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Ambiguous Loss in Grief Memoirs. Meaning Making in Auster and Giralte Torrente Patriographies

Sandra Pinasco Espinosa

Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, Lima, Peru

Contact: sandra.pinasco@uarm.pe

Biographical note: Head of Research Development at Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya - Lima, Peru. MB in Psychoanalytic Theory, currently beginning her doctoral studies. Her area of research is grief memoirs and the possibility of achieving meaning through personal writing, and relational lives and the conformation of the self. Some published works are "Saying goodbye at a distance", "The two faces of grief" and "Night, death and love in Pizarnik and Södergran poetics". She's a member of the International Auto/Biography Association and has presented papers at many international conferences on the topic. She also takes part in a research group on Spirituality, Psychology and Society.

Ambiguous Loss in Grief Memoirs: Meaning Making in Auster and Giralt Torrente Patriographies

This article considers grief memoirs as a medium to create meaning amid the ambiguous loss that occurs when someone close is gone without any apparent reason. This experience may be resolved through a life narrative that holds and accepts the different versions of that complex relationship; the presence/absence ambiguity of the person lost may be clarified by creating a narrative that encompasses all possible explorations. The article approaches Paul Auster's *The Invention of Solitude* (1982) and Marcos Giralt Torrente's *Tiempo de vida* (2010) as "patriography" grief memoirs that achieve a meaning-making process through different strategies to deal with their loss.

Keywords: ambiguous loss; grief memoir; meaning making; patriography

Introduction

In the face of death, the griever is usually given time and support to process grief. However, when society does not sanction the need to mourn for a prolonged time or even the need for grief at all because the loss is not presented as such socially and is not definitive or clear, the griever may go deep into silence. In these cases of ambiguous loss, memoir writing has grown in popularity as a means of achieving the goals of meaning and explanation.

Individuals who write memoirs as part of their grief process may be searching for emotional repair or consolation. This supposedly typical feature of "grief memoirs" originates in the notion of "scriptotherapy," a concept coined by Suzette Henke to refer to the self-healing process a person may achieve by writing about a traumatic event.¹ But over the years, research has shown that writing also leads to change since it offers psychological, emotional, and even physical benefits.² These experiments are based mostly on Pennebaker and Smith's model of

expressive writing: controlled writing in 20-minute sessions spread out over four to five days.³ This kind of writing allows for cognitive processing, understood as the possibility to “reorganize and structure traumatic memories to a more adaptive internal schema.”⁴ It is also established that writing about traumatic losses brings meaning to an incoherent or incomprehensible experience through a mostly social process.⁵

But does autobiographical writing accomplish this same kind of result? The effect of prolonged autobiographical writing has not yet been studied, especially in grief memoirs.⁶ Even though there have been some autoethnographic approaches to grief writing, such as those by Matthews (2019) and Lengelle (2020), their focus is on expressive writing. The only study on grief memoirs and how they might help people find meaning is Malecka’s (2020), which measures helping professionals’ knowledge of grief memoirs and if they use them while working with the bereaved people they attend. Nonetheless, it is a study on the impact on readers rather than those who write the memoirs, like Bartlett’s (2021) account of the impact of reading grief memoirs on the common reader, bereaved or not.

From there, we can go a step further and evaluate if change may be attained through memoir writing in cases of ambiguous loss.⁷ Does memoir writing give meaning to an incoherent or ambiguous experience, achieving similar results as expressive writing? This study would like to assess how resignification, understood as a meaning-making process, may be reached through memoir writing in circumstances of ambiguous loss, particularly when the person lost is a parent.

