Hartung, Heike. "Illness memoirs, ageing masculinities and care: The 'son's book of the father'." *Ageing Masculinities, Alzheimer's and Dementia Narratives*. Ed. Heike Hartung, Rüdiger Kunow and Matthew Sweney. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. 179–196. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350230637.ch-010>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 13:56 UTC.

Copyright © Heike Hartung, Rüdiger Kunow, Matthew Sweney and contributors 2022. Released under a CC BY-NC-ND licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Illness memoirs, ageing masculinities and care: The 'son's book of the father'

Heike Hartung

1. Introduction

In the twenty-first century, illness memoirs of dementia have emerged as a new subgenre of life-writing. Whereas a few dementia autobiographies *do* exist, written mainly by people suffering from early-onset Alzheimer's disease (McGowin 1993; DeBaggio 2002, 2007), the overwhelming majority of dementia memoirs are understandably biographies written by relatives. Yet in writing about another person who is no longer able to consent to or reject the representation of him- or herself, the narrators of these memoirs encounter what G. Thomas Couser described as 'vulnerable subjects' (2004a). This specific vulnerability of the person with dementia is added to the trope of biography as a kind of 'taking' of another's life, a fear voiced by the American historian Henry Adams in a letter to novelist Henry James, in which he likened biography to 'literary homicide' and explained his own venture into autobiography as 'a preemptive taking of his own life' (qtd. in Couser 2004b: 198). The distinction between autobiography and biography is blurred in the case of dementia memoirs. Narratives by relatives frequently concern themselves also with death and dying, with the loss of the parent or partner and its impact on the narrator's life.

The popularity of the memoir of the death of a parent was noted in the 1990s by feminist critics as an interest in the cultural consequences of loss

(Claire Kahane 1997, 49).¹ One of the best-known literary examples for this trend is the American writer Philip Roth's book *Patrimony: A True Story* (1991) concerned with his father Herman Roth's dying of a brain tumour. A more recent instance of this genre, which draws in many ways on Roth's earlier text, is the German journalist Tilman Jens's highly controversial book on his father Walter Jens's dementia, *Demenz. Abschied von meinem Vater* (2009; 'Dementia. Farewell to My Father'). This chapter will focus on the intertextual relationship between Tilman Jens's illness memoir and Roth's earlier text in order to analyse how representations of the father's last illness by the son reflect different aspects of ageing masculinities.

From the perspective of age studies, dementia life-writing has been analysed with reference to the social identity and subjectivity of the person with dementia (Ryan et al. 2009), and in terms of the gendered perspectives of relatives as well as the autobiographical perspectives of the patients themselves (Basting 2005; Hartung 2005; Couser 2009; Zimmermann 2017). In his essay on filial narratives of paternal dementia, Couser has noted that, contrary to demographic data of dementia, which show that women are even more frequently affected than men (Dementia Statistics Hub 2018), the majority of (American) memoirs on the illness focus on men. When these are written from a daughter's perspective, the daughter is frequently the main caregiver (Couser 2009, 225–6), while the sons' writing about their father's or mother's illness do this more often from a 'care-free' distance' (on the repercussions of this term, see Martina Zimmermann's chapter in this volume).

In this chapter I will show how the ethical and representational problematics of writing about others in the context of illness and old age intersect with contemporary notions of care, drawing on two sons' narratives about their ailing fathers in particular. The emphasis on care in the context of illness narratives will also serve as my point of entry for bringing together insights from age studies with those of masculinity studies.

¹ As Kahane explains about the historical background and formal aspects of this tendency to narrate a parent's death: 'Provoked in part by our millennial consciousness and the inevitable impulse to look backward, [...] this broad-based retrospection has spawned a dramatic proliferation of memoirs, the genre most overtly motivated by the desire to recapture, or reconstitute, the lost past in language. [...] [T]he contemporary memoir is typically a fragment, a memory-event often traumatic, elaborated after the fact as a meditation that itself engages the issue of memory and loss' (1997, 49). On the cultural function of the illness memoir of Alzheimer's disease, see also Ribbat (2006).

