Grief, Mourning and Motherhood: Cultural experiences of child and infant deaths across different social classes in the Victorian period.

by

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Abstract

Death was a considerably more prominent part of life in Victorian England, across all social classes, particularly the deaths of infants and children. 1 in 4 children died before the age of 5 consistently throughout the Victorian period. The Victorian fascination with death has been explored extensively by historians, especially the etiquette and social requirements of mourning within the middle and upper classes, and in turn the working classes' attempts to reach these requirements. However, up until recently, many historians have often failed to examine the ways in which Victorian death culture functioned as an expression of grief and emotion. The history of emotion, a relatively new approach within historiography, encourages historians to explore contemporary emotions, without superimposing modern concepts of feelings. This thesis uses this approach to compare and examine the ways in which middle-class and working-class families, particularly mothers, expressed grief when faced with the loss of infants and children. While there is no clear-cut line between the middle and working classes, the cultural identities of both social classes present clear differences in experiencing and expressing grief. However, neither social class were any less bereaved, or unable to feel grief over the loss of children. Their deaths were felt deeply, and the actions taken to memorialise their children were reflective of strong emotional bonds, despite the known high possibilities of death.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is all my own work and the sources of information and the material I have used (including the internet) have been fully identified and properly acknowledged.

Student Signature: Elysia Corrick.

Introduction

Death culture, mourning and the experience of infant and child loss was a prominent part of nineteenth century society in England. Infant mortality and child death affected all social classes, due to the prevalent and indiscriminate nature of disease. However poverty and poor living conditions meant that infant mortality rates were disproportionately high among the working classes.[1] One in four children died before the age of five, and this figure remained consistent between 1860 and 1900, despite the decline in adult death rates in this period.[2] More than 50% of all deaths in England and Wales were due to infections and infectious diseases, with children and infants at the greatest risk of infectious diseases such as cholera or scarlet fever.[3] These high rates of infant mortality suggests that families were exceedingly familiar with the deaths of infants and children, and subsequently the rituals and practices to mourn and mark their deaths. The central theme within this thesis is grief; in analysing the ways in which families experienced child and infant death, ultimately this thesis argues that grief was the driving force of much of the death rituals, practices and methods of memorialisation. To understand the cultural experiences of child and infant loss this thesis is also underpinned by themes such as social class, childhood and religion. Overall, while grief may have looked different across the social classes, it permeated through every deathbed, funeral and graveside of children in the Victorian period.

Social class in the nineteenth century was a defining aspect of life and death, therefore being an important theme within this thesis. Social class can be distinguished by inequalities in areas such as power, wealth, working and living conditions, education, religion and culture.[4] The nineteenth century class system has most often been structured into three categories, the upper classes (aristocracy), the middle classes and the working classes.[5] The distinctions of the middle classes is particularly important for the nineteenth century, as industrialisation created prosperous professions, such as bankers, lawyers and doctors, that more were distinct

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[1] Carol Dyhouse, "Working-class mothers and Infant mortality in England, 1895-1914", *Journal of social History,* vol12, no.2, (1978).

[2] Dyhouse, "Working-class mothers and Infant mortality in England."

[3] "Infant deaths in 19th-century England," OpenLearn, accessed 1st May 2024. https://www.open.edu/openlearn/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=28151&section=2.2

[4] David Cody, "Social Class," The Victorian Web, Accessed 14/01/2025, Last Mod. 30/08/2021, https://victorianweb.org/history/Class.html

[5] Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain,* (London: Routledge, 2016)

from the upper class and the lower classes. This new identity encouraged legal reform, such as extending the vote to more middle-class men and relaxing property laws with the Great reform act 1832, which essentially entered the middle classes into politics, giving greater authority to the class as a whole.[6] However, David Cannadine criticised the triadic structure as an oversimplification to suppose society could be defined by three categories. He suggests the structure fails to recognise the increasing diversity of the economy and presupposes that occupation was the only factor to social identities.[7] This limitation appears within this thesis, as it focuses particularly on the differences between the middle and working classes. There is no clear-cut line between the classes, in that no set professions or income made someone middle- or - working class, thus making the specific definition of groupings that this thesis compares unclear. However, this thesis embraces Cannadine's criticism, and focuses more on cultural and social identities to categorise social class. Whilst it is difficult to ascertain individual feelings about class self-identification, this thesis explores rituals and cultural behaviours that clearly differentiate between middle- and working-class experiences of child and infant loss; it does not attempt to specify who belongs to which social class. Thus, this thesis takes a more general approach to social class, as a cultural body, rather than a classification of peoples based on income or professions.

Another fundamental aspect to Victorian experiences of child and infant death is grief. This thesis aims to stress the prevalence of grief across both social classes, and thus the prominence of grief within Victorian death culture, specifically in experiences of child and infant death. Modern day grief has been defined as an acute phase immediately after loss, that has a wide range of symptoms including: sadness, anxiety, anger, and thoughts of longing to be with the deceased. Although, as a whole it is recognised that grief manifests itself and affects people differently.[8] While considering the modern-day definition is important to understanding what grief could look like, it is important to acknowledge that emotions are a

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[6] Simon Gunn, Rachel Bell, *Middle Classes: Their Rise and Sprawl* (Hachette:2011)

[7] David Cannadine, "Beyond Class? Social Structures and Social Perceptions in Modern England," *Proceedings of the British Academy,* vol 97 (1998)

[8] Renee Deveney, "Grief vs. Mourning: What's the Difference?," The Recovery Village, Last Mod.11 July 2022, Accessed 23 October 2023. https://www.therecoveryvillage.com/mental-health/grief/grief-vs-mourning/#:~:text=The difference between grief and mourning are the,feelings of grief are shown to the public.

product of their cultural environments.[9] This means that the modern day concept of grief is not entirely applicable to historical subjects as Victorian understanding and experiences of grief would be based on a different cultural environment. However, this does not mean we cannot understand emotions, such as grief, in the past, rather they need to be explored on their own terms. This notion originates from the history of emotions, an approach that has emerged over the last twenty years. Katie Barclay, historian and previous director of the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence in the History of Emotions, highlights that the history of emotions as an approach understands emotions as a biological response to external stimuli, but emotions are not universal in nature and thus are experiences based in culture. Barclay uses the example of love, arguing that love is not a biological universal experience, instead, cultural understanding of what love is shapes and directs the ways in which love is felt physically and is expressed.[10] This understanding is important to this thesis when analysing the ways in which Victorian families experienced and expressed grief. There is an obvious limitation with this field of thought, in that few historians, including myself, work with living subjects, and therefore have limited access to the emotions of individual historical subjects.[11] Emotions are complex and are very individual experiences, so it cannot be assumed that every person felt or experienced grief in the same way. However, Victorian death culture is notoriously rigid, regardless of one's individual feeling Victorian subjects had to conform to the prescribed mourning rituals. While many historians have interpreted this rigidity as a lack of feeling, others such as Herbert F. Tucker instead recognise the rigidity as equipment for the living to process and understand death, in which is inherently unknowable.[12] Therefore, grief is central to this infamous notion of Victorian death culture. This thesis analyses the material culture and products of death rituals, because they allow an insight into the cultural environment that would shape and influence the ways in which Victorians understood and expressed grief. Due to this, this thesis focuses on the general patterns of experiencing and expressing grief, and particularly the differences between social classes, rather than individual experiences.

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[9] Barclay, Katie. "State of the field: the history of emotions," The journal of the historical association, vol 106, no.371 (2021)

[10] Barclay, "State of the field: the history of emotions."

[11] Barclay, "State of the field: the history of emotions."

