

GRIEF: A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT

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Abstract

Grief is not a kind of feeling, or a kind of judgement, or a kind of perception, or any kind of mental state or event the identity of which can be adequately captured at a moment in time. Instead, grief is a kind of process; more specifically, it is a complex pattern of activity and passivity, inner and outer, which unfolds over time, and the unfolding pattern over time is explanatorily prior to what is the case at any particular time. The pattern of a particular grieving is best understood and explained through a narrative account, and not merely through a causal account, for narrative accounts in such cases have powerful explanatory, revelatory, and expressive powers which causal accounts lack. Although I will not argue for it here, I believe that this view of grief can be generalised to other kinds of emotion. If this is so, then many philosophical accounts of emotion are at fault in identifying emotion with a kind of mental state or event.

Grief is not a kind of feeling

There is, no doubt, something that it can feel like to grieve. So perhaps we might identify grief with a certain kind of feeling, a feeling of certain kinds of bodily changes, or perhaps a feeling of intense sadness on the recognition of the irrevocable loss of someone (or something) loved.¹ But then, what about all the other diverse things that are involved when one is grieving, in addition to feelings of sadness?² Are these to be dismissed as

¹ For the most well-known bodily feeling account, see William James, 'What is an emotion?', *Mind* 9 (1884), pp. 188–205. See also Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness* (London: Heinemann, 1999).

² For the so-called five stages of grief, see John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, vol. III (London: Pimlico, 1998) and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss* (New York: Scribner, 2005). Sigmund Freud is amongst those who have drawn attention to the similarities between grief and depression, in 'Mourning and melancholia' (*The Penguin Freud Library* Vol II, 1917/1984), pp. 251–268 (*Standard Edition* Vol 14). He also noted there that one can grieve for the loss of something which is not animate, such as, for example, freedom of speech. See

merely things that accompany grief but which are not part of grief as such?

Grief might well involve feelings, but on reflection it does seem odd to identify grief with a feeling. To see this, we should pay attention to some remarks of Wittgenstein which, although characteristically gnomic and open to multiple interpretation, do at least lead us to question the idea that grief is a kind of feeling. In *Philosophical Investigations*, he contrasts two sentences which are, on the face of it, grammatically similar: 'For a second he felt violent pain'; and 'For a second he felt deep grief', and he asks why the latter sounds odd. 'Grief', he says, is not the name of a sensation or feeling. He accepts that the question 'But don't you feel grief *now*?' makes sense, and that the answer might be affirmative when, for example, one feels a sudden pang of grief. So although quite rightly he does not deny that grief has a phenomenology, still, he insists, 'that does not make the concept of grief any more like the concept of a sensation'.³

This is an important intuition, and I think it points to a larger truth than just that grief is not a sensation. It points beyond that to the idea that grief is not to be identified with any kind of mental state or event, something that, like the feeling of pain, or the perception of a red cube, or the thought that it's time for tea, or the desire to stretch your legs, can be there one moment and not there the next. This is the idea that I want to develop.

Grief is not a kind of mental state or event

This is not the place to give a lengthy review of all the philosophical accounts of emotion that are in currency, but a brief survey will be helpful. Many accounts identify emotion, and grief in particular, with a kind of mental state or event; they have this in common,

also James Averill, 'Grief: Its nature and significance', *Psychological Bulletin* 70 (1968), pp. 721–748; Stephen Wilkinson, 'Is "normal grief" a mental disorder?', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 50 (2000), pp. 289–304; Carolyn Price, 'The rationality of grief', *Inquiry* 53 (2010), pp. 20–40.

³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), p. 174. See also Errol Bedford, 'Emotions', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 57 (1957), pp. 281–304. As Garry Hagberg has said, if we characterise grief as a feeling or sensation, we would then 'picture autobiographical true description as of a kind that bears a one-to-one correspondence to such sensations', in 'On philosophy as therapy: Wittgenstein, Cavell, and autobiographical writing', *Philosophy and Literature* 27 (2003), pp. 196–210, at p. 204.

in spite of differing over whether the chosen state or event is cognitive or non-cognitive.⁴ Some, as we have seen, identify emotion with a kind of feeling. Others identify it with a kind of judgement, as does, for example, Martha Nussbaum. At the beginning of her *Upheavals of Thought* she gives a narrative of her reaction to news of her mother's death, but (in spite of, one might say, the attention she gives to narratives here and elsewhere) she identifies her grief with a 'eudaimonistic' judgement, concerning one's own flourishing; she says, 'In the actual event, my grief was [. . .] identical to a judgment with something like the following form: "My mother, an enormously valuable person and an important part of my life, is dead"'.⁵ Others identify emotion with a kind of perception. For example, Robert Roberts argues that emotion is a concern-based construal of a perceptual kind; Jesse Prinz argues that emotion is a valenced perception of bodily changes; and Sabine Döring argues that emotion is an affective perception.⁶ Jenefer Robinson might be thought to be an exception here, as she emphasises the process aspect of emotion, but nevertheless in the end she identifies it with an affective appraisal, insisting that cognitive states are not part of the emotion proper.⁷

For those not familiar with the philosophical literature on emotion, the meaning of these terms will hardly be pellucid.

