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Julie-Marie Strange

'She cried a very little': death, grief and mourning in working-class culture, *c.* 1880–1914★

The pauper and the private burial represent binary opposites on the cultural landscape of the Victorian and Edwardian working class: the pauper funeral signified abject poverty and degradation while interment in a private grave, with all the attendant mourning paraphernalia, embodied social and economic status. Like many dichotomies, however, the meanings attributed to the pauper and the private funeral have lent themselves to oversimplification. Notably, analyses of both funerals have tended to focus on the slippery notion of 'respectability' at the expense of a considered discussion of working-class grief. Indeed, as David Cannadine and Pat Jalland have noted (and perpetuated), accounts of bereavement as a personal experience have been limited to the 'much biographied elite'.[1] One exception to this trend, David Vincent's analysis of love and grief in working-class autobiography, concluded that: 'The loss of a close relation was so bound up with the material problems of life that at worst it seemed no more than an intensification of the misery of existence'. Hence the working classes, especially the poor, could not afford the 'luxury' of what Vincent terms 'pure' grief. Rather, they possessed a capacity to 'contain' emotional experiences which, in the late twentieth century, would have a 'shattering effect' on the bereaved.[2]

Vincent's approach is typical of contemporary and historical perceptions of late Victorian and Edwardian working-class families. Most analyses have focused on poverty, respectability and the gendered division of labour. Where the dynamics of working-class interpersonal relationships have been considered, the historical gaze has fixed, almost exclusively, on an assumed relationship between material circumstance and latent sensibility: marriages resembled economic contracts; emotional ties with young children (especially infants) were tentative; and concepts of love (and life) were governed by an overriding sense of fatalism. Furthermore, working-class men have overwhelmingly been portrayed as breadwinner (or idler), handicapped in the capacity to love and the expression of emotion, and physically and emotionally removed from the immediacy of domesticity. In addition, the historiography of the Great War emphasizes

★ Thanks to Jon Lawrence and Andrew Davies for criticism and encouragement in equal amounts.

[1] D. Cannadine, 'War and death, grief and mourning in modern Britain' in J. Whaley (ed.), *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (London, 1981), 187–242 and P. Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford, 1996), 1.

[2] D. Vincent, 'Love and death and the nineteenth-century working class', *Social History*, V (1980), 223–47, reprinted in D. Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Working-Class Autobiography* (London, 1981), 39–61.

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the impact of death on an unprecedented scale on cultures of grief. Notably, this impact is generally measured against an overwhelming failure to explore cultures of loss and bereavement in the decades preceding the war.

With particular reference to grief, this article contests the perceived correlation between material insecurity and blunted sensibility; it questions the prominence of notions of respectability in accounts of responses to death; and it calls for a re-examination of the emotional underpinnings of the working-class family within the social and cultural context of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain. The term 'grief' refers to the emotional responses of the individual to an objective state of loss (bereavement); mourning is understood as the external expression of that loss. Grief is inextricable from the cultural signs which give it meaning. In this sense, grief (like the material culture of the funeral) has a history and the (public) context in which (private) grief is expressed is fundamental to our understanding of it. For instance, perceptions of masculinity that emphasized emotional rectitude rendered male articulations of loss oblique. Conversely, female-centred networks of support provided forums for drawing women together in gestures of condolence and sympathy.

Drawing on a variety of sources, including medical officer of health and municipal burial board reports, this article also examines the relationships between ordinary people and representatives of official bodies concerned with health, welfare, death and burial. In addition, the works of investigative journalists, novelists and contemporary social commentators are read in several ways: they represent self-conscious attempts to advance perceptions of the social world of the working classes, the relationships between its inhabitants and, in some cases at least, to make strategic interventions in that world. Given the personal character of grief, I also make extensive use of personal testimony. Autobiography and oral history can be read as individual windows into a particular past while highlighting broadly consensual understandings of mourning. Moreover, borrowing from the techniques of cultural history, languages of grief can be read as texts in themselves, metaphor and rhetorical device being richly suggestive of concepts of love and loss.

Crucially, I am not arguing for a single working-class culture of death and bereavement, nor that working-class culture was hermetically sealed from outside influences. Rather, I am working within a framework which configures the working-class culture of death as Other: working people were perceived and perceived themselves as removed from a prosperous middle-class culture. This difference was written into both the external and internal representations of their cultural practices, including those surrounding death and bereavement.

Beginning with an analysis of caring for the sick, this article proposes a flexible and inclusive definition of grief which demonstrates that the experience of bereavement was fluid, refracted through a multitude of identities and inseparable from the wider tragedies occasioned by death. In particular, I contend that familiarity with death and material insecurity did not diminish the distress of dealing with the terminally ill and/or the corpse. Moreover, I suggest that verbal expressions of stoicism and fatalism were not necessarily representative of apathy or dormant sensibility. Rather, expressions of profound sorrow were intensely private and often ephemeral to external observers. Thus, seemingly dispassionate statements could both conceal and betray the gravity of grief. Crucially, however, verbal expressions were not the only, or even the principal, means of articulating emotion. Indeed, an analysis of the rituals associated with caring for, and disposing of, the corpse illustrates the use of rites as symbolic languages for grief, sympathy and condolence. Questioning the extent to which the working classes lavished money

on funeral rites, I conclude that the historiographical preoccupation with respectability has overlooked the cathartic function of the funeral, negated the potential for individuals to invest burial rites with personal meaning, and failed to consider responses to death outside the rites of interment. Overall, I posit a flexible concept of grief: the bereaved fulfilled pragmatic responsibilities but created isolated moments and spaces in which to ruminate, manifest and remember their loss.

DEATH AND DYING

Mortality rates began to decline towards the end of the nineteenth century yet most working-class families continued to encounter death at close proximity: the sick were more likely to die at home than in hospital and their corpse would remain there until interment.[3] The candour facilitated by this acquaintance with death was often shocking to middle-class sensibilities.[4] Florence Bell, surveying ironworkers' families in Middlesborough in 1907, was horrified at the frankness with which impending death was discussed.[5] On calling at one house, she noted that imminent death was not only 'discussed quite freely' before a dying man but that his family were explicitly making plans dependent on his death: 'they were going eventually to move into another house in a healthier quarter, but could not do so as long as he was alive'.[6]

A familiarity with death tended, however, to be confused with ambivalence and/or fatalism. For instance, a Liverpool journalist in 1883 commented that death and disease were so familiar to the poor that they merely represented mundane incidents in life rather than personal tragedies.[7] This perception overlooked the diverse and complex experiences of grief and failed to distinguish between responses to death in general and in particular. In her autobiography, *A Bolton Childhood*, Alice Foley recalled how children 'of the streets' were acquainted with death from an early age.[8] For Alice, this acquaintance was rooted in the custom of visiting the recently bereaved in order to view the corpse. Despite experiencing direct contact with the physical remains of the dead, death as a metaphysical phenomenon remained 'something awful and mysterious' which 'would never be known to me or mine'. Thus, when her brother died, 'suddenly and without warning', all notions of familiarity seemed irrelevant to the unfamiliar anguish wrought by personal grief.[9]

Notions of familiarity with death also obscured the distress occasioned by illness and imminent death. In 1885, the assistant medical officer for health in Liverpool, Edward Hope, visited the home of J. R. Gibbon, aged twenty-four, who had contracted smallpox. Hope observed that Gibbon's mother and sister were in attendance but that 'the condition of the patient frightens them and they neglect him'. Given the disfigurement occasioned by smallpox, this fear seems reasonable. Indeed, at the time of Hope's visit, both women had, for the previous

[3] Chapels of rest only gained in popularity in the 1930s as undertaking became increasingly professionalized. See G. Howarth, 'Professionalizing the funeral industry in England, 1700–1960' in G. Howarth and P. Jupp (eds), *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal* (London, 1997), 120–34.

