

A Trace of Memory or an Illusion:  
Identity, Learning and Emotions in J. M. Coetzee's Jesus Novels

by

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To my memories, and the new beginnings...

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## ABSTRACT

In *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013), and *The Schooldays of Jesus* (2016), J.M. Coetzee's characters arrive at a 'New World' 'washed-clean' of memories and they start their journey to create new personalities and discover lost memories. My thesis focuses on how the characters' loss of memory helps create, and later transcends, their self-perception, which affects their identity, learning, and emotions through their journeys. It explains Coetzee's use of Don Quixote and how it helps to shape the characters' identities and define their relationships. Moreover, it sheds light on the use of languages and the quality of the educational systems they encounter through the journey. Finally, the thesis argues that the state of being 'washed-clean' causes disruption and confusion in defining their emotional needs and their seeking/ignoring them. The novels question the possibility of living with illusions, and the probability of starting again; accepting new beliefs and breaking all imaginative restraints.

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## CHAPTER 1:

### INTRODUCTION

J.M. Coetzee has hardly been an easy writer. He has chosen themes that touch on the lives of people and comment on universal topics. His two recent novels, *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus*, are no exception. These novels (hereafter called the Jesus novels) are neither science fiction nor fantasy but are packed with allegories, philosophy, and human experience. They reflect an accumulation of Coetzee's reading and have many references to great classical literary works and characters. The Jesus novels are set in a Spanish-speaking country where Jesus never appears, and no character goes by that name. The first novel, *The Childhood of Jesus*, starts with a middle-aged man, Simón, who finds it important to help a six-year-old boy. He takes upon himself the responsibility of finding the child's mother, though he has never seen her before. The boy, David, does not recall his parents either; to make it worse, he used to have a paper that explains his origin and gives his mother's name, but it was lost during the journey from Belstar Camp to the benevolent land of Novilla (No-vee-ya). Simón and David have both been "washed clean" of their memories, given new names, and taught Spanish in the refugee camp to prepare them for their move to this new land. As he recalls it to Ana, the clerk at the relocation center in Novilla,

We have come from Belstar, from the camp. Are you familiar with Belstar?

Yes, I know Belstar well. I came through Belstar myself. Is that where you learned your Spanish?

We had lessons every day for six weeks. ...

She inspects the passbooks. 'These were issued in Belstar?'

Yes. That is where they gave us our names, our Spanish names. (*Childhood* 2-3)

It is also worth noting that Simón and Inés, David's chosen mother, are not David's biological parents: David met Simón on the boat from Belstar; later, Simón decided that Inés is the mother when he saw her playing tennis. Neither of the adults have met each other or David before; however, for unexplained reasons, they took the parental responsibility they assumed so seriously.

As this family, "the family of David" (*Childhood* 309), tries to fit in, Simón finds it hard to live a life in which his sexual, dietary, and philosophical urges cannot be met, and occasionally he rebels against it. At some point, David is admitted to a school, but he finds it difficult to submit to the educational system and is consequently sent to Punto Arenas: a reform school for special children. He escapes, and the newly created family escapes to Estrella (Es-tre-ya), both to save David intellectual and to achieve their freedom. This is where the second novel, *The Schooldays of Jesus*, starts: with the family establishing a new life, finding new jobs and a new school for David. He is later admitted to the Academy of Dance, where he learns the basics of calling the stars by dancing their numbers. This is a concept that his family finds hard to understand, and its mysticism is a source of concern for Simón. However, it later becomes a source of rebirth as he too embraces the dancing.

Many aspects of the setting are not made clear in the novels, and it would appear that they are deliberately left that way. But the novels seem to reflect a journey through time and space, as "the language spoken is Spanish, the currency sounds Brazilian, town names feel Iberian, the state seems secular socialist, and literary allusions point towards *Don Quixote*, but do not map directly onto the text" (Freeman). Coetzee's latest novels

are not hard to read or follow; however, “despite [their] very simple style and relatively straightforward story line, the novel[s] as a whole [do] not seem to allow us easy interpretive access. We wonder what elements beneath the smooth surface disorient us” (Tajiri 187). In speaking of the end of the story, Tim Mehigan summarizes it by saying that it does not “bring about any conventional conclusion or resolution of themes or issues, but rather revolves the story back towards its initial premises” (183). While the novels contain many ideas, and allegories, memory and illusion are two of the major issues explored. Differentiating between the real and the unreal is important in determining the accuracy of the narrative and the nature of the relationships between the characters. If they cannot tell what is true and what is an illusion, it will be impossible for them to know their true identities and their real emotions and needs will be hard to grasp. Few scholarly articles, reviews, and inquiries attempt to make sense of the ambiguities of the Jesus novels. However, the critics may be waiting for a third book in the series before passing their final judgment. I personally believe that Coetzee is content with writing about the two phases of “Jesus” life; this inference is based on ideas he expresses in these two books and on his borrowings from *Don Quixote*, which is written in two parts, as well.

The act of chasing memories is important in the Jesus novels and is created by the illusions that Coetzee’s characters see or remember. The illusions start with the characters’ loss of memory, whether they can remember anything or just pretend to remember. Is that loss real, or is it a reaction to shock and trauma? Does this loss signify a state of being; if so, how? To trace the answers to these questions, we need to look at the qualities of the “washed-clean” state, as the loss of memory is selective. For example,



when Simón arrives with David in Novilla, he insists on the slate of being “washed clean”; but yet he can still judge the quality of a philosophical debate, the cuisine, and the meeting of his sexual desires. His memory is selective: it is “washed clean” in relation to his origin, identity and background, yet he finds himself hanging on to older memories that he cannot articulate or describe. He is constantly referring to old memories and to the difficulty of letting go. He says, “I place no value on my tired old memories. I agree with you: they are just a burden... it is something else that I am reluctant to yield up: ... the feeling of residence in a body with a past, a body soaked in its past” (*Childhood* 169). The answer comes to him from his friend Elena, who says, “Children live in the present, not the past. Why not take your lead from them? ... Why not try to be like a child again?” (170).

Simón and David are ultimately seeking answers, but Simón is looking for a philosophy of life and the meeting of his physical human needs. He is constantly looking for spiced food, companionship, sexual fulfilment, and standards that work logically. However, he cannot find any fulfilment of these needs. In addition to this, the people of Novilla do not seem to miss these needs but rather call them illusions or misunderstandings. When Simón explains his frustrations regarding these desires, Elena again explains to him that his passions are merely illusions from the past and that they do not exist in Novilla. However, his higher feelings of benevolence and good will are more welcome. These illusions form a substantial element in the story of David and Simón. They change the way in which their characters develop, both together and apart, through the help of their literary heroes, schools, and friends.

