

## Interview with Gillian Rose

### Introduction

The late Gillian Rose's life and work have attracted interest both inside and outside the academy. Her philosophical memoir, *Love's Work*, candidly addresses her struggle with ovarian cancer, and it reached a wide popular audience. Articles on Rose's thought have appeared in journals of philosophy, theology, Jewish studies, sociology, literature, and cultural studies. However, her dense prose makes reading her academic writing a formidable challenge. The interview published here, conducted one month before her premature death, offers an accessible point of entry into Rose's thought and a bridge between her autobiographical and philosophical writing.

In the interview, whether she is discussing Oxford philosophy, feminism, LSD, or her Jewish upbringing, Rose is direct and opinionated. The interviewer, Andy O'Mahony for RTE Radio, offers searching questions that range from solicitations to explicate passages from her writings to delicate personal queries. The interview is presented here only lightly edited for readability (a few overly personal comments about her sister, Jacqueline, their father, and other acquaintances have also been omitted). Rose's sometimes idiosyncratic language usage remains, suggesting the subtle awkwardness of the self-educated. Although dyslexic, Rose was fascinated by language. She taught herself German by reading Adorno and Wittgenstein, she kept a collection of 36 Bibles in different languages, and she made sure there was a dictionary in every room of her house.

Particularly notable in the interview are Rose's comments on religion. Perhaps because of her deathbed conversion to Christianity, a number of scholars have suggested that Rose's pre-conversion scholarly work was crypto-Christian. Rose grappled with her personal religious commitments, and considered herself 'too Jewish to be Christian and too Christian

to be Jewish' – until her final day. This ambivalence is reflected in the interview, and the only firm commitment that Rose makes is to the (Socratic) philosophical enterprise. Rose calls Socrates 'almost my Christ figure', she suggests that philo-Semitism is just as bad as anti-Semitism, and she urges a turn in social theory to 'political theology'.

In her early works, especially *Hegel contra Sociology* and *Dialectic of Nihilism*, Rose exposed what she took to be the transcendent foundations implicit in a vast range of theorists, from Weber and Durkheim to Derrida and Foucault. Again and again, she argued, social theorists and philosophers accept a Neo-Kantian problematic. They identify some authority by which experience should be judged. Rose unveils these authorities as illegitimate, as hidden appeals to some natural law authorized only by the theorist who posits it in a transcendent register. For the cure to this malady, Rose turns to Hegel. Hegel sustains the tension, and interplay, between answers to the questions of fact and of right, between what is done and what should be done, between social practices and social norms.

John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*, which has spawned a growing industry of genealogists investigating modernity's secular self-image, is heavily indebted to Rose's work. However, while Milbank and Rose agree on the diagnosis, that social theory hides its pervasive appeals to transcendence, they disagree on the cure. Milbank argues that transcendence must be posited, and it is better to locate it in the peaceful Christian narrative than in the violent secular narratives that dominate modernity. In *The Broken Middle*, Rose directly responds to Milbank, arguing that he offers only another avatar of the malignant Neo-Kantian problematic. She charges that Milbank imagines a harmonious world that can be achieved through Christian practice, but this supposed harmony impossibly attempts to simplify and still the difficult, tangled, and always violent nature of the world.

It would be easy – too easy – to read Rose as offering a 'Jewish' critique of Milbank's 'Christian' project. Milbank's work at times seems close to Jewish thought, for instance

when he writes of sanctifying the ordinary and draws attention to immanence through engagement with the work of Gilles Deleuze, Michel Henry, Henri de Lubac, and others. But Rose demonstrates how identifying immanence with transcendence is just as problematic as a focusing solely on immanence unless the relationship between immanence and transcendence is understood as a speculative identity, the tension between the two playing itself out over the course of history, the two never achieving ultimate reconciliation. Indeed, Rose's project *in toto* could be read as a critique of various subtle forms of supersessionism, a critique of the easy opposition between fallen world and redemptive, justifying force. Yet Rose's critique of supersessionism does not return her to Judaism; it allows her to develop an account of '*halacha* beyond *halacha*', of law not limited by the bounds of any particular community.

Instead of choosing a 'better' location for transcendence, Rose's later works shift focus to the virtues of faith and love. Supplementing Hegel with Kierkegaard, Rose retrieves conceptions of faith and love that do not appeal to supposed natural law. Faith and love do not invoke a new law; they are ways of navigating the law we have: the difficult world of practices and norms in which we live. Faith, for Rose, is a commitment to engagement with the world, despite its difficulty, despite its irresolvable tensions. Love involves an intensification of the ordinary experience of engaging with the world. As such, it is a source for training and renewal, propelling lovers back into the ordinary world ready to face its difficulties again. Hope, the final 'theological' virtue composing the traditional Christian triptych, is notably absent from Rose's work. Hers is a faith without hope, a commitment to engagement for its own sake, not for the sake of a time 'to come'.

