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Doubly disenfranchised: the experience of paternal grief following medical termination in Jérémie Szpirglas' *Pater dolorosa*

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ABSTRACT

The term 'disenfranchised grief' is increasingly being used to designate grief experiences that are overlooked by wider society. In the French context, this term has overwhelmingly been applied to perinatal loss. Focusing on medical termination (IMG), a somewhat liminal category of perinatal loss, this article considers the *doubly* disenfranchised experience of *paternal* grief in such circumstances. While IMG-related grief is, in itself, disenfranchised, not least because it lacks societal recognition, paternal grief following IMG is doubly so, since the male voice is seldom heard. Taking as its focus *Pater dolorosa* (2019), author and journalist Jérémie Szpirglas' narrative of medical termination, this article will consider the value of the term 'disenfranchised grief' in naming the experience of grief to which Szpirglas' text attests; the capacity of the text to give voice to that experience and to offer a textual transposition of it; and the role of male grief writing following medical termination in beginning to carve out an alternative space for the sharing of a grief experience that defies established social norms. The article will therefore suggest, in line with Rita Felski's argument, that 'a literary text could know as much, or more, than a theory', particularly when it comes to individual experiences of grief.

RÉSUMÉ

L'expression 'deuil non reconnu' s'utilise de plus en plus pour désigner des expériences de deuil niées ou ignorées par la société. En France, cette expression s'emploie principalement dans le contexte du deuil périnatal. Cet article propose d'élargir son emploi et de l'appliquer à l'expérience doublement niée du deuil paternel après l'interruption médicale de grossesse (IMG). Alors que le deuil lié à l'IMG manque déjà de reconnaissance sociale, le deuil du père dans de telles circonstances est d'autant plus ignoré, puisque la voix paternelle n'est presque jamais entendue. À travers l'analyse de *Pater dolorosa* (2019), le récit de Jérémie Szpirglas sur l'expérience de l'IMG, cet article considérera la valeur de l'expression 'deuil non reconnu' pour nommer l'expérience de deuil dont témoigne ce récit. Ensuite, il étudiera la capacité du livre

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à faire entendre cette expérience et à en offrir une représentation textuelle. Enfin, cette étude observera le rôle de l'écriture masculine du deuil après l'IMG dans l'établissement d'un nouvel espace dans lequel partager une telle expérience de deuil, qui défie les normes sociales. L'article suggérera donc, en accord avec l'argument de Rita Felski, '[qu']un texte littéraire peut en savoir autant, ou même plus, qu'une théorie', surtout quand il s'agit des expériences individuelles de deuil.

Medical termination of pregnancy occupies a complex position at the intersection of pregnancy loss and abortion. While it is now widely understood to fall within the category of perinatal loss (Clavandier and Charrier 2021), as the French terminology makes clear, there remains a close linguistic—and, arguably, societal—association between medical termination and voluntary abortion.¹ This parallel is apparent in the terms used to speak about the two practices in French: *interruption médicale de grossesse* (IMG) and *interruption volontaire de grossesse* (IVG), with the distinction found in the two adjectives that denote the motivations behind each *interruption*. The meaning carried by these adjectives is extremely significant, for it points to the fundamental question of choice. The French terminology seems to suggest that, in cases of IMG, since the reason behind the parents' decision to terminate the pregnancy is beyond their control—either because 'il existe une forte probabilité que l'enfant à naître soit atteint d'une affection d'une particulière gravité reconnue comme incurable au moment du diagnostic', or 'la poursuite de la grossesse met en péril grave la santé de la femme' (Légifrance 2021a)—it thus represents '[un] "non-choix"' (Zeghiche, de Montigny, and López 2020, §19). Yet studies on the lived experience of would-be parents suggest that this question of choice is vital to the grief experienced following IMG (Charrier and Clavandier 2019; Zeghiche, de Montigny, and López 2020). Indeed, questions regularly arise as to whether the parents made the right decision by terminating the pregnancy (Charrier and Clavandier 2019; Jaffe and Diamond 2011). This question of choice likewise establishes IMG as somewhat of an outlier within the wider category perinatal loss, which, in the French context, includes miscarriage, stillbirth and death up to 27 days post-birth (Sobieux 2014). In this sense, IMG occupies a highly liminal space, even beyond the liminality that sociologist Sabrina Zeghiche (2019) attributes to all perinatal loss. An IMG is not an IVG, as the parental *volonté*, required for the termination to be *volontaire*, is not present; and yet it remains distinct from other forms of perinatal loss, as the parents have made a decision to terminate the pregnancy.

This liminality is also evident in the status of the embryo, foetus, baby or child (Zeghiche 2019). Although, since 2008, the French state has acknowledged the social identity of a child born prior to the World Health Organisation-defined viability threshold of 22 weeks gestation (Bacqué and Merg-Essadi 2013; Giraud 2015; Légifrance 2008), and a more recent change in legislation has allowed for such a child to be named on the *livret de famille* (Légifrance 2021b), this foetal identity has often been considered problematic by feminist scholars (see Giraud 2015; Keane 2009; Layne 2003; Morgan 1996). Summarising Linda L. Layne's (2003) argument, Helen Keane suggests (2009, 154) that 'one of the main reasons for the feminist silence on pregnancy loss is reproductive politics, specifically the relationship between abortion debates and foetal personhood'. While, in

recent years, there has been a certain ‘humanisation du fœtus’ in cases of perinatal loss—an attempt to ‘reconnaître la souffrance des couples endeuillés et de leur permettre [...] d’en faire le deuil’ (Giraud 2015, 86)—as Anne-Sophie Giraud (2015, 89) notes, ‘[d]onner le statut de personne au fœtus’—which is often considered essential for the acknowledgement of grief (Giraud 2015)—‘aurait pour effet de remettre en question le recours à l’avortement, taxé alors d’infanticide’. Feminist scholars have thus been hesitant to acknowledge any equivalence between embryos and foetuses, babies and children (Keane 2009; Layne 2003). Yet, as Layne (2003) and Morgan (1996) suggest, the notion of foetal personhood need not be understood as a threat to reproductive politics (see also Keane 2009). A model of foetal personhood as ‘anthropologically informed’ (Layne 2003, 240) allows an individual to legitimately assert that an aborted foetus is their child, and therefore a person, while another can think of that foetus as simply a biological entity (Keane 2009; Layne 2003). In France, the current legislation around perinatal loss can be seen to ‘recherche[r] [...] une juste distance et un équilibre entre [c]es visions opposées’ (Giraud 2015, 89). It thus offers ‘une large place au choix et en particulier à la “volonté parentale”, car le statut [du] corps [du fœtus] oscille sans cesse de “pièce anatomique” à “enfant”, selon le sens que donnent les acteurs à leur relation avec cet être’ (Giraud 2016, 62). In practice, this means that a parent who has experienced a medical termination should be given the freedom to decide how that loss will be grieved. It is for this reason, following the language of the text on which this article will focus, that the loss discussed will be that of a child and the grief experienced, therefore, that of a parent (specifically, a father).