⁴ I say 'state or event' because most of the philosophers I am concerned with make no clear distinction between these two ontological categories, for example not making it clear whether a judgement is a state or an event.

⁵ Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 76. Nussbaum accepts that imagining, and ways of seeing, are typically also involved in grief: '... grief is the acceptance of a certain content, accompanied (usually) by relevant acts of the imagination' (p. 66, her italics). Nevertheless, she identifies grief with the eudaimonistic judgment: '... my concrete judgments entail that one [the eudaimonistic judgment], and that one is the one in terms of which I would wish to identify and define grief' (p. 77).

⁶ See Robert Roberts, *Emotion: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jesse Prinz, *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), and also his 'Is emotion a form of perception?', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 36 (2006) supp. Vol. 32, pp. 137–160; Sabine Döring, 'Affective perception and rational motivation', *dialectica* 61 (2007) pp. 363–394. For Prinz's own account of sadness at the death of a child, see *Gut Reactions* pp. 62–3. For other perceptual accounts of emotion, see, for example, Julien Deonna, 'Emotion, perception, and perspective', *dialectica* 60 (2006), pp. 29–46, and Catherine Elgin, 'Emotion and understanding', in *Epistemology and the Emotions*, D. Kuenzle, G. Brun and U. Dogluoglu eds (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), pp. 33–49.

⁷ And, according to Robinson, the affective appraisal is relatively short-lived, occurring 'very fast, automatically, and below the threshold of awareness', and is not itself a process in the sense that I will be driving at; see Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper Than Reason: Emotion and its Role in Literature, Music and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 41.

However, it should be evident just from what I have said so far that all these philosophical accounts of emotion, whether broadly cognitive or non-cognitive in their emphasis, have at least two features in common. First, they identify emotion with some particular kind of mental state or event. And secondly, they in effect give priority to the emotion, that is to the favoured mental state or event, *at a time*, rather than to the dynamics of the emotion – to the way it unfolds *over time*. (It is a notable fact that the tendency to identify emotion with a particular kind of mental state is much more characteristic of recent philosophical work on emotion than it is of recent work in psychology, although there is plenty of controversy here too over what emotions are.⁸)

Why would one be tempted, as part of a philosophical theory, to identify an emotion with an individual mental state or event of a particular kind, whether feeling, judgement, perception or affective appraisal? It would be an easy answer to say that philosophers just do have this tendency to apply Occam's razor whenever the opportunity for ontological parsimony seems to arise, without perhaps paying sufficient attention to that other wisdom, from Bishop Butler, that everything is what it is and not another thing. Anyway, Jesse Prinz has a nice argument why we should agree that emotion should be identified with an individual mental state or event, and I will now address that argument before turning to my positive account of grief as a kind of process.

Prinz puts the argument in the form of two problems which are faced by all 'component theories' (theories that do not identify emotion with any individual state), and in particular by what he calls 'encompassing theories', which 'either claim that every instance of an emotion contains all of the kinds of components

⁸ A notable exception in philosophical work on emotion in this respect is Karen Jones' 'How to change the past', in *Practical Identity and Narrative Agency*, C. Mackenzie and K. Atkins eds (London: Routledge), pp. 269–288, in which Jones argues that the higher cognitive emotions, of which love is her leading example, are 'interpretation-sensitive trajectories – 'ordered temporally extended sequence[s] of events and states' (p. 274). For recent psychology theories which understand emotion as a process, see, for example: Nico Frijda, *The Laws of Emotion* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), Klaus Scherer, 'Appraisal considered as a process of multilevel sequential checking', in Scherer K. R., Schorr A., Johnstone T., eds, *Appraisal processes in emotion: theory, methods, research* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001), pp. 92–120; Claudia Marinetti, Penny Moore, Pablo Lucas, and Brian Parkinson, 'Emotions in Social Interactions: Unfolding Emotional Experience', in *Emotion-Oriented Systems: The Humaine Handbook* (Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2011), pp. 31–46; Alan Fogel, Nwukah E., Dedo J.Y., Messinger K., Dickson K.L., Matusov E., Holt S.A., 'Social process theory of emotion: a dynamic systems approach', *Social Development* 1 (1992), pp. 122–142.