[4] Pat Jalland argues that the middle and upper classes had begun to retreat from death some decades earlier, declining to discuss impending death and employing nurses to deal with the remains of the dead. Jalland, *op. cit.*, 100 and 211–12.

[5] F. Bell, *At the Works: A Study of a Manufacturing Town* (London [1907], 1985).

[6] *ibid.*, 87–8.

[7] *Liverpool Daily Post*, 8 November 1883, 5.

[8] A. Foley, *A Bolton Childhood* (Bolton [1973], 1990), 37.

[9] *ibid.*

twelve hours, believed that Gibbon was dying and were sitting with relatives in the next room waiting for him to expire.[10] One woman, cited in Jeremy Seabrook's collection of working-class testimonies, recalled her childhood fear of a pale, consumptive mother who lay on a horse-hair sofa coughing and slowly dying: 'I used to avoid her.'[11] Kathleen Woodward's autobiography, *Jipping Street*, painted a vivid image of her slow-dying father repeatedly asking, with 'sunken eyes filled with tears', what he had done to deserve such suffering. He was simultaneously afraid, filled with self-pity and remorseful for the burden he placed on his family.[12]

Clearly, impending death invoked dread, uncertainty and, for some at least, distaste. Moreover, the dying occupied an unusual status in being neither fully alive in a social sense nor completely dead.[13] This problematic state of being illustrates the complex relationship between attitudes towards the terminally ill and towards death itself: solicitous care of the sick often fused with an implicit desire for death to make haste. This may have been linked to material circumstance and the wish to relieve relatives from the burden of supporting the economically unproductive. Yet it could also be motivated by a desire to curtail the suffering of the sick and those who watched them deteriorate. Writing of his early life as a 'Liverpool Slummy', Pat O'Mara described the slow decline of his once-beautiful aunt into a syphilitic 'horrible-looking, boneless hulk'.[14] Kathleen Woodward's description of the protracted death throes of her friend, Jessica Mourn, as 'an unchanging twilight' of 'slow-moving days, heavy with sadness' also implied the tension and agony of waiting for expiration.[15]

The desire to end suffering could, however, conflict with a determination to keep death at bay. Despite her husband's prolonged demise, Kathleen Woodward's mother appeared to wage a battle of wills with Death:

> I know that [father] is holding on tightly to her as though to save himself from slipping into the arms of Death; and it is very easy to understand that Death itself might be intimidated by mother, who looks unswervingly ahead, with a shut mouth and hard lines in her face . . . holding father back from the grave.[16]

The ability of carers to keep close watch over the dying possibly fostered a sense of control in an otherwise helpless situation. Florence Jones, born in Liverpool at the turn of the twentieth century, recalled that she and her siblings *allowed* their sick mother to expire after concluding that their constant surveillance was 'keeping her back, keeping her with us'.[17] The vigilance of friends and the familiar environment of the home could ease the distress of impending death, both for the dying and their carers. As a medical officer of health in 1880s Liverpool, Edward Hope repeatedly bemoaned the obstinacy of parents who refused to admit their sick children to hospital for fear of them dying alone and in unfamiliar surroundings.[18] Florence Smith, a

[10] Liverpool Record Office (LVRO) 352 HEA 2/2, 18 November 1885.

[11] J. Seabrook, *Working-Class Childhood* (London, 1982), 62–3.

[12] K. Woodward, *Jipping Street* (London [1928], 1983), 16.

[13] For exploration of intermediate state between being socially active and death as 'social death' see M. Mulkay, 'Social death in Britain' in D. Clark (ed.), *The Sociology of Death: Theory, Culture, Practice* (Oxford, 1993), 31–49.

[14] P. O'Mara, *The Autobiography of a Liverpool [Irish] Slummy* (Liverpool [1934], 1994), 18.

[15] Woodward, *op.cit.*, 145.

[16] *ibid.*, 16.

[17] F. Jones, *Memoirs of a Liverpool Stripper* (Liverpool, 1996), 88–9.

[18] See, for instance, Hope's daybook entries for 24 June 1884, 14 April 1886, 15 October 1885, 15 October 1886, 18 November 1886. LVRO 352 HEA 2/1 and LVRO 352 HEA 2/2.

child in Edwardian Durham, recalled that families felt uneasy in the impersonal environment of the hospital.[19] Conversely, residence in the home enabled the dying to participate in family life, to sort personal and domestic affairs, and to draw comfort from those close to them. Of course, not all deaths were protracted. Elsie Oman's mother was 'ill, dead and buried within a fortnight' from typhoid fever.[20] Likewise, Edna Thorpe found her mother 'dead in bed' from heart disease, the blunt phrase suggesting the shock of sudden and unexpected death.[21] The notion that sudden deaths circumscribed suffering may have soothed the bereaved but the circumstances of sudden deaths, especially violent, accidental or suicidal deaths, could be traumatic in themselves, evoking anger, guilt, disbelief and shock.[22]

It is impossible to measure the torment incurred by sudden death against the drawn-out agony of a slow death, or to classify either as a 'good' or 'bad' model of death (and, by implication, bereavement).[23] The circumstances of death were always particular to an individual, as were the responses of those who grieved for them. Yet historical analyses of working-class responses to death have tended to overlook the experience of grief, fixing instead on funeral expenditure, respectability and antipathy to pauper burial. As David Vincent notes, this owes something to the absence of an adequate vocabulary for grief among the working classes. Conceding that this alone cannot be read as an absence of feeling, Vincent goes on to suggest that material insecurity and daily toil precluded the indulgence of 'pure' grief. Rather, working-class families *contained* and, by implication, suppressed their grief.[24] As I demonstrate below, however, verbal fluency was tangential to the articulation of profound sorrow. In addition, expressions of loss were diverse, mutable and often oblique: they found symbolic expression through the public rites of burial, through gesture and memory, and the private negotiation of feeling. Moreover, privation and toil need not conflict with sorrow; they could exacerbate it. Far from containing their grief, therefore, the working classes accommodated it into the pragmatics of life. This did not diminish the gravity of feeling but, rather, facilitated flexibility in its articulation.

GRIEF

The pitiful character of Pennyloaf Candy in George Gissing's novel *The Nether World* is, perhaps, one of the most striking fictional representations of the mutability and inexpressibility of grief. As the health of her infant child visibly deteriorates, Pennyloaf determines to undertake the laborious journey to the hospital to seek advice. In the instant she meets the doctor, however, the child dies. Pennyloaf stares at the babe in 'a sort of astonishment', repeatedly asking, 'Is she really dead?' Gissing implies that her 'stupid' questioning and 'dazed, heavy, tongue-tied state' embody a state of shock and wonder. Far from a passionate outburst of grief, Pennyloaf's first instinct is to seek an old friend, Jane Snowdon. Desolation and despair only become manifest with the realization that she has left her umbrella at the hospital and must walk in the rain in wet shoes. It is this relatively mundane disappointment that tips Pennyloaf into a need to

[19] Manchester Studies Oral History Transcript (MSOH), Stalybridge Record Office, Florence Smith, Tape 962.

[20] MSOH Transcript, Elsie Oman, Tape 602.

[21] MSOH Transcript, Edna Thorpe, Tape 81.

[22] O. Anderson, *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford, 1987) and Jalland, *op. cit.*, 69–76.

[23] Jalland's chief model for her analysis of elite responses to death is the evangelical juxtaposition of the good and bad death. See Jalland, *op. cit.*, 17–38 and 59–76.

[24] Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge*, *op. cit.*, 41–2.

