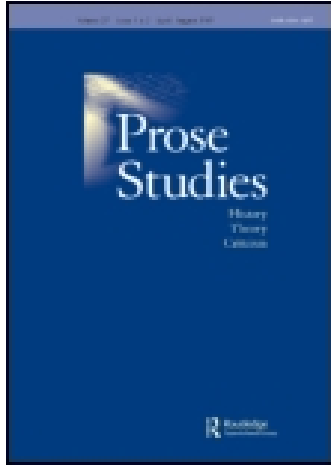


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Tom Ratekin

WORKING THROUGH THE FOUR DISCOURSES

Gillian Rose and the products of *Love's Work*

This article applies Jacques Lacan's four discourses to two memoirs, Love's Work and Paradiso, written by the British philosopher Gillian Rose during her treatment for cancer. It shows how Rose's evaluation and use of the different discourses parallels the trajectory of the psychoanalytic process as described by Lacan. First, Rose examines the discourses of the university and master and describes how they have positioned her in society. She then adopts the discourse of the hysteric in order to critique and demystify these positions. The analyst's discourse emerges in the action of writing the memoir itself. The empty page or screen veils and therefore evokes the object a, the cause of desire, instigating her revision of her own story. The analyst's discourse is particularly prevalent in the memoir form and provides a supplement to the novelistic "plot," a supplement that emerges in the form of the creation of new master signifiers. Thus, in Rose's case, the product of the four discourses is the strategy of "love's work," which prioritizes the effort of desire over perfect peace. The work of desire, which by definition addresses a flaw or lack, reconnects Rose to both her diseased body and the kernel of her desire that resists assimilation into the dominant discourse.

Keywords discourse; memoir; genre; cancer; philosophy; Lacan; Zizek; the postmodern

In her autobiographical writing, the British philosopher Gillian Rose evokes several qualities associated with one of literature's most discussed tragic heroes: Antigone. Antigone and Rose both present a detachment from the discourses that attempt to dominate them, asserting a freedom that appears both radical and exciting. In fact, in *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques Lacan argues that Antigone possesses a particular beauty because she is "between two deaths," having suffered a symbolic death prior to her physical death. A similar fascinating beauty is present in Rose's autobiographical work, the popular *Love's Work* (1995) and the posthumously published collection of "descants," *Paradiso* (1999). For Antigone as well as Gillian Rose, a meaningful life is created by connecting to individual desire despite the judgment of the world. Satisfaction comes not from a perfect peace, but from work and the feelings that develop out of risk and effort. For Rose, love emerges through a constant dialectic with desire and the lack that desire implies, not by protecting oneself with the status quo or an imaginary wholeness. Rose and Antigone – heroines committed to ethics – enact their desire through agonistic engagement.

In *Love's Work*, Gillian Rose uses the memoir form to provide her philosophical ideas with a personal context. When a philosopher such as Rose turns to the memoir form, a natural question to pose is what knowledge and experience can the memoir convey that academic discourse cannot? In addition, Rose's cancer diagnosis complicates that question. Given that she has a limited period to live and work, how is the memoir form a response to that limitation? Every text documents the fulfillment of a particular desire. If it did not serve the author in some way, it would not have been written. As Bruce Fink has pointed out, "a particular discourse facilitates certain things and hinders others, allows one to see certain things while blinding one to others" (130). This is particularly evident in the realm of genre, where an oversimplified example could be that poetry promotes interiority and hinders dialog, while drama promotes dialog and inhibits interiority. In his *Theory of the Novel*, Georg Lukács connects genre to psychosocial development, explaining the epic and novel in terms of integrated civilizations, with the novel emerging as the epic in a world "abandoned by God." One may conjecture that the type of integration that dominates modern consciousness is the integration of the self or subject. As traditional meta-narratives such as religion have waned, therapy and counseling have shifted the responsibility of happiness or utopia onto the individual. The memoir is the literary structure most suited to a society that accepts a radical split within the subject because its central problematic is the exploration of that split as presented in the gap between the author and the protagonist. Whereas a traditional autobiography may be dominated by knowledge and ideals, the modern memoir explores unconscious desire and the lack within the subject. *Love's Work* is an excellent example of the modern memoir in that we see first the ideals Rose has been given, then the traumatic effect of those ideals, and finally how she comes to terms with that trauma by creating her own master's discourse, or her own life philosophy. And the writing of the memoir is specifically connected to circumstances in her life. The immanence of death, which has forced Rose to surrender control of her body, also allows her to surrender control of her narrative, paradoxically separating her from philosophy as a fixed body of knowledge and connecting her to her own desire.

I will use Rose's work to show that a common and striking aspect of the genre of memoir is its resemblance to the psychoanalytic process. Although autobiographical writing varies tremendously, the literary memoir that has become popular in the last 20 years is often structured around the psychoanalytic processes of alienation and separation. First, the author describes her position in the world, or her alienation in the symbolic or big Other. Then, the author describes, or in fact enacts, a separation from that position and places herself within her own discourse, finally traversing the fantasy which supported the original position in the symbolic. For a detailed understanding of this process, I will use Lacan's four discourses as presented in *Seminar XVII*. As Mark Bracher explains, "These two processes [alienation and separation] can be seen as moving the analysand through the four structures of discourse identified by Lacan" (69). Thus, Lacan's four discourses will help us understand in more detail what kinds of knowledge the modern literary memoir facilitates and what knowledge it hinders as the author traverses the fantasy in the writing of the text.

For Gillian Rose, terminal illness also plays a role in the movement through these discourses, as the traumatic recognition of mortality instigates the memoir and thus this particular form of separation. The threat to ego attachments presented by cancer allows one to view life, and one's life-story, in a new way.¹ Therefore in Rose's

discourse, aesthetic closure and the closure of a life intersect, providing a variation of Scheherazade's work: storytelling keeps one alive. However, establishing an end to the story enables an acceptance of death. The striking aspect of Rose's narrative is that she does not describe a diminishing of desire, but an intensification that comes from a new freedom. Using Lacan's four discourses, I will show how this freedom is achieved. Rose presents examples of all four discourses within her text, using primarily the discourse of the hysteric to demystify all that she deems inessential. She then uses the discourse of the analyst – that is, an act of subjective destitution – to lay the ground for the eventual establishment of a new master discourse that incorporates her failing body and the ever-presence of mortality.

In his book *Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change*, Mark Bracher explains that in the four discourses particular effects are produced depending on the “roles or positions occupied in each discourse by four psychological factors – knowledge, ideals, self-division, and jouissance” (53). Lacan represents these factors with his own symbols: master signifiers are (S1), the network of signifiers or the system of knowledge is (S2), the Real that is excluded and produced by a system of knowledge is (*a*), and the divided subject, split between identity and desire, is (\$) (Bracher 53). Lacan places these four elements in a structure that resembles the multiplication of two fractions:

$$\frac{\text{Agent}}{\text{Truth}} \quad \frac{\text{Other}}{\text{Product/Loss}}$$

The function of the agent determines the position of the other three representatives, and thereby structures that particular discourse. For example, in the master's discourse, the agent is S1 (ideals); in the university discourse the agent is S2 (knowledge); in the hysteric's discourse \$ (the split subject) is the agent, and in the analyst's discourse the agent is *a* (jouissance). The four discourses are, of course, not exhaustive in their reduction of discourse to these four terms. They provide, however, a means of describing connections between the subject, language, desire, and the world that are particularly relevant to any discussion of the effect created by a language structure or genre.

