ACCEPTED VERSION

Katie Barclay with Kimberley Reynolds

Introduction: Small graves: histories of childhood, death and emotion

Death, Emotion and Childhood in Premodern Europe, 2016 / Barclay, K., Reynolds, K., Rawnsley, C. (ed./s), Ch.1, pp.1-24

© The Author(s) 2016

Final published version at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-57199-1_1

PERMISSIONS

https://www.springer.com/gp/open-access/publication-policies/self-archiving-policy

Self-archiving for non-open access books and chapters

Authors whose work is accepted for publication in a non-open access Springer book may deposit their author's accepted manuscript (AAM) in their institutional or funder repository, provided that the following conditions are observed.

The author's accepted manuscript is the version of the book manuscript accepted for publication after peer review, but prior to copyediting and typesetting. The self-archived AAM should not include any changes made after the point of editorial acceptance. Any necessary amendments or corrections to article content should be made to the version of record (VoR) on the publisher platform.

Deposition Terms

	Authored works, textbooks	Contributed volumes (inc handbooks)	Proceedings, and journal-like book series
Embargo length after publication*	24 months	24 months	12 months
Version of MS that can be deposited	AAM	AAM	AAM
Amount of MS that can be deposited	up to 10%	Author's own chapter**	Author's own chapter**
Institutional or funder repository	Yes	Yes	Yes
Author's own personally maintained website***	Yes	Yes	Yes (immediately on publication)

* Authors may make a closed deposit on acceptance, provided the embargo periods above are adhered to for public release.

** Multi-authored works: Each contributor may archive up to one chapter per volume (provided they are the author or a co-author of such chapter). Please note that any linking, collection or aggregation of chapters from the same volume is strictly prohibited.

*** Excludes commercial scholarly sharing networks (e.g. ResearchGate, Academia.edu, Mendeley).

17 August 2021

http://hdl.handle.net/2440/107670

Small Graves: Histories of Childhood, Death and Emotion

Katie Barclay with Kim Reynolds

In 1677 in Perth, Scotland, James Brown, in his capacity as a town officer, searched a brewhouse for an infant whom it was suspected a local woman, Margaret Black had given birth to and murdered. In his later testimony to the court at her trial for infanticide, Brown described how he 'found her child in ane bing of small coals and wrapt in a cloak and he […] caused the pannall wrape the child in a cleaner cloak and […] brought the child to the tolbuith'.[1] His testimony captured an important piece of his evidence, the discovery of a murdered newborn male child hidden in a pile of coal, but also, if briefly, Brown's emotional response to what he uncovered. Perhaps startling to a modern reader primed to preserve physical evidence for legal proceedings, when Brown found the body, he insisted that the mother, who accompanied him, redress the baby, removing the dirty and bloodied cloth he was wrapped in and replacing it with a new cloak. Brown does not explain his actions here and the surviving depositions do not suggest that anybody thought this behaviour was remarkable or his motivations worth recording in the limited space available in a court minute book. It may be that Brown had encouraged the mother to redress the child to incriminate her. It was commonly held across much of early modern Europe that a corpse bled when handled by the murderer and this child seemingly performed to custom, the prosecutor explicitly noting that the child's body bled when she picked it up.[2] Yet, typically, it was enough for a

---

[1] National Records of Scotland [hereafter NRS], JC2/14 High Court Book of Adjournal, 683-88: Margaret Black for murdering her own child, 4 August 1677.

[2] There was some debate on the origins of the blood in this case, but the indictment used it as evidence of her guilt. See: Richard Sugg, *Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires: the History of Corpse Medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorians* (London: Routledge, 2011), 177.

murderer to touch an exposed part of the body for this phenomenon to result. Instead, it appears that Brown's reaction was driven by his emotional response to finding a dead child and his desire that this infant's body receive some semblance of respect and care – a care that should have been given by the child's mother and which Brown attempted to force from her through his demand that she replace the baby's covering. In not changing the baby's wrap himself, Brown may have also been distancing himself from accusations of paternity or responsibility that caring for a child might suggest.

While the exact nature of Brown's emotion cannot be known – did he feel anger, pain, sadness, horror, a combination of these? – his response is redolent of the way late seventeenth-century Scottish culture felt about children and child death. Even illegitimate children who were evidence of their parents' 'wickedness', as the court described it, were entitled to care by their mothers.[3] And however Brown felt on finding the child, it provoked him to demand that care on the baby's behalf, indicating the importance of ensuring care within this community. Prosecutions for infanticide during the early modern period have been subject to considerable analysis, yet most of this has focused on the mother's motivations and treatment.[4] The evidence such cases provide for a society's care for its children has been

---

[3] NRS, JC2/14, 683-88.

[4] Laura Gowing, 'Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past and Present* 156 (1997), 87-115; Mona Rautelin, 'Female Serial Killers in the Early Modern Age? Recurrent Infanticide in Finland, 1750-1896', *History of the Family* 18, no. 3 (2013), 349-70; Deborah Symonds, *Weep Not for Me: Women, Ballads, and Infanticide in Early Modern Scotland* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Mary Clayton, 'Changes in Old Bailey Trials for the Murder of Newborn Babies, 1674-1803', *Continuity and Change* 24, no. 2 (2009), 337-59; Anne-Marie Kilday, *A History of Infanticide in Britain, c.1600 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

given little comment.[5] As the legal proforma that began indictments for infanticide in seventeenth-century Scotland explained, such convictions were necessary to protect 'childrene' from 'a cruell and barbarous murder'. Women were required to call for help during their labour, as without aid 'a new borne child may be easily stifled or being left exposed in the condition it comes to the world it must quickly perish'.[6] Deaths of 'innocent infants' were 'abhorred & prohibited and punished' noted the indictment.[7]

In Scotland, and possibly much of the rest of Europe where similar legislation operated, the public were expected to feel strongly about infanticide, to 'abhor' the occurrence of such crime, and murderers were to be warned not only of its illegal nature, but of the community's expected collective feelings on this subject. 'Abhor' in early modern Scots meant to feel 'repugnance' and to 'shrink back from', a seemingly visceral emotion of disgust and distancing.[8] A focus on 'innocent babes' ignored the social disabilities that faced both mothers and their illegitimate children in many early modern communities and may

---

[5] There are some attempts to get at this in cases where infanticide is performed by the wider kin: Cliona Rattigan, '"Done to Death by Father or Relatives": Irish Families and Infanticide Cases, 1922-1950', *History of the Family* 13 (2008), 370-83; Elaine Farrell, *'A most diabolical deed': Infanticide and Irish Society, 1850-1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

[6] NRS, JC1/42 Court Books, Trial of Alexander Barry and Margaret Watt for murder, 19-26 October 1694.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] 'Abhor *v.*', *Dictionary of the Scots Language* (Scottish Language Dictionaries, 2004), accessed 27 Jan 2015, http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/abhor.

have done little to improve their social position.[9] Yet, such language is telling for the special status it accorded newborn infants, their perceived vulnerability and the need for society to act together to ensure their survival. Here community emotion was enjoined by the state to give weight to the criminal indictment and to invest the public in the care and survival of young children.

