but impossible"' (Retief, 2002:97, quoting Hausman).

Graham therefore cautiously endorses Krog's 'ambivalent relationship to the truth' and her invention of a fictitious extra-marital relationship. 'For Krog to convey the subjective truth of her reactions to covering the TRC, it was necessary for her to distill emotions and invent situations dramatizing complex interpersonal dynamics,' he writes, quoting Anthea Garman: 'By insisting on poetic licence claimed for a book situated within the public... confessional space created by the Commission, in order to reveal the truths that liberate and make history, Krog unsettles the reader's trust in what would be considered to be "the truth" in the book itself' (53). Graham believes that the 'concept of truth as multiplicity' does not need to imply that the search for truth is abandoned, or ambiguity 'fatalistically' embraced – rather, he implies, some ambiguity should be tolerated in view, perhaps, of the very fragmentation of traumatic memory that makes a coherent or complete account difficult, if not impossible (53-54). Certainly, Krog achieves a distance from her material and keeps the reader at arm's length through this distancing technique. But for me as a white South African – having experienced the TRC process in much the way described by Albie Sachs, as a 'deeply engaging, profoundly affecting, brilliant, difficult, dark, intense process that we all participated in and watched and argued about' (Sachs: 2005), having been stricken by the testimonies of victims and perpetrators alike, and having been dependent on Krog's work as a journalist for almost daily bulletins – such distance, such licence, still seems a betrayal of both her journalistic mandate and her contract with the South African public with regard to the TRC, and an exploitation of the costly testimonies of those who had suffered.

For the Truth Commission, truth – some truth – was the ideal. But what could be attained was always going to be an incomplete patchwork of testimony from survivors and perpetrators. Zapiro's image of the unreachable goal of reconciliation is equally appropriate for truth itself (although in his cartoon a map with the legend 'You are here' [in Verwoerd and Mabizela, 40] indicates that Truth has been reached). The search takes one through an underground labyrinth, an image of lostness and path-finding, but also of burrowing underneath that which has been covered over, hidden away, remaining in darkness. This dark passage may also represent the unconscious and the unreliable elements of memory. In the cartoon the only guides are an unhelpful map, and one small lantern carried by the archbishop.

Nevertheless, important truths were uncovered by the TRC, providing some closure for the first time for a large number of survivors. Many more amnesty applications were received by the Commission than had been expected (7127 in total, of which 1312 were granted). Those seeking amnesty provided previously unknown information; perpetrators often confessed, for instance, to having lied in court when deaths in detention were investigated. For the entire nation the TRC hearings for victims and perpetrators became a sickening revelation of some of the worst acts of inhumanity imaginable, most of them committed by state-sponsored agents. Such truths forced South Africans to confront their past and the pain caused: a necessary process if a shared future was to be realised.

And reconciliation? Piet Meiring recalls the bewilderment of a black minister at the first hearings in East London:

There must be a mistake somewhere. I brought nearly my whole congregation along to be here today. They had to come and listen to what the victims say. They wanted to stretch out their hands to all the white people of East London, to forgive them, to be reconciled with them.... But I see nearly no white people to talk to today. There is nobody with whom we can be reconciled. Where are they? (Meiring, 1999: 28)

The case of the absent whites, the silent whites, is noted by Krog as well. She quotes an unnamed black academic writing to a newspaper: ‘We have Mandela pleading reconciliation, we have Tutu pleading reconciliation – where, oh where is the White Prince of Reconciliation?’ Krog agrees: ‘Indeed, where is he?’ but adds, ‘And, of course, it can be nothing else than a “he”’ (Krog, 1999:439). (By far the greatest number of victims who testified before the Commission were women, and of those who reached across barriers, most were women.) She herself comments: ‘The failure of Afrikaner leadership to say that something is owed has not only deprived the Afrikaner, trapped in anger and guilt, but it has, somewhat deviously, deprived the oppressed from [sic] the opportunity to say, clearly, this is what you owe’ (437). No reparation, no forgiveness is possible where guilt, the debt owed, is denied; and, as Krog notes, both parties are then deprived of the opportunity to reconcile.

In this regard Tutu's comment on Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden* (1990), set in a comparable Truth Commission context in Chile, provides some understanding of the frustrated victim. In the play a woman whose husband has just been appointed to his country's Truth Commission encounters and recognises, in her own home, the man who had tortured her during the Pinochet era. She now has him at her mercy, and holds a gun to his head while he denies being her former tormentor. Yet when he admits his guilt, she sets him free. 'His denial,' comments Tutu, 'hit at the core of her being, at her integrity, at her identity and these were all tied up intimately with her experiences, with her memory. Denial subverted her personhood. She was, in a real sense, her memory' (Tutu, 1999:32). One is reminded of the unfreedom of the unforgiving servant – but in this instance it is the opportunity to forgive that is denied.

Krog also quotes the inimitable archbishop's speaking of going the extra mile ('many, many miles'), saying to whites, 'we want you, we really want you' (1999:240). Of former president F.W. de Klerk's denials before the Truth Commission – his failure, perhaps, to become that Prince of Reconciliation – Tutu says, 'You see, we can't go to heaven alone. If I arrive there, God will ask me: "Where is De Klerk? His path crossed yours..." So I cried for him, I cried for De Klerk – because he spurned the opportunity to be human.' (In Krog, 1999: 240)²⁷

Tutu's views, informed by his faith as well as by a communal African ethos of humaneness, may not have been representative of all black South Africans. Yet in that period, guided by President Mandela and Archbishop Emeritus Tutu, South Africans were given an excellent example of the possibilities of reconciliation. That era has passed. Their successors have been less conciliatory. For many white South Africans, who had been subject to disinformation, steeped in the belief that South Africa was a Christian country with a Christian government, the horrors revealed at the Truth Commission came as shocks that needed time to be absorbed. Many – most – whites, whether stricken, ashamed, suspicious, or hostile to the process, lost an opportunity to participate more fully in a significant rite of passage, and, in the words of the generous pastor, to be forgiven and reconciled.

²⁷ Cf. the words of Desmond Tutu: 'My deepest sadness is that by and large, the South African white community has yet to acknowledge the incredible generosity that has come from the black community. I would say the white political leaders should tell their supporters: "You don't know how damn lucky you are."' (Quoted by Cole, 2010: 121)

Yet Ingrid de Kok expresses a hope of healing. Evoking the many references to injuries inflicted, permanent disabilities, death and exhumed bodies, she writes in ‘Body Parts’:

may the wrist turn in the wind like a wing
the severed foot tread home ground

the punctured ear hear the thrum of sunbirds
the molten eye see stars in the dark

the faltering lungs quicken windmills
the maimed hand scatter seeds and grain

the heart flood underground springs
pound maize, recognize named cattle

and may the unfixable broken bone
loosened from its hinges

now lying like a wishbone in the veld
pitted by pointillist ants

give us new bearings. (2006: 102)

Healing, even if it is not physical healing, engenders new life and a rooted wholeness, evoked here in references to underground springs, home, ‘named cattle’ (1.8) and the scattering of seed, the hope of a future. But for those who have died, represented by the ‘unfixable broken bone’ (1.9), the only hope is that their deaths have not been futile, that their remembrance will allow the nation to embark on a new course, never repeating the atrocities of the past. Yet this one-sentence poem is a prayer governed by the auxiliary ‘may’ (1.1): the future remains open.

Krog, in a poem she includes after describing the presentation of the TRC report by Tutu to Mandela, also asks, ‘where does one go from here?’

so much hurt for truth
so much destruction
so little left for survival
where does one go from here?

voices slung
in anger
over the solid cold length of our past
how long does it take
for a voice
to reach another
in this country held bleeding between us? (1999: 431)

In a poem in which the only punctuation consists of two question marks, the country bleeds again, and is ‘between’ rather than ‘within’ – though ‘between us’ suggests some inclusivity. After the devastation of the past (‘so much destruction/ so little left...’ [ll.2-3]), after the reopening of ‘so much hurt’ (l.1) for truth and the expression of anger for a past that seems immutable, a ‘solid cold length’ (l.7), how long will it take for people to be reconciled? The importance of the speaking voice on both sides is suggested by synecdoche (‘how long does it take/ for a voice/ to reach another?’ [ll.8-10]): reconciliation is the fruit of confession and forgiveness. The American subtitle of the book, *Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa*, is evoked in this poem, which questions whether forgiveness and reconciliation are truly possible. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission provided a public forum for such exchanges between individuals and, to some extent, for representative groups (political parties, businessmen and -women, churches) to confess their debt. Whether the model given by generous-spirited people will be followed by groups, by the nation, remains to be seen.

2.1 Touching the leper: Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela’s *A Human Being Died That Night*

Of the many texts emerging from the TRC, the most outstanding is a non-fictional work, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela’s *A Human Being Died that Night* (2003), which she has subtitled *A story of forgiveness*. The text itself is an exercise in grace. Gobodo-Madikizela seeks to understand and tell the story of the other, the enemy, and finds it in herself to feel empathy for the man held up as ‘apartheid’s henchman par excellence’ (121) in the brutality suffered by her people. The man in question is Eugene de Kock, whom the media had dubbed Prime Evil, and who was sentenced to two life sentences and 212 years imprisonment for innumerable crimes committed on behalf of the apartheid state. (Colonel de Kock was in charge of the so-called counter-

insurgency unit based at Vlakplaas, and led death squads both in South Africa and in neighbouring countries.)

De Kock was given a criminal trial – his crimes were on his own head, with no recourse to the fact that he was following orders from his political masters. (He was, the writer points out, one of the most decorated officers in the old South African Police Force.²⁸[Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003: 60]) Politicians such as F.W. de Klerk distanced themselves from him (59-60). Politically and legally he was cast adrift, and morally he was made a monster, to place a safe moral distance between him and the rest of humanity, especially apartheid’s beneficiaries. ‘He was exposed and alone in a country that, ironically, had employed mechanisms of denial to enable a regime of terror to thrive, and was now using denial to avoid facing responsibility for the past’ (41). (Verbeeck [2007], in discussing these views, describes De Kock as a ‘lightning conductor for the collective responsibility of the white minority, of whom a sizeable majority had supported the NP’s apartheid policy’ [2007:263; my translation]).

Gobodo-Madikizela is a psychologist and ethicist, whose work in the TRC and especially with De Kock, who had applied for amnesty, led her to write this penetrating study of guilt and forgiveness. Ricoeur writes that learning to tell the story of the other facilitates communal memory (2000:15), and this work has received the notice of historians. Verbeeck sees Gobodo-Madikizela’s ‘perspective on De Kock as aggressor’ as a ‘valuable contribution which will be underwritten by historians’ (2007:261; my translation)²⁹ and describes her work as a form of ‘people’s history’.

²⁸ Jeremy Gordin also makes this clear in *A Long Night’s Damage*, which he co-wrote with De Kock. In an introductory Chronology, entries read as follows:

1983, May: As a captain, ([D]e Kock) joins counter-insurgency unit at Vlakplaas under then Lieutenant-Colonel Jack Cronje.

November: Takes part in raid into Swaziland. Kills Zweli Nyanda, MK commander, in Swaziland. Police Star for Outstanding Service from Minister of Police Louis le Grange.

1985, July: Takes command at Vlakplaas....

September: With Willie Nortje, murders Japie Maponya.

December: Attack on houses in Maseru. SAP Silver Cross for Bravery.

(The Silver Cross was the highest South African award for bravery.) (De Kock and Gordin, 1998:10)

²⁹ Verbeeck writes that the emphasis generally falls on aggressors in research on political violence: ‘Victims generally deserve the fruit of an honourable remembrance, but aggressors the sharp edge of the dissecting blade’ (2007:261; my translation).

The writer is brought to interview De Kock by the response to him of two widows of his victims in the Motherwell bombing. De Kock, testifying before the TRC, had asked to meet with them in private, to apologise, and Gobodo-Madikizela is intrigued: ‘What would he say? “I’m sorry I killed your husbands”?’ (2003: 14)

One of the widows, Mrs Pearl Faku, says of the encounter, ‘I couldn’t control my tears. I could hear him, but I was overwhelmed by emotion, and I was just nodding, as a way of saying yes, I forgive you. I hope that when he sees our tears, he knows that they are not only tears for our husbands, but tears for him as well.... I would like to hold him by the hand, and show him there is a future, and that he can still change.’ (14-15)

Both Tutu and Gobodo-Madikizela deal with the possibility of change and restoration. Turning people into monsters puts them beyond the pale, beyond the reach of restoration. This is the question that intrigues Gobodo-Madikizela: ‘Was he too evil... to be worthy of... forgiveness?’ Was forgiveness ‘wasted on him’? (15) She considers Hannah Arendt’s concept of radical evil, referring to that which is beyond human forgiveness, but feels that the environment which creates those who commit atrocities must be taken into account. Whether to forgive, she argues, might be a purely academic question – except in a society where former enemies now have to live together: ‘How can we transcend hate if the goal is to transform human relationships in a society with a past marked by violent conflict between groups?’ (15)

Telling the story of the other, seeking understanding, may lead to a reinterpretation of past events, as Ricoeur has suggested. Gobodo-Madikizela understands the peril of her project, noting that trying to understand how societies create these ‘monsters’, trying to understand the perpetrator’s story, has ‘deeply disturbing implications’ (16) (This is akin to the narrator’s predicament in Bernhard Schlink’s novel *The Reader*, in seeking to understand the holocaust crimes of a woman he has loved: ‘I wanted simultaneously to understand Hannah’s crime and to condemn it.... But it was impossible to do both’ [Schlink, 2003:156].) Gobodo-Madikizela even quotes Claude Lanzmann (whose film *Shoah* (1985) details testimonies of holocaust survivors) on the ‘obscenity of the very project of understanding’ (173), as though understanding – even seeking to understand – would be equivalent to exculpation. She understands

this view as to ‘suggest that no language should be created to understand evil’ (17). For an alternative view, she quotes Christopher Browning, who suggests that understanding implies the possibility of empathy. ‘What I do not accept,’ Browning says, ‘are the old clichés that to explain is to excuse, to understand is to forgive’ (in Gobodo-Madikizela 2003:16). Gobodo-Madikizela herself turns to Emile Fackenheim’s ‘double move’ (17) of seeking, yet resisting an explanation, so as to avoid being drawn into the exculpation of evil (‘not to resist all or any inquiry... but to resist the misleading exculpatory corollaries of explanation’; she quotes Rosenbaum’s elaboration of this view, ‘(t)o resist the way explanation can become an evasion or consolation’ [in Gobodo-Madikizela 2003:17]). What she is acutely aware of is the fact that seeking to understand the history and context of someone who has done evil may well lead one at least some way in that direction. (‘Does understanding not send an implicit message of mercy born out of compassion for the murderer in view of the circumstances found to have influenced his behaviour?’ [16]) And this is indeed the risk she takes.

Since she will be, not a neutral witness or scientific observer, but a participant in an engagement with another, Gobodo-Madikizela introduces herself by prefacing her study with three telling personal anecdotes. The first is of voting, for the first time in her life, for a new South African government, in April 1994, in Boston. ‘I was the first person to vote,’ she recalls, ‘and my emotions were so intense that I seemed to feel them concretely as something that flooded through me’ (6). She is acutely aware of the historical significance of this moment, of being transported ‘from one historical moment, where I’d been a second-class citizen in my country of birth – where my parents and their parents had been sent from this place to that... to another historical moment of power, pride, and affirmation’ (6). For the first time, she is able to call South Africa ‘my country, my home’ (7). It is from this new position, which the writer has clearly made her own, that she is able to engage with De Kock.

The other two anecdotes are remarkable in that they seem both to have been chosen to suggest the writer’s fallibility, including the unreliability of memory and an awareness of her own ethical shortcomings. She recalls vividly the events following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 (she was then five years old), when country-wide protests were put down by force. Gobodo-Madikizela’s recollections are of local men,

‘fathers’, running and hiding, and of army trucks in the streets of Langa township, sometimes firing at people. ‘The image I was to recall many years later was that of a street covered in blood and bodies lined up like cattle in a slaughterhouse’ (9). However, when she joins the TRC in 1996, she discovers that archival records account for one death only from police shooting in Langa on that day. Even though the record could have been falsified by authorities, Pan-African Congress leaders cannot verify what she remembers, and the writer is forced to conclude that her recollection – so vivid and indelible – was incorrect, and her memory therefore unreliable. Though a five-year-old may easily be forgiven such a lapse, since a young child would probably not be considered a reliable witness in any event, Gobodo-Madikizela establishes the unreliability of memory, not by pointing to error in another, but by exposing her own. ‘What does this tell us about remembering traumatic events?’ she asks (10).

Her third chosen anecdote concerns moral choice within the context of available information. Within the nominally independent ‘homeland’ of Transkei, where she was lecturing in psychology at the time, the ban on political organisations like the ANC was lifted by the homeland government under Bantu Holomisa in 1990. An attempted coup soon afterwards, to remove Holomisa from office, was believed to have been instigated by the South African government. (‘Most people at the time,’ she writes, ‘myself included, had no doubt...’ [10]) The people of Umtata, hearing gunfire, aware of dramatic events unfolding in Holomisa’s office, celebrated when the coup leader, Captain Craig Duli, was captured – and Gobodo-Madikizela celebrated with them.

Later she was to hear that Captain Duli’s mutilated body had been thrown into the trunk of an army vehicle, and that he had died, either from his wounds or because he was shot together with his comrades. She realises that, though she could not have stopped these events from happening, her celebration had made her a party to them: ‘I had been party to the killing of another human being. I had knowingly participated in an incident that would certainly have resulted in the taking of a life’ (11). Later, serving on the TRC in the Eastern Cape, Gobodo-Madikizela hears the testimony of Duli’s widow, Nontobeka Duli. ‘How could I with honesty convey words of comfort

(as a facilitator) without first addressing my shame and guilt for having celebrated her husband's death?' she asks (12).

Taken together, these three 'linked stories' (6) prefacing Gobodo-Madikizela's account of her engagement with Eugene de Kock suggest a composite point of departure. She is able to write from a position of strength, affirmed in her identity as a 'first-class' South African citizen. Yet she is fully aware that memory, and particularly that of traumatic events, is unreliable, that it is difficult to reconstruct events in retrospect with accuracy, that even an honest witness may therefore be unreliable. Finally, she sets out with the humility of what Karl Jaspers (1947) calls existential guilt, a knowledge of her own moral fallibility – and this is evident in the rest of the text in her generous attempts to understand the context of others' moral choices, and in her unwillingness to judge. The fact that the second and third anecdotes end with rhetorical or unanswered questions establishes an openness, a willingness to consider views other than her own without prejudging them. Far from making her an unreliable source, Gobodo-Madikizela's openness about her own fallibility establishes trust in a writer who presents herself as humble, non-judgmental, and self-aware, with a finely developed moral sense and honesty.

The writer presents her interviews with De Kock as a dialogue – something she sees as important on a wider scale in a formerly divided and polarised society. Through dialogue, she believes, 'victims as well as the greater society come to recognize perpetrators as human beings who failed morally' (119). Such recognition of offenders' humanity, she believes, holds them accountable for their deeds: 'Sustained, engaged, ordered dialogue thus forces an offender to unearth what moral sensibilities he has buried under a facade of "obedience to orders"... and to face what he has done, not in the heady climate of the period of mayhem but in the sobering atmosphere of reflection on ordinary human lives now shattered' (119-120). Regarding serious offenders as monsters without conscience removes such moral responsibility from them.

Gobodo-Madikizela witnesses the effect on De Kock of dialogue and sober reflection. What set him apart from his former colleagues as well as from Eichmann, Gobodo-Madikizela feels, is what she calls an 'inner stirring'. He says of his first testimony at

the TRC that it was like ‘shedding a cloak’ (17). ‘And this was his burden, his struggle. The cloak had been removed to reveal not only what had been hidden before, not only from the public eye but from himself as well’ (23) – and he does not try to dignify his behaviour by denying moral guilt. Her own response is empathetic: ‘Watching [D]e Kock struggling with his past was what mattered. It gave me a sense of hope that he was in some emotional pain about the things he had done’ (44). This hope testifies to the writer’s belief in the possibility of change.

There are two occasions when Gobodo-Madikizela expresses empathy as a response to pain. The first shakes her profoundly. During her first visit, she asks De Kock about his meeting with Pearl Faku and Doreen Mgoduka. She describes his reaction as she observed it, careful to minimise interpretation:

His face immediately fell, and he became visibly distressed. I could hear the clatter of his leg chains as he shuffled his feet. Sitting directly across from me in the small prison consulting room, his heavy glasses on the table that separated us, he started to speak. There were tears in his eyes. In a breaking voice he said: ‘I wish I could do much more than [say] I’m sorry. I wish there was a way of bringing their bodies back alive. I wish I could say, “Here are your husbands,”’ he said, stretching out his arms as if bearing an invisible body, his hands trembling, his mouth quivering, ‘but unfortunately... I have to live with it.’ (32)

As a trained observer of human behaviour, able to detect evasiveness in De Kock and to analyse his word choice, the writer would quickly recognise pretence. There is none here. The fact that she recreates the scene and describes, rather than tells, the effect of her question on him, makes it possible for the reader to understand her instinctive response:

Relating to him in the only way one does in such human circumstances, I touched his shaking hand (32).

‘Such human circumstances’: Gobodo-Madikizela responds to De Kock’s pain as one person to another. Later she will write of empathy as the response to the pain of another – any other: ‘The power of human connectedness, of identification with the other as “bone of my bone” through the sheer fact of his being human, draws us to

“rescue” others in pain.... We cannot help it’ (127).³⁰ But on the occasion of her reaching out to touch De Kock’s hand, as thoughtlessly as Wiesenthal waves away a fly, she places this human connection in its larger context almost immediately as she recasts the act as incompatible with the fact that this man, this hand, had directed and executed ‘unspeakable acts of malice against people very much like myself’ – he is, in other words, or was, the enemy. But then she returns to the prison interview room, ‘sitting across from a trembling man in chains’, and feels reassured that there was ‘nothing especially incongruous’ in his vulnerability or her response to it (32). Nevertheless, the conflict and fluctuations do not cease: she feels guilty and wonders if her heart has ‘actually crossed the moral line’ from compassion to ‘actually identifying’ with De Kock. (33). The repetition of ‘actually’ conveys disbelief, as though such identification must be taboo, but it also speaks of the act or physical reality of crossing a divide, the enacted gesture of identification.

On her way home from this first encounter with De Kock, Gobodo-Madikizela finds herself sobbing as she drives, her feelings confused, suffused with loss – including a sense of loss for De Kock, the loss of ‘what he could have been’, something she feels she has touched, a side that was ‘not allowed to triumph’ over what he was to become: ‘apartheid’s killing machine’ (34). It has taken one encounter for this woman to see the ‘monster’ as a human being in need, to see ‘what could have been’, and to be deeply aware that ‘good and evil exist in our lives, and that evil, like good, is always a possibility’. ‘And that,’ she concludes, ‘was what frightened me’ (34).³¹ (It is interesting that, on her next visit, she prepares to meet both sides of De Kock, yet it is not the evil [known] side that she fears, but ‘the other... a human being capable of feeling, crying, and knowing pain’ [38] – such an encounter creates far more turmoil, as she shows.) Still shaken, she decides not to take her scheduled flight that evening, but to spend the night with a friend and her family, ‘[p]eople who were doing regular

³⁰ Compare Wiesenthal’s act of brushing away a buzzing fly ‘without thinking, simply as a matter of course’ (1998: 37), forgetting, for a moment, the political context in a simple interpersonal gesture. Gobodo-Madikizela’s gesture is, however, more significant and far-reaching.