In this thesis, I trace Coetzee's manipulation of illusions and memories and focus on how the characters' loss of memory helps to create and later transcend their self-perceptions. I explore how the loss of memory affects their identity, their use of language, and their emotions throughout their journeys, as traced in the Jesus novels. I will explore if memory is the only repertoire that stores our basic needs and ask, when this memory is lost or removed, can we remember our desires and emotions? Simón has lost, as all residents of Novilla have lost, his memory; but he still has basic desires: better food, sex, beauty, compassionate conversations, and a richer way of living in the world. On the contrary, everyone in Novilla believes him to be ridiculous, holding up onto an illusion rather than to the truth. Residents of Novilla share none of Simón's needs or they might have given up on them after some time, out of desperation.

In the first part of my thesis, I explain how Coetzee's many references to the character of Don Quixote help to shape the characters' identities and define their relationships with the people around them. The associations of Don Quixote with Simón and of Don Quixote with David are complicated, as both, father and son, see themselves as a portrayal of Don Quixote rather than of Sancho Panza. That is, there are two dreamers and no reality-seeker in Coetzee's story. The illusions they create about themselves are questionable, as their memories cannot fill in the gaps about who they really are. The influence of this memory-loss goes beyond affecting their identities to altering how their characters use language, perceive the world, and learn to live in it. To explore this idea further, the second part of the thesis sheds light on the use of languages in the Jesus novels and on the quality of the educational systems that Simón and David encounter in the two cities. I also investigate the mixing and matching of languages

spoken and David's creation of his own ways of learning. The last part of the thesis examines Simón's emotional state and compares this with that of his surrogate family and the other residents of the cities. I argue that the state of being "washed clean" causes disruption and confusion for Simón and David as they try to define their emotional needs and then either seek to fulfil or ignore them. This part of the thesis examines Simón's emotional needs in particular, as he has a preconceived idea about the emotions he is seeking: affection, excitement, and fulfillment. However, failing to meet these, he falls instead into a circle of formalities that threatens to block him from ever fulfilling them. The Jesus novels pose many questions about identities, illusions and needs. They ask about the possibility of living in illusions and in imagined identities and the possibility of creating new identities at any age. How far one can go, being so vulnerable, with no memories or inherited identities? What does a human need to be normal? And when one subtracts a name, a history, a culture, a family, a language, a religion, an identity from a human being, what is left of one's true self?

By considering Coetzee's portrayal of Simón and David and the relationship that governs them, my thesis considers the possibility of starting again out of a place of vulnerability and accepting new beliefs by breaking through all imaginative restraints. This possibility is better portrayed by a figure who does not live in a modern world, where these traits -- vulnerability and accepting new beliefs-- are embraced and encouraged, but by a figure who has struggled to be different, unique, in a world where going out of this norm is not a merit but a journey of self-discovery. Jesus could not be better used to carry it out.

## CHAPTER 2:

### DON QUIXOTE AND THE IMAGINATIVE IDENTITY

“*Humankind cannot bear very much reality.*” T.S. Eliot

When Coetzee first introduces his main characters in the Jesus novels, Simón and David, he presents them without identifying any characteristics. He describes them with little physical traits, as they are “washed clean” after arriving by boat in Novilla. On many occasions, Simón is referred to as David’s grandfather, a man who is “little old [to work as] ... *estibador*” (*Childhood* 13) and who struggles to carry a 36-kg<sup>1</sup> sack on his back. As *The Childhood of Jesus* develops and new members of the story appear, their characters evolve and are shaped differently, especially after David has been given to his chosen mother, Inés. She takes on the role of a mother very literally and transforms the five-year-old David into a spoiled, pampered child by bestowing care and over-protection on him: “push[ing him] in a stroller” (120) and “dust[ing] him with talcum powder as if he were a baby” (186). During this period of separation, Simón creates an identity for himself by working as stevedore; by going to a night school; and by meeting Elena, his neighbor. But can the present reality, assisted by imagination, alter how they construct their identities? Can the characters establish as their identities something that is completely invented?

In the second half of *The Childhood of Jesus*, and as a way of teaching David to read, Simón decides to introduce him to the *Illustrated Children’s Don Quixote*. This is a book Simón describes as being “unusual ... [because] it represents the world to us

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<sup>1</sup> “Fifty sacks a day: two tons” (*Childhood* 17).

through two pairs of eyes” (*Childhood* 182). Simón thinks this book will strongly encourage David to start reading, partly because it is illustrated and partly because of the heroic stories about Don Quixote. Little does he know that *Don Quixote* will make David even more persistent in exercising his imagination and less submissive to the rules of the world. From the beginning, Simón notices that David is opting to become a quixotic figure; he develops sympathy for Don Quixote and defends him on many occasions. When explaining the scene where Don Quixote is fighting with windmills, Simón describes to David:

To Don Quixote, it is a giant he is fighting. To Sancho, it is a windmill. Most of us - not you, perhaps, but most of us nevertheless - will agree with Sancho that it is a windmill. That includes the artist who drew a picture of a windmill. But it also includes the man who wrote the book. (*Childhood* 182)

By reading the book, David develops an attachment to Don Quixote’s character rather than learning how to read. He interacts with the character and creates his own interpretations of the incidents by following the illustrations, thereby leaving Simón puzzled and frustrated. David has become, as Lopez puts it, “another Quixotesque character, unable and unwilling to adapt to the interpretations of the world surrounding him” (95). He wants to be a hero in his own sense of heroism, transforming between shapes to save lives. At one point, he wants to swim like a seal to save a drowning soul; at another, he wants to be a magician or an escape artist.

But while Simón urges David “to submit to what is written on the page” (*Childhood* 165), David arrives at his own interpretation of language and of reality in general. As David’s teacher later puts it, “the real . . . is what David misses in his life”

(217). However, what makes the boy David different and more resilient than Coetzee's other Quixotesque characters is that he is "apparently not defeated by 'the real'". As we leave him embarked on a journey to Estrellita del Norte, where he expects to find a new life, having recruited a new member for his 'brotherhood', the feeling is that he is a new Don Quixote seeking out new adventures" (Lopez 95).

