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A Study of the Narrative of Death in Canadian Thanatography (1997-2017)

par

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Abstract

This study explores the representation of death in selected Canadian thanatography. It explores the manners in which the fear of death and grief are presented in narrative. In literature, the fear of death and grieving the death of loved ones expressed through the medium of language sheds light on narrative defense mechanisms and grief expressions. The corpus is comprised of eleven Canadian memoirs published between the years 1997 and 2017, which are divided into three categories: memoirs of illness, narratives of motherhood, and memoirs of aging. This study begins with an introduction to personal writing, the importance of memoirs in our age, the subgenre of thanatography, and the rise in its popularity in recent years. Afterward, it examines the tradition of personal writing studies in Canada, arguing that there is a lacuna in the study of death writing, which this thesis addresses.

This research is conducted in three main chapters. The first chapter examines the intricacies of the narrative of memoirs in representing death. In the first part of Chapter One, the history of temporality is laid out, since later in the chapter, the importance of temporality in the plot is studied in detail. In the second section of Chapter One, the development of narrative theory is explored. Mieke Bal, Roland Barthes, and Jean Genette's narrative theories and Paul Ricoeur's theory of temporality in the plot are the main theoretical frameworks upon which the narrative of auto/thanatography is analyzed. In the third part of Chapter One, the literary characteristics of point of view and verb tense are studied in the narrative of thanatography in order to delineate their roles in bestowing meaning to the plot. Regarding the point of view, the extent to which writers choose to implicate themselves in narration and the agency they bestow on the deceased is revealed, further determining the meaning of loss and mourning. Furthermore, the memoirists' unconscious attempts at manipulating the content of memoirs, through the

adopted point of view, shed light on the meaning of mourning, aging, sickness, and death. Another technique, verb tense, is employed differently in order to create linear and nonlinear plots; the theory of plot temporality by Ricoeur is the lens through which the structure of the narrative of loss and mourning is analyzed. Death, which usually marks the denouement of the plot, escapes its traditional organization. Therefore, it is always placed at the beginning of the narration, followed by an ellipsis, prolepsis, and analepsis. This technique is also studied in narration in order to analyze the memoirists' unconscious attempt at manipulating stories and deciphering loss and death.

The second chapter, with a focus on the idea of purity and pollution in relation to death, traces the representation of the abject in the narrative of thanatography. Abjection, which is portrayed in various forms in memoirs of aging, illness, and narratives of motherhood, is another common characteristic among narratives of death, the traces of which are explored in the second section of the chapter. In memoirs of illness, the abject is presented through an excess of bodily tissue, which is sometimes excised. The treatment and care offered to sick patients further perpetuate and distinguish the abjection embedded in physical and mental illness. In order to conduct this study, Susan Sontag's theories of the abject and illness are employed. In the second category, which is the narrative of motherhood, the abject adopts a more complicated form, defined through the relationship of the mother and the child. Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject is employed in order to delineate the psychological development of the child and its attempt at establishing an independent identity through abjecting the mother, an attempt to become me-other. The memoirs of aging present abjection differently. The telltale signs of aging, foreboding mortality, are unwelcomed by the subject, who regards them as the defining factors of the newly acquired, socially acceptable identity and a nascent sense of self, which must be adopted or resisted at times; consequently, the treatment of the latter group is also altered in the society. Besides the study of the abject, the writers' conforming or resisting narratives are delineated in the context of Canadian grand narratives of aging and illness. Moreover, and most importantly, the abject is studied in relation to the corpse, the ultimate sign of abjection, which once belonged to/was a loved one, resulting in bewilderment for the mourners.

In Chapter Three, another prevalent method of representing death, that is photography, found irrevocably in the corpus of this study, is examined. From memoirs of aging to narratives of grief, photographs are published alongside narratives in an attempt to strengthen, complement or contradict narration. Death, being an abstract notion evading description, is best presented and mourned through pictures. There are two main types of photographs published in memoirs: images of the deceased and images displaying the aging or ill narrator, whether in their prime or when they were ill-stricken. The first part of this chapter employs theories of photography proposed by Roland Barthes, Andre Bazin, and Susan Sontag. The second part of this chapter elaborates on Jacques Derrida's metaphysics of presence, introduced in his magnum opus, *Of Grammatology* (1997). The third part of this chapter, through the application of Derrida's ideas on photographs, examines the latter's role in representing death, that is, absence. The idea of photography in immortalizing the dead is one of the methods that the writers employ to deal with grief. The presentation of absence through the presence of photographs, and sometimes even words, works through a present signified, which is independent of its absent signifier; this logic, defying the very binary structure of language, helps the mourners grasp a better understanding of death.

The concluding chapter, besides reiterating the main characteristics of thanatography, also briefly elaborate on the concept of nationality and the representation of the setting of the

memoirs, that is Canada, in creating and redefining the socially acceptable meaning of death, grief, aging, and illness. This concluding chapter proposes the study of the setting and the representation of death as shown through narratives of memoirists belonging to various cultural, sexual, racialized, and social classes in further research.

KEYWORDS: Memoirs; Canadian thanatography; death; grief; narrative theory; the abject; illness; aging; photography; metaphysics of presence; absence.

Résumé

Cette étude explore la représentation de la mort dans une sélection de thanatographies canadiennes. Elle explore les manières dont la peur de la mort et le deuil sont présentés dans les récits. En littérature, la peur de la mort et le deuil de la mort d'êtres chers exprimés par le biais du langage permettent de mettre en lumière les mécanismes de défense face à cette angoisse et les expressions du deuil dans les textes narratifs. Le corpus est composé de douze textes autobiographiques canadiens publiés entre les années 1997 et 2017, qui sont répartis en trois catégories : récits de la maladie, récits maternels et récits du vieillissement. Cette étude commence par une introduction à l'écriture intime, à l'importance des récits sur soi à notre époque, au sous-genre de la thanatographie et à la hausse de leur popularité au cours des dernières années. Ensuite, elle étudie la tradition des études sur l'écriture autobiographique au Canada, où l'étude de l'écriture de la mort fait défaut.

Cette recherche se divise en trois chapitres principaux. Le premier chapitre examine la complexité de la narration de la mort dans les textes intimes. Dans la première partie du chapitre un, l'histoire de la temporalité est exposée puisque plus tard dans le chapitre, l'importance de la temporalité narrative est étudiée en détail. Dans la deuxième partie du chapitre un, le développement de la théorie narrative est exploré. Les théories narratives de Mieke Bal, Roland Barthes et Jean Genette ainsi que la théorie de la temporalité narrative de Paul Ricoeur sont les principaux cadres théoriques à partir desquels le récit de l'auto/thanatographie est analysé. Dans la troisième partie du premier chapitre, les notions littéraires de point de vue et de temps verbal sont étudiées dans le récit de la thanatographie afin de mesurer leurs rôles dans le développement de l'intrigue. En ce qui concerne le point de vue, la façon dont les écrivains choisissent de s'impliquer dans la narration et l’importance donnée au défunt sont révélateurs et révélatrices

déterminant la signification de la perte et du deuil. En outre, les tentatives inconscientes des auteurs de manipuler le contenu de leurs récits, grâce au point de vue adopté, permettent de saisir la signification du deuil, du vieillissement, de la maladie et de la mort. Une autre technique, celle du temps verbal, est employée afin de créer des intrigues linéaires et non linéaires. La théorie de la temporalité narrative de Ricœur est la lentille à travers laquelle la structure du récit de la perte et du deuil est analysée. La mort, qui marque habituellement le dénouement de l'intrigue, échappe à son organisation traditionnelle ; elle est donc toujours placée au début de la narration, suivie d'une myriade d'ellipses, de prolepses et d'analepses. Cette technique est également étudiée dans la narration afin d'analyser la volonté inconsciente des auteurs de manipuler les histoires et de décrypter la perte et la mort.

Le deuxième chapitre, axé sur l'idée de pureté et de saleté en relation avec la mort, retrace la représentation de l'abject dans le récit de la thanatographie. L'abjection, qui est représentée sous diverses formes dans les récits du vieillissement, de la maladie et les récits maternels, est une autre caractéristique commune aux récits de la mort, dont les répercussions sont explorées dans la deuxième section du chapitre. Dans les textes narratifs sur la maladie, l'abject est présenté à travers un excès dans le corps. Le traitement et les soins prodigués aux malades perpétuent l'abjection inhérente à la maladie physique et mentale. Pour mener à bien cette étude, les théories de Susan Sontag sur l'abject et la maladie sont utilisées. Dans la deuxième catégorie, celle du récit maternel, l'abjection adopte une forme plus complexe, définie par la relation entre la mère et l'enfant. La théorie de l'abjection de Julia Kristeva est utilisée afin de délimiter le développement psychologique de l'enfant et sa tentative d'établir une identité indépendante en abjectant la mère, une tentative de devenir un autre moi. Les récits du vieillissement présentent l'abjection d'une manière différente. Les signes révélateurs du vieillissement, qui annoncent la mort, ne sont pas acceptés par le sujet, qui les considère comme les facteurs de définition de l'identité nouvellement acquise et socialement acceptable et d'un sens naissant de soi, qu'il faut parfois adopter ou auquel il faut résister ; par conséquent, le traitement de ce dernier groupe est également modifié dans la société. Outre l'étude de l'abject, les récits de conformité ou de résistance des écrivains sont décrits dans le contexte des grands récits canadiens sur le vieillissement et la maladie. De plus, et surtout, l'abjection est étudiée en relation avec le cadavre, le signe ultime de l'abjection, qui a appartenu/était un être cher, ce qui entraîne un désarroi pour les personnes en deuil.

Dans le chapitre trois, nous étudions un autre mode de représentation de la mort, essentiel dans le corpus de cette étude, à savoir les photographies. Qu'il s'agisse des récits du vieillissement ou des récits de deuil, les photographies sont publiées à côté du récit dans le but de renforcer, de compléter ou de contredire la narration. La mort étant une notion abstraite qui échappe à la description, c'est par l'image qu'elle est le mieux présentée et qu'elle est rendue la plus sensible. Il existe deux types de photographies publiées dans les récits : l'une appartenant au défunt et l'autre montrant le narrateur vieillissant ou malade. La première partie de ce chapitre est consacrée aux théories de la photographie proposées par Roland Barthes, André Bazin et Susan Sontag, qui sont les principaux cadres théoriques sur lesquels repose l'étude de la signification et de l'implication des arts visuels. La deuxième partie de ce chapitre développe la métaphysique de la présence de Jacques Derrida, introduite dans son opus magnum, De la grammatologie. La troisième partie de ce chapitre, en appliquant les idées de Derrida aux photographies, étudie le rôle de ces dernières dans la présentation de la mort, c'est-à-dire de l'absence. L'idée de la photographie, qui immortalise les morts, est l'une des méthodes employées par les écrivains pour faire face au deuil. La présentation de l'absence par la présence de photographies, et parfois

même de mots, fonctionne à travers un signifié présent, indépendant de son signifiant absent ; cette logique, défiant la structure binaire même du langage, aide les endeuillés - et parfois les plus perdus - à mieux comprendre la mort.

Le chapitre de conclusion, en plus de rappeler les principales caractéristiques de la thanatographie, évoque également la notion de nationalité et la représentation du cadre des récits, à savoir le Canada, dans la création et la redéfinition de la signification socialement acceptable de la mort, du deuil, du vieillissement et de la maladie. Ce chapitre de conclusion propose l'étude du cadre et de la représentation de la mort tels qu'ils apparaissent dans les récits d'auteurs appartenant à diverses classes culturelles, raciales, économiques, etc. dans le cadre de recherches ultérieures.

MOTS CLÉS : Les récits intimes ; thanatographie canadienne ; mort ; deuil ; théorie narrative ; l'abject ; maladie ; vieillissement ; photographie ; métaphysique de la présence ; absence.

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INTRODUCTION:

“Without mortality, no history, no culture, no humanity” (7).

Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality, and Other Life Strategies*

1. Life Writing and the Popularity of the Genre

“Life writing,” initially used in the 18th century,[1] is a generic term for recording one’s life; its categories are, but are not limited to, autobiography, biography, memoir, diary, letters, oral history, travelogues, and thanatography. This genre, which documents personal experience, serves numerous purposes, among which three points are important to mention. First, it reflects on a self that is embedded in a social, economic, political, religious, ethnic, and historical context, is in constant interpersonal relationships, and is susceptible to change.[2] Secondly, the end of the narrative is usually marked by a presentation of a mature self that overcomes difficulties and reinvents itself. Last but not least, its aim, through offering a first-person account of one’s experiences, is to invite the reader to reflect on sociological, historical, and philosophical issues. Personal writings are mostly written in first person perspective, but mediated narratives are easily found; an example, included in this study, is Miriam Toews’ *Swing Low* (2001), in which the narrator adopts her deceased father’s viewpoint. However, since “the less that is mediated, the less distance there is between the subject and his or her words […] life writers want to be the interpreters of their own experience” (661), as Marlene Kadar (2000) puts it.[3] Moreover, the constant presence of the narrator, in personal writings, creates a close bond with the reader, which invites the latter to scrutinize various social discourses which have elicited and given rise to the genre and its subject. At times, the reader also identifies with the narrators. It is important to mention that it is the narrators' familiarity with the subject of the memoir, that is, the self, that has made this genre accessible to a flock of emerging writers. Personal writings, besides being a medium providing introspective opportunities and creating narrative identities,[4] reveal the intricate social complexities at play in society. That is the reason why memoirs are "valuable sources of historical, social, and ethnographical information about people and their worlds" (Kadar 662). It should also be noted that these two phenomena have an intricately dependent relationship; that is, the evolution of social and historical contexts gives rise to new narrative categories as well; for example, the crises of World War I and World War II brought about an influx of memoirs about experiences of war and their aftermath. The use of the adjective 'personal' in the title of this genre suggests the intimate experiences recounted by the narrator, which is one characteristic that has made this genre popular in our era. Auto/biography has gained so much popularity that more and more bookstores are dedicating a separate shelf to life writing, which suggests that the genre is profitable. The rise in sales also further strengthens this fact; at the beginning of the 1920s, Ben Yagoda (2009) quotes Bennett Cerf, the cofounder of Random House, that "fiction outsold nonfiction four-to-one. Now that ratio is absolutely reversed" (ch. 10). Cerf's claim begs this question: what has made this genre so popular? Several possible reasons are examined in the following paragraphs.

The Importance of Self

We may assume that it is the unique characteristic of our era, with its excessive interest in selfhood and its incessant glorification of individuality, that has made the consumption and production of nonfiction books soar. But life writing is not a nascent genre; as a matter of fact, "writing lives is an ancient and ubiquitous practice," Margaret Jolly writes in *Encyclopedia of*

Life Writing (ch.1 2001). The oldest examples of personal writings are traced back to "both the Old Testament (especially the Psalms, often taken to be written by David and some of the prophets) and the New (Paul's testimony in Acts)" (Yagoda ch. 2). However, the unique economic and sociological factors of our times may have accentuated the demand for memoirs. Jolly writes that the popularity of this genre is due to "the individualism unleashed by capitalism [that] cracks and reshapes in the fire of globalization and the communications revolution, a literature that foregrounds the shape of a single life and its span seems to focus the anxieties of the age" (ch. 1). Besides the paramount importance we attribute to individuality due to the role played by capitalism and the facility of publication, as Jolly observed, our era welcomes a wide variety of personal narratives, either in the book publishing industry or on social media platforms. In the latter case, it is in the name of "woke culture,"[5] which, on account of awareness of social justice, has invited marginalized groups in society, such as women, people of colour, immigrants, the physically disabled, and members of LGBTQ+ community to find their voice, narrativize their experiences and publish their stories online. Although narrators expose themselves to the public and their judgments, they are determined to publicize their experiences to raise the public's awareness of an unjust situation.

William Gass (1994) claims that autobiographies and memoirs are written to declare to the world that 'I' existed at some point on this planet, and these particular events have been born by and are exclusive to the very self of me. On a grand scale, Gass emphasizes "self-absorption" and "fleeing from futility" as the main motives for personal writings (42). He claims that, especially in the late twentieth century, "history [has] headed not for heaven but for the shelf" (45). The need to feel immortalized resonates in the industry of personal writing and its huge demand; that is the reason why sometimes the quality declines. Claiming that not all lives are worth recording, Gass writes that "[M]any lives are so empty of interest that their subject must first perform some feat like sailing alone around the world or climbing a hazardous peak in order to elevate himself above mere existence, and then, having created a life, to write about it" (46). Gass also writes that "self-absorption […] is the principal preoccupation of our age" (43). Yet, this depends upon the society and the culture. To some, Thomas Couser (2012) writes, auto/biography is a "naked narcissism" and to others a "glorified gossip" (47). Whichever the motif, the prerequisite of personal narrative is a 'cogito, ergo sum' accentuating the importance of self-knowledge and self-awareness, or what James Olney (2014) calls "the Montaignesque awareness of awareness" (45), and also that the writer must be more than courageous to go "emotionally naked" in public (Gass 49). Besides Gass' points, we have to remember that humans have always been storytellers. The urge to tell stories about oneself, according to Yagoda, either orally or in writing, is a "human trait" (ch. 5), rooted in self-absorption and first-person access to consciousness; the latter suggests the familiarity of one's reflections and feelings which allows narrators to delve into their thoughts and understand the world they live in.

Moreover, in constructing and sustaining a sense of self, narration plays a significant role. Narrating, while chronologizing one's experiences is a way of demystifying the cacophonous nature of the events and rationalizing the latter's occurrence in our lives. The will to announce and assert one's existence and the ensuing experiences not only paints a desirable picture of oneself, but also establishes a wholesome identity. Narrativizing one's experiences aims at grasping a better understanding of the self since life writing is the most individualized form of literature, a method of self-construction. Sometimes, memoirists recount their life stories to achieve a better self-understanding, justify their actions and seek closure or salvation. In Gass' words, the reader encounters different selves, such as "the guilty self, the remembering self, the applauding self, the daydreaming self …" (51). In other words, the autobiographical 'I' is presented with an opportunity to objectify a role-based 'I' in the past and to study it with meticulous precision. Through recounting their stories and considering their roles in them, the narrators embark on a self-understanding journey through which the 'I' is understood. Narrators become observers of their very individual selves. The writer's agenda in producing an intimate narration for an audience, a rare phenomenon in other genres, not only resides in one's need to leave traces behind, but also to create an embodied voice, in opposition to a third person "disembodied narration" (Couser 58), in a genre where "fiction and life writing diverge" (Couser 58). Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1997) encapsulates the desire of self-immortalization as follows: "For every poet begins (however, "unconsciously") by rebelling more strongly against the consciousness of death's necessity than all other men and women do" (10). Moreover, writing about oneself and one's experiences requires a detachment from the focaliser, inciting contemplation and a thorough multi-dimensional consideration of experiences and their significance. As Thomas Larson writes in *The Memoir and the Memoirist* (2007), "[I]n memoirs, we don't just tell the truth. We use the possibilities of the form to guide us into a process by which we try to discover what the truth of our lives may be" ("Preface"). That is, considering events from a new perspective, the narrator of personal writing, in a process of self-erasure, wins a heuristic understanding of events and their contribution to the newly invented sense of self, which is presented and identified with in the text. This heuristic quality does not necessarily negate the narcissistic nature of personal writing, and this opinion of mine is not a derivative of the nature and the subject of the genre, but that the very act of writing, as an artistic process, is an unconscious defense mechanism against mortality. Julie Rak, however, disagrees. In *Boom! Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market* (2013), she emphasizes the process of othering oneself and its exposition to the public's naked eyes; "[T]he attempt to write oneself into a narrative results in the creation of oneself as "other," a person who exists in a book as a character, in order to turn one's life into a story for others' enjoyment, provocation, and education" ("Introduction"). To Rak, it is the story of the narrator that matters and not the narrator as a person. In fact, the subject of personal writings is not always the storyteller, but the latter's loved ones, in which case the narrator witnesses the vicissitudes, such as illness, aging, depression, etc. specific to the subject of the corpus in this research, and recounts the story of witnessing. While testimony and witnessing mediates the genre's ragged narcissism, they become the catalyzers of "the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the 'knowing' of the event is given birth to" (57) writes Dori Laub in *Testimony* (1991). Through weaving events, untangling experiences and fleshing out characters, the narrators become "the participants and the co-owners of the traumatic events" (Laub 57). The effect of trauma theory in narration is briefly studied in Chapters One and Two.

Couser proposes that there are two 'I's in memoirs: "the writer who writes [the autobiographical I] and the writer who remembers; in other words, the writer and the protagonist" (15). However, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010), distinguish four 'I's in personal writings: "the real or historical I, the narrating I, the narrated I and the ideological I" (72). Various 'I's are distinguished and proposed by critics and even rejected by some; for example, Daniel Dennett (2014) claims that the author cannot be granted a self at all: a self comes to realization through narrating experiences and assumes an interlocutor, "coaxers or coercers" in Smith and Watson's (2010) words (66), to whom the narrator owes an explanation, a justification or a clarification. Through this process, a new sense of self is achieved. Dennett writes that narrative offers characteristics, such as form and structure, which are absent in speaking (5); therefore, characters are created, identities are performed, and personages are immortalized. If selves are “neither unified nor stable” (Smith and Watson 2010, 75), it would be safe to assume that narrators construct a sense of self through their roles. Therefore, in studying selves in this thesis, the narrated and the narrating selves in relation to their roles are taken into consideration. Through adopting social roles in their stories, narrators shed light on the social discourses in the context of which they define themselves and in which they participate. In Dan McAdams’ words (2018), in “role-based stories […] narrative identity integrates different social roles, values, attitudes, and performance demands in the variegated here-and-now” (362-4). In this manner, the memoirs are not only comprised of narratives about death, but also of all the narratives through which the autobiographical ‘I’ lends himself or herself to; that is, for example, the narrative of the hospitalized ‘I’ is as substantial an identity marker as the mourning ‘I.’ The reception of the various narratives is crucial, and it characterizes the prevalent ways of self-identification.

It cannot be determined whether the narrated self existed at some point, or its idiosyncrasies are invented due to memory failure. What is evident is that the self the writer remembers is not a given and fixed entity, yet it forms itself through narration; ergo the statement “there is no pre-existing self” (Couser 14); Heraclitus, Olney (2017) writes, puts it in better words when he claims that “individual man never is, but is always becoming” (6); Heraclitus’ claim attests to the importance of developing a sense of self through narration. The content of the story is an attempt on behalf of the narrators to impose a structure or an order on their life and a way of giving meaning to their experiences. Therefore, there are always two dominant selves present throughout the narrative: the writing self and the remembered self. Narrators of memoirs[6] are from different social backgrounds, and their stories target a wide variety of audiences thirsty for a reality unseen and unexperienced by them. Through the world of memoirs, the readers immerse themselves in a wide variety of narratives, including but not limited to misery narratives, narratives of abuse, narratives of injustice, narratives of a neglected childhood, narratives of war atrocities, narratives of mourning, and illness and in fewer cases, narratives of ordinary happy life. This all-encompassing genre, with its various narratives, does not have clear-cut boundaries. Any narrative that touches on personal experiences and aims at reinventing a new self falls under the generic term of personal writing and should be treated as such. This booming industry, viewed from another perspective, has commodified thousands of books, if not the writers,[7] in the 21st century.[8] In the end, Yagoda best encapsulates the popularity of this genre:

> Autobiographically speaking, there has never been a time like it. The memoir has become the central form of culture: not only the way stories are told, but the way arguments are put forth, products and properties marketed, ideas floated, acts justified, reputations constructed or salvaged. The sheer volume of memoirs is unprecedented; the way the books were trailed by an unceasing stream of contention, doubt, hype, and accusations is distressing. Yet, every single one of the books, and every piece of the debate about them, had a historical precedent. (ch. 1)

Based on a True Story

The phrase ‘based on a true story’ catalyzes most audiences’ enthusiasm for the consumption of a work of art. Personal writings, however, do not require a title that validates their veracity, but their popularity is mainly due to the fact that they are based on a true story (Couser 48). Couser also claims that “memoir seek[s] to exert leverage on reality in a way that fiction typically does not" (170). Therefore, it provides the readers with content they would have never had access to were it not for this particular genre. Literature mimics reality, and therefore, both fiction and memoirs are mimetic in nature. Fiction creates a reality of its own, its characters, and its setting, including time and place in which the events can be purely imaginary. However, the unwritten pact between the reader and the writer regarding the nature of fiction prevents the former group from questioning the veracity of the content. On the other hand, a memoir mimics itself, that is, the characters, events, and settings already exist, and the writer is ostensibly bound to represent them and stay faithful to them throughout the narration. In this case, the reader expects the author to be as true to reality as possible. This expectation makes memoirs limited both in content and narrative techniques. Although no definite line can be drawn between fiction and memoir, they can be defined by their specific relationships with reality. Through memoirs, the reader is introduced to a new reality and start living them vicariously. In this way, readers introduce themselves to other lives happening in their common world. Not only is it the external world the readers familiarize themselves with, but it is also the inner world, that is, the writer's identity claims and the development of his/her autobiographical character. On the other hand, a therapeutic process takes place if the reader's intention is to seek a familiar world in which another human being, the narrator in this case, demonstrates her or his experiences of similar vicissitudes the reader has already experienced. In this case, the veracity of events is rarely questioned, and the reader's trust is implied in the unwritten contract between the writer and the reader.

Besides memoirists' responsibilities, Couser addresses the reader's "engaging and demanding reading" of memoirs (178). The audience of memoirs invests emotionally in personal writings in a different manner than they do in fiction. The promise of a true story makes the reader identify and connect with the characters on a different level than in fiction. This does not mean that identifying with characters does not happen in fiction, but rather that the process of reading is a more specified and distinguished one in personal writing. With the promise of being true, the readers prepare themselves to confront a reality being present in a time and place different than their own; in other words, the readers acquaint themselves with a different aspect of the reality of the world in which they live. In fiction, being an imaginary world, the reader applies different standards while reading. However, certain forms of fiction offer verisimilitude to 'the real.' Although memoirs are committed to representing reality, the veracity of some stories can sometimes be questioned, not only due to the role of our memories in remembering events but because of the writers' ulterior motives. At times, memoirists would bend the truth and fabricate stories that would ultimately elicit sympathy from the audience. Two examples of such memoirs are written by James Frey and Nasdijj, both concocting stories about being a Navajo while being of European descent. In *A Million Little Pieces* (2005), Frey, assuming a native American identity, fabricates a great proportion of his narrative; surprisingly, once the book was censured as untrue, its sales skyrocketed. Although the defamatory accusations around this book have served the writer and the publishers an abundant profit,[9] this phenomenon and its public criticism imply the public's demand and this genre's commitment to the truth. Since every memoir represents aspects of the truth concerning a particular social and cultural class, its preoccupations are reflective of the people with the same background. Therefore, this genre becomes an invaluable resource to better understand one's era. Auto/biography, according to Olney (1972), "brings an increased awareness, through an understanding of another life in another time and place, of the nature of ourselves and our share in the human condition" (vii).

The importance of the genre to the reader indicates the meticulousness the writer must exert in order to present the audience with a true and credible story that is representative of its era.

“Writerly” Narration

The word “writerly” was used by Olney (1972, 5) to delineate the literary character of the genre. The novelistic nature of memoirs in turning lives into narration is another reason for their popularity. Besides its artistic and aesthetic appeals, personal writing allows writers to fill in the gaps, where memory fails, transforming this genre into so-called creative nonfiction, with the promise of representing reality. While we are bombarded by personal narratives written by privileged political and social figures and celebrities,[10] we can also notice a rise in reading the “nobody memoir” (Couser 177), in which the reality of the underprivileged is presented and greatly consumed by the public. The narrative of the under-privileged, living in harsh circumstances, being discriminated against because of skin color or ignored because of sexual orientation, has become abundant (177), and people have been investing in them both emotionally and financially, which is why readers feel betrayed if they find out they have been fed false information. Yet, the same reaction would be scarce and considered illogical while reading fiction. The rise in reading the latter type of memoir, known as misery memoirs, has roots in our culture and the narrative of victimhood, which is studied later in the chapter. The sudden emergence of memoirs and autobiography has not prevented some critics, such as Gass and Julie Rank, from questioning the genre. However, despite Gass’ anti-autobiographical statements in “The Art of Self” (1994), and Rank’s disdainful comments in *Auto/biography in Canada* (2005),[11] it can be argued that the art of writing, or at least hiring an apt editor, requires some degree of talent which cannot be defined solely in relation to drama, fiction or poetry. Couser also claims that writing auto/biography needs a writing talent, which may not be easy for everyone with an interesting story to tell. Personal writing is neither art for art's sake nor art for society's sake, but it is art for one's sake. After reading Gass' comments on this particular genre, Yagoda in his book, which meticulously traces and discusses all the memoirs written in the United States until 2009, writes: "The critics were right about some long-term trends that contributed to the memoir book: more narcissism overall, less concern for privacy, a strong interest in victimhood, and a therapeutic culture" (ch. 10). Despite what critics claim, auto/biography, which was considered as an inferior genre until the 1970s, has gained extensive attention more recently. By criticizing the genre's surge of popularity, Yagoda has pinpointed three important cultural phenomena in the twenty-first century that have given rise to personal writing: the culture of victimhood, therapeutic culture, and the importance of psychoanalysis; these three characteristics and their effects on personal writing production are briefly examined in the next section.

In order to explain Yagoda's "culture of victimhood in narration" (ch. 10), the relationship of the notion of victimhood to morality needs to be explained. The definition of morality is in flux. Our era has a unique definition of its own, which comes with the matter of moral status; "[T]o have moral status" Mary Ann Warren (1997) writes, "is to be morally considerable, or to have moral standing. It is to be an entity towards which moral agents have, or can have, moral obligations" (3).[12] Warren also adds that "if an entity has moral status, then we may not treat it in just any way we please" (3); "an emerging moral status" is victimhood, which gives the holder of the position a specific privilege since the latter has undergone harsh situations. This status, which suggests inequality, signals "suffering and neediness" (39).[13] Regardless of the positive or negative weight that the phrase carries, this culture has become one important basis on which the underprivileged are structuring their identities, and one "safe space" (Campbell and Manning 39) to communicate their stories is memoirs. Narrative, as explained earlier, can eventually offer salvation and self-understanding. Misery narratives as such are common and among them, we can cite Kylie Moore Gilbert's *The Uncaged Sky* (2022) and Christina Lamb and Malala Yousufzai's *I Am Malala* (2013). This therapeutic quality, offered by narration and an important element in contributing to the popularity of the genre, according to Yagoda (ch. 10), is discussed in the next section in more detail.

Self-understanding through fabricating a narrative is not new. Religious, familial, educational, and political institutions have long provided their populations with various ways of establishing a sense of self. In his book, *The Culture of Narcissism* (1991), Christopher Lasch traces the sociological and political factors leading to the stolid belief in individuality and its significant role in our times. The stern belief in individuality, which translates into personal writing, is an act of resistance; according to Lasch, "the psychological man of our times [is] the final product of bourgeois individualism" [the production of whom have greatly depended on] the devaluation of the past, […] the inadequacy of solutions dictated from above," the mistrust of institution and lack of faith in authorities ("Preface," *n. pag*); these factors have forced people "to invent new solutions from below" ("Preface," *n. pag*), which is the belief in individuality. One of these solutions has been a collective narrative, that is, the discourse of public experiences from various social, economic, educational, and political backgrounds. This collective narrative establishes and determines the multiplicity of choices in leading one's life; unlike in the past, there are no fixed, moral, and ethically acceptable ways of leading one's life. This uncertainty, finding its way into narration, is a means of confession, justification, and explanation of one's existential and ontological choices, which ultimately seeks "acclaim and sympathy" (Lasch 21) from fellow humans. The approval received by the publication of the book and audience support is a stamp of validity the memoirists receive from the public. The memoirs of 'the ordinary' have provided a vast pool of experiences in which writers share their calamities which the audience consumes, signaling a "search for some kind of reconciliation or sense of cohesive identity, and the difficulty of calculating the sum of all parts" (xiv), as Camilla Gibb puts it in her book titled *The Penguin Book of Memoir* (2011). This method, besides its therapeutic values, reinforces the power of individuality and subjective experiences, a catalyzer of the production of memoirs in our time. Daniel Mendelsohn, in his piece "But Enough about Me" (2010), puts it in better words when he writes that if, according to Freud, there is a "troubling association between creativity and narcissism, [it] is nowhere as intense as when the creation in question is memoir, a literary form that exposes the author's life without the protective masks afforded by fiction" (*n. pag*). In the following paragraphs, I will look at the definition, implication, and significance of this genre in Canada.

2. "Auto/biography? Yes. But Canadian?"

The title of this section takes up the title of an article by Egan and Helms in the Spring 2002 issue of *Canadian Literature*. This concise title, which is comprised of two questions, underlines two fundamental subjects: the first part of this title, introduces the slash separating auto and biography by which Helms and Egan refer to the "broad continuum of life writing" (6) and the emergence of "original and creative approaches to this genre" (7). The second part of this title, though, raises a more serious question; is Canada, as a nation, capable of claiming the genre of auto/biography, which entails a "collective understanding of history?" (Helms and Egan 5). Since life writing is always enabled and embedded in a sociohistorical context, personal experiences translate into public ones; therefore, the question of nationality and national identity is inevitably ingrained in the term life writing. For this reason, in the following chapters, I will study memoirs' entanglement with the place in which they were produced by emphasizing the role of personal writing in reflecting the broader narrative of a nation's identity since "smaller stories arrange themselves beneath and link upwards to bigger stories, which in turn may link up with even bigger and more encompassing stories" (McAdams 362). In other words, the way Canadian personal writing and its confirmation of or resistance to dominant societal norms will be examined. The country's geographical vastness, the history of Indigenous peoples, the multiculturality of the nation, and the two official languages are among many factors contributing to Canada's life writing "[figuratively] exist[ing] in many languages, and in many translations" (Kadar 665). Being the narratives of "people of multiple pasts" (Gibb xv), Canadian personal writing is multifarious in nature: immigrant narratives such as Michiel Horn's *Becoming Canadian* (1997), or war survival narratives such as Anna Porter's *The Storyteller* (2000) have brought their "hefty baggage allowance"[14] and have presented their stories to a Canadian audience; in M.G. Vassanji's words in "Am I a Canadian Writer?" (2004), "new Canadians bring their stories with them, and those stories then become Canadian stories" (11); the variety of voices not only is welcomed, but it also sheds light on the discourses at play in defining a national identity. Helms and Egan also warn readers that "[they] must actually consider whether Canada as the context for reception is not also the opportunity for narrative in the first place" (12); nonetheless, whether Canada becomes the context for reception or is the main subject of the narrative, it plays a role in literature, the mini-narratives of which work holistically to create, establish or resist collective identities; in each narrative, there are "layers" of narrative location" such as "environmental, familial, national, and cultural politics" (Smith and Watson, 2010, 71) that intersect and work towards identity creation. Therefore, personal writings "tell us about the Canadian cultural contexts from which they emerge and in which they operate" (Egan and Helms14).

The popularity of personal writing has reached Canada as well. Despite Neuman's claim in 1990 that "all is not well with life-writing in Canada" (Egan and Helms 8), a decade later, in 2001 George Fetherling in *The Vintage Book of Canadian Memoirs* (2001) writes that "Canadian writing has been undergoing such a boom" (vii). This cultural phenomenon indicates Canadians' desire for personal writing. Academically, auto/biography as a genre in Canada was recognized in 1990 when W.H. New asked Shirley Neuman to write a chapter on life writing in *Literary History of Canada* (1990). In the chapter "Life Writing," Neuman, through studying the Canadian corpus, raises important questions regarding the 'I' of the genre and selfhood, and these questions will be examined in the next section. According to Gabriel Helms and Susanna Egan, "by 1996, Neuman's research had already served to place auto/biography studies firmly on the academic map in Canada, both outlining how vast and various the field was and legitimizing it as an area of research" (6). One of the examples that further solidified the academic reading of Canadian personal writings is Helen Buss' *Mapping Ourselves: Canadian Women's Autobiography in English* (1993), in which Buss maps the personal writings, including letters, diaries, and autobiographies written by women in Canada to which she applies critical theories of the genre. Neuman's "Reading Canadian Autobiography" (1996) addresses the question of nationality in personal writings produced in Canada's "settler culture" (7) and invites scholars to move toward a unified theory of Canadian personal writings. Each work of personal writing has traces of individuality, determining the national identity, which in Bina Freiwald's words in "Nation and Self-Narration" (2002), are "implicated in a specular relation of mutual mirroring"

(17); therefore, the personal narrative becomes a building block of the history of the country in which it is written. Egan and Helms refer to “the personal narrative as a lens onto history and the contemporary world” (5), and even Gass, who disapproves of auto/biography as a genre, writes that “the writing of a life is a branch of history, [although] a broken [one]” (44).

Canadian life writing is indicative of Canadian lives; it is “closely connected to our understanding of the times and places in which [the writers] live” and more importantly, they can be used as “a means for examining such key concerns as gender or racial identity” (Egan and Helms 9). Stich also claims that Canadian life writing is “self-reflective [once embedded in] Canadian contexts […] It also indirectly contributes to a flexible understanding of the life script of Canadian culture as cultivated by autobiographical writers speaking for themselves and for the communities that shaped them” (xii). The narrative can be the representative of the nation or especially the class and ethnicity the writer belongs to; not only is it formed by the society, but also it forms national identity. Many personal narratives have been written in Canada and while some are integrated into the Canadian context, others resist “Canadian identity.” Given that the corpus of this thesis is exclusively written and produced in Canada, three important characteristics of national identity will be studied alongside the study of the features of thanatography; these three characteristics are the implication of the site and the setting,[15] characters, and the roles they adopt and the significance of the subject of the memoir.

3. The Genre of Memoir: Life Writing

So far, I have used personal writings as a generic term for auto/biography, memoirs, travelogues, and letters. At times, I may have also used auto/biography and memoir interchangeably; however, memoir is a distinct subcategory of personal writing with specific characteristics. Therefore, in the following pages, the nature of the memoir is further elucidated. In *Reading Autobiography* (2001), Smith and Watson mention Lejeune's definition of autobiography as "the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his existence when he puts the principal accent upon his life, especially upon the story of his personality" (1). Memoirs, though, are different from autobiographies in nature. A clear-cut distinction cannot be made among these genres since definitions evolve through time, and their relationship with the reader changes accordingly; in Lejeune's words in *Le Pacte Autobiographique* (1975) "[l]es genres littérature ne sont pas des êtres en soi: ils constituent, à chaque époque, une sorte de code implicite à travers lequel, et grâce auquel, les œuvres du passé et les œuvres nouvelles peuvent être reçues et classées par les lecteurs" (311).

The most comprehensive book of memoirs in Canada is *The Vintage Book of Canadian Memoirs* (2001), edited by George Fetherling, which categorizes Canadian memoirs into four thematic sections: "At home and Abroad," "Getting Started," "Uprootedness and Family," "Tragedies, Choices, and Losses." In this voluminous book, Fetherling includes excerpts from twenty-two Canadian memoirs, accompanied by a short introduction. According to Fetherling, literary memoirs began to gain popularity among Canadians "in the 1970s and 1980s" ("Preface," *n. pag*). Memoirs in Canada have evolved ever since to more accurately represent the country, including the narratives of immigrants, Indigenous people, people of colour, etc.

Memoir, which until the 20th century was referred to as "self-life writing" (Smith and Watson 2010, 2), is a form of auto/biography that can be considered as a subgenre of both autobiography and biography. It belongs to the former since its subject/protagonist can be the writer narrating his or her life, and it can also be considered a subcategory of biography if its subject/protagonist is someone other than the narrator. In the latter case, the narrator is present in the story, but the focus of the narration is on a third party most probably a person well-known to the narrator. Gerard Genette calls this type of narration "homodiégétique" which means that the narrator is also a character in the story. In the opposite case, the narration is called "autodiégétique" (qtd. in Lejeune 15). The artistic choice of point of view affects the process of meaning-making in memoirs. This important distinction is studied at length in the next chapter.

While biographies include a larger time scale of the writer's life, memoirs mostly focus on a single event, and their main character can be the author similar to an autobiography, or another person like a biography, which sometimes raises privacy concerns among the individuals whose lives have been made public. Autobiography, though, is exclusively about the writer, also including others as peripheral characters in the story. Biography is based on research, and its subject can be unknown to the writer, while a memoir must be about a person known to the author. Memoirs also share some characteristics with autobiography; they are both about a person's life, which is extensively recorded and reported in autobiography. However, the events are selected and described in memoirs. Although veracity is expected, the reader must already be aware of the unreliability of the faculty of memory from which the word memoir, *mémoire* in French, is ironically derived; in other words, the reader had better expect voluntary or inadvertent evasion from the truth. In general, memoirs are not neatly distinguished from a biography or an autobiography; they can include characteristics of either genre and still be called a memoir.

Not only should the different 'Is,' mentioned earlier in the chapter be taken into consideration while reading a memoir, but other defining elements crucial to the process of the creation of a memoir must be taken into account, such as the "coaxer, the addresses and the audience" (Smith and Watson 2010, 50). The confessional nature of memoir requires a coaxer or a coach to elicit the story from the narrator. Smith and Watson name social institutions, such as "family, churches, social media" (2010, 51-2), as the main elicitors of personal narratives. Once written, personal narratives target a group of audiences; one group being implied in the text and the other being the ones who pay to read the narratives. The implied audience or the addresses differ from one book to another. Sometimes, the writers address a selected audience in a narration, which is called an addressee and sometimes, they target certain individuals, for example, refugees, African Americans, the survivors of the Holocaust, or the LGBTQ+ community. The real audience, or the consumers, on the other hand, are those paying to read the narrative. These three important characteristics determine the raison-d'être of the memoirs.

This genre of memoir accentuates individuality, the importance of a "nobody's" story, and the selfhood of the narrator. In comparison to fiction, drama, and poetry which require creativity in concocting characters, plots, and settings, literary memoirs were considered an inferior mode of writing. K.P. Stich in his book *Reflections: Autobiography and Canadian Literature* (1988) quotes Otto Rank, who explains that memoir is the "art-manias of modern society, with [its] over-valuing of the artist's and the concurrent 'decline of the real artistic vigor'" (x-xi). Olney (1980) writes that the necessity of aestheticism in a literary work of art lies in its completion. This genre, on the contrary, mostly has an open ending and lacks the "wholeness, harmony, and radiance" of fiction (25). Further, Olney claims that this is one of the reasons why this genre was mostly ignored by critics. Autobiography stays open-ended, but memoirs, especially thanatography, that is death-writing, bring about certain closure, which distinguishes it from auto/biography. The closure, which usually marks the denouement of the narrative, is attained through the process of mourning the death of a loved one.

Memoir has various subcategories, which are defined by the relationship the writer has with the world and the events. Another distinguishing characteristic of each subcategory is the writer's intention in writing a memoir. According to Lejeune "l'autobiographie 'n'est que' la laïcisation du genre séculaire des confessions religieuses" (317). Different subcategories have recently emerged in the 21st century, such as children writing about their parents, political figures, such as presidents narrating their lives while in power, or former patients narrating their survival from a serious illness. One emerging category is auto/thanatography or writing about death, which is the main focus of study in this research. However, prior to the examination of the genre of thanatography and its characteristics, I will give a brief introduction to the literary corpus of this research; nevertheless, a more comprehensive explanation of the corpus and their particular literary characteristics are found in the last section of this chapter.The oldest memoir examined in this thesis is Marie-Claire Poirier's *Tu As Crié: Let Me Go,* published in 2000. A documentary with a similar name, directed by the writer of the memoir, was made in 1997, which is also examined in Chapter Three. In this memoir and the documentary alike, Poirier narrates the death of her daughter, a heroine addict, at the hands of a drug dealer. Miriam Toews' *Swing Low* (2000) memoir narrates the story of her father's life, from birth to a debilitating mental illness, and his ultimate suicide, which is also the subject of Moira Farr's memoir. In *After Daniel* (2000), Farr, the narrator takes the readers throughout the journey of her relationship with her partner, the latter's suicide, and the narrator's complicated grief afterwards. *Another Chance for Life* (2001) by Suzanne Giroux, recounts her story of illness. The narrator was diagnosed with cancer twice and struggled with the disease for years, and she exercises a persistent will to beat the disease and live. Frank Davey's book, *How Linda Died,* published in 2002, is also a narrative of illness in which the narrator tells the story of his wife, diagnosed with a brain tumour. Another memoir of illness, published in 2010, is Wayson Choy's *Not Yet,* which is the story of his hospitalization, and recovery. This research examines three memoirs published in 2015: Howard Akler's *Men of Action,* Marianne Apostolides' *Deep Salt Water,* and Ian Brown's *Sixty.* Akler's and Brown's memoirs are narratives of aging; Akler writes about his father and Brown expresses his concern about himself, his bodily changes, and a noticeable decline in his mental agility. Apostolides, in a maternal narrative, writes about the story of her abortion and carries out imaginary conversation with the aborted fetus throughout her book. Published in 2017, Monica Meneghetti's *What the Mouth Wants* and Carole Matthew's *Minerva's Owl* are the most recent works of thanatography examined in this research. Meneghetti's illness narration recounts the story of the mother's cancer and her demise. Matthews' memoir, also an illness narrative, is about the sudden death of her husband and her own prolonged grief. Since in all memoirs, including the works of thanatography, there is a close affinity between the memoirist, the narrator, and the protagonist, it is essential that the difference between the writer, the narrator, and the protagonist of memoirs be examined; therefore, in the following section, the nature of the "I" of personal writings is elaborated on.

4. Who Is the 'I' of Life Writing?

Personal writings are mostly narrated in the first person, and the corpus of this thesis is no exception.[16] Therefore, an important question of narration surfaces: who is the narrator, and is it different from the writer? Personal writings have various subgenres which are well-defined not only by the relation of the I-now, the agent narrating the story, and the I-then, the agent being remembered by the narrator, but also by the approach taken to narrate reality. For example, a narrator seeking to justify an earlier action with traces of remorse and regret would probably write a personal narrative in the form of an apologia; or a narrator confessing to an earlier misconduct would best write it in a confessional form. Subgenres as such, called apologia and confessional memoir respectively, are abundant in the history of literature from Jacques Rousseau's *Confession* (1782)-to today's online activities in social media in written forms, pictures, or videos, which are narratives comprised of different forms and stories conveying a certain type of reality to the reader.

In writing about auto/biography, distinctions must be made between the author, the writer/narrator, and the protagonist. The identity of the author can be easily established by referring to the cover of the book. According to an autobiographical pact, a term coined by Lejeune in *On Autobiography* (1989), it is generally accepted by the reader that the writer/narrator is the author. The reader must always assume that there is a possibility of the unreliability of the narrator as well. The writers, consciously or unconsciously, expose what they are willing to share with the world. Our selective memory is able to reconstruct a story through employing the faculty of imagination; therefore, auto/biography becomes the result of a collaboration between remembrance and reconstruction through which writers do their best to offer a desirable image of themselves. In an autobiography, the protagonist is the same as the narrator while in a biography, the subject of narration is a different person. In memoirs, the protagonist can be the writer; for example, in Toews' memoir, the narrative of the father is appropriated by the daughter. In either case, the narrator is present in the story, either telling a story of his or her own life, or another one's with him or her being present in the narration. Assuming there are four 'I's in narrative, according to Smith and Watson (59), the identity of the "real I" can be confirmed by referring to the cover page. The "narrating I" is the I-now; in other words, it is the subject remembering the past and trying to construct a narrative by putting the pieces of events together. The narrating ‘I’ objectifies the past ‘I,’ which can be a younger self, a hospitalized self, a mourning self, etc. The role-based narrators express themselves in various voices which makes them the ‘I’ that they are. For example, the narrator of *Sixty* (2015), a memoir introduced later, adopts the voice of a father, an aging man, a writer, a husband, a caring child, and many more. The “narrated I” or the object is the I-then or the self being remembered by the narrator. The “ideological I,” is the narrator considered as a subject embedded in a culture, shaped by political, racial or ethnic, sexual, and class identities. This specific self is the one through whom a certain type of ideology is re-enacted and reproduced, and which brings together the members of the same socio-cultural groups. In Alasdair MacIntyre’s words (2013), “[B]ecause as individuals seeking to narrate our own lives, we must always rely on the available ‘stock of stories’ that constitutes our common tradition” (216); these available stories are the products of a complex phenomenon of a culture produced and perpetuated in the society.

