

On the Epistemic Status of Literary Nonfiction in Philosophical Grief Research

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Abstract. Recently, research on grief has gained momentum in phenomenology and philosophy of mind. Grief, it is often assumed, is a temporally extended emotional experience of the irreversible, bereavement-induced loss of a significant person. Within and across philosophical approaches, grief memoirs are frequently quoted as phenomenological evidence for the tenability of assumptions about the occurrence, structure, and unfolding of grief experiences. In this article, I argue that this research strategy is problematic. The reason is that it overlooks the epistemic status and artefactual configuration of grief memoirs. They are not first-person reports of lived experiences, but carefully crafted and curated literary artefacts. As such, they explore and challenge the possibilities and limitations of autobiographical remembering, acts of remembrance, master narratives, and genre expectations. For this reason, grief memoirs should not be treated as phenomenological evidence, but as exemplars of literary griefworld technologies. The positive proposal is that the interdisciplinary investigation of grief memoirs could lead to new insights into the role of literary self-narrative practices for navigating and negotiating processes of grief.

Keywords. Grief; phenomenology; self-narrative; memoir; narrative practices

1. Introduction

In recent years, research in phenomenology and philosophy of mind has made considerable progress in understanding grief. For example, Matthew Ratcliffe (2017) has argued that the phenomenology of grief is characterised by “an all-enveloping, dynamic disturbance of life possibility” that encompasses one’s concerns, commitments, projects, habits, and future plans (p. 157; see also Ratcliffe, 2023). According to Michael Cholbi’s (2021) account, grief can be conceptualised as “an active process of emotional attention” (p. 55). This process is initiated by the death of a person that is important for one’s relationally established practical identity. Following Korsgaard (1996), he assumes that one’s practical identity is constituted by a collection of self-defining values, concerns and commitments. As a final example, consider Dorothea Debus and Louise Richardson’s (2022) account of the role of autobiographical remembering for grieving. On their account, autobiographical rememberings of the deceased can be experienced as pleasurable or painful, depending on the presence or absence of perception-like qualities.

Across these philosophical accounts, literary memoirs are frequently cited as supporting evidence for theoretical assumptions about the phenomenology of grief. For example, referring to J. L. Austin’s (1962) analysis of *misfiring* (i.e., contextually failing utterances), Ratcliffe (2023, p. 86) offers a quotation from Joyce Carol Oates’s (2011, pp. 64–65) memoir *A Widow’s Story* to support

his assumption that grief can be associated with the experience of *misfiring* words and utterances. As another example, consider Cholbi's (2021, p. 33) quotation of selected phrases from Joan Didion's (2005) memoir *The Year of Magical Thinking*, which serves to substantiate the assumption that grief is often associated with experiences of meaninglessness, dislocation, and disorientation. Furthermore, Debus and Richardson (2022) not only choose a quotation from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2021) memoir *Notes on Grief* as the main title of their article, but frequently offer quotations from this literary text and a suite of other memoirs to motivate and support their account of the role of emotionally valenced autobiographical remembering in grief. Other philosophical accounts of grief that pursue similar strategies include Thomas Fuchs's (2018) phenomenological account of the ambiguity of experienced presence and absence of the deceased, Allan Køster's (2020) existential-phenomenological account of post-bereavement feelings of emptiness, and Becky Millar and Pilar Lopez-Cantero's (2022) account of the possibility conditions of continuing loving bonds with the deceased.

In this article, I will develop a critical perspective on the feasibility of this (largely implicit) research strategy to treat grief memoirs as phenomenological evidence. By phenomenological evidence, I mean outcomes of systematic analyses of data, including first-person reports,¹ that serve to fulfil a supporting or justificatory role for assumptions about the occurrence, structure, or unfolding of phenomenal experiences. I will argue that treatments of grief memoirs as phenomenological evidence neglect the special epistemic status of grief memoirs. Specifically, I will show that grief memoirs do not represent or report grief experiences *per se*. Rather, they are carefully crafted and curated literary artefacts that are characterised by a self-referential relationship of the narrating 'I' (the narrator who is usually identical to the author) and the narrated 'I' (the protagonist) (Smith & Watson, 2010). These literary artefacts are constrained by various literary and non-literary norms, patterned practices, and socio-culturally shaped expectations about grief, remembrance, and self-narration. Consequently, grief memoirs should not be treated as phenomenological evidence.

The argument will unfold as follows. In Section 2, I will illustrate, with a focus on Ratcliffe's (2023), Cholbi's (2021), and Debus and Richardson's (2022) work, how grief memoirs are

¹ I use the notion of 'first-person reports' to capture recorded linguistic expressions (in written or verbal form) of introspected first-person experiences that are acquired, for example, in psychological or neuroscientific studies. These expressions count as raw data that are acquired under experimental conditions. These experimental conditions usually include the rigorous and systematic use of an explicit scientific methodology, the instruction of participants, and the control for confounding factors. This understanding is fully consistent with the ways in which the notion of 'first-person report' – or its equivalent, 'introspective report' – is frequently used in philosophy of mind and cognitive science (e.g., Irvine, 2021; Piccinini, 2003; Windt, 2013).

frequently cited as phenomenological evidence in support of their assumptions about post-bereavement grief experiences. In Section 3, I will offer a theoretical account of grief memoir as a literary genre. This account integrates recent research on self-narration in philosophy of mind, aesthetics, and cognitive narratology. Building on this account, I will identify and describe four key characteristics of grief memoirs in Section 4: they frequently negotiate and explicate the possibilities and limitations of autobiographical remembering, they discursively engage with the moral obligations of remembrance, they implement or challenge master narratives about grief and remembrance, and they fulfil or violate genre expectations. Together, I will argue in Section 5, these characteristics cast serious doubt on the feasibility of employing grief memoirs as phenomenological evidence. I will then start to offer an alternative view on the importance of memoirs for the philosophical study of grief experiences before concluding in Section 6.