Coetzee has used and borrowed from *Don Quixote* in his previous literary works. He believes that this book has many lessons to offer and should be read by all novelists. He asserts: "I have read *Don Quixote*, the most important novel of all times, time and again, as any serious novelist must do, as it contains infinite lessons" (Coetzee and Carlin, qtd in Lopez 81). He is especially interested in Cervantes' "conflict between imagination and reality, and in Cervantes' treatment of the effects that literature may have on the lives of readers" (Lopez 81). This effect rises to prominence in the Jesus novels, as they question "whether literature may be an effective guide in our dealings with reality, both in pragmatic and ethical terms" (Lopez 81). The focus in the Jesus novels is not on the text of *Don Quixote* but rather on the character of Don Quixote and his reactions to the world surrounding him. Coetzee's introduction of Don Quixote appears only in the second half *The Childhood of Jesus*. One assumes that he introduces him so late to allow the characters the time to show marks of their identities before the appearance of Don Quixote. Once they have read the book together, Simón and David are impacted by the presence of Don Quixote in the way they behave and build their images about themselves and the world. This impact is clearer in the first novel than in the second, because David quickly finds a way to create an identity for himself in the first novel, and he tests these characteristics throughout the second. Nevertheless, his

attachment to the character of Don Quixote and to the book itself is strong, even after they have moved to Estrella in the second novel. During their escape journey from Novilla, David resists sacrificing a page of *Don Quixote* when he needs to defecate-- a suggestion jokingly made by Simón-- and instead uses a handkerchief. This attachment is linked to his admiration for Don Quixote and an on-going comparison: David constantly compares his actions with Don Quixote's or opts for heroic actions like those of his hero.

As the story develops, David's attachment to Don Quixote's character grows still stronger, and he defends him and his actions on many occasions in front of his teachers who regard Don Quixote as a merely literary character. David fancies himself as a savior or a magician, and he frequently debates with Simón over whether things are really as they appear, or as he sees them. In one instance, when Marciano, the stevedore, has been caught in a fire, David believes that he will be able to swim like a seal to save Marciano because he is "an escape artist" (*Childhood* 186). As the debate continues around David's ability to save others, Simón continues to discourage him by explaining the need for training to be a good swimmer or an escape artist. In another incident, later in *The Schooldays of Jesus* after they have arrived in Estrella, David's friend Bengi throws stones at a male duck, injuring its wing. David insists on his ability to swim and to save the duck, even though he does not know how to swim. These illusions of David's are a substantial part of the story, and they continue to be present even after the family has moved to Estrella. David continues to see himself as a magician who can disappear or save lives in a way he has never actually experienced. To himself, he is a savior, a knight on errands-- much as Don Quixote saw himself but in an even more ambitious manner.

Lopez suggests that Don Quixote shapes his words after inflating his ideas with books on chivalry, “strung[ing]<sup>2</sup> these absurdities together with many others, all in the style of those that he’d learned from his books” (Cervantes 31). Furthermore, his perception of reality is completely distorted by the categories coming from the discursive universe he inhabits: “[W]hatever our adventurer thought, saw, or imagined seemed to him to be as it was in the books he’d read” (32). Instead of windmills, he sees giants; instead of inns, castles; instead of swineherds, dwarfs; instead of prostitutes, ladies. Similarly, David’s identity and aspirations are shaped in accordance with how he interprets Don Quixote’s adventures from the drawings. He acknowledges Don Quixote’s imagination and his ability by seeing the world in a way that no one else does. David is always confident of his ability to save his own and others’ lives through kisses, disappearances, and by undertaking activities he has never tried before. This ability is what creates the gap between Simón and David during their shared reading process and later, in *The Schooldays of Jesus*, when David dances the noble numbers<sup>3</sup> at the Academy of Dance in Estrella.

Throughout the narrative of *Don Quixote*, Don Quixote frequently refers to his hero: “I am simply guided only by the example given me by the great Amadis of Gaul” (Cervantes 459). It was around passages such as this that René Girard developed his theory of mediated desire, which Coetzee analyzes in “Triangular Structures of Desire in Advertising.” In this essay, he points out that,

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<sup>2</sup> Stringing.

<sup>3</sup> Dancing the numbers involves calling “the numbers [from] the sky. That is where they live, with the stars. You have to call them before they will come down.” (*Schooldays* 59)



Don Quixote [is one of] the major exemplars of vicarious desiring. Not only [does he] imitate the outward behaviour of models [he] find[s] in books, but [he] freely allow[s] desires to be defined for [him] by these models. Thus, in these cases there is not simply the desiring subject and the desired object, but also the characteristic third point of the triangle, the model through whom desires are meditated. (130)

To elaborate on this point of desires, Phillips explains:

Don Quixote is entirely contained in his fantasy world, because he cannot see the windmills. Don Quixote is aware of reality, because of what he whispers to Sancho... Don Quixote, initially [is] convinced of the reality of his fantasy, [he] is chastened by his encounters with the world, and [he] grows to doubt his experience until, on his deathbed, he rejects it. (382)

Desires and identities can be shaped and imitated according to the models one aspires to take in life. Basic desires can be both innate and learned; as they can be forgotten or lost.

The conversation between David and Simón mostly involves Simón's attempts to convince David that the narration of Sancho Panza is right, and that Don Quixote is deluded: there are no giants, and Don Quixote does not really descend into the earth. However, even if Simón identifies with Sancho Panza, he is acting like Don Quixote. He is constantly trying to act as pragmatically as Panza but ends up seeing his illusions as realities when he imagines himself young, wise and powerful compared to all other characters. Always desiring himself to be a model for David to follow rather than anyone else. In David's case, his rejection of reality comes from his belief in his imagination and his own potential; he believes in his abilities as a hero to save and to act. He is not

distorted by any old memories or images of how he should behave or be; he is who he believes he is. He lives on the thin line that links reality and imagination. David can see the real but chooses the unreal to survive. To shorten the gap between the two, he flips through the pages quickly:

Why are you handling the book so roughly?

Because. Because if I don't hurry a hole will open.

Open up where?

Between the pages.

That's nonsense. There is no such thing as a hole between the pages.

