LOVE'S WORK

GILLIAN ROSE

INTRODUCTION BY
MICHAEL WOOD

ALSO INCLUDING
"IN MEMORIAM: GILLIAN ROSE"
BY GEOFFREY HILL

GILLIAN ROSE (1947–1995), who is now recognized as one of the most important and influenti critical thinkers of her time, was a British philosopher and writer. For many years she taught at Susse University, drawing large numbers of research students, before she accepted a chair in social ar political thought at Warwick University. Her major works, which ranged from Continental philosoph to Judaism, include *The Melancholy Science*, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, *Dialectic of Nihilism*, *Th Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society*, *Judaism and Modernity*, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, ar *Paradiso*.

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LOVE'S WORK

A Reckoning with Life

GILLIAN ROSE

Introduction by Michael Wood

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Introduction

In December 1994 Gillian Rose gave an extraordinary lecture on time and death, closing with a intense reading of the Rilke sonnet that begins “Be ahead of all departures,” “*Sei allem Abschie voran*.” At that moment she had less than a year to live, and had already confounded her doctor predictions by remaining stubbornly and lucidly present to the world for longer than they ha calculated. Lucidity, and indeed a certain elegant stubbornness, were her mark as a philosopher and person. Her friend Jay Bernstein reminded us in an obituary that for her, philosophy was nev “abstract or abstruse”; more like a passion of the mind. Rose herself tells us in *Love’s Work* th studying philosophy at Oxford almost destroyed that passion—“the earnest stupidity of [he schooling” was succeeded by “the deeper stupidity of reading philosophy at university”—b fortunately nothing could finally estrange her from what she called her *daemon*. During a year in Ne York she discovered contemporary Continental philosophy, and especially the thought of T.W Adorno, on whom she wrote her first book, *The Melancholy Science* (1978). Important works followe —*Hegel Contra Sociology* (1981), *The Broken Middle* (1992), among others—and she became know as a philosopher who asked the hard questions and worked in several quite different intellectu registers. Her presiding figures were Hegel and Kierkegaard, and when I first met her she was deep a long and endlessly articulate conversation about them with Stanley Cavell.

The lecture I mentioned began with simple daunting words, true of all of us, but peculiarly resona in the
context of Rose’s personal history: “I may die before my time.” What she called anachronism was n just her topic; it was a threat. To be properly early in Rilke’s sense is to know, among other thing that “death is not nothing.” The rest of the lecture evoked, with great patience and sorrowf understanding, the twin traditions of the baroque theater as defined by Benjamin and mode philosophy
as represented especially by Heidegger, Levinas, and Blanchot, which have, in their very differe ways, claimed that death is indeed nothing, “endless in its extermination of life,” as Rose puts it, a not susceptible to any sort of
“inner relation” to its meaning.

What did Rose mean by that small word “may”? Did she think her doctors might be wrong? Th she would after all, as she says she hopes at the end of *Love’s Work*, not be “deprived of old age,” a become a version of Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple (albeit, we should add, a Miss Marple who wa the most strenuous of philosophical detectives)? No, but she believed that the entertaining of su thoughts was indispensable because, as she said in that same lecture, “the future is the time in whi we may not be, and yet we must imagine we will have been.” We must imagine this even if— especially if—we are pretty sure we shall not be there; and we must do this precisely because of t implication of the rest of the opening sentence. We may miss our time, or we may not have on “Before my time,” in this argument, doesn’t mean before my allotted span, whatever that might be; means before I have understood and practiced the work of dying as I need to.

Love’s Work is itself part of this understanding and this practice. Written in 1993 and 1994, a published in 1995, before Rose died—the description on the original dust jacket evokes her in t present tense—the book was both a radical departure from her philosophical writing and a brillia continuation of it by other means. In a chapter describing her illness and its failed treatments, s

speaks of the disagreements among her doctors, and says she “wanted control over the broadcasting any ambiguities.” She then glosses two meanings of the word “control,” the second of whic illuminates the whole act of writing of which it is a part. Control means first the “ability to manag not to force, the compliance of others, to determine what others think and do.” The second sense of th word is “more elusive,” Rose says, but “saves my life and...may induce the relinquishing of ‘contro in the first sense.”

> When something untoward happens, some trauma or damage, whether inflicted by the commissions or omissions of others, or some cosmic force, one makes the initially unwelcome event one’s own inner occupation...In ill-health as in unhappy love, this is the hardest work: it requires taking in before letting be.

This is scarcely control at all anymore: just the deepest, bravest, most scrupulous sanity. It is, as th connection between health and love suggests, the work not just of survival but of moral flourishing. saves life not because it avoids death but because it includes it—because it comprehends death “in th non-medical sense,” as doctors scarcely ever do.

For Rose learning how to die is inseparable from remembering how one has lived. She calls up th memory of a friend who died of AIDS, of a woman who survived cancer at the age of sixteen to live t the age of ninety-six, of another woman who “gave people, young and old, the courage to face th terrors of desire in themselves.” She takes us to Auschwitz and Krakow, to Jerusalem, to the grin mind-narrowing Oxford of her student years, the chaotic, inquisitive New York of a later time, th Birmingham of her hospital. Here, for example, is her description of Dudley Road, surely worthy any considerable novelist:

> The Dudley Road is almost impassable, like certain precincts of American cities. Poverty from every decade of the century seems to have been dumped here: boarded-up 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.

The work of love, for Rose, is what she calls her “life affair”: a matter of getting love wrong, an going on getting it wrong, but not only getting it wrong. And in this respect love is curiously lik reason as Rose defines it: a matter
of risk. “Reason, the critical criterion, is forever without ground.” And again, most powerfully, in lucid definition of the philosophical modernity that is so often taken for something else, somethin slicker or shallower: “There is no rationality without *uncertain* grounds, without *relativism* authority. Relativism of authority does not establish the authority of relativism: it opens reason to ne claimants.”

The person who emerges in this brief autobiography is fierce, difficult, vulnerable, and unrelentin in her will to hope and in her devotion to what she calls “the shared
cares of the finite world.” When she writes, thinking of Proust (“*les vrais paradis sont les parad qu’on a perdus*”), that “the only paradises cannot be those that are lost but those that are unlocked as result of coercion, reluctance, cajolery and humiliation,” she is saying paradise is not a gift or a effect of grace but the end of a plan of work, and although no one works to get into an inferno, on might need to stay there for some time to perform various necessary labors.

