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# Grief and Consolation in Greece and Rome: Ancient and Modern Perspectives

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In this talk I surveyed various ancient and modern approaches to grief in order to study the enduring problem of how we humans cope with grief and how these can be productively studied from a comparative angle. The recent upsurge in the study of grief and consoling strategies is especially interested in the healing arts, which is making use of various mechanisms from the humanistic tradition to cope with grief and loss. The paper hopes to spark new debates on how a diachronic analysis can allow for discovering new approaches. It will become clear that we need a great variety of solutions to allow for the processing of grief across a broad spectrum of personalities.

## **Preface: reflecting on death, grief and consolation**

Grief and death are slowly emerging from the shadows of a long-standing taboo and it is important that we acknowledge the experience as a deeply human one, known to humankind since the beginning of time. My interest in this project on grief in antiquity began some ten years ago, not from a morbid interest in death and dying, but because I saw the significance of ancient writings for this crucial aspect of our human lives, that is, how we cope with grief. The topic has made quite a come-back in recent years as for instance in *Time* magazine, where a cover article revealed the grief of a highly placed executive of Google,<sup>2</sup> or when in the *New York Times* recent

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<sup>1</sup> I want to thank the organisers for their kind invitation and for this opportunity to share some of my work with a wider audience. This talk is a revised version of my talk for the Australian National University in 2012, building on Baltussen, 2009a, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Sheryl Sandberg, who published a book about her experience *Option B. Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy* in 2017.

books on grief were reviewed. This recent public focus has been noted by many and some believe that the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, played a role in this development. Parallels abound between us and earlier historical periods and it is worth our while exploring the lasting value of coping mechanisms and grief strategies.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper I will argue that antiquity also experienced a new important development in grief management and that their insights may well inform our own approaches to grief. I will start from the fifth century BC Greek orator Antiphon who claimed to have a method to heal grief. In making rhetorical techniques his tool, he started something quite new in that he now applied *consciously* and *purposefully* what others before him had explored intuitively. I am calling this new approach the *therapeutic turn*, a phrase which I will for the moment clarify as: the *significant change* in how one human consciously attempts to assist other humans with their grief in a way that relies on language. Many of you will be familiar with the claim that Greek philosophers believed that philosophy could have a therapeutic role: it was for the mind what medicine was for the body. And while all my examples today will exhibit some philosophical influence, what needs emphasising is that the earliest therapeutic use of language came about in the context of *rhetorical practice*. Admittedly, Thucydides' marvellous report on the funeral speech of Pericles is quite famous as a rhetorical case of public consolation (*Pelop. War* 2.34–46). But I would hold that this case represents a different type in which the act of consolation is addressed to the community, in this case, to clarify the sacrifice made and lift the spirits of the citizens — which Pericles of course did by turning the speech into a eulogy of Athens itself and the Athenian way of life. Antiphon's claim was different: according to our sources, he set up shop in the marketplace and promised that he could cure individuals by way of analysing the causes of their grief and by using words (διὰ λόγων):

Antiphon is said to have composed tragedies both by himself and with the tyrant Dionysius. While he was still involved in poetry *he designed a method for the cure of grief* (τέχνη ἀλυσίας), on the analogy of the treatment of the sick by doctors and, getting himself a dwelling in Corinth near the market-place, he advertised that he was able to cure those *suffering from grief* through [the power of] words (διὰ λόγων); and discovering the *causes* of their sickness by

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<sup>3</sup> I cannot in this paper deal with all relevant texts, such as literary, philosophical and “fringe-consolation” such as Plato's *Phaedo*, Hyperides' *Epitaphios* or pseudo-Plutarch's *Consolation to Apollonius*. See Baltussen, 2013.

inquiry he gave consolation to sufferers. (trans. Dillon, 2003, slightly modified)

The power of the word is here invoked in a very special way. It is also striking that poetic sensibility is implied earlier in the text, and the fact that his approach is called a *technē*, a method based on skills. I am reading this as referring to rhetorical skills customised for grief counselling.

