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## Late Theory, Late Style: Loss and Renewal in Freud and Barthes

OLD AGE is more often than not associated in our culture with loneliness and loss. Consider, for example, the results of a recent survey of attitudes toward aging and death that was reported in the *New York Times*: almost 80 percent of those who were interviewed feared a slow descent toward death in a nursing home more than they did dying rapidly of a disease. What predominates is anxiety over the loss of function, over the loss of family and friends through death, over the loss of one's home, over a slow . . . loss.<sup>1</sup>

We find this expression of a pessimism about old age, particularly aging as it is refracted through the prism of loss, in theoretical texts as well. The psychoanalyst Gregory Rochlin's *Griefs and Discontents: The Forces of Change* is a case in point.<sup>2</sup> Rochlin admirably extends Freud's theory of mourning over the entire course of life, arguing that our lives are shaped and reshaped by losses which are succeeded by restitution. As the subtitle of his book declares, loss can be a force for change—this is a theme of my essay also. But Rochlin goes on to argue that in old age our strength for change is almost invariably diminished. The invigorating cycle of loss and restitution that he believes characterizes the rest of the life course comes to a dead end. In Rochlin's view loss yields only impoverishment, not renewal. In old age mourning is blocked; melancholia (depression) results.

Although Rochlin's formula accurately describes in psychoanalytic terms the experience of some people in old age, his portrait of the psychodynamics of old age itself reinforces the prevalent and dark view of old age as a period of inevitable and crippling losses. His negative expectation about aging, like other theories of aging as loss, can have the unfortunate

effect of fulfilling its own prophecy of aging as decline. But loss can continue to be transformative throughout old age as well as in other times of our lives. Grief can continue to be a force for change.

In this essay I focus on the dynamics of aging, loss, and creativity through the theorization of mourning itself (my example is the work of Freud) and through the expression of grief in writing, however disguised it may at first appear as criticism (my example here is Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*). I read Barthes's text as a countertext to Freud; at the same time I read both of their late texts as love stories, as stories of loss which are transformed into what are also stories of writing. Our lives can be broken by the loss through death of someone we loved. That is true, and I would be foolish to deny it. But they can also be impelled forward by such a loss. As we will see, Freud in old age continued his investigation of mourning in a creative way, and Barthes continued to radically invent a writing self.

How do we come to terms with the death of someone we love? This is the question Freud explored in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), a text which has been central to the development of research since.<sup>3</sup> But if "Mourning and Melancholia" is a founding text, it has also been a puzzlingly constraining text. Although the bibliography of psychoanalytic investigations of mourning has grown rather lengthy, for the most part discussions of mourning have not developed in a particularly fertile way theoretically. My disappointment with previous work on mourning, however, has not only to do with the paucity of theoretical elaboration about it. I have wished for a discourse about mourning more expressive than that provided by psychoanalysis, for writing that would combine the affective dimension of the experience of mourning (that is, the emotions associated with mourning) with theoretical descriptions of mourning as a psychological process. As Kathleen Kirby has written, "It seems that even in psychoanalysis, grief is that which is not or cannot be expressed."<sup>4</sup> This is certainly in great part because in psychoanalysis itself the emotions are something to be eliminated, to be unearthed and discharged, to be gotten rid of, not something to be cultivated. To this point I will return.

Three intertwined assumptions, all of which work to differentiate Freud's general model of mourning as described in "Mourning and Melancholia," guide my discussion. It is important to stress that none of them informed Freud's initial speculations on mourning (although some research since has proceeded in these directions). First is the assumption that we respond differently to the deaths of people to whom we are intimately bound at various times in our lives. Much research, for instance, on loss in childhood and adolescence turns on whether mourning is in fact even possible

for a young child. My second assumption is that our responses to the death of figures who play different roles in our lives (our parents, our children, our husbands, our wives, our sisters and brothers, our friends) will depend in great part on whether that person can in some measure and in due time be "replaced." Third is the assumption that the process of mourning grows both increasingly more difficult and yet paradoxically more familiar to us as we grow older, as losses inevitably accumulate around us and as we find ourselves coming closer to death ourselves.<sup>5</sup> (Who has not heard the seemingly desultory conversations of friends in their seventies who, reunited after several years, talk almost casually of the lives, which may well be the deaths, of their mutual acquaintances and friends? And what of . . . ? He died last year. Death has become a common occurrence.)

Finally and most importantly I am prompted by these assumptions to suggest that mourning itself, then, may be theorized differently at various times in our lives and that we must take special care to examine closely the context in which such theories are developed, so deeply implicated can we be in the very process of mourning itself.<sup>6</sup> We now commonly speak of an author's or artist's late style—this very volume, in fact, stands as testimony to the generative power of that notion. Similarly, we might think in terms of late theory, placing the development of theory in the context of a person's investigation and experience (intellectual and otherwise) over the course of his or her life and privileging, for the moment, the theoretical work of the later years. But I do not mean to include all theory here. Rather I am concerned with theories about life events and processes in which the investigator's own life experiences must inevitably play a part. Thus in theorizing about the life course we must self-consciously attend to our place in it as we do so. It is the same with mourning—all the more so for the purposes of this essay where loss, grief, and late life intersect.

Can we make any generalizations about late theory? Does the very fact that theoretical questions are "invented" in, say, the final third of one's life inflect them in any way? I cannot answer these questions. But I can say with some assurance that Freud's very theorization of the emotions he associated with mourning changed radically over time and that his theoretical creativity persisted throughout his final years, a long period which was permeated with loss, physical suffering, and psychic pain.