Rose’s epigraph to *Love’s Work* —“Keep your mind in hell, and despair not”—is taken from th sayings of the Russian monk Staretz Silouan, and is glossed several times within the text. There is, f example, “the unhappiness of one who refuses to dwell in hell, and who lives, therefore, in the mo static despair.” There is the moment when Rose describes herself as unhappy in love and refusing a consolation, including “the endlessly inventive love of my sisters.” “Keep your mind in hell and.. she says, without completing the sentence. Alternative healing, with what Rose regards as its fal spirituality, is said to offer a “counsel of despair which would keep the mind out of hell.”

Rose has done something wonderful with what seems to be the logic of the monk’s precept. If yo can weather hell, he appears to be saying, and not despair in the process, you will be saved. B contrast Rose turns hell into a staunch refusal of despair. To be afraid of hell is to lose all practicab hope, to seek to avoid the dark violent moments that mark all real life. To inhabit hell, to keep one mind there, is to find the hope that is not the opposite of devastation but its complement. Geoffre Hill, in his poem “In Memoriam: Gillian Rose,” suggests that “love’s work” offers “a blea ontology”; but it’s bleak only if you downplay the love of life that continues in hell, and the principle refusal of despair that governs all of Rose’s work. At the end of *Minima Moralia*, Adorno, on who Rose wrote so well,

asserts that “the only philosophy which can responsibly be practiced in the face of despair is th attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint redemption.” But even Adorno didn’t manage to think of hell itself as redemption’s home.

—MICHAEL WOO

Love's Work

Keep your mind in hell,
and despair not.

STARETZ SILOUAN,
1866–1938

My first meeting with Edna was inauspicious.

It was May 1991. I had just arrived in New York for the first time in five years, and had been met a Newark Airport in New Jersey by Jim. Unsure of what to expect, I first walked up at the barrier to th wrong man—to someone who looked like a caricature of Jim as I remembered him in good healt well over six foot tall, a mane of blue-black hair, thickset, welcoming. Suddenly aware of my wilf mistake, I stopped just short of an inept embrace. I stood my ground and then I saw him. His postu was as crumpled as the clothes he'd obviously slept in, his hair had turned gingerish and it rose fro his head in wild clumps with bald patches in between. This uneven growth dominated his manner too, as I realised after one minute in the taxi heading towards Manhattan, which loomed in archetyp and mocking splendour ahead of us. My formerly laconic and witty friend had become loquaciou needy, addressing with urgent familiarity everyone we chanced to have dealings with over the ne few days—taxi-drivers, bell-boys, waiters. And when he wasn't holding forth to those nearest to hir he issued a continuous, low, moaning sound, a piteous cradling for the inner, wounded being tha strangely, had surrendered to the publicity of the city streets. On Broadway, from Columb University, where Jim's apartment was located on 111th Street, down to the Lincoln Center, where went early morning swimming, I soon learnt to recognise multitudes like him: the old men in the forties, shrivelled, drained, mumbling across the intersections, icons of AIDS, amidst the bodif vibrancy of those striding to and from work and subways and stores.

By the time we reached Edna's apartment on West End Avenue, I was assailed by even mor apprehensions. I felt uncomfortable meeting the two people who were offering me accommodation f the first time in the company of this unkempt and erratic being—my beloved friend—to visit who was, I then thought, the whole purpose of my trip.

I needn't have worried, for each successive encounter proved as bizarre in its own way as the firs Gary, Edna's employer, was waiting in the foyer of 365 West End Avenue. I had been told that he wa a private scholar, a man of means and intellect, meticulous and courteous. So he was: but I had n been told that he was afflicted with a long-term wasting disease that left him with uneven gait ar hands locked in a rictus-like claw. Gary was utterly unfazed by Jim's doleful appearance and low pitched litany, for he was only too eager to communicate the essentials concerning Edna in the sho space of time we would have between leaving the lobby and reaching her fifth-floor apartment via th elevator. I knew that Edna was Gary's secretary and was expecting a dapper, matronly woma perhaps in her fifties. Edna, Gary hurriedly explained, was ninety-three years old. She had recent contracted cancer of the face; and, as a result of a prosthetic jaw, had had to relearn to speak. When then handed Gary the litre of Laphroaig purchased at Duty Free, he exclaimed, "Please God, you' not bearing whisky as a gift for Edna!" In her eighties, Edna had secretly started drinking a bottle Calvados every day, until she had had to be hospitalised, detoxified and warned that her octogenari life was at risk from her newly acquired habit. Thus we were ushered into Edna's presence an increasingly confused, I met my Intelligent Angel for the first time.

Edna took Jim on, greeting and welcoming us both as her immediate "Darlings," in a rasping b emphatic voice. She settled us into her huge high-backed armchairs, a legacy, she explained, of th outsize men in her family. In this family, it turns out, there are no surviving men, just Edna, her sixty

eight-year-old retired mathematician daughter and her two granddaughters. Edna was diminutiv amongst the heavy and ornate furniture; her tiny, wrinkled round face dominated by a false nos which lacked any cosmetic alleviation whatsoever. Smooth and artificially flesh-coloured, with thic spectacles perched on top, this proboscis could have come from a Christmas cracker. In the earl mornings, when I emerged from my room on my way to swim, Edna would have already bee installed in her reading chair for an hour or two. She would call out to me to enquire whether I wou mind if she were not to put on her nose. By then, not only did I not notice the nose, but, if anything, found the neat, oblong black hole in her face even more appealing.

Edna goes out to work for Gary seven days a week, taking the bus uptown, but often walking th thirty or so blocks back downtown. She acts as Gary's hands, word-processing his scholarship an correspondence; he in turn acts as the guardian of her much less infirmities, lending support to h arm as they climb the stairs to the restaurant on Broadway and 112th Street where they take lunc daily.

Meeting this third extraordinarily afflicted person within the first hour of arriving in New Yor transformed the difficulties of the first two meetings. Edna and Jim were soon exchanging stori from New York music life. "I've taken part in New York music life since 1904," mused Edna. Sh would have been seven years old then. And I watched, not for the last time, the delight that fle between the fading forty-seven-year-old and the one full of ninety-three years.

Later, when I found myself alone with Edna, there were certain things which she was determined make clear: "My marriage was not happy. My husband was disappointed with me. Although, when h died," she added, without a hint of triumph or rancour, "I was the only person permitted to attend hin The nurses in the hospital had to assure him that they were 'Edna.'"And for good measure, she als insisted that she did not eat vegetables. Nor, as she showed me around the apartment and we entere her bedroom, had she painted the room pink as long as her husband was alive: "I don't want you think that I made a man sleep in a pink room."

