

# = Doubling the Point

*Essays and Interviews*

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the pact she enters into (or allows herself to fall into) with her Angel of Death, the derelict Vercueil, seems increasingly to represent the promise of absolution as the novel develops. In this resolution, are you not close to the Dostoyevskian principle of grace?

JMC: It is 28 July 1990 today, and *Age of Iron* has yet to be published, though you have read it in manuscript. I am still too near its writing—too near and too raw—to know what to think of it. But let me take up the two terms *history* and *authority* and, at the risk of traducing Elizabeth, comment on them in the light, or in the shadow, of my aftersense of the book.

Elizabeth Curren brings to bear against the voices of history and historical judgment that resound around her two kinds of authority: the authority of the dying and the authority of the classics. Both these authorities are denied and even derided in her world: the first because hers is a private death, the second because it speaks from long ago and far away.

So a contest is staged, not only in the dramatic construction of the novel but also within Elizabeth's—what shall I say?—soul, a contest about having a say. To me as a writer, as *the* writer in this case, the outcome of this contest—what is to count as classic in South Africa—is irrelevant. What matters is that the contest is staged, that the dead have their say, even those who speak from a totally untenable historical position. So: even in an age of iron, pity is not silenced.

What is of importance in what I have just said is the phrasing: the phrases *is staged, is heard*; not *should be staged, should be heard*. There is no ethical imperative that I claim access to. Elizabeth is the one who believes in *should*, who believes in *believes in*. As for me, the book is written, it will be published, nothing can stop it. The deed is done, what power was available to me is exercised.

As for your question about absolution for Elizabeth, the end of the novel seems to me more troubled (in the sense that the sea can be troubled) than you imply. But here I am stepping onto precarious ground, or precarious water; I had better stop. As for grace, no, regrettably no: I am not a Christian, or not yet.

## = Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky (1985)

In Book II of his *Confessions*, Augustine relates the story of how, as a boy, he and some friends stole a huge load of pears from a neighbor's garden, stealing them not because they wanted to eat them (in fact they fed them to hogs) but for the pleasure of committing a forbidden act. They were being "gratuitously wanton, having no inducement to the evil but the evil itself . . . seeking nothing from the shameful deed but the shame itself . . . We were ashamed not to be shameless."<sup>1</sup>

In the time-before of which the *Confessions* tells, the robbery brings shame to the young Augustine's heart. But the desire of the boy's heart (the mature man remembers) is that very feeling of shame. And his heart is not shamed (chastened) by the knowledge that it seeks to know shame: on the contrary, the knowledge of its own desire as a shameful one both satisfies the desire for the experience of shame and fuels a sense of shame. And this sense of shame is both experienced with satisfaction and recognized, if it is recognized, by self-conscious searching, as a further source of shame; and so on endlessly.

In the "numberless halls and caves, in the innumerable fields and dens and caverns of memory" (X.xvii; p. 217), the shame lives on in the mature man. "Who can unravel such a twisted and tangled knottiness? It is unclean, I hate to reflect upon it" (II.x; p. 60). Augustine's plight is truly abysmal. He wants to know what lies at the beginning of the skein of remembered shame, what is the origin from which it springs, but the skein is endless, the stages of self-searching required to attain its beginning infinite in number. Yet until the source from which the shameful act sprang is confronted, the self can have no rest.

Confession is one component in a sequence of transgression, confession, penitence, and absolution. 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. In contrast, transgression is not a fundamental component. In Augustine's story, the theft of the pears is the transgression, but what calls to be confessed is something that lies behind the theft, a truth about himself that he does not yet know. His story of the pears is therefore a twofold confession of something he knows (the act) and something he does not know: "I would . . . confess what I know about myself; I will confess what I do not know about myself . . . What I do not know about myself I will continue not to know until the time when 'my darkness is as the noonday' in thy sight" (X.v; p. 205). The truth about the self that will bring an end to the quest for the source within the self for that-which-is-wrong, he affirms, will remain inaccessible to introspection.

In this essay I follow the fortunes of a number of secular confessions, fictional and autobiographical, as their authors confront or evade the problem of how to know the truth about the self without being self-deceived, and of how to bring the confession to an end in the spirit of whatever they take to be the secular equivalent of absolution. A certain looseness is inevitable when one transposes the term *confession* from a religious to a secular context. Nevertheless, we can demarcate a mode of autobiographical writing that we can call the *confession*, as distinct from the *memoir* and the *apology*, on the basis of an underlying motive to tell an essential truth about the self.<sup>2</sup> It is a mode practiced at times by Montaigne,<sup>3</sup> but the mode is essentially defined by Rousseau's *Confessions*. As for fictional confession, this mode is already practiced by Defoe in the made-up confessions of sinners like Moll Flanders and Roxana; by our time, confessional fictions have come to constitute a subgenre of the novel in which problems of truth-telling and self-recognition, deception and self-deception, come to the forefront.<sup>4</sup> Two of the fictions I discuss, Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* and Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*, can strictly be called confessional fictions because they consist for the greater part of representations of confessions of abhorrent acts committed by their narrators. Ippolit Terentyev's "Explanation" in *The Idiot* is a deathbed apologia which soon engages in the problems of truth and self-knowledge that characterize confession. Finally, Stavro-

gin's confession in *The Possessed* raises the question, left in abeyance since Montaigne's time, of whether secular confession, for which there is an auditor or audience, fictional or real, but no confessor empowered to absolve, can ever lead to that *end of the chapter* whose attainment is the goal of confession.<sup>5</sup>

### Tolstoy

It is the second evening of a long train journey. Conversation among the passengers has turned to marriage, adultery, divorce. A gray-haired man speaks cynically about love. He reveals his name: Pozdnyshev, convicted wife-killer. His fellow passengers edge away, leaving him alone with the unnamed narrator, to whom he now offers to "tell everything from the beginning." Pozdnyshev's confession, as repeated by this narrator, constitutes the body of Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata* (1889).<sup>6</sup>

Pozdnyshev's story is of a man who lived his life in an "abyss of error" concerning relations with women, and who finally underwent an "episode" of pathological jealousy in which he killed his wife. Only later, after being sent to prison, did it happen that "my eyes [were] opened and I [saw] everything in quite a different light. Everything reversed, everything reversed!" (233). The moment when everything becomes reversed (*navyvoroť*, "turned inside out") is the moment of illumination that opens his eyes to the truth and makes true confession possible. The confession on which he embarks in the train thus has two sides: the facts of the "episode," which have already of course come out in court, and the truth about himself to which his eyes have since been opened. Telling the latter truth, in turn, is closely allied to denouncing error, a state of error in which, in his opinion, the entire class from which he comes still lives.

With his air of agitation, the funny little sound he makes (half cough, half broken-off laugh), his strange ideas about sex, and the history of violence behind him, Pozdnyshev is plainly an odd character, and one would not be surprised if the truth he told were at odds with the truth understood by the quiet, sober auditor who later retells his truth to us. We would not be surprised, in other words, to find ourselves reading one of those books in which the speaker believes himself to be telling one truth while to us it slowly

emerges that somehow another truth is being told—a book like Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, say, in which the narrator believes he is speaking *for* himself but we are all too easily able to read him *against* himself.

Let me begin by summarizing the truth as Pozdnyshev sees it, allowing him to speak in his own voice.

### *Pozdnyshev's Truth*

As a child of my class, I received my sexual initiation in a brothel. Experience with prostitutes spoiled my relations with women forever. Yet with "the most varied and horrible crimes against women" on my soul, I was welcomed into the homes of my peers and permitted to dance with their wives and daughters (239).

I became engaged to a girl. It was a time of sensual promise heightened by alluring fashions in clothes, by rich food, by lack of physical exercise. Our honeymoon brought disillusionment, and married life turned into an alternation between bouts of animosity and bouts of sensuality. What we did not understand was that the animosity we felt for each other was a protest of our "human nature" against being overpowered by our "animal nature" (261).

Society, via its priests and doctors, sanctions unnatural practices: sexual intercourse during pregnancy and lactation, contraception. Contraception was "the cause of all that happened later," for it permitted my wife to move among strange men "in the full vigor of a thirty-year-old, well fed and excited woman who is not bearing children" (281, 283).

A man named Trukachevski, a violinist, came onto the scene. Led by "a strange and fatal force," I encouraged his friendship with my wife, and "a game of mutual deception" began. He and my wife played duets, I seethed with jealousy but kept a smiling front, my wife was excited by my jealousy, while an "electric current" flowed between her and him (293–294). In retrospect I now see that playing music together, like dancing together, like the closeness of sculptors to female models or of doctors to female patients, is an avenue that society keeps open to encourage illicit liaisons.

I left home on a trip but kept remembering something Trukachevski's brother once said: he slept only with married women be-

cause they were "safe," he would not pick up an infection. Overcome with jealous rage, I raced home. Trukachevski and my wife were playing duets. I burst in upon them with a dagger. Trukachevski escaped. My wife pleaded, "There has been nothing . . . I swear it!" (328). I stabbed her.

In prison a "moral change" took place in me and I saw how my fate had been determined. "Had I known what I know now, everything would have been different . . . I should not have married at all" (328, 334).

### *Tolstoy's Truth*

In 1890, in response to letters from readers asking "what I meant" in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Tolstoy published an "Afterword" in which he spelled out what he "meant" as a series of injunctions. It is wrong for unmarried people to indulge in sexual intercourse. People should learn to live naturally and eat moderately; they would then find sexual abstinence easier. They should also be taught that sexual love is "an animal state degrading to a human being." Contraception and the practice of intercourse during lactation should cease. Chastity is a state preferable to marriage.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Other Truth "of" Pozdnyshev*

If one rereads the story of Pozdnyshev, however, stressing elements other than those elements Pozdnyshev and the Tolstoy of the "Afterword" choose to stress, one comes up with another truth. I could allow this alternative truth "of" Pozdnyshev to speak in its own voice from its own "I." But then I may be read as prejudging the case by asserting the same authority for this second voice as for the first, the voice Pozdnyshev believes to be his own. So let me write the other truth simply as something postulated "of" or "about" Pozdnyshev, something extracted from his utterances yet not the truth he avows in his own person.

In the ballrooms and drawing rooms of Pozdnyshev's class a convention reigns: no one is to look beneath the "carefully washed, shaved, perfumed" exteriors of young men to see them as they are in their filthy naked nocturnal debauches with prostitutes. Another convention says that there are two kinds of woman, decent

women and prostitutes, even though on occasion decent women dress like prostitutes, with "the same exposure of arms, shoulders and breasts, the same tight skirts over prominent bustles." In fact, women dress to kill. Pozdnyshv: "I am simply frightened [by them]. I want to call a policeman and ask for protection from the peril" (239, 244, 249).

Pozdnyshv gets married and goes on a honeymoon. The experience is disillusioning: he compares it to paying to enter a sideshow at a fair, discovering inside that you have been cheated, but being too ashamed of your gullibility to warn other sightseers of the fraud. He thinks particularly of a sideshow advertising a bearded woman that he visited in Paris (251). As for intercourse, it leads to hatred and thence ultimately to killing. The killing goes on all the time. "They are all killing, all, all." Yet even when a woman is pregnant, when "great work" is going on within her, she permits the entry of the male instrument (261, 263).

Then comes Trukachevski, with his "specially developed posterior," his "springy gait," his habit of "holding his hat against his twitching thigh." Though Pozdnyshv dislikes Trukachevski, "a strange and fatal force led me not to repulse him . . . but on the contrary to invite him to the house." Trukachevski offers to "be of use" to Pozdnyshv's wife, and Pozdnyshv accepts, asking him to "bring his violin and play [*igrat*] with my wife." "From the first moment [their] eyes met . . . I saw that the animal in each of them asked, 'May I?' and answered, 'Oh yes, certainly'" (286, 295, 294, 293, 296).

Racing home to trap the couple together, he exacerbates his jealousy by imagining how Trukachevski sees his wife: "She is not in her first youth, has lost a side-tooth, and there is a slight puffiness about her," but at least she will not have a venereal disease. Pozdnyshv's greatest anguish is that "I considered myself to have a complete right to her body . . . and yet at the same time I felt I could not control that body . . . and she could dispose of that body as she pleased, and she wanted to dispose of it not as I wished her to" (315, 318).

Creeping up to the room from which the music comes, Pozdnyshv fears only that they will "part hastily" before he gets there and so deprive him of "clear evidence" of their crime. As he is about to stab his wife, she cries out that there "has been noth-

ing." "I might still have hesitated, but these last words of hers, from which I concluded just the opposite—that everything had happened—called forth a reply," and he kills her (322, 326).