How people in Western Europe have historically felt about child death, particularly the deaths of their own children, has been a topic of lively and ongoing historical debate for considerable time. Initial claims by scholars following in the tradition that rapidly grew up around the work of Philippe Ariès (1962) suggested that before the eighteenth century, and perhaps even later, parents displayed low levels of emotion on the death of their children.[10] This was explained by the assumption that a high level of emotional investment in children during a period of high child mortality would have been psychologically difficult. Accordingly, people protected themselves through curbing their feelings. In the years after

---

[9] Ólöf Gardarsdóttir, 'The Implications of Illegitimacy in Late-Nineteenth Century Iceland: the Relationship between Infant Mortality and the Household Position of Mothers giving Birth to Illegitimate Children', *Continuity and Change* 15, no. 3 (2000), 435-61; Lisa Zunshine, 'Bastard Daughters and Foundling Heroines: Rewriting Illegitimacy for the Eighteenth-Century Stage', *Modern Philogy* 102, no. 4 (2005), 501-33; Maria Luddy, 'Unmarried Mothers in Ireland, 1880-1973', *Women's History Review* 20, no. 1 (2011), 109-26.

[10] Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage, 1962); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1977); Joseph Amato, 'A World without Intimacy: a Portrait of a Time before we were Intimate Individuals and Lovers', *International Social Science Review* 61 (1986), 155-68.

Ariès' publication, historians increasingly disputed these claims. They reread the wide array of fine art representations of royal and religious children that Ariès' used as evidence for this topic, as well as using new sources, including literature, personal letters and diaries and court records to name a few, that displayed the social, economic and emotional investments that parents have had in their children across time. In doing so, they demonstrated both that parents loved their children and that funerary and commemoration practices marking that love were widespread across time and place.[11]

Over time, the historiography has become more sophisticated, moving from simple claims that 'parents loved' to recognition that displays of emotion are informed by culture. Studies of grief, much more than parental love, have been at the heart of this discussion, as the multiple ways that people have grieved across time and space have been explored, most recently influenced by new trends in the history of emotion.[12] This has been accompanied by

---

[11] Ralph Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (London: Routledge, 1989); Patricia Phillippy, '"I Might Againe have been the Sepulcher": Paternal and Maternal Mourning in Early Modern England', in *Grief and Gender: 700-1700*, ed. Jennifer C. Vaught with Lynne Dickson Bruckner (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 197-214; Julie-Marie Strange, '"Speechless with Grief": Bereavement and the Working-Class Father, c. 1880-1914', in *Gender and Fatherhood in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Trev Lynn Broughton and Helen Rogers (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 139-47; Elaine M. Murphy, 'Children's Burial Grounds in Ireland (Cillini) and Parental Emotions Toward Infant Death', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 15 (2011), 409-28; Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

[12] Anne Laurence, 'Godly Grief: Individual Responses to Death in Seventeenth-Century Britain', in Houlbrooke, *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, 62-76; Rachel Patrick, '"Speaking across the Borderline": Intimate Connections, Grief and Spiritualism in the letters of

a wide literature on portrayals of death in various forms of art and literature, sources that since Ariès have been used to provide useful insights to social practice.[13] In an early modern

---

Elizabeth Stewart during the First World War', *History Australia* 10, no. 3 (2013), 109-28; Stephen Pender, 'Rhetoric, Grief and the Imagination in Early Modern England', *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 43, no, no. 1 (2010), 54-85; Ronald K. Rittgers, 'Grief and Consolation in Early Modern Lutheran Devotion: the Case of Johannes Christoph Oelhafen's *Pious Meditations on the Most Sorrowful Bereavement* (1619)', *Church History* 81, no. 3 (2012), 601-30; Stephen Garton, 'The Scales of Suffering: Love, Death and Victorian Masculinity', *Social History* 27, no. 1 (2002), 40-58; Ulrike Gleixner, 'Enduring Death in Pietism: Regulating Mourning and the New Intimacy', in *Enduring Loss in Early Modern Germany: Cross Disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Lynne Tatlock (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 215-330. Discussions of the cultural specifics of parental love are relatively new, see: Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity and Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Katie Barclay, 'Natural Affection, Children and Family Inheritance Practices in the Long-Eighteenth-Century', in *Children and Youth in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland*, ed. Elizabeth Ewan and Janey Nugent (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2015).

[13] Gillian Avery and Kim Reynolds (eds), *Representations of Childhood Death* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 2000); Anne E. Bailey, 'Lamentation Motifs in Medieval Hagiography', *Gender & History* 25, no. 3 (2013), 529-44; Howard Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Nigel Llewelln, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual c.1500-c.1800* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992); Cornelia Niekus Moore, *Patterned Lives: the Lutheran Funeral Biography in Early Modern Germany* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006); Inga Brinkman, *Grabdenmäler, Grablegen und Begräbniswesen des lutherischen Adels: adelige, Funeralrepräsentation im Spannungsfeld von Kontinuität und Wandel im 16. Und*

European context, considerable discussion has been devoted to the impact of the Reformation on funerary and mourning practices and how this was refracted differently across nations.[14]