³¹ At one point Gobodo-Madikizela quotes Peter Malkin, who captured the fugitive Adolf Eichmann and spent time guarding him. Unlike De Kock, Eichmann showed no sign of remorse or conscience. Yet Malkin is changed by the experience and becomes aware of his own potential for evil: ‘[T]hose sessions caused me to reflect on my own actions in ways I never had before.... I would never be that easy on myself again... For the fact is as simple as it is inescapable: If the conscience stops functioning, even occasionally, one is in mortal danger of losing oneself’ (*Eichmann in my Hands*, quoted in Gobodo-Madikizela, 68).

jobs and had husbands and lovers and children... people who inhabited the world I was familiar with' (36). One foray into De Kock's world, one moment of relative intimacy with that world with its reminder of the possibility of evil, but also with remorse and pain, has been a profoundly disturbing experience.

The aftermath to this one unpremeditated gesture is recorded in detail, as the writer analyses her own feelings. But it is by no means the end of the matter. During a subsequent appearance of De Kock before the TRC, he asks to speak to Gobodo-Madikizela, and tells her, 'Pumla, that was my trigger hand you touched' (39). A chapter is devoted to this, as the writer describes her own reaction and speculates about De Kock's motives for the revelation, as well as what her gesture has meant for him. The effect of his words on her is chilling: 'I had touched his leprosy.... I was from now on infected with the memory of having embraced into my heart the hand that had killed, maimed, and blown up lives' (40).

The image of leprosy follows on Gobodo-Madikizela's earlier conjecture that one possible motive for De Kock's revelation was that of the 'self-shaming confessional, the cry of the leper... shouting, "Unclean! Unclean!"' (40) It evokes his evil as defilement and sickness, and more especially his untouchable outcast status. (She may be thinking of a parallel action by Jesus, in an encounter with a leper who had broken the taboo and had come up to Him, begging to be made 'clean'. Jesus does the unthinkable: 'Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I will; be clean"' [Mk 1:40,41].)

Yet the 'infection' had been registered unconsciously: the writer's own right forearm had been numb, temporarily paralysed on the morning after the meeting with De Kock, and this recollection leads her into an analysis of 'splitting' as a psychological defence mechanism. De Kock, too, she speculates, may have unconsciously 'split off' his trigger arm from himself. 'By touching the troubling murder "weapon", I had simply opened the floodgates of unwanted memory' (46). Now, in his imprisonment, he is haunted by the killing: 'They may not be alive but they are there. They are there in the day, they are there in the morning. They are there at night when the sun sets. You can forget about forgetting' (46). She sees him as burdened still by layers of the cloak he had begun to shed through his testimonies, but recognises too that 'the cloak

was part of him. Condemned and isolated under it, perhaps when I was drawn under its shadow for a brief moment of communion [D]e Kock saw some hope' (47).

What stands out in this chapter, called 'The trigger hand', is the fact that Gobodo-Madikizela's overriding response to De Kock's words, for all her sense of violation and concomitant anger (40), for all her suspicion that he may be manipulating her, is one of pity, which leads to understanding born of empathy: 'for all the horrific singularity of his acts, [D]e Kock was a desperate soul seeking to affirm to himself that he was still part of the human universe' (47). In choosing the word 'communion' rather than 'contact' lies the intimation that she has, for a moment, touched and shared De Kock's burden. (One is reminded by contrast of Damon Galgut's fictional Adam Napier in *The Impostor*, withdrawing his hand from that which has committed evil and refusing to listen to a troubled confessant – while the moral distance between them is actually slim.) The writer has broken the 'skin barrier' (42), the traditional awkwardness of touch between black and white South Africans – more unusual still when the black woman touches the white man out of compassion. But she has also broken through the barrier of his moral isolation – something neither his former superiors nor the beneficiaries of apartheid were prepared to do.

A second incident Gobodo-Madikizela records, in which her empathy is evoked, occurs later, in April 1998, at the end of one of her last visits to De Kock. Though the visit has gone over the allotted time, De Kock uncharacteristically lingers, and Gobodo-Madikizela stalls a little to give him time. Again she describes his behaviour:

De Kock came over and stood in front of me, arms folded and shoulders raised in a stiff, tense posture. He first looked away, then looked back at me, biting his lower lip as if about to admit to something terrible he had done. A heavy silence hung in the room. 'Pumla,' he began. "I've been meaning to ask you this, right from our second interview. Have I ever killed any of your friends or family?' (114)

Gobodo-Madikizela is taken aback: '[H]ad I just imagined it? Standing there stunned, in conversation with a broken man who had been an angel of death, I felt as if I were in the midst of a collision of scattered meanings within these prison walls that had enclosed our conversations.'

She looks at De Kock, seeking signs of malice.

His eyes were filled with suffering. I felt nothing but pity... I stared at his face again and for a moment I thought I might touch him – *again?* – to offer him some respite from the tortured emotions... De Kock stood in front of me, his shoulders bearing the weight of struggling with the memory of his own evil. I felt then that even if [D]e Kock had killed my loved ones, I would never have been able to tell him. I would have had to spare him. There was something in his face that I hadn't seen before, something utterly despairing. I finally found my voice. I said to him, 'No, Eugene. No one close to me.' (114, 115)

Like the prodigal's father, who is filled with compassion, Gobodo-Madikizela feels 'nothing but pity'. Though she has not been directly injured by De Kock, she has always been conscious of the injury to her people. 'But *I* cannot absolve [D]e Kock from what he did. That role belongs to those whose lives he cut short... and to those they left behind,' she realises (115; author's emphasis). Like the Jews who felt they could not vicariously forgive the Nazis for the deaths of those who had no say – raising again the spectre of murder as the unforgivable crime – she nevertheless allocates that role to survivors who, through bereavement, are also victims. Pearl Faku and Doreen Mgoduka are such victims. 'What does Pearl Faku forgive [D]e Kock for?' the writer asks elsewhere, and answers her own question: 'Forgiveness, while not disregarding the act, begins not with it but with the person. Forgiveness recognises the deed... but transcends it' (95). Gobodo-Madikizela's own pity and kindness certainly recognise the suffering of the culprit, as her record, with its detailed observation, testifies.

Though her simple answer may, she hopes, bring De Kock 'some solace' (115), the writer recognises that he could only salvage a 'sense of having done something right for once in a life gone to waste' (115). Small comfort, one might say, in having missed potential victims. The incident highlights the personal importance Gobodo-Madikizela holds for De Kock, but most of all his despair, the absence – indeed, the impossibility – of absolution. And it is here that Gobodo-Madikizela does take sides, introducing her account of this exchange as follows: 'White people could escape the ravages of the past and leave it "behind" or "buried". But [D]e Kock's past was following him. *He* was paying the price in shame' (113; author's emphasis). Earlier she had referred to the belief among apartheid government operatives in the 'tacit but powerful support they felt they were receiving from the beneficiaries of apartheid

privilege – the polite churchgoers, the cultured suburbanites, the voters. It is at their feet that the responsibility for apartheid, ultimately, can be laid’ (110, 111).³² Nor does she spare the government, which created the counter-insurgency unit, provided generous funding for covert operations, decorated operatives like De Kock, and never investigated the crimes committed until revelations forced them to appoint a commission, the Harms Commission, which in 1990 found no evidence of death squads at Vlakplaas (De Kock and Gordin, 1998:11). She walks out of a meeting addressed by former president F.W. de Klerk at Harvard University, after he has answered her question about De Kock with the words, ‘My hands are clean’ (2003: 60). Her eloquent articulation of De Kock’s anger reiterates this reaction: ‘De Kock was clearly angry that he had been made a scapegoat –that while he had been sought after as a master counterinsurgency strategist and treated like a hero under apartheid, he had become the most despised white person in post-apartheid South Africa’ (111).

De Kock’s scapegoat status also bothers Jeremy Gordin, who writes, ‘De Kock was thrown to the wolves while others escaped’ (De Kock and Gordin, 1998:291). He concludes his Afterword to *A Long Night’s Damage* with these words:

I hope Eugene de Kock is given amnesty. If he is not, then I hope that he will at least have some company in Pretoria Central. I am thinking of men whose military, police and civilian ranks place them well above that of a colonel (303).³³

³² Nevertheless, even in this instance, Gobodo-Madikizela’s reluctance to judge is evident in her earlier analysis of the factors creating apartheid’s foot soldiers: ‘that one was not a member of the privileged class in apartheid South Africa (is a matter) of sheer grace’ (57).

³³ Compare the ‘sentence’ handed down to a three-headed dog, Brutus, in Jane Taylor’s satirical play, *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997):

With regard to the first case: a head of political cannot always foresee how his vision will be implemented. We thus exonerate you, and retire you with full pension.

With regard to the head of the military: there is no evidence to link you directly to these barbaric acts. Nonetheless, an example must be made of you, or who knows where we’ll end up. You are thus sentenced to thirty years at the head of the new state army.

Finally, to the dog who allowed himself to become the agent of these ghastly deeds: you have been identified by the families of victims; you have left traces of your activities everywhere. We thus sentence you to two hundred and twelve years imprisonment. (In Graham, 2009:46)

Shane Graham has pointed out that this was the sentence, together with two life terms, handed down to Eugene de Kock.

Gobodo-Madikizela, in seeking to understand how De Kock became De Kock, examines his childhood (that of a stuttering boy whose conservative father, a magistrate, was distant, emotionally abusive, and sometimes violent) and especially the political and socio-religious context which caused him to see his death-squad role as that of a ‘crusader’ (2003: 53). Though she never steps over the line by denying personal conscience and culpability, her analysis does spread the blame and goes some way towards creating understanding. She includes the ‘Message from the President P.W. Botha’ inscribed in Bibles distributed to soldiers of the Defence Force (‘Of all the weapons you carry, this is the greatest because it is the Weapon of God’ [53]). This appropriation of divine sanction is further emphasised by the embossed SADF emblem on the front cover – as indeed it was in state propaganda and in deeply flawed, if not heretical, teaching from the churches supporting apartheid. Gobodo-Madikizela answers her own question, whether de Kock should have resisted ‘such forces as apartheid’s legalization of violence’ in the affirmative, but adds another question as a rider: ‘But could he have? Did he have the conviction to oppose the system he served?’ (57) If his upbringing pre-disposed him to violence, she argues, his social environment would not have equipped him to resist participating in state-sanctioned counterinsurgency operations (where ‘he belonged to a world where morality meant the same thing as hate’ [19]). Having entered this world, De Kock found, in his own words, that, in a war ‘fought in the shadows’ there were ‘no lines drawn to mark where you cannot cross’ (20). His own limit involved not hurting children, and for this, the writer finds, there is corroborating evidence (24-25).

Nevertheless, personal conscience must out, even in one as completely immersed in a dirty war as De Kock was, and he confesses, when asked for his ‘worst memory’, that he returned from one cross-border raid deeply disturbed by an acrid smell on his body, one which continued showers could not remove – ‘the smell of blood’ (50-51). The ‘killing clothes’, torn off, and the first of a series of towels were dumped in the refuse bin. ‘A human being died that night in the murder operation,’ Gobodo-Madikizela concludes (51), seeing in the suppressed conscience a destroyed man, whose humanity had to be denied for him to do the apartheid state’s dirty work.

The writer’s concern is not only to examine the conditions that could create – or destroy – a man like De Kock, but also with the post-apartheid context: ‘The question

is... whether we – our symbols, language, and politics, our legal, media and academic institutions – are creating the conditions that encourage alternatives to revenge’ (118). Within a conducive context, she sees the examples of forgiveness by individuals as encouraging reconciliation between previously hostile and polarised groups. Her own project is an attempt to contribute to this rapprochement.

Having examined dialogue and empathy through narrative, Gobodo-Madikizela also reflects on forgiveness, drawing on a wealth of sources as well as examples. She pays tribute to Pearl Faku, who ‘responded to [D]e Kock’s apology with the fullness of her humanity’:

Her statement of forgiveness was profound. As an invitation to [D]e Kock to turn the page, to come onto the path toward the road of peace, it had no equal that I was aware of... in the history of atrocities in the twentieth century. Her response surpasses much of what we know about people who have been victimized when their victimizers ask for forgiveness. It is hard to resist the conclusion that there is something divine about forgiveness expressed in the context of tragedy. How else can we understand how such words can flow from the lips of one wronged so irreparably? (94-95)

Like Ricoeur, Gobodo-Madikizela attributes the surprising element of forgiveness to divine grace – but she nevertheless sets out to understand the possibility of forgiveness. As she has shown in her narrative, she sees forgiveness evoked by compassion for the offender, which enables the one injured to transcend the injury, rather than overlook it. She quotes Nyameka Goniwe, widow of Matthew Goniwe, one of the ‘Cradock Four’: ‘Victims are looking for signs,’ Goniwe says, ‘and when they see those signs, they are ready to forgive’ (97-98). Yet Goniwe’s own experience at the TRC was unsatisfactory, in the absence of adequate information: ‘I can’t forgive and forget, or go on with my life until I know the actual killers.... We cannot close this chapter yet. Our lives have been involved in this case for years. I don’t know how it feels to be without it’ (96). Gobodo-Madikizela argues the possibility that trauma, and the emotions associated with it, become so much a part of one’s life that they become ‘part of the identity’ of one who has suffered loss: ‘The emotions stand in the place of what was lost’; to let go of them would mean to be vulnerable once again (97). Forgiveness, she argues, is a choice ‘to let go of the bitterness’, and it benefits both the one forgiven and the one who forgives, who is placed on a ‘new path toward healing’ (97). In this regard she quotes Doreen Mgoduka who, with Pearl

Faku, forgave De Kock for murdering their husbands: ‘Now I can mourn properly because this has helped me retrace his [her husband’s] steps in life in order to let him go in death’ (97). Not knowing the truth had impeded the necessary mourning process; with the help of De Kock’s testimony as well as his apology, Mrs Mgoduka can both grieve and forgive the loss of her husband. Goniwe, on the other hand, without truth, without a person to forgive or any sign of remorse, cannot close the chapter of her loss and ‘go on with’ her life.

The writer sees an apology as a speech act which, in order to ‘perform’, has to ‘name the deed, acknowledge wrongdoing, and recognise the pain of the victim. Such an apology conveys a sense of regret and deeply felt remorse. “Saying it makes it so.” A remorseful apology inspires empathy and forgiveness’ (99). Empathy, she argues, is the response to the pain of another; ‘pain cannot be evil’ (100). This is why forgiveness begins with the person, rather than the deed: ‘When criminal offenders, even the most egregious kind, show contrition and apologize, they are, quintessentially, *acting as human beings*’ (127, author’s emphasis). Once again, the spoken word, ‘saying it’, is given weight in the irreversible act of speaking remorse. Nevertheless, ‘apology’ seems to be a very weak term in the light of some of the injuries brought to light at the TRC, as Gobodo-Madikizela’s first reaction to De Kock’s request to apologise to the Motherwell widows shows.³⁴ ‘One begins to appreciate the magnitude of forgiveness,’ she writes, ‘when the “wrong” for which an apology is tendered is an atrocity’ (98). Dealing with Hannah Arendt’s concept of radical evil, which Arendt sees as beyond forgiveness, she acknowledges that there are acts ‘for which the language of apology and forgiveness may be entirely inappropriate’ (124). She argues, however, that such acts should not be isolated from the context giving rise to them – something better understood through dialogue. Moreover, the future of a society riven by violence and evil is more hopeful where reconciliation occurs. ‘Thus, while there may be value in recognizing and (positing) limits of forgiveness, if such exist,’ she writes, ‘some societies are finding it more constructive to focus on discovering and nurturing the conditions that make forgiveness first conceivable, then possible’ (124).

³⁴ ‘What would he say? “I’m sorry I killed your husbands”?’ (14)

In contemplating forgiveness in relation to power and powerlessness, Gobodo-Madikizela argues that, while ‘powerlessness is the affliction of the traumatized’ (100), they are empowered when their forgiveness is sought. ‘The victim becomes the gatekeeper to what the outcast desires – readmission to the human community’ (117). (I would add that the injured holds the key to liberation from the psycho-spiritual prison of guilt, that ‘uncleanness’ that no cleansing can remove – as De Kock found.) Just as she argues that dialogue with offenders recognises their humanity, thereby holding them to account for their deeds, becoming ‘both punishment and rehabilitation’ (120), so forgiveness is a form of vengeance: ‘revenge enacted at a rarefied level’ (117). This is because the one with the power to forgive refuses to return the hatred that dehumanised the offender in committing the offence. “‘This is what it means to be human,’” it says. “I cannot and will not return the evil you inflicted on me”” (117). Perhaps this is tantamount metaphorically to heaping burning coals on the offender’s head. Nevertheless, the writer understands and has experienced the discomfort of engaging with the offender, a discomfort born of the fear that one is compromising one’s own morality. Her own turmoil after touching De Kock stemmed from the fear of identification, of ‘stepping into the shoes of a murderer through empathy’ (120).

Yet Gobodo-Madikizela finds vindication for empathy in that shown by those who have the moral authority to give or withhold forgiveness, the widows of De Kock’s murder victims: ‘(T)he grace-filled gestures of forgiveness I had witnessed from people who lived with psychological scars as daily reminders of their trauma gave me even greater hope. In wrestling with my empathy, somehow I found solace in these gestures of forgiveness by victims. They validated my own feelings of empathy toward [D]e Kock’ (44-45).

Verbeeck (2007), while praising the study, faults it for not adequately covering De Kock’s offences – but these are exposed in De Kock’s own *A Long Night’s Damage*. Gobodo-Madikizela refers to this text, and also to Jacques Pauw’s television documentary, *Prime Evil* (1997), so she is not ignorant about the extent of De Kock’s guilt. She also deals with questions about her motives for dialogue. Asked at a conference whether she is not simply being manipulated by De Kock, Gobodo-Madikizela passes the task of answering to Albie Sachs, waving his arm in the

audience. ‘Sachs spoke about how important it was to “see these men’s humanity,” and how much our hopes as South Africans depended on reaching out to such glimpses of humanity in a spirit of compassion instead of revenge. Albie Sachs’s words were all the more nuanced because, as he spoke, he was gesturing with his cut-off arm’ (2003: 45).³⁵

Grace is an unexpected, unwarranted gift; there is, as the writer stresses, no duty to forgive. It is the victim who has the prerogative to choose between mercy and vengeance. For her part, Gobodo-Madikizela finds grace in empathy, and in a generous recognition of her own fallibility: ‘That one is not confronted with the choices [D]e Kock could have or could not have made, that one was not a member of the privileged class in apartheid South Africa are matters of sheer grace’ (57). Mercy, she concludes, ‘should be granted cautiously. And yet society must embrace those who, *like Eugene de Kock*, see... the road of shared humanity ahead. Our capacity for such empathy is a profound gift in this brutal world we have created for one another’ (139) (my emphasis). The writer’s emphasis on the healing of a brutalised society and on the possibility of change in the individual makes this study a testament to hope.

³⁵ Sachs lost his right arm and the use of one eye in a car-bomb explosion in Mozambique.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 The pastoral solution? A note on the *plaasroman*

The novels to be studied in the following chapters, *Disgrace*, *Agaat*, and *Kings of the Water*, are all variations on the genre of the farm novel or *plaasroman*. Since farms hold communities that have lived together within a particular social and political order, often for generations, the genre lends itself to examining, in microcosm, historical, social, political and economic questions within a country or society. In South Africa, with its vexed history of colonialism, of the 1913 Land Act which dispossessed black farmers of their land – and further prevented blacks from recovering or obtaining land – and of apartheid, land ownership has been a particularly painful concern. The appropriation by Afrikaner nationalism of the connection between the Boer and the land as an almost mystical bond was simultaneously a ploy to represent land ownership as a God-given right, denying the legacy of the Land Act and the effect of subsequent laws. The revolutionary slogan ‘Kill the Boer’, still used at political rallies after the demise of apartheid and criticised as hate speech, may well reflect the simmering resentment among black people about the loss of land.

J.M. Coetzee has been amongst those who have drawn attention to the use of the *plaasroman* genre, and has examined the flourishing of this genre in the Afrikaans literature of the early twentieth century within the context of that time, and particularly of increasing urbanisation and the supplanting of a peasant economy by capitalism. He sees the *plaasroman* in this context as ‘based on the myth of the return to the earth’ (1988:79). In this genre farm life, usually ruled over by a benign patriarch, is idealised, while ties to the soil and honest labour (performed by whites, black labour being excised) are celebrated. Coetzee places Pauline Smith’s *The Beadle* (1926) within this pastoral tradition (the farm in her novel is called *Harmonie*, the valley in the Little Karoo is *Aangenaam* [pleasant]), but for Coetzee the farm in Smith is ‘too little distinguishable from the village’ (1988:63). Indeed, both Smith and Olive Schreiner, as ‘women, as people of English culture, as free thinkers...perhaps stood too far outside the insular patriarchal culture of the Boer farm to write of it with true intimacy’ (63). Coetzee therefore classes their novels as farm novels rather than

plaasromans. While Smith conveys the ‘idyll...of African pastoralism’, Coetzee sees Schreiner as anti-idyllic (72), *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) presenting an unflattering ‘microcosm of colonial South Africa’ (65), her farm ‘reigned over by a sterile and slothful woman’ (66) who does not husband the land or care for its people as the pastoral myth requires. ‘Schreiner is anticolonial both in her assertion of the alienness of European culture in Africa and in her attribution of unnaturalness to the life of the farm’ (66). Her anti-pastoral novel is the forerunner to Nadine Gordimer’s *The Conservationist* (1974). (A similar critique is complicated in *Agaat*, in which the farm Grootmoedersdrift is husbanded by generations of women farmers who farm with care and wisdom – but Milla de Wet’s relations with people are far less sound than those with the soil and with livestock, so that the microcosmic critique of neo-colonialism still pertains.³⁶)

‘The pastoral solution to the question of how the white man shall live in South Africa is that he should retreat into rural independence,’ writes Coetzee (1988:81). He himself adopts and parodies the *plaasroman* genre in 1977 with *In the Heart of the Country*, and adjusts it in *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), before examining this same question, how the white man shall live in South Africa, in his 2001 novel *Disgrace*, in a post-colonial, post-apartheid setting. (In this novel Coetzee uses familiar Afrikaans words which connote inequality in a setting of reversed power relations, like *handlanger* [of David Lurie’s assisting a former farm labourer], and *bywoner*, of his daughter, residing on the land now owned by the same man.)