I have been discussing, or they claim that each emotion must contain at least some of these'.⁹ The two problems are the Problem of Parts and the Problem of Plenty. This is what Prinz says:

By including everything, one can lose sight of how the different parts hang together. Privileging a single part is a way of drawing attention to the feature that is most fundamental for understanding emotions. An encompassing account that fails to do this suffers from what can be termed the Problem of Plenty. The Problem of Plenty is the counterpoint to the Problem of Parts. The Problem of Parts asks: What components of an emotion episode are really essential to its being an instance of some particular emotion? The tempting answer is that all parts are essential. The Problem of Plenty then asks: If all parts are essential, how do they hang together into a coherent whole?¹⁰

Prinz argues that component theories cannot deal with these problems. To drive the point home he considers what he calls a 'parody':

Suppose one wants to provide a theory of conscious visual states. What, one might ask, is a conscious red experience? . . . '[O]ne might say that conscious red experiences have several parts. There is a feeling, a thought, an action tendency, an attention controller, and a memory trigger. . . . When asked to point out which one is the red experience, one might point to the whole set of entities. Red experiences, one might say, have many components.

This complexity would be gratuitous. It would be better to say that a conscious red experience is a unitary mental entity that has several functions, properties and effects.¹¹

I agree. It would be better to say that a conscious experience of red is a 'unitary mental entity'. But there seems to be an assumption that is driving both the Problem of Parts and the Problem of Plenty when we are concerned with emotion – an assumption that

⁹ *Gut Reactions*, p. 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Gut Reactions*, p. 241 and 242.

what we have in front of us to begin with are the parts, the ‘unitary mental entities’ and that we are then pressed with the question of how these parts ‘hang together’. This might well be true of some mental phenomena, and I agree that a conscious experience of red is one such. But it might not be true of all mental phenomena. Perhaps some mental phenomena are primarily processes, and only secondarily can we properly comprehend the mental states and events which they are made up of: the parts do not even come into view *as* parts unless and until they are seen as parts of a particular kind of process. This is, more or less, what I will now argue for. Grief is primarily to be understood as a particular kind of process, and the elements of this process can be seen to ‘hang together into a coherent whole’, to use Prinz’s phrase, through the coherence of a narrative of the process – a narrative of a grieving.¹²

Grief is a kind of process

Some things are processes, and some are not. Sometimes the distinction is made between those things that persist by *perduring*, of which processes are a kind, and those things that persist by *enduring*. A mental state, such as a conscious experience of red, endures, rather than perdures, if, as Thomas Hofweber and David Velleman argue, ‘its identity is determined at every moment at which it exists’.¹³ In contrast, a process persists by perduring, as its identity is not determined at every moment of its existing. One of their helpful examples is the process of writing a cheque:

A process of writing a cheque is a temporally extended process, with temporal parts consisting in the laying down of each

¹² I am not sure how important this is to my disagreement with Prinz, but I should make it clear that I am not aiming to provide a scientific account of grief, whatever precisely that might be. My aim is to capture what grief is, as we normally understand it. (James Averill rather amusingly notes ‘the obvious difficulty in eliciting this emotion [i.e. grief] in an experimental situation’, ‘Grief: Its nature and significance’, p. 740.)

¹³ Thomas Hofweber and David Velleman, ‘How to endure’, *The Philosophical Quarterly* (2010), pp. 1–21, at p. 1. In what follows I am indebted to this paper, in which they argue against the familiar distinction between endurance and perdurance in terms of having temporal parts, which they hold to be ultimately incoherent, in favour of the view put forward here. I hope that nothing significant in my overall argument hinges on the success of this argument.

successive drop of ink. What there is of this process at a particular moment – the laying down of a particular drop – is not sufficient to determine that a cheque is being written, and so it is not sufficient to determine which particular process is taking place. [. . .] Not only, then, is the process not present in its temporal entirety within the confines of the moment: it is not fully determined by the events of the moment to be the process that it is.¹⁴

This process of cheque-writing perdures because it is an object whose ‘persistence depends on spatiotemporal or causal continuity’; ‘its temporal parts do not belong to one and the same object merely by virtue of their temporally local properties, as they would if these properties fully determined the identity of the object to which each part belonged’.¹⁵

With this briefly characterised notion of a process in place, I can now set out my central claim about grief. Grief is a process, and is experienced as a process.¹⁶ It is a kind of process, which, borrowing again from Wittgenstein, I will call a pattern; he said, “‘Grief’ describes a pattern which recurs, with different variations, in the weave of our life’.¹⁷ The pattern has certain features. It includes characteristic thoughts, judgments, feelings, imaginings, actions, expressive actions, habitual actions, and much else besides, unfolding over time, but none of which is essential at any particular time.¹⁸ It involves emotional dispositions as well as particular experiences, and there will be characteristic interactions

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20. Some processes, such as the process of water coming out of a tap, are structurally homogenous; others, such as the process of cheque-writing or of grief, are structurally heterogenous. For the contrast between processes and events, and for the contrast between a process being structurally (or ‘empirically’) homogenous and its being semantically homogenous, see Kathleen Gill, ‘On the metaphysical distinction between processes and events’, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 23 (1993), pp. 365–384, the brief commentary of Alexander Mourelatos, ‘Aristotle’s *Kinesis/Enegeia* distinction: A marginal note on Kathleen Gill’s paper’, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 23 (1993), pp. 385–388, and Helen Steward, ‘Are processes continuants?’ (typescript).