'overcome all obstacles' and speak to Jane.[25] Gissing not only illustrates the disparity between apparently subdued public responses to bereavement and private emotion, he also suggests the potential for grief to kaleidoscope through a medley of sorrows, concerns and needs, none of which need fix on the identity of the deceased. This riot of feeling did not annul a sense of grief – it represented the inarticulacy of loss and the inextricability of death from wider anxieties.

Such examples suggest not so much a 'class' barrier to sentimental discourse but that overwhelming feelings of loss were, simply, inexpressible: short and/or fractured sentences reflect the bewilderment, sorrow and heartache of grief. Jack London, surveying 'people of the abyss' in 1903, related the story of a carpenter whose 'blissful' life ended abruptly with the deaths of his wife and three daughters.[26] The succinct manner in which the carpenter told of his loss conveyed the impact of bereavement: words failed to express his sorrow. D. H. Lawrence went so far as to suggest that profound grief could be made manifest in silence. In *Sons and Lovers* the death of William Morel devastates his mother. The only words she can utter – 'Oh my son – my son' – embody her grief. Yet it is her silence which best conveys the desolation she feels, especially when set against her articulacy in the rest of the novel. In her grief, she becomes 'small, white and mute' and, long after the burial has taken place, she 'remain[s] shut off'.[27] Her silence does not resonate with peace but is heavy, oppressive and ominous.

In his novel *Cwmardy*, set in a late nineteenth-century South Wales mining community, Lewis Jones illustrated the inadequacy of words to articulate intense sorrow. At the death of their daughter Jane, neither Shane nor Jim can verbally express the depth of their loss. Shane wails and sobs, rocks and moans. Later, at the funeral, tears 'overflowed and streamed down her face'.[28] Jim, meanwhile, is 'speechless with grief' and at the funeral hides his face while the other men present swallow hard, look awkward and try 'to appear unconcerned'.[29] Immediately after the burial, Jim resumes 'the usual routine of his life'.[30] Months later, he has cause to wear his suit, prompting Shane to recall that the clothes had not been worn since Jane's funeral. Jim's response, 'it be no good worrying 'bout it now', sounds almost dismissive.[31] However, at no point does Jones suggest that Jim does not share the grief or memories of Shane. Rather, Jim's grief is 'resigned' – it is quiet and solitary in comparison to Shane's tearfulness. Silent resignation in this account suggests not so much a conscious effort to control grief as an unconscious adherence to gendered cultures of emotional expression. Repeatedly, Jones emphasizes the cultural distinctions between the miners and their wives and the differing social, political and occupational worlds they inhabit. Both are attributed with characteristics of fortitude and resilience, yet those traits are manifest in different ways. The miners cling to a stereotype of masculine strength, while their wives are permitted to sob and wail in accordance with notions of feminine emotional vulnerability. In this light, it is unsurprising that most of the retrospective accounts of grief cited here derive from women. Such distinctions remind us that bereavement was (and is) mediated through gendered identities in personal and private contexts.[32]

[25] G. Gissing, *The Nether World* (London [1889], 1986), 267–8.

[26] J. London, *The People of the Abyss* (London, 1903), 88.

[27] D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (Harmondsworth [1913], 1975), 168–74.

[28] L. Jones, *Cwmardy: The Story of a Welsh Mining Valley* (London [1937], 1991), 64.

[29] *ibid.*, 64–5.

[30] *ibid.*, 68.

[31] *ibid.*, 92.

[32] It should also alert us to Vincent's overwhelming reliance on male autobiography as a text on working-class experience. See Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge*, *op. cit.*, 8–9 and 40–1.

Silence and/or dispassionate statements could both conceal and betray the depth of feeling. Recalling the death of her paternal grandmother, Margaret Penn observed that her father did not 'seem to be very upset', not least because the woman was elderly and 'had lived her time'. After viewing the corpse, however, her father 'chokingly' called out his usual farewell: 'Ah'm away now mother.' For Margaret, the unexpected gesture conveyed a simple but 'deep, warm affection'.[33] When children died, frugal expressions often hid the agony of grief. As Ellen Ross notes, late Victorian and Edwardian nurses were fascinated by the silence of mothers who kept a constant vigil by the bedside of sick children, a reticence which appeared incongruous with their solicitous care.[34] In her study of working families in Lambeth in 1913, Maud Pember Reeves described one mother who nursed her sick baby with unstinting devotion. When the infant died, she was distraught. Yet the doctor who arrived to certify the death beheld a composed woman whose only reference to bereavement was the dispassionate comment that it was 'better' now that the child was dead.[35] A woman cited in Jeremy Seabrook's collection of memoirs recalled the death of her younger brother from diphtheria. For three days and nights, her mother nursed her 'favourite' child, hardly sleeping herself. Breaking the news of his death to other family members, however, she was inexpressive and concise: 'He's better now, he's with Grandma and Auntie Hetty.' The respondent's assertion that her mother 'never got over losing him' and 'mourned that child for the rest of her life' further testifies to the inadequacy of language as representative of emotion.[36]

As a language of loss, therefore, stoicism was far from representative of fatalism or apathy. Recalling her childhood in Edwardian Liverpool, Elsie Pettigrew noted that families 'were used to people dying so young in life'. Yet when her own sister died, she was 'sadly missed by our whole family'.[37] Pettigrew's account indicates the potential for individuals to contextualize and rationalize responses to death without, necessarily, reducing the sadness or significance of loss. Similarly, Maud Pember Reeves cited the biography of Mrs S., asserting that when any of her children died, the woman 'cried a very little, but went about much as usual'. As far as Mrs S. was concerned, she had done all she could for the child within her means. Reeves concluded that Mrs S. 'loved her family in a patient, suffering, loyal sort of way which cannot have been very exhilarating for them'.[38] Thus women such as Mrs S. were not devoid of emotion. Rather, their circumstances blunted its expression: love and grief were like life – unextravagant.

Grief was, undoubtedly, inextricable from material circumstance: bereavement provoked concerns about the costs of burial, while the death of a wage earner depressed a family's finances. It is impossible, however, to disentangle financial anxiety from wider issues such as sorrow for a lost relationship, crushed dreams, broken routines and changed identities. Many of the marriages and familial relationships encountered by Florence Bell were, she concluded, typified by devotion.[39] Against this backdrop, she cited numerous examples of the death of a male breadwinner. At one house Bell met a woman, recently widowed, who sat in 'blank misery' and spoke only in 'little disjointed sentences'. The death of her spouse had left the woman 'bewildered and rudderless': the focus of her life was gone and there no longer seemed any

[33] M. Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles* (Firle [1947], 1979), 35.

[34] E. Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870–1918* (Oxford, 1993), 168–9.

[35] M. Pember Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week* (London [1913], 1979), 90–1.

[36] Seabrook, *op. cit.*, 25.

[37] E. Pettigrew, *Time to Remember – Growing up in Liverpool from 1912 Onwards* (Liverpool, 1989), 15.

[38] Reeves, *op. cit.*, 91.

[39] Bell, *op. cit.*; see for instance 114–15, 173–4.

reason to 'have anything done at the appointed time'. Her eldest daughter, meanwhile, sat with a 'face of hopeless misery'. Their house, which had been neat and comfortable, 'looked strangely transformed'. Bell implied that this was due, in part, to the uncertainty of their future and the probability that they would soon lose their home.[40] Yet far from suggesting that the emotional was subsumed to the material, Bell outlined a multifaceted face of loss, characterized by a medley of sorrows and anxieties.

