

## GRIEF BY NUMBERS

My mother told me grief doesn't get smaller. You reconfigure your life and you build anew, but it never hurts or means less.<sup>3</sup> You live through the lens of grief for the rest of your life.

Dad was 42 when he died, the answer to the wrong universe.<sup>4</sup> My share house in Melbourne is also no. 42 and the numbers reversed make my second favourite number, the day of my birth; a baby on the cusp of Leo and Virgo. Incidentally,  $4 \times 2 = 8$  (not that you need a maths lesson<sup>5</sup>) and eight is my favourite number, lovely curvy thing.

### What is the function and value<sup>1</sup> of extranarrative<sup>2</sup> literature and how does it interact with critical discourse?

Extranarratives demonstrate an interplay of thought, emotion, memory and experience in a distinctly performative manner, allowing readers to experience and direct their own interaction with a text. These narratives also interrogate the role of authenticity, narrative voice and alienation in literature. Ultimately, the power of extranarrative literature is its ability to engage and communicate as insistently and passionately through form as through content.

Extranarratives allow for an overt exploration of the complexities of human history and interaction. Simone de Beauvoir said that 'by following the sequence of time, I put it out of my power to convey interconnections...I [fail] to give my past hours threefold dimension' (7). Extranarrative, in refusing to adhere to traditional narrative structure, can be viewed in a similar respect. In *Diary of a Bad Year*, when J.M. Coetzee introduces a second narrative (and voice) and soon

<sup>1</sup> It is helpful to imagine how extranarratives might exist in a traditional narrative structure. Perhaps there would be alternating chapters or distinct sections encapsulating the different 'voices' of the text, rather than a presentation of them as insertions and interruptions on the page. Coetzee's *Diary* might exist as a novel with three distinct and separate sections covering J.C.'s 'Strong Opinions,' J.C.'s narrative and Anya's narrative. David Foster Wallace's (F.W.) footnotes in stories like 'Octet' or 'The Depressed Person' might be inserted into the text as brackets, or within dashes (both devices he already employs prolifically). In discussing meta-narrative, Peter Barry mentions that 'frames' can be intrusive where 'the embedded tale is occasionally interrupted to revert to the frame situation' (228). In this sense, extranarratives function as a constant interruption. This sustained interrupting and the tense struggle for power, in experiencing the narratives as competing structures on the page, would be lost in a conversion to traditional literary structure. The performative nature of the extranarrative form would be only a vague and implied shadow – a suggestion, rather than a visceral and challenging performance of human and literary connection.

<sup>2</sup> Literature in which additional narratives exist outside of, in contrast to and in competition with the 'main' text of a page. Where Genette frames meta-narrative as 'a narrative within the narrative' (228), extranarrative operates as a narrative outside of the narrative, an intrusion or interruption of the main text. It might also be helpful to frame extranarrative against the structuralist contention 'not to interpret literature, but to investigate its structures and devices' (Culler 8), whereby extranarrative seeks to interpret literature *through* its structures and devices – in a way an extended version of Genette's interpolated text (217).

<sup>3</sup> She told me because I asked her about Dad.

<sup>4</sup> See Douglas Adams' *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and read it immediately. It's hilarious.

<sup>5</sup> Years after I was diagnosed with Diabetes (an unfortunate bi-product of Cystic Fibrosis [a genetic illness stemming from a faulty salt-transfer gene that can affect the lungs, pancreas, digestive system and liver]) a Diabetic Educator was assigned to teach me about carbohydrate counting. I was 19. She brought out a piece of paper with pictures of an apple, a piece of bread and a glass of milk. The pictures had numbers next to them - their 'carb count' for one serve. Part of me wishes I had

Eight<sup>6</sup> is tilted infinity, feared and exulted, forever happening, happened and going to happen.

Freud would insist these numbers don't correlate to anything – they are arbitrary connections I have made in order to feel more mysticism in my life.<sup>7</sup> He might be right. These connections may well have been created by an overly imaginative and emotional brain.<sup>8</sup> However, I do think the numbers mean something.<sup>9</sup> What is life but a whirling chaos of connection? People are referential creatures, bound up together in trauma, success, denial, love... all the delicious, terrifying things.