---

beginnenden 17. Jahrhundert (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2010); Jean Guillaume (ed.), *Demeures d'éternité: églises et chapelles funéraires aux XVe et XVie siècles: actes du colloque tenu à Tours du 11 au 14 juin 1996* (Paris: Picard, 1995); Giovanni Ricci, *Il principe e la morte: corpo, cuore, effigie nel Renascimento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998); Minou Schraven, *Festive Funerals in Early Modern Italy: the Art and Culture of Conspicuous Commemoration* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); Gian Marco Vidor, 'A photographie post-mortem dans l'Italie du XIX et XX siècles : une introduction', in A. Carol and I. Renaudet (eds) *La mort à l'oeuvre. Usages et représentations du cadavre dans l'art* (Aix-en-Provence, Presses universitaires de Provence, 2013), 205-18; Barbara Borngässer, Henrik Karge and Bruno Klein (eds), *Grabkunst und Sepulkralkultur in Spanien und Portugal/ Arte funerario y cultura sepulchral en Espana y Portugal* (Frankfurt am Main and Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2006); Aleksandra Koutny-Jones, *Visual Cultures of Death in Central Europe: Contemplation and Commemoration in Early Modern Poland-Lithuania* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[14] Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (eds), *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Lucinda McCray Beier, 'The Good Death in Seventeenth-Century England', in Houlbrooke, *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, 43-61; Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998; Susan Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany* (London: Routledge, 1997); Craig Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany, 1450-1700* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000); Elizabeth Tingle and Jonathan Willis (eds),

Such studies have highlighted the importance of nationality, region, and change over time, as well as marking differences in how men and women were allowed to express emotion.[15]

Given the earlier concern with parental grief, how people have responded to the death of children has been an important theme in certain strands of this literature, with some variation across national contexts. Regions with developed historiographies of family life and childhood, such as France, Germany, the Netherlands and Britain, have sought to explicate commemorations of child death within this context.[16] In other areas, where those

---

Dying, Death, Burial and Commemoration in Reformation Europe (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

[15] Vaught with Bruckner, *Grief and Gender*; Marjo Kaartinen, '"Nature has Form'd thee Fairest of They Kind": Grieving Dead Children in Sweden circa 1650-1810', in *Childhood and Emotion across Cultures, 1450-1800*, ed. Claudia Jarzebowski and Thomas Max Safley (London: Routledge, 2014), 157-70; Phillippy, 'Paternal and Maternal Mourning'; Margaret King, *The Death of the Child Valerio Marcello* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994); Andrew Spicer, '"Rest of their Bones": Fear of Death and Reformed Burial Practices', in *Fear in Early Modern Society*, ed. William G. Naphy and Penny Roberts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 167-83; Gian Marco Vidor, 'Emotions and Writing the History of Death: an Interview with Michel Vovelle, Régis Bertrand and Anne Carol', Mortality 20, no. 1 (2015), 36-47; Gian Marco Vidor, 'Satisfying the Mind and Inflaming the Heart. Emotions and Funerary Epigraphy in Nineteenth-Century Italy', *Mortality* 19, no. 4 (2014), 342-60.

[16] Marjo Kaartinen, '"Nature has Form'd thee'; Phillippy, 'Paternal and Maternal Mourning'; Houlbrooke, *Death Religion and the Family*; Marion Kobelt-Groch, '"Freudiger Abschied Jungfräulicher Seelen": Himmelsphantasien in protestantischen Leichenpredigten für Kinder', *Wolfenbütteler Barock-Nachrichten* 31 (2004), 117-47l; Rudolf Dekker, *Childhood*

historiographies have been slower to develop, interest in child death has been motivated by particular commemorative practices, such as statuary devoted to children or funeral orations designed for them.[17] Accounts of children dying 'good deaths', which were often circulated

---

Memory and Autobiography in Holland: From Golden Age to Romanticism (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*; Robert Woods, *Children Remembered: Responses to Untimely Death in the Past* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006); Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Raimar W. Kory with Raimund Masanz (eds), *Archäologische und anthropologische Forschungen in memoriam Brigitte Lohrke* (Freiburg: Curach Bhán, 2015).

[17] Jeannie Łabno, *Commemorating the Polish Renaissance Child: Funeral Monuments and their European Contexts* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011); Hank Van Setten, 'Album Angels: Parent-Child Relations as Reflected in 19th-Century Photos, Made After the Death of a Child', *Journal of Psychohistory* 26, no. 4 (1999, 819-34; Anne Linton, *Poetry and Parental Bereavement in Early Modern Luthran Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Claudia Jarzebowski, 'Loss and Emotion. Funeral Works on Children in Early Modern Europe and America', in Tatlock, *Enduring Loss in Early Modern Germany* (Leiden: Brill 2010), 187-213; J. B. Bedaux and R. Ekkart (eds), *Pride and Joy: Children's Portraits in the Netherlands 1500–1700* (Ghent: Ludion Press, 2000); King, *Death of the Child*; Elisa C. Mandell, 'Posthumous Portraits of Children in Early Modern Spain and Mexico', in *Death and Afterlife in the Early Modern Hispanic World*, ed. John Beursterien and Constance Cortez, *Hispanic Issues Online* 7 (2010), 68-88; Rosemary Mander and Rosalind K. Marshall, 'An Historical Analysis of the Role of Paintings and Photographs in Comforting Bereaved Parents', *Midwifery* 19, no. 3 (2003), 230-42.

widely, particularly in Reformed Europe, have also been scrutinised.[18] However, it is only recently that children's own responses to death have become a topic of interest.[19]

It may appear that there is little left to be said on the relationship between childhood, death and emotion. However, in the last decade, two major and interconnected theoretical interventions have rejuvenated this topic: childhood studies and methodologies from the history of emotion. Drawing together scholars working at the intersection of these fields, this volume applies new methodologies to re-examine this discussion and to finally move forward a field that has implicitly and indeed often explicitly sat in Ariès' shadow.[20] Whether parents loved their children is no longer the question. What it means to love opens up a new set of priorities for the field. Focusing on north-west Europe, this collection highlights how

---

[18] Leendert F. Groenendijk, Freda Van Lieburg and John Exalto, '"Away with All my Pleasant Things in the World…": Model Death-bed Accounts of two Young Victims of the Plague of 1664 in the Dutch Town of Leyden', *Paedagogica Historica* 46, no. 3 (2010), 271-88; Ralph Houlbrooke, 'Death in Childhood: the Practice of the "Good Death" in James Janeway's *A Token for Children*', in *Childhood in Question: Children, Parents and the State*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and Stephen Hussey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 37-56.