2. The Philosophical Engagement with Grief Memoirs: Three Examples

Recently, philosophical research on grief experiences has gained momentum. This research frequently cites grief memoirs, such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2021) *Notes on Grief*, Julian Barnes's (2013) *Levels of Life*, Joan Didion's (2005) *The Year of Magical Thinking* and her (2012) *Blue Nights*, C. S. Lewis's (1961) *A Grief Observed*, Helen Macdonald's (2014) *H Is for Hawk*, or Joyce Carol Oates's (2011) *A Widow's Story*, as evidence in support of assumptions about the occurrence and emotional character of certain grief experiences. I assume that this strategy, which largely remains implicit, qualifies as a case of *retrospective phenomenology*, which is defined as "the interpretation, or reinterpretation, of already existing empirical data or analyses" (Køster & Fernandez, 2023, p. 154). Retrospective phenomenology, in general, can inform and constrain *front-loaded phenomenology* (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2021), which is a phenomenological method that aims at contributing to the formulation of new empirically testable hypotheses and the design of new empirical studies. In the present context, however, retrospective phenomenology is frequently used to support and substantiate philosophical assumptions about grief experiences. In what follows, I will review, in a necessarily selective, yet representative manner, this retrospective-phenomenological engagement with grief memoirs in recent philosophy of bereavement-induced grief.

First, consider Ratcliffe's (2023) phenomenological account of grief. On his account, grief is a temporally extended, integrated, all-encompassing emotional process that paradigmatically unfolds in response to the irreversible loss of a significant person. This irreversible loss is connected to a substantial disturbance of life possibilities. This disturbance encompasses various

experiential qualities within and across time, including “[l]ocalized and nonlocalized experiences of tension, conflict, negotiation, lack, absence, unreality, and being cut off from a shared world” (Ratcliffe, 2023, p. 8). The reason for this variable, yet pervasive sense of disturbance is that the deceased person has been implicated in a wide range of practices, habits, commitments, and future-oriented projects. Accordingly, the bereaved person needs to navigate and negotiate this disturbance of their life possibilities by reconsidering and restructuring their lifeworld while continuing their bond with the deceased under radically altered circumstances (Klass et al., 1996).

Throughout the development of this rich and complex account, Ratcliffe (2023) draws on two kinds of resources, in about equal measure, for his retrospective-phenomenological considerations: first-person reports from an online survey (Millar et al., 2020) and literary grief memoirs published by accomplished and highly regarded authors. Quotations from literary grief memoirs are used, often in a decontextualised manner, to motivate, support, or strengthen phenomenological assumptions.² As an example, consider Ratcliffe’s (2023) assumption that the phenomenal disturbance associated with grief extends from experiences *per se* to their linguistic representation (cf. pp. 85-86). Not only are post-bereavement experiences themselves rendered disturbed, strange, or meaningless, but also the ways in which bereaved agents capture those experiences through utterances and narrative descriptions. To support this assumption, Ratcliffe (2023, p. 86) cites a passage from Oates’s (2011) memoir *A Widow’s Story*, in which she attempts to capture the loss of Ray Smith, her husband and intellectual companion of 46 years. After rushing to the hospital, only to discover that her husband had already died from complications following a pneumonia infection, the narrated ‘I’ is requested to collect her husband’s personal items. In this passage, the narrating ‘I’ negotiates and challenges the appropriateness of the words ‘belongings’ and ‘home’ in the immediate aftermath of her husband’s death:

Someone must have instructed me to undertake this task. I am not certain that I would have thought of it myself. The word *belongings* is not my word, I think it is a curious word that sticks to me like a burr.

Belongings. To take home.

And *home*, too – this is a curious word.

Strange to consider that there would be a *home*, now – without my husband – a *home* to which to take his *belongings*. [...]

These toiletry things – that they were *his*, but are no longer *his*, seems to me very strange.

Now they are *belongings*.

Your husband’s belongings.

² By ‘decontextualisation’ I mean a mode of offering quotations from literary texts that is not framed by considerations on key characteristics (including plot, story events, stylistic devices, narrative perspective) of the relevant text. Any quotation is part of a wider plot structure and story-discourse configuration, and this should be taken into account by offering statements, remarks, or summaries to situate a quotation in its wider textual context – as it is common practice in literary studies and other disciplines that engage with literary texts in a systematic and methodologically constrained manner.

One of the reasons I am moving slowly – perhaps it has nothing to do with being struck on the head by a sledgehammer – is that, with these *belongings*, I have nowhere to go except *home*. This *home* – without my husband – is not possible for me to consider. (Oates, 2011, pp. 64–65)

This long quotation, Ratcliffe (2023) submits, supports the idea that “[...] tensions and conflicts are not limited to the experiences conveyed *by* one’s words; the words themselves seem somehow wrong too” (pp. 86-87). Furthermore, on his view, the curiousness of the word ‘home’ captures linguistically represented tensions between the habitual past and the indeterminate present: “Such tensions could occur due to the incompatibility between two practically meaningful worlds in which words operate, one including the deceased and the other not” (Ratcliffe, 2023, p. 88). This example illustrates how Oates’s (2011) *A Widow’s Story*, alongside a range of other grief memoirs, including Barnes’s *Levels of Life* (2013), Lewis’s *A Grief Observed* (1961), and Macdonald’s *H Is for Hawk* (2014), are recruited by Ratcliffe (2023) on numerous occasions as evidence in support of phenomenological considerations and assumptions.

Second, Michael Cholbi’s (2021) attentional account of grief also draws on grief memoirs to motivate phenomenological assumptions about the structure of grief. On his view, this structure is best characterised as “[...] a multistage process, an emotionally laden activity in which a bereaved individual attends to the loss of her relationship with the deceased [...]” (Cholbi, 2021, p. 72). Cholbi (2021), following Sebastian Watzl’s (2017) structuralist account, conceptualises attention as a structural feature of mental life, a mental activity through which agents prioritise some objects of perceptual, active, cognitive, or emotional processes over others, thereby shaping the unfolding of conscious experience. In attending to the loss of a relationship with the deceased, one’s emotional and cognitive processes are directed towards the past *and* the future (Cholbi, 2021, Chapter 3). In the *backward-looking dimension*, the bereaved attends to past experiences they shared with the deceased and that are relevant and significant for their practical identity. In the *forward-looking dimension* of grief, the bereaved is actively attending to their anticipated future so as to adapt their plans, habits, projects, and commitments to the fundamental changes incurred by their irreversible loss without relinquishing their relationship to the deceased. For this reason, Cholbi (2021) argues, grief should be understood as an active process. Many bereavement responses are characterised by actions and choices through which the bereaved can influence the structures and characteristics of their grief, thereby negotiating and adapting their relational practical identity to a radically altered situational context.

As an example of Cholbi’s (2021) reliance on grief memoirs as supporting evidence, consider how he argues for the assumption that the bereavement loss of a person is associated with a sense of disorientation “[...] to the extent that our practical identities are invested in their existence” (p.

