Gillian Rose's critique of violence

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The crisis of the legitimacy of the liberal democratic state is being posed today with an urgency and acuity not seen since the debates over the legitimacy of Weimar parliamentary democracy. Its constitutive claim to be able to satisfy both the values of justice and pluralism appears to be coming apart at the seams. Far Right movements are on the rise, and it is likely that they will become stronger, more vociferous and more violent in the future. These developments would have come as no surprise to Gillian Rose. In the Preface to *The Broken Middle*, published in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, at the very height of liberal triumphalism, she refused to join in the chorus. The dismantling of Soviet-style socialism, Rose confidently pronounced, will neither destroy Marxism nor resolve the antinomies of modern state and society. It would, however, open 'the opportunity to resume examination of the connection between liberalism and Fascism'.[1]

It is against this background that I return to examine Rose's works, with a view to finding answers to two specific questions. How does Rose understand the connection between liberalism and fascism? What resources does Rose's political theology provide for developing an effective anti-fascist strategy? However, in pursuing these questions, I have had cause to revise some of my previous assumptions about Rose's work, particularly with respect to her interpretation of the genesis of modernity and her understanding of modern subjectivity. In short, my previous essays overestimated the importance of Hegel and underestimated the influence of Walter Benjamin (and Nietzsche).[2] *Hegel Contra Sociology* appears to present a Left-Hegelian–Marxist interpretation of Hegel's social and political philosophy. On this reading, there is a mismatch between the rational modern subject, conceived in broadly Kantian terms, as a free, rational, independent, reflexive and self-determining agent, and the non-rational institutions of the modern state. This opens the space for a politics aimed at overcoming this incongruity. However, Rose's Nietzschean conception of the moral will as a disguised form of egoism undercuts this notion of a Hegelian political praxis, in both its reformist and its Marxist

derivations. From this point of view, it follows that the moral subject is a hindrance, not a stepping stone, to the accomplishment of universal mutual recognition. Indeed, for Rose, the unmasked moral will is revealed to be essentially fascistic in nature. Hence, it must be dismantled and reconstructed *before* it can become capable of recognizing other subjects in their universality and singularity. Furthermore, this work of destruction will take the form of exposing the violence of the modern subject to itself.

This Nietzschean dimension of Rose's project is much more salient in her late works, in which the concept of violence plays a more dominant role than in her earlier writings. It receives its most concentrated expression in both its psychological and its political dimensions in *Love's Work*. One might say that *Love's Work* combines a 'therapy of desire' with a potted genealogy of modernity. The result is a deeply traumatized concept of the subject, which Rose takes to be the truth, or, one could say, the 'untruth' of modern subjectivity in general. However, I shall contend that this is a distorted view of the modern subject, based on a one-sided view of the history of modernity; that is, one which largely ignores its emancipatory dimension.

'Keep your mind in hell, and despair not.' Rose adopts this dictum in *Love's Work* as a rule for dealing with her illness. However, it could equally be interpreted as her rule for life in modernity. Despite the fact that Rose's account of modern subjectivity is almost unremittingly pessimistic, she still enjoins us to be 'yea-sayers', to stay with the world and to remain politically engaged. Rose provides two grounds for not despairing – noticeably she never uses the word 'hope'. First, work, by which she primarily means the intellectual work of speculative critique and genealogical reconstruction. Second, faith, taken over from Kierkegaard, which allows for a 'suspension of the ethical', a way of comprehending the oppositions of modernity without being comprehended by them, and which opens up a space for ethics. Speculative critique is supposed to ground the suspension of the ethical in the actuality of existing social relations, enabling a balance between realism and utopianism.

However, I shall argue that Rose is not able to retain this balance because her radical distrust of modern subjectivity entails that her notion of the suspension of the ethical has no basis in socio-political reality, rendering it an essentially mythic construct. In so far as it takes on a visible political form, it has two effects, both of which are inimical to a progressive politics. First, if restricted to a form of political and cultural critique, it tends to display an anti-bourgeois ire. This has particularly deleterious and divisive effects with respect to combatting fascism, for it results in an anti-fascist cultural politics that is more concerned with attacking liberal and moral social consciousness than fascism itself. Second, it is open to appropriation as a justification for 'spontaneous' or 'divine violence'. The centrality of the concept of violence to Rose's political theology exposes it to the same objections that have been registered against Sorel and Benjamin in this respect. Rose is acutely aware of this and goes to great pains to distance her own theology of violence from that of Benjamin. However, these pains are ineffective because her notion of the suspension of the ethical is so poorly socio-politically grounded. In sum, Rose's analysis of fascism and how to fight it reproduces many of the same errors that so fatefully destroyed the unity of the German Left in the 1930s, resulting in the collapse of the Weimar Republic, with all its catastrophic consequences.[3]

In this article, I shall focus exclusively upon delineating the negative implications of Rose's political theology in general and as a means of combatting fascism in particular, and not offer an alternative aetiology of fascism or how to combat it. The first part of the article offers a reading of *Love's Work* that draws out Rose's concept of violence and its relation to her political theology. It then turns to a critical review of Rose's direct reflections on the nature of fascism, how it is to be represented and combatted.

Violence and love

Love's Work evidently belongs to the genre of autobiography, but beyond that it is not easy to classify. It would appear to be a memoir, an 'autothanatography', a 'spiritual exercise', a 'confession' and an *'apologia vita sua'*, all in one.[4] To make matters even more perplexing, we have to contend with Howard Caygill's statement that, appearances to the contrary, *Love's Work* is Rose's 'most difficult and esoteric act of indirect communication'.[5] If so, the work has a hidden meaning, buried beneath the surface of the text, requiring an esoteric reading to bring it to light.

