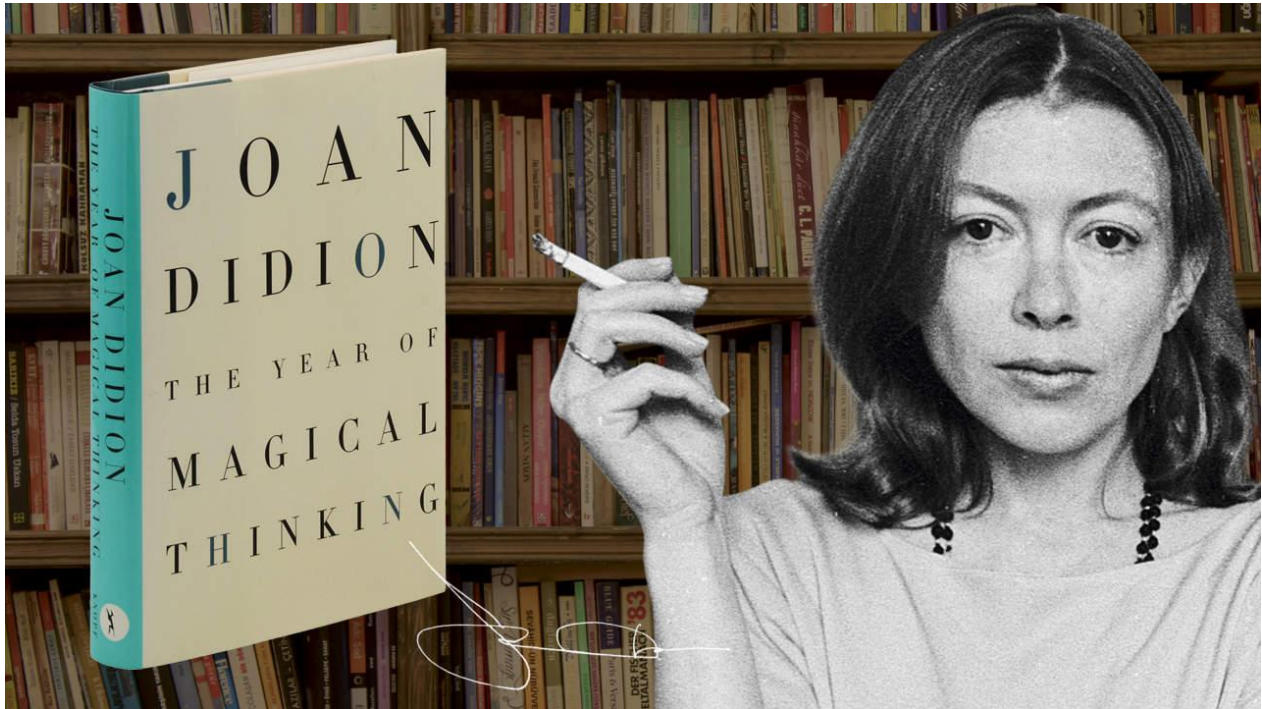


“The Year of Magical Thinking” by Joan Didion [C1]

In questo saggio al contempo intimo e analitico, la giornalista ha esplorato i meandri più oscuri del lutto, guardando in faccia la morte e gli stati di malinconia che spingono a confrontarsi con una vita privata di senso.



This short and intense book [recounts](#) the year of ‘magical thinking’ experienced by its author, Joan Didion, after the death of her husband, [fellow](#) journalist John Gregory Dunne. What she refers to as ‘magical thinking’ is the belief that thoughts alone have the power [to bring about](#) effects in the external world, and that unrelated events are causally connected despite there being no plausible reason behind it. This leads the magical thinker [to draw conclusions](#) that inevitably involve the acceptance of the supernatural.

NEW JOURNALISM

Author of renowned non-fiction, including the essay collections [Slouching Towards Bethlehem](#) (1968) and [The White Album](#) (1979), Joan Didion, who died in 2021, was a pioneer of New Journalism, an innovative non-fiction

genre that employed literary techniques. For instance, a writer may recount their personal experience as reportage rather than in a genre usually associated with fiction, such as a novel.

GRIEF

Death, melancholia, [ageing](#), mortality, [meaninglessness](#) and human connection are major themes in Didion's writing. After her seventy-one-year-old husband died of a heart attack just as they sat down to dinner, she proceeded to write this non-fiction masterpiece to capture the most [minute](#) details of her [grieving](#) process. "We are imperfect mortal beings, aware of that mortality even as we push it away, failed by our very complication, so wired that when we mourn our losses we also mourn, for better or for worse, ourselves. As we were. As we are no longer. As we will one day not be at all." "Siamo esseri umani imperfetti, consapevoli di quella mortalità anche quando la respingiamo, traditi proprio dalla nostra complessità, e così schizzati che quando piangiamo chi abbiamo perduto piangiamo anche, nel bene e nel male, noi stessi. Come eravamo. Come non siamo più. Come un giorno non saremo affatto."

