Entrevista al Profesor Robert A. Neimeyer

Siempre hay mil soles en el reverso de las nubes (proverbio indio) ¿Alguna vez volverá a brillar el sol de la misma forma tras la pérdida?

Many cultures offer sayings (dichos) that give consolation and comfort in the wake of suffering and loss, as well as ritual and informal means of support for achieving this. And in keeping with this hopeful attitude, contemporary research clearly indicates that most people adapt to bereavement surprisingly well, drawing on their own personal strengths and resources, as well as those of their family and community and systems of belief. However, we also know practically and scientifically that not all grieving people show this resilience, as 10% may lapse into prolonged depression, sometimes of suicidal intensity, and an equal number can experience high levels of anxiety and separation distress for a period of years. When these patterns become intense and prolonged, they merit professional assessment and intervention, and practitioners of several disciplines, including prominently nursing, social work, psychology and the clergy, have important roles to play in helping the bereaved disperse the clouds of grief, and find their way back into the sunlight of fuller living.

El Premio Nobel José Saramago en su obra Las intermitencias de la muerte, cambia temporalmente el carácter caduco y finito de la humanidad... ¿Se imagina un mundo sin muerte?

Human beings certainly are capable of imagining a world without death--at one level, this is precisely the world conjured by many of the world’s great religions. But such a world would not be recognizable as our own. As Buddhists recognize, death is one of the "four noble truths" that defines human life, and the paradoxical struggle to balance our attachments to the persons, projects and possessions that we cherish with the reality that we will lose them--at least in an earthly sense--sets the stage of the human drama. This further implies that living is a matter of learning the lessons of loss, accepting the challenge to find meaning in it and in the changed life that it introduces. Although the variety of cultural systems, philosophies, spiritual beliefs and individual personalities suggests that there is no single "right" way to accomplish this, in general a deep recognition and acceptance of death contributes to the development of wisdom, compassion, choice and appreciation for what we are given, whereas a tendency to shrink back from death or to live as if we were immortal is associated with various defenses (such as materialism or grandiosity) against death anxiety. In the helping professions a willingness to step closer to another’s pain, and to recognize its continuity with our own,
may be a precondition for our being helpful to the bereaved, at least at more intimate psychological levels.

Hace unos días, en una entrevista radiofónica, el Dalai Lama comentaba que, en última instancia, todo movimiento parte del esfuerzo individual. ¿Podemos asumir esta premisa al hablar de pérdida y duelo en una realidad tan socializada como la nuestra?

Practically speaking, it is true that every movement, every creation, every change originates in individual effort, creativity or choice. But at the same time, every such individual act, to be meaningful, draws on a vast and implicit field of human activity, artifacts and inventions that surround us like an atmosphere. As the Dalai Lama might also recognize, this ultimately blurs the boundaries between self and other, between self and world, and emphasizes our continuity with a universe of humanity and nature outside ourselves. In this sense, too, we live in paradox: on the one hand recognizing our ultimate responsibility for the lives we lead and the consequences they generate, and on the other acknowledging with humility our infinitesimal contribution to an infinitely larger whole. In terms of the larger social systems in which we grieve, we need to recognize that our social and cultural systems largely define our roles as survivors, and shape the very language with which we console one another, as well as the forms of bodily contact or embrace by which we might extend support or presence to another in the wake of loss. But we also make individual choices regarding whether or how we do these things, how we take up and use the social resources of culture to engage or avoid this pain or this person in this present moment.

Recientemente la NANDA revisaba la definición del diagnóstico de enfermería Duelo (cambia Duelo anticipado por Duelo): A normal complex process that includes emotional, physical, spiritual, social and intellectual responses and behaviors by which individuals, families and communities incorporate an actual, anticipated, or perceived loss into their daily lives. (Death Studies, revista que dirige nuestro entrevistado, publicó dos de los artículos que aparecen como bibliografía recomendadas)

¿Qué piensa de esta definición? ¿Cree que es apropiada?

