

Self-reflexive uses of photography in graphic narratives relating dying and bereavement

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As unique as each auto/biography (Couser) relating the illness and death of an author's loved one is, a striking number of recent graphic narratives doing so have one thing in common: they all make creative use of photographs of the deceased (and/or their homes and possessions) and often of the author him- or herself when sharing their recollections publicly in book form. Be they reprinted or indeed redrawn by hand, photographs can frame such narratives of loss and remembrance for authenticating effect, for example when acting as cover image; but often, I argue, their relevance goes beyond this one function, and proves central to the structure, aesthetics and aims of the story told. In any case, they hint at self-reflection.

In this paper, I analyse the significance of photographs for graphic narratives of bereavement. Texts to be discussed include Anders Nilsen's *Don't Go Where I Can't Follow* (2006), Roz Chast's *Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant?* (2014), Dana Walrath's *Aliceheimer's* (2016), and Tom Hart's *Rosalie Lightning* (2016).

Questions I ask concern our personal investment in the photographic (reflective of its sociocultural import), the commemorating function of the medium, the emotions elicited by photographic images (compared to comics images), and the different facets of meanings of a photograph as a thing of individual and – when published – cultural memory. In short: What is the role of photography (already playing an important role in public memory discourses) in the specific context of comics which – at least at first sight – narrate private, individual blows of fate?

Kurzbiografie

Nina Schmidt is a postdoctoral researcher at the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School, Freie Universität Berlin working on the project 'Patho/Graphics' which is funded by the Einstein Foundation. From 2012 to 2016 she studied for a PhD in literary studies at The University of Sheffield, UK. She successfully defended her thesis titled 'Autobiographical Writing and the Aesthetics of Illness – a Disability Studies Perspective on Contemporary German Literature (2007-2013)' in July 2016. Nina's academic profile can be found at the following link: http://www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/friedrichschlegel/assoziierte_projekte/Pathographics/Team/Nina-Schmidt/index.html