Whereas care has historically been encoded as feminine, feminist care ethics have foregrounded the importance of relationships and responsibility rather than rights and rules in conceptions of care, for instance, in work by Carol Gilligan (1982/2003, 19). She has also drawn attention to different notions of the self: the self as related and connected and the self as separate and objective, identified as different voices upon which both men and women can draw. Arguing against the model of gender difference in Gilligan's work, Joan Tronto has extended her critique to a social and political theory that is 'compatible with the broadest level of care' (1987, 661). With reference to male care, Tronto has analysed two forms of social care as the traditional domain of men: those of 'protection' and 'productive economic activity' (2013, 91) – aspects of care that come into play in public life such as protecting society (covering institutions such as the police and warfare) and providing for the family. These engagements, which have traditionally granted men 'a pass from caring', however, are no longer adequate in their foregrounding of 'the languages of economics, interests, and rights'. As Tronto points out, '[m]en do care, and the changing meanings of care in men's lives currently produce a remarkable amount of anxiety in American life. There is a need, then, for a thorough rethinking of how care responsibilities do and do not align with gender roles' (2013, 93).

Questioning this focus on the public realm within which care has been defined as a feature of hegemonic masculinities, the sociological concept of 'caring masculinities' has shifted its emphasis instead on familial care, promoting fatherhood as a realm for male care beyond the paradigm of protection and productivity. As Toni Tholen has argued with reference to Foucault's double perspective on care, – care of the 'Self' and care of the 'Other' – the conflicts that come to bear on the relationship between masculinities and care have to be considered from a historical and transdisciplinary perspective in order to make the contradictions between (male) subjectivity and forms of subjection visible (2018, 399). In this way, alternative forms of male care, – those which were traditionally conceived of as feminine and were characterized as relational, dependent and re-productive rather than productive – could be analysed in their political, social and cultural framework without reproducing a logic of subjection (Tholen 2019, 215).

The notion of relational subjectivity with its focus on social dependency rather than autonomy and dominance links feminist care ethics to current

conceptualizations of masculinities as ‘plural and changing over time’, as ‘not a given but performance, a task that has to be achieved, and a set of norms, differing according to regional, social, and historical contexts, that has to be fulfilled and embodied’ (Erhart and Horlacher 2018, 314). Relational subjectivity is also important for my analysis of illness narratives: with Mieke Bal’s concept of ‘second personhood’, a complex, dialogic form of intersubjective communication has been introduced into narrative theory, which links relational subjectivity with the reversibility of subject positions (in narrative) and the attempt (and willingness) to come close to the other person (1996, 182). In the general context of autobiography, Paul John Eakin contrasts the ‘supposedly self-determining model of identity that autonomy predicates’ with a ‘relational concept of selfhood’ that focuses on ‘relations with others’ (1999, 161). Specifically, in the context of illness narratives, Couser argues for an ethical code for narrating and representing ‘vulnerable subjects’ modelled on the unequal relationship between patient and physician based on trust (2004, 19). Lastly, Anne Davis Basting has introduced an approach to narrative as storytelling into the relationship between dementia and care that is based on improvisation and association rather than on linearity, one that relies on a performative notion of the self (2005).

2. Tilman Jens: *Demenz* (2009) – Between mourning the loss of the father and patricide

With reference to these conceptualizations of relationality that are important also for the context of (male) care and subjectivity, I will now turn to the German journalist Tilman Jens’s highly controversial text *Demenz. Abschied von meinem Vater*² (2009; ‘Dementia. Farewell to My Father’) in order to explore how representations of the disease (re-)configure notions of masculinity and how they affect the specific relationship of male kinship and care, of the son’s perspective on the father as he is changed by dementia. Comparing this example of a dementia narrative in the German cultural context with Philip Roth’s *Patrimony*, I will argue for the importance of a relational approach to the representation of a father’s vulnerability.

² Quotations from this text follow in brackets; translations from the German text are my own.

The public reactions to Jens's text have been compared to some of the more critical responses to John Bayley's memoirs of his wife Iris Murdoch's dementia, although the critique has been much more severe in Jens's case. In the 'case' of Iris Murdoch's illness, public responses focused on the disintegration of mental beauty, which made her suffering from Alzheimer's disease into a most frightful loss. Whereas Bayley was criticized for writing about his wife as a 'vulnerable subject' while she was still alive but unable to respond to his publications about her (Himmelfarb 1997), reviews of Tilman Jens's book about his father charged him with a form of patricide. In particular, literary critic Iris Radisch (in the weekly journal *Die Zeit*, 19 February 2009) dismissed his book as denouncing his defenceless father and ruthlessly turning his illness into a political metaphor. The latter point refers to Tilman Jens's linking his father's emerging dementia with the moment in 2003 when it became public for the first time that Walter Jens, at the age of nineteen, had briefly joined the Nazi party in 1942 and had failed to confront his own past.