While Coetzee presents a thoughtful analysis of the origin of the *plaasroman* in the 1920s and 1930s, Malvern Van Wyk Smith explores the ways in which it was thoroughly appropriated in the service of Afrikaner nationalism, which flourished in the subsequent decades. He examines a song from his schooldays, ‘*O Boereplaas*’, which encapsulates the myth of the *plaasroman*:

O Boereplaas, geboortegrond,

³⁶ Cf. J.M. Coetzee’s comments in his Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech (1987): ‘At the heart of the unfreedom of the hereditary masters of South Africa is a failure of love. To be blunt: their love is not enough today and has not been enough since they arrived on the continent; furthermore, their talk, their excessive talk, about how they love South Africa has consistently been directed toward *the land*, that is, toward what is least likely to respond to love: mountains and deserts, birds, animals and flowers’ (2002:96).

Jou het ek lief bo alles.
Al swerf ek heel die wêreld rond,
Waar so gelukkig, so gesond?³⁷ (Van Wyk Smith, 2001: 17)

Van Wyk Smith points out that the melody was that of Schubert's *Tannenbaum*, and that the song, unbeknownst to the unreflecting schoolchildren, was 'a capsule of all the racially and culturally exclusive myths and doctrines on which Afrikaner nationalism had been nurtured for decades' (2001:17-18) – as were the *plaasromans* set in literature courses. 'Such works,' he writes, thematised the nexus of the "boer" and his "plaas" as a timeless icon of national and numinous identity, not only validating an unquestioned right to the land but expressing also the very soul of the Afrikaner being' (17). He argues that the myths which give the farm and the farm novel potency in many cultures (such as closeness to the soil, fundamental survival) achieved a 'peculiar intensity' in South Africa 'precisely because possession of much of the territory by whites is seen to be controversial if not illegitimate' (17). Ampie Coetzee agrees: the common denominator between history and fiction is, in his opinion, the vexed question of land ownership (2000:2).

The increase in farm murders since democratisation in South Africa has been variously interpreted. With regard to the public reaction to such attacks, Ampie Coetzee quotes Etienne van Heerden's comment: 'Daar's motorkapings en rooftogte – maar min slagtings roer soos 'n moordaanval op 'n plaasopstal' (2000:xii).³⁸ The farm has retained its power in the popular imagination, especially among Afrikaners (the Afrikaans media cover farm murders with far more prominence, for example, than do the English-language media). Nevertheless, as Van Wyk Smith points out, farmers probably constitute less than 5% of South Africa's white population. His argument that the agitated response to farm murders among Afrikaners, in particular, is disproportionate (more people die in road accidents and of Aids, he argues) is perhaps disingenuous in view of the political and economic climate. Moreover, those who die on the roads or of Aids are not murdered; there is no suggestion of hate crime (though in the latter case there was cause for outrage at what many perceived to be criminal

³⁷ Oh Boer farm (a tautology unless Boer stands for Afrikaner), ground of my birth,/ I love you above all./ Even if I should roam throughout the world,/ Where would I be as happy, as healthy?

³⁸ There are car hijackings and armed robberies, but few murders move one as does a murderous attack on a farm homestead.

negligence). Ampie Coetzee argues that the question whether attacks on farmers are politically motivated, as many whites believe, or merely criminal, as the government insists, is immaterial: those who are directly affected, he writes, believe they are political (2000: xiii). (At present necessary and relevant ethical questions concerning land ownership and restitution are nevertheless obscuring other, equally urgent questions of food security.)

Van Wyk Smith points out the changes that the trope of the *boereplaas* has undergone in recent years, both as a result of attacks on farmers, which have turned the farm into a ‘war zone, a limbo of menace and insecurity’ (19), and through revelations before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission about covert operations planned and executed from a farm, Vlakplaas. ‘The burials at Vlakplaas,’ he writes, ‘have become the buried – but now resurrected – memories, mentalities, crimes of a whole discredited political culture. But they also invite us to ponder more closely the possibility that the trope of the “boereplaas” has always been an ambivalent one, an ideality which always depended for its potency and charm on as much denial as affirmation, on as much suppression as transcendence’ (20). Ironically, the shallow graves at Vlakplaas provide a historical echo to a fictional image of denial and suppression in the farm novel, a series of buried presences, beginning with Schreiner’s imagined ‘buried giant’, as Van Wyk Smith points out (2001:27) – a koppie which is near the centre of the farm and the novel itself. When, in *The Conservationist*, the shallow grave of a black man yields its contents after a rain storm, the ‘black corpse in the garden’ – the ‘dark side’ which is buried in the *plaasroman* – is ‘brought to light’ (Coetzee J.M., 1988: 81) – much as the disinterred bodies of death squad victims would bring to light what had been suppressed during the apartheid years. In Coetzee’s view, Gordimer’s novel ‘lays the ghost’ of the pastoral solution (81). Her novel ends with the description of the reburial by farm workers and anticipates land repossession: ‘They had put him to rest, at last; he had come back³⁹. He took possession of this earth, theirs; one of them’ (1974: 267). Van Wyk Smith, similarly, closes with the reminder that ‘the resurrections of Vlakplaas not only confront us with the suppressed truths of the past, but also generate the restitutions required for the nation to redirect its narrative.... If we are the stories we

³⁹ This echoes the ANC slogan *Mayibuye* (‘May he come back’).

tell ourselves, we now know that neither we nor the stories can – and must – ever be the same again’ (2001:35).

3.2. Bearing the sins? J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*.

Disgrace appeared in 1999, five years after the first democratic elections in South Africa. The first post-apartheid euphoria had not completely waned, and white people especially had reason to be thankful for a peaceful solution, an absence of retribution for the wrongs of the past, the extent of which was being revealed at TRC hearings. Yet *Disgrace* was not a hopeful novel, but appeared to be a deeply pessimistic portrayal of contemporary South Africa: Farred, for instance, sees the South Africa in the novel as a ‘disgraced – and disgraceful – society’ (2002: 343). More importantly, Wicomb (2002: 220), in a clear reference to the TRC process, sees the novel as proclaiming ‘the failure of the project of public memorialising, the naivety and inadequacy of that Christian discourse of remembering, forgiving and healing’. And indeed, the blight of guilt and the shadow of avenging violence, in the absence of either justice or mercy, seem to pervade the novel, leaving critics to seek traces of grace, and to debate the possibility or impossibility of ethical action for the individual subject. For the purpose of this study, I wish to argue, following Gareth Cornwell (2003) and others, that, while grace is indeed to be found in surprising spaces, it is found primarily in incarnational, sacrificial giving.

Much of the complexity of *Disgrace* derives from its limited point of view and unreliable focaliser – that individual through whom ethical action might be expected to be realised – in the figure of David Lurie. McDonald identifies the unease created for many readers: ‘The narrative form, a present tense version of free indirect style, makes it difficult to say, conclusively, that all this is simply a staged depiction of a self-indicting white male. This puts the reader, especially (but not exclusively) the black, gay or woman reader, in the uneasy, even provocative, position of being obliged to see the story through a disturbingly alien gaze without having any sense of the boundary between character and narrator’ (2002: 326). (Confusing the focalising narrator and the author himself has certainly led to much misreading of the novel.) Thus the reader comes to ‘participate’ in Lurie’s seduction and rape of a young female student, Melanie Isaacs – which are described only through his self-deceiving

consciousness – and has only Lurie’s judgment to depend on in evaluating later events. Other significant characters, all women, do not tell their stories, and remain opaque to Lurie, often serving to remind the reader only of gaps in his awareness and understanding: ‘You keep misreading me’ (2000: 112); ‘(Y)ou miss the point entirely’ (112); ‘*You weren’t there. You don’t know what happened*’ (134, 140; author’s emphasis). And, while Lurie does attain a form of grace, it is the women, whom he does not understand, and his daughter especially, who in small but heroic ways make a contribution to the future through taking suffering upon themselves. That they do this in contentious ways, in abominable circumstances, does not diminish the gift.

Much of the outrage elicited by the novel centres on its account of an attack on the farm owned by Lurie’s daughter, Lucy, during which she is gang-raped by the three intruders, while he is beaten and set alight with paraffin. The dogs she is caring for in her kennels are shot in their cages. Lucy, numbed, ‘dead’, refuses to report the rape to the police, though the theft of Lurie’s car and other items is reported for the purpose of claiming insurance.

The novel has two settings: Cape Town, where Prof. David Lurie falls into disgrace, and Salem, in the Eastern Cape, to which he retreats. A village in ‘old Kaffraria’, Salem was part of the colonial frontier for British settlers and is still a ‘border town’ or liminal space, now in the process of decolonisation and forming part of what Graham Pechey has called the ‘terrifyingly unmarked temporal frontier of decolonization’ (2002: 377). Salem calls to mind not only Hawthorne’s judgmental puritanical society, but also the city after which both towns are named: Jerusalem (‘possession of peace’, Salem meaning peace) – a site which has, paradoxically, known more conflict than most, just as Salem in the Eastern Cape has done.

Gareth Cornwell has expounded Salem’s history in a fascinating article, ‘Disgraceland: History and the Humanities in Frontier Country’ (2003), in which he sees Coetzee’s setting as the most logical ‘for a story concerned at its core with entitlement to the land in post-apartheid South Africa’ (43). He points out that, of the nine frontier wars fought in the district between British settlers and Xhosas, ‘the fundamental *casus belli* was the question of land, and the history of the region known to this day as “the Border” (or just “Border”) is a history of strife that is everywhere

inscribed in the landscape’ (2003: 43). Salem itself was established by a small group under the Rev. William Shaw, who named the settlement, quoting Psalm 76: ‘In Salem also His tabernacle and His dwelling place’ (Cornwell, 2003: 44). While the first conflicts passed Salem by, a raid by ‘a large force of some five hundred Xhosas’ made off with the settlers’ cattle during the Sixth Frontier War, and massed on a nearby hillside (44). A possible attack was averted by a man called Richard Gush, ‘a man of Quaker leanings and an avowed pacifist (“possibly the only man in the Eastern Cape who never carried a gun”...)’ (Cornwell, 2003: 45, quoting from a lecture by the historian Winifred Maxwell). Gush rode out to the Xhosas with Barend Woest as his translator and, being received because he was unarmed, was able to negotiate, appeasing them by fetching a gift of bread, tobacco and pen knives.

Cornwell argues that the incident described below – the account of which Guy Butler includes in his “The Life of William Gush” – may have bearing on the novel:

Some years before the war of 1834, some Caffres stole his team of bullocks when he was travelling, and he was so poor that he had not money to replace them. He would not however, lodge any information before the authorities, lest any armed force should be sent after the Caffres, and human blood should be spilled. (45)

In this possible historical precedent for events in *Disgrace*, it seems both the absence of any attempt at retribution and the giving of a gift pave the way for a costly peace which enables the alien settlers, although greatly impoverished and fewer in number (some having left), to remain in the territory alongside the Xhosa people. And, while Cornwell sees Guy Butler’s 1982 play, *Richard Gush of Salem*, as ‘1820-settler mythmaking’ (46), he quotes Butler on the incident which, for him, ‘went right to the heart of contemporary South Africa...the response of the individual conscience to racial and other violence’ (46).

In this light, Cornwell sees Lucy’s choice to remain silent about the offence committed against her, as an ‘intervention’: ‘it seems that we are being invited to read her response as a radical intervention... in the cycle of retributive violence which had (or *has*) for so long defined human relations on the “frontier” – an exemplary

demonstration of the principle of non-violence which for Coetzee is embodied in Christ's Crucifixion:

I understand the Crucifixion as a refusal and an introversion of retributive violence, a refusal so deliberate, so conscious, and so powerful that it overwhelms any interpretation, Freudian, Marxian, or whatever, that we can give to it.' (Cornwell, 46, quoting Coetzee in *Doubling the Point*, 1992: 337)

(The context from which this quotation is taken details Coetzee's extreme aversion to violence. I will return to the ethics of the Cross in relation to the novel.) Cornwell goes on to situate Lucy's intervention in a world that is 'not real', but belongs to what Coetzee has called fiction's 'rival history' (54). Lucy's final scene of almost paradisiacal serenity⁴⁰ – though undercut by fierce irony – belongs, equally, 'outside of history': these two scenes 'offer an ideal or mythical solution to a problem that in the real world seems incapable of solution; that is, they offer a *pastoral* solution' (54; author's emphasis).

Does *Disgrace*, together with Michael K – who evades land ownership and tries, in a purely 'conceptual' solution (Coetzee in an interview with Tony Morphet, quoted by Cornwell, 48), to live in the seams, as it were, between the fences – provide that 'pastoral solution to the question of how the white man shall live in South Africa', as Cornwell suggests? Is such sacrifice as Lucy makes, not seeking retribution and giving up her claim to her land, 'the price one has to pay for staying on', as she puts it in the novel (158)? I hope to follow Cornwell in exploring the possibility suggested in the novel of breaking the retributive cycle of violence through 'a refusal and introversion of violence', as Coetzee says of the Cross. Whether this constitutes mercy or sacrifice – or both – is less easy to define.

If Gareth Cornwell provides the key, it is Lucy Graham (2002) who has introduced the notion of sacrifice by drawing attention to the link between the name given to the student seduced by Lurie (the cause of his disgrace), Melanie Isaacs, and Jacques Derrida's discourse on the story of Abraham and his sacrifice of Isaac, his son. Refuting those critics who apply a Levinasian ethics of the (singular, transcendent, human) other to the novel, Graham quotes Derrida's criticism of this singular

⁴⁰ Cf. Graham Pechey's article, 'Coetzee's Purgatorial Africa' (2002:376).

conception of the other, in which he suggests that one ‘cannot respond to the call, the request, the obligation, or even the love of another without sacrificing the other other, the other others’ (Graham, 2002: 4, quoting from Derrida’s *The Gift of Death*, 1995). Derrida uses the ‘monstrous’ choice with which Abraham is confronted to argue that such choices are in fact common, as one cannot be responsible to one other without neglecting the ‘other others’. The question that arises, then, is ‘to whom is responsibility due?’ or ‘whom to give to’ (Graham, 2002: 8) – which is not unlike the lawyer’s question to Jesus about the law of love: ‘Who is my neighbour?’⁴¹ (In the novel *Lucy*, interestingly, chooses to call her former labourer, Petrus, her ‘neighbour’, something Lurie hesitates over before accepting.)

In his essay ‘Whom to Give to (Knowing not to Know)’ (1998), Derrida gives his own, sympathetic reading of Kierkegaard’s ‘Fear and Trembling’, in which the latter examines the Abrahamic story in terms of the paradox of morality it presents:

Abraham’s decision is absolutely responsible because it answers for itself before the absolute other. Paradoxically it is also irresponsible because it is guided neither by reason nor by an ethics justifiable before men or before the law of some universal tribunal. Everything points to the fact that one is unable to be responsible at the same time before the other and before others, before the others of the other. If God is completely other, the figure or name of the wholly other, then every other (one) is every (bit) other. *Tout autre est tout autre*. This formula... implies that God, as the wholly other, is to be found everywhere where there is something of the wholly other... (Derrida, 1998:170)

In the story of Abraham and Isaac, Derrida argues, following Kierkegaard, that Abraham, in order to give to God, the Absolute Other, what God requires, sacrifices another other, his son: it is ‘monstrous, outrageous, barely conceivable: a father is prepared to put to death his beloved son... because the Other, the great Other asks him or orders him without giving the slightest explanation’ (in Graham, 2002:7).

⁴¹ This question is overturned in Jesus’ answer, which takes the form of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37). The parable, which begins with a traveller on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho, makes the victim the protagonist, not the Samaritan, despite the name attributed to it – by the end of the first sentence the traveller has been stripped and left for dead by a band of robbers. The story therefore invites identification with the victim, and brings to mind Coetzee’s statement in an interview: ‘(I)f all of us imagined violence as violence against ourselves, perhaps we would have peace’ (1992: 337). The question is also overturned by Jesus’ question at the end of the parable, when he asks who ‘proved a neighbour to the man who fell among robbers’.

Abraham must hate that which he loves to fulfil his responsibility to the Absolute Other. Graham cites this in arguing that Lurie's defence of his seduction and, indeed, rape of Melanie – that he was a 'servant of Eros' (Coetzee, 2000: 52) – falls into the same category as Abraham's abnegation of responsibility in behaving unethically towards one beloved for the sake (ostensibly) of the Divine Other (Graham, 2002: 7). (Derrida is more sympathetic to Abraham's choice than is Graham.) What Lucy Graham omits from the ambit of her study is Kierkegaard's – and Derrida's – insistence that, paradoxically, love is still central: 'for it is indeed this love for Isaac that makes his act a sacrifice by its paradoxical contrast to his love for God' (Kierkegaard, quoted by Derrida, 1998:160). This 'gift of death' for the loved object will be found in Lurie's final act in the novel.

Nevertheless, Graham is correct in her understanding of Lurie's initial 'wrong' sacrifice. Lurie seduces Melanie by saying that 'a woman's beauty does not belong to her alone' (Coetzee, 2000: 16), and with the thought, 'Beauty's rose... she does not own herself' (18). Significantly, he also thinks, 'perhaps he does not own himself either' (18). (Lurie's contention that he is 'in the grip of something' suggests possession, which sets him apart from Abraham, who is tested precisely because he exercises choice.) He sacrifices, not himself, but (in his own perception) '*a child... (n)o more than a child*' (20; author's emphasis) to the fire, the 'last leap of flame of sense before it goes out' (27). In his narcissism, warding off old age and death⁴², he rationalises his abuse by drawing on neo-platonic Romantic notions, denying the fact of rape, sacrificing the other to his own ends. This event, the first to alert the reader to the concept of sacrifice, clearly signals an inversion of true sacrifice, and is hence the most unethical act. That Melanie, sleeping in his daughter's bedroom, evokes Lurie's

⁴² Cf. Lurie's thoughts after watching, unseen, as Melanie rehearses a stage performance: 'Yet the old men whose company he seems to be on the point of joining, the tramps and drifters with their stained raincoats and cracked false teeth and hairy earholes – all of them were once upon a time children of God, with straight limbs and clear eyes. Can they be blamed for clinging to the last to their place at the sweet banquet of the senses?' (24) He 'explains' his actions to Melanie's father in terms of fire: '(I)n the olden days people worshipped fire. They thought twice before letting a flame die, a flame-god. It was that kind of flame your daughter kindled in me. Not hot enough to burn me up, but real: real fire'. The perfective form for which Lurie has a predilection, follows, invoking complete destruction, a 'holocaust':

'Burned – burnt – burnt up' (166).

protectiveness and seems almost a daughter to him ('Mistress? Daughter' [27]) exacerbates the offence and sharpens the contrast with the Abrahamic sacrifice.

Derrida, who is at pains throughout his essay to point to the relevance of the Abrahamic story for the three monotheistic religions, yet concludes: 'As for the sacrifice of the son by his father, the son sacrificed by men and finally saved by a God who seemed to have abandoned him or put him to the test, how can we not recognise there the foreshadowing or the analogy of another passion?' (1998:172). Indeed, of Abraham's answer to Isaac's question, 'God will Himself provide a lamb for the burnt offering', Derrida writes, 'He says something... that, *although he doesn't know it yet*, will turn out to be true' (156; author's emphasis). Abraham's words are fulfilled literally in the provision of an animal for the sacrifice, but he unconsciously predicts more than that. God's inexplicable words to him ('Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love... and offer him as a burnt offering' – which, as Derrida points out, means 'holocaust' [Gen 22:2]) – are echoed at the outset of Jesus' ministry: 'This is my beloved Son' (Mt 3:17) and in John 3:16: 'God so loved the world that he gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish...'. It is possible that the troubling story of Abraham and Isaac invites the reader to begin to imagine, if that were possible, the cost of that divine choice between beloved others. Just as Abraham's story foreshadows the supreme sacrifice, Lurie's abuse looks forward to that which will be inflicted upon his daughter. In that event even David Lurie, who by his own acknowledgement, is selfish, will do anything, give his own life, to save his child, just as one imagines Abraham would willingly take the place of his son on the altar. In the story of Abraham, the lamb that God provides is in fact a ram, a substitution, a figure of the Father. When the Lamb of God dies, the sky is black.

A different reading of the story of Abraham and Isaac is given by René Girard, as marking not the beginning, but the end of sacrifice. While child sacrifices were practised by surrounding nations, Girard argues, the children of Abraham were given an object lesson in the suspension of the sacrifice: that child sacrifice was not what God required of them.⁴³ Girard sees this story as looking forward to the end of

⁴³ This reading could be borne out by reference to the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who consistently rebuke the Israelites for child sacrifices to Molech: 'And you took your sons and daughters, whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed.... Were your harlotries so

religion based on scapegoating (and therefore essentially violent: ‘Violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred’ [quoted in Kirwan, 2004:41]). In its place will come the Crucified – and here Girard’s views are similar to Coetzee’s. Girard’s interpretation of the crucifixion is that it is not a sacrifice to God, but a life of non-violence taken to its conclusion. ‘To say that Jesus dies, not as a sacrifice, but in order that there may be no more sacrifices, is to recognize in him the Word of God: “I wish for mercy and not sacrifices”’ (Girard, 1999: 184). (Cf. Hebrews 9,10.) This message of the Kingdom of God is not received by a culture premised on violence, which moves to reject it. The ‘logic of violence has the last word’, but the ‘logic of non-violence’ which does not resist it, is superior, according to Girard, because ‘it comprehends the other logic in addition to itself’ (185). When Girard argues that Jesus’ death is not a sacrifice, it is because he sees it as not being required by God. Jesus Himself does ‘give his life for his friends’ (185, quoting from John 15:13 on the greatest love): ‘There is no other cause for his death than the love of one’s neighbor lived to the very end, with an infinitely intelligent grasp of the constraints it imposes’ (185). This giving of oneself for the other or others is the final sacrifice: the end to the practice of scapegoating as sacrifice, and also the end to the cycle of violence. It is what I call sacrificial giving, taking suffering or death upon oneself (introversion) for the sake of another or others.

Though Lucy, in her mid-twenties, would have been born into white privilege and enjoyed its benefits, she is, in Petrus’s words, ‘forward-looking’ (Coetzee, 2000: 136), and seems to be part of the new order. Her father, however, sees her as a ‘settler’ (61) and a ‘boervrou’ (60) – as, apparently, do her attackers, whose hatred shocks her. She might therefore be seen as a relatively innocent victim, the perfect scapegoat for the old culture of violence, which has not been eliminated by democratisation. (Kirwan notes that ‘many of the victims of witch-hunts during the medieval period happened to be single women living on their own’; if they were in any way ‘marginal to begin with’ potential scapegoats were more vulnerable [2004:49], and it is possible, as Lurie speculates, that Lucy’s lesbianism was a factor in the attack.) The apparently personal

small a matter that you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to (idols)?’ (Ez 16:20,21). ‘For the sons of Judah have done evil in my sight, says the Lord.... They have built the high place of Topheth... to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind’ (Jer 7:30, 31). (The place name *Topheth* is probably derived from the Aramaic root *tpt*: ‘it will then mean “fireplace”’ (*The New Bible Dictionary*, 1287).

hatred from young men Lucy has not met before also brings to mind Willa Boesak's concept of 'God's wrathful children' (as discussed in chapter 1): those who take vengeance in the absence of visible justice – retribution or reparation – for the wrongs of the past.