Although recent years have seen ‘une levée de l’omerta sur un sujet [le deuil périnatal] longtemps considéré comme tabou’ (Zeghiche 2019, 125), there remains a distinct lack of social recognition for perinatal loss in France (Alexandre and Gaugue 2016; Giraud 2015; Zeghiche 2019; Zeghiche, de Montigny, and López 2020). The tri-partite liminality that Zeghiche (2019) identifies as inherent in this form of bereavement—‘[l]a liminalité de l’événement, du statut des parents endeuillés et de celui de l’enfant décédé’ (Zeghiche 2019, 129)—appears particularly apparent in the context of IMG, however. Questions around the liminality of the event point to the parental decision to end the pregnancy; the liminality of the parents’ status, having made that decision, is more complicated than that of other parents bereaved through miscarriage, stillbirth or death shortly after birth; and the liminality of the deceased child, given the previous discussion of foetal personhood and the association with IVG, is more complex still. It is this inherent liminality, Zeghiche (2019) suggests, that results in the lack of societal recognition for the grief experience. This question of society’s ability to recognise and legitimise social identity is particularly important in the case of IMG. Indeed, as Marie-Frédérique Bacqué and Dominique Merg-Essadi (2013, 63) note: ‘Pour beaucoup de parents, le sentiment de distorsion sociale réside dans le fait que leur enfant n’existe qu’à leurs propres yeux. C’est une souffrance en soi’. Similarly, Mélissa Alexandre and Justine Gaugue (2016, 17) note that, for the bereaved parents, ‘il s’agit [...] de faire le deuil d’un enfant qui ne semble être considéré par aucun autre qu’eux-mêmes. [...] La dimension sociale et collective manquant considérablement dans ces situations, les deuils de ces tout-petits enfants ne paraissent jamais entièrement clos’. It thus appears that a lack of social recognition and a level of resultant disenfranchisement are inherent components of contemporary French experiences of perinatal loss (Zeghiche 2019; Zeghiche, de Montigny, and López 2020).

While such disenfranchisement is common across perinatal loss, it appears more apparent in the lives of would-be fathers (see Weaver-Hightower 2012). That said, this disenfranchisement is not static; rather, it ebbs and flows depending on the social circumstances in which the griever finds himself (Zeghiche, de Montigny, and López 2020). As bereaved father and academic Marcus B. Weaver-Hightower (2012, 479, original emphasis) writes, ‘grieving is not *only* natural. Grief is also what happens when the emotional–biological reaction leaves off and the social order takes over. This makes it susceptible to gender restrictions and other social and cultural inequalities’. Yet male experiences of grief following perinatal loss, particularly in relation to IMG (Obst et al. 2021), have been largely overlooked (Dollander 2014; McCreight 2004; Weaver-Hightower 2012)—a trend also evidenced in scholarship on voluntary abortion (Coyle 2006; Coyle and Rue 2010, 2015; Nagy and Rigó 2021). Indeed, the absence of male perspectives in the academic and testimonial literature on the topics appears widespread in France and beyond (Clavandier and Charrier 2021; Nagy and Rigó 2021; Weaver-Hightower 2012). Such an absence of male voices is congruent with the experience of author and journalist Jérémie Szpirglas, whose first book, *Pater dolorosa* (2019), will be the focus of this article. As Szpirglas (2019b, 95) writes, in his experience, ‘[o]n ne trouve que des témoignages de femmes, ou presque. Comme si les hommes en étaient exclus’. He continues:

Même dans les quelques émissions de télévision que l’on trouve en rediffusion: aucun père à l’horizon. Soit qu’ils n’aient pas eu envie de venir, soit qu’ils se soient depuis séparés, soit qu’ils n’aient tout bonnement pas été invités. Comme toujours s’agissant d’enfants, seules les mères semblent concernées. (95)

This trend is confirmed in other social contexts, where, as Weaver-Hightower (2012, 485) writes of the USA: ‘Movies and television shows rarely show grieving men (unless, of course, their grief is destructive)’. While this absence of male perspectives is notable, with Weaver-Hightower (2012, 482) even suggesting that the literature on perinatal loss ‘largely writes fathers out’, it would be unfair to say that male silence on the question of IMG is tantamount to a societal silencing of men’s perspectives, for that would suggest that men are clamouring to share their experiences, which simply is not the case. Indeed, extensive searches for father-authored works, or works that offer a paternal perspective on medical and voluntary termination of pregnancy, have revealed limited results. In terms of contemporary, French works, I have only discovered two texts and one documentary film that give voice to these experiences.² What this paternal silence might suggest, however, is that men have internalised the social norms surrounding perinatal loss and voluntary abortion to the extent that it seems unusual or unnatural for them to speak on the topic, particularly as these questions most often centre on women (Dollander 2014; Weaver-Hightower 2012). As such, this article will refer to the experience of paternal grief following IMG as ‘doubly disenfranchised’. Not only does the father, just as the mother, endure the loss of the hopes, dreams and ambitions associated with his unborn child (Jaffe and Diamond 2011; see Szpirglas and Muller 2019), but his voice is much less frequently heard, such is the social expectation of men in cases of medical termination in contemporary France. The article will thus seek to shed light on the often overlooked question of paternal grief following IMG, as presented in Jérémie Szpirglas’ *Pater dolorosa* (2019).

Szipirglas is a French author and cultural journalist and *Pater dolorosa* (2019) is his first literary work. The title, as a recasting of the recurrent figure of the *mater dolorosa* and a transposition of the image to a secular domain, makes clear Szipirglas' intention to recentre the paternal in discussions of parental grief, particularly in relation to IMG. From the perspective of the author-narrator, the text traces Szipirglas and his wife's journey from the discovery of the pregnancy to the prenatal diagnosis of Down's Syndrome, through their agonising decision to terminate the pregnancy and the grief that follows, and on to an eventual third pregnancy. Szipirglas' text offers a rich and vivid depiction of the traumatic experience of paternal loss through IMG. As such, this text offers a counterpoint to the dominant conceptualisation of pregnancy termination as *interruption volontaire de grossesse* (IVG) and, as previously mentioned, opens up important questions regarding parental agency in cases of 'fatal foetal abnormality'. This question of agency is at the heart of the grief experience discussed in Szipirglas' text, for as subsequent analyses will show, the guilt experienced by the author-narrator is almost entirely centred on the extent to which he is responsible for the decision to abort his unborn child.