Walter Jens, who was diagnosed with dementia in 2004 and died in 2013, like Iris Murdoch was a public intellectual who was identified, and identified himself, with his mind. He was professor of rhetoric, a translator, literary critic, and novelist, who embodied in the post-war period the principles of the *Gruppe 47* that re-established a literary community in Germany after the Second World War based on its commitment to an open society and a literature that reflected that openness. His status as a critical public intellectual, well-known for his extraordinary memory and his critical public voice, made Walter Jens's evasive reaction to news of his brief membership in the Nazi party into a much-discussed public scandal in Germany, even before Tilman Jens's book publication.

The particular scandal of the son's depiction of his famous father in his reduced state – Radisch even talks about 'Denkmalsturz' (the downfall or overthrow of a monument) – seems to be related, like in Iris Murdoch's case, to the heights from which the downfall happened. In addition to this, however, the critical response to Tilman Jens's book frequently took the form of a psychoanalytic reading of his book as an Oedipal fantasy of revenge and retribution to which he has responded in a second book, *Vatermord. Wider einen Generalverdacht* (2010; 'Patricide: Against a General Suspicion').

The reference to Oedipal conflict and patricide in reviews of Jens's books brings up Freud's pronouncement of the death of the father as 'the most

important event, the most poignant loss, of a man's life' (qtd. in Kahane 1997, 50). In his construction of the Oedipus complex, Freud situated the death of the father as the pivotal desire of the male subject. Fathers loom large in a German genre that has even been called 'Väterliteratur' ('literature of the father' or 'fatherlit') to designate writings in the post-68 tradition, literary texts by sons and daughters, which are concerned with their fathers' Nazi past (Donahue 2014, n.p.). From this genre, regarded of some literary value, however, Iris Radisch dismisses Tilman Jens's book, which she regards as an expression of a disappointed and misdirected filial love.

The reception of Tilman Jens's book illustrates that the relationship between father and son is perceived as modelled primarily on conflict. It thus remains within the traditional public sphere of male care described by Joan Tronto as encompassing also 'intimate violence' as one of the 'puzzling features of protection as a form of care' (2013, 76). While this external view contrasts with the contents of Tilman Jens's depiction of the 'enlightened' family life of the Jens's, and with Walter Jens's acknowledged pacifism which suggests alternative modes of masculinity, it is Tilman Jens's employment of his father's own words against his embodied self in dementia in the structure of his book that engenders conflict, even 'intimate violence'.

The analogy Tilman Jens draws between his father's onset of dementia and his unacknowledged membership in the Nazi party in his youth has been criticized. It seems to me a misguided form of the kind of metaphorical blame put on the ill person, which Susan Sontag has analysed in *Illness as Metaphor* (1977). In addition, a second theme emerges in Tilman Jens's book: Walter Jens's provocative attitude towards euthanasia in his advocacy of autonomous and humane dying.³ This second theme is introduced with an initial quotation from Walter Jens's book *Menschenwürdig sterben. Ein Plädoyer für Selbstverantwortung* ('Humane Dying: Advocating Personal Responsibility'). This publication consists of a dialogue with Walter Jens's friend, the theologian

³ The debate on assisted dying is too complex in its repercussions to be treated adequately in the context of this chapter. For a reading of Tilman Jens's book in the context of German debates on assisted dying, which takes issue with his attribution of the 'creatural' to his father and reads it as an objectionable ascription of 'authenticity' to the person with dementia, see Matthias Kamann 2009, 16–27. Disturbingly, at the time of my writing this chapter, Tilman Jens has taken his own life (on 29 July 2020) in response to a devastating physical illness, thus putting into practice the attitude towards autonomous individuality expressed in his book on his father's dementia. He asked his friend, the journalist Heribert Schwan, to make this act of self-determined dying public (Schwan 2020: n.p.).

Hans Küng, on the topic of dignified death. In an essay on this theme, Walter Jens analyses texts ranging from the Bible to modern literature in order to argue for his conviction that modern medicine and the law should make dying less painful and more dignified. The quotation from this book, which Tilman Jens chooses to precede his own book on his father's dementia as a motto for the father's attitude towards a self-determined life and death, is excruciating in its dismissal of the humanity of Walter Jens in his later years of illness, and it is rendered in his own words:

After a self-determined life, [...] may I not be allowed to have a self-determined death rather than (to) die as a ridiculous thing that has only a passing resemblance with myself? And this last image will remain and outlast the impressions of earlier days, when I used to be an 'I' and not an 'it', when I used to be a thinking being and not a quivering body, a being whose pride may have been its shortcoming – but a rational and acknowledged shortcoming.