Tom Ratekin, in his book *Final Acts*, takes up the challenge of providing such a reading. It is valuable because it succeeds in identifying the central, redemptive drama driving the text as a therapy of desire. But its shortcoming is that it does not place this drama within the wider theologico-political context of the work. Ratekin suggests that '*Love's Work* is a text, like Sophocles' *Antigone*, that is propelled by the death and the sublime beauty of its heroine', and that its difficulty lies not in its stylistic features, but in 'not providing familiar forms for addressing trauma'.[6] The work is construed as a psychoanalytical text in its own right and its contents are interpreted on the basis of four tropes adapted from Lacan's Four Discourses: Master (knowledge), Hysteric (self-division), Analyst (identification with symptom) and Jouissance (identification with desire).[7] Although these 'stages' are not presented as a chronological narrative, they nonetheless chart the key events in Rose's life as she reports them: her alienation from and resistance to the power structures of Oxford University and the 'master signifiers' of Oxford-style Philosophy, through to becoming a 'master' herself; the struggle in her childhood and youth to overcome her 'hysteric' or self-divided subjectivity, culminating in the collapse of the 'phantasm' of her investment in the 'symbolic' order (symbolized by hearing her own disassociated howl while witnessing a wedding party); her affair with a Catholic priest and the survival of its breakdown, not by retreating into her old 'ego-ideal' but by casting it off; and finally her illness, how she lived by learning to love it, so that in the last months of her life, despite its ravages, she found a new vitality and exuberance. Dwelling, Antigone-like, in the space located between the symbolic death already suffered and the physical death to come, her 'naked soul' is released to celebrate life in a language of silence, prayer and praise. Thus, Rose finally converges with her chosen persona of Miss Marple: passing unnoticed, she is able to take an infinite view of things, but still retain her curiosity and passion for life.

Ratekin presents Rose's life-narrative as a series of collisions between her unconscious and her ego, with each collision signalling both a dispossession of her ego and a subsequent expansion of its contents, as she gains ever deeper insights into the workings of her own unconscious. This presents a sympathetic and perceptive reading of Rose's spiritual development, but Ratekin remains on the exoteric surface of the text and fails to apprehend its esoteric meaning – and for the simple reason that he mistakes the character of its protagonist. *Love's Work* is not only an account

of Rose's personal *Bildung*; it is a veritable *Bildungs-roman* with a cast of many characters, of which 'Rose' is just one, albeit the principal one. The primary intention of the work is *not* the self-disclosure of the author. Indeed, it is perhaps more 'other-exposing' than self-disclosing. Rather, *Love's Work* is dedicated to the education of the reader. Since deception is the very essence of indirect communication, we should not equate the statements of the characters with the beliefs of the author, even when the character 'is' the author. Accordingly, in the reading that follows, the name 'Rose' as it appears in the text will be treated as pseudonym or, better still, as a 'heteronym'.[8]

To illuminate how the text functions as a Socratic mode of indirect communication, it is instructive to read *Love's Work* by applying Rose's own account of the formation of modern consciousness in *The Broken Middle*. Under the heading 'Code and Commentary', Rose identifies four areas of convergence between Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Kierkegaard's *Repetition* in order to describe four 'stages' of consciousness: pleasure, shrewdness (spiritual animal kingdom), stoicism/unhappy consciousness, the 'paradox'. Rose states that these '*positions* are not *oppositions* – they can be suffered simultaneously'.[9] And this holds *a fortiori* when they are applied to real people, as in *Love's Work.* Nonetheless, it is not difficult to apply these categories to more or less distinct characters in the memoir. 'Jim', for example, characterizes 'pleasure' ('Philosophy remained cleverness, a game, but not a stage on life's way… He found no way … of bringing his inner emotional turmoil into his philosophy, his discipline, his art'[10]). Shrewdness is presented by the young (or hysteric) 'Rose'. Stoicism/Unhappy Consciousness corresponds to Rose's father/mother – 'Father Gorman' (no relation) and 'Jean Austin'. The 'paradox' corresponds to 'Edna', 'Yvette' and the mature 'Rose'.

It is also evident that *Love's Work* presents a correlation between these character positions and the 'ascent' of consciousness through cardinal 'moments' in the historical evolution of modernity. To map this, we must turn to the final chapter of *Love's Work*, where Rose presents a highly compressed account of the genealogy of modernity, beginning in the Protestant Reformation, passing through the Counter-Reformation, thence through to eighteenth-century Pietism, the Enlightenment, and ending in postmodernism. The most critical moment in this reconstruction is the 'dialectic' between the Protestant Reformation and the 'baroque' Counter-Reformation, since this provides Rose's basic paradigm of all subsequent cultural shifts in modernity.

