Thoughts of Love

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Edited by

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CHAPTER ONE

THOUGHTS OF LOVE

GARY PETERS

Love is a fickle thing, fickle because it is not a thing. Love flows; we pour forth our admissions of love, are in turn swept away by its sometimes cruel and sometimes unloving intensity. One lover melts into the arms of another, a simultaneous emergence and dissolution of subjectivity and objectivity—one can never be an object of love, one can never be subjected to love—a dissolution that renders all dualism bereft. Badiou is right: love is a "procedure" to the extent that something proceeds, but he is also wrong: it is not exclusively a "two scene" (Badiou 2001: 51). He is right to resist the dialectical sublation of the two into the one, but the fidelity to two-ness understood as an eventual truth procedure needs itself to be resisted, not in the name of the one, but in the name of love, the poignancy of which is precisely the *coexistence* of two-ness and one-ness, as all young lovers will testify to (our conclusion).

But why does love have such a good name? Does it have a good name? Surely its fickleness contradicts the honour it receives? Could one imagine a more unworthy recipient of such valorisation, of such glorification? Of such passionate commitment (the passion for love)? In truth, love is neither true nor false; it deserves neither a good nor a bad name. Love cannot be named, nor can it be evaluated, nor can it be judged: love is not of the order of truth, goodness or beauty (or passion), hence its resistance to philosophy and (vice-versa) philosophy's resistance to it. Who would join a philosophy class to learn the secrets of love?[1]

But still we talk and write, make claims that are as grandiose as they are mystifying—"love is all", "love is stronger than death", "all you need is love" (a favourite…it's my age), "love makes the world go round"—why do we so love to speak of love, of that which is not of the order of speech? Is there a danger that our love of speaking will displace the very thing that we are speaking of? Yes, there is that danger, but then perhaps it is a necessary risk, one that has to be taken if we are to ensure that silence

is not inadvertently permitted to lord it over the radically inarticulate domain of love. Derrida repeatedly says the same when finding himself standing beside the dead bodies of his friends, one by one, and required to speak of his love for them and (of course) of their own writing and speaking (always in that order, it's Derrida, remember). He speaks in order to keep the silence, ever-ready to impose its own unspeakable regime, at bay. The solemn profundity of silence is as much a sham as the clichéd, sentimental chit-chat that is also always available to impose its own form of mystification and obfuscation. Standing beside and speaking of/to his departed friend Althusser, Derrida speaks thus, and rather beautifully:

> Forgive me for reading, and for reading not what I believe I should say – does anyone ever know what to say at such times? – but just enough to prevent silence from completely taking over, a few shreds of what I was able to tear away from the silence within which I, like you, no doubt, might be tempted to take refuge at the moment….It is almost indecent to speak right now…but silence too is unbearable. I cannot bear the thought of silence, as if you in me could not bear the thought. (Derrida 2001: 114)

Turning this around, love, like speech, is itself "almost indecent", but, and this is the point, only *almost*. Through the pure force of its own dubious rhetoric, language is forever in danger of forcing love into the sterile chiasmus of an indecency of speech and the perceived decency of silence. Thus, most philosophical discourses on love reflect this very chiasmus and, as a consequence, perpetually restage the drama of love as a conflict of indecent and decent forces, a re-production that *almost* captures its theme—but not quite! But what is the nature and status of this "almost", this "not quite"? Counter-intuitively perhaps, silence says too much while speaking/writing says too little: Barthes writes something similar in *A Lover's Discourse*:

> My expressive needs oscillate between the mild little haiku summarizing a huge situation, and a great flood of banalities. I am both too big and too weak for writing: I am *alongside it*, for writing is always dense, violent, indifferent to the infantile ego that solicits it. Love has of course a complicity with my language (which maintains it), but it cannot be lodged in my writing. (Barthes 2002: 98)

So, why put our thoughts of love into writing then? Indeed, why collect the writings of others on love, and to what end? Each of the writers here in this volume could, no doubt, provide their own answers to these semi-rhetorical questions, even if their writings do not—why should they? Writing is not just about answering questions! Jean-Luc Marion, who has

of course achieved his recent fame thanks to his writings on love, declares that philosophers have largely ignored the subject of love (Marion 2007: 1), so at least the present work, alongside his own, might signal something of a sea change—but what exactly is likely to change? Will more writing on love bring us closer to its essence, can we "know" love, as the cliché "I have known love"[2] would suggest? Indeed is there any kind of relation between love and knowledge? Or perhaps knowing and knowledge must be distinguished in the case of love, and indeed not only there, which might make love a model, an exemplar of being—of being-with—that is irreducible to the lover's (or any other) discourse, including this one.[3]

Of course, the essays collected here are not lover's discourses; they are *about* love not the *expression* of love (that would be weird). But, having said that, the title of this collection—*Thoughts of Love*—consciously replaces the word "on" with "of" as a gesture (perhaps empty) intended to capture the fact that, whether consciously or not, intended or not, to write *on* love (in any way that is remotely meaningful) is to write from out *of* love. As in the French "*de*", to write *of* love is to write *from*: love is originary. This, of course, begins to bring us close to the Heidegger of *Being and Time* who installs "care" as a "primordial structural totality" that is ontologically prior to, and constitutive of the human and humanistic existential categories of (for example) love and devotion. (Heidegger 1962: 238) But typically, as Marion would no doubt point out if he referenced other philosophers (which he explicitly, and rather annoyingly, does not), Heidegger conspicuously avoids the subject of love; there is only one reference to it in *Being and Time* and then only in a footnote on the anxiety associated with the love of God. (1962: 492: iv). As an existential category, love is far too ontical for him; too much of "*the They*", too *human*. This is a pity because, for all of the richness of his account of "care" it misses, and thus fails to ontologically ground the molten core of true love, which, apart from anything else, is capable of extraordinary *care-freeness* (and, as we know, terrible *care-less-ness*).

