7 Loss, memory and the management of feeling

The preceding chapters have explored responses to bereavement that centred on the principal artefacts of death: the corpse, the funeral and the grave. It remains, therefore, to examine how normative grief was defined by the working classes; how loss found verbal and symbolic expression outside burial rites; and the ways in which the dead were remembered once they had been laid to rest. Little research has been conducted since David Vincent concluded, in the early 1980s, that working-class responses to bereavement were shaped by material circumstance. There are, however, several problems with the assumption that poverty precluded 'pure' grief. First, it is not inevitable that the relationship between poverty and death should limit grief. The two could operate together to create an overriding sense of desolation and despair. Likewise, the reverse was sometimes true: poverty might exacerbate the anguish of loss. Secondly, Vincent's use of the phrase 'pure grief' is evasive: he fails to clarify his definition of this term and, moreover, omits to identify those who did register this experience. Implicit in Vincent's narrative is an assumption that unfettered emotion was an ideal and privileged form of bereavement. That the working classes had not the 'luxury' to develop or indulge this heightened sensibility intimates that they were denied access to models of good grief available to those in wealthier circumstances.[1]

This chapter advances a more flexible understanding of responses to bereavement. Grief was manifest in diverse ways, at different times and was tempered by a multitude of factors, including – but extending beyond – material privation. Given the significance attached to the relationship between death and poverty, however, the chapter begins with an exploration of the impact of material circumstance upon responses to bereavement. In particular, the death of a breadwinner almost invariably plunged the bereaved into economic uncertainty, if not destitution. Yet the effects of death went beyond the material; bereavement created multiple

[1] Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, 39–61.

tragedies which did not diminish, but intensified the distress of loss. Hence, this chapter emphasises the sheer impossibility of disentangling financial anxiety from wider issues, such as sorrow for a lost relationship, crushed dreams, shattered homes and families, and broken routines and identities.

As in earlier chapters, this discussion reiterates the argument that expressions of bereavement did not depend upon verbal fluency. Grief could be articulated through a multitude of signs: through physical symptoms (such as weight loss or nightmares); acts of commemoration; attempts to contact the dead; through fractured speech; and, significantly, in silence. Remembrance could adopt a timelessness which not only enabled the bereaved to maintain some form of relationship with the memory of the dead, but which could also represent healthy adaptation to loss.[2] An acknowledgement of the diversity of bereavement experience should not, however, detract from recognition that many mourners shared a general consensus relating to normative grief and the desirability of resolution. This is not to suggest a reversion to proscriptive models of good grief but to suggest that most families expected the bereaved to achieve a degree of restitution. Within these shared understandings of normative grief, individual perceptions of timescales and forms of expression differed widely. An analysis of experiences defined as extreme or chronic grief facilitates a reading of the subjective criteria for recovery and reintegration into the sphere of the living.[3] In conclusion, therefore, this chapter demonstrates that material privation cannot be equated with the containment of feeling; grief was rarely set aside so easily. Rather, individuals developed strategies to accommodate the tumult of bereavement and all its consequences.

Poverty, grief and the family unit

It is, perhaps, inevitable that the material impact of bereavement has preoccupied contemporary and historical commentators given the extraordinary expenditure necessitated by funerals. Yet the death of a wage-earner, especially a breadwinner, also dealt a critical blow to family resources. In such circumstances, news of a death was inseparable from calculations regarding burial costs, loss of income and material security.

[2] S. Shuchter and S. Zisook, 'The Course of Normal Grief' in Stroebe et al., *Handbook of Bereavement*, 25.

[3] Jalland uses the terms 'chronic' and 'abnormal' grief to describe bereavement experience in elite families where resolution was not reached within approximately two years of death. Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 318.

Narratives of bereavement were often framed against references to finance. As Kathleen Woodward observed, a mother might be 'beside herself with grief' when a 'good' child died; all the more, however, if they were also her principal means of support.[4] When Deborah Smith's older sister died it dealt a 'great blow' to her parents who 'were looking forward to the help they would get through their children'.[5] Taken at face value, such comments confirm that the working-class family was an economical rather than emotional unit.

Bereavement and material tragedy were most commonly associated with widowhood.[6] Jack London asserted that the death of the male breadwinner was the worst disaster that could befall a family: 'The thing happens, the father is struck down, and what then? A mother with three children can do little or nothing . . . There is no guarding against it. It is fortuitous. A family stands so many chances of escaping the bottom of the Abyss, and so many chances of falling plump down to it.'[7] Implicit in London's claim was the sense that life and death were a lottery and that few widows were poverty stricken through any fault of their own. There is little doubt that widows, especially those with dependent children, were concentrated in poor housing and often engaged in low income, low status employment. Fictional portrayals of the widow characterised her as gaunt, overworked and exhausted.[8] Booth's survey of London's working-class districts highlighted a preponderance of widows residing in cramped rooms in the worst slums. An overview of a district typified by 'almost solid' poverty illustrated the diverse but overwhelmingly poorly paid occupations pursued by widows: hawker, brush drawer, paper kite maker, watercress seller, coster, washerwoman and mangler, 'odd jobber', charwoman, ironer, factory employee, matchbox maker and prostitute. In a similar area, a 'barely clad' and 'dejected' widow lived as best she could from needlework, yet she was often 'without fire or food'. At their most abject, widows survived by 'begging or picking up odds and ends in the street'. One widow was reputed to be 'one of the best beggars in the district'. Another, almost blind, 'struggle[d] hard for her children'.[9] Similarly, Rowntree's survey of York indicated that almost two-thirds of those in the lowest income group (under eighteen shillings per week) were families whose immediate cause of poverty was the death or illness of the male breadwinner. Over 15 per cent of those in Rowntree's 'primary

[4] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 131. [5] D. Smith, *My Revelation*, 18–19.
[6] The classic study of widows' bereavement experience is P. Marris's *Widows and Their Families* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958).
[7] London, *People of the Abyss*, 251–2. [8] Morrison, *Tales of Mean Streets*, xxi–xxii.
[9] Booth, *Life and Labour*, vol. II, 94ff, 69, 49, 178, 179.

poverty' class were thus situated due to the death of the principal wage earner.[10] Appraising social conditions in Oxford in 1912, Violet Butler concluded that it was impossible for widows to survive without some form of assistance, either from charitable agencies, kin, the parish guardians or former employers.[11]

Retrospective accounts of the death of a breadwinner father tend to support the parallel between widowhood and poverty. For Mildred Metcalfe (born 1891), recollection of her father's death at the age of fifty-seven was inextricable from the observation that her mother had a 'hard life'.[12] Despite having a wealthy and successful husband, Philip Inman's mother was left with little from the estate when he died; she took in washing and cleaned the gravestones in the local churchyard to keep the family afloat.[13] When Joseph Stevens's father (a joiner) died in 1907, he bequeathed a 'tidy sum'. Yet the legacy rapidly disappeared and, before long, the family piano was sold and his mother turned to the pawnbroker.[14] Jack Lannigan (born 1890) associated his father's death with he and his sibling becoming 'very hungry kids'. Lannigan begged for bread whilst his brother became a lather boy in a local barber's in order to contribute to the family wage.[15]

It is hardly surprising that many widows with dependent children were forced to turn to the poor law. Application for parochial assistance was galling for the proud widow and exacerbated the sorrow of a spouse's death. The substitution of the state for a husband turned on perceptions of the male role as rooted in financial provision and authority with no recognition of the friendship lost. Moreover, unless a woman remarried, her social identity ('widow') remained tied to the death of her spouse, long after the bereavement took place. Parochial authorities' records for the distribution of relief indicate a high percentage of widows among persons in receipt of relief. Pauper classification books for Cheltenham and Cirencester in the 1890s highlight that only the infirm outnumbered widows in receipt of indoor relief.[16] This trend was replicated in heavily urbanised areas. An article in the *Liverpool Review* in November 1890 observed that widows were strongly represented among the 'motley lot' who regularly queued for outdoor relief: 'The poor struggling self-respecting widow can hold out no longer. The parish – that fated and hated name! – must be appealed to, and thus the terrible descent is made from the happy, self-supporting home down through weakening efforts

[10] Rowntree, *Poverty*, 69–73, 154. [11] Butler, *Social Conditions in Oxford*, 73–5.
[12] Man. OH Tape, Mildred Metcalfe, Tape 723. [13] Inman, *No Going Back*, 16.
[14] Man. OH Transcript, Joseph Stevens, Tape 101.
[15] Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 97. [16] GRO G/CI 141/1 and G/CH 25.

and narrowing opportunities to the parish and the grave.'[17] Hence, the article implied, widowhood made a fall from respectability cruelly inevitable, if only through association with pauperism.