In this respect, Rose's argument is heavily reliant on the historical genesis of modernity set out by Walter Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. In her essay, 'Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism', Rose maintains that the significance of the Protestant Reformation does not lie in the event itself, but rather in its aftermath. Within a few generations, the enthusiasm for salvation had died away but 'the anxiety of salvation' persisted. Moreover, Luther, in delivering religion to the Prince, paved the way for the usurpation of the 'priesthood of all believers' by the '*Princedom* of all believers'. As a result, in the Counter-Reformation, the possibility of salvation becomes separated from the quotidian world. In the drama of the period, this separation is expressed in the depiction of the sovereign Prince grown melancholy through the loss of meaning, and rendered ineffectual and indecisive by his sadness. Into this power vacuum steps the court 'intriguer', 'all intellect and will power' (as Rose cites Benjamin) combining 'strict inner discipline and unscrupulous external action'. He could be a 'saint or evil genius'. Both the Prince and the intriguer are products of this '*created and creaturely world* with the aspiration but *without the promise of redemption*'. In this abandoned world, the divorce of salvation and meaning receives aesthetic expression in the form of an allegory of worldly destruction, the piling up of souless things: an '*excess of signification without salvation*, which is the meaning of worldly aestheticization, not truth as beauty but ornamentation without truth – *the Baroque ethic*'. Rose adds emphatically at this point in her commentary: this is the 'spirit of Fascism, or, *what Fascism means*'.[11]

The Enlightenment is presented as the outcome of Pietism. This is another example of a Reformation that produced its own opposite, for the 'law of the heart' that defined Pietist enthusiasm was inverted in the Enlightenment into 'an absolute and universal authority, without awareness of history, language or locality', the 'univocal imposition of a standard, whose very formal impartiality masks its origin in a partial interest'.[12] The flip side of the Enlightenment is postmodernism, which Rose understands as a return of the baroque ethic. In the conclusion to *Love's Work*, Rose aligns postmodernism with Benjamin's concept of the baroque, labelling it the 'unrevealed religion':

> This *unrevealed* religion is the baroque excrescence of the Protestant ethic: hedonist, not ascetic, voluptuous, not austere, embellished, not plain, it devotes us to our own individual inner-worldly authority, but with the loss of the inner as well as

the outer mediator. This is an ethic without ethics, a religion without salvation.[13]

The four 'historical moments' adumbrated above – in reverse order: postmodernism, Enlightenment, Counter-Reformation and Reformation – provide the external dimension of the inner world of the characters depicted in *Love's Work*. From this point of view, Rose's description of the chaos and neglect of Jim's apartment in his last days is presented both as criticism of the hedonistic stage of individual consciousness *and* as a critique of the post-modern world that produces it.

> I find it impossible not to see that apartment, which is branded into my mind, as the emblem of the post-modern city. With its garish half-light provided day and night by a green and yellow Tiffany lamp, it was the veritable philosopher's cave. Crammed with the phantasmagoria of Western culture, everything, by the time we got to it, was in a more or less advanced state of decreation. The most mighty art books, multi-volume sets of the major philosophers in the original languages, Greek, German and French, a unique music collection comprising thousands of records, tapes and CDs, hundreds of American paperbacks of literature and philosophy – all were scored with dirt, infested with cockroaches, stale with dust and debris.[14]

Moving from Rose's nightmarish, *Waste Land*-like depiction of the postmodern city to her portrayal of modernity, we are confronted with an equally dystopian vision in her descriptions of the Birmingham hospital where she received treatment, and its environs. Enlightenment reason is embodied in the representation of the professional reserve of the doctors, the icy language in which they express their fatal judgements and in the mechanical efficiency of the nurses. In contrast to the formal rationality that defines the internal order of the hospital regime, the vista of the hospital waiting rooms and the district surrounding it reveal the material inequalities suffered by the patients and the local residents. Rose conveys the anonymity of the waiting room in the following nightmarish description:

> In the amorphous reception area of the hospital, large oblong notices in five oriental languages are perched above the lintels to the lifts to the right of the main entrance of the hospital and over the entrance to the main interior corridor, the longest hospital corridor in Europe... The people milling here cover the spectrum of the life-cycle: they look

like 'Mussulmen', the working prisoners of labour and death camps who give up the will to live... Hordes of people sitting in rows are condemned by those notices to the indifference marked by their contrary signification. All access and egress lies through this dispiriting terrace of deprivation.[15]

Outside the hospital, things are just as bad. Rose's description of Dudley Road echoes that of Jim's apartment; another example of the excess of the decrepit signification that defines the postmodern world.

> Poverty from every decade of the century seems to have been dumped here: boarded up shops, wholesalers, the unemployed, countless furniture shops selling gaudy sofas too hard to sit on, five female dummies with kohl eyes in cheap saris, dishevelled children out of school. Huge advertisement hoardings sail majestically through the filthy screeching air, mocking the residents with their immaculate blandishments.[16]

In sum, Rose paints both Enlightenment modernity and postmodernism in a very grey light. They would appear to have no redeeming features whatsoever. Moreover, this judgement extends to the people that inhabit it: the doctors and nurses, the waiting 'hordes', the 'Mussulmen', the 'dishevelled' children, and so on.

The two intertwined moments of Protestant 'anxiety' and Counter-Enlightenment 'intrigue' are presented in *Love's Work* through a series of episodes taken from from Rose's childhood experiences. This is rather surprising for it would seem prima facie that an infant could not have acquired the requisite intellectual capacity to be an intriguer. However, it is precisely this implied assumption of innocence that Rose repudiates. Protestantism denotes the anxiety of a subject born into a world experiencing a crisis of traditional authority. The subject may respond to this anxiety either by work, to secure the condition of its own salvation, or, as the locution intriguer suggests,

by 'play', by making mischief: the attainment of salvation through negativity.