Freud's purpose in "Mourning and Melancholia," he tells us, was to investigate not mourning but melancholia. He wanted to use the process of mourning as a foil to understand melancholia: "Dreams having served us as the prototype in normal life of narcissistic disorders, we shall now try to throw some light on the nature of melancholia by comparing it with

the normal affect of mourning" (*SE* 14:243). Freud casts the difference between mourning and melancholia in clear-cut binary terms, and this false opposition has paralyzed discussions of mourning ever since. Mourning is defined as "normal." It is psychic work which has a precise purpose and goal—to "free" ourselves from the emotional bonds which have tied us to the person we loved so that we may "invest" that energy elsewhere, to "detach" ourselves so that we may be "uninhibited." Mourning is "necessary." It denotes a process which takes place over a long period of time. It is slow, infinitesimally so, as we simultaneously psychically cling to what has been lost and "test" reality only to discover that the person we loved is no longer there.

By "reality" Freud means primarily that we compare our memories with what exists in actuality, now. He portrays the process of mourning as a passionate or hyperremembering of all the memories bound up with the person we have lost. Mourning is represented as a dizzying phantasmagoria of memory. Every memory must be tested. But not only the past is at stake. Also involved is what one had imagined the future might bring. And each of those phantasies of the future must be remembered as well. As Freud wrote in his hyperterminological way: "Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it" (*SE* 14:245). While there is something compelling about Freud's idea of the meticulous and exhaustive memory work of mourning, there is also something vague about it. And this is all that Freud could say in this particular essay about the mysterious process of mourning other than it proceeds little by little as we withdraw our psychic investment from the person we loved. How does mourning "work"? Freud cannot tell us. His explanation is that in the passage of time mourning is "accomplished": "In mourning time is needed for the command of reality-testing to be carried out in detail" (252).

For Freud the most important aspect of this work of mourning is that it must come to an end. As he wrote, "We rely upon its being overcome after a certain lapse in time" (244). Or as he expressed it in the confident little essay "On Transience" (1916), "Mourning as we know, however painful it may be, comes to a spontaneous end" (*SE* 14:307). Thus Freud defined mourning as a way of divesting ourselves of the pain of grief, of getting it over and done with. If we speak of a person as being in mourning, what inevitably we have in mind in classical Freudian terms is that at some time in the future she, or he, will be out of mourning, done with grief.

For Freud, melancholia by contrast is pathological. It is characterized

primarily as a state, not a process. It is denial of the reality of loss. It is a "disorder," a "disease." Melancholia is ultimately failed, or unsuccessful, mourning. In this unequivocal distinction I find a peculiar kind of piety, an almost ethical injunction to kill the dead and to adjust ourselves to "reality." Cutting the distinction between mourning and melancholia too sharply, Freud leaves us here with no room for another place, one between a crippling melancholia and the end of mourning.

But my complaint with Freud's essay is, as I have already suggested, not only theoretical. I chafe against its clinical tone. To me his text does not seem sufficiently informed by an understanding of the experience of mourning, of the affective dimensions of grief. I do not mean to indict Freud here. But I do want to foreground the personal context in which he wrote "Mourning and Melancholia"—at the time he was interested in the dynamics of depression and the traumas associated with World War I. More generally, I want to insist here that we take a person's age and experience into critical account when we entertain their formulations of life's events.

Indeed Freud's own confessed experience and commentary confirm that the experience of grief *and* our thoughts about mourning can be subtly differentiated over the life course. Freud wrote "Mourning and Melancholia" when he was fifty-nine. What if he had written it earlier, during the period of his father's debilitating illness and death? Instead he wrote *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), which he later said was his "reaction" to his father's death, concluding then that for a son the death of his father "is the most important event, the most poignant loss, in a man's life" (SE 4:xxvi).<sup>7</sup> It is the word "poignant" which strikes me as inapt, as lacking the complexity and charge of ambivalence. For we know that soon after *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which testifies to Freud's hostility toward his father, Freud articulated fully what was only latent in the dream book. He developed his now famous theory of the Oedipus complex, a theory of desire and aggressivity which is rooted in particular moments in the life course for both the son and the father: the young son wants to take the place of the middle-aged father. For the middle-aged son, in other words, mourning for the father was associated with a complex of ambivalent emotions which were understood to be a reactivation of feelings experienced long ago. Perhaps, however, the opposite was the case. Perhaps the middle-aged Freud projected his feelings at the time back on earlier childhood experiences.

Or what if Freud had written "Mourning and Melancholia" not when he was in his late fifties but during his advanced old age? I think of the many losses he had to bear throughout his life. One he felt he could not. It

was the loss of a four-and-a-half-year-old, his grandson Heinerle, who died in 1923 when Freud was sixty-seven. When this child died it was as if for Freud the generations collapsed together and he had lost his own son. Only a year earlier, in fact, his daughter Sophie, Heinerle's mother, had died at the age of twenty-six. But it was the loss of the (boy) child who was still small which devastated him. It has been said that this was the only time in Freud's life when he cried. Soon after Heinerle's death Freud wrote, "I don't think I have ever experienced such grief. . . . I work out of sheer necessity; fundamentally everything has lost its meaning for me."<sup>8</sup> Two years later he wrote to Marie Bonaparte that he no longer loved anyone. Was it not the death of his small grandson rather than the death of his father that was the most "poignant" event in his life? And his response in old age? Not aggressivity, or at least not that I can see. Rather we hear in his words his exhausted resignation, his deadening pain which was contained by his attachment to the discipline of work.