¹⁶ For discussion, see Matthew Soteriou, ‘Content and the stream of consciousness’, *Philosophical Perspectives* 21 (2007), pp. 543–568.

¹⁷ *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 174.

¹⁸ Many of the process theories of emotion that one finds in psychology include only mental states and events and bodily activities, so, for example, excluding actions as such but including motivations and ‘action tendencies’; see Fridja *The Laws of Emotion*.

between these.¹⁹ Describable as grief, or as a grieving, it unfolds over time, and is narratable in ways that I will shortly put forward.²⁰ The pattern is understandable as grief because it follows a characteristic shape, although it will be individual and particular to the person, and will no doubt be significantly shaped by cultural as well as biological influences.²¹

One might summarise in this way the difference between my position and the other philosophical accounts of emotion that I have mentioned: they privilege a single mental state or event amongst a number of mental states and events as the emotion; whereas I privilege no particular mental state or event but rather the process, which is made up of mental states and events – and of much else besides. Of course, in thinking about and analysing a particular instance of grief, it is possible to pick out one or more particular state or event for closer attention, as one might focus on the moment when one first heard the terrible news, but this does not affect my point about what grief is, namely a process of a certain kind. Nor does it affect my claim that any such chosen state or event (including its content, whether propositional or not), will not be sufficient to determine that the process of grieving is unfolding.

The narrative of a grieving

If grief is a process as I am suggesting, then its identity, its being this particular process, depends on spatiotemporal or causal continuity. Just as the laying down of a particular drop of ink is not sufficient to determine that a cheque is being written, so a particular mental state or event, such as his coming to realise that she is dead, is not sufficient to determine that he is grieving. It is in just this sense that the Problem of Parts and the Problem of Plenty

¹⁹ For the interactions between emotional dispositions and experience, see Richard Wollheim, *On the Emotions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), and my 'Wollheim on Emotion and Imagination', *Philosophical Studies* 127 (2006), pp. 1–17.

²⁰ See Bowlby *Attachment and Loss* and Kübler-Ross and Kessler *On Grief and Grieving*.

²¹ See Ronald de Sousa on paradigm scenarios in his *The Rationality of the Emotions* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), esp. p. 182; David Velleman on how 'human affect follows a cycle of provocation, complication, and resolution' in 'Narrative explanation', *Philosophical Review* 112 (2003), pp. 1–25, at p. 12; and for a discussion of cultural variations in grief, see Anna Wierzbicka, 'Emotion and culture: Arguing with Martha Nussbaum', *Ethos* 31 (2004), pp. 577–600.

get things back to front. These Problems simply do not get a grip when we are concerned with processes.

Now this might suggest that what is needed for an account of grief is a causal account, one that will demonstrate causal continuity between the various states and events involved – the ‘events of the moment’. Although I agree that a causal account is possible here, I think that the best available account we can have of grief – of a particular process, remember – is a narrative account rather than a causal account.²²

Narratives have much in common with causal accounts.²³ Like a causal account, a narrative is idiographic: it is concerned with particular facts, events and individuals.²⁴ Like a causal account, a narrative cannot be concerned with just a single simple event or state; it must be about one thing happening after another, and the notion of coherence is concerned with how these things happening one after another hold together in some way.²⁵ Narratives, like causal accounts, are interest-relative.²⁶ And causal relations play a central part in the coherence of a narrative.²⁷

However, in addition, as I will now discuss, relations other than causal ones can constitute part of a narrative. First, narratives can exploit multiple perspectives in a way which gives them evaluative and emotional import of a kind which causal accounts lack; this import is revealed, or expressed, in the narrative in two kinds of perspective: internal perspectives, which are the perspectives of

²² As will emerge, I think that narratives provide the best account of grief because of the particular explanatory, revelatory, and expressive properties that narratives have, as compared to causal accounts. I do not make any exaggerated claims about narratives of the kind that were the proper target of Galen Strawson’s paper in this journal: ‘Against Narrativity’, *Ratio XVII* (2004), pp. 428–452.

²³ I cannot go into details here. For some earlier discussions of my position, see my ‘One’s remembered past: Narrative thinking, emotion, and the external perspective’, *Philosophical Papers* 32 (2003), pp. 301–19; ‘Dramatic irony and the external perspective’ in D. Hutto ed., *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements Series* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 69–84; ‘Narrative thinking, emotion, and planning’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67 (2009), pp. 97–105.

²⁴ R. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 165–170.

²⁵ See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Katherine McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

²⁶ For the interest-relativity of causal explanations, see David Lewis, ‘Causal explanation’, in D. Lewis, *Philosophical Papers Volume II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 214–240.