What is perhaps most striking about Gillian Rose's work, and of this interview, is how she weaves intensely personal reflections with rigorous philosophical thought, how she weaves philosophy with theology and with politics, and how this tapestry informs her unrelenting pursuit of the most basic ethical question: how are we to live? She answers this

question not with an art of living but with a poetry of living. An art of living suggests uninhibited self-formation; it suggests a practice of freedom. The poet, in contrast, must continually wrestle with the rules of grammar, rules that at once make possible and limit her practice. The poet's work is difficult, painful, slow, frustrating – but fueled by a mysterious necessity. Occasionally, surprisingly, the poet, through practice, in practice, creates something beautiful. But there is no time to linger: the beauty created propels the poet back into the difficulty of her work.

Before proceeding to the interview itself, let us briefly examine six key slogans that evoke the central themes of Rose's thought:

*Philosophy must start in the middle.*

It is easy to think of the world in terms of opposites, of dualisms: sovereign versus subject, individual versus community, mind versus world, immanence versus transcendence. But it is the simultaneous tension and identity in these pairs that interests Rose and that she calls 'the middle'. Dualisms are abstract and 'frozen'; the middle identifies their similarities and contradictions by examining the concrete social and historical conditions in which they arise.

Rose describes the middle as a 'perpetual carnival market' but also as 'systematically flawed' (*Judaism and Modernity*, 47; 45). The middle is 'flawed' because it can never be systematically organized, it is full of contradictions. But it is a 'carnival' because the tension between these contradictions is a lively and everlasting project of contestation. *Agon*, struggle, is the condition of the middle, and the human condition.

The work of the middle includes a continuing interrogation of reason itself, 'gradually rediscovering its own moveable boundaries' while it explores the contestation of other middles (*Mourning Becomes the Law*, 12). The middle can never be mended, there can never

be harmony amongst the contradictions of the world. Such a harmony would imply an ‘unequivocal middle’, a New Jerusalem, lacking history and institutions.

*Ethical life is risky, there are no guarantees – we are all victims and perpetrators.*

Ethically – and rationally – the right thing to do is never certain. The individual’s journey through life is one of “perilous adventures.” It is never clear where decisions taken will lead. Despite our intentions, our actions lead to results which perpetually surprise us – sometimes disturbing, sometimes pleasing.

Ethical life is and should be painful, according to Rose. She praises Holocaust literature that blurs the line between victims and perpetrators, which reminds the reader of both their incrimination and their responsibility. Living in the world constantly involves being implicated in violence and power. If we imagine that we can escape this risk – for example, by giving power to ‘community’, the result is simply to make the risks – and our position as victims and perpetrators – unacknowledged. We should never permit ourselves to be entranced by such a ‘sham-community’, a ‘false Jerusalem’.

We will certainly make mistakes – navigating the perilous world is difficult but necessary. We must not let the fear of error paralyze us from ethical action. This is the hell in which we are implored to keep our minds, without despair: ‘If you don’t feel pain, you won’t feel anything else’ (*Paradiso*, 38).

*Ethics is politics is metaphysics*

In contrast with the derogatory use of ‘metaphysics’ in much postmodern thought (and analytic philosophy), Rose unabashedly proclaims the philosopher to be a metaphysician – regardless of his or her intent. Metaphysics is the central term: both the system and the method. Ethics and politics are derivative from metaphysical work.

Metaphysics involves an Absolute. Rose is not bashful about this claim, even in its strongest forms. As she says in the interview below, ‘Everybody’s looking for an ethics. But in fact they should be looking for a political theology’. Political theology integrates metaphysics, ethics, and politics, whereas separating ethics from metaphysics undermines the efficacy of both.

In contemporary politics, both liberals and communitarians assume – and legitimate – forms of rationality which are nothing but forms of domination: the ‘formal-legal rationality’ of the libertarian and the ‘traditional rationality’ of the communitarian. Legitimizing one’s position with the (explicit or implicit) rhetoric of rationality makes politics easy. It ignores the difficult middle: the institutions and social configurations, constantly in tension and contestation, which are the starting point of politics, ethics, and metaphysics. Politics that implicitly claims rationality washes its hands of the violence and coercion that it authorizes. As Rose puts it, these political programs ‘aid and abet authoritarian power of control’ (*Mourning Becomes the Law*, 5).

*Modernity is characterized by dualistic splits which postmodernity continues*

Modernity (in continuity with ancient Rome) protects private property and establishes the fiction of the person/subject. Reason is enlisted to justify these splits. The result is a split of ethics from politics and of metaphysics from both. Consequently, the freedom of the subject supposed by modernity brings with it a depoliticization of the individual.