At the end of 1992, Mum was 43, Anna was 18, David was 7 and I was 4.<sup>10</sup> Hours after the horror of finding Dad in the paddock, I turned to Mum and said,

told her I didn't understand. Would she have given up at that point? She asked me to add up how many carbs there would be if I had two serves of bread and one apple. I managed, with more difficulty than I had ever experienced, not to sneer. I said five. She asked what if I had one apple and a glass of milk, plus three pieces of bread. I asked, is this was a mathematics lesson? I wasn't particularly polite. She stared, and I decided it was time to go.

<sup>6</sup> I've long had a strange relationship with numbers, agents of mathematics, most hated school subject, but also marker of life, ticker down of time, counter up of joys and loves.

<sup>7</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. (I must admit, my knowledge of Sigmund is limited. I'm told wasn't as pragmatic as I imagine.)

<sup>8</sup> And it's number 8!

<sup>9</sup> The number 17 chases me as well (in a cheerful, friendly way) and that too has its own memories and meaning, stemming mostly from my first love, who introduced me to these kinds of number contortions.

<sup>10</sup> It is poor etiquette to type numbers below ten as a digit rather than the full word, but I think it looks silly to have the 43 and the 18 digitised while the seven and the four are words. Are numbers even words when they're typed as digits?

They're certainly words when we say them out loud. Do they only become words when they're transformed into letters?

<sup>11</sup> A friend told me she never reads footnotes until the end of a work (if at all), which meant in her experience of my work, the second reading was as new as the first and told an entirely different story. Her admission reminded me of my own historical engagement with footnotes, which was not at all. In fact, I avoided anything that distracted me from 'the story' –

after that a third, he illuminates the difficulty of combining and understanding differing experiences, reactions and personalities – as much in life, as in literature. This difficulty is reflected in the struggles described within the narrative, and infinitely echoed in the competing structure of the three narratives on the page and the three, or possibly more, distinct voices in the reader's head. The reader interacts with the political theorising of J.C.'s opinions; with the wasting man who is forcing these words out and his interaction with these opinions, as well as his thoughts about and interactions with Anya; and with Anya's perspective on their friendship, on his 'opinions,' and on her own history; and finally with the once-removed perspective of Anya's partner Alan, through Anya's narrative. The framing of these stories as extranarratives demands that each set of ideologies and morphing characterisations be held in the mind at once, that we may experience each of their voices discretely, while also reading them as part of a unified voice (perhaps that of the author, real or imagined, behind the text or even the page itself, that finite and infinite, living and static thing). In the struggle to both condense and pull apart these voices and their interconnections, we echo our attempts to understand (to over-simplify, to connect, to deconstruct) any piece of writing – and any person.

The burden (or delight) of choosing a route through these competing narratives is with the reader. One narrative must always take a primary role, whether the reader purposefully focuses on a particular narrative before another, whether they will

‘It’s too horrible, I can’t think about it anymore. I’m going to play.’ And I turned and closed the sliding doors of the playroom behind me.<sup>12</sup>

At 16, I was slammed by memories of his death, of my brother’s lost wandering, of Anna saying ‘he’s not dead’ over and over again when we found him, and of my Mother’s incredible strength and the terrible price of her love.

I overheard her tell my sister to make sure she never put all of her hopes and love and heart with one person, to always keep something for herself, *because you never know what might happen*. They might be strangled to death by their own machinery whilst making a new fence at the top of their farm and be found by their seven-year-old son who would interrupt his mother making pizzas five days before Christmas to say, ‘Dad’s fainted.’

I have always been afraid of losing people and this is not a revelation. I lost one of the most important people in my life

jump across to an extra-interruption (which might be in the form of a footnote<sup>11</sup>, a secondary narrative or an intra-textual reference) or whether they trust the primacy of the page itself and will read everything on it before moving on, despite the fact that a particular narrative may carry on for some time from a previous page (Coetzee’s entire novel functions in this manner and David Foster Wallace’s famous footnotes do the same – his fifth footnote in ‘The Depressed man’ runs over six pages). Whichever route has been taken, extranarratives constantly demand the reader double back, question and realign their experience of the text.