Grief encompassed the loss of a specific individual, it effected changes in the mourner's identity and role, and it represented lost opportunities. In *The Nether World*, John Hewett is consumed by remorse, regret and bitterness at the death of his wife. The prospect that he must bury her in a pauper grave compounds his grief, not on account of any slur on their respectability, but because the poverty which necessitates the common grave is a symbol of crushed dreams: 'Do you remember what hopes I used to have when we were first married? See the end of 'em – look at this underground hole – look at this bed she lays on!'[41] Exhausted, he falls 'Nerveless, voiceless . . . upon the chair and let his head lie by that of the dead woman'.[42] The image is simple yet poignant. Gissing suggests that grief is manifest not only in relation to the present and the future, but also to the past; loss is bound with material concerns but not confined to them. Similarly, Florence Bell described one widow who mourned the death of her eldest son while her younger son 'cried forlornly'. Their grief, aggravated by financial worries, was characterized by disappointed ambitions too. Indeed, the efforts of the younger son to emulate his dead brother suggested to Bell that the boy had lost his sibling and his hero.[43] Another widow grieved for the death of 'an excellent son'.[44] The quality of 'excellence' may have been rooted in the son's willingness to provide for his widowed mother, yet this undertaking in itself hinted at selflessness, loyalty and pride – personal attributes which would also be mourned. While the prospect of destitution preyed heavily on the minds of dependants, financial worries were inseparable from the personality of the deceased and the wider tragedies effected by death.

Thus I would reject the idea that material insecurity encouraged the containment of grief, replete with its connotations of suppressed and latent sensibility. Rather, I would suggest that grief was managed: individuals developed strategies for confronting death and grief which allowed them to fulfil pragmatic responsibilities but which also provided scope for reflection, sorrow and anger in isolated moments and spaces. As D. H. Lawrence suggested, grief for the deceased might be perceived as an indulgence of sentiment but it could also signify a deliberate strategy in the management of feeling. Thus, when Lizzie Bates learns of her husband Walt's accident in 'Odour of Chrysanthemums', her thoughts immediately turn to material security: 'If he was killed – would she be able to manage on the little pension and what could she earn? – she counted up rapidly.' When 'sentimental luxury' begins to intervene with her calculations, she concentrates only on her children.[45] The notion that emotional reflection is both 'sentimental' and 'luxurious' does not, however, annul Lizzie's scope for ruminating on the personal tragedy of loss. Rather, she chooses to focus on the pragmatics of death and survival in the first instance, and only later, when washing her husband's corpse, does she take stock of her emotions and the character of the relationship lost.[46] Of course, at the heart of Lizzie's

[40] *ibid.*, 105.
[41] Gissing, *op. cit.*, 190.
[42] *ibid.*, 190–1.
[43] Bell, *op. cit.*, 105.
[44] *ibid.*, 104–5.
[45] D. H. Lawrence, 'Odour of Chrysanthemums' in J. Worthen (ed.), *The Prussian Officer, and Other Stories by D. H. Lawrence* (Cambridge [1911], 1983), 268–85 (278).
[46] *ibid.*

tragedy is the contemplation of her failed relationship with Walt. Indeed, had it been otherwise, the luxury of sentiment might have been harder to postpone. Pragmatic and emotional responses to death did not conflict but coexisted in a broad and complex framework of feeling.

The concept of managing grief acknowledges that some mourners possessed a capacity to rationalize death and attribute apparently unsentimental meaning to bereavement. For instance, noting that child mortality among the working classes was 'cruelly frequent', Florence Bell speculated those 'easygoing, good-natured and cheery' mothers who lost children to death had achieved a 'comparative immunity' from bereavement.[47] Moreover, Bell continued, the death of a child 'lessen[ed] the burden of life' and was construed, by some at least, as a 'positive benefit instead of a misfortune'. Thus, mothers were often tempted to neglect sick children, 'allowing' them to die.[48] One mother, Bell observed, expressed bitter regret that her child died a week prior to the validation of its insurance policy.[49] Another stated that it was 'better' that all her children had died as they had all been insured.[50] Bell placed such attitudes within the context of financial realism and pragmatic concern. What she overlooked, however, was that anxiety about finance also represented a public language of loss which expressed bitterness and desolation, yet was sufficiently impersonal to articulate to others. Furthermore, conceptual links between material circumstance and death not only invoked a vocabulary of anguish that Bell could easily comprehend, they could also represent a galling reflection on the circumstances which aided and abetted child mortality.

Displays of pragmatism in the face of death rendered expressions of sorrow ephemeral to external observers. In a similar vein, Vincent notes that few mourners could afford to indulge their grief by abandoning work.[51] I would suggest, however, that – as far as possible – the bereaved manipulated occupational responsibilities to accommodate their grief. As Alice Foley recalled, members of 'good-natured' communities often made practical allowances for bereavement: in factories, 'willing, sympathetic hands' kept looms running so that the bereaved could return home without diminishing their earnings.[52] Likewise, Sunday funerals were popular among the working classes.[53] The cynical commentator asserted that this permitted mourners to indulge for a day: 'They go in for a spree, a feed, a guzzle, winding up with long pipes, long yarns, and very often, a row.'[54] A more sympathetic reading, however, allows for the possibility that mourners contrived to organize funerals at times when participation would not affect their earnings. When municipal burial boards prohibited Sunday funerals, workers persisted in striving to arrange burials at times when people could attend without detriment to their income. In July 1890, Alfred Stansfield approached Middleton burial board on behalf of a number of Nonconformists to request that the times of funerals in the cemetery be changed: it was difficult for people 'which [sic] work in spinning mills and people engaged in warehouses in Manchester' to attend funerals as 'it means a whole afternoon off at works and leaving warehouses at the busiest time for to catch the train'.[55] The attempt to compromise demonstrates that while financial considerations were important, they did not override the desire to pay one's

[47] Bell, *op. cit.*, 191–2.
[48] *ibid.*, 194.
[49] *ibid.*
[50] *ibid.*
[51] Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge*, *op. cit.*, 59.
[52] Foley, *op. cit.*, 60.
[53] Cline, *op. cit.*, 43 and D. Clark, 'Death in Staithes' in Dickenson and Johnson, *op. cit.*, 5.
[54] *The Porcupine*, 13 June 1863, 84–5.
[55] Lancashire Record Office, MBM 3/2 5 July 1890. The board made Nonconformist funerals thirty minutes later.

respects to the dead. Indeed, the rites surrounding the disposal of the corpse were especially significant in a culture where verbal expressions of loss were obscure.

CARING FOR THE CORPSE

The first task in preparing for burial was to wash and dress – to lay out – the corpse. Ostensibly, this stemmed the odour of death and putrefaction, yet it also represented a landscape for grief, facilitating the renegotiation of identities between the bereaved and the deceased, and enabling the bereaved to accept the finality of death. Despite the hygienic advantages of laying out (the bladder and rectal muscle relax at the moment of death), the custom was widely condemned, especially as it kept the living in close proximity to the dead. Much criticism hinged on the popular image of the layer-out as a filthy and incompetent 'handywoman', a stereotype encapsulated by Dickens in the drunken character of Sarah Gamp.[56] Recent historiography has done much to rehabilitate the identity and status of the local handywoman.[57] None the less, I would argue that the significance of laying out the dead for the negotiation of grief and condolence has been severely underestimated.

As Sheila Adams notes, the identity and role of the layer-out in a street or community varied greatly. An undertaker or family might, for instance, employ a local woman renowned for cleanliness and efficiency to attend to the dead. In this context, laying out adopted the character of a business transaction, the layer-out expecting payment for her skills. Conversely, if the layer-out was known to the bereaved, her employ was less formal: she probably shared the same socio-economic background with the mourners, was familiar with them, and would either refuse payment or accept payment in kind.[58] Adams overlooks, however, the more intimate relationship between the bereaved and the layer-out, where treatment of the corpse was offered as a gesture of condolence. Mary Lester, born in 1910, recalled that her mother frequently attended to the toilet of the dead for her neighbours. Her underlying role, however, was to 'look after that woman' (the principal bereaved female).[59] Mrs Seal, born in 1912, noted that her mother and neighbours all helped each other with tasks and crises associated with the life cycle.[60] Similarly, a textile worker, born in 1898, noted that the women in her mother's locality 'helped one another' with the practicalities of birth and death.[61] Another woman, born in Burnley in 1908, recalled her mother helping to lay the dead out, 'although there were other people like me mother, they'd help one another'. Her mother always kept a 'laying-out bag' (a pillow slip) ready: it contained a white night-dress, white socks and 'everything for laying somebody out'.[62] One Bolton man, born in 1903, recalled that female neighbours used to visit the home of the dead in order to admire and wash the corpse.[63] In this sense, laying out adopted a much looser definition, signifying a communal act of remembrance as well as a pragmatic function.