In his essay “Paper Orphans: Writer’s Children Write Their Lives”, G. Thomas Couser names this kind of text a “patriography,” memoirs about absent fathers written mostly by their children that occupy a central place among what has been called “relational lives.”⁸ Every autobiographical writing includes a reflection on the person that the author has interacted with and who has shaped them, in an effort to obtain stability and coherence. It also includes an

understanding of the other as an autonomous subject with whom the author has established interpersonal relationships, seeking assurance and support. The life writing theorist Paul John Eakin used these concepts, which are based on relational psychoanalysis theory,⁹ to develop the notion of “relational lives”, defined as every autobiographical text that “feature the decisive impact on the autobiographer of either (1) an entire social environment [...] or (2) key other individuals, usually family members, especially parents.”¹⁰

In this type of memoir, autobiography and biography are intertwined, considering that telling one’s own story entails telling the story of the most important persons in our lives. From Roger Porter’s point of view, in *Bureau of Missing Persons: Writing the Secret Lives of Fathers*, relational lives are a form of collaborative writing since each person’s narrative—a father and son, for example—comes together and the writer assumes the role of “reauthor” for the life of the other.¹¹

Marco Giralt Torrente’s memoir, *Tiempo de vida* (2010), and Paul Auster’s *The Invention of Solitude* (1982) are both grief memoirs dealing with the death of a father, but they also address the emotional loss of a living father due to their lack of psychological presence in their sons’ lives. Throughout their texts, they aim to discuss themselves and their relationships with their fathers, but in doing so, they inevitably discuss who their fathers were. They even go into their pasts to discuss the scars such relationships left on them. Also, as grief memoirs, they frequently begin and finish with the subject of their father’s death, the events leading up to and following it, as well as the different thoughts, experiences, and emotions that are natural in any grief process. Finally, as a memoir about an ambiguous loss, they show the emotional turmoil it meant to live all those years with that specific form of fatherhood.

In all grief processes, there are several grief mediators involved that determine the loss experience.¹² Among these mediators, the background or personal history of the deceased, the manner of death (natural, accident, suicide, or homicide according to the NASH classification

of death),¹³ the particular relationship between the bereaved and the deceased, and several other tensions, such as accumulative losses, death by a long-undermining illness, or the presence of an ambiguous loss, can all be noted. These mediators are key to understanding the particularities of each grief process and, therefore, the possible grief memoirs they may produce.

In terms of the nature of loss, every loss that is uncertain is an ambiguous one. For example, when someone perceives a close person as gone, even though that person is physically present, or when someone experiences a loss that is not recognized by society, like a stillbirth, an overdose, a suicide, or an abortion. Boss's theory originated from her first observations of the psychological absence of psychically present parents. It is the lack of information and closure that leads to a possible traumatic experience, since the other family members must construct the reality (or fiction) of the person who is absent in mind or body.¹⁴ As a result, Boss refers to this situation as "the paradox of absence and presence."¹⁵ This is why ambiguous loss is deeply related to matters of relationality since it centers on the attachment to someone absent for a variety of different reasons.¹⁶ Even though the signs of complicated grieving, such as depression and anxiety, are similar to those of someone suffering from an ambiguous loss,¹⁷ the relationships at the core of the psychological family are usually where these symptoms first appear.

In cases of ambiguous loss, being able to cope with an absence usually requires the capacity to go on without information or answers. So, the possibility of making sense of the experience is more difficult than in most grief processes, and the need for external strategies is more urgent. In that scenario, writing could be the best way to cope with this traumatic process.

To clarify her theoretical approach, Boss establishes seven principles of ambiguous loss that appear in different ways depending on the family history. Some of them may even be more prevalent than others in particular cases.

(1) There is always involved a psychological family, and it does not have to be the blood family.

(2) The loss itself is neutral; what matters is how it is perceived. Every individual perceives the same loss differently, depending on how much ambiguity they can handle.

(3) A family and the individuals in it experience the ambiguity of the loss through the lens of their cultural and ethical beliefs.

(4) The loss-related truth is relative since it is difficult to ascertain. The only information to be analyzed emerges from the narratives constructed by the people involved in the loss. That is why grief memories are excellent sources of personal narratives of the most intimate details related to the loss experienced. They try precisely to bring meaning to the many versions at hand. Boss identifies resiliency in this type of loss as the ability to live effectively without all the answers.