University

Perhaps most familiar and therefore most easily grasped is the discourse of the university.² The best example of the university's discourse emerges in Rose's description of her experiences in school and as an undergraduate. Having already described her childhood inclination toward “Protestantism” and her belief in agonistic development, her disappointment with the rigid orthodoxy and unquestioned authority of these institutions comes as no surprise. Rose's impatience is palpable as she describes the study of philosophy at Oxford:

It [school] did not prepare me for the deeper stupidity of reading philosophy at university. The oppressive opulence of Oxford was married to a vision of philosophy which would have induced in me a lifelong alienation from it, had I not already made the pact with my *daemon* [emphasis in original]. At St. Hilda's

College, reading Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, I was taught philosophy by Jean Austin, the widow of the philosopher J. L. Austin. Jean Austin had published a paper on “The Meaning of Happiness,” for which she was well qualified in her aura of tense dejection, chain-smoking with shaky hands, her nails stained orange with nicotine. A cramped, nervous figure, she received us in the spacious, slow sitting-room overlooking the river and the Botanical Gardens. “Remember, girls, all the philosophers you will read are much more intelligent than you are.” The vacant, derogatory ethos of this initiation could not hide the contrary truth. Jean Austin did not think females could be trusted to read philosophy, to play the game. Hand-picked and super intelligent, they would either find the rules of the game fatuous, or *horribile dictu*, they might imagine that philosophy had some substance which exceeded the celebrated idea that certain kinds of propositions have illocutionary or perlocutionary force. “You do understand, philosophy has absolutely no use at all” (*Love's Work* 129–30).

We see that in this description Rose is put in the position of the object *a*, receiver of the totalized and comprehensive system of knowledge represented by Oxford and, specifically, Jean Austin. The distance between this system of knowledge and Rose's own interest and desires creates a feeling of “alienation” in Rose (her word) – an estrangement between herself and the goals of the system. The details of Rose's description highlight her feelings of oppression within the university discourse. Rose implies that Austin's separateness from her scholarly subject – happiness – is both cause and effect of her own unhappiness, and the extra information of Austin's prominent husband and the luxurious rooms and grounds suggest a structure only interested in maintaining its power, not evaluating or rejuvenating it.

Rose's commentary makes clear that she felt there was no place for her own agency in this environment. The statements establishing the philosophers' superior intelligence and philosophy's uselessness oppressed her individuality and imagination. As presented by Rose, Austin's university discourse was a structure riddled with fear; the professor feared that if she educates her students they will not play the game; that is, they will not reproduce the power structure exactly as it is. And Rose's physical description of Austin implies that fear separates her from her own desire and, therefore, happiness.

Rose goes on to describe her frustration when attempting to connect the required reading (Hume) with a passion of her own (Diderot). “Pronounced perverse” and sent to rewrite the essay, Rose strung together passages from Hume and received praise for her unthinking repetition of the established discourse. Not content with this praise, however, Rose informs Austin that she is only playing the game: “If that's the best essay on Hume you've ever had, it's because Hume wrote it” (*Love's Work* 130). Rose will not adapt to the dominant discourse, so sure is she of her own values and beliefs.

Master

In her description of her education at Oxford, Gillian Rose sets up an opposition between Jean Austin, who represents a “deeper stupidity,” and Jean Floud, who saved Rose “from this pernicious nonsense” (*Love's Work* 130). The example of Floud provides the reader

with an image of a Master's discourse that was satisfactory to Rose at one time. It is not the new Master discourse she will present at the end of *Love's Work*, but in presenting this role model Rose illustrates the elements of the dominant fantasy that runs through her life. Jean Floud's attractiveness to Rose is encapsulated in Floud's statement: "How I dislike teaching undergraduates from the women's colleges. They will have been taught so badly." Rose writes that she "bloomed in this degradation," and knew that [she] had found "a kindred spirit" (*Love's Work* 130). Although Rose shows both Austin and Floud criticizing their students, she finds Floud's criticism inspiring because it emphasizes the student's potential to fill, through work and good teaching, the lack she experiences. Floud acknowledges lack, but acts to improve on it, whereas Austin presents the philosophical canon as absolute knowledge. Austin emphasizes tradition and idolatry; Floud emphasizes the individual subject and work. This shift from prioritizing the system of knowledge to specific knowledge within a system reflects the movement from the discourse of the university to the discourse of the master.³

All knowledge, according to Lacan, begins as a discourse of mastery; master signifiers "ground and explain the procedure of a body of knowledge that constitutes the discipline" (Bracher 60). Philosophy as a discipline promotes a certain way of speaking, and is therefore a particularly obvious example of the master's discourse. As Bracher points out,

Philosophical criticism – including even deconstruction, which criticizes the master signifiers of philosophy – finds it very difficult to escape becoming another master discourse, as demonstrated by the proliferation in the 1970s and early 1980s of deconstructive master signifiers like "logocentric," "aporia," and "undecidability" (60).

This is an argument Rose herself has used against deconstruction.⁴ Yet, her own discourse promotes potential master signifiers such as "broken middle," "activity beyond activity," and as I will later discuss, "love's work," seeing in these terms an alternative to static theory or nihilistic despair. Therefore, in order for Rose to convey and promote her ideas, she must place them within an alternative body of knowledge that always risks becoming a new master's discourse. This paradox is the "tragedy of reason" with which all of her writing and thought wrestles.

In the preface to *Paradiso*, Howard Caygill provides a brief explanation of the difficulty of Rose's writing and places it within the narrative of her life:

Gillian Rose enjoyed the reputation of being a difficult author....Rose relished hearing stories from defeated readers of her first work, and would crown them with information that it began life as a commission to write a cookery book....The recourse to a difficult style did not arise from an incapacity to write clearly – as testified by the limpid essays that make up *Judaism and Modernity* (1993) and the posthumous *Mourning Becomes the Law* (1996) – but reflected the working through of the intrinsic difficulty of a "trauma within reason itself" (Caygill 7).

Caygill's description implies that because she chose to make her philosophical writing difficult, Rose gained pleasure from alienating her readers. Difficulty emerges as an escape from the paradox of reason because it demands work, the active engagement

of the reader in establishing meaning, and therefore will not allow these terms to accrue power separate from thought. Rose's solution in her philosophical writing is to accept the establishment of new master signifiers, but to counter their dominating effect by making the new signifiers abstract and difficult to penetrate or proliferate, thereby depriving them of their self-evident quality. We see in Caygill's comments and in the writing of *Love's Work* that this difficulty is something that Rose abandons when she learns that her life is ending. This shift, I believe, occurs because this original set of master signifiers are a reaction to the systemized discourse of philosophy, while near the end of her life Rose broadens her perspective and her audience. Confronted with the rhetoric of the medical establishment, new age mysticism, and the self-help language of happiness, she is pushed into establishing a new master discourse that will counter the alienation she, and many others from different backgrounds, experience from these pervasive belief systems.

Hysteric

If, however, we believe Caygill that *Love's Work* is Rose's "most difficult and esoteric act of indirect communication," (Caygill 8) how is this difficulty different from that found in her philosophy? And is the popular success of *Love's Work* related to or in spite of this difficulty? I suggest that *Love's Work* is a text propelled by death and the acceptance of fate. The book's difficulty lies not in the style, although it contains its share of linguistic challenges, but in not providing familiar formulas for addressing trauma. This difficulty paradoxically becomes its attractiveness or beauty, because Rose's unusual views and allusions emerge as the result of a fiercely independent subjectivity.

