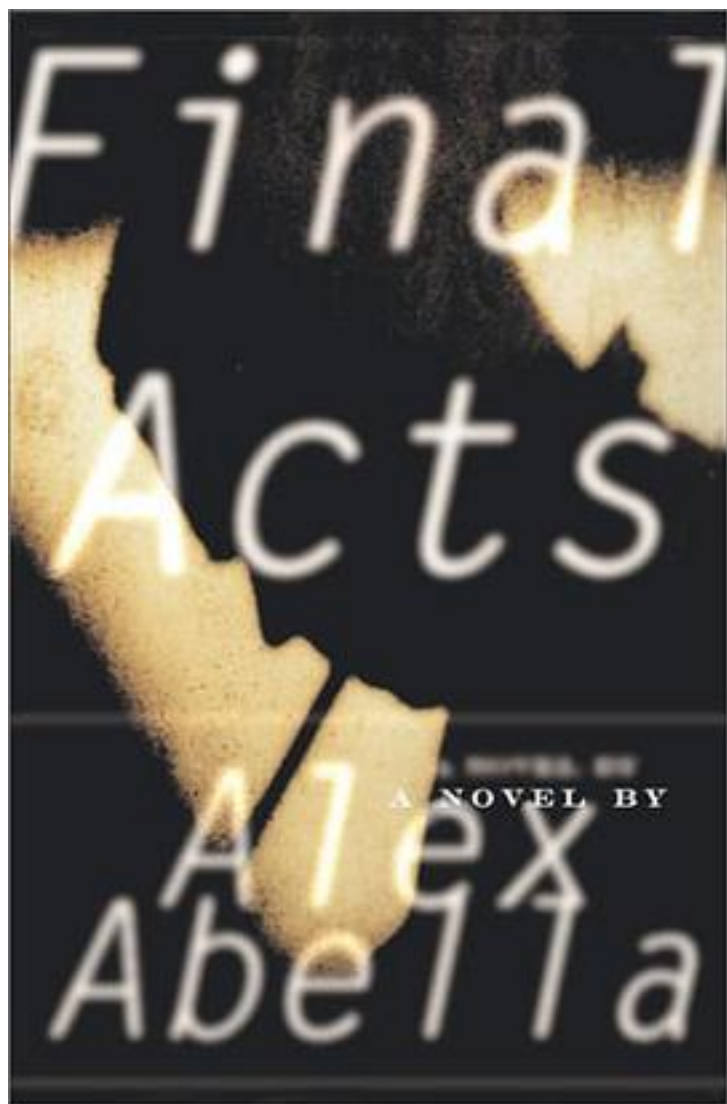


Final Acts



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Writers facing death offer a rare glimpse into human mortality--they have the unusual opportunity to craft the closing chapter of their life stories. Final Acts explores memoirs of terminal illness, and shows a paradoxical pattern where the diagnosis of terminal illness evokes not despair, but a new freedom and richness in life. The memoirs analyzed--by Allon White, Harold Brodkey, Gillian Rose, and Derek Jarman--provide insight into the experience of radical contingency that an awareness of mortality brings. Tom Rafter engages the concept of "traversing the fantasy," elaborated by Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek, to argue that the new richness in life each of these memoirists' experiences arises from the abandonment of a particular fantasy that guided his or her earlier work--a fantasy that both protected and inhibited the memoirist. Freed from convention, these writers, while close to death, can reinterpret the stories presented in their earlier work, and gain new perspectives on their worlds and existence.

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