LITERALLY CRAZY

Didion makes the [insanity](#) she felt she felt [overcoming](#) her a central theme of the book. She confesses that her expectations of grief were [overturned](#) by her actual experience of it: she did not expect the [grasp](#) of [insanity](#) to be so literal. For months, she kept expecting her husband to return, aware of and yet incapable of accepting reality. "Grief turns out to be a place none of us know until we reach it. We anticipate (we know) that someone close to us could die, but we do not look beyond the few days or weeks that immediately follow such an imagined death. We misconstrue the nature of even those few days or weeks. We might expect if the death is sudden to feel shock. We do not expect this shock to be oblitative, dislocating to both body and mind." "Il dolore risulta essere un posto che nessuno conosce finché non ci arriva. Noi ci aspettiamo (sappiamo) che qualcuno che ci è vicino potrebbe morire, ma non spingiamo lo sguardo oltre i pochi giorni o le

poche settimane che seguono da presso questa morte immaginata. Fraintendiamo la natura anche di quei pochi giorni o settimane. Ci potremmo aspettare, se la morte è improvvisa, di avere uno choc. Non ci aspettiamo che questo choc sia obliterante, disarticolante per il corpo e per la mente.”

MELANCHOLIA

Published in 2005, *The Year of Magical Thinking* won the US National Book Award for Non-Fiction and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. It is considered a [landmark](#) text within the literary body that treats the topic of melancholia. This theme is characterised by the experience of [detaching oneself](#) from mundane, everyday life to enter a [removed](#) space instead — whether literal or metaphorical — from which the subject [gazes](#) at the ordinary state of things and is, through that distance, able to [grasp](#) its strangeness. Space and time freeze in what could be called a state of stasis. “Grief is different. Grief has no distance. Grief comes in waves, paroxysms, sudden apprehensions that weaken the knees and blind the eyes and obliterate the dailiness of life.” “Il dolore è diverso. Il dolore non tiene le distanze. Il dolore arriva a ondate, parossismi, ansie improvvise che ti tagliano le gambe e ti accecano e cancellano la quotidianità della vita.”

A STATE OF STASIS

Didion refers to her experience of melancholia as one where she was able to see, and forced to [reckon with](#), what she [deems](#) to be [meaninglessness](#) itself. The silence and stasis overtake the space where her husband, and their life together, was before. “We have no way of knowing that the funeral itself will be anodyne, a kind of narcotic regression in which we are wrapped in the care of others and the gravity and meaning of the occasion. Nor can we know ahead of the fact (and here lies the heart of the difference between grief as we imagine it and grief as it is) the unending absence that follows, the void, the very opposite of meaning, the relentless succession of moments during which we will confront the experience of [meaninglessness](#) itself.” “Non abbiamo modo di sapere che lo stesso funerale sarà anodino,

una sorta di narcotica regressione in cui ci affidiamo alle cure degli altri e siamo completamente assorbiti dalla gravità e dal significato dell'occasione. Né possiamo conoscere prima del fatto (ed è questo il cuore della differenza tra il dolore come lo immaginiamo e il dolore com'è) l'interminabile assenza successiva, il vuoto, l'esatto contrario del significato, l'inesorabile successione dei momenti in cui ci troveremo ad affrontare l'esperienza della mancanza stessa di significato."

A BREAK FROM THE ORDINARY

Didion highlights how the experience of grief relates to ordinariness and triggers a break from it. She points to how life can change in the instant, in such a way that the most mundane action can intertwine with the shattering experience of death. Death, and the stasis of melancholia, Didion suggests, are closer than we think, a menace humanely unavoidable. We try to keep it at bay until the passing of a loved one shocks us. Didion also uses images of the most ordinary objects, such as shoes, as reminders of the loved one's absence: the ordinariness of these objects becomes connected with the other-worldliness of death. "Life changes fast. Life changes in the instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends." "La vita cambia in fretta. La vita cambia in un istante. Una sera ti metti a tavola e la vita che conoscevi è finita."

Glossary

- **ageing** = invecchiare
- **to draw conclusions** = trarre conclusioni
- **meaninglessness** = mancanza di senso
- **minute** = minimi
- **to keep it at bay** = tenere a bada
- **detaching oneself** = distaccarsi
- **to bring about** = causare
- **Slouching** = camminare con postura cadente
- **landmark** = pietra miliare
- **insanity** = follia
- **grasp** = portata
- **removed** = lontano, separato
- **overcoming** = sopraffare
- **deems** = considerare
- **menace** = minaccia
- **unavoidable** = inevitabile
- **passing** = decesso
- **other-worldliness** = trascendenza, mistica
- **recounts** = narrare
- **fellow** = compagno
- **grieving** = essere in lutto, afflitti
- **intertwine** = intrecciare
- **gazes** = osservare
- **reckon with** = fare i conti con
- **triggers** = scatenare
- **overturned** = ribaltare
- **shattering** = devastante