(5) Ambiguous loss is a relational issue, not an individual one. One person or a psychological family may suffer from it, but the many possible explanations for the loss experienced are found in their relations and their “processes” that are marked by ambiguity.

(6) Families, communities, and individuals tend to have natural resiliency, which has been defined as a level of tolerance for ambiguity despite the continuous lack of answers or explanations.

(7) Since we cannot measure ambiguous loss, the only access we have is through its victims’ narratives and accounts. We must also rely on the narratives of the person’s family or community, which support and validate the person’s perspectives and the loss they have experienced. We must assume it exists based on the shifting perceptions of those who have suffered it.¹⁸

In the next sections, this article will seek to connect the individual experiences and perceptions of Giralt Torrente and Auster about the losses portrayed in their memoirs with

these principles, their family context, and the outcome they achieve through writing. As this essay hopes to demonstrate, they seem to have accomplished, using different methods and taking diverse paths, a narrative that explains and gives meaning to their losses through personal writing.

Giralt Torrente and the neither Here nor There Father

At first, Giralt Torrente explicitly attempts to write a grief memoir, searching for the best way to write about his father's recent death. But he expresses in his text: "Grief is bizarre. Grief is experienced once it has gone. Grief isolates even oneself."¹⁹ He must accept that to write about grief, he must first take some time and experience pain and numbness before continuing.

Since his father's illness, Giralt Torrente seems to have been preparing to write about him; he even admits that by saying he would write about him later, he was able to avoid thinking about the impending loss. That put him at ease and let him concentrate during the two years of therapy and palliative care his father received for his cancer treatment. And maybe for that reason, he seems to have achieved, even from the start, the final task of grieving—relocating the deceased in a place that allows them to continue their lives in new conditions.²⁰

But because of his father's erratic behavior and absences for nearly all the author's life, his grief at his father's death was placed on top of his already ambiguous loss. His parents' misleading relationship and separation, his father's constant criticism or lack of interest in his work as a writer, his conflicts with his father's new spouse—everything summed up to the uncertainty of whether his father had finally gone away or if he would reappear in his life causing more problems.

Through his memoir, Giralt Torrente describes his family as conformed to by his parents and him during the first seven or eight years of his life; this is the first explicit psychological family in the memoir. He clarifies that despite the continuous memories with his

father –perhaps because when they were still living together, his father stayed at home painting while his mother went out to work– he lived lengthy periods of time alone in Paris and Morocco, where the author and his mother visited him. He later discovered that his relationship with his mother was almost dissolved, but at that young age, he did not suspect any drama.

His father finally left the house without much of a shock because of his frequent and extended periods living abroad, and his psychological family for the rest of his life was only him and his mother. After that, his father would occasionally come over and stay the night; both parents even rented summer houses next to each other for some years. However, the façade could no longer be sustained, and after a failed trip to visit his father in New York, his parents finally ended their attempts to keep the image of a good relationship for his sake.

Things changed when Giralt Torrente turned 13. He began to perceive the lies, including the one that his father is seeing someone else but has not told him about it, and he resents him for that. He feels betrayed and declares that “[i]t’s the beginning of the silences between us.”²¹ From that point on, everything in their relationship was about silence. The dull anger the author feels growing inside him is because he never once helps them financially, even when his mother is out of work for a while, brings his new girlfriend around and acts like he owns the house, and because he mostly disappears when problems appear. The author learns he can never rely on or receive any kind of recognition from his father because of his on-and-off presence. The true ambiguity of his loss lies in his inability to depend on his father’s presence and his perception of his absence as a betrayal.