This collage of extracts from Pozdnyshv's text literally tells a different story from the one he tells. This story is of a man who sees the phallus everywhere, peeking mockingly or bulging threateningly from the bodies of men and women. He marries in the hope of learning the sexual secret (the woman's beard) but is disappointed. He imagines sexual intercourse as a probing by the vengeful phallus after the life of the unborn child, with whom he identifies, within the mother. At the thought that his wife/mother's body does not belong to him alone, he feels the anguish of the Oedipal child. He tries to solve the problem by giving her to the threatening rival (whom he sees as a walking phallus), thereby retaining magical control over the couple; when they do not enact the scene he has prescribed and permitted them, he loses control and flies into murderous rage.

We hear Pozdnyshv speak this "other" truth about himself if we stress a certain chain of elements of his text and ignore those elements he wants us to attend to—his visits to prostitutes, his meat diet, and so on. No doubt we can read third and fourth truths out of the text by the same method. But my argument is not a radical one involving an infinity of interpretations. My argument is merely that Pozdnyshv and Pozdnyshv's interlocutor and Tolstoy and Tolstoy's public operate within an economy in which a second reading is possible, a reading that searches in the corners of Pozdnyshv's discourse for instances where the truth, the "unconscious" truth, slips out in strange associations, false rationalizations, gaps, contradictions. If the "unconscious" truth of Pozdnyshv is anything like the one I have outlined, then Pozdnyshv's confession becomes one of those "ironic" confessions in which the speaker believes himself to be saying one thing but is "in truth" saying something very different. In particular, Pozdnyshv believes that since the "episode" his eyes have been "opened" and he has attained a certain knowledge of himself both as individual and as representative of a social class that qualifies him to say what was "wrong" with him and is still wrong with his class (whose representatives, all but one, refuse to hear the diagnosis and move to another carriage). But the true truth "of"

Pozdnyshv turns out to be that he knows very little about himself. In particular, while he knows that "had I known [then] what I know now . . . I should not have married at all," he does not know why he should not have married or why he killed his wife. Yet the peculiar thing is that this incompetent diagnostician is given explicit support by Tolstoy as author in his "Afterword": what Pozdnyshv believes to be wrong with society, says Tolstoy, is indeed what is wrong.

Little I have said thus far about *The Kreutzer Sonata* is new. "The conventions which govern it are confused," says Donald Davie. "The reader does not know 'which way to take it.' Nor, as far as we can see, was this ambiguity intended by the author. It is therefore a grossly imperfect work."<sup>8</sup> "Broken-backed" is T. G. S. Cain's verdict: a "magnificently handled narrative of the moral decay of a marriage . . . introduced by, and partly interwoven with, an obsessively unintelligent, simplistic series of generalizations . . . spoken by Pozdnyshv but . . . undoubtedly endorsed by Tolstoy."<sup>9</sup>

Both the comments of Davie and Cain and my comments above point to a problem of mediation. A confession embodying a patently inadequate self-analysis is mediated through a narrator who gives no hint that he questions the analysis, and the analysis is then reaffirmed (as "what I meant") by the author writing outside the fiction. These mediators of Pozdnyshv are too quickly satisfied, one reflects: it is all too easy to read another, "deeper" truth in Pozdnyshv's confession. Yet when one looks to Pozdnyshv himself for evidence that he is disturbed by the strain of articulating one truth with one voice ("consciously") while another truth speaks itself "unconsciously," one finds nothing but the cryptic symptom of the preverbal half-cough, half-laugh, which may signal strain but may equally well signal scorn; when one looks to the narrator for signs of a questioning attitude, one finds only silence; and when one looks to Tolstoy one finds belligerently simplistic support for Pozdnyshv's truth. At all levels of presentation, then, there is a lack of reflectiveness. *The Kreutzer Sonata* presents a narrative, asserts its interpretation (its truth), and asserts as well that there are no problems of interpretation.

A willed belief that things are one way when they are another way is a form of self-deception. Whether Pozdnyshv is self-de-

ceived and whether the narrator is deceived are questions the text will not answer. For the question "Is Pozdnyshv self-deceived?" can only mean "Is Pozdnyshv a representation of a self-deceived man?" and the text does not reflect on this point. Whether the narrator is deceived or not by Pozdnyshv one cannot know, since the narrator is silent. But it is meaningful to put the question of whether Tolstoy himself, as writer and self-aware self-critic, is, at best, self-deceived when, by asserting that Pozdnyshv is a trustworthy critic of society, he implies that Pozdnyshv understands his own history, and therefore that his confession can be trusted to mean what he says it means. For, in the first place, there is a plethora of biographical evidence that the habit of keeping a diary in the peculiar circumstances of the Tolstoy household brought Tolstoy every day face to face with the temptations of deception and the problems of insincerity and self-deception inherent in the diary form and in confessional forms in general.<sup>10</sup> And second, the focus of the psychology of the novels of Tolstoy's middle period is as much on mechanisms of self-deception as on anything else.

What must surprise one, with this background in mind, is that Tolstoy should write a work so blank as *The Kreutzer Sonata* on the ambivalences of the confessional impulse and the deformations of truth brought about by the confessional situation, a situation in which there is always someone confessed to, even if, as in the private diary, the nature of this Other might be left undefined, in suspension. Around neither the confession within the confession (Pozdnyshv's presentation of his diaries to his fiancée) nor the confession of Pozdnyshv to the narrator is there any frame of questioning. Just as one effect of seeing the light has been to make it easy for Pozdnyshv to discard his earlier self, to regard that self without sympathy, so it would seem that the effect of "knowing the truth" has made it easy for the Tolstoy of 1889 to turn his back on the earlier self who had regarded the attainment of truth as perilously beset with self-deception and complacency, and to see the problematics of truth-telling as trivial compared with the truth itself. One might say that *The Kreutzer Sonata* is not only open to second and third readings, but is carelessly open to them, as though Tolstoy were indifferent to games of reinterpretation that might be played by people with time to waste. Thus

*The Kreutzer Sonata* seems to mark the repudiation by Tolstoy of a talent whose distinguishing feature was a capacity "to know himself," as Rilke says, "right into his own blood."<sup>11</sup>

Pozdnyshév's life falls into a before and an after, the before being "an abyss of error," the after a time of "everything reversed." His temporal position in the after gives him, in his own eyes, the complete self-knowledge that William C. Spengemann finds characteristic of the "converted narrator," whose knowing, converted, narrating self stands invisibly beside the experiencing, acting self he tells about.<sup>12</sup> On Pozdnyshév's conversion experience the text is silent except to say that awareness comes after "torments" (235). Still, as long as we continue to read *The Kreutzer Sonata* as the utterance of a converted self, rather than as a frame for a schedule of pronouncements ("abstain from prostitutes, abstain from meat, . . ."), we can continue to seek in the text traces of the sense of *truth-bearing* that comes to the converted narrator with the attainment of what he believes to be full understanding of the past.

To confirm that this sense of truth-embodiment—selfhood—and indeed the process of the conversion experience itself—was of acute interest to Tolstoy, we may turn not only to *Anna Karenina* but also to a document written ten years before *The Kreutzer Sonata*. *A Confession* is, in the main, an analysis of a crisis Tolstoy passed through in 1874, when reason told him that life was meaningless and he came close to suicide, till a force within him that he calls "an instinctive consciousness of life" rejected the conclusions of his reason and saved him.<sup>13</sup>

The language in which Tolstoy sets out this contest of forces is worth examining in detail. Though associated with reasoning, the condition of mind that leads him to "[hide] away a cord, to avoid being tempted to hang myself . . . and [cease] to carry a gun" is described as a passive state, "a strange state of mind-torpor . . . a stoppage, as it were, of life" (29–30, 24). Conversely, the impulse that saves his life is not simply a physical life-force but partakes of the intellect: it is "an inkling that my ideas were wrong," a sense that "I [had] made some mistake"; it is "doubts" (72, 76, 77). And though the impulse is finally named as "an instinctive consciousness of life," it is accompanied by "a tormenting feeling, which I cannot [in retrospect] describe otherwise than as a search-

ing after God" (109). Thus the opposition is not between a clear and overwhelming conviction that life is absurd, and an instinctually based animal drive to live: error, the drive to death, is a gathering sluggishness, like the running down of life itself, while the saving truth springs from an instinctive intellectual power that obscurely mistrusts reason. The second force does not clash with the first and defeat it. Strictly speaking, there is no conflict. Rather, there are two states of mind simultaneously present, the one a death-directed stoppage of life that simply *happens* (*na menya stali naxodit' minuty snačala nedoumeniya, ostanovki žizni*: "it happened that I was seized over and over with moments of puzzlement, stoppages of life"), the other a mistrust, a caution; and, for reasons that reason cannot fathom, the tide reverses, the second slowly begins to supervene, the first begins to dissipate.

One is not wrong to detect a certain philosophical scrupulousness in this account. There is another, conventional kind of language Tolstoy might have slipped into to describe this conversion experience, a language in which the self chooses selfishly to follow the voice of reason but is then saved from error by another voice speaking from the heart. This would be a language of the false self and the true self, the false self being rational and socially conditioned, the true self instinctual and individual. In Tolstoy there is no such simple dualism of false and true selves. Rather, the self is a site where the will goes through its processes in ways only obscurely accessible to introspection. It is not the self, or a self, that reaches out toward God. Rather, the self experiences a reaching-out (*iskaniem Boga*, "a searching after God"). The self does not change (change in the middle voice sense of change-itself); rather, a change takes place in the site of the self: "When and how the change took place in me [*soveršilsya vo mne etot perevorot*] I could not say" (114).

Insofar as it gives an answer to the question of what the condition of truthfulness is like, then, *A Confession* says that it arises out of an attentiveness and responsiveness to an inner impulse that Tolstoy calls an impulse toward God. The condition of truthfulness is not perfect self-knowledge but truth-directedness, what the peasant in *Anna Karenina* calls "living for one's soul," in words that come as a blinding illumination to Levin.<sup>14</sup> In his skepticism

about rational self-knowledge, in his conviction that men act in accord with inner forces in ways of which they are not aware, Tolstoy remains in sympathy with Schopenhauer;<sup>15</sup> where he parts company with Schopenhauer is in identifying the impulse toward God as one of these forces.

All of Tolstoy's writing, fictional and nonfictional, is concerned with truth; in the late writings the concern with truth overrides all other concerns. The restless impatience with received truths, the struggles to uncover the grounds for a state of truthfulness in the self that are common to both the Levin sections of *Anna Karenina* and the later autobiographical writings, have left on one reader after another the impression of "perfect sincerity" that Matthew Arnold records.<sup>16</sup> Common to both the autobiographical *Confession* and late stories like "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" is the crisis (a confrontation with his own death) that brings about an illumination in the life of the central character that makes it absurd for him to continue in a self-deceived mode of existence. Thereafter he may or may not live on as a (limited) witness to the truth. The sense of urgency that the crisis brings about, the relentlessness of the process in which the self is stripped of its comforting fictions, the single-mindedness of the quest for truth: all these qualities enter into the term *sincerity*.

One would therefore expect that a fiction in confessional form would provide Tolstoy with a congenial and adequate vehicle for the literature of truth that he wanted to write—that is, a fiction centering on a crisis of illumination, retrospectively narrated by a speaker (now a truth-bearer) about his earlier, (self-)deceived self. But what one finds instead in *The Kreutzer Sonata* is a lack of interest in the potential of the confessional form in favor of another, dogmatic notion of what it means to tell the truth. In consequence there occur two crippling silences in the text. The first is the silence about the conversion experience, an experience in which, as the example of Tolstoy's own *Confession* shows, the inner experience of being a truth-bearer is felt most intensely by contrast with the previous self-deceived mode of existence. Silence about this experience thus entails a failure of dramatization. The second and more serious silence is that of the narrator. Since Pozdnyshév's confession is a narrative monologue characterized by new-

found self-certainty, the function of doubling back and scrutinizing the truthfulness of the truth enunciated by Pozdnyshév must, *faute de mieux*, fall to his auditor. His auditor performs no such function, thereby implicitly giving his support to the notion of truth that Tolstoy himself presents in the "Afterword": that truth is what it is, that there are more important things to do than scrutinize the machinations of the will at work in the utterer of truth. This authoritarian position denies, in the name of a higher truth, the relevance of interrogating the interest of the confessant in telling the truth his way: whatever the will behind the confession might be (ultimately, thought Countess Tolstoy, a will in Tolstoy to get at her), the truth transcends the will behind it. The truth also transcends the suspicion that "the truth transcends the will behind it" might be willed, self-serving. In other words, the position taken up in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, both in the framework of interpretation with which Tolstoy surrounds it and in its own lack of armament against other, unauthorized readings, other truths—a lack of armament that one must finally read as contemptuous, disregarding—is one of short-circuiting self-doubt and self-scrutiny in the name of an autonomous truth.