Some parish guardians recognised the particular hardships of widows. In 1909 West Derby (Liverpool) parish guardians commissioned the first of a series of special reports into the living standards of widows with young children who claimed outdoor relief. Investigating a random sample of thirty-four widows with dependants in each relief district, the guardians concluded that although individual circumstances varied, the amount of relief given was inadequate to provide sufficient nutrition for growing children. As a group, widows were considered a 'very respectable, striving, and worthy class', yet the majority bore a 'weak and ill-nourished' appearance and the hardship they endured was 'appalling'. Indeed, it was 'not to be wondered at' that such women lived in squalid surroundings or that their children were sent to work at the earliest opportunity. The report urged the parish guardians to increase the basic amount of relief given to widows, although it expressed an expectation that the women would, perforce, continue to exercise 'great economy' and engage in some form of paid employment.[18] Of course, parochial definitions of adequate relief were arbitrary and continued to attract accusations of meanness. In 1913 Eleanor Rathbone, self-professed champion of the widow's cause, castigated the Liverpool guardians' perceptions of the poverty line. Despite an overall increase in working-class living standards since the end of the nineteenth century, parochial guardians were 'so accustomed' to associating poverty with widowhood they assumed that widows could 'reasonably be expected' to live on the margins of subsistence.[19]

The fundamental obstacle to the widow achieving economic autonomy was her children. Gissing outlined this predicament in *The Nether World* in 1889. Pennyloaf Candy is a fragile character who has adored her husband Bob despite his cavalier treatment of her. When Bob dies suddenly, Pennyloaf is 'all but crazy with grief'. Her emotional distress is exacerbated by the unexpected removal of the family's chief source of income (albeit an irregular one). Pennyloaf knows she must find employment, yet the need to care for her young children circumscribes the opportunities available to her. It is only by chance that Pennyloaf is able to combine resources with another widow to share a home, childcare and employment.[20] Some widows were fortunate in that adult children could

[17] *Liverpool Review*, 1 November 1890, 1–2.
[18] LVRO 353 WES 1/42, 30 October 1909. Reports were also conducted in 1912 and 1914.
[19] Rathbone, *Report on the Condition of Widows*, 16. [20] Gissing, *Nether World*, 356–7.

make significant contributions to the household purse.[21] Schemes to send younger offspring to boarding schools or children's homes, with the help of the parochial authorities, were occasionally used as a means to alleviating financial worry. Yet this disrupted the family unit further. As one Liverpool widow observed to Eleanor Rathbone: 'It is bad enough missing the father, without missing them.'[22] For Helen Bosanquet, however, reluctance to send children away had to be treated with caution. Mothers were largely apathetic, speculated Bosanquet, and indifferent to the absence of children; they just wanted charity in the form of monetary handouts.[23]

Of course, some widowed mothers were able to work, by conferring childcare responsibilities onto either older offspring or nearby neighbours.[24] Overall, however, the employment of mothers outside the home tended to invite charges of neglect. Philanthropists and child protection agencies were far more supportive of home-based employment schemes that facilitated financial independence without compromising maternal responsibilities.[25] Many widows recognised this anyway, expressing reluctance to seek employment outside the home or pursuing work, such as charring, where they could take young children with them. In turn-of-the-century York, most widows cleaned, took in laundry or catered for lodgers.[26] Arthur Thierens's mother struggled to eke a living from taking in lodgers in Trafford Park, Manchester, when his father died in 1914. The family were, however, 'always in debt'.[27] Frank Marsden's father died in 1910, leaving his mother destitute with four young children and three elderly relatives to care for. She supported her dependants by providing accommodation for members of a local theatre company.[28] One Bolton man noted that his mother supported eight children, including a baby (the respondent), by taking in laundry when his father died in 1907.[29] Laundry work was notoriously strenuous and a woman had to work long, hard hours to make a reasonable living from it. The physical exhaustion of such work combined with the emotional strain of financial

[21] M. F. Davies, *Life in an English Village*, 190, and Rathbone, *Report on the Condition of Widows*, 31.
[22] Rathbone, *Report on the Condition of Widows*, 42. [23] Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor*, 26.
[24] Man. OH Transcript, Mr Peacock, Tape 652. Born in 1895, Mr Peacock recalled that parents frequently left children to play on the streets in faith that neighbours would look out for them.
[25] See, for instance, Mrs Tudhope, 'Suggestions on Helping Widows With Dependent Children' in Grisewood, *Poor of Liverpool*, 1–6 (paper read at Annual Conference of Friendly Visitors, 16 October 1900).
[26] Rowntree, *Poverty*, 37. [27] Man. OH Tape, Arthur Thierens, Tape 821.
[28] Man. OH Transcript, Frank Marsden, Tape 717.
[29] BOHT, Tape 79b, Reference: AB/LSS/A/021.

insecurity and supporting a young family alone were inseparable from any feelings of loss precipitated by bereavement of a spouse. Moreover, children were sensitive to adult distress. Mrs Petts was seven years old when her father died in 1911. Two months later, her pregnant mother gave birth and subsequently contracted scarlet fever. Still weak when discharged from hospital, her mother appealed to the poor law guardians for assistance only to be told she must sell her furniture before qualifying for outdoor relief. As the eldest child, Mrs Petts earned what she could from running errands whilst her mother began to take in washing. In adulthood, Petts's memories of her mother were of a frail, exhausted and desolate woman who wept for months following the death of her husband.[30]

Yet if widows were especially vulnerable to the material implications of death, they were also adept at stretching scant resources to 'make ends meet' and could call upon neighbourhood networks of mutual support. A minority of women even began successful businesses during widowhood.[31] The flipside of this culture meant that the death of a wife and mother often precipitated the breakdown of domestic economy and the splintering of the family unit. As Carl Chinn has noted, 'a family might survive without its father; it was rarer it did so without its mother'.[32] Tellingly, perhaps, older men (aged over forty-five) were also more likely to commit suicide after the death of their spouse than women of the same age.[33] Widowers with young families might send children to live with neighbours or extended family. Older children might find independence from employment that also provided accommodation and food. When Edith Jennings's mother died, two siblings entered orphanages, Edith trained for domestic service and her brother, aged fourteen, became an apprentice joiner.[34] Others like Alice Rushmer (born c. 1895) married at the earliest opportunity. Romance aside, having 'no home nor nothing' rendered marriage an attractive prospect.[35]

Such abrupt changes in lifestyle and environment exacerbated the shock of bereavement. Yet some fathers strove to maintain home and family in a bid to limit the upheavals occasioned by death. Edna Thorpe's father, a packer in a Manchester factory, placed one infant daughter with his sister whilst he and five other children stayed in the family home. Edna, aged nine, took two half-days off school every week to attend to

[30] Man. OH Transcript, Mrs Petts, Tape 76.
[31] See, for instance, Maggie Chapman in Kightly, *Country Voices*, 98.
[32] Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives*, 17 [33] V. Bailey, *This Rash Act*, 213.
[34] Man. OH Transcript, Edith Jennings, Tape 14.
[35] Chamberlain, *Fenwomen*, 78–81.

housework and the four remaining siblings whilst their father was at work. When it became clear that Edna could not cope with school, housewifery and childcare, she and another sibling moved in with the aunt whilst their father and three brothers took lodgings. Despite the ostensible disintegration of the home, her father visited his daughters regularly, contriving to maintain a loose sense of the nuclear family.[36] When Winnifred Jay's mother died in 1910, the family 'just had to make the best of it': Winnifred's father assumed responsibility for cooking meals after work whilst Winnifred regularly missed school to do the laundry and pay the rent and club money.[37] This was far from ideal. Nonetheless, Jay's account of struggle and compromise only heightened the significance attached to the family unit. Jim Walsh's mother died in 1908 when he was eight years old. One sister was already 'skivvying' in domestic service whilst his eldest brother lived with an uncle. For the four children who remained at home, Jim's father 'struggled along' to provide 'the best he could'. A labourer, his father worked during the week and spent his weekends attending to domestic chores: washing on Saturday afternoons and baking bread and broth on Sundays. Jim's overriding recollection of his father was that 'life was really hard for him'. Indeed, one year following the death of their mother, his father 'must have got to the bottom of his patience' and escorted the family to the workhouse. When they arrived at the gates, however, 'he thought better of it'. This is not to suggest that his father was a model of virtue and fortitude: every so often, he 'went on the spree'. Yet this account of 'hard times' and the father's sense of conflict implied by the excursion to the workhouse suggests a quiet determination to preserve a home and family, even with sporadic lapses into heavy drinking.[38] In shifting analysis to the widower, it is possible to move away from the fixation with the poverty of widowhood. Stories of widowed men striving to maintain home and family alert us to the multiple tragedies occasioned by death. Moreover, such accounts provide a rare insight into domestic and emotional aspects of masculinity. The impetus to sustain a home for one's children highlights the importance attached to filial relationships whilst illustrating how seemingly pragmatic priorities could be imbued with personal significance: the struggle to remain 'a family' implicitly told of love, loyalty and selflessness.

For those whose homes and families did disintegrate in the aftermath of death, bereavement was aggravated by the loss of a familiar environment and lifestyle. Some parents laboured through fatal sickness hoping for

[36] Man. OH Transcript, Edna Thorpe, Tape 81.
[37] Man. OH Transcript, Winnifred Jay, Tape 43.
[38] Man. OH Transcript, Jim Walsh, Tape 458.

recovery but knowing that death would orphan offspring. When parents died within days of each other, there may have been little time to make firm arrangements for the care of children. George Price, a Liverpool fireman, died in June 1883. His wife, Margaret, died two days later of apoplexy. For their five children, the double bereavement resulted in the fragmentation of the home: two brothers went to live with an uncle, one sister moved in with a family friend, whilst two younger children entered the Liverpool Orphan Asylum.[39] Similarly, Joseph Quinn, a mariner, and his wife Sarah died from typhus within two days of each other. One surviving set of grandparents cared for their five children for four months, before applying for admission to the Liverpool orphanage for three-year-old William.[40] Samuel Bushel, a blacksmith, died of pneumonia on 7 June 1894. His wife died the following day of influenza. They left seven children orphaned.[41] Hannah Yates died of bronchitis in 1883, four days after the death of her husband, a painter, from the same illness; they left a six-month-old baby and two young daughters.[42]

For the children concerned, the death of a parent fractured a familiar world. Elsie Oman's recollection of her mother's death was inseparable from the memory of a world that 'fell apart'. With a father in the navy, Elsie (aged seven) was sent to live with an aunt whilst her brother (aged three) was cared for by a neighbour. One year later, both children were 'dumped on' a different aunt, so that they could grow up together.[43] Retrospectively, the bereavement became synonymous with the destruction of a home in both a literal and abstract sense. Rose Mutch (born 1905) recalled that her 'hard life' began at the age of seven when her father died. Her mother, a sick woman, was unable to care for the family and their 'home got broken up': several older children found work and lodging with relatives whilst two younger sisters entered a Dr Barnado's home.[44] Eight-year-old James Marlow's parents both died in tragic circumstances: his mother was 'found drowned' in the River Mersey in 1884; his father, a boiler maker, was accidentally killed when he fell in a graving dock. Four of his older siblings already had work and lodgings: his sisters in service and his brothers in Laird's shipyard. James entered Liverpool Orphan Asylum.[45] Even when all siblings entered the same orphanage, rules concerning segregation according to sex and age often meant that brothers and sisters were separated. Peter Robinson's father, a brass moulder, died of acute rheumatism in 1886. His stepmother