Gerard Genette would frame this kind of textual analysis as a ‘ripping apart...an unavoidable violence’ (215), yet it might more helpfully be framed as an unfolding – a wilful vulnerability. The reader is invited to see inside, underneath and through extranarrative texts. The power is given to the reader to discover meaning, to imagine what the point of these competing narratives is – to find their own truth. There is no untouchable dictation of meaning, but rather an invitation to interact. F.W. is the master of this technique in that he does not simply imply this interaction, but breaks the fourth wall entirely and demands it. In ‘Octet,’ the entire second footnote (which is also in brackets and thus functions as an extranarrative of itself) discusses at length F.W.’s desire to speak directly to his readers and the inherently performative and potentially ‘false’ effect he imagines this might have. He ends the note (which has taken up more than ¾’s of the page) with the declaration that it ‘might well ought to get cut. It may be none of this real-narrative-honesty-v.-sham-narrative-honesty stuff can even be talked about up front’ (147). F.W. uses extranarrative to question the reader, and himself, and in so doing, indirectly questioning the mechanics and authenticity of literary representation. Complicating matters further, in responding to reactions he imagines readers might have, he creates yet another (unwritten) extranarrative – that of the reader themselves at the moment of

footnotes, endnotes, forewords, commentaries...

<sup>12</sup> A dear friend, and former teacher of mine, told me young children often do not have the vocabulary to describe their grief. Which, of course, does not mean they do not feel it. I can look back now, and I can see the twisting lines of hurt and fear and anger that trapped me. I wanted him back so badly and knew it was hopeless; that he could never come back, that I could never go back in time to save him, or spend one more day with him, or talk to him one more time, or have one more hug; and it was so *unfair*, because sometimes people actually got the things they desperately wanted, but I never would. And why had it happened, why did he have to die, why him? And why us?

before I knew a thing about him. I still don't really know anything.<sup>13</sup>

I do remember some things: sitting next to him at the breakfast bar and asking for spoonfuls of his cereal;<sup>14</sup> hearing him get up in the morning, no matter how quiet he tried to be and running to join him, or demanding he come and stand in the doorway of my room, 'Daddy come and look at me!'; sitting in front of him on the four-wheel-drive motorbike, careening down green corridors, icy fingers of wind pinking my cheeks;<sup>15</sup> taking a running leap onto him as he play-fought with my brother and the distinct, low 'Ooof' as I landed.<sup>16</sup>

He wrote diaries. Years of diaries from the farm, from before my brother and I were born, from his travels through Africa when he was 23.<sup>17</sup> There is a video of him giving a speech as well, but I've never been able to get past the first few minutes. He's there, a whole person on that tape and in those diaries. Reels of plastic and decaying paper know him as I do not. I have not-known

reading. Extranarrative allowed F.W. to create texts that were self-conscious and (potentially) manipulative, whilst also being vulnerable and naïve, displaying the fears and tension he feels within and for his own work. If this kind of extranarrative analysis is 'violent,' then it is a delicate and poetic kind of violence.

Part of the power of this form is in the simultaneous engagement of an intellectual reaction with an emotional response. In Genette's words, this is a passing 'from analysis of statements to analysis of relations between... statements' (213). While we might feel touched and emotionally engaged by Anya's final letter to J.C. (and her accompanying narrative reflecting on her relationship with the old writer and hoping she can be there for him in his final days), we must also question why the narrative space previously occupied by J.C. is now taken up by a recitation of Anya's letter. One possibility is that J.C. has in fact died and Anya's letters (and memory and voice) are all that is left to represent him. The dominance of Anya's voice in both her own and J.C.'s narrative 'space' might equally function as a comment on her own power and endurance – where she perhaps appeared vapid and insignificant when we were first introduced to her. Coetzee successfully presents an emotionally fraught narrative, whilst also engaging in an intellectual analysis of the mechanics of the page and the possible meanings behind those mechanics. I have struggled with this concept of presenting a work that is deeply emotional and personal, yet that also engages in linguistic play and divisiveness and removes the reader from the emotion of the narrative at the moment when they most want to be engaged. I fear that these devices create a false or misleading impression and in drawing so much attention to literature's inherently constructed nature, it will no longer be possible to trust any part of it.

Yet literature is, by its most fundamental nature, a construction. It is a physical embodiment of con-

<sup>13</sup> People have told me things (my family, his friends, his family), but their words aren't the same as knowing him myself. Nothing will ever be the same.

<sup>14</sup> I hate cereal now. I don't know if this was a natural progression (cold, milk-logged slop = distasteful) or if I stopped eating it because he was no longer there.

<sup>15</sup> I tumbled off the motorbike on two different occasions. Apparently I was fine.

<sup>16</sup> After he died I became very concerned with who would play-fight with us.

<sup>17</sup> I am 23. I haven't read the diaries yet. I don't know if I can. I don't know how to face him, or myself.

him so well for 20 years; I don't know what it would mean to know him now.