Because the basic movement of self-reflexiveness is a doubting and questioning movement, it is in the nature of the truth told to itself by the reflecting self not to be final. This lack of finality is naturally experienced with particular anguish in a writer as truth-directed as Tolstoy. The endless knot of self-awareness becomes a Gordian knot. But if it cannot be loosened, there is more than one way of cutting it. "Man cuts the Gordian knot of his life, and kills himself simply for the sake of escaping from the torturing inward contradictions produced by intelligent consciousness, which has been carried to the last degree of tension in our day," Tolstoy wrote in 1887.<sup>17</sup> Alternatively, man can cut the knot by announcing the end of doubt in the name of the revealed truth. But this maneuver, followed by Tolstoy in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, raises its own problem. For whatever authority a confession bears in a secular context derives from the status of the confessant as a hero of the labyrinth willing to confront the worst within himself (Rousseau claims to be such a hero). A confessant who does not doubt himself when there are obvious grounds for doing so (as in



Pozdnyshv's case) is no better than one who refuses to doubt because doubt is not profitable. Neither is a hero, neither confesses with authority.

### Rousseau

The impact on Tolstoy of reading Rousseau for the first time is well known. For a while, as a youth, he wore around his neck a medallion with Rousseau's picture. "There would be a certain justice," writes V. V. Zenkovsky, "in expounding all of Tolstoy's views as variations on his Rousseauism—so deeply did this Rousseauism influence him to the end of his life."<sup>18</sup> Rousseau's *Confessions* first impressed Tolstoy for "the contempt for human lies, and the love of truth" they revealed, though in later life he delivered to Maxim Gorky his verdict that "Rousseau lied and believed his lies."<sup>19</sup> The terrain of truth, self-knowledge, and sincerity where Tolstoy spent so much of his writing life was mapped out by Rousseau, and it is only here and there that Tolstoy goes further than Rousseau in exploring it.

The *Confessions* begin: "I am commencing an undertaking . . . without precedent . . . I desire to set before my fellows the likeness of a man in all the truth of nature, and that man myself." Rousseau goes on to imagine himself appearing before God, book in hand, saying: "I have shown myself as I was: mean and contemptible, good, high-minded and sublime . . . I have unveiled my inmost self."<sup>20</sup> The task Rousseau sets himself is therefore one of total self-revelation. Yet one might at once ask how any other reader of the book of Rousseau's life save all-knowing God can know that he has truly told the truth.

Rousseau's first defense is that he passes the test Montaigne fails: whereas Montaigne "pretends to confess his defects" but confesses only "amiable" defects (Book X; II, 160), he, Rousseau, is prepared to confess to defects that bring shame upon him, like the sensual pleasure he takes in being beaten by a woman (Book I; I, 13). This defense does not, of course, answer the charge that he may believe he is telling the truth, yet be self-deceived. Here his response is that his method in the *Confessions* is to detail "everything that has happened to me, all my acts, thoughts and

feelings" without any structure of interpretation: "it is [the reader's] business to collect these scattered elements and to determine the being which is composed of them; the result must be his work" (Book IV; I, 159). And if this response seems evasive (if it does not answer the charge of selective recollection, for instance), Rousseau's position is as follows:

I may omit or transpose facts, I may make mistakes in dates, but I cannot be deceived in what I have felt or what my feelings have prompted me to do . . . The real object of my Confessions is, to contribute to an accurate knowledge of my inner being in all the different situations of my life. What I have promised to relate is the history of my soul; I need no other memoirs to write it faithfully; it is sufficient for me to enter again into my inner self. (Book VII; I, 252)

Rousseau's position is thus that self-deception with respect to present recollection is impossible, since the self is transparent to itself. Present self-knowledge is a *donnée*.

How does this position work out in practice? Here let us turn to the oft-discussed story of the theft of a ribbon told not only in Book II of the *Confessions* but also in the fourth of the *Rêveries*. While employed as a manservant, Rousseau steals a strip of ribbon. The ribbon is found in his possession. Rousseau claims that the maidservant Marion gave the ribbon to him, and repeats the charge to her face. Both Rousseau and Marion are dismissed. Rousseau comments: "It is not likely that she afterwards found it easy to get a good situation"; he wonders darkly whether she might not have done away with herself (Book II; I, 75–76).

Though remorse has weighed on him for forty years, Rousseau writes in 1766, he has never confessed his guilt till now. The act was "atrocious," and the spectacle of poor falsely accused Marion would have changed any but a "barbarous heart." Nevertheless, the purpose of the *Confessions* would not be served if he did not also try to present the inner truth of the story. The inner truth is that "I accused her of having done what I meant to do," that is, he accused Marion of having given him the ribbon because it was his "intention" that he should give Marion the ribbon. As for his failure to retract his lie when confronted with Marion, this was

the result of an "unconquerable fear of shame." "I was little more than a child": the situation was more than he could handle (Book II; I, 75–77).

Paul de Man distinguishes two strains in this story: an element of *confession* whose purpose it is to reveal a verifiable truth, and an element of *excuse* whose purpose it is to convince the reader that things are and were as Rousseau sees them.<sup>21</sup> Though de Man errs in asserting that the truth one confesses must in principle be verifiable (one can confess impure thoughts, for example), his distinction between confession proper and excuse does allow us to see why confessions of the kind we encounter in Rousseau raise problems of certainty not raised by confessions of fact. The act of theft was bad, says Rousseau, but there was an intention behind it that was good, and therefore the act was not entirely blameworthy. Similarly, the act of blaming Marion was bad, but it was caused by fear and was therefore to some extent excusable. Rousseau's self-examination ceases at this point. But the process of qualification he has initiated can be continued further. How can he know that that part of himself which recalls the good intention behind the bad act is not constructing the intention *post facto* to exculpate him? Yet on the other hand (we may imagine the autobiographer continuing), we must be careful to give the good in us as much credit as the bad: what is it in me that might wish to minimize good intentions by labeling them *post-facto* rationalizations?<sup>22</sup> Yet is a question like the last one not precisely the kind of question I would be asking if I were trying to shield myself from the knowledge of the worst in myself? And yet . . .

To get to the "real" truth of the ribbon story, de Man moves past a balancing of the claims of good intentions against those of bad acts to a scrutiny of the language of confession. "The obvious satisfaction in the tone and the eloquence of the passage . . . the easy flow of hyperboles . . . the obvious delight with which the desire to hide is being revealed"—these features of tone all indicate that "what Rousseau *really* wanted is neither the ribbon nor Marion, but the public scene of exposure which he actually gets." Both the theft and the belated breast-beating thus conceal Rousseau's "real" desire to exhibit himself. And if self-exhibition is the real motive, then the more crime there is, the more concealment, the more delay over revelation, the better. The "truly shameful" desire

that Rousseau is too ashamed to confess is the desire to expose himself, a desire to which Marion is sacrificed. And, de Man points out, this process of shame and exposure, like the process of confession and qualification, entails a regression to infinity: "each new stage in the unveiling suggests a deeper shame, a greater impossibility to reveal, and a greater satisfaction in outwitting this impossibility."<sup>23</sup>

It is perhaps naive of de Man to write of "what Rousseau really wanted" as if that were historically knowable. It may also seem incautious to base interpretation on an analysis of features of style. However, in the latter respect de Man has the authority not only of Rousseau but of Romantic poetics behind him. From an early merely anticlassical position that finds in sincerity, understood as a truthful relation of the writer to himself, a substitute for an apprenticeship to the classics,<sup>24</sup> Romanticism moves rapidly to the formula of Keats that reverses the entailments: not only does truth entail beauty; beauty entails truth, too. From here it is not far to the position that poetry creates its own, autonomous standards of truth.<sup>25</sup>

The notion that the artist creates his own truth takes a particularly radical form in the *Confessions*, since Rousseau is working in a medium—autobiography—with closer ties to history, and to referential criteria of truth, than to poetry. We can conveniently trace the stages by which Rousseau feels his way towards this position if we follow the theme of exhibitionism in the *Confessions*.

In Book III Rousseau describes a series of sexually exhibitionistic acts he performed as a youth. The description of these acts is itself, of course, a kind of exhibitionism. What motive do these two forms of self-revelation have in common? Jean Starobinski suggests an answer: both represent a recourse to the "magic power" of "immediate seduction": the subject reaches out to others without leaving himself; he shows what he is like while remaining himself and remaining within himself.<sup>26</sup>

Rousseau's self-revelations in fact always have in view the goal of winning love and acceptance. Self-revelation offers the truth of the self, a truth that others might be persuaded to see. Thus, in the words of Starobinski, whose analysis of Rousseau's exhibitionism I follow, "the *Confessions* are on the most important account an attempt to rectify the error of others and not an investigation

of a *temps perdu*. Rousseau's interest . . . begins with the question: Why does this inner feeling . . . not find its echo in the according of immediate recognition?" For this persuasive intent to be carried out, a language (*écriture*) must be invented to render the unique savor of personal experience, a language "supple enough and varied enough to tell the diversity, the contradictions, the slight details, the minuscule nuances, the interlocking of tiny perceptions whose tissue constitutes the unique existence of Jean-Jacques."<sup>27</sup> Rousseau's own comment on this stylistic project is as follows:

I will write what comes to me, I will change [my style] according to my humor without scruple, I will express everything I feel as I feel it, as I see it, without affectation, without constraint, without being upset by the resulting medley. Yielding myself simultaneously to the memory of the impression I received [in the past] and to present feeling, I will give a twofold depiction of [*je peindrai doublement*] the state of my soul.<sup>28</sup>

The immediacy of the language Rousseau projects is intended as a guarantee of the truth of the past it recounts. It is no longer a language that dominates its subject as the language of the historian does. Instead, it is a naive language that reveals the confessant in the moment of confession in the same instant that it reveals the past he confesses—a past necessarily become uncertain. In Starobinski's formulation, we are moving from the domain of truthfulness, where confession is still subject to historical verification, to the domain of authenticity. Authenticity does not demand that language reproduce a reality; instead it demands that language manifest its "own" truth. The distance between the writing self and the source of the feelings it writes about is abolished—this abolition being what distinguishes authenticity from sincerity—for the source is always here and now. "Everything takes place, in effect, in a present so pure that the past itself is relived as present feeling."<sup>29</sup> The first prerequisite is thus to *be oneself*. One is in danger of not being oneself when one lives at a reflective distance from oneself (a revealing reversal of values for autobiography).

Language itself therefore becomes for Rousseau the being of the authentic self, and appeal to an exterior "truth" is closed off. Furthermore, the only kind of reader who can judge between truth

and falsity in Rousseau while accepting—even if only provisionally—the premises of his confessional project, must be one like de Man, who tries to detect inauthentic moments in Rousseau via inauthentic moments in his language. De Man's analysis of the ribbon episode depends on the premise that confession betrays inauthenticity when the confessant lapses into the language of the Other. Thus, though de Man accuses Rousseau of (self-)deception on the basis of the "satisfaction" he detects in his tone, a "delight" in his own revelations, the satisfaction and delight are themselves detected in "eloquence" and "an easy flow of hyperbole," that is, in features of language that do not belong to Rousseau. Rousseau is not speaking (for) himself; someone else is speaking through him.<sup>30</sup>

Without contesting this identification of authenticity with truth, we may seem to have as little hope of giving the *Confessions* a second reading as we have of giving *The Kreutzer Sonata* a second reading without contesting Tolstoy's authoritarian truth. De Man is able to give a second reading of the ribbon episode only by detecting and exploring a fissure in the text, a lapse of authenticity. As long as his language remains his own, Rousseau would seem to remain sole author of his own truth.

To show that there is an alternative road to a second reading of Rousseau's text, via moments of inconsistency rather than via moments of false style, I should like to take up a passage in which Rousseau discusses his attitude toward money (Book I; I, 30–32). Here Rousseau presents himself as "a man of very strong passions," who under the sway of feeling is capable of being "impetuous, violent, fearless." But such fits are usually brief. He soon lapses into "indolence, timidity," overpowered by "fear and shame," embarrassed by the looks of others to such an extent that he would like to hide. Not only are his desires limited by his indolence and timidity: the range of his tastes is also limited. "None of my prevailing tastes center on things that can be bought," he writes. "Money poisons all." "Women who could be bought for money would lose for me all their charms; I even doubt whether it would be in me to make use of them." "I find it the same with all pleasures within my reach; unless they cost me nothing, I find them insipid."