Judith Butler is no stranger to Heidegger, in fact she uses the related (very Heideggerian) concept of "conscience" in her own reflections on love as it relates to the Althusserian ideological "interpellation". Butler's view is that the turn to respond to the "call" of the law (remember, the metaphorical "call" comes from a policeman) bespeaks a love of the law that, as ideologically constitutive of subjectivity, amounts to a love of being—a desire to *be*. In this sense, all thoughts *on* love (indeed all thought) would be, ontologically speaking, thoughts *of* love: to repeat, love here *is* originary. And yet, as Butler acknowledges, Mladin Dolar in his critique of Althusserian "interpellation" claims love as an outside of

the law and resistant to the "call" of ideology, a moment of passionate autonomy. Faithful to her mentors Althusser and Foucault, Butler is reluctant to accept at face value Dolar's claim that love is what is "left-over" and "beyond" interpellation. (Butler 1995: 23), and yet she is clearly attracted by the idea that there might be some possibility of imagining a non-ideological space of true or pure love. The problem to be confronted though is that, if one can imagine a non-ideological love then it would have to be a love devoid of—or dissolving of—subjectivity itself, given Butler's continued adherence to an Althusserian model of subject-constitution. It is this concept of love, on the very edge of being and non-being that is so often ignored or repressed in philosophical discourse, even where love is the topic, as in Alain Badiou's *In Praise of Love*, where the identity of "the two" lovers in their resistance to "the one" is always already assumed. But then his philosophy is, of course, set *against* the ontology of being, so the love of being or non-being is hardly an issue for his own mathmatico-erotico concerns.

Butler's consideration of a love that does not desire *to be* leads her into Nietzschean territory which, if nothing else (already a lot), directs the thought of love away from the moral and religious domains that, together, dominate what little philosophical reflection there is on the subject. Prior to the moralisation of the erotic, prior to the spiritualisation of the agapic, there is here identified (by Nietzsche/Butler) a raw willing of being that, Janus-like, faces both ways: the love of being/the dissolution of being; the love of the law/the dissolution of the law; the constitution of the subject/the de-constitution of the subject. Maybe this, the auto-destructiveness/constructiveness of the amorous will, can replace the sterile philosophical chiasmus of decency and indecency passed over and above and rightly mocked by Nietzsche. But smirking at the "*re-sentiment*" and hypocrisy of the moral majority ("herd") and exposing the malicious self-hate that necessitates the "death of God", while philosophically entertaining, still does not sufficiently address the difficulty that remains here: how can this love be spoken, written, delivered in such a way that the silence, so dignified by morality and religion alike, can itself be silenced by another language of love.

To be fair to Nietzsche, no one could have been more aware of the dead-weight of language and the "spirit of gravity" that would weigh-down any communicative flights, whether amorous or not. But, that said, he was by all accounts very inexperienced in love, a view to be treated, however, with some considerable scepticism (he was certainly inexperienced in *sex*, quite a different thing). But, experienced or inexperienced, he does perhaps offer a way forward (or should we say backward?) in his

promotion of, if not young love, then certainly *youth*. And, significantly, he does in fact mention love in his promotion of the "unhistoricality" of the young.

> We know, indeed, what history can do when it gains a certain ascendancy, we know it only too well: it can cut off the strongest instincts of youth, its fire, its defiance, unselfishness and love, at the roots…(Nietzsche 1983: 115):
>
> The sign that guarantees the superior robustness of its own health shall be that this youth can itself discover no concept or slogan in the contemporary currency of words and concepts to describe its own nature, but is only aware of the existence within it of an active power that fights, excludes and divides and of an ever more intense feeling of life (1983: 121).

Where Heidegger places his emphasis on the remembering of a forgotten being, Nietzsche proposes, indeed demands, a forgetting of an all-too-remembered history. In truth, they are of course both speaking of, if not the same (Nietzsche is no ontologist), then of very similar things: the need to forget in order to remember. But what does Nietzsche wish to remember? Above all he wants to re-connect (or re-root) his thought in the destructive-creative force of the will; a will that is strangled by history and silenced by language (concepts/slogans). But, more than this, and prior to the originary act of the will that creates and destroys the infinite becoming of being, Nietzsche's love of youth is itself an attempt to remember a youthful love that makes possible the self-creative/destructive act:

> For it is only in love, only when shaded by the illusion produced by love, that is to say in the unconditional faith in right and perfection, that man is creative. Anything that constrains a man to love less than unconditionally has severed the roots of his strength: he will wither away (1983: 95).

But, as Butler would no doubt remind us, how can we forget the very discourses of love that have allowed us to "know" what love is in the name of a pre-linguistic, pre-cultural, pre-ideological (and thus pre-subjective) will to be/not be that is "left-over" once this masterful voice has spoken? Maybe we can't; although Butler's response to this aporia is to suggest a different mode of occupying such discourses, one that highlights the performativity of language through the parodic, the ironic and the deconstructive. She has been criticised for certain idealism in this respect— and to be sure it is certainly easier said than done! But then so is everything concerned with academe.

A different, if somewhat ingenuous (i.e. non-"philosophical") approach, might be to actually look at young love and its own faltering attempts to avoid the concepts and slogans of its own historical repression: why not? So, in conclusion, here are some passages from an anonymous, but genuine love letter written by one young person to another.

Dear X

I know this is really lame writing a letter, but I feel it's the only way I can tell you how I really feel.

I think I always had a soft spot for you…

You've made me truely (sic) believe that I am worth someone's time…

I really don't know how to express how I feel about you, have felt and will always feel, without it sounding too cliché, so I will try my best to do it in the least lame way…

I just love looking at you, every single outline of you is perfect and you create this perfect shape of presence…

I'm completely terrified of considering what the future will be like, it's too difficult for me to lose you, but I know it's what you want, for there to be no us…

It's almost as if you have helped me expand my mind and to be a better person, I feel like my dreams will be so much more colourful and vivid now that you've helped me see things. But without you, I know those dreams will crash in on themselves and I'll be stuck in a continuous loop of sadness…

I know this letter may seem really jumbled up and confusing, but I just put pen to paper and wrote exactly how I feel (I probably still haven't finished)…

You are the best thing that has ever happened to me, nothing can ever come close.

I'll never forget you or how you've made me feel.

I love you

From Y

Like speaking of the dead, there is something indecent about reading other people's love letters and, worse still, plundering them for philosophical gain or the gratification of an academic audience keen to "wanna know what love is".[4] But then if, as Butler suggests, "conscience makes subjects of us all", then the feelings of guilt that will inevitably accompany the following remarks might be understood as themselves constitutive of a subjectivity that is here attempting to comprehend its own

"love of the law", its own desire "to be"—a likely story (but a story nonetheless, and one necessary to bring these thoughts to a close).