Love's Work carries the subtitle "a Reckoning with Life," a phrase that implies the settling of accounts. The "reckoning" of *Love's Work* suggests Rose's challenge – to herself and her audience – to honestly evaluate how her actions have tallied up. The memoir thus becomes a test of her philosophical ideas through the example of her life, and it counters Jean Austin's assertion that philosophy has no use. The expectations of the subtitle are not completely fulfilled, however, in that a reckoning implies a final outcome, and this is precisely what Rose refuses to provide. In Rose's narrative, the reckoning becomes the point in and of itself, and she leaves the outcome to those uncomfortable with the broken middle, or those who insist on a permanent master's discourse and the illusion of wholeness. The process of reckoning, and therefore the text as act, becomes its own example of her project's worth.

In *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács laments the distance between "the conventionality of the objective world and the interiority of the subjective one" (70) and describes the novel as the attempt to fill that breach, the impossibility of which permeates the novel with irony.⁵ Rose would agree with Lukács's insistence on recognizing this separation, and she connects laments such as Lukács's to the origin of philosophy:

Philosophy, ancient and modern, is born out of this condition of sadness. Metaphysics, which, in Aristotle's technical terms, is concerned with the relation between the universal "nose" and the sheer snubness of a nose, which no term can capture, this remote-sounding metaphysics is the *perplexity*, the *aporia*, at how

to find the path from the law of the concept to the peculiarity of each instance, from “the nose” to the snub (*Love’s Work* 124) [emphasis in original].

For Rose, the separation between the ideal and the specific is not a cause for despair, but a motivation for further work and development. Philosophy, as a process of mourning (and alternative to melancholia) “offers the consolation of reflection” (125). Rose goes on to connect metaphysics, the “perception of the difficulty of the law,” to ethics, the exploration of different routes on the way “towards the good enough justice” (124). And by positing this exploration as the highest good, Rose refines the gap between the ideal and specific as a foundational and integral aspect of the good. Rose’s ability to accept the indefinite allows her to challenge the structures: linguistic, political, and cultural, that typically provide comfort, and to partake in a constant process of becoming, or what she calls the “work.”

It is precisely Rose’s ability to tolerate her own lack and her eagerness to challenge received wisdom that places much of her writing within the discourse of the hysteric.⁶ Because the hysteric’s discourse acknowledges the subject’s split, it questions the master signifier and relies on desire; it is defined by Lacan as a step forward from the university and master’s discourses. The term “hysteric” has quite another meaning from the colloquial or pejorative definition. As we have seen, for Rose, knowledge can only be produced from an acknowledgment of lack – from a recognition of failure or sadness. And since, according to Rose, the activity of the search for meaning is precisely what gives life meaning, lack is valorized and displayed, not papered over. Thus throughout *Love’s Work* lack, embodied in the split-subject, becomes the agent.

Rose discusses her intimacy with lack most clearly in Chapter 4 of the memoir. Unlike Lukacs, Rose has no memory of a childhood ideal, a moment in which all desires were fulfilled. Proclaiming that she “was never an innocent child” Rose presents four “genies” who accompanied her and disturbed any possible mother-child unity: Immigration, Atheism, Divorce, and Dyslexia. Rose places dyslexia as her foremost disability, in that it taught her how to “germinate the other three.” Learning to overcome dyslexia, she acquired a faith in her ability to overcome frustration through work.

Rose sees her dyslexia as more than a physical handicap. Indeed, she suspects that her dyslexia was “an unconscious rebellion against the law, the tradition of the fathers, and against the precipitous fortress of the family” (*Love’s Work* 37). Thus her childhood memories are of “Protestantism” against authority and the father, but they are not contrasted with a pre-linguistic unity. Within the larger text, Rose connects her dyslexia to her skepticism of the symbolic and symbolically anointed identity: “The confusion of names marks the child with the stigmata of the fantasized identity which he cannot assume – and so he stumbles against its central asylum, the written names of the law” (37–8). As stigmata, the names represent what Rose believes she should be, yet she constantly experiences her non-coincidence with these names. However, the working through of her dyslexia establishes a paradigm of effort and reward which Rose repeats throughout life and claims as her own particular method.

Rose learns through the work of reading that “the only paradises cannot be those that are lost, but those that are unlocked as a result of coercion, reluctance, cajolery and humiliation” (40). Reading functions for Rose like a second mirror-stage: “[reading] became the repository of my inner self-relation: the discovery, simultaneous

with the suddenly sculpted and composed words, of distance from and deviousness towards myself as well as others" (40). The mirror-stage child may feel jubilant in anticipation of the unified being she sees in the mirror, but for Rose, the anticipation of unity is connected to *work*. Rose's dyslexia prevents her from easily seeing a unified being in the language that supposedly represents her. Any unity, in fact, comes from her own effort, and this encumbers Rose with the responsibility of creating a unified being, or of being personally accountable for closing the distance between her experience of self and that self's representation. The name as master signifier does not have symbolic efficiency for Rose; it lacks that one-to-one correspondence that supports the self-identical ego. As a consequence, the responsibility to *create* meaning provides Rose with the "incessant anxiety of autonomy" and the belief that she could manage "the world to her own ends" (40).

Rose uses an anecdote to illustrate her complicated relationship to her own name. On her 16th birthday she discarded her father's name, "Stone," and assumed her stepfather's name, "Rose." She makes clear that even these names are simply substitutions, Stone for the Polish-Jewish "Riddell," and "Rose" for the German-Jewish "Rosenthal." Rose describes this as a symbolic act of self-assertion: "[it] served as my bat mitzvah, my confirmation as daughter of the law" (41). Rose attempted to make herself a daughter of the law, but characteristically, she did it on her own terms. Beyond the symbolic value of choosing her own lawful name, the change signified her new ability to dictate the terms of her father's access, thereby subverting his authority. In her act of self-assertion, however, Rose once again is reminded of the limits of her power when she applies for a passport under her new name. "I discovered, to my disgust... that I was officially, in law, at the age of sixteen – worldly, voluptuous and scholarly as I fancied myself – an INFANT SPINSTER" (41). The contrast between the fantasy of adulthood and control promised by the acquisition of the name "Rose" and the government's subjugating label of "infant spinster" reminds Rose yet again of the failure of master signifiers (this time, "Rose") to encapsulate being and reinforces the not-all quality of any term. As in the hysteric's discourse, Rose's anecdote displays how the master signifier is lacking.

Another example of Rose's failure to find protection in language emerges with the death of her grandfather. Rose explains that as he lay dying, her grandfather lapsed into High German, "a language which, like all German products but German automobiles in particular, had been banned from [her] grandparent's house and presence since the war" (57). Building on the pleasure of turning seemingly impenetrable words into meaning that she discovered through dyslexia, Rose taught herself German by reading the philosophy of T. W. Adorno. She explains that she "was attracted by the ethical impulse of his thought, but also by the characteristics of his style, the most notoriously difficult sentence structure and the vocabulary full of *Fremdwörter*" (58). Rose believed that the German language could be a "channel for [her] protestantism against the broken promises of the mother-tongue," but it turned out that she was the only mourner to understand her grandfather in his last days. Paradoxically, her act of rebellion united her with her ancestral tradition, and her story exposes how the unconscious defines and structures what appears to be unequivocal law or meaning. In her grandfather's life, German was forbidden, but it appeared nevertheless. Similarly, German allowed Rose to exist outside a tradition, both by experiencing her dyslexia daily in Adorno's texts, and by acquiring a forbidden language. When the encounter with her grandfather occurred, she was forced to consider to what extent

her learning of German was an unconscious desire, perhaps a desire to return to a repressed element of her family heritage.