This, then, is my main theme for this paper: the origin and development of a new method of dealing with grief, a therapeutic turn, which started in ancient Greece and developed further in Rome (e.g. Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, Galen) and how it may hold some lessons for us today. To me the relevance for today is quite clear. We are all aware of our mortality and anticipate it. The need for grief expression in words is apparent across history and different cultures. But it is striking that, in the past 50 years or so, the modern study of grief has intensified considerably, as it has more recently for the ancient world. One important trend has been to diversify the types of grief and allow for greater variety in dealing with it. There is good reason to ask why this is the case, even if some important studies were done in the last century. Different views have been put forward to explain this trend: the rise of the social sciences, secularisation and the need for guidance in ritual, the Second World War and its subsequent “age of anxiety” accompanied with the rise of Prozac. It is quite possible that all these factors played a role, but my project has taken its cue primarily from the more recent changes in public grief expression, and — in the context of resolving mental disorders — the increasing critique of medicinal approaches leading to a movement of using the Arts in resolving grief.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps like retirement, death is a topic most of us prefer to deal with later — and with increased longevity this is perhaps a luxury we can afford. But unlike retirement, death has a way of imposing itself more frequently, disrupting our daily routines when family or friends are taken. In modern testimonies one may quote the well-known example from C.S. Lewis’ remarkable memoir *A Grief Observed* which opens with the statement: “No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear” (1961:5) or Joan Didion’s 2005 memoir *The Year of Magical Thinking*: “Grief, when it comes, is nothing

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<sup>4</sup> See Downie, 2000 and Bertmann, 1999.

we expect it to be" (26), or Meryl Streep in her comments on her husband's death.

Being at a loss for words has clear ancient parallels.<sup>5</sup> Consider the ancient testimonies like Cicero, Seneca, or Jerome, and we need no longer be surprised to find that the ancients knew about loss in as many forms as we do: loss of child, parents, pets, property, dignity, and country. It is said that Alexander the Great was inconsolable over the death of his horse, that Cicero (about whom we will hear more later) bemoaned his exile, as did the poet Ovid, and the famous physician Galen needed all his composure to cope with the loss of his carefully collected store of medication, recipes as well as quite a few of his writings after a fire in Rome. The struggle to contain emotions by rational means is as old as human documents allow us to trace. Thanks to a range of surviving written sources we know that humans have long found a need to *express* their grief, or as Shakespeare put it, "to give sorrow words". But once rhetoric and soon philosophy became more mature, they have pursued ways to use language as the cure. In my talk I examine Greek and Roman sources which offer a rich untapped reservoir to show how reading and writing can assist in coping with grief.

## **Ancient emotions: the benefits of a comparative approach**

Before I delve into some Greek and Roman texts, a brief word on modern grief studies will be helpful. It is worth pointing out that, notwithstanding Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), modern grief studies based on systematic *empirical* research are only 60 years old and that recently considerable debate on the best methods has made it into something of a "hot" topic. The first empirical research into acute grief in the famous Lindemann study as recent as 1944 showed the great variety of symptoms and responses to grief, thereby breaking with the Victorian attitude of the "stiff upper-lip" or the advice to "just get on with it".<sup>6</sup> Further work in the

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<sup>5</sup> E.g. Cicero *Fam.* 12.30 "I am writing to you, but I have nothing to say"; Seneca *Agamemnon* "There is no limit to weeping, Cassandra, because / what we are suffering has vanquished limit itself"; Jerome *Consoling Heliodorus* 1 "the greater a subject is, the more completely a person is overwhelmed and cannot find words to unfold its grandeur".

<sup>6</sup> The past few decades have seen renewed and lively debate about grief and how to deal with it, many building on Bowlby's studies of attachment and loss (1969–1980), but also offering

1970s by John Bowlby focused on the mother-child attachment and its impact on later experiences of attachment, separation and loss. And later still, we find the rise of the so-called “healing arts”.

That said, the benefits of a comparative approach for a study of grief are considerable. New methodological perspectives and hindsight are always a useful part of historical analysis, if used correctly, but modern methods and conceptual tools also assist in gaining greater clarity on meaning, context and development of the topic. Here I am not merely following the influence of social sciences upon historical studies since the 1960s, but also specifically the growing debate outside academe on the nature of emotions. In the public sphere I am here thinking, for instance, of the appearance of a range of so-called self-disclosure documents, memoirs which reflect on the loss of an intimate (e.g. C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*; J. Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*; Abigail Carter, *The Alchemy of Loss*; Megan O’Rourke, *The Long Goodbye*). As you can see, the authors have come up with very imaginative titles. These are not diaries with sentimental outpourings of emotions, but *well-crafted accounts* of their grief.<sup>7</sup>

## Homer

I will come to my two case studies in a moment, and will return to modern parallels where relevant, but first I would like to use one short example from Homer to make clear how different the approach to grief was *before the therapeutic turn*.