T. Jens 2010, n.p.; W. Jens 1995, 196

Tilman Jens begins his book by elaborating on his father's position on assisted suicide, which Walter Jens adapts, in conversation with his son, to the specific case of his being diagnosed with dementia. Walter Jens insists that he wants to be able to kill himself, with the help of his physician, when he is no longer an autonomous human being: 'Ich will sterben – nicht gestorben werden' ('I want to die, not be ushered into death' T. Jens 2009, 10–11).

Tilman Jens gives a clear picture of his father's identification with a life that is determined by language, books, conversation, dialogue, and writing to which he adds Walter Jens's own words on assisted dying. This is contrasted with an image of his father at the age of eighty-five with advanced dementia, whose main pleasure is eating cake when he wakes up in the night and who is looked after by Margit, a farmer and the former cook of the Jens family who has become his devoted carer. Tilman Jens acknowledges Margit Hespeler as his father's main caregiver, and who also becomes his father's main figure of attachment. He thus evokes in some detail what Kathleen Woodward has termed 'the scene of care' in her argument for the necessity to account for new forms of kinship within global care settings by witnessing the experience of the carers who have been neglected in illness writing so far (2012, 35, 41). The description of this care situation with the female carer at its centre reinforces

empirical observations that women are still most frequently the main carers, even though care ethics is in the process of reconceptualizing this imbalance (Tholen 2018, 388).

At the end of his book Tilman Jens foregrounds the exceptional status and extraordinary luck of Walter Jens in having his own personal carer, focusing on his emotional, or – as he terms it – ‘creatural’ existence. However, the contrast between the ‘rational’, self-determined Walter Jens and his ‘emotional’ embodiment as a person with dementia remains visible throughout the book and has a harsh and disconcerting effect. It is the formal gesture of intertextuality, in which the son uses the father’s own words against his present state of illness, I argue, that produces the negative effect of this memoir, which brings up the question of its ethicality.

3. Intertextual responses to Philip Roth’s *Patrimony* (1991): Relational (auto-)biography as the ‘Son’s Book of the Father’

In addition to using the words of his father, Tilman Jens models his book in its structure on Philip Roth’s *Patrimony*. Interestingly, the German translation of Roth’s book rendered its title as ‘My Life as a Son’ (*Mein Leben als Sohn* 1992). Roth’s text consists of six chapters with titles referring to his father Herman’s emotional expressions, for instance, chapter three: ‘Will I be a Zombie?’, in which Herman asks Philip Roth this question, when his son tells him about his tumour. Tilman Jens also divides his book into six chapters with titles frequently quoting familiar and familial expressions by Walter Jens, for instance, the first chapter, ‘Ich geh dann mal nach oben’ [‘I am going upstairs’], which refers to Walter Jens’s library at the top of the house in Tübingen that used to be his retreat and remains so through the early phase of his illness.

The use of dialogue sequences is a stylistic device used in other books about parental dementia, for instance in Elinor Fuchs’s memoir about her mother’s dementia, *Making an Exit* (2005), or in Arno Geiger’s book about his father, *Der alte König in seinem Exil* (2011; ‘The Old King in His Exile’ 2017). In both these texts, however, the performative dimension of the use of the person with dementia’s speech is more intensely emotional as well as more affirmative. (For a reading of Geiger’s book that reveals the complexities of personhood in a

son's writing about a father with dementia, see Michaela Schrage-Früh's chapter in this volume.)

Apart from the structural similarities between *Patrimony* and *Demenz*, Tilman Jens quotes directly from Roth's text, a quotation that focuses on the helplessness of the father and the difficulties of witnessing this as a son. The quote introduces the second chapter of Tilman Jens's book, which deals with the public scandal about Walter Jens's early membership in the Nazi party and his silence about this. The chapter further focuses on the father's depression and the onset of his dementia, which occur at the time of this public controversy. Tilman Jens contrasts this incident of depression with his father's major depressive disorder in the 1980s: Walter Jens's reaction then was to make his illness public. After his recovery, he talked about his illness in characteristic fashion in order to make the stigmatized, frequently tabooed and concealed, mental illness publicly visible. In 2003, at the age of eighty, Walter Jens's reaction is a different one. No longer able to work, he regards his life's work as completed, which is no occasion for joy to him. Again, Tilman Jens contrasts his father's present stage of early dementia with his earlier intellectual positions: 'It is at this point that the internalized writer's identification of writing with breathing, and the corresponding identification of no-longer-writing with being dead, bounces back on him with a vengeance' (2010, 36).