Back to the love letter: don't ever say that young love is full of joy and optimism! This letter is almost overwhelming in the tragic balance it strikes between hope and regret, happiness and sadness, dreams and reality. It is young, so innocent, and yet already old, already dying at the moment of its beautiful birth. If there be any doubts about the intensity and searing pain associated with the ironic-parodic predicament played out within Butler's notion of performativity, then here would be a good place to start. The very writing of this love-affair — by such a young hand — a writing already dependent upon age-old clichés and the lameness of a world-weary code,[5] is itself the originary force that, through its very pronouncement, establishes the thing which can now be lost. So, unlike words addressed to the dead, words drawn forth from a place of loss, these words passed from one young lover to another originate in an overpowering fullness; the *gain* rather than the loss of the other, the "perfect shape of *presence*" (what a beautiful phrase!) rather than the absence of the departed. But, to say again, this presence is at its birth already haunted by its own absence, a gain full of loss, a beautiful "now" under the curse of its own future. Thus, to be accurate, the birth of young love is a sublime rather than a beautiful moment, it is always a pleasure filled with pain. If, as Dolar maintains, love is in excess of the "interpellation" of the ideological state apparatuses, it is also in excess of *itself*: the spatial alterity of the loved-one; the temporal alterity of an anxious, because terrifyingly uncertain, futurity. "I'll never forget you or how you've made me feel": such is the future-loss already in excess of the beautiful moments of love and the lover's presence. This, perhaps better than anything, demonstrates the manner in which, as Nietzsche has shown, the love necessary to create, indeed to create *itself*, must have the strength to suffer the necessary destruction that accompanies the creative act. It is precisely love that creates the possibility of its own loss, without love there would be nothing to lose: this is the heart-rending discovery of young love. To witness this realisation, as we do above—accepting the guilt that such an intrusion brings with it—is a moving but also sobering experience.

"I have always had a soft spot for you": what could be more clichéd, what could be lamer than that? And yet, like all clichés, such a phrase, one bordering on the trivial, speaks volumes. And not only that: it simply *speaks*, and speaks *simply* when philosophers (and not only them) have preferred to stay silent. Of course, silence has many forms, philosophical discourse (very occasionally on love) being one of them. But in the end

the "softness" of love is what makes it so hard to articulate, so hard to predict and so hard to bear. The melting beauty of love and the terrifying sublimity of the experience produced or created by its infinite movement is not something unique to the young, but it is ontologically youthful to the extent that it is only here that we catch a glimpse of an originary desire "to be", to "expand", to be "better", to be "valued", and (if the infinite willingness of love is to be protected) the desire (filled with pain) "not to be". And one last reminder, if one were needed, of the power of the cliché: the final "I love you", with all of its hopeless hope, is "truely" (sic) true, and truly unbearable.

If nothing else, it would be good to think that the essays collected here and the thought that originated them (and was, in turn, originated by them) share a common love of love's eternal youthfulness and the thinking that such a thought might allow.

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Notes

[1] The same people who take a six-month course on 'the Blues' perhaps.
[2] Silver Apples, *I Have Known Love*, Kapp Records, 1969.

I have known love and love has won.
I burned my fingers on the sun.
I've been imprisoned on the moon.

I have learned what truth denies.
I drank the teardrops from her eyes.
I surrendered much too soon…..we can safely skip the rest!

[3] Barthes's point of course.
[4] *I Want to Know What Love Is* is a 1984 power ballad recorded by the British-American rock band Foreigner. The song hit #1 in both the United Kingdom and the United States and is the group's biggest hit to date.

I wanna know what love is
I want you to show me
I wanna feel what love is
I know you can show me

[5] Who said hyphenation was a dying art?

CHAPTER TWO

LITTLE LOVE AFFAIRS: PSYCHOANALYSIS, TRANSFERENCE AND LOVE

FIONA PETERS

This chapter aims to investigate some of the ways in which the psychoanalyst articulates the discourse of love. Traditionally at least, psychoanalysis as a discourse has not been particularly vocal about the question of love, concentrating instead on attempts to understand desire and sexuality in their various intertwined (and pathological) formulations. Indeed, many of Freud's critics critiqued (and continue to critique) him as being 'obsessed' with sex, ignoring the ways in which both the theoretical and clinical aspects of Freudianism work together to undermine and challenge the conception of sexuality as being "about" sex in the generally accepted genital meaning of the term.

However, on closer reading it is clear that psychoanalysis is in fact all about love, from the first manifestations of subjectivity as narcissistic to the "love affair" of transference that dominates the analytic situation. Importantly, the existence of the transference first manifested itself within a proto-analytic situation, in 1882 (the "Anna O" case history) from the patient herself, emerging as (at the time) a surprising and unwelcome development out of the 'safer' hypnosis therapy. Transference (and counter-transference) is pivotal to the analytic situation, showing that the experience of therapy is in fact a love relation that echoes (and hopefully alleviates) the strain of the vicissitudes of the patient's other relationships, past and present. According to Adam Phillips:

> The technique is a calling up, an evoking of the patient's desire, and then instead of acting on her desire the patient must be encouraged, against enormous resistance, to understand it. Like the analyst, she must speak but not touch. Psychoanalysis is about what two people can say to each other if they agree not to have sex (Bersani & Phillips 2008: 112).

This chapter will take up the question of the role and function of sexual love in Lacanian psychoanalysis, and then continue to outline the centrality of transference within the psychoanalytic situation. Lacan argues that love touches the other in the Real. This does not mean however, that for Lacan love has a "true" reality, on the contrary he means that it is something always tantalisingly beyond our grasp as human subjects trapped within a world of symbols and words.