[39] MRO 362 SAL 3/3/3, 4 July 1883.
[40] MRO 362 SAL 3/3/3, 5 December 1883.
[41] MRO 362 SAL 3/3/4, 4 July 1894.
[42] MRO 362 SAL 3/1/4, 8 March 1883.
[43] Oman, *Salford Stepping Stones*, 13.
[44] Man. OH Transcript, Rose Mutch, Tape 5.
[45] MRO 362 SAL 3/3/3, 2 March 1886.

applied for the admission of Peter and his two brothers into the Liverpool Orphan Asylum: his older brothers entered the Boys Asylum whilst Peter was admitted to the Infant Asylum, not only located in a separate building, but in a different street altogether.[46]

For many offspring, bereavement of one or both parents brought childhood to an abrupt end. Following the death of her father in a mining accident in 1910, a nine-year-old girl fretted about family income and, after the subsequent birth of a baby brother, became the principal carer for both the baby and younger siblings.[47] When both parents died, children as young as thirteen undertook to care and provide for younger siblings rather than dismantle the family unit.[48] One Blackburn man (born c. 1906) whose parents died leaving five children behind remembered his childhood in terms of sibling solidarity headed by the eldest child, Maud. The idea that 'we all contributed' and 'stuck close' indicates not only the survival strategies of bereft children, but the significance attached to familial ties.[49] The stories cited here also imply that female children were particularly susceptible to the effects of bereavement. Many girls stepped into the role of household manager and surrogate mother whilst adopting a sense of responsibility for widowed parents, often at the cost of their education.[50] David Vincent suggested that young children's emotional frameworks were not sufficiently sophisticated to register the impact of death or imbue bereavement with personal significance.[51] To a point, this may be true. Yet given Vincent's emphasis on the relationship between the emotional and the material, it is curious that he fails to explore bereavement in childhood in the context of its practical repercussions. Children may not have understood or been able to express the changes wrought by death, yet few would have been insensitive to the upheavals occasioned by bereavement.

Poverty and grief: the complexity of feeling

Anxiety about material security represented just one facet of bereavement experience; grief was, by its very nature, intensely personal and its public manifestation took many forms. Florence Bell's study of ironworkers' families in Middlesbrough repeatedly highlights the complex relationship

[46] MRO 362 SAL 3/3/3, 1 September 1886.
[47] BOHT, Tape 96, Reference: AB/KP/1c/009.
[48] Seabrook, *Working-Class Childhood*, 24. [49] Ibid., 35.
[50] See, for instance, Man. OH Transcript, Mrs Seal, Tape 50b. Mrs Seal (born 1913) thought her mother's illiteracy stemmed from staying at home to care for her younger siblings after her own mother died.
[51] Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, 56.

between poverty, bereavement and the wider implications of loss. Bell portrayed many of the marriages and kinship relationships she encountered as typified by devotion. Against this backdrop, she catalogued numerous examples of families bereaved of a male breadwinner. Indeed, the tenacity and resourcefulness of ironworkers' widows contributed to her overall perception of women in this class as resolute and competent household managers. 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 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 lose their home. Yet far from suggesting that the emotional was subsumed to the material, Bell took the inarticulacy of widow and daughter and reframed them as the face of multifaceted loss, characterised by multiple sorrows and anxieties. Notably, Bell gave the impression that the breadwinner had also been the locus around which family life revolved. Hence, if destitution preyed heavily on the minds of widows, it was impossible to disentangle such worries from the wider tragedies effected by death. Bell also cited the case of a widow whose eldest son had died at the age of twenty-two. Her grief at the loss of 'an excellent son' was not superseded by financial anxiety; it was compounded by it because the son had supported her. The mother's notion of excellence may have been rooted in the son's willingness to provide for her, yet this undertaking in itself hinted at qualities of selflessness, loyalty and pride – attributes which would be mourned. Another widow who mourned the death of her eldest son sat 'wringing her hands' whilst her younger son 'cried forlornly'. Bell imagined that the woman's grief was aggravated by financial worries. However, her grief told of crushed hopes and ambitions too. Indeed, the efforts of the younger son to emulate his dead brother and adopt his role suggested, to Bell at least, that the boy had not only lost a sibling but his hero also.[52] Ostensibly concerned to illuminate the circumstances in which ironworkers' families lived, Bell's observations are invariably inscribed with her own sensibilities. To a point, Bell expected death to be met with feelings of sorrow and loss. Yet her implicit surprise and discomfort with the suffering of bereaved ironworkers' families also suggests an expectation that grief was largely a

[52] Bell, *At the Works*, 104–5, 114–15, 173–4.

sentiment associated with relative economic security. Her accounts of widowed families indicate not only the financial stress of bereavement, but, also, prompt her readers to acknowledge that poverty need not constrict bereavement. Rather, grief encompassed the loss of a specific individual whilst triggering changes in the mourner's identity and role.

Historical emphasis on the sexual division of labour in working-class families has encouraged us to see the bereavement of a partner in terms of practical repercussions. Yet the death of a spouse could also create intense feelings of loneliness and added responsibility. Deborah Smith's memoir of her husband's death emphasised how the expectation of death did little to lessen the impact of bereavement when it finally came: '[I] scarcely dared to look into the future. My health was shattered by the long strain [of caring for the sick], and there were children depending on me.' After years of distance and acrimony, Smith recounts that she and her spouse rediscovered companionship during his final illness. The reconciliation and routine of caring for her husband frame the last days of their marriage in a positive light, yet they also heighten the sense of loss when Smith describes the early days of widowhood: 'how lonely the house felt. There was nobody to give us a welcome. No one can understand this who has not had an experience like it... I made [my children] sad when I looked into their faces and wept.'[53] Smith's narrative highlights the impossibility of the remote spectator (like Bell) being able to empathise with her personal experience whilst, implicitly, suggesting that expressions of loss took place within the private space of the home and were witnessed only by immediate family.

The death of a spouse threw the marital relationship into sharp relief. Comfort might be derived from late reconciliation and contrition for past misdemeanours, but death could also usher in bitter regret, especially if the marriage had fallen short of youthful hope. The death of Mrs Hewett in Gissing's *The Nether World* is particularly affecting because it represents individual loss and the defeat of the poor in the battle against Providence. John Hewett is consumed by remorse, regret and bitterness as he sits by the bed of his dead wife. The prospect that he must bury her in a public grave compounds his grief, not on account of any slur on respectability, but because the parochial burial 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!' When an old friend offers to pay for the burial of his wife, Hewett expresses 'sobbing gratitude'. Exhausted, he falls 'Nerveless,

[53] D. Smith, *My Revelation*, 34–6.

voiceless ... upon the chair and let his head lie by that of the dead woman'.[54] 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; John Hewett must grieve for the passing of his spouse and all his disappointed ambition. In this sense, Gissing also draws attention to the ways in which the status of breadwinner could be emotionally charged: striving to provide for one's family represented a language of love, hope and commitment; when provision fell short, it opened a chasm of guilt and feelings of failure.

The sheer complexity of bereavement experience necessitates that we reject notions of contained grief, replete with their connotations of suppressed and unacknowledged emotion. There is little room for manoeuvre in terms that create a dichotomy between pure and restrained bereavement. Rather, grief was managed: individuals developed strategies for accepting death and grief that allowed them to complete the practical tasks associated with bereavement but which also provided scope for reflection, sorrow and anger in isolated moments and spaces. In the short story 'Odour of Chrysanthemums', D. H. Lawrence explores the tense dynamics of marriage, maternal ties and grief through the character of Lizzie Bates. Trapped in an unsatisfactory marriage, Lizzie learns that her spouse Walt, a miner, has had an accident. 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.' Soon, however, 'sentimental luxury' intervenes with her calculations. Ignorant of the extent of his injuries, she ponders the possibilities of weaning Walt from drink whilst he recuperates and the potential for a reconciliation of their relationship. Lawrence's suggestion that these thoughts are 'sentimental' and 'luxurious' implies to the reader that Lizzie should not raise her hopes for reform, reconciliation or recovery. Yet he also infers that responses to news of accidents and potential death were far from ordered or rational. Rather, they must be sorted and prioritised according to circumstance. Thus, when Lizzie allows her mind to wander, it raises a wealth of difficult and emotive issues. To cope effectively with the return of Walt to the home, she must refocus her thoughts on less complex matters: she concentrates on the practical problem of providing for her children. This does not, however, annul Lizzie's scope for ruminating on the personal tragedy of loss: pragmatic and emotional responses to death need not conflict but can co-exist in a broad framework of feeling. Hence, Lizzie focuses on the pragmatics of

[54] Gissing, *Nether World*, 190–1.

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. Of course, at the heart of Lizzie's tragedy is the contemplation of her failed relationship with Walt. Had it been otherwise, the luxury of sentiment may well have been harder to postpone.[55]

The concept of developing strategies for managing grief acknowledges that some mourners possessed a capacity to rationalise death and attribute bereavement with apparently unsentimental meaning. One Wigan woman in Jeremy Seabrook's narratives of working-class childhood recounted the death of her brother in a mining accident in the early 1900s. The recollection is dominated by her grandmother's response to the bereavement: relief that a weakly grandson had died rather than one of his stronger brothers. This sentiment, seemingly harsh, was interpreted by the respondent as a bargaining with the economics of death: 'if one of them had been killed, it was better it should be him, because he wasn't as strong as the others'.[56] Such stories indicate, firstly, the discomfort of broaching stoical responses to death in a cultural context where grief is expected to be manifest in a sentimental fashion and, secondly, the potential for a language of stoicism to represent more than blind fatalism. In her memoirs of Edwardian Liverpool, Elsie Pettigrew reflected on the death of her stepsister Alice who left the family home to work in domestic service. Recalling that 'in those days you were used to people dying so young in life', Pettigrew perceived no contradiction with her parallel assertion that Alice was 'sadly missed by our whole family'. Again, this may illustrate a retrospective obligation to explain apparent resignation. Yet Pettigrew's story also suggests the potential for stoicism to temper responses to death without, necessarily, reducing the sadness or significance of loss.[57] Maud Pember Reeves similarly drew attention to the manner in which stolidity could be confused with apathy. Citing the case of Mrs S, Reeves noted 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 this account by noting that Mrs S 'loved her family in a patient, suffering, loyal sort of way which cannot have been very exhilarating for them'.[58] Within the context of daily survival, therefore, women such

[55] D. H. Lawrence, 'Odour of Chrysanthemums', 278.
[56] Seabrook, *Working-Class Childhood*, 68.
[57] E. Pettigrew, *Time to Remember: Growing up in Liverpool from 1912 Onwards* (Liverpool: Toulouse, 1989), 15.
[58] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 91.

as Mrs S were not devoid of emotion. Rather, their circumstances blunted its expression: love and grief were like life – unextravagant.