In the book, he never refers to his father’s new family as his own or his stepmother; she is always referred to as “la amiga que conoció en Brasil (the friend he met in Brazil).”²² He clearly considers her to be taking financial advantage of his father’s work and as his enemy in the silent conflict in which her son from a previous marriage is always put in front of him without his father ever stepping up to defend him. In that scenario, the other loss the author

suffers is that of a father who was by his side and with whom he had a strong relationship when he was a child, painting with him in his studio and visiting several art exhibitions together as a young man. The loss feels so deep that the author adds his mother's last name to his literary signature and explains in his first novel's presentation that he became a writer because of his paternal grandmother's influence, omitting his father's role in his choice. In that same novel, the main character's father dies. Giralt Torrente shares that right at the beginning of his memoir: "The same year my father got sick I published a novel in which I killed him."²³

The pain he endured is intertwined with the conflicts of his adolescence, when his estrangement from his father began due to a new awareness of his disappearances and half-truths. Later, he also had to deal with all the concerns he had at the beginning of his writing career and the many financial difficulties his mother and he had to face due to his father's abandonment. From this moment on, the author begins to experience many anxiety-related symptoms, like insomnia, depression, and binge drinking—symptoms usually related to complicated grief. As Boss claims, in these cases, "the culprit lies in the context outside the individual and their couple or family relationships."²⁴ This context adds elements that allow a better understanding of the ambiguity in the relationships and, for example, the role money plays in them. Most of their arguments stemmed from his father's lack of financial support and the fact that he instead handed all of his income to his new wife, who profited from his lack of financial control.

On the other hand, his father did not immediately depart to start his new family; rather, it was a process that lasted many years and involved him first commuting back and forth between the two homes. The author only discovered this truth through bits of information because his father never explained the situation; instead, he tried to navigate on the surface of any problem, superficial and uncommitted. This constant movement of sudden proximity with claims over his son and his ex-wife's decisions and then mostly distance kept feeding the

ambivalence of their relationship. After some awkward meals and long stretches of time without communication, the author almost completely erased his father's figure from his life. Nonetheless, this figure is still visible in his imagery and hunts him with questions about him, whom he knows so little about despite being his father.

Of course, this is the memoir's narrative; it is the author's version based on his experiences and some conversations he had with his father, especially during his last months of life. He knows his father would never tell a different version because of his tendency for silence, but he still puzzles over how he experienced all those years emotionally apart. Also, the book almost never gives his mother's side of the story; she is a victim in this narrative and the only permanent presence that allows the author to continue. She is presented as having a lot of natural resiliency despite the numerous financial problems she faces, whereas his son had to struggle to find answers and develop some kind of narrative that could explain his father's psychical and emotional absences. And he achieves it, for example, when he describes his continuous arguments with his father and the course of action they would follow: "The rope is always tense. He suffers and I suffer, but we're incapable of breaking it, of living without the other."²⁵ He feels his father owes him restitution for all the years he has neglected to support him, but more importantly, he owes him the assurance that he will always be there for him. He resents him for his absences, yet he needs and seeks to be in his presence. This pendular movement of approximation and separation is a clear manifestation of the ambiguous nature of their relationship.

Until new changes in their personal lives began to draw them closer again, Giralt Torrente got married and started publishing his novels. He received an award for his first novel, and his financial stability began to improve. Meanwhile, his father started to suffer from many age-related conditions. His second marriage also began to fall apart due to his new wife's ever-present suspicion that he preferred his son over her and the many tactics she employed to keep

the author at a distance and away from the apartment they shared and their lives.

Notwithstanding, this experience of ambiguous loss seems to be resolved throughout the memoir. The author records all the different situations he has experienced with his father and searches for explanations regarding his father's past, his closeness to his own mother, who died when he was 13, and his estranged relationship with his own father. In his text, Giralt Torrente also acknowledges that his father superficially tried to fulfil his job despite his frequent absences, such as when he scolded him for drinking too much, staying up late reading, or partying.