Edna believes in magic. One of the many books that she handed over to me after her early mornin reading sessions was *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. And the magic in that book is, think, the kind of magic which Edna believes in: the quiet and undramatic transmutation that ca come out of plainness, ordinary hurt, mundane maladies and disappointments. Thus she lives, whi Jim, locked in a fatal embrace with maternal dreams, "where everything," he groaned, in one of h rare moments of lucidity, "begins with 's'"—his mother's name was *Esther*—Jim had to die.

What Edna did not tell me then, did not tell me until several years later, after her ninety-six birthday, when Jim was long dead and my own circumstances had radically changed, was that she ha first been diagnosed as having cancer when she was sixteen years old—in 1913. She graduated fro Barnard College in 1917. How can that be—that someone with cancer since she was sixteen exud well-being at ninety-six? Could it be because she has lived sceptically? Sceptical equally of scien and of faith, of politics and of love? She has certainly not lived a perfected life. She has not bee *exceptional*. She has not loved herself or others unconditionally. She has been able to go on getting all more or less wrong, more or less all the time, all the nine and a half decades of the present centu plus three years of the century before.

Now, of course, I believe that it was Edna whom I went back to New York to meet. Edna was Jim' parting gift to me. She is an annunciation, a message, very old and very new. Edna is, as she insist my "home from home." Whereas the idea of the original home would arouse an agon of bitt ambivalence in me, the redoubled home has no colour or cathexis of pain inseparable from i welcome.

My journey to Auschwitz and east across Galicia to Bełżec on the border of the Ukraine did not affe
me in the ways I had expected: it was the unexpected, rather, which provided the nodes of enigma th
compressed incompatible and uncomprehended meanings together.

In my inaugural lecture as Professor of Social and Political Thought at Warwick in February 1993
mentioned that I was one of a number of Jewish “intellectuals” chosen to advise the Polis
Commission on the Future of Auschwitz. What vain posturing! Scientific status, superimposed on th
even more dubious notions of cerebral and cultural ethnic identity! We were set up. Enticed to pree
ourselves as *consultants,* in effect, our participation was staged. Conscripted to restructure th
meaning of “Auschwitz,” we were observed rather than observing, the objects of continuous Holocau
ethnography, of Holocaust folk law and lore.

On the train from Warsaw to Kraków, from the comfort of the first-class compartment, m
attention was drawn to a man who stood all the way in the corridor. Tall and angular, with a gaun
beak-like visage, he seemed to bear accumulated suffering with majesty, as if generations of pover
and loss had pared away all excess to reveal without guise his true nature.

At the banquet held several days later in the baroque ballroom of the Grand Hotel of Kraków, onc
the favourite venue for Jewish wedding receptions, the evening was framed by the pastel stucco
ceiling, tessellated floor and massive console mirrors. Gathered with our Polish counterparts, loc
dignitaries and intellectuals, we were served ample vodka to mask the absence of substantial food,
misplaced deference to the kosher scruples of the Jewish group. I found myself next to the intriguin
stranger from the train. I discovered that he was a former aristocrat, like a large number of th
assembled company, many of whom had spent the last forty years as art historians and curator
appointed custodians of their dispossessed familial palaces and mansions, with their sombre galleri
of art and furniture.

My half-week in Poland had already taught me that I was in a land of martyred people, whic
harbours in its midst a still more martyred people—the Jews. No—the Jews are not *harboured,* b
expelled into the borderless cemetery in the air, for the soil of death camps is cursed not consecrate
ground, according to Halachah, Jewish law. From the tower of the Mariacki Church on the Ryne
Głowny, the largest market square in Europe, on to which the hotel abutted, night and day, on ever
hour, the air vibrates with the plangent tones of the trumpeter. The trumpeter’s long note, followed b
two shorter notes of even lower pitch, to alarm the city of the enemy’s advance, stops abruptly as th
Tartar arrow pierces his neck. Four times, once to each corner of the tower, this herald of martyrdo
doles out his fatal music, so that, wherever you are, you hear the foreboding and fading echo of h
remorseless courses of ruin. As I travelled across the country, I learnt that it is this ever-repeate
martyrdom that serves as the calibration of daily clock time, broadcast at noon every day on the rad
station.

I found it more congenial to respond to Polish suffering: I found no consolation of lamentation f
the Jews. In the beech forests outside Tarnów, where 800 children and 1,000 old and infirm Jews wer
shot, the roughly marked mass graves are surrounded, mid-March, by masses of tiny white woo
anemones, wind-flower and bird-song, and the audibly rising sap of the pearly trees, as if a fairy ta
has taken place here. At the desolation of Bełżec, the first death camp, there were no survivors, an

there are no visitors today, just the freight trains thundering by in loud, rhythmic indifferenc Nothing grows from this soil because 600,000 bodies were burnt out on the ground, which remai spongy with colourless grasses: nature is a death's head here. Six matt Soviet urns brood on th periphery of the camp, beyond which stretch spinneys of silver birches—the fairy fantasia even dar to hover on this horizon, too.

But I wept, I wept soft Polish tears for Count Potocki, not knowing, then, who he was. Later th same evening of the banquet, two colleagues and I were wandering around the centre of Krakó looking for a tavern that had been recommended to us. Suddenly we found ourselves by mistake in courtyard in the presence of the ailing Count. We had stumbled into his old family town house, whic he had just recovered after forty years. He invited us to share a glass of tea with him, and conducted u up a solid central stairwell with a cast-iron balustrade, which, he explained, had been installed by Nazis, to the top floor, where he inhabited two small rooms crammed full of furniture, largely covere with dust sheets. George Wheeler, one of my companions, conservation consultant from th Metropolitan Museum in New York, was qualified to relish the magnificence of such casually strew antiques, while I noticed the sadness of the Count and the many pills he was swallowing. His sons, said, would now return from the States to enjoy their patrimony, and his grandchildren would ru gleefully up and down the stairs. The second floor of the house, he told us, as he carefully poured th tea from the awkward teapot, had been the art gallery, where the family's collection of paintings ha hung, "The third largest private collection in Europe." The collection has been the property of the sta since 1945, and is now housed in the main public gallery in Warsaw. He spoke without rancour, indee without emphasis, in his perfect English. He had been a pupil at Ampleforth School in Nor Yorkshire, and had scraped a living for the past forty years as a translator from English to Polish. On thing he respectfully bade me do, aware, I now believe, but without humiliating me, of my ignoran of Polish history and hence of his lineage, was to read Adam Zamoyski's *The Polish Way.* And th was how, much later, I discovered who he was.