[12] Herbert F Tucker, *A New Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture,* (John Wiley & Sons, 2014)

Today, grief is recognised as an inseparable feeling and process following the deaths of anyone, but most especially children. However, this notion has not often been applied to nineteenth century families and mothers by historians. It was not until the turn of the twenty-first century that the notion of grief was acknowledged as a part of contemporary life. Instead, the literature on nineteenth century death has focused primarily on the excess of the material culture in Victorian death rituals. Black dresses, ostentatious funerals and grand memorials are all signifiers of Victorian death culture. Philippe Aries's seminal works: *Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present* and *The Hours of Our Death,* have been integral to the historiography of death culture, referred to as "a groundbreaking study" in the field.[13] While not exclusively about the nineteenth century, Aries argued that the nineteenth century death culture was filled with extravagance. He stated that "Mourning was unfurled with an uncustomary degree of ostentation… it was a sort of return to the excessive and spontaneous demonstrations from the Middle Ages".[14] Thomas Lacquer argued that, funerals in particular were a solidification of reputation and social standing, stating that "For the same reason that the well-appointed funerals of the wealthy and prominent came to signify their pre-eminent position in society, the ignominious funerals of the poor came to signify the opposite".[15] This narrative that the material goods and strict code of etiquette for mourning was driven by the perceptions of respectability and social status suggested an absence of emotion in such rituals. David Vincent, in his work *Love, Death, and the Nineteenth Century Working Class,* did however, acknowledge emotions and grief. Vincent argued that, both the frequency of child death and lack of material security among the working classes meant that families often could not or did not grieve their children. He states that "The loss of a close relation was so bound up with the material problems in life that at worst it seemed no more than an intensification of the misery of existence."[16] So, while grief was acknowledged, it was regarded as an unlikely and small aspect of an already hard and miserable life that the working classes lived. Both of these narratives are overly simplistic and reductive in their approach to understanding Victorian death rituals and emotions. This thesis aims to both fill this gap in the

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[13] Richard J. Janet, "Death in the Victorian Family by Pat Jalland (review)" *The Catholic Historical Review,* vol 84, no.2 (1998)

[14] Philippe Aries, *Western attitudes towards death from the middle ages to the present*. (Marion Boyars Publishers: London,1974)

[15] Thomas Laqueur, "Bodies, Death and Pauper Funerals," *Representations,* No.1(1983)

[16] David Vincent, "Love and Death and the Nineteenth Century working class", Social History 5, no.2(1980)

literature, and explore how grief was present in death culture and mourning rituals, and consider how working-class families did experiences grief over the loss of infants and children even when facing material insecurity.

Julie-Marie Strange and Pat Jalland made significant strides in understanding grief as an integral part of contemporary experiences of death. Jalland's work, *Death in the Victorian Family,* focuses primarily on upper- and middle-class family's experiences of death generally, particularly basing her research on contemporary experiences through letters, memoirs, diaries.[17] This approach meant that Jalland had an intimate focus on emotions, particularly grief. Jalland dedicates a chapter to "the tragedies of children's deaths," in which she explores the role of Christianity in the experiences of child death. Jalland argued both that "there is no evidence to suggest that parents invested less affection in their children and felt less distress at their deaths than Edwardian parents", and that "the deaths of children were a supreme test of Christian faith" that faced considerable challenges due to previous teachings suggesting infants and children had very little chance in their short lives of redemption and salvation.[18] This thesis explores much of the same themes, therefore Jalland's focus on emotions through contemporary private literature, such as diaries provides significant influence. Strange, similarly devotes a chapter in her work *Death, Grief and Poverty,* "grieving for dead children." Within this, Strange challenges the negative working-class stereotypes, arguing instead that working-class families had a pragmatic response to the deaths of children that enabled parents to manage their sorrow and loss, not suppress grief.[19] Specifically, Strange challenges the historiographical notion, perpetuated by historians such as David Vincent, that material insecurity led to blunted sensibility, and argues that grief was just as important to working-class experiences of death, as much as that of the middle class, despite their economic circumstance.[20] Ultimately, both Strange and Jalland's works are integral to this thesis' aims to fill the gaps regarding grief as a central part of cultural experiences of child and infant death, and how this differs across the social classes.

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[17] George Robb, "Book Review: Pat Jalland, Death in the Victorian Family," *Journal of Family History,* Vol 23, no. 2 (1998)

[18] Pat Jalland，*Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996)

[19] Julie – Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britian 1870-1914,* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 2005)

[20] Julie-Marie Strange. "She cried very little: death grief and mourning in working class culture, 1880-1914," *Social History,* 27, no. 2 (2002)

Similarly to the gap in literature of grief as a central theme of child and infant death, this thesis also considers a gap in the literature surrounding the specific experiences of child and infant death, as distinct from the experiences of adult death. Much of the historiography of childhood and infant mortality has focused on the high rates of infant mortality and the reasons behind such rates. It did not seem to link with the historiography of death culture in the nineteenth century. For example, Carol Dyehouse's work "Working-class mother and infant mortality in England 1895-1914", while aimed only at the end of the century, focuses on infant mortality but only in the capacity of examining the reasons behind infant mortality, not the cultural experiences of such deaths. [21] This means that death culture has often not been looked at as separate or different for children and infants, than that of the practices and ritual for adults. Similarly to the theme of grief, historians such as Strange and Jalland did specifically analyse the distinct experiences of child and infant death. However, a significant number of historians like Vincent, Elizabeth Hurren and Steve King, all made significant arguments on the feelings of grief expressed through death culture, specifically for working-class and pauper families, however they did not, in great detail, explore the deaths of infant and children as distinct from that of adults. Therefore, this thesis analyses much of the same themes, but specifically, aims to distinguish the ways in which the deaths of infants and children were different to that of adults. One way this thesis aims to do this is through looking at the experiences of mothers; their expressions of grief and their role in child and infant death. While some of the death rituals for children may have been similar to that of adults, the experience and feelings of grief were distinct due to both the nature of the relationship between child and mother and the relationship between society and children in the nineteenth century. Similarly to understanding feelings of individual grief, it is exceedingly difficult to gain insight into individual mother-child relationships, however Victorian ideals of childhood indicate that, especially in the latter half of the century, the value of a child within society underwent a shift from economic value to sentimental. In which children were valued less for their importance in labour and became more of an emotional and affective asset, in the world of the domestic sphere, across the social classes.[22] This relationship meant that grief for children from a societal standpoint became more about the emotional impact of their loss

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[21] Dyhouse, "Working-class mothers and Infant mortality in England, 1895-1914"

[22] Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society, 1880-1990*, (Cambridge University press, 1997)

on society, which would be reflected in individual relationships. Historian, John Burnett argues that "the happiness and wellbeing of children was present to varying extent in all classes," he argued that emotional investment in children should not be equated to economical investment, but Burnett did also recognise the impact that economic stressors would have on complicating the relationship between parent and child.[23] This means that, for both the working and middle classes, there was an increased recognition of a strong emotional bond between mother and child, due to the changing ideals of childhood as a whole. Children were viewed as distinct from adults and someone to love and cherish specifically for their state of being as a child. While this relationship may have been more complex for the working classes, as children continue to remain a part of the family economy, this emotional relationship underpins the specific experiences of mothers when grieving the loss of infants and children.

Overall, there are two primary aims of this thesis, to examine the differences in cultural experiences in child and infant death for different social classes, and to investigate the ways in which these cultural experiences reflected and expressed grief. The first chapter in this thesis centres on care for sick and dying children and infants, and representations of child deathbeds in nineteenth century literature. It examines the home care, led by mothers, and the ways in which both middle-class and working-class mothers demonstrated vigorous devotion and care for their children in times of sickness and health. The primary source material for the chapter will mostly come from middle-class resources such as, household advice guides, newspaper articles and contemporary pamphlets. While this is significantly useful in obtaining an understanding on middle-class ideals of their own, and working-class, experiences, it is limited in gaining insight into working-class perspectives. This is a limitation throughout this thesis as working-class primary material is sparse, and often hard to access, but interpreting middle-class sources in the context of working-class experience, while acknowledging this limitation, can offer useful insight. Chapter one also analyses nineteenth century literature to understand the ways in which child death was represented, offering consolation to readers and being an expression of grief from the author. Chapter two explores the significance of the funeral the role of material culture in the funeral and mourning period in expressions of grief over the loss of infants and children. The notion of public grief is integral to this chapter, in that middle-class observers deemed public expressions of verbal or physical

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[23] Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society,1880-1990*.

emotion inappropriate, especially at an event such as a funeral. However, this grief could be expressed through the use of material culture. Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, argue that material culture mediates our relationship with death and the dead, therefore objects, images and places are used and made in order to memorialise the dead. [24] This chapter explores funeral and its paraphernalia, gravestones, postmortem photography and mourning dress through this lens. It explores the ways in which grief for the loss of children and infants was expressed through the use of such objects and rituals. Considerable parts of this chapter apply primarily to middle-class contemporaries due to the nature of cost over material objects, however an important element of the chapter is the lack of funeral rites in pauper burials, and how the removal of funeral rites demonstrated the need for and importance of such elements in the grieving process. As well as postmortem photography, as it can be seen as accessible in some cases with the lower classes. Finally, chapter three has less of a central focus on grief, but investigates outside contemporary concern over the role of the mother in the high rates infant mortality, and the subsequent reform on child welfare at the end of the century. This chapter explores infanticide, baby farming and alternative feeding as contemporaries' primary concerns behind such high infant mortality rates. In exploring infanticide, the chapter uses case files from the Old Bailey digital archive, as well as newspaper reports from The Times. For the baby-farming and alternative feeding, pamphlets from contemporary societies and household guides are used to examine the perspectives of the role of the mother. Ultimately, the contemporary view on the mother's role in infant mortality was exceedingly complex, with both a blame and sympathy felt towards mothers, most particularly working-class mothers.