Expressions of loss

For poorer families, focus on pragmatic concerns in the aftermath of death was necessary. Yet it could also prove a useful strategy in assuaging grief, not least because confronting the practicalities of bereavement provided mourners with a relatively impersonal language of loss. In contrast, explicit displays of emotional anguish were intensely distressing for others to witness. In his memoirs, Jack Martin noted that the job of informing bereaved relatives of a fatality in the pit was dreaded by miners. Recollecting the first time he carried such news to a mother whose son had died, Martin described a woman literally felled by grief: 'every drop of blood appeared to leave her face and she seemed to realise that there was something seriously wrong. She partly stumbled ... and I could see she was on the point of collapse. She said to me, "It's our Billy", and then she fell in a dead faint in the middle of the street.' Martin seems to imply that the woman's status as a 'noble and hardworking' mother should have exempted her from the 'mental torture and agony' of bereavement. That he found her pain unbearable to witness cements Martin's sense of the injustice of accidental and untimely death.[59] Of course, the striking images of the bereft also served a political purpose in highlighting the far-reaching consequences of pit owners who skimped on safety in pursuit of profit. In Lewis Jones's semi-autobiography, *Cwmardy*, the young Len is sent to acquaint a woman with the death of her husband in the pit, the 'most unpleasant job' for a miner to undertake. As the widow guessed the purpose of Len's visit, 'her face went white as a death mask with blue streaks and black shadows painted across it'. The insight, Jones suggests, strikes her 'like a physical blow', she bursts into 'hysterical sobs'. Even before Jones tells us of her cries ('Bill is dead. I can see it in your eyes. Oh, Bill, Bill! Oh, my little babies!'), the reader has interpreted the grief written on her face and form.[60] Indeed, the body language and actions of the bereaved could intimate powerful emotion without the need for words. When one man recollected the death of his father, a miner, in the Pretoria Pit (near Bolton) explosion in December 1910, the story was dominated by the memory of his mother standing resolute by the pit head until the remains of her husband were brought to the surface.[61] This striking image conveys hope, despair, fear and courage in all their

[59] Martin, *Ups and Downs*, 85. [60] L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 140–1.
[61] Bromilow and Power, *Looking Back*, 42.

magnitude; words are rendered superfluous in the bid to locate the emotional and mental turmoil of waiting for the body of the miner.

Clearly, expressions of grief adopted a variety of visual and symbolic forms. Visiting houses where a death had occurred, Florence Bell was struck by the number of people who came to offer their condolences to the bereaved. Homes that were 'full, quite full, of visitors', however, were not filled by the noise of guests: '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.'[62] This did not illustrate a class-barrier to sentimental discourse but, rather, that overwhelming feelings of grief were, simply, inexpressible. In such circumstances, words were superfluous: condolence and loss found adequate expression through the gathering of friends in a simple gesture of sympathy.

The manifestation of grief could also adopt extraordinary and unexpected forms. The sudden disappearance of Elsie Oman's mother was never explained to her. Only by hiding underneath a dining table and eavesdropping on the conversations of adults did Oman learn of her mother's death. Oman's description of her hiding place as 'warm, snug and private' provides a sharp contrast to the devastating truth of her mother's death and, in many ways, serves as a metaphor for the ignorance and comfort of childhood. The shock of knowledge and grief is further conveyed through Oman's subsequent refusal to eat. In denying herself the necessity and comfort of food, Oman was, perhaps, expressing her hunger for her mother.[63] Florence Jones experienced persistent nightmares following the death of her mother: 'I dreamed I was riding in the funeral coach again, sometimes on top of it, throwing soil onto the coffin with mother looking on. Terrible nightmares. Poor Mother.' The confusion of the dreams reinforces the sense of disorder inherent in Jones's suggestion that 'the family seemed to go to pieces' in the aftermath of their mother's death.[64] Somewhat differently, Margaret Penn illustrated how grief could be expressed in subdued statements. When her paternal grandmother died, 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 looking upon the corpse, however, her father betrayed his composure by uttering his customary farewell: 'Ah'm away now mother.' For Penn, the 'choking' words represented her father's simple but 'deep, warm affection'. In contrast, Penn's grandfather talked openly about

[62] Bell, *At the Works*, 103–4. [63] Man. OH Transcript, Elsie Oman, Tape 12.
[64] F. Jones, *Memoirs*, 90.

the death of his wife, musing that it 'winna be long' before he would join her. This blunt premonition of his own death implied that his life had lost its focus and, moreover, that the elderly man would welcome death.[65]

If the bereaved were inarticulate concerning personal loss, it was partly because coherent and detailed expressions were at odds with sentiment: short, fractured sentences reflect the bewilderment, sorrow and heartache of grief. As a forlorn carpenter revealed to the commentator Jack London, the affection of his wife and three daughters had brought 'bliss' to his life. His happiness ended abruptly, however, with their deaths (his daughters all died within a fortnight).[66] The succinct manner in which the carpenter expressed his loss conveyed the impact of sudden death; words failed to express his sorrow. Sometimes, grief was most poignant when articulated through silence. Ralph Finn could not recall his mother saying anything at the death of his baby brother; she simply pushed him away from the cot, the gesture representing the hopelessness of bereavement.[67] In D. H. Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers*, the domineering character of Mrs Morel represents the suffocation of mother love. When her son William dies, Mrs Morel is crushed; the only words she can utter in relation to her sorrow – 'Oh my son, my son' – indicate the gravity and possessiveness of maternal grief. Yet it is through her silence that Lawrence captures the desolation of loss, especially when set against her articulacy in the rest of the novel. Bereavement diminishes the mother; she becomes 'small, white and mute'. Long after William is laid to rest, Mrs Morel 'remained shut off'. Lawrence implies that the silence which falls on the Morel household does not resonate with the peace of the grave. Rather, it is heavy, oppressive and ominous.[68]

Silence could, of course, be ambiguous. Aged two when his father died, Philip Inman consistently questioned his mother about the personality of the dead man. In adulthood, he reflected that this 'continual catechism' may have been painful for his mother who, he noted, always spoke of the dead man as a father rather than a husband. In linking the two revelations together, it is possible that Inman also wondered at the character of his parents' relationship.[69] Reticence could, however, represent a code of propriety where intimate relations were concerned. Describing the working people of late Victorian London, H. M. Burton suggested that reluctance to discuss private affairs and feelings in public was common.[70]

[65] Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, 35. [66] London, *People of the Abyss*, 88.
[67] R. L. Finn, *Time Remembered: The Tale of an East End Jewish Boyhood* (London: Hale, 1963), 11.
[68] D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1913] 1975), 168–74.
[69] Inman, *No Going Back*, 11. [70] Burton, *There was a Young Man*, 11.

Indeed, if housing and spatial arrangements compromised privacy, verbal reserve represented a premium form of discretion. In her autobiography *Below Stairs*, Margaret Powell outlined her sense of shock when her mother, anxious for the safety of a husband fighting in the early months of the Great War, described her spouse as deeply passionate. Considered to be an 'austere man outwardly', the revelation allowed Margaret a rare insight into her parents' marriage and her father's character.[71]

For some, however, talking about despair or anxieties exacerbated matters. Reflecting on the lack of conversation between his parents, George Acorn sourly commented that all they had to discuss in any case was 'trouble'.[72] Surveying villagers in rural Surrey, George Bourne observed the reluctance of the poor to discuss misfortune. An elderly widow, whose breadwinning son had died, gave no indication of her ills until a chance word from Bourne prompted her to admit her fears for the future. Even then, she rapidly dismissed the hopelessness of her situation, returning swiftly to a cheerful and flippant disposition. For Bourne, the brevity and smoothness of her speech patterns revealed the despair her manner attempted to conceal.[73] Margaret Loane, district nurse, interpreted such reserve as indicative of a strong character. Relating a meeting with an elderly woman whose granddaughter had died of consumption, Loane presumed that the girl's mother would sorely miss her: she was beautiful, intelligent, the only female child, and just at an age when she was becoming useful. The grandmother, however, was succinct: 'Her sole comment at the end, and I thought it a beautiful one in its courageous resignation, was: "Ah, her mother has all she can do to *keep herself above it*."'[74] In equating stoicism with courage, Loane suggests that the bereaved had to work hard to overcome their grief and that this, in itself, operated as a coping mechanism. In a similar vein, Wil Edwards reflected after the death of his mother that 'life is a continuous process of adjustment'; one must 'learn' how to deal with personal tragedy.[75]

Tears were perhaps the most obvious indication of emotional upset. Yet even these might be considered taboo. When Jack Lawson's young brother died, his mother was 'dry eyed, apparently stone hard'; she was 'a picture of inarticulate suffering, defying description'. For Lawson, his mother's identity was rooted in struggle and survival. To weep, therefore, was a sign of failure and weakness.[76] When men broke

[71] Powell, *Below Stairs*, 7. [72] Acorn, *One of the Multitude*, 34.
[73] Bourne, *Change in the Village*, 20, 40. [74] Loane, *Queen's Poor*, 44.
[75] Edwards, *From the Valley*, 74.
[76] Jack Lawson, *A Man's Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), 240.