Eventually, we wished him good-night and began to descend the massive flights of stairs. Th climb up had audibly shortened his breathing and he apologised for not accompanying us down an out into the polluted night air of Kraków. He remained stationed at the top of the stairwell, leaning o the heavy balustrade and watching silently as his visitors made their way down. It took an eternity retraverse that Nazi monument, and he didn't take his eyes from us. Was he remembering his wif who had not lived to enjoy the return? Or anticipating the excited cries of his grandchildren? thinking back over the history of Poland, in which his ancestors had played so many decisive parts- as politicians, diplomats, poets and artists, and, above all and always, as owners of large estat worked by serfs? Yet I wept for this ruined and restored Pole—to my surprise, for I understoo perfectly well that this reallocation of private property is designed to create a species of investment, lure capital back from the States and from elsewhere in the diaspora. Such investment wall final demote limitless aristocratic seeming to the limits of bourgeois effecting and procuring.

"Heschel'er Riddell Kalasheen Bandit." I love the sputter and beat of these words, with the acce falling on the ultimate syllable: Heschel'ér Riddéll Kalashéen Bandít. This was the curse my patern grandmother would hurl at her husband when she was angry with him. She had frequent cause to b angry. She underwent fifteen pregnancies between 1899 and 1918, eleven live births, two babi smothered accidentally in her bed, and innumerable abortions. To this day, my father is not su whether Mrs Pollock, who visited regularly once a year, was the midwife or the abortionist: the moa and shrieks from behind closed doors were such a regular season of family life. "Heschel'er" is th

Yiddish diminutive for “Heschel,” “Harry”—if you must. “Riddell,” the family surname, change
hopefully to “Stone” to improve the family’s Lancashire credentials. “Kalasheen” is the Yiddis
version of Kalisz, the mid-Polish city from which the paternal family originates. “Bandit”
international: it means “You bandit!”

My father tells this story with obsessive relish, repeating his mother’s words and rhythm. Th
suggest an almost saving humour: “You are incorrigible, but I must love you.” By comparison, in m
mother’s family I find only devastation, made doubly demonical and destructive by the diversion
vast amounts of psychic energy devoted to its denial. Yet, when we were children, we were inducte
without preliminaries into the mysteries. My mother said, “Grandma would kill German babies
“Why would Grandma kill German babies?” “Because the Germans killed Jewish babies.”

My mother was brought up by a woman—her mother, my grandmother—who was the on
surviving member of her family. When Grandma was nineteen and Grandpa seventeen years old, the
had run away from Łódź, also in mid-Poland, to Germany to marry, against the wishes of the
families which belonged to different communities, Misnagdic and Hasidic. After their marriage, the
followed Grandpa’s family and emigrated to London. Between August 1939, when she and m
grandfather last holidayed, as they did annually, in Łódź, and 1949, when Cousin Gutta came and to
my grandparents that she, a remote cousin, was the only one left, fifty members of Grandma’s fami
were killed—the children bayoneted first in front of their parents. Nowadays, my mother denies thi
she denies that it happened and she denies that her mother suffered from it, so deep is her ov
unresolved suffering. This denial and unexamined suffering are two of the main reasons for her a
jovial unhappiness—the unhappiness of one who refuses to dwell in hell, and who lives, therefore,
the most static despair.

My God-forsaken families—from Kalisz and Łódź to Treblinka, but also to the East End
Manchester, Cheetham Hill Road, and to the East End of London, Whitechapel Road.

Yvette and I planned to visit Jerusalem together, where she was born and grew up. I very much wante to go to Israel with Yvette, who was teaching me biblical and modern Hebrew, capital and cursiv script. But she died before we could realise our dreams.

Once I arrived late for a taxi at Yvette's flat in Harrington Road, Brighton. The flat was perche high above a vociferous fire-escape, which I always tried to dampen on ascending in order to surpri her. On this occasion I'd booked the taxi to fetch me from her place, since I wanted to deliver volume to her and then fly on somewhere else. My mind went completely blank when the impatie driver remarked blandly, "There was an old woman at the address you gave me. She didn't kno nothing about a taxi." An "old woman"? Who? Yvette? Preposterous!

While I copied out Rilke's *Elegies* for Yvette, Yvette sent me Yeats's "John Kinsella's Lament fo Mrs Mary Moore":

ne other knows what pleasures man
table or in bed.
hat shall I do for pretty girls
w my Old Bawd is dead?

I suppose Yvette's looks could be misleading, for she was canny and crafty enough to disappear int the environment when it suited her purpose. From the moment that, unobserved, I first noticed an watched her, as she paced up and down the platform at Preston Park Station in Brighton, I knew that was in the presence of a superior being. Green tights, a shapeless dark skirt and a mop of nondescri grey hair were but transparent media for the piercing intelligence in evident amused communicatio with itself, and warranting, on each turn at both ends of the platform, a grim but irrepressible smil which spread slowly over her bare, unmade-up, delicate features.

This lucid apparition came to me many times— crossing the Level in Brighton, in the corridors the School of European Studies, as well as frequently at that same station platform—before I foun myself being introduced to her at Julius Carlebach's home, and the supernatural being began acquire a measure of the natural.

That evening at Julius's was memorable for another reason. It was the occasion of my initiatio into the anti-supernatural character of Judaism: into how *non-belief in God* defines Judaism and ho change in that compass registers the varieties of Jewish modernity. The more liberal Judais becomes, the less the orientation by Halachah, the law, and the greater the emphasis on individu faith in God. Julius sat at the head of the table in a dining-room which was museum and mausoleum the Carlebach family's distinguished and dreadful history. Portraits of his ancestors presided. Betwee Solomon Carlebach, Rabbi of Lübeck, Julius's grandfather, mentioned in Thomas Mann's *Dr Faustu* and Julius's cousin, Shlomo Carlebach, the singing Rabbi of Manhattan's Upper West Side, Julius' father, Joseph Carlebach, the famous Rabbi of Hamburg, accompanied his congregation fro Hamburg to their death outside Riga, with his wife and the four youngest of their nine children. Th square in Hamburg where his synagogue stood has recently been renamed Carlebach Platz. In h acceptance speech in Hamburg, when Julius received the honour on behalf of his family, he pointe out to his audience that they were assembled in the same school hall where he had stood, a fiftee

year-old schoolboy, on 10 November 1938, the day after *Kristallnacht*, when the Gestapo came ar told the children that they had four weeks to leave Germany. "You could hear people collaps internally," Julius commented on his adult audience. What happened to those children?

At dinner, Julius explained, "An Orthodox Jew doesn't have to worry about whether he believes God or not. As long as he observes the law." Subsequently, I became familiar with the notoriousl inscrutable Midrash: "Would that they would forsake Me, but obey my Torah." When we parted th evening, Yvette and I had agreed that I would visit her.

