

# FALLING THROUGH FELLATIO

**JEFF STEWART**

**UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY**

THE FOLLOWING TEXT consists of three short descriptive essays, mere beginnings, sketches towards an attempt to write the experience of being with another that reveals a sense of the infinite and positive limits of alterity. The first speaks of the experience of fellatio and falling into infinity, the second, 'To be near death', is concerned with the quietude of being-with a person who is about to die and the attention that brings, and lastly, 'Being at Murambi' speaks of being-with the bodies of those killed in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. These writings act as layers shifting between the enjoyment and sensibility of experience, a meeting of the flesh that draws one near, and the introduction of the third, or multiple parties highlighting responsibility.

## **Falling through fellatio**

Falling, through fellatio, a voluptuousness that "breathes impatience" for an absolute future that never arrives, a gasping for love at the limit of immanence (Levinas 1969, 254-5). This was the beginning, this falling, and then this attempt at writing the everyday. And it was here that the sacred intervened, in the beginning, making for an aura, in the finitude of the act, of transcendental corporality.

It is here where I begin.

Is the place important? Your house in the desert, perhaps? The red earth, a small green gecko, and the time of day. We were in bed in the afternoon, fucking. I had kissed your cunt, placed my mouth to your lips. We kissed, again, this time your tongue and this mouth, our lips together. We fucked. Lying on your back in the heat you dragged me up your body until my cock was touching your face. Your head raised on the pillow, my balls resting between your breasts you held my cock in your hand and fed it to your mouth. From the pressure at the base of my cock to your openness and my surrender, I fell.

This was the beginning, this naked passivity. Of this anyway, of this writing attempting to appreciate, acknowledge this free falling that I could, in this beginning, only call the sacred, the sensation, the living of our bodies holding in the afternoon light. Before I came. Before I came time expanded and engulfed us, as I experienced it. You holding my cock in your mouth and us moving together created behind my closed eyes a space so expansive that it seemed I ceased to exist. I felt through the touching of our bodies, through the direct physicality of our being, our acting together, a different time, one that touched, one that was every pore on the surface of my body. Each pore opening to the caress of a million lips. Each pore, that insignificant opening on the surface of one's skin, or the epidermis of

a plant, through which fluids may pass, that small opening for the discharge of pollen or seeds, or the minute interstices in the soil. I was falling into the world: an ‘I’ divested of egoism as in that encounter which is prayer, where “an attentiveness of the self before the other . . . shatters and reconfigures us” (Chrétien 2000, 156). A transgressive transcendence in the letting be of our coming.

But why the sacred or religiosity in this beginning? Perhaps because when attempting to write or think on the experience as lived, the language of narrative and logic relies upon concatenation, which translates into sequential points of reference straining towards a totality. The arousal however of the attempt at appreciating and acknowledging this falling through fellatio introduced a language of grace. As Simone Weil suggests in *Grace and Gravity* “[e]xperience as the transcendent: this seems contradictory, and yet can be known only through contact since our faculties are unable to invent it” (1992, 121). This embodiment acknowledges the transcendental as being integral for allowing that impossible experiencing, an experiencing of the world at its own borders and another distant arriving; a bodily transcendental dehiscence making for the saying of fellatio one afternoon in the desert.

Together-separately we greet, through the caress of our bodies, fecundity. To write this experience, even to begin to think it, however, is perhaps first to speak my sex; to speak my cock. That strange heterosexuality that names me also claims language, while my mouth, in another place—by chance this time by the sea—also took the cock of the one I loved, and lying with him was surprised by its tenderness in my hand. The dominant voice is mine, however, as (predominantly) heterosexual male. But what if I try and write the passion of this slight confusion? I will always have to return to this sucking and being sucked, this making of love, and this living in nakedness. Is there anything more holy and more irreconcilable than the separateness in sharing our bodies?

But what is the space I fall into that is now this writing, an attempted writing as testimony from the heart. This sacred heart that for Orthodox Christianity, to continue the metaphor, is at once carnal, mindful and of the spirit, a heart that sustains our body and thoughts, that home which is Christ’s palace. To speak, or better to pray from this chamber of sadness, joy, anger, death and life, one must “stand there with attention” (Theophan the Recluse in Chariton of Valamo 1997, 191). And it is this attention that attempts to speak this sex, which allows this space to be spoken. Here one opens, in fragility and enjoyment, making for a pledge to the other that acknowledges their absolute difference, not by any act of will, but through the heartfelt intimacy of the gift of ‘donation’.<sup>1</sup>

Being in place in the desert.