There is a hole. It's inside the page. You don't see it because you don't see anything. (*Childhood* 197)

So, do memories hold Simón back from being as imaginative as David? Do memories and previous experiences of the world prevent Simón from becoming a heroic example to David in place of the imaginary Don Quixote? Simón is striving to be a model for David, but he is reluctant to aspire to create wonders for the little boy. In Novilla, when David admires Daga and his friendship, Simón explains his desperation over Daga's spell on the family to Elena: "I cannot compete with him. He wears an earring, he carries a knife, he drinks firewater. He has a pretty girlfriend. He has Mickey Mouse at home in a box... Inés is under the man's spell too." (*Childhood* 224). Meanwhile, in Estrella, Dmitri, the murderer, has become close to David, and Simón is annoyed that such wild men would be models for the boy and not himself. He asks David:

If you want a model in life, look to me, ... look to Simón, the exemplary stepfather, the man of reason, the dullard; or, if not me, then to that harmless old

madman Don Quixote. But if the child really wants an education, who better is there to study than the man who could inspire such an unsuitable, [Simón], such an incomprehensible love? (*Schooldays* 229)

Simón is striving to be a model, using his reason, his load of memories, and his unexciting life, but he is unable to let go of the restraints of his past and unable to accept David's imagination.

David's character evolves through the two parts of the Jesus novels: he moves from wanting to be a life saver, a knight like Don Quixote, to a wild animal who takes but does not give, or a dancer who needs to be distinguished. However, Simón is still clinging to what he thinks he misses: to the remains of what he remembers from his old life. He is unable to behave as wildly as Don Quixote, as dangerously as Señor Daga or Dmitri, or to be as pragmatically as Sancho Panza. He is unable to travel further into the unreal or the mystical until late in *The Schooldays of Jesus* when he forces his feet in the silver, small-sized dancing shoes, and submits to the music in a dance. The end of the Jesus novels becomes a rewriting of Don Quixote in the sense of following the dreamy heroic world. Eventually, "Don Quixote abandons the literary universe of knight errands, returning to the prosaic world of Castilla-La Mancha" (Lopez 91); but David does not. On the contrary, he gradually leads Simón into his world. And whether out of admiration or inability to be real, Simón commits to David's world of ideals, helpless and obligated:

I am not opposed to him being a lifesaver. I am not opposed to any of his plans or dreams. As far as I am concerned – his mother may feel differently – he can be a lifesaver or a fireman or a singer or the man in the moon, as he chooses. I do not direct his life, I no longer even pretend to advise him. The truth is, he has tired us

out with his wilfulness, his mother and me. He is like a bulldozer. He has flattened us. We have been flattened. We have no more resistance.

Inés gapes at him in astonishment. David smiles to himself.

What a strange outburst! says Valentina. I haven't heard an outburst like that in years. (*Schooldays* 39-40)

David wants to be strong: to take, like lions and tigers. He does not want to be a human or an animal either, he wants only to have the animals' characteristics. Simón asks at the beginning of *The Schooldays of Jesus*,

Which kind of person do you want to be: the kind who gives or the kind who takes? Which is better?

The kind who takes.

Really? Do you really believe so? Is it not better to give than to take?

Lions don't give. Tigers don't give.

And you want to be a tiger?

I don't want to be a tiger. I am just telling you. Tigers aren't bad.

Tigers aren't good either. They aren't human, so they are outside goodness and badness.

Well, I don't want to be human either. (35-6)

Genuinely, David does not act like a human being; he is testing his vulnerability to its limits. In return, he gets where he wants: He can "escape from anywhere" (*Childhood* 286). Inés also believes that David "doesn't want to be like us, sitting and worrying about the future. He wants to be free" (*Schooldays* 36).

The need for identity is important, as both Simón and David have been “washed clean,” without memories. Both are striving, in Novilla, to find out who they are and what they are capable of in relation to the other residents of the city. On many occasions, Simón is frustrated by the aloofness of the Novillans, and how they can afford everything with little or no money at all. In contrast, after moving to their “new life” in Estrella, he complains at the price of the gold ballet dancing slippers, finding it strange that such an item should cost such a sum of money.

The Jesus novels are similar to *Don Quixote* in the sense that all novels “give us characters who become more real as [they] become[s] less real; give us an intensely moving vision ... [which they] tells us almost nothing” (Phillips 384). The more we learn about Simón and David, the less we understand their behavior: who is becoming real and who is adopting illusions. At the end of *The Childhood of Jesus*, Simón becomes another warrior, a version of Don Quixote who protects his son David from the authority, who wants to return him to Punta Arenas: ““Will you fight them if they come back?” “Yes, as best I can. I will borrow a sword. I’ll say, ‘Try to steal my boy again and you will have Don Simón to deal with!’” (*Childhood* 287). In the last scene of *The Schooldays of Jesus*, after struggling with David’s mystical teachings and behavior, Simón becomes a dancer, who calls stars from the sky.

### CHAPTER 3:

#### LANGUAGE AND LEARNING

When Simón and David arrive to Belstar, they are taught Spanish in the immigration camp to prepare them for the future. Spanish is the official language in Belstar, Novilla, and Estrella. No foreign languages are taught-- not even another dialect of Spanish. Though Simón finds it hard to master the language or understand others perfectly, he still manages to live, work, and communicate in a sensible manner. David, on the other hand, does not like Spanish and is mesmerized by English that sounds completely German:

Wer reitet so spät durch Dampf und Wind?

Er ist der Vater mit seinem Kind;

Er halt den Knaben in dem Arm,

Er füttert ihn Zucker, er küsst ihm warm.

‘That’s all. It’s English. Can I learn English? I don’t want to speak Spanish any more. I hate Spanish.’ (*Childhood* 80)

Languages evolve and are made up of parts of others; the text of the two novels is in English but should be understood as having been originally written in Spanish, as Coetzee points out. However, the question is: Are the novels narrated in Spanish then translated into English, leaving some Spanish vocabulary untranslated? Or are they written in English with some Spanish vocabulary and readers are supposed to understand that as Spanish?