These examples show how Rose's deliberate efforts to live her life a particular way were shaped and redefined by forces beyond her control, or, in illustrating Lacan's belief that man's desire is the other's desire (Ecrits 58, 278, 362). As is typical for the modern memoir, Rose structures her text around those opaque moments when logic or reason fails or is diverted by the emergence of desire. Those failures, however, are not melancholy or tragic for Rose. Within the memoir, each failure offers a new opportunity for reflection and knowledge in the same way that sadness spurs philosophic thought. Bruce Fink writes that "knowledge is perhaps eroticized to a greater extent in the hysteric's discourse than elsewhere" (133), and he does not mean the kind of knowledge that explains "how things are," which simply reproduces power, as in the university and master discourses. The hysteric's knowledge of lack as presented by Rose questions orthodoxy and thereby challenges stagnation. Knowledge is not an answer, but "a process of learning, the corrigibility of experience" (*Love's Work* 127). And it is erotic because it evokes and promises a fulfillment beyond the present. It promises a lost, or more specifically, a yet-to-be-discovered object of satisfaction, and in so doing, evokes a paradise that is Real, but not attainable.

One of Rose's most challenging anecdotes describes her connection to her Hasidic neighbors in Stoke Newington. Originally Rose did not realize that she was living in a Hasidic community, but over time she not only discovered this, but partially assimilated into the neighborhood: "on those days when, my own hair unwashed, I dashed to the launderette in the local parade of shops, with a chiffon scarf covering my head, my face scrubbed and unmade-up, I would be greeted and treated as a member" (43). Rose finally recognized how accustomed she had become to the neighborhood when she saw an ordinary English wedding party arrive across the street:

What struck me at once was the lightness of the vision: slender young bridesmaids in short white muslin dresses with loose bare limbs, the adults attired in the pastel hues of matrimonial finery, and the commingling of the sexes in easy high spirits, all on their way from the church ceremony to the jollifications of the reception (44).

Rose's apparent pleasure in this familiar spectacle is undercut, however, by an irrational response; her body responds physically to the exposed lack in the Other that the conflicting cultures create:

My disinterested perception of this happy procession was brusquely interrupted by the loud irruption of a subhuman howling, the source of which was unlocatable. It was howling as if from a dark, dank cave, where some deformed brute had been chained and tempted since time immemorial. The howling did not cease even after the last of the wedding party had disappeared from view.

It was I who was howling, in utter disassociation from myself, the paroxysm provoked by the vivacious contrast between the enviroing Judaism and this epiphany of protestants, the customary, laborious everydayness broken by the moment of marriage, the cloaks of the clandestine pious cleaved by the costumes of those weightless, redeemed beings. To this day, I cannot go to family weddings (44–45).

This passage establishes several apparent contradictions, beginning with the reader's traditional expectation that the author present herself as a coherent, unified subject. Within the memoir, Rose makes her persona just as vulnerable to lack and fallibility as the authority figures she exposes. This particular cut in the smooth surface of Rose's narrator, however, is provoked by the competing representations of pleasure represented by Hasidic Judaism and secularized Protestantism. The appearance of the light, modern, sexual Protestants in the heavily clothed Hasidic neighborhood functions as a metaphorical stripping of the signifier, revealing that underneath both clandestine piety and stylish beauty nothing exists but social convention, and the "howling" conveys the physical, animal response to this momentary emergence of the Real when the fantasmic support has been negated.

Rose's intellect can interpret the signs of both cultures, but her unconscious, perhaps responding to the competing and therefore unfulfillable demands of the particular fantasies presented (heaviness, law, and tradition for the Hasidic community; lightness, pleasure, and the modern for the Christians), reacts with an unsymbolizable, physical symptom, which evokes the discourse of the hysteric as explained by Bracher:

The hysterical structure is in force whenever a discourse is dominated by the speaker's symptom – that is, his or her conflicted mode of experiencing jouissance, a conflict manifested (in experiences such as shame, meaninglessness, anxiety, and desire) as a failure of the subject (\$) to coincide with, or be satisfied with the jouissance underwritten by, the master signifiers offered by society and embraced as the subject's ideals (Bracher 66).

Rose's response to the Protestant wedding party reminds us that despite culture's best attempts to naturalize sacraments such as marriage, a wedding is much more than a routine ceremony. Weddings not only enact the allowable channels for desire and fulfillment, they sanctify those channels, thereby implicitly devaluing other alternatives. In this scenario Rose's dialectic of Judaism and Protestantism is unable to find a synthesis. Assimilated to the everyday labor of her neighborhood and attracted to the lightness of the visitors, she recognizes the artificiality of both, and hence the denial demanded in the fulfillment of their mutual promises. It is precisely the common belief in the wedding as site of unequivocal, unquestionable happiness that makes it a horrifying experience for the non-believer. The naive expectations of the wedding as sacrament or, more colloquially, "the happiest day of one's life" do indeed have a tragic quality when placed in a discourse that throws doubt on the fantasy underlying these sacraments.

Analyst

Bracher summarizes the aim of analysis as helping "the patient encounter, acknowledge, identify, and finally come to identify with this excluded part of his or her being, the *a*" (69). And the analyst participates in this activity because of a disturbance, a disturbance analysis explains as a "conflict between, on the one hand, the identity (the S1) the patient has assumed and tries to maintain, and, on the other hand,

an unconscious desire for jouissance (the *a*) that is excentric to or incommensurable with (i.e. forbidden by) this assumed identity” (Bracher 69). I suggest that the writing of the memoir is similar to the working through of analysis in that through writing Rose hopes to identify the cause of the dissociation and then integrate the new understanding into her definition of her own identity. Just as she was able, through work, to make the jumbled dyslexic letters yield to the broader language, through the work of thought and writing she will place her symptom in a greater linguistic frame and thereby endow it with a more acceptable meaning.

Therefore we see that the memoir is not simply a description of past events but an interrogation by the speaking subject (author) of the subject of the statement (protagonist). In taking one’s self as subject matter, the memoirist finds his/her activity on a split or cut between a conception of self and the failure to coincide with that self. Therefore, the modern memoir typically takes as its subject not the failure of government, society, or a broader symbolic frame, but the failure or gap *within* the individual and the response to that gap which, according to Lacan, is the subject. As Slavoj Žižek explains:

a symbolic field is always and by definition in itself “decentered,” structured around a central void/impossibility (a personal life-narrative, say, is a *bricolage* of ultimately failed attempts to come to terms with some trauma; a social edifice is an ultimately failed attempt to displace/obfuscate its constitutive antagonism); and an act disturbs the symbolic field into which it intervenes not out of nowhere, but precisely *from the standpoint of this inherent impossibility, stumbling block, which is its hidden, disavowed structuring principle* (*Contingency* 125) [emphasis in original].