Why should money poison desire? The explanation Rousseau

offers is that *for him the exchange is always an unfair one*. "I should like something which is good in quality; with my money I am sure to get it bad [*je suis sûr de l'avoir mauvaise*]. If I pay a high price for a fresh egg, it is stale; for a nice piece of fruit, it is unripe; for a girl, she is spoiled."

This first explanation, which blames the egg or the fruit or the girl, is not supported by the facts (the only girl he ever buys is not "spoiled"; rather, Rousseau is impotent).<sup>31</sup> The phrase "I am sure to get it bad" is more revealing: in comparison with what he wants, what he *buys* (not what he *gets*) is sure to be bad/unripe/spoiled. "Unless [pleasures] cost me nothing, they are insipid." The prophecy that what I buy is sure to be bad is self-fulfilling.

Rousseau now gives examples of how he experiences the transaction of buying. He goes to the pastrycook's and notices women laughing among themselves at "the little glutton." He goes to the fruiterer's but sees passersby whom his shortsightedness turns into "acquaintances." "Everywhere I am intimidated, restrained by some obstacle; my desire increases with my shame, and at last I return home like a fool, consumed with longing, having in my pocket the means of satisfying it, and yet not having the courage to buy anything."

What is it that the eyes around him threaten to know and laugh at when he walks into a shop? Is it what he wants (to buy)? Is it the act of asking? Is it the act of proffering money? Instead of pursuing an answer, Rousseau makes a typically veering and retracting motion. As the reader follows the story of his life, he says, and gets to know his "real temperament, he will understand all this, without my taking the trouble to tell him." To the entire syndrome he gives the label of an "apparent inconsistency [*contradiction*]," namely "the union of an almost sordid avarice with the greatest contempt for money." For avarice the excuse is that "I keep [money] for a long time without spending it, for want of knowing how to make use of it in a way to please myself [*faute de savoir l'employer à ma fantaisie*];" and he at once goes on to distinguish between the *possession* of money (where money becomes "an instrument of freedom") and the *pursuit* of money (where it is "an instrument of slavery"), a distinction that neatly nullifies the vice of avarice he admitted to a moment ago.

Why is it that he has no desire for money? His answer is that money cannot be enjoyed in itself, whereas "between the thing itself and the enjoyment of it there is [no intermediary]. If I see the thing, it tempts me; if I see only the means of possessing it, it does not. For this reason [*donc*] I have committed thefts, and even now I sometimes pilfer trifles which tempt me, and which I prefer to take rather than ask for."

The logic of this passage is worth scrutinizing. As Starobinski reads it, Rousseau is giving an example of how "money poisons all."<sup>32</sup> But if we paraphrase Rousseau's logic accurately, it reads as follows: "I desire the thing but not the means that leads to it; therefore, I steal the thing but not the means," not: "I desire the thing but not the means, therefore I take (steal) the thing so as not to use the means." To the question "Why steal at all?" this passage gives no better explanation than: "I prefer to take rather than ask for." Nor does Rousseau push the exploration of his attitudes toward money any further, though he returns to the topic several times in the *Confessions*.<sup>33</sup>

Since Rousseau makes no headway in explaining his "apparent inconsistency," and since the illumination he promises the reader does not, at least for some readers, ever arrive, let me try to give my own explanation of the complex of behavior he describes. Attending less to his reflections than to the shop scenes he describes, we note that what offends Rousseau is the openness and legitimacy of monetary transactions. By going into the shop and saying "I want a cake" and proffering money, he is acquiescing in a mode of treating his own "I want" that effectively "poisons" it. It is brought into the public, equalized with the "I want" of every Tom, Dick, and Harry who enters the shop; it loses its uniqueness: it becomes known (by all the knowing eyes) in the same moment at which he loses control of the terms on which he wants it known; it becomes *spent* on a public scale of sous and francs. To Rousseau, his own desires are *resources* as long as they remain unique, hidden—in other words, as long as they are potentially confessable. Brought into the public eye, they are revealed to be merely desires like everyone else's. The system of exchange that agitates Rousseau, the system he will not participate in, is thus one in which his desire for an apple is exchanged for an apple, via the public

medium of money; for every time such an exchange takes place the desire loses its value. *Shamefulness* and *value* are thus interchangeable terms. For—in the economy of confession—the only unique appetites, the only appetites that constitute confessable currency, are shameful appetites. A shameful desire is a valuable desire. Conversely, for a desire to have a value it must have a secret, shameful component. Confession consists in a double movement of offering to spend “inconsistencies” and holding back enough to maintain the “freedom” that comes of having capital. This process of half-revealing and then withdrawing into mystery, a process intended to *fascinate*, is neatly exemplified in the passage as a whole.

If *buying* is unacceptable because it places desire on a public scale (such being the nature of money), *stealing*, though it, too, reveals the equivalent of the desire in the object stolen, has its compensations in replacing the revealed, and no longer shameful, desire with a crime—itsself confessable currency; and bringing into being the mystery of why he steals when he can afford to buy, the very mystery that he introduces and then withdraws from solving.

I do not wish to advance the reading I have given as *the* truth that Rousseau ought to have told about money, but did not or could not, just as I do not wish to advance the reading I have given of Tolstoy's Pozdnyshév as *the* truth that Pozdnyshév failed to see about himself. Indeed, one of the minor functions of these rereadings is to bring the notion of *the* truth into question.

On the other hand, there seems to me a narrower yet more productive direction to follow at this point than the Derridean line of arguing that the idea of truth belongs to a certain epoch, the “epoch of supplementarity,” that the idea enables a practice of writing by functioning as a kind of “blind spot” toward which writing moves by an endless series of “supplements” that continually defer truth.<sup>34</sup> The readings that Rousseau and Pozdnyshév have given themselves, and the rereadings I have given them, insofar as these rereadings have justified themselves in the name of the truth, are certainly Derridean supplements; and the deconstruction of the practices I have followed in rereading Rousseau and Pozdnyshév could certainly lead to a “better,” “fuller” pair of new readings; and so on to infinity. But the point Derrida makes is relevant to all truth-oriented writing; whereas the point I wish

to argue is that the possibility of reading the truth “behind” a true confession has implications peculiar to the genre of confession.

Returning to *The Kreutzer Sonata* and Rousseau's *Confessions*, we may note that we have passed through a similar progression in each case. A crime is confessed (murder, theft); a cause or reason or psychological origin is proposed to explain the crime; then a rereading of the confession yields a “truer” explanation. The question we should ask now is: What must the response of the confessant be towards these or any other “truer” corrections of his confession? The answer, it seems to me, is that to the extent that the new, “deeper” truth is acknowledged as true, the response of the confessant must contain an element of shame. For either the confessant was aware of the deeper truth but was concealing it, in which case he was deceiving his confessor; or he was not aware of the deeper truth (though now he acknowledges it), in which case his competence as a confessant is in question: what was being offered as his secret, the coin of his confession, was not the real secret, was false coin, and a de facto deception has occurred, which is fresh cause for confession.<sup>35</sup>

I have considered thus far the hypothetical case of a Pozdnyshév or a Rousseau who, confronted with a reading of his confession that yields a “deeper” truth than the one he has acknowledged, acknowledges the new truth and shifts his ground. In such a case, we might ask, where will the confessant *stand* his ground? For, in principle, if we have given one rereading of his story we can give a second. If the confessant is *in principle* prepared to shift his ground with each new reading as long as he can be convinced that it is “truer” than the last one, then he is no more than a biographer of the self, a constructor of hypotheses about himself that can be improved on by other biographers. In such an event, his confession has no more authority than an account given by any other biographer: it may proceed from knowledge, but it does not proceed from self-knowledge.

Whether the confessant yields to the new truth about himself depends on the nature of his commitment to his original confession. The more deeply he has avowed the truth of this confession, the more deeply its truth has become part of his personal identity. Yielding subsequently to the new truth entails damage to that identity. In the case of a Pozdnyshév or a Rousseau the damage is

particularly acute, since part of the being of each is that he has become a confessant, a truth-teller.

Alternatively, the confessant may refuse to yield to the new truth, thereby adopting precisely the stand of the self-deceived subject who prefers not to avow the "real" truth of himself to himself, and prefers not to avow this preference, and so on to infinity.<sup>36</sup> In this case, how can he tell the difference between himself and the self-deceived confessant, the confessant whose truth is a lie, since both "believe" they know the truth?

A third alternative is to confess with an "open mind," acknowledging from the beginning that what he avows as the truth may not be the truth. But there is something literally shameless in this posture. For if one proceeds in the awareness that the transgressions one is "truly" guilty of may be heavier than those one accuses oneself of, one proceeds equally in an awareness that the transgressions one is "truly" guilty of may be lighter than those one accuses oneself of (Rousseau is explicit about the latter kind of awareness in his own case: see note 22). To be aware of oneself in this posture—which follows inevitably from having an open mind on the question of one's own truthfulness—is already matter for confession; to be aware that the posture is not a guilty one (because it is inevitable) is a matter for further shame and confession; and so on to infinity.

What I have written thus far indicates that the project of confession when the subject is at a heightened level of self-awareness and open to self-doubt raises intricate and, on the face of it, intractable problems regarding truthfulness, problems whose common factor seems to be a regression to infinity of self-awareness and self-doubt. It is by no means clear that these problems are visible to the Rousseau of the *Confessions* or the Tolstoy of *The Kreutzer Sonata*. But to trust that evidence of such an awareness must necessarily surface in the text, when it is precisely not in the interest of either writer to bear such awareness, would be incautious. All we can say at this stage is that the problems are not articulated. For the time being we are in the position of Hume, who, confronted with an interlocutor who claims unmediated knowledge of himself (and therefore—though this is not in Hume—knowledge of his own truth), has no recourse but to break off the discussion for lack of common ground.<sup>37</sup>

## Dostoevsky

Confessions are everywhere in Dostoevsky. In simpler cases Dostoevsky uses confession as a way of allowing a character to expose himself, tell his own truth. The confession of Prince Valkovsky in *The Insulted and Injured* (1861), for example, is little more than an expository means of this kind.<sup>38</sup> Even in this early novel, however, an element of gratuitousness creeps into the confession: the freedom of revelation is not strictly necessitated by demands of plotting or motivation; its frankness is not strictly in character. In the later novels the level of gratuitousness mounts to the extent that one can no longer think of confession as a mere expository device: confession itself, with all its attendant psychological, moral, epistemological, and finally metaphysical problems, moves to the center of the stage. Though in other critical contexts it may be fruitful to treat confession in the major novels as, on the one hand, a form of masochism or a vice that Dostoevsky finds typical of the age,<sup>39</sup> or on the other as one of the generic forms yoked together to make up the Dostoevskian novel,<sup>40</sup> I propose here to single out three of the major confession episodes, in *Notes from Underground*, *The Idiot*, and *The Possessed*, and ask how the problem of ending is solved when the tendency of self-consciousness is to draw out confession endlessly.

*Notes from Underground* (1864) falls into two parts, the first a dissertation on self-consciousness, the second a story from the narrator's past. Though both parts can be thought of as confessions, they are confessions of different kinds, the first being a revelation of personality, the second the revelation of a shameful history. In the first and more theoretical part, however, self-revelation is subsumed under a wider discussion of whether it is possible to tell the truth about oneself in an age of self-consciousness or "hyperconsciousness," the disease of what the unnamed narrator calls "our unfortunate nineteenth century" and of St. Petersburg, "the most abstract and intentional city in the whole world." The "laws of hyperconsciousness," which dictate an endless awareness of awareness, make the hyperconscious man the antithesis of the normal man. Feeling no basis in certainty, he cannot make decisions and act. He cannot even act upon his own self-consciousness to freeze it in some position or other, for it obeys its own

laws. Nor can he regard himself as a responsible agent, since accepting responsibility for oneself is a final position. (This is not, of course, to say that he blames himself for nothing: on the contrary, he blames himself for everything. But he does so in a reflex motion originating in the laws of self-consciousness.)<sup>41</sup>

So much for theory. But before embarking on his own shameful reminiscences, the narrator-hero invokes the precedent of Rousseau.

I want to try the experiment whether one can be perfectly frank . . . Heine maintains that a true autobiography is almost an impossibility, and that man is bound to lie about himself. He considers that Rousseau almost certainly told lies about himself in his confessions, and even intentionally lied, out of vanity. I am convinced that Heine is right. (35)

In his own case, on the other hand, he will have no readers and therefore, he asserts, will have no temptation to lie.