Rose interprets her childhood dyslexia and ocular problems as being symptomatic of her unconscious rebellion 'against the law, the tradition of the fathers, and against the precipitous fortress of the family'. The 'blind protestanism' that produced her dyslexia also created the means of its cultivation. Reading, Rose informs us, became the 'repository of my inner self-relation'; a means 'of distance from and deviousness towards myself as well as others', and a way of securing a 'personal, protestant inwardness and independence'. But, 'as with the varieties of historical Protestantism, progenitor of modernity', her newly won independence came at the cost of the 'incessant anxiety of autonomy'. Equally, however, it enabled her to become 'roguishly adept at directing and managing the world to her own ends' – her ticket to the 'spiritual animal kingdom', to shrewdness. There is one more incident from Rose's Protestant education that is of note. As a young child, she stole a hymn book from a classmate. She was discovered, but not admonished or punished in any way. The hymn book was duly returned, and that was that. Except that it left Rose, 'at the mercy of a guilt that I could not begin to expiate myself. I was forced into an inner thralldom to an unknown god...'.[17]

We noted above that Rose's comment that reading allowed her a distance from her inner and outward 'deviousness'. Indeed, she believed she 'harboured secret, malign and crafty powers'. In other words, Rose was an infant intriguer. She evidently regards her deviousness as primordial: 'I was never innocent as a child.' In the course of the messy divorce between her parents, she utilized these 'devilish' powers to demonize her father by splitting his good and bad qualities, and projecting all the good qualities onto her stepfather, all the bad ones onto her father. This led her to confuse the borderlines between fantasy and reality, undermining her capacity to 'feel murderous in the confidence that I would never commit the foul act', and ruining her ability to 'tolerate highly charged yet contrary emotions about the same person'.[18]

Following her parents' divorce and subsequent protracted custody battles – a judge at the end of one sitting pronouncing: 'A plague on both your houses' – Rose became progressively estranged from her father. She dreaded his fortnightly visits, when he picked up her and her sister in his car and took them out for the day, to the point of nausea. Rose describes the conflict with her father in biblical terms:

> The battles waged between my father and myself took place, however, in his mystical chariot. Wheels within wheels and full of dreadful eyes, the enthroned Almighty chastised his prophet Ezekial for his abject rebellion.[19]

She felt that her father was subjecting her to psychological persecution. As instances of this, she

cites his admonishing her for breaking the fifth commandment to honour (not *love*, Rose wryly adds) the father; his impugning of her femininity by suggesting that she had the hands of a man; and his accusation that her 'wickedness' had been a factor in Rose's stepmother miscarrying 'the little brother I so craved'. (Rose accepts that this was a false memory on her part, albeit ambivalently.) Rose's father responded to her decision to change her name by deed poll from Stone to that of her stepfather (Rose) by breaking off contact, and they did not see each other for another five years. However, it would appear from the text that they were subsequently reconciled. This is symbolized in the book when Rose describes how, at her request, her father presented her with a set of the books of the medieval Talmud Rashi, inscribed with his blessing 'for his strange, eldest daughter of the law, who takes the son's part, too'.[20]

Before proceeding, it should be observed that Rose's apparent self-analysis of her turbulent relation with her father conforms very closely to a Kleinian narrative of childhood development. Whereas Ratekin reads Rose through the grid of Lacan, Rose reads herself through that of Klein. First, Rose's statement 'I was never an innocent child' is congruent with Klein's basic tenet that 'drives are relationships[,] and libidinal and aggressive fantasies are from the outset the mental expression of both life and death instincts'.[21] It is this destructiveness emanating from within that makes the infant anxious. Second, Rose's description of how as a child she unconsciously split herself and her 'objects' – in the latter case, the good and bad parts of her father – is a simplified form of Klein's concept of the 'paranoid-schizoid position': the use of phantasy by the infant as a mechanism for protecting itself against its own inner violence. Finally, Rose's account of the increasing horror she felt about demonizing her father conforms to Klein's concept of the 'depressive position', which refers to the point in the child's development when its ego can perceive the object as a whole, in which good and bad parts coexist. It then feels guilt for the damage that its destructive phantasies have done to the object, opening the way for the integration of the personality.[22] Although the 'paranoid-schizoid' and 'depressive positions' originate in childhood, Klein makes it clear that they continue into adulthood. Therefore, it is not incongruous of Rose to use her own childhood experience as a means of illustrating the far-from-childlike 'intriguer'.

To sum up the 'story' so far: by making her inner experiences and external observations emblematic of modernity, Rose has sought to shake us out of our own self-securities and lead us into the labyrinthine world of anxiety, paranoia, manipulation, abuse, anomie, indifference, violence and exploitation, both inside and outside ourselves. She has forced us to confront all the violent impulses and emotions that we want to disown and project onto others. In short, she has sought to educate us.

Interlude: *Picnic at Hanging Rock*

At this point in the 'story', Rose suddenly changes register and cuts to a poetic description of Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and its cinematic adaptation by Peter Weir. It relates the fictional story of a girls' school picnic at the eponymous rock, which ends in disaster as two of the schoolgirls and one of the teachers disappear without trace, never to be seen or heard of again. As a result, the school is ruined. The headmistress, Mrs Appleyard, and Sara, an orphan who had been refused permission to join the picnic as part of a persecutory campaign conducted against her by Mrs Appleyard, both commit suicide. The reader/viewer is given no explanation as to why the girls and their teacher went missing, or of what happened to them afterwards. However, to Rose, 'it is obvious what happens'. 'I know', she says, 'because the central mythic opposition in the story is that of the stone and the rose' – her 'two' surnames. On Rose's reading, 'Hanging Rock' is the Rock of Zion, symbol of a merciless, transcendent deity:

> Sublime and severe, the rock is supremely dangerous; for it takes whatever it wants and offers no explanation. It is power and might without love and grace: the god of an old testament, the Ancient of Days.[23]

The schoolgirls, by contrast, are all virginal sweetness and light, 'spring roses and romance'. The teacher who disappears too is also a virgin. What was their fate? 'They took and were taken into eternal life in exchange for the eternal damnation of Sara and Mrs Appleyard.'[24]