[56] C. Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (London [1844], 1968), 299ff. See also J. Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians* (London, 1971), 24–5.

[57] See S. Adams, 'A gendered history of the social management of death in Foleshill, Coventry, during the interwar years' in D. Clark, *The Sociology*, *op. cit.*, 149–68 and M. Chamberlain and R. Richardson, 'Life and death', *Oral History*, XI, 1 (1988), 31–43.

[58] Adams, *op. cit.*, 156–7.

[59] MSOH Transcript, Mary Lester, Tape 272.

[60] MSOH Transcript, Mrs Seal, Tape 50b.

[61] Bolton Oral History Transcript (BOHT), Tape 23c, Reference: AL/MS/A/016.

[62] BOHT, Tape 34a, Reference: JP/SS/1B/008. One assumes that her mother would have retrieved the garments once the body was dressed in a shroud and placed in a coffin.

[63] BOHT, Tape 71b, Reference: AL/JW/1a/006.

Assistance with laying out the corpse was inextricable from a wider female culture of mutual aid which not only alleviated practical tasks but could also be construed as providing emotional succour and offering sympathy. Lewis Jones implied the multifaceted role of the layer-out in his fictional account of Jane's death in *Cwmardy*. Mrs Thomas, a neighbour present throughout Jane's death-throes, immediately assumes control of washing and dressing the corpse. Indeed, between Jane's death and her funeral, Mrs Thomas 'seemed to be in complete charge of the household'.[64] Her offer to 'put things in order' for Jane's mother, Shane, implies a desire to alleviate Shane's grief by removing the burden of practical tasks.[65] The recollections of Mrs McIver, born in turn-of-the-century Wigan, reiterate this point. Neighbours invariably relied on her mother at times of confinement or death: 'They always knew they had nothing to worry about if my mother was there.'[66] Similarly Mr Brown, from Ancoats in Manchester, noted that everyone in his street depended on one woman, Mrs Chadwick, 'for all trouble and strife'.[67] An elderly woman, she attended pregnancies and births and would 'do for' bereavements, her tasks ranging from laying out the dead to catering for funeral teas. Although Brown assumed she never accepted payment for her services, he thought that families might 'treat her', perhaps to the pick of the ham or the pickle.[68] Mrs Chadwick's services catered for a community rather than a personal friend, yet her role appears analogous to that of Mrs Thomas in that she took control of the practicalities of death. On one level, this may have enabled the bereaved to maintain work patterns or prioritize other concerns, yet it could also be interpreted as a desire to ease the emotional burden of grief.

For those who washed their dead themselves, the task reinforced the finality of death, facilitated the negotiation of new identities and encouraged the bereaved to re-evaluate their relationships with the deceased. In D. H. Lawrence's 'Odour of Chrysanthemums', Lizzie Bates and her mother-in-law wash the body of Walt Bates.[69] Although the ritual symbolizes a struggle between the two women (the mother is jealous of her daughter-in-law), Lawrence imagines that the touch of the dead man stirs strange, powerful emotions in each woman. Walt's mother weeps and cries in the 'sibilant ecstasy of fear and mother love' as she recalls memories of Walt's childhood. His wife feels only the 'utter isolation of the human soul'.[70] She is struck by the inviolability of the dead, along with the realization that her husband is a stranger in death, as he had been in life. For Lizzie, the heavy and inert corpse of her husband brings a degree of horror and knowledge, for which she is ultimately grateful: it affirms her own sense of life although she remains fearful of death itself.[71] Similarly, when Alice Foley's destructive father died, his family expressed relief rather than any sense of 'intimate loss' or 'personal grief'. Examining the coffined face of her father, however, Alice perceived a 'strange dignity' in his 'marble countenance' that moved her. Although she refrains from elaborating on this feeling, Alice conveys a sense of grief prompted by the act of kissing and reflecting on the form of her father's cadaver.[72]

Laying out the corpse also helped to minimize the ravishes of death while fostering allusions to peacefulness and sleep. It is doubtful that the bereaved used notions of sleep and peace literally to deny death: even washed corpses smelt of decay and attained a waxy pallor. Yet by

[64] L. Jones, *op. cit.*, 59.
[65] *ibid.*, 57.
[66] Seabrook, *op. cit.*, 69.
[67] MSOH Transcript, Mr Brown, Tape 133.
[68] *ibid.*
[69] D. H. Lawrence, 'Odour', *op. cit.*, 268–85.
[70] *ibid.*, 283.
[71] *ibid.*, 284–5.
[72] Foley, *op. cit.*, 67.

rendering the corpse as lifelike as possible, the bereaved were able to associate the body with memory and the known personality of the deceased. In *Cwmardy*, the mimicry of sleep is a balm to grief. Looking on his sister Jane's laid-out corpse, the boy Len notes her smooth face, which seems to smile benignly. Although frightened by the stillness and silence of the body, Len readily recognizes Jane and recalls fond memories.[73] His next sighting of the corpse five days later is, however, bereft of images of comfort and peace: the corpse has shrivelled into an uncompromising vision of decay which fills the child with horror:

> Jane's beautiful face was gone. In its place was a dirty yellow mask with snarling lips that curled back from shiny white teeth. A blackened penny grinned at him mockingly from each of her eyes. . . . Dark blobs filled the places where her cheeks had been.[74]

The acrid smell and the 'awful face' haunt Len in his sleep as he wrestles to regain the image of his sister in the prime of youthful beauty.[75]

Given the emotional significance of laying out the dead, it is unsurprising that working-class families were reluctant to utilize public mortuaries and/or permit post-mortem examinations of the dead.[76] The retention of the deceased enabled the bereaved to fulfil their obligations to the dead and ensure that the corpse was accorded dignity and respect. In addition, the removal of the corpse from the home checked neighbourhood customs of viewing the body. Like laying out, displaying the corpse enabled the bereaved to come to terms with their loss while creating a forum for neighbours and kin to articulate their sympathy. Florence Bell noted that houses where a bereavement had occurred tended to be 'full, quite full, of visitors':

> All round the walls, on three sides of the room, wherever there is available space, people are seated, tightly wedged together, sitting sometimes in silence, sometimes bringing out simple inarticulate sentences of attempted consolation. . . . The men who sit round will smoke in silence.[77]

Clearly, the expression of condolence was not confined to verbal fluency. Conversely, visitors' stories relating to the personality of the deceased stimulated memory. As Florence Jones remarked, when her mother died, neighbours 'kept coming' to see the corpse, offering condolences and shared memories.[78] This may have reinforced a sense of loss, but remembering the dead in a communal context also confirmed and legitimized grief.

Simply expressing a desire to view the corpse may well have been interpreted as a gesture of condolence. As a small child, A. S. Jasper accompanied his father to donate a collection of money to a workmate whose infant had died. Accepting the gift, the colleague invited Jasper's father to look upon the corpse. As he drew back the lid of the coffin, the bereft man asked Jasper's father what he thought of the child. This was not an unexpected invitation: 'it was the thing everyone did in those days.' Yet in soliciting an opinion on the appearance of the child, the father was possibly seeking some confirmation of the beauty of the corpse and,

[73] L. Jones, *op. cit.*, 61.