Love, for Lacan, is the condition that reveals most about the impossibility of the sexual relation insofar as it reveals both the desire to engulf and dominate the object into the self, and the ways in which the loved one can never "live up" to the projected fantasy invented by the besotted lover. As Lacan puts it: "I love you, but because inexplicably I love in you something more than you – the *objet petit a* – I mutilate you" (Lacan 1981: 74). Here, love becomes inexorably bound not to any transcendent aspects of the loved one, but remains on the side of the "victim" of the "sickness" that Freud believed constitutes "falling in love." As Slavoj Žižek puts it: …"man's love for a woman – his very 'spiritual', 'pure' love as opposed to sexual longing – is a thoroughly *narcissistic* phenomenon: in his love of a woman, man loves only himself, his own ideal image" (Žižek 2007: 199). These examples illustrate a masculine relationship to love within a Lacanian framework; the paper will conclude by explicating the different relations of the masculine and the feminine to the paradox of love.

The conception of love that Freud offers needs to be separated from the notion of the drive, itself distinct from the purely biological instinct. The concept of the drive in Freud brings us closest to a recognition of the workings of the unconscious – insofar as the drive "drives us" – the impulsive nature of the drive reminds us that it can lead the conscious mind to places that it doesn't want to go – where control is lost – a drive without some form of violence or aggression is a contradiction in terms. Freud makes a distinction between drive and instinct – drives being specifically human, and in his 1915 paper 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes' he outlines the four components of the drive, pressure, source, aim and object. By 1920 in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', when he introduces the concept of the death drive, Freud realises that what he had presumed prior to that, that human beings' drives are purely towards pleasure, or attainment of the object (always part objects) are continuously disturbed by an internal contradiction – opposed to the pleasure principle and yet at the same time aligned to Eros. This will lead Freud towards the theorisation of masochism and sadism as erotic positions, reinforce his belief that there can be no "normal" sexuality and also influence his work

on repetition (of painful situations) and the ways in which self-destructive tendencies thwart the pursuit of happiness, leading to his argument in his late (1937) paper 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable', that, at the "completion" of an analytic treatment "…if a patient who has been restored to heath in this way never again presents a disorder that puts him in need of analysis, you never know how much of this immunity may be due to his good luck in not having to face any tests that are too hard for him" (Freud 2002a: 177). In this paper Freud uses the term "transference love", but how does he discuss love more generally? Freud tentatively works through problems such as why the human being cannot merely follow the path that the pleasure principle might be seen to lead us on – for gratification, immediate and at all costs. He developed beyond the pleasure principle to begin to explore the self-imposed limits on this, forever restricting our attempts for love to keep us together.

Freud speaks most often of love in his papers on technique – those that set out and deal with the practice of psychoanalysis – the analytic situation. He came upon the phenomenon that he called transference (and its necessary correlate, counter-transference) through his colleague Breuer's patient Anna O, who was initially treated by hypnosis but came to speak of her treatment as her "talking cure" as Breuer allowed and encouraged her to speak of her distress in the form of stories she told him - giving rise to the new practice of psychoanalysis. During the course of her treatment she apparently "fell in love" with her doctor who, caught between his patient and his jealous wife, abandoned the "talking cure" and left the incipient birth of psychoanalysis to Freud. Even at this early stage in the long history of psychoanalysis we can see the recognition of what we could term the "public", structural dimension of love that Žižek points out is essential if it is not to implode: "The more we progress from the outside to the inside, i.e. the more a love-relationship loses its support in the external symbolic texture, the more it is doomed to fail and even acquires a lethal dimension" (Žižek 1992a: 102).

In the paper on technique 'On the Dynamics of Transference' (1915) Freud remarks that this "…almost inexhaustible topic" allows the analyst to trace the particularity of the symptom as it is displaced into the relationship established between analyst and patient. As in his analysis of the drives, Freud argues that this can manifest itself both positively or negatively, in other words through a transfer of feelings that are affectionate or hostile – transference can be "about" the aggression that exists at the heart of every love relation, as Freud sees it. However the transference that is manifested in each particular analysis, is always a reworking, according to Freud, of that which psychoanalysis holds to be

the primary and overwhelming love relationship, that of the child and the mother.

That primacy of the dyadic relation with the mother (or first object) is maintained by Freud – and later by Lacan – as one of the first principles of psychoanalysis. It is useful when thinking about love, especially sexual love, insofar as it "haunts" our subsequent object choices in ways that, it can be argued, reiterate the idea that love is viewed in psychoanalysis as an exemplar of the impossible striving that Lacan labels desire. In Lacan's reworking of, or "return to" Freud, he takes Freud's ideas, developed partly from the experiences of transference, to theorise the child's move from the all-encompassing totality of its demand for the mother, and no one else, to becoming a human subject within a world where exclusive ownership of another exists only within the realms of fantasy and pathology.

Clearly, the child must develop an identity separate from the mother to become a subject, to enter into culture and civilization, and to transform its bodily drives and the misrecognition and narcissism of the Imaginary into inter-subjective relationships that at least attempt to gain recognition. The problem is, we never fully achieve this, and this is what Lacan means by "there is no sexual relationship". The separation from the mother that the fort-da game in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' illustrates, builds on the loss instigated by and through the mirror stage. Thus psychoanalysis is fundamentally a tragic discourse, all about a loss that can never be re-found, it is the condition of being human and it can be explained perhaps most comprehensively with the example of sexuality, desire and love. This leads onto Lacan's concepts of Need, Demand and Desire, corresponding roughly to Freud's notion of the Oedipal and Castration complexes. Need, that which the child is born with, as every other baby animal (for food, comfort etc.) are satisfiable (e.g. with the breast) which also strengthens the dyadic bond. There is however no sense for the child at this point that the care giver is distinguishable from itself (it has no self) and it has no sense of itself as a discrete object in the world (it is everything). It is need and these needs can be satisfied.

But in order to move from being a baby animal to a human it has to separate from this attachment and enter the world of discrete identities. This is what involves loss. At the point of the mirror stage the child, initiated into the state of loss, begins to demand more than the mother can ever provide. This demand is not for food, to be changed, cuddled and so on, but is for the absolute, unconditional and dyadic love that is an impossible thing according to Lacan. This is often illustrated as a concurrent awareness that the child is not all to the mother, that the mother

has other concerns as well as it; in Lacanian terms the third term, the third element that splits the dyadic unity forever. This aligns to Freud's castration complex and the internalisation of the prohibitions that form the super-ego. The child sees in the mirror its "ideal ego" an object, a perfect and whole object, while it still feels all over the place. This is the source of the fictive nature of wholeness and also the belief that we can somehow find the "other" part of us in the love object (you complete me…). We see ourselves as whole but we are not. So, as a consequence, human demand is for total love that is ultimately impossible.