Within *Love’s Work* the reader follows as Rose explores the experience of her own void/impossibility. She identifies or “maps” the master signifiers (for example, Judaism, Protestantism) that create the conflict, and then uses language to understand and partially reconcile that conflict. Within the vocabulary of alienation and separation presented by Lacan in *Seminar XI*, the mapping enacts alienation, and the reconfiguring displays separation. According to Lacan, it is through the analyst’s discourse:

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \quad \frac{\$}{S_1}$$

that separation is completed. In the analyst’s discourse, object *a*, jouissance or the cause of desire, is the agent, and this desire questions or interrogates the subject’s division (\$) as exhibited in “cracks” or symptoms. This questioning forces the split subject to work to produce connections and produce a new master signifier. This master signifier is superior to the previous ones in that it has been questioned and owned, that is, the subject takes responsibility for it, resulting in an altered sense of identity and, as Rose emphasizes in *Mourning Becomes the Law*, a strengthened understanding of values and ethics.

The similarity between the analytic process, Lacan’s four discourses, and the structure of the memoir can help us understand the attraction that so many people currently have to this genre. If we add current elaborations on Lacan’s concept of the act by Žižek, we see that the structure of the memoir parallels the four discourses and

also takes the act as its central problematic. In his work, Žižek shows how the act enables change – change in the fundamental fantasy that grounds the subject, and change that in turn enables the subject to alter the symbolic. Within the four discourses, the act corresponds to the discourse of the analyst in that both remove the subject from the repetition of familiar patterns by placing lack in the position of the agent. In “Four Discourses, Four Subjects” Žižek explains the discourse of the analyst:

the agent (analyst) reduces himself to the void that provokes the subject into confronting the truth of his desire. Knowledge in the position of “truth” below the bar under the “agent,” of course, refers to the supposed knowledge of the analyst, and, simultaneously, signals that the knowledge gained here will not be the neutral “objective” knowledge of scientific adequacy, but the knowledge that concerns the subject (analysand) in the truth of his subjective position. What this discourse “produces” is then the Master-Signifier (i.e., the unconscious “sinthome”), the cipher of enjoyment, to which the subject was unknowingly subjected (80).

One captivating aspect of the memoir is that its function as narrative entertainment (the internal narrative that resembles the novel) is supplemented by the writing of the memoir as an act in itself. The memoir performs the discourse of the analyst on a level initially separated from the diegesis of the memoir, but eventually reincorporated back into the narrative as the new master-signifier. Susan Griffin has explained this performative experience of memoir writing: “What is so astonishing about putting one’s life into words, about telling a story, is that certain aspects of being are not only revealed but come to exist fully for the first time” (358). The subject presented at the end of the memoir is not the same as the subject at the beginning because the experience of writing has altered that subject. The blank page (or screen) facing the memoirist parallels the void embodied by the Lacanian analyst and produces the transference experienced by the memoirist and the subject within the analyst’s discourse. This is clearly summarized by Rex Butler:

For Žižek, it is just his emphasis on the material presence of the analyst that also characterizes psychoanalysis, and why that “trauma” it diagnoses is not merely to be understood as some repressed and timeless memory the analyst helps us to recover but as something that is played out for real within the psychoanalytic session, something that *does not exist* [my emphasis] before analysis and actual contacts with the analyst (Butler 20).

The memoir (like the analysand) does not simply recount past events. It annuls the identity of the subject in such a way that he or she uses these discursive forms to establish a history that did not previously exist. In both cases, this alternative adds a piece of the Real to the previously accepted discourse, simultaneously unmasking the previous master’s discourse – destroying its aura – but turning the new object, and the new subject, into a sublime object through this supplement.⁷

Rose illustrates her individual process of identifying with her symptom by narrating her reaction to an affair that she had with a priest. It is a great tabloid story, replete with voyeuristic value, but Rose never uses that discourse. Her language remains abstract and metaphorical as she attempts to describe and understand her own

desire. Specific actions and events only appear as they illuminate that desire. Rose chooses this story because it fits a common pattern: “someone who seems free may turn out to be encumbered,” and as a result, “the Beloved is bereft of the Lover; she must become the Lover: she must generate love but without the love she received” (*Love’s Work* 71). This shift from beloved to lover provides a first step in separating from the desire of the other. Bereft of the lover, Rose can no longer respond to the *che vuoi?* (what do you want from me?) that he presented. The love she generates cannot be a response to the lover’s fantasy of her, but instead must come from herself. Removing the lover’s fantasy of her is a first step in the stripping of self that Rose enacts when she adopts the discourse of the analyst within *Love’s Work*.

In order to comprehend her reaction to the failed love affair, she must evaluate the meaning of “love” itself, and what kind of expectations and beliefs she brings to it, just as her previous discourse questioned the meaning of “wedding.” The discourse of philosophy, another support to which she habitually turns, offers no consolation:

Why is it so agonising to the Beloved when the Lover wards off love? The answer “loss” repeats the question. This conversion out of love, its incompleteness, is the illimitable medium of this whole composition. It is the point at which lovelessness confesses that she is investigating herself. Can this be sound method? Sheridan said of Scholasticus that he wanted to learn to swim without entering the water. Here, the method must be circular, and that is why it is not vitiated. Well, I am immersed. But if I am floundering, can I be saved by thrashing around? (72).

The agony that Rose describes is precisely what establishes the fullness of love separated from the support of the fantasy of knowledge. Lack of completion, or loss, exposes desire that had previously been protected or papered-over by the imaginary aspect of the affair. In order for Rose to understand that desire, she must experience it; she must jump in the water not knowing if she will swim or drown. If she does not, she will be caught up in someone else’s discourse, separated from herself and dependent. We see that Rose has accepted risk (thrashing around), thereby demonstrating faith (belief that she will swim). Her decision to love without her love being returned resembles an act in that what appears as a kind of masochistic pain actually enables a better understanding of her own desire and establishes a new freedom. As Žižek explains:

in a situation of the forced choice, the subject makes the “crazy,” impossible choice of, in a way, *striking at himself*, at what is most precious to himself. This act, far from amounting to a case of impotent aggressivity turned on oneself, rather changes the co-ordinates of the situation in which the subject finds himself: by cutting himself loose from the precious object through whose possession the enemy kept him in check, the subject gains the space of free action. Is not such a radical gesture of “striking at oneself” constitutive of subjectivity as such? (*Contingency* 122–23). [emphasis in original]

If we continue the drowning metaphor, the lover functions as a kind of life-preserver that has been removed (removed itself?) so that Rose is forced to learn to swim

or drown. She could search for another life-preserver, but that would inhibit the movement toward radical autonomy that Rose desires. Grasping a new life-preserver would mean giving way to her desire and repeating the symptom.

In her investigation of “love,” Rose chooses to embrace loss, exemplifying a shift from the discourse of the hysteric to the discourse of the analyst:

Let me then be destroyed. For that is the only way I may have a chance of surviving. Let those feelings uniquely called forth by sexual love, my life's passion and pain, my learnt desirability figured out of my primeval undesirability, let them prevail. Now I am not dissociated from my ululation. I hear the roaring and the roasting and know that it is I. Resist the telephone! Even though help is only a few digits away. For the first time, I say “No” to any alleviation, to the mean of friendship, to the endlessly inventive love of my sisters. I don't want to be justified. Keep your mind in hell and... I want to sob and sob and sob... until the prolonged shrieking becomes a shout of joy.