down and wept, it was often described as shocking and unmanly, despite taking place within the domestic interior, a place usually associated with feeling and intimacy. Patrick MacGill recalled that neither of his parents was particularly demonstrative. When his infant brother died, his mother turned her face to the wall and wept. To a point, this was expected: a strong character, she was, nonetheless, a woman and a mother. What was shocking to MacGill and his siblings, however, was the sight of their apparently stolid father crying.[77]

Narratives of fathers who wept emphasise their exceptionality within perceptions of gendered behaviour. Yet it is not the unmanliness of such examples that is striking, but, rather, the depth of feeling displayed by men whose emotional articulacy was usually confined to providing for their family. In *Cwmardy*, Lewis Jones illustrates the inadequacy of words to express loss within a gendered context. At the death of their daughter Jane, neither Shane nor Jim can articulate linguistically the depth of their loss. Shane wails and sobs, rocks and moans. Later, at the funeral, tears 'overflowed and streamed down her face'. Jim, meanwhile, is 'speechless with grief' and at the funeral, hides his face while other men present swallow hard, look awkward, and generally try 'to appear unconcerned'. Immediately after the burial, Jim resumes 'the usual routine of his life'. Months later, he has cause to wear his suit, prompting Shane to recall that the last time he wore the clothes was at Jane's funeral. Jim's response, 'it be no good worrying 'bout it now', sounds almost dismissive.[78] 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. Resignation in this account suggests the inarticulacy of grief, not so much from a conscious wish to control grief as from an unconscious adherence to gendered cultures of emotional expression. Repeatedly, Jones emphasises 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 emotional strength whilst their wives are permitted to sob and wail in accordance with notions of feminine susceptibility to emotional excitement. In light of this, it is unsurprising that most of the retrospective accounts of grief cited here derive from female authors.

[77] MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, 21.
[78] L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 64–8, 92, N. Thompson, 'Masculinity and Loss' in D. Field et al. (eds.), *Death, Gender and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1997), 76–87.

Memory and commemoration

Acknowledgement that grief could be profound without being public supports a concept of bereavement as a mutable state with no fixed criteria or timescale. Indeed, a robust analysis of bereavement must explore not only the immediate aftermath of death but, also, post-burial remembrance and commemoration. The degree to which the cemetery was utilised as a landscape for grief is uncertain. Rather, commemoration tended to be rooted in mementoes which were interwoven with domestic space and infused with intimate meaning. Memorialising the deceased in private sustained a lucrative industry: items manufactured specifically for the purposes of mourning (such as clothing and jewellery) were intended to be kept as personal souvenirs of the deceased. Likewise, letters of condolence and notes of sympathy represented a lasting source of comfort to the bereaved whilst testifying to the qualities of the deceased. Less popular, written memorials to the dead and lengthy accounts of their life and demise (a notorious example is Leslie Stephen's 'Mausoleum Book') operated simultaneously as biography and testimony of grief.[79] Such practices are typically perceived as the preserve of the middle and upper classes, not least because they required disposable income and a reasonable degree of literacy. Yet the memento could adopt a variety of guises, many of which (the lock of hair for instance) required little or no expense. Alice Foley recalled that a shabby picture adorning one of her many childhood homes was made of 'two black-rimmed fretwork cards behind the glass with slender angel forms blowing trumpets and small printed verses underneath them'. The picture also bore the epitaphs of both Foley's grandparents.[80] The picture was an endless source of fascination for Foley's childish imagination, yet it also testified to the resourcefulness of poorer families in commemorating the dead cheaply. As Foley's grandparents were interred in Ireland, the memorial also highlighted the flexibility of commemoration within a migrant culture.

For some, the home provided a ready-made memorial to the dead. Indeed, after the death of their child, Albert S. Jasper's sister and her husband felt impelled to move to new accommodation as 'the place they had gave too many memories of the baby'.[81] Following the death of his mother, Wil Edwards found that the family home was infused with his mother's identity. Edwards consistently confused his older sister Liza,

[79] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 300–17. For details of Stephen and his 'Mausoleum Book' see H. Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996), 50–95.

[80] Foley, *Bolton Childhood*, 5. [81] Jasper, *Hoxton Childhood*, 49.

who stepped into the maternal role, with his mother. In adulthood, he described the longing for his mother's presence as selfish and his ignorance of Liza's difficulties in combining the roles of surrogate mother and bereaved daughter as naive.[82] For those whose homes were relatively impermanent, possessions might be retained for their association with the personality of the deceased. Elsie Oman recalled that her 'mother's belongings was divided in the family' after her death. Of particular value was a collection of glass dishes, of little monetary worth (most had been bought 'cheap' and 'second-hand') but 'beautiful', perhaps as much in memory of a mother's 'mania' for glass as for their aesthetic qualities.[83] Recollecting his experiences on the assizes jury, James Dellow told of a 'decrepit poor chap' who sought legal redress for damage to his most treasured possession, a pillow on which his wife had expired. For Dellow, the pillow as a priceless item was absurd and the story is told in jocular tones.[84] Despite this, the narrative makes the more serious point that seemingly worthless objects could adopt extra meaning for those who clung to them as mementoes. More tenuous links with the dead could be maintained through abstract association. Elsie Pettigrew recalled that when the last of her father's offspring from a previous marriage expired, it dealt him a 'hard blow': not only had all the children from his first marriage died, whilst they were alive they embodied living links with his dead wife.[85] The cheapest form of commemoration, however, was verbal: reminiscing about the deceased gave vent to feelings of loss whilst simultaneously drawing the memory of the dead into the context of the living.[86]

A more unusual trend in domestic commemoration was post-mortem photography. Commonly, the corpse was featured recumbent on a bed or sofa with sheets and pillows in an arrangement suggesting sleep. Assessing the impetus to commission such portraits, Audrey Linkman has drawn a distinction between the portrait as memento mori, intended to encourage contemplation of one's own mortality, and as a 'palliative'. In essence, the soothing qualities of the post-mortem photograph hinged on the denial of death: photographers 'consciously attempted to ameliorate the finality of death by suggesting a kinder, gentler, more familiar state of being'. Far from being macabre, post-mortem photographs were 'tokens of the deepest love and affection' that permitted the bereaved to capture the serenity of death. As Linkman acknowledges, this practice was limited to a minority of late Victorian elite families, thus

[82] Edwards, *From the Valley*, 55. [83] Man. OH Transcript, Elsie Oman, Tape 12.
[84] J. Dellow, *Memoirs of an Old Stager* (Newcastle: Andrew Reid & Co., 1928), 23.
[85] Pettigrew, *Time to Remember*, 16.
[86] E. Roberts, 'Lancashire Way of Death', 205.

rendering generalisations about the practice problematic, especially as many of the surviving portraits are divorced from their original context.[87] Photographic portraits were still a luxury for most working-class families at the turn of the twentieth century. The extra cost of requesting the photographer to attend the family home further prohibited indulgence in this practice. One contributor to the *British Journal of Photography* expressed horror at receiving a commission from a shopkeeper. Not only did the deceased lie in a room in daily use as a living, eating and sleeping area, the photographer was incredulous that the house was so cramped 'yet the occupiers could afford to have the child photographed'.[88]

Children were the most common subjects for post-mortem photography. According to the *British Journal of Photography*, most adults had been portrayed in life, whereas children were 'cut off' before families had the opportunity to commission a portrait.[89] The notion that the photograph of the dead child represented a relic of a life which had not divested itself in other forms demonstrates the significance of the personal memento. For working-class families, the material effects of an infant would probably be recycled for the next child. The photograph, therefore, represented a tangible artefact of a life and personality. Moreover, the cost of an infant portrait was significantly reduced as corpses could easily (and inconspicuously) be taken to the photographer's premises. A tinker whose grandfather ran a small photography shop in a poor, Irish Catholic district of Edwardian Liverpool recalled that portraits of deceased infants provided a principal source of revenue. The pictures were cheap to produce but provided material representation of a short life: the image of the child would be mounted onto a matchbox with 'lovely little scrolls', sometimes accompanied by a memento, such as a piece of hair.[90] It is impossible to estimate how widespread this practice was. Nonetheless, the photographs offer a corrective to the impression that the lives (and deaths) of infants were held cheap.

Grief and commemoration might also be made manifest through reference to the pain and horror of one's own suffering. Far from fostering indifference or apathy, a degree of familiarity with death encouraged the capacity for sympathy and empathy. Elsie Pettigrew recounted that as

[87] A. Linkman, 'Not Dead But Sleeping: Post-Mortem Photography in Nineteenth-Century Britain' in *Proceedings of the Conference of the European Society for the History of Photography* (Udine, 1999), 2, 16. See also A. Linkman, 'Passing Trade: Death and the Family Album in Britain, 1860–1900', *The Photohistorian*, 123 (1998), 18–28, Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 288–91.

[88] *British Journal of Photography*, 3 August 1883, 449–50 (C. Brangwin Barnes). Thanks to Audrey Linkman for drawing this article to my attention.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Man. OH Tape, Mr Wallis, Tape 919.

a child she often lay awake in bed, imagining her own death and the grief of her family on discovering it. Such apparently morbid fantasies were, however, the route by which Pettigrew negotiated grief for the very real death of her sister, Margaret.[91] Some individuals merged personal feelings of grief with intense sympathy for other bereaved relatives. Elizabeth Flint noted that the powerful sense of loss she and her siblings articulated when their brother Ted died was inextricable from empathetic grief for their father who loved Ted passionately and mourned his death with overwhelming intensity.[92] Kathleen Woodward suggested that her mother's reminiscences concerning the birth of a stillborn child were grounded in a context of personal struggle whereby the story became a signifier of the older woman's 'flinty endurance'. That it was only after imbibing alcohol that Woodward's mother 'would relent and talk of the Past' implies a conscious management of sorrow behind an apparently impassive exterior. Woodward's use of a capital 'P' indicates the stature of the past in giving shape and meaning to the present. The account also indicates the child's sensitivity to bereavement. Woodward recalls that she absorbed her mother's story to the point where she 'used to think of that dead child in bed at night, before I went to sleep'. The narrative filled her with 'horror and suffocating fear' whilst simultaneously fostering a surge of passion towards her mother. In many ways, the significance the story adopted in Woodward's own narrative embodies the ambiguity of her relationship with her mother, characterised as both oppressive and loving.[93] This memory is richly suggestive of the complexity and ambivalence of familial relationships defined, to external observers at least, by poverty. It also illustrates that we cannot interpret 'grief' as a fixed emotion with prescribed roles and responses.