Szipirglas' text is also motivated by a desire to give voice to this neglected experience of paternal grief. As Szipirglas remarks in a television interview with Benjamin Muller on France 2's 'La Maison des maternelles',

Les hommes sont très peu entendus sur le sujet et moi, ce qui m'embête avec ça, c'est que si on n'entend pas la douleur des pères, on ne leur permet pas de faire le deuil, alors qu'il y a un deuil qu'il faut faire. (Szipirglas and Muller 2019)

It is this very point that lies at the heart of the argument presented here: simply put, would-be fathers grieve the loss of their unborn child just as would-be mothers. While they might grieve that loss differently from their partners (see Jaffe and Diamond 2011; Jégat 2019; Weaver-Hightower 2012), paternal grief following medical termination should not be relegated to the category of 'things we cannot say' (Ludlow 2008, 30, 35); rather, we should acknowledge the reality of this grief and seek to address it openly, as is increasingly the case with female experiences of grief following perinatal loss (Zeghiche 2019). This article will therefore explore the concept of disenfranchised grief, its value in naming the experience of grief to which Szipirglas' text attests; the capacity of the text to give voice to that experience and to offer a textual transposition of it; and the place of male grief writing following medical termination in beginning to carve out an alternative space for the sharing of a grief experience that moves beyond established social norms.

Disenfranchised grief

'Disenfranchised grief' is a term first coined by Kenneth J. Doka in 1989. According to Doka's (1989, 4) original definition of the term, disenfranchised grief is 'the grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported'. The concept 'integrates psychological, biological, and sociological perspectives on grief and loss' (Doka 2002, 5), with a particular focus on the often overlooked social dimension. This emphasis on the social opens up interesting areas of inquiry that take account of diverse cultural experiences of grief, understanding culture as 'the very milieu within which a loss is both perceived and grieved'

(Barbant 2002, 26). While the concept has come in for critique, given its limited empirical value, its political connotations and the implicit suggestion that societal recognition of grief is binary (P. Robson and Walter 2013; Zeghiche, de Montigny, and López 2020), it nonetheless remains valuable in the context of the grief experience under discussion in this article. The concept highlights

l'ancrage social du deuil et les normes sociales qui le sous-tendent, en mettant en lumière non seulement les prescriptions quant aux comportements et émotions jugés sur une échelle d'acceptabilité, mais surtout la nature des relations dignes de donner lieu à un processus de deuil. (Zeghiche, de Montigny, and López 2020, §1, original emphasis)

In so doing, it allows for a better appreciation of the individual experiences of griever(s) (P. Robson and Walter 2013).

In his original work on disenfranchised grief, Doka (1989) presented three sets of circumstances that he suggested might lead to the disenfranchisement of a loss: the failure to recognise or legitimise the relationship of the griever to the deceased; the failure to acknowledge the loss as such; and the exclusion or marginalisation of the griever. These three triggers of disenfranchised grief were later expanded, in Doka's subsequent work (2002), to include two additional considerations: the circumstances that led to the death and the ways in which individuals grieve the loss. That said, the term is increasingly being applied in contexts far beyond those initially envisaged by Doka, with the concept taking on 'a conceptual life of its own' (Doka 2002, XIV). The breadth of the term's application testifies to the richness and expansiveness of it, even beyond death-related grief, and to the benefits of naming a grief experience. As psychotherapist Jeffrey Kauffman (2002) explains: 'The concept of disenfranchised grief [...] fosters recognition that loss not allowed into the socially sanctioned psychological grief space is, nonetheless, actually there'. In this sense, merely giving a name to an experience of grief that has so regularly been overlooked and neglected is enough to begin to enfranchise the griever, by acknowledging that their grief *does exist* and that they have a *right* to experience it. Considering the experience of grief through such a lens also causes us to confront the role of society in dictating which losses can and cannot 'legitimately' be grieved and openly shared. As societies, 'in various spoken and unspoken ways, [...] deny recognition, legitimation, or support to the grief people experience', thereby stripping them of the 'social franchise to have their voices heard' (Corr 2002, 40–41), loss is categorised, somewhat nefariously, into that which is 'legitimately grievable' and that which is not. The basis of this categorisation is, according to Gordon Thornton and Mary Lou Zanich (2002, 86), 'the nature of the pre-loss relationship, the nature of the loss, and the nature of the griever'; that is, the very same criteria set out in Doka's (1989) original conceptualisation of disenfranchised grief. However, since 'la surutilisation non critique [du] concept' has the potential to 'donner l'impression que les forces sociales qui obstruent cette reconnaissance sont omnipotentes et que les acteurs sociaux aux prises avec un décès/deuil périnatal sont impuissants face à cet état de fait' (Zeghiche, de Montigny, and López 2020, §57), we must again acknowledge that this disenfranchisement 'n'est [...] jamais absolue, elle est toujours relative. Elle n'a de sens que dans son rapport avec la reconnaissance' (Zeghiche, de Montigny, and López 2020, §42). As such, it is not binary, but exists in a constant state of flux, dependent on the specificities of the '[n]ormative

hierarchies of loss' at play in a given society and in a particular social setting therein (P. Robson and Walter 2013, 101).

Nonetheless, following Doka's (1989, 2002) criteria, the grief recounted in Szpirglas' text might be considered disenfranchised on multiple levels. The first level of disenfranchisement emerges through the failure of French society to fully acknowledge the aborted child as a child and, as a result, to acknowledge the loss of that child as a loss in its own right (Alexandre and Gaugue 2016; Giraud 2015; Zeghiche 2019; Zeghiche, de Montigny, and López 2020). It is important here to draw a distinction between the official, legal position, which allows a child aborted through IMG to be acknowledged as an 'enfant sans vie' (Légifrance 2008) and to be named on the *livret de famille* (Légifrance 2021b), and the lack of social recognition that Szpirglas and his wife experience for their child. To give one example, at the consultation with the medical team prior to the termination, the couple ask: 'Le bébé va-t-il souffrir?' (82, my emphasis) to which the response comes, albeit in indirect speech, '[l]e *foetus* ne souffrira pas. Son système nerveux n'est pas encore suffisamment développé. Ce sont le travail, les contractions de l'utérus qui entraîneront sa mort, bien avant qu'il ne sorte—peut-on dire "*naître*"?' (85, my emphasis). The impact of this shift in terminology is apparent in Szpirglas' closing question: while one might be able to speak of the birth of a *child*, can a *foetus* also be birthed? Indeed, as Zeghiche, de Montigny, and López (2020, §19) write: 'En utilisant le terme "*foetus*", on dénie à l'enfant décédé toute appartenance "*humaine*" ou statut de personne à part entière; on le réduit à un état biologique primaire'. Despite the fact that Lou, Szpirglas' aborted child, was '*un enfant désiré, couvé, caressé, aimé déjà*' (107, original italics) and that the couple had 'projeté sur cette grossesse tant de sentiments et de rêves que l'enfant avait pris corps: Lou avait déjà pour nous son caractère, son futur, son espace dans notre quotidien, dont il nous faut bien faire le deuil à présent' (153), this sits in opposition with a medical (and social) discourse that understands Lou to be '[un] *foetus*'. As Giraud (2015, 88) explains:

Seule la naissance vivante et viable permet d'acquérir la qualité de personne, le droit continuant de parler de '*foetus*' ou éventuellement d'enfant à naître. L'utilisation du terme '*enfant*' apparaît seulement comme une concession de nature '*compassionnelle*' face à la douleur des familles.