He also recalls an important trip his father took to Berlin to visit him. For the first time, the author decides to let his guard down, displaying an important level of resiliency, and puts his resentments and bitterness behind him in order to spend time with his father without the constant arguments and protracted outbursts of anger. As Boss explains: "The goal is to find meaning in the situation despite the absence of information and persisting ambiguity."²⁶ Although the author is 34 and his father is 62, very little has changed between them; Giralt Torrente still lives without including his father in any decisions, and his father continues to stay away whenever troubles appear. However, the author acknowledges he has grown weary of the ongoing confrontation and that accepting his father as a presence in his life and letting go of all the conflicts would make him feel more at peace. "Slowly, imperceptibly, something has changed between us. The same things that have bothered me keep bothering me, but I have decided not to think about it."²⁷ This truce happens more than 20 years after he started the complex cycle of trying to get close only to be disappointed and despairing.

Throughout his memoir, Giralt Torrente sometimes pauses to reflect on certain aspects that he believes he has overlooked. For instance, some of these actions include discussing his writing, the differences between fiction and nonfiction writing, and how in the later one is afterwards tempted to remain silent or miss having the ability to create, as he experienced

during the writing of his memoir. However, his profession as a writer is one of the few links with his father that he may recover. He finally recognizes the link between his own writing profession and his father's as a painter in a circle metaphor that offers order and closure to the ambiguity. He clarifies that his writing career is completely indebted to his father's artistic influence, contrary to what he previously shared about his parental grandmother's writing influence. He claims that being a part of his "father's world" allowed him to appreciate "secret visual harmonies" from a very early age.²⁸ The plasticity he experienced much earlier with words came only after he began working with his memory in search of answers and had to construct an alternate personality away from his father, one that, being artistic, allowed him to rebel against him. He is even able to see himself from his father's perspective in his concern for his chosen profession or the hardships that awaited him, and he recognizes a fatherly figure in that concern. Finally, he admits that probably his father's influence would have led him to become a visual artist if it were not for his ambivalent relationship and the hardships he endured because of it.

By this point in the book, the ambiguous loss has been resolved since the author has demonstrated resiliency by continuing to live despite having many unanswered questions. The second half is devoted to his father's disease, treatment, and death, as well as how their time spent together gave them a second chance to get to know one another.

Auster and the Invisible Father

Changing completely the scenery but not so much the father's role, Paul Auster's family consisted of both of his parents, his sister, and him; however, his father was an elusive character with whom the writer almost had nothing to relate to. *The Invention of Solitude* was written in 1982, just after his father's death and when Auster was 35. It marks the beginning of a long reflection on his relationship with him that spans this memoir, several follow-up interviews,

and his subsequent memoir, *Winter Journal*, which also addresses the subject and was published in 2012, 32 years after the first one. This long process was necessary because Auster's ambiguous loss started when he was a child and persisted long after his father's death. It was precisely because of his death that the author began to process the ambiguity of his loss. On top of having to accept that, with his father gone so abruptly, he would only make sense of his relationship through his memories.

The first part of *The Invention of Solitude*, "Portrait of an Invisible Man," aims to build a version of his father that would fill the hole left by his constant absences and his untimely death. In general terms, Auster's father hardly spoke, and when he did, it was in such a way that his son did not know whether he was upset or indifferent. He locked himself in his work as a manager of rented apartments and, when at home, had the habit of taking long naps alone. Eventually, he divorced Auster's mother and never remarried. He stayed in touch with his son with a call every month or two, and three or four visits per year.

The author needs to take some distance from his father's death since it is still too soon for him to reflect on his relationship with him. He knows that his endeavor to understand him and how he behaved is bound to fail, but for the time being, writing is a way of keeping him alive: "Slowly, I am coming to understand the absurdity of the task I have set for myself. I have a sense of trying to go somewhere, as if I knew what I wanted to say, but the farther I go the more certain I am that the path towards my object does not exist. I have to invent the road with each step, and this means that I can never be sure of where I am."²⁹