[19] Hannah Newton, *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Hannah Newton, '"Very Sore Nights and Days": the Child's Experience of Illness in Early Modern England, c. 1580-1720', *Medical History* 55 (2011), 153-82.

[20] For discussion of this see: Albrecht Classen, 'Philippe Ariés and the Consequences. History of Childhood, Family Relations and Personal Emotions. Where do we Stand today?', in *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: the Results of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Hawthorne NY: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 1-65.

rethinking the relationship between childhood, death and emotion through these methodologies turns attention away from families to communities and nations. Children are no longer viewed as the private concern of individuals, but central to how communities defined themselves, negotiated their relationship with the divine and articulated emotional norms and values. The relationship between children and death provides a prism through which the emotional practices of individuals and communities can be explicated, and in turn, understanding the workings of emotion helps to place children in the world.

Histories of emotion and childhood

The history of emotions, as a methodological approach, operates on the premise that emotion is a social phenomenon, a product of particular historical moments and cultures. As such, not only how people *express* feeling, but *what* they feel, differs over time and space, allowing emotion to be studied and explained.[21] In many respects, much of the early work on grief has provided the foundations for a history of emotion to build on, particularly that which has focused on its cultural dimensions. Yet, much of this early work has operated on a number of assumptions that are now open to question.

Grief, perhaps more than most emotions, is frequently articulated in terms of a 'natural' or 'biological' outpouring that people manage through cultural forms. Elizabeth Clarke's otherwise fascinating discussion of seventeenth-century mothers' writings,

---

[21] Barbara Rosenwein, 'Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions', *Passions in Context* 1 (2010), 1-32; Susan J. Matt, 'Current Emotion Research in History: or Doing History from the Inside Out', *Emotion Review* 3 (2011), 117-24; Jan Plamper, 'The History of Emotions: an Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein and Peter Stearns', *History and Theory* 49 (2010), 237-65.

published in Avery and Reynolds (eds), *Representations of Childhood Death* (2000), situates their grief as something they learned to control through religious rhetoric, 'that voice, which tends to silence the utterance of grief'.[22] Similarly, Ralph Houlbrooke's (1998) very sensitive rendering of how expressions of grief and grieving practices evolved over a long early modern period, ultimately locates grief as fundamentally ahistorical, allowing him to assess the later sixteenth century as promoting 'a more compassionate attitude to grief' than previous eras.[23] Grief, particularly of parents, is also associated closely with love, so that overt outpourings of grief are often uncomplicatedly used as a measure of affection for the deceased.[24] Yet, whilst most historians would caution against measuring an absence of evidence of grief as an absence of love, the relationship between grief and love has not been explored. Does all loss require love and, if so, what form does such love take? Does it differ between different people?

Historians of emotion emphasise that it is not only how people express grief – how they attempt to direct their emotions and their mourning practices – that is historically specific, but emotion itself. Current, psychoanalytically informed understandings of grief as an overwhelming sense of loss that requires 'grief work', as a process of emotion management, overlooks the extent to which grief – the bodily experience of emotion felt during periods of loss – is a product of culture, reflected in the extraordinary range of grieving practices around the world, from head-hunting in Papua New Guinea to ritual

---

[22] Elizabeth Clarke, 'A Heart Terrifying Sorrow': the Deaths of Children in Seventeenth-Century Women's Manuscript Journals', in Avery and Reynolds, *Representations of Childhood Death*, 84

[23] Houlbrooke, *Death Religion and the Family*.

[24] Kaartinen, 'Grieving Dead Children in Sweden'.

wailing in premodern Ireland to stoic resilience in Britain after the World Wars.[25] Grief work itself is recognised as a twentieth-century Western construction that is increasingly felt to be outdated amongst psychologists, if not the general public.[26] Feeling loss as overwhelming, as pain or as something that exceeds the self is as much a product of culture as the processes that we use to manage those feelings.

This is not to suggest that people can consciously control such emotion, or that emotion does not have a biological dimension, but that biological processes are not determinative. Unpicking the role of the biological within emotional processes is and no doubt will continue to be, an ongoing topic of debate, yet increasingly scholars, in a wide range of disciplines, recognise the flexibility of the biological and the ways that the body adapts and conforms to culture.[27] Such plasticity can perhaps be seen in the ongoing debate

---

[25] Renato Rosaldo, 'Grief and a Headhunter's Rage: on the Cultural Force of Emotions', in *Text, Play and Story: the Construction and Reconstruction of Self and Society*, ed. Stuart Pattner and Edward Bruner (Washington: American Ethnological Society, 1984), 178-98; David Lloyd, 'The Memory of Hunger', in *Loss: the Politics of Mourning*, ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (London: University of California Press, 2003), 208; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[26] For discussion of the psychological literature on 'grief work' and its critics, see: M. Stobart et al, 'The Impact of Bereavement', in *The Cambridge Handbook of Psychology, Health and Medicine*, ed. S. Ayers et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 42-3.

[27] Roger Cooter, 'The Turn of the Body: History and the Politics of the Corporeal', *ARBOR Ciencia, Pensamiento y Cultur* 186 (2010), 393-405; Kathleen Canning, 'The Body as Method? Reflections on the Place of the Body in Gender History', *Gender & History* 11 (1999), 499-513.

on why most people recover from loss and are able to function 'normally' (and why a few do not), despite the variety of ways that people grieve. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that such a measure is complicated by the fact that 'normal' varies across culture and that 'normality' accounts for the behaviour of those who have been acculturated through the emotional customs of such communities. Or, in other words, some cultures may adapt to provide more space for pain (or other emotions) in everyday life than others. As historians emphasise, grief responses also change over time, leading to cultural moments where grieving ideals come into conflict, coexist or are transformed. People and even entire societies can respond to death in ways that surprise themselves, such as Britain's outpouring of grief on the death of Diana and the considerable commentary it caused in the press and amongst academics as people tried to explain what happened. A similar outpouring in nineteenth-century France at the death of Leon Gambetta has been compellingly explicated by Charles Sowernine as a ritual mechanism for dealing with territorial loss, and related questions of French identity and social change after war with Germany in earlier years.[28] Here grieving practices become a mechanism for communities to express, address and create social change.