### **To be near death**

To be near death is to experience boundlessness, boundlessness as thanks, and a remembering of the gift of life. To be near death, to be close to someone who is dying, is to be truly near. In “The Nature of Language” Martin Heidegger speaks of “two isolated farm houses—if any such are left—separated by an hour’s walk across the fields,” saying they

can be the best of neighbours, while two townhouses, facing each other across the street or even sharing a common wall, know no neighbourhood. Neighbourly nearness, then, does not depend on spatial-temporal relation. Nearness, then, is by its nature outside and independent of space and time (1982, 103).

My mother’s face was now neat and clean. The nurses had arrived after I notified them of her passing. The trickle of blood from the corner of her mouth had been wiped away as definitively as her life. Kissing her face, loving her body, was to be near to my mother. Sylvia. A then-fresh tattoo of her name, written within a traditional scroll with her favourite blue birds, marked her passing before she left. By the

time the shaved hairs on my arm had returned the funeral was paid for and Sylvie's ashes mixed with my step-father's in the rose garden behind the Anglican church in Alexandra.

I used to sleep at night in a hospital bed in my mother's room to help her with her new-found fear of the dark. Once, at three A.M., she woke and smiled asking if we could have a beer. Why not? Then she tried to sleep again while I held her fragile hand. To be near my mother I slept in the hospital room, to be near my mother I squatted on the edge of a panoramic landscape and prayed to her after her passing. I thank her, and I thank her, and I thank her for my life. A life given and kept in love, a life given. A gift from one person to hopefully another. For a gift can be accepted, acknowledged, held; or it can be ignored, forgotten. The gift from my mother she reminds me of.

To be near.

### **Being at Murambi**

Throughout the following writing I would like to understand the use of the word 'memorial' from the perspective of Jean-Luc Marion's *God Without Being*. 'Explaining' the Eucharist as memorial, he writes:

[t]he present of the eucharistic gift is not at all temporalized starting from the here and now but as memorial (temporalization starting from the past), then as eschatological announcement (temporalization starting from the future), and finally, and only finally, as dailyness and viaticum (temporalization starting from the present). As opposed to the metaphysical concept of time, the present here does not order the analysis of temporality as a whole, but results from it . . . It is not at all a question of commemorating a dead person to spare him the second death of oblivion . . . The event remains less a past fact than an a pledge given in the past in order, today still, to appeal to a future . . . (1991, 103).

Today I went to Murambi, Gikongoro, where more than 50,000 people were massacred. The site, a large technical school, is situated on a hill that slopes down towards either villages or cultivated land. The stillness and silence of the three story building at the end of a long gravel road is what first struck me when I arrived. This administrative building now acts as the place where a visitors' book may be signed and donations offered for the upkeep of the site. A man and a woman approached me. He would be my guide through the genocide memorial, which the whole school and its grounds have become, while the woman opened the doors to sixty-four classrooms which, until they were filled by those fleeing the massacres, had never been occupied, but now housed the dead. Women, children and men from the surrounding districts had been told by authorities to gather at the school for protection, but this proved to be an operation aimed at grouping them together in order to massacre people more easily. To diminish their resistance, water pipes and food supplies were cut, leaving those who were now trapped without provisions for two weeks until the attack began, on the night of April 20, 1994.<sup>2</sup>

By the side of the administration building is a mass grave. Towards the back there are a number of long dormitory-style buildings, some closer together, others set apart. Each of these is divided into five smaller classrooms. The first red door of the first classroom in the nearest dormitory is unlocked, and then another and another. Bodies have been placed onto racks, hundreds and hundreds of bodies, all treated with lime, their stretched and dried flesh one way of preserving their humanness. One woman wears a blue dress and a child, probably two years old, is still clothed in an ashen-red t-shirt with a faded yellow border around the neck and sleeves. Some still have tufts of hair. There is room after room of these bodies. Occasionally amongst them a rose has been placed, long stemmed and red