Over the 60 pages that compose the text's first part, Auster shifts from a detailed description of his father, who is described with resentment for his absence and the unease it produced in him, to a narration of his father's family's past, seeking an explanation for his personality. This is how he depicts a mostly fair portrait of his father that gives temporary depth to a basically elusive figure. Nonetheless, towards the end, he admits that once he finishes his

text, the scarce inherited objects from his father will become his: “My father has vanished from them, has become invisible again.”³⁰

This amount of depth contrasts with *Winter Journal*’s (2012) fragmented approach. In this memoir, the author mentions his father only five times. Auster laments that he took his father’s life for granted and that he did not speak to him sooner to settle their differences. He compares his father’s death to a hammer going down on him: “You were left with a feeling of unfinished business, the hollow frustration of words not spoken, of opportunities missed forever.”³¹

Even though his mother is the subject of most of the later memoir, this type of nostalgic regret and the fact that the last book’s reflection is once again about his father stand out. At the end, he recalls a recurrent dream in which he appears to be speaking with him. He cannot recall the conversation’s topic or any specific words shared, only that his father treats him kindly and consistently pays close attention to what he has to say—exactly the opposite of what he has done.³² This image is one way for Auster to deal with his father’s ambiguity; in his dreams, he ultimately finds a narrative that shows his ideal father, who coexists with the reality of his earlier memories.

In a 1992 interview, Auster reflects on the memory’s purpose: “You begin to explore the past, and invariably you come up with a new reading of the past, a new understanding, and because of that you’re able to encounter the present in a new way.”³³ Writing memoirs serves precisely this purpose: giving meaning to any contradictions experienced in the past. This is because each time the past is remembered, a new comprehension is gained, and this understanding helps the writer face both the remembered past and the present. This process takes place every time the past is written, but it becomes more obvious when contrasting two memories of the same event or person. Due to the distance between the self-narrator and the self-narrated and the process by which it is supposed to bring back a memory,³⁴ it becomes

aware of it and then represents it through a narrative discourse. The past changes and gains new meaning every time it is remembered. Also, the memories of the present influence the memories of the past, which produces differing results. That is why comparing two memoirs by the same author that were written some years apart may reveal varying degrees of memory elaboration and, therefore, provide for a contrast in the degree of integration or resignification the author has achieved between the two texts.

In *The Invention of Solitude*, Auster seeks to explain and understand his father's behavior and the degree of disconnection towards him through a detailed reconstruction of his personality, including all the new information he gathered about him after his death that showed some new sides of him: "I was born, became his son, and grew up, as if I were just one more shadow, appearing and disappearing in a half-lit realm of his consciousness."³⁵ For instance, his tenants esteemed him and felt confident enough to entrust him with the protection of their belongings out of concern about being robbed.³⁶ However, he does not develop resiliency because he is still too close to the fact that his father has passed away and cannot be reached to provide the answers to all of the issues that have been left unanswered:

"There has been a wound, and I realize now that it is very deep. Instead of healing me as I thought it would, the act of writing has kept this wound open ... Instead of burying my father for me, these words have kept him alive, perhaps more so than ever. ...each day he is there, invading my thoughts, stealing up on me without warning."³⁷

In two different interviews from 1987 and 1989, Auster tries to explain this process as "an exploration of how one might begin to speak about another person, and whether or not it is even possible."³⁸ He also discusses how writing in prose is the best way for him to organize his "conflicts and contradictions," including all of his reactions and emotions, without having to "choose among them."³⁹ Since there can never be one true version of the relationship with his father due to his ambiguity, the best course of action is to embrace all of the different

versions of it, try to make some sense of it, and learn to live without having all the answers. Auster followed exactly the same course from his first memoir to the later one.