²⁷ See Noel Carroll, ‘On the narrative connection’, in N. Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 118–132; and Carroll’s ‘Narrative closure’, *Philosophical Studies* 135 (2007), pp. 1–15.

those individuals who are internal to the narrative; and external, which are the perspectives of the narrator, and also of the author where those two individuals are different. Secondly, narratives can be concerned with explaining 'general events', and locating them within part of a larger pattern. These two features give narrative accounts a special explanatory, revelatory and expressive power.

I will explain these ideas in the next two sections, but before that I should make two brief general remarks about the notion of narrative that is at work here.²⁸ First, a narrative can be simply thought through, without there being any public act of narration; it is *publicly narratable, communicable*, but need not be publicly narrated or communicated to another person. So whilst, as the psychology literature shows, there are significant therapeutic benefits of narrating one's grieving to another person, my account does not depend on the therapeutic powers of such a narration.²⁹ Secondly, as Gregory Currie has helpfully argued, the property of 'narrativity' admits of degrees; we should be less interested in whether or not some piece of discourse for example *is* a narrative, and more interested in its degree of narrativity. Narratives of a grieving will, I suspect, possess a higher degree of narrativity than a narrative of some other, more short-lived emotions.³⁰

Narrative perspectives and free indirect style

Looking back on my past, when I seek to think through, and possibly to relate to others, what happened and what I did, my position is ironic – ironic in the sense of dramatic irony. The ironic gap in this case is between the following two perspectives: that of myself now as external narrator in thinking through the narrative; and that of myself in the past, a perspective which is internal to the narrative. (Of course, in an autobiographical narrative these two perspectives are perspectives of one and the same

²⁸ I say more elsewhere; for references, see Footnote 23 above. Also see my 'Empathising with one's past', *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 49, Spindel supplement (2011).

²⁹ For the therapeutic powers of grieving narratives, see, for example, Arnar Árnason, 'Biography, bereavement, story', *Mortality* 5 (2000), pp. 189–204. Thanks to Kathleen Higgins for the reference to this paper. Simply thinking through a grieving narrative can have therapeutic powers too, but I do not depend on this either. For a contrasting view of the role of narrative here, see Karen Jones' 'How to change the past'.

³⁰ See Currie's *Narratives and Narrators: A Philosophy of Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 34.

person, me.³¹) The gap can be triply ironic: it can be ironic epistemically – I now know what I did not know then; it can be ironic evaluatively – I now evaluate what happened in a way that I did not at the time; and it can be ironic emotionally – I now feel differently about what happened from the way that I felt at the time.

In autobiographical memory, and more generally in narrative thinking about one's past, these internal and external perspectives can become intertwined. There is a notion in literary studies which nicely captures this, and which can be read across to its psychological correlate in memory and in narrative thinking. This notion is *free indirect style*, which exploits the ironic gap between internal and external perspective, between character and author, in a special way. James Wood puts the idea very nicely in his *How Fiction Works*:

[With] free indirect style, we see things through the character's eyes and language, but also through the author's eyes and language too. We inhabit omniscience and partiality at once. A gap opens between author and character, and the bridge – which is free indirect style itself – between them simultaneously closes that gap and draws attention to its distance.³²

The idea is very familiar from modernist novels, although it is quite prevalent in Jane Austen, and also it is evident in much of our ordinary discourse – it is by no means merely a literary device.³³ David Lodge has a simple example from the story of Cinderella: 'Was that the clock striking twelve? She would be late'. This is neither direct speech ('"I shall be late", said Cinderella'), nor is it reported speech ('Cinderella expressed a fear that she would be late').³⁴ To get a flavour of free indirect style at work in

³¹ In drama, where the classical notion of dramatic irony has its home, the irony is between the perspective of the audience and the perspective of one or more of the characters in the drama; for example, we know what Oedipus does not know – that he wants to marry his mother.

³² James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), p. 11.

³³ For discussion of the use of free indirect style in Austen, see Daniel Gunn, 'Free Indirect Discourse and Narrative Authority in "Emma"', *Narrative 12* (2004), pp. 35–54. Anne Reboul has argued for free indirect style in ordinary discourse; I am grateful to her for personal correspondence on this.

³⁴ David Lodge, 'Consciousness and the novel', in his *Consciousness and the Novel* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 1–91. I have shortened his example somewhat.

a more subtle way, here is an example from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. Mrs Dalloway has just walked into Mulberry's the florists in Bond Street and has just been greeted by Miss Pym:

And then, opening her eyes, how fresh, like frilled linen clean from a laundry laid in wicker trays, the roses looked; and dark and prim the red carnations, holding their heads up; and all the sweet peas spreading in their bowls, tinged violet, snow white, pale – as if it were the evening and girls in muslin frocks came out to pick sweet peas and roses after the superb summer's day, with its almost blue-black sky, its delphiniums, its carnations, its arum lilies, was over.³⁵

Here, we are told how the flowers looked to Mrs Dalloway, but we are invited to see more than Mrs Dalloway sees in that short moment of entering the florists whilst greeting Miss Pym: we are invited also to see what the author more reflectively sees.