It is April, the month of mourning in Rwanda. The rose of remembrance placed beside a body, or perhaps it may have been between two, in the classroom at Murambi emphasises that the one lying amongst so many others is a person known, a member of a family and a community. These lying here are people, who have been killed, and this is what is repeated, and this is who has been exhumed, and this is who are underground 45,000 times. So 50,000 is no longer abstract, it is lived here in this place and it is smelt, for the bodies are still decomposing under their protective coating of lime. It is as the Australian journalist Sally Sara said:

the scent of genocide is so sickening, it's as if a trap has gone off in your chest. It's a damp, sorry smell like old fertiliser. It's so unmistakable it takes your breath and gives it back, just before each word comes out of your mouth (Sara 2003).

The smell of the people stays with you after having left the site. The decay under the limed skins is like the memory I carry with me of those who I have witnessed here. What will happen when this smell is no more, like the victims and survivors of the Holocaust? It has been twelve years since the genocide. When I walked out of the fifth room of the first dormitory half a dozen children were playing on the grass at the end of the veranda. All were under the age of twelve, all born after 1994. These are living memorials for me and they were shocking. The French forces that arrived late in Rwanda to usher out the leaders of Hutu Power the oligarchy that helped organise the genocide, at Murambi built a bar-beque area and volley ball court to play on on top of the freshly-dug mass graves. In his novel *Murambi: The Book of Bones* Boubacar Boris Diop says of this:

[t]hat was extremely bad manners. Had they believed, then, by behaving in such a way, that Murambi's dead were somehow missing that little something that made them human beings? (2000, 177).

During April this year in Rwanda, daily in the newspapers, on the radio and on T.V. people recounted stories of loss and pain, of mass burials, like that of 10,000 victims on the shores of Lake Victoria, Uganda that had been thrown into a river and washed down stream. Or the story of Clarisse Umwali who on the 7th of April this year at the Amahoro National Stadium, where thousands had fled for protection during the days of genocide but where many either died from starvation or selective slaughter, told of her survival and the atrocities she witnessed. "It is twelve years since the genocide, but to me it is like yesterday" she told Rwanda's main newspaper (*Newtimes* 2006, 12). The genocide is present. The past is lived currently. Remains of eighty six genocide victims from twelve families living in the Kanombe District were buried at the Kigali Genocide Memorial on April 18. Survivors recounted how victims were tortured and raped before being killed. "Some victims would be given toxic fluid that slowly destroyed their bodies while still alive", like dangerous memories (*Newtimes* 2006, 4). Trauma disrupts time exposing responsibility. This intruding, repetitious, near incomprehensible event is a current living of the past, an awakening to the demand of responsibility. A fact highlighted by the guilt often experienced by survivors suggesting "the moral dimension inherent in all conflict and suffering" (Caruth 1995, 88; 100 and note 10, quoting Lifton 179, 172).

Each dead person is here in this school, in this place as am I, as is the guide relating how he managed to hide in the bush while all the members of his family were massacred. I recognise myself in both victim and *genocidaire*. Being so close to this death, the witnessing of people who were killed, and their smell of decay sucks you into the act of killing. There is no escaping. There is definitely a bodily sensation of falling into the racks of dead, of recognizing that you too are this person, you too are the one who killed. The experience of alterity, that complete and unmistakable absolute separateness from the other who you must face, exposes with a shock of recognition ones responsibility. As Emmanuel Levinas writes:

[a]lterity becomes proximity. Not distance, the shortest through space, but initial directness, which extends as unimpeachable approach in the call of the face of the other, in which their appears, as an order, an inscription, a prescription, an awakening (as if it were a ‘me’), responsibility—mine for the other human being (1994, 110).

Surely at Murambi there is the possibility of nearness.

Once you manage to step through the threshold of these small classrooms you are almost surrounded by victims. This is the shock that the guide had tried to prepare me for, but which was impossible; how can one be prepared for such a meeting? It is hard to comprehend where you are standing, hard to credit that the dead are real, but at the same time they are so real, so present that the bodies manage to make you as present as they. I was displaced and not allowed any comfortable re-settling, to anywhere, anywhen that could be named. I was floundering, trying to take in the bodies and somehow gain a purchase on their presence. But they would not allow it. They had shattered my economy. I had been thrown, and I mean this in the sense of being cast, flung down, as well as Heidegger’s use of the term ‘thrown’, as coming to being outside one’s volition. Being thrown through facing these dead was an envelopment that arranged the room, the smell, the light and I around each other in a place of mutual implication and simultaneous presence (Casey 1993, 68).