Simón tries to explain to David, who has begun to take refuge in jabbering to himself with private, nonsensical words, that

Everyone comes to this country as a stranger. ... We came from various places and various pasts, seeking a new life. But now we are all in the same boat together. So we have to get along with each other. One of the ways in which we get along is by speaking the same language. That is the rule. It is a good rule, and we should obey it. ... If you refuse, if you go on being rude about Spanish and insist on speaking your own language, then you are going to find yourself living in a private world.  
(*Childhood* 222)

Simón links the use of any language other than Spanish to alienation and disconnection from the majority, though it is not clear why people in Novilla speak the Spanish language in particular. Yoshiki Tajiri poses the idea that, because *Don Quixote* is written in Spanish and it, “is the greatest classic written in Spanish” (193), people in Novilla had to speak it. Moreover, in *The Childhood of Jesus*, *Don Quixote* is not credited to Cervantes, but to the Arab historian named Cide Hamete Benengeli, who wears “a long robe and has a turban on his head” (*Childhood* 183). Cervantes declared that Benengeli wrote the original manuscript of the story in Arabic, and it has been translated to Spanish. He stated, mostly in Part II of *Don Quixote* that, “the translator from the original text of this great history written by its first author, Cide Hamete Benengeli” (Cervantes 648). In a similar manner, Coetzee marveled at this metafictional information when, as a young boy, he discovered that Daniel Defoe is the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, and that his journey is not a uniquely personal experience of Crusoe himself.<sup>4</sup> He accused Defoe of being an “impersonator and a ventriloquist” (Defoe, vii), and he is avoiding this

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<sup>4</sup> J. M. Coetzee mentioned this information in the brief introduction to his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 2003 (NobelPrize.org).

impersonating by referring *Don Quixote* to its original author: Benengeli. This is another question from Coetzee about the authorship of writers and the real source of stories.

The position of *Don Quixote* in the library is an ironic hint from Coetzee about the “marginalization of serious literature in the contemporary world” (Tajiri 195); Coetzee is trying to shed the light on great pieces with moral issues and lessons. When Simón finds the book in the small library in Novilla, he finds it among many books on carpentry and, ironically, about food and cooking. The book lies under many a book with “its spine torn off” (*Childhood* 179). History and its stories have no value in Novilla, and the society cares little about recording history for future generations. There, people are content with what they have and what they know; nothing further is needed, and no development is required. To them, as described by Eugenio, the philosophical stevedore, “history has no manifestation... history isn’t real... history is just a made-up story. [It] has no power to reach into the present” (137–8). Eugenio further says that history is merely a “pattern to see what has passed” (138).

This case of history is similar to the case of memories to Simón’s suffering in their shadowy presence. The parallel is that, because history has no value in Novilla, memories have no value either. People in Novilla believe that what has happened in the past, in reality or in books, is nothing but a mere record of the past that it should never restrain or direct their experience. But if memories and history-- which are considered illusions-- do not help one to improve oneself, and if the stevedores resist technology in favor of physical labor, why do they attend the Institute? What is the nature of the improvement and learning they need? The Institute is an evening entertainment for people in Novilla: young and old. It provides them with a chance to attend lectures,



discussions, and films, free of charge and with a dinner too. The classes there include many levels of Spanish, ranging from beginner to advanced, including concentrations on composition and conversation; however, Simón is interested in literature. He cannot find it but assumes that it exists in the high-level classes of Spanish. Furthermore, at the Institute, there is no introduction to any other languages and no mention of any language that is historically connected to Spanish—Latin, for example—which again demonstrates the discarding of history and its role of improving people’s lives or connecting them to the world. The languages Simón ponders and wonders why they are not taught range from constructed languages such as Esperanto and the German Volapük, to those of Spain’s neighboring countries (Portuguese, Basque, and Catalan), to indigenous languages such as Galician. To live and communicate in Novilla, there is only one language in only one dialect. Nevertheless, David is not content with this monolingual use; he insists upon finding his own gibberish language and expressing his dismay upon communicating in Spanish all the time:

‘Why do I have to speak Spanish all the time?’ ...

‘But why Spanish? I hate Spanish.’ ...

‘What language do you want to speak?’

‘I want to speak my own language.’

‘There is no such thing as one’s own language.’

‘There is! La la fa fa yam ying tu tu.’

‘That’s just gibberish. It doesn’t mean anything.’

‘It does mean something. It means something to me.’

‘That may be so, but it doesn’t mean anything to me. Language has to mean something to me as well as to you, otherwise it doesn’t count as language.’

In a gesture that he must have picked up from Inés, the boy tosses his head dismissively. ‘La la fa fa yam ying! Look at me!’ (*Childhood* 221)

Coetzee is calling upon readers to consider David’s questions “Why Spanish?” And what is wrong with other languages if they mean something to the speakers? Is not this how languages are created over time?

Language is not the only struggle in the Jesus novels, specifically regarding David and Simón’s realization that life is limited in Novilla. To find a distraction from his lingering memories in *The Childhood of Jesus*, and with David being in the care of his mother Inés, Simón follows the stevedores’ advice to find an evening class in the Leisure and Recreational Centre, where choices are limited to languages, life drawing, or philosophy. These classes reflect the same quality of conversation he hears from his colleagues and from Elena, his neighbor, and the availability of what he might enjoy is always closed. Ironically, the life-drawing class is the most popular among the men, something Simón acknowledges without humor, looking at his plate of unsalted noodles. When one of the class’s attendees draws an analogy between knowing the human body and modeling or drawing a naked woman, Simón is in a state of dismay about how long it takes the people of Novilla to understand the “the body” when “spending a few nights with a woman [will] teach you all you need to know about the body as body” (*Childhood* 146). And this is what Elena and Ana have accused him of suffering; the two women remark that his bodily needs to be with a woman is merely an illusion.

Hoping to find answers to his pressing needs or to comprehend the validity of his memories, David finds academic philosophy absurd and useless. Debating with Eugenio, the regular philosophy student, he finds it hard to follow the Platonic discussions of the chairness of a chair, “Sillicidad,” or what “lies behind all the diversity” (*Childhood* 142) of all chairs and tables, as it is easier to test a chair’s properties with a simple “kick.” Simón’s life is not complete, as he misses part of either an old memory or the undefined illusion of having one. He confides to Eugenio about this missing piece he needs:

Something is missing, Eugenio. I know it should not be so, but it is. The life I have isn’t enough for me. I wish someone, some saviour, would descend from the skies and wave a magic wand and say, Behold, read this book and all your questions will be answered. Or, Behold, here is an entirely new life for you. You don’t understand that kind of talk, do you?’ (*Childhood* 283)

Simón is seeking learning through experience, not a metaphysical concept that is hard to grasp. He is trapped between two worlds: a world where he once had a memory, or believes he had one, and the unimaginative world of Novilla. This is not to say that he never tries to enrich the quality of his life, but the outcomes never please him or bring change. At the end of *The Childhood of Jesus*, and after he has been injured by the crane, he tries to see the world differently, through the eyes of David. He fancies seeing like him, with his magnitude, self-worth, and his concepts of numbers floating on islands. In Estrella, and near the end of *The Schooldays of Jesus*, Simón attempts, body and soul, to join this world of mysticism.