31). In support of this view, Cholbi (2021) cites phrases from Joan Didion's (2005) *The Year of Magical Thinking*. In this memoir, the narrating 'I' seeks to navigate and negotiate experiences of grief ascribed to the narrated 'I' in the aftermath of the sudden death of her husband and collaborator John Gregory Dunne. In the argumentative context just mentioned, Cholbi (2021) engages with Didion's (2005) literary text as follows: "Joan Didion, author of the widely read grief memoir *The Year of Magical Thinking*, describes the shock of grief as 'obliterative, dislocating to both body and mind,' culminating in a confrontation with an 'experience of meaninglessness'" (Cholbi, 2021, p. 33). These quotations are taken from the beginning of Chapter 17 of *The Year of Magical Thinking*, in which the narrating 'I' reflects on the incongruity of anticipated and experienced forms of grief in ways that seemingly abstract away from the lived experiences ascribed to herself as the narrated 'I':

Grief turns out to be a place none of us know until we reach it. We anticipate (we know) that someone close to us could die, but we do not look beyond the few days or weeks that immediately follow such an imagined death. We misconstrue the nature of even those few days or weeks. We might expect if the death is sudden to feel shock. We do not expect this shock to be *obliterative, dislocating to both body and mind*. [...]

We have no way of knowing that the funeral itself will be anodyne, a kind of narcotic regression in which we are wrapped in the care of others and the gravity and meaning of the occasion. Nor can we know ahead of the fact (and here lies the heart of the difference between grief as we imagine it and grief as it is) the unending absence that follows, the void. The very opposite of meaning, the relentless succession of moments during which we will confront the *experience of meaninglessness* itself. (Didion, 2005, pp. 188–189; emphasis added)

Cholbi (2021) then employs the decontextualised phrases "obliterative, dislocating to both body and mind" and "experience of meaningless" – alongside similarly decontextualised quotations from Lewis's (1961) *A Grief Observed* – to offer a theoretical reason for the sense of dislocation that is often associated with grief:³ "That we grieve those in whom we have invested our practical identities helps explain this sense of finding oneself unfamiliar and the world around oneself disorienting" (Cholbi, 2021, p. 33). This case illustrates how grief memoirs are referenced and cited – often in decontextualised ways – in support of key assumptions about the phenomenology and attentional-emotional structure of grief.

It should be noted, however, that elsewhere in *Grief: A Philosophical Guide*, Cholbi (2021) offers nuanced considerations on the situatedness of grief memoirs in a wider context of popular culture and pervasive social norms and expectations about grieving. Specifically, he develops the following assumption:

³ These phrases are quoted in a decontextualised manner in the sense specified above in footnote 2: Cholbi (2021) does not offer any specifications of the situatedness of the quoted phrases in the wider discourse-story configuration. Nor does he summarise relevant plot events or briefly describes stylistic peculiarities of the relevant passage of Didion's (2005) *The Year of Magical Thinking*.

[...] grief narratives are a genre, predicated on conventions about how grief is supposed to happen. [...] That grief memoirs conforming to such conventions are popular attests to how their audiences have been led to expect depictions of grief to conform to a genre. But genres often correspond rather poorly to reality, and they come to reflect consumer tastes rooted in audiences' sometimes mistaken beliefs about the facts depicted in the genre [...]. (Cholbi, 2021, p. 180)

In other words, Cholbi (2021) assumes, in large agreement with the position that will be developed in Sections 4 and 5 of the present article, that grief memoirs are in part shaped by “conventions” (not dissimilar to master narratives) that relate to genre expectations. And yet, these critical reflections on the position of grief in a web of wider socio-cultural norms, conventions, expectations, and practices are not fully brought to bear on the evidentiary uses to which grief memoirs, most notably Didion’s (2005) *The Year of Magical Thinking* and Lewis’s (1961) *A Grief Observed*, are put in other parts of Cholbi’s (2021) important and field-shaping book.

As a final example, consider Debus and Richardson’s (2022) account of the phenomenological ambiguity of grief-related autobiographical memories. Vivid autobiographical memories of the deceased, Debus and Richardson (2022) argue, can be pleasurable or painful in a context-dependent fashion. The phenomenal experience associated with autobiographically remembering the deceased is a function of its perceptual quality. Pleasurable remembering is associated with a feeling of presence. The deceased is autobiographically remembered in a way that is characterised as *perception-likeness*. Painful remembering is associated with a feeling of absence. In these cases, the deceased is autobiographically remembered in a way that can be described as “*merely as if perceiving*” (Debus & Richardson, 2022, p. 60).

Debus and Richardson (2022) employ two quotations from Adichie’s *Notes on Grief* (2021) as supporting evidence for their core assumption that autobiographical rememberings of the deceased have the ambiguous phenomenological signature they are seeking to explain. In *Notes of Grief*, the narrating ‘I’ configures her grief in response to the unexpected death of her father. Her grief, it becomes clear, is further complicated by the spatial distance between the narrated ‘I’, being based in the United States, and her family home in Nigeria, amidst travelling restrictions that were imposed to limit the transmission of Covid-19 in 2020. Adichie’s grief memoir, it should be noted, is characterised by a deliberately fragmented structure and the frequent use of metaphors to represent emotional experiences that the narrating ‘I’ ascribes to the narrated ‘I’. Considering expressions of condolence and empathy in the days and weeks following her father’s death, the narrating ‘I’ seeks to capture painful experiences she associates with post-bereavement loss. The following passage is quoted in the beginning of the introduction of Debus and Richardson’s (2022) article (p. 37):

I wince now at the words I said in the past to grieving friends. “Find peace in your memories,” I used to say. To have love snatched from you, especially unexpectedly, and then to be told to turn to memories. Rather than succour, my memories bring eloquent stabs of pain that say, “This is what you will never again have.” Sometimes they bring laughter, but laughter like glowing coals that soon burst aflame in pain. I hope that it is a question of time – that it is just too soon, to expect memories to serve only as salve. (Adichie, 2021, pp. 24–25)

Towards the very end of the narrative discourse, the narrating ‘I’ captures a positively valenced response to a text message the narrated ‘I’ receives from her brother Okey:

One day, Okey sends a text that reads, “I miss his dry humour and how he would do a funny little dance when he was happy and how he would pat your cheek and say ‘never mind.’” It makes my heart leap. Of course I remember how my father always said “never mind” to make us feel better about something, but that Okey has remembered it too makes it feel newly true. Grief has, as one of its many egregious components, the onset of doubt. No, I am not imagining it. Yes, my father truly was lovely. (Adichie, 2021, p. 83)

This passage is quoted as supporting evidence for the assumption that contextual factors influence the emotional valence of autobiographical rememberings of the deceased (see Debus & Richardson, 2022, p. 57). Specifically, Debus and Richardson’s (2022) philosophically charged interpretation of this passage supports their general assumption that the frequency of positively valenced grief-related autobiographical rememberings increases as a function of time that has passed since the irrevocable loss of the significant person: “More broadly, contexts which facilitate the ‘good case’ seem likely to obtain when the bereaved subject has gone some way to finding a new place in their lives for the deceased, appropriate to their changed circumstances” (Debus & Richardson, 2022, p. 57). In sum, alongside other supporting quotations from Barnes’s (2013) *Levels of Life*, Didion’s (2012) *Blue Nights*, Lewis’s (1961) *A Grief Observed*, and other grief memoirs, Adichie’s (2021) memoir *Notes on Grief* is used by Debus and Richardson (2022) as evidence in support of the view that the phenomenal character of autobiographical rememberings, which have the deceased as their object, is ambiguous.