[74] *ibid.*

[75] *ibid.*, 62.

[76] This was perceived as stemming from superstition and 'ignorance'. See, for instance, R. Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (London, 1987), 7–17 and the *Lancet*, 24 November 1877, 784; 30 May 1896, 1539; 13 January 1906, 109; 19 June 1909, 1786; 24 July 1909, 260.

[77] Bell, *op. cit.*, 103–4.

[78] F. Jones, *op. cit.*, 89.

consequently, the extent of his loss.[79] This example is particularly striking as it highlights male gestures of loss and condolence: viewing the corpse was not restricted to female networks of support, while the organization of a workplace collection demonstrates a male-centred culture of mutual aid.

Displaying the corpse was also a medium for introducing children to death and, for some at least, it provided a source of bravado and entertainment:

> As children we would go round looking at all these dead children, we thought it were something. When we knew they'd died we used to knock on the door and say – can we have a look at your such-a-body who'd died.[80]

Furthermore, the custom could be associated with vague superstitious beliefs, such as 'touching a dead person stopped you dreaming about them'.[81] Such beliefs may tell us more concerning perceptions of bereavement than notions of the paranormal. In particular, they suggest a desire for the dead to rest in peace, thereby allowing the bereaved to grieve in peace.

Of course, viewing the remains of the dead provided neighbours with an excellent excuse for gossip and gauging where families ranked in a social and economic hierarchy. George Gissing drew upon this idea when describing the pre-funeral gathering at the Peckover household in *The Nether World*. Mrs Peckover would have cared little if her mother-in-law's corpse were buried in an orange crate but, 'with neighbours and relatives to consider', she purchased an expensive coffin which would be the talk of the neighbourhood for weeks to come.[82] In such portrayals, grief was peripheral to the financial cost (and 'respectability') of funeral rites. This cynical perception overlooks, however, the notion that viewing the corpse was a ritual which rendered private loss a communal rite of participation. This may indeed have been rooted in curiosity, yet it also facilitated expressions of condolence while reinforcing a sense of social inclusion. Moreover, save for the coffin, there was very little to see. As far as gestures of display go, viewing the corpse gave neighbours access to the home of the bereaved. This was far more likely to reveal their long-term financial and domestic circumstances than any funeral procession or expensive casket. Indeed, I would argue that analyses of working-class funerals have exaggerated levels of expenditure and the social jealousy of the bereaved. Furthermore, the emphasis on consumption and respectability has eclipsed any probing exploration of the private meanings invested in mourning rites.

THE FUNERAL

The popularity of burial insurance indicates the significance attached to financing a 'decent' funeral.[83] Conceding that life insurance saved many families the degradation of a pauper burial,

[79] A. S. Jasper, *A Hoxton Childhood* (London, 1969), 14.

[80] A. Bromilow and J. Power (eds), *Looking Back: Photographs and Memories of Life in Bolton 1890–1939* (Bolton, 1985), 35. See also R. Roberts, *A Ragged Schooling: Growing up in the Classic Slum* (Manchester, 1976), 124 and Foley, *op. cit.*, 38.

[81] F. Jones, *op. cit.*, 2. See also A. Tibble, *Greenhorn: A Twentieth Century Childhood* (London, 1973), 35–6.

[82] Gissing, *op. cit.*, 41.

[83] For contemporary observations on popularity of burial insurance see S. Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (London [1901], 1922), 291 and 423, and Reeves, *op. cit.*, 55–93. See also P. Johnson, *Saving and Spending: The Working-Class Economy in Britain, 1870–1939* (Oxford, 1985), 11–47.

historians and contemporaries alike have remained critical of burial clubs, associating them with extravagance, drunkenness and skewed financial priorities.[84] A more nuanced reading of burial thrift, proposed by Paul Johnson, suggests that working-class funerals were symptomatic of a burgeoning culture of consumerism: expenditure on extraordinary items acquired a symbolism beyond their intrinsic economic worth. In this sense, conspicuous consumption became synonymous with a specifically working-class concept of 'respectability'. Yet definitions of extravagance and respectability were highly subjective. As Thomas Laqueur notes, even the meanest of funerals tended to have the 'extra' of the coffin plate, with the name of the deceased inscribed upon it.[85] In this light, I suggest that working-class concepts of 'decent' burial were grounded in wider notions of respectful rather than respectable interment: the fulfilment of burial and mourning rites testified to the dignity and identity of the dead while facilitating expressions of loss, respect and condolence.[86]

Against the drab routine of life, even meagre displays captured the imagination of local people: in turn-of-the-century Bolton a funeral 'really [was] an occasion . . . it was like all the street would come out and watch it'.[87] Such displays were not, however, comparable with the funerals of the 'pretty affluent' who indulged in hearses and horses with plumes.[88] In the 'Tripe Colony' in Miles Platting, a working-class district in Manchester, at the beginning of the century, funeral processions were typified by the mourners not only walking the distance to the cemetery, but carrying the coffin there too.[89] Recollections of grand funerals tend to hinge on the relatively sensational funerals of a minority. Kathleen Woodward noted that lavish funerals 'composed the one interest strongly binding' the inhabitants of Kent Street. A funeral for one of the Roper family, notorious in the neighbourhood, was bound to draw crowds of spectators who gasped at the numbers of wreaths and muttered numerous 'blimeys'. This extravagance was not, however, equated with respectability. As Woodward's friend observed, if floral tributes helped the dead on their way to heaven, a Roper would need Covent Garden on their coffin.[90] On balance, therefore, the element of display inherent in the idea that 'all might be equal before the Lord . . . but there was nothing to be gained in going shabby' must be placed in perspective.[91] Fantastic funerals may have formed part of a cultural landscape but, as one textile worker born in 1905 noted, the poor 'didn't have fancy funerals like that, they couldn't afford it, they just didn't have them'.[92]

I would contend that images of lavish funerals have been mythologized at the expense of exploring the significance of mourning rites for grief.[93] For instance, mourning dress was

[84] See Johnson, *op. cit.*, 25. See especially J. Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians* (London, 1971), 19–31 and J. Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (Devon, 1972), 9–11.

[85] See Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, *op. cit.*, 11. See also P. Johnson, 'Conspicuous consumption and working-class culture in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, XXXVIII (1988), 27–42. T. Laqueur, 'Bodies, death and pauper funerals', *Representations*, I, i (1983), 109–130.

[86] See J. M. Strange, 'Only a pauper whom nobody owns: reassessing the pauper grave, *c.* 1880–1914', *Past and Present*, forthcoming.

[87] BOHT, Tape 32a, Reference: AL/KP/1c/013.

[88] MSOH Transcript, Mr Brown, Tape 133.

[89] MSOH Transcript, Miles Platting, Tape 153.

[90] Woodward, *op. cit.*, 36–8.

[91] R. Roberts, *op. cit.*, 133. Jalland argues that the culture of extravagant burial among the middle and upper classes has also been mythologized. Jalland, *op. cit.*, 196.

[92] BOHT, Tape 60b, Reference: AL/JW/1a/003.