However, this conflict between an official discourse that seeks to support bereaved parents and recognise them as such (Bacqué and Merg-Essadi 2013; see Giraud 2015, 2016) and a lack of wider societal recognition means that '[c]e manque de reconnaissance est vécu d'autant plus douloureusement que l'accès au statut de [parent]' (Giraud 2015, 95), since to deny the identity of the deceased child is simultaneously to deny the couple's identity as parents, since a parent cannot be a parent without a child (Giraud 2015).

This is later echoed in Szpirglas' account of the couple's third pregnancy, where he writes: 'Je ne raisonne plus en termes d'enfant. Je ne peux pas. Je n'y parviens pas. C'est un *foetus*, un point c'est tout' (191). While this is undoubtedly a method of self-protection at this point in Szpirglas' grief, the terminological distinction between '*enfant*' and '*foetus*' is revealing. Following the earlier discussion of foetal personhood, it appears that the two terms are mutually exclusive, with the former carrying a capacity for connection and relationship that seems markedly absent from the latter—the politically expedient, linguistic distinction of which Holly Runde (2019) writes (see also Sherwin 1992). In this sense, the imposition of the label of '*foetus*' upon Lou serves only to further disenfranchise

the couple's grief by undermining the legitimacy of any potential, parental connection. This chimes notably with the experience of fellow bereaved-parent author Camille Laurens, presented in her well-known text *Philippe* ([1995] 2011). Although speaking of death post-birth, rather than IMG, Laurens (2011, 67, original emphasis) explains how social expectations of parental bereavement 'établissent une hiérarchie du malheur: le pire c'est quand même de perdre un enfant, un *vrai*, une fillette de sept ans ou un fils de vingt ans [...]. Là c'est *vraiment* terrible'. Despite the French state's acknowledgement of the child, in permitting that Lou be added to the *livret de famille* (see Szpirglas 2019b, 142), the attitudes of the French public more broadly seem less able to recognise the lived reality of the father's experience. By refusing to fully recognise Lou as a child, these social and medical discourses disregard the father's experience of pre-birth connection with his (imagined) child and thereby nullify the grief he experiences as a result of their death (see Charrier and Clavandier 2019; Giraud 2015; Hurst 2020; Jégat 2019).

Secondly, Szpirglas' text offers various examples of the lack of understanding shown by the couple's wider social circle towards the experience of bereavement through IMG. While, for Szpirglas and his wife, '[se] séparer [de la réalité du bébé], c'est rompre avec tous les rêves échafaudés depuis bien avant sa conception, c'est mettre un terme prématuré à un amour que l'on croyait sans limite' (79), their wider circle of family and friends have an entirely different conception of Lou. As Szpirglas discusses in the previously referenced interview with Benjamin Muller: 'Le problème c'est que l'entourage ne le comprend pas. L'entourage va dire mais vous en avez déjà un qui est bien, vous en aurez d'autres, etcétera, et c'est nier, finalement. [...] C'est nier la douleur du deuil lui-même' (Szpirglas and Muller 2019). These attempts to relativise the loss and point towards the couple's potential, future children echo what sociologist Tony Walter (2007) refers to as the '[k]ey mantras' of modernist grief psychology: "let go", "move on"; however, they only result in increased disenfranchisement and further pain (see Jaffe and Diamond 2011; Layne 2003). The incomprehension shown by the couple's social circle is also core to their feelings of marginalisation (see Jaffe and Diamond 2011), as it becomes easier for them to retreat from the society that 'ni[e] la douleur [de leur] deuil' than to face the constant denigration of their loss. That said, there is an extent to which the marginalisation the couple experience as a collective also emerges at an individual level, within the couple itself: 'On commence même, toi et moi, à nous emballer—alors même qu'on s'était promis de ne pas. L'humeur est douce-amère' (48). Although these words appear prior to the termination, when the couple are processing the diagnosis of Down's Syndrome and coming to a decision about what to do, this reflects a recurrent undertone in the text, whereby the influence of wider societal discourse becomes manifest in the intimacy of the marital relationship, lived and imagined.

Thirdly, we turn to the circumstances of the death. Both IMG and IVG continue to carry a certain taboo in France (Bacqué and Merg-Essadi 2013; Boltanski 2004; Runde 2019), articulated most powerfully in Szpirglas' repeated phrase: '*nous avons pris la décision de faire mourir notre enfant*' (108, original italics). This notion of having '*fai[t] mourir [son] enfant*' recurs throughout Szpirglas' text, raising important questions about the extent to which, as Kolker and Burke (1993, 521) suggest, the guilt experienced by parents who have decided to terminate a pregnancy 'is inevitably compounded by the political atmosphere surrounding abortion in [...] Western societies'. Following the termination procedure and the birthing of the now-dead Lou, Szpirglas writes: 'Je me sens toujours aussi

dépourvu, désarmé. Toujours aussi coupable' (133). Similarly, in the therapy sessions the couple attend following the termination, he discusses how 'les mêmes sentiments s'expriment, obstinément: la culpabilité et le doute, la résignation et la douleur' (152–153). Likewise, Szpirglas' wife finds herself '[r]ongée par la culpabilité, tiraillée entre doute et aversion, amour et rejet' (59). Such feelings of guilt, induced by 'la peur du jugement que nous pourrions lire dans le regard de l'autre' (78), are, in Kauffman's view, a form of 'self-initiated disenfranchisement'. He continues: 'Whatever one is ashamed of in loss or grief is prone to be disenfranchised on the self's own initiative. Self-initiated disenfranchised grief may merge into socially disenfranchised grief, or it may occur entirely on its own' (Kauffman 2002, 71). This guilt exacerbates the pre-existing feelings of loss and complicates the grief experience further, since, as Szpirglas remarks in his interview with Benjamin Muller, 'il y a aussi ce côté du choix, d'avoir fait le choix de faire mourir l'enfant alors qu'il aurait pu être' (Szpirglas and Muller 2019)—a choice that, as Runde (2019, 35) reminds us, 'would seem to require the corresponding forfeiture of a right to acknowledge any resulting psychic loss'. As previously mentioned, this question of choice is vital. While the factor driving the couple's decision to terminate the pregnancy was beyond their control (the condition itself), the fact remains that Lou could have led a happy life, despite potential health complications (see Szpirglas 2019b, 181–182). The impact of this decision—and, more specifically, Szpirglas' influence upon it (see Szpirglas 2019b, 83–84)—therefore occupies a central role in the text and in the guilt Szpirglas and his wife experience. It thus becomes clear that 'regardless of how strongly [the couple] believe their decision was right', they continue, somewhat paradoxically, to 'worry about being criticised by others for "killing" their baby' (Kolker and Burke 1993, 521), and their grief remains disenfranchised.