Note that Rose states that the girls 'took' eternal life; they were not simply taken by it. Miranda, the senior girl, 'foretells the future' and leads the ascent. The outcome is a 'mystic marriage, the marriage of power and might with grace and love', purchased at the expense of Mrs Appleyard and Sara: a '*divine retribution*, timeless and foreknown'. It is the enactment of a mythic drama. Everything happened as it was meant to happen. 'Everything begins and ends at exactly the right time and place.' In the space

of four pages, Rose repeats this phrase twice, and she also designates the 'right time' in question: it is '[a]t midday, when time stops'. It is then that the 'knife slices the heart-shaped Valentine cake in half, proleptic penetration of their as yet intact vaginas', and the 'doom of Sara is announced'.[25] However, having solved the mystery, Rose brusquely dismisses the story's 'egregiously erotic spirituality' as a misrepresentation of redemption and repentance in Judaism and Christianity, respectively.

Although Rose ultimately disowns the truth value of the myth, her claim to be uniquely qualified to understand its meaning is evidently intended to disclose to the reader some aspect of truth about herself (or us). It doesn't take a Sigmund Freud to work out that the 'Rock' symbolizes her father (Stone), but the attribution of the other characters to 'Rose' is not so straightforward. Nonetheless, it is possible to align the characters in the narrative with the Kleinian 'paranoid-schizoid' and 'depressive positions' implicit in Rose's description of her relation to her father up to this point. On this interpretation, Sara would stand in for the young Rose in the former 'position'. Note, too, that Rose describes Mrs Appleyard and Sara as 'doubles', involved in a 'battle of will and wits'. She continues:

> The victim will not become good: she makes her own the violence she is dealt, just as Mrs Appleyard is dominated by the abuse which damaged and deformed her.[26]

The parallel with Rose's account of the fights in her father's car between the 'Almighty' and the 'prophet Ezekiel' would seem to confirm this reading. But when the characters are read from the point of view of the 'depressive position', it would appear that Rose could equally well be equated with Miranda. For, as we have seen, in assuming her position as the 'daughter of the law, who takes the son's part, too', Rose became reconciled with her father by sacrificing her previous one-sided or 'demonic' perception of him. By analogy, Miranda's union with the 'male spirit of the voiceless rock' is only made possible by the death of Sara *and* Mrs Appleyard. This is the deeper truth revealed by the tale that remains once its 'egregiously erotic spirituality' is eschewed: namely, that the marriage of the Stone and the Rose symbolizes the formation of a strong ego capable of maintaining itself against the threat of inner and outer violence, irrespective of gender. However, as the term suggests, the 'depressive position' is not stable, for it is predicated on a sense of loss and guilt

for the destruction wrought by its own formation. In other words, the ego, despite having achieved a fragile unitary state, is nonetheless in a state of mourning. One might call this the first 'Antigone' moment: 'Because we suffer, we acknowledge that we have erred.'

Rose places great emphasis on the fateful nature of the action. 'Everything begins at exactly the right time and place.' One might add that everything also ends at the right time and place, for it turns out to be of no ultimate significance. As Rose explains:

> Thus the order of the film, that it begins with the picnic and disappearance of the girls and ends with the two suicides, is of no consequence. The parity is the theme, for these mysteries balance each other, regardless of their temporal sequence...[27]

In my view, this observation is an allusion to Benjamin's *Critique of Violence* and his account there of the dialectic between 'law-making' and 'law-preserving' violence, which equalizes out the sum of injustices over the course of its 'oscillations', and to which Benjamin counterposes the idea of 'law-abolishing violence'. In her essay on Benjamin, Rose criticizes the way he employs law-abolishing violence, but not the idea itself. Rose takes Benjamin to task for his failure to provide any criterion of judgement by which law-abolishing and law-making violence might be distinguished. As a result, she points out that the whole notion of law-abolishing violence may be easily co-opted to justify the nihilistic violence of a revolutionary anarchism or a fascist idolatry. In this respect, Rose's criticism of Benjamin is in keeping with her attack on all forms of theological antinomianism that would seek to separate the 'lesson of law from the lesson of love'. Her argument is that such a severance represents a regression, as it were, to the 'paranoid-schizoid' position in the body of philosophical thought; a form of Gnosticism that, put simply, splits off the 'good' (love) and rigidly opposes it to the 'bad'

(law). In Rose's view, the Gnostic heresy in all its forms breeds a spirit of self-righteous fanaticism as it seeks to re-create the world in the abstracted image of its own purity. She detects this even in apparently benign thinkers such as Rosenzweig and Buber.

However, Benjamin is exempted from this general charge in one critical respect. In drawing a distinction between law-abolishing and law-making violence, Rose maintains Benjamin is

> the only modern Jewish thinker who is consistent enough to realize that this violence in law has implications for the idea of God. To avoid transferring the world's violence in law to God's violence in love, Benjamin defines divine sovereignty not as *love* but as law-abolishing *violence*. In his essay 'The Critique of Violence', it is not violence which is criticized, but any notion of the rule of law.[28]

It is evident that Rose wants to retain Benjamin's conception of divine violence, while at the same time detaching it from his messianic notion of 'now-time', the intervention of law-abolishing violence in a flash of redemption, by finding a way of *mediating* it in history, both theologically and politically.

