



Therapy

Harrie Rose

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Harrie Rose's debut novel brilliantly explores the causes and effects of depression and anxiety, as well as how early experiences shape one's life for good or ill. *Therapy* follows Barbara Verensky Miller as she recounts her past and present woes to her single, attractive, attentive psychiatrist Alex. The astute college professor knows she is falling for her counselor, but she remains unsure of his feelings for her. Rose balances the intricacies of the therapist–patient relationship with a fascinating yarn about a woman recognizing the contradictory influences on her life and ultimately coming into her own.

Barbara narrates the book as a flashback, many years after the therapy sessions with Alex have taken place. Occasionally, readers may get confused when the present-day Barbara interjects a few sentences about her present, only to quickly thrust the story back into the past again. There are also unnecessary instances in which Barbara addresses the audience, thus pulling readers needlessly out of the story to say, “But I’m getting ahead of myself,” or “Looking back...” The story functions best when the present Barbara remains quiet and lets the Barbara in therapy regale Alex with tales of her past.

From these accounts, Barbara, Alex, and the readers realize together the causes of Barbara's mental illness. She follows the protagonist's struggle to both break away from and please her overbearing immigrant Jewish family and her struggles with Jewish versus American identity, marvelously painting a specific portrait of one woman going through the universal experiences of trying to define herself as an individual and in familial relations. The author also includes a horrifically accurate portrayal of child abuse; Barbara recalls her father's beatings and her mother's belittling words with terror, but also with a certain chilling nonchalance typical of abuse survivors.

Family life becomes complicated when husbands enter the picture. When her first husband abandons her with one son, Barbara marries again, much to her family's surprise. Barbara describes the stress of being a housewife, mother, and teacher in an era when women weren't supposed to work. While Barbara fills multiple roles, her husband remains absent and critical, but she convinces herself that she and her growing family have been blessed with a good provider. In *Barbara*, Rose keenly captures what many 1950s' housewives felt, and indeed, a version of what some wives still feel today.

The author's strength lies in her descriptions—of Barbara's circumstances, and also of the Rhode Island flora and fauna adored by the protagonist. Unfortunately, this descriptive style can make readers feel as though they are reading reports about the characters rather than watching them act. Much of the dialogue is Barbara's; Alex says comparatively little; thus the psychiatrist comes across as a sounding board for the protagonist. If he had more to say or do, readers would better understand why Barbara falls for him. Also, missing and misused punctuation annoys. Although Alex is a bit one-dimensional, *Therapy* is recommended for anyone who enjoys a meaty read with a strong female protagonist.

JILL ALLEN (July 15, 2010)

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