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[24] Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture,* (London: Routledge, 2001)

Chapter one: The heart of the home is the sickroom: disease, deathbeds, and the good death.

The prevalence of childhood diseases, especially infectious diseases such as diphtheria or typhus, meant that attending to sick infants and children was a common responsibility for both middle - and working - class families. This responsibility was particularly impacted by the disparity between the medical professionals' ability to diagnose and then treat the patients of such diseases. The medical profession made great strides in identifying, describing, and classifying diseases. Scarlett fever was distinguished from diphtheria and typhoid was distinguished from typhus, thus there was a new understanding of many existing diseases. Additionally, developments in pharmacology led to many new drugs for pain relief like morphine and codeine.[25] However all these developments did little towards physicians' abilities to treat and cure these diseases. The lack of treatments available for the newly diagnosable diseases meant that care and comfort for uncurable patients mostly fell to the home and family. This chapter argues that this created a space for the family to begin their rituals and expressions of grief over the impending loss of a child. One of the most important roles expected in motherhood was to care for sick and dying children. For both the middle and working classes, skilled and constant nursing from mothers was the most anyone could do in instances of disease.[26]

An integral space for the middle classes was the "sickroom", coined by contemporaries like Harriet Martineau, who wrote about her experience of being secluded to her sickroom in *Life in the Sick Room* (1844). Martineau was a leading social and political theorist and journalist who fell ill with an unknown uterine complaint, in which her convalescence became a matter of public concern. *Life in the sickroom* has been praised as her most influential work because of her criticism of the treatment of the invalid and how she sought to take control of her treatment and illness by claiming the sickroom as her space.[27] Historians such as Amanda

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[25] Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body, and Victorian Culture,* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978) on The Victorian Web, Accessed 2nd April 2024, Last mod April 1991. https://victorianweb.org/science/health/health12.html

[26] Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[27] Allison Winter, "Harriet Martineau and the Reform of the Invalid in Victorian England," *The Historical Journal,* 38, no.3,(1995)

Caleb, have defined the sickroom as a domestic space that had outside interference from the medical gaze; intentionally separate and "other" as it was once familiar but modified for the ill, thus making the new space uncomfortable due to this unfamiliarity. However, it has also been described as comforting through the means of controlling the illness and not having it permeate through the lives of the healthy.[28] This definition of the sickroom, while useful in defining it as a separate space, excludes the notion that the sickroom was a distinct place of grief; a place for the living and healthy as much as it was a place for the sick and dying. This chapter argues that the sickroom was a space for middle-class families to confront and process the possibility that their child would die, making it a space for grief to begin. It is important to note, that while family led care was also important to working-class families, the notion of a sickroom is not applicable due to the simple fact that many working-class families lived in much smaller spaces, sometimes only in one room.[29] Therefore, caring for the sick and dying was a much more involved and intimate part of everyday life, instead of separate and other like the sickroom. Overall, this chapter explores the ways in which both working-class and middle-class families attended to their sick and dying children, prioritising care at home due to the notion that this would be the best care they could receive and the best place to prepare for the possibility of death. This care and devotion from mothers of both social classes, despite the high possibilities of death, was entirely indicative of love and grief. It is important to note however, working-class grief after caring for a dying child was particularly complex. Often families could not afford any other care than that can be given by their mothers. In addition, care could be financially, physically and emotionally draining for mothers and families often leading to a sense of relief after the infant or child's death. This pragmatic response to loss could occur at the same time as grief and sorrow. [30]

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[28] Amanda Caleb, "Contested Spaces: The Heterotopias of the Victorian Sickroom," *Medical Narratives of Ill Health,* 8, no.2 (April 2019)

[29] "Victorian Homes," The National Archives. https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/victorian-homes/#:~:text=The%20houses%20were%20cheap%2C%20most,of%20toilets%20and%20a%20pump.

[30] Julie-Marie Strange, "She cried very little: death, grief and mourning in working class culture, 1880-1914," *Social History,* vol 27, No.2(2002)

This chapter also investigates deathbed scenes in popular Victorian literature and the ways in which they expressed grief over the deaths of children. The deathbed was a prominent feature in Victorian fiction. Although not a new development, it was popularised during the nineteenth century. Some of the most famous deathbed scenes were those of children, which portrayed the slow but calm and restful journey to death. This portrayal of death has been labelled "the beautiful death", which contempor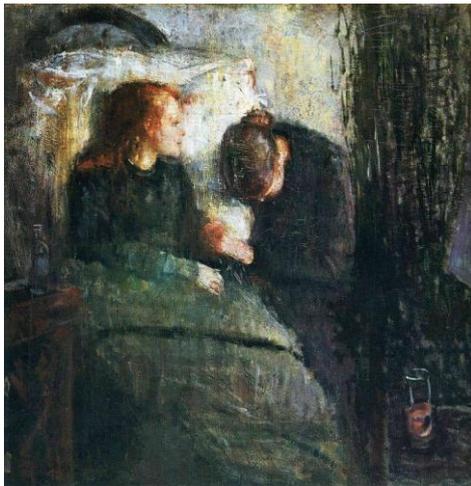aries most often linked to tuberculosis, in which the slow, life-draining symptoms could be interpreted as an immortalising process and a gentle descent into death.[31] "The beautiful death" was painted, written about in poems, and even influenced fashion. Edvard Munch painted figure one, *The Sick Child* (1885) to record the moment before the death of his older sister Sophie, who was dying from tuberculosis, a disease which he himself nearly died of as a child.[32] The image portrays the suffering that was used to inspire the painting and simultaneously conveys beauty in its softness. Lord Byron, the romantic poet, even declared his wish to die of consumption "How pale I Look- I should like, I think, to die of consumption… because then the women would all say, ' see that poor Byron – how interesting he looks in dying'".[33] The "beautiful death" featured as an undertone in some deathbed scenes, alongside the concept of a "good Christian death". This notion of a good Christian death represented the ideal death, one that was slow, painless and at home surrounded by loved ones, thus giving the dying time to pray, repent and ensure salvation for themselves, as well as to say goodbye to their loved ones and leave their earthly existence finished.[34] However, this concept fractured when the death of children came into question. Evangelical concepts like original sin suggested that children who died had very little chance of salvation. Fictional deathbed scenes of children often looked to resolve this concern and

Figure 1 Edvard Munch, "The Sick Child," 1885

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[31] Carolyn A Day, "Morality, Mortality, and Romanticising Death," in *Consumptive Chic: A History of Beauty, Fashion and Disease,* eds Carolyn A Day (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017)
[32] Edvard Munch, "The sick child,"[painting] 1885. Edvard Munch Blog, accessed 4th April 2024 https://www.edvardmunch.org/the-sick-child.jsp
[33] Imogen Clarke, "Tuberculosis: A Fashionable Disease?," The Science Museum, Accessed 4th April 2024, Last mod. March 2019. https://blog.sciencemuseum.org.uk/tuberculosis-a-fashionable-disease/
[34] Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996)

portray the salvation of children. They were entwined with representations of childhood that portrayed purity, innocence, and piety. This chapter examines how these ideas of childhood and salvation were depicted through the deathbed of child characters, through popular works of fiction like *Jane Eyre* (1847), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), and *The Daisy Chain* (1856). The portrayal of deathbed scenes of children in Victorian literature used the ideals of childhood to express the grief that followed the death of a child. It was likely that for the authors, the characters death was a depiction of real grief that they had experienced in life. For the readers, the death of child characters that were sure of their place in heaven and experienced a painless death surrounded by family, may have mirrored real-life experience. This allowed the reader to find comfort in their own situation, feeling that their child did not suffer and was able to reach salvation, even if this was not actually the case. Overall, deathbed scenes in Victorian literature are indicators of both the wider cultural ideas of childhood and Christianity, and the individual grief felt by authors and readers.