Within the context of Judaism the concept of divine violence is already mediated theologically in the form of Revelation through the Oral Law and the Written Law as transmitted through the Rabbinic Talmud Torah. Rose notes with approval that Benjamin's notion of divine violence is 'guided' by, not deduced from, the second commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill', but she believes this in itself cannot provide sufficient grounds for sound political judgement. As a complement, Rose recommends the idea of Halakah as a form of 'local jurisprudence' that is able to explore the 'complex contextuality of the commandment', and so provide the basis of a wise *phronesis*.[29]

From the political perspective, Rose sides with Adorno against Benjamin. Affirming Adorno's dictum that 'universal history must be construed and denied', Rose observes that Adorno would 'unravel the antinomies of realization before staking everything on the flash of redemption'.[30] Of course, this is how Rose conceives the political dimension of her own project: the work of unravelling or reconstructing the antinomies of modernity so as to keep the 'middle' and the 'ethical' open, coupled with a readiness to 'risk' political action.

Rose's objection to Benjamin's notion of now-time culminates in its incorporation into her notion of the suspension of the ethical.

> *To posit that the ethical is 'suspended' is to acknowledge that it is always already presupposed.* It grants a momentary licence to hold the ethical fixed and unchanging. But once this is granted, the moment will be imperceptible, for the movement of faith does not take place in time, or, it takes place in every moment of time...[31]

Faith is at once a mode of understanding and an ethical, or supra-ethical, act. It releases the individual to act in a way that does not return it to itself; to risk life so that it can live it – symbolized by Abraham's readiness to bind Isaac with faith not resignation. Rose assimilates Kierkegaard to Hegel: 'The life of spirit is not one that shuns death, and keeps clear of destruction; it endures death and in death it maintains its being.'[32] This is to suspend the 'love of violence' in the 'violence of love':

> It is *this witness alone* – this always already knowing yet being willing to stake oneself again – that prevents one from becoming an arbitrary perpetrator or an arbitrary victim; that prevents one, actively or passively, from acting with arbitrary violence.[33]

Returning one last time to Rose's synopsis of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, it may be seen how it serves as a parabolic summation of Rose's whole project. The notion of the now-time is symbolized by the 'arrest of time' at noon; the descent of the eternal into the temporal; the elevation of the pedestrian to the sublime. But, whereas for Benjamin the mythically foreordained cycle of repetition is destined to repeat itself forever unless it is interrupted by the metaphysical equivalent of a nuclear holocaust, Rose believes that now-time can be, as it were, mobilized. That is to say, now-time does not enter into the world in a lightning flash; it is, rather, an *aporia*, continually reconfigured in time and history. Thus, on a Rosean retelling of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Miranda will ascend *and* descend the rock. As a result of her ascent, the rock will no longer be as before, the 'Ancient of Days', 'all power and might' that takes what it wants without explanation, for it will have been transformed into a 'boundlessly expiatory' deity that 'without demanding sacrifices accepts them'. The violent, loveless God has become the God of violence-in-love. Miranda, by falling in love with violence, has freed herself from its terrors, and has thus freed herself for love. This is Rose's version of the willing of the eternal return of the same, *Amor fati*. It would appear to entail the perfect memory of all violence perpetrated upon one as the prelude to its active forgetting. Guilt without

punishment has become punishment without guilt. This is the second Antigone moment: complete self-overcoming, 'inaugurated' rather than 'aberrated' mourning. By contrast, it is precisely Mrs Appleyard's and Sara's refusal or inability to love the violence that has been done to them, and by them to each other, that dooms them to destruction. This is an all-forgiving or all-condemning God. But it also represents the greatest temptation to idolatry.

Fascism: how not to fight it

As we have seen, Rose rejects Benjamin's messianic notion of redemption on the basis that, if enacted, it would be indistinguishable from an apocalyptic form of violence; and, if not, it would become a static form of political mourning. Furthermore, to obviate these two outcomes, Rose introduces a concept of mediation to overcome the abyss separating law-abolishing violence and the law, appealing to the Rabbinic tradition of Talmud Torah and to Adorno's notion of the construal and denial of universal history through the reconstruction of its antinomies. However, I shall argue that neither recourse is sufficient to constrain the violent implications that she so clearly identifies in Benjamin.

First, in her essay on 'Ethics and Halacha', Rose undermines her own appeal to Halacha ethics, contra Benjamin, when she shows how the flexibility of Halacha inverts into a formalism once it has to maintain itself in competition with the legal system of the modern state.[34] Thus the issue of ethics in modern Judaism is returned to the issue of the antinomies of law within the state. In short, modern Judaism in both its orthodox and conservative forms cannot provide the historical mediation Rose needs to distinguish her notion of political action from Benjamin's messianic conception of politics. Second, Rose's appeal to Adorno fares no better. Adorno's notion of the construal of universal history is merely a concession to the sheer fact that there has been material progress in history.[35] Unlike Hegel, he does not accept that the modern form of subjectivity represents, historically speaking, a normative achievement. Similarly, Rose, although sensitive to the historical evolution of legal epochs, also eschews the Hegelian notion that this evolution charts an ascent in human freedom. It follows that the conditions for the realization of universal mutual recognition are neither accomplished in principle (as in Hegel), nor immanent in the present (as in Marx).

These problems make it difficult to see how Rose can connect theory and practice. On the one hand, her theoretical work demonstrates that, given the separation of morality and legality in modern society, all political attempts to overcome or mend this diremption will only reproduce them in a new form. On the other hand, Rose contends that political activity is a practical imperative. It seems that we are, to use a common expression, damned if we do take political risks, and damned if we don't. Rose positions herself equipoised between these two alternatives.