Elleke Boehmer (2006: 136) has pointed out that Lurie and Lucy discuss scapegoating just before the attack occurs. Lurie 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. (2000: 91)

Coetzee portrays scapegoating as a religious ritual with a wider application than that of Judaism (described in Leviticus 16), and Lurie sees it as having lost its potency with the waning of religious belief. Girard, on the other hand, sees the practice as fundamental to that (old) religion that lives on in a violent culture, and the scapegoat as the necessary recipient of such a society's propensity to unite itself by creating a common enemy: demonising, then destroying, a vulnerable candidate. If Willa Boesak is correct in discerning anger in many black people in the post-apartheid period, in the absence of justice, then in the novel an unprovoked attack on an innocent person would certainly qualify as scapegoating. When Lucy compares rape to '(p)ushing the knife in' (158), she evokes the very thing Abraham is stopped, at the last moment, from doing: sacrificing another. The fact that she will go on literally to bear the child conceived in this violence means that she takes upon herself, bears in her body, the outcome of the sins of the past.

David Lurie never understands Lucy's decision to remain silent about her violation, and presents several arguments for taking action – which, at the time of reading, make more sense to the reader than Lucy's unexplained position. When Lucy agrees, moreover, to give up her land to Petrus – who, in Lurie's opinion, may have been behind the attack or at least have turned a blind eye to it – in order to stay on her smallholding, her decision appears senseless to her father. But Lucy fulfils the

teaching of non-retaliation and non-violence which Girard sees as central to Christ's message and death:

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.⁴⁴ (Mt 5:38– 41)

This teaching ('Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good' [Rom. 12:21]) sees non-retaliation as more than the absence of retribution. While there is no doubt that the offence is evil, it is nevertheless to be absorbed without retaliation, and to be followed by an act of will in which more is given than was taken by force: the other cheek, the cloak, the extra mile. This is tantamount to an enactment of forgiveness – even where forgiveness has not been sought. Significantly, it is the act, not words, that matter. It is an act of will – the heart may be slow to follow. Lucy, having stripped herself of all rights and claims, left with 'nothing', says that this is what she 'must learn to accept' (205), and one assumes that the process will take time. When she does not report the rape, then chooses to give up her title to the land, and to keep the child so violently inflicted upon her, bearing in her body the evil done to her, and resolving to 'be a good mother' (216) – she fulfils the highest ethical ideals.

Ideally, this should bring to an end the cycle of retributive violence, yet even in Coetzee's fictional world this conceptual solution may not succeed: Lucy will stay, but there is no guarantee that Petrus, who is to give his protection in marriage in return for her land (Lucy will be his third wife), will protect her and honour her terms. Her choice to follow this course, rather than that favoured by her father ('They ought to turn the farmhouse into a fortress. Lucy ought to buy a pistol and a two-way radio...' [113]), is nevertheless more hopeful than the doomed stance of her neighbour Ettinger, who is ready to defend his land with violence, in the manner already abandoned as unsustainable by the apartheid government.

⁴⁴ In Jesus' time, a Roman colonial soldier could compel a local resident to carry a burden for him for one mile, as Simon of Cyrene does in the gospel account of the passion.

Leela Gandhi quotes Derrida on '(t)hat strange behaviour where a living being in *quasi-suicidal* fashion, "itself" works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its own immunity', and comments: 'Here, then, is the text for that prior concession to the injurability of the self upon which a certain ethics of non-violence founds its manifesto. One... that privileges self-suffering over violence or, to be more precise, is liberated from the reflexes of aggression through preemptive concession to its own "precariousness"' (Gandhi, 2008: 169). Such a predisposition – which Lucy attains through suffering – is very close to Jesus' teaching, which provides a strategy for non-retaliation, an alternative to the 'reflexes of aggression', by absorbing violation and being prepared to open the self to further offence. Giving up mechanisms of self-protection does indeed seem suicidal, but the alternative is violence: 'people fail to understand that they are indebted to violence for the degree of peace that they enjoy' (Girard, Oughourlian and Lefort, 2003 :211).

Elleke Boehmer describes Lucy's – and Lurie's eventual – stance as one of 'abjection'. Her apparently positive articulation of Lucy's 'physical abjection to, and a new responsibility for' a history of violation (a course she sees as 'traditionally feminine') (Boehmer, 2002: 343) nevertheless echoes the criticism made by Alain Badiou of 'near-suicidal' theories of pacifism and non-violence, which he sees as 'an ethics of abjection, too much in love with pain and death' (in Leela Gandhi, 2008: 170). The terms Lucy uses in the novel are 'Subjection. Subjugation' – which, she insists, are '(n)ot slavery' (149). These suggest an elected position – under – rather than a denial of agency, the loss of any position but that of the degraded victim.⁴⁵ ('You can govern us as long as we remain the governed,' Mahatma Gandhi wrote.⁴⁶) I therefore disagree with Boehmer's reading of Lucy's position as that of the 'stereotype of the wronged and muted woman'; unlike her father, who, as a subject, 'abjects selfhood', Lucy – according to this reading – has 'abnegation thrust upon her' and remains the object of history (Boehmer, 2002:349). I believe that, while Lucy's

⁴⁵ The roots of *subjection* denote being placed (or thrown) under, of *subjugation*, being under a yoke. The root form of *abjection* denotes being thrown away.

⁴⁶ Leela Gandhi quotes Mahatma Gandhi on his concept of 'soul force': 'You can govern us as long as we remain the governed.... The force implied in this way may be described as love-force, soul-force.... This force is indestructible.... The force of arms is powerless when matched against the force of ... the soul' (2008:163).

violation is thrust upon her, she does exercise choice and displays extraordinary grace in its aftermath.

Lurie's own stumbling progress towards grace is also charted through the motif of sacrificial love. At first he is morally blind. Professor of Communications (since the 'great rationalization' [3]) at the Cape Technical University, he is nevertheless still in thrall to his old masters, the Romantics, who, he later admits, 'have not... guided him well' – either that, or he has not 'listened well' (179). He invokes the Romantic sublime⁴⁷ in seducing and raping Melanie.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Lucy Graham comments, of the rape of Melanie, that when Lurie 'usurps upon' her, idealising her as Aphrodite, 'there is a critique of this Romantic version of desire, and a warning that veiling the other in sublimity may obscure abuse and may permit one to behave unethically toward another body' (2002:7).

Kimberley Wedeven Segall has examined the concept of the 'sublime' from Longinus onwards, noting that, for the Romantics, '(t)he expanding imaginative capability of the romantic sublime produces an aggrandised sense of self' (2005:42). She argues persuasively that Lurie's initial narcissistic Romanticism makes way, after the attack, for an experience of what she calls the 'traumatic sublime', which 'alters the focus from the protagonist to another character' (42). She traces this change through the altered conception of Lurie's Byronic opera, which now celebrates not the poet but his mourning mistress, now middle-aged – and even his abandoned daughter, who enters the opera unbidden. These two 'ghosts' draw Lurie into the perspective of the suffering victim. His relation to the dogs he helps tend is another barometer of change. While conceding that Lurie is hardly transformed to sainthood, Segall writes that he 'does, by the end, recognize that others experience suffering; it is a shift from narcissism to a nascent awareness of others' (41). She also points out that the words 'sublime' and 'sublimation' – Lurie's forte – share the same root.

⁴⁸ Cornwell has argued at some length that in the novel 'the humanities, the Romantic imagination, indeed, Western modernity as a whole, simply have the stuffing knocked out of them' (2003:62). In Africa they are bankrupt, without relevance to Lurie's 'post-Christian, posthistorical, postliterate' students, of no use when he is locked in a lavatory while his daughter is raped ('He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa'). Cornwell relates this to Elizabeth Costello's sister's view, of which he writes, 'there seems to me to be considerable authorial sympathy for Blanche's sentiments' (57). A somewhat reductionist understanding of this overtly Christian view (Blanche is a nun), is that the secularisation of the Humanities' original purpose, 'the recovery of the true message of the Bible' (in Cornwell, 56), in the name of reason, has killed them. Costello interprets her sister's view by saying that, 'the humanities are of their nature incapable of satisfying the essential human craving "that is, in the end, a quest for salvation"' (in Cornwell, 57). Blanche will go on to argue that "'a secular vision of salvation" is impossible' (60) (much as an end to secular confession is impossible). Its replacement by reason during the Renaissance, and brought to South Africa by colonialism ('the Europeans came to Africa bearing the gifts of civilization, education and enlightenment' [Cornwell, 71]) provided, in Blanche's words, a 'false ideal' ('You can be as gods.... We will teach you to live for ever' [in Cornwell, 61]). Cornwell relates this discussion to both Lurie's and Lucy's 'redemptions'. The Humanities do not help Lurie outside the university ('The truth is, he has never had much of an eye for rural life, despite all his reading of Wordsworth' [218, cited by Cornwell, 58]), and even the English language is found to be 'an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa' (117, in Cornwell 58). Cornwell argues that Lurie's view of the language, that it needs to become 'reconstructed, purified, fit to be trusted once more', so that it can be used again ('starting all over again with the ABC' [129]), pertains to Lurie himself (59). When he finds himself, in

Though Lurie is blind to the comparison between his rape of Melanie and the later rape of his daughter, the novel connects the two through word and image. His rape of Melanie is almost obscured by her acquiescence when he first seduces her, and her apparently willing participation in their third encounter. But between these occasions Lurie forces himself upon Melanie uninvited after seeing her on stage and re-imagining her as a goddess-figure. ‘Not rape,’ he reflects, ‘not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of a fox close on its neck’ (Coetzee, 2000: 25). Lucy, too, speaks of being ‘dead’ (161) and compares rape to murder (158). But more sinister is the link in a distorted pastoral image, which Wicomb (2002) has pointed out: of the rapists Lurie thinks, ‘It was not the pleasure principle that ran the show but the testicles, sacs bulging with seed aching to perfect itself... seed driven into the woman’ (199). Just before this Lurie considers the abuse he himself is guilty of, feeling that he is punished for ‘broadcasting old seed’ (190), but nevertheless claims virility when he thinks of the ‘force that drives the utmost strangers into each other’s arms.... The seed of generation, driven to perfect itself, driving deep into the woman’s body, driving to bring the future into being. Drive, driven’ (194).

In addition to this problematic understanding of sexuality (particularly male sexuality), the old association of rape with the conquest of the land is not absent either. Critics such as David Attwell have pointed to the association in Coetzee’s oeuvre between the depiction of rape, particularly inter-racial rape, and the portrayal of colonisation (*The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee; Waiting for the Barbarians*).⁴⁹ Here the notion of conquest resurfaces in linking the rapes. Lurie, seeing Melanie on a motorcycle passing his car, thinks, ‘*I have been there!*’ (33; author’s emphasis), and, seeing her on stage on his return to Cape Town, is possessively proud of her success: ‘Mine! he would like to say’ (191). (The link between his rape of Melanie and the old

Salem, ‘losing himself by the day’ (121, Cornwell 59), he is, Cornwell argues, losing his life to find it, a ‘process modelled on Christ’s words for the holy surrender of conversion’ (59).

⁴⁹ David Attwell speaks of the novel’s ‘tendency to represent colonial and post-colonial history alike as a cyclic re-enactment of power and appropriation at every level’ (2002:338).

order is made explicit by a member of the panel at Lurie's hearing, who refers to the 'long history of exploitation of which this is part' [53]. Melanie, the 'dark one' [18], is coloured.) Lucy, for her part, believes her rapists thought of her as being 'in their territory' (158). While Melanie's name means 'the dark one', Lucy denotes light; the novel in its depictions of trans-racial rape, evokes and balances the ghosts of 'white peril' and 'black peril'.

Yet Lurie, though he sees the attack on Lucy as a form of retribution for a 'history of wrong', fails to see that he is part of that history, part of the centuries-old pattern of exploitation and abuse, having re-enacted 'the old colonial appropriation' (Wicomb, 2002: 216). Wicomb argues that the new culture being born with decolonisation is not transformed, not translated, that the 'pathologies' of the past endure, and that the 'modalities of the past – sex, race, violence – continue to prevail'. Indeed, she maintains that the gang-rape of Lucy represents an intensification of the old violent culture in the novel, when compared to the earlier rape of Melanie.

Insofar as Lurie's actions make him co-responsible for the 'sins of the fathers' which will be visited upon the next generation, his daughter, he fails to acknowledge his part. Interestingly, the two scenes that seem staged to provide a space for acknowledgement, repentance and apology appear to subvert a conventional understanding of these moments. The first, the disciplinary hearing in which Lurie is accused of harassment of a student, appears to be something of a parody of the TRC process. He is asked to admit wrongdoing and express repentance, in return for rehabilitation and the retention of his position. 'They wanted a spectacle,' he tells Lucy hyperbolically afterwards, 'breast-beating, remorse, tears if possible. A TV show, in fact. I wouldn't oblige' (66). What he tells Manas Mathabane, Professor of Religious Studies and chair of the commission (possibly reflecting the role played by Archbishop Tutu at the TRC), is that '(r)epentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse' (58). He sees the hearing as purely legal and secular, part of the new bureaucracy, and refuses the discourse of confession, repentance and atonement. Though he pleads guilty to the charge of harassment, he refuses, disturbingly, even to read the charge against him (an act which excludes Melanie's account from the narrative, akin to other elisions of women's experience), showing his lack of care for the other, whom he has already objectified. ('The story is, she took

sleeping pills,' his ex-wife has heard [45] – but Lurie shows no interest in this.) The more serious charge of rape is not raised. Significantly, though he pleads guilty to the charge levelled against him, Lurie frustrates the panel by not naming, not acknowledging, the wrong he has done: 'Yes, he says he is guilty,' Farodia Rassool says, 'but when we try to get specificity, all of a sudden it is not abuse of a young woman he is confessing to, just an impulse he could not resist, with no mention of the pain he has caused, no mention of the long history of abuse (by empowered white males of disempowered females of colour) of which this is a part' (53). (Later, Lurie himself will be equally frustrated in his efforts to draw the word 'violation' from Petrus, whom he holds responsible for the offence against Lucy.)

It is clear that the trauma of the attack on Lucy and on him changes Lurie, as his love for his daughter draws him into the experience of the victim – though the question whether he can fully identify, whether 'he has it in him to be the woman' (160), is left open in the novel. This, and Lucy's association of him with the men who do such things as rape, may be what leads to a rather bizarre visit to Melanie's home and her family, which occurs suddenly in the novel with no indication of the reasons for Lurie's decision. In this second episode, the discordance between his own secular discourse and Mr Isaacs' Christian understanding of the process is almost comical. Isaacs, true to his Christian ethics, invites Lurie for a meal ('Break bread with us' [167]), so proverbially heaping burning coals on his head. (Mrs Isaacs, who remains silent, appears to be appalled at this turn.) Though Lurie claims to want to say 'what is on (his) heart' (165), he is still not sure what that might be, and again launches into an inappropriate explanation of the 'fire' Melanie struck up in him (166) and his lack of the 'lyrical': 'Even when I burn I don't sing' (171). He does manage to say, 'I am sorry for what I took your daughter through.... I apologise for the grief I have caused you and Mrs Isaacs. I ask for your pardon' (171). Yet Lurie again fails to name the offence and, throughout the visit, lusts after Melanie's even younger sister, appropriately named Desiree, so undermining any sense of remorse he might wish to express – especially when he momentarily envisions a threesome. When Isaacs asks him, 'what are we going to do now that we are sorry?' (172), he decides that he dislikes the man. He questions more than once whether his words and gestures are 'enough': 'Is it enough for God, do you think, that I live in disgrace without term?' (172) he asks Isaacs, who has placed Lurie's guilt and atonement before the eyes of

God. In a staged last gesture, he prostrates himself before the mother and daughter. ‘Is that enough? he thinks. Will that do? If not, what more?’ (173) He seems not to have considered anything beyond an apology. (‘What is the efficacy as well as the adequacy of such sorrow?’ Boehmer [2002:344] asks – going on to examine the true sorrow – even pitifulness – of Lurie’s later self-abjection as ‘dog-man’.) Lurie is clearly out of his depth in trying to meet the family on their terms, and relieved when the visit is over.

It seems from these two scenes that the ‘Christian discourse of remembering, forgiving and healing’, which would include confession – the same discourse to which repentance belongs – is indeed inadequate, as Wicomb has suggested. Perhaps it is more correct to say that any discourse, any verbal process, is incapable of effecting change in this instance. Indeed, would ‘sorrow’ be enough, in the light of the history Lurie and his abuse represent? Coetzee seems to suggest that more is needed, ‘real actions’ (61) perhaps, rather than symbolism. Lucy says, ‘Guilt and salvation are abstractions. I don’t act in terms of abstractions’ (112).

If Boehmer is correct in identifying the evil Lurie has done as ‘the evil of having objectified others through reason as entirely different from ourselves and therefore to be used as we see fit’ (2006: 141) – the same reasoning, it must be noted, behind colonial and apartheid practices – then, she argues, it is not through reason that redemption may be gained. She turns to Attwell’s term, ‘unawareness’ (noting that Attwell, in his interview with Coetzee, ‘experimentally terms this state of unawareness “grace” – a word which ‘shadows a novel called *Disgrace*, yet which Coetzee himself finally disavows’). Lurie’s ‘individualist, self-justifying’ reason is surrendered, she writes, to make way for an ‘almost involuntary, because not self-aware... love’, a ‘self-emptying *respect* for the other’. (2002:345-346; author’s emphasis). Lucy Graham speaks of a ‘felt contact’ with the other leading to care (2002: 10).

Lucy Graham has pointed to the relevance in this context of Coetzee’s essay, ‘Confession and Double Thoughts’ (in Coetzee, 1992). In this essay Coetzee describes confession as ‘one component in a sequence of transgression, confession, penitence, and absolution’ (251) and continues: ‘Absolution means the end of the

episode, the closing of the chapter, liberation from the oppression of the memory. Absolution in this sense is therefore the indispensable goal of all confession, sacramental or secular' (251-252). He argues, as David Attwell points out in their accompanying interview, that, in the absence of grace, 'for which there is no secular equivalent', secular confession cannot bring release (247). The verbal process of secular confession, even with an endless chain of self-analysis, can never reach a point of absolution, and close the chapter.

Coetzee's 'counter' to 'the endless trials of doubt' is a simple one: the body. 'Whatever else,' he argues, 'the body is not "that which is not," and the proof that it is is the pain it feels' (Coetzee, 1992: 248). He concludes:

Not grace, then, but the body. Let me put it baldly: in South Africa it is not possible to deny the authority of suffering and therefore of the body. It is not possible, not for logical reasons, not for ethical reasons... but for political reasons, for reasons of power. And let me again be unambiguous: it is not that one *grants* the authority of the suffering body: the suffering body *takes* this authority: that is its power. To use other words: its power is undeniable. (248)

The authority of the suffering body lies in its undeniable presence (that which is). The emphasis throughout the novel, then, is not on transcendence (as in Levinas), but in immanence, and meaningful action is incarnational. With reference to the views expressed by Coetzee, Lucy Graham argues that Levinas's ethics of responsiveness to 'the frailty of the one who needs you and is counting on you' (Graham, 2002: 6), which Levinas sees in the face of the other, could be more appropriately applied to the body, and particularly the suffering body: a physical presence. The suffering of another has, of itself, a claim upon us, a claim which, Coetzee seems to argue (in an interview during the years of political transition), is given greater authority within a society of unjust power relations and the unjust allocation of resources. Lurie negates this responsibility to the other in relation to Melanie Isaacs, according to Graham, in that he behaves 'unethically toward another body' (2002: 7).

When he is attacked (and, ironically, burnt), being reduced to a suffering body, and Lucy is raped, Lurie, drawn into her suffering, tries to reach out to her, but is rebuffed. Yet he dreams of her as a child, calling out to him to save her – much as the voice of Byron's suffering daughter ('*Why have you forgotten me?*' [186]) will come

to his mind unbidden when he tries to compose an opera about the poet. His failure to protect his daughter troubles him more than his own injuries seem to (157).

Since Lucy does not accept the care he wants to give her, the ‘others’ through whom Lurie will learn to care are the dogs he helps look after at an animal shelter.⁵⁰ The dogs are present to him at first only in body, that which is. He glibly quotes the church fathers in denying that animals have ‘proper souls’ (78). But, in helping Bev Shaw at her clinic – which has become something of a hospice for unwanted animals (much as Elizabeth Costello’s sister runs a hospice for dying humans) – his scepticism about their ‘thoughts’ and ‘feelings’ makes way for compassion for the dogs, so that by the end he can reflect on ‘what he no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name: love’ (219). He may be helped in this by the love of a crippled dog: ‘he is sensible of a generous affection streaming out toward him from the dog. Arbitrarily, unconditionally, he has been adopted; the dog would die for him, he knows’ (215). It is perhaps for this reason that Coetzee uses, of all animals, the dog: not only for its lowly status but because of its capacity for unstinting love that will give itself wholly to the other. Just as the true love relationship in Coetzee’s *Age of Iron* (1990) is one between a tramp and his dog, so here it is the dog who exemplifies the ‘greatest love’, that which will die for another being. The love Lurie receives is wordless, and he, too, learns to give of himself in the presence of dying dogs through absolute silence. ([T]he space of death is a space where language has no place’, writes Marais, quoting from *Foe*: ‘...this is not a place of words’ [2006: 88])

The two markers of change in Lurie are his unexpected tears after an episode of ‘*Lösung*’ (2000: 142), as he calls it – putting down unwanted dogs – and his care for dead dogs. The ‘unawareness’ (Boehmer, 2006: 139) which Elleke Boehmer refers to is evident in his unpreparedness for the tears that overcome him (‘tears flow down his face that he cannot stop’), and his lack of understanding: ‘He does not understand what is happening to him. Until now he has been more or less indifferent to animals’ (Coetzee, 2000: 143). The second marker is found in behaviour he can explain even less: his care for the bodies of dead dogs, from which he can expect nothing in return. In guarding the corpses’ dignity, escorting them into the fire of the incinerator, Lurie

⁵⁰ The first indication of imaginative sympathy for another is found in Lurie’s interest in the disconsolate, abandoned bulldog Katy, who is kennelled on his daughter’s smallholding.

renders a last service to the lowest of the low, in the face of the most extreme alterity, that of both animals and death. That this becomes a duty of care for him is evident in his sense of having betrayed the dogs during a time away from the Eastern Cape ('For that betrayal, will he ever be forgiven?' [178]). 'Why has he taken on this job?' he asks himself, and struggles, again, to give it meaning, concluding that, if it is not for the dogs, who are dead and know nothing of 'honour and dishonour', it must be for himself: '(f)or his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape' (145-146). But it is the dogs' perceived need that moves him: 'he is prepared to take care of them once they are unable, utterly unable, to take care of themselves. A dog-man, Petrus once called himself. Well, now he has become a dog-man: a dog undertaker; a dog psychopomp, a *harijan*' (146). The man who was once too selfish, too proud to show either concern for another or remorse for harm inflicted, has reduced himself to an untouchable – being, precisely in this, a child of God⁵¹ in serving the untouchable. In this he shows empathy for others who constitute – *are* – even less than the suffering body: they are dead bodies. (Alan Northover [2009: 289-290] has pointed out that Lurie, who once refused penance and scoffed at community service, ends up doing both.)