Post-modernity is in continuity with modernity. It, too, separates metaphysics from ethics, but now the separation is effected through the search for an uncontaminated ethics – in dialogue, in deconstruction, in love, in the encounter with the Other. Even when this postmodern ethics is defined as ‘fluid’, it ultimately remained fixed as Reason’s opposite. Rose represents this opposition as that of Athens against Jerusalem, ‘degraded power’ versus

‘exulted ethics’. The result is that modernity and post-modernity refuse to engage in ‘specific reflection on modern law and the state’ (*Judaism and Modernity*, x)

This post-modern dualism takes on the psychic form of melancholia. For Freud, a lost object can either cause temporary grief until its loss is thoroughly processed (mourning) or its loss can cause the sufferer to fixate on the loss indefinitely (melancholia). According to Rose, postmodernists are caught up in a crippling melancholia, preventing them from returning to the hard work of the middle, to the actualities and possibilities of concrete existence.

*Ontology is a false substitute for metaphysics*

Ontology is an attempt to evade metaphysics, an attempt that proceeds historically in two stages. First, Heidegger (as well as Gadamer, Dilthey, and others) attempted to locate a precondition for any philosophy in “being.” Second, a generation of philosophers emerged (particularly French post-structuralists) who were post-ontological, who struggle with and against Heidegger and put “being” under erasure, but who necessarily work in the overpowering wake of ontology.

The attempt to think death reveals decisive evidence of the failure of ontology. For ontology, death is the lack of being: nothing. The relation to death becomes the condition of possibility for all experience (being-towards-death). In contrast, Rose argues that metaphysics links finite beings with transcendence and thus give all beings an inner relation with death – a relation which is important but not overwhelming.

Ontology is opposed to representation. Representation works on the surface; ontology seeks the authentic depths. For ontology, the subject is only free beyond the constraints of representation. Rose takes these metaphors very seriously: she condemns the ‘aestheticization’ of philosophy by ontology, the replacement of critical reason with aesthetic

pathos which ignores its own underlying reason: ‘If metaphysics is a predicament not a choice, its vaunted demise will always issue in bad metaphysics’ (*Dialectic of Nihilism*, 95).

*Love involves risk and vulnerability*

A love relationship is yet another space of contestation, a space where the intensity of contestation is intensified. To be able to love, one must acknowledge the boundaries of oneself and others and be willing to have those boundaries put in question. The lover is ‘ever-strange’, he ‘comes up against you, and disappears, again and again, surprising you with difficulties and with bounty’ (*Love’s Work*, 60). Love focuses on the middle: not me, not you, but the space we constitute and navigate through our love.

The risks of love are even greater than the normal risks of navigating the middle. In love, each lover has absolute power over the other, and each is in a state of absolute vulnerability to the other. The rules and agreements which govern our professional lives have no sway in our personal lives. But this does not mean that love is antinomian, that lovers are anarchists. Love is infused with power, violence, and law. And because of our vulnerability in love, the risks entailed in love are magnified.

When love is lost, there is work to be done, the work of mourning. In order not to slip into melancholia, the boundaries of the “soul” must be rearranged. This is a process of accepting rather than transgressing the law, of allowing mourning to become the law. At the end of the process, in the return to the law, one returns to the city, ‘renewed and reinvigorated for participation, ready to take on the difficulties and injustices of the existing city’ (*Mourning Becomes the Law*, 36).

-- Vincent Lloyd



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*(To the best of my knowledge this includes all of Rose's published writings, excluding redundancies)*

### Interview

*Were you planning for a long time to study philosophy at Oxford?*

Yes. I discovered philosophy at about the age of sixteen reading Pascal and Plato. You don't become a philosopher, you discover you're a philosopher. It's a passion, it has to be a passion. You have to fall in love with Socrates. That's the only criterion. People say to me, 'How do you know you're a philosopher?' I say, 'There's only one way to find out if you're a philosopher, is whether you fall in love with Socrates.' If you fall in love with Socrates, then you're a philosopher. And you'll always be a philosopher.

*But you were disenchanted with Oxford philosophy, weren't you?*

First of all, I went to women's college. It was extremely straight-laced, very strict. Even in the 60's you had to be back in college by a certain time or you'd be fined or gated. You weren't allowed men in your room; we used to smuggle them in and out. The philosophy was so narrow. I'd already read an enormous amount of philosophy, and I found that suddenly I was being asked to read in a very narrow way, a very destructive way, a way that didn't correspond to any of the things that I thought philosophy was about. But I played the game. I did the best I could do.