The relation between the ‘Is’ in life writing can be defined as “a focus on [a] past while [trying] to form an identity in the present” (Smith and Watson 2017, 10); the narrating ‘I’ adopts a role which is defined in the social context in which they live. In this literary corpus, narrators adopt the roles of mourning mothers, grieving partners, bereaved children, hospital patients, and writers, to mention some among many. The narrator’s identity then, formed through the interaction of narrative elements such as plots, subplots, setting, and dialogue, can not only be reshaped through narration, but it also can be indicative of the social discourses that lead to its production. In other words, social discourses beget personal narratives, and the latter perform and perpetuate the former. In McAdams’ words, “[N]arrative identity is a special kind of story—a story about how I came to be the person I am becoming” (364), hence the significance of the narrating and narrated I in the story. McAdams’ claim also implies that the ‘I’ that starts personal writing differs from the 'I' that ends it. Therefore, in this thesis, the narrated I, with a focus on its roles, is analyzed to delineate the manner in which the subject confronts the notion of death and conforms to or resists the dominant social discourses on the subject. The narrated self produces other role of the bereaved; that is, it practices and perpetuates the norms and rituals expected from a person mourning the death of a beloved one.

5. Death Writing or Auto/Thanatography: A Subgenre of Memoirs

One nascent subcategory of memoir is death-writing, which varies in subject and includes the narrative of the death of a beloved one, the journey of mourning, the story of illness and recovery, the narratives of aging, or the stories of suicide survivors. Thanatography, which the *OED* defines as "an account of a person's death," was initially used in 1839. This genre, as a subcategory of personal writings, promises a true account of the narrator's life; that is, thanatography's true-to-life narrative of death and mourning belongs to the genre of nonfiction, as opposed to fictional forms with the same subject, such as elegy. Although all literary forms concerning the subject of death, according to Priscila Uppal in *We Are What We Mourn* (2008), represent "public dimensions of mourning" (3), the nature of the genre through which one's grief is expressed impacts the meaning, forms and qualities of reception, and the intended audience. While the last two effects, that is the qualities of reception and the intended audience, are elaborated at length earlier in the chapter, when the veracity of the genre and the unwritten contract between the readers and the writers are discussed, little is said about the changes the nature of genres impose on the meaning of the text; this quality cannot be studied without the discussion of the nature of literary writing as opposed to non-fiction production. In other words, what is the distinguishing quality of fiction and nonfiction? The fundamental question of the nature of mimesis, representation, and verisimilitude, the study of which goes beyond the scope of this research, has been the subject of contemplation from Aristotle in *Poetics,* Henry James in "Art of Fiction" (1924) to contemporary philosophers, such as Gregory Currie in *The Nature of Fiction* (1990). The relationship of the literary representation of an experience to reality determines whether a work of art belongs to the category of fiction or nonfiction. Drawing a clearcut line between these modes of representation, however, proves impossible since the traces of fiction are found in works of nonfiction, especially where memory fails, and the narrators fill the gaps with a what-could-be event rather than what actually happened. In fiction, likewise, the traces of the real world can be found; in "What Is Fiction?" (1985) Curries writes that, "[W]hile stylistic or generic features may certainly count as evidence that a work is fiction rather than nonfiction, they cannot be definitive of fiction. For the author of nonfiction may adopt the conventions of fictional writing; and it is agreed on all hands that there are certain works of fiction which, considered merely as texts, might well be nonfiction" (385). Beside the subject of fiction and nonfiction, which is inspired by real life, the form of its representation should not go unnoticed. The literary form the writers use to express their emotions is subjective and a matter of aesthetic and stylistic choice. As it is examined in this research, narrative functions as a receptacle that organizes events, rendering them understandable. Poetic genres, such as an elegy, shorter than memoirs in length and celebratory in nature, do not necessarily inhere the logical organization of life narrative. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, grieving narrators employ poetic forms when the language of the prose and the symbolic order come short of representing their emotions. Although both literary forms of grieving and bereavement own complexities of their own, this research focusses on the nonfiction prose form of death writing.

Egan assigned the term "autothanatography" (qtd. in Couser 43) to refer to death-writing in general. If Egan's and Holmes' slash in auto/biography is applied to autothanatography, then auto/thanatography can apply to all narratives of death, including stories about oneself and narratives about others. Memoirs, as mentioned earlier, are about different subjects, and what makes auto/thanatography a specific genre is well-described in Tom Rachman's words in "Meeting Death with Words" (2016): "Memoirs rarely tremble with such life as when expressing their author's death" and the worldview of the narrator is the meaning of "nothingness [imposed] on what precedes" (*n.pag.*). Rachman claims that this emerging genre is due to the "growing aging population" (*n.pag.*), however, a preoccupation with mortality is not a nascent notion, and it has always been a crucial existential question. This "living dyingly," according to Rachman (*n.pag.*), is not specific to age, ethnicity, or gender, but is a defining characteristic of human consciousness, which is being aware of one's mortality. It is the power of thinking about annihilation and immortality that has made human beings express their emotions in art and literature.

Mortality, an unpleasant notion to live with, is inevitable. Mortality always imposes on "elderly people, for what they've had and [on] the young, the dread of losing what they haven't had" (Rachman *n.pag.*). Mortality threatens the very basis of individuality, subjectivity, and uniqueness -- that is what personal writings essentially exist for. Yet, instead of glorifying one's life, thanatography depicts the most inherent fear of human beings, death. What is the purpose of writing about death? Is it existential anxiety, the desire to leave a trace behind, or the need for closure that incites memoirists to write about their angst? Or, according to Laurence Breiner in "Lyric and Autobiography and West Indian Literature" (1989), does it "fulfill the universal impulse known as self-pity?" (3). Interestingly, what is encrypted in narration, according to

James Randall (2013), is death despite its genre. This preoccupation only becomes more salient in auto/thanatography. If death, according to Walter Benjamin in "The Storyteller" (2016), is "the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell" (qtd. in Randall 1), how does auto/thanatography then offer a vivid picture of death? It is in the eventuality of death that life becomes meaningful and precious. The writer offers the space where life meets with death and adopts meaning, and the reader joins the writer to experience a figurative death, which is embedded in the narration. Anthony O'Keefe in "Mortal Interruptions: Autobiography, Death, Thanatography" (2005), writes of an "autobiographical displacement" which "lend[s] [writers'] textual skills to the creation and the re-creation of an *other* central self, attempting to give (and give back to) that self a voice that death has erased" (14). In other words, while the memoirists write about the dead, they displace themselves as the deceased and therefore, they experience mortality through writing. The encrypted death shows different aspects in narration, such as temporality and embodiment, briefly examined in the following paragraph, and studied in detail in the following chapters.

While death as a notion connotes nothingness, which makes it impossible to examine, it can be studied through its manifestations, that is, the way it is perceived and understood and ultimately, represented. This notion constitutes one of the core ideas in this thesis, and it will be explained in the following pages. Temporality in narrative is the first aspect to be considered in this thesis in relation to mortality. Death is easily perceived by the passage of time; therefore, temporality is a key concept in understanding death and mortality. Whether temporality constitutes consciousness, or the latter is the building block of the former, is not clear. However, it is evident that one cannot be perceived without the other. We define our beings as embedded in a temporal dimension, inter alia, which is mainly perceivable by the changes it brings about; the way it surfaces in narration is deeply examined in the next chapter.

The second telltale sign of mortality is humans' inevitable aging, which is one of the changes brought about by the passage of time. Aging and the undesirable bodily transformation it brings are crucial notions in understanding death. The relationship between abjection and death is prevalent in death writing, and this evidences the narrator's perception of mortality. The way the narrators express their feelings toward aging, the corpse, or the ill body is studied in depth in Chapter Two. Another important manner in which death is conceptualised is the metaphysics of presence; Derrida claims that absence is not ever fully absent since it is the absence of something whose presence is implied. He writes that in the absence of an entity, what is perceived is the absence of presence, or the trace of presence. Derrida also introduces the notion of "différance" which refers to the process of meaning-making through trace and the meaning that is always differed. Since death is a type of absence, its relationship with trace is studied in the memoirs through and as published photographs and collages alongside narration. As a result, the way death manifests itself in writing and photography is demonstrated. Derrida's metaphysics of presence is also applied to the analysis of the myriad photographs published in the memoirs. In Chapter Three, the relationship between death, photography, and narration is studied in depth. The subject of death is a universal concern, and the selected corpus of Canadian thanatography under consideration here demonstrates the troubling allure of contemplating mortality. In other words, although Canadian literature is examined, the focus of this research is phenomenological and not cultural. Before examining each characteristic in the memoirs (temporality, corporeality, photography), the notion of death and the way we perceive it will be examined. This will be followed by a survey of existing research on Canadian auto/thanatography, and a brief history of the notion of death.

A Brief History of the Notion of Death

There are many studies dedicated to defining death. The questions posed usually revolve around the nature of death, that is, what is death? Is it heart stopping? Is it a brain stopping its functioning? Is it the loss of consciousness? Patients are announced dead when no pulse is found, which begs the question: what if the heart keeps working, and the brain is dead? Are such patients considered dead because they do not have consciousness, or they are considered alive? Can a person without consciousness or any discernible state of mind be considered alive? These questions are not easy to answer and have perplexed thinkers for a long time. According to Steven Laureys in “Death, Unconsciousness and the Brain” (2005), although “[T]he concept of death has evolved as technology has progressed” the patient is announced dead if “the functions of the neocortex, not of the whole brain or of the brainstem, [is] permanently lost” (899-904). Their organs are harvested, despite a beating heart, and the body parts are transplanted into other patients. If death is the death of the brain, then can death be considered the loss of consciousness? If so, do we die every night when we go to sleep? John Donne, prominent seventeenth-century English poet, in his poem titled “Death Be Not Proud” (262-3)[17] addresses death by saying that he is not afraid of it since he experiences a death-like state every night when he goes to sleep; he calls sleep the younger brother of death. If death is a state of nothingness, do we exist while sleeping? If we are not aware of nothingness, how can death cause such fear among humans? A similar theory, which goes by the name of the parallel theory, was proposed by Diogenes, the Turkish philosopher of 400 BC. Diogenes aligns the pre-birth state and death and claims that as we are unable to perceive reality before our births, we will not be able to do so after our death, and therefore, death is not to be feared since its state resembles that of sleep. The obvious problem with this theory is Diogenes's negligence of existential anxiety. Human beings live in a state of fear due to the evasive nature death. The existential angst must be studied, and ways of understanding death must be proposed, not to remedy the situation, but to alleviate the pain of anticipating one's eventual demise.

Death is a form of absence, which may be the root of confusion to humans; Paul Edwards in "Existentialism and Death: A Survey of Some Confusions and Absurdities" (2009), draws an analogy between death as a distinct form of absence and the absence of an entity, only to mention that they are of different kinds (5). In order to clarify his proposition, Edwards writes about a blank canvas displayed to an audience whose beauty would not be appreciated since it displays nothingness; absence becomes absence. This proposal begs the question of whether the absence of the canvas resembles the nature of death. To our perception, death is an intangible notion, with the potential of actualization at any moment. Its imminency, though, is perceivable through its signs.

The history of theorization and speculations about death is too extensive to be recounted here. However, a very short history of the evolution of its perception will be laid out in order to understand this subject, its relatability to our lives, and its representation in thanatography. Inquiries about death necessitate intelligent beings capable of questioning their place and aim in the world. Either blessing or misfortune, our evolved consciousness has the ability to question itself, its existence, its world, and of deeply scrutinizing its environment. This seemingly simple question has led to centuries of philosophizing about death, some of which have been so systematized as to be named a religion, while others remain a philosophical doctrine. Far earlier than any religious beliefs monopolized speculation about the death of the human body and soul, to use dualistic language, the pre-Socratic philosophers such as Diogenes put forth ideas regarding death. In his book titled *Death and Immortality in Ancient Philosophy* (2019), A. G. Long surveys the evolution of pre- and post-Socratic philosophers toward death. Long surveys the evolution of pre- and post-Socratic philosophers' thinking about death, mapping conceptions of immortality from the points of view of skepticism and stoicism. The notion of immortality had a significant popularity in "early Greek philosophy and poetry" ("Preface," *n. pag*). Afterward, Long investigates Plato's "the immortality of the soul" (Long, "Preface," *n. pag*), which established the first steps in distinguishing the soul from the body, the annihilation of which was soothed by the immortal nature of the soul, commonly referred to as essence. This outlook, which hierarchizes the soul over the body and shapes the perception of the latter, is examined in depth in Chapter Three. The notion of the body in opposition to the soul was later strengthened in the seventeenth century and marked by René Descartes' efforts and insistence on uniting the soul and the body.[18] Descartes' dualism in *The Meditations* (1641) has significantly shaped theories of materialism, existentialism, nihilism, and phenomenology in its wake.

The subject of mortality is not exclusive to philosophical studies and has been widely discussed and analyzed in the realms of psychology, sociology, history, and other domains of the humanities. Apart from the ancient philosophical views of death, briefly laid out earlier, the cultural approach to the event, including death treatment, mourning, and burial rituals have been studied by anthropologists in order to trace the development of different death traditions and variations among cultures. The anthropological study of death, according to Antonius Robben in *Death, Mourning and Burial* (2004), is mainly comprised of six trajectories: "conceptualizations of death, death and dying, uncommon death, grief and mourning, mortuary rituals, and remembrance and regeneration" ("Introduction," *n.pag*). One important notion in this thesis, the abject, finds its roots in anthropological studies, that is the taboo and the untouchable, which Robben traces to the "eleventh century and increasingly [fear] of the decaying corpse" (Introduction," *n.pag*). This fear is referred to as "the death of the self" (Robben, Introduction," *n.pag*). Other death theories, such as "the tame death model," dominant throughout the eleventh to the seventeenth century, establishes death as a "social affair" in which "family and community were present at the deathbed, wake, and funeral" (Robben, Introduction," *n.pag*). This model emphasizes the collective mourning of family members, which facilitated individual mourning. With the rise of the importance of individuality in the seventeenth century, the "death of the self model" replaced the collective mourning process. The earlier model, which had a semblance of collectivity, transformed into the individualistic and dualistic model. The "death of the other model," dominant throughout the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, implied people's fear of losing someone close, rather than their own demise. The last model discussed by Robben, "the invisible death model" (Introduction," *n.pag*), dominant in the twentieth century, refers to the taboo around the subject matter in the society; in other words, it refers to the significance of a subject's death and its infinitesimal influence on the lives of other members in the society. The path from collectivity and fear develops into the invisibility of death in contemporary society, as though the subject matter of death were an unsolicited and inconvenient distraction in the face of ever-increasing societal obligations.

Not only has death been the subject of philosophy, anthropology, history, sociology, and psychology, but it is also abundant in literature, film, and visual art throughout history and in all cultures. The fear of death can be instigated by one's health being put at risk, by confronting a corpse, or by experiencing the death of a friend or a family member. The form of fear changes, but at its heart lies the fear of annihilation. Mortality, as mentioned earlier, is a necessity in human lives and death is considered a grave incident in an individual's life. Pondering death, attending to it, in other words, results in nothing since our perception is directed toward nothingness. Therefore, we must turn to more tangible concepts in order to shed light on the obscure matter of death. Temporality, the abject and absence/presence, or what Smith and Watson (2017) describe as "the constitutive process of autobiographical subjectivity" (15), which may shed light on death's epistemological obscurity, are explained in the following pages.

6. Literary Characteristics of Auto/Thanatography:

The following, that is, narrative temporality, the abject, and metaphysics of presence are the characteristics of auto/thanatography present in the corpus of this study. Not all memoirs are subject to the examination of each characteristic; therefore, certain memoirs only appear in a section or two.

Temporality

If memoir and more specifically, thanatography collects and shapes past moments into narratives of the present and future, then temporality, its perception, and representation is central to both. There is a long history concerning the philosophical domain of time. Heather Dyke and Adrian Bardon in their book, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Time* (2016), give a thorough history of the study of the concept of time in philosophy. Henri Bergson in his book *Time and Free Will* (1889), proposes "*la durée,*" a model of lived time and perception that negates positivism and Newtonian theory. Bergson mentions that time as perceived by an individual is unique and does not concord with the objective account of temporality that physics offers: "we must not be led astray by the words ‘between now and then,’ for the interval of duration exists only for us and on account of the interpenetration of our conscious states. Outside ourselves, we should find only space, and consequently nothing but simultaneities” (52). Bergson’s notion of temporality introduced the concept of subjectivity in time perception, which later became the basis of phenomenology. Bergson claimed that time was perceived as a series of *nows* and therefore, the tripartite temporal structure, that is the linearity of the past, present, and future, is but an illusion.

Bergson’s ideas became the basis against which phenomenologist Martin Heidegger proposed his definition of temporality. Heidegger proposes the “authentic” understanding of time, which will be discussed in the second chapter. Time, in Heidegger and Bergson’s philosophies, is a medium for having a sense of self and of one’s death. Since time perception is subjective and plays an important role in aging, the way writers perceive temporality as a feature of death is central to thanatography. Heidegger, who has also contributed greatly to the study of the nature of temporality and its relation to death, writes in *Being and Time* (1962) that it “must be reckon[ed] with” (278). His theory of temporality and the way memoirists “reconcile with time” (Heidegger 278) through narrative are discussed in detail in this thesis.

Past and future, or retention and protention respectively (137), in phenomenological terms, according to Robert Sokolowski in *Introduction to Phenomenology,* are different modes of perception of temporality. While present moments are turned into memories and the time yet to come into hope, we maintain a continuous sense of temporality. Memories, hopes, fears, and present moments give us a sense of self. This sense of self is constantly threatened by mortality. The nature of temporality makes death potential; being a bundle of present moments, our existence can arrive at a point where the past, present and future meet. If so, selfhood loses its meaning and faces annihilation. Time, although an important factor in self-construction, provides for our inexistence. In his article titled “Time to Die: The Temporality of Death and the Philosophy of Singularity” (2004), Gary Peters writes: “This [the singular self] is especially the case in the face of death where the existential balance of past and future is seriously disrupted” (10).

Temporality plays a major role in familiarizing us with death. Although there have been arguments against the Heideggerian linear perception of temporality, such as Jean Baudrillard’s postmodernist propositions about temporality, the linearity of which has long been manipulated by technology, no Western philosopher has succeeded in offering a comprehensive philosophy of circular time perception. Situatedness applies to almost all theories about temporality, either the circular, parallel, or linear perception of temporality. In either case, human beings are situated in a temporal context that foreshadows their imminent deaths; postmodernist theories, such as Baudrillard’s *la finitude de la temporalité,* suggest situatedness. As Nick Hanlon elaborates in his article (2004), being authentic towards death for Baudrillard, who questions the linear perception of temporality due to the abundant technological apparatus capable of manipulating its nature- is “la finitude de la temporalité, est le fondement caché de l’historicité de l’homme [Dasein]” (522). In this quotation, Baudrillard refers to both human situatedness and his/her intertwined existence with temporality. The inextricable nature of temporality and existence is most salient in the grammar of narrative, the study of which is narrative theory, most comprehensively executed by Paul Ricoeur’s three volumes of *Time and Narrative* (1984-1990), Gerard Genette’s *Narrative Discourse* (1983), and Mieke Bal’s *Narratology* (1997). Bal, Genette, and Ricoeur’s narrative theories shed light on the intricacies of the narratives of thanatography, and their discussion of order, duration, and voice in memoirs are examined later in this thesis, with the objective of determining the ways in which the memoirists untangle the memories of the deceased.

Corporality and The Abject

The importance of the body in constructing a sense of self and identity is incontrovertible; its transformation, due to aging, illness, and disability gravely affects one's self-perception. The violation of the normal established boundaries of the body, which adversely affects one's perception of the self, is unpleasant and unwelcome. In "Approaching Abjection" (1982), Kristeva defines the abject as "something rejected from which one is not separated, from which one is not protected as is the case with an object. An imaginary strangeness and a menace that is real, it calls to us and finished by devouring us" (127). In the corpus retained for this research, three subcategories of the abject are studied in relation to death: aging, illness, and the corpse, each of which is briefly introduced in the following paragraphs.

Aging

As one ages, the body goes through transformation, and some Canadian writers repeatedly lament this undesirable change; Ian Brown's *Sixty* (2015) is but one example in this corpus in which the body poses the ambivalent question of being or ownership; in other words, it plays the simultaneous role of being the self and a property of it. In either case, it is in constant flux, especially with aging. Senescence brings along bodily deterioration and deep existential questions about self and identity through time; that is, once the skin sags, the vision blurs, one's physical ability declines and one loses control of bodily functions, the body begins to betray one's long-established identity. Such gradual deterioration continues, as Kristeva (1982) writes "until, from loss to loss, nothing remains …. [the body] falls beyond the limit" (3). Bodily transformation is a constant reminder to the mortal being that death is afoot. As the body, according to D.C. Covino in *Amending the Abject Body* (2004), "repeatedly violates its borders" (17), one's social status changes accordingly, which in turn affects self-perception. This undesirable status, which forebodes vulnerability and mortality, is called the abject. This subject is studied in the narratives of senescence in Brown's *Sixty* and Howard Akler's *Men of Action* (2015).

Illness

Besides aging, illness is also a menace to selfhood, corporeality, and embodiment.[19] Once the body is threatened by an unexpected illness, the self which has always identified with the latter is alienated. With illness, the boundaries of the self are violated, and control over the body is lost. The corporeal boundary is so important that, according to Dennis Waskul and Pamela van der Riet (2002), "failures to sustain these symbolic preserves pose serious threats to self" (493). The new physique imposed by illness, which the self does not recognize and refuses to acknowledge, results in the latter's displacement and the feeling of abjection; Waskul and Riet mention that "[a]bject embodiment is an extreme and horrifying condition. It represents everything that could potentially go wrong with the body along with catastrophic effects on self, others, and social situations" (489).

Illness shatters the illusion of absolute dominion over one's body. It brings along an uncontrollability that borders on abjection. The changes in bodily function and the colonization of the body that some severe health conditions, such as cancer, bring along, affect one's sense of self. Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* and Susan Sontag in *Illness as Metaphor* (1978), investigate the effects of the ill body on the perception of self in society. Therefore, the narrative of the aging body, the way in which it is perceived, evaluated, cared for, and represented and its relationship to death are studied in the following memoirs: Monica Meneghetti's *What the Mouth Wants* (2017), Frank Davey's *How Linda Died* (2002), Robyn Burnett's *A Chance for Life: The Suzanne Giroux Story* (2001) and Akler's *Men of Action.*

The Corpse

Confrontation with the corpse of a person, especially if the latter was a loved one, causes ambivalent emotions; the body, which once belonged to an individual, adopts the status of an object; this ambivalent positioning borders on the feeling of abjection, which according to Kristeva (1982), "perturbs an identity … an order; [it does not] respect limits …" (127). What Kristeva defines as the abject resonates with death; the lifeless body is "the most sickening of wastes" (1982, 3). This sentiment is expressed in two memoirs: Anne Claire Poirier's *Tu As Crié: Let Me Go* (2000) and Marianne Apostolides' *Deep Salt Water* (2015). In these narratives of mourning, Poirier and Apostolides express their feelings of the loss of a child and the abjection they feel upon seeing their lifeless bodies. In Poirier's memoir, the narrator's daughter is murdered and in Apostolides' memoir, the narrator has an abortion. The way in which the narrative of thanatography confronts the abject and resolves the pangs of loss is examined in Chapter Two.

Absence/Presence in Narrative and Photography

Jacques Derrida, in his book *Of Grammatology* (1997), questions the supremacy that the Western philosophical tradition bestows upon speech over writing. Derrida's philosophy, which finds its roots in phenomenology and Saussure's proposed linguistic system, criticizes the "metaphysics of presence and logocentrism" (*Of Grammatology* 108). Derrida claims that due to the binary opposition inherent in our linguistic system, we tend to perceive reality in positive and negative terms; that is, the imposition of binary opposition on reality always inevitably confers a positive and a negative meaning on a phenomenon. For instance, the colour black is perceived in juxtaposition with the colour white. In this manner, absence is perceived in opposition to presence, and Western philosophical traditions tend to confer a positive meaning on presence and a negative one on absence. Derrida writes that presence is never “fully present” (119), for it has absent aspects; in other words, every notion bears traces of the word it opposes, and accordingly, it is understood in “différance” (xliii), that is, by being different and being differed, from the binary opposition word. According to Gayatri Spivak in her introduction to *Of Grammatology* (1997) “[T]he structure of the sign is determined by the trace or track of that other which is forever absent” (xvii). In defining trace, Lars Frers in “The Matter of Absence” (2013) writes that “[t]he absence of the signified, the sign as a trace is presented as the specter that haunts essentialist understandings of being” (433) which refers to the postmodern understanding of the world based on *différance.* Being cannot be solely perceived but in relation to non-being.

Therefore, if absence always leaves a “trace” behind, so does death. In other words, being and death are understood, and can only be understood, in terms of each other. Death as portrayed by writers cannot be understood without a proper comprehension of being. Therefore, this research will examine how death is understood and presented in Canadian memoirs from the Derridean perspective, applying the concept of *différance* to photography. According to Genevieve Lloyd in *Being in Time: Selves and Narrators in Philosophy and Literature* (2003), “[T]alk of différance is talk of what is not, of what is never present, of what is always differed” (5). Derrida’s use of the concept of *différance* can be construed as an elaborate metaphor for death itself, which alludes to an ever-postponed and never-present phenomenon.

Photography in Memoirs

Barthes’ interest in photography lies in its static nature. Barthes writes that, unlike the nature of the film, photographs reject the passage of time, which is a necessary element in alleviating grief. A photograph captures the moment and imprisons a fragment of time. Although grief reinitiates by gazing upon a photograph of the deceased, its nature provides the spectator with an opportunity to ponder upon death and process mourning. According to Antoine Compagnon (2016), "[M]ouring is pure repetition […] and therefore eludes any formation of narrative [*mise en intrigue*], since it is denial of temporality" (212). In his *Mourning Diary* (2010), which juxtaposes Barthes' grieving narration and photographs of his mother, he writes that "to know *maman* is dead *forever*, *completely* […], to think […] that I too will die *forever* and *completely*" (19). The grief-stricken narrator experiences his metaphorical demise while pondering on his mother's death; it is the death of the other, in Barthes' case his mother, which reminds him of his mortality.

What is the relationship of Derridean trace to photography?[20] Before elaborating on the links between the two, a brief introduction to the study of photography will be necessary. In some Canadian thanatography, photographs are published alongside the narrative. The photographs are either of the deceased, or they portray the narrators in their prime. In the latter case, the narrators express nostalgia while looking at photographs taken in the past. These photos, which remind the narrators of their youth or of someone who has passed away, create a sense of lack or absence. Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (2010) and Sontag in *On Photography* (1979) explore different aspects of photographs and their relationship with death and absence. They investigate the representation of absence in photography, resembling a death-like state, in which the viewer of the photograph, in the case of looking at a photograph of himself or herself, is neither in the objective nor subjective position, but somewhere in between. In other words, the person looking at the photograph experiences annihilation before death occurs. Moreover, photography, by capturing and seizing a moment, immortalizes a frame. This inherent aspect of photography causes ambivalent and contradictory feelings while witnessing the photograph of the deceased, the result of witnessing a photograph of a person who does not exist. Barthes writes that in seeing a photograph "I exhaust myself realizing that this-has-been … in the photograph, what I posit is not only the absence of the object; it is also […] the fact that this object has indeed existed and that it has been there where I see it" (*Camera Lucida* 106-115).

The absence that a photograph posits is of the same nature as one's absence in the case of death. The images published in several of the memoirs in the corpus are studied from this viewpoint in relation to Derrida's metaphysics of presence, which proposes the traces of presence in the absence of an entity. This theory adapts well to photography, which aims at portraying and conserving an absent frame; that is, the traces of presence are paradoxically manifested in the photographs of the deceased. Furthermore, since Derridean metaphysics of presence is not limited to photography, but also through language and narrative, the narrator of thanatography, mourning an absent person, struggles to articulate the feeling of loss through the presence of signs that the words stand for. This paradox is examined and applied to the corpus in Chapter Three in order to further elaborate on the nature of death and mourning and its representability. The following section provides an overview of existing scholarship on Canadian memoirs and more specifically, on thanatography.

7. Canadian Auto/Thanatography: A New Approach

Canadian auto/biographies and memoirs have been studied since this genre established itself among academics in the 1990s. In his book, titled *Reflections: Autobiography and Canadian Literature* (1988), K.P. Stich edits a collection on the history of research on Canadian auto/biography up to 1988. Stich's collection is comprised of feminist readings of memoirs and the construction of a sense of self through autobiographical narration. The research has a specific focus on self-development through "voices of ordinary people" (140),[21] which Stich claims sheds light on Canadian lives. Another study is Julie Rak's *Auto/biography in Canada: Critical Directions* (2005), the introduction to which elaborates on the discussions of auto/biography and memoir from feminist/gender studies and Aboriginal perspectives. Rak writes that in studying life writing in the twenty-first century, "there are as many approaches as there are critics" (13). According to Rak, prominent studies on auto/biographies were conducted before 1996, including feminist readings by Sidonie Smith and Nancy K. Miller, and African American studies conducted by Joanna Braxton and William J. Andrews. The corpus of feminist studies is vast; an example, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, is Helen Buss' study of women's autobiography in *Mapping Our Selves* (1993), which is among the first Canadian research on feminist personal writing. Another study published in 1994 is Joanna Kadi's *Food for Our Grandmothers,* which studies the personal writings of Arab-Canadian and Arab-American women. Roxanne Rimstead has also conducted a study in the field of feminism and personal writing in her book titled *Remnants of Nation: On Poverty Narratives by Women* (2001). In her book, Rimstead studies resistance and poverty in books written by women writers such as Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* (1973). Besides interdisciplinary approaches to life writing in Kadar's article on multicultural history (1996) and Rimstead's article "Mediated Lives: Oral Histories and Cultural Memory" (1997), which are about "oral history" (Rak 5), more research was done in the field of "life writing," an umbrella term including memoirs, diaries, letters, biotexts,[22] biographies and autobiographies introduced by Shirley Neuman in "Reading Canadian Autobiography" (1996). Feminist readings of Canadian auto/biographies constitute a vast corpus of research conducted so far; one important study is

Shirley Neuman's article "Autobiography and Questions of Gender: An Introduction" (1991). In this article, Neuman studies auto/biographies written by women and argues that theorizing about auto/biographies makes "gender an unproblematized issue" (2). She concludes that theories developed by men do not apply to texts written by women; therefore, a feminist approach is more relatable to the literary works written by women.

Studies on Indigenous/Aboriginal personal writings are also abundant. Deanna Reder in "Indigenous Autobiography in Canada: Uncovering Intellectual Traditions" published in *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature* (2015) claims that Aboriginal life writing is the oldest genre used by Aboriginal writers. She studies Indigenous life writing as a mode of self-expression, an opposition to power, and a continuation of "aboriginal intellectual tradition" (171). Reder studies aboriginal self-affirmation and self-development in her research.

Canadian auto/biographies have also been studied through the lens of narrative theory. This approach focuses on identities and selfhoods as shaped through narration. Narrative theory, in the Canadian study of auto/biography, is mostly intertwined with feminism; as an example, Jeanne Perreault in *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography (*1995) studies the way women's selfhood is shaped through narration. Perreault studies different aspects of selfhood and rejects defining the feminine 'I' in relation to a particular discourse (129). Researchers have also conducted sociological studies in relation to auto/biography. In this case, the focus of the researcher is not literary works but heterotopias, that is, the space giving the subjects the opportunity to resist power. This type of research considers memoirs as a space in which the writers can express their ideas freely and perform resistance. A mode of performing this type of resistance is online activities through which users target a wide variety of audiences by narrating their lives and elaborating on their experiences, such as Twitter, Facebook, and personal weblogs.

In less than fifty years, life writing was studied in terms of its genre, its authors, and critics have introduced new analytical, interdisciplinary, and post-structuralist approaches to this field of literature, yet the study of personal writings in relation to death is scarce; besides the study of death in nature in Canadian literature, for example, Atwood's influential *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), the theme of death in memoirs is limited to studies from a sociological perspective. As an example, Laurie McNeill in "Writing Lives in Death: Canadian Death Notices as Auto/biography" (2005), conducts a comprehensive study of obituaries in Canadian newspapers, which she believes represent the public's interest with "devouring others' personal lives" (188). In McNeill's work, treating newspaper announcements as texts and studying death are conducted in the context of Cultural Studies research, but no literary work is mentioned in her research on the subject of death. McNeill also claims that Canadian obituaries are short narratives shedding light on the ways Canadians per/form- that is shaping while performing- new identities for the deceased and themselves in and through social media. McNeill studies what is acceptable among Canadians and what is considered unconventional by concentrating on what is mostly published in newspapers and what expressions and linguistic features they share; she concludes that death announcements in the LBGTQ+ community, or those who do not have a family or children, were nowhere to be found.

Another study of death in Canadian auto/biography is Martine Delvaux's "Histoires de Fantômes" (2005), which is about Poirier's memoir. Delvaux approaches Poirier's text from various perspectives, such as Freudian and Derridean readings, among others. It studies the death of children from the viewpoint of parents. In this case, Poirier's relationship with her daughter, a prostitute dependent on heroin ultimately murdered by one of her clients, and the narrator's grieving process, are analyzed: "Comment ta mort pouvait-elle ne pas me tuer, moi qui t'avait donne la vie?" (139). Besides the sociological approach, Delvaux applies Derrida and Freud's theories regarding mourning (147), Emmanuel Levinas's theory regarding others' deaths (153),[23] and Barthes's theory of photography (148). Because of its relevancy, the theoretical framework in Delvaux's research will be relevant to this study. A more recent example of the study of contemporary Canadian thanatography is Sarah Carson's doctoral thesis, *Ambivalent Visions: Dreams, Bereavement, and Belonging in Contemporary Canadian Memoirs* (2013), which is a study of the nature of the "deathbed vision and dreams of the dead" (ii) in eleven contemporary Canadian thanatographies in relation to bereavement. Carson's study focuses on the role of mourners' dreams and their relationship to death.

Another collection of essays with a broad spectrum of critical theories applied to Canadian personal writing is *Tracing the Autobiographical* (2005), edited by Marlene Kadar, Linda Warley, Jeanne Perreault, and Susanna Egan. In this book, performing identity, exile, colonialism, feminism, space, and the idea of home, to name a few subjects, are studied in Canadian, and in some cases Australian,[24] literary works. In their introduction, the editors explain that studying auto/biographies are a means to "seek the traces of […] self-representation in fragments of documents and images" (1). They claim that the "cultural context" is an essential aspect to be taken into account when reading personal writings. The writers' insistence on the pragmatism of the genre leaves little space for art for art's sake purposes, and proposing a political and social agenda is at the core of the chapters included in their collection.

In his article titled "Surviving the Paraphrase" (1976), Frank Davey writes about the lack of phenomenological criticism in the corpus of Canadian literature and critical studies. In an answer to Davey's call, phenomenological studies of Canadian literature have been sparsely produced in the form of author studies and single work studies. For example, a phenomenological feminist reading of Canadian literature was published by Barbara Godard and John Moss in "Structuralism/Post-Structuralism: Language, Reality and Canadian Literature" (1987), in which Moss and Godard write about the tradition of Canadian criticism and its indispensable entanglement with sociological studies. Through alluding to Davey's call for reading "literature qua literature" (Godard 28), the writers expand on the history of 'New Criticism' in Canada. They write that examining a text in relation to the experience of the writer allows a "temporal reading of the text rather than spatial" (28) one; in other words, it shows the way a specific experience "is projected in the form of writing" (28). According to Godard and Moss, Canadian phenomenological feminist studies emphasize the significance and the effect of one's gender on one's experiences, which, to a great extent, defines selfhood. Furthermore, these studies aim at locating women in a "colonial space from which one perceives discourse as a form of power and desire" (46).

Another research from a phenomenological viewpoint is conducted by Patrick Howard in "How Literature Works: Poetry and the Phenomenology of Reader Response" (2010), which examines the experience of high school students in learning literature, especially poetry, in an interactive process. Howard claims that this method of learning allows students to form new perspectives and opinions. Phenomenological studies of texts in relation to their writers have also appeared in the corpus of Canadian criticism. Trent Keough's doctoral thesis titled *George's Fragments: Bowering's Phenomenological Self* (1992), in an intertextual study, examines Bowering's phenomenological theories of writing and applies them to his literary works. Kevin Bushell's "Don McKay and Metaphor: Stretching Language toward Wilderness" (1996), through studying the language of McKay's poems, especially its metaphors, examines the ways in which the poet's view of language resembles that of Heidegger's, concluding that both the poet's and the philosopher’s language attest to “possibilities that no dictionary can arrest” (38). Single work studies have also appeared in the corpus of Canadian literary criticism. A research study titled, “In Search of the Split Subject: Psychoanalysis, Phenomenology and the Novels of Margaret Atwood” (1997) by Sonia Mycak and Eleonora Rao, focusses on six of Atwood’s novels. Although the main focus of this study is psychoanalytical, the writers offer a phenomenological reading of Atwood’s selected works from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s viewpoint to determine the divided selves among Atwood’s characters.

Although there have been examples of phenomenological studies in the corpus of Canadian criticism, a lacuna of genre study from a phenomenological perspective is notable. The intended interpretation of thanatography in this research is an overdue answer to Frank Davey’s call for a criticism that goes beyond the structuralist reading of texts. This phenomenological study of thanatography examines the narrative of death in relation to the experiences of a narrator whose experience of temporality, corporeality and mortality is expressed through language, which despite its limitations, makes room for a new sense of self. In this manner, mortality and mourning adopt meaning through individual experiences, which find their representation in the collective experience, or the phenomenological horizon of experiences, in thanatography. In other words, this study is an attempt at the explication of the techniques through which the writer, and eventually the reader, experiences the subject matter of death. Examining the experience of Canadian writers in the genre of thanatography sheds light on the common characteristics that this genre collectively shares in the context of Canada. Moreover, it examines the idiosyncrasies of language, upon the expression of grief and mourning, and explicates narrative techniques the writers employ to express the ineffable, i.e., the experience of non-being.

Feminist, social, narrative, anthropological, trauma, and gender studies approaches are abundant in the study of Canadian memoirs, though a philosophical reading of memoirs is not generally undertaken. What has been studied so far lacks a consistent phenomenological[25] outlook toward death. Writers have taken various approaches dealing with literary texts as noted above, but no research has been done regarding the way death presents itself in personal writings. There is no thorough study of how death is represented, more specifically, in terms of aging, abjection, and temporality in Canadian memoirs. This research adopts a phenomenological reading of death in contemporary Canadian memoirs, one which specifically focuses on mortality and attempts to delineate each writer's treatment of death. My research focuses exclusively on the narrative of death and bereavement, and studies the way death is treated and understood in narration by looking at the common characteristics they share, such as narrative temporality, the abject, and the metaphysics of presence in photography and narration. This study aims at elucidating the ways Canadians, from different social and cultural backgrounds, approach death in their narratives. I believe the existing scholarship on–Canadian personal writing will benefit from research that considers the representation and un-representability of death in memoirs, a subject that has until now not been addressed in all of its phenomenological and narrative complexity. The selected corpus is outlined in the next section.

8. Corpus

The corpus of this thesis is comprised of eleven selected Canadian memoirs written between 1997 and 2017 in French and English, with a specific focus on death. Although they are written by authors from different social, ethnic, and cultural background, their subject is common. I divide the corpus into three categories: the first comprised of narratives of aging and mourning; the second, narratives of illness, and the third category is comprised of maternal narratives and narratives of loss.

Narrative of Aging and Mourning

Akler's *Men of Action* (2015) is about the narrator's difficulty accepting his father's death. During his father's stay in hospice, he struggles to understand his father's comatose situation by obsessively reading about the functionality of the brain and consciousness. The narrator weaves his research with the narrative of his father's illness. Throughout the memoir, the father's character is developed through flashbacks, memories, and photographs. I will apply the theory of narrative temporality to Akler's achronological narrative in order to delineate the characterization of narration as a receptacle in representing the subject of death. The narrator's confused emotions after seeing his father in a half-conscious state are also studied through the lens of the abject. This short memoir includes family photographs, the significance and effect of which a studied through theories of photography and Derridean metaphysics of presence. The second memoir, Brown's *Sixty* (2015), which begins on the narrator's sixtieth birthday, mourns the passage of time and aging. Throughout his story, the sixty-one-year-old narrator writes about his life and choices in hindsight, and in order to understand his past decisions better, he compares himself with his recently deceased father. Using abundant humour and sarcasm, the narrator goes through an identity crisis and doubts himself and his decisions. Comparing his aging journey with his father's has evolved into a narrative, the details and intricacies of which are best unraveled through narrative temporality. Moreover, the writer, whose stylistic choice of adorning the cover page of the memoir with a photograph taken on his sixty-first birthday, shares an intimate narrative of his body changing, wrinkling, and sagging. I will analyze the very cover of the book and the narrator's interest in photography, using the theories of Barthes, Sontag, and Derrida. Moreover, Brown's book is placed in the context of the society in which it is produced and received in order to determine whether its narrative of aging conforms to or resists the dominant discourse about the aging body in society. Thus, notions of care and the evolution of its meaning throughout the narration are examined.

Narratives of Illness and Mourning

After narratives of aging, the thesis examines narratives of illness. The first memoir in this category is Giroux's *Another Chance for Life* (2001). The narrator of this book, shocked by the diagnosis of breast cancer in her early twenties, recounts the story of her fight for survival. The ill-stricken narrator has reasonable difficulties accepting the changes her body goes through; the unpleasant bodily changes and the narrator's emotions are studied through the theory of the abject. This memoir also includes numerous personal and family photographs, and their relationship to the text is studied from the Derridean perspective. Davey's *How Linda Died* (2002) takes the reader through the events of his marital relationship and his wife's death due to a brain tumor. This narrative of mourning, which includes photographs of the couple and their memorable moments, is studied through the lens of the abject, narrative theory, and photography. In Meneghetti's *What the Mouth Wants: A Memoir of Food, Love, and Belonging* (2017), the narrator takes the reader through the journey of maturing from girlhood to womanhood, her obsession with gustatory pleasures, and her turbulent relationship with her mother. The narrator's relationship with food and the female body is examined in Chapter Three, while her narrative of mourning is analyzed using narrative theory viewpoint in Chapter Two. Moreover, Meneghetti's stylistic choice of including drawings of foods and fruit in her memoir is briefly discussed in Chapter Three. The title of Wayson Choy's *Not Yet* (2010) foreshadows the plot of the book, and has an intricate narrative intertwining past and present, hallucination and reality while the narrator is ill and hospitalized. This book is solely studied from the lens of narrative theory. A unique example in narratives of illness is Toews' *Swing Low* (2000), which offers a unique point of view adopted by the narrator. While the writer of the book is Miriam Toews, the narrator is her father, who is not alive at the time the book is written. Based on her father's diary and notes from the hospital where he is cared for, Toews constructs a narrative in which the narrator, that is, the father, recounts childhood memories, his marital relationship, his job, his mental health, and his hospitalization. The choice of point of view is a unique opportunity to study this narrative of illness in relation to narrative theory's focalizer[26] and its effect on the meaning of the memoir. The subject of mental health is also investigated through the theory of the abject in Chapter Two, and its treatment and reception in society in contrast with physical illness. Another memoir in this category is Carol Matthews' *Minerva's Owl* (2017), which narrates the sudden death of a husband and the ensuing prolonged grief of the narrator. The distinct characteristic of this memoir is the narrator's awareness of the process of bereavement through narrative. I will examine Matthews' powerful narration in the light of theories of narrative temporality. Although there are no photographs published in this memoir, the narrator writes about them; and more importantly, the bereaved narrator embarks on the journey of better understanding her deceased husband through the letters the latter sent to her at the beginning of their relationship. In other words, the narrator tries to understand the absence of her husband through the presence of words in his letters; I will study this Derridean aspect in Chapter Three. The last memoir in this category, analyzed in Chapter Two, is Moira Farr's *After Daniel* (2000), in which the narrator mourns the death of a partner, and more importantly, raises awareness about suicide and those affected by it.

Maternal Narrative and Narrative of Mourning

This category includes memoirs written by maternal figures who have lost their children. Apostolides, in *Deep Salt Water* (2015), crafts an extraordinary narrative replete with metaphors and symbols, through which she mourns the death of a fetus. After having an abortion, the narrator mourns the death of her child and ponders the nature of abortion. The symbolic narration, the metaphors, and the incomplete sentences have an affinity with the theme of abortion, which will be studied in depth in Chapter Two. In Chapter Two, the subject of abortion in relation to abjection is investigated; the fetus, before being aborted, belongs to the body of the mother; the relationship between the fetus, the mother, and abjection is studied in depth. *Deep Salt Water* incorporates collages in the memoirs, which is an interesting stylistic choice to complement the narrative of abortion. This characteristic is studied in light of Derrida's metaphysics of presence in Chapter Three.

Another maternal figure narrating the story of her deceased child is Poirier; she is also the director and the narrator of the movie with the similar name. In an elegiac memoir, the narrator bereaves the death of her daughter, who is murdered by a drug dealer. Through narration, Poirier expresses her regret about her actions when her daughter was alive. This memoir is mostly studied through the lens of the abject, which discovers the maternal relationship in regard to abjection and rejection. Moreover, since the narrator in the memoir is in charge of identifying the corpse, her confrontation with her daughter's lifeless body and its adverse influence on the former are also investigated in relation to abjection. Poirier's memoir was originally a documentary movie, published before the book. Therefore, in Chapter Three, I will study the book and, to a lesser extent the movie, in relation to Derrida's metaphysics of presence and the importance of visuals in better understanding the nature of death regarding two modes of the representation of reality put forth by Poirier.

Chapter I:

Narratives of Death in Canadian Auto/thanatography

> "But people will do anything rather than admit that their lives have no meaning. No use, that is. No plot" (249).
>
> Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

1. Introduction to the Narrative of Being

This chapter studies the essential characteristics of being as expressed and experienced in narrative; in other words, narrativizing one's experiences sheds light on the linguistic elements which enable us to better comprehend our existence, one important characteristic of which is temporality. Being is primarily enabled and experienced in a temporal/spatial dimension; that is, the temporal/spatial underpinning of existence allows a cohesive understanding of being and a sense of self, for, according to Derrida in *Given Time* (1992), "nothing appears that does not require and take time" (6). The perception and expression of being are mediated through language, which begs the question as to whether language "with its tiresome bias in its treatment of time" (Quine 154),[27] is capable of delineating the intricacies of temporality inherent in being. Language constrains the perception of being in a series of verb tenses, semantics, and syntax. Being, although seemingly self-given, can be a source of confusion once it is imagined independent of temporality. The division of temporality into the past, the present, and the future tenses inevitably brings forth a beginning and an end for every phenomenon, and the story of our being is no exception. This dimension unravels the mortality that temporality brings along. Temporality premonitions the inevitable, and we comprehend that our existence is subject to death- we are doomed not to be from the day we are born. As a defense mechanism, a healing tool, or a desperate need to assert one's presence in this world, the writer shares the most intimate feelings- fear and grief- with the narratee. Writing of one's fear and grief, besides being a therapeutic tool, sheds light on various aspects of being, such as the sense of self through time, the acceptance of corporeal decay, and the extent to which narration allows the writer to communicate those feelings. The narrators, who mourn the death of someone close to them, cope with their loss through the manipulation of temporality in the story and the stylistic choice of point of view. It is important to mention that although the main focus of this chapter is temporality, it also analyzes the effect of point of view on the implications of the meaning of the text.

We distinguish being and non-being easily, attributing being to entities existing in the continuum of time and place. In Tony Roark's words in *Aristotle on Time: A Study of the Physics* (2011), "one might be inclined to think that the existence of time is a necessary condition for the existence of material objects. It seems necessary for the variety of objects that we are accustomed to interacting with, anyway" (2). If not existing in the continuum of time and place, we consider them absent or nonexistent.[28] Yet, non-existence can take on various forms, eliciting different reactions. We react to an absent person in a different way than we do to a deceased beloved one. Although both are considered non-existent- that is, not existing at a specific time and place, they demand different understanding and treatment of the issue. Mortality and non-existence understood essentially through the binary opposition of language seem to be comprehensible up to the moment one experiences the death of a friend or a family member. Resisting rules of language, death, the most powerful form of non-existence, does not yield to language's binary structure of signifier and signified. Death paralyzes our most basic notion of being and non-being, and the grief that ensues demands the healing necessary for human survival. Being susceptible to annihilation not only makes us realize the limits of our being, but also motivates us to find our place in the universe.