As I have shown in this section, Ratcliffe (2023), Cholbi (2021), and Debus and Richardson (2022) recruit grief memoirs as evidence for their phenomenological assumptions about the quality and structure of grief experiences. In this way, grief memoirs are treated, I have argued, as resources for retrospective-phenomenological analyses. However, this research strategy neglects the epistemic status and artefactual qualities of grief memoirs. After all, grief memoirs are literary artefacts that expose, navigate, and challenge norms governing grief and remembrance, genre expectations, socio-culturally established self-narrative patterns, and much else besides. In the next

section, I will elaborate on this assumption and specify the literary, artefactual status of grief memoirs.

3. Grief Memoirs as Literary Artefacts

For current purposes, I assume that grief memoirs are a special case of textual self-narratives. In general, self-narratives can be defined as the products of creating self-referential narrative representations of autobiographically remembered personal past experiences or imagined personal future experiences (Fabry, 2023b). These kinds of narratives are self-referential in the sense that a narrating 'I' (the narrator) is referring to themselves as the narrated 'I' (the protagonist) (Smith & Watson, 2010). Autobiographical remembering shapes, and is shaped by, the narrative configurations that make up a self-narrative. The notion of autobiographical remembering, in the present context, captures both episodic remembering, i.e., the remembering of particular, temporally structured experiences in one's personal past (Michaelian & Sutton, 2017), and semantic remembering, i.e., the remembering of "facts or propositions" that are relevant for capturing one's personal past (Michaelian, 2016, p. 20). Together, episodic and, to a lesser extent, semantic rememberings influence, and are influenced by, self-narrative configurations. Likewise, autobiographical future imaginings, as conceptualised by Szpunar (2010) and others, can shape, and be shaped by, self-narrational structures.

In order for a representation to count as self-narrative, it should have the following characteristics, at least to a minimal degree: first, narratively represented experiences should be temporally ordered (Carroll, 2010). Second, narratively represented experiences should be connected by causes (Carroll, 2010), reasons (Currie, 2006), or emotional configurations (Velleman, 2003; for a discussion, see Fabry, 2023b). Third, the intentions, actions, and emotions of the narrated 'I' should be intelligible for the addressee, at least to a minimal degree (Mackenzie, 2014). Finally, the social, cultural, political, and historical context of narratively represented experiences and events should be provided at least to a minimal degree (Ibid.). Self-narrativity should be understood as a gradual phenomenon, ranging from minimally to maximally connected and contextualised self-referential discourse-story configurations (Fabry, 2023b).

Self-narratives can take various forms and can occur, for example, in spontaneous conversation and across a wide range of media and genres, including, but not limited to documentaries, performance art, singer-songwriting, and comics (for an overview, see Smith & Watson, 2010). *Textual* self-narratives, which concern us here, depend on literacy-dependent, written forms of communication (Smith & Watson, 2010). Textual self-narratives *weave together*

different discursive threads and thereby create an *autoglottic space* (Harris, 1989), a self-contained space on the page – or more recently on screen – that connects, across time, the co-absent narrating ‘I’ and the addressee (Fabry, 2018). Memoirs, in addition to autobiographies, are important examples of textual self-narratives (Fabry, 2023a). They rely on a relationship that is established, often implicitly, between the author, the narrating ‘I’, the narrated ‘I’, and the reader. For current purposes, this relationship can be captured with reference to Philippe Lejeune’s (1975) notion of the *autobiographical pact*, which stipulates the identity of the author as stated on the cover, the narrating ‘I’ and the narrated ‘I’.

In contrast to autobiographies, *memoirs* do not aim to offer an account of the intellectual and social development of the narrated ‘I’ across their lifespan (Schwalm, 2014). Rather, the contemporary memoir, which concerns us here, “[...] narrows in on a particular aspect of the author’s experience: a relatively short time period, specific event, or select theme” (de Bres, 2021, p. 11). *Grief memoirs*, then, are defined as textual self-narrative products that focus on the narrative representation, navigation, and negotiation of autobiographically remembered grief experiences, autobiographical memories of the deceased, and acts of remembrance. They are carefully constructed, configured, crafted, and curated literary artefacts. As such, they are products of creative writing practices (Schaeffer, 2020), which include, but are not limited to, elaborate narrative techniques, the employment of stylistic devices, and the engagement with intertexts and other products of aesthetic expression. As literary artefacts, grief memoirs actualise a literary phenomenon that is analogous to the *double vision of fiction* (Polvinen, 2017, 2023), which captures the duality of the mimetic representation of events and experiences in the storyworld *and* the artefactual status of narrative products (Kukkonen, 2018). The *double vision of the grief memoir*, then, consists in the duality of the mimetic representation of grief-related experiences ascribed to the narrated ‘I’ and the artefactual, narrative design of the literary text. Grief memoirs, thus understood, are situated in a wider web of *master narratives*, narrative patterns, and norms that dominate in a given socio-cultural community (McLean et al., 2023), as well as genre conventions and expectations (Schaeffer, 2020). They are also situated in the wider economy of the *storytelling boom* (Mäkelä & Meretoja, 2022), which aims at monetising the narrativization of grief and other transformative experiences.