A cultural emphasis on the production of emotion creates both a more complex model for understanding the operation of emotion and provides historians with a methodological opportunity. Emotion is no longer unknowable and assumed to be identified only in its

---

[28] Charles Sowernnine, 'Channelling Grief, Building the French Republic: The Death and Ritual Afterlife of Léon Gambetta, 1883-1920', in *Emotion, Ritual and Power in Europe: 1200 to 1920: Family, State and Church*, ed. Merridee Bailey and Katie Barclay (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

cultural traces, but shown as actively created or performed.[29] As such, historical evidence, whether in private letters and diaries, in literature and pamphlets, in art or architecture, or in institutional records, can be understood as not only the fingerprints of emotion, but an active part of how people construct and perform the emotions they experience.[30] Cultural forms are implicated in the making of emotion, giving shape and meaning to the messiness of human experience and, in so doing, impacting on the biological experience of emotion. In this, emotion becomes a form of practice.[31]

Viewing historical sources, in all their variety, as a part of the practice of emotion helps historians to come closer to the emotions of the dead than has previously been appreciated, not only accessing emotional expression but its formation. As a methodology, this has required scholars to approach their sources from a different perspective, and particularly to rethink the representation/experience distinction in different source forms, yet it is also an approach that utilises the scholarly tools that humanities researchers have always brought to their work: close attention to the construction of language and non-linguistic forms of expression, a concern for the meaning of symbols in cultural context, and an appreciation for the relatedness of texts and their interactions.

The relationship between the biological and the cultural is also a question at the heart of childhood studies. While the period of life that people are designated 'children', as well as the traits and characteristics associated with 'childhood', are recognised to vary across time

---

[29] Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and is that What Makes Them have a History)? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion', *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2012), 190-220.

[30] Katie Barclay and Sarah Richardson, 'Introduction: Performing the Self: Women's Lives in Historical Perspectives', *Women's History Review* 22, no. 2 (2013), 177-81.

[31] Sheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice'.

and place, the biological realities that pertain especially to very young children who require considerable support and educational input to survive and thrive must also be taken into account.[32] Initial claims that medieval and early modern societies did not recognise childhood as a distinctive phase are recognised as untenable, not only because of historical evidence which shows that most societies have held different expectations of behaviour for children compared to adults, but also because biological processes have demanded that this be the case. Exploring how the biological and developmental aspects of growing up have impacted on social and cultural processes has become increasingly important to discussions of how we assess and define childhood and account for variation.

As with studies of emotion however, recognising that biology does not necessarily determine what it means to be a child has been decisive to the field. When childhood begins and ends and what is expected from children in terms of education, work and even emotional responses to different situations has varied enormously, sometimes even within the same culture, depending on class, gender and circumstance. As several chapters in this volume suggest, how childhood was understood, and its application to different groups of children, often affected what it was held children should be taught about death. Expectations of their capacity to process this information and emote in what was considered appropriate ways have

---

[32] Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 9; Anna Davin, 'What is a Child?', in *Childhood in Question: Children, Parents and the State*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and Stephen Hussey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 15-36; Margaret King, 'Concepts of Childhood: What we Know and Where We Might Go', *Renaissance Quarterly* 60 (2007), 371-407; Patrick Ryan, 'How New is the "New" Social Study of Childhood? The Myth of a Paradigm Shift', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38, no. 4 (2008), 553-76.

similarly varied across time.[33] Poor children have been particularly vulnerable to assumptions that they 'mature' more quickly than their wealthier counterparts, excusing their engagement in work in the early modern period or sexual activities in the nineteenth century.[34] Part of what is under question here is not only different understandings of how children should emote, but different understandings of the biological capacity of children of particular chronological ages across time. This is not to suggest that some cultures have been naïve or wrongheaded in their approach to child-rearing; but that, to a large extent, children have always needed to have considerable capacity to adapt to cultural expectation. The relationship between the body and society, therefore, is complex and multi-layered and childhood, as a phase when aspects of biology set it apart, constitutes a unique opportunity for exploring this relationship.

Recognising that, at least in the temporal and geographical contexts of medieval and early modern Europe that fall under the domain of this book, childhood was understood as a distinct period (if one that varied across time and place) has also required historians to take the concept of childhood seriously and to place children, as well as their intersections with other parts of their identity such as class, gender, and religion, at the heart of these discussions. As a number of studies have demonstrated, 'childhood', as a period imagined by adults as well as children, has often carried considerable cultural weight.[35] Whilst debates

---

[33] See particularly Chapters 4, 8 and 10.

[34] Patricia Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children in England, 1580-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Joanna Bourke, *Rape: a History from 1860 to the Present* (London: Virago, 2007).

[35] Lydia Murdoch, '"Suppressed Grief": Mourning the Death of British Children and the Memory of the 1857 Indian Rebellion', *Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012), 364-92; Jane Eva Baxter, 'Status, Sentimentality and Structuration: an Examination of "Intellectual

around the 'invention' of childhood have tended to focus on the period from the mid-eighteenth century, explorations of the concept of childhood as part of larger life-cycle models have illustrated the ways that children act as an important referent in many culture's understandings of themselves – childhood becomes a discursive construct that helps adults and children understand themselves and society as well as the child.[36] As Lynch and Broomhall demonstrate in this book, narratives of the lives of children help communities situate themselves, their values and identities. Yet, that children are marked as distinct also reminds us that their experiences are likely to be unique and worthy of study.

As such, placing the child and the voices of children at the heart of childhood studies is increasingly important, as we attempt to explore how age impacts on how people engage with, process and construct themselves and the world around them. For historians, who often rely on sophisticated cultural forms such as writing or art, the voices of children themselves can be difficult to access. Almost all the authors in this volume, however, seek to address this issue, imaginatively engaging with historical evidence to reconstruct the experiences of children and their emotions in relation to the death of themselves or others. Reading against the grain has long been posited for social historians and here we see authors such as Newton and Barclay using parents' accounts to access the children they describe, while Maddern looks at how medieval saint's lives describe children's responses to death in their accounts of miracles. Others, such as Colding Smith, think about the child as a reader, using literature to

---

Spaces" for Children in the Study of America's Historic Cemeteries', *Childhood in the Past* 6, no. 2 (2013), 106-22; Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995).