Tilman Jens's repeated strategy of contrasting his father's present stage of dementia with his former words makes this intertextual device into a form of judgement that leaves little room for Walter Jens's subjectivity as an ill person. This strategy apparently resembles that of his father's, as Neil Donahue points out in his contextualization of the son's book: 'Tilman does, as son and journalist, what his father had taught him to do and follows his example by examining the contexts and putting to question the possibilities of explanation' (2009, online). Significantly, Donahue's justification of Tilman Jens's book publication remains within the traditional scheme of male kinship, contrasting the 'bad son' (within the scheme of Oedipal revenge and even patricide) with that of the 'good son' (following the father's rational example).

One of the reasons I have pointed out for the disturbing effect of the memoir is the son's use of intertextuality, of the father's own words against the

‘vulnerable subject’ that he has become. The contrast that the book builds up in pursuing this formal device leads to an almost exclusive foregrounding of the losses, whereas the depiction of Walter Jens’s embodied existence in his dementia links him frequently, in an ageist stereotype, with childhood, thus reinforcing the distance between his formerly autonomous existence and his dependant presence. In this way, the narrative technique of intertextuality turns into a punitive form of what I call ‘intimate textual violence’.

Investigations into the ethicality of autobiographical writing within the framework of the male kinship relationship, in what Richard Freadman terms ‘the Son’s Book of the Father’ (2004, 122), bring up the question of loyalty *versus* disloyalty, protective silence *versus* public exposure: ‘[H]owever well intended, books about family are bound to involve some degree of compromise of the sensibilities of others, some measure of indecency. Self-revelation just does entail revelations about others. The moral issue is where to draw the line’ (2004, 128). As Freadman further points out, sons’ memoirs of the father fuse autobiography with biography, which he characterizes as ‘relational (auto) biography’ (2004, 128). He sets breaches of confidentiality against ‘the notion of a wider public good or common interest’ (2004, 125).

The relationality in Tilman Jens’s book consists in a dialogue with his absent father that revolves around the two main topics of Walter Jens’s position on humane dying and his silence about his early membership in the Nazi party. The focus, furthermore, is on the farewell from the father, as the subtitle announces. The public persona Walter Jens is set against the demented person of his later years, while the book is reticent about the emotional aspects of the relationship between father and son. The breaches of confidentiality, it could be argued, are justified by the ‘common interest’ in Walter Jens as a public intellectual and by the journalistic ethos of being explicit about an illness that is still stigmatized. The intertextual and intellectual engagement with Walter Jens’s own writings could also be seen as part of this moral justification. Why, then, does this book seem to many readers ‘highly unethical’ (Zimmermann 2017, 55)? In order to reflect on this question, I will turn to Philip Roth’s *Patrimony* as an intertext of the ‘Jens controversy’ and as a different representation of a father–son relationship in relation to illness and dying.

4. Philip Roth's *Patrimony*: Performing masculinity as 'female' care for the father

In his own essay on 'humane dying', Walter Jens used Roth's book as an example of a concrete depiction of death and dying, focusing on a passage in which Philip Roth ponders the meanings of his father's brain after having received the MRI pictures of his father's tumour. This is the passage which Walter Jens quotes:

Alone, when I felt like crying I cried, and I never felt more like it than when I removed from the envelope the series of pictures from his brain – and not because I could readily identify the tumor invading the brain but simply because it *was* his brain, my father's brain, what prompted him to think the blunt way he thought, speak the emphatic way he spoke, reason the emotional way he reasoned, decide the impulsive way he decided. This was the tissue that [...] had ruled our fate back when he was all-powerful [...], and now it was being compressed and displaced and destroyed because of 'a large mass predominantly located within the region of the right cerebellopontine angles and prepontine cisterns. [...]' I didn't know where to find the cerebellopontine angles or prepontine cisterns, but reading in the radiologist's report that the carotid artery was encased in the tumor was, for me, as good as reading his death sentence. [...] Maybe the impact wasn't quite what it would have been had I been holding that brain in the palms of my hands, but it was along those lines. God's will erupted out of a burning bush and, no less miraculously, Herman Roth's had issued forth all these years from this bulbous organ. I had seen my father's brain [...]. A mystery short of divine [...]