Caring for the sick and dying.

As the medical field developed in its knowledge of diseases, it also saw a significant change in the role of doctors. Most significantly was the creation of the general practitioner. With new qualifications and regulations surgeons and apothecaries could train to become a GP, which meant they were trained in a wide range of medicine including, surgery, midwifery, paediatrics, and pharmacy.[35] The GP became relied upon by middle-class families to visit the home and provide care. The GP would obtain diagnoses, check on patients when symptoms changed and administer pain relief, such as morphine after its discovery in the 1860s.[36] However, despite the new developments in understanding diseases, doctors in general still knew very little about treatments. Most childhood diseases such as scarlett fever, smallpox, and whooping cough could not be treated.[37] This meant that GPs were more often observers and supporters of the palliative care administered by the family, rather than a medical aid.[38] Hospitals were also viewed by the middle classes as repositories for the working classes due

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[35] D.U Bloor, "The Rise of the General practitioner in the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners* 28, no.190 (1978)

[36] David Helm, "The Beauty of the Sickroom: Family Care for the Dying in the English Upper and Middle Class Home, 1840-1890," *Family and Community History* 16, no.2 (2014)

[37] Yaffa Drazin, *Victorian London's Middle-class housewife,*(Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2001)

[38] Carol Anne Beardmore, "Death Grief and the Victorian GP: A Case Study of Edward Wrench of Baslow Derbyshire, 1862-1898," *Midland History* (2022)

to the lower standards of care. This meant that the majority of the care and comfort provided to middle - class sick and dying infants and children fell to the mother to administer. In which many mothers would work tirelessly and use any resource available in attempts at treating their child. Similarly, working-class families prescribed the practice of caring for the sick and dying in their homes, despite having significantly less access to resources, such as doctors. This was also in attempts to give their children the best care possible. However, an integral reason behind the working-class preference for home care was a deep mistrust of the medical profession. In which working-class people, including infants and children were repeatedly used, experimented on, and violated by the medical profession.[39] Similarly to the middle classes, keeping their children at home meant working-class mothers could attempt to take control over their child's health, despite the minimal options for treatment. Ultimately this chapter demonstrates the ways in which mothers across both social classes cared deeply for their sick and dying children, despite the lack of help from medical professionals, and how this was entirely an act of love and grief.

The mother's role as nurse was an integral aspect of the last moments of a child's life. Her effort to nurse a child back to health or prevent ill health, despite the knowledge that it was likely that her child would die before the age of five, suggested that emotion was the key motivator behind family led care. This role was not just to help out where they could. Often skilled and constant home nursing from mothers was the most that could be done for seriously ill children, and in some instances, this was enough to nurse a child back to health.[40] The number and popularity of household guides published attests to middle-class mothers' dedication in this role. There were many household guides published over the course of the nineteenth century and several of them were exceedingly popular. For example, *"Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management"* (1861) by Isabella Beeton was significantly popular, with nearly two million copies sold by 1868.[41] Mothers were not expected to instinctively know all there was to know, without training, about preventing, recognising and treating both minor and serious illnesses in children and infants. However, there was a clear notion from medical

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[39] Jenna Dittmar, "Infant Bodies were 'Prized' by 19th-century Anatomists, study suggests," University of Cambridge, last mod July 2016, accessed 13th May 2023. https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/infant-bodies-were-prized-by-19th-century-anatomists-study-suggests

[40] Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918*.

[41] Susan Zlotnick, "On the Publication of Isabella Beeton's Book of Household Management, 1861" *Branch: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth Century History* (May 2012).

professionals that, despite this, ignorance was common among mothers, especially working-class mothers, and this was concluded as a leading cause of infant and child deaths.[42] Thus, household guides were a popular resource to provide this information, as well as advice on other domestic issues like cookery, clothes-making, and childrearing. The guide *"Children and How to Manage them in Health and Sickness"*(1860), written by physician S. Barker M.D, made it clear that mothers obtaining knowledge on health and sickness of children was the best way to prevent infant mortality.

> "The utility of such books as this will be admitted by every medical man who has much to do with young mothers, and who, consequently, knows the lamentable ignorance that prevails, even the simplest of rules of health…often a young mother has found, when too late, that had she possessed the information these pages convey, her lost little one might have been spared to her…".[43]

Most household guides were primarily aimed and consumed by middle-class women; thus, it was unlikely that such advice would reach working-class women. However, many guides still commented on the circumstance of working-class families and women, demonstrating middle- class observations. Moreover, these guides reflected changing ideas about the causes of infant mortality in the medical sphere. Medical professionals like Florence Nightingale, the first professional nurse, and Louis Pasteur, who published his germ theory in 1861, started promoting cleanliness and sanitation as a prevention of infant mortality, and household guides followed suit. These professional opinions were encouraged as a replacement to previous methods of child rearing and nursing like a mother's intuition and all the old wife's tales and remedies.[44] *Cassell's Household Guide* (1869), written anonymously, was one of the most prominent household guidebooks that was reprinted twice after its original publishing updating it with the times, in 1884 and 1911. Published over three volumes, the guide amassed a large amount of information aimed at both middle- and working-class women.[45]

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[42] Danika Bonham, "From the Mouths of Babes: Infant Mortality and Medicalised Motherhood in County Durham, England, 1892-1914," University of Saskatchewan (2018)

[43] Samuel Barker, *Children and How to Manage Them in Health and Sickness, from Infancy Upwards: A Book for Mothers and Nurses* (London: Robert Hardwick, 1860).

[44] "Victorian Motherhood Guides Reflected Changes," Racing Nelly Bly, Last Mod.9th May 2021, Accessed 11th Jan 2024.https://racingnelliebly.com/fashion-forward/victorian-motherhood-guides-reflected-changes/

[45]Tracy Kasaboski, "Meg Dod's Stuffing and the Legacy of a Temperance Man," Last Mod. 30th Aug 2018, Accessed 11th Jan 2024. https://thecowkeeperswish.com/tag/cassells-household-guide/

Throughout the volumes, advice on preventative childrearing measures and "diseases incidental to children" was prominent. In these sections Cassell's guide emphasised the importance of environment and cleanliness for healthy children, advising that "doctors agree that the best place for children is the upper parts of the house where the air circulates more freely and odours from the basement are less penetrating." It also suggested that "a healthy baby is a quiet one".[46] This messaging was in line with other guides like *Advice to a Mother on the Management of her Offspring*(1860) and *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*(1861). Beeton's chapter on "the rearing, management, and diseases of infancy and childhood" makes a point to note that even in times where mothers are seemingly doing everything right in raising their child, disease still follows, and in some cases where poor children have barely any of that, continue to thrive:

> "We see elaborate care bestowed on a family of children, everything studied that can tend to their personal comfort - pure air, pure water, regular ablution, a dietary prescribed by art, and every precaution adopted that medical judgement and maternal love can dictate...in despite of all this care and vigilance, disease and death invading the guarded treasure. We turn to the foetor and darkness that, in some obscure court, attend the robust brood who, coated in dirt...live and thrive."[47]

This point demonstrates an acute awareness to the lack of control anyone has over the health of children, despite the care and devotion given by any mother with all the information they can access. It was reassuring mothers that children can still die under the best conditions, the same way children can thrive in the worst ones, suggesting that the fault may not always lie with the mother. Ultimately, it is clear that mothers were aware of the harsh realities they faced when attempting to keep their infants and children healthy, especially the lack of options that the medical field provided for childhood illnesses like scarlet fever and smallpox.[48] However the consistency of teachings through the several household guides meant that women who read several of these publications could be reassured, not confused, in their ability to give the most up-to-date and extensive care to their children. The presence of these

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[46] *Cassells Household Guide: being a complete encyclopaedia of domestic and social economy, and forming guide to every department of practical life* (London: Cassell, Petter and Galpin, 1869)
[47] Isabella Beeton, *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management,* vol 3 (London: S.O Beeton Publishing, 1861)
[48] Drazin, *Victorian London's Middle-class Housewife: What she did all day.*

advice books allowed middle-class mothers to take an active role in their child's health and attempt to give their children the best care possible throughout childhood, especially in periods of illness. This active role also contradicts the fatalistic notion that the inevitability of infant and child deaths meant parents accepted their deaths. Instead, the popularity and use of household guides suggests the opposite, that despite the knowledge of the probabilities of death, mothers continued their efforts to save their children. Therefore, a mother's love and grief over the potential loss of a child to illness was the driving force of their care at home.