[93] Elizabeth Roberts also notes that many funeral customs cost very little but were invested with supreme significance. E. Roberts, 'The Lancashire way of death' in R. Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (London, 1989), 188–207 (191).

widely identified as symbolic of conspicuous consumption.[94] Amy Pownall, an assistant in a Manchester pawnbrokers in the early twentieth century, recalled that 'however poor' the bereaved were, they would invariably want to 'rig' the entire family up in black clothing.[95] Even in cases where the dead were interred in pauper graves, families strove to acquire suitable mourning garb. Jack Lannigan's mother bought both he and his brother new suits and caps for their father's burial in a pauper grave. The suits, purchased 'on tick', were pawned immediately following the funeral and the boys never saw them again.[96] Describing the pauper funerals he saw in Liverpool during the early 1900s, Andie Clerk observed that 'A brave effort would be made to wear something black, jackets or skirts being got from the pawnbrokers.'[97] It must be noted, however, that definitions of 'black' fluctuated wildly according to the circumstances of the bereaved: the working classes may have aspired to new mourning garb, but many had to utilize pragmatic ingenuity to obtain funeral wear. For instance, Margaret Penn described a local funeral where:

> The boys wore their Sunday best with black ties – some bought specially for the occasion, some borrowed, some, on the very poorest children [ties] merely lengths of broad black tape.[98]

A. S. Jasper recalled one family funeral where the bereaved 'bought what black they could afford' and, with varying degrees of success, dyed their everyday clothes.[99] In the novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Robert Tressell portrayed a funeral where the four bearers of a coffin, all nominally dressed in black, bore a 'remarkable dissimilarity' in appearance, their 'black' garments ranging from 'rusty brown to dark blue'.[100] The shoddiness of such clothes must have been apparent to all. What took precedence was the sombre colour: it reflected the melancholy mood of bereavement, it visually identified the bereaved and it represented a shared language of respect for the dead. As one Bolton woman, born in 1899, noted: 'Oh they respected the dead in them days and everybody wore black, you would never dream of going to a funeral with anything but black on.'[101] Indeed, those who wore light or coloured clothes during bereavement invited speculation as to the gravity of their grief.

The funeral also facilitated expressions of community, neighbourhood and occupational identity.[102] Like mourning dress, participation in a funeral procession represented a non-verbal means of expressing compassion for the bereaved and paying respect to the dead. One Bolton textile worker, born in 1898, asserted that neighbours followed coffins to the cemetery from a desire to demonstrate their sympathy with the bereaved.[103] In *Cwmardy*, Lewis Jones depicted the funeral cortege as marked by groups of miners accompanying the coffin or stopping and doffing their caps as the procession passed.[104] That Jones used this scene to emphasize the close-knit nature of the mining community reinforces the sense that in so far as the funeral was a

[94] See Jalland, *op. cit.*, 300, Bell, *op. cit.*, 78 and Curl, *op. cit.*, 9.

[95] MSOH Transcript, Amy Pownall, Tape 800.

[96] Burnett, *op. cit.*, 97.

[97] A. Clerk, *The Autobiography of an Early Street Arab* (Liverpool, 1973), 11.

[98] Penn, *op. cit.*, 162.

[99] Jasper, *op. cit.*, 121.

[100] R. Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London [1914], 1993), 523.

[101] BOHT, Tape 74, Reference: JP/SP/1/028.

[102] Laqueur argues that funerals were a text on the community membership of the deceased. Laqueur, *op. cit.*

[103] BOHT, Tape 23c, Reference: AL/MS/1a/016.

[104] L. Jones, *op. cit.*, 63–5.

'display', it was one which drew upon gestures of communal support rather than a carnival of extravagance.

The custom of friends returning to the home of the bereaved for a 'funeral tea' extended the communal aspect of burial rites. As Florence Bell noted, the funeral tea offered a rare opportunity for adults to indulge: crowding the house with guests for a day was 'a stimulus and a pleasure', undoubtedly 'tinged with the excitement and anticipation of the entertainer'.[105] Notably, children tended to associate funerals with ginger cakes, jam sandwiches and home-made wine.[106] The funeral tea may have represented unnecessary expenditure (the scale of some may be gauged from recollections of seats borrowed from pubs and undertakers who loaned cups, saucers and tea urns), yet they were inseparable from broader notions of negotiating bereavement.[107] The tea could represent a 'thanksgiving' for the dead, it provided an opportunity to reminisce and, poor as a family might be, it could symbolize a gesture of thanks to neighbours and friends for their support. Crucially, the convivial presence of friends and family in the immediate aftermath of interment militated against dwelling on melancholy thoughts and feelings.[108]

Secular mourning rites were integral to concepts of the 'decent' funeral. Yet the historiographical preoccupation with such rites as texts on respectability and consumption has encouraged a tendency to overlook the meanings invested in the religious burial service. Admittedly, the obscurity surrounding the religious beliefs of the working classes renders analysis of the burial service problematic.[109] As with birth and marriage, however, most families turned to the church at times of death.[110] This was, to a point, inextricable from notions of what constituted a funeral and, as advocates of cremation noted, if cultural habits were slow to change in the best of circumstances, it was highly unlikely that they would during times of bereavement.[111] Moreover, popular religious belief tended to be flexible: it could operate in tandem with superstition and be invoked on a selective criteria. Thus I would suggest that mourners could appropriate spiritual rites and invest them with private meaning. Christian notions of the afterlife also represented a language of hope against a life of poverty. Even the vehemently anti-clerical hero of Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* 'could not help longing for something to believe, for some hope for the future; something to compensate for the unhappiness of the present'.[112] Yet doctrinal precepts could also aggravate grief. Alice Foley recalled how the 'kind and sympathetic' nuns at her school shook their heads in dismay to learn that her brother had not received mass before his death. The 'ominous implication' of this omission for her brother's soul exacerbated Alice's 'overwrought sensitivity' and she lay sick for weeks.[113]

[105] Bell, *op. cit.*, 77–8.

[106] See Clifford Hills, born 1904, and Annie Wilson, born 1898, in T. Thompson (ed.), *Edwardian Childhoods* (London, 1981), 37–63 (50) and 68–101 (81).

[107] MSOH Transcript, Alfred Warhurst, Tape 81. MOH Transcript, Mr Brown, Tape 133.

[108] See, for instance, L. Jones, *op. cit.*, 66.

[109] See, for instance, S. Meacham, 'The church in the Victorian city', *Victorian Studies*, II, 3 (1968), 359–78; B. Harrison, 'Religion and recreation in nineteenth century England', *Past and Present*, XXXVIII (1967), 98–125 (also printed in Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1982), 123–56); H. Pelling, 'Religion in the nineteenth century British working class', *Past and Present*, XXVII (1964), 128–33; H. McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (London, 1974), 280–3; H. McLeod, 'Religion in the city', *Urban History Yearbook* (1978), 7–22.

[110] See G. Gorer, *Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain* (London, 1965), 30–42. It should be noted that poor inhabitants of rural parishes had little option but to turn to the church in the absence of a municipal cemetery.

[111] *The Times*, 31 October 1887, 4.

[112] Tressell, *op. cit.*, 229–30.

[113] Foley, *op. cit.*, 38.

Tressell's contemptuous treatment of the 'Christian' working classes suggests his perception that a significant number held some concept of Heaven, even if – as clerics were apt to lament – they chose to dispense with notions of Hell. Sarah Williams contests the notion that working-class belief retained no concept of atonement: popular belief perpetuated a clear set of moral expectations which were neither arbitrary nor divorced from church-based religion. Thus, the fulfilment of subjective moral and ethical criteria was perceived as sufficient to secure entry into the afterlife. In particular, notions of 'sin' and 'goodness' were dependent on points of 'neighbourliness' and 'brotherliness' rather than doctrinal strictures or church attendance.[114] In this sense, the bereaved could find comfort in the burial service as a confirmation of the social worth of the dead in conjunction with the tacit understanding that it signified the right of the deceased to an afterlife.