How does this work in narrative autobiographical thinking about one's own past? What this kind of thinking can do is express, through the way we think, and through the way we remember, how what happened to us is 'infected' by the irony of our position: by what we now know, and by how we now evaluate and feel about what happened. And it can do this not, so to speak, in two parts, one being what I then thought and felt, and another being what I now think and feel about what I then thought and felt. It does it, rather, all of a piece. For example, if someone made a remark to you as you parted at the end of a dinner, which at the time you took to be a harmless pleasantry, but which you now realise was a barb intended to do its poisonous work through delayed action, you do not (at least characteristically) remember it as a harmless remark which you now realise was no such thing, but you remember it *as* a poisonous remark.³⁶

³⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: CRW Publishing, 1925/2003), p. 16. The opening sentences of this book are also replete with free indirect style.

³⁶ Hofweber and Velleman touch on this phenomenon: '... the mind is not especially scrupulous about the distinction between the momentary subjects occupying these distinct points of view. Remembering a past experience, I tend to feel that I am (as one says) reliving it, that I am back there again, while also occupying the here and now. [...] the structure of memory leads me to conflate my remembering self with the self of the experience remembered' ('How to endure', p. 13); see also David Velleman, 'Self to Self', in his *Self to Self: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 170–202; and see also Mark Rowlands, 'Memory', in J. Symons, & P. Calvo, *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Psychology* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 336–345, in which he addresses concerns that memories of this kind are 'constructive'.

In grief, you might well remember the last time you saw the person you loved, not knowing, as you do now, that it was to be the last time. And this knowledge will infect the way you remember it. The psychologist and psychoanalyst Tilmann Habermas has a powerful example from a patient, Mrs B, whose husband left for the office and, as she later realised to her horror, committed suicide. Mrs B is relating her memories of the last time she saw him:

I still see the day when he comes home and lay down, and when he got up and said he had to go back again to the office. I said: 'Would you like me to come along?' 'No, I still have to do, what I have not finished before'. This was I think around half past five or . . . I will never forget the image. I looked after him and I see him walking around the corner, with hanging shoulders . . .³⁷

As Habermas notes, through the immediacy and drama of the narration, 'the listener is pulled into Mrs B's perspective that she had at the time'. But we are also and at the same time pulled into the memory as Mrs B now remembers it: she now remembers it *as* the last time she saw her husband, walking around the corner with hanging shoulders, so that, because of what she now knows, the memory of that day is itself infused with the portent of the terrible future that the earlier experience did not have.

An autobiographical narrative of a grieving, then, can reveal or express both one's internal and external perspectives so that these two perspectives are intertwined through the psychological correlate of free indirect style. This power of a narrative is further enhanced when it is publicly narrated. For the narrative can reveal or express my external perspective on my grief, not just through the content of the narrative itself, but also through my *act* of narration, which can itself also be expressive of my grief. And this in turn points to an interesting feature of emotional experience: one's grief might be ineffable, in the familiar sense that it cannot be expressed in language, but it does not follow from this that it cannot be expressed at all.³⁸

³⁷ Tilmann Habermas, 'Who speaks, who looks, who feels? Point of view in autobiographical narratives', *International Journal of Psychiatry* 87 (2006), pp. 497–518, at pp. 505–6.

³⁸ Of course I wish thoroughly to resist any assimilation of a narrative with what is narrated (in a way that is perhaps characteristic of certain postmodern views), but still one's narrative of one's grieving can indeed be part of the process of grieving itself; there is nothing philosophically puzzling about this.

There is a further point about the revelatory power of a narrative of a grieving, and that is that it can reveal things that might or might not be revealed intentionally, and this can be very important in interpreting and understanding another person. For example, it can reveal, through the content of the narrative or through the way the narrative is expressed in the act of narration, that one cares less about what happened than one thinks, or that one cares less about what happened than one is prepared to say. Or the narrative can reveal aspects of the narrator's character or personality of which the narrator is not aware.

General events

The second feature of a narrative account of a particular process of grief that is important in considering its advantages over a causal account is the way in which narratives can capture general events. By a general event I mean a kind of event or event type which recurs as part of a wider pattern – a pattern within a pattern so to speak. One of the most famous opening sentences of a book is Marcel Proust's in *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*: 'For a long time I would go to bed early'.³⁹ This captures precisely the sort of thing I have in mind: there is a kind of pattern to young Marcel's activities, in which going to bed early was something that he would regularly do at this time of his life.