Voicing disenfranchised grief

While the loss Szpirglas experiences in the aftermath of Lou's death is, undoubtedly, disenfranchised, the writing and publication of *Pater dolorosa* gives voice to this much neglected experience of grief and seeks to legitimise it by, as Amy-Katerini Prodromou (2015, 6) remarks of grief writing more broadly, 'plac[ing] the loss in the social sphere to be recognized and/or validated by others'. This is of particular value in the case of the doubly disenfranchised experience of bereaved fathers following medical termination. Indeed, as Benjamin Muller comments in his interview with Szpirglas, while medical termination remains 'tabou comme sujet, ce qui l'est encore plus, j'ai l'impression, c'est que ce soit un papa qui prenne la parole sur ce sujet' (Szpirglas and Muller 2019). While highlighting the widespread absence of male voices in public discourse surrounding IMG, this comment also points to the question of gender norms and societal expectations of loss and grief. In Doka and Martin's (2002, 342) view: 'A subtle interplay exists between gender patterns and disenfranchisement. Male intuitive grievers as well as male instrumental grievers are sometimes caught in a double bind: condemned if they express grief emotionally, sanctioned if they do not'. While this intuitive-instrumental model of grief (Martin and Doka 2000) has its roots in supposedly 'masculine' and 'feminine' grieving patterns, it should be noted that more recent work in the field of psychology, led by Doka and Martin (2010, Martin and Doka 2011), has sought to de-couple the intuitive-instrumental paradigm from gender.

Nonetheless, a gendered conception of grieving continues to have an impact on societal expectations of grief (see Jaffe and Diamond 2011; Jégat 2019; Weaver-Hightower 2012), with men ‘socialized to be strong, to keep their emotions in check’ and yet also ‘criticized for not showing emotion overtly when they experience a loss’ (Doka and Martin 2002, 341).

Szpirglas defies this masculine expectation to be ‘strong’ (Malacrida 1997; Weaver-Hightower 2012) and regularly presents the raw emotion of his experience of loss. Take, for example, the scene that directly follows Lou’s birth:

Nous ne bougeons pas. Je me prépare psychologiquement. J’y ai pensé pendant toute la semaine. Un instant auparavant encore, je ne voulais pas le voir. [...] J’avais peur de cet instant. Peur de cette concrétude, de la violence de cette vision. Peur de la mort provoquée, peut-être, aussi, dans une certaine mesure. Je pensais que cela me ferait trop de mal. [...]

Et pourtant, là ^{maintenant} tout de suite je veux rester. Ce n’est même pas une décision consciente. C’est une évidence. Je veux rester.

Rester avec toi, pour ne pas te laisser seule, t’accompagner, te soutenir. Certainement.

Mais aussi rester avec toi, pour rencontrer Lou ensemble, tous les deux. Lui donner une réalité palpable [...].

Lui dire au revoir.

Contrairement à ce que j’aurais pu penser, je n’y vois plus rien de malsain. Cela me semble la chose la plus naturelle du monde. (124–125, original formatting)

Bearing witness to a number of the presentational features to be discussed in the following section of the article, this passage captures Szpirglas’ experience in a way that also challenges the idea of Lou as a ‘foetus’. Here, we find evidence of the pre-death relationship between parent and child and of a desire to ‘donner [à Lou] une réalité palpable’ (125; see Clavandier and Charrier 2021; Giraud 2015). The emotion of the encounter, much to Szpirglas’ surprise, moves him to engage with his child in a way completely contrary to how he had planned, yet one that ‘[lui] semble [...] la plus naturelle du monde’ (125). As Szpirglas takes Lou in his arms, the father’s embrace becomes a means of paternal protection and one by which to communicate to Lou ‘tout [s]on amour’ (130). Although Szpirglas’ perceived role in the couple’s decision to terminate the pregnancy (see Szpirglas 2019b, 83–84) might be understood as a failure to protect the child he had fathered (Coyle and Rue 2015; Dollander 2014; Jégat 2019), the text bears witness to an irrefutable desire to protect and care for Lou in whatever ways remain open to him: physically, prior to Lou’s cremation, and at the level of memory, by ensuring they are never forgotten, both privately (within the family unit) and publicly (via the text) (see Clavandier and Charrier 2021).

Szpirglas’ desire to protect Lou is further articulated in the narration of the couple’s regular trips to the funeral home. Following the trauma of the birth, as Szpirglas and his wife lie together on the narrow hospital bed, a thought begins to haunt him:

Notre enfant à nous repose dans je ne sais quel recoin de la chambre mortuaire de l’hôpital, seul et loin de nous. L’image que nous nous en faisons est cauchemardesque: une morgue froide et déshumanisée où notre minuscule bébé attend d’être éliminé tel un déchet médical. (134)

This language of ‘clinical waste’ recalls the status of the body of the aborted foetus in times past: ‘un “déchet” voire une “pièce de collection anatomique”’ (Giraud 2016, 61).

Such is the nightmarishness of this image, conflicting so powerfully with the couple's desire to care for and protect their child, that as soon as Szpirglas' wife is able—and despite some hesitation from Szpirglas—the couple set out to see Lou. This initial trip to the funeral home begins a series of visits, which come to structure the couple's daily routine:

Nos journées sont ponctuées par nos visites quotidiennes à la chambre mortuaire [. . .]. Je ne fais part à personne de ce rituel, pas même à mes parents [. . .] Paradoxalement, à rebours de toutes mes préconceptions rationnelles, ça me fait du bien, à moi aussi. [. . .] [L]orsque je me trouve dans cette pièce sans âme, face à notre petit Lou, le sentiment qui domine est le réconfort. (139–140)

These words attest, once again, to the disjuncture between individual lived experiences and societal expectations of IMG-related loss. While Szpirglas' 'préconceptions rationnelles'—that is, the reasoned logic of social norms—would suggest that there would be no benefit in spending time with the body of an aborted child, what he actually finds is an overwhelming sense of comfort and connection. Indeed, when the time comes to leave the funeral home and Szpirglas and his wife set out on 'la promenade silencieuse qui suit immanquablement, [il] en ressent[er] les effets: un soulagement paradoxal, une forme de catharsis' (140). By perpetuating a degree of connection with Lou and seeking to protect them from a would-be sense of non-existence that wider society seems to attribute to them, Szpirglas is able to overcome the feeling of having failed to protect his child (Coyle and Rue 2015; Dollander 2014; Jégat 2019) and defends against the accusation of child death as 'the ultimate lack of protection and nurture, the ultimate breakdown and failure in being a "good parent"' (DeSpelder and Strickland 2005, 383).

