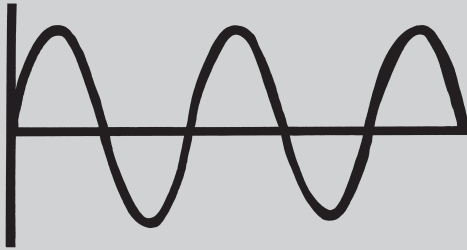


ALTERNATING MOURNING

With Alternating Mourning (AM), grief flows in both directions and may completely reverse itself. Far from being an unstable conduit for grief, AM allows for greater depth of feeling to flow more efficiently over greater distances. The downside to more deeply felt grief is a need for insulation to step down emotions for common transmission. Consumer mourning outlets vary according to countries, size of populations and equipment. The horizontal axis measures time, the vertical axis measures grief.



Alternating Mourning

Water, Water Everywhere

'I see' 'with my voice.' – Alice Notley, *The Descent of Alette*

Water, water, everywhere, my dead ones, and you wading through ferns to my window, a cat on a buoy, a rabbit on a paddle, a dog with a bowl in her mouth, water rising, water advancing and yes, yes, that is me, swimming through milk of sky, not a speck of barnacle underfoot.

Water, water, everywhere, bodies, gliding, feathered, furred, sweet pink and brown, your skins, you come to me with your blue eyes and your brown eyes, with your violet and green eyes, you come into my arms that hush and stride, Mother, Father, your legs that kick and strut, my pets, I carry you into my sleep, you come and I have saved my tuna water, I have made a meal of egg and rice for you, I have saved my best thoughts, too, I lay them at the foot of the bed and wait for you to slip under the door.

Water, my dead ones, and you with your ravaged look. It sometimes takes hours for you to face me, other times you have brought your own utensils, you come and I am open, you swim through my ribs.

My love, to love is to lose your love, to lose; the hand is emptied, if I turn away, if the rain stops, if I am silent . . . all the formulas for turning back time.

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Grief is a century of death, and a century of death before that, and before that, I want to bring you into the fold, Death, I want to drag you right into the mall, the earth, which is made of death.

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I think about Thích Nhất Hạnh smiling every time someone puts her foot on the brake. I see the smiling Buddha in the brake lights too, but more importantly I wonder how he drives in those long robes and then I think of course he doesn't drive, and it's easier to find the brake lights amusing.

I found the brake lights of the car I rear-ended last month alarming. I was calling out to you, my dead ones, I was calling you home, and I smashed into something solid and I forgot about breath.

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I want to love my memory of you, it's not a conceptual feeling though I can attempt a grid of my feelings for you, I can calculate the number of verbs, and adverbs; I can leave a how-to diagram on the coffee table if you would like to look at it when I finally sleep.

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I am feeling about you the way waves feel about the shore. You come at me in endless loops, your moods, the looks on your faces, my lost ones, more alive by the minute, and the colour in your faces tinting with the seasons.

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I am not interested in what Bourdieu, or Kristeva, has to say about grief. I don't want a grid, I want arms. I don't want a theory; I want the poem inside me. I want the poem to unfurl like a thousand monks chanting inside me. I want the poem to skewer me, to catapult me into the clouds. I want to sink into the rhythm of your weeping, I want to say, *My grief is turning and I have no way to remain still.*

I am not interested in feeling by proxy; I go to the hollow when I want to empty, I go to theory when I want to sit with someone else's thinking, I go to myself when I want to see you.

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I am feeling about clover, I inhale and it honeys my lungs: if I finally do catch you and put my mouth to yours you will taste that summer.

When I am being torn apart, I don't need you to point out the empty seed pods of winter.

You won't find a couplet in the wild, my love; a sestina is a formal garden, a villanelle is the court, a sonnet is an urban love story, an epic is the senate, a prose poem is the city.

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I am not interested in other words for honey. I am interested in honey.

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I saw Mary Oliver on Cypress. The rough angles of the coastal mountains terrified her. Later she appeared on Spanish Banks looking west. *Distance is helpful*, she said, *but size isn't: this is too raw for poetry*. I dropped her in Stanley Park, I thought she might be more comfortable wandering the groomed paths.

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I am operating on instinct here, the way the guy at the beach chooses his rocks to stack and the rocks never topple, they are grey on grey against grey, modular bodies, sturdy, flat, fat as islands.

I can't be worried about offending Mary. I can't weigh my grief against a pound of flesh. I have a right to order the driftwood or not. Whole nations have been built on description.

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Mourning, like a thigh appearing in the blue light of winter.

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Choose your memories well, my love, death is a long meditation.