Yvette's dowdy and unselfconscious bearing was unable to conceal her visceral vocation as th Lover— not the Beloved: she was predator not prey. I had picked this up immediately that first time spied on her from my station hide-out. The main room of her small granny-flat was furnished so that conjured the atmosphere of Jerusalem's Ben Yehuda Street. Teeming with colourful artifacts, agains the backdrop of the holy city, it re-created in miniature the bazaars of Eastern Europe, displaying th wares of so many destroyed folk cultures. From every available space, photographs of Yvette's fiv children and ten grandchildren listed tenderly towards her. We invariably sat opposite each other the solid table by the window, high above the tree-lined road, and Yvette expounded to me he philosophy of love. Yvette was sixty-five years old when I first began to get to know her, and she had concurrently, three lovers:

hat lively lad most pleasured me
all that with me lay?
nswer that I gave my soul
d loved in misery,
t had great pleasure with a lad
at I loved bodily.

inging from his arms I laughed
think his passion such
fancied that I gave a soul
d but our bodies touch,
d laughed upon his breast to think
ast gave beast as much.

When I protested at this ceremony of lust, Yvette's reply was prepared: Yeats's "Last Confession was elaborated by Swinburne:

thorns go as deep as a rose's,
d love is more cruel than lust.

Yvette described my idea of creative closeness in relationships as a "total" and, by implicatio totalitarian attitude. However, she insisted that while the number of her former lovers was too great count, she had only been in love five times. This was an important distinction to her, and sh appreciated having it confirmed by Miriam, her youngest child and only daughter.

Yvette was formidably well read. She had been married to an academic who taught English at th Open University, but now, in the mid-1980s, she was working as a secretary at the University Sussex. Yvette regularly attended lectures and conferences, and she always posed with studie diffidence the most well-aimed critical questions, which presupposed her command of whatev

literature was at stake. She was, however, deeply Francophile, and her staples were Proust—she rerea
A la Recherche in its entirety, once a year, in her antique, slightly foxed Pléiade edition— ar
Maupassant, all the passages and stories expurgated from school editions. She also had a sly b
ardent passion for the novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett. And these authors, whom she inhabite
knowing them to be both enticing and rebarbative, were the source and confirmation of her philosoph
of human relationships.

One Sunday, with the rain singing out of the secular silence, I met Yvette by chance walking in th
unusually deserted Preston Park. We recognised each other with pleasure from afar. Yvette came u
close to me and put her hand on my arm. I already knew that her daughter, Miriam, after years of n
being able to conceive, including an ectopic pregnancy, with the consequent loss of one of h
fallopian tubes, was now, at long last, expecting. Yvette said in a factual and unemotional tone o
voice, "I have cancer of the breast. I have to wait for an operation." She paused to gauge my respons
which was guided by her evident dispassion, and then she added, "Miriam and I are now two ladies-i
waiting."

Yvette was divorced from her husband. It had been he who had initiated the decisive break afte
they had had five children together. Yvette stressed that the shock of their unanticipated separation d
not derive from the closeness of their tumultuous family life, but from the fact that their partnersh
had always sustained much extra-marital activity on both sides. Several small children would b
deposited in the coping hands of Nanny as Yvette snatched a furtive and hurried rendezvous with he
current liaison. "I loved my man," she would defiantly assert of her former husband. Although she fe
that she and her daughter Miriam, in particular, had been utterly deserted by him, she refused t
rewrite history. Coming from a family in which my mother divorced both of her husbands, and, i
addition, denied that she ever loved them, I found Yvette's aggressive vulnerability refreshing.

Yvette was the most enthusiastic and inventive grandmother. She couldn't spend enough time wit
her grandchildren, and she was especially close to Miriam's two children, who lived downstairs in th
main body of the spacious Victorian house that Yvette had bequeathed to her daughter. She frequentl
visited her favourite son and his wife in Southampton with their older children. Another son woul
visit from London with his Sephardi wife and their two children, and the remaining two sons lived i
Israel and Australia.

Yvette was completely devoted to pleasure without guilt. This was what made her such an attentiv
and encouraging confidante. She would listen with rapt attention to my confessions of pain and rag
but invariably dismiss my scruples, overcoming the nihilism of the emotions by affirming the validi
of every tortuous and torturing desire. Although I was thus tutored by her, I watched with squeamis
propriety as Yvette playfully squeezed her three-year-old grandson's balls and penis. "Aren't childre
meant to emerge to independence with a residue of resentment from the fact that it is the mother wh
accidentally arouses but explicitly forbids genital pleasure?" I ventured with theoretical pedantry i
remembrance of Freud, and of the narrow border between child care and child abuse. Yvette positivel
relished my staid inhibitions, which she dismissed airily as contrary to the universal and sacred spir
of lust. A Grand Mother indeed.

In the far, dark corner of Yvette's main room there stood a heavy veneered chest of drawers with
pride of family photographs jostling on top. The three bottom compartments of this tallboy we
jammed full with pornographic material, which, one day, after I'd known her for quite a while, Yvett
showed to me. The photographs were almost entirely of women, clad in enough to titillate, an
revealing proud genitals in various *contrapposto* positions. Yvette possessed very little mal
pornography, not because it is less available, but because it didn't interest her.

When I remarked one day, in a different context, that I couldn't reconcile her grandmother identity with her prodigious sexuality, she looked sadly and wisely at me as the one corrupted b unnatural practices: "Have you forgotten the connection between sex and children?" She was, course, partly right.

Yvette's inexhaustible animus could be traced to her unsentimental disapproval of her own mothe as a mother and as an Israeli. According to Yvette, her mother, now in her nineties and living in home in Jerusalem, had barred her children from loving or esteeming their father. Yvette's infinit fury at this ban had bestowed on her the lifelong celebration of lustful love. This vocation w inseparable from the rage at her mother, but also, and deeper still, it was inseparable from her secr concurrence with her mother concerning the intellectual inferiority of the male. Her contempt w overlaid, and therefore indiscernible to the untrained eye, with a much more explicit contempt for th resentful ruses of preyed-upon females.

To capture her distance from her mother as an Israeli, Yvette gives over the narrative voice to he for the space of a story. Yvette had, after all, run away in her early twenties with a one-legge Englishman, a "goy," as she would say. I cannot find a published version of this jumble tale, but on probably exists in Hebrew or Yiddish.