In 2008 for a creative writing class, I wrote about a parent forgetting things about a child who had died. A woman in the class said a friend's young daughter had died and her friend could never forget a single thing about her - she thought about her every day and would never forget. I know her words were meant as a reprimand<sup>18</sup>, but all I could think was what an exquisite and agonising gift her friend endured.

Mum still finds it difficult to talk about my father. It would have been his 61<sup>st</sup> birthday not long ago and she and I spent the day together, gentle supports for shared moments. I cried that day and she sensed my frustration that the loss of him was still so raw. She told me that she cried every day for eight months after he died. Sometimes when she was alone, but sometime before friends, who would curl and twist in apology.<sup>19</sup>

We left the countryside two years after Dad died. Mum had been trying to manage

cepts, emotions and thoughts that only exist inside the mind. Drawing attention to this construction is embracing literature for the construction it is, which seems ruthlessly honest, rather than false.

As for removing a reader from emotion at the moment they want to engage with it, we reach an interesting conundrum. As I wrote 'Grief by Numbers' I was aware of needing to look at what I was writing from out of the corner of my eye. If I faced it directly, I would be lost in it (or it would be lost in me). The extranarrative features of the work are not necessarily a removal from the emotion of my story, but a physical embodiment of my fragmentation, confusion and difficulty in facing my own past. Furthermore, the extranarrative form is a way for me to talk about the fact that I have dealt with grief by intellectualising it, by connecting it to literature, to other memories, to other people and by sidling past it, never quite letting it block out the light.

However, this moment of 'emotional engagement versus intellectual analysis' is exactly the point where a reader may choose to read the text *as they desire*. A footnote does not reach off the page and physically drag the eye down. It can be ignored. The central story can be followed through if a reader so desires, as can the story of the footnotes, the story of the interruptions or the story that is told in the white spaces of the page.

Extranarrative destabilises and challenges, and this struggle is an important part of the message the form communicates. It presents alternate and competing elements on the unified, yet fatally divided, page and in doing so, creates a dialogue and a tension that echoes a struggle within the narrative itself, whilst also referencing a struggle between traditional and alternative forms of literature and even the struggle of the 'self' to understand the contradictory elements of its own existence and the challenge of bringing that contradictory self in line with other contradictory selves. The form raises many concerns: which narrative will be read first; which narrative will compel the reader to read on, ignoring the other elements; which narrative communicates the

<sup>18</sup> I still find it strange that anyone would attempt to critique another person's experience of grief. Is grief limited to the old and the wise? Can it be graded?

<sup>19</sup> She said she told them it was okay to cry, that it wasn't their fault. The tears came just as often when Dad was not mentioned. She told them it is healthy to grieve and to do so before the people who love you. I still don't cry well with others.

<sup>20</sup> I saw the beautiful wooden deck and the view over a big green park which Mum must have chosen for that reason (but

the farm alone, as well as look after two grieving children and herself, who was suffering something far worse – her own grief, that of her little people, and the invisible loss of our family’s stolen future. I didn’t want to leave,<sup>20</sup> but it meant David and I received an education beyond our little school<sup>21</sup> sooner rather than later, which probably wasn’t a bad thing. We left our tree-hut, the long driveway past the tennis court up to the single-floored house, the deck that Dad built the year before, the trampoline behind the fence in the front paddock, the green upon green upon green as far as you could see, the frosts after winter nights which would briefly immortalise our footprints in the grass before the day melted them away, the stars that burnt from every corner of the sky. We left our beautiful, deadly farm behind.

strongest message; and how do we unify all of these elements and read them as a complete work of literature? These different elements might be understood through the lens of Lacan’s ‘valuing [of] the modernist or postmodernist text, where...a novel plays with the devices of the novel’ (Barry 109). The emphasis there is play – yet extranarrative uses this play to refer back to a deeper human experience of literature, and of living. Extranarrative literature says: we are creatures of struggle, why should we not interrogate our competing natures, our lack of understanding for one another’s histories or behaviours and our constant quest to find the understanding we lack? Extranarratives present contradiction and confusion<sup>27</sup> in order to make sense of the universal struggle to understand one another, and our world.