There is a danger, however, of creating a vision of bereavement as invariably typified by emotional trauma; memories of the deceased could be comforting and pleasant. Furthermore, bereavement might occasion a new sense of freedom. In particular, the death of a mother – the symbolic glue of family life – might create new obligations for family (especially female) members, yet it could also dissolve them. Sam Shaw's mother died whilst he was serving a sentence in a boy's borstal. Feeling lonely but unable to bear the cost of attending her funeral, Shaw imagined returning to his family and visiting her grave at the end of his servitude. Ruminating on the phrase 'What is Home without a Mother?' deterred him from this fantasy; instead, he focused on building a new life and

[91] Pettigrew, *Time to Remember*, 21.
[92] E. Flint, *Hot Bread and Chips* (London: Museum Press, 1963), 102.
[93] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 6–8.

placing the difficult relationship with his father and his criminal history behind him.[94] For Annie Kenney, the death of her mother enabled her to pursue her ideals and devote all her energies to suffrage campaigning rather than to her family: 'With my mother's death the cement of love that kept the home life together disappeared. We felt more like individuals in a big world than a family group and each planned his life according to his or her ideals.'[95] Grief could also lose its initial meaning with the passage of time. When Ralph Finn's father died, he described his mother as 'heart-broken'. Yet the bereavement became integral to her sense of self; she gloried in having survived misfortune whilst suffering endowed her with a social kudos.[96]

It is equally significant to note that some deaths were met with relief or indifference. This could adopt a variety of guises: gratitude for deliverance of the dead from pain and illness; respite from unpleasant relationships; and, perhaps, thankfulness for the alleviation of a financial burden. Kathleen Woodward recalled that 'one of the few pictures which lightened our walls at Jipping Street was a framed certificate of [my Grandfather's] death, on which was also recorded the fact that his body was washed up at Mortlake. This solitary memorial held for me a most fearful interest.'[97] Far from symbolising sadness, the certificate testified to her grandmother's satisfaction at the death of a tyrannical husband. Likewise, it would be naïve to assume that the material effects of the dead were always retained as keepsakes. The Vestry records for Brownlow Hill Workhouse in Liverpool indicate numerous families making applications to claim the effects of relatives who had died in the workhouse.[98] Yet many families recycled or pawned the deceased's belongings. As one pawnshop employee recalled, the effects of the dead, including wedding rings, could be turned into 'ready cash', especially for families with no intention of redeeming the goods.[99] Whilst this may well have been necessitated by privation, it seems equally plausible to suggest that, for some at least, remembering the dead was undesirable.

In a similar vein, some widow/ers remarried with apparent haste. Pat O'Mara detailed the slow and painful death of his once beautiful aunt. The seemingly compassionate observation that her husband (who had given her syphilis) was 'prostrated, and carried on desperately at the funeral' is, however, cancelled by the curt note that 'ten months later' he married Bridgett Kelly.[100] Rapid remarriage could prompt bitter

[94] Shaw, *Guttersnipe*, 115. [95] Kenney, *Memories*, 26. [96] Finn, *Time Remembered*, 16.
[97] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 5. [98] LVRO 353 SEL 10/11–17, 1882–1911.
[99] Man. OH Transcript, Mrs Holtby, Tape 791.
[100] O'Mara, *Autobiography of a Liverpool Slummy*, 18–19.

recrimination in families who thought the dead deserved to be mourned a little longer. We should be wary, however, of accepting new unions as signs of indifference. Margaret Loane cited the case of a pensioner who was devotedly nursed by his wife. When he died, the widow appeared heartbroken and depressed for some weeks. Loane met the woman some six months later to find her wearing violets in her hat and telling of her forthcoming marriage to a widower. Yet the woman's jollity did not, according to Loane, erase the memory of her deceased husband. Rather, it represented a pragmatic and optimistic approach to life. As the widow suggested, 'You cannot live by the dead.' In this sense, then, making the most of one's opportunities need not be incompatible with grief or maintaining memories of the dead.[101]

Talking to the dead

To a point, strategies for managing grief indicate a belief in life after death, for the bereaved if not the deceased. Nonetheless, attempts by bereft friends and family to communicate with the dead highlight a desire to remember and maintain a relationship beyond the grave. In an organised context, contact with the dead was sought through the psychic powers of the medium. Less formally, individuals could 'feel the presence' of the dead. Although widely perceived as unorthodox, a belief in spirits could bring comfort to the bereaved. Indeed, notions of a spirit world were actually promoted in popular ideas relating to the physical integrity of the dead in the afterlife and visions of Heaven as a home. Likewise, references to the cemetery as 'God's acre' concealed the 'horrible reality' of decay with 'beautiful sentiment'.[102] Overall, therefore, concepts of the pervasive presence of the dead represented a continuum of broader cultural frameworks which sanitised death and ameliorated grief by promising reunion.

The popularity of spiritualism surged in the latter half of the nineteenth century, despite accusations that it was wholly unscientific, irreligious and completely devoid of 'common sense'.[103] Recognition that spiritualism was a forum for the expression and management of loss tended to be subsumed to concerns that the vulnerability of the bereaved left them open to exploitation. As endless investigations (notably by the Society for Psychical Research) into the authenticity of spiritualism illustrated, questions of 'truth' were highly subjective, often controversial and risked crushing the hope, trust and belief of grief-stricken

[101] Loane, *Queen's Poor*, 309. [102] *Lancet*, 12 December 1896, 1716–17.
[103] Ibid., 23 September 1876, 431–3.

individuals.[104] Similarly, historical analysis of spiritualism in the nineteenth century has acknowledged, firstly, that loss was the principal motive for individuals turning to spiritualism and, secondly, that searing grief created an overwhelming desire to believe. Nonetheless, critical analysis of spiritualism has focused largely on the politics of spiritualists. Logie Barrow, for instance, concedes that fears relating to death were important but argues that the plebeian appeal of spiritualism in the 1820s lay in its promotion of a democracy and egalitarian learning.[105] Ruth Brandon and Janet Oppenheim have focused on the debates between science, religion and spiritualism.[106] Conversely, Alex Owen states that questions relating to the legitimacy of spiritualist phenomena have dominated historical research with the effect of closing discussion on the significance of a spiritualist discourse.[107] Owen's own analysis concentrates on the gendered implications of spiritualism. In particular, the role of 'medium' presented women with a supreme opportunity to subvert conventional gender roles.[108]

Analyses that take grief as the pivotal point of interpretation have tended to focus on the boom in spiritualism during and immediately after the First World War.[109] The most authoritative work in this field is Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*. Concerned with the cultural commemoration of the dead in the aftermath of the First World War, Winter perceives the surge in spiritualism's popularity as indicative of a pan-cultural need to remember and acknowledge the sacrifices of both the war-dead and the bereaved. Shifting the focus away from the medium, Winter offers a twofold definition of spiritualism. First, spiritualism was perceived as a secular phenomenon grounded in a psychical and psychological quest to communicate with the dead. Secondly, it was interpreted as

[104] For history of Society for Psychical Research see F. Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism*, vols. I and II (London: Methuen & Co., 1902).

[105] L. Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850–1910* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1989).

[106] R. Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Random House, 1983) and J. Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[107] A. Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1989), viii. See also J. J. Schwieso, '"Religious Fanaticism" and Wrongful Confinement in Victorian England: The Affair of Louisa Nottidge', *Social History of Medicine*, 9, 2 (1996), 157–74.

[108] Owen, *Darkened Room*, 1–17.

[109] See, for instance, Cannadine, 'War and Death', J. Hazelgrove, 'Spiritualism after the Great War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10, 4 (1999), 404–30, and J. Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society Between the Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). See also O. Lodge, *Raymond: Life and Death with Examples of the Evidence for Survival of Memory and Affection After Death* (London: Methuen, 1916).

a religious perception of angels, apocalypse, and divine presences in daily life. Common to both definitions, however, was the willingness to surpass conventional materialism and theology. Whilst some individuals engaged in spiritualism as part of wider research on the paranormal, Winter acknowledges that many 'simply wanted to converse with the dead'.[110] Winter's analysis of spiritualism can be extended to include conversations with the dead in informal and individualised contexts. Such conversations may well have been, and were expected to be, monologues. Indeed, whether the dead heard, understood and/or responded was not really at issue: the bereaved could talk to the dead – silently or aloud – from a simple desire to remember and maintain a relationship. In this sense, what David Cannadine has called a 'private denial of death' can be redefined as a personal gesture of commemoration.[111]

Such examples are, by their very nature, difficult to ascertain: contemporaries and historians alike tend to be disparaging about spirits and ghosts. In a story concerning the fear instilled among the residents of a female lodging house on account of a 'ghost', Charles Booth distanced himself from 'the superstition of these people' by recounting the success of a placebo-effect exorcism.[112] Belief in the supernatural also attracted ridicule at a popular level. In his autobiography *Shop Boy*, John Thomas suggested that even those who professed to believe in 'signs' from another world (namely his grandmother and her friends) treated them as a source of amusement rather than profound meaning.[113] Likewise, Florence Jones's recollection of a séance in early twentieth-century Liverpool was characterised by memories of stifled giggles and an overriding assumption that the medium was a fake. Furthermore, understandings of the séance converged with notions of clairvoyance: Florence and her friends had no intention of contacting the dead; they simply wanted to know whether or not they would marry.[114] Thus, not only could the séance be appropriated for different purposes, disparagement was not always in conflict with an element, however slight, of hope.