A LEGEND ABOUT THE BAAL SHEM TOV (BESHT)—
THE BEARER OF A GOOD NAME

> *In the remote Polish village where he lived, there is a widow—shall we call her Katrilevska for she is* not *Jewish. She has several mouths to feed and is hopeless and helpless. A coarse-looking peasant enters her hovel and ascertains her needs. First, he brings her firewood, fills up her stove and lights it. Then he goes back, returning with two pails of water on his shoulders and now she can boil some coffee. Lastly he brings her a warm loaf. All this at 4 a.m., and all the while the peasant hums a song in a foreign tongue, but it is very sweet. He bids her farewell and disappears. It is the Besht, and he was humming* tehilim, *and was back in his house just after 4 a.m., in time to pray* shakhrit.

The crucial thing is that Yvette's mother recited this story with disapprobation—or, I wonder, was i heard with disdain by the young Israeli children?

Yvette had two major recurrences of cancer before she died. After the first, relatively mino operation, a nip in the breast, which she valiantly displayed to select visitors, and several courses chemotherapy, Yvette fell *in love*—in love, according to her own criterion—hopelessly and helpless in love. But no Besht ever came to save her or even to console her. The object of this serious passio was thirty years her junior, a colleague of my generation. Clever, charming, promiscuous an superficial, he enjoyed Yvette's friendship, but was genuinely disconcerted by her remorseless ardou Yvette was monstrous: she pursued him with myriad love letters, phone calls, messages pinned to h door, unsolicited visitations. I taunted her, "Yvette, if you were a man, your actions would be seen a gross harassment." On a later occasion, her violent blandishments unabated, I asked her, archly, wh she would do with him, were he, miraculously, to succumb? Yvette replied without a fraction o hesitation, "I would chew him up and spit him out."

A whole generation of young women and men were bereaved by Yvette's death. She made nev friends up to the end, and she gave people, young and old, her courage to face the terrors of desire themselves and to ease off the unstable alleviation of attributing to the Beloved our desire for tho

terrors. She could impart this wisdom because it grew out of the folly that she was still endless contesting in herself. And the cure for an unhappy love affair was always the pleasures of the ensuin one.

Yvette practised the *ars moriendi;* I had long known that she would. The day before she died, h spirit intact, she listened with a look of beatitude on her simplified face to the story that I had broug with me from Leamington Spa, where I had just moved, to the Brighton hospice, where she lay in room that formed a hard crystal of light, exposed to the raucous and merciless spring. It was a lo story, and when I had finished relating it to her, and had sat quietly with her for several hours, sh finally spoke out of the suffused silence, “You are now going to leave.” Then, in her own way, sh gave me her blessing: “You know how I feel. You know how I feel. Nothing has changed. Nothing ha changed. All the very best. All the very best.” I bent over her and kissed her on the lips several time her lips reaching mine each time before mine touched hers.

Among the many pieces of unlined file paper, cut into thirds and covered with Yvette’s old fashioned typewriting, I found another fragment of Swinburne:

om too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
e thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be

at no man lives for ever,
at dead men rise up never;
at even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

I believe that I did in some sense visit Israel with Yvette, that through knowing her, I someho reached the soul of that land of blessings and curses.

New York. Auschwitz. Jerusalem. My three Cities of Death: where I have been drawn time and tim again over the last five years. My dead, dead Jim. Yvette across her civil wars. My numbered bu nameless dead in Poland. Dearest, doughty Edna.

These lives, these deaths, like mine, come to me on the analogy from Plato between *the soul* and *ti city:* the souls across the century, and the cities across the centuries.

Taking afternoon tea in the local, balmy Sunday park, surrounded by complaisant and complace young families, the shallow waters of the duck pond idling in front of us, my sister Jacqueline, wh had been working on Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, took a deep breath and announced: “I’ve ha enough of mad girls.”

I was never an innocent child. I was for ever accompanied by four wicked and energetic Particle secret and clever companions, who never allowed me any inhuman innocence of beginning, and wh kept me prodigiously busy. These imps were called “Im,” “A,” “Di” and “Dys”: “Im-migration,” “A theism,” “Di-vorce,” “Dys-lexia.” Dyslexia, the last of these genies, is really the first: for, b discovering from very early on that the desert of stony words could be made to bloom, that I cou channel what I could not overcome, I acquired a puckish strategy for enchanting the agents adversity. The fourth disability could be made to germinate the other three.

In Jerusalem, Paul Mendes-Flohr’s son, Itamar, is so profoundly dyslexic that, at the age of twelv he cannot read a single word in any of the three languages which he speaks fluently: Hebrew American-English and Arabic. Rita, his mother, is a Sephardi Jew from Curaçao, hence the “Mendes in the family name. His father, Paul, is an American Jew. Itamar bears five names: his parents amalgamated surname, and three given names, one Israeli, one Arabic, one English.

Itamar’s parents, secular Zionists, are pro-Palestinian and active in the peace movement. Rita, h mother, architect and artist, stands daily in the roaring midday sun, dressed in heavy, black, lon garments, with other women, mostly Ashkenazim, members of the protest movement “The Blac Palestinian Women.” They expect the insults hurled from marauding bands of right-wing youths, wh also congregate in the square. Itamar’s father, Paul, hosts a group of Arab intellectuals and Israe academics who assemble weekly at the American Colony Hotel, situated between the Damascus Ga and Herod’s Gate, the one location in Arab East Jerusalem where you see vehicles parked next to eac other, some with Israeli and some with Arab numberplates. Paul, who combines his political activitie with being Professor of German-Jewish Intellectual History at the Hebrew University, has lost th sight in one of his eyes by neglecting to procure any treatment for a detached retina.

Dyslexia in a Jewish child is fraught with significance. For childhood is the preparation for th reading of the portion of the law at thirteen, the bar mitzvah, when the child becomes an adult, “a so of the law.” In Itamar’s case, I suspect, as in mine, the inability to read is a blind protestantism, a unconscious rebellion, against the law, the tradition of the fathers, and against the precipitous fortre of the family. The stuttering in the face of the Written Word enacts a mimesis of the embattled an shattered truth of father and family. The confusion of names marks the child with the stigmata of th fantasised identity which he cannot assume—and so he stumbles against its central asylum, th written names of the law.

My conviction that I harboured secret, malign and crafty powers was encouraged by the adu treatment of me as a well wound-up mechanical toy that perversely refused to work. The emotion and symbolic meaning of my dyslexia was overlaid and obscured by several physical disabilitie which received a lot of attention.