Besides the dogs, whose suffering evokes Lurie's empathy and feeling involvement, Bev Shaw is another catalyst for change. She is initially despised as 'dumpy', singularly unattractive, by Lurie, through whose eyes women – even his daughter – are represented in terms of their level of attractiveness to men (the male gaze thereby exercising power in the narrative). He cannot understand why Lucy appreciates Bev and sees her as something of a mentor. Yet Bev is another character who, out of love, takes suffering upon herself. The work she does at the clinic – which culminates in the putting down of unclaimed, unwanted dogs – is difficult. When a goat is brought to her with wounds too long neglected to be healed, Bev seems to draw his pain into herself, kneeling beside him, stroking him and speaking quietly, so that the goat becomes still. Her distress, when the owner has dragged the animal away to be slaughtered, is evident – so much so that the ever-ironic Lurie, to his own surprise, finds himself trying to comfort her. When asked if she minds the job of mercy-killing, she replies: 'I do mind. I mind deeply. I wouldn't want someone doing it for me who

⁵¹ The term *harijan* was Gandhi's name for the lowest caste, the 'untouchables', meaning, literally, Vishnu's creature; child of god.

didn't mind. Would you?' (85) Bev bears the cost of caring, suffering, for each animal, the humblest other, in order to mark its passing as a being that matters, escorting it with compassion. This is then what Lurie, in his own way, continues after their deaths, since the mystery of the soul of the other has become manifest to him in the theatre of death, and he does not want their passing to be 'unmarked, unmourned' (178).

Lurie knows that, in the greater scheme of things, this service to the bodies of dead animals is 'nothing, less than nothing', but in the trajectory of his life it represents a significant change, the enactment of empathy, 'real actions', beginning at the most basic level. Lucy, too, after giving up her title to her land, is left, as she says, 'at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity' (205). This is the stripped, vulnerable, humble position she has opted to take, which she must 'learn to accept', and, she says, 'perhaps that is a good point to start from again' (205). The sense of a beginning is extraordinarily hopeful in so bleak a novel. Lucy, who could leave the country, chooses to stay, on these terms, and without illusions. After centuries of usurpation, expropriation and exploitation, this seems to be the novel's only viable answer to the 'question of how the white man shall live in South Africa', as Coetzee puts it in *White Writing* (Coetzee, 1988: 81).

When Lurie comments on Lucy's chosen life with the words, 'Like a dog', she agrees: 'Yes, like a dog' (205). This seems to denote only the humblest abasement, but Lucy's last words also point to the capacity for self-sacrificing love which the dog exemplifies, the ethics of the crucifixion. The root of Cynicism, the ancient Greek philosophy which taught that happiness was to be found in virtue, is *Kynikos*: doglike (canine). Northover quotes Borchert in this regard: 'happiness [for the Cynics] could be achieved by the understanding and strength of mind to want nothing, lack nothing' (this is echoed in Lucy's words, 'With nothing...With nothing' [205]). Hence, 'the most characteristic feature of Cynicism was an asceticism that sought to reduce physical wants to a minimum, as in the case of the animals after which Cynics were named, and to achieve spiritual independence like gods.' Northover concludes: 'according to the cynics, one can only become like gods by living like dogs' (2009:303). The Son of Man, who had nowhere to lay his head, the God who dies for

love of others, represents the perfection of ethics, and Lucy stands in this line. (One is also reminded of the God/dog inversion in Coetzee's *Age of Iron*.)

The articulate Lurie learns a wordless love; and silence is also a hallmark of Lucy's stance. When at first she remains mute before her father (while possibly confiding in her friend Bev Shaw), the reader understands that the trauma and Lurie's maleness, as well as his dealing in abstractions, make it difficult for her to speak. But she also does not – indeed, it seems she cannot – explain the choices she makes in the aftermath of the rape, at least not to her father, in words he would understand. If her actions in absorbing the offence against her and bearing it may be compared to the Crucifixion, as Cornwell suggests – an introversion of violence – then her silence bears comparison to that of Jesus at his trials, prophesied by Isaiah:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
Yet he opened not his mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
And like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb,
So he opened not his mouth. (Is 53:7)

Jesus' refusal to defend Himself before Pilate may be related to his earlier words about losing his life, emphasising his individual freedom to choose his course: 'I lay down my life, that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord' (Jn 10:17,18).

Abraham, too, is associated with silence, and, while Lurie's earlier actions represent a perversion of Abraham's obedience to his love for God, Lucy's sacrifice perhaps invokes the silence of the cost of doing right, in a way that transcends human ethics, and can therefore not be easily understood by others. Derrida notes that Kierkegaard writes 'Fear and Trembling' under the pen-name *Johannes de Silentio*, of which Derrida writes: 'This pseudonym keeps silent; it expresses the silence that is kept (1998: 155). He relates this silence to that of Abraham in the Biblical account: 'Abraham doesn't speak of what God has ordered him to do, he doesn't speak of it to Sarah, or to Eliezer, or to Isaac. He must keep the secret (that is his duty), but it is also a secret that he *must* keep as a double necessity because in the end he *can only* keep it: he doesn't know it, he is unaware of an ultimate rhyme or reason' (155). Derrida

seems to suggest that Abraham does not fully understand, could not explain if he wanted to, what he must do. Of Abraham's enigmatic response to his son's question, Derrida writes that he speaks without lying, but also without telling. 'To the extent that, in not saying the essential thing, namely, the secret between God and him, Abraham doesn't speak, he assumes the responsibility that consists in always being alone, entrenched in one's own singularity at the moment of decision' (156). (One can compare this to Lucy's insistence, 'in my life I am the one who makes the decisions' [Coetzee: 2000:198]). In fact, Derrida argues, no language exists in which this responsibility could be explained: 'there is no language, no reason, no generality or mediation to justify this ultimate responsibility which leads me to absolute sacrifice... in favour of another absolutely imperative duty binding me to the wholly other' (1998: 165). Unlike the tragic hero, Abraham cannot speak, cannot lament ('Abraham can neither speak nor commiserate, neither weep nor wail' [166]). Derrida quotes Kierkegaard's words: 'he speaks no human language. And even if he understood all the languages of the world... he still could not speak – he speaks in a divine language' (167). Lucy, too, it seems, would need the 'tongue of a god' to articulate her course.

The figure of Abraham also stands behind Lurie's final act: the sacrifice of the dog he has grown fond of, whom he bears 'in his arms like a lamb' (2000: 220) to be put down. '(R)ather than ending,' writes Pamela Cooper, 'the novel stops... the scene of sacrifice becomes a spectacle of forces suspended, calling forth echoes, left to hang' (2005:36). The novel's last words express Lurie's decision, 'Yes, I am giving him up' (220). The 'gift of death', to use Derrida's words, is not described, only anticipated. The sacrifice, the bearing of the burden of the other, with love, is what matters. (And, if Abraham's shadow falls over this scene, bearing the beloved to the place of sacrifice, the possibility is not foreclosed, for the sentimental reader, of another angelic intervention.)

But these endings, or beginnings, for Lurie and his daughter, these essentially private redemptions, do not satisfy everyone. Zoë Wicomb cites Lurie's 'non-naming' of marginalised, very needy people in his trips to the incinerator:

By the time the orderlies arrive in the morning with the first bags of hospital waste, there are already numbers of women and children waiting to pick

through it.... There are vagrants, too, who hang about the hospital grounds by day and sleep by night against the wall of the incinerator, or perhaps even in the tunnel for warmth. (Coetzee, 2000:145)

In the light of this human need, to which Lurie does not respond, Wicomb questions the value of Lurie's empathy: 'If his self-marginalisation and professed humility in the company of dogs is not simply a matter of hyperbolic posturing, it certainly escapes ethical engagement with the human condition' (Wicomb, 2002:219). This is true, but is the change in Lurie completely worthless? There are enough critics who have argued that alterity goes beyond the humanism of Levinas's conception, that animals are Other. If Lurie's attainment of empathy, of right sacrifice, is not an ending – as the novel has no ending – not an end, but a beginning, with the possibility of growth, then Wicomb's judgment is premature. If, on the other hand, his 'redemption' ends there, she is certainly right. The novel, of course, leaves the matter open.

Gareth Cornwell, for his part, returns to the historical parallel of Lucy's sacrifice, in the record rivalled by fiction:

Examination of the historical record with which *Disgrace* seeks to compete (see Coetzee, "The Novel Today" 3) forcibly reminds us of some awkward facts; first, that Richard Gush of Salem was an eccentric individual whose celebrated gesture did nothing to alter the course of history, and that a mere sixteen years later there began what Coetzee (quoting Mostert) has described as "the most terrible of [the frontier] wars, 'a war of race, perhaps the first of its kind,'" whose conduct attested to "the active, personal hatred by now felt by the Xhosas for the whites" (Coetzee, "Noel Mostert" 338).... In the long view of history, the attack in *Disgrace* on the Luries, the "personal hatred" (156) that Lucy senses to be animating her rapists, is neither more nor less than a resumption of the last Frontier War. (2003:53)

This 'last war', then, is the post-apartheid struggle for land, for redress of colonial appropriation, 'usurpation' – where the victory is a foregone conclusion. Cornwell goes on to cite Coetzee's account (in 'Noel Mostert') of Sir Harry Smith's appalling conduct in relation to a local chief, Maqoma, who is made to prostrate himself, with Smith's knee on his neck, as an example to the Xhosas, and concludes: 'One cannot help but see Lucy's acceptance of her necessary "Subjection. Subjugation" (159) by

Africans as an exact reproduction in reverse of this symbolic spectacle of unequal power relations' (53).

Do Lucy's enactment of forgiveness and subjection of herself in the novel, like Gush's historical heroism, offer little long-term value to society? Lurie, who disagrees with the choices she makes and leaves the smallholding, sees 'the people she lives among' as the problem:

An image comes to him from the *Inferno*: the great marsh of Styx, with souls boiling up like mushrooms. *Vedi l'anime di color ci vines*. Souls overcome with anger, gnawing at each other. A punishment fitted to the crime. (209)

Coetzee has used imagery from Dante's *Inferno* before, in *Age of Iron* (1990), to depict the suffering in the townships during South Africa's state of emergency which preceded democratisation. In this, later, infernal vision, it is not divine justice that is seen taking its course, but interpersonal violence. The implication is again that of the cyclical re-enactment of history, the inability to escape from the wrongs of the past, the condemnation to an endless cycle of revenge, enacted one upon another. And, while Lurie's view is not to be confused with that of the narrator, there does indeed seem to be no answer, in the absence of either justice or mercy, for injustice on the scale on which it has occurred, and with such enduring effects still making themselves felt. The trouble with vengeance, Lurie tells his daughter, is that the desire for revenge is not easily satisfied. (The Judaic commandment of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was not given to prescribe retribution so much as to limit its scope, containing the urge for revenge and bringing the matter to an end.) 'Vengeance is like a fire,' Lurie says. 'The more it devours, the hungrier it gets' (112). Cornwell writes that 'in the vision of *Disgrace*, white South Africans can expect no meaningful absolution from historical guilt through the mechanisms of the civil state (and these would of course include the TRC)' (Cornwell, 2003: 63). Both secular confession and racial vengeance are processes without end.

It is in this light that Lucy's subjection to that history, seen by the same writer as Christ-like, intended to break the cycle of avenging violence, is seen as 'ideal', 'mythic'. ('It would have to be said,' writes Cornwell, 'that nobody "in reality" is

even remotely likely to behave in the way that Lucy Lurie does' [2003: 54]⁵²). But he also questions whether her 'intervention' should be seen as purely mythical. Instead, he turns to Coetzee's essay (published in *Giving Offense*) on Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly* and the concept of *ek-stasis* or ecstatic experience, a kind of 'holy madness': 'a being outside oneself, being beside oneself, a state in which truth is known (and spoken) from a position that does not know itself to be the truth' (Coetzee, 1996 in Cornwell, 62).⁵³ (The 'unawareness' Attwell and Boehmer speak of is also reflected here.) This position, Coetzee writes, 'is not created simply by declaring oneself outside the fray. It becomes available only to the subject who declares himself outside the discourse commanding the fray, that is outside reason, that is, inside a certain kind of folly [or madness]' (in Cornwell, 62). This description brings to mind Lucy's divine madness, which she cannot explain in the reasonable terms required by her father. Lucy's decisions, Cornwell believes, represent a 'deeply religious response', if 'unauthorised by orthodoxy' (63). (Lucy, it must be remembered, states unequivocally that she believes in this life only.) Cornwell also sees such 'madness' reflected in Lurie's final act, which, he says, the reader cannot understand or interpret: 'Redolent of sacrifice and self-sacrifice, it appears as a religious observance, a ritual prompted by a "faith" that David Lurie has himself not yet begun to understand' (63). The 'only hope' for white South Africans to shed the burden of the past, Cornwell concludes, 'would seem to be ontological: some form of self-surrender involving more than just thought... which renders the individual open to an ethical *ek-stasis* beyond or outside of history (the intervention of grace?)' (63).

This argument reiterates that for the collective guilt of colonialism and apartheid, there can be no remedy, no form of collective cleansing or absolution. There can be no adequate reparation for centuries of entrenched injustice. Only for the individual, and outside of history, can a private redemption be found – and I accept Cornwell's

⁵² The irony is that South Africa's Christian churchgoers should be expected to follow the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, from which the teaching of going the extra mile, enacting forgiveness, is taken. Moreover, those who forgave perpetrators at the TRC showed that such costly forgiveness is possible.

⁵³ Cornwell describes such ecstasy as 'prompted not by reason but by feeling' (2003:62), which would certainly be true of both Lucy's and Lurie's choices. However, it seems to me – and I may be quarrelling with Erasmus – to reflect an impoverished view of mystical experience, discounting the human spirit, that God-breathed mystery which in the Bible is distinguished from the soul (Heb 4:12; 1 Cor 14:14, 15)

argument that Coetzee, who sees no absolution through a secular process of confession and repentance, which belongs to ‘another discourse altogether’, finds that discourse in the discourse of faith. However, in Lucy’s case one can see her ‘holy madness’ as bearing fruit in her environment, and as not being limited to private acts. In Lurie’s case the outcome of his ‘redemption’ remains inconclusive.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘It was my ... hanslam’: *Agaat* as a pastoral evocation of guilt and (possibly) forgiveness.

And last, the rending pain of re-enactment
of all that you have done or been; the shame
of motives late revealed, and the awareness
of things ill done and done to others’ harm
which once you took for exercise of virtue.

(T S Eliot, *Little Gidding*)

The exceptionally fine translation of Marlene van Niekerk’s *Agaat* (2004; English translation 2006) by Michiel Heyns⁵⁴ has made this *plaasroman* accessible to readers worldwide. The story of a rich white woman who adopts a coloured child, only to relegate her to servanthood when her own child is to be born, has been read by some as an analogy of colonialism. Though the novel resists reductionist readings, the relationship between the two protagonists, Milla de Wet and Agaat Laurier, does reflect elements of South African history. Forty years later, as power relations shift in the country, relations between the women are also reversed, and the coloured servant’s ascendancy is inversely proportionate to her mistress’s loss of control – which eventually takes the form of complete paralysis from motor neuron disease. On Milla’s death the farm will go to Agaat, her spurned foster child. While nursing her erstwhile mistress, Agaat reads from Milla’s earlier diaries to confront her with the damage she has done and the denial of her true motives. Milla dies in 1996, two years after the advent of democracy, on the Day of Reconciliation (16 December), but whether the two women are reconciled, whether Agaat can forgive the irreparable harm done to her, remains uncertain. I will argue that, though the narrative is always unreliable, the novel does suggest the possibility of an ‘impossible’ forgiveness.

Derrida’s description of forgiveness as a ‘madness of the impossible’, pure because unconditional, is tantamount to Jesus’ injunction to turn the other cheek – as suggested earlier, this is an injunction which is said to be humanly impossible because

⁵⁴ Published in the U.K. as *The Way of the Women* (Little, Brown, 2007); published in the U. S. A. as *Agaat* (Tin Roof, 2010).

it requires no remorse on the part of the offender, and even opens the self to a repeated violation. Agaat does this literally when Milla, frustrated by the loss of her son's confidence, strikes the younger woman in the face, and on her breasts and shoulders: 'She stood stock-still absorbing the blows without moving a muscle, without retreating a single step, without any retort' (551). But Agaat's thoughts and feelings remain unknown.

The novel to some extent dramatises Ricoeur's exposition of forgiveness, which for him is a form of labour – almost of travail – that 'begins in the sphere of memory and proceeds into that of forgetting' (Ricoeur, 2000: 13; my translation). He draws first on Freud's labour of 'working through' (*Durcharbeitung*) which entails the courage to dredge up suppressed memory and its own hurt or sickness. This is possible in the act of telling: 'memory becomes language in telling' (15). For her part, Milla is completely speechless (though the narrative belongs to her), and the 'speech acts' of dredging up the past, confession and forgiveness are closed off to her until a semblance of speech is briefly restored by Agaat. But Agaat does engage in *Durcharbeitung*, recovering the past, perhaps unwittingly, when she returns to it through Milla's diaries. Ricoeur argues that learning to tell the story from the position of the other facilitates communal memory, and this seems to occur between the women. What is more significant is Ricoeur's description of the retroactive activity of the change that may occur in the interpretation and moral burden of the past (and blame in particular), in the course of this process. This may indeed happen when Agaat reads Milla's diaries aloud, so telling the story from Milla's perspective. Yet whether she can eventually do so without bitterness is not clear. There are certainly indications that Agaat reaches a point of mourning – the phase Ricoeur places after the labour of forgiveness – and of letting go of the one who is both loved and hated: Milla, her mother, mistress, oppressor, and now her patient.

Questions of guilt and forgiveness are woven into the pastoral fabric of *Agaat*, which draws on the biblical pastoral. A *plaasroman* set in the Overberg, on the farm Grootmoedersdrift, the novel lyrically celebrates the beauty of the mountains, rivers, fauna and flora, and realistically depicts Milla de Wet's mixed farming ventures. Milla is a good farmer, with respect for the soil, one who gently brings calves to birth and mourns cattle which die of botulism, remembering them and their mothers by

name. The novel's pastoral strain is reinforced by repeated references to the twenty-third psalm (though these are often undercut by ironic contexts).

Set in Milla's last year (she is seventy) and leading up to her death, the narrative has four strands, all from Milla's point of view. One, in the present tense, details her thoughts as she lies paralysed and is nursed by Agaat. Another, in the past tense and second person, records Milla's memories, while a third, consisting of italicised inserts, tracks the course of the disease that has gradually robbed her of all control and agency. The last strand is made up of entries from Milla's diary, selected and read to her by Agaat. These and Milla's memories re-create the intertwined lives of Milla, her husband Jak and son Jakkie – and Agaat Laurier, adopted and raised by Milla, now a servant and effectively Milla's farm manager and full-time caregiver.

Milla, seven years childless, rescues – and takes by force – the cast-off coloured child of her former nanny, and has her christened Agaat. Insofar as the novel has been read as an analogy of colonialism, the overtones of the arrogant paternalism which claimed to civilise and Christianise Africa's 'children' are complicated by the fact that in this particular instance Agaat is a child, and a wild, neglected child at that. When Milla finds her curled up in the fireplace of her squalid home, her fist in her mouth, she has no name (unless her nickname Asgat serves) and cannot speak. She is filthy, undersized and undernourished, and shows signs of physical and sexual abuse. Milla gives her a stiff dose of tranquillisers, much as one would a wild animal which has to be caught and transported. Milla's adoption of the child is only partly self-serving – though she is seldom honest about her motives – as she sees herself as called, commissioned by God for this task of upliftment. (This ironic echo of apartheid propaganda cannot completely annul an element of sincerity in Milla's motives, though she denies her need for a child and her will to power – nothing less than megalomania in her husband's eyes [623].)

If Asgat (ashen-bottom) is Cinderella, then Milla has the power, as an educated rich white woman, to play the fairy godmother and transform the child's life. She sets about her mission, sometimes with intuitive understanding and kindness, but also with a bloody-minded determination to enforce her will. When she locks up the little girl in a windowless room for three days and nights until she is prepared to speak face to

face, Milla falls equally into the fairytale type of the wicked stepmother. When the child finally complies, and asks for jelly and custard, she is given a crust of dry bread. This ambiguity characterises the relationship throughout.

In fact Milla is playing God, forming the girl-child in her own image. Yet, while the novel often suggests parables, there are no crude analogies in *Agaat*. Milla reflects on her efforts to get Agaat to breathe out as she speaks: ‘The Lord is my witness, I’m thoroughly exhausted with trying to breathe life into the child’ (528). This is reminiscent of the Creator’s breathing *ruagh* (breath, spirit) into Adam to make of him a living being. At first Agaat is reluctant to speak at all (‘as if she’s scared that I’m going to take something from her if she opens her mouth’ [518]); later she refuses to speak on exhaling, ‘as if she’s scared I’ll steal her breath’ (524). This, then, suggests a reversal of divine creation. And the child is right. Milla, in putting her language into Agaat’s mouth, is simultaneously empowering her and robbing her of the possibility of developing her own language, her own identity. She will become Milla’s creature. Much later, in contemplating the woman Agaat has become, ‘invisibly inscribed, from the moment you took her in, with your and Jak’s pronouncements’ (554), Milla asks herself:

What must it feel like to be Agaat? How could you ever find that out?
Would you be able to figure out what she was saying if she could explain it?
She would have to explicate it in a language other than the one you had
taught her.
How would you understand her then? Who would interpret for her?
(554)

Childless Milla sets herself up as mother (*même*), repudiating her society’s efforts to make her conform to racist ideology by constantly questioning her relationship with a coloured child. Her egotism and hypocrisy are revealed in her indignation that the hard work she has put into this project of upliftment should be so ill-appreciated, and that by the dominee’s wife and her sanctimonious neighbour. But she is also a creature of her time and society, and reminds herself constantly to keep some distance. On one occasion she records, ‘I wanted to press her to me. But that’s against the rules’ (519). Milla, who has reminded others that she comes from the ‘house of reason’ (238) (her maiden name is Redelinguys), has come to live in the house of De

Wet – the law. Both the law in 1954 South Africa and social taboo forbid physical intimacy between ‘races’.

Only at the end of the novel is the tenderness of the early relationship revealed, in Milla’s diary entries recounting times spent together, in the veld or beside the river, or poring over books, when she is sometimes moved to tears by the child’s responses. When Milla is beaten by Jak, she slips into Agaat’s bed; when sadness overcomes her, she finds the child’s hand slipped into hers for comfort.

Milla records her reply to Agaat’s question, ‘What is holy?’