*I've heard it said so often about Oxford philosophy that it teaches people to take things apart.*

It does. It teaches them to be clever, destructive, supercilious, and ignorant. It doesn't teach you what's important. It doesn't feed the soul. It doesn't allow you to read even the philosophers who it introduces you to holistically, never mind all the philosophers it declares are outside the canon. The awful thing is that it's still taught the same way. My whole vocation has been to teach differently. But in both America and Britain, most philosophy departments are just like they were when I was eighteen. A lot of young people, teenagers, who feel very passionately about philosophy and who have good analytical minds go to university and are turned off. My students get a different initiation altogether. But students who go to Oxford and Cambridge are still being taught in this very arid way.

*To a young man, a young woman, what would you say to them?*

I would say, 'Don't read *Sophie's World* and don't read Hare and don't read Locke, but read Plato, read St. Augustine, read Pascal, read Rousseau – read the great thinkers'. You know this book *Sophie's World*, it's got a narrative running through it, and then it's got chunks of philosophy. Literally the chunks of philosophy are printed in this very ugly script. I think if you haven't read the philosophers, you'd make nothing of it. It's done very dogmatically. I don't understand why that book has had such appeal. It has no *eros*. I was teaching a seventeen year old, and I didn't give him *Sophie's World* to read, which is meant to be a book for teenagers. I gave him the real thing. Now, at the age of eighteen, he's a philosopher.

*You mentioned the disappearance of eros, meaning a desire or hunger.*

*Eros* ranges from sexual desire to intellectual curiosity. It's just a hunger, I think that's a good way to put it, because a hunger acknowledges a lack, but knows also that it can be filled. If you just say, as some people do, that Platonic *eros* is lack, you've only got half of it.

*As some currents in French thought do, see it only as lack.*

They see the whole of intellectual life as founded on absence that we're always illegitimately trying to make present. That's what deconstruction says. Beyond all our cherished contraries, like nature/culture, writing/speech, positive/negative, there's a desire for the full presence of these things – but the truth is, there's only lack. Derrida said in an interview, 'I mourn, therefore I am', which is his recasting of the philosophical enterprise. But it's not mourning, because Freud says in his famous essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' that if you complete the work of mourning, you return to the fullness of being, whereas if you don't

complete the work of mourning, you remain melancholic. So it seems to me the whole of recent French philosophy is melancholic.

*Point to those philosophers, those thinkers, who see eros in more full-blooded, more positive terms...*

I don't think there are any now. I think that is what's missing from philosophy at the moment and that is what I'm trying to restore in my own work. In the tradition, I think it's in Rousseau, Hobbes, Marx – I even see it in Marx – Freud. I think it's in all the great thinkers, but not in deconstruction or other French thinking.

*There's another negative style – I'm thinking of the 'masters of suspicion', Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, or a certain reading of them by Paul Ricoeur.*

They're seen as radical debunkers, but that's only the first, skeptical stage. All of the important thinkers of the last two hundred years start off by debunking, by skepticism. But underlying that is a positive vision which they want to re-insinuate, and they do it cleverly, through skepticism. Marx wants to restore full activity to those who have been deprived of their activity in the labor process. Freud wants to restore perfect memory so we can move forward and give attention to what we are doing and not be fixated on something we've lost in the past. So you can read every thinker skeptically or holistically.

*You make the point in one of your essays that you came upon crisis in modern Judaism corresponding to the crisis you found in modern philosophy.*

It is the same crisis, but that's not recognized. In a lot of recent thought, especially French thought, Judaism is seen as a New Jerusalem, as the ideal of community. Everybody is looking for a perfect community, a community of love. Judaism is seen as offering this community of love because it was destroyed politically at the fall of the Second Temple, and therefore it has survived as a discursive community. But I think that's a very dangerous position because Judaism is a part of the modern world, and it suffers like the rest of the modern world from the painful opposition between power and love. You can't set Judaism up as this ideal. It's just as bad as anti-Semitism: it's philo-Semitism. And it's not realistic. I've tried to say: don't idealize Judaism, it's as bad as denigrating it. It's not a step forward, it's not good for Judaism, and it's not good for philosophy.

*But what's wrong with it?*

It ignores the divisions within Judaism. Judaism itself is deeply, deeply divided between Conservative Judaism, Orthodox Judaism, and Reform Judaism. It's overlooking the debates within Judaism, the divisions within Judaism, and it's also overlooking Judaism's relationship to the dilemmas between power and violence that all communities face in the modern world.

*In other words, it's an attempt to think of an ethics without any sense of law.*

Exactly. It's antinomian, it's anarchic, it's utopian. These are just the sort of things we were meant to get away from by giving up Marx.