Narrative, being inextricably intermingled with and constructed through time, reveals the existential angst of a narrator whose narrative applies to every human's condition. With the power of words, narrative intends to clarify the ultimate confusion of our existence, death, and endeavours to paint a picture of absence through which the narrators, paradoxically, assert their being. The narrative gives narrators the opportunity to know, create, recreate and understand themselves as beings defined by time and space. Bound to this continuum, we comprehend our being through the materiality and temporality precedent to death. Although circular, this understanding deepens the comprehension of ourselves. The narrative allows the narrators to throw themselves once more,[29] this time voluntarily, into the world. By doing so, they better understand mortality and ascertain their imperceptible being in the universe. It is through words that the narrator is able to continue existing and coping with the sanguine fact of mortality. On the brighter side, narration allows storytellers to mourn and process their grief, the result of which is called thanatography. Although thanatography directly deals with the angst of mortality, every type of narration can be considered a death experience since the self that is portrayed lasts while its story is written and diminishes with the narrative denouement.

In order to offer a clear analysis of the elements of narrative theory, especially narrative temporality in thanatography, each notion is studied separately in the following sections. The first section is a condensed review of temporality from pre-Socratic to twenty-first-century philosophy, as well as its study in scientific discourse. The reason for this brief introduction is to contextualize and justify the application of the most recent theories of temporality to narrative, which also explicates why certain theories have informed the methodological approach to this study. The second section, a brief history of narrative theory, is laid out in order to further clarify the applicability of the notion of temporality to the plots of literary works and more specifically, to the thanatographies studied here. Once the correlation between temporality and narrative is established, key narratologists such as Bal, Genette, and particularly Ricoeur are discussed. Once fleshed out, this theoretical groundwork on narrative temporality will allow me to analyze Canadian auto/thanatography and examine each memoir, including the tales of time and stories about time. The objective of this chapter is to examine the way narrative theory applies to auto/thanatography; in other words, it shows how developing a narrative and a plot provides the writers with an opportunity to come to terms with mortality, and reveal the ways writing, as a self-revelatory process, helps the narrators understand, grapple with and accept others' or their mortality.

2. A Brief History of Temporality

The demystification of being is rendered impossible if time, that is "the horizon of all understanding of being" (Blattner 2007, 311), is not clearly understood. As H.G. Wells' shrewd time traveller in *The Time Machine* (1895) observes, "any real body must have extension in four directions: it must have Length, Breadth, Thickness, and—Duration. But through a natural infirmity of the flesh, which I will explain to you in a moment, we incline to overlook this fact. There are really four dimensions, three which we call the three planes of Space, and a fourth, Time" (8). Therefore, understanding being is entangled with the perception of temporality, which has been the subject of contemplation among philosophers, physicists, and writers alike. In the following pages, I will attempt at summarizing the long history of contemplation on the nature of temporality for the sake of elucidating the way time “carries us within it” (Ricoeur, 1984, 152); since temporality is an inseparable part of our existence, undeniably, it manifests itself in narration, and therefore, it is crucial to understanding.

Although our conception of temporality has evolved through history, our perception of time has remained constant and limited to language. The very structure of language, that is, grammar and semantics, determines the structure of our perception of reality. Whether our consciousness has given birth to language, or that language predetermines the structure of our consciousness requires a greater question to be asked: does language precede thinking, or is thinking a faculty capable of functioning in spite of language? This question, the examination of which is beyond the scope of this chapter, is widely discussed by Steven Pinker in *The Language Instinct* (1994), who claims that thought precedes language, and that the latter is not an environmentally learnt skill, but an instinct evolved through time (ch. 1). What is undeniable though is, the inclusive relationship between consciousness and reality, as Daniel Dennett claims and studies in *Consciousness Explained* (1991). Be that as it may, an indispensable feature of grammar, which is temporality, must be analyzed in order to ascertain how thanatography manipulates narrative time in the effort to come to terms with death. In the English language, one of the important rules of grammar to refer to different times is the usage of the verbs in the past, present and future tenses; we also use subjunctive and indicative modes to express other aspects of reality. Hitherto, our perception is constrained by the tripartite pattern of temporality that the English language allows; this aspect, which is studied in depth in this chapter, is followed by a discussion of the history of temporality.

In defining temporality, the collaboration of philosophy and physics is undeniable. Whether time is a supplement or an essential characteristic of being still baffles theoreticians. That is why some scientific theories are to be found amid the philosophical notions presented here. I will begin with Parmenides, the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher, who lived in 515 BC. He claims that time is "mortal-bound" (40);[30] that is, time is a dimension humans impose on the order of things to make sense of them and ultimately their world. Furthermore, Parmenides claims that the notions of past, present, and future are misleading and the result of defective grammatical structures. He writes that the existence of present, past, and future is contradictory and therefore, cannot be explained through grammar. The theories of another pre-Socratic philosopher, Zeno, living circa 490 BC, have been long neglected until in 1908 when they were reintroduced by J.M.E. McTaggart. Zeno argues that "the distinction of past, present, and future is simply a constant illusion of our minds" (458). Zeno claims that time, as we perceive it, does not exist and that our perception of temporality is nothing but an earthly perception of a more complicated entity. Another pre-Socrates philosopher, Heraclitus (535 BC), was the first to declare that time is but a flux and a transition, an idea that was later adopted by Aristotle, who claimed that time is only perceived through change and concludes that time is change (426).[31] Afterward, two distinct groups put forth their theories: the Presentists, and the Eventualists. The former group approached time in a series of present moments, while the latter considered it to be of a tripartite nature. The Presentists' perception of time is later resonated in St. Augustine's *Confessions* (400) and the phenomenological approach to time. Eventualists' tripartite model suggests a linearity in time, which allows the lexicons of past, present, and future. However, the idea of nonlinearity was not an unfamiliar notion; the possibility of the nonlinearity of time was first proposed by Averroes, the Andalusian philosopher, who introduced the cyclical structure of temporality.[32]

While in the tripartite structure, present events are prioritized over other tenses due to the irreversibility of past events and the unpredictability of the future, the nonlinearity of Averroes creates a sustainable equilibrium among the tenses." This idea well manifests itself in storytelling. In relation to narration, temporality, despite its determined linear perception, can be manipulated at the whim of the narrators, prioritizing a past event over a present phenomenon. While linear temporality in storytelling indicates a traditional method adopted by writers, nonlinear plot structure offers innovative ways to arrange events and recount them, thereby blurring or enhancing causality or emphasizing the importance of a singular event to subsequent moments in narrative.

Another important theory of temporality is found in the seventeenth century with Emmanuel Kant's notion of 'Ideal Time,' suggesting that time itself is not perceivable by humans, but solely its representation. As mentioned earlier, Augustine's presentist idea was reintroduced by phenomenologists, especially Edmund Husserl, who attempted to resolve the contradictory nature of time perceived by humans. He introduced the role of memory and anticipation in order to reconcile the past, present, and future. Husserl claimed that the present moment is not extended, and that it is the mind remembering the past and anticipating the future as a means of extending its existence in time. Humans' simultaneous ability to perceive the present, remember the past, and anticipate the future amazed Husserl and led him to introduce the specious consciousness, which suggests the present, past, and future as motions in tandem, culminating in a unity. He also emphasizes the subjective perception of temporality in contrast to its objective representation, which is measured with the clock and the calendar; these tools used to be the unquestionable instruments in determining the irreversible events of the past, the present, and the future. To Husserl, the subjective perception of time mattered the most, which resonated with

Henri Bergson's theory of *la durée*, which also implied that an objective account of temporality is a myth. Bergson claims that time perceived by humans, that is the subjective account, is different from the objective account laid out by philosophers and scientists.

The nineteenth and the twentieth century have seen some radical theories of time. After the theories of relativity were proposed by Einstein[33] and the ensuing clash between the subjective perception and objective representation of time, time lost its deep-rooted credibility, and indetermination reigned. Time, which was perceived as a fixed entity before the theory of relativity, became inconsistent and fluid. One literary example of this is the temporal indeterminacy resonating in literary works, such as Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931), in which the description of time does not conform to its traditional fixed representation. Time, in her work, adopts various forms: "This drop falling has nothing to do with losing my youth. This drop falling is time tapering to a point. Time, which is a sunny pasture covered with a dancing light, time, which is widespread as a field at midday, becomes pendant. Time tapers to a point […] Time falls" (104).

It is notable that after centuries of battle subsequent to Aristotle's conception of temporality, which advocated that time is a fixed entity and only perceived through change,[34] and sophists' ideas advocating relativity, the latter group prevailed. The theory of temporal indeterminacy championed by the sophists clearly described the way in which we perceive reality and construct a sense of self through time. Contemporaneous physicists, such as Erwin Schrödinger, Don Page, and William Wootters, have studied the behaviour of temporality, defined as light having the dual reality of particles and photons, in lieu of attempts at analyzing its nature. Does this mean that our era has completely understood the nature of temporality? Scientifically, there is a perfect explanation for its behaviour, but pragmatically, we still tend to consider time a familiar entity by which we measure hours, years, and decades. We live in present moments, we partially remember our past, and we have hopes and desires, realized or not, in the future. The unidirectionality of time deprives us of the opportunity to go back and live once more. Our understanding may have adopted various forms, yet it has not evolved in nature. Therefore, since the object of analysis here is human perception and its ability at narrativizing experiences in conformity with the tripartite structure of time unaffected by relativity, this thesis must limit itself to its literary representation in memoirs. In other words, this thesis examines the characteristics of thanatography as a genre and human understanding of death as represented through literature.

Narrative is a receptacle for the experience of temporality, expressed in tales of time and tales about time. Existing through time and narrating the stories of our lives can adopt various forms with one common feature; they inevitably have a beginning and an ending. The narration's temporal structure allows the analysis of being-in-time, and it redefines temporality in accordance with the experience of the narrator. The significance of temporality in thanatography sheds light on the mourners' perception of events and the way their experiences are shaped into a story. The unidirectionality of time, discussed previously, offers some possibilities in narrative, such as analepsis,[35] prolepsis,[36] and ellipsis,[37] which makes the plot of thanatography complicated and open to interpretation. Time, linear or non-linear in structure, makes death inevitable, which does not necessarily mean that temporality is defined by death even though it is commonly perceived as such. The unavoidable reality accompanying time is our mortality. We know that as we age, and as we move forward through the dimension of time, we define our being by what we have done and been rather than what will be. We are certain that as we age, we will die and therefore, reconciliation is the only option. Consequently, this chapter is an attempt at delineating the intricacies of language in relation to death, and therefore, narrative theory will be applied to certain memoirs among the corpus.

3. Narrative Theory in Canadian Auto/thanatography

The applicability of the word narrative to various notions such as argument, theory, evidence, ideology, or practice may perplex the reader as to what narrative theory entails and what differentiates a narrative from a non-narrative text. In defining the adjective "narrative," which can modify the nature of the noun that follows it, Didier Coste writes, "an act of communication is narrative whenever and only when imparting a transitive view of the world is the effect of the message produced" (1989, 4). These rules are necessary components of every narrative regardless of its subject. Therefore, prior to the individual study of memoirs, Coste's characteristics will be briefly examined in the corpus of this thesis. In establishing a literary work as a "narrative text" (5), Coste enumerates five essential characteristics or rules, the most important of which Gerald Prince (2004) recapitulates as follows: the first rule is "transactiveness," which refers to the actions as opposed to mere happenings; the second is "transitiveness," which applies to "events involving an agent and a patient- that is deep or remote causality as opposed to a lack of it;" the third rule is "specificity instead of generality," which prefers the specific narrative events to "mere sequences fitting any or indefinitely many sets of circumstances;" the fourth is singularity instead of banality, and lastly, a narrative text requires "presence as opposed to the absence of alternative courses of action for the narrative participants" (14).

Coste argues that some of the plot-related characteristics, that is features three to six, can vary in each narrative in relation to the nature of the text. Some of Coste's notions are not original, but an elaboration of what was previously proposed in the history of narrative theory. For example, transactiveness is what Viktor Schklovsky introduced almost three decades earlier as story versus narrative, respectively "narrative" and "narrativizing" in Hayden White's words (qtd. in Prince 13), which is an indispensable principle in works of fiction and non-fiction that create causal links between events, and therefore, creating a plot. In this manner, Schklovsky's narrative of the memoirs would envisage a mourner who bereaves the loss of someone or their youth, while narrativizing the experiences- that is creating a plot- culminates in a unique literary work in which the narrators express their specific understanding of the subject matter alongside aesthetic choices.

The second rule, transitiveness, proposed by Coste, applies to auto/thanatography as well, since it is written to be consumed. The grief of the narrator would be rendered meaningless if the pain is not communicated and the narrative is not received by an audience. As mentioned in the last chapter, this genre calls for attention and recognition. Therefore, a new implication arises as it is read by the audience, who imposes meaning on the text throughout the reading process; that is, both the narrator and the audience play vital roles in the narrative's re/creation. The third rule, that is the obligatory causal relationship, necessitates the creation of any type of narrative and is not limited to auto/thanatography, the very process of narrating one's grief is to construe meaning. As previously mentioned, death is not to be remedied, but the symptoms can be alleviated through the consoling process of writing. Besides being the raison-d'être of narration, here is an interesting, yet heartbreaking narrative. After suspecting her partner's suicide and calling the police, the narrator of *After Daniel* writes:

> As we settle at the table and the young officer pulls out his notebook, I'm asking, in what must seem a spaced-out way, "Is he dead?" […] he manages to answer directly. I am given a further reprieve from the truth, though of course, I know by now it is true, has to be […] I'm asked if I'd like a glass of water. Everything is happening very slowly now, as though we're immersed in something viscous, something jelling and holding us. Water? A glass of it? Are you going to get it for me? […] I strain to understand, as though grasping the precise meaning of this question might somehow explain what is going on in the other room [where the body is found]. ("A Closed Door")

The narrator conveys her confusion at the realization of her partner's suicide and although she is almost certain of her partner's suicide, the possibility of construing an imaginary scenario crosses her mind. The partner's suicide, becoming an impetus for her to write the book, is digested, processed, justified, and narrativized until it is uttered in a grim and direct way: "Valentine's Day Special! One Night Only! The Suicide of Daniel Jones! Starring Daniel Jones! […] And Moira Farr as the girlfriend- who didn't know" ("Daniel, We Hardly Knew You"). Seeking reasons for loss incites the desire to write, and while the journey of the exploration of the reasons through narrative may not necessarily culminate in a definitive answer, it is a process of mitigating the pain. In Coste's words, "[M]eaning is the standard of my being; narrative meaning is the standard of my (our) being as mortal" (5). In another memoir, *Tu as Crié: Let Me Go* (2000), the mother of a murdered daughter expresses her need for consolation through narration: "Here my search begins, for meaning, not for certitude. Alone, I walk in absence. I am looking for you" (Poirier 8). Later in the book, the narrator shares her need to seek the truth and to reflect in order to "understand you [her daughter] better" (31). Therefore, narrativizing is a reflective journey toward the understanding of an event.

The third characteristic, that is the specificity of narrative in contrast to generality, refers to the unique characteristics the memoirists employ to personalize their narration. Since the nature of memoirs is personal and semi-autobiographical, and Coste deems "personal or biographical factors play[ing] the role of Necessity in the matter" (8), the memoirs examined in this thesis benefit from the quality of specificity.

The fourth characteristic, as the names suggest, demands originality, that is "singularity," in Coste's words, contrary to banality, which entails blindly following a series of steps to achieve one's objective. In relation to narration, and based on what Coste writes about metafiction,[38] the cognizance of the process of storytelling assumes the most important role in differentiating specificity and banality. The awareness of the process, that is the journey of self-understanding in opposition to the mechanical production of a plot, is of various degrees in each memoir. Sometimes, self-awareness on the part of the narrator reaches such an intensity that it betrays the very act of narration and analysis. An example of this is Farr's memoir, which at times morphs into another genre, that of a self-help book, due to its extensive understanding of the process of narration. The narrator becomes the writer, and vice versa. The narrator/writer stubbornly resists being narrativized and decides to inform others:

> I became aware that my obsession with the subject- my burning needs to know, in intricate and complete detail, why this suicide had happened- represented a common grief reaction among people who have survived a traumatic loss, and in particular, a suicide. I suppose I eventually rationalized, through some deep-seated Presbyterian impulse, that if I must have an obsession, I would at least be

> putting it to good use in writing a book, transforming chaos into reason and purpose. ("Prologue")

The last clause in the citation betrays the literary nature of narrative; in other words, by including this clause in storytelling, the genre borders on the self-help category. However, at times, the narration morphs into a memoir, when the writer is estranged from the narrator through adopting a third-person point of view:

> 1993. A warm evening, late in Spring. A man and a woman, casually dressed, in their thirties, sit across each other in a small […] restaurant […] in Toronto […] Sitting side by side with him that evening as he- Daniel- gently washed her feet, it would have been impossible to imagine how quickly she would become the one administrating the care, inconceivable that he would be capable of destroying himself, hurting her so badly, leaving her- that is, me, for this is a true story, my story- so soon, so tragically. ("Prologue")

At the beginning of the book, where the previous quote is from, the writer refers to herself in the third person, witnessing, in hindsight, her first date with a man who was going to kill himself in a year.[39] The use of the third person point of view, the effect of which will be studied later in this chapter, is quite a rare phenomenon in a modern corpus of personal writings. Nevertheless, by distancing herself from the woman of her memories, Farr, who would soon suffer the tragic loss of a partner, presents an impartial viewpoint. Her adoption of an omniscient viewpoint informing the reader that "the man she was in love with" ("Prologue") would kill himself, in juxtaposition with the shift of point of view in the last line, notifying the reader that she plays the role of the narrator, multiplies the shocking effect produced. As a consequence of her technique, the potency of identification and sympathy far surpasses the reader's expectations, which would not have happened had the writer adopted the first-person point of view from the start. The authority that the narrator establishes at this point, that is, identifying with the writer and emphasizing the 'mineness' of the story, foretells Coste's specificity in narration. Farr's narrative is characterized by her traumatic experience, which is the suicide of her partner. The nature of suicide elicits a particular form of grieving, which "due to the combination of the sudden shock, the unanswered question of 'why,' and possibly the trauma of discovering or witnessing the suicide" (353),[40] writes Audra Knieper, can be transfigured into a complicated bereavement. Given the necessity of the expression of the experienced trauma, the narrator in *After Daniel* "incorporate[s] the death of [her] partner into [her] personal narrative and sense of self" (41)[41] in order to move from "sense-making to meaning-making" (Pritchard and Buckle, 37) through which, she discovers the possible reasons for Daniel's suicide, weaves her resentment, anger and frustration into the story, and reaches an ultimate reconciliation and purpose by turning her narrative into a self-help book for survivors of suicide.

Another memoir belonging to this category, in which the line between the narrator and writer blurs, is Akler's *Men of Action* (2015). In this type of memoir, the distinction between the narrator and the writer, as explained in depth later in this chapter, appears intermittently throughout the book; for example, the first sentence of the first chapter, "[T]he first time I shaved my father, he was in a coma" (7), establishes the writer as the narrator through the usage of first-person point of view. The first example of disengagement from the stream of events occurs in chapter seven (13), the very first sentence of which reads "'[T]o pay attention,' writes the essayist Sven Birkerts, 'is to attend. To be present, not merely in body- it is an action of the spirit'" (13). In this chapter, the narrator, adopting an estranged academic tone, distances himself from the series of intimate events that are central to his story. The memoirist aspect of the literary work is sometimes comprised for the sake of raising awareness. But again, isn't raising awareness, as discussed in the previous chapter, one of the goals of narrativizing and sharing one's experiences? In Akler's memoir, facts about neurobiology, epilepsy, consciousness, the state of being unconscious, and especially the comatosed state are implemented in narration for an audience seeking clarification on such subjects, the examples of which are to be found in chapters sixteen, twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-six, to name a few.

Therefore, in the two previous examples mentioned, the characteristic of specificity as opposed to banality manifests in the way the narrators weave their authority and awareness of the process of narration into their plot. These two examples do not discredit other memoirs as banal, but simply emphasize the degree of awareness. The genre of personal writing necessitates a certain level of cognizance in order to be realized, shared, and narrativized, therefore, almost all memoirs benefit from the quality of specificity. The phrase 'almost all' in the previous sentence excludes certain types of memoirs, which are relayed by another person different than the narrator; that is, the writer whose name appears on the front cover is not the same as the narrator's. For example, Giroux's *A Chance for Life* (2001), although narrated by Giroux, is "told" (front cover) by Burnett. My aim is not to label the last example as banal, however, the awareness or specificity achieved through remembering, researching, gathering information, and utilizing language, that is, the stylistic choice of the writer of syntax and semantics by the writer/narrator surpasses the self-understanding achieved through relaying information.

Two important components of the fifth and last characteristic, contrasting "the presence as opposed to the absence of alternative courses of action for narrative participants" (Prince 14), need clarification prior to its application to the corpus. The "courses of action," refers to the plot. According to Teun Dijk (1975), "the action structure is part of the abstract logical structure of narrative discourse and is commonly called the ‘plot’ of the narrative or story” (274). The second component is “narrative participant,” which must be distinguished from the narrator. The participants are all the characters involved in the course of the story, except the narrator. Therefore, the last feature of narrative texts signifies the implication of characters in the story and their impact on the latter’s meaning. Accordingly, none of the works included in this thesis is so inordinately self-centered as to be solely about the narrator. Despite the genre’s narcissistic nature, as explained in Chapter One, the memoirists employ the inevitable and necessary roles of their entourage in order to make their stories more palatable. In conclusion, the ‘narratively’ nature of thanatography, according to Coste’s notion, has been established, which allows a deeper analysis of its components in determining the meaning of the memoirs later in this chapter. In the following pages, the intricate elements of narrative, such as temporality and point of view, are studied prior to the study of the history of narrative theory.

The classic account of narratology, beginning with Aristotle’s *Poetics* and continuing through to the German Romantics and Russian Formalists, has developed a myriad of other approaches, such as feminist, generic, ideological, and metaphoric narrative theories, to name a few.[42] Contemporary narrative theories are either novel or derivative of earlier propositions. The contrast between the classic and modern approaches is best differentiated by Flundernik, who in “Histories of Narrative Theory II: From Structuralism to the Present” (2008), writes that “[a]lthough classical models started out with a structuralist fixation on plot and narrative grammars in Todorov, Barthes, Bremond, and Greimas, narratology in the 1970s and 1980s was mostly concerned with discourse and narration rather than plot” (43). Narrative theory has also permeated other fields; for example, Bal, a contemporary narratologist, has developed the narratology of ballet, drama, and painting based on Genette’s theories. Among later narratologists whose focus was on narration rather than plot, Paul Ricoeur paired narratology and the study of tenses, which also is part of the methodological framework in this thesis.

Narrative theory, unlike common belief, does not intend to analyze a discourse but to disclose the proprieties of narrative. The descriptive analysis of a genre of literature uncovers the ingrained narrative, which ultimately exposes its cultural constituents. In order to conduct such an analysis, a novel narrative theory is proposed by Barthes, who suggests a deductive method contributing to a narratological reading of literature; that is, conceiving "a hypothetical model of description […] and then to proceed gradually from that model down, towards the species, which at the same time partake in and deviate from the model" (239).[43] This method, he writes, is applicable only if the narratives of a specific genre are not an "assemblage of events" but "having a common structure, open to analysis" (238). He proposes examining chosen books of a specific genre and analyzing them as an extensive sentence to which linguistic rules can be applied. Since linguistics does not go further than examining a sentence, Barthes' suggestion regarding an efficient way of examining a book is to consider it as a sentence, which can be analyzed from three perspectives: function, action, and narration; the former characteristic refers to the meaning of the text which Barthes believes to be "the very first criterion by which units are determined" (244). He also states that functions are not necessarily represented by sentences and can go beyond these units. The second perspective, which Barthes calls actions, refers to the action of characters in a narrative. Instead of the psychological analysis of characters, Barthes proposes that characters should be analyzed on an "actional level" (259), and their actions, he continues, take meaning once they are integrated into narration. Function and action take place in a narration, which is the third and last level of narratological analysis. In narration, Barthes develops the relation between the narrator and the reader and the personal and impersonal language the former uses to recount or represent events. It is the narrator who creates a balance between the personal and impersonal narration to achieve the desired effect. In short, to Barthes, a combination of meaning and form culminates in structuring a narrative. Barthes' function, action, and narration refer to the same concepts Ricoeur and Genette introduce, though with a different terminology explained later in the chapter.

After 1960, narrative theory adopted an all-encompassing approach toward every medium that could be treated as a text; for example, a city, a billboard, or an advertisement was considered and analyzed as a text in which signs of a different nature than the alphabet determine the message. Consequently, narrative lost its traditional meaning, and narrative theory was compromised in order to analyze a discourse, now a widely inclusive term, in the most effective manner. Among modern narratologists, Gerard Genette offers a comprehensive definition of the term narrative. His theories will be presented and applied to Canadian thanatography in the following paragraphs, followed by Bal's theory of point of view and Ricoeur's theory of temporality. The following analysis is selective, that is, the theories are applied to a certain number of texts, which I thought were best representative of the theoreticians' ideas. Nevertheless, each element of narrative theory can be separately analyzed in each memoir, which would have made this chapter indefinitely long.

Genette's Five Elements of Narration in Canadian Thanatography

In *Narrative Discourse* (1983), Genette distinguishes three levels of meaning of the word narrative: the first refers to the story, also known as the signified; the second definition concerns the "statement, discourse or the narrative text" (27), also known as the signifier, which is the object of study here; and the last definition refers to narrating, that is the action of recounting the narratives. Genette deems the following five criteria necessary when studying a narrative, and these will be illustrated with examples from the corpus:

1. Order, which refers to the sequence of events arranged in a specific timeline, is a characteristic of the plot. It is indicative of the writer's choice to present events in a specific sequence. Order can be determined by the verb tenses the writer uses to describe each event. For example, a past perfect tense indicates a priority of a past event over another. Therefore, in order to achieve the desired effect, the narrator prioritizes one event over another. The nonlinearity of narration determines the effect and the meaning. As an example, Farr's book unravels the denouement of the plot, that is, the suicide of her partner, in the first chapter ("Prologue"). The choice of presenting events in this order eliminates the element of suspense and makes the subsequent events crucial to the understanding the narrator achieves throughout the narration. In fact, the nature of thanatography necessitates a nonlinear plot, the conclusion of which is presented at the beginning of the narrative. This order provides the narrators with an opportunity to go through a reflective journey in which, besides understanding the subject at hand, a new sense of self unravels.

Genette also introduces various techniques of narration which bring about different effects on the reader. Among the techniques used in narrative, Genette asserts that the ellipsis, or the elimination of events, prolepsis or the anticipation of events, analepsis or the remembrance of events, and paralepsis, meaning a brief mention of an event, are definitive and crucial in producing meaning. This narrative choice is indicative of the narrator's un/conscious attempt at presenting certain events while disregarding others. An example of ellipsis is found in Akler's *Men of Action* in which the narrator informs the reader that in the first and second editions of his memoir, he eliminated an important part of the plot regarding his reaction to his father's death. After receiving the news, he sat on the stairs of a random shop and "sobbed and sobbed and sobbed" (99). It is only in the third edition of the book that he accepts his father's demise. Another example is an ellipsis of an important event in Farr's book where the narrator refuses to publish her partner's suicide notes for privacy reasons and, more importantly, for the contradictory nature of the notes left by a suicidal person which the narrator substantiates by quoting Marc Etkind's *Not to Be* (1997): "If suicide notes are indeed attempts at communication, then they are dismal failures […] And there lies the ultimate paradox of the suicide note: If someone could think clearly enough to leave a cogent note, that person would probably recognize that suicide was a bad idea" ("Daniel, We Hardly Knew You"). Another example of this technique is the ellipsis of fifteen years from pages 84 to 85 in Apostolides' *Deep Salt Water*; it is through these chapters that she sees the need to "talk about her abortion to someone" (89) for the first time, which is a pivotal moment in narrating her story and creating a plot. Plot order and its features, due to their affinity with narrative temporality, are studied in depth further in this chapter.

2. Duration: Genette introduces notions of narrative time and story time, shown by the acronyms NT and ST respectively. The relation between NT and ST reveals the writer's tendency for anachronism in order to achieve a particular goal. Thus, a narrator can elongate a short event for the sake of dramatization, summarize a long story in order to question its importance, or create a perfect balance between them to create an effect of verisimilitude. A prominent example of this technique in thanatography is the perpetuation of the subject of death. For example, Farr's memoir narrates the events of Valentine's Day, the day after her partner took his life, in one lengthy chapter titled "A Closed Door," for the sake of conveying the traumatic

feelings experienced. It describes the day as follows: “Now I see myself in the early morning of that particular February day, walking down the two steep flights of stairs from Daniel’s sprawling old apartment” (“A Closed Door”). For the next few pages, the narrator, utilizing a flashback technique to the moment she nursed her boyfriend to recuperation, narrates her memories of the previous Valentine’s Day at work. She elaborates on her discussion with her partner a month earlier about Valentine’s Day through which she creates a suspenseful break from the main plot until she hauls the reader back to the main event by writing “[Y]es, the closed door made sense then” (“A Closed Door”). This marks a definitive time for the reader and the narrator in the plot. The elongation technique is not employed for the sake of dramatization since the grave matter of suicide, especially in nonfiction, does not require further dramatic flare. On the contrary, it is the moment of finding the closed door and the alarming note- “Do not come in. Please call the police” (“A Closed Door”)- that altered reality for the narrator. The traumatic event is represented in the extended narration between the time the narrator notices the taped paper on the door and the moment she deduces the message. The narrator writes, “[I]n those awful first moments, however, I stand absorbing the note’s message, stunned, my legs going weak” (“A Closed Door”). Therefore, Genette’s narrative time (NT) solely serves the purpose of explaining the narrator’s emotions. In narratological terms, the moment of realization that a horrible event might have taken place on the other side of the door, that is Genette’s story time (ST), is narrated in one lengthy chapter, which is the narrative time (NT). This subjective perception of time, shown through narrative time (NT) and lengthier than the story time (ST), is a way of decathecting from reality while processing grief.

Another example in which the narrative time is compromised for the sake of story time is in *Deep Salt Water.* Chapter eighteen narrates the abortion, which is expected to be narrated at length. However, the narrator, simply writes that “[T]he fish disengage from their surroundings” (67). This brief description, besides creating a shocking feeling in the reader, shifts the focus of the story from the fetus to the ensuing grieving journey of the mother. Moreover, the employed metaphor, that is the analogy of the fetus to a fish, creates a safe distance for the narrator to recount the troubling events in an estranged manner. Thus, rather than narrating the separation of the fetus from a maternal body, the narrator recounts the detachment of a fish from the body of an ocean.

Men of Action also presents an example of this kind; Akler uses the span of one chapter to cover the events of an entire year from his father’s death to his anniversary. The narrator does not leave but half a page to direct the reader’s attention to what mattered to him from the beginning of the memoir: his father’s absence. This span deprives the reader of information regarding the narrator’s grieving process, yet it connotes the centrality of the subject of death, and it accentuates the insignificance of the events in a year in the father’s absence; he writes, “the one-year anniversary of my father’s death […] my mother and I at the cemetery” (118). In other words, the absence of events represents the absence of the father.

3. Frequency simply refers to the number of times an event is recounted. The narrator of *Deep Salt Water* recurrently recounts her abortion- which has also, metaphorically, led to the death of her relationship- with various metaphors: “A sac of grief floods cities and women” (11), “Her lifetime is ended, a curious thing” (17), “We’ll make a child who won’t be born. I’ve never come to terms for this. Not yet.” (20) are among some examples throughout the book. Another example is seen in Poirirer’s memoir, in which the narrator mentions the death scene only once: “A Sunday morning. A young woman dies, strangled in a ransacked apartment” (7). The adopted impartial tone and choice of words, such as “a young woman” instead of “my daughter,” and the

single frequency of the narrated event prompt the reader to question the proclaimed intimate nature of the thanatography. In other words, the narrator, through estranging herself from the main event of the story, makes the reader curious and interested in the events and enables herself to narrate a traumatic experience through *distanciation*.

Another example of narrative frequency occurs in Matthews' memoir, *Minerva's Owl* (2017), which is written in elegiac prose that mourns the death of the husband in six chapters named after the famous stages of grief. The frequent reminiscences of the dead husband from the first chapter, "your death was sudden" (19) to the last chapter, "I tug my cleft ear, feeling your absence and cleaving to the sense of your presence" (136), culminates in the narrator finding the dead a part of herself: "My memories of our life together are part of who I now am and …. You are with me" (143). Therefore, frequency is sometimes a conscious narrative strategy with an underlying aesthetic motive, or an unconscious act among writers. Some narrators, through repetition, satisfy their need for closure while others, although mentioning the death only once, mourn it continually through various forms of narrative.

4. Mood, usually in correlation with the subject of literature, can be expressed in different forms and regulated to various degrees in narration, which Genette believes to be determined by certain criteria such as distance, perspective, or focalization. Distance, according to Bal is "an event presented in anachrony […] separated by an interval, long or small, from the 'present'" (89). This narrative feature, distance, is extensively determined by focalization. Therefore, these two narrative characteristics, distance, and focalization are interdependent and work toward the common goal of establishing a particular mood in the story. For example, a third-person point of view in narrating the death of a beloved person results in an objective estranged narration, which either creates the effect of surprise or establishes the text as a report, rather than an intimate

memoir. On the contrary, first-person narration results in an intimate description of events, which inevitably engages the reader to a greater degree. The study of mood is implied in the earlier example: Farr's dual choice of focalization establishes two different moods throughout the book, which, as analyzed earlier, imposes its specific mood on the reader and determines the narrative path. Poirier utilizes the same technique, studied further in this chapter.

5. The last characteristic, voice, in other words, point of view, identifies the perspective from which a narrative is recounted. Genette's criteria fall into two main categories. The first category, comprised of order, duration, and frequency, depends on the verb choice, hence, falling under the category of verb choice. The second category, comprised of mood and voice, is mainly determined by the choice of point of view. Genette goes in depth explaining the concept of voice, yet Bal's notions of focaliser would be more suitable to the study of auto/thanatography. These two essential features, in relation to narrative temporality, are further studied in the remaining part of this chapter.

Bal's Theory of Point of View in Narration

An important feature in narratology that impacts the meaning of the text is the point of view adopted by the narrator. Bal studies this aspect in depth in her book titled, *Narratology* (1997). According to her, the word narrator was introduced by Wayne Booth in 1961 in order to differentiate "the biographical writer and the narrator in case studies" (18). Although a text is written by an author prone to certain ideologies, upon analyzing a text, the narrator, the "I," or focaliser, and the author are differentiated. Among "the several possible manifestations," Bal writes, "the agent which utters the linguistic signs which constitute the text" is the objective of this research (18). The narrator becomes an agent whose expressive outlet is through linguistic signs and he or she is simultaneously shaped by them. This technique is linguistically-focused and is conducted through analyzing the intricacies of language, which culminates in the character the narrator presents to the audience. The narrator's self is performed through narration, which reproduces one's selfhood. Being reshaped does not exclusively apply to the focaliser, as the narrator too grapples with the subject matter and creates a self capable of reconciliation with death. Consequently, the three main impacts resulting from the difference between point of view and focaliser are self-identification with the deceased, power or agency bestowed on the characters, and detachment from the events. These three features, which memoirs of this study collectively share, determine the effect and the meaning of the text. The following paragraphs will demonstrate this in more detail.

The first narrative technique in thanatography is the identification of the narrator with the deceased. Through narration and self-enactment, the narrators of thanatography become the ones they mourn. This identification process, which moves from empathy to decathecting, constitutes the act of bereavement. Becoming the one we mourn transcends an act of empathy but more of a feat of self-erasure, viable through the therapeutic tool of narration, in favour of a being who is thoroughly consumed by the thought of the deceased. As Freud puts it in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), "[T]he disturbance of self-regard is absent in mourning" (243); instead, there is "this devotion to mourning" (Freud, 1917 243), that is epitomized by the narrative the mourner produces about the deceased. The technique of identification with the deceased indicates the narrator's awareness of his or her vulnerability toward death. In *Tu As Crié: Let Me Go* (2000), the narrator identifies her daughter's body with her own and as a result, she experiences her daughter's death as her demise: "your [her daughter's] death foreshadows mine

[hers]" (55). This is one of the explicit cases in which the narrator states directly that a beloved's death taught them how to live with mortality: "Now I am learning to live with my own [death]" (55). Another example is Matthews' memoir, throughout which the narrator stresses the oneness of herself and her husband: "you became so familiar that I could not draw a line between us" (17) and, in response to people telling her that she has lost her soulmate, she writes "[W]hat I know for sure is that I have lost my mindmate" (72). Although her husband is long gone, Mathews writes "you are still a part of me, Mike, and yet I can only imagine you as being far away, out there in the drift of stars" (24). The closeness the narrator writes about "is the only thing that gives me [her] comfort" (Matthews 24). Self-identification with the deceased only occurs at the end of the memoir when the narrator writes "I, too, begin to feel that you are an integral part of who I am" (136). The narration ends with an emotional detachment, decatheting, or claiming a new "respect for reality" (Freud, 1917 244), which persists in the absence of the deceased and which reshapes the mourner's self, fragmented in the absence of the loved one until "the ego becomes free and uninhabited again" (Freud, 1917 244).

The second feature of the choice of the focaliser, that is the adopted point of view, determines the extent of control exercised over narration and the agency given to the character. By employing this technique, the narrator decides whether a character is in charge of her or his voice. This technique also distinguishes the narrator from the focaliser, which, if analyzed, reveals the extent to which the focaliser acts as a mouthpiece for other characters. An example would be the sentence "he said" or "she said" at the end of a statement, which attributes an authoritative voice to the speaker of the sentence; on the contrary, the characters are stripped of their narrative power should the point of view shift to a free indirect discourse.[44] In general the prevalent adopted point of view in personal writings, that is, the first-person narrator, exerts control over the story and other voices and “lends itself better than any other to anticipation” (Genette 67). This shift in the representation of events is best depicted in Farr’s book. As was briefly explained earlier, the narrator of the story adopts an omniscient third-person point of view throughout the first pages of the book in order to distance herself from the narrated events. In Genette’s words, “[N]arratized,” as opposed to direct discourse, “is the most distant and reduced” form of narration (171), and since third person point of view, especially of an omniscient kind, is the least expected focaliser employed by memoirists, it conveys a sense of detachment to the reader. Therefore, once Farr changes the point of narration to a first-person perspective, the reader, feeling shocked, needs time to adapt to the intimate narration born of and contrary to the earlier adopted detached perspective. Another reason for the narrator’s shifting point of view would be to further assert her authoritative voice once she identifies herself as the female character of the plot, that is, the former female protagonist to whom “it never occurred that he [Daniel] might break such a startling and candid promise [that is not to kill himself]” (“A Closed Door” 316).

In the first chapters of *Men of Action,* the writer distances himself from the subject of narration, the death of his father Saul. In other words, Akler does not use his father as the focaliser until the end of the memoir where the father’s voice is heard. The distance Akler takes in the beginning contrasts his inclusion of his father as a focaliser towards the end. While the father is the only character whose narrative authority is compromised by the point of view the narrator adopts- which might be done consciously or unconsciously- the narrator gives other characters the authority of owning their statements: “Sarah nodded, ‘Also,’ she said, [...]”, “[H]e was lucid, Trudy told me,” “[F]rom an email […] by my brother Ed: “We spoke with the attending physician […]” (32-33). On the other hand, in *Deep Salt Water*, the narrator grants agency to an aborted child, a character in the memoir, in order to be able to conduct conversations with her: "'But how is the ocean made?" I always forget the tenacity of children. 'But Mama …'" (25). The simultaneity of the aborted sentence and the child is not contingent; "I am sorry, sweetie" (26) is what Apostolides says after the baby leaves her sentence unfinished. Through her metaphor-laden conversations with the child about the oceans, she refers to the child's tenacity in being conceived and finally "murdered" by the mother, who assimilates herself to different types of fish devouring her child: "the larger fish eat the smaller one" (31). Giving agency to the child is the narrator's first step towards accepting the reality of death.

The chosen point of view also determines the unperceived and unnarrated aspects of the story; in other words, point of view limits the perception of events to the perspective of the narrator who may, inadvertently, suppress, evade and hide certain aspects of truth. As mentioned earlier, the nature of thanatography requires a perceptible presence of a narrator who chooses the focalization, which almost always deprives the deceased of their narrative agency; in other words, they are spoken for and analyzed. The opposite situation, where the deceased speaks for him/herself, is rare in thanatography. In *Deep Salt Water*, which barely gives "the floor to the characters' speech" (Genette 1980, 174), Apostolides in an extended inner monologue lets her already-aborted fetus speak: "If I were a fish, I'd be a salmon. Leap like fireworks- pinkness and viscera- I like it best when currents are strong. This has built good muscles …" (21); through examples such as these, the narrator makes her presence imperceptible to the audience and gives full agency to a non-existent entity, making the fetus the focalizer of the narrative.

The deceased's discourse does not seem to be their exact words but the narrator's extrapolation, who, in an undeliberate act, deprives the soon-to-be deceased of their agency, reducing them to his/her interpretation of reality, that is, to his/her focaliser. This applies to most thanatography in which the deceased- even though alive at the story time- is deprived of a voice of her/his own in narrative time. An unconventional and unique example is Toews's *Swing Low* (2000) which is narrated in the first person point of view and supposedly that of the deceased father. Although the focaliser of the thanatography is the father, the narrator is the daughter who bases the content on her father's diary and on her memories from the time she lived with the family and others, including her impressions of the deceased. This technique has endowed the text with a dramatic irony which makes it difficult to believe or handle at times. A character-bound narrator, Toews writes a memoir whose narrator is the father; in other words, the voice of the father is appropriated, shaped, and voiced by the narrator. The writer, according to Bal in *Narratology*, can be simultaneously the CN- character-bound-narrator, and the EN- the external narrator, which is a rare situation in the case of memoirs. Toews writes an extensive memoir, in her father's voice, in which she describes her father's life from childhood, his problems with his mother, falling in love, getting married, having children, aging, hospitalization, and suicide. Toews incorporates her father's notes and diaries into her research alongside her memories of him and his lifestyle. The specific case of simultaneously being the CN and the EN offers Toews a unique opportunity: to live her father's life, regret her father's lost opportunities, speak up for him when he did not, take alternative decisions, praise and criticize him and in the end, honour him as a great human being, teacher, husband, and father. In the epilogue, becoming a CN, the narrator commemorates the memory of the father: "In the end, words couldn't save my father, but his lifelong faith in the power of reading and writing will live on. In the summer of 2000, the brand-new Melvin C. Toews Reading Garden will open in Steinbach, adjacent to the public library that he was so instrumental in founding" (190-1). Being the CN and the EN, the writer identifies with the father and narrates the events of his life while adopting his viewpoint, which simultaneously detaches the writer from the narration. The father "did not simply talk at all" (xiii), which makes the narrator conjure and fabricate a good proportion of the memoir. The father, whose voice has been ignored and dismissed throughout his life, is ironically hijacked once again in narrating his very personal life. The last chapter, which is about the father's final day, depicting him as strolling through town and suiciding by throwing himself in front of a train, is narrated in first person. The narrator retraces her father's steps through his stroll in town, interviews the people who met him that day, and visits the place where his father killed himself. The nature of suicide is not compatible with first-person narration, hence the shift in point of view. While Toews avoids an accusatory tone and adopts the father's voice to commemorate his life, Farr, through distancing herself from Daniel, who took his own life, veers the focus of narration towards those survived by the deceased. By doing so, the book adopts an informative tone with occasional weaving of the narrator's personal life.

The third and last feature of the choice of point of view determines the distance or the attachment of the narrators in relation to themselves, the reader, and other characters in the book. For example, the first-person point of view disguised as the third-person limited point of view in *Swing Low* reduces the distance between the real narrator, that is the daughter, and the object of narration, that is the father. This impersonification, however, belies the narrator's emphasis on the father's reticence. As a result of this duality, a paradoxical effect is produced- that is the daughter's desire to give a voice to a man who never spoke for himself and secondly, found amidst the father's note, the desire of a man to remember his memories and assert a stable selfhood: "I felt my face flush, and I mumbled something about old age and the ability to remember details of an event that occurred fifty years ago but not necessarily what you had for dinner the night before. Even as I said it [sic.] I knew she wouldn't buy it. She patted my hand though, and murmured, Mel, I know you're insane" (89). The rescue gesture conducted by the daughter leads to a reconstruction of a father figure who, by the end of the diary, had gradually lost his memory. This reinvention endows a self, which although lost at the end of the father's life, is immortalized through narration.

Incorporating a second-person perspective in narration is not a rare phenomenon in thanatography. This voice is usually employed to address the deceased through which the narrators, giving the deceased the semblance of presence, find the space and time to communicate what was left untold and thus attaining a sturdier sense of closure. This specific technique also, however implicitly, turns the reader into a witness. The narrators' monologues, usually emotional, invite the reader to be attentive to the storyline. Among the memoirs in this study, four examples that use this technique stand out: *Tu As Crié: Let Me Go!, Deep Salt Water, After Daniel,* and *Minerva's Owl.* The topic of the first memoir, *Tu As Crié: Let Me Go!* includes a second-person point of view. Instead of writing "elle a crié," which would distance the narrator from the deceased, the latter chooses a second-person point of view, "tu," to initiate a narrative in the tradition of conducting a conversation: "You were there, in the early morning light. I was not" (Poirier 8). The persistence of the second person throughout the memoir is indicative of the narrator's attempt at concretizing the presence of her deceased daughter. In order to create an element of shock, Poirier employs the same technique as Farr does, only with a slight difference; instead of shifting points of view, Poirier employs the possessive adjective 'my': "A young woman dies, strangled in a ransacked apartment. She was a heroin addict. She was of service to men. She was beautiful. She was my daughter" (7). The detached report-like voice found in the first sentence contrasts the intimacy created by the possessive adjective in the last sentence.

The same technique, that is the second person perspective, is employed by Matthews, whose narration is a continuation of the correspondence she had with her spouse at the beginning of their relationship. The narrator considers grieving a "final phase of marriage" (17) and therefore pours her emotions into her letters to her deceased husband in order to seek closure. The title of Mathews' book indicates such a premature closure; "[T]he owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the coming of the dusk" (11), which implies acquiescence to death and the inevitability of grief, which matures the bereaved.

In Farr's memoir, at times, the narrator shifts the narrative from the first-person point of view to the second-person point of view. In the latter case, besides addressing the deceased, an accusatory tone- probably due to the shock caused by the partner's suicide- is adopted: "you always claimed about your indifference to trees and other simple, natural beauties" ("Daniel, We Hardly Knew You"). Another example clarifies the narrator's frustration with the tragic surprise she received from her partner: "it is hard to know what your next move should be, counterintuitive, wrong somehow […]" ("Doing Time in the Prison of Mourning"). Similarly, in Apostolides' memoir, *Deep Salt Water* (2017), the aborted fetus turning into a character-bound narrator is addressed as 'you:' "If you were a fish, you'd have been a person," (22) is what the narrator writes when addressing the fetus. This amalgamation of a conditional tense, that is imagining the impossible, alongside the second person point of view recurs throughout narration: "'I'll swim to China!' you would've said. You'd point to the sea and kick your legs" (24). Sometimes, the second person pronoun is used to refer to the husband; "you arrived at my door. You invited me in, then you slowly disrobed me" (33). Additionally, the narrator changes the point of view to 'we' in order to include her partner in the mourning process; "[W]e flutter in the rage of time. We stand at the breach, as the leap, of becoming" (39). Interestingly, the narrator is aware of the chosen point of view and writes "[W]hat is the language to talk of abortion? The language of 'rights' is too limited […] Unable to find the proper words, my only resource is this plea: the prayer that someone will offer forgiveness. Not you- that's too forcibly therapeutic. Not 'her,' as a fetus- that's too New Age" (41). The last two sentences may refer to distinct people, that is the husband and the fetus, however, the ambivalent meaning in the sentence where the subjective pronouns are embedded is open to interpretation.

Mood is an inseparable aspect of point of view and is dependant on, determined by, and a consequence of the latter. As explained earlier, a simple shift in the narrative point of view alters the meaning of the story and produces a wide variety of effects on the reader. While the first-person point of view establishes an authoritative voice, the second-person perspective, in which the deceased is addressed directly, attempts to integrate the voice of the dead into the story. Moreover, a feeling of detachment accompanies third-person narration. "Motivation," which Bal defines as the initial reason for narration and description (37), is employed as a technique in auto/thanatography that marks the beginning of narration with an emotional recounting of memories of a recently deceased person. Farr writes, "1993. A warm evening. Late in Spring […] Daniel killed himself" ("Prologue"). Afterward, the narrator writes about death preceding the beginning of the narrator's journey of coping with death. This can also be considered as the plot scheme of thanatography. The latter step is usually the longest part of auto/thanatography. For example, the narrative of *Minerva's Owl* is largely comprised of the narrator's struggles preceding her husband's death.