By the time Auster writes *Winter Journal*, 30 years later, the loss of his father seems to have already been processed. That judgment may be drawn from the conversation about him, which is casual and unassuming. He largely acknowledges the shock of his father's death, how unlike mankind his father was when compared to his father-in-law, and how it hurts him that his father was never able to witness him as a successful writer. His father always thought that his son would end badly, and when he died, the author was still struggling financially and in his personal life. Auster even notes in the same interview how his father's passing also resulted in a generous inheritance that allowed him to focus only on writing for a couple of years, which gave him the push he needed to gain the recognition he later received: "It's a terrible equation, finally. To think that my father's death saved my life."⁴⁰

This same thought appears in *Winter Journal*, where he recalls the numerous financial difficulties he faced during the years just before his father's death, which prevented him from writing for more than a year as he tried to survive. Then, after experiencing a sort of epiphany while watching a brief dance choreography, he wrote his first prose piece. The same night he finished writing this text, on February 14, 1982, his father passed away from a heart attack: "Just as you were coming back to life, your father's life was coming to an end."⁴¹ This mirror image of him being reborn as a result of his father's death is sustained by the significance of his inheritance in shaping his promising new future. That is one of the meanings he has given to his father's passing, along with the fact that his absence is no longer the reason he was unable to speak with him and resolve their issues.

After his father passed away, Auster sought to explain his bond with him. To achieve that, he needed to rescue the few positive memories his father must have spared him from a completely negative one: "A feeling that if I am to understand anything, I must penetrate this

image of darkness, that I must enter the absolute darkness of earth.”⁴² In this recount of his father’s family secrets, he finds the following memories: Auster’s father’s upbringing in poverty; his grandmother’s unwavering commitment to her family; her innocence following her husband’s murder; and the engraving of her principles in Auster’s father’s mind—a grown man who, without his wife or children, visited his brothers every day and his mother every Friday.

He had to add a few memories of him behaving like a father to all that new information. The sum of all this knowledge helped him to comprehend his father’s inconsistencies and realize that he would never be able to fully understand him due to the ambivalence he experiences when thinking about or remembering him—he was sometimes enraged and other times despondent:

“The rampant, totally mystifying force of contradiction. I understand now that each fact is nullified by the next fact, that each thought engenders an equal and opposite thought. Impossible to say anything without reservation: he was good, or he was bad; he was this, or he was that. All of them are true. At times I have the feeling that I am writing about three or four different men, each one distinct, each one a contradiction of all the others. Fragments.”⁴³

In his next memoir, written 30 years later, Auster still embraces this knowledge, but the emotion behind it is somewhat different. After the initial frustration and confusion, the second memoir shows mostly resignation and acceptance of these conflicting truths, as well as a tolerance for the ambiguity that has allowed him to live without having all the answers at hand.

Conclusion

The memoirs this essay discusses all reveal a family network of demands, agreements, and primarily silences. Because the familial relationships that gave rise to it persisted, their

relational experience's lack of meaning continued. Despite that, the authors choose to bring light to what was hidden or confusing in an effort to clarify relationships and exercise their right to select a particular narrative that allows them to live with the reality of not really understanding why or how they have experienced their loss.

On the one hand, Giralt Torrente was able to achieve reconciliation with his father a couple of years before receiving a cancer diagnosis. This was possible by giving up his demands on him and accepting all of the unresolved issues rather than pressuring his father for answers he was unable to provide. He then had two more years to talk to him and make amends throughout his medical treatments and last months of life.

While many people had varied opinions of his father and his generosity, Auster had to accept the many portrayals of his father that emerged after his death in order to realize that he was not necessarily a bad person. He had to learn to accept the fact that even though he was his father's son, he was not his father's priority, and he just could not help it. It was what his father's family history had taught him to do and what his mother's ferocious lessons on family loyalty had carved in him: first his mother, then his brothers and sisters and their own children; the rest were outsiders.

After a complex process in his first memoir that seemed to have taken many years to complete, his second memoir revealed signs of being reconciled with his father's multiple images. The first book opened the subject, laid the groundwork for all of his father's different versions, dove deeply into his family's history, and attempted to explain where he came from as well as how he was regarded by those outside the nuclear family. On the other hand, the second memoir allowed the author to turn the light on himself in order to realize that he had to let his father rest without having definite answers.