“Loss” means that the original gift and salvation of love have been degraded: love's arrow poisoned and sent swiftly back into the heart. My time-worn remedy has been to pluck the arrow and to prove the wound, testing its resources with protestant concentration. This time I want to do it differently. You may be weaker than the whole world but you are always stronger than yourself. Let me send my power against my power. So what if I die. Let me discover what it is that I want and fear from love. Power and love, might and grace. That I may desire again. I would be the Lover, am barely the Beloved (*Love's Work* 74–75).

Her past strategy of plucking the arrow in order to “prove the wound” reflects the hysteric's investigation of the signifier's lack. Such a strategy stops at the recognition of her howling; it separates the wound from the investigator. In wanting to do it differently, Rose moves to the discourse of the analyst, first by insisting on physically experiencing her desire, and then by refusing to have her ego soothed in the usual ways, such as comfort from her sisters, that would simply return her to her previous self.

In claiming her own “roasting,” Rose expresses a wish to get beyond simple narcissistic desire (the imaginary) to an understanding of a desire that was previously unconscious. When she says “that is the only way I may have a chance of surviving,” she implies that through a recognition of this greater desire she may live in symbiosis with it and not be held captive by her symptoms. And Rose expresses a readiness to take this step in such statements as “Let me then be destroyed” and “So what if I die.” The relaxation of attachments to her ego allows the risk. Sending “my power against my power,” the strength of the unconscious is recognized as greater than the ego, and discovering what she wants and fears from love is a means of accessing that power. By understanding her own desires around love, Rose can become the lover, and not be confined to the desire of the other as represented by the beloved. The subjective destitution presented in this passage allows Rose to create an autonomous subject for whom, not coincidentally, the trappings of the temporal world hold little value.

And in doing it differently, we also see a different writing style. The structure of grammar and syntax is relaxed as Rose takes greater risks with her language. As she approaches her desire, she must find a new way of expressing that search and discovery,

and in the exchange of power that makes language, she is able to discard the power of the university discourse – academic language – as she accesses the power of her own desire, which is best suited to the memoir form. Fragments and ellipses may imply confusion, but they also imply directness, a departure from the script, and hence a directness of feeling. Her language, and her focus on herself, convey the effects of this subjective destitution.

Love's Work

Rose's declaration and assumption of her own desire finishes Chapter 5 of *Love's Work*, but the power of language and symbols is evoked again at the beginning of Chapter 6:

Suppose I were now to reveal that I have AIDS, full-blown AIDS, and have been ill during most of the course of what I have related. I would lose you. I would lose you to a knowledge, to a fear and to metaphor. Such a revelation would result in the sacrifice of the alchemy of my art, of artistic "control" over the setting as well as the content of your imagination. A double sacrifice of my elocution: to the unspeakable (death) and to the overspoken (AIDS).

Not that I haven't been wooing you continually by the moods of metaphor; but we have kept the terms of our contract: you have given me free rein, and I have honoured my share of the obligation by not using up that freedom, by leaving large tracks of compacted equivocation at every twist of the telling.

Yet, do you not know and fear even more about love? Yes, yes, of course you do, but while the sorrows of love in their monotony are endlessly engaging, illness is intrinsically not. So why should I deliberately spoil this narration by reduced equivocation? I must continue to write for the same reason I am always compelled to write, in sickness and in health: for, otherwise, I die deadly but this way, by this work, I may die forward into the intensified agon of living (*Love's Work* 76–77).

By presenting this information hypothetically, Rose is able to reflect on the relationship established by convention between the reader and writer of the memoir, and to initiate the reevaluation of that contract. And by making her hypothetical illness AIDS instead of cancer, she exposes the power of the signifier before its connotations can take root. If, as Susan Sontag has asserted, "societies need to have one illness which becomes identified with evil, and attaches blame to its 'victims'" (Sontag 104), AIDS has replaced cancer as that disease. Because AIDS represents more than just a physical illness, it is our best example of how the imaginary dictates the meaning and understanding of illness. Rose suspects (correctly, in my opinion) that she would lose the reader's trust if she now admitted to having had full-blown AIDS while narrating the text up to that point, because in the public imagination having AIDS would redefine every element of Rose's life. Omitting that information breaks the unspoken agreement between reader and writer on what aspects of life are important or unimportant. And hiding such information would expose Rose's perspective as too unorthodox to be believable. But by invoking AIDS as a possibility

along with her power as author to shape the narrative, Rose forces the readers to question their complicity in this narrative and to examine to what extent the subject that Rose presents is constructed to please the reader. Adopting the hysteric's discourse once again, she forces the reader to momentarily share the groundless ground she herself has adopted.

In Rose's text, discussing the specifics of cancer, similar to evoking AIDS, is equated with spoiling the narration. She discusses aspects of the body – shit, her colostomy – that disturb contemporary concepts of self by presenting pieces of the bodily Real. At this point, her body becomes the stumbling block, that element that cannot be synthesized into her "self" through ordinary, approved discourse. In the same way that learning German provided Rose with a way to experience her dyslexia, writing the memoir and describing her colostomy connects her to her body, making that body a part of herself in a new way. And it is precisely Rose's claiming of her diseased body, as opposed to the strategies of peaceful detachment or military engagement against it, that turns this attitude into an act: "For what people seem to find most daunting with me, I discover, is not my illness or possible death, but my accentuated being; not my morbidity, but my renewed vitality" (*Love's Work* 79). Rose accepts the lack or failure of her own body in the same way she accepts the failure of the love affair: it presents an opportunity for her to experience her own feelings and to incorporate the knowledge gained into a more complete, synthesized life. In refusing to place cancer in its usual taxonomies, Rose challenges the structures that replicate power, particularly the definition of the ill as Other that eases the minds of the healthy.⁸

By placing the story of her illness in the middle of *Love's Work*, Rose is able to situate her cancer in the context of a life philosophy – her "existential drama" – and thereby evade the dominant tendency to interpret a life, like a story, solely through its ending. Just as she was not content to let Hume write her essay on Hume, even though it received praise, Rose refuses to let the discourses of cancer, the medical establishment, or New Age spirituality determine the narrative of her life. The comforts that the medical establishment and New Age spirituality might provide fail, in her mind, because they do not accommodate lack, and the work against lack is precisely what connects her to life. Rose describes medicine as a foreign language, one of which she knows words and phrases, "but never proceed[s] to grasp the underlying principles of grammar and syntax, which would give [her] the freedom to use the language creatively and critically" (102–03). The discourse of medicine is foreign to her because it follows the discourse of the university and the master, and therefore it does not connect to her desire. Rose wants to use it creatively, pursuing "alternative questions and conclusions," but this is the opposite goal of its advocates, who want to eliminate questions and institute order. For the doctors, the language of medicine is clear and unequivocal, whereas as Rose discerns the gaps in what they say: "I perceive all the more pellucidly the subliminal beat: what you cannot cure, you condemn, so that you restore the equilibrium of your dangerous inner impulses" (103). Having embraced the danger of her impulses as a life philosophy, the equilibrium of the university discourse offers no satisfaction. Her cancer is, indeed, incurable, but Rose's reaction is to accept that cancer as something that supports and enables the challenges of love's work, which, by the end of the memoir, she reestablishes as a master discourse that does not alienate her from her body or from her desire.