For a long time, the ancient Greeks had little to assist them in times of distress except for rituals, music and lament.<sup>8</sup> In Homer we find Achilles in

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new theoretical approaches, especially regarding cultural differences and types of grief. In other words, we have become more sensitive to the usefulness of mourning (Horwitz & Wakefield, 2007), to the psychological mechanisms underlying grief responses (Bowlby, 1969–1980; Parkes), to the different causes of loss, and to the culturally distinctive factors involved (Parkes-Laungani) in processing and resolving difficult emotions. Both quotes are taken from Horwitz and Wakefield, 2007:30.

<sup>7</sup> They have already become studied in their own right by Jeffrey Bermann *Companionship in Grief. Love and Loss in the Memoirs of CS Lewis, John Bayley, Donald Hall, Joan Didion and Calvin Trillin* (2010).

<sup>8</sup> I omit for the moment a curious incident of a medicinal cure for grief, when Helen uses a special concoction which is said to be *nêpenthês* “grief-assuaging”, in Book 4 of the *Odyssey* (ll.224–228) to cure her husband Menelaus and their guest Telemachus, who are both struck by a bout of grief when reminiscing about Odysseus.

a sorrowful state when his friend Patroclus has died. The situation is complicated: Achilles has not only been boycotting the war effort, but as a result of this Patroclus proposes to go to battle in his place *wearing his armour*, and Achilles lets him. This engenders a sense of guilt which complicates his grief (*Iliad* 18.22–27):

A black cloud of grief came shrouding over Achilles  
 Both hands clawing the ground for soot and filth  
 He poured it over his head, fouled his handsome face  
 And black ashes settled into his fresh clean war-shirt.  
 Over-powered in all this power, sprawled in the dust,  
 Achilles lay there, fallen  
 Tearing his hair out, defiling it with his own hands.  
 Antilochus bent over him the while, weeping and holding  
 both his hands as he lay groaning for he feared that he might  
 plunge a knife into his own throat. Then Achilles gave a loud cry

Remarkably Achilles' behaviour is that of women mourners, but more extreme, so much so, that it frightens his companion who interprets his behaviour as potentially suicidal. In this case *we* can see how he is brought down by the powerful mix of several emotions: pride, guilt and grief. In his great commentary on the *Iliad* of the early twentieth century — admittedly written when scholarship centred on textual criticism — Walter Leaf focused mostly on conventional literary and linguistic analysis (grammar and morphology) focusing on the word 'clean': "'clean' translates the peculiar *nektareôî* which probably means *euôdes* nice-smelling, since herbs were used to preserve garments ... the cloak may be a present from Thetis" (vol. 2:271). Leaf was of course not primarily interested in ancient fabric softeners, but in determining the correct text and explaining the meaning of words, not emotions. I would hold that a psychologising reading leads to a richer and more rewarding insight into the emotive effect of such a passage, provided it is viewed within a wider development of attitudes and responses to grief.

Antiphon is important as a bridging factor of that transition into a new world of grief management in fifth century BCE Athens, when his grief strategy is to exploit rhetorical techniques. Instead of ritual, moaning and self-pity, we now find more rational approaches to grief, a search for the right word, turn of phrase, to change the outlook or at least mood of the addressee. I already quoted one passage for Antiphon's innovation at the

start of this paper<sup>9</sup> and how his interest in poetry was brought into connection with rhetorical skills and knowledge of causes. A second passage also mentions his power to drive out grief with the use of language (*Philostr.* I.15):

Antiphon developed great powers of persuasion ... and he announced a course on 'grief-assuaging' lectures [*nêpentheis akroaseis*], asserting that no one could tell him of a grief so terrible that he could not root it out of the mind.

Note how the term *nêpentheis* links this text to the unique occurrence in Homer when Helen offers a special drink to Menelaus and Telemachus (*Od.* 4.222) to relieve their grief when they reflect on Odysseus' fate and the Trojan War.

Crudely stated, hereafter it is *not just ritual, but reason* that deals with the emotions, especially when it comes to consolatory writings. Philosophical views would begin to dominate the ways of thinking, but while their influence has been studied in great detail, their *efficacy has not*. My next example from Rome shows the continuity of Greek strategies, but also the further internalisation of the consolation process, when Cicero almost single-handedly invents the self-consolation. In this case both reading *and* writing prove crucial to the process of mourning and healing. But he does this because he discovers philosophy is inadequate.