Herein lies the significance of the burial service. As an ingrained component of funeral ritual, it was inseparable from the secular customs of death which attributed dignity to the dead and testified to the grief of mourners. Moreover, the service was integral to notions of the funeral as an act of closure: it separated the dead from the bereaved, propelled them towards an afterlife while sanctioning the return of the bereaved to the world of the living, and it incorporated both the deceased and the mourner in their respective domain. To omit or deny a fundamental component of burial custom thus ruptured the cathartic function of the funeral.[115] A burial scandal in Stoke, near Coventry, in August 1878 highlights the distress caused when a family were prohibited from interring the dead in their chosen manner. The parents of an unbaptized baby had approached the Anglican minister of their parish, the Reverend Arrowsmith, to read the burial service at the funeral of their child. Arrowsmith refused and informed the family that no other Anglican clergyman was permitted to read the burial service over the grave. Having no money to travel to the municipal cemetery in Coventry, the distressed parents turned to a Nonconformist minister to assist them in conducting an improvised service: the funeral began in Stoke Independent Chapel, moved to the turnpike near the Anglican church and ended with the interment of the coffin in the Anglican churchyard.[116] That the family chose to improvise rather than omit a burial service suggests the significance they attached to their right to inter the dead with appropriate spiritual rites. Moreover, the decision to overlook the implications of a fundamental doctrinal regulation which withheld access to the burial service illustrates a loose, malleable notion of spiritual authority.

The burial service could, therefore, be interpreted more as a secular 'right' than a spiritual 'rite', the denial of which was interpreted as a denial of dignity and respect. In her autobiography, Anne Tibble described her mother's horror when told she could not expect to see the soul of her unbaptized baby in heaven. Added to this blow, the child's corpse was to be consigned to the back of the church, underneath the rubbish heap, along with the other 'ungiven'. Despite attempts to quell the grief of his wife with reassurances that 'Holy folk can often be grudgers', Anne's father clearly harboured a deep resentment and never returned to church.[117] Kate Taylor, born in 1891, recalled that her sister's death from infectious disease meant that the coffin was prohibited entry into church. Kate's mother, consumed by bitterness,

[114] S. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c. 1880–1939* (Oxford, 1999), 116–17.

[115] See J. Littlewood, 'The denial of death and rites of passage in contemporary societies' in D. Clark, *The Sociology*, *op. cit.*, 69–84, and T. Kselman, 'Funeral conflicts in nineteenth-century France', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XXX (1988), 312–32.

[116] *The Times*, 9 August 1878, 7.

[117] Tibble, *op. cit.*, 63 and 98.

overcame her usual reticence to chide the vicar: 'You have kept her out of church; you can't keep her out of heaven.'[118] Thus, perceptions of the burial service were inextricable from concepts of the funeral as a whole: the fulfilment of burial rites represented a shared language of respect and sorrow which not only rendered verbal eloquence unnecessary, but which also provided a source of comfort – as opposed to recrimination – in the aftermath of the funeral.

CONCLUSION: REMEMBERING THE DEAD

The completion of public mourning customs marked a significant point in the psychology of bereavement: the corpse had been laid to rest, the rituals associated with death were complete and the bereaved were left to resume their daily routines. This is not to suggest, however, that grief was resolved or that the dead were forgotten. Memory and commemoration persistently called the dead into the sphere of the living. Commemoration, most often associated with grave space, tended to be rooted in personal mementoes of the dead which were interwoven with domestic space and infused with intimate meaning.[119] The memento could adopt a variety of guises, many of which – the lock of hair and the burial certificate are the finest examples – required little or no expense. Of course, some families pawned the belongings of the deceased, either from necessity or a disinterest in sentimental association. Yet many families reused items, such as clothes, which had belonged to the dead and were, probably, inseparable from their identity. Some possessions acquired great sentimental value despite their minimal material worth. Elsie Oman, for instance, treasured her mother's collection of glass dishes, of little monetary value (most had been bought 'cheap' and 'second hand') but 'beautiful', as much in memory of a mother's 'mania' for glass as for their aesthetic qualities.[120]

The most common form of commemoration, however, was verbal remembrance: talking about the deceased gave vent to feelings of loss while simultaneously drawing the memory of the dead into the context of the living. Likewise, talking to the dead could be a palliative to grief. As opposed to more formal notions of 'spiritualism', such conversations may well have been, and were expected to be, monologues. Indeed, whether the dead heard, understood and/or responded is not really at issue: the bereaved could talk to the dead – either silently or aloud – from a simple desire to remember and maintain a relationship with them. Thus, Hannah Mitchell described her grandmother as a woman not given to fancy. Yet:

> [She] would sit talking to her husband who had died many years before, and would seem surprised if I said I couldn't see him. A few minutes later she would be talking about everyday things like washing and baking.[121]

Similarly, John Dugdale, born in 1906, recalled that after finding his grandfather dead in bed one morning, he could feel the man's presence 'for weeks after'.[122] Whether the elderly man was 'with' John or not did not matter: the sense of his nearness was a balm to the boy's grief.

In managing grief, working-class families did not negate loss but, rather, they formulated

[118] Burnett, *op. cit.*, 292.

[119] Elsewhere, I explore the meanings invested in the neglected grave. See J. M. Strange, 'Tho' lost to sight, to memory dear: the neglected grave in Victorian and Edwardian commemorative culture', *Mortality*, forthcoming.

[120] MSOH Transcript, Elise Oman, Tape 12.

[121] H. Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell – Suffragette and Rebel* (London, 1977), 48.

[122] Stalybridge Oral History Transcript, John Dugdale, Uncatalogued.

positive, constructive and, crucially, malleable means for its expression. Moreover, linguistic fluency was not necessary, or even desirable, for the expression of loss, sympathy, condolence or commemoration. Rather, grief was articulated, first, through the social rites of mourning and, second, via personal and abstract symbols and signs. That these did not always concur with shared definitions of grief did not belittle their significance. Undeniably, material anxiety was inseparable from most facets of daily life. This was, however, markedly different from subjugating humanity to such concerns. Languages of resignation, poverty and fatalism – so often mistaken for indifference or a lack of humanity – frequently concealed a wealth of emotion which was no less harrowing for being intensely private. Moreover, expressions of loss were not confined to public rites of mourning as signifiers of social status. Rather, individuals used shared rituals of burial to negotiate personal meanings of loss and readjustment.

In arguing for recognition of the diverse, multifaceted face of grief, this article has wider implications for the historiography of the late Victorian and Edwardian working class. To begin, further research is needed on the emotional underpinnings of the family. In particular, perceptions of masculinity in relation to the articulation of emotion, men's relationship to the home and male-centred networks of mutual support (usually seen as the preserve of women) would benefit from an analysis which moves beyond a concern with economic status and male-associated culture (the workplace and leisure). Likewise, understandings of working-class values – notably respectability – must overcome a preoccupation with consumerism and social status to include shifting conceptions of identity, emotion and personal dignity. Furthermore, this article demonstrates that verbal eloquence is only one of many representations of feeling: non-verbal signs (mannerisms, intonation, facial expression and silence) can convey profound emotion and attachment.

Finally, literature concerning the impact of the First World War on bereavement in post-war society has argued that a hiatus in the material culture of burial was mirrored by a rupture in the culture of grief: the ostentatious and shallow were replaced by the private and personal.[123] However, this analysis of the decades preceding the Great War not only questions the extent of pre-war ostentation, it also suggests the existence of an intensely private, subdued culture of sorrow and loss before the tragedy of mass bereavement. Of course, the death of a loved one as a direct cause of the war facilitated its own problems, meanings and resolutions. In terms of post-war cultures of death and bereavement, however, I would suggest that we can only begin to assess the impact of the war when we have probed the sheer complexity of love and loss in pre-war culture. Sensibility was inextricable from the negotiation of selfhood, while familial relationships often shaped and informed an individual's social and cultural interaction outside the family. In this sense, working-class cultures of love and affection have a social and cultural history of their own, and are substantially more sophisticated than references to material circumstance alone imply.

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[123] See especially Cannadine, *op. cit*. Sarah Tarlow argues a similar point to my own with reference to reading the inscriptions on headstones. See Sarah Tarlow, *Bereavement and Commemoration: An Archaeology of Mortality* (Oxford, 1999).