Afterword

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What's the story? What happened here, you ask, as you finish Catherine Belsey's article and come to the end of an arc that began with Paul Simpson (an urgent start, making us think about how we sided a bit with Norman Bates watching Marion Crane go to her watery grave, coffined in chrome), then had us think (with Gerald Prince) about how the affordances of film can convey Bates's anxiety and subsequent naïve relief through direct facial expression, while in writing these could really only be clumsily told rather than shown? If that was enough establishment of the situation, then we came to the terrible complicating action of Angelo's first telling, and much later retelling in obviously changed circumstances, of his ordeal in the 2005 London tube bombings in Lambrou's article. Angelo's tellings are oral ones of personal experience, and that first-person subjectivity is at the heart of Jim Phelan's argument that we need especially to attend to the *voice* of the implied author when we read the narration in novels and memoirs. His examples include *The Sound and the Fury* and Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*. Didion writes of the sudden death, barely comprehensible, of her beloved husband of 40 years, and every word is hers alone, as it were (including the direct speech of others, which of course she frames and at least implicitly evaluates). By contrast, the story of a death that Ruth Page analyses is being written (the progressive aspect applies) by an untraceably large and dispersed variety of authors or contributors, being a Wikipedia article attempting an objective summary narrative of the murder of Meredith Kercher. This story-development is not a free-for-all, an online version of a public meeting shouting match, being significantly constrained by procedures that govern any revisions, additions and subtractions. As Page shows, we are still adjusting to the affordances of social media of this kind, and their cultural and political implications. If anyone clicks on the Wikipedia article seeking to learn 'what finally happened' in the Kercher murder trial, resolution and coda, then it is fitting that there is only a temporarily final version, as it were. Because this issue's story arc comes to an unforeseen close, a narrative twist that is more surprise than suspense, with Catherine Belsey's reminders of how so much storytelling (crossing all boundaries like film/prose, fictional/real, personal/vicarious, etc.) is driven by awareness of loss, and unsatisfiable desire (the desire not to lose, not to change, always to have and to hold, always to survive, to know, to love and be loved and be happy).

No, you persist, but what are these articles *really* about? They are all – all six of them – about how narratives help us deal with the big issues, than which none is bigger than death. How do we deal with death, our own or someone else's (especially if we love that someone, or fear them, or in some other way see in them a version of our selves)? One thing we do is narrativize. And by narrating, we (hope to) transform it. Not for nothing is William Labov's recent retelling of his own method of narrative analysis called *The Language of Life and Death* (2013).

Stylisticians believe in the explanatory potential of linguistic analysis (which needs to be sufficient but also efficient, economical as well as thorough) in accounting for literary effects or reader responses; the effect of interest in Simpson's article is the reader's sense of narrative urgency. (Here it could be useful to canvas ordinary readers, to get an idea of what they have in mind by 'urgency'.) And if the linguistic analysis is truly explanatory, the stylistician ought to be able to show that by incorporating such and such features, a 'plain' narrative can be invested with urgency; and that by removing realizations of those same features from an extant narrative judged to be endowed with a sense of urgency, that sense of urgency is principally what disappears.

Six features or stylistic tendencies are usefully nominated in Simpson's article as likely to be prominent where there is an onset of urgency. The list includes a shift to one-clause sentences, or asyndetic clauses, with minimal clausal subordination; material and behavioural processes rather than projecting mental or, least likely, relational processes (these are too static); absence of evaluative modality, especially epistemic (more categorical statement); scenic ('isochronous') narration; representation of speech and thought in the Free Discourse forms (Direct or Indirect); and events occurring in the primary text-world, not a more embedded one.

Exploring a passage as closely as the stylistician does, one can always debate whether, for example, the McEwan passage is as 'urgent' as it could have been (is '*there was no time for argument*' a bit clunky in the circumstances?). Still we admire the tension between the dynamism of the fighter plane and its murderous machine-gun fire, and the frozen (silent, immobile) reaction of boy and woman, a dangerous inertness conveyed in part by kinds of intratextual para-repetition (she 'wouldn't stand, wouldn't move, would not take his hand') all in oppositional contrast to Turner, who is soon on his feet and then running. A notion (deeply culturally embedded) of 'immediacy' underpins these decisions: the highlighted stylistic tendencies are those one might expect to contribute to conveying an effect of immediacy, of there being *no time or textual space* for the luxury of an adjective or a *seemingly* or a *because* clause. As Simpson says, these are rules of thumb rather than absolutes, and not all will always apply; there is room for fine-tuning and contemplation of exceptions (relational processes, for example, said to be 'static' and dispreferred, are actually quite numerous in the short McEwan extract).