Three years after the death of his grandson Freud published *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926). He was seventy years old at the time. Under the pressure of the discontents of his own aging body, under the pressure of the loss of the grandson he loved so much, Freud turned his attention to what was virtually a new subject for him—anxiety and its relation to separation (not to castration). As John Bowlby has astutely observed, it was only in Freud's late years and in the "revolutionary late work" that is *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* that Freud brought his theorizations of anxiety and defense into relation with his theorization of mourning. It was not until this text that Freud understood—it was for him a discovery of momentous proportions—that the "key to an understanding of anxiety" is "missing someone who is loved and longed for" (*SE* 20:134, 136). In a brilliantly clear reading of the trajectory of Freud's thought over the course of his life, Bowlby argues that in this text Freud "was struggling to free himself of the perspective" of his thought as it had developed over his long life in theory and that he succeeded, magnificently, in positing "a new vantage point" from which to see.<sup>9</sup> What did Freud see? He saw the figure of the mother (in Bowlby's terms, our first attachment figure). The mother, of course, is the great missing figure of Freud's work over his long life (and much of psychoanalysis since then has been devoted to elaborating precisely the figure of the mother). I might add that interestingly enough it was precisely during this period that Freud was concerned with losing his mother through death (his mother died in 1930 at the age of ninety-five; Freud was seventy-four at the time).<sup>10</sup>

Six years before the publication of *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*

Freud had dealt in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) with what I will call separation anxiety in a now famous passage that has come to be referred to simply as the *fort-da*. Recalling his little grandson playing with a wooden spool, calling *fort* (“gone”) as he cast it out and *da* (“there”) as he reeled it back in, Freud theorized that we learn to master loss by rehearsing it and, importantly for my purposes, by inventing compensation for that loss. Such an exercise is, I would argue, a pedagogy of the emotions, a workout in mastering both anxiety and grief, so difficult is it in this paradigmatic situation to distinguish the two emotions from each other. The child, writes Freud, “compensated himself” for the absence of his mother “by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach” (SE 18:15). What the child rehearses in play, those of us older often rehearse in fantasy. What if my child were to die? My wife? My husband never to return home? Are these fantasies preparatory? Anticipatory? Do they serve the same function, do they provide compensation in the way that Freud suggests the cultural play of the *fort-da* does? I would say no. Such fantasies may even increase anxiety and anticipatory grief. But this is not my major point. What I want to underscore is that even in the scenario of the *fort-da* Freud is approving strategies for finding a way to give up (if only momentarily) the person to whom one is attached, to be independent, not dependent, an emphasis which is anticipated, as we have seen, in “Mourning and Melancholia.” Indeed, as Jessica Benjamin has so astutely pointed out, the emphasis in Freudian psychoanalysis is on detaching ourselves from others, on severing the bonds of love.<sup>11</sup> As such it is consonant with the dominant Western tradition of valuing individualism and independence over filiation and interdependence, and as such, it should be interrogated.

But in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* Freud comes to a different conclusion. Representation of loss is, as it were, a lie; the experience of loss itself is of another order altogether, inexplicable in its pain. In this late work Freud seeks to understand the differences between anxiety, fear, and pain. It is, to echo John Bowlby’s word, a struggle. It is as if Freud is seeking to name the unnameable, that which he cannot explain. Anxiety, Freud concludes, “has an unmistakable relation to *expectation*: it is anxiety *about* something. It has a quality of *indefiniteness and lack of object*” (SE 20:166). Fear is related to a definite danger. And pain? In an addendum to *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* Freud asks a stunning question: “When does separation from an object produce anxiety, when does it produce mourning, and when does it produce, it may be, only pain?” (SE 20:169). Freud cannot give a satisfactory answer to his rhetorical question—that is part of

the point. But the question itself serves to introduce a new category, that of pain, a pain which is irreducible, which is not assuaged by the process of mourning and the protocols of grief, a theorization of the very pain, perhaps, which he felt with the death of his grandson.

Freud had earlier remarked that "every affect . . . is only a reminiscence of an event."<sup>12</sup> In the case of hysteria, for example, he had argued that the disagreeable event, which had been repressed, must be remembered and, along with it, the accompanying disagreeable emotion revived. The goal of therapy was to extirpate the distressing emotion and return to a state of equilibrium, or calm. In this respect Freud's general theory of the emotions is in accordance with his view of mourning as articulated in "Mourning and Melancholia" and repeated in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*. The aim is to "undo the ties that bind" the bereaved person to the person he (or she) has loved and lost during "the reproduction of situations" (*SE* 20:172)—this reminds us, of course, of the *fort-da*. But Freud had now also concluded that there was another possibility altogether: that of the experience of pain, only pain. In earlier defining mourning as synonymous with our giving up of the dead, Freud had not understood or foreseen the psychic pain that could be entailed in loss—and the degree to which he could not give up his pain, the degree to which mourning as he had earlier described it was not set in motion in all cases.

Yet that very pain, I am also suggesting, contributed to Freud's continuing to revise and rethink the theoretical structures he had created throughout his life.<sup>13</sup> Thus I do not read Freud's late theorization of pain, in other words, in the light of Rochlin's view of the dead end of old age when loss yields only impoverishment. Rather Freud continued—to me it is thrilling—to build his life in theory.