I as witness am complicit with both victim and perpetrator. To witness is to be involved ethically with the other. In Medieval law, to bare witness was necessarily an act, an action between people requiring community. In “The Ethics of Testimony” Andrea Frisch writes

[t]he belief indexed by the medieval purgatory oath is predicated on an ethical relationship . . . witnesses . . . in effect swear an oath of solidarity with a person; they do not offer evidence about an experience or an event . . . testimony is thus best understood as a performative utterance . . . (The witnesses) are not referring that belief to a prior experience, but are rather performing that belief in the very act of bearing witness (2003, 44).

In the instance of this writing or this reading now, this relationship of witnessing is with you. We are not at Murambi, we are not in the rooms with the dead, but we are at once complicit in the genocide and the possibility of its prevention. The being-with that opens us to responsibility is a turning to the face of the other and that murder that is infinitely possible. The last lines in Diop’s *Murambi: The Book of Bones* are

the dead in Murambi, too, had dreams, and that their most ardent desire was for the resurrection of the living (2000, 177).

\* \* \*

I would like to conclude by asking some questions. What is it these three experiences of fellatio, being near to my dying mother, and the dead at Murambi have in common that makes for a living of the infinite in the everyday, if this is what we see as happening here? Is it the relationships between separateness, the proximity to another through the body, through living and through death? Is it only when we speak in terms of death or heightened sexual activity that concerns about the disruption of time are raised: what about moments of performance, of playing football, of walking in the bush or to the shop to buy milk? And is the coupling of experience with religiosity too problematic to take us very far? For me the fall into the body and the responsibility of the other that this allows is at once transcendental and of the ordinary. This is so because we live it.

## Endnotes

1. I am struggling to reach the word that may speak this attention, but perhaps donation has a resonance with gift, as well as Marion's use of the term when he quotes Husserl:

[t]he 'principle of all principles' posits that every originally donating intuition is a source of right for cognition, that everything that offers itself to us originally in 'intuition' is to be taken quite simply as it gives out to be, but also within the limits in which it is given there (Husserl *Ideen 1*, cited in Marion 2000, 180).

2. For a detailed documentation of the Rwandan genocide see Human Rights Watch, "Leave None To tell the Story," <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/rwanda/Geno1-3-04.htm>

## References

- Caruth, Cathy 1995 "Traumatic Awakenings" in Parker, Andrew and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (eds.) *Performativity and Performance* Andrew New York: Routledge, pp. 89-108.
- Casey, Edward S. 1993 *Getting Back Into Place: Towards a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Chariton of Valamo (ed.) 1997 *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology* London: Faber and Faber.
- Chrétien, Jean-Louis 2000 "The Wounded Word" in *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn', The French Debate* New York: Fordham University Press.
- Diop, Boubacar Boris 2000 *Murambi: The Book of Bones* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Frisch, Andrea 2003 "The Ethics of Testimony: A Genealogical Perspective" in *Discourse* 25: 36-54
- Heidegger, Martin 1982 "The Nature of Language" in *On The Way To Language* San Francisco: Harper pp57-108.
- Levinas, Emmanuel  
—1994 "From Ethics to Exegesis" in *In the Time of Nations* London: The Athlone Press, pp107-113.  
—1969 *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Marion, Jean-Luc  
2000 "The Saturated Phenomenon" in Janicaud, Dominique (ed.) *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn* New York : Fordham University Press, pp. 177-216.  
—1991 *God Without Being* Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Sara, Sally 2003 Report from Rwanda *The World Today* Radio National, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Friday 22 August.
- Weil, Simone 2002 *Grace and Gravity* London: Routledge, London.

**Jeff Stewart** is currently a Ph.D. student in the Performance Studies Department of the University of Sydney. He is also a practicing artist who includes his home as a site of performance and exhibition making the everyday an integral component of his practice.