Simpson is right to note that the stylistic recipe for urgency fits passages of hyperchondriac panic as easily as air-raids; he argues that we can filter out the burlesque cases by noting the style-content mismatch. Perhaps we could enlarge this account of potential mismatches from the dual to a triple: style-content-context. Many kinds of irony and satire involve using a linguistic texture that in 'ordinary circumstances' would convey danger, tragedy, or something fearful or pitiful, covertly to mean something very different (often not simply 'the exact opposite') in what we take to be special circumstances, a

quite different context. There may not be a detectable style-content mismatch in the subtler cases, but the wider context alerts us that the 'dangerous' content is not to be taken at face value. Although Simpson quotes a short passage from Jerome (which, in a different context I suggest, might conceivably be a non-burlesque report of a serious heart condition) he actually discusses a much longer passage, where the narrator reports his finding that he has every ailment save tennis elbow and housemaid's knee. This extended content allows a reader to conclude that the narrator is a dramatizing hypochondriac, expressing and enacting urgency where really there isn't much. We project from this fuller content a different context. But the style remains urgent; it has to, to provoke amusement.

Simpson's idea of a Kuleshov Monitor (character-narrator within the story upon which reader/viewer emotions can be 'hung') is an important criterion for some of the urgency effects he is interested in. It is similar to a requirement I have postulated in short-story passages that are especially emotionally immersive of the reader:

> The kind of situation in which the reader seems most likely to develop an emotional engagement, I postulate, is one where a speaker or focalized character is presented (or can be inferred to be present) in a particularized imaginable situation (a 'deictic' task for the writer), where in addition we readers learn explicitly or implicitly what *they* feel strongly about and are moved by (in the narrative present). This engagement is a drawing of the reader into empathy with a depicted character, achieved by furnishing the textual means with which the reader can 'see into' or *see along with* that character's imagined consciousness. (Toolan, 2012a: 213)

Concerning the Kuleshov experiment, in which the same shot of an impassive Mozhukin was variously presented following three contrasting images (of a bowl of soup, a woman in a coffin, or a girl with teddy bear), the first thing that audience responses suggest to me is that we have a powerful impulse to turn successive, similarly-framed representations into a coherent sequence, with narrative properties, where we can. So we assume and seek to find how Mozhukin's expression relates to the previously presented soup, corpse, or girl, and assume he is offering some kind of commentary. This in turn makes the crucial coherence-forging assumption that Mozhukin has just seen the soup (or the corpse, etc.) just as we have, so that he like us is attending to it. And we invoke standard realist scripts and schemas unless there are clear signals inviting us not to; so we assume, if Mozhukin is in a shared situation with the corpse, for example, that he would normally feel sorrow and we imagine him feeling and registering that sorrow.

I'm not sure that our desire to see Marion's car (admittedly, with her body inside it) sink fully into the swamp indicates the moral conflictedness that is sometimes suggested. Does it occur to the viewer that this will cause Norman Bates's crime to be harder to uncover? Or, knowing that this is a Hitchcock movie where we crave terror and mystery, do we not even think about it? And aren't most of us a bit OCD: if a car is to be sunk in a pond, we want it to sink all the way in (there's probably a cognitive basis for this preference too)! In any event the results of the experiment with the QUB students is pretty conclusive: that when (as in the actual film) we see the car's sinking intercut with Bates' reactions, and are thus encouraged to 'see along with' Bates and evaluate as he does, then we root strongly for the car to submerge fully; whereas when we just watch a sinking car

and no one else is in shot, we really don't much care. This experiment would be open to further manipulations: for example, a version where in place of the Bates intercuts one saw shots of an earlier Marion (embracing her lover, perhaps, as in the opening scenes of the film?). Perhaps in that condition viewers might positively want the car *not* to sink below the surface.