Roth 2016, 6–7

In keeping with Walter Jens's identification with a rational and intellectual self-identity, he picked out this passage on the father's brain, which he uses as an illustration of the precision, visuality, and scientific accuracy literary representations of death and dying have gained in modernity (W. Jens 1995, 109). By contrast, Tilman Jens quotes a passage from Roth's book that is concerned with the weakness of the father who used to be a strong man, thus focusing, once more, primarily on loss.

The passage from Roth's memoir illustrates some of the characteristics of this literary text, above all the strong emotional link between son and father

that is apparent even in this scene's focus on the materiality of the diseased brain, the MRI pictures. Roth frames this viewing of the brain scan, first, in his own emotional affect. Crying, alone in his hotel room, Roth expresses his emotional connection to his father, while making explicit the meaning of the brain scan for him as the death sentence for his father. Second, Philip Roth contextualizes the material image of the (diseased) brain in the father's individuality, in his characteristics, his emotional and impulsive being. Thus, he acknowledges him as a subject and places him in relation to his family and to himself.

The quoted passage also indicates the emotional tone of the memoir, which has been described as 'a deeply moving account' of the relationship between father and son (Berman 2012, 75). In spite of its explicitness, Roth's book has been regarded largely as benign in its representation of the father. This is astonishing in view of a central scene in the book, which is related to the meaning Roth attaches to 'patrimony' and which, according to Eakin 'poses so starkly the ethical dilemmas of life-writing' (185; qtd. in Gooblar 2008, 37). In this scene, Herman Roth, who convalesces in his son Philip's house after a hospital visit that has left him weakened, has, as he calls it, 'beshat myself' (2016, 120, 121). In a detailed description that borders on 'representational excess' (Kahane 1997, 50), Philip Roth narrates his father's shame about his incontinence while detailing his cleaning up of his father's shit. At the end of this extended scene, Roth describes his feelings of acknowledgement of his father, and that he even emphatically embraces the situation because he comes to understand it as his patrimony: 'So that was the patrimony. And not because cleaning it up was symbolic of something else but because it wasn't, because it was nothing less or more than the lived reality of what it was. There was my patrimony: not the money, not the tefillin, not the shaving mug, but the shit' (2016, 123–4).

In this scene, Roth deconstructs the notion of patrimony by identifying it with excrement as a universal object of devaluation. While reducing his father in this scene to abject matter, Philip Roth, in Kahane's reading, 'identifies with his father's humiliation, and with the corporeal vulnerability that he and his father share, conveying this mutuality through an "anal humour" that gives bodily functions more than their due' (1997, 50). By grounding his writing about his father in the material aspects of his existence, or – as Nancy K. Miller

has argued – ‘in the spectacular but nonetheless ordinary mess of human life’ (1992, 20), Roth evokes – both in the epiphanic ‘shit scene’ and in the ‘brain scan scene’ – a sense of his father’s characteristic and ordinary subjectivity. This form of ‘productive’ male care seems different from the traditional forms Tronto describes for the public realm. In a specifically writerly form of public care, patrimony can be read as a caring rather than destructive or violent form of textual inheritance, in which ‘the memoir almost becomes a kind of posthumous grandchild’ (Miller 1992, 32).

A contrast between Tilman Jens’s book on his father and Roth’s *Patrimony* emerges that is not primarily related to the question of writing ethically about a ‘vulnerable subject’. At the end of his book, Tilman Jens concludes that the life of his father in his dementia is still valuable and that this is mainly due to his privilege of having his own carer Margit, who caters to the physical needs that have become predominant for him. He describes the ‘new’ father that he perceives after the public intellectual Walter Jens has gone: ‘The father I knew has disappeared long ago. [. . .] But now, after he has gone I have discovered a completely different father, a creatural father – a father who simply laughs when he sees me, who cries a lot, and then again, a few minutes later, is pleased with some cake or a glass of cherry juice’ (2010, 152). This final image of a ‘creatural father’ does not counteract the structural effect of ‘intimate (inter) textual violence’, with which the book juxtaposes the words of the ‘rational’ Walter Jens, in particular his position on euthanasia, with his ‘emotional’ self in dementia. With its insistent focus primarily on what is lost in dementia, Tilman Jens’s writing about his father remains within the traditional public realm of male care.

By contrast, Philip Roth’s approach to his father’s dying is more emotional, relational and embodied. Even though Roth apparently betrays his father’s trust by making his humiliation into the central epiphany of his book, his ‘care’ for his father, by transgressing boundaries of representation, also creates something new in terms of ‘textual intimacy’.