As if in answer to the Freud who had seventy-five years earlier asserted that the death of the father is the most poignant event in a man's life, Barthes in *Camera Lucida* mourns not the father but the mother whom he adored. I read Barthes's self-portrait of his bereavement for his mother as a figure and performance of interminable grief. For me this haunting text, defined as its contents and as a tangible object (the book itself), represents the possibility of a response to loss that situates itself between mourning and melancholia. The book itself embodies a resistance to mourning which entails a kind of willed refusal to relinquish pain. Rejecting our conventional notion of mourning as it has come to us from Freud's essay on mourning and melancholia, Barthes, uncannily echoing the late theory of Freud, makes a subtle



distinction between pain and emotion: "It is said that mourning, by its gradual labor, slowly erases pain; I could not, I cannot believe this; because for me, Time eliminates the emotion of loss (I do not weep), that is all. For the rest everything has remained motionless" (CL, 75). Over time, Barthes believes, what subsides are the emotions of grief, its wild flourishes (those associated with *Hamlet's* Laertes, for example).<sup>14</sup> The emotions (what were they? despair? a sense of abandonment? Barthes does not tell us) have emptied themselves out, leaving him vacant and hollow and numbed. He has come to a dead stop: "For the rest everything has remained motionless." Does this not recall Freud's response to the death of his grandson?

Barthes insists on the particularity, the concreteness, of his loss. He refuses to assimilate his loss to an abstraction, a generality, or even to the family structure. What he has lost, he writes, is "not a Figure (the Mother), but a being" (CL, 75). He will not even say here *his mother*. What he has lost is "not a being, but a *quality* (a soul): not the indispensable, but the irreplaceable. I could live without the Mother (as we all do, sooner or later); but what life remained would be absolutely and entirely *unqualifiable* (without quality)" (CL, 75). Even when he will have survived her death, he imagines that his life will nonetheless remain impoverished.

In *Camera Lucida* Barthes seeks to understand subjectivity in terms of a person's relation to a photograph. It is as if he is exploring the possibility of sustaining the in-between of mourning and melancholia.<sup>15</sup> A photograph is motionless, he says, like his pain. Yet Barthes also locates the very quickening of feeling in a photograph that holds a particular emotional power for him. Unlike the Freud of "Mourning and Melancholia," he does not want his grief to subside. On the contrary, he wants those very feelings to be sustained. Affect, he writes, "was what I didn't want to reduce; being irreducible, it was thereby what I wanted, what I ought to reduce the Photograph *to*; but could I retain an affective intentionality, a view of the object which was immediately steeped in desire, revulsion, nostalgia, euphoria?" (CL, 21). He imagines that there must exist a photograph that will renew his numbing pain over his mother's death.

But which photograph? How can Barthes sustain "an affective intentionality"? In one of *Camera Lucida's* few novelistic scenes we see Barthes alone at night in the rooms where his mother had died, sifting through photographs of her, looking for the one photograph which will express the quality he insists is unique to her: "the assertion of a gentleness" (CL, 69). We see him slowly moving back in time with her. The goal of this "gradual labor" (Freud) is not to come to the end of mourning but to maintain it. The finding of the photograph (it is a photograph of his mother taken in a

garden) and his writing of that scene do not serve to sublimate his pain but to seal it. This is what he wants. He asks us to imagine him alone, gazing at the photograph of his mother: "The circle is closed, there is no escape. I suffer motionless. . . . I cannot *transform* my grief" (CL, 90). Nor does he wish to.

What photograph does Barthes imagine will sustain his grief? Barthes chooses from the heap of images a photograph of his mother taken years before he himself was born, when she was only five years old (just a little older, it occurs to me, than was Freud's grandson Heinerle when he died). The poignancy of youth and of old age are thus for him doubled in this photograph which represents, paradoxically, the vanishing of an appearance. Barthes selects a photograph which represents abstractly his memory of her. It is a stunning choice. The photograph (he calls it the winter garden photograph) does not serve to restore to his memory a specific event or experience he had with his mother. In *Camera Lucida* grieving is not represented in terms of a Freudian hypercathexis of memories of the person lost to death. Barthes writes, "The Photograph does not call up the past (nothing Proustian in a photograph)" (CL, 82). "Not only is the photograph never, in essence, a memory . . . but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory" (CL, 91). The "essence" of memory then? It is rooted not in the actual but in the imaginary, in fantasy. This particular photograph of his mother is a kind of imaginary afterimage which takes on value in its materialization after death.

This photograph of his mother is not a souvenir, one of whose purposes is, as Susan Stewart has written, to restore the past, most often to "evoke a voluntary memory of childhood."<sup>16</sup> It is neither a transitional object nor a talisman. It does not soothe the child—a man who is now in his sixties—who has lost his mother. It does not function like the Freudian paradigm of *fort-da* to master separation anxiety, to transform his grief. Its purpose is to reinforce his pain. Thus *Camera Lucida* is like a meditative theoretical dream whose purpose is the fulfillment of a wish. If Barthes will not abandon his counter-memory of his mother, then in a sense he can't be lost. If there is a dialectic at work in the family structure of parent and child theorized by Freud in his middle age (the Oedipus complex), so too there is represented here a dialectic in the emotions associated with this structure—an oscillation between the indeterminate poles of anxiety and grief, an oscillation which produces, perhaps, "only pain," the pain Freud wrote of so provocatively in his late text *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*.