As Simpson concludes, 'The effects … of the positioning of a particular kind of intra-diegetic character within the story are sufficient to override frameworks of expectation about what is just, decent or honourable', referring a little earlier to Marion as 'an innocent woman'; one might qualify this picture of goodies and baddies by noting that Marion has stolen a large amount of money (her adultery is more defensible), and that Bates is more mad than bad: plus, he is so fresh-faced! Some of what viewers feel about Bates is akin to what many readers feel about Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov, in *Crime and Punishment*: it wasn't nice of him to bury an axe in the pawnbroker's skull, but we then become so drawn into his desperate view of things that we half want him to evade the detective Porfiry's traps. The more general point about the powerful anchoring and gravitational pull of being encouraged to see things literally and metaphorically from an embedded character's very specific point of view is nicely confirmed by the *Psycho* experiment, regardless of questions about morality. And the links between all this and the question of narrative urgency merit plenty of further exploration, as does the search for a working definition of 'narrative urgency', so as to clarify how it differs from (or resembles) suspense, speed, emergency and other impressions. The focus on what Simpson calls the isochrony of the action and the telling in situations of narrative urgency is also suggestive (since phoneticians already use 'isochrony' to denote equality of measures over time – as in the approximate isochrony of stresses in spoken English – an alternative label might be 'durational match' of actions and their telling). Absolute coterminousness or coextension of telling and events is a tall order, if not an unrealistic one, in narratology. Perhaps only in the most performative kinds of speech act (sentencings, marryings, directives, promises) are the verbalization and the act fully synchronous – but then performatives are not narrative telling. So we need to emphasize that even in the Genettian scenic we are talking of effects, impressions and illusions, rather than real durational identity. Certainly direct dialogue usually takes longer to read than to say.

In fact performativity shadows many of the articles gathered in this issue: a strong sense that situated doing, doing in the right circumstances, is how meaning is created, so the meaning is in the doing rather than existing antecedently (an existentialist and inte-grational-linguistic idea, perhaps). The way I write is who I am, says Joan Didion, for example, who in her grief-stricken state adds 'I need more than words to find the meaning'. We might think she means that it is not in the words alone, but in the writing of the words, that she hopes to find meaning. But she wishes she had some magical filmmaking machine, so as to show simultaneously 'all the frames of memory' from which we (why us?) might make our selection. Some transferring of narrativizing responsibility, from Didion (for whom everything is simultaneous – not a narrativized sequence at all) to her addressees is impossibly wished for here. Didion needs 'whatever it is I think or believe to be penetrable'. Do we understand what this means, constatively? Or are these obscure or impossible disclosures more crucially performative, an enacting of grief and despair

as stylistically and tonally difficult (cold, intense, impenetrable, obsessive) as those of Quentin Compson?

Why did Didion write *The Year of Magical Thinking*? Moving and powerful as it is, for some readers it is about Didion to a fault, and narcissism has been diagnosed in the voice and style Phelan gives us samples of. Certainly the distancing projections and repetitions that Phelan admires as expressive of cool and polished detachment, tamping down grief and trauma, may strike other readers as mannered and indulgent. Can these sharply contrasting assessments be put to any kind of stylistic test? A stylistician might well do a Systemic Linguistic transitivity analysis of the paragraph in which Didion pronounces her husband dead. This suggests a double dissociation: first of the deceased, not even a participant in the processes reported; then of Didion, almost never agentive, very frequently the affected, or recipient participant. Even when in subject position of a volitional process (*I wanted a priest*), she is a near-wordless reactor rather than an initiator: *They asked if I wanted a priest*. But there's something disengaged or under-explained also in the priest's contribution. He *appeared* (more magical than arriving) and *said the words*: what words, why? His visit could have been a little narrative, but it is given no such status. With rereadings another pattern comes to the fore, which reflects how Didion represents herself as beneficiary or recipient: the three reports that *I thanked him/them*. Just like an (Anglophone) customer. But even without a thorough transitivity analysis the reader will have noticed that John Gregory Dunne is almost completely absent from this paragraph, mentioned only in a very few embedded clauses which carry presuppositions involving him. No sentence here *asserts* anything about him, or describes his body, lying now within the cubicle; from that level of intimacy, Didion has curtained us off.

Why did Didion write *The Year of Magical Thinking*? To enable herself to go on, I imagine, after the devastating loss of her husband (and cruelly soon after, writing another account after the death of her daughter Quintana, again to enable herself to go on living – which in her case means to go on writing). I doubt she has survivor's guilt, but the loss and the grieving must have left her … well, at a loss. At a loss what to say, how to resume, how to cope with this enforced change, and how to see and articulate the point of it all; which is to say – since a narrative must have a tellable point – how to move beyond the tellable narrative of John Gregory Dunne's death to a coherent sequel about her own continuing life.