Another way in which mothers, particularly middle-class mothers, attempted to care for their sick and dying children was through medicine, such as advertised non-prescription remedies.[49] However, similarly to the rest of the medical field, most commercial remedies did very little to heal their children, some even caused more harm through strong and harmful ingredients. Despite this, the sale of over-the-counter medicines increased astronomically in the second half of the nineteenth century, due to the increasing numbers of chemists and druggists promoting and selling drugs, falling drug prices and the general demand for self-medication. The demand for self-medication, especially to heal sick infants and children, could attest to mothers' constant and unwavering attempts to save their children from death. Chemists stocked a wide variety of medications and toiletries, including proprietary medicines such as Eno's fruit salt for bile-laden blood, Mother Siegal's curative syrup for unspecified stomach ailments and Beecham's pills. These types of medicines were heavily advertised as cures for numerous conditions and were strongly disapproved of by medical professionals.[50] Advertisements for these medicines could be found everywhere, from posters to playing cards, to songs written about them in plays. One particularly popular place was in the advertisement's pages in newspapers; advertisements of all kinds were featured there but generally half of all the advertisements were for medicines. These advertisements contained letters from grateful patients who were "cured" by the drug and commendations from doctors. [51] When it came to advertising medicines for children, teething was a prominent ailment featured, likely because it was viewed as a perilous time for the child, causing fevers and linked to insomnia, deafness and epilepsy. There were several competing companies

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[49] Drazin, *Victorian London's Middle-class housewife*.

[50] Roy Church, "The British Market for Medicine in the Late Nineteenth Century: The Innovative Impact of S.M Burroughs & Co," *Medical History* 49, no.3 (July 2005)

[51] Monika Urbanik, "Advertising Medicines in the 1800s," *Museum of Pharmacy,* Vol 27,(2016)

selling soothing teething powders, one of which was Mrs Winslow's Soothing syrup (figure 2).[52] The syrup was produced in the US and was widely marketed to have been created by paediatric nurse Charlotte N Winslow, however, it was actually developed in 1849 by Jeremiah Curtis and Benjamin A Perkins. It was incredibly popular, selling one and a half million bottles a year by 1868.[53] The advertisement for the syrup depicts a happy mother cuddled on what we can assume is the sickbed, with her two children, who were also both smiling and looking

Figure 2 Advertisement for Mrs Winslow's soothing syrup, 1886

content, reading about the syrup, with the medicine open on the sideboard.[54] This advertisement conveyed the very opposite to the feared experience of sick, inconsolable, and possibly dying children, and the physical and mental strain this put on mothers. However, the two main ingredients used in the syrup were morphine and alcohol, thus instead of curing the ailments of the child, it masked them and often times caused addiction, comas or even death in very young children.[55] We now know that only one teaspoonful of the syrup contained enough morphine to kill the average child.[56]

Mrs Winslow's syrup was not the only harmful drug on the market, being intentionally misleading in its advertising. Another was "Harrop's Soothing Syrup" that was documented by a British doctor in 1875 to be falsely advertising about how safe it was. The dosage for children of different ages was almost hidden in the packaging and, due to the high concentration of morphine mothers often incorrectly dosed their children, similarly to Mrs Winslow's syrup. [57] Fennings, another company advertising teething powders, also shows an idyllic scene of a

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[52] "Mrs Winslow's soothing syrup," [Colour illustrated advertisement] 1886, International museum of surgical science, accessed 11th May 2023. https://imss.org/2020/02/a-note-from-the-collections-dangerous-soothing-syrups-patent-medicines/

[53] Lillian Climo, "A Note from the Collections: Dangerous Soothing Syrups: Patent Medicines," International Museum of Surgical Science, last mod 2019, accessed 11th May 2023. https://imss.org/2020/02/10/a-note-from-the-collections-dangerous-soothing-syrups-patent-medicines/

[54] Briony Hudson, "The Poor Child's Nurse," Welcome collection, last mod, October 2017, accessed 11th May 2023, https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/WckzzigAACe3DJPD

[55] Climo, "Dangerous Soothing Syrups."

[56] Karen Berger, "Pharmacy's Past: The Soothing Syrup Known for Causing Death in Thousands of Babies." Pharmacy Times, last mod. March 2019, Accessed 12th May 2023. https://www.pharmacytimes.com/view/pharmacys-past-the-soothing-syrup-known-for-causing-death-in-thousands-of-babies-/1000

[57] Climo, "Dangerous Southing Syrups."

happy and healthy child as a result of their drug (figure 3).[58] This suggests that the drug would provide this for a mother's own children. However, both Winslow's and Fennings ignored the reality of children suffering from complications of teething. The Fennings advertisement states " for teething troubles and the ups and downs of childhood", when in reality, for children across all social classes these "ups and downs" were matters of life and death that mothers had very little control over despite the amount of effort and money spent to treat them.[59] Ultimately, most of the over-the-counter medicines advertised did not live up to their claims and did very little to cure children and infants of their ailments, and even put them in worse conditions due to their strong and harmful ingredients, thus leaving mothers just as helpless as before. However, the popularity of such drugs was a testament to the lengths any mother would go to try to save their child from both suffering from pain and succumbing to their illness.
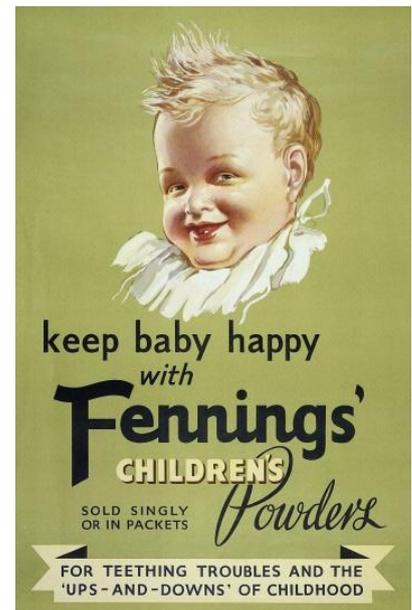

Figure 3 Advertisment for Fennings' Childrens powders

Overall, advertisements were indicative of what customers wanted - a healthy peaceful child – however medicines rarely gave them this.

Working-class families suffered the same lack of solutions to high infant mortality rates that the middle classes did, and they had the same emotional response and desire to do anything to save their child from succumbing to the dangers of disease. However, working-class mothers were limited by their financial situation; they could not spend copious amounts on over-the-counter medicines or household manuals. This is not to say that no working-class women had access to these but rather most did not, as well as not having the funds for most doctors or the ability to take time off from employment to look after their sick children. Despite these limitations, family-led care was still preferred and prioritised, similarly to the middle classes. In part this was due to a deep mistrust of medical professionals and institutions, which was not completely unsubstantiated. It was well known by contemporaries that hospitals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were filthy places, infested with disease and filled with doctors looking to experiment not care for patients. It was also

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[58] "Fennings' Children's Powders," [Colour advertisement] The welcome collection. https://wellcomecollection.org/works/p36fvn82

[59] Hudson, "The Poor Child's Nurse."

believed by working-class people that invasive medical procedures were unnatural and were assaults on the integrity of the body.[60] Therefore working-class mothers chose to care for their own infants and children for fears of such violations. An article by the Society for the Abolition of Vivisection (1884) wrote about an instance in which two physicians experimented on their patients and published their own article in the *Lancet,* a prestigious medical journal, outlining their experiments. The two physicians worked at the University College Hospital and the Westminster hospital, they both "administered a toxic agent (that is, a poison), not only upon frogs and cats, but likewise of 47 men and women, and who were, moreover, their patients". This pamphlet emphasises how the work of those two physicians was abhorrent. The society overall advocated for the welfare of animals, and this focus of this pamphlet was to highlight how the experimentation on animals can easily lead to the experimenting on working-class and vulnerable people. The article opens by stating "The society for the abolition of vivisection declared and maintained several years past that the practice of torturing animals for scientific purposes would, unless extirpated, spread from hospital to hospital throughout the land, and the poor and friendless be experimented upon".[61] Seemingly, the society was right. While experiments such as this may not have been a common occurrence, the pamphlet highlighted how experimentation on working-class patients was happening and being openly discussed in the Lancet, thus being completely accepted by the medical field.