Cicero's case is truly a sad one, because we can confidently say that he was ill-prepared for what Fate had in store for him. A successful politician and orator, he lived in the tumultuous last days of the Republic. We know about his grief responses from three types of documents: letters, a consolation (only fragments), and a philosophical discussion of grief and other emotions. Only one had been studied seriously (the *Tusculans*), when I came to the material. So here I have attempted to make a new contribution to the debate. Traditionally, Cicero was berated for writing about his grief. The Renaissance scholar Petrarch declared it a disappointment, historians in the 1960s were equally unimpressed, calling his *Consolatio* a sentimental schoolboy essay.

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<sup>9</sup> Ps. Plut. *Lives of Ten Orators* 883–884 [= T6(a) Pendrick, trans. Dillon 2003, modified. Philostratus, 244-9 CE) I.15 [498 Olearius] = T6(d) Pendrick). The doubts about these testimonies as unreliable retrojections (Pendrick, ad loc.) are not conclusive (see Baltussen 2009).



The weakness of these readings is that they judged Cicero by modern standards. I think we can improve our understanding of Cicero's grief by including *all three* types of his writings as part of his grief work, and with one new element: that we make use of the modern convention of viewing grief as a *process*; this will allow us to identify grief stages and take the self-consolation more seriously in the process of healing.

Let us first consider what actually happened to Cicero. He lost his daughter after she had just given birth in February 45 BC. He was plunged into a period of grief, which lasted several months, as is clear from his letters to Atticus. He had lost his public status due to political turmoil, his wife to divorce, and on top of that now his beloved only child. In other words, he had lost his pride in his work as politician and the safe haven of his family home. The loss of his daughter tipped him over the edge and landed him in a depression: his symptoms fit the type of grief nowadays called pathological or abnormal grief. In one letter he writes: "For after trying everything, I have nothing, in which I can find peace. For while I dealt with that, about which I have written to you before, I — as it were — fostered my pain. Now I reject everything and find nothing to be more bearable than solitude" (*Letters to Atticus* 12.8). In breach of the social code of his time and class, Cicero admits that he is inconsolable, and even that he is fostering his grief. He withdrew from Rome's political scene and stayed in the countryside. Cicero's special situation and resulting isolation explain his responses to the agony of grief: he has to figure it out himself, and does so first by *reading* everything he could find on coping with grief and loss, and next, by *writing*.

But these are not random scribblings: after a telling silence of some weeks, he gets going, does research and involves Atticus in finding materials.<sup>10</sup> Then he reveals his purpose: *he has written a self-consolation* — which he claims is an unprecedented thing. Remarkably, the orator has addressed himself somehow and made an effort to cope with his loss. Cicero's use of persuasion or encouragement, based on a strong belief in the therapeutic value of the word, is to be expected. Only later does he reflect

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<sup>10</sup> Compare Didion: "I was taught from childhood to go to the literature in time of trouble, [so I] read everything I could get my hands on about grief: memoirs, novels, how-to books, inspirational tomes, *The Merck Manual*. Nothing I read about grief seemed to exactly express the craziness of it ..." [interview].

philosophically himself in the *Tusculans*. In modern terms: the addressee is in fact asked to *re-conceptualise* their situation, that is, they are invited to re-evaluate their views on the circumstances which have led to their emotional state. In essence, it is not far removed from recent modern approaches to anxiety, distress and bereavement in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) an approach influenced by Stoicism. In this method patients are also encouraged to reconsider their interpretation of circumstances or events and to change their perspective by imagining different outcomes, in particular the preferred outcome. Again, in modern terms, Cicero is “re-learning the world”.<sup>11</sup>

This tripartite way of explaining Cicero’s response to loss has the advantage that we do not just approach Cicero’s emotional state of mind in theoretical ideals (as reflected in his *Tusculans*), but in pragmatic terms (as I detailed in Baltussen, 2013). His proud statement that he has done something unique shows that he has moved on from his terrible personal tragedy, something his stylised philosophical account in *Tusculans* cannot reveal. This interpretation relies on the renewed attention for the value of the emotions not only in our own psychic lives, but also in ancient belief systems as well. The remarkable neglect of his letters may have been caused by the fact that most readers found his laments and cries of woe rather painful and embarrassing and prefer to leave them aside. These judgments are clearly based on rather anachronistic notions of the appropriateness of grief expression.<sup>12</sup> The crucial point to take away here is that Cicero ignored philosophical advice and went his own way in creating a document intended for both himself and for *other Romans* as a source of consolation.