Together, these considerations strongly suggest that grief memoirs should be understood as carefully crafted and curated literary artefacts that are part of a complicated web of literary creative practices, narrative patterns, genre expectations, socio-cultural norms, and economic incentives that constrain grief experiences and their narrative representation. This assumption is reminiscent of Radden and Varga’s (2013) critical discussion of the phenomenological engagement with

depression memoirs. They note that grief memoirs “[...] may tell us more about the discourse on depression within the medium of literature than about the concrete and ‘raw’ experience of depression itself” (Radden & Varga, 2013, p. 100). This point, I argue, also applies to grief memoirs. The ways in which grief experiences are narrativized and negotiated in these literary texts can offer more insights into the peculiarities of narrative practices, genre conventions, and the wider socio-cultural context than into the dynamical phenomenal unfolding of grief *per se*. In the next section, I will substantiate this claim by examining four key characteristics of grief memoirs: their revelation and negotiation of the constructive character of autobiographical remembering, their discursive engagement with the moral obligations of remembrance, their perpetuation of or resistance to master narratives about grief and remembrance, and their situatedness in a web of genre expectations.

4. Key Characteristics of Grief Memoirs

Grief memoirs, I have argued in the previous section, are first and foremost literary artefacts that navigate and negotiate the very possibility of narrativizing experiences of irrevocable loss. In this section, I will offer an examination of four characteristics of grief memoirs that cast further doubt on the feasibility of the strategy to treat them as resources for retrospective-phenomenological analyses without any qualifications. This focus leaves room for the possibility that other characteristics are also relevant for a proper philosophical understanding of the epistemic and artefactual characteristics of grief memoirs.

First, consider how grief memoirs negotiate the possibilities and limitations of autobiographical remembering, with a focus on episodic aspects of remembering. Episodic remembering, empirically informed philosophical research indicates, is generative and constructive, rather than reconstructive and preservative (Dings & Newen, 2023; Michaelian, 2016; Michaelian & Robins, 2018; Werning, 2020). In the philosophy and cognitive science of memory, so-called *memory distortions* are taken as evidence for the view that constructive episodic remembering is adaptive (Michaelian, 2016; Schacter et al., 2011, 2023) and can be epistemically beneficial for the agent (e.g., Fernández, 2015; Puddifoot & Bortolotti, 2019). Empirically evidenced memory distortions include, but are not limited to, transience, consistency bias, self-enhancing bias, and positivity bias (for a review, see Schacter, 2022). *Transience* refers to the phenomenon that the accuracy and phenomenal richness of episodic memories of specific personal past experiences decline over time. The notion of *consistency bias* refers to the tendency to evoke personal past experiences in ways that are consistent with one’s self-knowledge, beliefs, values, and affective attitudes at the time of recall. The *self-enhancing bias* is defined as the inclination

to make episodic memories (and, to a lesser extent, semantic memories) align with a positive self-conception. It is often connected to the *positivity bias*, which leads to an overly positive assessment of one's past intentions, actions, and interactions (for a review, see Schacter et al., 2023). Arguably, these and other memory distortions might be contextually influenced and, at times, exacerbated by the very processes of textual self-narrativization. If it is correct to say that acts of self-narration can and often do influence episodic remembering in important ways (Hutto, 2017; Hutto & Myin, 2017, Chapter 9), it follows that this also applies to the constructive, distorted aspects of engaging with one's personal past. Vice versa, to the extent that the narrative representation of episodic memories features prominently in memoirs, their distortedness will inevitably influence the shape, form, and content of story-discourse configurations (for discussions, see de Bres, 2021, Chapter 2; Radden & Varga, 2013).

The influence of the constructiveness of episodic remembering on the epistemic status of accounts of one's personal past is by no means specific to memoirs in general and grief memoirs in particular. However, many memoirs reflect on or critically engage with the constructive character of episodic remembering – and the susceptibility to memory distortions, unreliability and uncertainty it entails – with literary means (de Bres, 2021; Radden & Varga, 2013). As an example, consider the quotation from Adichie's (2021) *Notes on Grief* above, in which the narrating 'I' describes how a text message from her brother Okey can dissolve doubts about the reliability of her semantified autobiographical memories of her beloved father: "Grief has, as one of the many egregious components, the onset of doubt. No, I am not imagining it. Yes, my father truly was lovely" (Adichie, 2021, p. 83). The discursive structure of Didion's (2005) *The Year of Magical Thinking* can serve as another illustration of the assumption that grief memoirs critically engage with the constructive, at times distorted character of episodic remembering. The narrative discourse contains quotations from logbooks, diaries, research articles, and other resources that are meant to correct, improve, or corroborate the ways in which the narrating 'I' recollects the night of her husband's death and the immediate aftermath of her irrevocable loss. For example, the narrating 'I' engages with the logbook entry of their apartment building in an attempt to identify the time of her husband's death:

NOTE: Paramedics arrived at 9:20 p.m. for Mr. Dunne. Mr. Dunne was taken to hospital at 10:05 p.m.

NOTE: Lightbulb out on A-B passenger elevator.

The A-B elevator was our elevator, the elevator on which the paramedics came up at 9:20 p.m., the elevator on which they took John (and me) downstairs to the ambulance at 10:05 p.m., the elevator on which I returned alone to our apartment at a time not noted. I had not noticed a lightbulb being out on the elevator. Nor had I noticed that the paramedics were in the apartment for forty-five

minutes. I had always described it as “fifteen or twenty minutes.” *If they were here that long does that mean that he was alive?* (Didion, 2005, pp. 20–21)

As this example shows, the narrating ‘I’ integrates quotations from logbooks and other writings into the discursive surface structure of the text to performatively negotiate the deficiencies and distortions that are an integral part of autobiographical remembering, especially in times of emotional upheaval.

More generally, these considerations on the constructive character of autobiographical remembering have two implications for the epistemic status of grief memoirs. First, the dynamic relationship between self-narration and constructive autobiographical remembering suggests that grief memoirs should not be understood as reconstructive and undistorted phenomenological first-person reports of the author-narrator’s grief experiences. Second, and relatedly, grief memoirs are the products of the creative, artefactual engagement of the narrating ‘I’ with autobiographical, especially episodic memories ascribed to the narrated ‘I’. For these reasons, grief memoirs do not easily avail themselves as easily accessible retrospective-phenomenological evidence.

The second characteristic of grief memoirs that concerns us here is that these literary texts do not only negotiate the idiosyncrasies and particularities of autobiographical remembering, but also the moral obligations of remembrance. In many cultures, bereaved persons are morally obligated to remember and commemorate deceased persons, especially those that have been implicated in their practical identities. Blustein (2008) identifies three aspects of this moral obligation. First, bereaved persons ought to “[...] affirm that death has not obliterated the significance of the one who has died” (Blustein, 2008, pp. 269–270). Second, bereaved persons ought to be morally committed to continue their duties of love and honour towards the deceased through appropriate acts of remembrance. Third, as bereaved persons, we “[...] must recognize and accept obligations to remembrance if we are to legitimately impose obligations on our successors to remember us” (Ibid., p. 277). Together, then, acts of commemorating the deceased, as described above, have a socio-culturally shaped moral dimension.