Still, this reader can't leave this paragraph of Didion's memoir without asking whether the social worker *really* said, in those circumstances and in front of the newly bereaved, 'she's a pretty cool customer'. This is so extraordinarily crass as to press against the outer limits of our credibility requirement for narratives. I'm not saying Didion invented this, but might the circumstances, the immediate narrative, have been told differently? In 2005 this paragraph with its 'cool customer' phrase was reproduced all over the internet (including in the *New York Times* and *London Review of Books* reviews); so that it's hard to believe that the identity of the particular social worker wasn't 'outed', at least within the hospital community. Slight though our opportunity is to glimpse his perspective, I feel for him.

Perhaps the social worker has a different account. There are always alternative accounts, never more so than in criminal trials for murder, as Ruth Page shows in her study of the clash of narratives about the murder of Meredith Kercher, a British student

on a year-abroad programme in northern Italy. Descriptions of 'what really happened' continue to be recycled, revised, contested, and reconstructed. But in contemporary digitized social media, where thousands (potentially) can contribute to the retelling, the open-endedness and revisability is unprecedentedly extensive. Or is so at least for those with the time, energy, and interest. This all parallels the history and the historiography that underpin it, only massively accelerated and largely channelled through the internet; largely, but not completely, since the detail of competing social media accounts ultimately must respond to the discourses of the Italian legal proceedings. Most of all, Page puts the wiki back in Wikipedia, reminding us that this remarkable online resource is no more an author*less* repository of received wisdom than were its 18th- and 19th-century antecedents (Diderot, *Brittanica*), or *Gray's Anatomy* or the *New (later Oxford) English Dictionary* of James Murray and others. But, different from these, in writing and rewriting about something as personal and painful as Meredith Kercher's murder the contributors to the Wikipedia pages about the crime and prosecution are narrating a topic that lies more in the domain of journalism than general knowledge. The open-endedness of the report confirms what we already knew about events in history – that their explanation is never definitively resolved – but also draws attention to the judicially controversial contribution that such mass media coverage makes. This is still, after all, an ongoing legal case: the retrial of Knox and Sollecito, following an appeal by the prosecution, is currently proceeding and expected to last until the end of 2013, when the trial court's verdict – conviction or acquittal – will be returned to the Supreme Court.

Marina Lambrou's study explores the sensitive topic of personal narrative retellings, using the accounts given by Angelo of his terrifying experience on 7 July 2005, caught up in the London tube and bus bombings which killed 52 other commuters. As Lambrou makes clear, Angelo's second account cannot entirely accurately be called a retelling, as it was produced in response to a specific question from a sociolinguist researcher, and 30 months after his first account, which was given to a TV journalist (and by extension an indefinitely large audience) at Kings Cross station, within minutes of Angelo reaching safety. Lambrou notes that the earlier account has an *in medias res* opening. It is surely true that no oral personal narrative can ordinarily begin with 'People started to scream because there was a burning smell, and everyone, to cut a long story short, thought they were going to die'. We can assume that the TV news item into whose report Angelo's account has been embedded (mostly as Complicating Action and Evaluation) has already provided (at the outset) some form of interim Resolution-cum-Abstract and then some Orientation. So Angelo's two accounts are as interesting for their differences as their similarities. A major difference, as one might predict, is the full orientation preceding the later version.

Lambrou's article ponders the possible reasons for the relative scarcity of first person singular pronouns, and substitutions of what happened to 'people' and how 'people' responded, in Angelo's narratives (a trend found also in the accounts of people who have survived, *comparatively* unharmed, a massive traumatic event). As suggested, Angelo's barrister training may be a factor here but the dissociation may also relate to what is sometimes rather glibly called 'survivor guilt' – in reality what may be an extremely disturbing sense that you have survived unscathed where others have lost their lives, despite being as innocent as you. In these circumstances, and with justification anyway,

it makes sense for your narratives to emphasize that the evil done to you did not select you as individuals, or allow you to act as individuals, but as a powerless victimized collectivity.

Lambrou's article isn't really about retellings or twice-told tales, but it should make us think more about what these involve. We tend to expect 'retellings' to follow closely the structure and content of a first telling, but why exactly? In the context of 'compelled retellings' (e.g., in the police station or in court) there is a particularly strong pressure for similarity among multiple retellings (although not absolute lexical identity: that, for a forensic linguist, would point to some kind of dodgy dealing). But narrative retelling is another linguistic domain (alongside direct speech reporting, and translation) where we need to be careful in any assessments in terms of accuracy or fidelity (a theme of Prince's article also). There is no space to explore this further here, other than to suggest that 'the same person' telling 'the same story' about themselves on two occasions sharply separated by time, space, or other factor does indirectly raise two questions whose implications spread wide: can we change, and don't we, inescapably, change?