Cicero’s case shows remarkable parallels to those of C.S. Lewis and Joan Didion, since all sought solace in their reading and writing. For them writing was not only their professional skill but a comfort zone, and they have managed to “write the wrongs” in a way that suits them.<sup>13</sup> As examples of

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<sup>11</sup> I borrow the phrase from Thomas Attig’s book title: *How We Grieve. Relearning the World* (2010) who, according to the blurb, “rejects the grief stages and phases offered by Kubler-Ross, Engels, Lindemann, Bowlby, and the medical profession as static and too automatic. Instead he considers grief to be an individualized process”.

<sup>12</sup> Although Erskine (1997) has recently offered a fair account of Cicero’s grief experience, his analysis does not go far enough.

<sup>13</sup> A phrase used in a recent newspaper article (“Spectrum”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 8–9, 2011:21). I owe this reference to my colleague Dr Jacqueline Clarke.

*self*-consolation such activities would in modern terms be accepted as valid therapeutic tools. But in both cases, this was an *intuitive* act of self-protection and turning inward. C.S. Lewis had great difficulty to get his brutally honest self-disclosure published in the early 1960s, while Cicero had very little choice when he had no public or private context to communicate his grief along conventional lines. He did receive letters from other senators, but these contain the more standard types of common exhortations, basically saying “count your blessings in these difficult times and get on with it”. What he did instead is read everything there was in his friend’s library, and when he considered this unhelpful or ineffective, write his own consolation, this time *to himself*. But this was not all, for *we* can now see that Cicero underestimated the effect his reading and writing had:

You exhort me and say others want me to hide the depth of my grief. Can I do so better than by spending all days in writing? Though I do it, not to hide, but rather to soften and to heal my feelings, still, if I do myself little good, I certainly keep up appearances. (*Letters to Atticus* 12.10)

Perhaps it was not acceptable or perhaps he was not allowed to admit it — a Roman senator in such difficult times should not place his own problems above those of the state — yet there is at least the admission that it distracted him somewhat.<sup>14</sup> And on top of that, after his consolation he launched into a phase of *furious writing activity*, concentrating on philosophy. Here he was much influenced by the first philosophical consolation by the Greek Platonist Crantor. We know only that Crantor wrote to a friend who had lost a son, because the work does not survive. But Cicero admits that this Greek work was of immense importance to him. To this phase belong his *Tusculan Discussions* and I would argue that this therapy included some further skill-based activity, namely *translating* Greek philosophy — a demanding and technical skill which had a lasting influence on the philosophical tradition in Latin.<sup>15</sup> Thus Cicero, author by nature and therapist by necessity, was able to “bootstrap” himself out of his grief, and in his own eyes, regained social and intellectual respectability from his reading and writing activities.

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<sup>14</sup> Wilcox, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> I defend this interpretation in H. Baltussen, 2011:37–47.

## Plutarch

My final and favourite example is a brief but striking reminder how the use of the right words can be a powerful tool to assist someone in their grief. The Greek philosopher, writer and priest Plutarch around 90 AD, was forced to write a letter of consolation to his wife, when he heard about the death of their two year old daughter. He happened to be travelling, and the letter offers a fascinating glimpse of a private letter, which uses philosophical ideas, yet also reveals something of the author's emotional state.<sup>16</sup>

The document is an elegant and well-structured piece of writing, but for our purposes and in view of the time available I will concentrate on one short passage, which sums up much of his strategy in offering solace to his wife.<sup>17</sup> Plutarch leads into the advice by using some standard elements known from rhetoric: they offer encouragement and praise to cheer up the addressee. But a more important component of the strategy is to make elaborate use of good memories. That is, instead of avoiding talking about the deceased child, he focuses on her. This may look a somewhat sentimental passage to us, but it is more than that; let me read it out first (see Baltussen, 2009):

she was the daughter you wanted after four sons and she gave me the opportunity to give her your name. There is special savor in our affection for children at that age; it lies in the purity of the pleasure they give, the freedom of any crossness or complaint. She herself too had great natural goodness and gentleness of temper: her response to affection and her generosity both gave pleasure and enabled us to perceive the human kindness in her nature.