We might also categorise extranarratives in light of Barthes’ ‘declaration of radical textual independence,’ (Barry 63) – though we must quickly thereafter differentiate from other aspects of post-structuralist thought. While this kind of work can be seen as a ‘tissue of textualities’ (Barry 61) and to be ‘carry[ing] a plurality of significance,’ (69) that tissue and that plurality (or disunity), does not automatically mean they ‘betray’ themselves, and prove literature’s disconnect from the individual and from society. That way of thinking gives power to the fallacy that only traditional forms of literature present an accurate rendering of the human condition. And what is tradition, but a historical construction based on the way things have always been and therefore are, rather than the way things could<sup>22</sup>, or even should, be? If we accept that we are not perfectly unified creatures, that we are full of contradictions,

which was like a toy in comparison to the farm) and I said, ‘Where’s our lawn?’

<sup>21</sup> There was one classroom and 13 students by the time we moved in 1994. It has closed down now. They amalgamated three schools in the area and built a better, more attended, school. There was a plaque on the grounds of the old school in front of a tree that was planted when Dad died. I was so angry when they returned it to us. I know it was better that they send it back to us than that it be lost. But I suppose I had imagined the tree and its dedication surviving far beyond us, far beyond Dad. I suppose I thought of it as a version of him, and somebody dug it out of the ground and posted it back to us in the mail.

<sup>22</sup> At 10, my teacher told me I was not *thinking* the right way. She described this incorrect way of thinking as ‘Sian-language,’ which was apparently a lateral, but unacceptable, way of thinking.

<sup>23</sup> With the constant questioning of voice, agency and truth that extranarrative invites, the form might be seen as perilously close to suffering from what Jean Baudrillard called a ‘loss of the real’ (Barry 84). Does extranarrative, in its simulation of academia, its inversion of traditional creative writing, its problematic use of ‘the author’ as a voice at once within and outside of the text, move so far from ‘reality’ as to be a simulacrum? A page with text, in which the text is imagined? In some ways the fear is one that could be applied to any form of literature, which is always an attempt to re-package reality and represent it in some *original* way. If extranarrative is a simulacrum, it is not of reality, but of litera-

My Mother has endured more than I could ever truly understand and she is one of the brightest, most positive and loving people I have ever known. A large part of realising my own grief has been realising a shadow of what she went through, and the incredible strength and vulnerability she has inside her, to live outside the dictatorship of despair. Nineteen years ago the life she was meant to have was stolen, but she chose to survive.<sup>24</sup>

My grief has grown with me, it has grown bigger inside me and sometimes it seems to billow far out of my body. But mostly it fits perfectly inside my skin. It has changed me, but I have also changed it. I imagine that won't ever stop. I'm still trying to understand what it means that he died and we lived. I'm trying to understand what it means that life must go on without him. I'm trying to understand that I could lose everything (again), and I have to love and trust anyway.<sup>25</sup>

confusions and battles, then representing disunity<sup>23</sup> is not a removal from a grounded subject, but a more accurate and honest depiction of that subject.

Extranarratives also invert Barthes' contention that 'writing is the destruction of every voice' (1466). F.W. and Coetzee both create a multiplicity of voices through their extranarrative writing. F.W. constantly comments on and narrates his own narration in what we assume to be 'his' voice, existing as it does outside of the story he tells. When he footnotes 'that might not be the right word – too pedantic; you might want to use the word *transmit*, or *evoke* or even *limn*' (155) it is the intimate voice of a writer, assumed *the* writer (though admittedly a constructed version of his voice on the page), questioning his work. Coetzee's (assumed) voice in *Diary* is deeply present in his inclusion of a character so like himself, even carrying his initials. Admittedly this voice is decidedly *not* Coetzee. However, the possibility remains that this character is Coetzee's own imagined version of himself or an alternate self who might have responded as described to the situation in the novel. It could be argued that Coetzee's construction of a narrative that leads the reader to ask these very questions absolutely means his voice as 'the author' is present. Extranarrative engages directly with concepts of agency, narrative voice and direct address, and presents a powerfully voiced (multiply-voiced) extranarrative of the perceived author.

This kind of self-reflexive and self-referential dialogue between an author and their text must be questioned. It introduces the problematic issue of an author conferring trust in their narrative by an air of transparency that might actually be misleading. Coetzee has created a character conceivably so close to himself as to appear indistinguishable. There is an element of authority and trust conferred by this trading on his own name, yet if the 'narrating situation of a fictional account is *never* reduced to its situation of writing' (Genette 214) then we are being falsely

ture, which questions the validity and veracity of any creative output that seeks to represent 'reality' as something simple. This undermines Baudrillard's claim of a 'panic-stricken production of the real and the referential' (1736) in that extranarrative calmly and playfully suggests 'truth' might be in the imagined space. Thus, the simulacrum of literature allows a true representation of reality, reality which the simulacrum then suggests is best represented by the imagination.