A similar cathartic quality is seen in Szpirglas' motivation for writing the text: 'Il y avait évidemment un geste cathartique de ma part. Il fallait que je l'écrive de toute façon' (Szpirglas and Muller 2019); however, his motivation extends beyond a personal need to write to a desire to support others bereaved in the same way:

Mais il y a aussi une volonté d'aider d'autres couples ou d'autres personnes qui se sont trouvés dans les mêmes situations. Et le problème de l'IMG et même plus largement du deuil périnatal c'est que, aux yeux de la plupart des gens autour de nous, ce n'est pas un vrai problème, [. . .] on n'a pas vraiment perdu un enfant. Alors, on n'a pas perdu un enfant qu'on a vu grandir, avec lequel on a eu des conversations, ça c'est sûr, mais on a perdu un enfant quand-même. (Szpirglas and Muller 2019)

Faced with a society that fails 'to recognize that a real loss actually has taken place' (Corr 2002, 43), Szpirglas steps out in defence of the right of parents who have lost children through IMG to be recognised as bereaved parents by wider society, beyond the existent medical and statutory recognition (Bacqué and Merg-Essadi 2013; Charrier and Clavandier 2019; Giraud 2015, 2016; Zeghiche 2019), and to grieve that loss openly. Szpirglas' efforts to clearly situate the experience of IMG within the category of perinatal loss are revealing of his personal conception of it, reinforcing Lou's identity as a child and legitimising his own grief, as their father. His text thus emerges as an effort to educate the wider public on the fact that IMG-related loss is still 'un vrai problème' and to re-shape the parental grief paradigm in a way that reduces the primordial emphasis on the loss of 'un enfant qu'on a vu grandir, avec laquelle on a eu des conversations' (see also Giraud 2015). Szpirglas' text is thus as much a form of engaged writing as it is his personal narrative of child loss

and bereavement, constantly seeking to tackle the widespread lack of understanding that characterises (French) societal expectations of IMG and its associated grief.

This collective lack of understanding also extends to the funeral industry and its practices, of which, as Szpirglas remarks, ‘une IMG n’en fait manifestement pas partie’ (91). Speaking of their reception at the crematorium, on the day of Lou’s funeral, Szpirglas writes: ‘Un jeune homme nous accueille. Pour une fois, l’habit fait le croque-mort. Et ce type-là mérite pleinement le qualificatif d’obséquieux, avec tous les sous-entendus péjoratifs qu’il suppose’ (147). With his ‘zèle [...] horripilant’ and his desire to ‘trop bien faire’ (147), the couple are stripped of some of the poignancy of the moment. Based on an earlier conversation at the funeral parlour (see Szpirglas 2019b, 91–92), they are aware of the apparent conveyor-belt-style process of cremation at *Père Lachaise* and the over-zealousness of the undertaker only exacerbates this. Having given the couple a brief moment to say their final goodbyes,

[l]e croque-mort hélas revient. Et nous fait son plus beau numéro d’obséquiosité, qui se termine en majesté lorsqu’il quitte la pièce tête baissée, en marche arrière, à pas comptés, en tirant la table roulante sur laquelle repose le cercueil et Lou dedans.

On se regarde.

Lou méritait mieux que cela. (148)

Not only do Szpirglas and his wife feel guilty because of their decision to terminate the pregnancy, but the undertaker’s efforts to hold rigidly to societal expectations of a cremation ceremony, without pausing to inquire as to the parents’ wishes, compound that guilt: ‘Lou méritait mieux que cela’. The disenfranchisement seen here speaks to Doka’s (2002, 413) suggestion that ‘the discrepancy between individual and collective meanings of the loss’ is key to understanding disenfranchised grief. In this case, the funeral director, as the representative of social norms, imposes his (French society’s) model of how mourning ought to occur, jarring with the couple’s personal experience of loss and their desired mourning practices.

Such a ‘discrepancy between individual and collective meanings of the loss’, to refer back to Doka (2002, 413), has a significant impact on Szpirglas, to the extent that he will later struggle to fully recognise the loss he has experienced and thus to legitimise his grief. Recounting a conversation with an acquaintance, he writes:

Au détour d’une phrase, la réalité s’impose: j’ai perdu un enfant. Je n’en avais jusque-là pas totalement conscience. [...]

‘J’ai perdu un enfant’: il me faut me dire ces mots ^{les arracher}. Ces quelques syllabes ne signifiaient rien jusqu’ici. Elles s’alourdissent à présent d’un poids monstrueux.

Il me faut les dire, me les répéter. Pas à voix haute toutefois. [...]

C’est ma douleur. Elle m’appartient. (217, original formatting)

When Szpirglas acknowledges the reality of his pain and grief, he is able to take ownership of it. He realises that, despite the social discourse that neglects the identity of an aborted child and, to an extent, inhibits male grief following medical termination (F. M. Robson 2002), this is his reality. Yet, even in taking a stand in defence of his own grief, Szpirglas still hesitates: ‘Il me faut dire ces mots [...], me les répéter. *Pas à voix haute toutefois*’ (my emphasis). There is undoubtedly a sense that the dominant societal definition of child loss continues to impact on Szpirglas’ experience of bereavement and on his capacity to fully articulate it. The use of the verb ‘arracher’, conjuring an image of the acknowledgement of

child loss being forcibly dragged from his lips, captures powerfully the extent of the dissonance caused by speaking out about a grief experience that is not only largely overlooked, but about which men even more rarely speak.

Transcribing disenfranchised grief

In addition to the thematic manifestations of disenfranchised grief within the work, Szpirglas' grief experience also becomes manifest in the form and structure of the text itself. Throughout the work, a rich pattern of font changes, uses of bold and italic text, superscript and subscript captures many of the emotive facets of disenfranchised grief. This begins from the outset of the text; however, one of the most poignant, early examples comes when the initial warning sign of Down's Syndrome is identified at the twelve-week scan:

3,2 millimètres. Quel chiffre ridicule. ^{Les chiffres, on leur fait dire ce qu'on veut.}

C'est un signal. Une alerte. [...] Cela ne signifie pas que quelque chose va mal. Pas forcément, du moins. La grande majorité des cas se soldent par un rassurant négatif. ^{Mais.}
Mais. Mais. (17, original formatting)

The repetition of 'mais' mimics Szpirglas' pounding doubts and concerns, as his brain whirs with the potential meanings of this finding. Likewise, the steady downward progression of the repeated words gives an indication of the father's mindset as he and his wife are quickly ushered out of the room: 'On serre la main du médecin. Merci, au revoir' (17). This visual representation of the couple's descent into 'l'inquiétude [...] [qui] retombe comme un soufflé mal cuit' (21), despite its apparent triviality, offers a tangible image of that which is often not spoken and regularly overlooked by society: the suffering caused by prolonged periods of waiting for results, of wondering what the outcome of the latest test will be and what it will mean for the family unit. The bleakness of this waiting—and, arguably, the violence that accompanies it—is echoed across the text, from the moment Szpirglas reflects on the connection between the words *attente* and *attentat*: 'Je me fais la réflexion que, par un artifice de la langue, on peut faire un rapprochement malheureux entre "attente" et "attenter", voire "attentat"' (113), to the image of waiting as 'l'obscur tunnel, dont le bout illuminé semble s'éloigner à mesure qu'on avance' (159). The textual formatting thus complements and enhances the representation of that voiced by the words themselves, adding further depth to the articulation of the father's experience.