Desire emerges where physical need is subtracted from impossible demand. So, needs can be satisfied, demand is total, that place between the immediate satisfactions and demand is what Lacan terms desire, and it is itself impossible—sexuality finds its place here. Lacan argues at this point in his work that the death drive is operable in the speaking being as a reminder of what we are not, of what is lacking in us. The notion of the Thing takes its place here, as that which is both life giving and deadly and that reminds us of the Real and its continuing presence in our everyday lives. "The Thing is that which in the real, the primordial real, I will say, suffers from the signifier, and presents itself to the analyst in the gap produced by the signifying cut" (Lacan 1981: 205). What does Lacan mean? Well, that there are objects that cut in and remind us that we are simply not all-knowing and that the Symbolic cannot encompass all. The cotton reel, as Belsey explains is an example of what stands in for the Real, and Lacan develops the concept of *object a* to demonstrate that this is never achievable. The object of our love is only ever a replacement and an inadequate one, for the lost Real.

Lacan argues in 'The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis' that, contra desire, love exists as a drive, inherently attached to the death drive:

> You will now understand that – for the same reason that it is through the lure that the sexed living being is induced into his sexual realization – the drive, the partial drive, is profoundly a death drive, and represents in itself the portion of death in the sexed living being (205).

In his seminar on Freud's papers on technique, he goes so far as to argue that "we are all agreed that love is a form of suicide" (Lacan 1998: 149). He refers here to Freud's concept of the death drive and its necessary link to both the arena of love and sexuality, and the impetus towards a return to an inorganic state that exists as the underbelly of the pleasure principle.[1] Lacan echoes Freud's belief that "being in love" is a sickness

wherein the stricken person "impoverishes" his ego through the elevation of the favoured object, the beloved.

The links between death, love and the Real are highlighted here. Alenka Zupancic performs a psychoanalytic reading from Lacan of "love as comedy" that argues that "In love, we do not find satisfaction in the other that we aim at, we find it in the space, or gap, between, to put it bluntly, what we see and what we get" (Zupancic 2002: 77). She takes Lacan's argument that 'sublimation raises, or elevates, an object to the dignity of the Thing, Freudian '*das Ding*' (62), insofar as "sublimation is identified with the act of 'producing' the Thing in its very transcendence, inaccessibility, as well as in its horrifying and/or inhuman aspect" (62). This indicates that as the so called pure object of love is raised to a higher level this is an example of forcing the inaccessibility that I have shown marks the Thing (otherwise known as putting somebody "on a pedestal").

She then argues that Lacan surprisingly claims, in his unpublished seminar on anxiety: "Only love-sublimation makes it possible for *jouissance* to condescend to desire" (62). Lacan, according to Zupancic, relates this linkage of love and de-sublimation to his statement that "love is a comic feeling" (62), and that "In relation to comedy we can actually say that it involves a certain condescension of the Thing to the level of the object" (62). "The object of love cannot give me what I demand of him since he doesn't possess it, since it is an excess in its very heart" (58), this stresses the idea that it is precisely the gap that allows a place for a form of exchange, as Lacan puts it:

> What the one lacks is not what is hidden within the other—the only thing left to the beloved is thus to proceed to a kind of exchange of places, to change from the object into the subject of love, in short: to *return love* (58).

We can read in Lacan's work the extent to which the loss inherent in the assumption of sexual difference leans towards a construction of the "One", both holding out the promise of totalisation and concurrently withdrawing it:

> Love is impotent, though mutual, because it is not aware that it is but the desire to be One, which leads to the impossibility of establishing the relationship between "them-two" *(la relation d'eux)*. The relationship between them-two what? Them-two sexes Lacan 1998: 6).

Suzanne Barnard points out that the desire not *for*, but *to be* One that the sexually differentiated subject experiences (usually categorised as the

phallic signifier): "stands ultimately for the impossibility of signifying sex. As such, it can be understood to represent both a traumatic failure of meaning and the impossibility of ever fundamentally anchoring or positivizing the subject" (Barnard & Fink 2002: 2). Thus "ever achieving one's gender or ever accomplishing one's sexuality" (11) is barred from the subject as a loss that is *inherent* rather than a more or less pathological aberration. As Paul Verhaeghe points out, the desire for an imaginary dual relationship may persist but it can never succeed:

> The imaginary dual relationship is based on the conviction that it is possible to give/find/get "it". In practice, this turns into misery and torture, with the result that there is often a swing to the other extreme, the conviction that nothing is possible, that there is no point in anything, and that everything is the same. This reaction remains within the dual imaginary relationship, although it is now tinged with bitterness and disappointment instead of hope and expectation (Verhaeghe 2011: 68).

For Lacan, in his radical return to Freud, love is related to the status and centrality of what he terms the "big Other" – the symbolic substance to life, the set of unwritten rules that regulate our speech and our acts – what we believe to be true. This big Other is established within the Symbolic realm and, according to Lacan, there is no love outside speech: "Love emerges out of speech as a demand that is not linked to any need. Love is a demand that constitutes itself as such only because the subject is the subject of the signifier" (Salecl 2000: 17). As a subject in the gendered Symbolic realm in which the subject is always already constituted and marked by lack, the object cause of desire lies precisely within that lack or gap. This object is thus both what the subject lacks and also at the same time what is believed to fill that lack. The demand of love thus attempts to find the "truth" of oneself within the other, or as Renata Salecl puts it: "What love as a demand targets in the other is therefore the object within him - or herself, the real, non-symbolizable kernel around which the subject organises his or her desire" (18).