Verb Tense and Temporality in Narration

The narrative features studied so far derive meaning by being embedded in the plot, the dynamics of which are extensively studied by Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative,* published in three volumes from 1983 to 1985. Ricoeur, influenced by precedent narratologists and phenomenologists, studied the functionality of temporality in the plot, which is achieved by reconciling two theories: phenomenology and post-structuralism. After extensively elucidating his definition of plot in volume one, Ricoeur applies temporality to the plot in his second volume. Conclusively, his studies reconcile the Augustinian definition of temporality in narrative with the Aristotelian plot. Although the structure of the plot has changed since Aristotle, he claims, the Augustinian structure of temporality is still applicable. Augustine's interpretation of temporality, as studied earlier in this chapter, is a phenomenological perception, which is greatly dependent on the subjective perception of time. Therefore, Ricoeur, being influenced by phenomenologists, claims that texts can be interpreted and understood in different ways due to the extraordinary power of language.

Ricoeur considers the plot as a machine that produces characters who assert their existence through their relationship with others and their individual experience of time. He deems the role of dialogue in the plot important which, as stated in an interview with Erik Nakjavani in 1981, offers a "[A] dimension of this world" (1085). Plot's linear temporality is best represented by the model proposed by Gustav Freytag in *Technique of the Drama* (1900). While some memoirs employ this linearity, almost all the memoirs studied in this chapter have nonlinear narration. Nonlinearity is employed to juxtapose, justify, explain, or clarify events, and each text uses this technique for different purposes, which will be examined later in this chapter. The tripartite model of flashback, flashforward, and presence, disguised as memories, predictions, and mourning, are employed in various orders in thanatography. Death marks the reference point to which later events are gauged. The language of flashback has an emotional and nostalgic nature, while the language of prediction is that of uncertainty and unpredictability, revealing the mourner's difficulty with imagining a future without the deceased.

The tripartite structure of temporality is imposed on the plot of *Sixty*, in which the narrator describes his past with memories, the present with grief and dreads a future replete with possibilities including death. He hears "the sound of time leaking out steadily" (228) as the narrator desperately strives to freeze and capture time, "drawing it, writing it, describing it" (229), however much in vain. Once he realizes turning sixty means he has "less time" (204) to live, he decides to defeat it by "creating something to show for [his] life … something to show for [his] existence on the planet, to pay the gods of regret" (15). His obsession with death drives him to weave "the memories and create the stories that make [him] who [he is], narratively" (243), something with which he can immortalize his presence in this world. This type of narration, in which excessive concern with temporality is exhibited, is called "tales about time" or "Zeitroman" in Ricoeur's words (*Time and Narrative II*, 101), which are distinct from "tales of time" (*Time and Narrative II*, 101). He also claims that a great number of tales belong to the former category. In this corpus, on the contrary, some of the memoirs belong to the first category in which the memoirists attempt to share their experiences of temporality with the reader. Unlike Barthes' claim that "time sequences narrative but does not move through it" (T. Martin 3), thanatography allows a fluidity of time which ultimately turns out to be a narrative *about* time. In Zeitroman, "the very experience of time is at stake" (*Time and Narrative II*, 101), which is what the memoirists struggle with. However, through narration, the memoirists learn that "the agreement with [time] is everything" (*Time and Narrative II*, 106). In *Sixty*, the narrator does not mourn anyone's death, except occasional remembrance of his deceased father and mostly the evanescent nature of time. *Sixty* is not only a tale of time, as Brown paints a detailed picture of his sixty-first year, but also a tale about time; “it’s a diary about time and the things that make it stop” (21), he writes. Being bound to the passage of time, the narrator’s physical beauty, memory, friends, family, and life are fading away, dying and decaying. Yet through oscillations in narrative time, the narrator struggles to preserve them: “And in the place of those lost accomplishments, there’s just the clock ticking on the wall, making its sound, which, as Tennessee Williams said, is loss, loss, loss … yet it reminds me that I am not yet all the way to the end … not yet, not yet, not yet which is another sound the clock makes” (6-9).

The tripartite structure of temporality also resonates in Akler’s book through the narrator’s use of the familiar techniques of flashback and flash-forward. The central theme of time measurement, in Akler’s memoir, is the father’s death, which divides the plot of the story into flashbacks before the father’s sickness, the narrative’s present, that is, the father’s death, and flash-forward techniques, that is, when the narrator expresses his feelings after having experienced his father’s death. In this manner, the writer moves from one event to another and creates a pastiche in which his memories, summaries of neurological articles, and philosophical observations are compiled in an attempt to identify himself with the father. The narrator thus achieves a new sense of self by constantly identifying with him; “my teenaged eyes captured by the same black-and-white images that had captured his teenaged eyes forty years earlier” (22); “I thought of how he spent his hours, searching for the right word. I smiled: just like me” (94). Through the plot development, that is, the narrative of his father’s hospitalization which is primarily recounted in simple past, the writer puts a halt to narrating the events and, in the form of short chapters, shares his readings of scientific findings about consciousness and awareness narrated in simple present. These chapters not only create a distance from the main subject of narration, that is, the death of Saul, the father, but they also indicate the awareness of the writer’s writing process and shed light on his perception of the events as they unfold; "[C]onsciousness, Graziano says, is the story our brain tells us. This is the story I want to tell about consciousness" (66). These pauses disturb the linearity of the narrative, yet they let the narrator assert himself and his understanding of the writing process; "I am quite conscious of my mimetic act, of one mind that attempts to capture another mind on paper" (67).

In chapter 62, that is, towards the end of *Men of Action* (2015), the narrator foreshadows the death of his father by writing that his father "showed enough cognitive function that we hoped his improvement would continue" (91). By using the past tense and the verb "hope," the writer implies the inevitability of losing his father by the end of the memoir. In this memoir, there is the imposition of a linear plot on the events. Death, as an experience, can resist description, and the language of death, as Akler puts it, "resists easy narrative … A futile attempt to adduce experience" (117). Articulating death in words seems "no more or less difficult than fiction," (103) Akler writes. He believes that writing about death "goes beyond diction" (103). Matthews also shares the same thought as she writes "I turn to words for solace, but there are no words sufficient for this aching void… And yet everyone tries. When a loved one dies, people bring the death books, and there are a great many" (21). By creating a meaningful story out of death, which resists human understanding and interpretation, and through reshaping the experience of time by imposing a personalized narrative structure including flashbacks, self-displacement in the future, and a newly shaped experience of time, the character-bound-narrator creates and polishes a new self whose understanding might be greater than the one that started the memoir.

Apostolides' memoir does not impose a linear timeline on the plot: "'stay here' you said … this is when we're tossed from youth: when we know, with our instinct- our animal bodies- that time is not an ever-forward. 'Stay here'" you said," (37) the narrator writes, describing her youth. Apostolides narrates events in a haphazard way, repeats them, and at times, demands that the reader create a coherent story: abortion, pregnancy, and flashback to the first time the narrator met the father of Blythe, the fetus, analepsis to another tragic event, which is her nephew's death in the army before her child's abortion, her struggles, her trips which had taken place before she met Blythe's father, getting back to him, and forgiveness. But moving beyond forgiveness and confession, Apostolides reminds the reader and herself that she is aware of her actions and is trying to "bear them" (122). For her, writing a memoir is the process of confession and atonement, and the narration becomes a chance to come to terms with a decision already made. Almost at the end of the memoir, in chapter 31, Apostolides questions the very nature of abortion: "What's cut is the tissue- material, body- potential for life … It's hubris to think we could nullify that; it's like saying that humans could kill the earth" (122). Reassuring the reader that she does not "seek forgiveness," she writes "I seek, instead, to bear the burden of my awareness" (122).

Although the narrator does not seek forgiveness, she changes its definition, transforming forgiveness into creation and finding comfort in writing: "This language, creating: this molten core where life becomes, inside my body […] All that remains when we die is a poem […] My body, in time, will become this potency: one small poem. That's all I get" (125-139). Writing and creation as means of solace are not specific to Apostolides but is a characteristic of writers of different eras; a technique that in Apostolides' terms "could offer redemption" (45). While abortion is the literal subject of Apostolides' memoir, its figurative resonances extend to the premature ending of a relationship with Blythe's father: "you had three fetuses. None was born … in the end, the marriage couldn't survive the death" (32). Fragmented sentences are copious throughout the book's first chapters, suggesting the incapacity of language to express grief: "I drank the brew. A spot of tea, a spot of blood. That's how it should've: quite benign. She would've been a heavy flow, an extra pad, another couple days' annoyance. Not a child. It's the abortion- the surgical abortion- that made her a child" (56). At one point, Apostolides brings up the "elusiveness" of death—the difficulty of grasping it, of getting over the death of her child—and writes, "dis-appearance- as a concept- is elusive […] gone-ness is hard for the mind to conceive" (77). Throughout the book, the reader notices Apostolides' stream of consciousness technique through italics; "'*Murderer!'* […] *You killed your baby'"* (27) and in an introspective moment, she repeats "I murdered a fetus" (27) three times. Yet it is only close to the end of the book that she confesses to it to another person: "I murdered a fetus" (110).

Another example of the manipulation of the temporality of the plot is manifested through the nonlinear plot in Poirier's memoir, in which the narrator is "looking for [her deceased daughter]" (8) whom she has had to let go due to drug addiction. For a shocking effect, created by a non-linear plot and a pre-mature denouement, Poirier begins the memoir by informing the reader that "her daughter was strangled" (7) at the hands of a client in her apartment. Throughout the pages to come, the narrator, denying her daughter's early death, is in search of her: "You will return tonight, or tomorrow, I am waiting … oh! My living child" (13). Her denial is further revealed to the reader when she does not accept to go to the morgue to identify the body. The only barrier between the narrators of *Let Me Go* (2000) and *After Daniel* (1999) and the reality of death is a door that they adamantly refuse to open. In Poirier's sombre poetic mourning, replete with denial, anger, and acceptance, guilt and forgiveness have no place; neither does the narrator seek forgiveness for not attending to her daughter's needs, nor does she deem to forgive the killer: "[the killer] whom I shall never forgive; the unforgivable, the man who took your life"

(12); yet again, it is only on the last page of the memoir that she confesses, through the therapeutic process of writing, that she writes "I let go, I let you go mon amour" (56).

One technique in producing a nonlinear plot prevalent in thanatography is "analeptic beginning" (Genette 1986, 66). Unraveling the denouement of the plot at the beginning of narration- that is analeptic beginning- is a salient characteristic of thanatography for its denouement, being the death of a person, is revealed to the reader at the beginning of the plot. This technique is employed in the memoirs of Apostolides, Farr, and Poirier. Being comprised of a premature denouement and an analeptic beginning, the plot of thanatography discards the element of suspense and premonitions death, which is already foreshadowed by "sequential ordering" (Bal 67), that is, the order of narrated events in case of a chronological plot. Sometimes, the choice of verbs predetermines the denouement of a plot. The first sentence of *Deep Salt Water*- "Blythe was a fish" (11)- containing metaphorical language and a verb in the past tense informs the reader of the child's death. Apostolides and Manley narrate the story by reversing the plotline. Apostolides narrates her story with a self-accusatory tone as the narrator leads the reader through a journey in which she regrets, laments, breaks up a relationship, gets back to the child's father, and forgives herself in the end. *Deep Salt Water*'s narration focuses on the possible life of a child named Blythe, through using conditional language after the abortion. The narrator focuses on the development and death of the fetus as well as her feelings toward it. By posing the ethical question of whether abortion was the right decision for her, Apostolides takes the reader through a journey of self-affliction, pondering, and absolution. Although in the first pages of the book she writes, "I've never come to terms for this [abortion]. Not yet. You'll see" (20), twenty pages later, the narrator confesses that she "still seek[s] forgiveness" (44), and she realizes that, maybe, in order to forgive, she "need[s] to forget" (44). The imposition of a plot on the events turns them into a story in which the ocean and its creatures, in an idiosyncratic language, are compared to the mother and the prematurely aborted child, who from the very first page is compared to a fish. The narrator “concocts an array of stories” (77) through which she is seeking after meaning, exoneration, and self-explanation and is cognizant of the “redemption a story can offer” (45).

In thanatography, an analeptic beginning is mostly marked by a reference to the date of the event: “October 18th, 1992, five-twenty a.m. The end of the world. A Sunday morning” (Poirier 7); “1993. A warm evening, late in spring” (Farr, “Prologue”); “February 25, 2012. Your death was sudden. Shocking. Just seventeen days in which we thought you would recover and then eight days in palliative care” (Matthews 19); “Blythe was a fish in my body. Her eyes are open in the murk. My water broke and the whole sea spilled” (Apostolides 11). Lastly, although the narrator does not recount his wife’s passing away until two-thirds of the story is narrated, its analeptic beginning is the very title of the book, *How Linda Died.* Farr’s book title, *After Daniel,* also marks a reference point through which the narrator writes about her difficulty with adjusting and adapting. Although the title excludes “Daniel” from the story, it is comprised of numerous flashbacks with him at the center of them. The subject of thanatography is self-revelatory. The narrative is mostly written in the simple past tense, which is an analeptic narrative aiming to inform the reader of the raison d’être of the narrative they are about to read. Anachrony, or in Genette’s words “[the comparison] of the order in which events or temporal sections are arranged with the order of succession these same events or temporal segments have in the story” (1986, 35) is the basis of the narrative of auto/thanatography, which is almost always narrated in simple past. Anachrony requires the narrator to go back in time and remember the story, which ends in somebody's demise; it is also an attempt at preventing the inevitable forgetfulness of the focal subject, that is, death.

Death and its experience resist any mimetic description, resulting in the narrators' confessed inability to articulate and convey what they emotionally bear. Memoirists collectively lament the inability of language to express grief and lack, an emotion that defines itself outside the circle of language. Grief can be appeased through writing, though it cannot be completely understood and dealt with and may haunt the narrator long after the memoir is done. Matthews confesses "there are no words sufficient for this aching void" (Matthews 20) and Farr writes that "words failed him [Daniel]" (Farr, "Danie, We Hardly Knew You"), in delineating Daniel's difficulty, despite being a writer, with expressing his depression through words. Language cannot be representative of the various experiences and emotions humans have and is but a tool used by narrators to represent and communicate their reality with the audience. To them, it is a weapon to justify their feelings and assert their being in the conundrum. In order to optimally use this tool of communication, narrators bend the essential characteristics of language. One employed technique is oxymoronic sentences, that is, a sentence riddled with paradoxical meaning. The narrator of *Minerva's Owl* (2017), for instance, strives to comfort herself through this technique in order to overcome the barrier of language once it comes to depicting grief. She writes: "[Grief] is surprisingly light, surprisingly heavy … I can't go on. I'll go on" (25). Her sentences overcome the barriers that syntax imposes on perception and her "speech-situation," as Harald Weinrich calls it (54), is based against the mimetic nature of syntax in relation to temporality. The "mimetic relation between the verb tenses and lived time" according to Ricoeur, is disturbed (*Time and Narrative II* 64). In speech-situation, which relates the use of verb tenses to the communication taking place between people rather than the mimetic nature of language in regard to temporality, past and imperfect tenses are considered as modes of un-involvement. This distances the narrator from the narrated events and the narrated subject. The "narrated world," in Ricoeur's words, becomes "foreign to the immediate and directly preoccupying surroundings of the speaker and listener" (*Time and Narrative II* 68-69). Death, as seen mostly narrated in the past tense, conveys the distance the narrator takes, which ultimately ends in alienation from the subject of death. Narration in the past tense, Ricoeur writes, "transpose[s] [events] to the level of fiction" (*Time and Narrative II*, 75) making the events seem unreal while simultaneously, simple past accompanies remembrance, which is "limited to a hopeless struggle to combat the ever-increasing gap that generates forgetfulness" (*Time and Narrative II* 140). Identifying the preterit, Ricoeur's zero-past in narration, combined with a chronological order of events, reveals the narrators' stance and their choice of displacing themselves through the narration. Sometimes, the zero point is the title of the memoir; for example, Davey's *How Linda Died* prepares the audience for the story of Linda's life and her death; another example is Farr's memoir; *After Daniel* indicates the writer's intention in delineating the lived reality after the death of someone she knew intimately.

Another example of paradoxical sentences is found in Meneghetti's memoir, in which she writes "I have already heard the silence he [the father] is hearing" (41). She is writing about the time when the paramedics came to move her mother's body to the morgue, a traumatic experience in which the narrator could only convey her feelings through paradox. At the moment of seeing her mother's body being carried to the morgue, the narrator realizes that her mother is no longer present; that is, the narrator learns that what is being carried out is not an individual but a corpse: "They lift Mom's corpse- for that's what it is now, isn't it? – onto the board" (41). Heart-broken and guilt-ridden, she writes "[H]ow can the leaves look yellow when I smell the fresh fragrance of bright June green? What's wrong with me?" (41). This understanding is preceding her observation of a passing car outside her home where the presence of her mother is no longer felt: "The passenger seat is empty" (42). In this memoir, the narrator reveals narratives of her sexual experiences, passion for food, love for her family, and grief for the deceased mother which are expressed through the Proustian technique of remembrance of things past - that is an everyday object, an action or a scent flooding the senses and prodding memory; for example, "a little stainless steel pot" (89), that evokes the mother in her kitchen, the famous "*passeggiata* and how close we all were before my mother died" (98), "the flowers" (115) that her mother loved, which made her a connoisseur unbeknownst to her, "that first Christmas I spent with my two loves" (129), and many other phenomena helping the narrator "weave [her] narrative web and become ensnared" (165).

Another technique to overcome the inability of language to express grief is through incomplete sentences. In Meneghetti's memoir, when the mother dies of cancer, the narrator expresses her grief in truncated and clipped sentences: "One eye open. Three in the morning. Father's Day … Now I know the truth about death. A very quiet moment, very natural, so subtle you can miss it" (39). Clipped sentences, according to Barthes, are a way of expressing grief, and, in his terminology, distortion refers to sentences, or verbs, that lack subjects. Meneghetti uses them abundantly in her process of mourning. Farr does as well, as when upon seeing Daniel's note taped on his bedroom door advising the narrator to stay out and call the police, the narrator of *After Daniel* writes: "Locked. Another surge through my heart" ("A Closed Door"). The first fragment contains solely a verb, and the second part lacks a verb. Reality seems paradoxical at the moment of confrontation with death and is best conveyed to others through this type of distortion. Fragmentation usually manifests itself in the description of the time of death too: “October 18th, 1992, five-twenty a.m. The end of the world. A Sunday Morning” (Poirier 7), or “February 25, 2012. Your death was sudden. Shocking” (Matthews 19). These examples manifest the narrators’ effort at capturing the very essence of death and mortality. Whether they fail or deliver, they depict the maximum capacity of language at painting their reality or its incapacity at capturing death.

Another issue that emerges from some of the memoirs, and which has not yet been addressed is the dominant attitude of society towards elderly people and the ways in which they narrativize that experience, whether conforming to the prevalent social narratives of aging or resisting them. The narrator’s experiences in interacting with the society, as studied later in this section, entail what Robert Butler calls, “Ageism” (243) in “Age-Ism: Another Form of Bigotry” (1969). According to Butler, “ageism describes the subjective experience implied in the popular notion of the generation gap” (243). The reverberations of Butler’s “popular notion” are found in the memoirs of aging in this thesis. Moreover, the attitude towards aging, being entrenched in the psyche of the population, not only is perpetuated by the society, but it is also reinforced by the elderly people. One example of a memoir of aging and the reinforcement of the notion of aging is Brown’s book, the full title of which is *Sixty: The Beginning of the End or the End of the Beginning?* (2015), reveals the concerns of the memoirist. Brown’s narration, choice of genre, chosen addressee, and content reveal the attitude of the writer toward his aging self and that of society toward elderly people in general. In order to place Brown’s memoir in the context of the literature of senescence, the “master narrative of aging” (de Medeiros) must first be explained and contextualized. According to Kate de Medeiros (2016), the master narrative of aging finds its form in the dominant literary genre of autobiography, used by elderly people to express their concerns and difficulties; “[T]he traditional memoir or autobiographical format is one that is commonly used with older adults" (67). Medeiros claims that in order to produce a counter-narrative,[45] "different literary forms" (67) must be employed. I will begin with the adopted genre and content of the memoir. In *Sixty*, the writer employs "the commonly used" genre of memoir to write about senescence. Regarding the contents of master narratives, Medeiros, through studying the narrative of aging, proposes three common features: "Narrative of decline […] metaphor of journey [and] loneliness" (66). Brown's memoir, interestingly, conforms to these narratives and at times, as will be shown later in this section, presents a few examples of counter-narratives. For example, regarding the narrative of decline, Brown complains about his physical and mental weakness; "[B]ecause I can't walk, I can't hike. Rebecca, a physiotherapist in Banff, tells me that I can ride a bike, but I can't walk up Tunnel Mountain, my usual daily constitutional" (148). He continues, "[T]rudging up the stairs to the Banff Centre from downtown, gasping for breath. But: there's a twenty-year-old, also gasping! Fuck him! Then some fifty-year-old runs past me, while talking to a pal. Fuck me" (151). The envying gaze towards the youth is another important criterion with which the narrator defines himself at his age. The narrator perceives the "arithmetical relation to time and aging" (127), as DeFalco puts it in *Uncanny Subjects* (2010), in the presence of another person; this movement from "selfhood" towards "self-perception" (2010) marks a pivotal moment in self-recognition. Brown continues writing, "[Y]es, I have a doctor in Banff, as well as the physiotherapist. I have been coming for five summers, and I hike a lot, and I need a doctor, okay?" (157). The addition of the word 'okay' to his sentence can be for humorous ends, however, rather than accepting physical decline as a biological inevitability, the narrator deems self-explanation to an implied audience necessary. Moreover, the narrator, more cognizant and scared of the decline in his mental ability, writes "I should count the number of times I forget things in a day, but of course I am afraid to do that" (41); "I just typed April 8,

1914. I am convinced it's early-onset dementia, brought on by a string of prepubertal concussions, but mistyping the date is nothing, a mere ripple of forgetfulness across the ever more watery surface of my brain" (68). Interestingly, he undermines his forgetfulness by juxtaposing it to the narrative of his aging body: "This morning, confronting my sagging dog of a face in the mirror, I reached for a tube of hair gel, in an effort to tame the few disobedient sprouts I have left" (68). The narrative of senescence can either be a response to the master narrative of aging or a counter narrative to its inevitability; however, simultaneity and multiplicity of narratives and counter-narratives, as in the case of Brown's memoir, is also possible. Brown's memoir not only lacks enough examples of counter-narratives, but is also, as the numerous previous examples show, fraught with the narrative of decline. Paradoxically, the narrator aligns aging with loss of physical and mental ability in the context of a work of art he produces at the age of sixty-one, something that must be valued and revered, yet is ignored.[46]

Another dominant narrative in memoirs of elderly people is "the metaphor of journey" (De Medeiros 67). Also known as life review reminiscence, personal writing is a "self-evaluative form of reminiscence with intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions" (81).[47] In Brown's memoir, this feature resonates in the preface of the book: "In 2004, when I turned fifty, I mentioned to a friend that I thought there was a book in the subject: that reaching what another pal optimistically called "the halfway point" entailed not just changes in the way I lived but changes in the way I looked at my life" (1). The employment of simple past tense indicates the end of an event, which Brown uses when writing about the raison-d'être of his memoir. He also employs the word "optimistically," which corroborates my earlier claim regarding the narrator's view of life the quality of which is deteriorating. In the last pages of the memoir, Brown, for the second time, uses the words "journeys and events" (311) to describe his life. Despite these examples, the narrator offers some instances of counter-narrative with an emphasis on "keeping trying" (4). Brown's counter-narrative is further marked by Gwendolyn MacEwen's poem, titled "Late Song," appearing on the first pages of the book. "Late Song" is a counter-narrative of senescence that rejects the idea of ending: "But it is never over/ Nothing ends until we want it to./ Look, in shattered midnights,/ On black ice, under silver trees,/ We are still dancing, dancing" (*n.pag.*).

Another sign of counter-narrative is that the narrator is cognizant of the dominant attitude of society towards elderly people; he writes, "[E]veryone over sixty feels the public prejudice against them, feels vaguely compelled to be sedate and proper, but everyone wants to smash the prejudice as well" (50); he continues, "over the age of sixty. You're not supposed to have any desire beyond the age of sixty. You are supposed to be an insensate stone. Or, at best, cuddly, grandfatherly and cute" (76). Although the narrator's claims do not remedy the situation, they raise awareness about the dominant mentality towards this group, which dictates that over a certain age, certain social roles, such as being a grandparent, are solely acceptable, and that the individual should consider their lives over; that is, instead of focusing on the future, elderly people should contemplate their past successes and failures in a narrative of journey. Brown, however, resists this type of narration, and he critiques society's behaviour towards elderly people. "I think that's good for my sixty-year-old brain. The present beats the future" (111), as he singles himself out from the collective of sexagenarians. The narrator, aware of his nonconforming outlook continues "[B]ut of course I would say that, wouldn't I?" (111). The juxtaposition of these sentences indicates his hesitation toward conformity and the rejection of the dominant position.

Another feature of narrative of senescence put forth by Medeiros is loneliness, which the narrator of *Sixty* (2015) does not experience. However, he is very much aware of this dominant social discourse: "[G]etting older is a process of getting lonelier and lonelier until, at the end, you are completely solitary, and then you are officially dead" (132). The narrator, although not feeling lonely, becomes a mouthpiece for those who do: "[A friend] gave me hope that my life as an older person did not have to be a long desert of loneliness and pain and rejection, that trying was all I could reasonably do, provided I had a cause, a passion, a focus. That was all I needed, something to become obsessed about" (96-97).

Another important element in the narrative of elderly people is the role and importance of the audience. If according to Atwood, "[E]very recorded story implies a future reader" (*Survival* 2), the audience of memoirs determines the contents, reception, and rejection of the work of art. The audience of personal writings can be the narrator, an explicit addressee, or society in general. In Brown's memoir, the addressee, through adopting a self-reflective role, is both the narrator and the representative of society: "just like that, standing there in the darkened kitchen at sixty, having been that sort of person—the kind who thought he was twenty-one when he was forty—strikes me as a terrible error. O you fool, I think, you did not realize upon what quiet foot The End approacheth" (5-6). Besides, aligning his sixty-first birthday with "the end," he criticizes his naiveté. Admonishing himself for not being more present recurs throughout the memoir until he writes "[I]t's hard to take it easy. It feels like a concession to death. When I am making my way along King Street these days to buy a takeout lunch at Fresh and Wild […] I notice how deliberate my pace has become, how measured, as if I am trying to pace out the time left" (84). The narrator, in an act of resistance to fleeting time, warns himself to become more observant and perceptive of the time passing by. Self-chastisement is resonated in other parts of the book (62, 167), which can be embedded in the master narrative of aging. Self-critique marks the awareness of the narrator for conforming to the master narratives of senescence and through observation and perception, the narrator deems it his responsibility to resist the narratives of loneliness and the metaphors of journey. As mentioned earlier, the narrator adopts a “reflective role” (Medeiros 69) that comes with aging; as the body changes and mental acuities and physical abilities decline, the subject rethinks the social discourses according to which their previous identity, at the time of youth, was defined. This is the aftermath and consequence of the narrator defining himself by his chronical age. Rather than redefining aging adapted to one’s attitude and outlook, he conforms to the dominant social narratives of senescence.

The narrator observes the way people treat the youth and elderly people; based on the similarity in the nature of the treatment he and elderly people receive, the narrator acquiesces to the fact that he belongs to the sexagenarian community. He compares his physique with his earlier photos, questions his physical ability, sexual prowess, mental capacity, and the nature of care he receives from his family and community. Care and its implications will be studied in detail in the next chapter.

It is important to note that Brown’s memoir is the only example of a memoir of aging in this category and that it can not be generalized to all memoirs of aging. These results may be found in other memoirs of aging; they also reveal what is not stated and therefore absent from this type of literature. The missing narrative from the corpus of the memoirs of senescence is female narratives. Perhaps the description of sagging and wrinkled skin would not be as tolerable as when it is written by male writers. The absence of female narrative of senescence indicates what Emma Halliwell and Helga Dittmar (2003) call the “double standard of aging” (675). In their study, most women claim that “aging has a negative impact on their appearance [and that they feel] societal pressures concerning their appearance" (681); this can be one factor, among many,[48] that female narrative of senescence is missing from the corpus of personal writing.

4. Conclusion

All memoirs share the therapeutic quality of writing through which the narrators come to terms with their loss and accept fate. Imposing a plot on the stories is a way of bestowing meaning and significance on the events; that is, meaning could be lost if there were no form imposed on the events. All the memoirs follow the classic linear narrative structure. There is a quality in every single part of the plot, that is sharing, introducing, hoping- a rising action, a climax or an anti-climax, falling action, and a denouement. However, in this type of literature, it is the denouement that carries the most emotionally effective resolution: coming to terms with mortality or, at least, accepting someone's death. Writing softens the edges of mourning, but it never takes the grief away; in Matthews' words the mourners "can get above the grief, but [they] can never get beyond the mourning. It goes on forever" (104). The memoirists are "always already ahead of [themselves] through care," which is Heideggerian term for thinking about one's death (181). Once the plot is shaped with temporality as its bedrock, auto/thanatography becomes inevitably "time embodied" (Ricoeur *Time and Narrative II,* 151), which is indicative of narrators manipulating the stories in ways that lead to their coming to terms with death. Narratives of death make the experience of time conspicuous. The narrators' experiment with time, once embedded in the narrative, in Mikhail Bakhtin's words "thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible" (Martin 2); time becomes the object of the experiment in narration which, according to Bal (1997), is "the most important topic presented [in memoirs]" (178). This experiment manifests itself in the plot through different techniques such as prolepsis, analepsis including retroversion, flashback, remembrance and memory, paralepsis, elision, and finally, repetition. Choosing to narrate the events in chronological order or rearranging them in a desired sequence "presents an existential structure" (175)[49] through which the agent temporalizes his/her being; in other words, there is a subject-object relationship which, Ricoeur writes, "proceeds the exigency of finding what makes the object's unity of meaning and of basing this unity in a constituting subjectivity" (1980, 88).

If Genette deems the comparison of "narrated time" and the "time of narrative" necessary, then it can be deduced that the narrators almost always displace themselves, remember, and recount an event that happened prior to the time of narration. The nature of auto/thanatography necessitates a narrator who has experienced the death of a loved one, for the story of the narrator transfigures into a comprehensible structure in which death is recognized. In other words, the narrator places himself or herself in the past and builds the narration toward a predictable future. In this sense, by placing themselves in the past, the narrators create a being-towards-death in hope of the latter's acceptance and the hope of closure. Narrative, according to Flundernik,[50] allows the narrator to experience the totality of the narration objectively for the first time. The primary experience, its development, and result offer a unified experience to the narrator who, while narrating, grants being represented and reconstructed by narration. As Flundernik observes, "such a model of the narrational recuperation of past experience affords a number of interesting perspectives on the status of experiential consciousness in narrative fiction and, more specifically, on the use of tenses and deictics in the narrative text" (1993, 53).

Narratives, including this thesis, most importantly are products of their social and historical contexts. Margaret Somers (1994) quotes Genette regarding historical and social elements enabling and producing a text: “written narrative is to some extent constitutional and instrumental” (634). In this manner, texts are useful means to unravel the mechanisms at work in producing a literary work of art. After being applied to texts, this system of thought, besides its inclination towards structuring elements of narration, will reveal the way a narrative is constructed and received, but also the way in which it constructs the narrator’s self-perception.

In some memoirs, such as Brown’s, the passage of time is perceived through bodily changes; in other words, temporality makes corporeal decay salient. Aging, the concern of many memoirists in the selected literary corpus, brings along a sense of mortality, and its resonance is abundant in the memoirs. Besides temporality, corporeality, and embodiment play important roles in defining a sense of self. Therefore, in the next chapter, the relationship between temporality and undesirable corporeal changes, that is the abject, is discussed.

CHAPTER II:

The Abject Body in Selected Canadian Auto/Thanatography

1. Introduction

This chapter will trace the representation of the abject in relation to mortality in selected Canadian thanatography. Prior to any close reading of the corpus through the lens of the abject, it will be necessary to define embodiment and corporeality and the notion of abjection. A brief history of corporeality and the perception and understanding of the body as a defining characteristic of selfhood and individuality will be summarized. Analysis of thanatography through the theory of the abject will allow us to understand the way we denounce death and show aversion to its bodily implication. The signified of the abject is best represented, in Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1982), in "none but literature" (5), suggesting that studying literature further clarifies the notion and the representation of the abject. Therefore, this chapter will examine human fear and abhorrence of death in thanatography as yet another narrative strategy that aims at representing the unrepresentable. Nevertheless, Kristeva's skepticism toward the incapacity of the symbolic in rendering the abject contradicts her faith in literature's potency, characterized fundamentally by the symbolic, to reify "the unsymbolizable" (Kristeva 1982, 23). Kristeva believes in the power of narrative to reveal "our struggle with death" (*Powers of Horror* 24); in other words, since it is "spoken fear," it is "subsequent to language," therefore narrative becomes a receptacle for human apprehension of mortality; this does not imply that fear necessarily exists once language is acquired, but that the latter enables the already-ingrained fear to be concretized; Kristeva finds that "verbalization has always been confronted with the 'ab-ject' that the phobic object is" (*Powers of Horror* 41). Therefore, it is in narration that fear unfolds and lends itself to observation. The objective of this study, and more specifically this chapter, is to uncover the signs of the fear of death within the corpus, which can be expressed through the symbolic, whether stated or implied.

Corporeality and embodiment are often-used body-related terminology. The subtle distinction between these terms suggests the crucial role the body plays in creating a sense of self. Corporeality refers to the physical materiality of the body, also referred to, by Higgs and Gilleard, as "corporeal betrayal" (8):[51] it changes through time, which makes uncontrollability its prominent quality. This "social actant," (5)[52] in Donna Haraway's words, ages through time- its skin sags, its vision blurs, and it becomes listless; in Brown's words "aging is the readiest and most available manifestation of the decline, and of our own resistance to it, and thus the easiest thing to blame. So, we focus on the decline" (209). Embodiment, on the other hand, is "epigenetic," which signifies that "the body [is] a vehicle of social agency" (Higgs and Gilleard 2018, 5-6). It indicates the role of society in relation to the body; in other words, embodiment includes one's relation to one's body, others' bodies, authority, etc. This intricate network of connections produces a social identity known as embodiment or "social agency" (5)[53] in Haraway's words. Embodiment, as a crucial determining aspect of one's identity, sees its epitome in four dimensions as "the disciplined body, the mirroring body, the dominating body, and the communicative body" (Frank 53).[54] This defining attribute, one's image of one's body in relation to oneself and society, is represented through the narrator's father in *Sixty,* a former athlete, who "resigned himself to the fact that he could not beat the decay of his end. I [the narrator] saw his resignation in the sag of his shoulders the moment I walked into his berth in the ER" (201). Corporality and embodiment have mutual influence, shaping each other and allowing redefinition. Not only is the definition of embodiment in flux through "a set of narratives and practices […] including especially those processes framed by a resistance, rejection, or re-imagination of traditional/modern ideas of age and aging" (Higgs and Gilleard 2018, 7), but also the definition of embodiment affects narratives of aging, which ultimately leads to certain new habits intended to keep the flesh in better health.

The importance of the body as a subject of study, according to Bryan Turner, is a result of four important phenomena: "the growth of consumer culture in the postwar period, the development of postmodern themes in the arts, the feminist movement, and finally what Foucault (1981) has called 'bio-politics'" (18).[55] The impossibility of conceiving an 'I' without the body has turned attention toward the moral, societal, and ethical role the body plays in creating an identity; for example, Brown writes that he "used to disdain plastic surgery as undignified, but [his] views have softened since [he] realized how much the younger world wants to deny the older world any longing or lust or vanity – in other words, since [he] turned sixty" (190). The urge to rejuvenate oneself through plastic surgery not only affects identity but reshapes the narrative of aging. The definition of corporeality has shifted throughout history, and in order to adequately unpack its implicit and explicit representation in thanatography, I will now provide a brief discussion of its conceptual development, one that is in flux throughout history.

Inevitably, any memoir/thanatography traces the meanderings of the body in its various states- youth, adulthood, procreation, relations with self and others, illness, decline, and death. It is therefore important that any study of thanatography unpack what a body is, how it is put into discourse, how it is managed in youth and old age by self and by others, how it is seen by self and others, but in a wider scope, how the body itself is socially constructed and historically situated. Therefore, the way we see our own bodies and the bodies of others is also socioculturally situated. If narratives of memoirs reorder events in order to make sense of a 'story,' they also take into account various conditions of bodily ability and inability.

2. A Brief History of Corporeality

Before discussing the matter of the abject, a brief history of corporeality will be summarized here, from classical philosophical traditions to the Renaissance and the historically Enlightenment-embedded ideas of Descartes, to modern phenomenology and Foucauldian biopolitics. This will foreground the discussion of the abject, which will be implemented in order to understand the way elderly people construct a sense of self when their body image forebodes the impending image of failing corporeality. Finally, the undesired corporeal signification of mortality, the relationship of the body to death, and the treatment of the dead body as the abject will be explored and analyzed in the corpus.

Corporeality was addressed in pre-Socratic philosophy. The Stoics' attitude toward the body is revealed when they write about suicide. Suicide, in their point of view, is not a real loss since, according to them, humans are not the true owners of their bodies; rather than perpetuating corporeal ownership and the care that ensues, Stoics, including Socrates, encourage "an alienation from it"[56] (Hankinson 35), which deprives humans of any rights they could have claimed over their bodies. Socrates, considering the body "an evil" (37),[57] states that the goal of philosophy is "the cultivation of the soul" (36).[58] Stoics' alienation from the body contrasts the perpetuation of bodily care and its responsibility in our society, discussed further in this chapter. Plato, in *Republic*, enumerates the philosopher's responsibilities, excluding bodily pleasures, which are "obstacle[s] to achieve knowledge" (Hankinson 37). Plato's treatment of the body best resonates with Elizabeth Grosz's notion of "somatophobia […] which constitutes the body as a 'danger' to reason" (43).[59] Although Socrates and Plato look down upon corporeality, Aristotle, the Cynics, and the Stoics, rather than belittling corporeal attributes, advised people to tend to their bodies since it is the seat of the soul.

The idea of dualism in Ancient Greek philosophy prior to Christianity has remarkably influenced the constitution of Christian tenets. According to Lynn Baker,[60] Christianity borrowed Platonic dualism, and after refining it, called it the sole distinguishing element between animals and human beings; to them, the essential characteristic of a human being is the possession of a material body and a nonmaterial soul (327-8). In his book *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (2017), Richard Dyer establishes Christianity's simultaneous with and denial of the body as one of the cornerstones in creating the notion of a practiced, regulated, and productive white embodiment. Dyer suggests that the abundant imagery of the suffering, desiring, corrupt, and failing body in the Bible, such as Christ's birth, crucifixion, and death had an ineluctable effect on the notion of corporeality in "European culture and consciousness" (15), which implies "the sensibility of the body" (15). Dyer's suffering body is resonated in the memoirs of illness and senescence in this study, and the corrupt body is represented through the abject and the undesirable bodily changes, the implication of which in defining a sense of self is discussed later in this chapter. Dyer also attests to the paradoxical notion of corporeality vis-à-vis spiritualism, the former manifested in Mary and the latter in Christ; his idea suits the binary opposition embedded in European languages: "incarnation [is] of being, that is in the body and yet not of it" was a drastic shift in people's beliefs about the body; the answers, which once were found in religion, were sought in science.

In the nineteenth century, Edmund Husserl, one of the founding fathers of phenomenology, attempted to explain a phenomenon in accordance with its subject's experience, however, limited. Husserl and his students were often criticized because of their negligence of the role of the body in the perception of one's world.[61] In this regard, phenomenology opposes Cartesian philosophy. Once Husserl targets individual experience, the implication of/for the body is inevitable. Body, to Husserl, does not oppose the mind but is an extension of it, and vice versa, which renders experiencing plausible. An object exists once there is an individual present to perceive it; it is through one's senses, the movements and the positions taken in space that experiencing becomes possible. Phenomenology, the study of experiences, is fundamental to be born in mind as a necessary backdrop upon studying literature, especially personal writings, which primarily deals with expressing and relaying personal experiences.

Rather than an extensive reflection of God's image, the idea of being an independent entity offered opportunities for self-discovery, especially those of and about corporeality in various domains such as "medicine, painting, sculpture …" (Sawday 8).[62] The epitome of the concept of corporeality is found among Renaissance paintings and sculptures which, with minute attention, showed the recognized truth about this accompanying- though long estranged- human possession, the body. In the Renaissance, human anatomy was examined in many books such as Andreas Vesalius's seven volumes titled *De Humani Corporis Fabrica Libri Septem* (1543). The fascination with corporeality is salient in the paintings of Vesalius's *Dissecting a Body* (1543), Raphael Sanzio da Urbino's *La Fornarina* (1518-19) (see figure 1), Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (1484-6) (see figure 2)- to name a few- who were among myriad artists whose art exposes different aspects of corporeality, its beauty, its ugliness and its insides hidden from the naked eye. From Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Deyman* (1656) (see figure 3), which shows two surgeons dissecting a brain, to Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (1601-2) (see figure 4), displaying Thomas' finger in Jesus' body, being nailed to the cross, people's fascination with long-neglected corporeality is resonant; the reassurance, to Saint Thomas, was not plausible, except by feeling the corporeal existence of Jesus with his own hands.

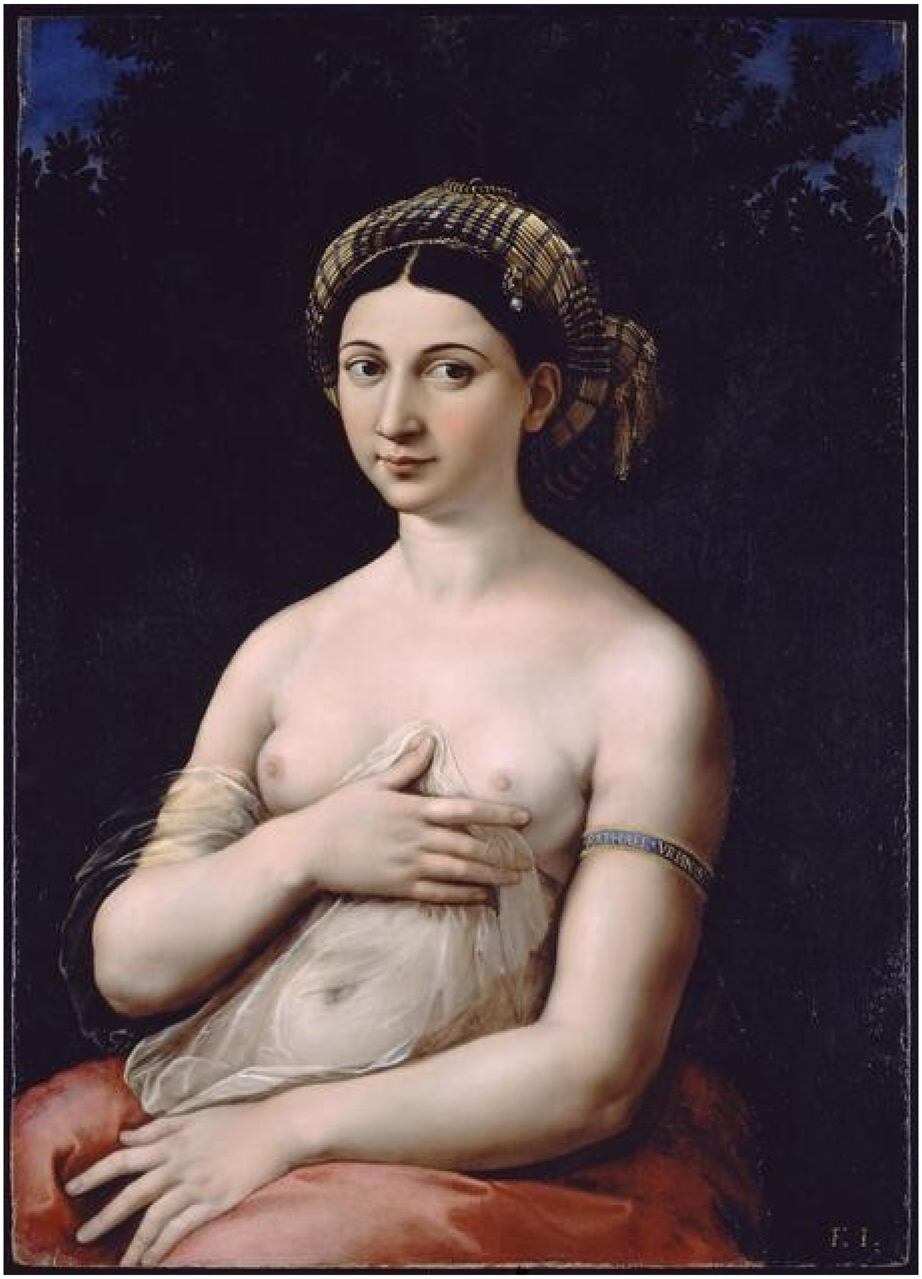


Figure 1, portraying the body of a woman. Sanzio da Urbino, Raffaello. *La fornarina.* 1518-1519, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome.

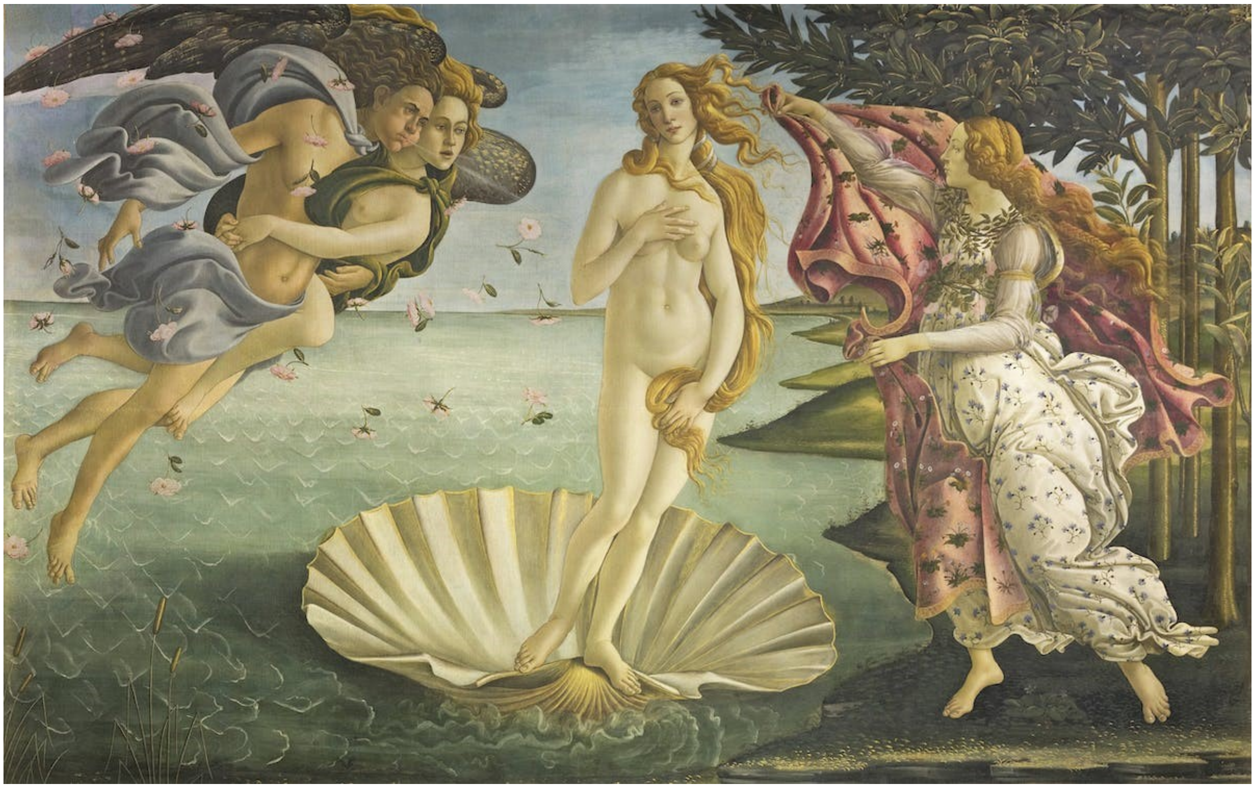


Figure 2, once more the naked bodies of a woman and a man is highlighted in this painting. Botticelli, Sandro, *The Birth of Venus*, 1484–1486. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

Raphael's *La Foramina,* besides implying intimacy with the painting subject, which "defines [his] professional self [and] is essential to the meaning of the work" (132),[63] represents the fascination with the human body and the latter's ideal portrayal[64] during the Renaissance. The purpose of painting the nude, in Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* and Raphael's works, was to "investigate the nature" of the body (49).[65] To paint a body is to acknowledge the importance of corporeality in defining an individual. The fascination is not limited to female nudes; Bernstein claims that the painting of the male nude started "about 1460 onward" (50).