*You can have that strain within Christianity as well.*

I think whenever you get an antinomian or anarchic tendency, you must always ask: 'What is it reacting against'? You'll find its twin in relations of power or domination or whatever.

The utopian impulse always has a relation in the real world to things that are difficult. I think what you are suggesting to me is that there's a notion of paradise without the difficulty. Yes, of course, we can't abandon that idea, but we should be very careful when we project it onto communities.

*The other side of that equation is the distortion of reason.*

I think that there's a perception that postmodernism thinks it has given up a notion of reason that it characterizes as totalitarian, dominating, imperialistic. In fact, postmodernism is itself rationalism. I call postmodernism a 'despairing rationalism without reason' because it really wants to claim: 'Look, you've let me out!' – 'me' being a woman or a member of an ethnic minority. Now that's a highly rational thing to say. It's not the devastation of reason, it's using reason. Reason is not this monolithic, domineering, authoritarian thing. It's our bread and butter.

*So the postmodern critique is really devising a man of straw...*

Definitely, and using the very resources it's disqualifying.

*Then there's no escape.*

There's no escape. Reason can be enlarged. Reason can be full of charity. But you can't escape reason.

*You suggest that even to pose a choice between Athens and Jerusalem is to miss something important.*

It misses the third, it's always the third point that's the most difficult one. Focusing on oppositions you miss that. We've got to look at why we can't live in ideal communities, and at the whole notion of rights and individualism. I think the most important thing that we should be looking at is the relationship between the ways in which modern societies right across the world are emphasizing individualism but, structurally, are becoming more authoritarian. It's that mix of the individualism of the soul and the authoritarianism of the structures that we need to get a perspective on. I think no modern philosophy is doing that. The debate between communitarians and liberals or libertarians overlooks that whole structure of authority, domination, and power, and that's what we really must keep our eyes on.

*That suggests that people working in moral and political philosophy need a strong handle on social theory.*

Absolutely. It is very important that people should know that in the Continental philosophy tradition it's not just Heidegger and Derrida. There's another tradition of social and political thought that goes back to Kant and Hegel which is equally important. There's this awful divorce between philosophy which thinks it's interested in ethics and social and political thought which is more sociological. They've got to be brought together somehow. We've



got to bring the soul and the city back together somehow and stop separating them off intellectually and culturally. I think that, in the wake of the perceived demise of Marxism and of Heidegger's Nazism, everybody's looking for an ethics. But in fact they should be looking for a political theology. We need to think about God and the polis and not about this anodyne "love ethic."

*'If I knew who I was', says you, 'I wouldn't write'.*

I don't like it when people say, 'I'm writing this book as a woman, as a Jew, as a Catholic, as a black'. Those are things that need to be explored in order to know what they are. We write in order to explore what they might mean. To put them there as fixatives is fascist. They are not fixed things, to be a woman, to be a Jew, to be a black, to be a Catholic. They're highly mobile, volatile things. If you're growing, you don't even know what they are from one minute to the next. So you can't start your book by saying, 'This is where I write from'. You've got to find where you write from by questioning where you start from.

*You're ancestors came originally from Poland to Germany and then to London, to the East End of London, and to Manchester.*

They thought it was New York when they got off the boat. They had no English at all, and they got off the boat at Manchester under the mistaken idea that this was New York.

*You grew up within the context of Judaism – it was a real live thing for you, was it?*

It was Judaism as a culture rather than a religion. My grandparents were Orthodox Jews. My mother was culturally a Jew, not religiously a Jew, which again was rather liberating because it meant that I could explore what it meant to be a Jew religiously.

*To what extent do you attribute your range of intellectual interests to growing up in, if not religious, in cultural Judaism?*

I'm sure there must be a connection there. It's made me very open-minded. I'm very intellectually promiscuous, but I'd like to think that it doesn't make me superficial, because I'm always reading at the heart of matters. I don't know why I have this great range, but I think philosophy and poetry go together, and you must remember that philosophy for me includes political philosophy. It's not just, you know, 'the therapy of desire'. It's the city as well as the soul, and I find that in literature as well. I love poetry. Socrates was a great poet as well as a philosopher, even though he never wrote a word of poetry. Socrates is almost my Christ figure. When I read the account of Socrates' last days and hours, I feel that I could reach out and touch him. When he says that the soul has grown feathers in order to return to God, when he describes in great detail how a human being grows feathers, you feel you could just reach out and touch him.

*Were you clued in early on to what you refer to as the 'anti-supernatural' character of Judaism?*

Yes, in a sense, because Judaism meant certain kinds of food, meant having your Sabbath on Saturday rather than Sunday. Judaism was practical cultural correlations rather than faith or

law. I knew nothing about that at all. I just knew that I was a Jew, and that meant that I was different than other children.