Against this background, grief memoirs, especially the ones that constitute the text corpus for retrospective-phenomenological analyses at issue, can be understood as artefactual manifestations of morally constrained acts of remembrance. As literary artefacts, they are products of narrative practices of memorialisation and commemoration that require the active participation of addressees through acts of reading. In this sense, as Andrea Westlund (2018) puts it, “[t]he telling itself constitutes a public performance that itself memorializes the dead, comparable to other forms of memorial (grave stones, inscriptions on benches or other markers at public places, and so forth) that play a similar role” (Westlund, 2018, p. 34). While the similarity of literary grief

memoirs and other products of memorialisation should not be overstated, it is the case that grief memoirs, as products of textual self-narration, belong to a large collection of artefacts, objects, artworks, rituals, and practices that memorialise and honour the deceased.

One implication of this moral obligation to commemorate and honour the deceased is that grief memoirs, just like other forms of remembrance, represent the deceased in ways that tend to highlight their strengths, achievements, and moral virtues, rather than their weaknesses, failures, and moral vices. The way in which the narrating 'I' in Adichie's (2021) *Notes on Grief* commemorates her father, as a person who "truly was lovely" (p. 83), which I discussed above, can serve as a ready example. However, the narrative memorialisation of her father also goes one step further by discursively representing how he is commemorated by others: "Concrete and sincere memories from those who knew him comfort the most, and it warms me that the same words occur: 'honest', 'calm', 'kind', 'strong', 'quiet', 'simple', 'peaceful', 'integrity'" (Adichie, 2021, p. 25).

Overall, then, grief memoirs are not only artefacts that navigate and negotiate the possibilities and limitations of autobiographically remembering the deceased. They are also manifestations of socio-culturally shaped practices that are constrained by moral obligations of remembrance. While these moral obligations can influence the shape, quality, and unfolding of grief, they find their most compelling expression in artefacts, objects, rituals, and practices as rehearsed above. Again, this casts additional doubt on the feasibility of treating grief memoirs as phenomenological evidence, without any further considerations on the commemorative role that these grief memoirs come to play through publication and readerly engagement.

The third characteristic of grief memoirs concerns their situatedness in a web of socio-culturally shaped narrative structures. Grief memoirs, like all other forms of self-narrative, navigate and negotiate master narratives (Fabry, 2023b). Master narratives are widely shared narrative patterns and plot structures that dominate in a given socio-cultural community or society (McLean & Syed, 2015). They are normatively laden structures for perpetuating systems of power and oppression through narrative practices (McLean et al., 2023). Master narratives influence, often implicitly, how lived experiences and autobiographical memories can be narratively represented. Furthermore, "[t]hey provide the frame and material to form one's own identity narrative, servicing as the ready-made option for how to construct a meaningful and productive life within a society" (McLean & Syed, 2015, p. 325).

Grief memoirs, like other self-narratives, perpetuate or resist master narratives through the configuration and reconfiguration of plot events. If they resist master narratives, they contribute to the formation of *alternative narratives* (McLean et al., 2023; McLean & Syed, 2015). Especially narrators that are members of socio-culturally oppressed groups need to establish or strengthen

alternative narrative patterns and frames for representing personal past events and experiences. Alternative narratives, then, can become a powerful means, in the context of literary discourse and beyond, for actively subverting and resisting socio-culturally established systems of oppression (McLean et al., 2023). Grief memoirs therefore reinforce or resist established narrative patterns. This entails that they are part of a larger socio-cultural context of practices and norms that constrain grief, remembering, remembrance, and the possibility conditions of self-narration in a given socio-cultural community. Furthermore, as literary artefacts, grief memoirs are products of the narrational, often performative navigation and negotiation of structural master narratives about grief. These master narratives include popular and academic conceptions of the structure of “normal” grief (see Cholbi, 2021, pp. 180–181). For example, according to the relinquishment conception, which is often attributed to Freud (1917), grief ultimately aims at severing one’s emotional connection to the deceased. According to the more recent continuing bonds conception, grief should aim at continuing one’s emotional bond with the deceased (Klass et al., 1996). The upshot is that grief memoirs are always already contextualised in a rich landscape of narrative patterns and plot configurations that memoirists can resist, but not escape.

As an example, consider how Oates (2011) exposes, and thereby challenges the structural master narrative of the *good Widow*, which offers a template for the emotional and practical labour that women are supposed to enact in the aftermath of their spouse’s death.

The Widow is consoling herself with a desperate stratagem. But then, all the widow’s stratagems are desperate right now. She will speculate that she didn’t fully know her husband – this will give her leverage to seek him, to come to know him. It will keep her husband “alive” in her memory – elusive, teasing. For the fact is, the widow cannot accept it, that her husband is gone from her life irrevocably. She cannot accept it – she cannot even comprehend it – that she has no relationship with Raymond J. Smith except as his widow – the “executrix” of his estate. (Oates, 2011, p. 97)

Advice to the Widow: Do not think that grief is pure, solemn, austere and “elevated” – this is not Mozart’s Requiem Mass. Think instead Spike Jones, those unfunny “classical” music jokes involving tubas and bassoons. Think of crude coarse gravel that hurts to walk on. Think of splotted mirrors in public lavatories. Think of towel dispensers when they have broken and there is nothing to wipe your hands on except already-used badly soiled towels. (Ibid., p. 111)

As these quotations illustrate, the negotiation of the *good Widow* master narrative is a pervasive discursive feature of Oates’s (2011) grief memoir that resonates with, comments on, and at times ironically juxtaposes the narratively represented experiences, autobiographical memories, and instances of remembrance ascribed to the narrated ‘I’.

The assumption that grief memoirs are always already situated in a dense web of master narratives and alternative narratives casts further doubt on the idea that they should be treated as phenomenological first-person reports of grief experiences. Rather, they navigate and negotiate

socio-culturally shaped narrative patterns that constrain and prefigure the plot structure and discursive configuration of self-narratives more generally. This is fully consistent with the view that grief experiences *per se* are shaped by, and frequently vary as a function of, social expectations, cultural practices, rituals and norms (Fabry, 2023c). However, grief memoirs can add another layer by showing how these socio-cultural patterns prefigure and constrain self-narrative accounts of grief experiences.