While figures one and two concern the idealization of the body, figures three and four depict Renaissance fascination with dissecting the body, that is, reducing an individual to its parts. This depiction was concurrent with the advancement of the science of medicine, such as William Harvey's blood circulation theories in the sixteenth century. The dissection of the human body into smaller parts was an attempt at understanding how the body works, which would have been impossible without acknowledging its importance in defining human beings. In his book, *The Body Emblazoned* (1996), Jonathan Sadway studies the "Renaissance Anatomy" (54) in the paintings of the era in depth, and shrewdly points to the fluidity of gender once a body is dissected; "once the body has been partitioned […] the very categories 'male' and 'female' become fluid, even interchangeable" (3); this concept is represented in the cover of *What the Mouth Wants* (see figure 5), which portrays Caravaggio's *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* (c.1593); the portrayed boy crosses the boundaries of gender binary opposition. Therefore, besides the depiction of the beauty of the body, the crucial role of the latter in determining identity becomes inconvertible. *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* amazingly portrays the emblem of Christianity, Jesus, embodied, whose resurrection is ascertained by touching his flesh, not his soul. Grosz's notion of somatophobia is manifested in this painting through a novel portrayal of a spiritual figure, that is, Jesus, who transcended corporeal attributions.

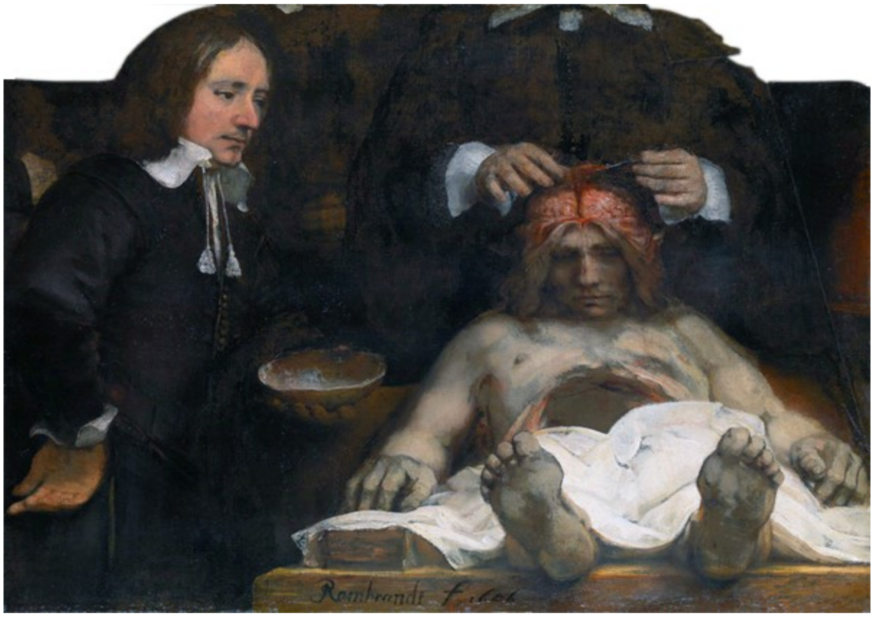

Rembrandt f.

Figure 3, a brain is being dissected. Harmenszoon van Rijn, Rembrandt. *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Deijman,* 1656. Hermitage Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam.

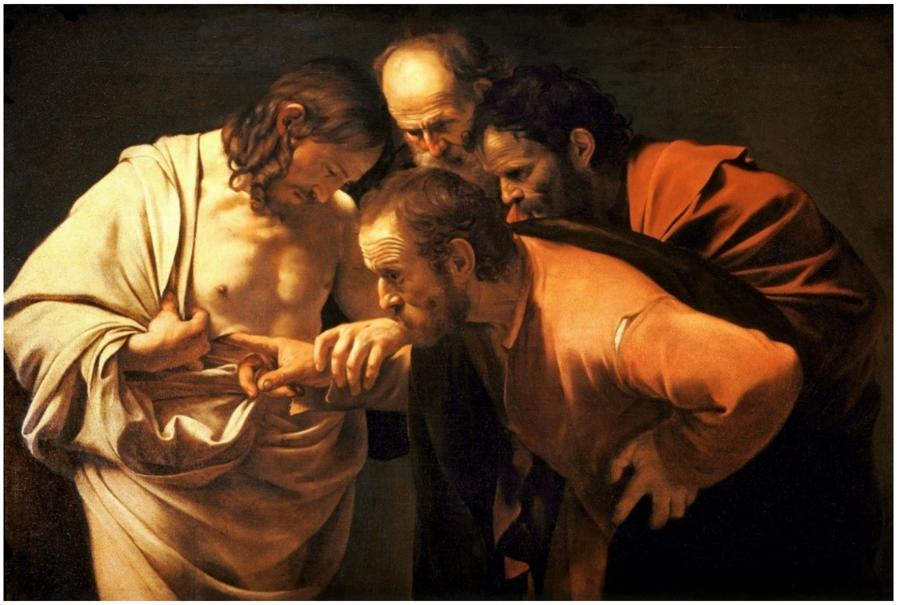


Figure 4, Da Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi*, The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, 1601-2. Sanssouci Building, Postdam.

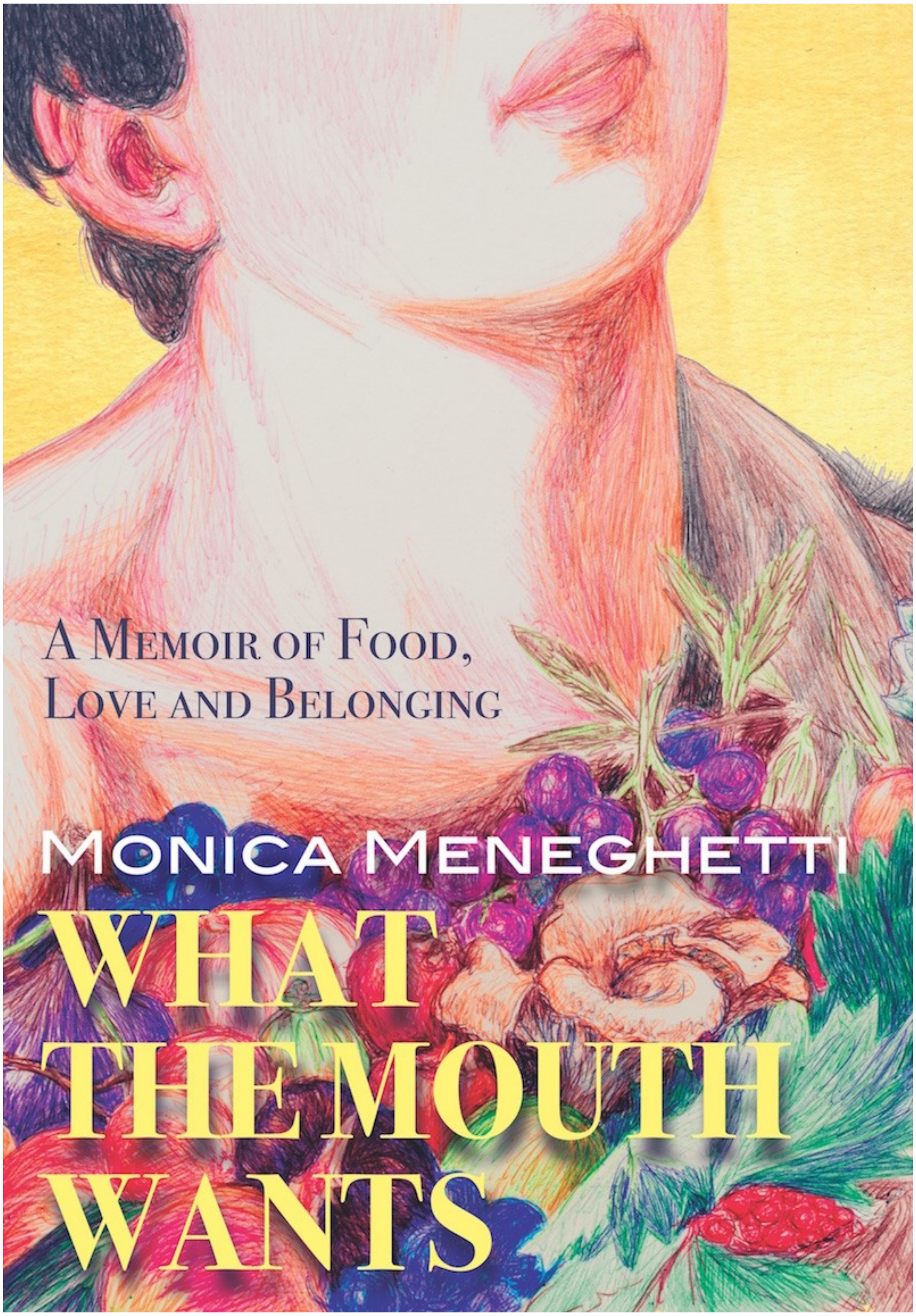

A Memoir of Food,
Love and Belonging
Monica Meneghetti
What
the Mouth
Wants

Figure 5, Da Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi*, Boy with a Basket of Fruit* (1593). 1601-2. Galleria Borghese, Rome. Meneghetti's book cover is different from Caravaggio's original painting.

One example of an interdisciplinary study regarding corporeality and its effects on self-perception, identity, and intersubjective relationships is Foucault's work, which traces the treatment of the body by social laws from the 17th to the 20th century. Foucault claims that the authority's power and the dominance it exerts on the population are of corporeal nature. Yet, at the end of the 19th century, when societies were heading toward industrialization, a phenomenon making efficient human labour indispensable, the nature of power as Foucault envisioned previously, changed. In the newly industrialized society, the individual's role in productivity and the flourishing of the economic system enacted a new form of power in which the healthy body is valued significantly, which is germane to a study of aging and the unproductive body, how it is seen and managed. Productivity, being the main value of an individual in society, makes the senile body, normally less productive than a healthy body; as one's body grows more senile, productivity becomes more and more difficult, which alters one's sense of self. Akler writes about his father whose "days [were] altered irreparably [without work.] He had retained a few clients, small ones with simple accounts that he could handle at home, but he grew too unfocused, too forgetful. Deadline escaped him completely" (21). As a result, Akler writes, his father had to retire and the retirement "redefined him" (19). Unproductivity as a result of senescence makes one a burden, either to the family members or the health care system of a country; Akler writes, "[His father] fell. Once a month for six months, he fell somewhere in the house. In the shower, by the bed, approaching the fridge […] The million prior journeys he had made meant nothing; every step was now uncertain" (29). In a society, where productivity is deemed to be the most important quality, the perpetuation of the self-care trend, feasible through dedicating oneself to a certain lifestyle such as following a balanced diet, regular exercise, and even cosmetic surgery, is encouraged. Most of the trends are not only a product of the capitalist system but also an encouragement of consumerism, which gives the consumers the illusion of exercising subjectivity; in a certain way, capitalism begets capitalism. In Brett Neilson's words in "Ageing, Experience, Biopolitics: Life's Unfolding" (2012), this process is also called a "compression of morbidity [which] attempts to maximize the period of life in which people can care for themselves by reducing experiences of senescence" (48).[66]

In *Space, Time, and Perversion* (1995), Elizabeth Grosz points out that in the history of western philosophy's corpus of knowledge, the role of corporeality is neglected. Therefore, not only is there not enough background to study the body but also the history of western philosophy considers corporeality inferior to the study of the mind. Grosz writes about two types of body manifesting themselves in the history of western philosophy after the 20th century: an "inscriptive body" subjugated to different discourses, and a "lived body" making experiencing possible. An inscriptive body is malleable in and through different discourses in society; Grosz points to the analogy of a body to a machine. As machine parts can be manipulated and changed to serve a particular purpose, body parts, due to particular expectations and various discourses in society, are forced to change and adapt. As a result of deep embeddedness in society and one's relationship with oneself and others, the body is shaped and shapes the psyche. An example of Grosz's "lived body" and "inscriptive body" is seen in Brown's experience and an altered self-perception when among a younger crowd. Brown writes, "[L]ots of older women of my acquaintance get irrationally breathy at the sight of a younger man's unsagging chest, visibly tighten in the presence of young confidence. We seem to need to see elasticity unless we can find our way to not seeing it […] we are wired to describe our declines as declines […] and that is a recipe for unhappiness" (209). Furthermore, the "inscriptive body," also contributes to the formation of the psyche. Bodies and their related characteristics not only construct a sense of self but act as markers of status. Therefore, the body becomes a vessel, which simultaneously is a sign of subjectivity and society; not only does it internalize certain rules and laws, but it also inscribes them on its flesh; in other words, it externalizes itself.

Pierre Bourdieu, in "Belief and the Body" (1990),[67] discovers the relationship between the subject and its setting; Bourdieu rivets the attention to the relationship between the taken-for-granted, tacitly embedded, and obeyed regulations of the habitus in which one is born, as opposed to the arbitrary learning- imitation, and the subject, who, unwillingly and simultaneously, reproduces and naturalizes "practical sense and social necessity" (69). Moreover, Bourdieu argues that the world of objects, our reactions, and relationships to them are mostly established through bodily "movements and displacements which define the space of objects as much as [we] are defined by it" (76). An example can be found in Findley's *The Stone Orchard* (1999).[68] Throughout the first chapter of the book, the narrator attempts at establishing a sense of self in relation to the town he would like to settle in; he writes, "[W]hat we were seeking was not only a home but a base for our new careers […] But since most of our writing could be done at home, what better workplace than an old farm? You can already see we were innocent romantics" (5). Defining himself as an "innocent romantic" in relation to the new environment he desires to inhabit, is a token of the narrator's effort to identify himself through the setting. In "Narrative Habitus" (2016), Jennifer Fleetwood writes "as the habitus shapes 'perception and appreciation of practices,' so the narrative habitus shapes how narratives are heard and received (185). For instance, the protagonist of Toews' *Swing Low* is mostly defined in relation to the town of Steinbach, Manitoba, where he lives. Toews writes that "Dad's life fell into the typical pattern of our small town of Steinbach, Manitoba: an ordered existence of work, church, and family, with the occasional inevitable upsets along the way" (xii). Moreover, the entire narrative of the memoir, revolving around the father's illness and eventual suicide, unfolds as the father struggles to understand the reason for which he is hospitalized while writing: "Bethesda Hospital, Steinbach, Manitoba. I've been trying for weeks to make sense of things. For instance, why am I here? I've filled up several yellow legal pads, right to the margins, with words and sentence fragments, but nothing is clear to me" (1). The identity of the protagonist of *Swing Low,* largely depends on the environment he lives in. It is his experience, specifically his career as a teacher in "an elementary school for forty years" (xii) that shapes his identity.

3. The Abject in Canadian Auto/Thanatography

The idea of pollution, studied by Mary Douglas in her book *Purity and Danger* (1966), generally refers to "bits and pieces […] recognizably out of place, a threat to good order, and so are regarded as objectionable and vigorously brushed away" (197). The most archaic form of pollution is found in "food loathing" (Kristeva 1980, 2) which, tracked down by Douglas to primitive tribes, refers to a set of rules against consuming certain animals (51). The idea of dirt that is "out of place" resonates in Kristeva's extensive study of the abject. The notion of the abject has not been static; Georges Bataille[69] attributed it to the lower classes of society and the way they were treated by the ruling class. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva did not treat abjection as "the bi-product of class oppression but as a necessary part of the human condition, part of the dialect between defilement and purification" (136),[70] or one aspect of corporeality, embodiment, and its inevitable role in constructing identity. Kristeva borrows the word "abject" from the Latin word "abjectus," the past participle of the verb "abicere," which means cast off or rejected. Kristeva's theories are influenced by Freud's model of the psyche in *Totem and Taboo* (1913) as well. Kristeva writes about the reaction towards the unknown and the uncategorized, which threatens to break down the distinction between object and subject. It is a realm where meaning collapses, subsequent to the Lacanian mirror stage[71] and prior to the symbolic order, which comes short of attributing meaning to the phenomena; there is no signifier producing the signified abject; and whatever that does not lend itself to the system of signifiers/signified is considered the abject: "the abject is already a wellspring of sign for a non-object, on the edges of primal repression" (Kristeva 1980, 11). In other words, abjection is "what disturbs identity, system and order" (4); therefore, the established systems are an attempt to create boundaries — physical and symbolic, between abjected material, abjected people, and those who are not considered the abject.

The abject violates rules and borders. Being precedent to the Lacanian 'symbolic order,' where abjection, "a composite of judgement and affect" (Kristeva, 1980, 10), is couched, repulsion takes place; the affect of disgust is "the repulsive gift that the Other, having become alter ego, drops so that "I" does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence" (Kristeva, 1980, 9). It is through affect that "I' becomes heterogenous" Kristeva writes; the affect system, is "the primary motivational system and without its amplification, nothing else matters- and with its amplification, anything else can matter" (14) write Adam Frank and Elizabeth Wilson in *A Silvan Tomkins Handbook* (2020). This 'primary motivational system' is expressed through "pre-signifying articulations" that can be connected to "infantile semiotization" (Kristeva, 1980, 51). That, which resembles oneself and is not oneself and is the epitome of the abject, according to Kristeva, is the corpse (*Powers of Horror* 3), which is neither an object nor a subject; it belongs to the realm of the unknown- what Freud calls "Das Unheimlich" or the uncanny (219).[72] In Grosz's words, "abjection is sickness at one's own body […and to understand] that the body is more than clean and proper" (qtd. in Cavino 17), which is to perceive the body as a subject and an object simultaneously; or in Kristeva's words "the abject has only one quality of the object- that of being opposed to I" (1982, 1). To conceive the body as the abject, a self that is susceptible to decay or to become a cadaver is to fathom mortality. Once Ian Brown saw "his [father's] lifeless state […] there was no longer any difference between what once had been my father and the table he was lying on" (24); in other words, once the subject/object boundary collapses, the uncanny instigates horror and abjection. A corpse is a threat to identity, and the quality- belonging to the 'The Real'- that bestows subjectivity on an individual. Kristeva positions the abject exactly before the Lacanian mirror stage, which marks the moment when the not-yet-fragmented subject has a break with the world and perceives its fractured, fragile figure in relation to an unidentifiable lack. In this sense, literature, especially the one representing death, can explore the way that language is structured over a lack or an unsatisfied desire- a realm that discovers what cannot be articulated and what threatens the ego; in other words, a dichotomous world is created in which there is a distinction between "ego/not ego, inside/outside" (Kristeva 1980, 14). Language, Kristeva proposes, is at once arbitrary and limned with the abject fear of loss (14). What purifies the sense of abjection, Kristeva states - "anchored in the superego" (*Powers of Horror* 15)- is art and religion (*Powers of Horror* 11), the traces of which will be analyzed in the memoirs. The rest of this chapter is subdivided into three sections corresponding to the representation of different forms of abjection; the first examines abjection and abortion in maternal narratives, especially Apostolides and Poirier's memoir; the second focuses on the study of abjection and gerontology in Akler's *Men of Action* and Brown's *Sixty.* The last section examines the abjection of illness and the ill body in Akler's *Men of Action,* Meneghetti's *What the Mouth Wants*, and Suzzane Giroux's *A Chance for Life*.

Abortion and Abjection

The maternal narrative in *Deep Salt Water* indicates a subtle relationship between abortion and abjection. Through a narrative burdened with symbols, metaphors, and metonymy, Apostolides transcends the communicative in language. Where language comes short of establishing a signifier-signified relationship, she writes, "[W]hat is the language to talk of abortions? The language of 'rights' is too limited" (41); the intensity of emotions, this "sudden irruption of affect […] repudiates the common code" (Kristeva, 1980, 53) and builds itself into silence and nothingness to represent the inexpressible. I would like to venture that death adopts the characteristics of the Kantian Ideal or Lacanian Real, which are neither achievable nor apprehensible. The nothingness that death embodies resembles the permanent state of elusiveness that the Ideal or the Real possess. Apostolides limns a narrative where the aborted fetus, now a source of guilt and rue to the maternal figure, metaphorically turns into a fish and a pearl living in the bodily ocean of the mother figure's body: "Blythe was a fish in my body. Her eyes are open in the murk. My water broke and the whole sea spilled" (11). The fetus, which[73] cannot liberate itself from the mother in order to become the me-other, finds itself in an inescapable situation; once freed and thrown into the symbolic order, the infant tries to abject the mother- a feeling that is called the "primal repression" (Kristeva 1980, 12). This process takes place "before the establishment of the conscious/unconscious," before "the establishment of the subject's relation to its object of desire [Lacan's *objet petit a*]" (12). Yet the aborted infant in Apostolides' memoir cannot abject the mother; it becomes the abject itself, that is, an aborted tissue. The maternal ocean, in *Deep Salt Water,* represents the primal repression, the antecedent state to the abjection of abortion. The narrative is a post-abortion attempt to give the deceased fetus a sense of self, but language is nevertheless incapable of establishing a subject-object relationship between the aborted corpse and the world; the narrator is "[u]nable to find the proper words" (41) hence, the absurdity of the fetus's selfhood. Yet, through an imaginative voice, the fetus is forcefully pushed into the symbolic realm without ever going through the mirror stage and the realization of its independent entity: "Mama? … Why is there seaweed on your body?" "Because I am a woman." "Then I'm not a woman." "Not yet," I say. But you will be, my love…" (13). The word 'abortion' is not mentioned in the narrative and is replaced by a simile, which assimilates abortion to "cleaning" and the child to a "mess" (25): "It's the sound that's suction- a motor, a vacuum- it's almost as if I'm cleaning the kitchen. 'You make such a mess,' I chuckle softly" … Now I can tidy up in peace" (25) thinks the mother to herself while lying on the bed waiting for the operation, or "vacuuming and cleaning" to happen and cleanse its body of "a mess."

The fetus- the wasted bodily material, "the mangled unborn" (Apostolides 27) turns into an epitome of abjection, which violates the schism of objectivity and subjectivity, life and death, a corpse, and a functional body; it is a three-month-fetus that has neither consciousness to be called a subject, nor can it be considered an object, especially once considering the voice it has been given in the narrative by the mother. By drawing a similarity between the aborted fetus and an octopus, Apostolides attributes an abject quality to the child: "I see an octopus moving in water. The bulb of its head is the frightening part" (16). It is through displacement, othering the fetus, and dehumanization, that Apostolides is struggling to defy the abject or as Kristeva explains, "verbalization has always been confronted with the 'ab-ject' that the phobic object is" (*Powers of Horror* 41). Yet after the abortion, she inevitably confronts the abject and writes, "how will we dispose of the dead?" (12). The choice of the word "dispose of" attributes an unwantedness to the soon-to-be-discarded matter; a verb encumbered by negative connotation.

Language struggles to free the fetus from the mother, attempting to claim an identity of her own, which she only attains at the end of the memoir; the mother lets it go; devoid of the voice it once had, the fetus is replaced with another fetus who, apparently, cannot talk, is not aborted and waits to be thrown in the world; "[if it lived,] she'd be an adult. She'd be young and in love …" (130); this suggests a projection into the symbolic order, which is also a defense mechanism against the abject, as against death.

The mother, through the impregnated narrative, struggles to free herself from the fetus, to establish an independent identity, which is purged from it; "I' am not but do separate, reject, ab-ject. While in other memoirs, there is a movement toward the deceased, in Apostolides' narrative, there is a move of abject repugnance away from it. Abjection with a meaning broadened to take in subjective diachrony, [which] is a precondition of narcissism" (Kristeva 1980, 13). It is as though the mother is in need, once more, of the Lacanian mirror stage, to abdicate herself; to be thrown in a symbolic order where she can write in a language free of any metaphors, simile, symbol or metonymy; a language that can establish the signifier- signified relationship plainly; "[the doctor] is probing for […] the exact location of tissue to excise" (66) and finally "[T]he fish [the fetus] disengage from their surrounding" (67); this "verbal play," through the use of metaphors and similes, "implies an ability to imagine the abject […] It is only after his death, eventually, that the writer of abjection will escape his condition of waste, reject, abject" (Kristeva 1980, 16). Therefore, the maternal figure strives to distinguish her purged self from the aborted fetus that once belonged and was attached to the mother's body through the umbilical cord. The aborted fetus expresses itself in a language filled with the phobia of imminent non-existence; although it is the maternal figure who gives it the ability to express itself in this manner, the fetus confronts the frightful signified death for which there is no signifier; “a helpless child, terrified, as I lie on the bed” (66). Despite the precocious case of abjection in abortion, “this insurmountable horror,” the child also “must abject the maternal body so that the child does not become abject by identifying with the maternal body” (140).[74] However, this rejection is not easily accepted by the mother who grieves: “She died so close to her arrival. Miles, compulsion, she died out of water, surrounded by air she could not breathe” (Apostolides 84). The separation and the ensuing pain, no less than a loss, requires mourning. Because Kristeva writes, “the violence of mourning for an ‘object’ that has always already been lost” (1980 15), the mother accepts death and mourns that “fate can’t be denied. It can be ignored, but that’d be stupid” (Apostolides 132). In order to refute becoming the abject, the mother aborted the fetus.

The “thetic phase,” introduced by Kristeva in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), is the threshold of the symbolic when the child adopts an identity of its own, while Chora indicates the phase precedent to the child abjecting the mother. This phase, according to Winfried Menninghaus in *Disgust* (1999), is characterized by “its fluid heterogeneities and the rhythmic streaming of libidinal drives” (20).[75] Left unexplained by Kristeva, this phase terminates once the child abjects the mother, as a waste, to create a boundary between itself and the mother, to attain an independent entity. Chora, Kristeva claims, prepares the child to enter the realm of language where the symbolic, in addition to the pre-existent semiotic, is at the child’s disposal for communication. The semiotic, referring to the cries, babbles, and coos the child makes before language acquisition, and the symbolic, a structure generating meaning based on the relationship between the signifier and the signified, go in tandem to bestow meaning on the world. The abject feelings, such as pain, fear, disgust, rage, and the ineffable, even in the “thetic phase,” is solely communicated through the semiotic.

Assimilating an aborted fetus to “embryonic wastage” or “pregnancy wastage” (261)[76] implies the undesired bodily bi-product, the abject. While a miscarried fetus cannot be capitalized on, it is considered a waste; on the other hand, an aborted fetus or a “rare resource” can be experimented on in laboratories giving it “more value” than the miscarried fetus. Yet, in medical terms, both are considered “bodily waste” (Ariss 264). In either case, the fetus is abjected, so the body can become “clean and proper” (Kristeva 1980, 108). According to Kristeva, “[T]he corpse represents fundamental pollution” (*Powers of Horror* 109), and the aborted or the miscarried fetus, epitomizing a concretized death, “a representation of death” (Ariss 268), is an intimidating sign of death.

Apostolides’ guilt-ridden narrative substantiates the presence of a superego which comes into play with “the sense of abjection [we] experience” (Kristeva *Powers of Horror* 15); the abortion and its subsequent guilt- housed in the superego- are the main reasons for the maternal narrative, in which a purification from abjection becomes plausible. Acceptance of death lies in the rejection of abjection, whether it is an aborted fetus or a corpse. The mother chooses to abject what is not ‘I,’ “to determine the borders of the embodiment to redefine her identity. The rejected becomes a determining element for the woman to substantiate her individuality; “[S]uch wastes drop so that I- [she]- might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit” (Kristeva 1980, 3); the fetus dies and the mother lives; in Ariss’s words, “[I]t necessarily exists so that something else may continue to exist” (268). The loss of a fetus followed by narrating the experience not only alleviates the pain but also helps develop a sense of self for the narrator; “denying women’s access to abortion, as well as the power to narrate the meaning of their abortions, denies them the basic conditions for developing a sense of self” (Ariss 265).

Another maternal narrative is Poirier's *Tu As Crié : Let Me Go* (2000) memoir. While Apostolides' maternal narrative revolves around the imaginary and the separation of the child from the mother, Poirier's maternal narrative sees death in the symbolic. In this memoir, the narrator is a mother who yearns for the unity of Lacan's imaginary phase[77] and resists being abjected: "Yanne, my survival, my lineage extinct. You left my womb to die" (51). To the narrator, her daughter's primary abjection was no less than experiencing death. Being abjected and dying, to Poirier, bear a close resemblance to each other. Once realizing her daughter's lifeless body is lying in the morgue, the mother saw it beyond her capability to confront it. Yet conscious of her daughter's corpse lying in the adjacent room, she writes "your body of my body" was "manhandled and […] humiliated" (26); the mother resists being abjected and yearns for unity. She rejects any implication of dissociation and sees herself as an extension of the corpse of her child: "Each time I heard your name, a knife turned in my womb, like a labour in reverse, keeping me pregnant with you, forever!" (27); the signification of being "pregnant forever," figuratively implying grief, is precedent to the child's primal repression, that is, abjecting the mother; "she [the mother] is the other subject, an object that guarantees my being as subject" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 32); in Poirier's memoir, the mother resists being an object to "guarantee" the child's existence. When asked if she is "the mother of the dead daughter" (Poirier 16), she defies the truth and replies negatively, refusing to go to the morgue. Poirier's recurrent reference to her pregnancy when writing of her daughter's corpse and the ensuing grief is salient in the narrative. Poirier's attempt at rebuking the daughter's abjection is the most conspicuous when she writes: "Premature, you rushed in. You threw me into turmoil […] with your urgency to be born" (8); rejecting abjection, for the victim's mother, is rejecting the loss of her daughter. Unlike *Deep Salt Water* in which the narrator does not wish to be rejected nor abjected, Poirier reminisces about the imaginary. While in her memoir, Apostolides seeks independent selfhood through abjecting the fetus, in Poirier's narrative, the narrator, the mother, considers abjection as death; it is the unity she aspires to.

Illness, Senescence, and Abjection

In the following pages, the focus of analysis will be on two memoirs in which old age, its complications, and its significance in the narrative are the main preoccupation of the narrators. To do so, I will be delving into recent theories of care in order to analyze the manner in which elderly people relate to their bodies in Akler's *Men of Action* and Brown's *Sixty*. These reflections underscore debates about whether I *am* my body, or whether I am in possession of my body. The matter of identification with or alienation from the body lies in the body's boundary, which tacitly asserts one's identity; or as Brown writes, "it's never simple, this confrontation with the physical self […] I relied on my body for a sense of self: it told me what to do, who to be, who I was, what I could be […] But then what happens when you get old when your body starts to break down? What sort of a self do you have then?" (197-207). Aging reshapes the physique, and subsequently, acknowledgment of a new sense of self is necessary. If senescence brings along disability and uncontrollability,[78] the individual may disown the body which was once a defining characteristic of selfhood. According to Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs (2011), "[E]xcrement represents a danger to identity that arises from the outside, a harbinger of disease, decay and death" (136); Akler writes that his father, a neurological patient, "can produce particularly pungent secretions. The phlegm is truly foul. Despite the fact that their injuries originate in the head, the smell is deeply intestinal, regurgitant. This is what bubbled out of Saul's [his father's] tracheostomy tube" (85); he was so repulsed by the odour emanating from his father's body that he "remained in a pocket of nausea for the rest of the day" (85). A threat to the father's individuality, bodily secretions, which is a sign of abjection, did not bode well for the narrator: "Excess fluid escaped through his pores. We towelled him dry, but it didn't stop. His arms and legs continued to weep" (87). More than the repulsing bodily excretion, "the failure of agency […] the failure to exercise control" is indicative of the abject (Gilleard and Higgs 2011, 8). The first chapter of the *Men of Action* begins with the narrator shaving his comatosed father's face, which was "a new intimacy with the old man" (7). The comatosed father, having a listless body, is handled by family members, nurses, and doctors. Lacking the agency he once possessed, the narrator's father reshapes the relationships his family members have with him because of his inert body; this is mostly a consequence of the change in the nature of care. Being in a coma for more than six months, he cannot assert his being as he used to, leaving family members bewildered. An "uncanny identity" (125), according to DeFalco (2010), is produced in the process of "aging into old age" (125). This new identity which is the result of one's relationship with oneself and the others is at times challenging to reconcile with.

According to Virginia Held (2006), although there has not been a definition commonly accepted among scholars, the central focus of an ethics of care "is on the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility" (ch. 1). The nature of care is developed and redefined based on the relationship of the caregiver and the one in need of care. Held implies that the moral and ethical responsibilities of a caretaker- regardless of the nature of their work,[79] should value and perpetuate care while exercising it. The nature of care changes through Akler's narrative. The onset of the disease is accompanied by extra care toward the state of the father; as the latter's condition exacerbates: "He fell. Once a month for six months, he fell somewhere in the house. In the shower, by the bed, approaching the fridge […] The million prior journeys he had made meant nothing; every step was now uncertain" (29)- the family decides that "his home had become too perilous" an environment to him (29). The care that was offered by the family members at home did not meet the father's needs; therefore, after "geriatric assessments," they decided that "he now needed more care" (29), which resulted in moving him to a hospital. Consequently, the care that was given prior to hospitalization changes in nature; formerly, care was seen as extra attention to the physique of the ill, while in the hospital, care was transformed into regular visits from the family to improve the morale of the patient, which resonates with Foucault's idea of the institutionalization of care of a loved one by the state. In this manner, the dynamics of care between the care-give and care-receiver change.

The ethics of care in Canadian literature is further studied by DeFalco in *Imagining Care: Responsibility, Dependency, and Canadian Literature* (2016). In Canadian narratives of fiction and non-fiction, DeFalco examines the nature of care offered by non-professionals, that is by immediate family members, friends, and partners. DeFalco begins her study by an examination of the gendered nature of care and the fabrication of a new self in the process of caregiving among female caregivers, which she claims is not in alignment with a self they identify with outside the domain of care. DeFalco's emphasis on the feminine nature of care is nevertheless subverted in the form of a counter-narrative of care. This is seen in Akler's narrative, where the male narrator takes meticulous care of his ill father, even when the father is hospitalized and supervised by healthcare professionals.

Among the memoirs of illness in this research, with the exception of a few cases, care is often offered in a professional milieu. The decision for recruiting professional caregivers at times imposes a cumbersome moral and ethical responsibility on the decision makers' shoulders. The ethical dilemma lies in the clash of “the maintenance of subjectivity” and one’s “ethical commitment” to certain family members and friends (DeFalco, 2016, 7). This “maintenance of subjectivity” is represented in Toews’ story through the narrator’s character, Elvira, whose constant care of the mentally ill husband results in exhaustion; “Elvira was going down and needed rescuing” (221) Toews writes, which made the husband realize that “something had to change” (221). After Elvira asking the narrator, who refused to eat for consecutive days, if “he wants to die” (221), the husband consents to hospitalization. This “para-ordinary care” as DeFalco calls it, meaning “care adjacent to the ordinary” (2016, 7), has a feminine nature although the caregiver decides to abandon it for the sake of her own mental health.

DeFalco’s description of the gendered nature of care is also portrayed through the narrator of *After Daniel,* who, due to caring for the depressed and often-ill boyfriend, calls herself “Nurse Moira” (“A Closed Door”). The appellation of “Nurse Moira” is a new identity, indexing a contrast “between a self defined through separation and a self defined through connection” (DeFalco, 2016, 11); in other words, the narrator’s identity outside the sphere of her relationship and the one constructed through her relationship with her partner are not compatible. The fabricated self the narrator of *After Daniel* creates is that of failed caregiver whose patient ultimately takes his own life; Farr writes, “Nurse Moira to the rescue. Not a script I planned, or even knew I was following, but looking back, it appears I was quite a natural in my role among the ranks of failed saviours. As I now know, where there’s a suicide, you’ll often find us” (“A Closed Door”). The fact that a new identity is shaped when “one’s egocentric occupation with the needs of the self [… transmutes into] an emerging awareness of interpersonal [relationships and others’ needs” (DeFalco, 2016, 10) is succinctly represented in the title “nurse” the narrator adopts in the process of caregiving.

Whether the body is the individual or an object of possession, the reciprocal influence of one on the other is incontrovertible; the body and the self construct each other in a mutually defining relationship or, as Arthur Frank puts it in *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (1995), "selves act in ways that choose their bodies, but bodies also create the selves who act [… yet], how bodies create selves is scarcely understood at all" (40). In an attempt to understand the body, its functionality, and its effects on self-understanding, Frank introduces a continuum at the opposite ends of which stand contingency and predictability; while the latter denotes extreme control over the body, contingency shows a lack of it. The defining factor in Frank's definition is control: a determining characteristic in self-identification and the body's approval in society.[80] This "dissolving façades of wholeness and instability" DeFalco writes (2010, 126), and marks the beginning of dependency on others for survival; the cumbersome task of taking care of an ill person is whether undertaken by a family member or is outsourced to healthcare and geriatric facilities. Perhaps, the ethics of care is partly intermingled with casting of the abject and its representation; care is undertaken, undoubtedly out of love for the ill, but also to mask the representation of repulsion in the Other since the abject is an inseparable part of oneself; in other words, "the Other, having dwelt in me as *alter ego,* point it [the abject] out to me as loathing" (10). That is, the act of caring for others is self-care transformed; that is, the act of care is a defense mechanism against disgust and repulsion. If others are taken care of, that is if I am, there will be no threats to the "laws, connections [… that] condition me" (Kristeva, 1980, 10), hence a secure realm is created for one and the others to dwell in and exist. Caring is an act of protection against an invader that does not respect corporeal boundaries and is a threat to selfhood.

Distinguishing the border between one's body and others' marks one's corporeal territory, which fosters individual identity. What encroaches on the body's limits makes the identity of the individual endangered; bodily excreta violate the body's boundaries. This abjected material is considered unwelcome by the individual and others since it poses a threat to the wholesome identity of the person. It is the accompanied abjection that aging brings with itself that not only is a threat to identity, but a sign of death. The aging body "mark[ing] like a thousand subcutaneous gravestones" writes Brown (12), also the signifier of mortality, is considered an object of avoidance and repulsion. However, according to Gilleard and Higgs (2011), modern lifestyles have slowed down the process of aging and incapability; what was once attributed to elderly people, is no longer applicable to them: "Traditional signifiers of old age- grey hair, wrinkled skin and the very length of one's life- are flaunted in direct contradiction to their usual role as signifiers of abject old age" (137).[81] In *Men of Action,* the narrator's father growing "too unfocused, and too forgetful" (21) with everyday tasks has made the family consider moving him to an eldercare home. His dependence on family members to execute everyday activities redefined his relationship with them; Akler writes "[T]he problems in his head were complicated by those in his body" (21). This marks his father's early lack of control, that is, Frank's contingency.

While the body can signify aging, social practices can dissociate earlier negative attributions of aging from corporality. Gilleard and Higgs (2011) suggest that, more than the ageing physique of elderly people, abjection is "a threat to the agency and identity of the sufferer" (136) and a threat to social order; in *Sixty*, Brown, a witness to his father's increasing age and declining health, feels his father's uneasiness at his bodily excrement, which the narrator has to deal with: "I was observing his growing Otherness, his transformation into a non-physical sluicings; … his terror of indignity, of being dependent on others, of being a bother; his steady apologizing for putting me through the … chore of washing the shit off his legs" (10-11). His father's aging body, "his transformation from self to spirit … the decline of his body" coincides with the time the narrator "began to feel the decline of [his body]" (10). His future self was growing into the Other, "a position defined […] by its alienation and its vulnerability" (10),[82] with whom he could not but recently identify; the identification with the deceased, as mentioned earlier, is one of the common narrative techniques in thanatography that Brown employs. Brown writes of the sad feeling overcoming him whenever he meets with an old friend: "Each encounter is a new measure of time going by, as you notice some new wrinkle, a new pattern of spots on the hands, some new carefulness" (18), marking "aging disgracefully … acquiring its distinct affinity with the abject" (136-8)[83] pushes the narrator to consider himself a new member of the aging group. In Kristeva's words (1982), it is "the theme of suffering-horror [which] is the ultimate evidence of such states of abjection within a narrative representation" (141); the narration is the only constant representing the never-aging self against mortality. Brown accepts the affinity to the new group and writes "I always wondered how my father endured the culling that marked the last twenty years of his life, the incessant dropping off of his friends and co-workers, and now I know: with the shameful, secret pride of the last one standing" (67). He eventually confesses, "we are food for worms, lads. Because believe it or not each and every one of us in this room is one day going to stop breathing, turn cold, and die" (179); the narrator's acquiescence to reality would not have been possible without confronting abjection and mortality through literature to "speak his suffering" (Kristeva 1982, 146). In Brown's memoir, the narrator's observation of himself and the world around him is so acute that a distinct line can be drawn between the writer, who is writing the story of his life, and the narrator offering a unique experience of aging; the effect of this dual perspective is explained at length in Chapter One. This narrative technique, specific to personal writings, makes the narrator stand outside the circle of life while witnessing himself and others moving through time and aging: "I watched his [his father's] transformation from self to spirit, saw the decline of his body … just as I began to feel the decline of mine" (10). The narrator constantly reminds the reader that death, especially as one ages, can happen at any moment and that it is "impossible not to consider [its] possibility" (177).

Marked as the other, or "being assigned to the community of old age" according to Gillead and Higgs (2011), "means reaching the final stage in the human life course" (137); the final stage is a harbinger of death and the inevitable abjection it precedes. Bodies, according to their extent of control, are defined, constructed, identified with, or alienated from society. The identification of the self and the body, according to Frank (1995), is, at its easiest point "as long as the body is healthy, and mortality is beyond the horizon of consciousness" (33). On the contrary, once mortality is on the horizon, identification and association are more difficult. Lack of control may also indicate disability which, according to Lennard Davis in "Visualizing the Disabled Body" (2020), is defined as "a disruption in the visual, auditory, or perceptual field (168). Disability is embedded in a dichotomous-based language, in which normalcy and abnormalcy, ability and disability, and wholeness and incompleteness bear contrasting values.[84] The disabled, whose existential requirements are not "easily accommodated in standard spatial arrangement," becomes the target of "the gazing subject" (Davis 168). In another article, "Nude, Medusa's Body, and Phantom Limbs: Disability and Visuality" (2016), Davis claims that disability is a result of "a system in which value is attributed to body parts" (57). The disabled body parts become a victim of a society in which functionality and dysfunctionality are parts of a larger system of meaning. Davis's claim resonate~~s~~ with Foucault's words in *Discipline and Punish* (1979) as "a political field" (25) in which "power relations have a hold upon it [a body part]; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry our tasks … the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (26). Once the value is tied to productivity and earning capital, the disabled are automatically forced out of the game and disability "becomes a power derived from its otherness, its monstrosity, in the eye of the "'normal' person" (Davis 2020, 170).

The rhetoric of "other" is one of the most commonly shared ways of expression among the narrators; the fear of being an object of the gaze and of losing their former social status is embedded in the narrative of senescence and illness. The "other," capitalized in Brown's narrative, is a source of fear and disgust to the narrator; "[B]ut I was younger then, and only just setting out on the transition to getting older- to becoming the Other. I figure, what with so many people so terrified of what is coming down the road, and averting their gaze to the nearest distraction, someone ought to keep his eyes open" (310). The way disability appears, sometimes the result of aging, to the "normal" person, is a token of decay and mortality. The disabled, as a "symbol of otherness" (Davis 2020, 176), does not belong to a fast-moving society, and the architecture of cities and dwellings also leads further to their disempowerment. Elderly people turn into the future image of the gazing subject, who sees the alienated undesired future self as an object, in a form susceptible to decay. Davis, by attributing a Freudian term to the phenomenon, takes it a step further; he calls it the unfamiliar, *Das Unheimlich,* which is a threat to the illusory sustainability of ego. A classical clinical example of this moment is that of elderly people who no longer recognize themselves in the mirror, and address their mirror's reflection as if it were a different person (Higgs 2018, 7). This undesired form, a ticking bomb, a reminder of mortality, may create a ruptured sense of self. DeFalco, through acknowledging the unwelcomed effects of aging on identity" extends the uncanniness to the production of "divisive identity" (2010, 125);

she writes that “a glimpse in a mirror, […] draw[s] attention to a fundamental mortal instability at odds with impressions of permanence” (2010, 127). This newly perceived sense of self, confirmed through the perception of corporeal changes, resembles a late mirror stage in which the individual suddenly becomes aware of a burgeoning identity. The realization of DeFalco’s uncanniness can be further extended to the observation of the contrast between oneself and one’s old photographs taken at one’s prime. One facet of selfhood that the subject tries to associate with and the other facet to dissociate from, that is the threat or the unfamiliar, is the object of hatred and repulsion in society. Therefore, their self-identification is reinforced and is subject to the dominant ideology about the body, disempowering the owner of the body; Brown writes “I know how I feel about other people’s wrinkling skin (it doesn’t make me like anyone else), but I know how I feel about someone seeing my own: terrified” (209). The way the narrator feels at the exposure of his changing body brings about an unwantedness described as terror, which may further cause self-alienation.

In Brown’s memoir, the ethics of care is presented in salient contrast to technocracy; the narrator, advocating for Canada’s allocated budget to elderly care per year, is opposed by the dissenting voice of a “thirty-fiveish pal, a former Ontario provincial government advisor” (150), who objects to “spending all that money to satisfy my parents and their generation’s neurotic obsession with not dying” (150).[85] Another example of care is the narrator informing the reader that he hired two doctors when he is away at his usual vacation spot, reassuring the reader that he “needs it” (157). More importantly, through redoubling the number of doctors taking care of him, the narrator mostly reassures himself that he can ward off mortality.

To write about one’s or someone else’s illness, that is “pathography” (Burlea 61), is an attempt to heal the incurable. Once taken ill, an individual’s self-perception is susceptible to change; our body, once reliable, becomes untrustworthy, and the experience of "how we [may] go down into the pit of death and feel the waters of annihilation" (3)[86] can change our perception of our bodies, hence of ourselves. Besides changes in self-perception, the diseased individual finds himself or herself treated differently by friends, family, health care workers, and society in general; sometimes, according to Suzana Burlea, the very "personhood [of the ill] is objectified" and reduced to medical terms (60). In the case of contagious disease, according to Sontag in *Illness as Metaphor* (1978), "contact with someone afflicted with a disease [...] feels like […] the violation of a taboo" (6); the diseased individual is the abject who must be cast way; otherwise, it would contaminate whoever is in their reach. The medical terminology referring to sickness and disease mostly bears negative connotations; the language of disease can be generalized to denote unfortunate events. Sickness not only bodes the weakness of our bodily systems, but it also is a harbinger of mortality. The alienation of the sick body from itself, and society underlines abjection escorted by illness. The body's frailty and its excreta belie self-control; once the control is lost, and the corporeal boundary between one and the other is blurred, abjection and disgust are the first instinctual reactions.

A narrative of disease is Davey's *How Linda Died*, in which the narrator's wife is diagnosed with an inoperable tumour; cancer is also the main focus of narration in Giroux's *A Chance for Life* and in Meneghetti's *What the Mouth Wants*. Cancer, according to Sontag (1978), "fills the role of an illness experienced as a ruthless, secret invasion" (5); the undesired alien tumour invading the body and spreading throughout its organs, being uncurable, is associated with death. In *A Chance for Life,* upon receiving the news of having cancer, the narrator's father, while crying, asks, "God […] why are you coming to take her so quickly?" (30). While it is the fatality of the disease that strikes the family in *A Chance for Life*, in *What the Mouth Wants*, the narrator, remembering her childhood and having insufficient knowledge of the disease, deems death "as a mystery [and deems it] contagious" (Sontag 1978, 6); therefore, she "shields her breasts" upon seeing her grandmother's excised breast, "her hollow chest and armpit zoom[ing] into view" (Meneghetti 26) fearing she would catch the same disease. The corporeal deformity that cancer sometimes brings about can be a source of horror and abjection; the excision of a breast, or an abnormally bloated stomach goes against the image of a healthy body; therefore, it can be a source of disgust. The narrator in *What the Mouth Wants* is not "at the limit of primal repression [but] has discovered an intrinsically corporeal and already signifying brand, symptom, and sign: repugnance, disgust, abjection" (Kristeva 1982, 11), which she unwillingly identifies with and repulses simultaneously. The narrator's mother and grandmother die of breast cancer, a disease that runs in the family, and Meneghetti's description of the disease implicates "a language that gives up, a structure within the body, a non-assimilable alien, a monster, a tumour, cancer that the listening devices of the unconscious do not hear" (Kristeva 1982, 11). However, through writing about a familial intergenerational trauma, that is Meneghetti's observation of her grandmother's "hollow chest" (Meneghetti 26) and her subsequent losing of her mother to breast cancer, the narrator "disrupts the spell of [topic avoidance]" in the family (2), writes Meera Atkinson in *The Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma* (2017). Intergenerational, or transgenerational trauma, which is a phenomenon that focuses on the indelible traces of the effects of a trauma from the inflicted generation to subsequent ones, underlies the importance and the potentiality of transmissibility of "epigenetic modifications […] to subsequent generations" (665).[87] Meneghetti's memoir is a courageous act of self-implication into an illness narrative, which is transmuted into "a textual reckoning with trauma within and beyond the family" (Atkinson 50). In other words, although the narrator 'shields' herself from the disease and rejects it as abjection, she confronts the familial transgenerational disease through writing herself into the narrative.