*And you were dyslexic.*

I was deeply dyslexic, which also provided a refuge because it gave me an ambition. I wanted to learn to read. It was what I had to do, because I couldn't read, so it gave me a kind of independence to have that as a project. Once I learned to read, which was just a matter of learning a different technique, then reading became everything, it became my whole world.

*You saw this as a kind of unconscious rebellion.*

I did subsequently, because it meant that whilst your parents were squabbling about access to you, you could be sitting at home with a book. The adults were the emotionally irrational ones; you were sitting there with your book. I saw it not so much as a rebellion but as a refuge.

*So you became more independent.*

I think so, because I think a child who reads acquires immense independence of the adult world. They develop their own relationship to language, to thought, to stories. They develop whole inner worlds.

*Did you pay a price for that?*

Yes. I had very few friends. When I went to school, I was considered a stick in the mud. I used to sit on the coal bunker and read whilst the other children were playing tag, and that made me extremely unpopular.

*You first met your friend Jim Fessenden in 1970 or thereabouts in New York City.*

I was a student at Oxford visiting New York. I met Jim and he offered such a vision of philosophy to me. He was working on Nietzsche, and he had a deep relationship with the whole history of philosophy. I had just emerged from Oxford where I'd been reading philosophy analytically, ahistorically, aridly, and suddenly I found myself in a philosophical culture again that offered me substance. Jim never finished his Ph.D., he dropped out. He offered a relationship to the whole history of philosophy: it was he who told me to read Hegel, it was he who told me to read Husserl and Heidegger, who I would never have been told to read at Oxford. But, on the other hand, he didn't follow through himself. He was a musician. I've come across this more than once, a man who is a musician, whose emotional life exists in music, but he's also a philosopher. In order to write philosophy or be a philosopher, you've got to bring together your emotional and your intellectual life. If you keep them separate, you'll be a bad philosopher. What I discovered with Jim Fessenden is, emotionally, he could only be expressive in music, and therefore his philosophy dried up.

*But you yourself have been able to pull the two strands together.*

Through suffering. Through growing. Through failing. Through illness.

*Did you ever get into drugs?*

I did some drugs, but nothing serious, nothing more than marijuana and LSD. Never anything hard like cocaine.

*LSD?*

Oh yes.

*I'm told that it's very risky to go that route without supervision.*

It was done under very close supervision, with very pure LSD, with lots of ice cream and music.

*Did you have...*

Absolutely surreal experiences, a trip. Yes, they were very important to me. I learned an enormous amount from it because, as a philosopher, one is interested in perception, in aesthetics, in all these things.

*So what was it, was there a heightening?*

It's an intensification, but it's also a surreal experience. Everything becomes hyperreal: colors, shapes, forms, sounds. You have to be cautious not to be overwhelmed by very ordinary experiences. That's why you must do it under supervision, with a friend, and with very controlled amounts of the drug. But I only did that two or three times in the early 70s.

*You have been diagnosed with advanced ovarian cancer. Did you get any warnings of your condition?*

No, none at all. I felt very well, in fact incredibly well, because for the last ten years I got up every morning at six o'clock, cycled to the swimming pool, and swam two kilometers. I was doing that up until the day before my first operation. It's called silent cancer. I had no warning at all.

*How did you get the first indication, during an exam?*

I did an inaugural lecture, and after the inaugural lecture I had a bout of vomiting. I thought, 'I've just been working too hard'. I went to bed, and I was all right the next day. I thought, 'At the end of term perhaps I'll go and see the doctor'. And then at the end of term I had another bout, and when the doctor came to examine me, he said, 'You've got something in you the size of a melon'. He sent me to a specialist and it all took off from there, but I never felt ill. In fact, I still haven't felt ill. The only thing that's made me feel ill is medicine, medical practice, operations and things. I don't feel ill at all.

*So, as we speak, you feel fine?*

I feel absolutely fine, yes.

*You make the point in your memoir that that's one of the things people find difficult.*

People think that if you're described as having cancer, you should be in the role of patient or victim, somebody who can be looked after, patronized, put in a category, seen to be ailing. If anything, it has given me new vitality.

*So your friends have had to come to terms with this.*

Definitely, and my family too, because they didn't expect somebody to get cancer who was actually so healthy and so strong. I was the strongest member of my family, the only one who took regular exercise. And I have a good life, whereas all the books about cancer say the kind of people who get cancer are people who are depressed, unhappy, have unsatisfactory work, don't have good relationships. This didn't make any sense to me at all.