As theorized in psychoanalysis, mourning is a process that takes place unconsciously. As Freud and others have described it, part of the process

is the psychic taking into ourselves, the *internalization*, of the figure of the person we mourn. But in Barthes's gesture of *externalizing* the figure of his mother, he undertakes to block the work of mourning. We can read "I cannot transform my grief" as "I will not." Thus my understanding of the representation of mourning in *Camera Lucida* with its emphasis on exteriorization goes counter to Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's explanation of the process at work in the inability to mourn. To the process of introjection in so-called normal mourning, they propose the process of incorporation in an impossible mourning. Their suggestive metaphor is that of the split-off crypt located psychically inside the body and containing what cannot be forgotten, or in the words of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida in "Fors," "the very thing that provokes the worst suffering"; what is contained is a "secret" constituted out of "intolerable pain." Of Abraham and Torok's theory of mourning refused, Derrida explains: "I pretend to keep the dead alive, intact, *safe (save) inside me*, but it is only in order to refuse, in a necessarily equivocal way, to love the dead as a living part of me, dead *save in me*, through the process of introjection, as happens in so-called 'normal' mourning. . . . Faced with the impotence of the process of introjection (gradual, slow, laborious, mediated, effective), incorporation is the only choice: fantasmatic, unmediated, instantaneous, magical, sometimes hallucinatory" (71). Cryptic incorporation is a secret process that "marks the effect of impossible or refused mourning" (78). It is hidden from oneself. But Barthes wishes to keep his pain no secret. In concretizing the production of his pain in relation to a photograph (not a fetish, not a transitional object), he seeks to remain in mourning, to retain his psychic pain. J.-B. Pontalis has described psychic pain as referring to a state halfway between anxiety and attachment to others. We may conclude here that it occupies a middle position *in between* mourning and melancholia. Barthes's pain is more akin to sorrow, then, than melancholia (depression), a distinction which the psychoanalyst Joseph Smith can help us to understand. "In sorrow," Smith writes, "the degree of pain expresses the personal value of what has been lost. In depression the degree of pain is a measure of what is thought required to undo the loss, but it is also the pain of not being able to grieve."<sup>17</sup>

*Camera Lucida* is haunted by a kind of death-work. Barthes makes it painfully clear that this photograph of his mother is a condensation of all deaths across the generations—of the child he never had, of his mother's death, of his own death. As Barthes nursed his mother into her death she became his "feminized child." As he looks at the photograph he thinks, "The only 'thought' I can have is that at the end of this first death, my own death is inscribed" (*CL*, 92–93). If the mother is the mirror for the infant,

this photograph of his mother, still a child herself, shows him his death, the death of the man who is not yet born. Not just in the ontological sense that death will come to all of us in due time but in a more literal way. Incribed in the photograph of his mother is the genetic code of his family, "the truth of lineage" as he puts it (CL, 103). Gazing into the photograph of his mother as a young child, Barthes sees into the future which is old age. "The Photograph," he writes, "is like old age: even in its splendor, it disincarnates the face, manifests its genetic essence" (CL, 105). In old age we are increasingly dispossessed of our "individual" bodies, even as we are burdened by them. What remains is the idea of that body, an essence of genetic generational memory.

The photograph represents the catastrophe of death, which is its repetition. In an almost Freudian way Barthes forces himself to feel that our bodies carry death in them. "In front of the photograph of my mother as a child," he writes, "I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, *over a catastrophe which has already occurred*" (CL, 96). In the apartment that had belonged to his mother and in the space of his book, Barthes imagines for himself the repetition of the catastrophe, replaying it over and over in his mind, reliving the death which has already occurred, witnessing and producing his own loss.

Barthes surrounds the figuration of his grief with theoretical meditations on photography. He acknowledges his "uneasiness" (he puts it gently) with being "torn between two languages, one expressive, the other critical" (CL, 8). He invents awkward and precious terms—the *punctum*, the *pensum*, the *studium*—which distract us from what they are meant to refer to. What I remember of *Camera Lucida* is the tableau of grief. What I consistently forget is Barthes's critical vocabulary of photography. But Barthes can also write movingly of mourning and photography together: "there [is] in every photograph: the return of the dead" (CL, 9). Anxiety and grief, endlessly repeated.

To review: as Freud defines mourning in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia," its aim is our adaptation to "reality." The metaphor is that of detaching binding ties, of undoing ties that bind and constrict. "The complex of melancholia," he wrote, "behaves like an open wound" (SE 14:253). For Freud, then, the work of mourning is the work of healing a wound. It is a rite of passage out of the shadow of death and into reality. In *Camera Lucida* Barthes explores photography as a "wound," as a way of refusing to allow the wound of his mother's death to heal (21). In *Camera Lucida* Barthes etches his own death with the tones of fatality. "From now on I could do no more than await my total, undialectical Death," he wrote (72).

As we know, in what was to be an uncanny and tragic coincidence

Barthes died in an automobile accident the very year that *Camera Lucida* was published.

We will never know if Barthes would have been able to sustain his grief. Nor would we have necessarily wanted to hold him to his vow. He died soon after his mother died, and he died at a relatively young age—sixty-five. For all that and perhaps because of it, I read the tableau of Barthes in mourning for his mother as representing the limit in old age of coming to terms with our losses. Barthes's *Camera Lucida* does not present us with proof of this, of course. But *Camera Lucida* elegantly presses us to consider this possibility, presenting a challenge to the early (and still commonly held) Freudian notion of grief as something to be purged.

In loss and at the upper limit in old age (which will be different for every person), we very well may not want to "free" ourselves from the emotional bonds which have secured us to others we have loved so that we may "invest" our energy elsewhere. We may not detach ourselves from our losses. Instead we may live with them. And then die with them. If grief is painful, it is also absorbing. Further, it may be sustaining. Even more, it may be transforming—of thought, of style, of life itself. For: some attachments remain binding phantasmatically forever.

As *Camera Lucida* suggests, with some losses mourning may never come to an end—and such mourning need not necessarily signify impoverishment in old age, as Rochlin would have it. We may remain in between mourning and melancholy. I do not mean, of course, that this may be characteristic of grief in advanced old age only. I am thinking also of a parent losing a young child, or perhaps a child of any age. For the Freud of "Mourning and Melancholia" the end of mourning is concurrent with the understanding that our life must be reshaped through new attachments. But Freud had himself once cautioned that mourning was age-specific. In "On Transience" he wrote that when mourning "has renounced everything that has been lost, then it has consumed itself, and our libido is once more free (in so far as we are still young and active) to replace the lost objects by fresh ones equally or still more precious" (*SE* 14:307). In a sense Freud, as we have seen, pursued the implications of these important parenthetical thoughts in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*.