Apart from being an abjection, the breast is also a source of sensual pleasure and desire to the narrator when she writes, “I can’t remember when was it here? My fingers curling the curls of her mound? Or my lips encircling her areola, my tongue wet on inverted nipples?” (Meneghetti 64). In Meneghetti’s narration, the dual nature of desire towards and the abjection of the breast resonates with what Butler writes in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) in which she discusses the “possibilities of rematerialization” when gender-related laws and rules question the dominant, yet unstable, hegemony of sexuality and materiality (2). In this manner, the materiality of the body can affect the discourse of gender, and that those standing outside the sphere of sexual normativity, are considered against-subject entities, that is an “abject” or outcast to be repudiated. Therefore, the narrator’s desire for the breast transforms the status of the flesh, which used to be a source of abjection to her.

Meneghetti further discovers the abject in taste and food. When describing breast cancer, through using simile, Meneghetti compares “areola” to “the texture of orange peel” (26), which are “the symbols of sensual pleasure turned on its head to evoke illness and death [to show] cancer is the corruption of the flesh” (6).[88] The confluence of various senses, affect, and emotions such as grief, pleasure, death, and boredom finds their way into foods, imprinted in the brain as memories of the past; “[W]ithin the risotto lurks the texture of being loved. History’s al dente at the centre, surrounded by the long-simmered softness of forgetting. Saffron scent blossoms into belonging. Sage infuses drawn butter with dusty grief, the only way to swallow the joy of gnocchi” (53); this is yet another Proustian technique with which food instigates memory. The pre-symbolic, the attachment to her mother’s umbilical cord, is fused with her disgust for the tripe the mother, forcibly, makes her eat. After vomiting the food, she writes that "beyond the umbilical lies tripe" (19). The narrator also wonders whether she was force-fed the same flesh when she was in her mother's "uterine brine" (19) because if she knew, she "would have spelunked to [her mother's] fallopians and bribed some other ovum forth to take [her] place. To save [her] face" (19) in order to avoid the abject food and to cast aside the mother.

The narrator's relationship with the mother is tumultuous; when, at the age of sixteen, the narrator loses her mother and is incapable of mourning her death, she questions her love for the deceased. Her limited and strongest memories of her mother come through sensual pleasures of food, taste, and smell, but the narrator is overcome by her mother's uncanny corpse: "and now here I am, watching as Dad cleans and changes Mom into a fresh nightgown. I look away. One eye open" (Meneghetti 39). The anomaly of the mother's body provokes horror as the narrator sees death and the potential abjection in the corpse of the mother, which complies with the narrator's symbolic dichotomy of being neither an object nor a subject. The corpse, according to Kristeva (1982) "is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance" (3). The corpse lies somewhere between the subject it used to belong to and the object it has become- yet forcefully resists recognition as an object for the bereaved since it used to be, or belonged to, a beloved family member. After her mother's death, Meneghetti describes the scene of her aunt sobbing over her mother's body: "Zia croons her sister's name through sobs. She begins smoothing the body's hair, caressing the cheek. How weird. It's as if she believes she's talking to Mom, but Mom isn't in there" (40). The previous sense of self, established in relation to the alive family member, is replaced by the new one; that is, the abject corpse becomes the new external locus based on which the mourner endeavours to construct a sense of self. The corpse, neither a complete object, nor an absolute subject, becomes even more unappealing to the mourner to base the new identity. As a result, the abject, inevitably, becomes a part of the identity of the mourner; an undesirable quality that must be cast off through the mourning process and the special treatment of the remains of the loved one. According to Kristeva "placing the responsibility for the lifeless body of the deceased into the hands of a third party reinforces norms to separate life from death and serves to solidify death and the human corpse and unfamiliar and repulsive" (406).[89] After witnessing her aunt crying over the corpse of her sister, Meneghetti writes, "[T]wo men arrive carrying a black board and a purple blanket. […] They lift Mom's corpse – for that's what it is now, isn't it? - onto the board [wrapping her in the blanket …]. The inside of the blanket is cool and satiny. The outside is a warm velvet. Why would they put the velvety side out instead of in, against her skin? O. Because Mom is dead" (41).

Cancer is marked by an invasion of the body; the word cancer is derived from "the Greek Karkinos and the Latin cancer, both meaning 'crab' which was inspired, according to Galen "by the resemblance of an external tumour's swollen veins to crab's legs" (Sontag 1978, 9); the invasion of the tumour, besides being insidious, is considered abjection that through encroachment breaks the boundary of the body, which once characterized by its independence from others and the world. The body is invaded by an external object consuming the organs; in *A Chance for Life*, Giroux writes, "[I]n my left breast, I found a lump. It was the size of a pea, and it moved around as I touched it […] Over the next couple of weeks, it started to grow; very slightly, but enough to notice" (28). In *How Linda Died*, in one of his dreams, the narrator sees a "crab with hooked claws like the hook at the end of the assailant's leg. I don't understand why in the dream I see only the men as having to battle this intruder, this monster, this cancer, but I evidently do" (116). The association of brain tumour and the crab cannot be more salient in the narrator’s dream and the fact that he sees himself in a “battle” with the tumour resonates “[T]he talk of siege and war to describe […] cancer [giving it] a striking literalness and authority” (Sontag 1978, 65-6).

The uncontrollability of the tumour is another aspect of the abject; the tumour can metastasize, and cancer can recur after chemotherapy, indicating that the individual has no control over the disease, nor over its effects on his or her body: “[C]ells without inhibition, cancer cells will continue to grow and extrude in a chaotic fashion, destroying the body’s normal cells, architecture, and functions” (Sontag 1978, 62-3). After realizing her cancer has metastasized and is spreading, Giroux expresses her feelings this way: “[W]hen I heard those words, I felt like I’d fallen into a different world. I couldn’t stop myself […] I never realized how much until it was taken away from me” (58).

Besides cancer’s characteristics of possible deformation, invasion, and uncontrollability, its destruction of body cells is another indication of the abject. Not only is the body colonized by growing tumours, but it is also “replaced by a non-you” (Sontag 1978, 67); Davey writes that his wife “complained that she didn’t like what was happening to her personality- that she was irritable, impatient, short-tempered” (85) because of the medication she consumed to shrink the size of the tumour in her brain. The abject arises with the alien tumour rooting and sprouting inside the body while consuming its original cells, it sets to grow. What was once considered as a self, or ego, is replaced by a non-ego making it the object of horror and disgust. Writing cancer and writing tumour is an attempt at recuperating control — or at least, control over the narrative of illness and disease. Writing about the abject is a desire to have a handle on the uncanny, a desire to ‘domesticate’ death.

Another representation of the abject is found in the treatment of the ill; in this section, Giroux, Choy, and Toews' narratives of illness will be examined in order to determine whether the definition of the abject alters in the treatment of the physically ill in contrast to the mentally ill. The first two examples are narratives of physical illness, and- if the language of mind-body dualism is permitted- Toews' memoir can be labelled as a narrative of mental illness. Another important difference between the first two memoirs and Toews' is that the latter's memoir is a witness narrative, albeit written in the first person point of view; in other words, the writer witnesses the vicissitudes suffered by the parent, and she finds a medium to relay the information; in Frank's words (2015), "[I]n the cycle of witnessing, telling the story of one negative dialogue can be the beginning of a positive dialogue. That is what witnesses do: they transform absence of dialogue into open, on-going dialogue" (13), which is a positive take on witness memoirs. This manner of documentation is a constituent of the ethics of care. Another difference among these three memoirs is that Toews and Giroux's memoirs are female narratives, and Choy's is a male narrative. In the following paragraphs, prior to studying the abject, the conformity of the narrative of illness to the grand narrative is studied.

Giroux's memoir is a "restitution narrative" (Frank 2015, 13), comprised of two narratives of illness, hospitalization, medical care, and recovery, that interlaces conformity and non-conformity narratives. According to Frank (2015) "the general issue of the ill person giving up claims to his or her own body as a condition of becoming a patient" (11) is a dominant discourse in illness memoirs; however, in Giroux's story, the narrator, after receiving the news of having a malignant tumor and facing her immediate family's emotional reaction, "bounce[s] out of bed" and says "[W]hy is everyone crying so much? I am not dead yet" (30). The ill narrator's reaction to the devastating news is an immediate claiming of the narrative; she resists sadness and pity with a show of strength so much so that she was “working at cheering everyone up” (30) and even decides that it was time she “took control” (31) of the situation. Her resistance is further shown when she “began to put on [her] make-up and curling [her] hair” (31); the nurses, frequenting her hospital room, allegedly “laughed at [her] determined efforts. [One of them] found it amusing” (31). The refusal of the adoption of the role of the passive patient, put forth by Frank resonates with the astonishment of the nurses, as though taking care of an ill body resists the dominant narration of cancer patients, who, according to one of the nurses, “had made it through just fine” (Giroux 31). The absence of dialogical discourses between the patient and the caregivers renders interpretation and analysis difficult. However, a description of their reaction sheds light on what is expected or deemed unusual in their views. The narrator is highly aware of the dominant discourses in medical institutions by claiming that she “didn’t want the doctors treating [her] like just another number” (31) therefore, she builds up an intimate relationship with the staff that would humanize her further as a patient; being at ease with her sick body, she invites others to treat it in the same way; in a sense, she prevents the Foucauldian medical gaze (*The Birth of The Clinic* 14) by going against the mainstream. She does not define herself in relation to her sickness, nor does she allow being defined by the institution; she knows she is “special” (31), and she would like to keep it that way; in other words, Giroux offers a counter-narrative that goes against alienating herself from the diseased self. Writing a memoir of illness can be for the sake of distancing one’s physical pain from one’s existence to apprehend a clearer picture of the situation. According to Frank (2015), writing a memoir of illness allows one to “reduce the gap between the physical and the existential suffering caused by the disease” (9). Nevertheless, Giroux refuses to write a memoir of her own; interestingly, she relays information to the writer of the book. With the tumor metastasizing, the narrator experiences cancer for the second time, albeit with a different outlook; “I hadn’t yet been diagnosed for a second time, so my attitude was very different” (61). The second time, her narrative is hijacked by a priest who was “repeatedly performing last rites [which] were not exactly helping [her] morale” (56). She confesses that she feels like an “octopus” (56); despite the doctor’s claim that she “wouldn’t survive the second surgery,” she was hopeful praying to God to “give [her] a second chance” (57). This is another example in which the narrator has “monological claims on the presentation of [her] body” (Frank 18). However, she takes control over her body again by informing the doctors that she does not “want to do chemo anymore” (69). Eventually, being chosen for an experimental medication against breast cancer, she recovers.

Choy’s memoir lacks dialogues since the narrator is unconscious throughout the story; the narrative is comprised of his dreams and hallucinations due to medication; the patient, that is the narrator, exhibits consent and submissiveness to the pills he is fed; ‘“Mr. Choy?’ I heard her say. ‘I need you to swallow this tiny pill. Please open up. It’s to help you go back to sleep. […] As is, I thought. […] I took a couple of sips and swallowed the tiny pills”’ (62). The narrator of *Not Yet* experiences the development of a new self that is more adapted to Frank’s “restitution” of oneself (2015, 13); after spending “more than a month and a half” at the hospital (105), the narrator decides “to focus on a body that [he] neglected for a long time” (107). The importance of the body, which comes to his attention after the disease, is an aftermath of the disability his disease has caused him; he “no longer held onto the wall rails and no longer needed Richard’s arms for balance” (107). Although he is not satisfied with his situation, he does not complain about it; in other words, the narrator adjusts himself to the situation; he “simplifies his goals to achieve one small thing every hour [to be a productive body] and [he] refuses to worry about the future” (105); this type of positivity is missing from Giroux’s narration; yet, it is important to remember that the nature of the diseases borne by the narrators varies in severity and seriousness. Another important difference is the level of consciousness of the narrator in the literal sense of the word. The narrator of *Another Chance for Life* is never sedated or refuses to be, and therefore, understands the medical discourses at work. Through a narrative of illness, she takes control of the disease and the way it is defined. On the other hand, the narrator of *Not Yet,* sedated most of the time, cannot claim his body; the reclaiming of the body only happens after his disability; with the help of doctors, he "pay[s] attention to muscle tone, recovery time […] to time-outs, and to let [his] brain connections and [his] muscles track their paths without anymore neurotic interferences about the future" (106). For the narrator of *Not Yet,* who adopts the role of the unconscious sick body, the reclaiming of his life spans a sizeable chapter in the book (113-189). Due to his unconsciousness and his inability to express himself when intubated, the narrator was spoken for, which Frank writes "increases that suffering" (2015, 10); after his recovery though, through deciding to write a memoir about his illness and taking control of his life, the narrator attempts at reducing the pain the illness caused him.

Narrative agency also distinguishes the narrative of physical illness and that of mental illness. The writer of *Swing Low* is the daughter of the patient, and she bases the content of the memoir on the patient's notes, letters, and diaries written at the time of hospitalization. The narrator questions the veracity of the content with the very first sentence of the memoir; "I've been trying for weeks to make sense of things" (1); given the fact that her father suffered from a mental illness, the writer questions the cognitive ability of the external narrator from the very beginning of the story. The writer informs the reader that the narrator is incapable of deciphering his notes; "I've filled up several yellow legal pads […] but nothing is clear to me" (1). The narrative agency is questioned, and unreliability is established which is scarce in narratives of physical illness. Toews writes, “[A]t the end of his life, my father, in a rare conversation, asked me to write things down for him […] Soon I was filling up pages of yellow legal pad notes with writing from his point of view so he could understand when he read it to himself” (xiii). His lack of agency in narrating his story is ironically exacerbated as he overhears a conversation between his daughter and a nurse who “promised [his] older daughter, Marj, that [he] would not be discharged over the weekend” (5); his exclusion in making a decision concerning his physical state is indicative of the family and healthcare givers’ mistrust of the mentally ill patients. Later in the memoir, the narrator, who has always been cognizant of his situation and the way he was treated, writes: “It dawned on me that this nurse believed me incapable of rational thought, that I had slipped, mentally, below the average capacity of an eleven-year-old” (89). Another difference between these types of memoirs is the feeling of the abject, that is, the uneasiness and unwantedness, that is experienced by the mental patient; “I said [I am mentally ill] because I wanted [my brother who runs the hospital] to say that I wasn’t or that, if I was, I would soon be fine […] that I had nothing to be ashamed of” (2); further in the book, he writes: “Mel es en schinde [..] But of course it is [true], I say, schinde is a Low German expression meaning “lower than low,” originally, I believe, one who tortures horses, a taskmaster, a tyrant” (95); shame only appears in narrative of physical illness when the patients depend on their caregivers for conducting basic daily activities; the mental patient however, despite his or her capable physique, feels ashamed; in other words, shame appears in both narratives, albeit in different forms and for different reasons; while in narratives of physical illness, the abject is what disturbs and exceed the borders of the physique, in the narrative of mental illness, the contrast lies between the self concocted by the patient and the one perceived by others. The narrator of *Swing Low* expresses his embarrassment again: “But this business of “wanting attention” embarrassed me to such an extent that I vowed to remain quiet. Besides, it wasn't attention I wanted so much as clarification. But they're busy, these nurses, and I understand that I baffle them. I baffle myself" (5). His shame, stemming from his experiences, makes him uncomfortable asking for healthcare. The doctor reassures the patient that "admission was a big step forward, an essential part of the healing process […]" (2); the connotation of the word heal, as to opposed to 'cure,' which is used in the narrative of physical illness, indicates "what happens when a disease is conquered [while] healing restores the whole person" (Geary and Hawkins 5); this quote suggests that when the word 'heal' is used, the lost self of the patient is supposed to be restored, which connotes the selflessness of the mentally ill; while in the narrative of physical illness, it is not the person, but an organ, that malfunctions. Through self-chastisement and eventually feeling shame, the narrator embeds his discourse perfectly in the "culturally dominant narrative" (Young 53) of mental illness.

Another stark contrast between narratives of physical illness and mental illness is the attitudes adopted by healthcare workers toward the ill. While in Giroux's story "nurses cried" (20) at the fact that a young woman was suffering from cancer, they behave indifferently toward the suffering of the narrator of *Swing Low;* the lack of physical symptoms makes the healthcare worker skeptical of the experienced pain by the ill; "I asked [the nurses] questions such as Where am I? Why am I here? Where is my wife? (this lasted over and over and over) until they grew short with me. I noticed that one nurse had written on her clipboard, "Patient talks non-stop, obviously wants attention"' (4), while the patient is perceptive enough to write that "this business of "wanting attention" embarrassed me to such an extent that I vowed to remain quiet. Besides, it wasn't attention I wanted so much as clarification" (5). This time, the shame the narrator feels is the result of the way that healthcare givers treat him. Patient shaming is one of the dominant discourses in Toews' narrative: "Naturally I asked but a well-meaning nurse in training mistook me for a large four-year-old and said, Oh, you've been a busy guy in the last couple of days. Busy, adds a doctor, having a psychotic breakdown (5). The disrespectful nature of the dialogue between the second nurse and the patient is indicative of a very different nature of care offered at mental institutions, which also redefines the relationship of the ill with himself or herself, which brings me back to the study of the nature of care in memoirs.

The healthcare givers' sympathy, an important element in the ethics of care, is lacking in the narrative of mental illness as opposed to the narrative of physical illness; in *Swing Low,* the patient demands care regarding his mental health, however, his request is dismissed by the caregiver:

> nurse enters room, checks my feet, mentions something about contusion on foot, to which I respond, Yes […] I actually wonder what my foot has to do with my confusion and say so. Really, I say politely, it has to do with my head. Nurse responds: Your feet? I answer: My head. Nurse says: Mel, we are talking about your feet right now, okay? Inane conversation, non-conversation. Yes, let's talk about my feet, why not? The nurse eventually left. (139)

The caregiver, suspicious of the validity of the mental patient's request, refuses to provide him with service; it would have been attended to if the patient did not belong to a psychiatric ward. For example, Giroux recounts the care that she receives as follows; "[T]he nurses came in, stroking my hand, consoling me as best they could. They told me stories of other women who had made it through just fine" (31). Although Frank (2015) suggests that the "core plot of these stories presents a protagonist who is struggling with a newly acquired sense of self and an antagonist—the healthcare worker—who undermines this effort at meaningful self-definition"

(10), the contrasting nature of care can be sought in the manifestation of the disease and the extent to which the pain is manifested externally. In the first example, despite the patient's request of treating his "head," his foot, having an open wound, was prioritized; in Giroux's story, the avalanche of sympathy ensues the doctor's discovery of the metastasized tumor, the news of which "got around quickly" (30); in other words, when pain is connected to a tumor or an injury, the response of the healthcare worker becomes more immediate than the moment when pain cannot be directly connected to an invasion to the body, or to an open wound, which is the visible abject that must be immediately attended to. Mental illness, regardless of its severity, lacks an obvious external manifestation, which affects the nature of care given by healthcare workers. With the definitions of mental illness and care changing, the relationship between the patient and healthcare workers changes as well; as a result, the relationship of the patient with his or her sense of self and identity alters. Moreover, the lack of sympathy from figures of authority, doctors, and nurses in this situation, can make the patient dubious regarding the actual existence of the illness they are suffering, which in turn, makes the ill further doubt themselves.

4. Conclusion

The abject, which according to Kristeva symbolically refers to the child abjecting and rejecting the mother to attain a sense of self, also refers to any undesirable bodily excreta exceeding and violating bodily boundaries. In this chapter, besides a brief history of corporeality, the notion of the abject and its relationship with abortion, aging, and illness have been examined in the following memoirs: *Deep Salt Water*, *Tu As Crié: Let me Go*, *Men of Action*, *Sixty*, *What the Mouth Wants*, *A Chance for Life*, and *How Linda Died*. The first two memoirs, also maternal narratives, treat the abject differently than the others. The maternal narrative longs for the abject;

unconsciously, as the mothers who have lost their children refuse the primary abjection of the child and wish to be "pregnant forever" (Poirier 27), marking the rejection of the child's abjection; in Beneventi's words, they "weave both absence and the obscene into [their] narrative" (5). In *Deep Salt Water,* though, the aborted fetus, "matter out of place," (Douglas 36), is abjected so the mother can claim a new identity; by removing the tissue- the fetus- from the body, the mother reclaims her identity in the symbolic order. In maternal narrative, the abject comes from the inside; it is experienced differently than in other memoirs in which the other, holding up a mirror to the narrators, becomes the abject. In relation to aging in *Sixty*, the abject refers to the undesirable corporeal decline signifying death and decay. In *Men of Action,* it is the patient's bodily excreta, encroaching upon bodily boundaries, that is a harbinger of imminent death. If an illness results in the excision of body parts or deformity, it violates the image of normality and therefore, it can be perceived as the abject. The body of the deceased, neither a subject nor an object, is handled by a third party to further distinguish the boundaries of life and death, the clean and the abject. While the body, either cremated or buried, is not present in the lives of the deceased's family, its memory lingers on.

Death and the decaying body are signifiers of the abject, the signified. The language of death, the expression of pain and revulsion, although sometimes transcending the symbolic, is limned to its full potential in thanatography. The narrators struggle to fathom the depth of their feelings through the symbolic, which comes short of expressing grief and pain. Death, having no constant signified, is optimally represented through pain, illness, the cadaver, the abject, and the aging body. Death destructs the seeming order of the symbolic, and although death does not render to any signified, the abject, represented through the signified, can be a powerful representation of death. Transcending language, understanding death belongs to "a side of consciousness" that "lacks speech and communication" (Kristeva, 1980, 30); this side is the pre-symbolic stage; that is, the phase where feelings and nonverbal communication are present. The ambivalent feelings towards death, that is rapprochement in contemplating it and its telltale signs, and distancing from it in attempting at defiling oneself from death signifiers, are reminiscent of Freud's "death drive," meaning that "the goal of all life is death" (1955 30) and its simultaneous hatred. This incapability of expression and the ensued silence allow one to "regress back to the affects that can be heard in the breaks in discourse" (Kristeva, 1980, 30). These breaks are partly filled with photographs of the deceased individuals, which the next chapter will investigate; that is, I will examine the relationship between death and photography and aim to provide a reason as to why the narrative of death is so often filled with photographs. Whether the latter is a complementary or a necessary part of thanatography will also be examined.

CHAPTER III:

Photographs in Canadian Thanatography

1. Introduction

The use of photographs, paintings, drawings, and collages in thanatography, which does not necessarily depend on using visuals, begs a teleological question: what is the purpose of incorporating photographs and collages in narratives? Although some specific media, such as graphic novels require drawings, others, such as novels and memoirs, are not inherently dependent on pictures and photographs to tell a story, which makes the existence of the latter seem superfluous. However, this “rhetoric of image” (xiii)[90], according to Barthes, does not serve an aesthetic purpose but rather corroborates the narrative of life, death, pain, and mourning. The visual narratives in the thanatography studied in this chapter are, in most cases, felicitous souvenirs of the deceased; they are media through which the deceased is commemorated and mourned. Drawings and collages, to a lesser degree, are also used in my corpus. For example, in Apostolides’ *Deep Salt Water*, drawings and collages are used to complement the maternal narrative. The many drawings in the book are metaphors for abortion, such as the sea as the mother, and the fish representing the fetus.[91] The front cover illustration by Sheryl McDougald, which represents a queer interpretation of Caravaggio’s *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* is also used in Meneghetti’s *What the Mouth Wants.* The front cover of the book portrays a wide variety of fruit, and also the sensual face and neck of a young man as an embellishment to the narration. Some of the chapters are also adorned with a drawing of fruit, food, or drink as decoration. As opposed to Apostolides's memoir, the content of Meneghetti’s memoir does not depend on the drawings in order to offer a more complete picture, for they solely serve an aesthetic purpose.

In the following pages, a survey on the nature of photography as discussed and theorized by André Bazin, Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, Walter Benjamin, and Christian Metz will allow me to examine the relationship between this medium and the representation and narration of death, the predominant subject of the studied memoirs. The "elegiac nature of photography" (15), as Sontag puts it in *On Photography* (1971), has not escaped Barthes and Derrida's scrutiny, as Barthes claimed that "[I]f photography is to be discussed on a serious level, it must be described in relation to death" (*Camera Lucida* xi), and Derrida, in an interview, in *Copy, Archive, Signature* (2010), asserts:

> There can be no photograph that is not about mourning and about the simultaneous desire to guard against mourning, precisely in the moments of releasing the shutter and of viewing and circulating the image. What the photograph mourns is both death and survival, disappearance and living on, erasure from an inscription in the archive of its technically mediated memory. (ch.1)

The intertwined nature of photography and death is salient enough that I have decided to relate the inherent absence of people in photographs to Jacques Derrida's philosophy of trace. Therefore, prior to applying the Derridean trace of absence to the photographs published in the memoirs and its significance, his theory of trace is elaborated and its relationship with death is examined. Moreover, the study of photography and death inevitably carries with it important notions such as spectatorship, intentionality, production and reproduction of images, and finally, authenticity, each of which is also studied further in this chapter.

The two following questions must then be asked in any inquiry on the nature of photography and its significance in relation to thanatography, and how does its internal grammar, if it can be granted one,[92] contradict our tripartite understanding of temporality as represented in writing? Before answering these questions, we must first ask whether photography is an independent language; and, if it is considered a language, what characteristics make it so. I will begin with the modern definition of language, as put forth by Ferdinand de Saussure. The reason for this choice is the linguist's influence on the theories of Barthes and Derrida, whose philosophies are the fundamental theories in this chapter.[93]

Photography, which has been facilitated by pushing a button on our cellphones, a device at everyone's disposal, has become a prevalent mode of documenting reality. Its ubiquity and practicality have made photography a tool for authenticating reality. It has become so popular that its existence in authenticating a fraction of reality supersedes the actuality of the event. In other words, we tend to believe the authenticity of an event only if there exists a record to corroborate its existence. Sontag writes that "[P]hotographs furnish evidence […] something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it" (4). The possession of photographs, in this manner, becomes an inevitable object of power. The nature of photography transcends linear temporality, for a photograph offers "free rewriting time," or "an imposed reading time" by the spectator (Metz 81);[94] the discrepancy among the time of photography, the time of the photograph and the arbitrary moment of spectatorship creates a chasm in human perception of temporality. Therefore, if "death is but the victory of time" (Bazin 4),[95] photography, which seizes and captures time and space,[96] is one of the best media to study death.[97]

Being in possession of the photographs of the deceased, mourners, either as a necessary phase of grieving or as the inevitability of coming across the deceased's photographs, cope with death. The ubiquity of photographs which has made humans "homo photographicus" (Richter, ch. 1), has altered the reality of death since it allows contemplating photographs of the deceased an inevitability in the mourning process. In other words, according to Martine Delvaux and Catherine Mavrikakis "la photographie est la promesse que le monde existe encore dans un ailleurrs" (21),[98] that is, the existence of the deceased is contemplated in a world of photography where he or she is present, albeit in a photo. The display of oversized photographs of the deceased has become an inseparable part of funeral observances and spectatorship. The fact that "in the photograph, something has posed in front of the tiny hole and has remained there forever" (Barthes *Camera Lucia* 78), causes contradictory sentiments. An example of Barthes' claim can be found in Poirier's memoir where, upon seeing the photographs of her deceased daughter, Poirier expresses her emotions through a paradoxical language that shows reality through light moving across a space in which her daughter is absent: "I wait for the band of light to move across the photographs of that morning. I see the light. It is there. You are not. I feel so cold" (8). Poirier's sentiments verbalize an aspect of photography that "is concerned with the staging of a struggle against the loss of memory, an attempt to archive and preserve what is about to disappear for good" (Ritchter, ch. 2). Seizing the moment made the mourner realize that the inevitable has happened, the nature of which according to Barthes is "violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed" (*Camera Lucida* 91). The photograph always registers absence. In an interview,[99] the photographer Winfried Sebald claims that "[T]he gray zone in black-and-white photographs is what is between life and death" (108). His claim is best represented in Poirier's memoir in which, while documenting her daughter's life, writes that "I mourn for you in black and white, in shifting shades of grey where light and shadow flow together […] I live in black and white. I am in the dark and I want to see. I search for the light within, for reconciliation. In film, black and white often indicate a passage of time, of time past. For me, time stopped with you […]" (10).

Not only is the subject of photography of value, but the moment a photograph is captured is crucial since documenting is choosing "between photographing at X moment or a Y moment" (Berger and Dyer 19), which attests to the temporal nature of this recording medium. It is also important to mention that what is published in the memoirs is a reproduction of the images already taken; that is, there is an element of choice and intention included which may be missed by the reader of the photographs. Derrida claims that "recording an image would become inseparable from producing an image" (*Copy, Archive, Signature* 5). The experience of time, what it presents, and what it is a trace of is gaged through photography which, according to John Berger writes in *Understanding a Photograph* (2013), makes us aware "of the poles of absence and presence" (19). Capture is the verb often used with the noun 'photograph,' and by capturing a moment, photography "isolates, preserves and presents a moment taken from a continuum" (Berger 20). Metaphorically, this verb is used by Matthews in her memoir in juxtaposition with the word "presence," who writes that widows "sit at their [deceased husbands'] desks, use their pens, keep up the rituals, and try to capture threads of our partners' presence" (22). It is not a coincidence that the writer uses photography jargon to express the absence left by the deceased husband, for the narrator's efforts are to mitigate the pain of someone's loss by looking for the traces left by the deceased, such as their clothing, belongings, etc. The narrator continues to "find evidence of your [her husband's] presence [furthermore]: notes scribbled on odd bits of paper, old letters, messages tucked in books. Whenever I'm at the computer I rediscover photographs and emails from you" (110).[100] The photograph, by playing the signifier for an absent signified, "defers" death. Death takes meaning by deferring its meaning through a series of signified which do not directly represent death but hint at it. Therefore, photographs become Derridean "*différance*" (23), first supplementing the meaning of death and absence, then morphing into a trace of mortality.[101]

Unlike other memoirs where photographs become a part of the mourning process, in *Deep Salt Water,* it becomes a signifier of an eminent absence; that is, before having an abortion, the narrator asks to look at pictures of the fetus: "'I want this abortion.' But I want to see it. […] The hollow picture- shadows and echoes- projects an image of my center. I shrink back from the portrait I see: a helpless child, terrified, as I lie on the bed" (66). The "hollow picture" is a time fragment captured between now and then, "bearing witness to human choice being exercised in a given situation" (Berger 18). The photograph does not sustain its conventional role in this situation and instead represents the spectator's will at capturing a moment that is a reaffirmation of his or her choice. According to Berger, a "photograph is already a message about the event it records. The urgency of this message is not entirely dependent on the urgency of the event, but neither can it be entirely independent from it […] I have decided that seeing this is worth recording" (18). Unlike other photographs which are traces of the past, this picture forebodes an eminent absence. This atemporality challenges the question of referentiality, for what is the point of reference in the sonogram then? Is it the past, when the picture of the fetus is taken, or the future, which signifies the absence to come? Once the photograph is taken, the question of referentiality can pose a challenge for assuming a determined starting point or the "original," is a vast philosophical subject, one which is questioned and elaborated on by Derrida in *Copy, Sign, Archive* (2010).

Photographs, or capsules of time, besides offering a narrative limited to the frame of the picture, are also complementary modes of communication. When paired with narrative, not only do photographs convey what cannot be articulated through language, but they also authenticate what the memoirists claim to be true. The latter's necessity in the case of personal writing seems so crucial that Nina Ernst writes that "[G]raphic memoirs often establish an effect of authenticity by including photographs as a means of reflecting back to truth" (65). Some media, such as photography, lay claim to a stronger veracity of the representation of reality, rather than others, such as writing and language. Sebald claims that the veracity of the narrative, which can be arguable, is confirmed only through photographs, stating that "the written word is not a true document after all. The photograph is the true document par excellence. People let themselves be convinced by a photograph" (106). Although Sebald may have undermined the capacity of language at communicating 'the truth,' memoirists, as explained in Chapter One, principally stay true to the events. In order to produce the desired effect on the reader, however, personal writings can be subject to manipulation by distancing from the truth. Our memory may also falter at times. More importantly, what makes the nature of language equivocal lies in its propensity to multiple interpretations. Altogether, it seems logical to claim that photography paints a truer picture than words do, even disregarding modern strategies of computer-generated image manipulation, such as Photoshop.

In representing reality, photography is also compared with painting; Sontag in *On Photography* and Barthes in *Camera Lucida* propose theories of photography that discuss photography's importance and impact as a modern art on our lives. As opposed to painting, the dominant art precedent to photography, which may distort, beautify and manipulate reality, photography allegedly is true to reality and captures a fraction of it. Berger, in comparing photography with painting, writes[102] that "[E]very relation between forms in a painting is to some degree adaptable to the painter's purpose" (19). The notion of photography's objectivity disregards the photographer's choice of the object captured, framing and angle, shutter speed, the choice of lens, the role of Photoshop, and myriad other factors which bestow or deprive meaning from an image. Photographs' adoption and rejection of meaning are discussed in Brown and Akler's memoirs later in this chapter as well.

How about photography as a language? In *Course in General Linguistics* (1959), Saussure defines language (8)[103] and its important elements: "the signifier and the signified" (65). In order to clarify the physio-psychological process, that is the production of language through thoughts and vocal cords, he proposes "to retain the word sign [signe] to designate the whole and to replace concept and sound-image respectively by signified [siginifé] and signifier [signifiant]. The last two terms have the advantage of indicating the opposition that separates them from each other and from the whole of which they are parts" (67). Saussure also emphasizes the arbitrariness of the relationship between the signifier and the signified, which becomes the main difference between photography and language. Unlike language, in which contingency and arbitrariness determine the relationship between a concept and an entity, photography, if not functioning on a symbolic level, necessitates a rational relationship between the photograph and the photographed. Therefore, unlike the Saussurean definition of language, photography creates a more faithful relationship between the photographed and reality. In Barthes' words "photography's referent [signifier] is not the same as the referent of other systems of representation" (76), therefore, photography's "power of authentication exceeds the power of representation [i.e., that of language]" (89).[104] Barthes goes on to write that "language is, by nature, fictional […] but the photograph is indifferent to all intermediaries: it does not invent; it is authentication itself" (*Camera Lucida* 87).

The nature of photography, to Barthes, necessitates an absent signifier, which violates the standard system of communication. A present signifier necessitates a present signified in most forms of communication in order to guarantee relaying the intended message faithfully. A photograph, in the absence of a signifier, is communicated in its entirety, making it a unique medium. “A photograph,” according to Sontag, “is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence” (16). Being closely intertwined with death, Sontag writes that all photographs are “memento mori” (15). In this regard, the nature of photography resembles that of death in that the memory of the deceased, or the signified, persists in the absence of the signifier, creating a sense of fragmentation. This system of registering reality, which according to Charles Baudelaire is “strongly conditioned by the industrial process” (353-4),[105] has created an unprecedented experience for it offers a new medium to experience immortality. In *Sixty,* upon contemplating a photograph in an exhibition, the narrator writes that the “photographs are there to suggest that glory is ageless […] the boys in the picture feel ‘invincible, just like you feel,’ they too feel they were destined for greatness”’ (180). The absence of the signifier and the eternal presence of the signified brings about an erroneous logic, making the subject of portrayal seem immortal. At this moment, the reality of a photograph clashes with the reality of the observer as the narrator continues: “And then came the stuff that stopped me: ‘Did they wait till it was too late to make their lives have one iota of what they were capable?” (180). The aging narrator doubts whether he once assumed his life possessed the same nature as photography, that is, temporal perpetuity. It is the nature of the photograph that makes him think and doubt his choices.

An indexical nature is one of the supposed characteristics of photography. Ernst claims that photography has an “indexical quality” (65); in other words, the signifier is an index of the signified. Charles Sanders Pierce, according to Christian Metz, “calls indexical the process of signification (semiosis) in which the signifier is bound to the referent not by a social convention (symbol), not necessarily by some similarity (icon), but by an actual contiguity or connection in the world" (82). Philippe Dubois,[106] on the other hand, asserted that photographs can become symbols when "it comes to the [arbitrary] organization of its content [… such as] framing, lighting, and so forth" (qtd. in Metz 82). Thus far, different theoreticians assumed different definitions for photography. Signifier/signified, indexical and symbolical have been proposed for the nature of photography. In this sense, photography transcends language, in the sense of "la langue," since the former becomes an all-encompassing system of communication[107] which in nature is closer to Saussure's "le langage" rather than "la langue."

Although not linguistic characteristics per se, representation, and resemblance are essential attributes of any system of communication. Which one, that is representation or resemblance, can better define the nature of literature and photography? Jenn Web in her book *Understanding Representation* (2008), differentiates representation and resemblance, calling the former one of the "master concepts of modernity" (15). She also writes that resemblance is a "meaning-making system based on similitude […] and representation on difference" (25). Both meaning-making systems can be applied to photography and literature. As resemblance, a photograph is similar to what it produces and as representation, it functions in the absence of the signifier. The absence of the photographed item is further concretized by the tangible presence of the photograph. Narrative, being "la langue" on the other hand, functions on the level of representation, the characteristics of which were briefly explained earlier. Accordingly, photography does not create a discontinuation between reality and what it represents, while language, according to Derrida,[108] deploying signs to reconstruct reality, connotes the message rather than denoting it. The distance language creates in representing reality is larger than the gap photography produces in displaying the signifier. Therefore, photography becomes more powerful in representing reality because of its "true implication" (354).[109] This proposal begs the question of the importance of photograph publication in memoirs and the roles they play in meaning-making; does the publication of photographs suggest the incapability of language at conveying the reality of death, or do they function as supplementary information to the narrative?

Photographs and narratives depict reality through their unique communication systems: the former through representation and the latter through mimesis. The imitated or represented reality in narrative and photography shapes the mourner's understanding of the death of a person in question, while trace can be the "mark of the absence of a presence, an always-already absent present of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience" (*Of Grammatology* xvii). This is the reason behind the printing of photographs alongside the narrative of death. An example would be Brown's memoir with its distinct front cover photograph, (see figure 8), which is a perfect foreshadowing for the narrative of the book and a representation of the story to come. While the front cover is indicative of the story of the memoir, the images accompanying the text play a corroboratory function. Both of them, however, are annexes to the narrative. Whether the signatory relationship between our thoughts and reality is an apt medium to communicate thoroughly and truly is a vast subject beyond the scope of this chapter.[110]

In regard to photographs published along narration, the former does not discredit or question the authenticity or validity of the narrative of thanatography but further authenticates the narrative of absence and death. However, Richter disagrees with this proposition when he writes "*Of Grammatology* questioned the unity 'word' and all the privileges with which it was credited, especially in its nominal form. It is therefore only a discourse or rather a writing that can make up for the incapacity of the word to be equal to a thought" (ch. 1). The incapacity of words Richter refers to is compensated by photographs published in the book.[111] The photographs are also an attestation to what has been and what thrives to exist through words of grief. Moreover, they can act as visual narratives; while being ironically silent or even inscrutable, photographs complement the story of loss and death. Both words and photographs paint a clearer picture of the story of the deceased; Sontag believed in the power of narration, and she claims that "[O]nly that which narrates can make us understand" (*On Photography* 25). The inter-dependent narration through words and images compromises what each medium comes short of conveying -- a reconciliation that is anchored on the interconnection of the text and the images. Sometimes, photographs act as counter-narratives, that is, they go against narration; for example, while the narrative is about ill or deceased people, their photographs show them in their prime. They narrate the stories of the days when they were alive and well. These photos revive memories and play important roles in identity construction; an example is Giroux's memoir; recounting the narrator's difficult years of struggling with cancer, which portrays, paradoxically, a photograph of the narrator, who is healthy and happy (see figure 9). Another interesting example is Davey's memoir. The narrator, while writing about a bitter memory of his wife having an affair, juxtaposes his narration with a picture of her (see figure 10) recently having become a mother and holding their child affectionately (269). There is a stark contrast here between the motherly portrayal of the narrator's wife and the latter's insistence on "spend[ing] [another] week with him [the person she was having an affair with] in Montreal at Ritz-Carlton" (268); the portrayal of the photo delineates the desire of preserving the good memories alongside the narrated undesirable ones.

Alongside studying a photograph, i.e., observing what transcends linear temporality, comes spectrality which is being "looked at by ghosts" (Gibson 85). In *Objects of the Dead: Mourning and Memory in Everyday Life*, Margaret Gibson studies everyday objects belonging to the deceased in relation to the mourning process. One of the chapters focuses on the role of the photographs of the deceased and their effect on the mourners, which she calls "spectrality" (85). The "inescapable temporality" (31),[112] which links the past with the present, allows the spectator to be haunted by the fixed gaze of the deceased. Once our life cycle is replaced, in Mules' words, by the "life-death-life" (33) cycle of photographs of those who passed away, a feeling of spectrality takes place, which gives photography its essential nature of immortality. Mules writes that "the dead are permitted to live again as a spectralized presence within the awareness of the spectator, but only on condition that the spectator's own life is wounded, pricked, or bruised at the same time" (33). This is one of the reasons for the publication of photographs in memoirs: the reader, the narrator, and the narrative permit being haunted by the spectrality that the photographs create. The published photographs, subject to the choice of the narrator, create the desired effect for the mourner. Not found among the memoirs examined in this thesis, however, it is the presence of the photographs of the dead that adds to the thanatographical meaning of the text.

The Narrator as Photographer: The Intentionality of Photography

Death can be experienced in different ways in relation to photography; whether revisiting an old photograph, being exposed to the camera lens, or photographing the dead,[113] one can experience mortality in different forms. The third and last types of images, having the narrator as the photographer, are examined here in order to explore the relationship between the photographer and the subject of photography. To take someone's photograph, according to Sontag, "is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability" (16). In chapters 76 and 79 of *Men of Action,* Akler describes two old photographs, which he took, in detail; there is an arbitrary narrative of a background story that leads to the moment in which the photograph is taken. Although the photographs include most members of the family, the story revolves around the figure of the father. The descriptions are limited to the deceased's thoughts, actions, and motifs. Following the descriptions, the narrator draws a parallel between his father's personality and lifestyle and his own: "He is thirty-nine, a father for the fourth time with another on the way. […] His hair is dark and cut short […] I was forty-four when Susan became pregnant. We told no one through the first trimester but him" (110). The narrator's effort at understanding his late father through a photograph and by understanding his situation in comparison to his offers a new perspective to him. Moreover, a sense of belonging and closeness is resonated in his narrative when writing about photographs: "And a photo of us, side by side in a booth at the Free Times Café, on College Street [....] I also remember we took a stroll that day, after we left the Café: Susan and I, Nonni and Saul" (106). Reconstructing the narrative, albeit dependent on the deceptive faculty of memory, reverses the memory of the father who had a good life and enjoyed time with his family.

This category of photography "lays claim to another reality," i.e., the time when the person photographed was alive. Once the photograph is revisited, it makes the photographer rethink the moment of taking the photograph, including his intention, motivation, memories, and conversations attached to that particular moment. Consequently, a new reality is constructed through memories which must be shaped and revised in order to correlate with the photograph that was taken. This process alters and redefines memories, ensuing a different reality perceived by the photographer/spectator. This reality is defined though with one important difference: the subject of photography no longer exists, creating lack, absence, and an uncanny incompatibility with the reality of the moment when the photograph was captured. The absence, reinforced by concrete evidence of an image, concretizes death. An example of this category, albeit with the person photographed alive at the moment of photography, is in Brown's memoir. The narrator's father, fallen ill, was hospitalized, and upon visiting him, the narrator attempts to capture the moment. Once the camera lens creates a distance between the photographer and the photographed, the former sees a new reality in which he "couldn't bear to see the strange desolation on his long, kind face." Hence, the narrator/photographer "threw [the photograph] out." (201) The narrator captured a photograph of his father when he was in his most vulnerable state, and when the narrator walked into the ER, he saw "his resignation in the sag of his shoulders […], in the hang of his head and especially in the look of fear and hopelessness in his eye" (201). The intention of taking the photograph was to capture "what fades and that terrifies [him]" (200). He wished to "confront" (200) what was going to fade through the lens of the camera, but he failed and threw the photograph away. In a sense, the object of photography is violated through the exposure of the ill and aging body of the beloved to the camera lens and the will of the photographer. Thus, besides encapsulating the past event, the photograph makes the spectator "deal with the present" (Sontag 180).

Therefore, alongside intentionality comes the matter of ownership and spectatorship once the photograph is produced. The lens of the camera gives the photographer the power to not only seize the object of photography but also make it the owner of what/who is photographed. The power of ownership and spectatorship is a pivotal factor in determining the meaning of photographs for, besides its content, meaning can be found in what is not captured or what

Barthes calls the "punctum" (*Camera Lucida* 27), "the point, the poignant, the minuscule emergence of a point" (Richter, ch.1). The punctum depends on a reader, whose power of spectatorship bestows meaning on the content and delineates what is not included. During this process, absence is accentuated, making this medium similar to death. Metz relates the absence of the content to a kind of fetishism, to "the primordial displacement of the look aimed at replacing an absence by a presence" (86). Metz writes that the nature of photography makes gazing easy and therefore, a photograph can become an object of fetish. He also mentions that the tangible presence of the photograph, which "maintains the memory of the dead as being dead" (84), is the presence of an absence. This whole process is possible in the light of a reader i.e., an agent whose involvement in reading the content alters the meaning of the photograph. As examples, the mini albums published in Giroux's (*n.pag)* and Davey's (319-341) books attempt at filling an absence; in the former case, the happy days of childhood that the narrator mourns and yearns for, and in the latter, the childhood of a lost wife.

Among the various ways adopted by mourners in processing grief, photography captures what the deceased remind the mourners of. In her doctoral thesis,[114] Carrie Arnold explores the ways in which bereaving university students explore grief through photography and meaning reconstruction. This process necessitates that the mourners embark on a journey during which they take photographs of the objects that best remind them of the deceased, such as a cherry blossom, the deceased's favorite tree, a café in the city, a tattoo, a type of food, and so on. The narrator of *Sixty,* after losing his father, attempts the same experiment and tries to capture a photograph that represents his father: "I tried to take pictures, but nothing would do. Nothing was memorable enough to replace him" (125). While the process does not offer consolation to the narrator of *Sixty,* this method, according to Arnold, has proven to be effective in the bereavement process.

2. Derrida's Philosophy of Trace and Photography

In his magnum opus, *Of Grammatology*, Derrida traces the history of writing, speech, and Western philosophical thought in order to delineate and criticize the supremacy attributed to writing over speech. Derrida borrows the terminology "logocentrism" (3), meaning the centrality of words in expressing reality, from the German philosopher, Ludwig Klages. The significance of logocentrism is not only due to the importance of the written words but also because of their presence. The importance of presence, which Derrida calls "metaphysics of presence" (22), is also questioned in his book; he criticizes the importance given to the presence of an entity rather than its absence. This binary opposition, containing the importance conferred on presence rather than absence, has roots in Saussure's proposed linguistic system, which Derrida fervently criticizes. Nonetheless, Derrida paradoxically utilizes the system he criticizes to communicate his theories. Derrida claims that Saussure's proposal creates a binary of positive and negative poles in language in which the importance and value fall upon what is present and the disvalue on absence. Be that as it may, Derrida claims that we are in dire need of a new thought and linguistic system to adequately express reality as it is perceived. His proposal is deeply rooted in the history of Western philosophy and the latter's obsession with expressing 'the Real.' The history of philosophy inevitably[115] assumes that an absolute reality, such as Plato's Ideal,[116] exists that transcends our perception and the language system we have created and used.[117] Consequently, Derrida proposes his system of thought, which he calls "of grammatology" (4), meaning "science of writing" (1).[118] In this proposed system, he values speaking over writing.