Rose presents new age spirituality as just as closed and oppressive as medical discourse. It insists on an equilibrium that disallows the human; the authority of new age, however, lies in the purity of the transcendent:

It burdens the individual soul with an inner predestination: you have eternal life only if you dissolve the difficulty of living, of love of self and other, of the other in the self, if you are translucent, without inner or outer boundaries. If you lead a normally unhappy life, you are predestined to eternal damnation, you will not live.

This is the counsel of despair which would keep the mind out of hell. The tradition is far kinder in its understanding that to live, to love, is to be failed, to forgive, to have failed, to be forgiven, for ever and ever. Keep your mind in hell and despair not (105).

This language without boundaries denies desire just as much as the language with too rigid boundaries. It proposes an ideal that cannot be achieved, and in turn becomes oppressive for Rose. Rose's motto, "keep your mind in hell, and despair not," taken from Staretz Silouan and used as an epigraph, exemplifies a paradox and complexity that, according to Rose, these other discourses do not allow. To place one's mind in hell replicates the experience of subjective destitution present in Lacanian analysis. It frees one from the confines of wholeness and perfection, and therefore enables the establishment of a new, more effective discourse. Denial of this hellish situation would force Rose to work continually to maintain an illusion, while a relentless fight would likewise confine her to a life determined by her illness. By keeping her mind in hell, Rose actually acquires freedom.

Rose illustrates this paradox with the term "love's work," a process of surrendering control that demands both risk and faith:

"Control" in this context has two distinct meanings, both equally crucial. In the first place, "control," as you would expect, means priority and ability to manage, not to force, the compliance of others, to determine what others think or do. In the second, more elusive sense – a sense which, nevertheless, saves my life and which, once achieved, may induce the relinquishing of "control" in the first sense – "control" means that when something untoward happens, some trauma or damage, whether inflicted by the commissions or omissions of others, or some cosmic force, one makes the initially unwelcome event one's own inner occupation. You work to adopt the most loveless, forlorn, aggressive child as your own, and do not leave her to develop into an even more vengeful monster, who constantly wishes you ill. In ill-health as in unhappy love, this is the hardest work: it requires taking in before letting be (97–98).

The second definition of control presented demands as its first step an acceptance, and the examples of unhappy love and ill-health reflect the traumas of desire and fate, respectively. Rose has gained control by developing a new master signifier, "love's work," that as a process allows for continuous displacement and change. As such, love's work provides a way of gaining knowledge without institutionalizing that knowledge as a new university or master discourse. Instead of banishing what is other, Rose makes the difficult demand that she love what is killing her, which illustrates the identification

with the symptom that signals the end of analysis for Lacan. In her adoption of the aggressive child (an allusion to herself?) she has moved from symptom to *sinthome*. The abstractness and equivocation demanded by such a term as “love’s work” or the metaphor of the aggressive child, allow Rose to be unequivocal when it comes to topics such as her colostomy; she embraces what is typically repressed, claiming her symptom as her own as is possible within a philosophy of love’s work but not within the philosophy of propriety or formal knowledge. And Rose regains the readers’ trust precisely through her specificity, which reveals a willingness to discard the dominant discourse both in what she says and how she says it. In prioritizing her symptom, Rose moves to the genre of memoir – the sloppy, vulgar, and undisciplined sibling of philosophy and the novel.

The Products of *Love’s Work*

Thus we see that in *Love’s Work* the four discourses come full circle. Lacan explains, however, that because the subject produces the new master signifiers herself – because she tells her own story – the signifiers and the subject’s desire come closer together and the alienating power of the master’s discourse is diminished. Summarizing Lacan, Bracher states that the discourse of the analyst allows the subject to

assume its own alienation and desire and, on the basis of that assumption, separate from the given master signifiers and produce its own new master signifiers, that is, ideals and values less inimical to its fundamental fantasy and the desire embodied by that fantasy (Bracher 68).

We see this cycle continue in *Paradiso*, as the master signifier of “love’s work” is replaced once again. In *Paradiso*, Rose searches for a language of praise to replace the agonistic strategy of love’s work.

Rose’s first portrait in *Paradiso* is of her friend Sister Edna, and Rose explains that “It was the desire to communicate [Sister Edna’s] radiant goodness that gave birth to this whole work in which I am engaged” (*Paradiso* 15). Rose’s connection to Edna’s goodness, however, developed out of her own need when faced with unfamiliar feelings of contentment. Habituated to interrogating the Other – writing the discourse of the hysteric – Rose finds she has no method with which to praise:

And I turn to Edna for help: I need help in my state of bliss. For I am well practised in the arts of resignation and in the prayer that they provoke. O God, take away this pain, this punishment – prayer in adversity. Yet I have no liturgy for thanksgiving, for praise, for consummation; for my well-being, love-ability, or for a new sensation; a constant awareness of existence, alone or in the company of others, imbued with a silly palpability, a beauty at once tactile and visual – as if on each intake of breath one were immersing one’s hands in the deep folds of some fine material saturated in glorious colour. How to give this beauty back? I ask Edna if I can see her in order to try and speak to her about my condition of doxological terror. The withdrawal of the abyss, the overwhelming plenitude of every moment, leaves me more vulnerable than the busy tumult of distress: I have

nothing to clutch, nothing to point to as my burden, nothing from which to bet alleviation. My soul is naked: it has lost its scaffolding of regret and remorse or even repentance: it is turned: and the unexpected result is the sensation and the envelope of invisible and visible beauty (20–21).

Having dropped the scaffolding of the agonistic ego, Rose is overwhelmed by the fullness of the beauty of existence. Moving further into separation, she loses the moorings of alienation, and she turns to Sister Edna for a new, “less inimical” language to describe her experience. Not having learned the language of gratitude or praise at university, Rose turns to her religious friend, still wary and frightened by authority, for a discourse of the church.

As the traditions of nation and church have shown, however, praise is also intimately linked to power and authority. How can Rose convey her own bliss or Edna’s goodness without imposing her or Edna’s method as law? Rose’s solution lies, somewhat surprisingly, in the figure of Miss Marple (who shares Sister Edna’s advanced age). According to Rose, Miss Marple has given up ego attachments and focuses on observing the world around her. Her interest is not in how she is seen and desired by the other, but to “be in the image of another Truth and to receive it and grow into it” (18). And faith enters this equation through the belief that if desire coincides with something higher, it will not oppress but instead improve the greater world. Miss Marple, in fact, suggests the experience of the second death that Lacan elaborates in his discussion of Antigone. Stripped of symbolic roots (how does she appear in these different places? Doesn’t she have her own responsibilities?) she appears as a pure receptacle for knowledge just as Antigone is a pure receptacle for ethical goodness. The rest has been stripped away.

Rose then goes on to describe her own practice of praise. Suffering from feelings of nausea and disorientation while riding a train, she uses the image of Sister Edna not as model but as prayer:

Think of Sister Edna.

Think of sister Edna.

Think of sister Edna.

Think of sister Edna.

The beat of the train takes up your name (22).

In a somewhat mystical fashion, the inner thought of Edna merges with the outside rhythm of the train. Internal and external worlds harmonize. Through the prayer, Edna’s goodness affects Rose, her nausea abates, and from this experience Rose imagines her next project:

Gradually, as I sit bolt upright, the nausea abates, and this work comes to me. I will write a Paradiso which will be a series of descants on friends and family who have somehow passed beyond purgatory, who have dwelt in the abyss, in hell, and

undergone purgation. I will write about goodness and its fruits: under the names of Edna and Hariklia (22–23).