Quite recently I was propelled out of an optician’s chair with the impetus of primitive and long forgotten despair, when the optician remarked to me casually that I have a “lazy” eye. On recoverin my equilibrium and equanimity, I had it explained to me that the epithet “lazy” is employed to rend the nature of a squint intelligible to children. I riposted that this vicious metaphor can only be hea by a child as a harsh, personal judgement on her very being, on her good intentions and on h willingness to collaborate. Since the defect in my vision and the defect in my comprehension of wor

on the page were not distinguished from each other, the pronouncement "lazy" tore down through m and ~~made me determined, once I learnt to read, never to rest in the work of deciphering dangerou~~s an difficult scripts.

The uncoupling of my wandering eye and my wandering mind did not finally occur until I w seven years old. I woke up in a hospital bed to find myself in the unaccustomed presence of both m father and my mother, which made me immediately aware, before I'd fully regained consciousnes that something very important and serious was happening to me. A row ensued between the two o them as to whether I should be permitted to eat or not. I cannot remember whose view prevailed, but do remember being fed mashed banana, which I promptly vomited up. Meanwhile, the operation correct the squint was successful, and now I could concentrate on learning to read.

Reading, however, did not interest me. With a persistent, dreary ache, my habit of sounding ou words backwards, of not seeing sense in the unit of conjoint letters, gave me the dull conviction that was a closed creature where reading was concerned. The special teacher, to whose house I was take unwillingly every day after school, her voluminous, unified breast bolstered on the table next to th tall glass of cold milk and the plate of dry, predictable biscuits, did not seem a likely anagoge in recalcitrant mysteries which possessed only a dubious claim on my soul.

The only paradises cannot be those that are lost, but those that are unlocked as a result of coercio reluctance, cajolery and humiliation, their thresholds crossed without calm prescience, or an preliminary perspicacity. Reading was never just reading: it became the repository of my inner sel relation: the discovery, simultaneous with the suddenly sculpted and composed words, of distanc from and deviousness towards myself as well as others. My disastrous Judaism of fathers and fami transmogrified into a personal, protestant inwardness and independence. Yet, as with the varieties o historical Protestantism, progenitor of modernity, the independence gained from the protest again illegitimate traditional authority comes at the cost of the incessant anxiety of autonomy. Chronical beset with inner turmoil, the individual may nevertheless become roguishly adept at directing an managing the world to her own ends. Little did I realise then how often I would make the retu journey from protestantism to Judaism.

On my sixteenth birthday I changed my surname by deed poll from "Stone" to "Rose," from m father's name to my stepfather's name. From one heteronym to another: for, if "Stone" substituted fo the Polish-Jewish "Riddell," then "Rose," English Rose, masked German-Jewish "Rosenthal," valle of roses, one of the many horticultural names arbitrarily adopted on emancipation by a people who God is absent from nature. This violent act of self-assertion, which was the culmination of sever years of impatient waiting, served as my bat mitzvah, my confirmation as daughter of the law. represented the end of my legal childhood, during which the conditions of my father's access had bee established by frequently challenged Orders of the Court. Now *I* could decide on the pattern communication and on our "access" to each other. My prematurely adult self-image was, howeve severely dented soon after this *rite de passage*. I discovered, to my disgust, on personal supplicatio for my birth certificate at the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane in order to apply for my fir passport under my new name, that I was officially, in law, at the age of sixteen—worldly, voluptuou and scholarly as I fancied myself—an INFANT SPINSTER.

I did not, of course, control any of the consequences of my action. My father responded rapidly my change of name by officially disowning me. As , I did not see him between the ages of sixteen an twenty-one. The Name: the Name. A rose is [not] a rose is [not] a rose is [not] a rose. And it wa Gertrude Stein who formulated the positive version of that liturgy—*Stein*, a "Stone," no less.

During a three-year period, when, a Lecturer at the University of Sussex, I was working on th German schools of neo-Kantianism, the dry and dusty volumes of epistemology evacuated from th entrails of the British Library, I purchased my first property. It was a modest, two-bedroomed flat in characterless modern block with shaky foundations in Stoke Newington, the only part of London that could afford. I worked three days a week in the British Library and commuted to Brighton on the oth two. In Stoke Newington I gradually discovered that I was dwelling among a community of Hasid Jews, the Lubavitch Habad. “Gradually discovered” because, while the men are instantly recognisab in their late eighteenth-century gaberdines, summer and winter, with their square beaver hats and lon ringlets hanging down over each ear, flanking their pallid, earnest faces, it takes longer to identify th women and children. They have a superficial appearance of normality, which is all the mo estranging in its radical deviation from the working-class norm, in this outer ring of London, to whic the underground does not extend. On marriage, women belonging to this sect shave their heads, an from then on they wear a wig, called a *sheitl*, which means “parting,” so named because of the partin the line of absence of hair, in this lugubrious concession to the cosmetic. They bear a child annuall issue of the commandment to copulate every Sabbath eve, and to refrain during and aft menstruation, when the women immerse themselves in the *mikveh*, the public ritual bath. The limbs these children are completely covered up, arms and legs hidden by gravid garments, whatever th season or temperature of the air. At night I could imagine that I was *a flâneur* in Middle Europ strains of High German, French and Italian, as well as Yiddish and Hebrew, would percolate from th street through the open windows of my flat. And on those days when, my own hair unwashed, I dashe to the launderette in the local parade of shops, with a chiffon scarf covering my head, my fac scrubbed and unmade-up, I would be greeted and treated as a member. This involved cultivating passing talent for altercation: arguing for priority in drying my linen, because *my* plane was leavi for the Holy Land half an hour earlier than the transport of my adversary.

I did not realise how deeply I had become accustomed to this neighbourhood iconography of th holy community, living in the midst of that peculiarly dense piety of popular Kabbalah, which enjoi the men—and only the men—to return the divine sparks to the creator in ritual song and dance, un one day, looking out of the window of the flat, I saw a wedding party arrive at the block of flats on th opposite side of the road. Not an Hasidic wedding, an ordinary English wedding. What struck me once was the lightness of the vision: slender young bridesmaids in short white muslin dresses wi loose bare limbs, the adults attired in the pastel hues of matrimonial finery, and the commingling o the sexes in easy high spirits, all on their way from the church ceremony to the jollifications of th reception. My disinterested perception of this happy procession was brusquely interrupted by the lou irruption of a subhuman howling, the source of which was unlocatable. It was howling as if from dark, dank cave, where some deformed brute had been chained and tempted since time immemoria The howling did not cease even after the last of the wedding party had disappeared from view.

It was I who was howling, in utter dissociation from myself, the paroxysm provoked by th vivacious contrast between the environing Judaism and this epiphany of protestants, the customar laborious everydayness broken by the moment of marriage, the cloaks of the clandestine pious cleave by the costumes of those weightless, redeemed beings. To this day, I cannot go to family weddings.