General events do not feature in this way as part of a causal account. (Causal laws and statistical generalisations might be appealed to – 'smoking causes cancer'; 'high voltage electric shocks cause death' – but these are appealed to in order to explain particular cancers and particular deaths.) Narratives too are concerned with particulars, as I said earlier, but they are not concerned *only* with particulars. They are concerned also with various kinds of general description, such as a description of someone's character or personality. And – what is relevant here – they are concerned also with capturing kinds of patterns, or what I am calling general events, such as young Marcel's going to bed early. Ian McEwan in *Solar* uses general events to capture the way things typically unfold in the process of the collapse of a marriage:

³⁹ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, tr. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (London: Vintage Books, 1992), Vol.1, p. 1.

But even if he ate late with friends, he was usually home before her, and was forced to wait, whether he wanted to or not, until she returned, though nothing would happen when she did. She would go straight to her room, and he would remain in his, not wanting to meet her on the stairs in her state of post-coital somnolence. It was almost better when she stayed over at Tarpin's. Almost, but it would cost him a night's sleep.⁴⁰

Here we do not have a causal account or explanation of a particular event, but rather appeal to a kind of pattern of activity and passivity, one which is all too familiar: the pattern of how a collapsing relationship tends to unfold. We will see shortly some examples of how general events are related in narratives of grief.

General events of this kind form a significant part of our memories, and it is an interesting fact that these kinds of memories can be experiential as well as semantic or propositional: one can experientially remember, perhaps from the inside, perhaps from an external perspective, the general event without that memory being tied to any particular occasion. Here is a nice example:

I have a particularly vivid memory from a series of childhood holidays in the south of France. Every year we would visit a campsite in a small village and, for every day that we were there, we would walk down a long, dusty track to reach the rock-beach. The track was flanked on one side by vineyards that stretched away into the distance and on the other by the river. As a child, the walk seemed to take an eternity each time and the heat and dust stay with me to this day. When I consider this memory I know full well that I cannot pick out which particular day it was that I am remembering. Nor do I think it likely that any individual day *was* like this. But, for all that, I do not think it is a false or misleading memory. I suspect it is a blend of various experiences and all the more valuable for it.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ian McEwan *Solar* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2010), p. 9. Note the free indirect style in the penultimate sentence of this citation.

⁴¹ This example is from Andrew Routledge, M. Res essay, University of Manchester, 2010; thanks to Routledge for discussion here. See also Marya Schechtman, 'The truth about memory', *Philosophical Psychology* 7 (1994), 3–18. I use the term 'general event' in recognition of the work done by Martin Conway and colleagues on these kinds of memories; see, for example, Martin Conway, 'A Structural Model of Memory', in M. Conway, D. Rubin, H. Spinnler, & W. Wagenaar, *Theoretical Perspectives on Autobiographical Memory* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), pp. 167–194; and Martin Conway and C.

General events are very often thought through in narrative thinking. We think back to those holidays in France. Or we think back to the days before the clinical depression set in, when we would happily get up in the morning and go for a run whilst it was still dark; then we remember how, after the depression set in, we would for a long time be unable even to summon the energy to pull our socks on in the morning.

Now, just this kind of thinking is highly characteristic of narrative thinking about grief. Grief is a kind of pattern which, as I mentioned earlier, takes a characteristic shape, and accordingly the capacity of narratives to incorporate and make sense of general events is especially important here. In grief, we can appreciate that *this* pattern is unfolding in *this* way both as we undergo it, and as we later remember it; 'During those months, every morning I would . . .'. The narrative of a grieving will thus reveal how the pattern of grief unfolded over time in a characteristic way.⁴²

Two narrative accounts of grief

To illustrate the explanatory, revelatory, and expressive powers of a narrative of a pattern of grief, I will turn to two literary examples – literary, although they are both based on the authors' own lived experiences. One might complain here that these are, precisely, literary, and that accordingly they do not properly capture our 'ordinary' narratives of grief. But I hope that a close examination of the examples will show that, in fact, these are not different in kind from our ordinary narrative practices; they may be well-written and highly evocative narratives, but this is a difference of degree not of kind. (One might compare here the example of Mrs B from Habermas cited above: thoroughly unliterary, but still highly evocative.) I have picked these two examples of autobiographical narratives of grief because they illustrate especially well the properties of narrative that I have been discussing: the ironic distance between the two perspectives of narrator and of protagonist, often fused through free indirect style; and the capacity of

Pleydell-Pearce, 'The construction of autobiographical memories in the self-memory System', *Psychological Review* 107 (2000), pp. 261–288.

⁴² See again de Sousa's notion of paradigm scenarios in *The Rationality of Emotion*.

narratives to capture the importance of general events in the process of a grieving. I will not burden the reader with a commentary: I hope they will speak for themselves.