A similar pattern is seen in Szpirglas' presentation of the discussion with the medical team following the couple's decision to terminate the pregnancy. In advance of the meeting, they had prepared a clear, structured list of questions; however, when the time comes to ask them, 'elles se bousculent—sortent dans un bazar total. Il y en a tant qu'on a peur de les oublier' (82). The page formatting and use of various font styles captures the lived experience of the meeting in a way that words themselves appear unable to. The quality of the transposition of the couple's questions, from a spoken to a written format, is such that the reader is left in no doubt of the tones used, the emotion felt and the overwhelming weightiness of the situation:

EST-ON SÛR DES RÉSULTATS?
 EN EST-ON BIEN SÛR ET CERTAIN? À 100%?
Sanglots
 [...]

 Quand va-t-il mourir? Pourra-t-on le savoir?
 Peut-on lui donner une existence officielle?
 Lui donner un nom?
Mouchoir/sanglot
 Peut-on lui donner une existence officielle
 sans préciser le sexe?
 [...]

 Peut-on lui faire des obsèques?
Mouchoir/sanglot/sanglot
 Peut-on \ ^{faut-il} le voir? (82–83, original formatting)

In addition to rendering the emotion of the meeting, the introduction of slashes, coupled with sub- and superscript, offers a means of visualising the doubt and self-questioning that feature throughout the text (see Szpirglas 2019a). As Szpirglas asks himself what is the ‘right’ or ‘proper’ thing to do, the reader is given insight into his thought process by the pairing of *pouvoir* and *falloir*, presented in subscript and superscript respectively. The pairing of these specific verbs recalls the tension between the social expectations of men following perinatal loss and the author’s personal experience of paternal grief—that is, of the contrast between what Szpirglas apparently *must* do (*falloir*) and what he is mentally, emotionally and physically *capable of* doing (*pouvoir*). Moreover, the introduction of italics gives the scene a semi-theatrical quality, with the italicised text acting almost as stage directions, thereby alluding to the somewhat choreographed act in which the couple are engaged. There is a sense that they are not entirely free to ask all the questions they would wish to, or are reluctant to do so. Notice, for example, the use of superscript to introduce the additional consideration of whether they might be able to ‘lui donner une existence officielle / ^{sans préciser le sexe?}’ (83). This makes reference to a relatively recent modification of French legislation (Légifrance 2020), which has since been followed by a new law (Légifrance 2021b), and which allows Szpirglas and his wife to ‘déclarer la naissance de Lou, enfant né sans vie, de sexe indéterminé’ (142) and to have their name ‘inscrit dans le livret de famille’ (142).

This move to ‘accompagner le deuil des parents par une inscription mémorielle de l’enfant sans vie à l’état civil’, as it is described on *Vie publique* (2021), the French government’s platform for public debate, finds further echoes in the publication of Szpirglas’ text. To a large extent, the inscription of Lou’s existence in the *livret de famille*, a personal document seen only by the immediate family and relevant state actors, is expanded in Szpirglas’ text to include the wider reading public, all of whom will find inscribed in this text a legacy for a child who is so often overlooked by wider society (see Charrier and Clavandier 2019). In so doing, Szpirglas’ writing attests to a desire, common among parents bereaved through perinatal loss, to ‘officialiser la famille’ (Dollander 2014, 111; see also Clavandier and Charrier 2021). We see this evidenced in Szpirglas’ discussion of ‘la manière de compter’ (212); that is, the way people consistently neglect to include Lou within the number of the couple’s children—a recurrent issue in cases of perinatal loss (Zeghiche, de Montigny, and López 2020). As Szpirglas writes, ‘pourquoi tout le monde veut-il absolument que nous attendions notre deuxième enfant, alors que c’est

le troisième? [...] Même notre livret de famille l'affirme noir sur blanc' (212; see also Charrier and Clavandier 2019). Despite the legislative change discussed above and the couple's positive experience with the employee of the *mairie* who registered Lou's birth, '[qui] s'avère d'un tact appréciable et d'une sollicitude touchante' (142), it appears that there is still work to be done in changing wider social attitudes. While scholars such as Black (1989), Rothman (1986) and Kolker and Burke (1993, 520) have all discussed how '[w]ith an abnormal diagnosis, the lost baby is seen as irreplaceable regardless of gestational age', such psychological insights do not seem to have made their way into the French social consciousness; rather, to refer back to Szpirglas' earlier referenced interview comment, the go-to response in such cases has become 'vous en aurez d'autres' (Szpirglas and Muller 2019), thereby dismissing the value of the aborted child. The transcription of this experience in textual form seeks to combat that pervasive attitude, by defying the dominant discourse and drawing attention to alternative modes of living with IMG-related grief.

The presentation of the text also seeks to render visible something of the psychological experience of disenfranchised grief. As noted earlier, one of the common features of (male) grief following perinatal loss is guilt (Bacqué and Merg-Essadi 2013; Dollander 2014; Jégat 2019) and that theme recurs throughout Szpirglas' text. Structurally, however, the guilt of the father-narrator is also expressed in a series of imaginary episodes that are interspersed within the body of the narrative and appear with increasing frequency in the second half of the text. These imaginings are distinguished from the main narrative thread by the use of two distinct fonts. One of these sets of imaginings details what the couple's life might have been like had they not opted for a medical termination and, instead, decided to keep the child. In these passages, the father-narrator attempts to envisage how their life would have been, caring for a child with Down's Syndrome, and he reflects on the implications of such a decision for the couple and for their eldest child. For example, following their imagined decision to 'accueilli[r] Lou parmi nous, à la maison' (195), we read of how 'le grand frère prend son rôle très au sérieux. Sa maturation éclair en est presque effarante' (208). Likewise, the imagined Szpirglas 'ne peu[t] [s]'empêcher de penser à l'avenir: cet avenir pas si lointain où nous ne serons plus là, ou tout simplement plus assez vaillants pour prendre soin de Lou. / C'est à lui alors, le grand frère, qu'échoira la lourde tâche de s'occuper de tout' (208). There is a clear sense of transferred guilt here: the guilt that Szpirglas expresses in the real, for having 'take[n] an active part in the baby's death' (Kolker and Burke 1993, 524), and for having potentially influenced his wife's decision (see Szpirglas 2019b, 83–84), is erased in this set of imaginings, as the baby is still alive; however, a new form of guilt emerges for having shortened his eldest son's enjoyment of 'cette période d'innocence et d'irresponsabilité' (208) and placed on his shoulders 'la lourde tâche de s'occuper de tout' (208). In other words, the father's guilt in such situations appears inescapable.