It was when I was living in Stoke Newington that I finally passed my driving test. I had overcome not only the fundamental lack of co-ordination between my mind and the mechanics of th motor vehicle, but, I discovered here, too, a much deeper inhibition. I see in my mind’s eye that n man’s-land which I had had to cross from the security of home, harbouring my mother, stepfather an sisters, to my father’s car, parked and waiting at a tangent to the house. My sister and I, obliged b

court to spend one weekend afternoon a fortnight with my father, would be driven somewhere by hi
for ~~a few hours, usually to the cartoon cinema, situated in Terminal One at London Airport~~. Th
battles waged between my father and myself took place, however, in his mystical chariot. Whee
within wheels and full of dreadful eyes, the enthroned Almighty chastised his prophet Ezekiel for h
abject rebellion. Sitting in the front passenger seat, I was wrathfully and precisely informed that I th
fifth commandment to honour (not *to love*, note) my father as well as my mother. Indeed, I ha
Measured palm against his palm, fingers against his fingers, I was told that I was the bearer of hand
with the magnitude of a man. I think my resistance finally broke one Saturday afternoon, when m
father told me, by way of explaining my beloved stepmother's unusual absence, that it was m
wickedness that had caused her to lose the child that she had been carrying—the little brother I s
craved, living, as I did, in a world of sisters.

Court case after court case contesting the conditions of access followed these traumatisin
interviews. And, to my increasing horror, my devilish powers grew apace out of the demonising of m
father. How many children find that their fear and hatred of a parent can actually land that parent
court, defending himself against charges brought on the child's initiative? What happens to childre
who split off their ambivalence about their parent and neatly personify it in two separate characters-
the wicked father and the good stepfather? This long and perilous upbringing spoilt my imaginatio
my ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality, to be able to feel murderous in the confidenc
that I would never commit the foul act. It ruined my capacity to tolerate highly charged yet contra
emotions about the same person, and not to isolate the dangerous aspects exclusively in one re
person.

This is the source of my excessive spirituality, my screwtape obsession with disembodied trut
How do I know what my father said to me? Over the years, I have asked him and my stepmother aga
and again whether they really did tell me that I was responsible in effect for the miscarriage of
foetus too immature for its sex to be formed. They always respond with great loving kindness, yet, an
here's the rub, I can never remember what they reply to my mythical question. No matter how man
times I ask them, and no matter how hard I try, I cannot recall the answer.

After one especially bitter court case, I learnt from Ann, our long-standing, resident mother's hel
and adopted member of the family, that the judge had pronounced: "A plague on both your houses
This surreptitious knowledge, smuggled in to me, of something not right on both sides, must hav
saved me by restoring a sense of unresolvable truth, by putting a disturbing and fuzzy paradox in th
place of stern and unequivocal judgement. But to this day, I do not care to drive a car.

My overcharged gnostic imagination continues to embellish the Manichaean opposition betwe
my fathers. Doctors of medicine, they are equally disaffected Jews. I do not use the conventional term
"assimilated," because it fails to capture the energetic alienation from traditional Judaism which s
forms the modern Jew, and which accentuates adopted characteristics—the dour and abrasiv
Yorkshireman, the horse-mad Irishman, full of the blarney.

On the two Passover *Seder* nights at my maternal grandparents', in the interstices of the assembl
company's chanting of the Hebrew, my father tenaciously polices solecisms of grammar an
pronunciation in the halting conversations which take place between the adults and the children
English with frequent lapses into Yiddish. My grandparents, who move easily between Yiddish
Polish, Russian, Hebrew and French (the last of these languages specially acquired for their freque
holidays at the gaming tables of Cannes and Nice), are indifferent and heavily accented speakers
English. They find my father's strictures burdensome and offensive, and they persist in the
macaronic medley of tongues.

When my stepfather replaces my father at *Seder* nights, the stakes are raised. In the place of
~~policeman, we have a comedian. Irving intones the Haggadah in the dutifully monotonous mumble~~
a son of the law. The patriarch, my grandfather, presides at the head of the long table, laden with a
the traditional signs and symbols. The youngest male child, my cousin, whose question, “Why is th
night different from all the other nights?” begins the holy recital, sits on one side of him; the elde
female child, myself, who, at the appointed time, opens the front door for Elijah, so that the angel
death should pass over the house, sits on the other side of him. In the course of the service, which h
its high points in the hide and seek of the coins in the matzo, but also its *longueurs,* Irving interjec
into the steady flow of the Hebrew a stream of very Anglo-Saxon obscenities. Grandpa pretends not
hear and continues expressionless in his recitation. For the children, the exquisite pain begins of tryin
to suppress their hilarity. The acceleration of these depredations is as predictable as the order of th
service itself. Grandpa starts to threaten disapproval by the most subtle expressions of discomfor
while the young people increasingly fail to suffocate their mix of consternation and glee at th
wholesome transgression. Eventually—how long can we hold out?—Grandpa pauses and feigns lon
suffering exasperation, the children collapse in merriment, and Irving makes a show of contrition.

The contrast between my father’s strict, clipped conformity to the Queen’s English and m
stepfather’s love of the underside of the language, pronounced with a Dublin lilt, gives you th
difference of character and temperament: the stern eye versus the eye moist with humour and illic
pleasure; the one, doctor of medicine turned stockbroker, devoted to the professional accumulation o
wealth, who gives nothing away; the other, doctor of medicine and compulsive gambler, reckless an
profligate, who carelessly loses everything. The stone and the rose. In my thirties, as my electe
apprenticeship in Judaism deepened, I approached my father and urged him to give me a five-volum
set of the Bible with the Commentary of Rashi, the great medieval philosopher and Talmudist.
explained to him that it is traditional for a Jewish father to give the set of five volumes to his son. M
sister Diana, who overheard my request, commented in a factual tone of voice, “Asking our father f
something is like trying to get blood out of a stone.” Nevertheless, he obtained the set for me an
inscribed it with his blessing for his strange eldest daughter of the law, who takes the son’s part, to
Irving brings peonies, *Pfingstrosen,* Pentecostal roses, magnified blooms of the early summer harves
the eternal in the fleeting benison.

worship the King all glorious above;
gratefully sing his power and his love;
r shield and defender, the Ancient of Days,
vilioned in splendour and girded with praise.

tell of his might, O sing of his grace,
ose robe is the light, whose canopy space;
chariots of wrath the deep thunder-clouds form,
d dark is his path on the wings of the storm.

e earth with its store of wonders untold,
mighty, thy power hath founded of old;
th stablished it fast by a changeless decree,
d round it hath cast, like a mantle, the sea.

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