Finally, like all literary texts, grief memoirs perpetuate and negotiate genre conventions and expectations (Schaeffer, 2020; see also Cholbi, 2021, pp. 12; 180–181). These conventions and expectations concern the characteristics of specific literary artefacts and the ways in which readers engage with them. They are actualised through the means of the attentional and emotional economy of the *storytelling boom* (Mäkelä & Meretoja, 2022), for example the employment of paratexts or the launching of advertisement campaigns. Grief memoirs, then, navigate or negotiate expectations about certain characteristics of narrative discourse, including “aporia, a focus on un/transmission, negotiation of readerly response and empathy, textual disruption” (Schaeffer, 2020). Furthermore, they frequently employ strategies of narrative fragmentation and (inter-)textual bricolage, thereby challenging common assumptions about the coherence-oriented narratability of the irrevocable loss of a significant person (see Smith & Watson, 2010). The autoglottic space that is opened up by grief memoirs can thus be understood as “[...] a space wherein writers might negotiate the conventions of traumatic literature, working within them while at the same time challenging the assumptions that readers bring to painful stories” (Schaeffer, 2020, p. 16).

A brief look at the most salient characteristics of the narrative surface structure of Didion’s (2005) *The Year of Magical Thinking* should suffice to illustrate that grief memoirs discursively navigate and negotiate genre expectations about the narrative disclosure of grief and remembrance. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010) offer an instructive analysis of the ways in which this grief memoir establishes new narrative modes for challenging and subverting expectations about narratively representing, and thereby *working through* grief:

Much of Didion’s narrative employs a dry, flat reporting voice, attentive to details of medical procedure, which seems obsessive in its concern with the material – autopsy details, clothing, food, the passage of days. Another self-reflexive voice tentatively questions her own mental status and juxtaposes citations from other writers about mortality that she references but cannot engage. Throughout her memoir, she refuses a voice of grief and mourning, the expected way of telling and ‘overcoming’ a story of loss and shock. The process of coming to ‘speak’ the irreversibility of death to herself emerges tentatively, if at all, in a counterpoint of speech and silence. (Smith & Watson, 2010, pp. 83–84)

As this brief narratological interpretation illustrates, *The Year of Magical Thinking* negotiates, challenges, and thereby lays bare genre expectations about revelatory, self-disclosing narrative accounts about grief and remembrance. Similar narrative strategies can be identified in Adichie's (2021) *Notes on Grief*, Oates's (2011) *A Widow's Story*, and other grief memoirs that are frequently cited as retrospective-phenomenological evidence.

A different, often complementary strategy that can be discerned when engaging with memoirs is the frequent straddling of boundaries between the factual and the fictional in literary textual self-narration. As highlighted by recent narratological scholarship on autofiction (e.g., Effe & Gibbons, 2022), literary texts that are informed by, represent, and negotiate the lived experience of the author-narrator often oscillate between different narrative features that provoke and warrant sometimes fiction-oriented, sometimes fact-oriented readerly strategies. In other words, the general trend towards autofiction renders the epistemological status of grief memoirs even more complex than initially assumed. In sum, the fact that grief memoirs are contextualised in a web of genre conventions and expectations, some of them explicit, some of them implicit, further complicates the feasibility of treating them as easily recruitable retrospective-phenomenological evidence.

5. Against Treating Grief Memoirs as Phenomenological Evidence

As I have argued over the last two sections, grief memoirs are literary artefacts that navigate and negotiate grief experiences, autobiographical memories of the deceased, acts of remembrance, master narratives and genre conventions and expectations. Therefore, grief memoirs should not be treated as phenomenological evidence in support of assumptions about the presence, structure, and quality of grief experiences without any qualifications.

This claim echoes in many ways Jennifer Radden and Somogy Varga's (2013) concerns about treating depression memoirs as *autobiographical testimony* for the lived experience of individuals suffering from depression:

In drawing on autobiographical accounts of depression, whether employing them in conceptual analysis, as the basis for developing theoretical models, or even quoting them for illustrative purposes, caution is called for. The ambiguities surrounding first-person accounting of experience, particularly notable in written memoirs, should be of concern to the researcher. (Radden & Varga, 2013, p. 112)

Like depression memoirs, grief memoirs are carefully crafted literary artefacts that defy any straightforward treatment as retrospective-phenomenological evidence. Using quotations of

phrases and passages from grief memoirs without any qualifications and reservations leads to at least two problems. The first problem is that this research strategy is at risk of underestimating the complexity and artefactual status of grief memoirs. As we have seen in the previous section, Adichie's (2021) *Notes on Grief*, Didion's (2005) *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Oates's (2011) *A Widow's Story*, and other grief memoirs frequently cited in philosophical research on grief are literary texts that pursue various narrative strategies and employ a range of stylistic devices and intertextual references. As proposed in Section 3, they can be understood as manifestations of the *double vision of memoir*: they are at once mimetic representations of grief-related experiences *and* narrative designs, which are contextualised in a socio-cultural environment that is populated by master narratives, genre expectations, and incentives of the storytelling economy. Overlooking these aspects of grief memoirs entails that the epistemic status and the aesthetic and narrative design of these literary artefacts cannot be properly understood.

The second problem with this research strategy is that the (often decontextualised) quotation of grief memoirs as retrospective-phenomenological evidence can lead to unwarranted assumptions about grief experiences. At best, these assumptions might focus on some phenomenological aspects of grief and neglect others. They might thus run risk to be selective, just as the text corpus of grief memoirs that is employed for retrospective-phenomenological analysis is selective. At worst, theoretical assumptions that rely, at least to a certain degree, on quotations from grief memoirs as phenomenological evidence might be misguided or mistaken, not only about the structures and qualities of grief experiences,⁴ but also about their scope and their intra- and interindividual variability within and across time. After all, the memoirs that are frequently mentioned in philosophical work on grief are written by accomplished, relatively wealthy, anglophone literary writers who mostly live in Western countries and are highly regarded in the spheres of literary criticism, scholarship, and popular media. Furthermore, all memoirs at issue were written in the late 20th or early 21st century. These socio-cultural and historical factors, in combination with the artefactual status of grief memoirs, should suffice to raise skepticism about the ubiquity and generalisability of descriptions that can be found in grief memoirs. At the very least, the socio-cultural and aesthetic-narratological aspects I have mentioned should be taken into

⁴ This is largely consistent with Cholbi's (2021) precautionary assumption that grief memoirs and other literary texts tend to selectively represent, at times in an exaggerated fashion, the author-narrator's or artist's grief experiences: "Yet no single artistic work can fully illuminate grief's nuances. For one, such works nearly always focus on a single grief episode. We can learn a great deal about grief when such episodes are representative of grief experiences in general, but if they are atypical, they are as likely to mislead as to inform. Also keep in mind that literature and the arts thrive on drama and are thus likely to over-represent the most intense emotionally high-pitched grief episodes at the expense of representations of ordinary, more 'healthy' grief episodes" (Cholbi, 2021, p. 12).

account when quoting grief memoirs as retrospective-phenomenological evidence. This also holds true when quotations from grief memoirs are offered alongside quotations from phenomenological first-person reports, which were acquired through qualitative empirical research (e.g., Millar et al., 2020), for example in Ratcliffe's (2023) phenomenological account of grief. Even if grief memoirs were to be interpreted as capturing certain aspects of grief, these narrative configurations are idiosyncratic, selective, and occur in the context of rich creative self-narrative practices (for a similar point, see Cholbi, 2021, p. 12).