Nonetheless, there are two ways in which it can be said that Rose's work opens up a political praxis. One is to affirm that the work of speculative critique constitutes a political praxis in itself. This is indeed the position mostly taken by Rose. Another way, largely implicit in her work but explicit in her writings on Rosa Luxemburg, is a politics of 'spontaneity', which would rearrange the barriers of the political in a way that could not be inverted and re-incorporated into the status quo ante. If the first avenue presents a 'political speculation', the second presents a 'speculative politics', because its path would not be determined in advance by a 'method'. Contra Benjamin, however, the 'flash of redemption' presented by this spontaneity would be theoretically and historically informed by an understanding of the prevailing socio-historical context. The theoretical work of reconstructing the antinomies of modernity would provide precisely this component.[36]

However, Rose's reconstruction of the genesis of modernity is based wholly on the work of its critics: Marx, Nietzsche, Weber, Benjamin, Arendt. These are inadequate to provide a rounded understanding of modern society. Rose's depictions of modern life in *Love's Work* suggest she shared Benjamin's vision of modernity as a fallen world, despite her protests to the contrary. In short, the notion of mediation that Rose invokes against Benjamin has no ground on which to 'connect' her theory and her call for political practice. Rose claims that politics happens when 'you act, *without guarantees*, for the good of all – this is to take *the risk* of the *universal* interest'.[37] But, if the good exceeds the liberal polity (as it does for Rose), then there is no limit as to what constitutes the universal interest. Her call to act licenses an agonal politics that, if given free rein, would descend into anarchy. Rose's notion of the 'suspension of the ethical' as 'witness' is an insufficient constraint on the arbitrary violence it purports to preclude. All political movements can claim with good conscience to be acting on its behalf, and certainly to be taking the 'risk' of so doing. Indeed, proto-fascist forms of religious

fundamentalism could appeal to the suspension of the ethical to justify their praxis.

In her late work, Rose's anti-liberalism takes on a rather sinister tone. She maintains that liberal societies repress violence to such an extent that individuals have no means of managing and cultivating their violent impulses and feelings towards others and themselves. This prepares the way for a periodic 'return of the repressed' in sudden outpourings of seemingly irrational violence. To counter this, Rose calls for a 'noble politics' that, drawing upon Machiavelli, Nietzsche and Weber, would make transparent the *impure* relation between violence and human association that liberalism would seek to disguise.[38] A noble politics would restore classical *virtu* to modern politics by ridding us of our bourgeois sensitivities, and thus provide a 'bridge to love'. It is in this spirit that Rose castigates liberal parents for not allowing their children to play with toy guns, or for stopping them from watching violent video games, on the basis that it will impede their capacity to deal with violent emotions and prevent them from acquiring compassion for others. (Presumably, the same applies for adults playing with real guns.) Furthermore, she argues, a culture in which violence was openly represented and indeed enacted would be one that is also existentially more meaningful. That is to say, it would provide an antidote to postmodern nihilism. Rose contrasts Machiavelli's preference for the violent ceremonies of the ancients – 'sacrificial acts in which there was much shedding of blood and much ferocity; and in them great numbers of animals were killed' (as she quotes from the *Discourses*) – to the more peaceable ones of the moderns, commenting: 'The one ceremony celebrates, in the killing of animals, the violence out of which virtue emerges, the other substitutes a delicacy in which the human will is sacrificed.' One can only assume that Rose's decision to convert to Anglicanism was a late one. In Rose's words, 'To know the violence at the heart of the human spirit gives death back its determination and its eternity.'[39] It would seem love-*in*-violence is sliding into love-*of*-violence.

In 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation', Rose argues for an anti-fascist cultural criticism directed at the potentiality for fascism in the self-certainty of the modern 'moral will', and the reinforcement of its latency by the 'representation of fascism'. Rose's main target in this latter respect is Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. The film is indicted for insulating the audience from any suggestion that they might be complicit in fascism; and, moreover, for

allowing them to actually enjoy fascism as a spectacle. As an unsentimental counterpoint, Rose chooses *The Remains of the Day*, a Merchant Ivory film, which she recommends as an alternative way of representing the Holocaust, one that undermines the moral self-certainties of the audience and awakens them to the fascism lurking within themselves. Rose contends that by drawing the audience into identifying with, or at least showing empathy for, the head butler's unquestioning acceptance of his lord's Nazi sympathies, using a setting the audience can relate to – 'the great house', 'a political culture which we identify as our own, and hence an emotional economy which we cannot project and disown' – the film 'induces a crisis of identification' in the viewer.[40] For it purportedly brings about an 'active recognition in the nihilism of disowned emotions, and the personal and political depredations at stake'.[41] That is to say, it exposes the viewers to their own repressed violence, which the representation of fascism as a spectacle leaves intact.

In my view, it is unlikely that the film's reception induces any such 'crisis of identification'. For one thing, Rose's assumption that the 'great house' is an emotional centre of British cultural life is completely outdated.[42] For another, the representation of the country house in *The Remains of the Day*, as a metaphor for the fascist corporate state, places us at an even greater remove from seeing it as an emotional centre. But the main reason why the film does not challenge our identity in the way that Rose believes is that we have already worked through our emotions, certainly to a far greater extent than the aristocrats and servants depicted in the film. We are able to empathize with and forgive the head butler his passive fascism because we are aware that he lived in a far more repressed society than our own.

Similar arguments can be made for the audience response to *Schindler's List*. The film may be a sentimentalized version of the Holocaust, but it is still harrowing. I imagine most people who went to see it, certainly when it was first released, did so out of a sense of inexplicable guilt. It presented an opportunity to commit an act of atonement and witness by enduring the discomfiture of its spectacle. Rose's psychological egoism inverts this act of solidarity with mankind into its opposite: into a form of bourgeois smugness or voyeuristic sadism. Her interpretation of the film and its reception implies a systematic distrust of the expression of common feeling.