Gerald Prince looks at moments of non-equivalence in the translation of narrated and narrating features between two alphabetic written languages, chiefly to revisit those features in their claimed indispensability. He begins by noting how a narrator's gender and sex can remain undisclosed far more easily in English than in French or German narratives (in French, for example, gender-agreement of adjectives and past participles is required). He then surveys a wide range of ways in which translation – even between English and French, two relatively cognate languages – highlights kinds of difference where a categorization is forced upon you in one grammar but left open or ambiguous in another. Sometimes, however, it may be that something grammatically ambiguous (such as whether *His daughter cried to him: 'Be careful!'* reports a singulative or iterative frequency event, where the French must unambiguously choose one – *lui cria* – or the other – *lui criait*) is disambiguated rapidly in the co-text; or it may not much matter. Between film and written narration, point of view is always unambiguously apparent in the former, whereas for stretches of written narrative it may remain quite unspecified. Again, a crucial supplementary question is whether the absence, in the particular circumstances, makes a difference. There are many valuable insights along the way of Prince's survey. For example, many of us will concur with his brief observations about an asymmetry between what is acceptable in the way of *inquit* clauses in English (e.g. *She said*; with possibility, albeit rare and archaic, of *said she*) and standard French (where only the inverted *dit-elle* is permitted). Furthermore (a matter of degree rather than an absolute) the *inquits* are less used generally than in an English counterpart – or so I found when comparing English and French versions of a Raymond Carver story, where only half the *I/he/she said* clauses were translated by some form of *dire*, the translator evidently relying on the logic of the co-text to guide the reader as to who is speaking (Toolan, 2012b: 56–57).

I suspect that, from a stylistician's point of view, what James Phelan proposes we think of as the implied author (synthesizing narrators, characters, voice, elements of structure) is what we have hitherto attributed to 'the narrator' – even when we didn't have much in the way of grounds for specifying the human particulars of that narrator. We were just sure, following Wayne Booth and earlier generations of critics, that – for

example – we wanted to specify something *other than* William Faulkner himself, as the voice (combining style, tone, and values) of and in *Absalom, Absalom!* So in broad terms stylisticians may be receptive to the spirit of Phelan's proposal that tone is part of voice, and 'voice' is what is so rapidly identifiable as characteristic of Eliot's narrator in *Middlemarch*, or of Jason Compson in 'his' section of *The Sound and the Fury*. Another term again comes from Belsey: presentation. This seems to denote what some might simply call style, the complex distinctiveness of that iconic or performative 'perfect fit' of form and content that we look for in literature.

Some readers of this journal may also wonder if Phelan's 'Voice' approximates the stylisticians' idea of 'mind style', which notwithstanding subsequent adjustments meant something simple and powerful to its early proponent, Fowler (1977), that a text's style might be eloquent of the mind that sponsored it (i.e., of the character whose thoughts or values it represented). Near the beginning of Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* a police officer asks Christopher, the boy-narrator, 'Did you kill the dog?', and the text continues: 'I said, "I did not kill the dog".' In saying just this (instead of something more 'normal' in the circumstances, like 'No!') and in reporting saying this, we have one of many style indications that here is a mind that is distinctive: perhaps too literalist, a bit obsessive, a bit inclined to mirror rather than able to 'see where the talk is going' and able to skip intermediate steps, also an innocent. But if we say that Christopher is the first-person narrator of *The Curious Incident*'s text, and even if (*pace* Phelan) we strainingly argue that Christopher is responsible for scene-juxtaposition and dialogue, is he also the author of the book's title, and other peritexts? These feel to be well outside Chris's control, perhaps his knowledge, so a distinct sponsor needs to be identified – perhaps Mark Haddon in *propria persona*; or, more plausibly, Mark Haddon 'playing a role' (hence Phelan's advocacy of the category 'implied author'). By virtue of that framing supervisory role, Haddon is understood to have oversight of everything per-formed by Chris in *his* role, as overt narrator, notwithstanding the sense we have that within the narration it is *Chris's* tone, voice, and values that are laid bare directly (and those of 'role-playing or implied author Haddon' only indirectly, at most). That, at least, is how I would reconcile Phelan's proposal with received views in stylistics, regarding authors and narrators. Despite the hidden control of everything in *The Curious Incident* from and by the implied author, we are in fact much more interested in Christopher and his tone/voice/values. This is so even though we also know that Christopher is pure invention (a truth that Belsey also emphasizes) while the implied author of Chris's story is some kind of prosthetic extension of Haddon himself (if we don't like a novel's chapter-headings or typography, it would usually be much more natural to blame the author than the narrator).