The former, Derrida claims, is one step removed from perception, that is, our thoughts, while writing is twice removed from our perception. Therefore, speaking represents reality more truthfully than writing. One of the examples among memoir is Poirier's book. A documentary, *Tu As Crié: Let Me Go* (1997), narrated by Poirier, precedes the publication of the memoir, published in 2006. The order of the publication of the memoir and the documentary may have been contingent, but the oral narration of the story in the documentary is prioritized over its written production. This mode of publication is consistent with Derrida's grammatology. In her article titled "Speech and Mourning in Anne Claire Poirier's *Tu as Crié 'Let Me Go!':* Towards an Empathetic Cinema" (2004), Charlotte Selb studies the importance of the narrator's voice over the movie and claims that it generates a sense of empathy; that is, an identification or a displacement on behalf of the readers/audience, which contributes to a greater sense of understanding others' misery and vicissitudes. Moreover, she writes that the voice-over acts as a therapeutic tool and an attempt at filling the void created by the death of the daughter, which ultimately bestows meaning to "the absurdity of death" (4). The narrator's voice over, in a Derridean manner, subverts the supremacy of written words and uses the appeasing power of speech to heal.

Mediated through thoughts, the perceived reality is communicable primarily through speech, and secondarily through writing. Derrida observes that writing, being "the signifier of the signifier [which] no longer designates the surface" (7) falls short of conveying the real and becomes a "derivative of it" (7). Therefore, in the memoirs, photographs, as signifiers, complement the reality of narration when language "ceases to be self-assured, contained, and guaranteed by the infinite signified which seemed to exceed it" (6). The Saussurian binary opposition of language defines death in opposition to existence. Derrida's philosophy, claiming that writing cannot represent reality, makes death only remotely understandable, which is the reason why the narrators integrate photographs in their writing. Photography, not being a language, is exempt from Derrida's ideas regarding language and writing. It does not rely on a signifier conveyed through narration. It is the signifier of the deceased, absence, and ultimately mortality. "For Derrida," Richter writes, "the photographic image cannot be thought in isolation from the concept of trace and from the ways in which it allegorizes a subject's non-self identity and dispersal (ch.1). By creating a chasm in temporality through the apprehension of a segment of time, photographs make the intangible subject of death more understandable to the bereaved. An example is found in Choy's memoir where, in a life-threatening condition, the narrator remembers the last days of his father. Once recounting these memories, the narrator writes about a photograph he took of the deceased in place of writing about the day: "Before my father left Toronto to finish his last days in Vancouver, I took a snapshot of him, grinning happily, holding baby Kate, my goddaughter, in his arms" (16).

This brief introduction to *Of Grammatology* most certainly fails to capture Derrida's complex philosophy. Yet, the point in offering this introduction is to compare photography, as a language,[119] with written narrative and to determine which of these systems of signification allows a more true-to-reality expression. In the binary opposition of the Saussurean system, a positive and a negative meaning is conferred on words. In this regard, when comparing absence and presence, "[W]hat is most real, true or important is what is most present" (Bradley 6). If in the metaphysics of presence, the negative load conferred on absence makes the latter loathsome, the essentiality of death, being absence, makes it an unpalatable notion. However, photography through capturing and concretizing absence complies with Derrida's metaphysics of presence; in other words, the presence of the photographed in the image does not necessitate his/her presence in the real world. The photograph replaces the absence while conveying a sense of presence, and the presence of the photograph embodies an absence which in turn disputes the importance of presence over absence. In Derrida's words, it is the photograph's "presence of the present [that] separates from itself, supplants itself, replaces itself by absenting itself, produces itself in self-substitution" (309). The present photograph becomes a substitution for death and diminishes the pain of the unwelcome absence. The metaphysics of presence, in Derrida's words, "wishes to […] give a privileged position to a sort of absolute now, the life of the present" (309), while photography, as a form of representation, "not only breaks self-presence but also the originarity of the present as the absolute form of temporality" (309). Therefore, the publication of photographs in memoirs and the therapeutic role that they play in acquiescence to death is an essentiality of thanatography.

One of the notions in relation to the metaphysics of presence that Derrida elaborates on is trace. Speech, used to communicate one's reality to another, is uttered in the presence of a speaker and an interlocutor. A written text, which does not necessitate the presence of the writer nor the reader, inheres an element of absence, i.e., the absence of the writer. The conveyed message, twice removed from reality,[120] inheres the trace of the absence of the writer whose message, i.e., the signified, is also conveyed through the absent signifier. Therefore, Derrida concludes that writing bears traces of absence at all times. In defining trace, Derrida writes about the essentiality of the sign and the fact that its essence can never be questioned in our linguistic system: "Trace is a contingent unit of the critique of language always-already present: language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique" (254), claims Derrida.[121] He writes that "the sign is that ill-named thing,[122] the only one, that escapes the instituting question of philosophy:

'What is …?'" (xvii). With the sign becoming an ineluctable part of speech and language, Derrida draws on the metaphysics of presence:

> the formal essence of the signified is presence, and the privilege of its proximity to the logos as phoné is the privilege of presence, [but the] trace is not only the disappearance of origin- within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. (18-61)

What then is the relationship between photography and Derridean trace? Derridean trace is an essential outcome of Derridean deconstruction, with which he "avoids the Nietzschean connotation of demolition" (*Copy, Archive, Signature,* "Between Transition and Invention: The Photograph in Deconstruction"). It is a "gesture [that] involves taking something apart in a way that heeds the logic of its architectural plan and thereby exposes the internal tensions that both enable and vex it" (*Copy, Archive, Signature,* "Between Transition and Invention: The Photograph in Deconstruction"). Therefore, the present and absent aspects of entities become, while entailing, the trace of each other. In this regard, to study the trace of photography in narration is applying Derrida's deconstruction. Photography, as well as narration, bears the trace of the reality that once was (existed) when the deceased was alive, and interestingly, Derrida writes that "the most effective deconstruction […] is one that deals with the nondiscursive [i.e., non-linguistic system, e.g. photography], or with the discursive institutions that do not have the form of a written discourse" (*Copy, Archive, Signature,* "Between Transition and Invention: The Photograph in Deconstruction"). The semblance of the presence offered by photographs is a defense mechanism against the absence created by death; this can be one of the reasons for preserving photographs of the deceased. "Derrida argues that every apparently pure, or self-identical presence is nothing more than an effect generated by a prior series of differences" (Bradley 7); i.e., the death/absence of a person is understood in opposition to an earlier presence, which again defies the logic of photography: what used to exist becomes timeless and continues existing. It exists despite its anterior demise.

Derridean trace shares a common characteristic with photography, as both lack a present signifier and therefore, their signified adopts meaning in *différance*[123] from what is absent, regardless of the subject of photography, whether it revolves around death or not. Photography, due to its potential for encapsulating the signifier in the absence of the signified, inheres the traces of what is photographed. Therefore, one can argue that photography's nature is intertwined with the Derridean trace. The confluence of Derridean trace and photography finds its peak in death, where the trace of the latter, found in photography, turns into an active element in the process of mourning. Barthes, who studies trace in *Camera Lucida*, calls the signifier "the Referent" whose "stubborn presence […] produces the essence [the spectator] is looking for […] a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see. In short, the referent adheres" (6). In this sense, death becomes an inseparable component of photographs, and its nature a contradiction to what human faculties are capable of perceiving. Barthes goes on to write that "death is the *eidos* of the photograph" (15), eidos being the essence since being exposed to the camera lens is to experience death at least once: "everything which happens within the frame dies absolutely once this frame is passed beyond" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 57).

In writing about trace and photography, Sontag argues that "[C]ameras establish[ing] an inferential relation to the present (reality is known by its traces), provide an instantly retroactive view of experience" (180). The trace, whether inferential or representational, is the element that photography and writing share. Photography may distort reality but the irrevocability of the fact that what has been photographed existed at some point makes this medium a source of knowledge and power (Sontag 2). For instance, in complementing his narrative, and in order to offer a more vivid picture of his memories, Davey publishes approximately twelve pictures of his deceased wife throughout his memoir, *How Linda Died.* Photography, through capturing both space and temporality, can evoke a feeling of nostalgia pertaining to what existed and is missed. Davey's nostalgic feeling follows a dream he has of his deceased wife; the narrator wakes up and writes "I keep trying to repicture her- this Linda, who was in the process of being healed by death" (326). The narrator's nostalgic feeling is a result of a clash of realities, in one of which the wife does not exist anymore, and in another -- that is, the ephemeral dream -- she is resurrected. In other words, nostalgia is the result of a conflict between that which used to exist and its present traces, whether in the form of a photograph, a memory, or a dream.

Trace, vouching for the presence of an entity in relation to its absence, is best captured in a photograph which Barthes calls the "noeme," meaning "that has been" or "the intractable" (77); he writes "what I see has been here, in this place which extends between infinity and the subject (operator or spectator); it has been here, and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred" (77). Photography, through seizing the past, suggests a present that is past, "a secondary form of existence" Sebald says "or one that is coordinated with ours, superior or subordinated to us. The people that disappear from life still prowl around somewhere in this life" (Scholz 105). In Matthews' memoir, traces of absence are not limited to photographs but to her "memories and journals [which provide a kind of harvest and a sense that [their] love is not lost" (122). After her husband's demise, the narrator studies the letters they used to write to each other when they lived in different cities. It is through the letters that Matthews tries “to know exactly what [her husband was] thinking, wanting to understand, wishing [she] could ask [him] questions. Everything about [him] is again mysterious and remarkable and fascinating” (61). The death of the husband has created a new post-mortem identity that the mourner tries to discover again. The new identity, that is, the absence left by the deceased, is established through *différance* with the sense of identity before the loss. The narrator attempts at finding meaning, in the absence of her husband, in what is documented and what is not written in the letters. Consequently, the identity of the mourner is differed and is defined in relation to the trace, which is the result of the deconstruction of being. The deceased’s being, “supplemented” by trace, becomes the referral point in relation to which the mourner tries to establish a new identity. The mourner effaces his/her last identity, formerly established in relation to the presence of the significant other in order to create a new sense of self that would be able to survive. Matthews writes that her “memories of [their] life together are part of who [she] now [is]” (143). The juxtaposition of memories, as traces, and the mourner’s “current” being vouches for the new identity constructed in the absence of the husband. The identity of the mourner can become a trace of the deceased, a continuation cultivated and understood in the absence of a significant other: “I’ll understand who you truly are and who I am, now that neither of us is as we were” (61), Matthews writes, which is a “*différance* unified only by the concealed narrative force” (MacDonald 154); in other words, the delayed comprehension of selfhood is attained through narrative. The “absence within [the mourner]” (McDonald 154) is filled by the traces the deceased left behind. Matthews writes that “everywhere I find evidence of your presence: notes scribbled on odd bits of paper, old letters, messages tucked in books. Whenever I’m at the computer I rediscover photographs and emails from you” (110). The photographs and letters adopt a new meaning shaped by “what is not there” (McDonald 155) rather than by what is. Matthews writes “I, too, begin to feel that you are an integral part of who I am, though I am still too aware of your presence as you to contemplate ever having another partner” (137).

The absence of the signifier bestows a powerful meaning on the signified, which makes the absence of the signified bolder in the presence of the trace. Derrida, in an attempt to de-pathologize mourning, tries to “find the beauty of friendship and connection with some kind of beyond […] to honor the otherness of the dead and our attachment to them” (464).[124] Similarly, Matthews writes about the connection she finds with the deceased husband in the distance that death imposes on them; “I tug on my cleft ear, feeling your absence and cleaving to the sense of your presence” (136). She concludes that bereavement is the last and inevitable phase of marriage and writes of “bereavement as a separate and distinct phase of our continuing marriage […] one in which we are apart and yet together, cleft, yet cleaving to each other. In our Epilogue, I cleave to you, Mike. I talk to you. *Michaelangelo, Mio marito, Mio angelo*, I will never leave off speaking to you” (140). By communicating with him, Matthews finds the Derridean connection “to the beyond” while mourning her husband (Mathews 140). She writes “[I]t is where you are not/that the fissure occurs/ and the light crashes in” (23). Ironically, the mourner finds the deceased where the latter cannot be found, but its trace, in form of ‘light’ becomes a solace to the narrator.

A trace may be assumed for all means of recording reality, such as movies, paintings, and photographs. Yet, photographs possess two important characteristics that distinguish the medium from other means of reproducing reality. First, photography is not “an interpretation” (67)[125] of reality as painting is. Photography is an apprehension of a moment; it isolates a fragment of temporality and gives it a resemblance of eternity. Therefore, photography leaves a trace of what is captured at a specific moment in time. Second, the photograph’s “independency” (Berger 68) from the time of its apprehension gives it a unique characteristic and an independent identity of its own from the captured moment. The photograph is not the moment apprehended but a trace of it. This way, a photograph, a rupture in temporality, represents simultaneously two segments of time: the past, when the photograph was captured, and the present, the moment when the photograph is seen.

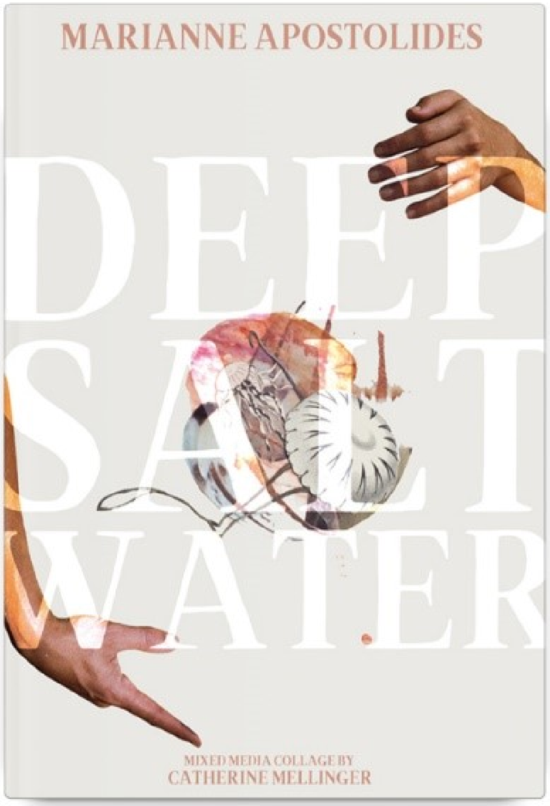


Figure 6, Deep Salt Water front cover; a pregnant mother holds her stomach. The fetus, portrayed as a fish, and eel and jellyfish are in the ocean of the mother's stomach. Mellinger, Catherine. *Deep Salt Water.* Marriane Apostolides, Bookthug, 2015. Front cover.

How about other media recording reality which are found in the memoirs studied in this chapter? One medium which constitutes a significant part of *Deep Salt Water* is collage. Instead of employing photographs, as most memoirs do, Apostolides adopts an unconventional method of complementing her narrative with collated photographs and images. The collages function as visual translations in the memoir. Richter claims that the juxtaposition of photographs and narrative confirms Derrida's "provocative assertion that […] something can be presented, interpreted, explained and even understood in terms of something else" (ch.1) which is photography as well as collages. In this manner, photography and collages become visual translations for narration, offering a holistic understanding of the subject. The book cover (see figure 9) foreshadows the story of the memoir as the visuals are mostly collages of various images that have direct connections to the theme of the memoir. The collage on the cover portrays two hands wrapped around a pregnant stomach in the heart of which we can see sea animals, such as jellyfish; the latter function as an extended metaphor for the fetus throughout the memoir. The metaphors of ocean and pearl which are used for the mother and the child are visually presented throughout the narrative. Abortion, portrayed in a collage on page 142 (see figures 7a, 7b, and 7c), serves as an anachronic narration at the end of the book. The collage on the back of the book cover (see figure 8), is concurrent with the first chapter, which describes the terror the fetus, depicted in the form of a child,[126] feels being lost in the ocean of the mother's womb.

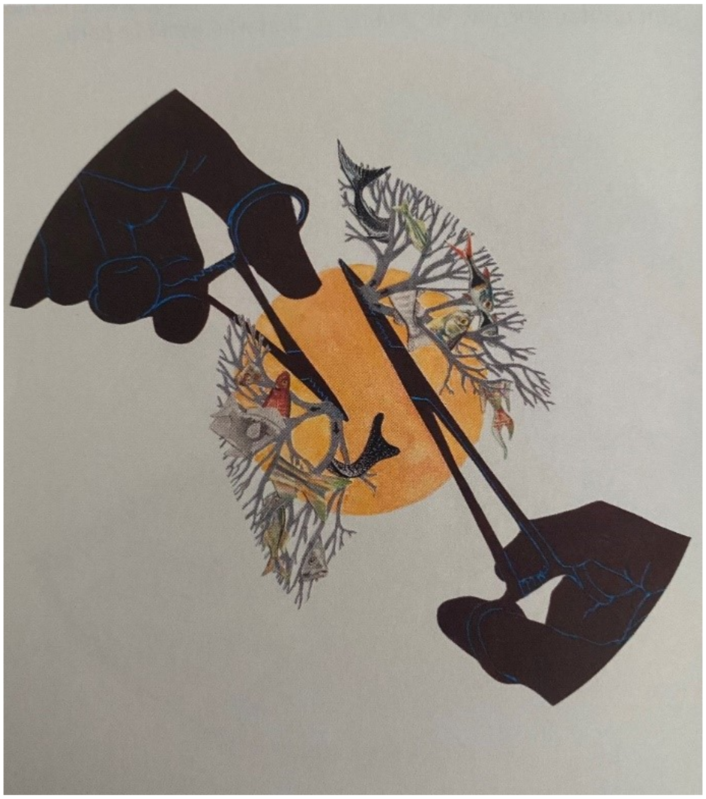


Figure 7a, this picture represents the theme of the memoir; the metaphorical umbilical cord, in form of an aquatic plant, is being severed from the mother's body (142). Mellinger, Catherine. *Deep Salt Water.* Marriane Apostolides, Bookthug, 2015.

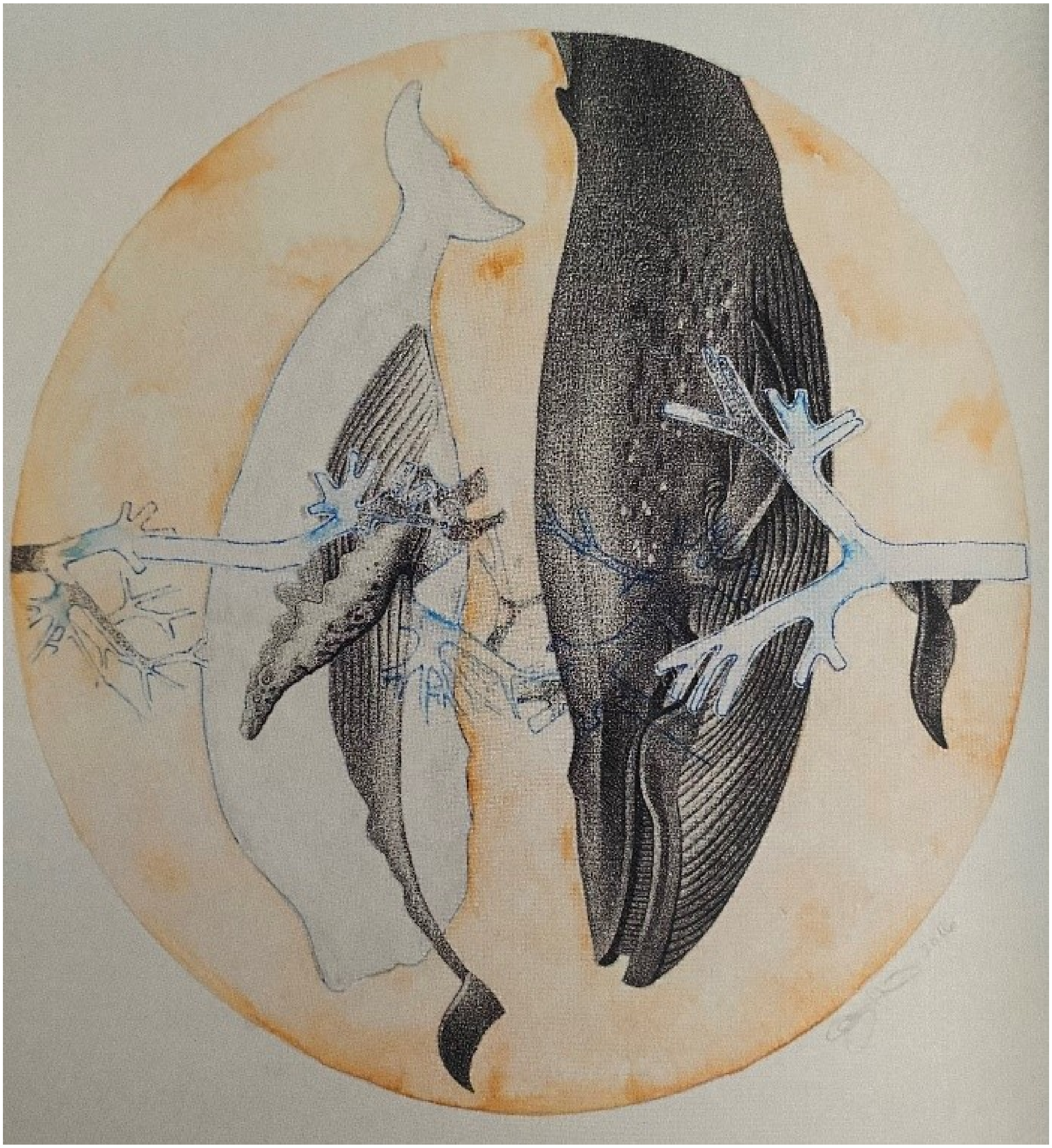


Figure 7b, in this collage (144), there is a small whale inside the larger white one. Yet, the link between the two adult whales is severed. Apostolides writes, “[I]t’s only males who sing this song, and only when they’re completely alone (145). Mellinger, Catherine. Deep Salt Water. Marriane Apostolides, Bookthug, 2015.

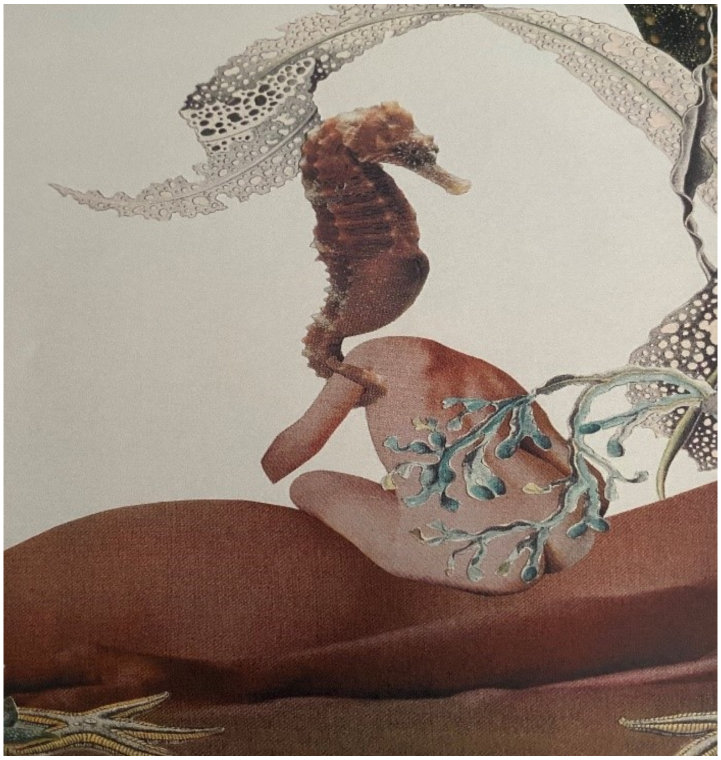


Figure 7c, this is the last collage published in the narration (146). An optimistic portrayal of the situation of a woman being rescued by a seahorse is accompanied by Apostolides' narration: "Only whispers and tingling, like breath on the nape. Like the promise of more. I believe this sensation" (147). Mellinger, Catherine. *Deep Salt Water*. Marianne Apostolides, Bookthug, 2015.

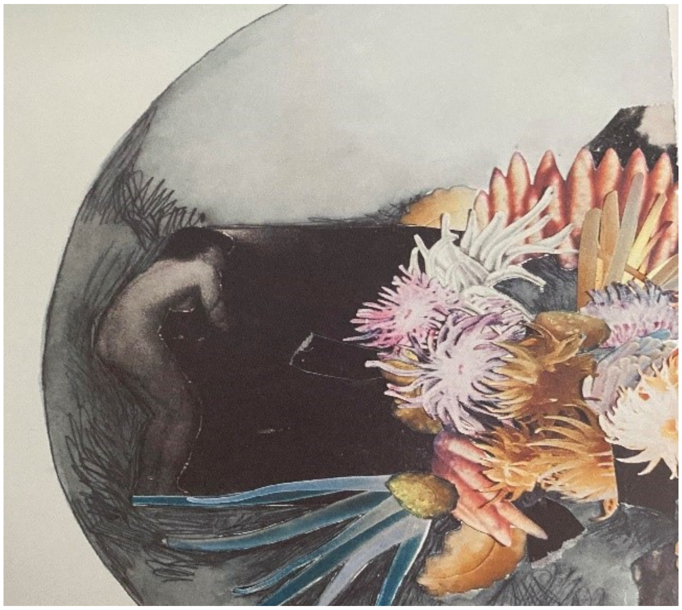


Figure 8, a child, presumably the fetus, is lost in the ocean of her mother's womb Mellinger, Catherine. *Deep Salt Water*. Marianne Apostolides, Bookthug, 2015.

The ubiquity of collages in this memoir begs the question as to why the writer chose the latter to complement the narration. Collage, which is an "artistic technique of applying manufactured, printed, or "found" materials, [...], to a panel or canvas, frequently in combination with painting (*Britannica*), defies the logic of narrative and offers a new perspective to the events. I believe that Apostolides aimed at offering the narrative of abortion in two distinct ways: first, being the story of an aborted fetus, which helps the mother construe a new reality and a novel identity, and the second, through a pastiche of images which metaphorically alludes to the chaotic experience of the mother having an abortion. In this manner, not only do the collages juxtapose narration but also, they disrupt and interrupt the latter; in a way, it functions as a counter-narrative. Apostolides' choice of using collages, instead of pictures, underlies the confusion the abortion of the fetus has caused the narrator. Given the arbitrariness of the nature of collages and often seemingly ill-fitting elements, in this case, aquatic life and the womb, the narrator and the collage artist complement the narrative of confusion with the "noninstrumental use of language" as Scarlet Higgins calls it in *Collage and Literature* (2019) (1). Collages "extract art from the grip of the mimetic and the narrative" (Higgins 2), which represents what cannot be conveyed through words. Moreover, collages disrupt the predictability of the structure of narration. This defiance of the '"structurality of structure' [is] a challenge to the metaphysical preference for Being as presence" (Derrida *Copy, Archive, Signature,* "Between Translation and Invention: The Photograph in Deconstruction"). In other words, the juxtaposition of collages and narrative deconstructs the expected, i.e., the norm, which in the case of *Deep Salt Water*, symbolizes the main subject of narration. Absence and death, in *Deep Salt Water,* are prioritized over presence. This manner of narration, which offers perspective to the substitution of presence, best defines Derrida's idea of deconstruction. Therefore, the use of collages in this memoir transcends its potential ornamental purposes; that is, they construct a narrative of their own which simultaneously belies the logic of narration and complements the narrative of abortion. Rather than seeking the trace of death in images -- for example publishing the sonogram which the narrator refers to on page 66 -- Apostolides portrays the enigmatic nature of death and the confusion it creates through an "anti-narration" (Higgins 1).[127] The subject of anti-narrativity brings forth, once again, the role of photography in juxtaposition to narration. Derrida's deconstruction and photography as anti-narrativity have better shown the role of photography in juxtaposition to narration. If the word "deconstruction, like all other words, acquires its value only from its inscription in a chain of possible substitution" (ch. 1), photographs published alongside texts are deconstruction in essence, and their presence complements what is inexpressible through words.

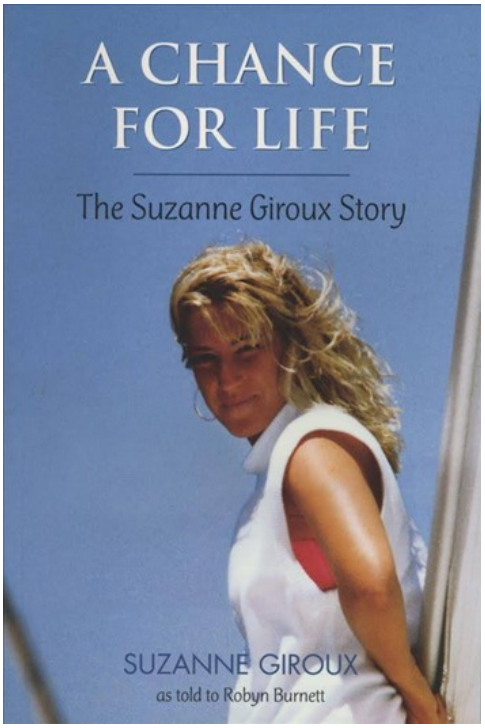
3. Conclusion

If "the language of the human sciences criticizes itself" (xix),[128] then the language of literature is no exception; that is, narrative criticizes itself for what it does not represent. Therefore, at least in the subcategory of thanatography where the main subject is absence and mourning, the text requires the publication of photographs: either as juxtaposition, addendum, counter-narratives, or collaboration. However, if photography is considered a language, that is, as mentioned earlier, a language without grammar, and all signatory systems are subject to Derrida's deconstruction, what makes photography an exception? What is the purpose of juxtaposing two signatory systems that come short of representing reality? The answer is in the very nature of photography. Coming in the form of "*sous-rature*" or "under erasure" (*Of Grammatology* 60),[129] I believe, photography presents its essential nature since, in photography, the privilege given to presence over absence is always already deconstructed by itself. Photography presents both and neither presence and absence,[130] but it prioritizes absence, a notion which has been considered "secondary" or "inferior" to presence. Therefore, it presents death at its best. "Il n'y a pas de "hors-texte" Derrida writes (*Of Grammatology* 158). Since narrative criticizes itself, it erases itself. I relate Derrida's notion to photography and venture to put forward that there is nothing *hors-cadre.* A photograph, similar to a text, erases itself; in other words, photography by prioritizing absence over presence, is deconstruction and annihilation in essence; it erases presence while portraying absence. That is the reason, I believe, that photographs are used in thanatography, even if not in abundance, since what can materialize death better than a frame that is in constant self-deconstruction and erasure? The presence of photographs is "always already exiled from itself into its substitution" (Richter, ch. 1), which metonymically represents death. Closure, if ever found, is not in forgetting the deceased nor in creating a narrative immortalizing and glorifying the dead, since nothing escapes the erasure that time inevitably brings. Yet, photographs, although susceptible to erasure themselves, are constant reminders of an absence, whether long gone or imminent. I disagreed with Sebald at the beginning of the chapter when the latter questioned the veracity words can offer in depicting reality. However, I would like to propose that, when comparing narrative and photography, the latter, through overthrowing the prevalent metaphysics of presence, transcends, erases, and reshapes itself to represent a reality that escapes narration. Derrida writes it masterfully when he claims that we

> already have a foreboding that phonocentrism [which] merges with the historical determination of the meaning of being in general as presence […] presence of the

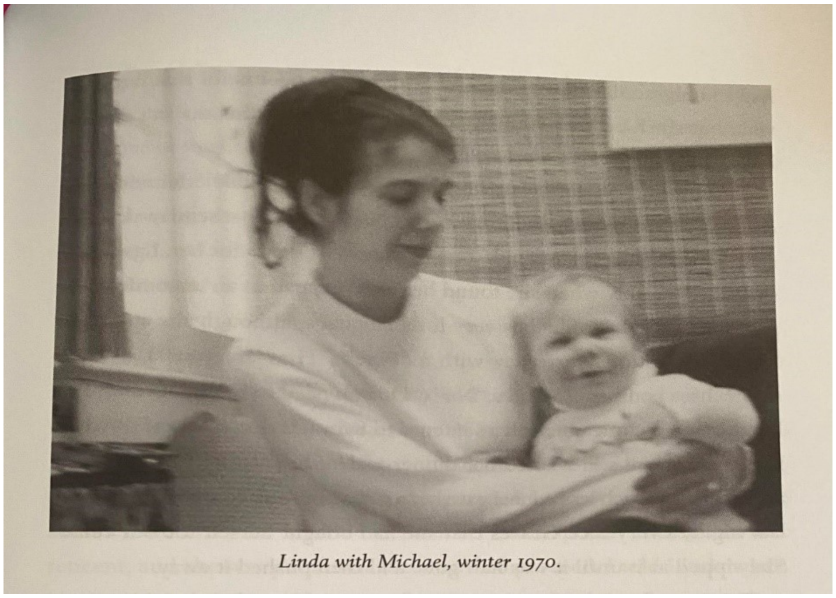
> thing to the sight as eidos, presence as substance/essence/existence [ousia], temporal presence as point [stigmé] of the now or of the moment [nun], the self-presence of cogito, consciousness, subjectivity […]" (12).

This substance is marginalized in photography; therefore, in juxtaposing photography and narration, a unity of absence and presence is created which makes reality more understandable to the perceiver. This unity births closure that makes the intangible understandable. In the memoirs, the memoirists repeatedly attest to the incompetent nature of words in describing how they feel, which is the reason why their emotions are expressed in their memoirs in a "noninstrumental language" as Higgins called it (1). Matthews writes, "I turn to words for solace, but there are no words sufficient for this aching void. No way to describe it. And yet everyone tries" (21). In thanatography, although "there is preference for being" (Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature,* ch. 2), the key subject, death, dominates the structure, hence the substitution, conditioning deconstruction.



A CHANCE FOR LIFE
The Suzanne Giroux Story
SUZANNE GIROUX
as told to Robyn Burnett

Figure 9, The front cover of *A Chance for Life* portraying the narrator happy and healthy; Giroux, Suzanne. *A Chance for Life,* edited by



Linda with Michael, winter 1970.

Figure 10, A motherly portrayal of the narrator's wife cuddling her son (*How Linda Died* 269). Davey, Frank. *How Linda Died.* ECW Press, 2002.

This invites an important question: which steers narration, photographs, or words? When the choice of photographs is simply for aesthetic purposes, it is the narration that determines the choice of photographs and drawings. For example, Davey's narrative includes photographs of the narrator and his wife complementing the narrative of participating in a pet contest (30), while the photograph published on page 269 (see figure 10) serves the purpose of an analepsis in narration. This photograph steers the narration in a different direction which, according to Sontag, is an act of "[R]ehabilitating old photographs, by finding new contexts for them" (77). It is the juxtaposition of the past, the already-taken photograph, along with the "post tragedy" (79)[131] narration that makes grief more understandable.

Moreover, the grammar of photography[132] does not correspond to the language's tripartite temporal and grammatical structure. In this manner, photographs are counter-narratives in relation to the events mostly narrativized in the past tense. Unlike language, photographs "repeat what could never be repeated existentially" (Barthes *Camera Lucida* 4). Therefore, in an "analogical manner",[133] i.e., producing a simulacrum of reality, photography can be used as a "peritext" (4),[134] that is, what adds meaning, a corroboration to language, especially to the narrative of death. An example of peritext can be found in Giroux's memoir, which is replete with photographs of family members and the narrator, most of which are embellished narration. They also prove the accuracy of events and descriptions. The reader, though, must be halfway through the book to see a mini album published in five pages, which are not numbered; however, I consider them to be a strong addendum to the narrative of illness. The photographs, independent of the words, establish a narrative in which they portray the narrator from childhood, through to teenage years, adolescence, marriage, and her struggles with cancer.

Published in chronological order, the photographs highlight the milestones of the narrator's life. The unreliability of memory, especially in personal narratives, encourages the publication of photographs which further establish the veracity of the creative nonfiction. Likewise, photography "metonymically represents memory" (1).[135]

Another example, found in Davey's memoir, is ellipsis.[136] The narrator of *How Linda Died,* in the chapter titled "After" (319-341), uses multiple photos, to which no story is allocated, as an annex to the narration. While the chapter includes the narrator's reflection on his life after his wife's death, it also includes random photographs of his wife from childhood. The photographs and the posthumous reflections do not correlate. While the former portrays the deceased in her early childhood with her parents, the latter narrates the grieving days of the narrator. Therefore, photographs can play different roles when published alongside narrative: they can complement, juxtapose, annex, or contradict the story offered by the narrator.

Barthes in *Camera Lucida* writes that photography resembles death by creating "a fascination with what has died but is represented as wanting to be alive" (xi). Photographs, according to Barthes, constitute a present "reality in a past tense" (*Camera Lucida* xvii) that escapes grammar. Photographs, according to Barthes, once capturing a fragment of the fleeting present moment, imply the return of the past, or in some cases the "return of the dead" (*Camera Lucida* xiv), making this medium a suitable addendum to thanatography, which complements the deictic meaning of photographs. Barthes writes that it is the "stubbornness of the referent in always being there that produces the essence [death] that [Barthes] was looking for" (5-6). In the absence of a signifier, the signified is accordingly missing, a system that photography defies. Photographs and memories in tandem perform in the absence of signifiers, creating a gap in our perception which makes the process of mourning more tolerable. Photography persists in the absence of the subject, and this specific quality intertwines the nature of photography with death, or as Barthes puts it, "in photography, I can never deny that the thing has been there. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past" (*Camera Lucida* 76). Barthes' choice of the word "superimposition" delineates the nature of photography. Photography, constantly, reminds the spectators that a reality existed in the past, rescued from "proper corruption" (Bazin 8). In this manner, photography wins over the decay the passage of time imposes on living things.

Considering thanatography a narrative of loss and pain, and that the narrators, at times, find closure at the end of their narrative, using photographs is a way of "externalizing" the pain (Chan 1). In *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (1990), Michael White and David Epston write about the methodical use of narrative as an externalization of internal pain. This method allows the patient to healthily manifest emotional pain and to reconcile with it. Epston and White specifically write about narrative therapy as an influential method with which patients deal with their pain. In this manner, photographs can also function as an externalization of the pain of the mourner. They can become a token for the narrator to "communicate in ways that cannot be easily achieved with unaided dialogue" (16).[137] The concept of externalizing pain is performed through the choice of photographs that the memoirists publish in their books. The photographs published in the memoirs are subject to the intention of a narrator who deems it therapeutic along with the narration. This intentionality invites important questions to consider when studying photographs. Photographs published and written about in the studied memoirs can be divided into three categories, and the following section will delve into their significance in memoirs.

Photographs and Reflexive/Reflective Gaze

The first types of photographs analyzed are the pictures of the narrator of the memoir. The photographs can be subject to a reflexive gaze, in the sense of a gaze directed back at itself, or a reflective one, a gaze with which the subject is thinking about himself/herself. Since there is a discrepancy between the time of the photograph and the gaze, a gap in temporality presents itself to the viewer. The observer experiences a unique sense of temporality which allows for the existence of two simultaneous selves. It also means the photographed moment, being timeless, freezes a fraction of time that would not otherwise survive demise. This self-displacing experience, coupled with being objectified by the lens of the camera, creates a sense of mortality and death. The observers, with an existential discomfort, examine their existence documented in a moment irretrievable at the time of spectatorship. This feeling has been expressed by different theoreticians of photography. For example, in an interview, Derrida speaks of an unease when posing for the camera which he assimilates to "*l'angoisse devant la mort*" ("*Derrida"* 00:05:28). Similarly, Barthes writes that "everything which happens within the frame dies absolutely once this passed beyond" (*Camera Lucida* 57). Barthes calls the captured frame a fragment that is "anesthetized and fastened down" (57), and the two verbs Barthes uses imply immobility and lack of agency; therefore, the person photographed can experience death by looking back at the picture that was taken of them. An example of this type of photograph is seen in Brown's *Sixty* (Fig. 8).

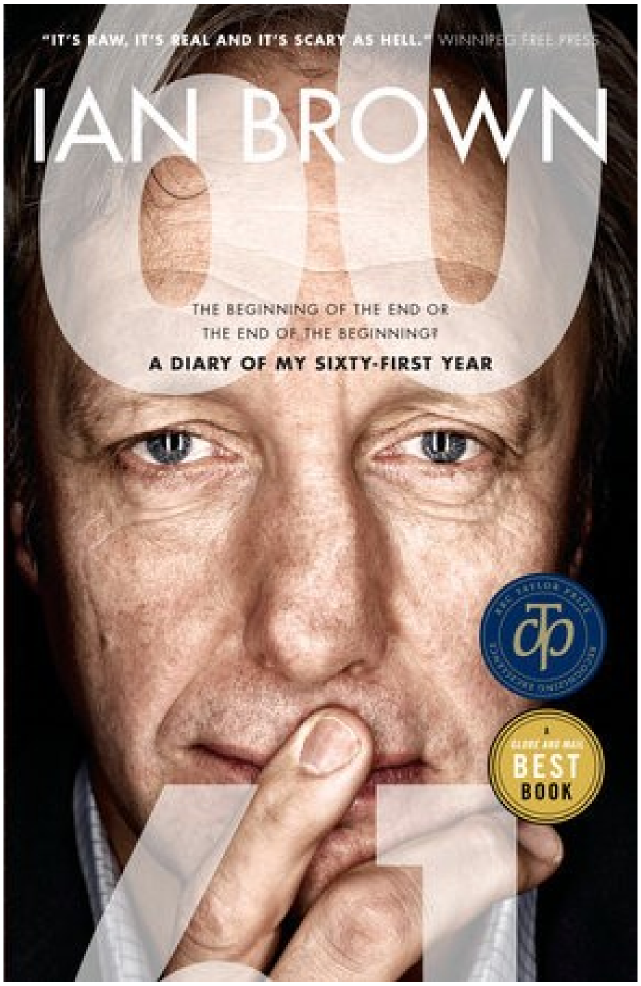

"IT'S RAW, IT'S REAL AND IT'S SCARY AS HELL." WINNIPEG FREE PRESS
IAN BROWN
THE BEGINNING OF THE END OR
THE END OF THE BEGINNING?
A DIARY OF MY SIXTY-FIRST YEAR
A GLOBE AND MAIL BEST BOOK

Figure 11, The narrator's aging face with an emphasis on wrinkles and creases is the front cover of the memoir. Brown, Ian. *Sixty,* Random House Canada, 2015. Front cover.

This book, which is about aging, displays a photo of the narrator on the front cover (see figure 11), either for the purpose of being true to reality, or emphasizing its autobiographical nature. The narrative of senescence is discernible by the conspicuous portrayal of wrinkles and creases of the visage of the narrator. Brown writes that "age spots now show up on my body with such speed and frequency I feel like a special effect- the man who is turning sepia before his photograph can" (68); the choice of word 'sepia,' which is the colour of all the photographs published in the memoirs, connotes aging. Barthes uses the word 'sepia' when describing an old photograph; "[T]he photograph was very old […] the sepia print had faded, and the picture just managed to show two children […]" (1984 67). Sepia contrasts the wide spectrum of colours captured by modern cameras with the monochrome registration of reality by the old ones; therefore, by employing the word sepia, a quality which is attained through time, Brown accentuates his aging process. Besides the emphasis on aging, Brown compares his aging self to a photograph, which, unlike its unchanging nature, oxidizes and changes colour through time. The narrator proves to be well aware of the nature of an image, and he weaves this narrative with his desire for stillness:

> At one point I […] look out over what seems to be the perfect […] countryside [picture …]: This is the pastoral view someone in England has always wanted to preserve. A vision of stillness, of nothing changing. There is no death in this picture, or if there is, it is simply continuation: what was, is, and will be. It is an antidote to the sadness of aging. (Brown 118)

In the same memoir, on the day of his birthday, the narrator comes across a pile of photographs of himself as a forty-year-old man. What startles him is the magnitude of transformation his physique has endured: "[The card] contains two photographs of me walking my daughter, Hayley, in her stroller in Los Angeles, when Hayley was an infant, and I was … thirty-nine? Forty? And of course, we all know what that looks like: it looks thinner. Your hair is ill-advised, but you have so much more of it you don't really care. At forty, I looked like someone who thought he was twenty-one" (5). The narrator immediately reminds himself that he has turned sixty and in humorous language adds that "[T]he End approacheth" (6). The discrepancy between the photographed and the present self is so stark that the narrator chastises himself for the choices he has made, reminding himself that he is sixty and that life "goes by much too fast" (6).

Photographs of the Deceased as Objects of the Gaze

The second category includes the photographs of the deceased which become the object of spectatorship. This kind of gaze has two significances: first, it redefines death for the mourner and second, it helps to recall one's memories and therefore, creates a more realistic perception of the circumstances. The two processes function cooperatively in order for the mourner to reconcile with the new reality. By preserving the moment, photography redefines death. However, this redefinition greatly depends on the moment of spectatorship; a photograph viewed immediately after death may invite a deep and painful sense of loss for one in the thrall of mourning, whereas the same photograph viewed years later may evoke happy memories and even nostalgia. A photograph that is "a present that consists its own memory" (Richter, ch.1), allows the mourner to bring forth memories associated with the photograph and "explore the link between past and present" therefore, "creating more complex and layered narratives in which emotions and embodied states from the past, alongside the setting of the experience, are brought into sharper view" (95).[138] Having photographs of the deceased and contemplating them allows "preserv[ing] him [the deceased] from a second spiritual death" (Bazin 6);[139] the fact that this medium, photography, captures and allows a certain type of preserving the deceased's health and youth brings a sense of relief.

CONCLUSION:

The Representations of Death in Canadian Auto/Thanatography

A riveting experience such as death, a universal concern shared by humans of various social, racial/ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, is best communicated in the universal language of art, including, but not limited to, sculpture, such as *Angel of Death* or *The Haserot Angel* (1924) by the Danish Herman Matzen (see figure 12), painting, such as Arnold Bocklin's *Self-Portrait with Fiddling Death* (see figure 13), cinema such as *There is No Evil* (2020)[140] and literature such as Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930). Among the many genres in literature, personal writing is used as an expressive medium to write about the angst of mortality. As the narrators contemplate their lives, a new understanding of selfhood emerges. Sometimes, literature is used to lament the death of a loved one, that is a partner, a parent, a friend, or a child. Among its many functions, narrative helps mourners to plumb the depths of their grief, understand the grieving process, redefine their relationship with the deceased, recreate a sense of self capable of understanding mortality, and survive the tragic event of loss which oftentimes is to be found in the denouement of the plot. In order to understand the expression of this complex process in literature, I have studied eleven selected Canadian auto/thanatography published between 1997 and 2017. The reason for selecting these specific books was subjective, determined by the familiarity of their topic and the emotional impact they have left on the researcher. The idiosyncrasies of each text cannot be extended to the entirety of the produced literary works in the community it belongs to since the chosen literary work may not be representative of the community, which would make the extension a superficial generalization.

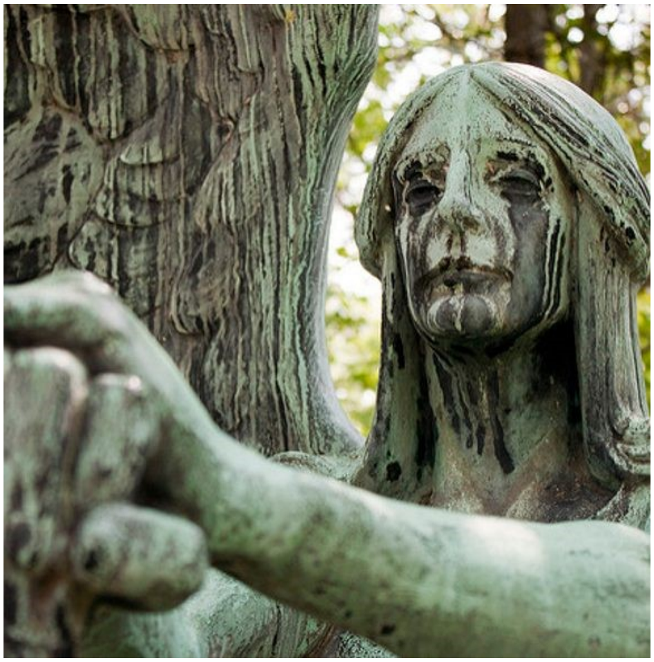


Figure 12, *The Haserot Angel* was crafted by the Danish sculptor Herman Matzen in 1924. This statue is in Cleveland Lakeview Cemetery.