On David’s side, learning is always acceptable if paired with imagination. The little boy admits knowing how to read as early as age six, without being instructed. He

makes up stories about the fate of his nightly hero, Don Quixote, and accepts the fact that they both- David and Don Quixote, are dreamers and understand each other. Being without a memory, as is Simón, David is able to create illusions that validate his present existence, not just his past. His family also acknowledges his abilities, but with skepticism: “He is confident, but his confidence isn’t always well founded... he believes he has powers he does not really have” (*Schooldays* 73). As he goes to school in Novilla, David struggles to match his imagination to the school system, resulting in a conflict between his family and the authorities. He cannot yield to his teacher, Señor León’s authority, so long as the latter does not believe in his imagination. Being an exceptional child in Novilla is not a privilege; it rather labels one as disobedient and in need of reforming. As Señor León puts it: “Refusing to listen to his teacher does not mean a child is exceptional, it just means he is disobedient. If you insist the boy must have special treatment, let him go to Punto Arenas. They know how to deal with exceptional children there” (*Childhood* 267). Moreover, the school’s testing process, used to measure progress, does not adequately measure David’s abilities to read and write. He taught himself to read, as his mother confirms, but he does not know when and how the school expects him to show it.

The education in Estrella, at the first attempt, does not carry any hope for understanding or nourishing David’s abilities. In *The Schooldays of Jesus*, and after the family has run away from Novilla to Estrella to save David from the educational authority, the family tries to teach him at home through a private tutor. When Señor Robles struggles with David’s imaginative math calculations, he declares that he has a “cognitive deficit” that impedes him from thinking like a rational human being: “We do

not need to see each tree as an individual entity, as animals do, we can see it as an example of the class ‘*tree*.’ It also makes mathematics possible” (*Schooldays* 30–31). However, as the name Estrella (“star”) indicates, David finds the educational approaches that enable him to succeed through dancing. Choosing to pursue dance is a pivotal stage in David’s life and in the lives of his family members. At the Academy of Dance, Ana Magdalena is “guiding the souls of our students toward that realm, to bringing them in accord with the great underlying movement of the universe, or, as we prefer to say, the dance of the universe” (68). Here, David finds an imaginative environment to support his methods of learning. He excels in dancing all the prime numbers, bringing all the stars down to Earth. Calling prime numbers from the sky is not an orthodox method to teach math, music and dance; it is an imaginative method to call the numbers to descend to the sky to become a star. To elaborate this idea, Ana Magdalena and her husband, Señor Arroyo hold an open evening to educate parents about the educational philosophy of the Academy:

To bring the numbers down from where they reside, to allow them to manifest themselves in our midst, to give them body, we rely on the dance. Yes, here in the Academy we dance... so as to bring the numbers to life. As music enters us and moves us in dance, so the numbers cease to be mere ideas, mere phantoms, and become real ...

In the dance we call the numbers down from where they live among the aloof stars. We surrender ourselves to them in dance, and while we dance, by their grace, they live among us...

The numbers you have in mind, the numbers we use when we buy and sell, are not true numbers but simulacra. They are what I call ant numbers. Ants, as we know, have no memory. They are born out of the dust and die into the dust.

*(Schooldays 68-9)*

Later, David's metaphysical understanding of the world enchants Simón into pursuing an education again after all the failed attempts in Novilla. David is Simón's idol: His example is enough to encourage Simón to start again, from scratch, in an attempt to understand the soul, stars, and numbers.

## CHAPTER 4:

### EMOTIONS OR ILLUSIONS

The residents of Novilla and all the immigrants who join them are described as being “washed-clean” of all their memories and past connections. However, it is never clear if this act of forgetting is, as Ng and Sheehan describe, “a physical process by which memories of the past are scrubbed away (in, say, the journey from Belstar to Novilla); or whether it is merely a convention, a necessary social contract [for] gaining admittance to Novilla” (Ng 96). The insistence that all the inhabitants have forgotten their former lives and identities is, in itself, an invitation to inquire more about the method and its validity and how it can be guaranteed that the residents of Novilla will not remember anything at all. In other words, how can this “washing” be so selective? How is it possible to forget memories, passions and names but still remember skills and be aware of not remembering anything? As Simón goes through life in Novilla, he realizes that something is missing from his life: the need to love and be loved. Despite the fact that the people in Novilla are “curiously benevolent and diligent, and most things [being] free of charge, Simón is constantly frustrated by the emptiness of the life here; people are not interested in sex,” he complains (Tajiri 187). The life there is dully complacent: Residents are not interested in spicing food or eating meat for breakfast, not interested in using innovative methods at work to save time and energy, not interested in making conversations about random thoughts. The people of Novilla simply lack a passion in all areas of their lives.

When Simón starts on his quest in Novilla to find David’s mother, he presses Ana, who works at the immigration center, to help him find her. Since he does not know the mother’s name, he trusts his instinct to let him recognize her name when he sees it.

He is guided by lingering memories in a way that seems absurd and impossible in Novilla. After many attempts to persuade Ana to search the records to look for David's mother, she agrees to help, but not in the way he was hoping, because she says, "People have washed themselves clean of old ties [and] you should be doing the same: letting go of old attachments, not pursuing them" (*Childhood* 24). Ana is saying that, in Novilla, you need to live as you arrived, and not look for previous attachments or pursue desires. Ana is the first person to shock Simón about the manner of the life he should adopt in Novilla. He is perplexed about the existence of his own appetites and keeps wondering, "What are our appetites for if not to tell us what we need? If we had no appetite, no desires, how would we live? What is wrong with satisfying an ordinary appetite?" (36–7). In Novilla, "the aim is to secure material improvement, rather than release from emotional or psychological suffering" (Mehigan 168).

These troubling questions keep lingering in Simón's mind-- especially after he has secured a residence and a job. Something is still missing; because of it, he cannot adjust to his new life. When Ana closes the conversation on appetites and desires, he finds refuge in the presence of his neighbor, Elena, through whom he tries to find the answers and about whom he daydreams. She repeatedly tells Simón that he is "suffer[ing] from memories" (*Childhood* 69) and that his inquiries about sleeping with women are a "strange thing to be preoccupied with" (69). A memory is a form of suffering in Novilla because of what it carries from the past, and since everyone has lost their memories, he should too. Joyce Carol Oates summarizes Simón's struggle when she says that,

He has difficulty adjusting. He has lost his memory yet retains a discomfiting "memory of having a memory." Although he tries to conform to the worker-and



society, he feels alienated from the very atmosphere of Novilla — a generalized “benevolence,” “a cloud of good will.” Nothing seems urgent here, nothing is privatized. All is generic, universal, impersonal. (Oates, “Coetzee”)

The life Simón finds in Novilla is “*Anodina*”: a life that is insignificant without the turbulence of life, a life “too placid for his taste, too lacking in ups and downs, in drama and tension” (*Childhood* 76).