 As well as experimentation on working-class patients, this pamphlet is an echo of the earlier scandal of body snatching in the early nineteenth century. Physicians had been reported to be paying body snatchers to steal bodies from graves to experiment on and practice their medical procedures. Infant bodies in particular, were sought out and valued by anatomists, because of their educational value as different from adult cadavers.[62] Body snatching was a common occurrence, particularly in the first half of the century, because the number o9f medical students requiring cadavers to learn from was at an all-time high, and the removal of a body from a grave was vague when it came to its legality. The disinterment of a body was not viewed as a crime and the poor, buried in shallower graves, were the easiest for body snatchers to

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[60] Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London*.

[61] Society for the Abolition of Vivisection, *Experiments on Patients by Two Hospital Physicians*. 1884. https://www.jstor.org/stable/60214423

[62] Dittmar, "Infant Bodies were 'Prized' by 19th-century Anatomists, study suggests."

access.[63] Newspapers reported on the numerous arrests of body snatchers, the Trewmans Exeter Flying Post reported on a case tried in Wells in 1823 restating the prosecutors opening statement :

> "What would be so agonising to the feeling of a distressed parent, whilst watching the last convulsive efforts of the departing child, than to know, that after its mortal remains should be consigned to the sacred depository of the dead. The tomb should be violated and by the same inhuman hands the body disrobed of its habiliments and cut piecemeal?"[64]

These reports demonstrate the pain and suffering that many families faced in having their dead loved ones, including children, be at risk of violation in their resting place and their earthy body for the sake of a physician's "curiosity." While rationally it can be acknowledged that it would have aided medical development, this does not minimise the violation of consent. The Anatomy act of 1832 was passed in an attempt to curb the issue of body snatching; however, the act still outlined the legality of physicians continuing to use unclaimed pauper bodies.[65] Workhouses were particularly dangerous places for infants due to the elevated levels of infectious diseases to which they were so vulnerable. It was not until 1838 that stillborn babies had to be registered in workhouses, prior to this, it was considerably easier to sell the body to an anatomist.[66] This mistrust in medical professionals ran deep and the act likely did very little to curb anxieties of working-class families. Therefore, mothers took it upon themselves to care for their sick and dying children, keeping them safe and close in case of death, in which the proper rituals could then be observed, and grief be felt.

Overall, there is not a lot of evidence displaying exactly how working-class mothers treated their children, however, the rise in district nursing from the 1860's does point to how home care was received by working-class families, later in the nineteenth century. There were significant developments when it came to hospitals throughout the nineteenth century, many new hospitals were established, and Florence Nightingale was particularly influential when it came to the cleanliness and standard of care on hospital wards. By 1901 a quarter of all

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[63] Janet Philip, "Bodies and Bureaucracy: The demise of the body snatchers in 19th century Britian," *The Anatomical Record*, vol 305, No.4(2022)

[64] "Stealing Dead Bodies," Trewman's Exeter Flying Post, January 20th, 1823, pg. 3.

[65] "Dissecting The 1832 Anatomy Act: In Conversation with Professor Dame Sue Black," Highland Archive Centre, accessed 12th May 2023. https://www.highlifehighland.com/highland-archive-centre/highland-archive-centre/dissecting-the-1832-anatomy-act/

[66] Dittmar, "Infant Bodies were 'Prized' by 19th-century Anatomists".

Londoners used the services of ninety-two hospitals.[67] However it was noted by surgeon Frederick Treves, who worked at The London Hospital in the 1870s, that working-class patients still refused treatment and avoided hospitals. Treves commented on hospital registers that recorded the substantial number of patients refusing treatment and leaving hospitals. Treves stated that, "The poor had a terror of it...and many an hour I spent trying to persuade patients to come in for treatment. Operation results were not encouraging, and the general public knew it."[68] Thus, even as late as the 1870s, working-class families still preferred caring for their sick children at home. Historian, Julie-Marie Strange argued that dying at home was an important part of working-class death culture, because of the communal nature of it. There was fear that children sent to a hospital could die alone in an unfamiliar place. Instead, keeping the child at home with friends and family could ease the distress of the impending death, for both the dying and the carers.[69] As well as this, the ability of carers, the mother and the community, to keep close watch over their sick and dying children created a sense of control, even if the situation was helpless.[70]

The use of hospitals by working-class people did increase as the century progressed, however this came more from a fear of inquest from officials over the child's death than trust of doctors or want of hospital care. [71] Instead, the rise of district nursing was the main way in which the working classes gained access to medical treatment. At the beginning of the century the profession of district nurse did not exist, however throughout the century the profession formalised to become a paid occupation. The definition of district nursing was the care for the sick poor within their own homes, this definition changed over the twentieth century, but for the nineteenth century they were specifically there to provide care in homes for working-class families.[72] The 1861 census demonstrated that there were significantly more domestic (district) nurses in employment than institutional (hospital) nurses, with 24,821 domestic compared to a 4,448 institutional.[73] This number alone suggest the popularity and necessity

[67] Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London*.

[68] Michelle Higgs, "Victorian Hospitals: Deadly Infections," A Visitor's Guide to Victorian England, Accessed 11th May 2023, Last Mod March 2019. https://visitvictorianengland.com/category/hospitals/

[69] Strange, "She Cried Very Little."

[70] Strange, "She Cried Very Little."

[71] Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London*.

[72] Elaine Denny, "The Emergence of the Occupation of District Nursing in Nineteenth Century England," Thesis at University of Nottingham(1999).

[73] Denny, "The Emergence of the Occupation of District Nursing in Nineteenth Century England."

of taking nursing into the homes of working-class families. Ultimately, it accommodated the working-class preference for home care, whilst providing the ever-developing medical care the patients needed, closing the gap between the mistrust of doctors and institutions and the need for better care for their vulnerable infants and children.

Overall, family-led care of sick and dying children and infants was important to all families in the nineteenth century. Mothers embraced the responsibility to care and attempt to ward off disease and death that seemed to chase their children and infants. The middle-class mother's attempts to use any resource available to them, such as household guides and over the counter remedies, demonstrated that even in the face of very little help and medical guidance, mothers would do everything they could to keep their children alive. This level of care and devotion suggested that grief was central to their motivations, in that mothers were attempting to ward off their own grief, as much as death itself. Working-class mothers were much the same, despite the lack of resources available to them. The mistrust of medical institutions ran deep in working-class culture, and so the community was the basis of their care for their sick and dying children. In keeping their children at home and sharing the burden of caring for their children with the community, emotions were also shared. The care offered by hospitals was not viewed as helpful, instead there was a real chance that doctors would prioritise their own curiosity and fail to prevent the deaths of their children. Thus, keeping them home offered familiarity, community, and the opportunity to grieve properly, if there was nothing left to do. However, just like middle-class mothers, working-class mothers did everything they could to save their sick and dying children, including saving them from the medical sphere itself. While the deaths of children and infants were constant, so was the care and devotion of mothers and family.

Representations of the deathbed and child death in literature for children and adults.

Children's literature both reflected upon and avoided the realities of life as a child in the nineteenth century. One way in which this was particularly demonstrated, was through the theme of death. Death was a prominent and unwavering aspect of childhood in the nineteenth century, and thus literature could be utilised by both readers and authors to either escape the certainty of death or prepare for it. Literature, including child deathbed scenes, was extremely

popular in the second half of the century, this came at a time when children's literature was changing in style and content. The idea of fantasy and imagination in stories was not apparent before the mid nineteenth century, instead, literature for children was informative, interesting, and sometimes charming, but was overall very serious. In the later half of the nineteenth century, literature included child characters that avoided death through magical escapism, where protagonists were given the ability to overcome death through magic.[74] This notion of magic and fantasy came with newer emerging ideals of childhood, in which children were no longer viewed as empty vessels to be filled with information, instead they were special and were attributed with purity and innocence.[75] Cautionary, moral tales urging children to piety were still prominent, but most emphasised the value and innocence of children, often using death to portray this. [76] This section focuses on literature that portrayed the newer ideals of childhood such as innocence, purity and piety, through the deaths of child characters, such as Nell in Charles Dicken's *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and Helen in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, and the ways in which the focus of these stories was grief. The death of infants and children was so prominent in both adult and child life, that, in turn grief, was almost an inevitable feeling. Thus, the depiction of child deathbed scenes in literature were bound to reflect grief, from the experiences of the author to the interpretation from the reader. This section explores how the portrayal of the death of the ideal child created a space in which middle-class readers could find comfort and acknowledgement of grief and apply these stories to their own experiences of child death. It is almost impossible to measure the impact of literature on an audience, however it is possible to make some assumptions about how readers may have interpreted literature. It is also important to note that, while education and literacy rates were increasing during the period, the fact remains that most readers were middle-class. When it came to much of the detail of working-class life, novels remained largely silent, instead working-class stories were used as vessels for moral growth and self-reflection.[77] Thus, it is important to stress that these stories do not act as representations of