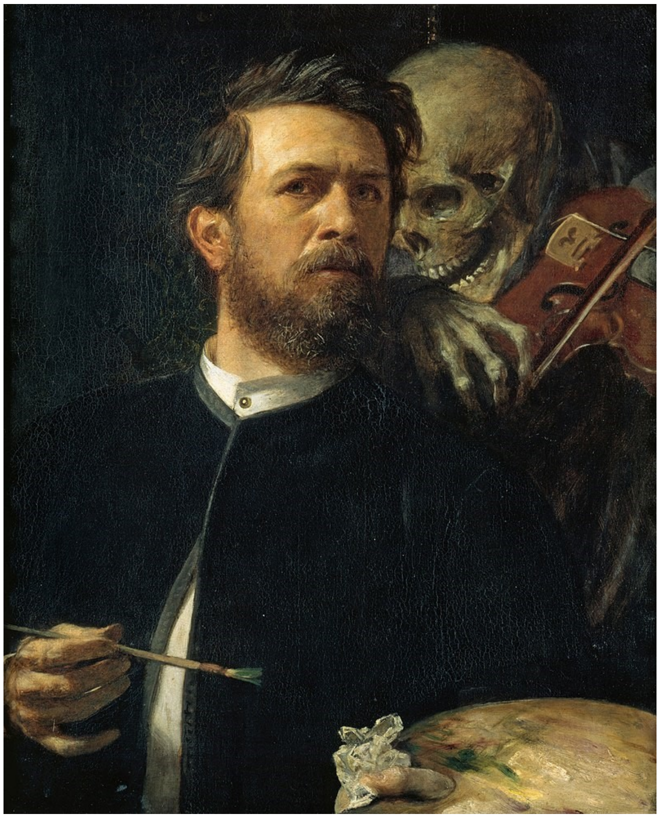


Figure 13, Arnold Bocklin. *Self-Portrait with Fiddling Death.* 1872, Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

Through studying these books, besides their common subjects, they have revealed certain common characteristics, such as their nonlinear plot temporality, the representation of the abject, the narrators' struggle with understanding the physical and emotional absence of the beloved, and the publication of photographs. Although the chosen books have been produced at different historical moments, in different geographical locations, and by writers of various social, economic, ethnic and sexual, and gender identities, there is a great commonality among their characteristics. Therefore, in dealing with grief, I have concluded that at least these three elements considered in this research are utilized to better grasp the elusive nature of death. These characteristics and their representation in the memoirs will be restated in this chapter.

The first common characteristic, narrative temporality, studied in Chapter One of this thesis, examines the narrative features of memoirs and their effects on the meaning of the writer/narrator in terms of making sense of bereavement and loss, and in the reader in terms of the interpretation of the text and their reflections on their inevitable mortality. The features include the order of events in plots or narrative temporality and the choice of point of view and focalization; in other words, the structure of the narrative and its implication in the meaning of the memoirs are studied through the lens of narrative theory, especially of Bal, Genette, Flundernik, and Ricoeur. This analysis is conducted in an attempt to delineate the functionality of the plot, especially the relationship between narrative temporality and the subject of death. In memoirs of mourning, by blurring the line between the past and the present, narrators weave memories and stories of grief. Analepsis and prolepsis abound in memoirs about others and work toward a story the denouement of which promises the birth of the memoirists' new selves and the immortalization of the deceased. An interesting example of this is Poirier's claim of "letting go" (56) of her deceased daughter, who screams the same words as she was trying to free herself from the grip of her murderer. In other words, the narrator of *Let Me Go,* through wordplay in the title of the book, lets go of her daughter and the grief she was haunted by, hence the rebirth of a new self in the absence of the deceased. Analepsis, despite the elusive nature of memories, and projection, constitutes an important aspect of personal narration. Meneghetti writes about the importance of memories in the last chapters of her memoir:

> Memoir arises in the chasm between a memory and its source experience. Writing memoir irrevocably alters its subject matter. What feels like a reclamation is only another permutation of the incessant storytelling that forms our reality. From memories, as impressionistic as dreams we weave our narrative web and become ensnared. (165)

The narrative of grief necessitates temporal manipulation, since the tripartite structure of temporality limits our understanding of death. Marking the end, death is supposed to be the denouement of a plot, that is, the last event in a narration with linear temporality. However, in the narrative of death, death does not signify an ending, but a beginning of a new life, albeit a painful one. Examples of this are abundant in death writing: “[W]hen Hegel writes that Minerva’s owl takes flight only with the twilight closing in, he spoke about philosophy painting its gray on gray and said ‘then has a form of life grown old, and with gray on gray it cannot be rejuvenated, but only known’” (Matthews 148); “I must let you go, stop holding you back. My heart must acquiesce. My body surrender [sic]. You must leave, my wounded kite, and fly towards infinity […] I let go. I let you go, mon amour” (Poirier 56); “[O]nly whispers and tingling, like breath on the nape. Like the promise of more. I believe this sensation” (Apostolides 147); “I shrugged off this memory, such bad fiction. I maintained my pace […] I could hear the baby’s breathing soften. She began to snooze. I moved some sentences around in my head”

(Akler 119). In the last example, Akler ends the narration by writing about life, that is, the narrator's newborn baby, rather than the death of his father. Moreover, by accepting the new reality and concocting a new sense of self, the narrator attempts at persisting in the absence of the deceased. Matthew's memoir, *Minerva's Owl* which is a symbol of knowledge and wisdom, implies the denouement of the memoir. In a sense, the narrator of this memoir, having endured the pain of loss, matures and expresses it through the title, which suggests understanding. *After Daniel*, among memoirs about others, exhibits a heightened self-consciousness which culminates in the very title of the memoir. The memoir's aim is not to mourn the death of a partner, but to help those experiencing the pain of witnessing the death of a loved one intimately. Through a nonlinear narration, Farr, who adamantly refuses to become the object of pity or sympathy, establishes herself as a knowledgeable narrator aiming at informing those affected by suicide, hence my earlier claim regarding the awareness of the narrator of herself and the produced work of art.

Davey's and Manley's narratives are the most structured ones, that is, adapted to the tripartite structure of temporality. In other words, the writers divide their narratives into parts with dates in the manner of a diary. For example, Davey's memoir is comprised of three chronological parts: Before Linda's illness, while Linda is sick, and after her death. The latter examples adopt a more conventional method of narrating someone's life. Another example in this category is Toews, whose memoir attempts a nonlinear narration; interestingly, this nonlinearity makes the comparison of the healthy state of the father in the past and his struggles with a mental disorder at the hospital salient; the use of nonlinear plot accentuates the father's fleeting sense of self. Another example is Apostolides' memoir, which, in addition to the use of an achronological narration, overtly questions the ability of language (41) to represent the real.

The turn to the language of metaphor and collage, that is, the language of abortion and pain, is only truly communicative through transcending the literal and transmuted into metaphors, symbols, and collages. Meneghetti's memoir, which shares the characteristics of memoirs about others and self, fashions a sense of self that matures throughout her story, culminating in the narrator's understanding of the intertwining of her memories of childhood and her adult desires. The memoir also narrates her mother and grandmother's struggle with cancer, and it bereaves the death of the mother. Although the narrator mourns her mother's death in a chapter or two, her grief continues to be present through symbols and metaphors throughout the narration.

The memoirs about self have distinct plot characteristics. The plots of these memoirs, with a focus on the concept of self at its heart, usually revolve around a dilemma, such as aging, sickness, and self-contemplation. The end of the memoir is marked by closure whether the memoirists' concerns are resolved, or they acquiesce to unwelcoming changes. In the narrative of illness, such as Choy's and Giroux's, the memoirists write about their journey of pain, persistence, and healing, which is ensued by the lionization of the self. The narrative of illness not only reveals the attitude of society towards the sick, but also elucidates the relative nature of care, studied in the previous chapter. The narrative of aging, such as Brown's, besides revealing the memoirist's concern about senescence and its implied hardships, reveals implications about society and the manner in which people treat elderly people. Regarding their plots, the following conclusions can be made. These memoirs, collectively, to various extents, are stories of the time, that is the "Zeitroman" introduced in Chapter Two. Rather than explicitly writing about time, these memoirs are embedded in a temporal discourse and are the products of this causal relationship. In other words, stories of senescence are direct results of the passage of time, and therefore, rather than manipulating narrative temporality, these memoirs yield to its significance in defining selfhood. Brown writes about his struggles and final reckoning with temporality: “I mean, it’s easy to forget, amid the pleasures and terrors and gentle draining sounds of everyday life, how it all goes by much too fast. Even if you pay attention all the time, and who, really, manages to do that?” (6). Yet Brown does. The narrator, through mentioning the importance of temporality in the early chapters of the book, makes his memoir a story about time and establishes himself as constantly cognizant of temporality. Choy, Giroux, and Meneghetti’s memoirs, although employing narrative techniques of ellipsis, prolepsis, and analepsis, are not Zeitroman, nor memoirs about time. Their main subject, being sickness, is more pertinent to the subject of the abject, studied in Chapter Two and concluded in the following paragraph.

Another common characteristic in death writing, studied in Chapter Two is the narrator’s horror and disgust at indications of death, for example, the corpse. The abject, foreboding death and mortality, are portrayed differently in the memoirs. In narratives of aging, it is the sagging skin foreshadowing senescence; in the narrative of abortion, it becomes the fetus; it is disguised as sickness, extra tissue, or an absent body part in the narrative of the ill, and its epitome becomes the corpse, which prompts repulsion and abhorrence. Being hardwired to repel death, human beings process their horror and disgust differently when exposed to various death-related phenomena. In the memoir of abortion in this research, the aborted fetus embodies abjection; once being a part of the mother’s body, it is removed as unwanted tissue which the narrator describes as “a gob of shame bleed[ing] [her] leg” (Apostolides 27). The mother’s feeling of disgust finds itself in the juxtaposition of “gob,” “bleeding” and shame. It is the dubious nature of the corpse, bordering on subjectivity, once having agency and now transformed into an object, that is, the passive state of becoming a corpse, that makes confrontation horrifying. Nonetheless, it is a tangible experience of the abstractness of death, and the refusal to confront the corpse is a way of rejecting death, as shown in Poirier's memoir when the narrator refuses to go to the morgue (41). In maternal narratives, the abject is salient, as the narrator, usually the mother, is incapable of drawing a clear border between herself and her lost child. The dead child, becoming an object, fails to maintain the past relationship with the body of the mother from which it was ostensibly born. After the death of her daughter, the narrator "look[s] … inside [her]self" to find her (Poirier 17). It is the reverse pregnancy, which blurs the line between the aliveness of the mother's body and the listlessness of the child's body.

Another manifestation of the abject is found in illness, which through violating the borders of the body, becomes the undesirable. In the narrative of illness, the abject is represented through the absence of an organ or by excess tissue. For example, cancer in the narratives of Giroux, Meneghetti, and Davey is described as an invasion of the body which violates its sanctuary. The excessive tissue, which infringes upon bodily boundaries and causes misrecognition of the body, is compared to an octopus; "I looked like an octopus" Giroux writes while she was "hooked up to a catheter to drain [her] urine, an IV to replenish [her] fluids, and God knows how many monitors around [her]" (56). The violation of corporeality is also represented through the removal of an organ, best shown in Meneghetti's narrative when the narrator feels disgusted at seeing her grandmother's single breast (26). These examples of illness, aging, and abortion, are foreboding examples of the epitome of repulsion, which is the corpse. In the narrative of mourning, the feeling of disgust, despite the loving relationship between the mourner and the deceased, is prevalent and represents a typical response to the subject of death.

In the category of illness, the abject, which is studied in the view of that is unpalatable and rejected, can also be examined in relation to the dichotomy between "nature and culture" (Frank 10), that is the split between disease and its treatment. In other words, the relationship between the nature of care in healthcare systems and the latter's relationship with the diseased casts light on the rejection of abjection in society. In this manner, in chapters two and three, the narratives of memoirs of illness are analyzed to discover the layers of patient narratives along with or in juxtaposition against medical narratives. The very definition of sickness and the treatment of the ill, depending on the nature of mental or physical illness, further determines what is perceived as the abject and redefines the notion of care.

Another common characteristic in narratives of mourning is the publication of photography, drawing, and collages alongside narration. Through studying the visuals alongside narration, the role of the former is determined to justify, juxtapose, complement, or annex the narrative of mourning. The visuals and their roles, studied through the Derridean perspective of the metaphysics of presence, embody absence in a manner that makes death more understandable and tangible to the mourners. The absence created by death, which cannot be expressed through words, finds its medium in photographs and collages. In expressing one's grief and understanding death, words, proven to be incapable of staying true to the mourners' feelings, are complemented with photographs of the deceased, usually portraying the latter in their prime. The use of collages, limited to Apostolides' narration, underlines the paradoxical nature of language, that is, using present signifiers to convey an absent signified. The nature of collages, through juxtaposing seemingly unrelated images, aims at pronouncing the paradoxical relationship of the subject of thanatography and narration. Moreover, photographs are sometimes published for the sake of commemorating and immortalizing the deceased. Immortalization through photography, studied in depth in Chapter Three, is a notion proposed by Bazin and further developed by Sontag and Barthes. Therefore, besides the Derridean reading of photographs, the latter's functionality in commemorating the deceased is noteworthy. Photographs outlive their subjects and, in this manner, defy death and annihilation, which is another reason for which photographs abound in narratives of death. Therefore, the literary elements of the genre of auto/thanatography are, but not limited to, the manipulation of narrative temporality, the representation of the abject, and the publication of photographs, which inheres in the metaphysics of presence. These elements are employed as receptacles for communicating thoughts and feelings about death.

In thanatography, the narrators exhibit a dual propensity towards the subject of death; either they approach the subject through contemplating the deceased, or they repulse any signifiers implying mortality; in other words, there is a *distanciation* and a rapprochement towards death and its signifiers. The rapprochement, concretized in the nature of the genre, also manifests itself in story-telling and narrativizing, as elaborated in Chapter One. However, narrators, through clipped and paradoxical sentences, distance themselves from linguistic rules and structures, and seek haven in the nonsensical language and chaotic structures where no grammatical rule reigns; sometimes, memoirists reach to poetry when the language of prose comes short of expressing their grief; for example, Matthews, grieving her husband's death, quotes poems of bereavement (22, 23, 34). This paradoxical act, that is narrativizing, organizing experiences, and logicizing the meaning of events contrast the distance taken by narrators when writing about death through a language defying proper grammar. A similar inclination is manifested in Chapter Two where dissociation from the corpse and the manifested abhorrence at what is considered the abject is belied by the contradictory reaction in empathizing with the ill, caring for the elderly people, and yearning for the lost ones. Furthermore, Chapter Three was an attempt to show the indispensability of this contradictory nature in photograph's essence. In other words, distancing and rapprochement are manifested in the embedded absence in the presence of photographs; the deceased's absence contrasts his or her presence in the photograph's omnipresent tangibility. Perhaps, the nature of death and thanatography requires an oscillation between rapprochement and *distanciation* for it becomes more comprehensible through contemplating what it is not and through human's contradictory reactions towards it.

Examining the pragmatic nature of the genre, that is the moral qualities of narrative, necessitates a thorough discussion of ethics which is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, a very brief examination of the moral quality of narrative of death follows. The phenomenology of morality, as opposed to ontic ethics, claims that morality is relative and culturally based. The task of phenomenology of morality is "to find a place for value in a world of facts" (57), write Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons in "Moral Phenomenology and Moral Theory" (2005). Although narrative of mortality does not elicit any moral judgements, its subgenres, such as narrative of suicide, care, abortion, and murder does. The latter subgenres call for sympathy or empathy. I believe that part of the unwritten contract between the writers of personal writings and readers is to engage the latter emotionally and elicit a moral judgement, in most cases, in favour of the narrator. Moreover, the writers are obliged to tell the truth to the readers, whether the intended audience or not, who play the role of an authority, to whom truthful confessions must be made in order to preserve the integrity of the genre. Throughout this process, the writer seeks an array of responses, such as absolution, sympathy, etc., which in turn contributes to the construction of the writer's narrative identity, having a stronger grasp of the events and experiences. Through using language as a tool to share the endured vicissitudes, writers, in a political act, elicit ethical questioning of the subject matter, which invites the audience to emotionally engage, reflect on the subject of narrative and decide; after all, "narrative is a participatory act" (3) as Adam Newton writes in his book *Narrative Ethics* (1995). In other words, the path to moral judgment is paved with emotional reactions, reflection, reasoning, and decision. Therefore, emotional reactions such as sympathy and empathy adopt an immense value. In case of thanatography, various subjects, ranging from illness, care ethics, abortion ethics, aging and mortality elicit various responses from the readers; needless to say, that the intention of the readers in choosing this type of literature, to an extent, predetermines the nature of their reaction. In other words, the readers' intention in seeking help or to simply engage in another reality dictates the nature of the consumers' reactions; whether it is commiseration or a mere cultivation of understanding of another human being's vicissitudes, an empathetic or a sympathetic feeling is induced. For example, according to Selb, Poirier's narrative and its moral thematic call "for a shared sense of justice" (7) with which the readers censure the society for failing to protect addicts and sex workers. This intersubjective condemnation and sympathetic feeling may also induce a sense of absolution in the narrator.

The exact definitions for the words sympathy and empathy, if there are any, prove to be difficult since their denotation and connotation have been in flux in various eras. Defining these terms and writing about them, according to Sophie Ratcliffe in *On Sympathy* (2008), is challenging due to "the vagueness that surround the term[s]" (8). For example, whether sympathy "should be understood as an emotion (or feeling) in and of itself- or as a cognitive position achieved through processing judgements of emotional states" (Ratcliffe 10) is debatable. Nevertheless, one of the many roles of literature is to elicit understanding and compassion; "the cultivation of imagination and empathy" Tim Gillespie writes in "Why Literature Matters" (1994), is one of literature's contributions to society and culture. The intersubjective understanding, mostly a result of a phenomenological experience of the narrative with which the readers project their own dispositions and intentions onto the text, creates a sympathetic feeling. This sympathetic act is the distinguished quality of creative nonfiction, such as thanatography, as opposed to a self-help book. It is needless to say that each genre, that is nonfiction and creative nonfiction, has its own followers, and depending on the needs of the consumers, one or the other is adopted. However, the writer of the creative nonfiction, through his or her engagement with the subject matter intimately, is able to share the experiences in a more efficient way, which again through creating empathy or sympathy, helps readers comprehend the subject matter more easily.

The corpus of this thesis is limited to memoirs published between 1997 and 2017. Thanatography published after 2017, such as Don Gillmor's *To the River: Losing my Brother* (2018) or Emma Hansen's *Still: A Memoir of Love, Loss and Motherhood* (2020), can be analyzed to determine whether similar narrative elements and strategies are to be found in their narration. Thanatography approaches death from various perspectives, for instance, memoirs that specifically address suicide in Canadian personal writing, such as Farr's memoir, or Liz Levine's *Nobody Ever Talks about Anything but the End* (2020). Memoirs of illness, especially those with an emphasis on hospitalization, can be further analyzed to determine the role of the Canadian healthcare system, its strengths, and shortfalls, with an aim of creating more robust and responsive institutions that take into consideration the ethics of care. Another interesting topic for research is the linguistic analysis of memoirs of death; in other words, death writing may possess its very unique language, which can be analyzed and delineated. Suzanne Fleischman, in her book titled *Tense and Narrativity: From Medieval Performance to Modern Fiction* (1990), studies the linguistic intricacies of fiction in creating and sustaining meaning, and this same approach can be applied to nonfiction, which can be a mirror of the hegemonies of the society in which it is produced. Although written by memoirists from different social, political, cultural, racial/ethnic, and economic backgrounds, the "individual grief experienced at the death of another human being" according to Emile Durkheim, "is expressed collectively in culturally prescribed ways of mourning" (Robben, "Introduction"), the common characteristics of which have been laid out in this chapter. One important "culturally acceptable" way of mourning in Canada is expressing grief through narrative, which in Norberg's words, "is precisely 'a way to chart a course of action at a time when the thread of tradition is irreparably broken'" (745). Canada, as the setting of the selected memoir, can be the subject of further research since its particular characteristics define and shape the accepted ways of grieving. The phenomenology of space, or as Heidegger calls it "[B]eing-in-the-world" (53), is an essential characteristic of defining the nature of humans and our experiences. The relationship between individuals and their environment is dynamic, and since the latter, serving as a continuum, is occupied by individuals, it plays an indispensable role in defining its occupants' experiences; in other words, "[P]lace is something living, and its meaning and value cannot be separated from our experience of it" ("Introduction") writes Janet Donohoe in *Place and Phenomenology* (2017). Not only space shapes human experience, the nature of grieving and mourning in this study, but also individuals "construct space socially" (Donohoe "Introduction") and bestow meaning on various environments. As mentioned earlier in this study, this research is not a cultural one and the study of Canada as a place defining and shaping mourning is beyond its scope; nevertheless, it is an intriguing subject for further research.

In this thesis, I have shown the various ways in which memoirs variously confront, symbolize, displace, and contend with the inevitability of death, whether their own or those of others. Memoirs provide a rich field for research and can be approached in a number of ways, including considerations of the ways in which the social identities of gender and sexuality, social class, ethnicity and racialization shape life experiences and consequently their portrayal through writing. They may also say something about nation, for Canada, “is not the subject but the occasion and the audience” (Helms and Egan 13), which can be examined in the context of memoirs. For example, Susanna Egan's *Mirror Talk* (1999) links contemporary auto/biographical experimentation with lived crises, placing Canadian writers alongside Americans and Europeans, which would be a valuable source for understanding the discourses of nation. Studying memoirs in the context in which they are produced would reveal the mechanisms and social discourses that have enabled their production. Although “living a life [and] telling or writing one” is different, the “[I]nterdependence of self and context” (Helms and Egan 15) is incontrovertible; the self is decipherable through narration, and the story unravels the hegemonies and discourses the memoirists, unconsciously or advertently, perpetuate throughout the writing process. The personal narrative either conforms to or resists the communal one; in either case, it would broaden our understanding of dominant discourses in producing literature.

ENDNOTES

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[11] Margaretta Jolly in *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* (2001) writes about the origin of the word 'life writing' (ch. 1) and its significance in different centuries. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Life Writing in the Long Run* (2017), claim that 'life writing' is not representative of the various genres in which 'self' is performative and plays a central role; Smith and Watson write "even the terms 'life narrative' and 'life writing' seem too limited for the ever-increasing modes of presenting, performing, imaging, circulating a 'life' in the multimedia of graphic memoir, performance art, visual art, and online platforms" (ch. 1).

[2] The notion of identity politics situates and studies the represented autobiographical I in the economic, sociological, political, racial, religious and sexual aspects in the context of the society. Valentine Moghadam in *Identity Politics and Women* (2018), writes about identity politics at length. The cultural studies perspective can be a future research topic.

[3] This technique, called character-bound narrator (CN) and external narrator (EN), and its effect in meaning making and directing narration are further studied in "Chapter II: Narrative of Death in Selected Canadian Thanatography."

[4] The notion of narrative identity is discussed in "Chapter II: Narrative of Death in Selected Canadian Thanatography."

[5] In 2017, Oxford English Dictionary added a new meaning to the word "woke" in its entries. It defined the term as "figuratively being aware or well-informed in a political and cultural sense" (Martin).

[6] It must be noted that the word "memoirs," in this context, is used in its plural form. The words autobiography and memoirs (-s being a part of the word) is synonymous and they are different from the word memoir, which takes on the suffix -s to show plurality. Yagoda in *Memoir: A History* (2009) writes about the difference among the terms in the first chapter, titled "Memoiruniverse" (ch. 1).

[7] Ben Yagoda quotes how Julie Grau, the editor of *Girl, Interrupted,* "explained to *Vanity Fair* in 1997 why memoir trumped fiction in the marketplace: 'You can send the 'I' out on a tour'" (ch. 1).

[8] In the first chapter, "Memoirunvierse," of his book, Yagoda presents an exhaustive list of memoirs published in the 21st century. He also investigates the lucrative contracts signed by celebrities, artists, politicians, former CIA agents, singers, and rock stars mostly often followed by a response from family members in form of memoirs, to write about their life experiences. Interestingly enough, the list of renowned writers who published autobiographies and memoirs pales in comparison.

[9] According to Yagoda, after recompensating the readers who asked for refunds and the fees related to legislator processes, the *Random House Publication* and Frey, after adding a warning to the book regarding the reliability of the content, "received a total more than 4.4 million dollars in royalties" (ch.1).

[10] Among the most recent examples, I can refer to politicians' books, such as Jean Chretien's *My Years as Prime Minister* (2021), Brian Mulroney's *Memoirs: 1939-1993* (2022), Barak Obama's *A Promised Land* (2020) and John Bolton's *The Room Where It happened* (2020), social figures', such as Trevor Noah's *Born a Crime* (2016) and Rachel DeLoach's *My Friend Anna* (2019). Among celebrities, we can refer to Matthew McConaughey's *Greenlights* (2020) and Patti Smith's *Just Kids* (2010).

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[11] Both Gass and Rank's comments about the genre of memoirs are cited later in the first chapter and are not quoted here to avoid repetition.

[12] Mary Ann Warren in her book titled *Moral Status: Obligations to Persons and Other Living Things* (1997) writes about the ethical question of morality and its applications in our lives.

[13] In their book*, The Rise of Victimhood Culture: Microaggressions, Safe Spaces, and the New Culture Wars* (2018), Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning map the cultural movements leading to the culture of victimhood; in their comprehensive book, they also study the various aspect of this emerging culture and its implication in the society.

[14] According to Helms and Egan in "Auto/Biography? Yes. But, Canadian?" Ken Wiwa in a *Globe and Mail* series called "Passages to Canada" writes that Canada allows immigrants "to bring [their] past with [them]. You get a pretty hefty baggage allowance when you come to Canada" (12).

[15] The difference between site and setting is studied by Smith and Watson (2010). While setting refers to the general milieu in which the work of art is produced, in this case, Canada, site "then, more actively than notions of place or setting, speaks to the situatedness of auto- bio graphical narration" (71). For example, the setting of Toews' *Swing Low* is Canada, while its site is a mental hospital. In this manner, the functionality of the site in Canada can be scrutinized as well; that is, it can be determined, although to an extent, the manner in which Canadian mental hospitals function in the society.

[16] Rarely are found personal writings narrated in the third person viewpoint. Examples of such narration are autobiographies of Julius Caesar and Pope Pius III; there are a few modern examples such as "Joe Torre's memoir [the former New York Yankees]" (Yagoda, ch. 1).

[17] This poem is published in *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne* (2001).

[18] Descartes concludes dualism with the unconvincing theory of the pineal gland, which allegedly is the seat of the soul.

[19] The difference between corporeality and embodiment are studied at length in Chapter Two: The Abject in Canadian Auto/Thanatography.

[20] For a complete definition of Derridean trace, please refer to Chapter Three, part II titled "Derridean Philosophy and Photography."

[21] An example would be Roxanne Rimstead's "Mediated Lives: Oral Histories and Cultural Memory. Reading Canadian Autobiography" (1996), who studies narrative as a pragmatic tool which permits minorities to express themselves in a safe space.

[22] Joanne Saul in *Writing the Roaming Subject: The Biotext in Canadian Literature* (2006), uses George Bowering's coined term "biotext" (4) to refer to the "howness and whatness" of the biographical text in relation to 'bio,' which emphasizes on "life: including family relationships and genealogy" (4).

[23] His arguments about death are found in his book *God, Death, and Time* (2000).

[24] See Christine Crowe's "Giving Pain a Place in the World: Aboriginal Women's Bodies in Australian Stolen Generations Autobiographical Narrative" (166-189).

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[25] By phenomenological, I mean an approach that holds human experience and its expression at its heart; the reference to philosophical school is not intended in this context.

[26] The term focalizer is elaborated on and explained at length in Chapter Two.

[27] Willard Van Orman Quine in his book *Word and Object* (1960), studies the relationship between reality and language, and the way the latter represents the former; Quine also studies the implication of the relationship of the two in translation.

[28] The notion of absence is multifold in philosophy; the three predominant notions, according to Zhihua Yao in "Typology of Nothing" (2010), are as following: "privative nothing, absolute nothing, and original nothing" (78). Non-existent, in this research, belongs to the first category denoting death, in other words, deprivation of life.

[29] Martin Heidegger believes we are already thrown in this continuum by being born; he writes about thrownness and falling in the fifth part of his book, *Being and Time* on page 219.

[30] Quoted in Ronald Hoy in "Parmenides' Complete Rejection of Time" (1994).

[31] Aristotle and D.W. Hamlyn. *De Anima Books II and III*. Clarendon, 1968.

[32] Time is not perceived linearly in different cultures. Linear temporality is an Anglo-Saxon tradition. Some cultures do not share the Judeo-Christian perception of temporality; for example, in certain Indigenous cultures, according to Gisela Becker, although it differs from tribe to tribe, "the individual is the center of the time circles and events are placed in time according to their significance to the individual and the community" (145).

[33] By theories, I am referring to general and special relativity.

[34] According to Chelsea Harry in *Chronos in Aristotle's Physics: On the Nature of Time* (2015), for Aristotle, "time (chronos) is an attribute of motion or change (kinesis)" (1).

[35] According to Gerard Genette in *Narrative Discourse* (1986), analepsis is "any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment" (40).

[36] According to Gerard Genette in *Narrative Discourse* (1972), prolepsis is "any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later" (40).

[37] Ellipsis, according to Gerard Genette in *Narrative Discourse* (1972), "refers to the fact of leaving out, passing by without any mention" (40).

[38] For more information regarding this characteristic and metafiction, see Chapter Four in Coste's book*, Narrative and Communication.*

[39] In her book, Farr refuses to use the verb commit for suicide; for the sake of consistency, I have chosen to use the writer's exact wording. "I use the term "killed himself" to describe what Daniel did, as opposed to "committed suicide," "took his own life," "died by his own hand," or other such distanced phrasings, because for me it most aptly expresses the particular violence that it takes for a young man […] to cause his own death" (Far, "Prologue").

[40] In "The Suicide Survivor's Grief and Recovery" (2011).

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[41] This quote is taken from "Meaning-making after Partner Suicide" by Tyler Pritchard, and Jennifer Buckle.

[42] Sonja K. Foss in *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice* (2018), studies various branches of narrative theory.

[43] See Barthes' article titled "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative" (1975) for more information.

[44] The choice of focalization highlights an important aspect, which is the direct/indirect discourse. This feature, which was originally introduced by Genette, and is extensively studied by Flundernik in her article "The Free Indirect as Paradigm of Discourse" (1995).

[45] According to *Routledge Handbook of Counter-Narratives,* counter-narrative "are stories revealing marginalized views" (Introduction).

[46] Aging studies, which has gained scholars' attention in the beginning of the twenty-first century, examines the dominant attitude of the scoiety toward the elderly. This branch of study investigates the causes of such behaviour among the population. One of the fundamental works in aging studies in Margaret Gullette's *Aged by Culture* (2004), in which the writer investigates the idea of aging and its importance in creating the identity of the elderly people.

[47] Cited from "Life Review Reminiscence in the Elderly" (1985) by Victor Molinari and Robert Reichlin. A comprehensive study of late-life story telling, narrativizing and reminiscing in the creation of a sense of self in the elderly people is conducted by Kathleen Woodward, Andrew Scharlach and Marilyn Fabe in their book, titled *Telling Stories* (1997).

[48] Since there are no literary works regarding this matter, I will not explore other possible factors in the rarity of female narrative of aging; feminist gerontologists study this issue in depth. Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter One, "Helen M. Buss' *Mapping Our Selves: Canadian Women's Autobiography in English* (1993) and Jeanne Perreault's *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autobiography* (1995), combined attention to women's writing and feminist theories with analysis of the role of auto/biography in gendered and historical identity" (Egan and Helms 7). Patricia Smart studies French Canadian personal writings written by women in *Écrire dans la Maison du Père : L'émergence du Feminin dans la Tradition Littéraire du Québec* (2003).

[49] It is a term that Paul Ricoeur uses in "Narrative Time" (1980).

[50] In *The Fiction of Language and the Language of Fiction* (1993).

[51] By corporeal betrayal, Higgs and Gilleard refer to the corporeal decay in spite of being taken care of. See Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs' "Unacknowledged Distinctions: Corporeality versus Embodiment in Later Life" (2018) for a more detailed explanation.

[52] Quoted in Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs, "Unacknowledged Distinctions: Corporeality versus Embodiment in Later Life" (2018). See Haraway's *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium* (2018) for more information.

[53] Quoted in Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs, "Unacknowledged Distinctions: Corporeality versus Embodiment in Later Life" (2018). See Haraway's *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium* (2018) for more information.

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[54] For a more detailed description of the four dimensions, see Arthur W. Frank, "For a Sociology of the Body: An Analytical Review" (1991).

[55] For a more detailed study of the importance of the body, See Turner's "Recent Developments in the Theory of the Body" (1991).

[56] See RJ Hankinson, "Body and Soul in Greek Philosophy." *Persons and their Bodies: Rights, Responsibilities, Relationships,* edited by MJ Cherry, Kluwer Academic Publisher*,* 1999, pp. 35-56.

[57] See RJ Hankinson, "Body and Soul in Greek Philosophy." *Persons and their Bodies: Rights, Responsibilities, Relationships,* edited by MJ Cherry, Kluwer Academic Publisher*,* 1999, pp. 35-56.

[58] See RJ Hankinson, "Body and Soul in Greek Philosophy." *Persons and their Bodies: Rights, Responsibilities, Relationships,* edited by MJ Cherry, Kluwer Academic Publisher*,* 1999, pp. 35-56.

[59] The notion of Somatophobia is widely discussed in Elizabeth Grosz, "Refiguring Bodies?" *The Body: A Reader,* edited by Monica Greco and Mariam Fraser, Routledge, 2007, pp. 47-51.

[60] For more information, see "Christians Should Reject Mind-Body Dualism" (2003).

[61] The body and its role in defining selfhood was later examined by Husserl in his life. See Sokolowski, Robert. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

[62] See Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (1995).

[63] In his article titled "Raphael's Designer Labels: From the Virgin Mary to La Fornarina" (2003), Rona Goffen studies Raphael's paintings throughout his career. The writer studies the relationship of the painter with his colleagues through the tacit signatures the former leaves on his paintings.

[64] Idealization of the female body, although prevalent during the renaissance era, has not prevented some artists, such as Albrecht Durer, to paint the old nude; interestingly in his paintings *The Bathing Women* (1496), the body of the young female is in contrast with the old, who is represented in a distorted manner. The latter's body, flesh and demeanor are 'abjectified' in contrast to the elegance of the young female's.

[65] In her article "The Female Model and the Renaissance Nude: Dürer, Giorgione, and Raphael" (1992), Joanne Bernstein studies the representation of the female body in the paintings of Dürer, Giorgione, and Raphael.

[66] The notion of productivity in a Capitalist society is widely discussed in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980) by Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze. The writers propose a new notion called "a body without organs," which refers to the body as a receptacle of organs without the forced structure.

[67] See Pierre Bourdieu's *The Logic of Practice* (1990). Translated by Richard Nice, Stanford UP, 66-79.

[68] This Canadian memoir is not a part of the corpus in the thesis however, its subject seems appropriate here.

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[69] See Bataille, Georges. “Abjection and Miserable Forms.” Translated by Yvonne Shafir. *More & less*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999, pp. 8-14.

[70] See Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs, “Ageing Abjection and Embodiment in the Fourth Age” (2011).

[71] Lacanian mirror stage is an important process in the formation of the “I” through the recognition of one’s reflection in a reflecting surface, such as a mirror, which, Lacan deems, in John Storey’s *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (2018), “an act of intelligence” in understanding one’s surroundings (287).

[72] For more information, see Sigmund Freud’s "The Uncanny" (1919).

[73] In *The Life of the Mind: A Novel* (2021), Christine Smallwood faces a dilemma choosing the proper relative pronoun: “What did you call it when a life stopped developing, but didn’t end?” (4). The relative pronoun “which” is preferred over “who” since the object in question is lifeless and inanimate.

[74] See Kelly Oliver, *Subjectivity Without Subjects* (1998). Lisa Ikemoto in “The In/Fertile, the Too Fertile and the Dysfertile” (1996), claims that in January 1992, the term “embryonic waste” (11) was first used by the “Canadian Royal Commission on New Reproductive Technologies” to describe the phenomenon of the undesired and abjected fetus.

[75] qtd. in Rina Arya, “Unpacking Abjection” (2014).

[76] See Rachel Ariss, “Theorizing Waste in Abortion” (2003).

[77] In his book, *Écrits* (2006), Lacan explains the mirror stage as following: the image “gives rise to a series of gestures in which he playfully experiences the relationships between the movements made in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it duplicates” (94).

[78] This idea is related to the studies of disability. Robert McRuer in *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (2006), critiques the notion of normalcy and it being a social construct. Disability, to McRuer, is not specific to a certain disabled group, but to everyone whose bodily decay and aging brings about uncontrollability and disability.

[79] That is the role of the caregiver can be officially or socially bestowed on the individual; an example of the former case is a nurse, and an example of the latter case can be a parent.

[80] Frank’s proposition is relevant to Foucault’s biopolitics, which suggests the regulation of the body by the authority.

[81] See Higgs and Gileard, “Ageing Abjection and Embodiment in the Fourth Age,” *Journal of Aging Studies,* (2011).

[82] See Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs, “Frailty, Abjection, and the ‘Othering’ of the Fourth Age” (2011).

[83] See Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs, “Ageing, Abjection, and Embodiment in the Fourth Age” (2011).

[84] “Critical Disability Studies” is an interdisciplinary study of the cultural, historical, and social aspect of disability and its effect on an individual’s identity. Critical disability studies theories, methods and solutions are used to improve the life quality of people with disabilities.

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[85] The notion of care, measured in relation to capital, although casting light on one of the crucial factors determining its definition, is beyond the scope of this chapter and can be studied in further research.

[86] For more information, see Virginia Woolf, "On Being Ill" (1930).

[87] This quote is taken from a scientific study titled "Intergenerational Transmission of DNA Methylation Signatures Associated with Early Life Stress" (2018) and written by Ludwig Stenz.

[88] See Domenico Beneventi's "Queer Appetites: Embodied Desire in Monica Menghetti's *What the Mouth Wants*" (2021).

[89] Quoted in Courtney Nations, Stacey Baker and Eric Krszjzaniek, "Trying to Keep You: How Grief, Abjection, and Ritual Transform the Social Meanings of a Human Body," *Consumption Markets and Culture* (2017).

[90] In the foreword to Barthes' *Camera Lucida,* Geoff Dyer introduces two essays written by Barthes, one of which is titled "Rhetoric of the Image," which I thought was suitable as a general term to refer to the implications of photographs.

[91] A picture of the front cover is included later in this chapter (see figure 8). The role of collages in creating the desired narrative is so important that the artist's name, Catherine Mellinger, is published alongside the writer of the book.

[92] Later in the chapter, by drawing on different theories on photography, I will conclude that photography has certain characteristics that transcend language; however, it cannot be granted a grammatical system. This is what Bathes claims to be true, which is also explained later in the chapter.

[93] In *Of Grammatology,* in regards to the importance of Saussure, Derrida writes that he has "chosen to demonstrate the necessity of deconstruction by privileging the Saussurian references, not only because Saussure still dominates contemporary linguistics and semiology; it is also because he seems to me to hold himself at the limit; at the same time within the metaphysics that must be deconstructed and beyond the concept of the sign (signifier/signified) which he still uses" (329).

[94] Christian Metz in his article "Photography and Fetish" (1985), quotes Peter Wollen when drawing a contrast between the temporality of cinema and photography (81). Metz writes that due to the atemporality of photography, a gaze can linger longer, therefore making photographs "work as fetish" better than cinema. He also explains that the nature of photographs permits recurrent spectatorship, which he translates into "an imposed reading time" (81).

[95] In his article "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" (1960), André Bazin studies the nature of photography and its relationship with temporality. Inevitably, he writes about death and its representation in the media of cinema and photography.

[96] In *Copy, Archive, Signature* (2010), in an interview with Jacques Derrida, the interviewer Hubertus Von Amelunxen suggest that "photograph fragments and ruins space" ("A Conversation on Photography"), which I thought was interesting as a subject of study. To what extent does photography capture and alter space? And what role does it play in the perception of a reproduced reality?

[97] Christian Metz quotes Philippe Dubois' *L'acte Photographique* (1988), illuminating another aspect of photography in relation to death which is the "silence of the photographic authority" (83); the photographer goes mostly unbeknownst to the reader. Dubois writes that "silence and immobility," which

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are two adjectives defining death, “figure” photography (83) so much so that Dubois calls photography “thanatography” (83).

[98] See “Premières Photos. Dernières Images : Le Cliché de Saisissement” in *Expressions Culturelles des Francophonies* (2008).

[99] Christian Scholz documents his interview with W. G. Sebald in the article titled ‘“But the Written Word Is Not a True Document,” A Conversation with W.G. Sebald on Literature and Photography’” (2007).

[100] Derridean trace, which is elaborated on later in Chapter Three, is not limited to photography. Trace is a fundamental essence of any referential, indexical and signatory system in which binary opposition plays a role.

[101] This method i.e., “*différance*, supplement and deconstruction” is used by David McDonald in his essay “The Trace of Absence: A Derridean Analysis of Oedipus Rex” (1979).

[102] In his book, *Understanding a Photography* (2013), Joh Berger extensively writes about the contrasting nature of photography and painting.

[103] In order to answer this question, Saussure differentiates “la langue” and “le langage” (9). While the latter is specific to humans i.e., “a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions” (9), the former refers to any systems of communication, which is “a self-contained whole” (9). In this regard, photography belongs to “le langage” since it misses important elements of language, “la langue,” which are semantics and syntax. Therefore, Saussurean signifier and signified system will be applicable in its case.

[104] Later in the chapter, I explain the difference between representation and resemblance, and whether photographs belong to the former or the latter category.

[105] Barthes, Roland. “The Phenomenon of Photography.” *The Grain of the Voice,* New York Hill and Wang, 1985, 353-358. The use of photography in producing and reproducing reality is discussed by Walter Benjamin in “A Short History of Photography” (1931).

[106] In *L’Acte Photographique* (1993).

[107] Richter in *Copy, Sign, Archive,* mentions that Derrida expressed his fascination with words over images; Richter writes that “this radical version of *philologia* is one that also undermines, even as it posits, the hierarchical positionality of the word in relation to the image” (ch.1).

[108] *Of Grammatology* (354).

[109] See Roland Barthes’ “The Phenomenon of Photography.” *The Grain of the Voice,* New York Hill and Wang, 1985, pp. 353-358.

[110] This problem raises the question of what reality is, a broad subject in the history of Western philosophy, from Plato, Emmanuel Kant, to phenomenologists and postmodern philosophers. Whether reality is the Platonic unreachable or restricted to human understanding, we must keep in mind that the framework and the basis of the “truth” is questioned in relation to human beings’ understanding. Therefore, it is reasonable to find a common ground, and reasonable within human common sense, when the nature of reality is discussed. In other words, even if a Platonic version of reality exists, our

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perception will never afford such an understanding. Hence, what would be the purpose of discussing an unattainable truth?

[111] I have to mention that the incapacity of the representation of reality does not exclude photography. Derrida's proposition must be considered on an epistemological level. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, this lack is intrinsic to all systems which work on binary oppositions. However, I claimed earlier in the chapter that photography is an all-encompassing language; therefore, I have used photography as a system that reproduces a closer simulacrum of reality than words do.

[112] In "Visual Images and Spectrality" (2000), Warwick Mules writes about the effect of industrialization and the invention of photography in which "various aspects of modern society have been allowed to come into view" (31).

[113] In her chapter, "Romance: Post-Mortem Photography" in *Photography and Death: Framing Death throughout History* (2020), Racheal Harris studies the history of post-mortem photography alongside the details of the deceased's photographs, that is, choice of clothing, lighting, setting, and ornaments in relation to the gender and age of the photographed. She writes that, sometimes, the objective of post-mortem photography is to "imitate life" (33).

[114] The thesis is titled *Using Photo Narrative to Explore Meaning Reconstruction Among Bereaved University Students* (2018).

[115] I say "inevitably" due to the structure of language and the distance it creates when expressing one's thoughts.

[116] Regarding the reality that photography portrays, Sontag hints at the Platonic Ideal in writing that photography "de-Platonizing our understanding of reality" (195), which provides an opportunity to reflect upon the differences in how perceptions are communicated through different media.

[117] Derrida criticizes the "transcendental signified" as he calls it (xvi); Heidegger calls it "Urworter (originary word)" (xvi); both of these terms attempt at pinpointing the problem of language and being, the primary existence or the Ideal.

[118] In his book, *Derrida's Of Grammatology: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide* (2008), Arthur Bradley offers a brief companion to Derrida's *Of Grammatology.*

[119] The justification for which I am considering photography a language is found in the introduction of this chapter.

[120] i.e, first, the conversion of reality perception to thought, and second, putting down the thought in form of words. This notion is explained earlier in the chapter.

[121] Derrida writes about language and trace in his article "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" (1979).

[122] In order to manifest the problem of language, reality and consciousness, Derrida does not invent new signs, i.e., words, because "to make a new word is to run the risk of forgetting the problem or believing it solved" (xv); instead, he crosses them out.

[123] Derrida claims that it is solely through "differing/deferring" from the original concept (23).

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[124] In her article "Remembrance of the Future: On Derrida and Mourning" (2006), Joan Kirkby studies Derrida's approach to death and mourning in his book titled *Memories for Paul de Man* (1988), which was written in homage to Paul de Man after his death.

[125] John Berger in *Understanding a Photograph* (2013), writes about the difference between painting and photography in depth in the chapter "Appearances." In representing reality, photography and painting are diegesis and mimesis in practice; while photography represents the reality, painting, subject to stylistic and aesthetic choices, shows reality, rather than representing it.

[126] Later, on page 143 of *Deep Salt Water,* the narrator informs the reader that the fetus was a female; "[T]he girl with the freckles has large brown eyes. They're deep like woods, like trees cut down" (143).

[127] Anti-narrativity is defined as any code, sign or symbol that disrupts the conventional correlation of the signifier and the signified. According to Robert Scholes in "Language, Narrative and Anti-Narrative" (1980), anti-narrativity is "an attempt to frustrate our automatic application of [semantic] codes to all our event-texts. [The elements of anti-narrativity] force us to draw our attention away from the construction of diegesis according to our habitual interpretive processes" (211).

[128] In the translator's preface in *Of Grammatology,* Gayatri Spivak, in explaining Levi Strauss' ideas of language, claims that "the language of the human sciences criticizes itself" (xix).

[129] Derrida writes that "the gesture of *sous rature* implies 'both this and that' as well as 'neither this nor that' undoing the opposition and the hierarchy between the legible and the erased (*Of Grammatology* 321).

[130] In *L'Acte Photographique* (1993).

[131] In "Exploring Grief with Photography" (2015), Jane Harris and Jimmy Edmonds, after losing their son, write about their experience of holding workshops in which bereaved parents remedied their loss through sharing photographs and stories of their children. In the collective bereavement, as opposed to the dominant individual grieving, parents realized that it was easier to come to terms with their loss.

[132] Barthes believes that photography cannot be granted grammar, nor can it be dubbed a language since the relation of photography and reality is analogical and not signatory. Since photography "does not include any discontinuous element that could be called a sign" (353), it cannot be language.

[133] This term, introduced by Roland Barthes, is further explained in his article "The Phenomenon of Photography" (1985).

[134] "Peritext" is introduced by Gérard Genette in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987).

[135] In her article "Photography, memory, metonymy or, WG Sebald's Vertigo" (2013), Kristen Seale studies the metonymic relationship of photography to memory in W. G. Sebald's novel, *Vertigo* (1990).

[136] For the definition and role of the word "ellipsis" in literary narration, see chapter ii: "Narrative of Death in Canadian Auto/Thanatography."

[137] In "Using Photographs in Narrative Therapy to Externalize the Problem: A Substance Abuse Case" (2012), Chitat Chan, Kee-Hung Ngai and Chi-Keung Wong study the effects of using photographs in treating patients who suffer from substance abuse. According to the writers, "the use of photographs in psychotherapy can be dated back to the 1970s" (4), which is called "photo-therapy" (4).

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[138] In “Narratives of Loss: Exploring Grief through Photography” (2021), Belen Jimenez-Alonso and Ignacio Bresco de Luna write about photography as a therapeutic method of mourning. They conduct research with a selected number of candidates who create a portfolio containing a series of photographs, related to the deceased, as a therapeutic tool. Every day, the mourners try to capture photographs of an item which reminds them of the deceased. This process helps them understand the deceased and death more clearly, therefore making the healing process easier.

[139] Contrary to this view, in their article “Using Photographs in Narrative Therapy to Externalize the Problem: A Substance Abuse Case” (2012), Chitat Chan, Kee-Hung Ngai and Chi-Keung Wong claim that photographs distance the mourners from reality (4). As a healing process, which they call “photo-therapy” (4), the distance created by the photograph helps the mourners overcome their grief.

[140] *There Is No Evil* (2020) is a movie about prisoners’ execution and death; it is directed by the Iranian director, Mohammad Rasoulof.

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