[36] Philippa Maddern and Stephanie Tarbin, 'Life Cycle', in *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family in the Early Modern Age*, ed. Sandra Cavallo and Silvia Envangelisti (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 113-34.

reconstruct the emotions expected by the text and to extrapolate the implications for typical children. As texts that teach children how to interpret and respond to death, including providing them with models for feeling, and that we can assume that at least some children would draw on such resources in articulating and performing their own emotions, works written for children can provide key insights into the sensibilities of the child reader. This refocusing on the voice of the child is reflective of a new confidence in childhood studies that children's voices are not lost to historians if we imaginatively engage with historical sources, and this collection both adds to the work in this embryonic field and provides models for performing similar work elsewhere.

In bringing together the history of emotions with childhood studies, this volume highlights how emotion studies help scholars to 'construct' the child and children's place within the family and society during the long early modern period in Europe.[37] Emotions play a central role in shaping the community, with feelings used to mark its boundaries.[38] As Karen Vallgårda *et al.* note, children who are both subject to 'emotional formations', the process of learning the patterns and practices of feeling, and to 'emotional frontiers', where groups with different emotional norms and values meet, contest and overlap, are often useful subjects through which to explore the making of community.[39] It is through processes of

---

[37] This field is only just emerging, but some useful early works include: Jarzebowski and Safley, *Childhood and Emotion*; Jarzebowski, 'Loss and Emotion'; Peter Stearns, 'Obedience and Emotion: a Challenge in the Emotional History of Childhood', *Journal of Social History* 47, no. 3 (2014), 593-611.

[38] Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

[39] Karen Vallgårda, Kristine Alexander and Stephanie Olsen, 'Emotions and the Global Politics of Childhood', in *Childhood, Youth and Emotions in Modern History: National,*

education that the values, behaviours and feelings of emotional communities are often most clearly articulated, whilst the special positioning of children in many communities provides key insights into their makeup and relationships. Children are often emotionally fraught subjects, inspiring communities to feel and behave in particular ways. Through charting how people, including children, responded to child death across time, it is possible to build a picture of the spaces of children in early modern societies and conversely to explore how children help shape their communities through their presence, emotions and behaviours. By focusing this discussion on the single theme of child death, this collection provides an opportunity for an explicit study of continuity and change over time.

The chapters that follow range across a long early modern period and make it possible to track a remarkable set of continuities over the centuries, including the belief that childhood was a distinct period of life; the importance of care and affection when raising children, and the expectation that parents would grieve their loss. Yet, within this framework, understandings of the nature and duration of childhood, appropriate grief responses and displays from both adults and children, and the nature of care and affection, were contested and underwent change. Moreover, even at a single historical point, reactions to child death could be complex and conflicted as parents and communities tried to reconcile feeling with economic and social interests, religious orthodoxy and consolations, doubts, and competing models for grieving. These debates were informed by changing religious practices, new medicines, new literatures, and new values. Using a wide-range of sources – including portraiture, literature for children and adults, letters, diaries, and medical and institutional records, and drawing on the work of scholars from across disciplines, including family

---

Colonial and Global Perspectives, ed. Stephanie Olsen (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 12-34.

history, English literature, art history, and childhood studies, this chronologically structured work allows readers to trace these debates over time.

Death, emotion and childhood in north-west Europe

Small Graves ranges from the late medieval period to the mid-nineteenth century – a long early modern period – with a focus on north-west Europe, providing coverage of a group of nations representing most of the major theological divisions in the Post-Reformation period, but also a region where the Reformation was perhaps more significant in disrupting the daily lives of families and communities than for their Southern neighbours, and where Catholic and Protestant communities often lived alongside each other. Despite the nuances of different faiths, as these essays show, there are some remarkable continuities in how these nations responded to, evaluated and gave meaning to the deaths of children. Children were placed at the heart of many of these communities, both as key to family lineages and identity, and to communities' investments in their future selves. They shared a desire to see their children saved and refracted their emotional responses to child death through a religious framing. They also often shared literatures featuring pious children that provided models for children when dying. In many respects, these are also similarities that can be traced into Southern Europe, where commemorative practices around child death were often not very different.[40] Yet variation can be teased out, with parents framing their anxieties around child care and death along distinct theological lines, in the emphasis communities placed on particular motifs or themes in their reflections on child death, and in how children were situated within

[40] King, *Death of the Child*; Mandell, 'Posthumous Portraits'; Schraven, *Festive Funerals*; Vidor, 'Satisfying the Mind'.

the community. Tracking these differences across and into Southern and Eastern Europe would be a fruitful area of future research.

North-west Europe is also a region, with perhaps an exception for some of Scandinavia, where there is an established literature on death, family life and increasingly childhood.[41] Such histories have often acknowledged the significance of child death in such communities, not least because of significant child mortality across the period. Rates vary enormously across time, region, and social group, but losing one in every four or five children in the first year of life was fairly typical. When aggregated across time and space, around one child in two failed to make it to age ten in early modern Europe.[42] At particular moments, during failed harvests or outbreaks of disease, death rates could soar and, despite various medical and social interventions, infant and child mortality remained high until the beginning of the twentieth century.[43] Yet, despite this acknowledgement, studies of child death have tended to sit at the periphery of scholarship, an interesting note in larger discussions of family relationships, grieving practices or the history of the child. Placing child death at the heart of research and using it as the key lens through which to explore bigger questions around death, emotion, identity and family is unusual.

A study of death in early modern, north-west Europe cannot be untangled from the religious context that gave both life and death meaning during the period. Until the eighteenth century, and for most people considerably beyond this date, belief in God and an afterlife

---

[41] For a survey of the key works in childhood studies, see Further Reading.

[42] Henry Kamen, *Early Modern European Society* (London: Routledge, 2000), 18.