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[74] Marvin Tyler Sasser, "The Advent of the Denial of Death," *Georgia Southern University Graduate Studies*, no.166 (2008)

[75] Bette P. Goldstone, "Views of Childhood in Children's Literature Over Time," *Language Arts* 63, no.8(1986)

[76] Kimberly Reynolds, *Fatal Fantasies: The Death of Children in Victorian and Edwardian Fantasy Writing*, in "Representation of Childhood Death," eds. G. Avery, (Palgrave, Macmillan: London, 2000)

[77] Alysa Levene, Jean Webb, "Depictions of the Ideal Child in Nineteenth Century British literature and Legislature," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth,* vol 12, no 1 (2019)

working-class realities, instead they act as insights into middle-class commentary and perception of working-class experiences.

The deathbed of a child was more often than not steeped in fictional liberties, prioritising the image of the corpse over the abjection of the body. This meant that the corpse was often romanticised, in which it was projected as the perfect vision of its formal self; innocent and pure, instead of acknowledging the repulsive aspects of dying as well as the seriousness of the child's ailments and possible pain before death. [78] This practice is clear in the death of the child character Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*(1841). While not being a witness to the moment of death itself, it was a deathbed scene that had a strong reaction of devastation from the audience.[79] In presenting the body of a dead child as in its ideal state, Dickens presented the death of childhood itself to the audience, expressing the grief over losing something that was so perfect. Readers who had experienced the loss of a child themselves would be likely to take comfort in this image, rather than being confronted with the realities and gruesomeness of the death of a child. The beginning of the death sequence starts with Nell supposedly sleeping after her arduous journey with her grandfather to escape the money lenders that are after them, with her grandfather and friends reading to her and talking to her just before she fell into her sleep. Until her grandfather goes in once more and realises that she is in fact dead, "no sleep so beautiful and calm, so free from trace of pain, so fair to look upon." Her deathbed is described as, dressed with here and there some winter berries and green leaves, gathered in a spot she had been used to favour and her grandfather said "when I die, put near me something that has loved the light and had the sky above it always', those were her words". Nell herself is depicted as "still her former self lay there, unaltered in this change….sorrow was dead indeed in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born; imaged in her tranquil beauty and profound repose." [80] This portrayal of Nell is a prime example of projecting the image of the perfect body while avoiding the realities of the physical consequences of death. It highlights her beautiful and cherubic qualities as well as death bringing an end to her suffering. The use of the word "born" when discussing the new state of happiness after her death

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[78] Margo Masur, "Inhumanly Beautiful: The Aesthetics of the Nineteenth Century Deathbed Scene," *State University of New York College at Buffalo,* Paper 18 (2015)

[79] Dominic Rainsford, "Sentimental: Since the Death of Little Nell," *Cahiers Victorianes et Edouardiens,* (2012)

[80] Charles Dickens, "*The Old Curiosity Shop,*" The Project Guttenberg Ebook, Last mod. November 2021, Accessed 12th May 2023. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/700/700-h/700-h.htm

suggests not an end to something as death implies, instead it suggests that her reward and resolution for her life begins in the afterlife. Her grandfather affirms this, suggesting she was better off dead saying, "death warms her hands and restores rosiness in her cheeks." Ultimately, she has completed her life by leaving everyone in the story marked with her beauty, kindness and meekness.[81] Overall the depiction of Nell in this way gave a positive undertone to the death of Nell and created a space in which Nell moved on to a better place, in which she did not suffer in death, and was rewarded for her hard life in the afterlife. It is known that Dickens suffered the loss of a daughter, Dora Dickens, who was eight months old after suffering convulsions. A letter written by Dickens describes his daughter falling ill. He describes that "there is nothing in her appearance but perfect rest. You would suppose her quietly asleep. But I am sure she is very ill." This experience aligns almost exactly to his descriptions of Nell in her death. This suggest that in writing the death of Nell, Dickens was reflecting and expressing the grief he felt in his own experience of child death.[82] However, the audience reaction to Nell's death did not reflect the sentiments Dickens portrayed. One anonymous reaction in the Metropolitan Review in 1841 argued that " happiness, which is so largely at the author's disposal, had not been more generously dealt out by Mr Dickens… little Nelly… deserves a better fate than to die so prematurely."[83] This reaction suggests that despite the realities of the frequency of child death, this was not accepted as inevitable. It could be suggested that readers simply did not want to face what was reality; they wanted escapism and fiction from this story. However, it was also likely a reflection of real grief, that parents and families did not accept that children had to die despite the conditions they found themselves in. Therefore, the deathbed of Nell represents both the expressions of grief from Dickens himself, but also the grief and frustration families felt in a time where child death was high.

Similarly to little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the ideal child was represented and explored through the death of children in many other pieces of fiction and children's literature. Mary Grecko argues for the "Victorian cult of the dead child," in which the increased idolisation of

[81]Morgan Strawn, "The Standard of Grief: Mourning in Victorian Fiction and Life Writing," Oklahoma State University(2019)

[82] "Our little baby is dead." Letter of Note, last mod Jan 2012, accessed 19th June 2024. https://lettersofnote.com/2012/01/19/our-little-baby-is-dead/

[83] Rainsford, "Sentimental: Since the Death of Little Nell."

childhood relied on the figure of the dead child.[84] With the increased popularity of dead children featuring in fiction, the dead child became synonymous with the ideal child. This is when the perfect child, one that is innocent and uncorrupted by adulthood, is immortalised, and kept perfect through death. As well as the notion that children are made more precious because of the high infant mortality rates, children that did not make it to adulthood were saved from the hardships and corruptions of life. [85] The deathbed scene of Helen in *Jane Eyre* (1847) reinforced this notion. Helen was Jane's only friend at the school they attended, Lowood school, and was portrayed continually as a pious and gentle girl, even when repeatedly punished at school by her teachers. While at school, Helen falls sick with consumption, and Jane visits her in her sickroom. Helen herself tells Jane about her acceptance and happiness that her death is upon her:

 "I am very happy Jane; and when you hear I am dead you must be sure to not grieve, there is nothing to grieve about... the illness which is removing me is not painful , it is gentle and gradual; my mind is at rest...By dying young I shall escape great sufferings".[86]

This conveyed both the lack of pain in her terminal illness and her gratefulness for death to take her before she suffers from a life of misery and poverty due to her having "no qualities or talents to make my way very well in the world." Thus, Helen is kept perfect in her state of childhood, immortalised, and protected in the afterlife. The lack of pain in Helen's death is also significant due to the fact that Helen died of consumption, which is modern day tuberculosis. Consumption permeated Victorian society, killing around four million people In England and Wales between 1851 and 1910.[87] Due to both the prevalence and the symptoms of the disease; being a slow and gradual deterioration of the body whilst the mind stays intact, consumption became entwined with the notion of the good Christian death.[88] Thus Helen's slow death allowed her to say goodbye to Jane, and accept own death, reflecting on her next journey to the afterlife. Helen acknowledges this, telling Jane that she "Counts the hours till that eventful one arrives which shall restore me to Him, reveal Him to me".[89] Helen's piety in

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[84] Mary Gryctko, "Eternal Innocence: The Victorian Cult of the Dead Child," PhD Thesis, University of Pittsburgh (2020)

[85] Gryctko, "Eternal Innocence: The Victorian Cult of the Dead Child."

[86] Charlotte Bronte (Currer Bell) *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*,(London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1847).

[87] Clarke, "Tuberculosis: A Fashionable Disease?."

[88] Day, "Morality, Mortality, and Romanticising Death."