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Wanting is exhausting; in death have we let yearning go?

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I read Mary Oliver's poem about angels dancing on the tip of a pin and I kept thinking, *She is writing about a penis, Mary Oliver is really a gay man and everything is about AIDS*, which made me want to carry Mary Oliver in my pocket.

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How many shapes will you visit me in, Death? How many gestures – each a stitch in the belly. The entire woodland echoes with your filthy mouth, the neon tree, the leaf flickering a sequin in green velour, my flickering rock, my soft bowl, my leafy gasket, you bring me thoughts of the purest vials of amphetamine. You burn like the skin of a spider, laugh with the bounce of a rabbit, and yes, I do remember Spanish Banks, the city a diorama in Le Creuset, and later, burning your prescriptions in a cucumber mist, that heron appearing suddenly, so casual in his faded Chelsea coat, his prehistoric beak and yellow eye watching as I burned enough OxyContin to tile a small bathroom.

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Sappho says in the house of song there shall be no mourning, but all song is mourning. All shapes reflect absence; I have collected all the bits of soap, every trace that can still float, and strung them from the rafters.

I am here with my flesh and my thoughts, trying to let go of you.

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I see you in the Carolee Schneemann, banging the floor with a broom. I see you in the black, stacked shapes of Louise Nevelson, I see you in Andrea Zittel's *Escape Vehicle*, we are floating from island to island. I see you in Metro Pictures, there are endless reels of you moving stones from one side of a field to another. Who would you have been had you understood realism? Blood pooling in fur cups, boardrooms filled with hundreds of babies? A screen the shape of a jellyfish floating through a park? You can give a girl a cleaver but you can't make her swing.

Under all that rage, joy, big as the pills in Damien Hirst's mirrored cabinet, a caplet so huge you could parasail across the bay.

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Good attracts good and so on.

The emergency of women is the emergency of the world. We say, *What good is history if we have not felt it?* We say, *Don't let the dead go until you have tasted them.*

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How does one see? A thing in movement, a pail attached to a tall spiky wood, snow, spring, light? What is the beetle carrying? How banana a slug? What temperature mist? How glisten the leaf tremble?

Judith Butler at Princeton on the ethics of violence. The 'I' cannot tell the story of how it came to be – we may only become self-knowing by engaging in non-judgment. The self that propels the narrative is no longer, but the narrative goes on.

Who is that narrative?

Who is I?

Who is happy?

Who is singing? Who are we singing to? Ruth? Shulamith? Solomon? Son of Samuel? Buddha? Mother? Is it the man with no hands on the subway floor? Is it the last iceberg? Is it Dada? Is it you, my love?

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Fuck you, you say, fuck art, fuck cancer, fuck your empty gestures, fuck every way we are contained, every way we are numbed, fuck your female heroes with their trembling lips and short tethers.

Fuck the way you see me as a fence post, fuck fence posts. Fuck the way you rely on women's work. Fuck the way you absent us from your conversations. Fuck Bellow, fuck Olson, fuck Berryman, fuck rhetoric, fuck you.

Take this anger; wipe your face with it, take your career and douse it in kerosene, walk away from it, you do not do, you do not do, grief, in your pointed shoes.

Everything has been critiqued, everything has been photographed, Diane Arbus took advantage of the freaks, Lee Miller

finally turned the tables on the gaze, but she photographed more death than she made surreal masterpieces.

My love for you floats across architecture, lets the wind lift its skirt, refuses to be tamped down.

I am not angry – what smart person wouldn't want to fuck art? Or fuck in art? Or be fucked by art, her clean lines so hard and bright?

I call you from Matthew Marks, from Gagolian, tracing the lines of a huge Richard Serra curve. I have seen so much thinking gleaming, I want to roll it too, make it big, manly, I want to ride it through Manhattan, but mostly I want it solid, a deep root tethering me, an unflappable sense of calm. Are you calm now? I see you in the Arbus retrospective, furtive glances at the journals, you want to be angry but you can't stop looking and when you look you love and when you love the entire world unfolds around you, you are so bright you make the security guards flinch, lurch, pat the mics on their chests.

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The future at a hundred miles an hour, mouths stretched like windsocks. I hate your seamless layers, you know that, but you scratch by, and I am thinking of all the Trojan horses this bay has seen, eleven of them now, bobbing in the harbour, containing who knows what army of product.

Unbelievable views, never did take them for granted. There is a spot just outside the pillar and glass where, when you stand in the pea gravel and whisper to me, standing where I am standing by the totem at the edge of the continent, we can hear all the dead ones singing.