She would ask her nurse to feed not only other babies but the objects and toys that she liked playing with, and would generously invite them, as it were to her table, offering the good things she had and sharing her greatest pleasures with those who delighted her. (trans. Russell)

Despite his use of some standard elements Plutarch clearly succeeds in adding a personal touch to the response, appealing to a shared experience of special significance for both parents as well as *shared grief*. The lively portrayal of the child is both moving and generous as a tribute to the child

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<sup>16</sup> A work attributed to him, *Consolatio ad Apollonium*, is not a genuine Plutarchan work. It does have some significance for the consolation tradition, but it is less relevant for my purpose here. See Konstan, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> I am concentrating on the emotive part of the strategy; for the rational component see Baltussen, 2009a: 67–98.

and the mother. Rather than assume that this shared experience would be readily available for recall, he gives a striking characterisation of the child, “picturing” her with words as a last tribute and as a lasting image for the mother to treasure. In other words, this striking passage contributes to the value of the letter as a *memento* of the child, to be read and re-read long after her demise. Such a vivid evocation with (potential) emotional impact is typical of a literary technique called *ekphrasis*. There are other subtle techniques used in this letter, but I leave those aside to make one more, small point about such refined writing in relation to deeply upsetting news. Some modern commentators have accused Plutarch of insincerity in his literary composition of the letter: instead of raw emotion we get a finely composed letter. Does this make his emotion less genuine? I think not: inherent style and revisions of the text can explain this.

## Conclusion

For my final comments I return to the modern day and offer a few very quick parallels before I sum up my main points. One way to look at the renewed importance of the study into grief is to identify the turning point in the twentieth century with regard to public mourning. On this point I find it difficult to go past the case of Princess Diana: somehow in 1997, her death triggered a change in how grief was displayed in public that was different from before.

Earl Spencer’s speech in praise of the people’s princess was not only a well-planned emotional eulogy, but also a quite subtle and subversive critique of the press and the royal family (Earl Spencer, September 6, 1997):

Diana was the very essence of compassion, of duty, of style, of beauty. ... she was a symbol of selfless humanity, a standard-bearer for the rights of the truly downtrodden, a very British girl who transcended nationality. Someone with a natural nobility who was classless ...

In his emotive praise of the “people’s princess” Spencer combines the eulogy for her character with implicit criticism on the Royal family’s background (German), lack of compassion, and inherited nobility. There is good reason to believe that the death of Princess Diana prepared the way for public emotional outpouring. With her death something unprecedented occurred and things had changed permanently.

But this modern case is not unprecedented: in the year 19 AD the hugely popular grandson of Augustus and designated heir of Tiberius, Germanicus, died unexpectedly under suspicious circumstances; his death caused huge public display of mourning in Rome and the empire. The account in Tacitus shows how important eulogy was in honouring his memory:

His funeral, ... was *honoured by panegyrics* and a *commemoration of his virtues*. Some, thinking of his beauty, his age, ... likened his end to that of Alexander the Great. Both had a graceful person and were of noble birth, and died in a foreign place, ... [But] Germanicus was gracious to his friends, temperate in his pleasures, the husband of one wife, with only legitimate children. (*Annals* 2.73)

But what is implied here, with the same subtlety as Earl Spencer's, is that he had the exact opposite qualities to Tiberius.

To conclude, I have, in very brief terms, argued how a significant change in attitude to grief occurred in fifth-century BC Greece, and tried to show that grief is a special case which allows for comparative analysis with modern experiences. More importantly, the recent trends over the past three decades also show a change in our attitudes, one of greater openness, and improved therapeutic practices.

Cultural differences aside, the study of grief management across time shows at least three things: (1) that we do well to regard grief as a *process* that may not have a definite ending but can benefit from an activity of some sort, and the choice of which activity has to be a personal one; (2) that reading and writing can play a major role in the healing process; and (3) that there still is *not one method* to apply to every individual case. This point strikes at the heart of the paradox of grief and the notion of empathy: we all consider our grief unique, while at the same we there is a sense that we know what the other is going through. The similarities between grief management across time creates an opportunity to explore its "literary capital" for the benefit of the bereaved within the context of the Healing Arts. It is in this spirit that I will continue to pursue the lessons of the ancient world in an attempt to connect with the latest trends of the healing arts, which encourage an active attitude whether it is reading, writing, walking, poetry or music as various forms of therapy. And if our world needs famous personalities like Sheryl Sandberg to show the way, then so be it.

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