*So what about the prognosis, you just go from day to day?*

The official prognosis has varied enormously. Those medical practitioners who I think have been least wise have tried to put a term to my condition. They said, 'You might have a few months of good health, but if the chemotherapy doesn't work, you'll be dead within a year.' That was said to me two years ago. But my current oncologist just says to me, 'This is just a chronic condition, we treat symptoms as they occur.' It's not in my case aggressive, and although when it was diagnosed I was told that I was lucky to be alive, that an enormous amount had spread – right through my abdomen, it's now in my lungs, in fact – the other thing my oncologist always says when I go to see him is, 'Is there anything you want to do that you can't do?' I think that's a wonderful question. He doesn't look at me and say, 'You look awfully ill' or 'You've perhaps got a month to go', he just says, 'Is there anything you

want to do that you can't do?' And I think, 'No, I'm doing everything I want to do, and more'.

*I understand that you've taken a middle path between conventional medicine on the one hand and New Age healing or alternative healing on the other.*

Not really. I do see an immunologist in London because one of the ways cancer is being treated now, especially in Scandinavian countries, is by boosting the immune system. You aren't taking drugs like in chemotherapy that are destroying your blood cells. You just take lots of vitamins and minerals and things like that. I'm certainly doing that. But I also see a conventional oncologist, and I've had more chemotherapy, of a fairly mild kind, which seems to be working.

*With alternative healing, didn't you express some unease at how it is intent on you becoming an exceptional person?*

Alternative healing, I think, has its own cruelties, because it says – and some of the best literature says this – if you get an illness like this, then you must start to love unconditionally, to live exceptionally. In fact, when people get illnesses like this, often their worlds fall apart. That's the last thing they can do. Unlike the scenario you get in a film like *Shadowlands*, often couples are not brought closer together by one of them getting cancer. Often one partner feels guilty and rejects the other. So you've got more problems rather than fewer problems. I think it's crude of alternative healing to say that you've got to live a perfect life. You've got to go on living your ordinary life, and just be as optimistic and positive as you can. To be able to live with uncertainty is terribly important. To be able to say – it's a



religious assumption, isn't it? – 'I just don't know what's going to happen, and that's all right.' You've got to be able to say that.

*You say at one point in Love's Work, 'I'm highly qualified in unhappy love affairs.'*

Perhaps some people have over-construed that. I do say at the end of the book that I have had two very successful long-term relationships. I don't want to appear as simply a waif of love. Nevertheless, that statement was introduced strategically and realistically because I wanted to explore what it is to be love-able and what it is to be non-love-able – I mean loveable and capable of love at the same time – and that's why I introduced it in that dramatic way. It is true, of course, because I have had a lot of unhappy experiences – otherwise I wouldn't grow, would I?

*Did you see any pattern?*

Certainly I did. One tends to think, first of all, that things are happening to you. What you have to discover from unhappy love affairs is your own agency and your own ambivalence. I think some forms of feminism detract from women being able to do that. They teach women that they're oppressed, and they don't encourage women to see their own active involvement in situations where they may indeed be unequal. But you need to see your own involvement in that, commitment in that, in order to move beyond it.

*You talk about the rage that some women feel towards other men in their lives that often masks an even greater rage expressed in terms of choosing an incompetent partner.*

There's a syndrome, which I discovered in myself, and which I see in other women, whereby you're very angry with men, maybe with your father, and therefore you choose a partner who it's easy to be contemptuous of. I think that's a syndrome that needs to be recognized more. I would put that generally: we don't talk enough about the power of women, we talk much too much about the powerlessness of women.

*The power residing in what?*

In being a mother, in being a lover... that women are not always on the weaker side of things, they're often on the stronger side of things, but nevertheless representing themselves to themselves as weaker. Therefore they don't understand their own agency in their choice of love object.

*Then feminism hasn't really been of much use to you.*

I've never found feminism relevant to me, but then politics begins when you think about what's relevant to other people. In my own case, I've always been encouraged by men. The model that one grows up in a patriarchal culture where women are oppressed certainly doesn't correspond to my experience. I've been encouraged at every stage by men in my family, by teachers, by tutors.

*I want to return to friends and lovers. There's a Father Dr. Patrick Gorman, not his real name, in your life who played a quite important role. Was it love at first sight?*

[giggles] Yes, I think it was. I put his story in *Love's Work* because of its drama. I wanted to raise the whole pattern of doomed love relations so I chose one that had an obvious drama about it. It serves to introduce another story which is the story of how, when I got ill, the man I was involved with couldn't deal with it and let me down. That's why I introduce the story of Dr. Patrick Gorman. Nevertheless, it is a story that is worth telling in its own right. I think that the most disappointing thing about the story is that the love affair for him was not an important experience.

*Maybe that's a male thing.*

But you would think, as a priest, it ought to be a crisis in his vocation. I suppose I was offended that he didn't have a crisis in his vocation.