I say everything that’s wild everything that’s free, everything that we didn’t make ourselves, everything that we can’t cling to & tie down. Your soul is holy. Wouldn’t she just gaze at me: But you caught me & tamed me. So I just pressed her close to me, shame. (627)

Though it is hard to conceive that the child would have been better off if left unclaimed, Milla’s enforcement of her will on the life of another, her capture of the human soul, matches Derrida’s description of the crime against humanity as ‘a crime against what is most sacred in the living, and thus... against the divine in man’ (2001:31). (The novel’s emblem for the soul appears to be the rare and fragile, magnificent Emperor butterfly.) And so the crime perpetrated on a larger scale is evoked in particular interpersonal relations. Even Milla’s naming of Agaat is an exercise in power, and ‘Good’, the meaning of Agaat’s name, comes to mean ‘obedient’ in the house of De Wet.

Yet Milla’s guilt lies less in her adoption of Agaat than in her subsequent betrayal of the relationship. After another seven years, when she is about to give birth to her own first child, she banishes Agaat from the back room of her own home to an outside room and relegates her to the role of a servant. She sets about her new project with careful planning, her suppressed guilt evident in that she works alone, at night, to prepare the room, hanging curtains, bringing in crude furniture made from apple crates, until 12 July, 1960 – Agaat’s forgotten twelfth birthday.

And when the clock struck twelve,

Her dish was of enamel made,
Her mug of tin, her knife her fork her spoon
Hidden under the kitchen sink.
Here, your things, in case of need,
They have their place as you do now,
You are of another breed. (582)

On the stroke of twelve the godmother's transformation of the Cinderella child into a princess has come to an abrupt end. In managing Agaat's move to the backyard on the day, Milla decides to 'take her mind off' its implications by keeping the child busy. In order to do this, she decides to teach Agaat to slaughter livestock. While this is realistically a part of livestock farming, it runs counter to the paradisiacal literary pastoral (in which 'they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain' [Is 11:9]). In a novel with many harsh scenes, this is the cruellest, with vivid descriptions of the frightened young ewe, the frozen girl, and the drawn-out, bloody process briskly overseen by Milla.

Milla rationalises her actions, without acknowledging her motives for taking the child or for abandoning the relationship. Forty-three years later, when the 'battle positions' are formed (405), Agaat reads from Milla's diaries and brings out an alphabet chart to restore language to Milla. When provoked, Agaat reveals another dimension to the cruelty perpetrated on that day, in the flat words, 'It was my own *hanslam*.'

Can it be? Milla wonders, as she remembers Agaat's *hanslam*:

Sweetflour. Discarded. One of a triplet. Full-milk Agaat fed her with extra cream and a teaspoon of clean slaked lime, from the bottle, eighteen times a day, at blood heat as her book says, reduced to six times a day, until she started eating oats and lucerne by herself. She was five months old and she came when Agaat called her. The one we slaughtered that day was a nursling wether with a fat belly. (446)

In the first book of Samuel, David, the shepherd-king, is confronted with his guilt in the form of a parable about a ewe lamb. Having taken the wife of one of his officers, and got her with child, David has Uriah killed in battle and marries Bathsheba, his widow. He gets away with murder. Accountable to no man, the king continues unassailable in apparent denial, until the prophet Nathan is sent to catch the king with a story:

‘There were two men in a certain town, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and with his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

Now a traveller came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveller who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man, and prepared it for the one who had come to him.’

David burned with anger against the man and he said to Nathan, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.’

Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man!’ (2 Sam 12: 1-7, NIV)

It is this story that cracks open David’s denial and guilt and leads to intense remorse, recorded in the fifty-first psalm, with its confession of sin and denial, and repeated desire for cleansing:

Have mercy on me, O God,
According to thy steadfast love;
according to thy abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
And cleanse me from my sin!
For I know my transgressions
And my sin is ever before me....
Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being;
Therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (vv. 1-7)

(The last words are echoed in the novel, which has its own long descriptions of ablutions.) But Milla is less honest than the chastened David, and initially resists and denies the accusation (‘You lie!’ [446]), then rationalises her guilt. Yet the biblical pastoral evoked by Agaath’s words, pertains. Rich and powerful Milla has robbed one much poorer of all that she had: the love of a surrogate mother, a home and a place – and even, literally, the trusting lamb she had raised, so forcing the child to echo her own crime and share in her guilt. Milla’s guilt is exacerbated by the fact that she has taken Agaath by force and set her up in a new position, a new relationship (‘You’re my only mother,’ the child tells her [633]), only to take everything away from her. ‘Oh, my little Agaath,’ she realises in her last days, ‘my child that I pushed away from me,

my child that I forsook after I'd appropriated her, that I caught without capturing her, that I locked up before I'd unlocked her!' (540). But though she finds 'truth in the inward being', these words, significantly, are never spoken: 'Why only now love you with this inexpressible regret? And how must I let you know this?' (540)

In Nathan's story, not only the poor man, but the ewe lamb, too, can be seen as a figure of Agaat. In fact we might ask whether Agaat is not in some ways Milla's *hanslam*, a source of comfort taken from her childhood home, the realm of her loveless mother and her erstwhile nanny. Like the poor man's lamb, Agaat is certainly 'like a daughter', though of 'another breed' in the eyes of the law and Milla's society. At times the two share a bed and fall asleep together. Initially Agaat is a member of the household, sharing their meals:

In the dining room of old, at the far end of the table, Abba, Father bless this food for our everlasting good, the little silver shovel in the little hand, the little blunt silver fork in the other. (581)

From here Agaat's meals move to the kitchen at Jak's insistence, but Milla sits with her, coaxing her to eat ('Stories and rhymes to make it go down' [581]). Then comes the abrupt end, and Milla paints an A on the underside of Agaat's plate and mug, so that they will not get mixed up with those of the 'other servants' (282).

This ewe lamb, too, is killed. When Milla moves Agaat, the child's belongings – the red dress and green dress Milla had made for her, her birds' eggs and stones, the moleskin she brought with her to Grootmoedersdrift – are packed into a brown suitcase and placed in the outside room. That night Agaat buries the suitcase. In her only account of her life, mediated as a children's story to Jakkie in the third person, she says:

And she took the suitcase filled with the dresses and shoes of the child she'd been and went and buried it deep in a hole on the high blue mountain across the river. And piled black stones on top of it. And trampled it with her new black shoes and cocked her crooked shoulder and pointed with her snake's-head hand and said:

Now, Good, you are dead. (689)

Like the prophet, Agaat uses a pastoral parable to pierce Milla's denial of guilt. When Milla, with the help of the alphabet chart, tries to provoke a confrontation by asking questions about the past, Agaat replies with verbatim recitations from the books Milla left with her, to make her more useful. These are usually not without irony or accusation ('When meat is cooked for the kitchen-maid or kaffir, she sings, or even for the house, it's good to boil it in the bouillon pot for the first hour or so, to extract as much nutrition as possible into the water' [449]). Milla must reap what she has sown. But when she spells out questions about Agaat's relationship with Jakkie, the younger woman replies with another long recitation, probably from the *Farmer's Handbook* – but her song-like rendition transforms the prescription:

In the life of the sheep
Weaning-time is the most critical time.
You who are farmers of the future
Must make every effort to see
that the little lambs do not suffer over-much.
That their first growth is good is essential
Because once marred in their development,
They never mend again. (491)

Agaat's mouth twists, as if weeping, and Milla closes her remaining good eye as she continues:

Therefore, before you banish the ewes,
The lambs must walk for a while with their mothers
Together in the best grazing
To acquaint them with their new place.
Although mourning can never be forestalled,
They will then have to suffer much less sorrow. (491-492)

The ewe, she continues, must then be taken to graze far away from the bereaved lamb, out of earshot ('A child as is well known/ can tell its mother's voice from a thousand others,/ and from as far away as four miles') and must be succoured as she, too, is bereaved.

After this Agaat, who never cries, even as a child, rocks herself in Milla's wheelchair, making moaning, snuffling noises, as if allowing herself for the first time to mourn her loss, her double bereavement of her mother and her childhood self, as her second

bereavement approaches. While the recitation, the parable, may have been intended to puncture Milla's denial, it is her own buried grief, the truth of her own 'secret heart', that is unexpectedly brought into the open. She has 'worked through' to her past hurt and come to the work of mourning. It is after this that she begins to go out at night, eventually to produce the buried suitcase.

There is no doubt that these two strong-willed, manipulative, stubborn, battling women love each other, so that, even as Agaat uses Milla's own text to confront her with the irreparable damage she has done in abruptly, roughly cutting off her foster daughter, she is also confronted with her own grief at the loss. And Milla grieves for Agaat, pictures her, in her sorrow, facing loneliness, curling up once again in her fireplace for comfort. When she asks Agaat to pray for her, Agaat bites on her knuckles until she draws blood, begins a conventional prayer, then emits, like expletives or curses, a string of names of livestock diseases.

The *Farmer's Handbook* reveals the good shepherd's practice, the one who 'will gather the lambs in his arms...carry them in his bosom/ and gently lead those that are with young' (Is 40:11). The indictment is that Milla has shown more care for the wellbeing of her animals than for that of her adopted daughter; she is a better pastor than she is a parent. And though the prejudices of her husband and community, the 'rules' of apartheid law and practice, provide a context for her behaviour, she cannot evade imputability.

Agaat remains deeply ambiguous; the narrative, moreover, is presented as unreliable throughout. Milla's self-deception makes her perspective suspect, and later her illness and medication erode its trustworthiness further. It is never clear, for example, whether Jak, the abusive trophy husband, is as much of a liability on the farm as her memory suggests. Then – if one considers the weight of the spoken word in the 'speech acts', as Ricoeur (2004: 478) calls them, of confession and absolution (*vrijspraak*) – the absence of speech in this novel is remarkable. Agaat is not given a voice, and speaks to Milla in the idiom she has been taught, her utterances often opaque. Milla, to whom the narrative belongs, but for the first and last chapters, is completely speechless in the present relationship until Agaat restores language to her at a very late and fragile stage.

In this novel it is the events that are telling, their juxtaposition suggestive. When the often tender scenes in Milla's diary describing Agaat's childhood come into play, a number of similarities and, more importantly, reversals, become clear retrospectively. Milla began by washing the filthy child, repeatedly, and her own ablutions at Agaat's hands open the narrative of the two women. The eye contact with which the two initiated communication gives them a language when Milla is paralysed but for her eyes. The alphabet chart with which she taught Agaat to read is brought into her sickroom in the last days, enabling her, for the first time, to initiate conversation. Even Japie, the duster which was used to smack the child, is brought back for pointing at letters. The reversals are evident in the overturned roles and power relations. But it is the difference in content that is more significant: while Milla imposed her will, scrubbed, smacked, and demeaned the child, Agaat is at pains to honour her patient's will and guard her dignity. As though heaping burning coals on Milla's head,⁵⁵ she gives her the very best care possible.

Milla knows that she is facing an inquisition. In her mind Agaat's starched white cap grows higher and higher until it resembles a mitre – an emblem, with the shepherd's crook, of the shepherd of God's flock. Milla must give account of her pastoral care; she will be judged by the very values she has taught Agaat in farming. And so Agaat becomes like God in her mind – not God the Creator, the role she appropriated, but God the Judge.

How will Agaat judge? Milla wonders. When Agaat has the 'meaning of everything' carved on her headstone, will it be a 'last curse or blessing'? (423). 'Her name is Good. Would it be good to forgive me? ... Would it be good to take revenge? ... How can I help her?' (439) Atonement, Milla knows, is impossible: 'How does one compensate somebody for the fact that she allowed herself to be taken away and taken

⁵⁵ This biblical notion seems to be a particularly graceless form of rapprochement, in that it involves doing the right thing for the wrong reason:

If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat;
And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;
For you will heap coals on his head...(Prov 25: 21, 22)

Yet Paul quotes it approvingly in the context of love for enemies – the way of grace – as a way of not being overcome by evil, but overcoming evil with good (Rom 12: 19-21)

in and then cast out again? And to be made and unmade and remade? Not that she had a choice' (215).

Agaat reads Milla's thoughts uncannily well. While having her ears cleaned, for example, Milla signals with her eyes: 'just let me be please... you don't need clean ears to die', and Agaat replies, 'Oh yes... you do. St Peter sticks in his key to check' (339). Yet immediately after this she seems to become deliberately obtuse:

Forgive me.
How's that?
Forgive me.
I didn't say anything!
...Forgive me.
Give you what? Arsenic or arsenite or arsenate? Don't be silly. (340)

When the alphabet is brought into the sickroom, Milla, knowing that she can lose the limited power to communicate at any moment, realises that this is her 'last chance' (438). Agaat is not malleable; she repeats Milla's sentences but also misunderstands or adds to them to turn Milla's self-justification to an indictment of her racism:

Do something for your fellow humans? Or do something with your fellow humans or to your fellow humans? Fellow human – or super human? Or half human? Less human than yourself? (438)

And Milla struggles to form sentences when Agaat fails to repeat them aloud, so that the most important words remain unspoken: 'Sorry. Powerless. Guilty. I am. I shall be. But. How am I to. Die?' (438)

Insofar as Milla comes to a realisation of guilt and is able to ask for forgiveness, the words remain unspoken and seem not to be received. Whether Agaat forgives or not is not entirely clear; she remains the unknowable Other and the novel resists closure. I wish to argue, nevertheless, that the notion of forgiveness suggested by Agaat's actions speaks of grace, a free gift, or Derrida's concept of forgiveness as unconditional, needing neither repentance nor confession.

To forgive a repentant offender, Derrida argues, is already to forgive another, a changed person, whereas, in the Abrahamic tradition, ‘the *unconditional*, gracious, infinite, aneconomic forgiveness [is] granted to *the guilty as guilty*’ (2001: 34; author’s emphasis). Seen in this light, Milla’s hope that she can make Agaat understand that she is no longer the person she was, is beside the point.

Again, it is the events and their juxtaposition that must speak. Agaat’s generosity is evident in the garden she maintains for Milla, in the careful positioning of mirrors before the open window so that Milla, on awakening, is surprised by the glory of the garden the two women first designed and made together, thus creating the pastoral paradise Milla wanted. Once Milla wakes to find that Agaat has fallen asleep at her feet, her arm draped over the cold feet. And though Agaat wakes with some embarrassment, she returns before leaving to press Milla’s feet against her breast, against her forehead (373).

Then, just before Milla dies, Agaat digs up the suitcase she buried ‘on the moonlit night of the burial of the heart’ (495), the night of her twelfth birthday, so symbolically reversing some of the damage done to her that day by resurrecting the child. Excitedly, she brings its contents to Milla’s bed. Milla can no longer see, but she is given items to touch, including the soft mole pelt Agaat had taken with her when she was first brought to Grootmoedersdrift. After Milla’s death this is left lying on her pillow, seemingly as a gift from the feral child, as though to exorcise even the earlier guilt, the capture of the soul.

Van Niekerk inscribes the possibility of forgiveness in other ways as well. Both Agaat’s capture and Milla’s death take place on 16 December. For Milla, it is significant that she finds the child on what is, for her, the Day of the Covenant – and she sees her task as a divine commission, writing it out in a text that will later sicken her son. A day that was supposed to be a reminder of God’s grace to embattled Trekkers soon became for the Nationalists a means of justifying the appropriation of power. For many other South Africans, Dingaan’s Day, as it was also known, was a reminder of conquest. It was an act of the grace on the part of the Mandela government to retain 16 December as a public holiday and, with exquisite tact, to

rename it the Day of Reconciliation. And so it is that Milla dies two years after the advent of democracy, on what has become the Day of Reconciliation.

And then the representation of Milla's death suggests another parallel, another reversal. When Milla first 'catches' Agaat, the child runs away with Milla scrambling in pursuit, finally falling on top of her and holding her down tightly. Now that Milla is to be released in death, and the power relations are also reversed, the opposite might be expected: Agaat in the superior position – but no:

whose are the hands here around my belly squeezing my breath in and out? whose warm weight supporting me from behind and from below?... who is a buoy beneath me so that I should not sink from my own weight not perish? in what body am I sustained as in a crib? tilted as in a cradle? who breathes beneath me...

*where are you agaat?
here I am
a voice speaking for me a riddle where there is rest
a candle being lit for me in a mirror
my rod and my staff my whirling wheel
a mouth that with mine mists the glass on the valley of the shadow
of death
where you go there I shall go
your house is my house... (673)*

In this impossible, moving evocation of death, beautifully and freely translated, Agaat is the cradle of the mother become infant; she is Ruth the despised Moabitess, who proved a faithful daughter. Most of all, she is the Good Shepherd of the twenty-third psalm whose goodness and mercy follow Milla to the end, 'through the eye of the needle' (191). As before her betrayal of the child, Milla, in dying, receives this comfort: '*in my hand the hand of the small Agaat*' (674).⁵⁶ The shroud Agaat has made and embroidered (and tried on, lying in Milla's coffin) is filled with pastoral images of birth, of generations, of farming: 'Genesis and Grootmoedersdrift in one'

⁵⁶ This is more explicit in the original Afrikaans:

in my overberg
liefhebbend
in my hand die hand van klein Agaat (Van Niekerk 2004, 699)
[in my Overberg/ lovingly/ in my hand the hand of little Agaat]

The references to the 23rd Psalm are also added in the English translation of *Agaat*.

(677). The tombstone she erects identifies Milla by her maiden name and proclaims Agaat's judgement on her life:

And then God saw that it was Good. (681)

'What is impossible with men is possible with God,' says Jesus of the divine grace that will allow a rich man through the 'eye of the needle' (Lk 18:24). Derrida argues, quoting Hegel, that the unforgivable, 'the crime against the spirit' or the divine in the human, militates against the very capacity to forgive which is the human divine (2001: 34). In *Agaat* the capture of the child's soul and its subsequent destruction imply a loss of that gift for forgiveness. It is only when Agaat digs up her grief, then her suitcase, to recover the child destroyed by Milla's cruelty and her own defence against it, that she seems to recover her divine capacity for grace. This is not forgiveness owed; it is not even forgiveness asked for – it is independent of the perpetrator. If indeed Agaat forgives, it is the free gift of a free woman.

CHAPTER 5

‘Mercy! You sound like a woman’: Mark Behr’s *Kings of the Water*

For his third novel, *Kings of the Water* (2009), Mark Behr also chooses the *plaasroman* genre and pays tribute in it to Coetzee’s *Disgrace*⁵⁷, building in parallels and departures from the benchmark earlier novel, which itself had used the genre to mark similarities and departures from the past. While *Disgrace* is set in British settler territory, and *Agaat* in the Cape, *Kings of the Water* follows the more moderate Trekkers north to the rural heartland of the Orange Free State, now the Free State, close to the Lesotho border. Set in September 2001, during Mbeki’s presidency, and spanning two days, the novel traces the ‘machinations of transition... on this plot of earth’ (124). *Kings of the Water* also contains echoes of and departures from Alan Paton’s *Too Late the Phalarope* (1955) in its exploration of a father-son relationship against the background of a rural Afrikaner community in transition.

Disgrace is present yet again, but it is guilt which is relentlessly foregrounded, and denial in its many forms – omission, euphemism, erasure and forgetfulness – that is exposed. Michiel Steyn, having fled South Africa in guilt and shame in the 80s, finds his compatriots have no such burdens: ‘No one ever, black or white, had supported, been complicit in or privileged by apartheid or any other kind of exploitation. By its own magnificent volition, a system existed without human agency. South Africans he bumped into overseas seemed to believe that they had, one and all, slipped from their mothers’ wombs with cries of *Amandla!* And their mothers had answered *Ngawethu!*’ (134).⁵⁸ He concludes that, ‘As no one, ever, had been offside, it was best – easiest – to live as if he, too, hadn’t’ (134). But where no one has ever been wrong, no change or growth is possible.

⁵⁷ There may well be a sly reference to *Agaat* as well, in the name of a local farm, Oumoedersdrif (12).

⁵⁸ Behr confessed at a conference to having spied for the state on fellow members of NUSAS, a left-wing student organization, while he was at Stellenbosch University, and elicited more widespread condemnation than he seems to have expected. (Discussed in interview with Van der Vlies, 2010.) Here he seems to be satirising the many whose guilt may not have been as dramatically exposed, but who were nevertheless complicit in sustaining the apartheid government, resorting to a convenient amnesia.

During his army conscription the teenage Steyn witnesses an act of torture when he sees an officer interrogating an ‘LP’ or member of the local population. Later he will tell his partner: ‘I wish I could tell you I was kicked out of the army for calling someone to account, that I left for reasons of conscience’ (106). Instead he goes AWOL after having been caught in his first homosexual encounter with an Indian officer on a whites-only beach. In this act, the political context clearly plays a part: it is a triple offence which would cease to be an offence at all under the new constitution, yet in the 1980s it constitutes a public disgrace. He is publicly deranked and shamed, but this guilt is not the cause of his regret (though entry into the military, participation in the border war and his thoughtless attitude towards the fate of the Indian officer, who loses his rank and is expelled from the army, are raised). Michiel’s greater guilt lies in the abandonment of his girlfriend, Karien, who has fallen pregnant. Though he offers to marry her, she rejects him, knowing of his unfaithfulness and now public homosexuality, and refuses to join him in London when he chooses to leave the country rather than return to the army. Karien’s clandestine abortion goes wrong and she takes refuge with Michiel’s parents. It is for this abandonment more than anything that Michiel’s father Dawid (Oubaas) holds him responsible (34) when he returns fifteen years later for his mother’s funeral.

Carli Coetzee has commented: ‘In a number of recent works by white South Africans, a similar trope is used: the return to the childhood farm, which serves as a way of focusing the adult narrator’s sense of the loss of a way of being. These are more than simply stories about loss of innocence.’ (One is reminded that the farm, in Behr’s novel, is called *Paradys*.) Coetzee continues: ‘they are narratives of a dramatic severance from the world and values of the Afrikaner ancestors, in which the narrator chooses not to continue the lineage and values of the fathers’ (2001:689). This is certainly true of Behr’s novel, in which the relationship and conflict between father and son are central.

The novel uses and complicates the motif of the prodigal son’s return. In Richard Holloway’s reading of the parable, which is usually read as ‘an example of conditional forgiveness at work’ (2002:60), the central act is not the repentant son’s return, but ‘the running of the father to greet the returning sinner’ (2002:80; see also the discussion of this in Chapter 1). In the parable, which to Holloway is emblematic

of ‘creative forgiveness’ – unconditional, independent of repentance – the father is moved by pity (Lk 15:20) to embrace his son and forestall his condemnation.⁵⁹ Only in this spontaneous grace (the gift) is Derrida’s ‘pure’ forgiveness to be found for Holloway (pure because unconditional). Hannah Arendt also emphasises the importance of the restoration of a future to the forgiven: ‘The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility – of being unable to undo what one has done – is the faculty of forgiving’ (1989:237). Like Holloway, she sees forgiveness as a creative act: while revenge is a predictable re-action, forgiveness, its ‘exact opposite’, ‘acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven’ (240-241) – a notion which is dramatised conversely in the parable of the unforgiving servant, which depicts as imprisonment the psycho-spiritual effects of unforgiveness for both the unforgiving and the unforgiven.