This guiding of our sympathies and interest involves a kind of illusion. As the exam-ple of 'Here Caddie' triggering Benjy's moaning shows, there is a staging and a structur-ing here, which, with hindsight, readers find communicative and poignant. None of this is designed by Benjy and none of it is accidental, Phelan notes, who wishes to alert us to the work of the Faulknerian implied author. On the one hand, we understand, Benjy really is looking through the fence and Luster is hunting in the grass and then one of the men who is 'hitting' calls 'Here, Caddie' and Benjy cries and Luster berates him, and it's just one contingency after another, duly reported by Benjy, who comprehends only some

of what is going on. No synergistic contrivance. On the other hand, the whole thing is a kind of trick or illusion since, as we learn later, 33-year-old Benjy is severely learning-disabled and has minimal language comprehension, and no language-production: he cannot think, let alone say, the things that the first quarter of *The Sound and the Fury* has him narrating, from 'Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting' onwards. So the entire section is profoundly unnaturalistic. But the whole has been so brilliantly constructed – by Faulkner – that its effects and communications to us feel natural.

There is always a difficulty with talking about voice and speech in the novel, or for that matter asking the reader to please listen to the first sentence of Quentin's section of *The Sound and the Fury*. That is not to say that 'listening' isn't a good idea; one way to induce it is to ask the reader to please voice the text, as an aid to attentive processing, as I have urged with regard to *Middlemarch*'s complex preface (Toolan, 2011). But unless we are enjoying an audiobook or other vocalized reading, there are no voices, no speech, nothing to listen to, in the novel – only lots of writing and the pictures, sounds, smells and so forth that these conjure up. Besides, the actual audiobook version of *Invisible Man* (say), where we incontrovertibly hear a voice with tone and attitude may be more hindrance than help, for Phelan's purposes, closing the possibilities down as to just what the complex of voice and values projected by the implied author and to be derived by the design-conscious reader might be (the novel is available on CD, unabridged, read (aloud!) by Joe Morton, Jr). So I'm not sure we have actually escaped from a predominantly metaphorical (hence, open) notion of voice. Perhaps this is why I remain unsure whether our very different assessments of Jason and Quentin are guided by their own voices or, as Phelan proposes, by implied-author Faulkner's voice. Any attentive reader knows that these brothers are chalk and cheese, but they are also aware that by the time Jason starts his nasty tirade, poor Quentin with his obsessions about time, guilt, failure, imagined incest and what all has been 18 years dead, by his own hand. Quentin is another who could not change – could not imagine changing – and so could devise no survival narrative.

There isn't the same author/narrator separation, of course, in Didion's first-person memoir, which attempts the difficult task of remembering and relinquishing, of keeping and of letting go (hence the tensions and tonal counter-currents Phelan explores), in pursuit of an ending to this grieving, an acceptance of this change however terrible. The connections with Catherine Belsey's commentary are direct: Didion's narrative is like any narrative a powerful possessing of its first reader especially (Didion herself), but when it ends – and in being a narrative, it was *planned* to end – it will dispossess her and us. That much has been foreseen, understood; what cannot be so understood in advance is what the narrative means, since this only emerges in the process of writing it. So the memoir is a containing of Didion's loss, not a denial of it, in the Lacanian terms Belsey adopts. But Didion's writing powers do not enable her to 'keep hold' of Dunne, let alone bring him back; in Belsey's Lacanian terms 'the signifier that empowers the speaking being cannot in the end deliver a countervailing presence'.

From the stylistic point of view, Phelan has set us all a challenge. He may well be right to say that in attending to the modulations of Didion's voice, with all its double-accented and self-conscious comments and so on, readers are deeply moved and come to

understand grief better. If so, can we develop a more detailed explanation with explicit criteria, analysing this complex cause (the voice) and complex effect (deep feelings, deeper understanding) into their key elements? The stylistic assumption is always that the text, as complex cause, can be further analysed down to its instrumental parts, whose postulated instrumentality we might try to falsify.

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