Robert Roberts also adopted a pejorative tone when relating accounts of belief in ghosts in the Salford neighbourhood of his childhood. With a mix of humour and incredulity, Roberts assumes a tone of childish ridicule towards those who believed in the paranormal. Indeed, 'Ladies susceptible to night noises roused a cruel streak in us boys.' Jocular

[110] J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 54–5.
[111] Cannadine, 'War and Death', 227. [112] Booth, *Life and Labour*, vol. II, 72–3.
[113] J. Thomas, *Shop Boy: An Autobiography* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 26–7.
[114] F. Jones, *Memoirs*, 83–4.

references to 'illiterate elders' who related stories of the supernatural, and of quack doctors who ran 'sidelines' in mediumship, suggest Roberts's desire to distance himself from the irrational. Yet despite his derisory tone, Roberts hints that such beliefs could mitigate the grief of the bereaved. Relating the story of a local family who lived in fear of their dead mother returning to haunt them, Roberts recalled that he and his peers failed to comprehend their anxiety. As his sister Ellie observed, the family cannot have loved their mother very much: 'When [our] Mother passed away in the unthinkable future, Ellie asked, would she, without fail, come back and haunt us – at any time, just at her own convenience? Because there was nothing any of us would want more!'[115] Similarly, Hannah Mitchell implied that talking to the dead was a palliative to loss. 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.'[116]

In this sense, the deceased continued to pervade a domestic and personal landscape in a metaphorical if not literal sense, slipping in and out of conscious interaction. John Dugdale (born 1906) recollected finding his grandfather dead in bed one morning. Retrospectively, Dugdale suggested that he could feel the old man's presence 'for weeks after'.[117] 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. Thus, individuals did not need to believe that the dead accompanied them or responded to appeals made to them. Rather, loosely defined notions of dia/monologues with, and the presence of, the dead indicated a desire to remember the deceased in a personal context. The desire to feel the presence of the dead required little proof of an afterlife when it allowed the bereaved to feel that death had not severed the relationship with the deceased, but, rather, repositioned it within a new context. It must also be remembered that feeling the presence of, and talking to, the dead was usually inextricable from feelings of intimacy and could, for some at least, offer comfort by affirming the value of the relationship lost.[118]

Extreme responses to bereavement

As illustrated above, responses to death were far from uniform. Recognition of the diversity of bereavement experience calls into question

[115] R. Roberts, *Ragged Schooling*, 131–3. [116] Mitchell, *Hard Way Up*, 48.
[117] Stalybridge Oral History Transcript, John Dugdale, uncatalogued.
[118] Shuchter and Zisook, 'Course of Normal Grief', 34.

assumptions concerning recovery and restitution from loss. The limits of tolerance towards relatives who failed to resolve grief indicate broad concepts of normative grief; those who 'lost all sympathy' for the grief-stricken were implicitly invoking a notion of the acceptable boundaries of mourning.[119] Drawing on the case notes of patients admitted to Lancaster Moor and Prestwich Asylums in the north-west of England, this section explores narratives of mental illness where grief was situated as the cause of madness. On admission to an asylum, patients were usually accompanied by relatives who, in most instances, gave an account of the patient's illness and completed questionnaires distributed by asylum staff to 'direct the treatment of the patient to the best possible advantage'. Containing an average of thirty-four questions, questionnaires addressed the patient's family history and previous experiences of illness, distress and poverty.[120] The use of medical records as a text on extreme bereavement is problematic. Given the marginal status of the lunatic asylum patient, their stories of loss are hardly representative. To a point, they are not supposed to be: their very situation demonstrates the perceived atypicality of chronic grief. It is impossible to assess retrospectively the diagnoses of medical practitioners or next of kin. Furthermore, the stories that case records relate were refracted through asylum staff who transcribed the information they perceived to be relevant or true and, necessarily, coloured it with their own opinions.[121] Asylum staff sometimes rejected relations' narratives. When Margaret Hamen entered Prestwich Asylum in January 1890, the admissions officer dismissed suggestion that bereavement had precipitated Hamen's decline, emphasising instead 'heredity, puerperal fever, lactation and disappointment'. Admissions staff interpreted stories of illness through a framework of norms and values. The officer overseeing the case of Mary Hewitt agreed that bereavement was integral to her illness, yet it was not the emotional impact of loss but, rather, Hewitt's unwise choices in the aftermath of loss, notably her co-habitation with the 'unsteady' Tom Taylor, that precipitated mental decline.[122]

Nevertheless, case records provide a rare snapshot of familial relationships whilst illustrating the imagery and language used to describe and conceptualise grief. Moreover, the case histories cited here demonstrate a vast range of criteria for the successful resolution of a bereavement process. It should also be noted that whilst a number of men were

[119] Jane Ann Smith, admitted to Prestwich Asylum in April 1890, claimed her sister had lost sympathy for her. LRO QAM 6/5/33.
[120] LRO HRL 3/14. [121] LRO QAM 6/5/33, LRO QAM 6/5/25.
[122] LRO QAM 6/5/25.

admitted to the asylum on account of chronic grief, bereavement tends to feature in a greater number of female case records. This is not to suggest that men grieved less, or that they were more adept at resolving bereavement. Rather, such discrepancies point to the gendering of grief and madness. To a point, women were expected to feel emotional upset more keenly and manifest it in socially visible ways. Men, however, were more likely to be admitted to asylums on account of unemployment and drink.[123] This is supported by Victor Bailey's exploration of coroner's inquests into suicide deaths in Victorian Kingston-upon-Hull. Bailey indicates that statistically, male suicides were caused by economic uncertainty (especially unemployment), drink and illness. In comparison, female suicides (apart from in late old age) were frequently precipitated by problems or disturbances in personal relationships.[124]

Admission to the asylum carried a stigma. It was, therefore, in the interests of a family to locate a social rather than hereditary cause for insanity. Moreover, locating madness in the context of bereavement may have encouraged sympathy rather than disparagement from others. If grief was supposed to evoke compassion, it must also be assumed that personal loss was understood to represent a potentially devastating experience. John Walton has suggested that most asylum admissions were initiated by next of kin after a lengthy decision-making process. Contesting Andrew Scull's conclusion that relations were admitted to asylums when they were economically unproductive, Walton's analysis highlights the willingness of families to stretch definitions of unacceptable behaviour before turning to the asylum.[125] Victor Bailey also suggests that labels of madness tended to originate in familial contexts. Nevertheless, most families resisted committal to the asylum until all other possibilities had been exhausted.[126] Some relatives in this sample appear to have had little patience at all. For instance, Margaret Barrow, admitted to Prestwich Asylum in June 1880, was 'troublesome to her son'.[127] Most accompanying relatives, however, expressed detailed perceptions of their relatives' well-being in a language of concern and compassion.

[123] For gendering of lunacy see E. Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture* (London: Virago, 1987), J. Ussher, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) and K. Davies, '"Sexing the Mind?" Women, Gender and Madness in Nineteenth Century Welsh Asylums', *Llafur: The Journal of Welsh Labour History*, 7 (1996), 29–40.

[124] V. Bailey, *This Rash Act*, 165–252.

[125] Walton, 'Lunacy in the Industrial Revolution', 1–22.

[126] V. Bailey, *This Rash Act*, 54–6. See also Wright, 'Getting Out of the Asylum', 137–55 and D. Wright, *Mental Disability in Victorian England: The Earlswood Asylum, 1847–1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[127] LRO QAM 6/6/7.

When providing a retrospective biography of madness, relatives probably fixed on the extraordinary events in lives rather than the grinding problems of daily survival. Indeed, this may explain why bereavement could be identified as the cause of insanity long after the death in question had occurred. Eliza Elastee's daughter stated that the onset of her mother's mania in 1885 was rooted in the death of a child some five years previously.[128] Thomas Parker, a labourer, had displayed signs of mental illness for four weeks when he entered Lancaster Moor Asylum in January 1881. The cause of his despair, however, was assigned to the death of his daughter two years before.[129] Thomas Gough, a labourer from Liverpool, was admitted to Lancaster Moor in June 1880. According to his sister, the death of their father eighteen months previously had deeply affected Thomas, and he had been 'getting worse for the last six or seven months'. He had twice attempted suicide, once by hanging and once by slitting his throat.[130]

Despite the methodological problems, it is possible to read, albeit tentatively, asylum narratives of bereavement for insights into conceptualisations of normative grief and resolution. Margaret Riley, a young servant from Liverpool, was admitted to Lancaster Moor in January 1880. Her brother described her as industrious, regular and temperate. He noted, however, that 'she would grieve greatly for any family trouble'. In particular, 'she grieved greatly after a sudden death of one of her brothers or if any of her people died she would cry greatly'.[131] It is difficult to discern what Riley defined as 'great' grief. Yet the phrase is richly suggestive: it implies profound distress and indicates that Riley was deploying a concept of normative grief against one of chronic loss. Similarly, Richard Leighton gave a vivid description of his wife's 'furies' in the two weeks preceding her admission to Lancaster Moor Asylum in June 1880. Frances Leighton had become 'ill in mind' a few days after the death of their daughter and had 'got rougher and rougher every day since and fearful last night, throwing herself about'. That Richard had waited two weeks before escorting Frances to the asylum suggests an initial tolerance of her 'furies', possibly in the belief that the behaviour was related to the shock of bereavement and would subside.[132] Grief thus had recognised forms and limits; when individuals transgressed those boundaries it prompted discomfort and difficulties for others. Indeed,

[128] LRO QAM 6/5/25. Admitted Prestwich 7 January 1885. Last entry 1 July 1885.
[129] LRO HRL 2/10. Discharged recovered 5 April 1881.
[130] LRO HRL 2/10. Discharged recovered 7 December 1880.
[131] LRO HRL 3/8. Discharged to workhouse 14 September 1880.
[132] LRO HRL 3/8. Discharged recovered June 1882.

conflicting interpretations of acceptable grief had the potential to create discord between family members. Rebecca Ninnis, a thirty-four-year-old weaver, was admitted to Lancaster Moor in August 1895 on account of being violent, abusive and 'unmanageable'. The admissions officer suggested that a recent confinement combined with excessive alcohol consumption had precipitated the attack of mania. Rejecting this diagnosis, Rebecca's husband William asserted that she had 'troubled a trifle' at the deaths of her mother, two sisters and brother, and had taken to attending spiritualist meetings in an attempt to establish contact with them. His emphasis that spiritualism was the 'one thing' which had affected his wife indicates the extent of his disapproval; Rebecca had 'never been the same woman' since participating in such pursuits.[133] In rejecting spiritualism as an unacceptable gesture of mourning, William incorporated Rebecca's attempt to contact the dead into a concept of chronic grief. He was also, perhaps, sensitive to the aspersions cast on Rebecca's (and by extension, his own) moral character by the suggestion that she drank heavily.