So, for Lacan, the status of the big Other is the ultimate guarantee of Truth, even when (perhaps especially when) lying. He talks of this as the quilting point – master signifier that guarantees consistency of the big Other – revealed by Lacan to be a fake – we act as if the Other knows what we don't. The point of psychoanalysis for Lacan is to enable the patient to break with the reliance on the master signifier. In his later work he moves from the concept of the symptom, to be uncovered through analysis, to that of the *sinthome*. Lacan developed the concept of the *sinthome* during the latter phase of his work, specifically in his un-

translated 'Seminar on James Joyce' (1975). Prior to that point, he had concentrated on the triad of Symbolic, Imaginary and Real, which emphasises the role of "decoding" insofar as the "traditional" psychoanalytic symptom was able to be traced, or deciphered, through the process of analysis. In the late phase of his work, Lacan shifts the emphasis from the realms of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and concentrates instead on the place of the Real, a move that pulls in its wake the new concept of the *sinthome*. The *sinthome* is introduced through a reading of a literary writer; thus it is marked from its instigation as a concept related to art or representation: "The whole problem is there – how can an art, in an expressly divinatory fashion, aim to embody the *sinthome*, in its consistence, but equally in its ex-sistence and in its hole?"[2]

In this Seminar Lacan brings, through Joyce, the notion of the *sinthome* into the previously triadic structure of the Borromean knot, a diagram he had recently begun to utilize, having first introduced it in 1972: "How was someone able to aim, through his art, to render this fourth term, which is essential to the Borromean knot, as such, to the point of approaching it as closely as possible?"[3] So the *sinthome* at this point joins the diagram of the Borromean knot (the inter-linking Imaginary, Symbolic and Real) as a "floating" fourth element that drapes over and through each of the other strands of the knot. This four stranded knot of the Seminar allows Lacan to both introduce and pay due attention to the specificity of the artistic experience and effect, while at the same time refusing the category of "artist as suffering", in other words reading the artist as a conglomeration of his/her symptoms. As Philip Dravers points out, it is the *singularity* of the artist that comes to the fore with the concept of the *sinthome*. He argues that in this seminar:

> Lacan uses art, and above all the question of what artists do with their symptoms, to *supplement* the logic that unfolds from the analytic discourse in the form of R.S.I. in order to explore how they each hold together at the level of a quite singular experience, while at the same time deriving a new kind of consistency at the level of their knotting.[4]

The *sinthome* is introduced as a lingering residue of the symptom while at the same time working to keep the other elements of the knot together. As Dravers states above, the R.S.I. triad represents an *analytic discourse*; the *sinthome*, while resistant to interpretation, keeps together the possibility of this type of communicative discursive practice. Yet the *sinthome* is not definable or reducible, but instead "leeches" onto each of the other three elements in a singular and individualistic manner. Art, according to Dravers, "brings out the very texture of the knot by casting

the subtle ray of its light-spun thread across rings which would otherwise have only the substance of shadow and in so doing it helps us to pick out the essential fourth element woven by its artistry."[5] Lacan identifies *jouissance*, or enjoyment, as the key element of the binding together of the four strands of the knot, an enjoyment that compensates for an originary "failure" of the triad Real, Symbolic and Imaginary. According to Dravers, the *sinthome* is a *supplement* that allows the creative subject, in this case Joyce, to secure an identity through artistic production:

> For such is Lacan's thesis in his seminar, that, through his art, Joyce managed to construct his own supplementary means of securing R.S.I. in order to compensate for a specific mode of failure at the level of their original knotting – and, as we shall see, he did so by using his own quite singular artistry with the letter to spin a supplementary thread from the jouissance inscribed in *lalangue* which he then threads through the gaps and holes of the knot, according to the logic of his symptom and the fault it answers to.[6]

This lengthy sentence is worth quoting in full since Dravers gets to the heart of what the *sinthome* represents, specifically in relation to the writer. *Lalangue*, the language of the symptom, becomes melded with enjoyment, and weaves through the holes and gaps of the triad Real, Symbolic and Imaginary, to produce the specific *sinthome* that enthralls and fascinates the reader, while being irreducible to any set of tools, whether psychoanalytic, linguistic or biographical. Josephina Ayerza highlights the irreducibility of the *sinthome*:

> Always trying to get hold of the unspeakable, Lacan designated by *sinthome* what is irreducible to significance. Non-signifiable, however symbolized, the non-signifying will stipulate the condition of the split speaking being, the specificity of its *jouissance* (Ayerza 1990: 3).

While I agree that the *sinthome* is "irreducible to significance", it none-the-less supports a consistency of signification by manoeuvring *jouissance*[7] or enjoyment, through the communicative structure of the other three interrelated elements of the knot. The moment at which Lacan introduces the concept of the Borromean knot is also the point when he shifts in his writing from an emphasis on the Other, or communication (although that is never completely lost), and moves towards the realm of enjoyment (as desire or *jouissance*). The concept of the *sinthome* is linked to and developed from the psychoanalytic symptom; it shifts from this in the ways in which it loses the correlation of cause and effect, becoming not the representation of the manifestation of a trauma, a symbolic means

of allowing the trauma to be read, but rather a means expressing the pleasure of non-representation. Sarah Kay explains that "the symptom becomes the *sinthome*, the manifestation of the subject's enjoyment which he cannot give up but should embrace as 'what is in him more than himself', its symbolic dimension declines and the subjects' imaginary relation with enjoyment correspondingly increases in importance" (Kay 2003: 80).

The concept of the *sinthome* in Lacan's work remains largely unexplored in current academic discourse; part of the reason for this, in the English-speaking academic community at least, is the problem of its non-translation/translatability into English and the forbidding difficulty of reading *Seminar XX111 Le Sinthome* in the original. Žižek, however, utilises the *sinthome* regularly throughout his writing, often in relation to the writer Patricia Highsmith. What he does *not* do is explain it as I have done in the previous section. It is Žižek rather than Lacan who begins to utilise the concept in relation to popular culture, and he never claims that the *sinthome* is something peculiar to Highsmith. In fact he often evokes it as Hitchcockian, highlighting the ways in which Alfred Hitchcock denies the viewer of his filmic texts the "deep" meanings that he appears to be constructing, but instead develops his own genre out of a "level of material signs that resist meaning" (Žižek 2001: 199) and which "relate in a kind of pre-symbolic cross-resonance" (199). Žižek argues that these films exemplify the ways in which *sinthomes* slide away from meaning: "in contrast to symptom which is a cipher of some repressed meaning, *sinthome* has no determinate meaning; it just gives body, in its repetitive pattern, to some elementary matrix of jouissance, of excessive enjoyment (199).