Rose's responses to these films derive from the conviction that the combination of an authoritarian state and a libertarian free market creates the ideal

breeding ground for the growth of a fascist movement that aspires to seize the power of the state for its own ends. However, her notion of politics completely ignores the significance of the state as a site of political contest. She invariably reduces it to Weber's definition as the holder of the monopoly of legitimate violence. As a result, her notion of politics is orientated by the concept of the public good, in the classical sense, and the notion of universal mutual recognition in the modern sense, and it is constrained by the separation of ethics and morality. But beyond that, it is wholly indeterminate. Furthermore, in keeping with her notion of the speculative method (which is a suspension of all method), Rose gives no indication of how the goal of the universal good could be advanced or what form its achievement would take. Everything is ruled in; nothing is ruled out. It is at once a macro-politics and a micro-politics. It is conducted both within a democratic framework and outside of this setting. However, on one point Rose is consistently clear: legal forms of recognition are systematic forms of misrecognition. Real recognition, for Rose, can only arise out of a conflict that transcends the normative framework of legal equality. From this point of view, the most noble and ignoble enemy is fascism, for it upholds the truth that all law is violence. The scene is then set for the ultimate showdown between 'violence-in-love' and the 'love-in-violence'. Such is the singular danger of Rose's political logic.

Notes

1. Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1993, p. xi.
2. In my two previous essays in *Radical Philosophy*, 'Gillian Rose and the Project of a Critical Marxism' (*RP* 105) and 'Nihilism and Faith: Rose, Bernstein and the Future of Critical Theory' (*RP* 134), I argued that Rose's establishes the basis for a renewal of the emancipatory impetus of Critical Theory. However, I am now sceptical of this. My critique here of the relativistic implications of Rose's notion of the 'broken middle' is anticipated in my 'Whither the Broken Middle: Rose and Fackenheim on Mourning, Modernity and the Holocaust', in Robert Fine and Charles Turner, eds, *Social Theory and the Holocaust*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2000.
3. I realize this is a rather sweeping claim, but it is evident that the KPD policy of 'social fascism' was hardly a productive one in the light of the immanent threat of fascism.
4. Tom Ratekin defines 'autothanatology' as the 'proximity to death within an autobiography' written in the shadow of a terminal illness. See his *Final Acts: Traversing the Fantasy in the Modern Memoir*, State University Press, Albany NY, 2009, p. 2.
5. Editor's Preface to Gillian Rose, *Paradiso*, Menard Press, London, 1999, p. 8. Caygill's comment is surely the door through which all serious interpretations of *Love's Work* shall have to pass.
6. Ratekin, *Final Acts*, p. 51.
7. See *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Norton, New York, 2007.
8. Rose takes over the notion of 'heteronyms' from Fernando Pessoa as denoting the creation of imaginary lives to explore the author's fragmented self. See *The Broken Middle*, p. 161 n25.
9. Ibid., p. 15.
10. Gillian Rose, *Love's Work*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1995, p. 103.
11. Gillian Rose, 'Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism', in *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays,* Blackwell, Oxford, 1993, pp. 189–96; here, pp. 190, 193, 181, 189, 196.
12. Rose, *Love's Work*, p. 128.
13. Ibid p. 127.
14. Ibid., pp. 109–10.
15. Ibid., p. 81.
16. Ibid., p. 80.
17. Ibid., pp. 31–47.
18. Ibid., pp. 31–42.
19. Ibid., p. 41.
20. Ibid., p. 46.
21. J.A. Greenberg and S.A. Mitchell, *Object Relations Theory in Psychoanalysis*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, Mass., 1983, p. 143.
22. My summary of the 'paranoid-schizoid' and 'depressive position' is taken from Juliet Mitchell, 'Introduction to Melanie Klein', in Lyndsey Stonebridge and John Phillips eds, *Reading Melanie Klein*, Routledge, New York, 1998, pp. 11–30.
23. Rose, *Love's Work*, p. 48.
24. Ibid., p. 50.
25. Ibid., pp. 49–51.
26. Ibid. p. 51.
27. Ibid.
28. Rose, 'Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism', pp. 188–9.
29. Ibid., p. 208.
30. Ibid., p. 207.
31. Rose, *The Broken Middle*, p. 148.
32. G.W.F. Hegel, cited in Gillian Rose, 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation', in *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 56.
33. Rose, *The Broken Middle*, p. 148.
34. Rose, 'Ethics and Halacha', in *Judaism and Modernity*, pp. 25–32.
35. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* trans. E.B. Ashton, Routledge, London, 1973, p. 320.
36. Rose provides an indication of the way in which this conjunction of theory and practice might work in her essay on Rosa Luxemburg in *The Broken Middle* (pp. 199–215). Ultimately, I would argue that even here the arbitrariness resulting from Rose's suspension of the ethical is in evidence.
37. Rose, 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation', p. 62.
38. Rose, 'O! untimely death. /Death!', in *Mourning Becomes the Law*, p. 144.
39. Ibid., pp. 141–2.
40. Rose, 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation', pp. 53–4.
41. Ibid., p. 52.
42. Raymond Williams notes that by 1900 the country house was no longer based on land, but on capital. Hence, 'the true fate of the country house novel was its evolution into the middle class detective story'. In the popular imagination 'emotionally' they are 'centres of isolated power, graft or intrigue'. *The Country and the City*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1973, p. 250.