Towards the end of the book, Roth also thinks about the meanings his father and his father’s dying have for him. Acknowledging that his love for his father in his vulnerability borders on idealization (Berman 2012, 93), Roth links his emotional engagement with his father to an idea of fatherhood that repeats the intensification of the external or material of the earlier quotation: ‘He wasn’t

just any father, he was *the* father, with everything there is to hate in a father and everything there is to love' (2016, 127). Immediately following this statement, Roth overhears his father telling his partner that 'Philip is like a mother to me'. Roth, surprised by this statement, would have expected him to compare his care for him to that of a father, but concedes that his father's description was 'more discriminating than my commonplace expectations while at the same time much more flagrant, unblinking, and enviably, unself-consciously blunt' (2016, 127).

Without wishing to essentialize the focus on relationality and emotional connection with female care, I argue that Roth's text readjusts the relation between masculinity and care by accepting a kind of 'motherliness' towards his dying father. In thus departing from the more frequent 'care-free' perspective of the son, Roth embraces the private and familial form of 'caring masculinity' while making it, as a writer, public.⁴ With reference to the relation between masculinity and care, then, Philip Roth's book performs a shift from a conflicted to a caring, even 'maternal', relationship between son and father, whereas Tilman Jens's book remains within 'the long tradition of depicting relationships especially between sons and fathers as an unsolvable conflict' (Tholen 2018, 401).

5. Conclusion

In spite of the differences in form between a literary and a journalistic memoir, and in the contents of the texts between a father dying from a brain tumour and one dying from dementia, the comparison between Philip Roth's and Tilman Jens's books about their fathers illustrates the difficulties of determining where to draw the line in writing about 'vulnerable subjects'. Whereas Tilman Jens may continue what his father has done throughout his conscious life, when he intertextually engages with the father's writings, the difference is that

⁴ Roth's embracing of an alternative form of 'caring masculinity' is particularly astonishing in its contrast with the hypermasculine persona in many of Roth's novels. With reference to *Patrimony*, this shift has been interpreted as a contrast between the 'bad son' as the 'transgressive son who rails against his castrating mother and ineffectual and submissive father' in many of the novels and the 'good son' in the autobiographical books 'who honors his parents and defends them from attack by others' (Berman 2012, 102).

it is no longer Walter Jens who is speaking, but that his earlier words are turned relentlessly against his embodied self, however changed. There is a difference, particularly in the case of writing about mental illness, in *who* is the speaker of the utterance.

If one of the fundamental paradoxes of biography is its attack on private life, it is surprising that it is Philip Roth's book with its apparent transgression of intimacy, which successfully evokes the father not primarily as a 'vulnerable' but a complete subject, whereas Tilman Jens by following his father's example and writing what the father had taught him to do leaves little room for the 'no longer rational' subject. Whereas Tilman Jens's book on his father remains within the traditional framework of rational masculinity, Philip Roth's text in its performative and transforming aspects opens up alternative forms of the relation between masculinity and care.

Relational subjectivity also comes to bear on these different representations of son–father relationships. Whereas in Tilman Jens's book the structural emphasis on the topics of guilt and memory loss, humane dying and individual autonomy matches the predominant images of crisis and decline, Philip Roth's *Patrimony* with its invocation of remembrance – 'You must not forget anything' (170) is the book's last line – and its evocation of the materiality and specificity of human subjectivity succeeds in fostering an engaging image of his father as well as providing an unconventional perspective in an imaginative and empathetic 'son's book of the father'.

Bibliography

- Alzheimer's Research UK. 'Dementia Statistics Hub: Prevalence by Gender in the UK.' <https://www.dementiastatistics.org/statistics/prevalence-by-gender-in-the-uk/> [1 November 2020].
- Bal, Mieke. 'First Person, Second Person, Same Person.' *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*. New York: Routledge, 1996. 165–94.
- Basting, Anne Davis. 'Dementia & the Performance of Self.' *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*. Eds. Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2005. 202–13.
- Berman, Jeffrey. *Dying in Character: Memoirs of the End of Life*. Amherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 2012.