One of Žižek's clearest uses of the *sinthome* in relation to Hitchcock can be found in the chapter 'Why is Reality Always Multiple?' (from Žižek 1992). Here he points to the "unique dimension" of the Hitchcock film as he perceives it, arguing that Hitchcock introduces motifs into his films that appear to provide meaning or depth, while in fact these cover a void that substitutes for meaningful explication. In other words, the enigma of the Hitchcock film is precisely its ambiguity of meaning, which enables different interpretations to be constantly read into it. He argues that Hitchcock: "invented stories in order to be able to shoot a certain kind of scene. And, while the narratives of his films provide a funny and often perceptive comment on our times, it is in his *sinthomes* that Hitchcock lives forever. They are the true cause of why his films continue to function as objects of our desire" (200). The key point to extrapolate from this reading of the *sinthome* is the way in which the argument revolves around the element of pleasure to be gained from the *sinthome* precisely in its lack

of hidden meaning. After all, who would *want* to reveal an absolute hidden meaning in *Vertigo* or *Psycho*? The pleasure lies in the nothingness which at the same time appears full of promise: "…yet this nothing was not an empty nothing, but the fullness of libidinal investment, a tic that gave body to a cipher of enjoyment" (200).

'The Undergrowth of Enjoyment' and 'The Ideological Sinthome' chapters from *Looking Awry* (Žižek 1992b) represent a clear link between Žižek's abiding interest in both the *sinthome* and Highsmith's writing. In 'The Undergrowth of Enjoyment', his reading of the *sinthome* is less narrowly defined than when writing exclusively on the specific effects of the Hitchcock film. Also, it becomes clearer in these texts to see how the *sinthome* need not be exclusively considered as a device that must be held within the text; instead, it may function as a 'glue' for sustaining an individual's sanity, or warding off psychosis, in the sense already shown in respect of Lacan's formulation. The *sinthome* is thus written here as a dilemma "for the subject, who is caught in the either/or, the Thing embodying impossible enjoyment or the Symbolic that excludes it" (Wright & Wright 1999: 13). As I have shown in relation to Lacan, the belief that analysis would resolve this *impasse* is replaced at the end of his work by another form of resolution: "For the late Lacan, this resolution comes about through identification with the *sinthome*, through a recognition of the singularity of this element, the particular form of one's own enjoyment" (13).

Žižek chooses Patricia Highsmith's short stories as one of the ways to elucidate the "invisible kernel, that meaningless fragment of the Real" (12) that constitutes the *sinthome*. He argues that her stories focus on forces that are unexplained, and are at the same time both attractive and repellent. One of the stories he cites, 'The Mysterious Cemetery', provides him with the title of his paper; the 'undergrowth of enjoyment' of the story consisting of the strange growths that appear in a graveyard behind a hospital after experiments involving radiation are carried out on dying patients. Instead of being repulsed by these, as might be expected, the local people not only get used to them, but "poems are written about the uncanny and irrepressible 'undergrowth of enjoyment'" (Žižek 1999: 31). By utilising films and stories such as Highsmith's, Žižek in this article tries to explicate the ways in which the *sinthome* functions within popular culture, and how and why we as readers or viewers are "drawn in" to these particular subversions wrought by the *sinthome*. As an element of the Real, adrift within each subject, it holds the subject, or an inter-subjective community, together precisely because, as in the Highsmith text, it appears as something that a rational (or unequivocally Symbolic) universe would

exclude or negate. The community of 'The Mysterious Cemetery', for example, is reassured and held together by the *sinthome* of the strange growths (which in themselves, of course, *mean* nothing).

Weaving between Žižek's examples from popular culture to aid him in explaining the ways in which the *sinthome* functions, is also a concentration on the individual and his/her attempts to avoid psychotic breakdown by constructing an individual *sinthome* that prevents the Symbolic from splitting apart: "The paranoid construction…is already an attempt to heal ourselves, to pull ourselves out of the real 'illness', the psychotic breakdown – the 'end of the world', the falling apart of the symbolic universe – with the help of a substitute-formation" (22). In this sense literary texts can exhibit both vacuity and discomfort along with a specific and powerful enjoyment that echoes Žižek's claim for the *sinthome* as the One that evades even the residue of meaning that Lacan retains for *object petit a*.

To indicate the specificity of this One, Lacan coined the neologism *le sinthome*: the point which functions as the ultimate support of the subject's consistency, the point of "thou art that", the point marking the dimensions of "what is in the subject more than itself" and what it therefore loves "more than in itself", that point which is none the less neither symptom (the coded message in which the subject receives from the Other its own message in reverse form, the truth of its desire) nor fantasy (the imaginary scenario which, with its fascinating presence, screens off the lack in the Other, the radical consistency of the symbolic order) (30).

Žižek asks the above in his conception of the *sinthome*, instead of the symptom seen as compromise: "the analysis is over when we achieve a certain distance in relation to the fantasy and identify precisely with the pathological singularity on which hangs the consistency of our enjoyment" (32). He argues that, contra *objet petit a*, the *sinthome* is instead a "certain psychotic kernel evading the discursive network" (132). The key point here is that there is *no possibility* of its inclusion within the Symbolic or the social order; in other words, it remains One, not articulated within the discourse of the Other (Lacan's previous articulation of the theory and purpose of psychoanalytic discourse). Žižek defines this as follows: "In the field of the signifier as differential, every One is defined by the bundle of its differential relations to its Other, i.e. every One is in advance conceived as 'one-among-the-others'" (132). *Objet petit a* is in a sense a particle adrift within the boundaries of this configuration, the *sinthome* is not. Instead it is a particular One "that is not one-among-the-others, that does not yet partake of the articulation proper to the order of the Other" (132). Žižek takes this further in claiming that the *sinthome* is "a psychotic

kernel [that] can neither be interpreted (as symptom) nor 'traversed' (as fantasy)" (137). It must then, as Lacan argues in his final theorisation of the psychoanalytic process, constitute something to identify with: "The *sinthome*, then, represents the final limit of the psychoanalytic process, the reef on which psychoanalysis is grounded. But, on the other hand, is not this radical impossibility of the *sinthome* the ultimate proof that the psychoanalytic process is brought to its end?" (137).