The other series of imaginings focuses on what might have happened to the couple had they decided to terminate the pregnancy and then been unable to conceive again. This set of imaginings is the darker of the two, with this darkness invading the couple in the absence of a third child to '[c]hasser l'obscurité par la lumière' (163). In these passages, we see the couple torn apart, with separation seemingly emerging as the only viable option:

La famille ne s'agrandit pas. On vit dans un souvenir fantasmé ^{magnifié}. On s'épuise. Ce n'est plus un fossé, c'est un rift ^{éruptif} secoué de tremblements mortels.

Vient un moment où tout l'amour du monde ne suffit plus. [. . .] En butte aux récriminations et à la rancœur, le spectre de la séparation se fait chaque jour plus palpable. (219, original formatting)

These portions of the text bear witness to what Szpirglas describes, within the main narrative thread, as 'une peur lancinante, quasi obsessionnelle' (152), namely that he and his wife would separate and that, with that separation, he would lose not only his wife, but also 'le nid douillet que nous avons bâti ensemble et dans lequel nous avons déjà accueilli un monstre merveilleux' (152). For Szpirglas, this appears unthinkable; it is 'une chose à laquelle [il se] refuse absolument' (152) and yet he still devotes not inconsequential sections of his text to imagining how his life might have played out, had this have been the case. While these sections might only be imaginings, when we read passages such as: "'C'est de ta faute." / Ça y est, le mot est lâché. / Je ne l'avais pas vu venir. Je ne pensais pas que nous en étions à ce point, que tu te déchargerais ainsi sur moi de toute responsabilité: ce serait moi qui l'aurais voulu. Moi [. . .] seul qui aurais tué notre petite famille' (186), it is hard to believe that these thoughts have not also featured prominently in Szpirglas' lived experience of bereavement, thereby attesting, once again, to the persistence of guilt in male experiences of medical termination.

Defying disenfranchised grief

While '[r]esearch rarely focuses on the short- and long-term effects of an induced abortion on the concerned men' (Nagy and Rigó 2021, 677), this article demonstrates that there is a need to reflect on the impact of IMG-related grief on would-be fathers and to encourage this grief to be shared. While Szpirglas' text is but one man's story, when compared to further-reaching psycho- and sociological studies, it is certainly representative of broader trends in male bereavement following medical termination and other forms of perinatal loss, particularly in terms of disenfranchisement (Dollander 2014; Jégat 2019). Beyond merely giving voice to the male experience of disenfranchised grief following IMG, however, *Pater dolorosa* also acts as a method of self-enfranchisement for the grief experience to which it attests. Following Kauffman's (2002, 70–71) argument, instead of 'disenfranchising himself [. . .] according to societal regulations', Szpirglas can be seen to 'allow [him]self grief, independent of any external permission', to 'tak[e] into [his] own hands the power to decide what is to be grieved'—and how. In so doing, there is a sense that Szpirglas is also taking hold of this opportunity for enfranchisement on behalf of 'd'autres couples ou d'autres personnes qui se sont trouvés dans les mêmes situations' (Szpirglas and Muller 2019). Thus, defying the social discourse that regularly overlooks perinatal loss and neglects the identity of the aborted child, Szpirglas' text 'donn[e] corps à l'enfant dont la destinée funéraire est "précaire"' (Clavandier and Charrier 2021, §13). Although Clavandier and Charrier (2021, §16) write primarily about digital narratives of perinatal loss, the primary aim of Szpirglas' text is identical: 'matérialiser l'expérience du point de vue de la personne qui la relate, particulièrement la relation avec l'enfant sans vie'. In so doing, the aborted child is integrated into 'la trajectoire biographique de la

personne et du couple’ (Clavandier and Charrier 2021, §16; see also Charrier and Clavandier 2019) and their identity legitimised by the publication of the text, ‘qui l’établit et l’officialise socialement’ (Clavandier and Charrier 2021, §16).

By placing his experience of IMG-related loss in the public domain, Szpirglas also contributes to an effort to begin shifting the paradigm of (parental) grief, by giving voice to a much-neglected experience of loss. Szpirglas’ text attests to literature’s capacity to articulate the complexities of such an emotive and poignant experience, with the written word shown to have a capacity to act in ways that the spoken word cannot. In this sense, *Pater dolorosa* affirms Rita Felski’s (2008, 7) claim that ‘a literary text could know as much, or more, than a theory’, highlighting how, as per Weaver-Hightower (2012, 463; see also Ellis and Bochner 2006), ‘[s]tory and narrative technique can make a powerful, ineffable contribution to human understanding that supplements (and sometimes perhaps exceeds) what can be conveyed in realist ethnography’. Through its varied dynamic of font changes and other shifts in textual formatting, the text presents the traumatic experience of loss in a way that transcends the page and speaks to each reader on a personal level. This desire to speak directly to an individual reader is captured powerfully by the closing passage of the text. As Szpirglas imagines how the couple might eventually release ‘le médaillon témoin’ (221) that had journeyed with Lou through the cremation, one cannot help but draw a parallel between the couple’s imagined release of this little medal, attesting to Lou’s existence and the trauma of the couple’s loss (see Charrier and Clavandier 2015), and the release of the text, through its publication, into the hands of the reader. As that little ‘médaillon témoin’ is tossed into the sea, leaving but a momentary ripple on the surface of the water, yet plunging to the depths of the seabed below, there is a call on the reader to do more. There is a call on us to receive the text—that metaphorical ‘médaillon témoin’, which likewise attests to Lou’s existence and to their father’s grief—to plumb the depths of the traumatic lived experience it contains and to do better than the ‘croque-mort’ who, as the enforcer of normative mourning, so inhibited the couple’s ability to acknowledge and express their grief.

Notes

1. Medical termination of pregnancy came into effect at the same time as voluntary abortion, with the *Loi Veil* of January 1975. See Légifrance 2000.
2. The texts and film that I refer to here are: Jérémie Szpirglas’ *Pater dolorosa* (2019), Michel Hermenjat’s *Cet enfant qui m’a manqué: parole d’homme face à l’avortement* (2012) and Coline Grando’s *La Place de l’homme* (2017).

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