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Manchester University Press, 2024.**

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William McEvoy is Joint Head of Drama, Theatre, and Performance and Associate Professor in Drama and English at the University of Sussex, with a distinguished career spanning teaching, research, and theatre criticism, including contributions to *The Stage*, *TLS*, and various academic journals. *Reanimating Grief* (2024) is his meditation on grief born out of personal experience with loss. The book investigates the concept of reanimation through case studies in theatre, literature, and Irish folk songs. While the term's meaning of revival is central to the kind of questioning the author employs, reanimation is utilized through its many cognates as well as metaphorical connotations. The analysis explores the expression of grief's emotional and perceptual aspects while examining its influence on reading, critical thinking, and creative writing. It is a work thoughtfully crafted and structured with the reader in mind, with chapters further divided into subchapters ranging from three to ten pages, each with their respective introductions and conclusions. Reflecting on the personal experience of grief that prompted the research, the chapters begin with autobiographical reflections presented as short sections of creative writing. In the introduction, the author situates the key concepts and their interconnectedness such as reanimation, grief, mourning, death, and loss, along with a general outline relating to their application in the upcoming chapters.

Chapter one titled *Genealogies of Grief: Classic Reanimations* “explores classic examples of reanimation in theatre and literature,” serving both as a foundation for constructing the concept's genealogy and as a way to investigate theatre's tendency to blur the line between life and death (18). Through the katabases in Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, McEvoy highlights the ontological shifts caused by the death of a parent and the difficulty of conceptualizing death for those they leave behind. The analysis continues with the reanimating and recursive qualities of grief and the power of poetic elegy in Virgil's and Ovid's versions of the Orpheus myth. Through Sophocles' *Electra*, the knowledge and perception of grief, along with the kind of narratives it can generate, are examined in relation to their contribution to the power of fiction and performance on stage. The chapter also alludes to Maria Crepsi's painting *Noli Me Tangere* and Jean-Luc Nancy's interpretation of the resurrection narrative before moving on to Shakespeare's elegies in *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*. The focus here is on how the poetic acts of said elegies transform the body into textual beauty.

In the following chapter, *Animate Objects of Mourning*, the author explores questions of animacy and inanimacy through “enchanting” moments of dramatic coups de théâtre, which he argues act as mnemonics of grief (43). The four examples discussed are Societas Raffaello Sanzio's *Giulio Cesare* (1997), Formalny Theatre's *School for Fools* (2001), the UK Complicite's *Mnemonic* (1999), and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1997). These plays contain moments in

performance where the permanence of death is disrupted. The enchantment arises as the transformations in these examples do not lend themselves readily to logical explanation and thus, they also mimic the grieving process. In the chapter, Freud's concept of the uncanny is connected to the dual ontology caused by the transformative power of death.

Chapter three by the title of *Grief, Fiction, Passion* discusses Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with a focus on the death of the father, his ghost as a revenant, and Yorick's skull as a memento mori. The play's many reanimations are also explored through Freud, Lacan, Greenblatt, and Maguire, as well as Maggie O'Farrell's *Hamnet*, with a focus on grief and mourning. The author concludes the chapter by arguing that literature and theatre mediate our grief creating metatheatres of mourning (86).

The chapter *Dead Forms, Living Characters* "explores the death and reanimation of realism" in Chekov's *The Seagull* and *Three Sisters* (88). In the former, this is symbolized by the taxidermic bird, which acts as a representation of the failed portrayal of nature while signaling its propensity to return, not to fade away entirely. In the latter, it is shown through various styles and structures that move away from simple, realistic portrayals of the self. McEvoy argues that *The Seagull* had set the stage for the innovations applied in *Three Sisters* by deliberately exposing the limitations of realistic theatre. One of the innovations is that while deaths are not represented and thus grief is "impossible" in *The Seagull*, in *Three Sisters*, Chekov reanimates a form of realism that is capable of representing death and grief, predicated on absence (90).

In chapter five, *Burying the Living and the Dead*, Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Happy Days* are contrasted with Enda Walsh's postmodern metatheatre in *The New Electric Ballroom* and *The Walworth Farce*. McEvoy argues that Walsh's reanimations of Beckettian themes such as entrapment, trauma, and guilt serve as an antidote to Beckett's theatre (121). Both playwrights challenge the medium and its form, with Beckett pushing theatre to its limit by subtraction, while Walsh does so by accretion. Walsh's plays use comic linguistic excess in the place of Beckett's linguistic minimalism, and absurdism through vivid colors instead of Beckett's tension between light and dark. It is argued that through farce Walsh provides a critique of myths of nation. The chapter also acts as an intermediary between the theatre and song sections of the analysis by highlighting the role of music in *The Walworth Farce*.

The last two chapters turn to the analysis of Irish folk songs that reanimate the dead through evoking "bereavement and loss" (132.) In *Medical Afterlives* grief's reanimations are discussed through the intertextuality death and grief create in different forms of media: Joyce's short story *The Dead*, the folk song *The Lass of Aughrim* by the Dubliners, and the novel *Beautiful World, Where Are You* by Sally Rooney. In Joyce's short story, the song's narrative role is examined, highlighting gender relations and the transmission of cultural memory. In contrast, McEvoy argues that Rooney's novel employs the same song to show

how “old folk ballads like *The Lass of Aughrim* no longer possess the evocative, connotative power they once had” (134).

The final chapter, *Mothersongs*, is the most autobiographical, as its title suggests. The songs it discusses, namely *Finnegan's Wake*, *The Ballad of William Bloat*, and *Navy Boots On*, hold strong evocative power for the author, particularly in relation to his early years in London and memories of his mother. *Finnegan's Wake* is given additional context unraveled by the discovery that the song originates from the United States. The different ways of mourning, the conflict that arises from it, the comedic resurrection, and how these aspects connect to Irishness are explored at the beginning of the chapter. Attitudes towards death and mourning resulting from different cultural traditions are contrasted through a series episode from *Derry Girls*. We learn about the author's revelations on grief and mourning through *The Ballad of William Bloat* while recurring features of gender relations in Scottish and Irish songs are explored in *Navy Boots On*.

The vastness of the topic and the universality it holds in relation to the human experience are appropriately focused within the author's expertise and further narrowed by autobiographical connotations. While the choices arising from these defining factors are relevant, one might wish other works had been included in the research such as Killroy's reanimation of *The Seagull* for chapter three, or *Raglan Road* paired with *Navy Boots On*. The writing of the book and the research that went into the different reanimations of grief through the different types of media were a revelatory experience for the author and helped him “cope with the potentially overpowering emotions of loss” (178). Although unconventional for an academic work, the creative writing at the beginning of the chapters highlights the personal nature of the grief experience. Granted, the book was featured in the 2024 Gothic reading list by Manchester University Press and addresses a central theme in the field, it may be of greater interest to those focused on Theatre or Irish Studies, especially those of us who are looking for ways of navigating loss and sorrow.