*So what did you have, immediate attraction, a meeting of minds?*

Yes, always a meeting of minds, because I never get attracted to somebody unless there's a meeting of minds. It was quite like any other love affair really, except that I didn't know whether he would consummate it, but it was a matter of very softly and cautiously finding out whether he would or not.

*When he discovered that you were the friend of a man in New York who died of AIDS, all that was worrying him was whether or not he might have contracted AIDS from you.*

First of all, he was very worried after reading the manuscript of *Love's Work*. He insisted, which I'd already decided, that I change his name, otherwise he said his career would be

ruined – and it was his career he was concerned about. Two weeks later he phoned me up, and I thought he'd phoned me up to apologize for being so self-absorbed and not saying, 'My goodness, what a tough lot you're going through with this illness and with the person who let you down'. But he phoned up to ask me – which actually showed shocking ignorance – whether he might have AIDS. I was very shocked because this is a man who is advising young people, and he ought to know that you can't carry AIDS for twenty years.

*Were you shattered at that point that he thought along those lines?*

I wasn't shattered, I was disgusted. I thought it was very self-centered, and extraordinarily unimaginative, and very shallow of him, as well as being very ignorant.

*Talking of those days you say, 'Lovemaking is never a simple pleasure.'*

Rather like alternative healing which says, 'If you live perfectly you'll be all right', I think booklets that try to say, 'This is what you should do to improve your love life', totally overlook the psychological complexity of what's going on between two people. It is never simply the meeting of two bodies. It is the meeting of two souls. So you can never simply teach technique. There is always a third party to every love relationship: what your relationship is to eternity or infinity. That will affect your relationship to another human being. Whether you see another human being as related to God, if you like, will make a difference to how you treat him as a lover.

*Do you believe in eternity?*

Definitely. It's the only thing I believe in. [laughter] If there is eternity, then it's now, and it's at all time. So it's the only thing you can believe in, because, after all, time is devastation. You can't believe in time. Time is going to destroy you. You can't believe in time, you have to believe in eternity.

*So you believe in something outside of the spatio-temporal continuum?*

Certainly, yes. But I think one has to preserve an agnosticism about it. I love what Simone Weil said, that agnosticism is the most truly religious position. You must be able to say you don't know. Agnosticism is the only true religion because to have faith is not to give up knowledge, but to know where the limit of knowledge is.

*On that point, you've said Freud is, in a certain sense, more religious than Jung, for similar reasons.*

Yes, for similar reasons, because Freud, unlike Jung, will not offer you an alternative mysticism. He says that you've got to live without authority, and he says quite explicitly in one of his lecture series that psychoanalysis stops where faith begins. It can't provide a figure of salvation for you. Jung tries to compensate for the lack of figures of salvation, and therefore I think Freud's position has greater integrity.

*'Night time is psyche time', you wrote.*

In the evening, you have to work through – work through is a phrase I like very much, it comes from Freud, in fact – you have to work through all the things, all the emotional

realities you've encountered during the day that perhaps you haven't given your full attention to.

*And morning, then, 'holy terror'.*

Morning is holy terror. Morning is more cosmic. During the night in your dreams you've worked on all the psychic material accumulated from the day before, but in the morning when you wake up it's a rebirth, you have to decide whether you want to exist or not. I think that's a deep crisis. Some people don't make it out of bed, after all. [laughter]

*You say that to spend the whole night with someone is agape. We normally make a distinction between agape and eros, that agape has something to do with relating to God, eros to our fellow humans.*

It's more that *eros* is about desire and *agape* is about care. If you don't simply make love with someone and then leave, but spend the night holding them, it's much nearer care than desire, or it's the beautiful mix of the two.

*But how absolute a distinction is it?*

I don't agree with Nygren who makes an absolute distinction between *agape* and *eros*. I think *eros* fulfilled always becomes *agapic*.

*Where is friendship, then, in that mix?*

Friendship is also a very beautiful and important thing. It could all be seen under the sign of friendship.

*(Reprinted with permission of RTE Radio. Note: audio files of the interview have recently been made available at <http://www.rte.ie/radio1/dialogue/1043490.html>)*

### Bionotes

Gillian Rose (1947-1995) was Professor of Social and Political Thought at the University of Warwick. She graduated from St. Hilda's College, Oxford, and completed her doctorate, directed by Leszek Kolakowski, also at Oxford. Her work ranged over German and French philosophy, jurisprudence, social theory, theology, and urban planning. Among her books are *Hegel contra Sociology*, *The Broken Middle*, and a memoir, *Love's Work*. She also served as an advisor to the Polish Commission on the Future of Auschwitz.

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