The first example is from Alan Bennett's *A Life Like Other People's*. Bennett is describing his regular visits to his mother, who is dying in a hospice with advanced Alzheimer's. The visits unfold in a characteristic way: each time, unsure if this particular visit will be the last, he would try to gain her attention. Here we have a narrative of general events, and, embedded deeper in the narrative, we have further general events, which Bennett is trying to remember experientially. Moreover, we are able to appreciate the two perspectives, subtly intertwined, of Bennett as 'character' in the related events and of Bennett as narrator, from both perspectives seeing the absurdity of his trying to engage emotionally with his mother, who was already lost to the world:

To make her see me is not easy. Sometimes it means bringing my head down, my cheek on the coverlet in order to intercept her eye line and obtrude on her gaze. In this absurd position, my head virtually in her lap, I say 'Goodbye, Mam, goodbye,' trying as I say it (my head pressing into the candlewick) to picture her with Dad and print her face on my memory, Mam laughing on the sands at Filey with Gordon and me, Mam walking on the proms at Morecambe with Grandma. If this produces no satisfactory epiphany (a widening of the eyes, say, or a bit of a smile) I do it again, the spectacle of this middle-aged man knelt down with his head flat on the bed of no more interest to the other old women than it is to my mother.⁴³

The second example is from C. S. Lewis's *A Grief Observed*. During his process of grieving for the death of 'H', Lewis found four exercise books around the house, and filled them with his 'jottings' about his experiences. Once they were filled up, he stopped: 'I *will not* start buying books for this purpose'.⁴⁴ The extract I have chosen is from the beginning of the third book, where he comments on a general event: how he experiences the world as does someone who is grieving but not at the time thinking of the person grieved over:

⁴³ Alan Bennett, *A Life Like Other People's* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2010), pp. 229–230.

⁴⁴ C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 50.

It's not true that I'm always thinking of H. Work and conversation make that impossible. But the times when I'm not are perhaps my worst. For then, though I have forgotten the reason, there is spread over everything a vague sense of wrongness, of something amiss. Like in those dreams where nothing terrible occurs – nothing that would sound even remarkable if you told it at breakfast-time – but the atmosphere, the taste, of the whole thing is deadly. So with this. I see the rowan berries reddening and don't know for a moment why they, of all things, should be depressing. I hear a clock strike and some quality it always had before has gone out of the sound. What's wrong with the world to make it so flat, shabby, worn-out looking? Then I remember.⁴⁵

Conclusion

At the beginning of the fourth of his exercise books narrating his experiences, C. S. Lewis says the following:

In so far as this record was a defence against total collapse, a safety-valve, it has done some good. The other end I had in view turns out to have been based on a misunderstanding. I thought I could describe a *state*, make a map of sorrow. Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state but a process. It needs not a map but a history, and if I don't stop writing that history at some arbitrary point, there's no reason why I should ever stop. There is something new to be chronicled every day. Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape. As I've already noted, not every bend does. Sometimes the surprise is the opposite one; you are presented with exactly the same sort of country you thought you had left behind miles ago. That is when you wonder whether the valley isn't a circular trench. But it isn't. There are partial recurrences, but the sequence doesn't repeat.⁴⁶

This expresses very nicely what I have tried to argue for in this paper: the emotion of grief is a kind of process – a complex

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

pattern of activity and passivity, inner and outer, which unfolds over time, and the unfolding pattern over time is explanatorily prior to what is the case at any particular moment, and moreover, explanatorily prior to any particular mental state or event at any particular moment which is part of the process. The pattern of a particular grieving is best understood and explained through a narrative account, and not merely through a causal account, because narrative accounts in such cases have very powerful explanatory, revelatory, and expressive powers – as is illustrated by the small segments of narrative that I have included here. It is because grief is a process of this kind, narratable in this way, that its parts ‘hang together into a coherent whole’.

Might this be generalised to other kinds of emotion – even perhaps to the kind of example from William James which is made so much of by philosophers, the fear experienced at the approaching bear in the woods? I would like to think that it could. Grief, of course, is a process that continues (perdures) for a relatively long time, but processes can be short-lived too, and there is much work in psychology which throws light on the complex ways in which, for example, an experience of fear unfolds: recognition and appraisal, bodily feeling, bodily response, facial expression, expressive action, action-readiness, motivation, action, and so on, each of them only fully intelligible as part of an unfolding process of the experience of fear.⁴⁷ Amongst all this multiplicity of mental states and events involved in fear, why think that one must privilege one particular mental state or event over the rest as *being* the emotion? Why not think instead that fear, like grief, is a process, whose parts hang together into a coherent whole in virtue of their being parts of a process? But I leave the answer to these wider questions for another day.⁴⁸

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⁴⁷ As I mentioned earlier, perhaps an account of a more short-lived emotion, such as fear, will have a lesser degree of narrativity than an account of grief, involving, as it no doubt would, reference to many sub-personal elements of the process.

⁴⁸ Many thanks to audiences at The Einstein Forum in Halle, The University of Warwick, The University of Belfast, The University of Salamanca, and at the Royal Institute of Philosophy seminar at the University of Bradford, and to Roddy Cowie, Kathleen Higgins, Peter Kivy, Hichem Naar, Joan Pearlman, Andrew Routledge, and to my colleagues at The University of Manchester, for many helpful suggestions and discussions.