[43] Susan Broomhall, 'Health and Science', in *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family in the Early Modern Age* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 176-7; Rachel G. Fuchs and Victoria E. Thompson, *Women in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 25.

underpinned death and people's emotional responses to it. As noted above, perhaps the biggest impact on grieving practices during this period was the Reformation, which fundamentally transformed understandings of the afterlife as well as appropriate funerary rituals and emotional responses to death. A number of authors have noted the distinct ways that this transformation played out across Europe; others have looked at the way responses to child death were shaped by the increasingly fractured religious context associated with the growing number of Christian sects, each with their own particular interpretation of Christian creed.[44] Most sects agreed that all people were born with the taint of original sin that required Christ's sacrifice to ensure salvation in the next life, but what role it played within childhood was more complex. The medieval church held that if infants were baptised and their original sin washed away, until they were old enough to commit personal sin (usually thought to be around age seven), they would go to heaven. Unbaptised infants were a theological problem, finally resolved in popular belief through limbo, where infants awaited God's mercy. Such ideas continued amongst the laity in the reformed Catholic Church, whilst some Catholics also emphasised the significance of God's mercy as enabling children's progress into heaven.

The idea of limbo, and similar concepts such as purgatory, were rejected by most protestant sects, leaving infant death as an ongoing and often thorny topic of debate. As various chapters in this volume illustrate, this was resolved in different ways. Some sects believed that all infants went to heaven before they committed personal sin; others believed baptism was necessary and that unbaptised children were damned; some that children's salvation was inherited through their parents until the age of responsibility.[45] Løkke demonstrates that in some places, such as late-eighteenth-century Lutheran Denmark,

---

[44] See footnote 13 for this historiography.

[45] For a good summary of this shift in beliefs, see Houlbrooke, *Death Religion and the Family*.

theology evolved to reflect a growing demand for the salvation of infants – a shift in religious belief to reflect popular emotional needs. Children were not passive in such religious controversies, with their deaths and their responses to death actively informing ongoing debates, not least as the deathbed could provide an opportunity for God to work through children. As Ryrie and Barclay suggest, these beliefs shaped how people responded to infant and child death, whether they felt anxiety and despair or hope and joy. Yet this perhaps should not be overstated. As Broomhall shows in her chapter on sixteenth-century France, the theological distinctions on questions of child salvation often had few practical repercussions for how institutions and communities responded to child death, even as institutions moved between Catholic and Huguenot hands.

Across most of Western Europe, a 'good death' provided reassuring evidence of the existence of heaven and that the deceased was destined to join other loved ones there.[46] The 'good death' was marked in emotional terms, with the dying person being reconciled to the end of her or his life and, ideally, looking to death with peace or even joy. It was marked by a calm demeanour, reflections on God, and the ability to offer pious advice to those remaining behind. It was a death that comforted those left behind. A good death was not beyond a child's capacity. As Lynch and Maddern observe for the medieval period, the ability for God actively to intervene in the lives of children provided space within earlier communities to imagine children as precociously exceeding the boundaries of youth. Sitting on the periphery

---

[46] Patricia Eichel-Lojkine (ed.), *De bonne vie s'ensuit bonne mort: récits de mort, récits de vie en Europe (XVe-XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006); Roger Chartier, 'Les arts de mourir 1450-1600', *Annales Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 31 (1976), 51-76; Daniel Roche, 'La mémoire de la mort. Recherche sur la place des arts du mourir dans la librairie et la lecture en France aux 17e et 18e siécles', *Annales Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 31 (1976), 76-119.

of death and the afterlife acted to give dying children knowledge and experiences that were beyond those around them. The working of God could be actively shown in the emotional demeanour of children, allowing them to display peace under considerable pain and distress and joy at what awaited. For children at the heart of miracle stories, it was also marked in the transformation of the body into a beautiful state, with old injuries and scars removed. Here the association between innocence and beauty was highlighted, with broader repercussions for understandings of young children, whose bodies were not yet marked by disease or injury, tying them to a model of Godly innocence that located children as distinct from adults. Whilst the association of childhood purity with godliness declined over the centuries, innocence remained an important idea associated with children in later eras, locating them in need of special protection and care.

The ability of God to work in the lives of children in the post-Reformation period remained an important idea, particularly for those who displayed spiritual gifts such as prophecy or preaching.[47] Yet, dying a good death was no longer a marker of precocious spirituality, but something that all children could aspire to. As Barclay and Colding-Smith illustrate, post-Reformation children were provided with models of appropriate ways of dying in their childhood reading, as well as in more formal encounters with the theology underpinning them in sermons, the catechism, and through their parents' teaching. Colding Smith describes how the saintly child in traditional religious depictions of child death sat uneasily within early nineteenth-century literature, with young children increasingly depicted

---

[47] For discussion see Susan Hardman Moore, '"Such Perfecting of Praise Out of the Mouth of a Babe", in *The Church and Childhood*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: D. S. Brewer, 1994), 313-24; Nigel Smith, 'A Child Prophet: Martha Hatfield as *The Wise Virgin*', in *Children and their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie*, ed. Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 79-93.

as more playful and as having limited ability to truly comprehend death's nature. Newton goes further, showing that the realities of dying – when death was caused by painful and disfiguring diseases or accidents, for instance – sometimes did not allow children to achieve this model, even if they had been trained to strive for it.

Whilst religion remained a dominant theme across the period covered by this volume, as Broomhall and Walker note, anxieties and care for children and the desire to protect them from harm were not only motivated by concerns for their soul. Even very poor children, who were often disconnected from familial networks, could be viewed as important parts of community life and their survival something to be desired and sought. Such markers of care were observed not only in protective legislation such as infanticide acts, but in the textual care found in the records of institutions that sought to mark the lives and deaths of the children who moved through them. The value placed upon children in many early modern communities ensured that they often played a central role in their emotional practices, and how they defined themselves and displayed and articulated their Christian values.

Children were particularly important markers of family identity and lineage, as Sidén notes for seventeenth-century Sweden, and even after death, their location within the family was worthy of sometimes elaborate commemoration. Deceased children in Sweden were not only mourned, but, like living children, actively used to shore up social status and power – even dead children contributed to a family's construction of its lineage. Moreover, dead children could be used in spiritual practices to direct a mourning family's relationship with God. In this, such children continued to play a critical role in the family, even after death. As this suggests, children signify potential; both literally and figuratively they carry a society's hopes and dreams, whether in the present or eternity. Children are, accordingly, invested with particular social significance as communities imagine their futures. This fact underlies Lynch's discussion of the way, in the Middle Ages, stories of child death were potent means

for exploring not only local concerns and anxieties, but the relationship between the human and divine.