Both Lacan and Žižek relate the big Other/phallus/masculine logic of Law) to the *sinthome* as "feminine" logic; that is, only symptoms and the Law retain the logic of the one. The *sinthome* is not pathological - it loses the correlation between cause and effect – becoming not the manifestation of a trauma, a symbolic means of allowing the trauma to be read – but rather a means of non-representation that allows and elevates a perverse enjoyment. Sarah Kay explains: "the symptom becomes the *sinthome*, the manifestation of the subject's enjoyment which he cannot give up but should embrace as 'what is in him more than himself' …its symbolic dimension declines, and the subject's imaginary relation with enjoyment correspondingly increases in importance (Kay 2003: 80). Žižek evokes the notion of *sinthome* in relation to Hitchcock – highlighting the ways in which the director denies the viewer of his films the deep meanings that he appears to be constructing, but instead develops his own genre out of "a level of material signs that resist meaning" and which "relate in a kind of pre-symbolic cross-resonance". The *sinthome*s slide away from meaning: "in contrast to symptom which is a cipher of some repressed meaning, *sinthome* has no determinate meaning; it just gives body, in its repetitive pattern, to some elementary matrix of *jouissance,* of excessive enjoyment" (80).

The fundamental point of psychoanalysis is that desire is not something given in advance, but something that has to be constructed – and it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the co-ordinates of the subject's desire, to specify its object, to locate the position the subject assumes in it. It is only through fantasy that the subject is constituted as desiring: "through fantasy, we learn how to desire" (Žižek 1992b: 23). The *sinthome* is neither symptom nor fantasy – instead "the One of *jouis-sense*, of the signifier not yet enchained but still floating freely, permeated with enjoyment: the enjoyment that prevents it from being articulated in a chain" (23), that is, evades the signifying process. The ultimate moment of psychoanalysis may well be the identification with the *sinthome,* what it is that in each of us (differently) acts as our particular *sinthome* (love, writing, work…etc.).

So, a *sinthome* is *not* an object of desire but the artificial symbolic framework by which means we preserve our sanity – by conferring narrative consistency on our experience. Our existence is held together by our *sinthomes* which are "little pieces of the Real." Therefore, when Lacan argues that 'the question I should consider is not if my love is a true one. I should ask for the truth of my love, which is something really different,' he is saying that love is hidden in the subject and what *sinthome* constitutes the particularity of our desire.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, when somebody loves me they also threaten me – I am reduced to a mere object, the object of the other's fantasy:

> I feel the inherent abject dimension of that object when I do not want to respond to the other's demand for love. Then, when the other is attacking me with her/his desire, I am bothered, humiliated even. But love emerges when, from the very position of being reduced to mere object, I begin to long for the other. The confrontation with the fact that I am nothing but the object of the desire of the other is, then, neutralized or oppressed by my own desire, i.e. my love for my beloved Lacan (Lacan Undated: no page numbers).

For Lacan then, love has the same structure as transference, as it does for Freud. He argues that when a patient enters analysis, he or she positions themselves as the object of the other's (analyst's) desire – the desire to be helped, either to recognize one's symptom or, in the late Lacan, to understand that the *sinthome,* rather than constituting a pathological barrier to fulfilment, becomes instead something to embrace as "what is in him more than himself", its symbolic dimension declining as the subject's "imaginary relation with enjoyment correspondingly increases in importance"(Kay: 2003: 80). The analysis allows the subject to trace back the path to his or her relation with love – and Lacan argues that the analyst has to recognize that he/she is involved in a love affair, one that nonetheless refuses the analyst his or her own pleasure and desire.

And in the arena of masculinity and femininity Lacan introduces the notion of the "act" in Seminar 15 (1967/68) where he uses it to theorise a turning point in the notion of the analytic cure. The "cure" is complete supposedly when the patient realizes that he is the subject of the desire of the Other, or that he is in fact the lack of the other's desire, refusing to be "the one" or, in fact to return love. Becoming an analyst himself is at this moment constitutes the "psychoanalytic act", insofar as when one becomes an analyst one recognizes one's place as the "empty" cipher of

the other's desire. In *The Fragile Absolute* Žižek argues that it is only women who can make this move, through their act:

> Lacan proposed as (one of) the definitions of a 'true woman' a certain radical *act*: the act of taking from man, her partner, of obliterating – even destroying – that which is 'in him more than himself', that which 'means everything to him and which is more important to him than his own life, the precious *amalgam* around which his life revolves (Žižek 2009: 151).

Žižek explains that the situation the woman finds herself in, as the object of masculine desire, can free her by and through the "psychoanalytic act", thus recognizing other Lacanian claims, that "woman does not exist" and "woman is a symptom of man." By this he means that woman can challenge and subject the "phallic economy" which he believes forces the symptom. The *sinthome* and concurrent radically feminine act thus refuse to "give body" to the ways in which "man's love for a woman – his very "spiritual", "pure love" as opposed to sexual longing – is a thoroughly *narcissistic* phenomenon: "in his love of a woman, man loves only himself, his own ideal image" (Žižek 1994: 99).

The symptom is a manifestation of trauma, in Freud's times often "written on the body", the *sinthome* loses the correlation between cause and effect, saturated by *jouissance* it manifests the centrality of *enjoyment* that both disturbs yet supports the subject's relationship to her reality. It cannot be "worked through" and we must, according to Lacan and Žižek, learn to "enjoy our *sinthomes*" It is, according to Žižek: "the point marking the dimensions of 'what is in the subject more than itself', and what it therefore loves 'more than in itself…the imaginary scenario which, with its fascinating presence, screens off the lack in the Other, the radical consistency of the symbolic order" (Žižek 1999: 30). It is, according to Žižek, "a psychotic kernel that can neither be interpreted (as symptom) nor traversed (as fantasy)" (Žižek 1999b: 137)—the final limit of the psychoanalytic process, the refusal of the workings of fantasy.

The workings of fantasy dominated Breuer's "analysis" of Bertha Pappenheim (Anna O) in 1881-2. To repeat, it was she who coined the term "talking cure" and shifted her treatment from the previously used hypnosis to "speaking out" her symptoms. As mentioned above, she also "fell in love" with Breuer, imagining herself pregnant with his baby, amongst other symptoms. This is the first instance of a transference relationship and marked the "birth" of psychoanalysis, while at the same time signalled Breuer's horrified departure from the new discipline.

As indicated earlier, Freud analysed Ida Bauer (Dora) in 1900 (published in 1905), his "failure" in the case allowed him to recognise the