Clearly, concepts of chronic grief were highly subjective. Margaret Dobie (aged thirty-seven), an unmarried shopwoman from Bolton, was admitted to Prestwich Asylum in January 1880 having attempted to cut her throat. The uncle who accompanied her on admission disputed the medical officer's suggestion that the attack was sudden and occasioned by ill health. Margaret had, he claimed, experienced a previous attack of insanity some nine months earlier, after the death of her father. Although she had improved since that time, she had remained 'nervous' and 'timid' and, having no other immediate family, was 'very lonely'.[134] Whether or not Margaret's uncle was accurate in his diagnosis is, to a point, irrelevant. What is striking is his confident belief that bereavement could effect such devastation on an individual life. Similarly, Emma Grindrod, a dressmaker from Rochdale, attempted to commit suicide in February 1880 by driving a needle into her chest. The aunt who accompanied her to Prestwich Asylum informed the medical officer that Emma's mother had died some years previously of phthisis. Emma had always 'lived poorly' and 'worked rather hard', being a melancholy woman and never sleeping too well. The recent death of her father had, however, 'greatly upset her'.[135]

In these accounts bereavement was framed in terms of emotional distress. The implicit juxtaposition between the bereavement of solitary individuals and the experience of those who maintained other close

[133] LRO HRL 3/19. Died of retro-peritoneal sarcoma 1 March 1905.
[134] LRO QAM 6/6/17. Died of phthisis 20 March 1880.
[135] LRO QAM 6/6/17. Discharged recovered 20 August 1880.

relationships suggests, however, a conception that loneliness could exacerbate grief. These stories also illustrate how the death of a relative shattered homes and routines. Rachel Hodson, a cotton winder aged thirty-three from Bolton, was admitted to Prestwich in February 1885 after stabbing herself in the throat with a pair of scissors. According to her sister: 'Father died last November and not right since – gone worse. Not slept well for long time, eats little yet went to Mill till two days ago.' Rachel had nursed her father during his final illness. The detail that she had to lift him in and out of bed suggests the extent of his infirmity. As the medical officer noted, his subsequent death was 'evidently a great trouble' to her. In the days following her admission, Rachel fluctuated between upbraiding herself for neglecting her father's home and asking asylum nurses for something 'to sleep her to wake no more'. Rachel was a spinster and her notes suggest that she lived alone with her father (her mother had died some years previously from a stroke). His death, therefore, meant the loss of a relationship, a routine, an identity as daughter/carer and, perhaps, a home.[136] Similarly, Robert Bell (aged fifty-seven), a bachelor labourer from Ulverston, was admitted to Lancaster Moor Asylum in March 1890. His brother John located the onset of Robert's symptoms (indifference to his surroundings and restlessness in the night) in the death of their mother two years previously: Robert had begun to 'ail' whilst 'living by himself in a lonely cottage'. John reiterated that since their mother's death, Robert had lived 'all alone by himself'. He had threatened to drown himself and said spirits told him to 'make away' with himself.[137] Again, the emphasis on loneliness suggests that the hardest adjustment after bereavement was the loss of companionship, routine and the renegotiation of one's identity.

Whilst it is difficult to generalise from small samples, Robert Bell is exceptional among these sources. Overall, asylum records suggest a preponderance of single women whose breakdown was rooted in grief and loneliness at the death of a parent. This may illustrate nothing more than a high ratio of unmarried women who depended on their parents. However, it also implies the social and economic isolation of bereaved spinsters. Whilst the widow often had children for comfort and distraction, the grief-stricken spinster was thrown back on her own resources. Accompanied by her friend Sarah Radcliffe, Alice Weston entered Lancaster Moor Asylum on 3 March 1895. An unmarried woman, aged forty-six, Alice had moved from London to Burnley to work as a machinist. All her relatives had died except an aunt to whom she 'was much

[136] LRO QAM 6/5/25. Last entry 1 July 1885 states 'much same but generally busy'.
[137] LRO HRL 2/16. Died 27 November 1890 with fluid on his lungs.

devoted'. Since the death of this aunt six years previously, however, she had been completely alone and suffered much poverty. Sarah Radcliffe was also unmarried and alone in the world – 'having no parents'. When Alice returned to health, they resolved to make a 'comfortable home' and live together 'as sisters'.[138]

The case histories of the chronically bereaved tell stories of love, familiarity, and the perceived influence of external factors on an individual's experience of grief. In particular, they indicate that the death of a spouse was construed as a tragedy, not simply from the loss of a breadwinner or household manager, but from the devastation occasioned by losing one's partner and companion.[139] Following the sudden death of her husband in July 1885, Phoebe Entwhistle had become increasingly low-spirited: she resigned her post as a weaver, sacrificed her home and went to live with her brother. In October, she was admitted to Prestwich Asylum where she was described as suffering from mania.[140] Notably, male patients thought to be suffering from chronic grief tended to have lost their wife, a reflection perhaps that without a woman at its core, domestic life lost its comfort and meaning, especially in old age. Robert Holt, a cotton bleacher from Bolton, entered Prestwich Asylum in October 1880 in an emaciated and 'demented' state. According to his records, he 'never appeared to get over the shock' of his wife's death two years previously.[141] Similarly, Philip King, a tailor from Liverpool, was admitted to Lancaster Moor Asylum in February 1880. He dated his depression from the death of his wife the previous July.[142] Hamilton Cunningham, a hawker, entered Lancaster Moor in February 1885. His sister Elizabeth Walton stated that: 'he has never been happy or cheerful since he lost his wife and we all think that has preyed on his mind for he was always thinking about his wife'.[143] In losing their spouse, the bereaved often forfeited a core component of their identity and lifestyle. Samuel Goldsmith (aged seventy-two), a warehouseman from Chorlton, was admitted to Prestwich Asylum in November 1886. The onset of his dementia was attributed to the death of his wife whom he had nursed through illness for the previous four years.[144] The narrative suggests that

[138] LRO HRL 3/19. Admitted 3 March 1895. Discharged recovered 3 March 1896.
[139] Current psychotherapy recognises 'broken-heart syndrome'. See M. Stroebe, W. Stroebe and R. Hansson, 'Bereavement, Research and Theory: An Introduction to the Handbook' in Stroebe et al., *Handbook of Bereavement*, 10–11.
[140] LRO QAM 6/5/26. Last entry 30 October 1885 suggests no improvement in Phoebe's condition.
[141] LRO QAM 6/6/17. Discharged to workhouse 26 May 1880.
[142] LRO HRL 2/10. Died of phthisis pulmonatis 26 February 1881.
[143] LRO HRL 2/15. Died of senile decay 17 January 1889.
[144] LRO QAM 6/6/26. Died from old age 1 January 1887.

grief, combined with the absence of a familiar structure and role, precipitated dementia. Likewise, John Glasford, admitted to Lancaster Moor in July 1890, was said to have been 'troubling' ever since he buried his wife fifteen months previously: he had 'broke up his home and he never seemed satisfied since'.[145] The image of the deliberately dismantled home not only reinforces a sense of loss, it also seems symbolic of the passing of a familiar life that was rooted in a relationship and particular environment.

The despair of some individuals at the death of their spouse was thought to be sufficiently powerful to precipitate drastic action. On the night of his suicide in March 1898, John Drummond, a clogger from Caernarfon, had told neighbours that he was 'a lost man since his wife died'.[146] An inquest in May 1889 into the suicide of Ann Richardson, a sixty-three-year-old woman from Liverpool, concluded that the death was motivated by the recent loss of her husband, since when she had been 'in very low spirits'.[147] Joseph Hartley, a coke burner, was found hanging 'within an hour' of his wife's death. The coroner's inquest reported that 'when the breath had left his wife's body he kissed her, and in the greatest grief left the room, and it is surmised, immediately hanged himself'. He left several young children behind.[148] Whilst it is impossible to determine the character of such marriages, the acknowledgement that the death of a spouse could facilitate such profound personal sorrow should warn against reading the working-class marriage exclusively as an economic contract devoid of friendship and emotion.[149]

Conclusion

Previous chapters have focused on the artefacts of death and the public rites of mourning as forums for negotiating grief. This chapter developed that analysis to examine the ways in which bereavement was understood and made manifest outside shared cultural representations of loss. The management of personal feeling enabled the bereaved to confront the multiple losses and problems precipitated by death. Yet it also facilitated private opportunities for giving way to anguish and distress. The only 'suppression' of feeling evident in this analysis was temporary. In managing grief, working-class families did not negate loss, they formulated

[145] LRO HRL 2/16. Died of carcimona of prostrate gland 3 May 1901.
[146] *Liverpool Weekly Courier*, 26 March 1898, 5.
[147] *Liverpool Weekly Mercury*, 25 May 1889, 1. [148] Ibid., 5 March 1898, 8.
[149] Vincent suggests that the romantic love of courtship was blunted during marriage by the hardships of poverty. He does, however, concede that spouses could retain some form of 'bond' on the basis of shared experience. Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, 54–5.

positive, constructive and malleable means for its expression. Moreover, whilst most individuals held some notion of resolution and restitution, this did not conflict with holding a treasury of memories or with maintaining abstract relationships with the dead. That these were not always visible to external observers does not cancel their significance for the individual mourner. As the following chapter highlights, 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.