



Writing Widowhood: The Landscapes of Bereavement

Jeffrey Berman

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Explores how memoirs of widowhood can help us understand the reality of bereavement and the critical role of writing and reading in recovery.

The death of a beloved spouse after a lifetime of companionship is a life-changing experience. To help understand the reality of bereavement, Jeffrey Berman focuses on five extraordinary American writers—Joan Didion, Sandra Gilbert, Gail Godwin, Kay Redfield Jamison, and Joyce Carol Oates—each of whom has written a memoir of spousal loss. In each chapter, Berman gives an overview of the writer’s life and art before widowhood, including her early preoccupation with death, and then discusses the writer’s memoir and her life as a widow. He discovers that writing was, for all of these authors, both a solace and a lifeline, enabling them to maintain bonds with their lost loved ones while simultaneously moving on with their lives. These memoirs of widowhood, Berman maintains, reveal not only courage and resilience in the face of loss, but also the critical role of writing and reading in bereavement and recovery.

“*Writing Widowhood* is a stunning achievement that combines biography, literary history, and theoretical and philosophical exploration into the nature of grief as well as mental illness—all seamlessly executed. Berman elegantly and lucidly conveys a range of theories and perspectives to suit both academic and general readers. Berman never compromises complexity while remaining accessible and straightforward throughout.” — Virginia L. Blum, author of *Flesh Wounds: The Culture of Cosmetic Surgery*

“*Writing Widowhood* contributes to the field of autobiography/biography, and particularly to women’s writing within that generic field, by discussing five memoirs which Berman categorizes as the ‘widow memoir.’ No other critic that I know has shaped commentaries into a newly defined genre. Berman’s book, thus, makes an important contribution to the overall field.” — Linda Wagner-Martin, author of *Telling Women’s Lives: The New Biography*

Jeffrey Berman is Distinguished Teaching Professor of English at the University at Albany, State University of New York. He is the author of many books, including *Death in the Classroom: Writing about Love and Loss* and *Dying to Teach: A Memoir of Love, Loss, and Learning*, both also published by SUNY Press.

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