While skepticism about the feasibility of treating grief memoirs as retrospective-phenomenological evidence is urgently needed, this does not entail the view that grief memoirs should be ignored by grief research in philosophy and other disciplines. They can and should be regarded as important resources, but of a different kind than tacitly assumed by Ratcliffe (2023), Cholbi (2021), Debus and Richardson (2022), and others. In what follows, I will briefly outline to what extent grief memoirs can and should inform grief research.

Grief memoirs can attest to creative practices of navigating and negotiating the narrational possibilities and limitations of capturing grief, autobiographical memories of the deceased, and transposing acts of remembrance into autoglottic space. Following Karin Kukkonen's (2023) proposal, literature in general can be understood "[...] as an uncertainty practice for both readers and writers, that is, a cultural practice particularly suited to inhabit the uncomfortable epistemic space of volatility" (Kukkonen, 2023, p. 1146). While Kukkonen is concerned with contemporary practices of fictional and autofictional narration, I contend that her proposal can also be applied to the corpus of grief memoirs that is at issue in this article. The bereavement-induced loss of a significant person is frequently associated with a lifeworld that has become disrupted, strange, and, indeed, volatile. Grief memoirs, like other literary texts, can offer opportunities for navigating this volatile lifeworld in which old certainties need to be given up or transformed and new certainties need to be established in times of unpredictable emotional and epistemic instability. This idea is consistent with Kathleen Marie Higgins's (2020, 2024) observation that creative practices, including narrative practices, can be understood as aesthetic, epistemic, and emotional modes for navigating a lifeworld that has been irrevocably altered.

The systematic investigation of grief memoirs, then, can lead to a better understanding of the role of self-narrative engagement in the context of grief and remembrance. Focussing on the author's modes of creative writing, new research questions come into view. To what extent, if at all, can literary self-narrative practices, such as the crafting and revision of a memoir, contribute to a renegotiation of and reconnection to a lifeworld that has been rendered futile and volatile? To what extent, if at all, can the crafting and revision of a grief memoir expose the limitations of

narrativising experiences and memories associated with grief? What can be said, and what needs to be remained unsaid, about grief with and through the creation of self-referential literary artefacts?

Focussing on the reader's role of self-narrative engagement, it would be worthwhile to explore how grief memoirs resonate with the reader's expectations and predictions throughout the act of reading (see Kukkonen, 2020). These expectations and predictions concern swift embodied responses to discursive configurations, as described by Caracciolo and Kukkonen (2021). In addition, they pertain to the ways in which readers cognitively and affectively relate to the narrating 'I' and the narrated 'I' and their attempts to navigate their emotional processes, their autobiographical rememberings, socio-cultural expectations about grief, and much else besides. This readerly perspective, empirical evidence suggests, is often shaped by the personal relevance of literary texts, which in turn influences how they are navigated and understood (Kuzmičová & Bálint, 2019). In the present context, the personal relevance of narrative accounts of grief might shape and prefigure how readers respond to grief memoirs.

The overall suggestion, then, is that grief memoirs do not qualify as retrospective-phenomenological evidence that can support assumptions about the presence and shape of certain aspects of grief experiences. Rather, they are literary artefacts that can help authors and readers navigate volatile lifeworlds with self-narrative means, which are always already situated in a wider socio-cultural context. It is in this sense that grief memoirs can contribute to a better understanding of grief. They can then be understood as exemplars of a *lifeworld technology* (Kukkonen, 2019, 2020), which can tell us more about the place of creative literary practices in navigating grief, which is understood as an *unchosen transformative experience* (Markovic, 2022), than about the phenomenology of grief *per se*. The exploration of this *griefworld technology*, to integrate notions developed by Kukkonen (2019, 2020) and Ratcliffe (2023), will require interdisciplinary research that takes work in phenomenology, philosophy of mind, cognitive narratology, and the cognitive sciences into account. Grief memoirs could then qualify as particular kind of *boundary objects*, that is, artefactual objects that avail themselves to the interdisciplinary integration of different scholarly perspectives, which require complementary forms of expertise (Kukkonen, 2024). The interdisciplinary approach I am suggesting could then help identify, conceptualise, and describe the relevant cognitive and affective processes and the patterns, norms, and expectations that are associated with self-narrative engagement in the context of grief, both from a writerly and readerly perspective.

The study of grief memoirs as exemplars of a socio-culturally situated griefworld technology could help overcome the two problems of current philosophical treatments of Adichie's (2021)

Notes on Grief, Didion's (2005) *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Oates's (2011) *A Widow's Story*, and other literary textual self-narratives I have identified above. First, it can do justice to the complexity and artefactual status of grief memoirs. Second, it avoids the risk of making unwarranted assumptions about the phenomenology of grief, because it shifts the target phenomenon from grief experiences to literary self-narrative engagements with the navigation and negotiation of grief experiences.

6. Concluding Remarks

In this article, I have critically discussed a research strategy that is frequently pursued in recent philosophical research on grief. This (largely implicit) strategy consists in treating and recruiting quotations from literary grief memoirs as retrospective-phenomenological evidence for assumptions about the occurrence and characteristics of grief experiences. I have argued that this strategy is problematic because it neglects the epistemic status and artefactual configuration of grief memoirs. Consequently, it underestimates the socio-culturally shaped design principles that guide grief memoirs. Furthermore, this research strategy can lead to unwarranted, selective, or overgeneralised assumptions about grief experiences. The overall claim that I have established throughout this article is that grief memoirs are not evidentiary resources for retrospective-phenomenological analyses, but literary exemplars of griefworld technologies that form part of socio-cultural practices for navigating and negotiating grief and remembrance. The positive proposal for future research is then to investigate grief memoirs through interdisciplinary collaboration and integration across phenomenology, philosophy of mind, cognitive narratology, and the cognitive sciences.

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