In *Kings of the Water* it is not the father, but the farm worker Mamparra, to whom Michiel also owes a burden of guilt, who rushes with open arms to meet him on his return. She and Karien, especially, demonstrate pure or creative forgiveness. Returning to face the pain he caused fifteen years earlier, it is Karien whom Michiel most dreads facing, but he is surprised by her lack of recrimination, by the fact that the burden he has carried is no longer a weight upon her: she has already forgiven him, and has told herself that it is up to Michiel to ‘pluck up the courage to find [his] way back’ (196). Karien’s statement, ‘In the end, our petty righteousness cannot stand up to imagination’ (202), reveals imaginative empathy as the key to her creative forgiveness. Her parting words to Michiel are: ‘We can always make it easier for ourselves, you know, by resorting to the mutual forgiveness of each vice that opens the doors of paradise’ (225). Forgiveness, mutual and unconditional, will make homecoming possible, the wordplay suggests, as well as a state of grace.

The motif of the prodigal son’s return is complicated in the novel by the fact that neither Michiel nor his father seems to want to be reconciled. It is for his mother’s sake that Michiel returns, and for her sake that Oubaas asks him to come to the farm, Paradys. It is his mother Beth (Ounooi) who would have killed the fatted calf, as his

⁵⁹ ‘But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.’

father points out, on his arrival (17). A further complication is the fact that guilt is not one-sided: Michiel also needs to forgive his father, whose recalcitrance remains with him in ‘each of a million memories and thousands of dollars to [his therapist] Glassman’ (19). He comes to realise that his father’s anxiety about the softness he detected in his youngest son had bred in him a constant vigilance (32) which made him see his elder brother Peet’s gentleness as a ‘fatal flaw’ (75), should it be detected in himself. It is not difficult to see that the act which disgraces him publicly, and that with a man of colour, coming shortly after Peet’s death, is one of defying finally the ‘goddamn father’ (138) and everything he stands for.

There are moments of grace in the novel, beginning with the surprising ‘fugitive moment’ of intimacy between father and son. Michiel is shocked to see his father’s condition: wheelchair-bound, weak, and wracked by Parkinson’s disease. But the old man is as fierce as ever, and insists that his son, who has just walked in after an absence of fifteen years and a long journey, will bath him. Michiel suspects that this is done to humiliate him, and is unprepared for his father’s sudden vulnerability and the softness in his eyes and manner. (It is also possible that Oubaas is unprepared for his son’s gentle good sense in caring for him, now that Michiel towers over him and power relations are reversed.) As he takes his mother’s place in bathing his father, Michiel wonders, ‘Might this fugitive moment contain something of what the religious call grace?’ (31). But the moment passes all too soon as Oubaas slides unexpectedly from chuckling at a comment, into unmitigated grief, terrible to behold, so that Michiel sinks to the bathroom floor, head bowed, until it passes, and the old man reverts to recrimination and to bellowing out orders.

Within this brief opening Michiel is able, when prompted, to tell his father that there were times ‘I wished you a taste of your own medicine....Some kind of revenge’ but that that desire has left him (34) – not only, he thinks but does not say, because revenge would lose its sweetness on so pitiful a figure, but also because ‘at heart, old man, I always loved you’ (35). Yet when he asks his father, ‘Is there no mercy in you?’ Oubaas answers:

Mercy! You sound like a woman, for Christ’s sake. If you must be this thing you are, can’t you at least pretend to have balls? (35)

The association of mercy with the effeminate (together with the ironic imprecation of the name of Christ) is part of the country's sickness, as Behr shows. When Michiel tries to explain to Glassman his father's gratuitous violence, he says, 'Whatever it is is mixed in with the delusions of raw white South African male power. You have to have grown up there to know what I mean' (31). His eldest brother Peet sidestepped the white male rugby-army script which the middle brother Benjamin took to naturally and Michiel submitted to for fear of his father's disapproval. Yet he confesses that he felt 'an impostor in the army and the scrum' as 'someone was always being hurt' (181).⁶⁰ The exclusion of gentleness and mercy from the white male role in turn excludes the vulnerable Peet, 'gentle and undefended' (75), as well as Michiel. Peet destroys himself rather than bring shame to his family, and Michiel is expelled from Paradys when he refuses to return to the army:

'Then you will not set foot on this farm again. That's life, Michiel,' says his father. 'You play by the rules or else you don't play at all.' (58)

'I am the rule the game depends upon,' Michiel is able to counter in his mind years later, when he has the 'knowledge of the machinations of good and evil' (58, 59) and is able to see the patriarchal rule that governed his life as being far more arbitrary than it appeared at the time, its warped nature part of the evil of society.

Peet, the embodiment of *agape*⁶¹, is the antithesis of this model: 'When Peet looked at you, you felt as though he was observing a thing of infinite wonder, maybe holy, something you never saw in the mirror' (75). It is this quality which Michiel, in his 'hyper vigilance' (77), with that other, more 'powerful gaze' of the father upon him (174), feels would be a weakness in himself – and this is Behr's greatest indictment of the evil of the 'delusions of... white South African male power': the equation of

⁶⁰ Du Pisani (2001) devotes a subsection ('Warriors and sportsmen', 165) to the influence of military service and sport, especially rugby, in the formation of boys for hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity.

⁶¹ *Agape*, Greek for the highest form of love, 'which sees something infinitely precious in its object' (*The New Bible Dictionary*, 1974: 752), is used in the New Testament for divine love. It is also used in the commandment which lies at the basis of the ethics concerning the other: derived from Leviticus 19:18, the commandment to love one's neighbour is applied more widely by Jesus (notably in the parable of the Good Samaritan) to include even one's enemies.

gentleness, kindness – and mercy – with weakness and non-masculinity. ‘What he loved in his brother Michiel feared in himself. The capacity for kindness and the love that drew him to Peet, the gaze that made the beholden feel almost beloved, was what frightened Michiel if it was seen in himself’ (75). The novel follows on Paton’s *Too Late the Phalarope* in its examination through a father-son relationship of the harshness of white South African patriarchy, with its deep unspoken fear of weakness entrenched in an unyielding exertion of power.⁶²

Not surprisingly, since mercy and kindness are permitted for women, they are indeed the novel’s bearers of mercy; they are generous-spirited and able to forgive when wronged. Rachel, the mother of Michiel’s partner Kamil, a Jewish communist whose Palestinian husband is a serial philanderer, teaches her son unsentimentally that love is a verb – it is expressed in doing. She and her husband call the one in need *Habibti*: beloved.

Ounooi, the privileged lady of the manor, frustrates her son with the iron self-control of her generation, her genteel omission of all unpleasantness. Michiel finds it difficult to forgive her her submission to patriarchy at home and in the church, at the crucial point when his homosexuality is revealed (she herself is said to be ashamed of this complicity afterwards), and returns her regular letters to him, unopened. Yet at the first overture from her son she flies to America to stay with him and Kamil and, though she never refers to the missing years, is able to express her love for him even after he has, once again, deeply hurt her. Michiel, exasperated by Ounooi’s ability to dissociate herself from unpleasant incidents in the past, has insisted on telling her the truth about Peet: that he was homosexual, that he had contracted Aids, that his death

⁶² In the incident from which the novel takes its title, three boys man an inflated tractor tube on the farm dam, holding off two younger girls, who lack the power to contend successfully for a place. When the boys adapt the old chant (‘I’m the king of the castle’) to ‘We’re the kings of the water/ and you’re the henchman’s daughter’, two of the mothers take up the challenge, strip to their underwear and swim out to overturn the tube and let the girls have a turn. In this scene, patriarchy in the making receives its come-uppance from the new forces, probably reflecting changes that have occurred in the country. Michiel, who is watching, does not help the boys keep or regain their power and privilege, much to his nephew’s chagrin – the boy suggests, in words unspoken, that Michiel was not ‘man enough’ to help them and, indeed, Michiel no longer subscribes to the machismo or the unfairness entailed. Yet the women who are now in power generously include the boys, and all come to share the tube, learning to move and steer it harmoniously together in what could have been a rather obvious parable, had it not been so deftly handled by Behr. Van der Vlies (2010) sees this episode as symbolically ‘at the centre’ of the novel.

was not an accident but a suicide. His desire to hurt is as effective as the truth he uses 'like a blade' (90): 'Within a few minutes she had shrunk to look as if everything that had never happened to her had happened now, all at once' (90). He apologises almost immediately, saying he was 'dead wrong' (91) and his mother's love covers the offence. Yet he will describe their reconciliation as 'shabby' (41), probably because so much has had to be left unspoken. At her funeral, however, Michiel discovers that his mother had gone into battle against the stigma surrounding Aids: 'Silence is killing our people,' this soul of discretion told the new mayor (93), channelling her grief into positive action.

Such acts of mercy are counted among the graces of the Holy Spirit. If Ounooi's kindness is the inspiration, a 'tiny ember of what was possible', as her protégée Lerato says, Karien, thoroughly rooted and grounded, swearing fluently in Afrikaans, is the novel's refreshing angel of mercy. Raised in a dysfunctional family, she is adopted as another protégée by Ounooi, who becomes her model and mentor, and who saves her life and protects her during her pregnancy. Though Ounooi is disappointed that Karien does not fulfil her potential to become a successful lawyer, Karien finds contentment in doing good in her rural community. ('There's work to be done here, in town, good work that doesn't require my being a lawyer' [153].) When she miscarries twice after her marriage to Dirk, the dominee, they adopt two Aids orphans and in so doing help their community deal with transition, as the intransigent Oubaas's acceptance of his godchildren shows. Michiel realises that what he had to learn while in exile, Karien has learnt by being part of the transition, 'right here, on the job in the manse and behind her easel' (153). Her conscious choice to remain 'here' (151) – she is constantly linked to place – has become an evolving, creative project, and will help facilitate Michiel's homecoming.

Michiel cannot believe Karien's capacity for forgiveness: 'He is unconvinced by her lack of regret or anger at him' (151) and tells her that he is astonished at her generosity (153). Having believed that he had permanently wounded her (as he had his mother), he has developed what Glassman calls a 'base need to beat up on yourself'. When Michiel blames this on the Christianity of his upbringing, Glassman replies, 'It may also be self-inflicted. What would be left of your feelings without the comforts of self-flagellation?' (152). The psycho-spiritual prison of the unforgiven

becomes a familiar space, difficult to leave when the door is opened. When Michiel and Karien ride out on the farm and stop to talk, it is she who reaches out, putting her hand into his pocket to touch his hand, still withdrawn – as indeed is he, held back by self-blame – in order to re-establish a relationship.

‘If you’re blaming yourself,’ Karien says, ‘please stop.... I could have knocked your head in with a hockey stick. I was humiliated. I was beside myself with hurt. But I never blamed you for the choices I made. We were kids, for god’s sake. I’m okay. It’s not blame I want to talk about’ (153). Yet Glassman has pointed out that his guilt lies in the fact that he deceived Karien about his ‘other desires’ (172). Michiel knows that ‘[h]is flight and the pain she must have endured alone were but the grand conclusion to countless smaller treacheries. At the heart of human relationship is language and the notion of solidarity, two things melded together to constitute what we call trust.... You need not plunge a blade into someone’s heart to lose trust. One may do so by keeping quiet about what you can almost not imagine to be true’ (172). Though the last words are self-exculpatory (with the distancing, furthermore, of the pronoun ‘you’, aggravated by the shift to the more impersonal ‘one’), the enormity of the betrayal of trust is not minimised.

So when Michiel tells his story to those gathered at table after Oubaas has retired, it is to Karien that he speaks throughout, and he apologises formally to her and to his brother for the pain he has caused. Her forgiveness may be related to Jaspers’ notion of existential guilt, which in Karien’s view would be specifically the collective guilt of apartheid: ‘Without generosity as vast as the heavens we would by now all have had our brains blown out. Like the Oberholzers’(153) she says, referring to neighbouring farmers who were murdered.

Karien is also honest about the ‘relief’ of giving up Michiel, her main link to Ounooi: ‘In herself she’d known that they were lovers through familiarity and fondness. Although it was subsumed by righteous anger the day she turned her back on him, she also had a sense of being set free, that he had made it possible for her to leave him, and thus also for her eventually to walk away from Ounooi’s spell. It was wonderfully terrifying’ (197). Although the freedom Karien experiences is not that borne from forgiveness, but rather from facing truth – and more immediately from anger – it still

reflects the terror of leaving the familiar, the known and loved. That Karien is able, at her most vulnerable, to take this step is a sign of her moral courage.

If in some ways the novel is about survival, mercy and creativity both seem to be key to the women's survival. Rachel, nursing her apparently dying son, 'has within her some fountain from which she draws strength and light' (179). Ounooi flourishes even as her husband weakens. Karien explains: 'Everyone in town was saying "poor Beth Steyn this" and "poor Beth Steyn that". In truth, she was soaring. She'd finished teaching and now it was going to be the farm and her project in the township. She did the house renovations' (174). Karien herself finds healing in painting and makes a name for herself as an artist, but it is especially in her work in the community that she finds fulfilment. Her ethics, faith and creativity converge in her statement, quoted earlier: 'In the end, our petty righteousness cannot stand up to imagination' (202).

Of all the women characters the one most wronged seems the least conscious of the fact. The farm worker Mamparra's nickname (idiot, conferred after a single mistake in her teens) has stuck to such an extent that Michiel cannot discover her real name, though he asks. She and Pietie, of all the workers, are the only ones to dispense with the titles conferred by inequality and white power (Oubaas, Kleinbaas) and call the Steyns by their names. Mamparra's forebears, the Mohlakwanas, are buried in the farm cemetery. Michiel, with his A for History in Matric, discovers the erased chapter of the 1913 Land Act and the 'legalised theft' (98) of land only when in London, and reads Sol Plaatje on its effect on black landowners in the Orange Free State. Many were forced to become servants on the land they had owned. And though he asks whether land cannot be restored to Mamparra when the children inherit the farm, Karien has already ascertained that she would have to be married to qualify. Though Pietie has courted her for years, Mamparra has remained unmarried. It is revealed that, as a young woman, she was raped by the Steyns' neighbouring landowner, Oberholzer. It seems no recourse was available to farm workers, for no action seems to have been taken – but the rape could be a factor in her refusal of marriage. Mamparra's son, Geel – the name an unflattering reference to his light skin, and again the only one available until Mamparra provides his correct name – has not had the opportunities given to the Steyn children, or even Paradys's 'black princess' (4),

Lerato, daughter of the family's housekeeper and Ounooi's protégée, who is now a successful corporate executive.

Mamparra is said to have led a religious revival among the Paradys workers. In a shameful episode from Michiel's childhood, a group of schoolboys summon her to demonstrate speaking in tongues: 'A posse of white teenagers on chairs, while the black woman stands with her hands as if in prayer on the polished red cement floor.' She offers to preach 'Jesus' infinite love and forgiveness'. '*No, kak, Mamparra, no preaching today. Just do the tongues. The boys guffaw...*' (80). The inequalities which permit this lack of respect for an elder, a woman, and her faith are self-evident. Mamparra, as the 'farm's clown' (80), the resident 'idiot', is considered fair game. Of love and forgiveness the boys learn nothing.

On two occasions Mamparra joins the family to take what might be regarded as her rightful place, but because she is still an employee, the 'shed worker' (99), the situation is awkward, and is presented almost comically. The first is during the funeral, when Michiel looks around to find that Mamparra has trailed the family to the front pew, possibly in the belief that she will be needed to help with Oubaas and his wheelchair – though he also wonders whether she has 'feigned absent-mindedness' (99). Because there is not enough room, Michiel ends up crushed between his niece and Mamparra, with the entire front row squeezed together. His father's words, 'astrante bleddie meid' (99) (cheeky bloody girl) come to his mind, but it is also during the service that Michiel becomes aware of his debt to Mamparra.

The second occasion is the family dinner after the funeral. The black people who form in some ways an extension to the family – the housekeeper Alida, and her sophisticated daughter Lerato, who has come to attend the funeral with her children – are not included because, as Lerato explains to Michiel, it is just too awkward with Oubaas, and so they eat separately in the guest rondavel. But when a storm breaks overhead, making it impossible for the guests to leave, places are hastily laid for them. Then Mamparra is heard, singing *Pie Jesu* in the kitchen.

‘Die hemel help ons,’ says Oubaas. ‘Is daai een ook nog hier?’⁶³ (126)

Karien invites Mamparra to the table, and she enters with a dishcloth over her shoulder, still wearing her worker’s hat, which Karien removes to the sideboard, while Lerato takes the dishcloth and places it alongside, ‘with the red hat perched like a surreal tortoise beside the hot-tray’ (127). Mamparra ‘smooths down her blouse and smiles nervously at the children’ while ‘Oubaas’s jaw is set; his eyes a smoky blue on the table’ (127).

The comical awkwardness of this disputable progress in relations is captured in Karien’s wink at Michiel: ‘Unbelievable, I know. Ounooi, are you here... to witness this? Face to face, side by side, yesterday today and tomorrow’ (127). Behr captures both the interconnectedness of ethnic groups and the anomalies of transition, seen, for instance, in the fact that Oubaas still refers to Lerato’s children as ‘piccanins’ but is godfather to Karien’s black adopted children, who will inherit, through her, a third of the farm. While there is some justice in land returning to black ownership, if only because the children are incorporated into the elite, this does not constitute justice for Mamparra. Though both Karien and Michiel would like to see the workers gain a share in the farm, questions remain about whether the new laws of tenure will indeed work for the benefit of those for whom they are intended. The new elite, represented by the mayor, Sam Thabane, who may well have appropriated money collected for a public swimming pool, is not likely to help her.

‘Mamparra Mohlakwana,’ says Karien, ‘doesn’t stand a chance’ (164).

Mamparra is disadvantaged by colour, class and gender and her unmarried state – as well as in her personal capacity, as her nickname testifies. In the comical edge to the scenes above, it seems the narrator, too, colludes in making fun of her – yet she retains a dignity which is ultimately supported by the text. And, where the other female characters survive and overcome pain through acts of mercy and through creativity, Mamparra has – besides her success as an evangelist and her constant singing – another secret: she dances.

⁶³ Heaven help us, is that one *also* still here?

Before Michiel leaves, she insists he admire her ballgown. The following scene occurs after an interlude:

He is writing... when he hears singing.... He goes through the sliding doors. The sun is netted behind a haze of cirrus, the afternoon cold overlaid by tones of gray. She is on the footpath, passing beneath the bare fruit trees. Like decorations, single white blossoms cling to branches along her way. The disappeared sun makes the red of the dress seem even brighter between the stark black stems and the matt green of the ragged fig hedge. One arm is covered in a red mesh sleeve from shoulder to wrist and she carries red pumps in her hands. The blood-red bodice is held up by one thin strap across her left shoulder and whatever suspension is hidden in the fabric. A wide skirt swishes in folds around her calves, above her bare feet, her stride confident and unhurried.

‘What do you think?’ she says, stopping at the base of the stairs to slip on the shoes. Before he can respond she has come on to the cement stoep and spins on the shining cement floor, making the skirt flare like a magnificent bell. She has on light-cerise lipstick; a suggestion of rouge on her cheeks. Her hair is pulled back tightly by a silver comb with a red ostrich feather.

‘Beautiful,’ he says. ‘Is it chiffon?’

‘Charmeuse,’ she answers, lifting the skirts and swaying on the balls of her shoes. (219-220)

Mamparra is not named throughout this description, nor initially in the following dialogue, one of Michiel’s last encounters on the farm, so that the reader is not at first aware who the subject of this vision might be. And indeed, the derogatory nickname would be out of place in the glowing description in which the sunset and the storm-wracked farm conspire to add glamour to the description of a woman confident in her womanhood. (She also graces and reclaims, it seems, the same cement stoep which was the scene of her earlier denigration.) And, though she confides that the material came from ‘the koelie in town’ and that the whole package represents ‘two years of my savings’ (220), the effect is not spoiled, not even by the dyed ostrich feather, no doubt deemed appropriate for the artificial glitz of the ballroom dancing milieu. She and Pietie came third in the tango in the Free State Nationals, she tells Michiel. The encounter ends with Michiel wishing her well for the next competition. ‘Half looking back, she has re-entered the orchard, again singing, the ostrich feather pertly bobbing as she nods: “We will be the champions.”’ (221)

It is immediately after this triumphant, hopeful exit that Michiel asks Alida for Mamparra's real name.

‘Her name? Mamparra, till her deathbed. No red dress ... will change that. Give a monkey a golden ring, it's still an ugly thing. You're too behep [preoccupied] with names' (221).

Of this mean-spirited derogation by a co-worker with superior status, a last reminder of her demeaning context, Mamparra is unaware. The reader's last view of her remains a joyous one.

To read this scene as a final description of the ‘happy worker’, duped by the opium of the people and simple, childlike pleasures into disregarding injustice and oppression, is to misread both this scene and the novel as a whole, which makes no concessions about farm workers' conditions. To my mind it is a tribute to the human spirit which can rise above degrading conditions, retain dignity and beauty, and hope. Mamparra refuses to be downtrodden; she, more than any character, celebrates life. (‘Resistance, Kamil teaches his students, is the secret of joy’ [99].) Because this is one of the final scenes it is given particular significance and Mamparra, with a flourish of her red ostrich feather, has the last word. Her creative forgiveness, in her reaching out to Michiel without any acknowledgement of guilt on his part, is not denigrated but celebrated.

Yet it must be added that Behr, in creating, as it were, the character of the ‘forgiving servant’, provides a form of self-absolution for his alter-ego, Michiel, or, in the words of Carli Coetzee, ‘self-consolation’: ‘Narratives of conversion can too easily be self-referential in the sense that they perform the author's self-absolution’ (2001:691).

Seen in this light, *Kings of the Water* is more glib in its consideration of the possibilities of atonement for white guilt than *Disgrace*.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Carli Coetzee quotes Sandile Dikeni (in an interview published in the *Mail and Guardian*) on Mark Behr's earlier work, as well as that of Rian Malan: ‘The Europeans love it. It pushes the moral high ground back to white people, forces me to accept that they're not entirely bad. They feel sorry, man. We'll kill you if you don't forgive. They'll hug you to death, and you don't have an option’ (2001:691). Clearly it is the ease of the ‘sorriness’, the expectation that forgiveness *must* follow - that it would be morally wrong to withhold it – that is the problem.

Though a newspaper headline reminds Michiel that '[w]omen can change the world' (207), it is to Michiel that the novel belongs, and his pilgrimage that is central. He knows that Oubaas 'had wanted him to come to Paradys not because the father had seen his son from a long way off and was moved by pity and tenderness, not to embrace and kiss him, but only because he imagined that's what the son's mother might have wanted' (148). And so Ounooi becomes the catalyst for a partial reconciliation between father and son.

Kamil, who defines forgiveness early in the novel as 'accepting the distance between how we would have wanted things to be and the way they are', also reminds Michiel that '[p]arents don't redeem themselves. Rarely to their children, anyway' (9). As Psyche to Michiel's Eros (199), Kamil has played his part in the equilibrium the latter has found since the dissolute years after he left home. Now Michiel is on his own, and he can expect little help from his father.

At first Michiel resolves not to call his father Oubaas, as before, but to use the paradoxically less intimate 'Pa'. It is perhaps his own capacity to be moved by 'pity and tenderness' that leads to a moment of rapprochement when he is bathing his father, and which makes it possible for Oubaas to speak to him openly about his grief ('I haven't slept since the night your mother died' [187]) and his wish to die. Before Michiel's departure, the two were unable to speak to each other.