Giralt Torrente dealt with the ambiguity of his father's relationship much earlier, and his father's passing did not influence the process that had already been resolved. Giralt Torrente

even had a few years before his father passed away to take care of him and get closer. Even though he never received any answers, he was able to heal emotionally knowing that his father would live to see him married, become a successful author, and become a self-sustaining adult.

In contrast, Auster's process of dealing with it started right after his father's sudden death. For him, the death of his father set the process in motion. When he passed away, Auster was still struggling to establish himself as a writer while also going through a marriage crisis that resulted in a divorce and having to care for his little son. Everything he had been holding within blasted up all at once, and his first memoir was filled with it. That is why the text's tone is one of urgency and distress; he shows no confidence in his ability to complete the task. In addition to becoming a recognized author and being married a second time to the woman he is still with nowadays, he is able to detect some positive outcomes of his father's death in different interviews years later. Thirty years later, in his second memoir, the task is completed and his father is laid to rest. He is no longer a restless image but a more compassionate dream presence that he can speak about without suffering.

Memoir writing enables one to identify a variety of possible explanations for these ambiguous losses in order to cope with them and be able to continue despite their continuous ambiguity, such as losing a father despite being physically or emotionally present. In that way, it allows the authors to live in spite of the lack of a solid truth or one true answer.

Notes

1. Henke, *Shattered Subjects*, xi.
2. Savitri et al., "Expressive Writing," 2-3.
3. Pennebaker and Smith, *Opening Up by Writing It Down*.
4. Baikie and Wilhelm, "Emotional and Physical Health," 341.
5. Neimeyer, Klass, and Dennis, "A Social Constructionist Account of Grief," 489.

6. Den Elzen, “Therapeutic writing through the lens of the grief memoir”, 218.
7. The concept of ‘ambiguous loss’ was coined by Pauline Boss in her classical study *Ambiguous Loss. Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief* (1999) and developed to his last work *The Myth of Closure. Ambiguous Loss in a Time of Pandemic and Change* (2021)
8. Couser, *The Work of Life Writing*, 94.
9. Benjamin, *Like Subjects*; Mitchell, *Conceptos relacionales*.
10. Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories*, 69.
11. Porter, *Bureau of Missing Persons*, 11.
12. Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 57-75.
13. Gottschalk et al., *Guide to the Investigation*, 42–56.
14. Boss, “Ambiguous Loss Theory,” 105.
15. Boss, *Loss, Trauma, and Resilience*, 120.
16. Boss, “Ambiguous Loss Theory,” 106.
17. Boss, “Ambiguous Loss Theory,” 107.
18. Boss, “Ambiguous Loss Theory,” 106-107.
19. Giralt Torrente, *Tiempo de vida*, 11.
20. Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 69.
21. Giralt Torrente, *Tiempo de vida*, 39.
22. Giralt Torrente, *Tiempo de vida*, 26.
23. Giralt Torrente, *Tiempo de vida*, 9.
24. Boss, “Ambiguous Loss Theory,” 11.
25. Giralt Torrente, *Tiempo de vida*, 68.
26. Boss, “Ambiguous Loss Theory,” 106.
27. Giralt Torrente, *Tiempo de vida*, 95.

28. Giralte Torrente, *Tiempo de vida*, 96.
29. Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*, 27.
30. Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*, 59.
31. Auster, *Winter Journal*, 28.
32. Auster, *Winter Journal*, 168.
33. Hutchinsonson, *Conversations with Paul Auster*, 42.
34. Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 72-73.
35. Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*, 21.
36. Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*, 49.
37. Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*, 28.
38. Hutchinsonson, *Conversations with Paul Auster*, 7.
39. Hutchinsonson, *Conversations with Paul Auster*, 25.
40. Hutchinsonson, *Conversations with Paul Auster*, 24.
41. Auster, *Winter Journal*, 165.
42. Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*, 28.
43. Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*, 53–54.

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