The project of *not lying* is put to the test most severely in the story of his relations with the young prostitute Liza. After a night of "vice . . . without love," he recounts, he wakes up in her bed to find her staring intently at him. Feeling uncomfortable, he begins to talk without forethought, urging her to reform and offering to help her. Why is he doing this? he later asks himself. He explains it as "sport," the sport of "turning her soul upside down and breaking her heart." However, he has an inkling that what attracts him is "not merely the sport" (82, 91).

The next day the "loathsome truth" dawns on him that he has been sentimental. His reaction is to begin to hate Liza; nevertheless, he cannot forget the "pitiful, distorted, inappropriate smile" she wore as she gazed at him. "Something was rising up, rising up continually in my soul, painfully, refusing to be appeased" (94, 97, 96).

A short while later Liza visits him to take him up on his promise. With a feeling of "horrible spite" he embarks on a cruel confession. All the time he was mouthing fine sentiments, he says, he was inwardly laughing at her. For, having been humiliated by his friends, he had turned on her as an object to humiliate in turn. All he had wanted was "sport." Now she can "go to hell." Surely she realizes that he will never forgive her for coming to his apart-

ment and seeing the wretched conditions in which he lives? He is bound to make her suffer, since he is "the nastiest, stupidest, pettiest, absurdest and most envious of all worms on earth"; and for eliciting this abject confession, for hearing him speak "as a man speaks . . . once in a lifetime," she must be punished even more; and so forth (106–108).

At first Liza is taken aback by his "cynicism"; then, surprisingly, she embraces him, as if it has dawned on her that he too is unhappy. He is overwhelmed. "They won't let me—I can't be—good!" he sobs in her arms. Almost at once, however, he begins to feel ashamed to be in a "crushed and humiliated" position (107, 109). In his heart flares up

a feeling of mastery and possession. My eyes gleamed with passion, and I gripped her hands tightly. How I hated her and how I was drawn to her at that minute! The one feeling intensified the other. It was almost like an act of vengeance! At first there was a look of amazement, even of terror on her face, but only for one instant. She warmly and rapturously embraced me. (110)

In the "fever of oscillations" typical of hyperconsciousness (11), his next moves are almost predictable. (1) He presses money into Liza's hand to indicate that she remains a whore to him; then, when she leaves, (2) he rushes after her "in shame and despair," reflecting, however, (3) that the real cause of his shame is the "bookishness" of this gesture. He gives up the chase, persuading himself (4) that a feeling of outrage will "elevate and purify" the girl. He feels pleased with this formulation and (5) despises himself for being pleased (112–113).

At this point the story of Liza comes to an end: "I don't want to write more from 'underground,'" the narrator says. However, his text is followed by an "authorial" note: "The 'notes' of this paradoxicalist do not end here . . . He could not resist and continued them. But it also seems that we may stop here" (115).

The summary I have given of the "Liza" confession is not a disinterested one. I have emphasized those moments at which something comes up out of the narrator's depths that he does not understand even in the retrospect of fifteen years. Part I has prepared us for a confession in which no motive will be hidden from the light of hyperconsciousness, in which Rousseau will be ex-

ceeded in frankness. Those moments at which the narrator does not understand himself therefore have a peculiar status: either they were not understood fifteen years ago when he was actor in his story, and now are recorded without interrogation by him in the role of confessant; or they are now given a retrospective explanation, but an explanation odd not so much for being false as for being final, that is, for not being subjected to the endless regression of self-consciousness (I shall give an example below).

Specifically, we might want to question the "Liza" confession at the following points.

1. If it is "sport" to humiliate Liza, what motivates the narrator that is "not merely the sport"?

2. "Something was not dead within me, in the depths of my heart and conscience it would not die . . . Something was rising up, rising up continually in my soul, painfully, and refusing to be appeased. I returned home completely upset; it was just as though some crime were lying on my conscience" (96). What is the name of the "something," and what is the nature of the crime?

3. "They won't let me—I can't be—good!" he sobs, uttering words that seem to come from a stranger within him. What does the utterance mean? One reading is that he is continuing his "sport" with Liza, pretending to be tormented and unhappy. Another is that the voice from within is the repressed voice of a better self which "they" won't allow to emerge.

4. In Liza's embrace he passes through a rapid series of states of feeling remarkable for their ambivalence. Though cryptically expressed, these include: triumph that he has got his aggressive confession off his chest without incurring a rebuff, a desire to set his seal on this victory by sexually possessing the girl, and an abiding will to humiliate her even further. There is no doubt that he and she have the makings of the sadomasochistic couple so common in Dostoevsky. But the account I have just given rests only on the report he gives of his own inner state and of what he reads on Liza's face; and what she reads in his face (he in turn reads from her face) awakes in her first amazement and terror but then rapturous response. Is she misreading him, seeing "true" love where she should read sadistic desire?

In a sense, yes: the burden of his ridicule of her is that she is a bad reader who has misread him from the beginning as being

sincere when he is not. But one must remember that as a writer of his own story he is in a privileged position to dictate readings. His "Notes" dictate a reading in which Liza is duped in the brothel as well as in his apartment. Not only is he the writer of his story; he also plays the leader in the two dialogues he has with Liza, asking her questions, telling her who and what she is. Only one judgment of hers on him gets reported: "You speak exactly like a book" (86). For the rest, her reading of him is memorialized in his "Notes" only in the two looks: the "wide-open eyes scrutinizing me curiously and persistently" to which he wakes up in her room (77), and the look in his apartment that reads passion in his face. Not much material from which to infer her reading of him. Yet we have a fair idea of what her wide-open eyes see: a man who has paid his money and spent two hours in her bed having sex with her "without love, grossly and shamelessly" (77). Her comment that he speaks like a book is accurate too. Can we be convinced, then, that she misreads him when he says he wants her to escape prostitution, and again when he says he feels passion—or perhaps even need—for her? The possibility seems open that Liza has a knowledge of, or at least an insight into, the narrator that he, as teller of his own story, cannot afford to acknowledge: and that from this point of vantage (point of advantage) the three moments of perception he allows to Liza are flaws in the texture of his story.

It would be naive to propose a reading of the story—filled out from Liza's three moments and from the moments at which a voice speaks unbidden from within him—in which the hero emerges as "in truth" an unhappy, self-tormented young man longing for a woman's love yet afraid to expose his longings. There is an irony at the heart of *Notes from Underground*, but the irony is not that its hero is not as bad as he says he is. The real irony is that, while he promises a confession that will outdo Rousseau in truthfulness, a confession he believes himself fitted to make because he is afflicted with hyperconsciousness to the ultimate degree, his confession reveals nothing so much as the helplessness of confession before the desire of the self to construct its own truth.

It is worth going back to Part I of the *Notes* to see what the hero has to say about desire. The enlightened 1860s view, he says, is



that desire obeys a law, the law that man desires in accord with his own advantage.<sup>42</sup> But the truth is that every now and again man will desire what is injurious to himself precisely "in order to have the right to desire for himself" without being bound by any law. And he desires that freedom from determination in order to assert "what is most precious and most important—that is, our personality, our individuality" (26). The primal desire is therefore the desire for a freedom that the hero identifies with unique individuality.

The question one might immediately ask is: How does the subject know that the choices he makes, even "perverse" choices that bring him no advantage, are truly undetermined? How does he know he is not the slave of a pattern of perverse choices (a pathological pattern, perhaps) whose design is visible to everyone but him? Self-consciousness will not give him the answer, for self-consciousness in *Notes from Underground* is a disease. What is diseased about it is that it feeds upon itself, finding behind every motive another motive, behind every mask another mask, until the ultimate motive, which must remain masked (otherwise the endless regression would be ended, the disease would be cured). We can call this ultimate motive the *motive for unmasking* itself. What the underground man cannot know in his self-interrogation, therefore, is why he wants to tell the truth about himself; and the possibility exists that the truth he tells about himself (the perverse truth, the truth as a story of perverse "free" choices he has made) might itself be a perverse truth, a perverse choice made in accord with a design invisible to him though perhaps visible to others.

We are now beyond all questions of sincerity. The possibility we face is of a confession made via a process of relentless self-unmasking which might yet be not the truth but a self-serving fiction, because the unexamined, unexaminable principle behind it may be not a desire for the truth but a desire to *be a particular way*. The more coherent such a hypothetical fiction of the self might be, the less the reader's chance of knowing whether it is a true confession. We can test its truth only when it contradicts itself or comes into conflict with some "outer," verifiable truth, both of which eventualities a careful confessing narrator can in theory avoid. We would have no grounds for doubting the truth of the underground man's confession, and specifically of his thesis that

his ultimate quality is consciousness, if there were not imperfections in the surface the confession presents, moments, for example, when the body under stress emits words like "I can't be good," signs of an unexamined underlying struggle.

It would not be surprising, if the narrator's confession *were* a lying, self-serving fiction, that the repressed truth should break through its surface, particularly at moments of stress, in the forms of stirrings of the heart, intimations of the unacknowledged, utterances of the inner self, or that the truth should soon be repressed again. What is disappointing about *Notes from Underground*, if we think of it as an exploration of confession and truth, is that it should rely for its *own* truth not only upon the return of the repressed at the level of the acting subject (the hero of the story of Liza) but also upon a lack of *subsequent* censorship at the level of the narrating subject (the hero telling the story of himself fifteen years later). It is as though the one process that is not subjected to the scrutiny of self-awareness is the narrative process itself. By presenting the story of his relations with Liza as, in snatches, the story of two autonomous selves (Liza being allowed her own say, her own looks), by reporting the voice from underground that spoke within him fifteen years ago, the narrator makes it easy enough to read another truth, a "better" truth, than the one he is telling. Is the naïveté that allows the voice of the "other" truth to go uncensored evidence of a secret, devious appeal to the reader that the narrator does not acknowledge? Certainly he presents the question of whether his story is a "public" or a "private" confession in an ambivalent way: it becomes, in effect, a pseudo-public but "really" private document.<sup>43</sup> But the *Notes* end indeterminately. The paradoxes of self-consciousness could indeed go on forever, as the authorial coda says in excuse. Nevertheless, the questions I have raised remain not only unanswered (it is not in their nature to be answered) but unexplored. Dostoevsky in *Notes from Underground* has not found a solution to the problem of *how to end the story*, the problem whose solution Michael Holquist rightly identifies as the great achievement of his mature years.<sup>44</sup>

*The Idiot* (1868–69) is in several ways a book about last things. One thinks of the references to the Book of Revelation and the Holbein painting of the dead Christ, of Ippolit Terentyev's confrontation with his own imminent death, and of the many stories

of the last moments of condemned men. The pervading sense that there is a limit to time affects attitudes toward confession too: there is much casting around after an adequate confessor, and impatience with confessions that are not serious.

The major confessional episodes in *The Idiot* are the game of truth-telling at Nastasya Filippovna's, and Ippolit's "Explanation." There is, however, an episode I wish to take up first that succinctly expresses some of the philosophical problems of confession.

Keller, "overflowing with confidence and confessions," comes to Prince Myshkin with shameful stories about himself, claiming to be deeply sorry yet recounting his actions as though proud of them. The Prince commends him for being "so extraordinarily truthful" but asks what might be the motive behind his confession: does he want to borrow money? Yes, confesses Keller, "I prepared my confession . . . so as to pave the way . . . and, having softened you up, make you fork out one hundred and fifty roubles. Don't you think that was mean?"<sup>45</sup>

We recognize that we are at the beginning of a potentially infinite regression of self-recognition and self-abasement in which the self-satisfied candor of each level of confession of impure motive becomes a new source of shame and each twinge of shame a new source of self-congratulation. The pattern is familiar from *Notes from Underground* and is familiar to the people of *The Idiot*, who readily spot the worm of vanity in the self-abasement of others, and barely react with indignation when it is pointed out in themselves. At the kernel of the pattern lies what Myshkin calls a *dvojnaya mysl'*, literally a "double thought," but what is perhaps better imagined as a doubling back of thought, the characteristic movement of self-consciousness (346). It is a double thought in Keller to want sincerely to confess to Myshkin for the sake of "spiritual development" while at the same time wanting to borrow money; it is the doubling back of thought that undermines the integrity of the will to confess by detecting behind it a will to deceive, and behind the detection of this second motive a third motive (a wish to be admired for one's candor), and so on.