The new NANDA definition of grief is suitably broad to encompass its many aspects, and to recognize the extent to which grief is shaped by factors that include but are not limited to visible emotional expression. Moreover, it is important to emphasize that grief is a normal response to loss -except when it isn't. That is to say, responding to loss with grief is not inevitable- a surprisingly large subgroup of bereaved people respond to the loss of a child or partner in a resilient fashion at emotional and behavioral levels, experiencing a level of sadness that is only modest in intensity and brief in duration, and their positive adaptation in the years that follow suggest that this is not simply a “denial” of the reality of death. The contrasting circumstance also challenges the "normality" of grief, when some forms of grief are intense, debilitating, prolonged, and interfere with one’s functioning in family, work and social contexts. Good evidence suggests that the keen separation distress and challenge to a meaningful sense of self, world and future that characterizes such complications call for a clearer conceptualization of complicated bereavement, and more creative and focused therapeutic approaches for those who suffer it.

Parece que nos empeñamos en abordar el duelo desde teorías tradicionales... ¿puede indicarme brevemente las principales diferencias entre la visión del doliente por teorías tradicionales y contemporáneas?

In the context of the helping professions, “traditional” theories really originated with Sigmund Freud, and his vision that the grieving person is engaged in an intense inner struggle...
between a part of the self that strives to hold on to the deceased person, to maintain emotional investment in the lost other, and a realistic part of themselves that recognizes the need to let go, seek closure, and invest that emotional “energy” in new relationships. Other traditional perspectives often implicitly accept these premises, cautioning against unhealthy identification with the deceased or establishing a predictable series of steps or tasks to be negotiated on the way back to normal life. In contrast, many contemporary theories question these premises, suggesting that the goal of grief is to transform rather than relinquish the bond with the deceased or to alternate between internal “grief work” and restoring our sense of purpose and possibility in a changed social world. Among these contemporary theories that cast the bereaved in an active, coping role, those that focus on meaning-making, finding or reinventing a life story that has been challenged by loss, are of particular interest to me because of their resonance with our existential and spiritual position as human beings, because of their coherence with the emerging scientific literature, and especially because of their rich implications for providing guidance in our helping efforts with the bereaved.

No puedo dejar pasar la ocasión de preguntarle acerca de la bibliografía del duelo... ¿podría indicarme las 5 obras que considera indispensables?

What references are considered indispensable depend on one’s point of reference professionally and personally. However, there are some good places to start, regardless of the direction in which one heads. It is hard to claim literacy in grief theory or therapy without being familiar with Freud’s pivotal paper, Mourning and Melancholia, published at the height of the first World War. Although it might have been unduly influenced by its historical context, too strongly analogizing adaptation to bereavement to adaptation to trauma, it is hard to understand subsequent developments in Western conceptions of grieving without it. The work of John Bowlby and Colin Murray Parkes extends this psychoanalytic tradition in a strongly interpersonal direction by emphasizing the way in which our evolutionary tendency to form strong attachment relationships to those who provide a secure base for our lives gives rise to our protest against the loss of such bonds. Importantly, attachment theory also suggests how our level of security or insecurity in such attachments shapes our response to the loss of others’ physical presence in our lives. The Handbook of Bereavement Research (2001) by Margaret Stroebe and her colleagues and its successor volume (now in press) provide the broadest survey of what is known scientifically about bereavement, including contemporary theories, research programs, and issues of assessment and to a lesser extent, therapy, written by most of the leaders in the field internationally. The book by Deborah Carr and her colleagues entitled Spousal Bereavement in Later Life has the opposite virtue: instead of sweeping vista of grief research, it offers many probing perspectives on a single focused study, entitled CLOC (for Changing Lives of Older Couples), one of the few in-depth studies of bereavement that begins before the death of a partner, that then follows survivors across a course of several years of post-loss adaptation. And finally -and immodestly- I might suggest the relevance of Meaning Reconstruction and the Experience of Loss and its accessible companion, Lessons of Loss (Aprender de la Pérdida, released recently by Paidós in an inexpensive edición bolsillo). Both sketch the contours of the struggle for meaning in the aftermath of loss, and give practical guidance to the bereaved and to those who help them in integrating loss into their ongoing lives.
YA PUEDES SOLICITAR LA PREINSCRIPCIÓN PARA NUESTRA QUINTA EDICIÓN

http://tanatologia.org/master/formulariomaster.html