- Couser, G. Thomas. *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2004a.
- Couser, G. Thomas. 'When Life Writing Becomes Death Writing: Disability and the Ethics of Parental Euthanography.' *The Ethics of Life Writing*. Ed. Paul John Eakin. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004b. 195–215.
- Couser, G. Thomas. 'Memoir and (Lack of) Memory: Filial Narratives of Paternal Dementia.' *New Essays on Life Writing and the Body*. Eds. Christopher Stuart, Stephanie Todd and Timothy Dow Adams. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009. 223–40.
- DeBaggio, Thomas. *Losing my Mind. An Intimate Look at Life with Alzheimer's*. New York: Free P, 2002.
- DeBaggio, Thomas. *When It Gets Dark. An Enlightened Reflection on Life with Alzheimer's*. New York: Free P, 2007.
- Donahue, Neil H. 'The Political Pathology of Amnesia in Postwar Germany: Tilman Jens' *Demenz: Abschied von meinem Vater* (2009).' *Glossen: German Literature and Culture After 1945*, 39 (2014). <https://www.blogs.dickinson.edu/glossen/archive/most-recent-issue-glossen-392014/neil-h-donahue/> [17 December 2020].
- Eakin, Paul John. *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999.
- Erhart, Walter, and Stefan Horlacher. 'Editorial: Themenschwerpunkt: Comparative Masculinity Studies and the Question of Narrative.' *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* (IASL) 43.2 (2018): 312–26.
- Freadman, Richard. 'Decent and Indecent: Writing my Father's Life.' *The Ethics of Life Writing*. Ed. Paul John Eakin. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004. 121–46.
- Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Philosophical Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003.
- Gooblar, David. 'The Truth Hurts: The Ethics of Philip Roth's "Autobiographical" Books.' *Journal of Modern Literature* 32.1 (2008): 33–53.
- Hartung, Heike. 'Small World? Narrative Annäherungen an Alzheimer.' *Siegener Periodicum zur Internationalen Empirischen Literaturwissenschaft* 24 (2005): 163–78.
- Himmelfarb, Gertrude. 'A Man's Own Household His Enemies.' *Commentary* 108.1 (July–August 1997): 34–8.
- Jens, Tilman. *Demenz. Abschied von meinem Vater*. München: Goldman, 2010.
- Jens, Tilman. *Vatermord. Gegen einen Generalverdacht*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2010.
- Jens, Walter. 'Si vis vitam para mortem. Die Literatur über Würde und Würdelosigkeit des Sterbens.' Walter Jens und Hans Küng. *Menschenwürdig Sterben. Ein Plädoyer für Selbstverantwortung*. München: Piper, 1995.

- Kahane, Claire. 'Gender and Patrimony: Mourning the Dead Father.' *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 9.1 (Spring 1997): 49–56.
- Kamann, Matthias. *Todeskämpfe. Die Politik des Jenseits und der Streit um Sterbehilfe*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009.
- McGowin, Diana Friel. *Living in the Labyrinth: A Personal Journey Through the Maze of Alzheimer's*. San Francisco: Elder Books, 1993.
- Miller, Nancy K. 'Autobiographical Deaths.' *The Massachusetts Review* 33.1 (Spring 1992): 19–47.
- Radisch, Iris. 'Der Mann seines Lebens: Tilman Jens verklärt und denunziert seinen an Demenz erkrankten wehrlosen Vater Walter Jens.' *Die Zeit* 9 (19 February 2009).
- Ribbat, Christoph. 'Authorship, Alzheimer's, and the Illness Memoir.' *Colloquium Helveticum* 37 (2006): 179–97.
- Roth, Philip. *Patrimony: A True Story*. [1991] London: Vintage, 2016.
- Ryan, E.B., K.A. Bannister, and A.P. Anas. 'The Dementia Narrative: Writing to Reclaim Social Identity.' *Journal of Aging Studies* 23 (2009): 145–57.
- Sontag, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977.
- Schwan, Heribert. 'Tilman Jens ist tot.' <https://www.heribert-schwan.de/tilman-jens-ist-tot> [17 December 2020].
- Tholen, Toni. 'Narrating the Modern Relation between Masculinity and Care. Perspectives on a Transdisciplinary Problem.' *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* (IASL) 43.2 (2018): 38–402.
- Tholen, Toni. 'Caring Masculinities? Probleme und Potenziale.' *Caring Masculinities? Männlichkeiten in der Transformation kapitalistischer Wachstumsgesellschaften*. Eds. Sylka Scholz and Andreas Heilmann. Munich: Oekom, 2019. 213–24.
- Tronto, Joan C. 'Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care.' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12.4 (1987): 644–63.
- Tronto, Joan C. *Caring Democracy. Markets, Equality, and Justice*. New York, London: New York UP, 2013.
- Woodward, Kathleen. 'A Public Secret: Assisted Living, Caregivers, Globalization.' *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life* 7.2 (2012): 17–51.
- Zimmermann, Martina. *The Poetics and Politics of Alzheimer's Disease Life-Writing*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.