Similarly, if Barthes's wish was to seal his grief forever, to render it immovable, unchangeable, unalterable, immutable, still his writing hand was moving across the page to achieve this effect of motionlessness. His grief was expressed creatively. Significantly, in *Camera Lucida* the sixty-five-year-old Barthes turned to what was for him a new kind of writing (just as in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* the seventy-year-old Freud

turned to new theoretical questions). There is a surprising risk in Barthes's rhetoric of self-expression and a near self-indulgence (and why not?) in metaphor which earlier in his career he had denied. In the late fall of 1977, just after his mother had died, Barthes astonished his audience at a seminar in Paris by expressing his desire to "escape from the prison house of critical metalanguage" and, in J. Gerald Kennedy's words, "through simpler, more compassionate language to close the gap between private experience and public discourse."<sup>18</sup> *Camera Lucida*, written over a period of some seven weeks during the spring of 1978, represents a definitive break with Barthes's other writing. "Nostalgia, sympathy, and final devotion," "all matters of bourgeois sentiment," as Kennedy puts it, surface on the pages of *Camera Lucida* (390). Barthes insists in *Camera Lucida* that he could not "transform" his pain, but his pain radically transfigured his style. There is in addition the stunning strength in Barthes's willful resistance to the teleology of mourning which takes the form of neither denial nor negation. With *Camera Lucida* as our text we may conclude that the refusal to allow mourning to run its so-called normal course can vivify and not impoverish a life.

In "Mourning and Melancholia" Freud did not address the possibility of a creative outcome of loss. But as we have seen, both his late work and that of Barthes testify to just such a possibility. In both cases loss in old age stimulated creativity. Coincidentally, uncannily, in their late years both challenged the then canonical notion—and it was Freud's own invention—that mourning in order to be successful was signaled by the end of grief, the cessation of its pain. Freud posed a new theoretical question, challenging his own earlier formulations. Barthes risked the sentimental in style, insisting in particular on retaining an "affective intentionality" (*CL*, 21). Years earlier Proust, Barthes's historical alter ego, had written, "I had to recapture from the shade that which I had felt, to reconvert it into its psychic equivalent. But the way to do it, the only one I could see, what was it—but to create a work of art." The crucial difference between the Proustian and Barthesian aesthetic is this: Barthes sought not to recapture his feelings of long ago but to sustain his sorrow, to dwell in his pain which was for him not representative of a past "moment of being"—the phrase is Virginia Woolf's—but the locus of his being in the present.<sup>19</sup>

Recently George H. Pollock, a psychoanalyst who has done research in the fields of mourning and aging for many years, has explicitly linked creativity and the process of mourning, insisting that "the successful com-

pletion of the mourning process results in creative outcome.” “Indeed,” he writes, “the creative product may reflect the mourning process in theme, style, form, content, and it may itself stand as a memorial.”<sup>20</sup> It is in this light that I understand Freud’s *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* and Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*: as reflections in old age of the creative power of loss and its accompaniments, pain and grief. In their different ways, these texts—the writing itself—are memorials to those losses.

More generally, then, what is the relation of writing about mourning to mourning itself? A memorial serves to keep alive a memory, to sustain it, to preserve it. The connotation is positive: a memorial, a monument, honors our dead, commemorates those we have lost and thus stands as a testament to our pain, our losses. There are times when we either may not be able to or should not detach ourselves from the pain of loss, although the canonical notion of mourning prescribes the opposite, a forgetting.

In *Camera Lucida* a sixty-five-year-old man writes eloquently of his love for his mother, unfashionable though it was at the time in his circle to do so. In my essay I have read Barthes’s story of the vanishing of his mother as a story of commemoration and of tribute through writing which contests the traditional Freudian view of mourning. And indeed much recent work on mourning in cultural studies has taken just this form: it suggests that loss through death sets writing in motion, resulting in the declaration or expression of pain and a revision of the theorization of mourning itself.

Thus, for example, the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo has written of the sudden death of his wife, the anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo, while they were doing research together in the Philippines. He tells us of the wholly unexpected force of his grief, which impelled him to understand the experience and practices of the Ilongots otherwise and to undertake his own research differently, research that deals in great part with the expression of grief in everyday life outside of publicly acknowledged rituals and symbolic practices. It is a love story, a death story, a writing story. Similarly the cultural critic and AIDS activist Douglas Crimp, who has lost many of his friends to AIDS, has called into question Freud’s opposition between activism and mourning. As we have seen for the Freud of “Mourning and Melancholia,” mourning is a long and private affair that takes place in the solitary *mise-en-scène* of the psyche; it is unconscious work which precludes any interest in the outside world. But for Crimp, the grief of loss and the violence of prejudice encountered daily by members of the gay community have transformed mourning into militancy.<sup>21</sup> The experience of grief

and rage (Crimp implies that the two are here inseparable) is the catalyst for politicization which takes the form of mobilizing as a group and also, in Crimp's case, writing. Again, a love story, a death story, a writing story that protests the commonly accepted notion of grief as something to rid oneself of privately. And my own essay? I began my reading about mourning only after I too had lost someone so central to my life that with him I lost my sense of a future: it was unimaginable. My own essay on mourning, then, is also a love story.