<sup>24</sup> She said, 'I chose to believe that I would get through and that I would be happy again.' Her choice saved all of our lives. It's still saving mine now.

<sup>25</sup> There is a part of me that still doesn't believe these words. It is a part that fears joy as much as grief, a part that looks at both sideways as if they are wild things and might lunge for my throat.

For three days before the funeral, Dad lay in his coffin in our house. Having him there felt like we were still a family, like he hadn't died yet.<sup>27</sup> I would drag a chair next to his coffin so I could see inside and I would touch his hair and his face and stroke the satin lapel of his suit. We filled the coffin with photos and books and trinkets and we each soaked up his presence, soaked up the sight of him.

Dad was not a singer, but he did sing to me. He would cup my hand, and while I squirmed in terrified delight, he would draw teddy bear circles on my palm, round and round and round, getting slower and slower before the 'one step, two step, tickle you under there!' Mum said that for the three days I had his captive attention, when I climbed onto the chair next to him, I would sing to him.

Now it seems sweet and desolate, and I don't remember doing it at all.

I can only imagine that little girl, as if she is someone in a photograph who I haven't met. I see her skinny legs poking

led. It cannot truly be Coetzee speaking through J.C. in *Diary*, if Genette is to be believed (though perhaps he shouldn't be?). F.W.'s use of footnotes also introduces a possibility of misappropriated authority.<sup>26</sup> There is an implied authenticity in the footnote form, with its historical connotations of academic reference, that F.W. is perhaps trading on to gain the trust of the reader. Both devices (that of inserting a possible 'self' into the text as a fictional character and using a structural form that implies trustworthiness) serve to question the agency of the author and invite the same questioning from readers. These texts request and expect that we mistrust them and in mistrusting them, we must mistrust all forms of authority, of which authorial intent (and supremacy) is a good place to start. Yet the texts also claim we are inherently multiplicitous creatures and that these extraneous, extracted and extreme constructions accept and explore humanity's true nature. Indeed they are transparent almost to the point of faultlessness – if they do not (cannot) hide anything, then perhaps there is nothing to do but trust them, which should probably make you a little suspicious...

Extranarratives re-imagine the boundaries of literature. They perform the complexity of narrative life versus human life versus the invisible life in-between. They might be postmodern or poststructuralist, or they might be neither. They exist in a self-created space, above, around, within, marginalised and imagined by the literary page. They alienate to familiarise, they perform to speak the truth; they do not accept that people or the literature they create must always follow the rules. They declare that form can have just as much to say as content, maybe even more.

<sup>26</sup> Lisa Samuels explores the agency of footnotes in her essay 'Relinquish Intellectual Property.' She dissects the merits of academic referencing, the appropriation of ideas and the possibility of ever truly having an original thought. The essay is 18 pages long and contains only two sentences. Ten of its 44 words are footnoted.

<sup>27</sup> Mum said I was excited when the coffin was due to arrive because, 'Daddy's coming home!' She had to remind me it wouldn't be like before.

out the bottom of her red dress<sup>28</sup> with the embroidered front that flares out to her knees. I see her little round tummy and her flushed cheeks and her pale brown ringlets.

I see a little girl who climbs up to watch her Father's pale face, his still hands, his black suit with the satin lapel, his old cap pulled over his black hair – because he didn't look like himself after they blow-dried him.

And I don't know why she sings to him. I don't know what her voice sounds like or if she remembers all the words.<sup>29</sup> I don't know if she thought he was lonely and sad – like everyone else – and needed cheering up; or if she thought he might reach out and take her hand again; or whether she thought he might still be able to hear her.

<sup>28</sup>A dress for twirling – which was a favourite activity. I still like it now.

<sup>29</sup>I have two niecelings. One is five and three-quarters (quarters are very important at this age) and remembers all the words when she sings, though she is gorgeously out of tune, which is sweet especially because my sister is such a beautiful singer. The other is two and half and she gets distracted about half the way through most recitals. She'll generally keep humming along, or sing in nonsense-language (she must take after me). When I think of my nieces and the little girl in the picture – the one looking into the coffin – I feel acidic with rage, as if that will be enough to protect them from being hurt (as if that could re-write what happened to the girl in the photograph).

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