Stories, whether in fiction or in the personal accounts that emerged from the dying and those that witnessed death, were also an important method for creating narratives of emotion and for performing emotion itself. The role of writing as a space for the bereaved to define their feelings and align them to social norms is widely recognised, as Barclay discusses in her chapter. Storytelling also provided a space for early modern societies to process how to understand death, to provide prescriptive ideals for dying, and to explore what particular deaths meant, in social, economic, political and emotional terms. Here the distinction between fictional tales and those tied to 'real' deaths breaks down, as both forms provide a space to practice emotion. Sidén demonstrates that such storytelling was not confined to the written form alone, with families using portraiture to complete the life stories of deceased children through narrativising their 'victories' over death. But writing did provide a useful mechanism for articulating death, as demonstrated by several chapters. It is therefore all the more fascinating that medieval society, as Maddern argues, was constrained in discussing child death due to the absence of appropriate discourses for their articulation. In the post-Reformation period, stories of child death flourished, most famously in stories of 'good deaths', but also in the wide array of gruesome endings that children met in ballads and chapbooks during the period.[48] Bourgault du Coudray finishes this collection by reading such tales for their evidence for emotions around sibling death, closing off the discussion of the early modern period by situating them in light of the new field of psychology that arose during the nineteenth century. Placed under the analytical lens of the medical profession, child death lost its religious connotations and perhaps also its communal dimension.

---

[48] Vic Gammon, 'Child Death in British and North America Ballads from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries', in Avery and Reynolds, *Representations of Childhood Death*, 11-28.

Psychotherapy privatised child death as a parental loss and analysed sibling grief in terms of the parent-child dynamic. Such shifts marked the origins of modern grieving mechanisms, raising questions about the meaning of child deaths in a context where the relationship between the community and children may be very different.

Given the emotional investments of the community in children during the early modern period, perhaps intensified due to the high-mortality rates of children, deliberately ending the life of a child can be viewed not only in terms of the loss of the individual, but as a threat to the survival of a community. The high rates of infanticide that existed in some early modern communities then sits uneasily alongside the social and cultural importance of children within them, as well as state interventions, in the form of prosecutions, that encouraged people to 'abhor' such practices.[49] Yet, that some people were willing to kill their children, whether to preserve sexual reputation or due to the necessities of poverty, is suggestive of social and cultural weight that children carried as markers of family identity, of morality, of sin within such communities. Here the innocence of the child was lost beneath the broader cultural ramifications of their birth. As Walker demonstrates, the emotions of parents that murdered their children, as well as the community's response to such deaths, was complex and varied. Parental love was not necessarily lacking in such cases, nor were communities unsympathetic to a murderous parent's plight. Importantly, the emotions and subjectivities of murderous parents and the communities that housed them were not

---

[49] Infanticide rates were regionally and temporally specific. Anne-Marie Kilday, *A History of Infanticide in Britain, C. 1600 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 26. The medieval period does not appear to have had particularly high rates for example: Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 45.

necessarily stable, but shifted as they tried to make sense of their own and others' behaviour and to create meaningful stories from unthinkable events.

Across this volume, responses to child death have been described in terms of grief, yet what is clear is how many different emotions this terms incorporates. Whilst all would agree that grief requires a sense of loss, for some it included pain and sadness, for others fear and anxiety, and, perhaps surprisingly, for many it included joy. The Scottish painter, John Phillips, captures this complexity in his 1856 work, *La Gloria*, which depicts a Spanish wake for a dead child.[50] In it, a distressed mother is invited to join the party, marked by musical instruments and dancing, to celebrate the certain salvation of the child, for a group that believed that young children bypassed purgatory and went straight to heaven. Emotions associated with death were also influenced by a person's position in relation to it. For the dying child, death may have meant an end to physical suffering or being reunited with a beloved sibling or parent, including that of the Holy Father, so important in the symbology of Christian death. For a parent, the death of a child could be devastating, but it could also bring relief. For a sibling, the loss of a beloved brother or sister might be difficult to articulate or understand; a person may feel guilt or anxiety at being left behind. As Bourgault du Coudray notes, a sibling's death may even be rendered emotionally unimportant and deprioritised as a traumatic event by the medical tropes of nineteenth-century psychoanalysis. For the wider family or community, child death may have provoked a desire to provide greater levels of care and affection for remaining children or brought dread at the end of a dynasty. The emotional implications of child death, then, are not only different across time and place, but according to the nature of the investments people had in children and their role in the community, meaning that a study of child death not only sheds light on a phenomenon that

[50] National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh, John Phillips, *La Gloria* (1856).

was often very personal, but refracts the place of children in the early modern community and their importance to how they imagined themselves.

Across eleven chapters, *Small Graves* rethinks the relationship between death, childhood and emotion. Moving beyond a historiography that has focused on what responses to child death tell us about parental affection, the collection highlights that child death affected not only individual families, but communities and cultures. As a result, the emotions that early modern communities performed in response to both dead children and representations of dead children are far more complex than love and loss. Children were not inured from this complexity, demonstrating a range of emotional responses to death, attempting to perform to cultural prescriptions, and showing awareness of and impacting on its broader communal implications. For this reason and as several contributors here suggest, an appreciation of age, and particularly its interaction with physical development, may open up important insights into how emotion is learned, and how that learning is ongoing across the life course, as emotional responses evolve with age. In applying methodologies from both the histories of emotion and childhood, these new stories of child death highlight the complexity and depth of past experiences of emotion and childhood and the space for more to be told. In many respects, some of the remarkable continuities in social practice across early modern north-west Europe that are observed in this collection have disguised the diversity of experience that these themes raise. Histories of child death in other cultures have the potential to denaturalise some of what remains familiar in Western cultures.[51] Whilst different contributors provide access to a range of types of children, further work that explicitly makes comparisons between their experiences of death may well extend information and

[51] John Boulton and Clare Wood, '"To Beget a Child": Spirit Children, Birth, Death, and Grief at '1788' in the Kimberley', Paper presented at Children's Literature, Childhood Death, and the Emotions, 1500-1800, University of Western Australia, 5-6 December 2013.

understanding and reinforce the existence of the multiple childhoods that compete within each society. It is hoped that this volume, and particularly its methodological interventions, provides a starting point for such histories to work from.