

Love and Loss

Judith Girke

Patricia Bosquin-Caroz, in her introduction to the NLS Congress, says that “[l]ove ignores the narcissistic fantasy from which it draws its support.”¹ Every person creates their own narcissistic fantasy at the time of their symbolic castration. Lacan uses the analogy of mourning for this process.² The entry into language of the now split subject is also the beginning of love. Through it, the lack-in-being (*manque-à-être*) becomes bearable. But by beginning to invest one’s lack in another person (Lacan’s ‘Love is to give what one does not have’³), not only is the narcissistic fantasy ignored, but an attempt at establishing full fusion is launched. As Nietzsche said, “[t]he marriages that are entered into out of love (the so-called love marriages) have error as their father and need as their mother.”⁴

The loss of a love object is painful because it reminds a person of the one object that has always already been lost. When a loved one dies, this eternally lost object is lost a second time.⁵ In facing a loved one’s death, one faces not only a real loss in relation to another human body, but also a symbolic loss in language. What the mourner is missing is the loved one, but also new signifiers, which are needed to restore the veil to cover their now apparent lack.⁶ This work of re-signification is exhausting and often takes years.

In many societies, mourners are not left alone. Mourning rituals are symbolically excessive events. They consist of complex exchange processes, exuberant consumption and are conducted in ceremonial language. “And what do these rites involve if not the total, massive intervention, from hell to heaven, of the entire symbolic system” states Lacan.⁷ These practices of symbolisation serve not only to commemorate the dead, but also to support the mourner. What they themselves cannot do is instead done by such others. Often, the bereft are not expected to

¹ Bosquin-Caroz, P., *Painful Loves. Presentation of the 2025 NLS Congress Theme*, 2024. Available at: <https://www.amp-nls.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/ENG.-PBC-Presentation-of-the-2025-NLS-Congress-Theme-FV.pdf>

² Lacan, J. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI: Desire and its interpretation*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink, Cambridge: Polity, 2022, p. 349.

³ Lacan, J. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII: Transference*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink, Cambridge: Polity, 2017, p. 34.

⁴ Nietzsche, F. *Human, all too human. A Book for free spirits*. (1878), Penguin Classics, 1994.

⁵ Lacan J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X, Anxiety*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. A.R. Price, Cambridge: Polity, 2014, pp. 334-335.

⁶ See also Billiet, L. *Orientation text. Mourning and break-ups*. Available at: <https://www.nlscongress2025.amp-nls.org/blogposts/billietmourningengelseversie>

⁷ Lacan, J. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI, [...] Op. cit.*, p. 337.

speak and professional mourners might even do the crying for them. Participation in such symbolically charged events has a supportive effect until a new narcissistic fantasy takes hold. Eventually, “the bond with the true object of relation, the masked object, the object *a*” is restored, that is, again “masked beneath the *i(a)* of narcissism and misrecognized in its essence.”⁸

Only in analysis is loss compensated for in a completely different way: here, too, speaking is placed in the service of love, but not in order to cover the lack, but to accept it.

⁸ Lacan, J. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X, [...] Op. cit.*, p. 335.