In this example Rose chooses not to focus on her own physical pain, but replaces it with the greater goodness of Edna. The leap of faith exemplified in the detachment from one's self is rewarded with the solution to problem: a discourse for her gratitude. Metaphorically, both love and illness have been Rose's own hell and purgation, the nausea standing in primarily for her experience with cancer and secondarily for the roasting she experienced in disappointed love. In this example, as in the analyst's discourse, knowledge is produced by placing it in the position of product, not as agent or other. Rose's desire, stemming from her discomfort, addresses Edna as incomplete subject, and the product is an understanding of goodness (S1) that she is able to put into discourse (S2). Paradise then is the integration of desire and knowledge into a transmissible form, and the analyst's discourse is less likely to become authoritarian because of the temporal and unique nature of desire and the lacking subject. As Rose separates even further from the mundane world, we see that she establishes a new master discourse, the discourse of praise, that accommodates her failing body and her limited ability to work. While the discourse of the hysteric, so prominent in *Love's Work*, allowed Rose to see lack and therefore work continuously to fill that lack, the master discourse she establishes in *Paradiso* facilitates the reception of beauty and goodness. As Bruce Fink explains, "Every discourse requires a loss of jouissance and has its own mainspring or truth" (Fink 137); this is particularly evident in the shift between these two autobiographical texts, as the pleasure of protest is exchanged for the pleasure of praise.

Writing on the popularity of the confession in modern discourse, Dennis Foster asserts:

We have lost the Author, the master of meanings, intentions, and language. But we have something more interesting, even if more insidious: a master who doesn't know, a leader with no course. The writer in this view has no truth, but has a language that has developed out of the labor and accidents of life, something peculiar to him, his to use but not fully to control: a discourse (4).

What Foster presents here, and what many writers on postmodernism have claimed, is that the kind of writing characterized as the discourse of the university – codified knowledge – has lost its efficacy. We no longer have the Author with a capital "A." In this age of skepticism, rigid authority has lost its aura and its ability to capture our desire. And yet this knowledge that the big Other no longer exists does not necessarily create joyous freedom. One could argue that smaller authorities have proliferated as we look for guides and experts for even more specific elements of our lives. The modern memoir, I would argue, participates in this movement, and reflects the popular value placed not in codified regimes of knowledge but in the belief that self-knowledge is most likely to lead to contentment. Therefore, although memoirs are still written by political figures, military heroes, and intellectuals who gain their authority from their place in the symbolic order, the proliferation of memoirs by people who have made no other dominant mark on society reflects this belief that a narrative of self-knowledge has value and deserves a public audience. *Love's Work* is typical of this type of modern memoir in that its use and movement through the four discourses presents

a paradigm for altering one's discursive position. While ostensibly presenting a form of self-knowledge, the success of Rose's autobiographical writing lies in her ability to convey that the pursuit of self-knowledge is bound to fail, and her ability to provide that failure with a sublime beauty.

The memoir is a paradox in that on one level it presents a one-to-one correspondence. The autobiographer takes herself as the protagonist and conventionally, these two identities coincide. However, what drives the narrative of a memoir is precisely the non-coincidence of the author and the narrator. That gap is what the memoirist attempts to fill. We see in Rose's work, particularly in the shift from *Love's Work* to *Paradiso*, that this gap is never filled once and for all. The separate peace made by the author of the memoir functions similarly to the marriage that often ends the novel. It is an artificial closure that suggests a sequel to evaluate the newly established master signifiers such as "marriage" and "love's work."

To change one's fundamental fantasy may, in fact, be more heroic than a stubborn commitment to ideals in the face of death.

In writing a memoir, one gives oneself over to language and risks not liking what appears on the page. Knowledge may be gained that proves one's structuring principles to be false. The attractiveness of the memoir, however, is the bridge it presents between writing and life. As in the stories told by Walter Benjamin's artisans, it conveys wisdom, not information.⁹ Rose expresses a similar idea: "However satisfying writing is – that mix of discipline and miracle, which leaves you in control, even when what appears on the page has emerged from regions beyond your control – it is a very poor substitute indeed for the joy and the agony of loving" (*Love's Work* 59). In the memoir, writing is not love, but in allowing love to be defined by the "regions beyond your control," the memoirist illustrates how the self is never stable, how it, and therefore the ways that we love, are continuously altered by the symbolic (discipline) and the Real (miracle). The best memoirs do not give advice. They illustrate how experiences such as love, writing, and death are determined by particular discourses. And in illustrating these different discourses, they convey choice, freedom, and possibility to the reader.

Notes

1. As Ellie Ragland explains: "However, nothing less than the death of ego certainties can enable a person to reconstruct his or her being around new desire. For the alienations that anchor one in fixed identifications are based on the fear of loss. People settle for any known set of identifications, however painful, lest they fall out of the familiar symbolic order into the real of anxiety which opens onto a void of actual emptiness at the center of being" (94).
2. In the university discourse knowledge (S2) occupies the position of agent, placing jouissance (a) in the position of other, producing an alienated subject (\$) who finds truth in a new master signifier (S1):

$$\frac{S2}{S1} \quad \frac{a}{\$}$$

3. Lacan presents the master discourse as:

$$\frac{S1}{\$} \quad \frac{S2}{a}$$

in which master signifiers (S1) order knowledge (S2) according to their own values and keep fantasy ($\$ < > a$) in a subordinate position (Bracher 59).

4. "Yet, by disqualifying universal notions of justice, freedom, and the good, for being inveterately 'metaphysical,' for colonizing and suppressing their others with the violence consequent on the chimera of correspondence, 'post-modernism' has no imagination for its own implied ground of justice, freedom and the good. This ground is therefore held in a transcendence far off the ground, where, with a mixture of naivety and cynicism, without reason and in despair, post-modernism leaves analysed and unanalysed according to its tenets the pre-conditions and rampant consequences of power, domination, and authority." (Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law* 7).
5. "Yet this glimpsed unified world is nevertheless purely formal; the antagonistic nature of the inner and outer worlds is not abolished but only recognised as necessary; the subject which recognises it as such is just as empirical – just as much part of the outside world, confined in its own interiority – as the characters which have become its objects" (Lukács 75).
6. Bruce Fink summarizes the structure of the hysteric's discourse

$$\frac{\$}{a} \quad \frac{S1}{S2}$$

"In the hysteric's discourse, the split subject occupies the dominant position and addresses S1, calling it into question....In the lower right-hand corner, we find knowledge (S2). This position is also the one where Lacan situates jouissance, the pleasure produced by a discourse, and he thus suggests here that an hysteric gets off on knowledge... object a appears in the position of truth. That means that the truth of the hysteric's discourse, its hidden motor force, is... commanded by the real, that is, by that which does not work, by that which does not fit" (133–35).

7. "The Real here is precisely that missed opportunity: the trauma of betrayal, of what might have been. The alternative history fantasy of what might have happened is not simply an illusion, but functions as a betrayal or haunting of the Real" (Žižek and Daly 102).
8. For a discussion of the depiction of the diseased as Other, see Sander Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS*.
9. "Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom" (Benjamin 86–87).

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