The problem is not only in having memories but in the illusion of having them. Elena points out that Simón’s unhappiness is the result of his lingering memories-- or his memory of having memories. He holds onto the idea that something is missing in his life, and he keeps seeking it. Elena explains to him how she sees the continuous needs he is experiencing:

The name you choose to give this *something-more* that is missing is passion. Yet I am willing to bet that if tomorrow you were offered all the passion you wanted – passion by the bucketful – you would promptly find something new to miss, to lack. This endless dissatisfaction, this yearning for the something-more that is missing is a way of thinking we are well rid of, in my opinion. *Nothing is missing*. The nothing that you think is missing is an illusion. You are living by an illusion. (*Childhood* 75)

But Simón’s struggle with memories is what makes him different, at least in Novilla. He will not give up until all the doors of opportunity are shut. In other words, “Simón’s nostalgia, his inability to let go, would mark him as sensitive, empathetic and human” (Ng 98). He also instills this idea in David upon their arrival; he is aiding David’s memory of having memories, as this is what will help him find his mother: “You may

think you are washed clean, but you aren't. You still have your memories, they are just buried, temporarily" (*Childhood* 26).

Living a life without passion is not what Simón wants. Even after all the explanations from Ana and Elena, with their disappointments, he is still determined to go after this "something more" he believes he needs. However, after trying sex with Elena, and knowing that she was not interested, he asks himself if he should adopt her way of life and let go of his lingering memories so as to better fit into this new life. But in considering this, he questions whether "the price we pay for this new life, the price of forgetting, may not be too high" (*Childhood* 71-2). He tries to reason with her about the possibility of reviving these feelings, but ultimately the surroundings close him down. Nevertheless, Simón does not stop seeking. In an attempt to satisfy his needs, he visits the Leisure and Recreational Centre in the hope of finding relief, but that is not as fruitful as he had hoped. The Centre makes him feel uneasy with its limited choice of classes, its food plainness, and its useless philosophy. His last attempt to find comfort and relief from his desires in the Salóns increases the burden of his memories, making him feel alienated and disconnected. The Salóns, or *The Leisure and Recreational Centres*, are clubs where men where they can have access to "personal counselling[,], stress relief[, and] physical therapy" (*Childhood* 162) all provided by females. The process of applying, the questions, and the long waiting list exasperate Simón and increase the level of his feeling that he is different from the other residents: "I am beginning to think there is something in my speech that marks me as a man stuck in the old ways, a man who has not forgotten" (169). Despite these attempts to find himself and to fulfill his passions in Novilla, his feelings towards David are still strong, and he grows fonder of him with

every passing day. Simón's passions are gradually directed towards the boy and his well-being once he realizes that there is nothing in Novilla that can meet his desires.

To survive, humans need their memories of the past. James McGaugh explains that, "all of our knowledge of our world, and our skills in living in it, are based on memories of our experience. So, too, are our plans and dreams. Life without memory is difficult to imagine. After all, imagination requires memory. A life without memory would be no life at all" (ix). In applying this to the residents of Novilla and to Simón, we can see that Simón, alone, is trying to be human, to live a life with memory: a recollection of wanting and desiring that make human lives a valuable experience. The satisfaction or dissatisfaction of an experience is always remembered even if the experience is forgotten, and retaining these memories is a rather complicated process. In Novilla, having memories is recognized as a form of suffering. However, Simón is willing to accept them and to pursue them further. He calls them the "shadows of memories" (*Childhood* 77), and he admits to holding onto these shadows. But can he continue to live while still retaining these shadows? Does the presence of the shadows obstruct or contradict his "washed-clean state"? Tim Mehigan questions this concept as presented in *The Childhood of Jesus*: "How is the memory of the old to be hidden and yet also held onto and retained? How can we maintain our ties to the past and yet also change?" (166–7). However, the act of washing is both a chance for rebirth and, as Simón's experience reveals, "a violation of the self as an entity with a past, an entity in possession of [m]emories laying deeper than all thoughts" (Ng 96). J. M. Coetzee is examining here the possibility of hiding and burying the past deeply-- all experiences, all needs and secrets-- and then living a simple, happy life of productivity. These are novels

that go beyond questions of one's place and role in history, beyond the simple urge to represent historical facts with verisimilitude. Rather, they ask questions like the following: "What am I doing when I represent? What is the difference between living in the real world and living in a world of representations?" (Attwell, "Face" 237). Through this, Coetzee put a focus on "the ageing body and its vulnerabilities; on passion and rationality; disconnectedness from one's own past and possible future; on a longing for affection; and on the fear of mortality" (Dimitriu 59).

With the sudden changes in David's situation and his running away from the reform school in Punta Arenas, the family arrives in Estrella to start their "new life" (*Childhood* 320). It is a new life indeed, with the extremity of emotions it provokes in the family. In the course of the second novel, *The Schooldays of Jesus*, it becomes clear that the memories created in Novilla are remembered and not washed away. But what about the previous shadows of memories that Simón used to suffer from? Early in their time in Estrella, a long argument ensues between Simón and David around the truth of their memories before they were in the boat in Belstar. Simón assures David that memories can be false, as "we have no way of telling whether what these people remember are true memories or made-up memories. Because sometimes a made-up memory can feel just as true as a true memory, particularly when we want the memory to be true. We just have no way of telling for sure whether a memory is true or false" (*Schooldays* 17). In other words, Simón is dubious about the reality of his memories and their shadows, and he is now completely in favor of "made-up" memories, regardless of their truth or validity.