Since Michiel's visit is restricted to a day and a half, which includes the funeral and its aftermath, there is little opportunity for closure and, indeed, the novel ends with deliberate inconclusiveness: Michiel is left beside the road to the airport, all flights to the USA having been cancelled, not knowing whether he will continue on the road or return.

On his only night at the farm, sleeping in his old room, Michiel wakes, screaming, from a nightmare in which he sees his father hanging by his tie from a burning tree. 'He tries to free himself: if he can prevent the body from falling before the flames burn through the tie it will not be dead. He calls *Habibti*, *Habibti* but the branch is engulfed and he hears the crack as it separates from the huge trunk and he dives,

yelling, trying to catch the body before it can strike the ground.’ (183) Michiel then goes to his father’s room and the old man wakes.

‘It’s me, Oubaas,’ Michiel tells him, switching on the light to make sure the tie from the dream is still there, confiscating it on leaving as he says, ‘Goodnight, Oubaas.’ (183)

This ‘rescue’ is one Oubaas will never know about. In the dream it is involuntary, the cry ‘Habibti’ restoring the old man, through his need, as the beloved. This is reinforced by the now conscious use of ‘Oubaas’ in their subsequent encounter and Michiel’s removal of the tie, potential instrument of suicide.

But Michiel has tried in another way, too, to save his father. When Oubaas retires and Michiel goes to say goodnight, the old man confesses, ‘I can’t go on without your mother.... I can’t see tomorrow without her’ (142). Michiel stretches across the bed from his mother’s side, to touch his father’s hand. Oubaas asks his son about religious belief and confesses that, for him, faith is ‘the only way I know I’ll see her again’ (145).

‘You *will*, Pa,’ Michiel assures him. What follows is a beautiful evocation of regeneration, drawn from the life of the farm: ‘In the morning you’ll wake with the piet-my-vrou.... It must be the tenth generation after the one that was here when I left.... There’ll be the hum of bees, as if the world is vibrating. If even one of the blossoms is still on the trees you’ll see Ounooi in that’ (145). Paradys, even or perhaps particularly after the storm, must teach the desolate man that life continues. ‘Nothing lives unless something dies.... That’s what I believe god is,’ Michiel says. ‘The energy that connects everything’ (145). By trying to enable his father to recognise grace that is ‘new every morning’ (Lam 3:23) when he wakes, Michiel might make it possible for him to face each ‘tomorrow’ as it comes.

When Michiel first enters his parents’ bedroom, he sees a copy of *Disgrace* on his mother’s bedside table, the story of the ‘disgraced father’ on his daughter’s farm (144). Now it is the disgraced son, on his father’s farm, who reaches out in compassion, literally and figuratively, to the father. In some ways, as in *Disgrace*, the

child becomes parent to the father, and here the parable of the prodigal son is reversed.

Yet when Michiel rejoins the others at table, he will hear, in another reminder of the parable, that he has not been disowned as he thought, but is joint heir with Karien and Benjamin to the farm.⁶⁵ As he has, through Paradys, tried to restore life to his father, so has his father, through the farm, already reinstated Michiel as his son, symbolically restoring life to him. (In this the novel is directly opposed to Paton's *Too Late the Phalarope*, in which the implacable father disowns, and symbolically eliminates, his disgraced son.)

Michiel also has to deal with the dominee, now Karien's husband, who told him at nineteen that homosexuality was an 'abomination'. Dirk has changed and is able to say so with some diffidence: 'We look back. We can't believe. There is incredulity at how things were. How we were. How we lived, among ourselves, and in this country.... I think and act differently from the way I did then.' (195) He also recognises the source of his earlier teaching: he had been chaplain at Valhalla, the military centre of the regime. Michiel wishes afterwards that he could have been 'more magnanimous' (175) in his response, which is lukewarm – but Dirk's continued association with the hated church makes this impossible for him. Though Dirk's words do not constitute a full apology, he is one of the few characters to recognise his own fault, grow from the knowledge, and make a difference. (Rachel's words come to mind: 'And Rachel, with her arms wrapped around her husband's shoulders, whispers: *But which ways of knowing teach humility, my love?*' [188])

Finally, it is perhaps most with himself that Michiel needs to be reconciled, as the words on his therapist's wall point out. The aptly-named Glassman has on his wall a photograph of Derek Walcott with a print of 'Love after love'. These lines are quoted in the novel: *The time will come When, with elation, you will greet yourself arriving At your own door, in your own mirror, And each will smile at the other's welcome....* (82)

⁶⁵ When Benjamin tells Michiel this, he is said to 'await the prodigal's response' (166).

Upon leaving the farm Michiel stops for a moment at the now-dilapidated farm stall, looking back, and ‘sees the structure as it would have been, back then’.

A bakkie is parked there with a boy looking back through the glass. Hello, he says, without thinking. No matter who passes here or what goes on in there, on photographs and bookshelves, in letters returned unopened to sender, on the linens and kindness of a thousand and one strangers. No matter where earth or water receive you into the great embrace, there you are: my boy, my man, my heart, my beloved. (228)

Having returned to the door he left in shame and guilt, Michiel has seen the many reflections of who he was and is, where he has come from, in the place itself and amidst the people he has loved and, upon leaving, he is finally able to meet and love himself. (The novel’s epigraph is from James Baldwin: ‘And love will have no choice but to go into battle with space and time and, furthermore, to win.’)

This is the meaning of homecoming in the novel. When Michiel first returns, the decision having been made without much forethought upon news of his mother’s death, the farm and homestead are familiar, but he is a stranger. ‘He knows, as he has for years, that his home – whatever a home is – is no longer here’ (50). During her visit to San Francisco his mother had expressed concern at the modern urbanites’ rootless culture (75), stressing the need for rituals to keep people together.

During the funeral service, where the family and community are gathered, Michiel finds that he has entered a ‘layer of disconsolation’ formerly unknown to him (81). Glassman has pointed out that Michiel had not mourned his other losses, those of Peet and of Karien and his family (58), so that he is overwhelmed by the prospect of losing Kamil when the latter becomes gravely ill. But Kamil recovers. Now, within the formal ritual of the church from which he is so deeply estranged, Michiel nevertheless asks himself, ‘Is the grief of all memory repeated in the superlative?’ as he mourns his mother (81), and it seems that deferred grieving is also made possible in this context.

Then thunder is heard, rain begins to fall, and Eugène Marais’ beautiful ‘Dance of the Rain’ (*Die Dans van die Reën*) comes involuntarily to Michiel’s mind: ‘*Our sister dances from the mountains of Moshoeshoe... she has unfurled her grey kaross, her bracelets flash and her beads glitter, the cattle and the big game look up, they flare*

their nostrils as the voices of the smallest creatures sing: it is the dance of the rain, look, our sister, she has come...' (84). This Afrikaans poem, set in the Free State, evokes the spirit of Africa as few others do, and draws together, for Michiel, the natural environment of his childhood, its people and their culture.

Michiel tells Karien of the effect of the landscape itself, 'of the season's shameless beauty: the redgrass that is still green, and sheep in the veld...Red and orange sandstone buildings and wind pumps rotating above cement dams against the blue. Poplars. Willows. Migrant swallows nesting beneath highway overpasses. Seduction in the eye – in the heart and the mind – of the beholder: someone else may find it banal' (147-148). And it seems that familiarity does inform Michiel's response to the beauty of an early South African spring.

On his last morning Karien persuades Michiel to ride on the farm with her, and dares him to gallop home – though he has not ridden since he left.

With the wind on his face his eyes water and his heart thuds in his contracted chest. He gets the feel of the animal beneath him. When he is one with the horse his body seems to swell and release. He feels tears coming off his cheeks and in the thrill of speed and fear he feels utterly alive, in his flesh an exhilaration that for a very long time – even without his feeling the absence – has not been there. (205)

In his extremity Michiel is conscious of his body, of touch, as he becomes one with the horse. Looking back on this experience at Peet's graveside brings a new awareness: 'During the ride with Karien he admitted to himself that rarely, if ever, has he known fulfilment – happiness? – as he has here. Like something suspended that is ignited again. A tiny window or crack opened....' (215). Karien, so fully present *here*, is the catalyst to a homecoming Michiel had not expected, a recovery of a part of himself that he did not know he had lost. 'Inside all he and she said to each other, her fingers finding his in the jacket pocket, was already the presupposition of knowledge and of lives shared, a language that cannot be had elsewhere. Oh, go on, allow yourself: the sense of belonging, almost; as close as there is to any belonging in life' (215). The place where you are known is home, and Michiel is able for the first time to claim that fully – in spite of his own initial resistance – not only through shared memory, but also through Karien's acceptance of him as he wants to be known

(something that is still difficult for his father). The epitaph on Peet's gravestone, in Afrikaans, ends, 'returned here to Paradys' (218). Michiel looks at the stone as he thinks, 'Whatever that little crack is... nowhere but here is it restored, does it remind you of what... you constantly live without' (215).

Nevertheless, in spite of the importance of the here, of presence, the homecoming that is permitted him is not bound, ultimately, to place, will not disappear 'at the first gate of Paradys or at the airport' (215), but will go with him. Paradys regained is a restoration of the person, the filling of an unconscious gap, restoration to a greater wholeness after the loss of being torn away from a place where you are known and belong. It is the ability to welcome yourself at your own door, wherever that may be. (Even after the goodbyes have been said and Michiel has left the farm, his brother telephones to tell him of the attacks on New York's Twin Towers, and gives him the options of driving on to Sandton, where he himself lives, or '[o]therwise,' he says, 'come home' [234].)

Ironically, the passage on homecoming is interwoven with a discussion Michiel has with Benjamin, in which his estrangement is foregrounded, an alienation that has nothing to do with place and everything with the injustice still perpetrated by its people. He feels unable to take up his inheritance, and so be part of it. During the funeral service he was conscious, wedged against Mamparra, 'melded' together, that 'the sweat of her labour is the calcium in his bones, in his powerful lungs... every step, every breath, what she has done most days of her life is in him' (97-98). Her labour sustained him; his privilege was grounded in her dispossession. Now, as he faces his brother, he asks him to face this injustice: 'Look, Benjamin... Look how we make people live so we may live like royalty.... I don't want that responsibility, cop out or not' (217).

Karien, too, is conscious not only of white debt to the disenfranchised, but of continued economic inequality. When Benjamin, now a Sandton businessman, expresses his enthusiasm for Mbeki's African Renaissance, she snorts, 'Renaissance, *my hol!*... And we're not witnesses, for god's sake. We're participants who are being further enriched' (163). When she expresses her belief that all whites might well have been murdered on their land like the Oberholzers, but for the generosity of ordinary

people, Lerato, who has joined the new elite, counters, ‘Generosity, my foot!... It’s the ten-foot wall around my house, with three strands of electric fence, that keeps the tsotsis out’ (153). It is clear that the line of division has changed but that the conditions of most remain largely unaltered. When Karien commends their ‘forgiving spirits’ in not avenging themselves, Lerato speaks instead of the ‘patience of being human’: ‘People believe their time *will* come.... How long the patience of some will last, *that’s* the question’ (154).

This question is left open in the novel, as indeed it must be. Michiel, who left during the worst years of apartheid, has returned to the ‘new’ democratic South Africa, witnessing the ‘new being born, dragging its afterbirth along with it, scratching its head to figure out a way to imbibe the past or otherwise see itself perish’ (94). He is aware of the progress of history, seeing in his father, brother, and the latter’s son, ‘the last three generations that will have it like this’ (118).

The *plaasroman* provides for the farm as microcosm, a small community in which generations have lived together within social structures reflecting the political and economic dispensation in the country. The genre lends itself to questions about land ownership and the correction of historic injustice, labour relations and economic justice. Both on the farm and in the country, the past must be dealt with or it will trip up the future. The reminder of farm murders underlines the precariousness of tenure. (Van Wyk Smith sees the farm novel, in this context, as an ‘icon of White South Africa’s fragile domicility and haunting complicity’, its potency as a trope dependent on nostalgia for that which is ‘always already in the past’ [2001: 20]). To presume that the ‘forgiving spirit’ of the poor will be sustained indefinitely would be to presume too much. Lerato sees this, the ‘honeymoon period’ of the new South Africa – which was, in 2001, already waning fast – as ‘borrowed time’ (154).

All three the novels discussed in detail in this study are written from a white point of view. In *Kings of the Water* the setting is post-apartheid, but forgiveness occurs largely amongst the white protagonists, and the broader notion of forgiveness for the sins of apartheid is merely introduced, and left open. Lerato and Sam Thabane are the only characters to speak on behalf of Black South Africans – and they are both part of the new elite, separated by wealth and power from the majority. We learn little of the

good work Ounooi and Karien are said to do among the poor, or of their circumstances, just as the apparently inadequate housing afforded the Paradys workers is described only from the outside. It seems Behr, who lives mainly outside South Africa, was confining himself to what he knew and, like Coetzee and Van Niekerk, not presuming to write on behalf of the other.

Behr extends the reach of this *plaasroman* beyond South Africa, from Michiel's arrival in his 'Nike Airs made in Cambodia' (4) to the sudden, unexpected intrusion of international events into this localised narration as he leaves. When Michiel has said his goodbyes and is on his way to the airport, cell phone messages alert him to a crisis in New York; the attack on the Twin Towers – the ultimate international act of revenge – and its aftermath are in progress as the novel ends, bringing to mind the bitterness of many towards the United States, with its citizens' 'abundance of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' (215). (We are reminded that the novel is set in the Bush era.)

Benjamin also reminds Michiel of injustice and the exploitation of the poor beyond the close quarters of the farm, beyond South Africa:

'Does the proximity make it intolerable, Michiel?... Seeing their lives so close? Because I know enough about California's economy to know who does the work there. You can hold this pose only because you don't see the hands picking the strawberries and lettuce you eat.... Go and look at the land around Salinas and tell me what distance between so-called fucking abstraction and sweat makes your life in America possible.... You want me to buy you out and use that money to build better houses for these people, I'll do it. Even if you want me to sell pieces of land or give it to them, I will.... Why don't you and your clever boyfriend lobby to give back the place you live in to whomever it was taken from?' (217-218)

This debate could obviously be taken further, its complications explored much more fully, but the novel leaves it there. Suffice to say that the appropriation of land, throughout the colonised world, has seldom been rectified, and that economic imperialism, exploitation, landlessness and inequality are not limited to pockets like South Africa. The struggle of the Palestinian people, for example, is voiced through Kamil's father Malik; class and other inequalities are foregrounded through constant debate amongst the members of Kamil's family.

Ways of ‘imbibing the past’ – whatever Behr’s rather innocuous term might mean – must take into account the inexorability of memory which defies the progress of time. Returning after a fifteen-year absence, Michiel muses on the evolution of the human race, and the fact that, in one life, every cell in the body changes: ‘Within a short time, we can no longer be said to be the same person. That’s the marvel of the postmodern moment: pissed, shat and sweated out of all responsibility’ (107) – as though mobility and constant change could absolve one from the burdens of the past. ‘But what of memory,’ the thought continues, ‘held in bones and teeth way beyond the I’s tenuous cohesion?’ The fanciful thought that remembrance is stored in surviving elements, in the bone, outlasting the vicissitudes of time and the instability of identity, is echoed, its scope broadened, later in the novel, when the future of Paradys is discussed. Michiel’s thoughts go to a *plaasroman* set thirty years earlier during apartheid’s heyday, Nadine Gordimer’s *The Conservationist* (1974), with its ‘disgraced’ white man leaving the country, the Africans left to ‘lay to rest the one who has no name’.

A name rarely sticks to a map for long. But bones remain under the debris of fences, streets and pavements. In lava rock and seabeds, in sweeping winds, bones lie across what once was or may be in future a brief boundary, a foundation or a border post, to be read, chewed on, mined, used as a tool or ignored for ever. (165)

Behr’s accelerated aerial film of a changing land, changing map – at the mercy of the elements as well as of the human will – accentuates that which remains: the bones, hidden under the surface, as though memory resides forever in the land itself. Paradys, equally, has changed hands, from probable black ownership to that of English settlers, to Afrikaners – but the bones of the Mohlakwana ancestors lie buried there forever, reminiscent of the ‘buried giant’ in the first *plaasroman* in English, Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883). And, while they may be ‘ignored for ever’, the novel includes a word on that too: ‘*Ignoring... differs from ignorance in that it is harder work*’ (79).

Kings of the Water pays tribute to *Disgrace* to the end but, just as Michiel, telling his niece a story, departs from the script of the Pied Piper, so Behr changes the outcome of his novel.

Michiel tells the story of the Pied Piper when his niece Bianca has woken during the night. She knows the story and corrects him as he goes, so that, to her amusement, he has to plead for narrative control. When the Piper has all the town's children following him, Bianca completes the story:

‘Back to the river, where they all drown,’ she murmurs, her voice now sleepy.

No, he says. No one drowns because of what grown-ups who always think they know better did or didn't do... (185)

In Michiel's version, the Piper leads the children to a cave, returns to town, and receives his just payment from the now contrite townspeople. ‘And slowly, all singing and dancing, the children come back into town with incredible stories of their journey and what they saw on the mountain’ (186).

Behr does not allow the sins of the fathers to damage the lives of the children (as they do in his first novel, *The Smell of Apples*, which was published in English in 1995), but turns the children's story into one resolved by both mercy and justice, in which the adults, ‘who always think they know better’, pay their own debts and no-one is sacrificed. This may be a reflection of Michiel's own return, fundamentally undamaged, as his capacity for kindness and mercy shows – and this is reflected not only in relation to his father, but also in relation to the children throughout the novel. (The exception may be Benjamin's son Thomas, who has become judgmental and so ‘thinks he knows better’.)

The concluding passages in *Disgrace* and *Kings of the Water* may be seen in a similar light. Where David Lurie, in disgrace, comes to Salem, Michiel Steyn, in disgrace, comes to Paradys – the Biblical overtones clear in both. At the end both leave. David Lurie gives up the crippled dog he has grown fond of and, in a last act of kindness, carries him to his death, giving the trajectory of his story an ethical dimension.

And Michiel, his journey to the airport and a defined future interrupted, is left beside the road for an encounter with an undernourished, neglected old horse of indefinite colour and sex. The horse follows him to a fence, but shies away when Michiel offers

him an apple, taken from the ‘padkos’ Alida had packed. He reaches as far as he can in offering the apple, and clucks his tongue.

The horse comes closer. He hears the breathing through the moving nostrils, receives the scent into his own. He feels the velvety muzzle on the skin of his open palm, the vibration of the crunch and chew. He touches with his free thumb the pus and drip from one scarred socket, sees the reflection of himself tiny in the pupil of each eye. The horse turns from the fence, seems to waver, then heads back into the veld. (236)

Using all the senses, Behr creates a complete encounter with the other, but this is one not of sacrifice, but of mercy, a gift. Michiel is not repelled by the horse’s age, ticks or sickness, but reaches out to touch without imposing his will on the horse. (And this time the animal survives, just as the children do in the fairy tale.)

‘As in water face answers to face, so the mind of man reflects the man’ (Prov 27:19). If it is in relation to the other that the self is known, Michiel has found his ‘own mirror’ (82) in his former home, in photographs and in relationships, and this is echoed in the ‘tiny’ reflection he sees of himself in the horse’s eyes. In this last, random encounter, his undefended openness to the other is reflected back to him in the giving and receiving of the gift.

CONCLUSION

(WRITTEN BY DAVID MEDALIE)

The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility – of being unable to undo what one has done... – is the faculty of forgiving.... Without being forgiven, released from the consequence of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to a single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer's apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell. (Arendt, 1989:237)

In the above passage (quoted in the first chapter of this thesis), Hannah Arendt emphasises the fact that forgiveness can only function in a situation in which an exacting logic of retribution is not imposed. The comparison she draws between the failure to forgive and 'the sorcerer's apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell' is telling, since the reference to sorcery and magic reinforces her point that the enactment of forgiveness requires an acceptance of and entry into what is almost a different order of existence, a radically distinct moral environment.

Arendt describes the failure to forgive in terms which suggest stasis, being locked and confined, being imprisoned: she speaks of 'irreversibility', of being 'unable to undo what one has done', of being 'confined to a single deed from which we could never recover', of remaining 'the victims of its consequences forever', and of being 'unable to break the spell'. Forgiveness, by implication, has the potential to reverse the seemingly irreversible and to act as a meaningful alternative. In other words: the failure to forgive is associated with determinism, with an uncompromising consequentiality; with *impossibility*. Forgiveness, on the other hand, is associated with *possibility*.

In abstract terms, such concepts may be difficult to grasp. One of the advantages of narrative – fictional or non-fictional – is that it has the capacity to embed concepts or ideas in social contexts, and to dramatize (but also to problematize) them, as this thesis has demonstrated. Texts such as *A Human Being Died That Night*, *Disgrace*, *Agaat* and *Kings of the Water*, in their different ways, all dramatize the difficulties posed by the impulse towards forgiveness, but also the possibilities such a quest affords.

Two novels by the same author, written many years apart, exemplify the contrast Arendt draws between the closed circle of implacable retribution and the opening up of possibilities associated with forgiveness. In Mark Behr's first novel, *The Smell of Apples* (originally published in 1993 in Afrikaans as *Die Reuk van Appels*), the present is represented as deterministically damaged by the abuses of the past. In this work, published during the dying days of apartheid, the conclusion emphatically enacts a grim logic of remorseless consequentiality. There is no possibility of escape, as indicated by the adult Marnus, himself irretrievably damaged by his childhood, when he says that 'in life there is no escape from history' (Behr, 1995: 198).

However, in *Kings of the Water*, published seventeen years later, the situation – as we have seen – is very different. When Michiel returns to Paradys, he is filled with foreboding because he expects to find that there is indeed no escape from his history, that the past in all its retributive fervour will be there to accuse him in the present. But he is astonished to find instances of forgiveness, magnanimity and grace; and, even in his fraught relationship with his father, moments of tenderness and humaneness that he had not anticipated. The determinism of impossibility, of there being no escape, has been replaced by the openness of possibility.

This does not mean that forgiveness is easily granted or attained – in *Kings of the Water* or in any of the other texts included in this thesis. But there is a crucial difference between what is *impossible* and what is *difficult*. The former speaks of a society doomed to remain the victim of its history, while the latter suggests ways of trying to move forward by responding differently to the past. In seeking to distinguish between these two modes of conduct, this study finds its ethical value and its purpose.

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APPENDIX

The parable of the lost son

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear (Jesus). And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’

And he said, ‘there was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said, “Father, give me the share of the property that falls to me.” And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey to a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; but no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.’” And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his servants, “Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; ⁶⁶and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” And they began to make merry.

Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked him what this meant. And he said to him, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf,

⁶⁶ ‘The gifts are all signs of honour and authority. *Shoes* were the prerogative of free men, not of slaves. (Guthrie, D. *et al.* *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* : 912)

because he has received him safe and sound.” But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured his living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!’” And he said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.””

(Lk 15:1,2, 11-32)