In my other versions of this essay (it has been written and rewritten and published in two previous versions before this one), my own experience of grief was latent, not manifest, not written, not expressed. I did not even gesture toward it. I attempted to inflect the emotional dimensions of grief through the stories of other people, not my own. My own story seemed then too personal, too impressionistic perhaps. But I no longer think that. What I see too is that I was not only then following the protocols of the profession of literary criticism but I was also modeling my own writing in part after Freud, continuing the tradition that one should not express emotions but analyze them. This time my essay is, openly, an essay on both mourning and aging—I have a strong attachment to the texts and figures of the late Freud and Barthes, and I was prompted also by the experience of grief and the desire to learn more about mourning.

My guess is that most research on mourning is inspired by the experience of loss itself, by people who have been touched by grief. The model of research on grief, therefore, would be diametrically opposed to that of the "objective observer" who is "detached" from the subject of inquiry. Barthes's *Camera Lucida* thus stands for me as a model for such research. It is a subtle and powerful investigation into the process of mourning while at the same time it is a moving expression of that grief, a writing of loss that is simultaneously an expression of creativity. *Camera Lucida* thus serves as a prototype for human sorrow. Our reading of it would not have the purpose of mastering sadness as implied in Freud's model of the *fort-da* but rather that of preparing ourselves for such an experience and understanding the strength of expressing it in writing. It was long ago I read Simone de Beauvoir's *A Very Easy Death*, an eloquent and searching account of her mother's death by cancer at the American Hospital in Paris. A love story, a death story, a writing story. Years later I held on to that book—I do not mean literally—as I watched Michel Benamou, my companion of seven years, die in that same hospital. That book did not make the pain less; it made it more real. This essay is dedicated to his memory.



## Notes

1. "Most Want Long Lives but Fear Dependence," *New York Times*, Nov. 18, 1991 (National edition).

2. Gregory Rochlin, *Griefs and Discontents*.

3. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *SE* 14:239-58.

4. Kathleen Kirby (Syracuse University), "Indifferent Boundaries." For an excellent critical review of psychoanalytic literature on mourning up to the mid-sixties, see Lorraine D. Siggins, "Mourning," 14-25. For recent readings of literature in terms of mourning, see Sharon Cameron, "Representing Grief," 15-41 (an essay which strangely avoids psychoanalysis), and Neal L. Tolchin, *Mourning, Gender, and Creativity in the Art of Herman Melville*, which contains a comprehensive bibliography of work (literary and otherwise) on mourning.

5. Anna Freud makes a distinction between *grief* in a child and *mourning* in an adult (Anna Freud, "About Losing and Being Lost," 9-19). For Melanie Klein, on the other hand, mourning is a critical phase in the development of the infant, with melancholia associated with the depressive position (Klein, "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States," 125-53).

The psychoanalyst George H. Pollock has steadily made important contributions to research on mourning. He insists that we should study mourning in relation to the life course and in particular to aging. As he asserts in "Aging or Aged," "My studies of various object losses, notably childhood parent loss, childhood sibling loss, adult spouse loss, and adult loss of a child, convince me that it is necessary to describe the function, role and meaning of the important lost 'object' at different periods of the life course. . . . When viewed on a chronological axis, the significance of that which is 'lost' reveals different meanings and functions during the adult periods. For example, the meaning of a spouse is different when one is in the early twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties. In a recent study I described the changing meanings siblings have for each other during the adult years and how these sibling relationships are related to adult friendships. . . . During the adult periods, parents and children change in their meanings for each other. The kinship relationships always remain, but the individuals may have different *significances* for each other at various periods of adult life" (552). See also Pollock's "On Mourning, Immortality, and Utopia," 334-62.

Several empirical studies lend support to this view, of which I note only two here. In "Grief Reactions in Later Life," 289-94, Karl Stern, Gwendolyn M. Williams, and Miguel Prados conclude that in older people mourning is marked less by overt signs of grief and more by actual physical illness. The authors also observe a tendency in older people toward the idealization and glorification of those whom they have lost (this may be the case in Barthes's portrayal of his mother in *Camera Lucida*). More generally, Jerome Grunes and Wendy Wasson make the case that the process of mourning is different in the second half of life—mourning may never be complete—and cite this example of an older woman to make their point succinctly: "Incomplete mourning seems to be the lot for many elderly. An eighty-year-old woman, telephoning for an appointment, said that she was suffering from the loss of her great love. When seen at her first appointment, it was discovered that her husband-lover had passed away ten years before but that the painful aspects of his loss were as fresh as if he had recently died" (Grunes and Wasson "The Significance of Loss and Mourning in the Older Adult," in *The Problem of Loss and Mourning*, 182).

6. Similarly, one may resist a certain theorization of mourning depending upon

one's own experience of mourning. A fascinating instance of such resistance from the history of psychoanalysis itself comes to us from Karl Abraham. In "A Short Study of the Development of the Libido, Viewed in the Light of Mental Disorders" (1924), Abraham reports that when he first read "Mourning and Melancholia" he resisted the idea of the introjection of the figure who has been lost. Only later did he realize, he says, that his resistance was due to the fact that the previous year he had lost his father and in fact had displayed physical signs of the psychological process of introjection, which he did not wish to acknowledge.

7. Freud also wrote in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that "men . . . dream mostly of their father's death and women of their mother's" (SE 4:256). To my knowledge this interesting observation, which could be explained on the basis of intergenerational gender identification, has not been explored since. It raises the issue of possible connections between mourning and gender. I do not know of any empirical research that deals with mourning and gender other than studies of the different responses of men and women to the death of their spouses; the difference, however, is only noted, not accounted for theoretically. At the other end of the spectrum, Hélène Cixous has theorized mourning in terms of gender, speculating that women do not mourn (that is, do not come to an end of their suffering) but sustain themselves with pain. I make much the same argument here but not in terms of gender. See Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation," 41-55; see also Juliana Schiesari, "Appropriating the Work of Women's Mourning."