Myshkin thus identifies in "double thought" the malaise that renders confession powerless to tell the truth and come to an end. In fact, Myshkin does more than diagnose the malaise. "Everyone

is like that," he says: he, too, has experienced double thought. But the recognition that double thinking is universal is itself a double thought, as Myshkin at once recognizes: "I couldn't help thinking . . . that everyone is like that, so that [*tak čto*] I even began patting myself on the back" (my italics). The very movement of recognition thus entraps him in the syndrome.

This point is worth stressing. Both Keller and Lebedev (who makes a confession to Myshkin a page or two later) directly address the question of why they choose the Prince to confess to. Questions of the spirit in which confession is made and of the adequacy of the confessor can no longer be ignored after the party game of confessions (173–187), where, after a round of confessing the worst actions of their lives, the partygoers are left feeling ashamed and unsatisfied, and Totsky's cynical comment that confession is only "a special form of bragging" seems to be vindicated (173). Keller and Lebedev give identical explanations for their choice of Myshkin as confessor: he will judge them "in a human way" (*po-čelovečeski*, "like a man"). Further, being not wholly a man but an idiot, "simple-minded" (as Keller explicitly calls him [345]), a mouse (*mys*), he is not engaged in the all-too-human game of using the truth for his own ends. He is a being neither godlike in severity (though Aglaya Yepanchin expresses her misgiving that in his devotion to the truth he may judge without "tenderness" [465]) nor manlike in subjecting truth to desire. In choosing Myshkin to confess to, Keller and Lebedev are therefore seeking—though obscurely and for impure, "double" motives—forgiveness rather than judgment, Christ rather than God.

We may set in contrast against this ideal confessor-figure the party guests who find themselves acting as confessors to Ippolit Terentyev's "Explanation." Even before Ippolit has begun reading out his confession, some of his auditors have formed their own ideas about what his act of public confession, as such, might imply. Myshkin sees it as a device Ippolit has created to force himself to carry out his suicide; Rogozhin, on the contrary, sees it as a way for Ippolit to compel his auditors to prevent his suicide. Thus both see his confession as in the service not of truth but of a deeper desire (to die, to live).

As for the confession itself, it wrestles with its own motives in a way with which we are by now familiar in Dostoevsky. First,

claims Ippolit, his confession will be "only the truth" because, since he is dying of tuberculosis, he can have no motive for lying (in other words his confession is written in the shadow of last things). Second, if there is anything false in the confession his auditors are bound to pick it up, since he deliberately wrote the document in haste and did not correct it (the argument from authenticity of style taken over from Rousseau). Third, while he is aware that his confession may be thought of as a means to an end, a way of justifying himself or asking forgiveness, he denies either of these as a motive. Being, as it were, on the scaffold, and therefore privileged, he asserts his right to confess simply "because I want to"; and he asserts his right to assert such a motiveless, "free" confession against any imputation of a motive. His confession belongs to last things, it is a last thing, and therefore has a status different from any critique of it. The sincerity of the motive behind last confessions cannot be impugned, he says, because that sincerity is guaranteed by the death of the confessant. The sincerity of any critique of him, on the other hand, can and should be subjected to the endlessness of criticism. His authors impugn his motive for a motive of their own; they do not want to know the truth about life and death, and to this end are prepared to impose upon him the silence and doubleness that must follow when silence is taken for acquiescence: "There is a limit to disgrace in the consciousness of one's own worthlessness and powerlessness beyond which a man cannot go, and after which he begins to feel a tremendous satisfaction in his own disgrace" (452). The truth his auditors do not want to hear is that there is no life after death and that God is simply "a huge and horrible tarantula" (448). His suicide is therefore an assertion of his freedom not to live on the "ridiculous terms" laid down for man (453).

The argument presented by Ippolit is thus that in the face of death the division of the self brought about by self-consciousness can be transcended in, and the endless regression of self-doubt overtaken by, an overriding will to the truth. The moment before death belongs to a different kind of time in which truth has at last the power to appear in the form of revelation. The experience of time out of time is described most clearly in Myshkin's epileptic seizures, when, in the last instant of clarity before darkness falls, his

mind and heart were flooded by a dazzling light. All his agitation, all his doubts and worries, seemed composed in a twinkling, culminating in a great calm, full of serene and harmonious joy and hope, full of understanding and knowledge of the final cause . . . These moments were precisely<sup>46</sup> an intense heightening of awareness . . . and at the same time of the most direct sensation of one's own existence to the most intense degree. (258–259)

Reflecting on such moments, Myshkin thinks of the words "There shall be time no longer" (259). With these words Ippolit later prefaces his confession.

The moment in which earthly time ends, self-doubt ceases, the self is integrated, and truth is known, recurs in Myshkin's stories of executions. In one of these stories (86–88) he tells of the extraordinary richness with which the condemned man experiences the most mundane details of life. In another (90–93) he imagines a man on the scaffold who in his last moment "knows everything." Later Myshkin has his own experience of the "blinding inner light" that floods the soul of the man under the executioner's knife (268).

Ippolit claims to be on the scaffold as much as any of Myshkin's condemned men. From this position of privilege he wishes to bequeath to mankind his "truth," which he imagines as a seed that may grow to have great consequences. Specifically, he hopes that his death may have meaning in a meaningless universe if he can sow in the minds of men the idea of a philosophical suicide like his own.

But does Ippolit "really" have the privilege of truth? The prognosis of death within a month has been pronounced by a mere medical student; Ippolit is by no means on his deathbed; and most of the guests at the party respond to his "Explanation" "without disguising their annoyance" (454), taking it as a ploy by a vain young man to win attention. They decline to take his vow to kill himself as sincere. He, in turn, refuses to take their indifference to his confession as sincere indifference, reading it as pressure to force him to go through with the suicide. Faced with a suddenly ridiculous situation in which he and his auditors have become like poker players each trying to outbluff the other, in which, if he kills himself, he may be doing so out of spite or frustration, and in which the most urgent demand that he spare his life comes from Lebedev, who does not want a mess on the floor, he puts a

pistol to his head and pulls the trigger, only to find the gun not loaded. What had started as a project in philosophical suicide degenerates into a chaos of laughter and weeping. The question of whether or not Ippolit had a privileged, "true" insight into life and death is re-enunciated by Keller in a new and banal form: did he forget to load the pistol or was it all a trick?

The farcical end of the episode reasserts the problem Ippolit claimed he had transcended, the problem of self-deception and of the endless regression of self-doubt. The project of suicide as a way of guaranteeing the truth of one's story with the ultimate payment of one's life withers under the corrosion of Rogozhin's comment: "That's not the way this thing ought to be done" (423). It ought to be done, Rogozhin implies, without an "explanation," without a why and wherefore, in muteness and obscurity. The explanation, the privileged truth paid for with death, is in truth a seed, a way of living on after death: it therefore casts into doubt the sincerity of the decision to die. The only truth is silence.

The dream that Ippolit recounts in his confession deepens the paradox. Ippolit dreams that he tells a man to melt all his gold down and make a coffin, then dig up his "frozen" baby and rebury it in the golden coffin (446). The dream is based on a real-life incident in which Ippolit has done a good deed for a stranger, thinking of his deed as a seed cast abroad into the world. In the complex condensations of the dream, the eighteen-year-old Ippolit is the frozen baby, the "Explanation" the golden coffin; planted in the ground like a seed, the dream foretells that the baby will not be resurrected (immediately after the dream Ippolit thinks of the Holbein painting of the dead Christ, a Christ who will never rise). Speaking, like the unbidden utterances of the hero of *Notes from Underground*, from a "deeper," "truer" level of the self, the dream reveals Ippolit's doubt about the fertility of his "seed" and undermines the privileged truth-status of the "Explanation" of which it constitutes a part.<sup>47</sup>

The poetic effect of the dream is powerful. However, rather than read the dream as a privileged truth coming from "within" Ippolit—a procedure that would unquestioningly assign to the unconscious the position of source of truth—I would ask here, as I asked in *Notes from Underground*, why these confessants fail to censor from their confessions traces of a "deeper" truth that con-

tradicts the truth they seek to express. One answer might be that, transferring into first-person self-narration the same "Menippean" mixture of genres that characterizes his novels as a whole—a mixture including philosophical exposition, confessions, and dreams—Dostoevsky treats the self-betrayal of the narrator as a purely formal issue that only a mundane realist would take seriously. The question remains troubling, however. We continue to feel that when Dostoevsky falls back on a univocal "inner" truth, he betrays the interrogation of notions of sincerity that he otherwise carries out via a rigorously conscious dialectic.

The underground man sits down to write his confessions vaguely oppressed by memories from the past, otherwise bored and idle. He will tell his stories to soothe himself; he will tell the truth because, unlike Rousseau, he will be writing for his own eyes alone. This is as far as his examination of his motive for confessing, the spirit in which he confesses, and the significance of an audience, goes. It is precisely these questions that *The Idiot* brings into prominence. Confession, in *The Idiot*, can be made only to an adequate confessor; and even Prince Myshkin, the Christlike man, turns out to be inadequate, unable to absolve the confessant (as he is unable to rescue himself) from the spiral of double thought. As for the spirit of confession, *The Idiot* says, it is ridiculous to believe that the truth can be told as a game, a way of passing time. No act of will seems able to compel the truth to emerge, not even the willing of a moment of illumination via the willing of one's own death, since that will may itself be a double thought. Dostoevsky's critique of confession is clearly bringing us to the brink of a conception of truth-telling as close to grace.

Dostoevsky takes his next, and last, steps in the exploration of the limits of secular confession in *The Possessed* (1871–72). There are two episodes that concern us. Kirillov, like Ippolit, plans to kill himself to sow a seed of truth in the minds of men. The difference is that Kirillov actually kills himself; and the focus of interest is not on the explanation he gives for his suicide (the seed)—an explanation full of savage, grandiose, blasphemous unreason<sup>48</sup>—but on the actual suicide.

However, the questions of whether Kirillov scrutinizes his own motives for presenting his manifesto for suicide (one hesitates to call it a confession), and of whether he is subject to self-doubt and

self-deception, become almost meaningless, since the novel allows no access to his mind. The scene of his suicide is presented through the eyes of the younger Verkhovensky (it is an irony typical of the book that while Kirillov thinks he kills himself to assert his freedom, he is all the while being nudged toward suicide by Verkhovensky). It is thus through gesture, posture, and external detail that we must read, as far as we can, the last moments of Kirillov, "grasp[ing] himself," as René Girard says, "in a moment of vertiginous possession,"<sup>49</sup> trying to achieve self-transcendence through death. Taking up a cryptic posture behind a cupboard in a dark room, Kirillov enters a trancelike state, his eyes "quite unmoving and . . . staring away at a point in the distance" (635). He seems, if one reads him correctly—with Myshkin's readings of condemned men at the back of one's mind—to be waiting for the instant to arrive when the self is entirely present to the self and time ceases, in which to blow his brains out. *In this reading*, Kirillov goes further than any other character in Dostoevsky in the cultivation of death as the sole guarantee of the truth of the story one tells of oneself. But we must remember that Kirillov in his last hour is more and more a madman and a beast (his last action before killing himself is to bite Verkhovensky), and that the reading from outside forced upon us by Dostoevsky perhaps signals that Kirillov's consciousness is conscienceless, inhuman, unreadable.

The chapter "At Tikhon's," excluded from the serialized version of *The Possessed* by the editor of the *Russian Herald* and later excluded by the author from the separate edition of the novel, resumes the skeptical interrogation of the confessional impulse. Stavrogin, visiting the monk Tikhon, shows him a pamphlet he plans to distribute confessing to a crime against a child; but soon Stavrogin's motives for offering the confession fall under scrutiny, and become in turn a subject of confession.

Stavrogin recounts his offense (an unspecified sexual crime followed by a provocation to suicide) without explanation of the motive, unless "being bored" (705) counts as an explanation. Instead of an exploration of motive, which so easily—as we see in Rousseau—shades into self-justification, we have an insistence by Stavrogin on his own guilt and responsibility (704, 705, 711). Even when, years later, the child begins to appear to him in visions, he insists that these visions are not involuntary: he is responsible for

them, he summons them up of his own accord, though he cannot help doing so (717). The image of the child is thus not an emanation of a guilty "inner" or "unconscious" self: the same self that committed the act compulsively confronts itself with its guilty memory; there is no distinction between a self that intends and a self that acts.<sup>50</sup>

Stavrogin's act is understood as an abomination by both Stavrogin himself and Tikhon. What Tikhon opens to question, however, is the motive behind Stavrogin's desire to publish his guilt. Interrogation of this motive, exteriorized in Tikhon's interrogation of Stavrogin, takes the place of the interiorized self-interrogation we are accustomed to in first-person confessional narratives. In interrogating it, Tikhon opens up the gap Stavrogin has sought to close between the subject's self-knowledge and the truth.