The position that Simón adopts is accurate insofar as memories can be made-up, and the more we convince ourselves of their legitimacy, the truer they become. Ian Hacking supports this view when he notes that:

Most people now accept the commonplace that memory is itself like a camcorder, creating, when it works a faithful record. We do not reproduce in memory a sequence of events that we have experienced... We touch up, supplement, delete, combine, interpret, shade. (247 qtd in Campbell 11)

As the discussion continues between the boy and Simón, David states his wish neither to marry nor to have passions in the future. Simón responds to this remark by saying that “passions have a life of their own” (*Schooldays* 21). Life in Estrella is different from that in Novilla. It seems they found the new life they were seeking, but why is Simón not trying to find a Salon or a men’s club to release his sexual passions? Simón has gone through the burying stage: the stage Elena described earlier but which needed time. He is content with his single life. He never complains about his need for female company, and his relationship with David starts to alter as he becomes immersed in his dancing at the Academy of Dance. Simón is directing his memories of passion, or the illusions of these memories, into a place of understanding and starting over. He buries them and instead calls to the mystical unknown numbers to appear in the horizon.

Nevertheless, passions are powerfully present in Estrella in the person of Dmitri, the museum caretaker, whose job is to take care of beauty, whose passion is paired with violence. A passion seeker himself, Simón never approves of Dmitri’s behavior towards Ana Magdalena, nor does he believe the accuracy of the correspondence between the two. Until the end of the book, Simón doubts that such an alabaster lady could have

passions for Dmitri, given his standards of couples and passions. Although Simón had tried to pursue his passions in Novilla, regardless of his age and looks, he finds it hard to believe that such a “strikingly beautiful” (*Schooldays* 43) woman could be attracted to the “smelly, oily haired” Dmitri (47). Simón is holding his appetites at a distance: he is directing what is left of his energy toward a better understanding of the world around him, towards understanding David’s visions and the truth of his own memories.

In *Schooldays of Jesus*, Simón is returning to what seems to be reality in much the same way Don Quixote did before he completely gave up all his dreams and illusions. Simón is ready to let go of those dreams, but he decides to try one last time to give himself over to the new mystical dancing, to start again from nothing with the badly-fitting, silver dancing shoes. Simón wants to understand numbers, wants to submit to the world of dancing, to fit in a small-size silver dancing shoes after cutting the toe ends with a blazer and lace it up. Wearing the “clown shoes” (*Schooldays* 259) and bearing the laughs of Mercedes, the dance instructor, he dances. With all its awkwardness, the last scene of the second novel is a new beginning: “embodying an abstract idea in the physical world in a way that came so easily to the young David” (Kirsch 40). This new life of Simón’s in Estrella is the twist that pairs him with Don Quixote. He is no more a dreamer; he is starting again, born again to reach for a new meaning in life, starting from the vision of an imaginative child.

## CHAPTER 5:

### CONCLUSION

In *Slow Man* (2005), Coetzee “writes the story of migration as an ending, while in *The Childhood of Jesus* [he] writes it as a beginning” (Atwell, “Face” 222). The Jesus novels present a network of arguments about reality and imagination woven with allegories and philosophical debates. Coetzee has tried, throughout his previous literary works, to prepare his readers for the intensity and dense philosophy in his writing. This time he uses a child, David, as the main character in his two novels, and this is the first time he has done that. He bestows upon David a greater capacity for imaginative attention, freedom of speech, and philosophical insight than any adult character. The truth about David’s existence and his relationship with Simón is Coetzee’s focus. The memories of their past lives were washed away during the journey to Novilla, and new needs arise with the shadows of the memories that remain.

As the touchstone of the Jesus novels, the shadow of Don Quixote lingers around Simón and David, with each trying to imitate his heroism and avoid his submission to reality. The two, through their different readings of the same book, focus on actions that they find heroic and then adopt in real life. David, who wished to be a life-saver or a magician who disappears, is a source of inspiration, an imaginative soul, who never accepts adult realities; Simón, on the other hand, is busy balancing his life between his memories and the actions of heroic fatherhood. They are both dreamers, but they create different identities and chose different visions of their worlds. In his writing, “Coetzee is certainly not interested in writing books for escapism or entertainment. His is a

philosophical approach to literature. He uses fiction like steel wool to scrub away at himself in the hope of revealing unadorned truths” (White).

New beginnings are hard to achieve, and human experience is not easy to forget; but it can be redirected. J.M. Coetzee draws an intimate line between the past experiences, or what we imagine as one, and the real life lived. He himself admits to favouring imagination over reality as he puts it in his writing: “[F]rom what I write it must be evident that I don’t have much respect for reality. I think of myself as using rather than reflecting reality in my fiction” (Coetzee, *Good* 69). Rather, “his interest lies in people’s relationship to the stories they tell themselves about reality, and also in the implicit social contract between writer and reader” (Dimitriu 61). In other words, he wants to experience how far people are capable of remembering, how much of what they remember is true, how memory shapes our personalities, and, ultimately, what we become if we cannot remember any of these past experiences. Coetzee is leading the readers to question the “equilibrium between binaries: rationality and imagination; mind and body; belonging and peripatetic existence” (Dimitriu 60).

The *Jesus* novels starts with, Simón and David, two strangers finding who they are, struggling to build identities, seeking a better life and relief of passions, and trying to fit into a docile city. Both they and the residents of Novilla, are clean of all past memories, and personalities, to start again from nothing to build a new self. Acting like a role model for David, Simón fails to impress the child with his rational behaviors, as he always feels the necessity of missing basic needs. By doing this, he, unintentionally directs David to the path of alternative idols and puts himself on the search for his lost reality. Comparing his passions with that of the wild Daga’s and dangerous Dimtri’s, and



their power over David, he asks whether one who can be too passionate, will be too violent.

The novels end with a new start, as fresh as that of their arrival, with the Simón learning how to obey the rules of imagination, following David's steps in the same Academy, by the same teachers towards the stars. Though the Jesus novels are easy to read, their interpretation is not easy. Coetzee writes about numerous interlocking issues concerning family, feelings, inclusiveness, and the meaning of all life wrapped with an allegorical tale. He is planting questions on every level, without providing answers, leaving his readers to decide whether their lives are just an illusion or a rewriting of older lives. Hence, with each reader, each different experience, each identity, there is always a different interpretation. In the Jesus Novels, Coetzee's manipulation of illusions and memories has altered the characters' self-perception and emotions. Their lost memories, or the memory of having a memory, has set them in a pursuit for a new self, a new start, and new feelings. It is an invitation to question if what people remember about themselves, and their experiences can hinder them from finding who they are. It is a plea to start again, with absolutely nothing, from nothing. Simón and David, with different levels of remembrance, have managed to build new identities and lead their emotions to different directions through different processes of learning.

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