8. Freud to Katá and Lajos Levy, June 11, 1923, in Ernst L. Freud, ed., *Letters of Sigmund Freud*.

9. John Bowlby, *Separation*, 49-50.

10. What was Freud's reaction to his mother's death? It was radically different, he tells us, from his reaction to his father's death, a difference in the intensities of grief which prompts me to underline, again, that mourning itself must be theorized differently over the course of life. Freud found that his mother's death brought him relief, not pain. He gauged his response. It was "peculiar," he judged. And yet he astutely grasped the meaning of his response. As he wrote to Sandor Ferenczi about his reaction to his mother's death: It "has affected me in a peculiar way, this great event. No pain, no grief, which probably can be explained by the special circumstance—her great age, my pity for her helplessness toward the end; at the same time a feeling of liberation, of release, which I think I also understand. I was not free to die as long as she was alive, and now I am" (Freud to Sandor Ferenczi, Sept. 16, 1930, in Freud, *Letters*, 400).

Freud's mother was certainly of an age to die. For expected deaths, we often prepare ourselves by anticipatory mourning. But for those who die at a very advanced age there may be such a subtly incremental separation from them in expectation of their death that we cannot even call it anticipatory mourning. Perhaps in such cases mourning does not take place either before or after death. The work of mourning is primarily an unconscious process, and perhaps our separation from people of a very advanced age can be effected consciously. I do not mean to say here that Freud did or did not do the work of anticipatory mourning for his mother. But from his own account we may conclude that he consciously felt no grief.

11. Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*.

12. "In a discussion before the Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society in 1909, Freud is reported by Jones . . . as having said that 'every affect . . . is only a reminiscence of an event'" (James Strachey, Editor's Introduction to *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, SE 20:84).

13. See Peter Homans, *The Ability to Mourn*. Homans argues that in the life

and work of Freud, mourning works to set individuation and theory in motion. "The process of individuation," he writes, "acquires clarity and concreteness when it is understood in relation to the twin realities of mourning and monuments—the one psychological, the other social structural. It is the creative outcome of mourning, and the outcome of individuation is in turn the creation of meaning, a building up of new structures of appreciation born of loss" (263).

14. What of Lacan's reading of Hamlet's celebrated "inability to mourn"? In "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*" (1959), Lacan is concerned with the trajectory of the tragedy toward Hamlet's "act," and thus with the fact that a crime has been committed. Like so many other commentators, he is fascinated with Hamlet's so-called procrastination: "Hamlet just doesn't know what he wants" (26). But if we think of grief (that is, the *state*, not the *process*, of mourning) in terms of not giving something up, then we can understand Hamlet this way: he does not act because he does not want to, not because he can't. The object of Hamlet's desire is double: his own emotions (his own pain), which he wishes to retain so to maintain the conversation with the dead (the Ghost), the father. In his reading of *Hamlet* Lacan stresses mourning in its social appearances, observing that it is through discourse that we as social beings complete the work of mourning: "The work of mourning is accomplished at the level of the *logos*" (38). But from my perspective we can understand Hamlet as purposely not wanting to enter into symbolic rituals. Hamlet does not want to bury the dead, yet we could not describe his grief in terms of the crypt, in Abraham and Torok's sense.

15. I am alluding here to the stimulating notion of the in-between in the work of J.-B. Pontalis. See his *Frontiers in Psychoanalysis*.

16. Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, 145.

17. Jacques Derrida, "Fors," 98, 69; Joseph Smith, "Identificatory Styles in Depression and Grief," 260.

The point I am making here pivots on the distinction between externalization and internalization (introjection, incorporation). Internalizing the lost object as a part of mourning has become something of a theoretical piety which may be born out of the superego. Pontalis has written that the "*work-of-mourning* [is] a complex process that operates no longer on representations but rather on an *object* incorporated into the shell, the container, of the ego; a process, therefore, that is intrapsychic in the strongest sense, and whose teleological purpose has been said to 'kill the dead'" (Pontalis, "On Death-Work in Freud, in the Self, in Culture" [1978], 85). Or as Hans W. Loewald has insisted: "Mourning involves not only the gradual, piecemeal relinquishment of the lost object, but also the internalization, the appropriation of aspects of this object—or rather, of aspects of the relationship between the ego and the lost object which are 'set up in the ego' and become a relationship within the ego system" (Loewald, "Internalization, Separation, Mourning, and the Superego," 493).

Smith also makes the following fascinating point: "In grief one has the courage to take pity on oneself—without shame, and for precisely that for which one hurts. If it be a stubbed toe, as it were, then that is the pain acknowledged. The grieving person does not at that point pridefully substitute some 'major loss' as the rationalization for anguish. The depressive, by denying that which he has lost, is left to wallow in objectless feelings of self-pity. To fall short of grieving the actual loss is to be mired down in such 'unattached' feelings of pity, quiet, emptiness, wrongness, humiliation, and impotent rage" (Smith, "Identificatory Styles in Depression and Grief," 260).

18. See J. Gerald Kennedy, "Roland Barthes, Autobiography, and the End of Writing," 383. Barthes's mother died Oct. 25, 1977.

19. Marcel Proust quoted in Hannah Segal, "A Psychoanalytic Approach to Aesthetics," 196-207; Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 70.
20. George H. Pollock, "The Mourning Process, the Creative Process, and the Creation," 28.
21. Renato Rosaldo, "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," 1-21; Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy," 1-18.