The encounter between Stavrogin and Tikhon (717–730) consists of a double testing. All the while Tikhon tests the truth of the series of motives Stavrogin claims for making public confession, Stavrogin tests Tikhon's adequacy as a confessor. He wants Tikhon to prove his power to absolve by seeing through the untruths proposed by Stavrogin himself to the truth beyond. But just as there turn out to be limits on the kind of penance and the kind of forgiveness Stavrogin is prepared to accept, there turn out to be limits on the kind of truth Tikhon is to be allowed to see. Specifically, Stavrogin is not prepared to permit Tikhon to trouble a certain kernel of identity he wishes to claim for himself. Thus despite his readiness to forgo any right to explain his crime and excuse his guilt—a readiness which gives the impression that he wants absolute truth and true absolution—Stavrogin's confession becomes a game whose essence is that certain limits will not be transgressed, though the contestants will pretend to each other and to themselves that there are no limits. It is thus a game of deception and self-deception, a game of limited truth. Tikhon ends the game by breaking the rules.<sup>51</sup>

The identity Stavrogin is determined to assert is that of great sinner. He presents his crime against the child as all the more contemptible—great in its contemptibility—because its motive was so idle, its passion so flat. Tikhon suggests that so mean and yet so pretentious a crime might deserve only laughter, and counsels Stavrogin to undertake quiet penitence rather than seek "mea-

sureless suffering." Tikhon thus draws into question the *scale* on which Stavrogin thinks of his crime and his punishment. Stavrogin wants "measureless suffering" to be prescribed for him as a sign that his guilt is measureless; and the measurelessness of his guilt must follow from the banality of the evil of his crime. Tikhon places before Stavrogin's eyes the possibility that he may merely be a dissolute, rootless aristocrat with Byronic pretensions who wants to attain fame by the short cut of committing an easy abomination and confessing it in public.

It is important to note that Tikhon does not present this account to Stavrogin as *the truth about him*, since by that act Tikhon would be presenting himself as a source of truth without question. He presents it as a possible truth, a possibility that Stavrogin would have to confront if he were seriously pursuing the truth about himself in a program of spiritual self-interrogation (just as Tikhon would have to examine his own motives for minimizing the scale of Stavrogin's evil in the course of his own self-scrutiny). Thus Tikhon cuts short the bad infinity of one regression of self-consciousness—a regression more clearly typified by such self-abasing breast-beaters as Marmeladov and Lebedev, in whom the shamelessness of the confession is a further motive for shame, and so on to infinity, than by Stavrogin, whose version of the regression is that the meanness of his act is a kind of greatness, and the meanness of this conscious trick a further kind of greatness, and so on—to replace it by another regression of self-scrutiny that has the potential to extend to infinity but also has true potential to end in self-forgiveness.

Self-forgiveness means the closing of the chapter, the end of the downward spiral of self-accusation whose depths can never be plumbed because to decide to stop at any point by an act of will, to decide that guilt ceases at such-and-such a point, is itself a potentially false act that deserves its own scrutiny. How to tell the difference between a "true" moment of self-forgiveness and a moment of complacency when the self decides that it has gone far enough in self-scrutiny is a mystery that Tikhon does not elucidate, leaving it, perhaps, to the spiritual adviser "of such Christian wisdom that you and I could hardly understand it" to whom he recommends Stavrogin (729)—though if one has read Dostoevsky attentively one might guess that this monk would never articulate

the difference, on the principle that, once articulated, the difference would invoke efforts to incorporate it into a new game of deception and self-deception; further, that to articulate a decision not to articulate the difference could similarly become part of a game; and so on to infinity. The endless chain manifests itself as soon as self-consciousness enters; how to enter into the possession of the truth of oneself, how to attain self-forgiveness and transcend self-doubt, would seem, for structural reasons, to have to remain in a field of mystery; and even the demarcation in this field, even the specification of the structural reasons, would similarly have to remain unarticulated; and the reasons for this silence as well.

### The End of Confession

The end of confession is to tell the truth to and for oneself. The analysis of the fate of confession that I have traced in three novels by Dostoevsky indicates how skeptical Dostoevsky was, and why he was skeptical, about the variety of secular confession that Rousseau and, before him, Montaigne attempt. Because of the nature of consciousness, Dostoevsky indicates, the self cannot tell the truth of itself to itself and come to rest without the possibility of self-deception. True confession does not come from the sterile monologue of the self or from the dialogue of the self with its own self-doubt, but (and here we go beyond Tikhon) from faith and grace. It is possible to read *Notes from Underground*, *The Idiot*, and Stavrogin's confession as a sequence of texts in which Dostoevsky explores the impasses of secular confession, pointing finally to the sacrament of confession as the only road to self-truth.

In a long review of *Anna Karenina* that appeared in his *Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevsky praises Tolstoy for the "immense psychological analysis of the human soul" conducted in the novel. This depth of insight he sees exemplified in the episode of Anna's near-fatal illness, during which Anna, Vronsky, and Karenin "remove from themselves deceit, guilt and crime" in a spirit of "mutual all-forgiveness," only to find themselves embarked after Anna's recovery on a downward path into "that fatal condition where evil, having taken possession of man, binds his every move, paralyzes every desire for resistance."<sup>52</sup> In the case of Karenin, the pity, remorse, and liberating joy he feels in forgiving Anna are not proof

against the shame he experiences when he returns to society in the role prescribed for him: that of humiliated husband, "a laughing-stock" (*Anna Karenina*, p. 533). First he feels self-pity, then a shameful suspicion that in forgiving Anna he may have expressed not the generosity of the self he aspires to but the weakness and perhaps impotence of the self he does not want to be. Thus introspection allows him to deny what he had earlier experienced as a liberation of his true, better self in the name of a new truth, "deeper" in the sense that it undermines the earlier one. This "deeper" truth is of course, in truth, a self-serving self-deception that (in Tolstoy's commentary) allows Karenin to "forget what he did not want to remember" (548): in so purely secular a creature ("He was a sincere believer, interested in religion primarily in its political aspect" [538]), self-scrutiny is an instrument not of the truth but of a mere will to be comfortable, to be well thought of, and so on.

The question usually asked about *The Kreutzer Sonata* is: How, after the "immense psychological analysis" that typifies *Anna Karenina* (1874–1876), and in particular the analysis of the movements of self-deception we find there, could Tolstoy have gone on to write so naive and simple-minded a book, in which the truth that the truth-teller tells emerges as a bald series of dicta about controlling the appetites? Before we accept the question in this form, however, we ought to recall three things. The first is that in *Anna Karenina* we already have the spectacle of a truth-seeker who, though as riddled with self-doubt as any, finds truth not via the labyrinthine processes of self-examination but in illumination from outside (in Levin's case, the sudden illumination of a peasant's words). The second is that there is no argument that will succeed in outflanking the underground man's assertion that self-consciousness works by its own laws, one of which is that behind each true, final position lurks another position truer and more final. From one point of view this is a fertile law, since it allows the endless generation of the text of the self exemplified by *Notes from Underground*. From another point of view, that of the hungerer after truth, it is sterile, deferring the truth endlessly, coming to no end. The third thing to bear in mind is that the kind of transcendence of self-consciousness to which Dostoevsky points as a way of coming to an end may not be available to a rationalistic,

ethical Christian like Tolstoy, who can find the truth in simple, unselfconscious people but is skeptical of a way to truth beyond self-consciousness through self-consciousness.

With these considerations in mind, we can perhaps rephrase our question in a way more sympathetic to the later Tolstoy, as follows: To a writer to whom the psychology of self-deception is a not unlimited field that has for all practical purposes already been conquered, to whom self-doubt in and of itself has proved merely an endless treadmill, what potential for the attainment of truth can there be in the self-interrogation of a confessing consciousness? There can be little doubt that Tolstoy was capable of making Pozdnyshev's confession psychologically "richer" or "deeper" by making it ambiguous—indeed, material for creating such ambiguity already lies to hand in the text—but (one must imagine Tolstoy asking himself) *to what end?* Thus, after all the machinery has been set up (the narrator, ready to play the part of interrogating and interrogated Other, the train of clues pointing to a truth that questions and complicates the truth the confessant asserts), we see (I speculate now) disillusionment, boredom with this particular mill for cranking truth out of lies, impatience with the novelistic motions that must be gone through before truth may emerge (a truth that anyhow always emerges as provisional, tainted with doubt from the processes it has gone through), and a (rash?) decision to *set down the truth*, finally, as though after a lifetime of exploring one had acquired the credentials, amassed the authority, to do so.

thoughts Kafka notes down in his journals from the particular density of the experiences they arise from, see Maurice Blanchot's essay "La Lecture de Kafka," in *La Part du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), pp. 9–19. Blanchot writes: "The Journal is full of remarks that seem connected to theoretical knowledge . . . But these thoughts . . . relapse into an equivocal mode that does not allow them to be understood either as the expression of a unique happening or as the explication of a universal truth" (p. 10).

23. Cohn's paraphrase would fit more comfortably over Kafka's meditations, in the same notebook, on the eternal return of the expulsion from paradise (*Hochzeitsvorbereitungen*, p. 94); that is, they describe a mythic present. I would suggest parenthetically that part of the reason for Cohn's failure to push her conclusions far enough may lie in her reliance on the treatment of the present in Harald Weinrich's *Tempus*. Weinrich treats the "historic present" as an "als ob" for a past time and as a component of a "Metaphorik der Tempora." It is, however, precisely the metaphoricity of the narrative present that Kafka is bringing into doubt in this story. See Weinrich, *Tempus: Besprochene und erzählte Welt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1964), pp. 125–129; Cohn, "Kafka's Eternal Present," p. 149.

#### Robert Musil's Stories of Women

1. Quotations are from Robert Musil, *Five Women*, trans. Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser (1966; reprint, Boston: Nonpareil Books, 1986). This volume incorporates two stories by Musil not included in the 1924 collection, *Three Women*; hence the different title.

#### Interview

1. J. M. Coetzee, *Truth in Autobiography*, 3 October 1984, University of Cape Town (pamphlet).  
 2. J. M. Coetzee, *Foe* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), p. 157.  
 3. J. M. Coetzee, *Age of Iron* (London: Secker Warburg, 1990), p. 91.

#### Confession and Double Thoughts

1. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Albert C. Outler (London: SCM Press, 1955), II.iv.ix; pp. 54–55, 59; hereafter cited in the text.  
 2. In a useful essay in definition, Francis R. Hart describes confession as "personal history that seeks to communicate or express the essential nature, the truth, of the self," apology as "personal history that

seeks to demonstrate or realize the integrity of the self," and memoir as "personal history that seeks to articulate or repossess the historicity of the self." Thus "confession is ontological; apology ethical; memoir historical or cultural"; "Notes for an Anatomy of Modern Autobiography," in *New Directions in Literary History*, ed. Ralph Cohen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 227.

3. For example, in the essays "Of Exercise or Practice" (Book II, chap. vi) and "Of Presumption" (Book II, chap. xvii). Montaigne expresses his intention to "see and search myself into my very bowels" in Book III, chap. v. Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. John Florio (London, 1891), p. 430.  
 4. See Peter M. Axthelm, *The Modern Confessional Novel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).  
 5. I use the term *confessor* to denote the one to whom the confession is addressed and the term *confessant* for the one who confesses. It is worth noting that Oswald Spengler, quoting Goethe's lament over the end of auricular confession brought about by Protestantism, suggests that it was inevitable that after the Reformation the confessional impulse should find an outlet in the arts, but also that, in the absence of a confessor, it is inevitable that such confession should tend to be "unbounded"; *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles F. Atkinson (London, 1932), II, 295.  
 6. Leo Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Stories*, trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 233. Where I give the Russian, I quote from "Kreutzerova sonata," in L. N. Tolstoy, *Sochineniya*, IV (Berlin, 1921), pp. 160–293. Subsequent references appear in the text.  
 7. Leo Tolstoy, "An Afterword to *The Kreutzer Sonata*," in *Essays and Letters*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London, 1903), pp. 36, 38.  
 8. Donald Davie, "Tolstoy, Lermontov, and Others," in *Russian Literature and Modern English Fiction*, ed. Donald Davie (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 164.  
 9. T. G. S. Cain, *Tolstoy* (London: Elek, 1977), pp. 148–149.  
 10. On becoming engaged, Pozdnyshv (like Levin in *Anna Karenina*) hands over his intimate diaries to his future wife, who reads them with horror. Tolstoy draws in both novels on the episode in his own life when he gave his intimate diaries to his fiancée, Sonya Behrs. In his biography of Tolstoy, Henri Troyat describes the part the diaries played in the marriage. Quoting an entry from 1863 ("Nearly every word in his notebook is prevarication and hypocrisy. The thought that she [Sonya] is still here now, reading over my shoulder, stifles and perverts my sincerity"), Troyat comments that the "private



confessions" the couple made in their diaries "unconsciously turned into arguments of prosecution and defense" against each other. As Tolstoy's fame grew and it became clear that his diaries would one day become public, the question of what he might write in them became a matter of strife, his wife on occasion denouncing him in her diary for insulting her in his diary. In the last year of his life Tolstoy kept a secret diary, which he hid in his boot (his wife ferreted it out while he was asleep); Troyat, *Tolstoy*, trans. Nancy Amphoux (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 371, 397, 366, 718–719, 902, 917.

Countess Tolstoy regarded *The Kreutzer Sonata* as neither a free-floating fiction nor a sermon but a personal attack "directed against me, [mutilating] me and [humiliating] me in the eyes of the whole world." She wrote a novel in response, denouncing Tolstoy, the preacher of celibacy, as a sexual brute, and was barely restrained from publishing it (Troyat, pp. 665–668).

11. Rainer Maria Rilke, letter of 21 October 1924, in Henry Gifford, ed., *Tolstoy: A Critical Anthology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 187.
12. William C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 15.
13. Leo Tolstoy, *My Confession*, in *My Confession and The Spirit of Christ's Teaching*, trans. N. H. Dole (London, n.d.), p. 77; hereafter cited in the text. Where I give the Russian, I quote from *Ispoved'* (Letchworth: Prideaux Press, 1963). The title can be rendered *Confession* or *A Confession* (there is no article in Russian).
14. Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954), p. 829.
15. Man "knows himself in consequence of and in accordance with the nature of his will, instead of *willing* in consequence of and in accordance with his knowing"; Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp, 4th ed. (London, 1896), I, 378.
16. Matthew Arnold, "Count Leo Tolstoy," in *Essays in Criticism*, 2d series (London, 1888), p. 283.
17. Leo Tolstoy, *Life*, trans. Isabel F. Hapgood (London, 1889), p. 70.
18. V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, trans. George L. Kline (London: Routledge, 1953), I, 391.
19. Quoted in Cain, *Tolstoy*, p. 9; Maxim Gorky, *Reminiscences of Tolstoy, Chekhov and Andreev*, trans. Katherine Mansfield, S. S. Koteliensky, and Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1968), p. 30.
20. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, anonymous translation, 2 vols. (London: Dent, 1931), I, 1; hereafter cited in the text. Where I give

the French, I quote from *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), vol. 1.

21. Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 280.
22. This strategy is common in Rousseau. For example: "Far from having been silent about anything or suppressed anything that might have been laid at my door, I often found myself tending to lie in the contrary sense, and accusing myself with too much severity rather than excusing myself with too much indulgence; and my conscience answers me that one day I will be judged less severely than I have judged myself"; "Quatrième Promenade," in *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 1035; my translation.
23. De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, pp. 285–286.
24. See, for example, Wordsworth's second "Essay upon Epitaphs" (1810): "Where [the] charm of sincerity lurks in the language of a tombstone and secretly pervades it, there are no errors of style or manner for which it will not be, in some degree, a recompense"; *Prose Works*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and J. W. Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), II, 70.
25. See, for example, T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921): "A philosophical theory which has entered into poetry is established; for its truth or falsity in one sense ceases to matter, and its truth in another sense is proved"; *Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), p. 118.
26. Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La Transparence et l'obstacle* (Paris: Plon, 1957), pp. 214–215.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 228, 240.
28. *Annales*, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 243.
29. Starobinski, *Rousseau*, p. 248.
30. Though it is an easy eloquence that betrays Rousseau here, the language of the Other from which he more often strives to free himself is the language of La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère, and Pascal. "The great prose writers of seventeenth-century France," writes Margery Sabin, "established an authoritative language of psychological description which drew strength precisely from the public character of language." Rousseau carries his protest against this language of feeling, says Sabin, down to "every level of the work, even to the implications of syntax and the meanings of individual words." She goes on to give an exemplary analysis of Rousseau's style in his description of his feelings for Mme. de Warens, where phrases "circle" the elusive feeling rather than pinning it down. "If his emotion remains elusive,

- confusing, paradoxical—well, the style argues, that is the true nature of his inner life”; *English Romanticism and the French Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 19, 29.
31. The episode is recounted in Book VII (I, 261, 292–294).
  32. Starobinski comments that Rousseau first uses “the principle of immediacy” to clarify his psychology, but that almost at once this principle “takes on the value of a superior justification, of a moral imperative” of higher validity than “ordinary rules of right and wrong” (*Rousseau*, p. 132). In fact the principle is not given a moral coloring in the passage I am considering.
  33. For example, in the discussion of his “miserliness” during his time with Mme. de Warens, or of his dislike of giving money for sex (Books V, VII; I, 188, 261).
  34. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 157, 163–164, 245.
  35. It might be objected that I draw too sharp a line between being aware and not being aware of the “deeper” truth, ignoring the gradations and subtleties of self-deception that stretch between the extremes of innocence and mendacity. But, as Michel Leiris for one recognizes, the autobiographer takes on himself in the same way that the *torero* takes on the bull: there are no excuses for defeat; *Manhood*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Cape, 1968), p. 20.
  36. For this account of the mechanism of self-deception I am indebted to Herbert Fingarette, *Self-Deception* (London: Routledge, 1969), pp. 86–87.
  37. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Ernest Mossner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 300.
  38. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Insulted and Injured*, trans. Constance Garnett (London, 1915), pp. 240–251.
  39. This is in essence the position taken by Alex de Jonge in *Dostoevsky and the Age of Intensity* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975). De Jonge’s thesis is that many of Dostoevsky’s confessants—Valkovsky, Marmeladov, and Svidrigailov among them—are adherents of a “cult of intensity” founded by Rousseau, who exploit the masochistic pleasures of self-abasement. De Jonge sees Dostoevsky as a psychologist of confession exploring the ways in which people with no sense of self, no sense of guilt, no interest in the truth, use self-revelation as an instrument of power and pleasure (pp. 175–176, 181, 186–187).
  40. Mikhail Bakhtin argues that the Dostoevskian novel is a form of Menippean satire, a mixture of fictional narrative with philosophical dialogue, confession, hagiography, fantasy, and other usually incompatible elements. In addition, says Bakhtin, Dostoevsky exploits the old European tradition of the carnival, where customary social restraints may be dropped and utter frankness may reign in human contacts; *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), chap. 4. To Bakhtin the confession is thus in the first place a structural element of Dostoevsky’s fiction, though he goes on to explore a “dialogic” attitude toward the self in Dostoevsky’s first-person narrators, the self becoming its own interlocutor (chap. 5).
  41. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, in *Notes from Underground and The Grand Inquisitor*, ed. and trans. Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: Dutton, 1960), pp. 6, 8, 9, 16, 8; hereafter cited in the text. The metaphor of self-consciousness as a disease is a commonplace in Europe by the 1860s. “Self-contemplation . . . is infallibly the symptom of disease,” wrote Thomas Carlyle in 1831: only when “the fever of Scepticism” is burned out will there be “clearness, health”; “Characteristics,” in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (London, 1899), vol. 3, pp. 7, 40. See also Geoffrey H. Hartman, “Romanticism and ‘Anti-Self-Consciousness,’” in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970), pp. 46–56.
  42. On Part I of *Notes from Underground* as a critique of the Nihilism of the 1860s, see Joseph Frank, “Nihilism and Notes from Underground,” *Sewanee Review* 69 (1961), 1–33.
  43. “I wish to declare . . . that if I write as though I were addressing readers, that is simply because it is easier for me to write in that way . . . I shall never have readers” (35).
  44. “Metaphysical concern for the end of Man is realized in the most formal attributes of the structure of [Dostoevsky’s] novels, the narrative shape. And this is so because he was among the first to recognize that what a man might be could not be separated from the question of what might constitute an authentic history”; Michael Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 194.
  45. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. David Magarshak (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), pp. 344–346; hereafter cited in the text. Where I give the Russian I quote from *Idiot* (Kishinev, U.S.S.R.: Kartya Moldovenyaske, 1970).
  46. I have amended Magarshak’s translation slightly, rendering *imenno* as “precisely” rather than “merely.”
  47. The paradox of the seed probably comes from John 12:24: “Except a

- corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." The verse is quoted in *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (London, 1927), I, 320.
48. "There will be full freedom when it will be just the same to live or not to live . . . He who will conquer pain and terror will himself be a god . . . Every one who wants the supreme freedom must dare to kill himself . . . He who dares kill himself is God"; *The Possessed*, trans. Constance Garnett, with a translation of the chapter "At Tikhon's" by Avrahm Yarmolinsky (New York: Modern Library, 1936), pp. 114–115; hereafter cited in the text.
49. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), p. 276.
50. However, the paradox inherent in the notion of self-compulsion stands. And, at the moment of stress when Stavrogin confesses "the whole truth," namely that he wants to forgive himself, and asks for "measureless suffering," Dostoevsky returns to a dualistic psychology in which an "inner" self utters itself: Stavrogin speaks "as if the words had again issued from his mouth against his will" (727).
51. Insofar as the metarule of the game is that the rules should not be spelled out—in fact that it should not be spelled out that there are any rules, or any game—the account of the mechanisms of self-deception given by Fingarette neatly describes the game (see note 36 above).
52. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Diary of a Writer*, trans. Boris Brasol (London: Cassell, 1949), II, 787–788.

#### Interview

1. J. M. Coetzee, "Blood, Taint, Flaw, Degeneration: The Novels of Sarah Gertrude Millin," *English Studies in Africa* 23, no. 1 (1980), 41–58; reprinted in Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 136–162.
2. "André Brink and the Censor," *Research in African Literatures* 21, no. 3 (1990), 59–74; "Censorship and Polemic: The Solzhenitsyn Affair," *Pretexts* 2, no. 2 (1990), 3–36; "Breytenbach and the Censor," *Raritan* 10, no. 4 (1991), 58–84.

#### The Taint of the Pornographic

1. C. H. Rolph, ed. *The Trial of Lady Chatterley* (London: privately printed, 1961), pp. 70–72, 89–90, 159.

2. D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (New York: Modern Library, 1957), p. 252; hereafter cited as *LCL*.
3. D. H. Lawrence, *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover* (London: Mandrake Press, 1930), pp. 9–10.
4. Tylor, quoted in Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 13.
5. Rolph, *Trial*, p. 98.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 253, 255.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
8. The force of "bad language" that the gamekeeper exerts on Connie is clearest in the first version of the story. In one episode, Parkin/Mellors derides Connie's word "lover" and confronts her with himself as her "fucker." "'Fucker!' he said, and his eyes darted a flash at her, as if he shot her"; *The First Lady Chatterley* (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 108. This aggressive verbal act is directed not only by Parkin at Connie: as Evelyn J. Hinz points out, the baring of obscene words is also a baring of the teeth by Lawrence at his (British) readers; "Pornography, Novel, Mythic Narration: The Three Versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*," *Modernist Studies* 3 (1979), 41.
9. D. H. Lawrence, *Selected Letters*, ed. Diana Trilling (New York: Farrar, Straus, Cudahy, 1958), p. 275.
10. For the first three, see D. H. Lawrence, *Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Anthony Beal (New York: Viking, 1966), pp. 26–30, 32–51, 52–67; hereafter cited as *SLC*.
11. Jonathan Swift, "The Lady's Dressing Room," "Cassinus and Peter," "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed," and "Strephon and Chloe"; *Complete Poems*, ed. Pat Rogers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 448–466.
12. For a detailed reading along these lines, see T. B. Gilmore, "The Comedy of Swift's Scatological Poems," *PMLA* 91 (1976), 33–41.
13. Lawrence writes: "There is a poem of Swift's . . . written to Celia, his Celia—and every verse ends with the mad, maddened refrain: 'But—Celia, Celia, Celia shits!'" (*SLC*, p. 29). Huxley published his essay on Swift in 1929. See Aldous Huxley, *On Art and Artists*, ed. Morris Philipson (New York: Harper, 1960), pp. 168–176.
14. D. H. Lawrence, letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, 28 December 1928, *SLC*, p. 26; Introduction to *Pansies*, *SLC*, p. 29; *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover*, p. 14.
15. See David Burnley, *A Guide to Chaucer's Language* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), chap. 8.
16. At this point Lawrence writes most clearly under the influence of