[89] Bronte, *Jane Eyre*.

her life and on her deathbed modelled the perfect child, and greatly influenced Jane's own faith, turning her into a more faithful and sinless child. Jane becomes quite worried when she hears of Helens illness, "how sad to be lying on a sick-bed, and to be in danger of dying! This world is pleasant – it would be dreary to be called from it and have to go who knows where?"[90] The fear of death that Jane expresses demonstrates a very real question of mortality, however Charlotte Bronte uses Helen as a reassuring and comforting message of faith.[91] Jane asks "You are sure then Helen? that there is such a place as heaven?" and Helen replies "I am sure there is a future state; I believe God is good; I can resign my immortal part to him without any misgiving...you will come to the same region of happiness; be received by the same mighty universal parent, no doubt, dear Jane".[92] Helen here imparts the notion of universal salvation, where all will be saved regardless of sin or belief in life, which contradicts the popular Anglican notion of prating for redemption.[93] Helen here teaches the readers of the warmth and goodness that awaits after death, so as well as conveying the notion of childhood as perfect and without suffering. It also acts as consolation to those who grieve a lost child, parent or peer.

The character Helen itself was formed from grief. Similarly to Dicken's Nell, Helen was based on Charlotte's sister Maria who died from consumption shortly after she joined a school similar to that in Jane Eyre. Thus, the story acts as a memorial for Maria and a place where Charlotte's own grief was expressed. The depiction of faith reflected Bronte's own beliefs, and the lack of pain in Helen's death also reflected Bronte's hopes that Maria's death was painless and without suffering. [94] While this could be labelled as sentimentality by critics and scholars, as the reality of Maria's death was likely painful and the loss of children prematurely was not often welcomed as an idea to protect them from life, these notions were not just based in fantasy but rather grief. The death of Helen depicts how unfathomable and life changing grief was, and how authors and readers found comfort and were consoled by finding the silver-lining and hoping for the best for their children.

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[90] Bronte, *Jane Eyre*.
[91] Haley Highfield, "The Divine Consumptive: The Depiction of Tuberculosis in Jane Eyre," Thesis University of South Carolina.(2022)
[92] Bronte, *Jane Eyre*.
[93] Highfield, "The Divine Consumptive."
[94] Highfield, "The Divine Consumptive."

Similarly to Bronte's *Jane Eyre,* the Chrisitan teachings around the good death, were imperative aspects to much of children's literature. This can be seen in Charlotte M. Yonge's *The Daisy Chain*: Yonge was an author who was devoted to her religious life, teaching at Sunday schools and writing novels and other works for use in Sunday schools and Christian teaching. Her works focused on traditional family life, rigid Christian beliefs, and moral principles. Yonge donated all the proceeds of her works to charity in order for her writings to not be a consequence of vanity and gain, only virtue and disseminating the work of her church, the Church of England.[95] *The Daisy Chain* was published in 1856 in full. It was previously serialised in a magazine, and it was her second most popular novel reaching nine editions in twelve years.[96] *The Daisy Chain* is a family chronicle following the May family. The story primarily focused on the domestic environment of this family; however, it was not entirely insular, with themes of parish affairs and religious and political concerns.[97] The everyday life of the May family however was not as superficial as it may seem. The story begins with the tragic loss of the mother, Mrs May in an accident, in which the eldest daughter, Margaret, lived, but was left disabled. While it was not an uncommon experience for families in the nineteenth century, this beginning establishes a very intentional family dynamic. Maragret is bound to a life on the couch, stagnant and growing despite her age and looming womanhood. Margaret fills the role of moral guide to her ten other siblings, but most of all her younger sister Ethel, the primary character of this book. Therefore, when, at the end of Book Two, Maragret succumbs to her sickness and dies, her deathbed is steeped in religious ideology and teachings. The days leading up to Margaret's death are a perfect reflection of the middle-class sickroom, as explored previously. The family doctor visits but lacks the ability to do anything to aid or cure Margaret "Dr Spencer had come to the sickroom, but he could only suggest remedies that were already in course of application to the insensible sufferer." Her carers, because of the lack of her mother for this role, were her sister Ethel and Mrs Arnott her Aunt, who continued to devote their time to caring for Margaret but to no avail: "Mrs Arnott and Ethel were watching, and trying everything to relieve her, but with little effect".[98] This signifies

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[95] Anita C. Wilson, "Charlotte M Yonge's the Daisy Chain: Victorian Artifact or Classic?" *Children's Literature Association Quarterly,* (1981)
[96] Shirley Foster, Judy Simmons, "Charlotte Yonge: The Daisy Chain," in *What Katy Read,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995)
[97] Foster, Simmons, "Charlotte Yonge: The Daisy Chain."
[98] Charlotte M Yonge, *The Daisy Chain,* (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1856)

the change of the dynamic of the sickroom becoming the deathbed, in which, "She lingered on the boarders of a land very far away". The narrator, as the story has no set perspective, noted that, "They could not follow her into the shadow of death, but could only watch the frail earthly prison-house being broken down, as if the doom of sin must be borne, though faith could trust that it was but her full share in the cross".[99] This echoes Christian commentary, with the use of the phrase "shadow of death" directly quoting the verse "The Lord is my Sheperd" which is known most for being a funeral reading, and was popularised in the nineteenth century.[100] More than this though, the comparison of Margaret's body to a frail earthly prison house made a clear comment on the suffering of Margaret's life due to her physical body, as well as the superiority of the afterlife, a place where she would not be bound by illness or disability and would instead be free. Just like with the death of Helen, Yonge portrays Margarets' death to be a good Christian death, in which her slow demise allowed her to reconcile with her death, repent for her sins and ensure her salvation. Ultimately, the religious teachings in Margarets death were there to offer comfort and support in a parent's time of grief. By feeling certain of the salvation of a child's soul, parents would no longer have to worry about either the death or the child's previous sufferings in life. Parents could move on with their sorrow and know that their child was safe in the afterlife.

Overall, the presence of child death and deathbed scenes in nineteenth century literature reflected the reality of grief that was felt in the times of child death. Both Dickens and Bronte suffered the loss of a child, Dickens as a parent, and Bronte as a sister, and writing the fictional depictions of their child character's death was likely integral to their own expressions of grief. In portraying the ideal child, innocent and pure, removed from all suffering through death, they could re-write their experience, taking comfort in these qualities, instead of the possibly more gruesome and painful reality of death. Readers could take this message away and apply it to their own experiences of child and infant death, reassuring and comforting themselves in their own grief. The significance of Christian ideals of childhood and death in literature, especially *Jane Eyre* and *The Daisy Chain*, only compounded the story's undertone of grief. The reassurance of salvation for infants and children was a serious concern for many parents, who feared for, or had already lost their children. The certainty of salvation for these characters

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[99] Yonge, *The Daisy Chain*,
[100] Brent A. Strawn. "The Lord is My Shepherd." Bible Odyssey accessed 19th June 2024. https://www.bibleodyssey.org/articles/the-lord-is-my-shepherd/

could console readers that this would be the case for their own children. Ultimately, grief was the centre of these stories, for both authors and readers.

Conclusion

The pervasiveness of disease and the high rates of infant mortality throughout the nineteenth century meant that almost every family, both middle- and -working class, faced the very real possibility that their children may never make it to adulthood. This chapter has highlighted the ways in which families, particularly mothers, attempted to keep their children from harm by caring for them at home in times of sickness, and how literature throughout the period depicted the deathbed scenes of children. Ultimately, it is clear that grief was present and important to both social classes. During the initial stage of death and dying. Grief was certainly not the only factor when families were considering their options of care when a child or infant fell sick, especially for the working classes. Resources, circumstance and the individual feelings would certainly affect this. However, in examining the ways in which most families utilised every resource they had – for middle-class families this was things like household guides and over-the-counter medicine, and for the working classes this was often district nurses and their community - it suggests a devotion that could only come from love and grief due to the illness and potential loss of their child. The preferred option of home and family care for both social classes demonstrate this further. For the middle classes, the assurance of GP's and safe care from mothers, allowed families to comfort their ill child, and when necessary, prepare them for death. For the working classes, the mistrust of medical professionals and institutions motivated their preference for home care, ensuring safety and proximity to their loved ones in the time of death. Deathbed scenes in Victorian literature reflect this preference for dying in the home, or at least surrounded by loved ones. This chapter explored works of literature, such as *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), Charles Dickens, *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charlotte Bronte, and *The Daisy Chain* (1856), Charlotte M Yonge, of in which centred around the expression of loss, of the ideal child, and the very real children of the authors. Both Dickens and Bronte felt the loss of a child and their works depicted a death free from suffering, in which loved ones were present, and in *Jane Eyre* especially, salvation was certain. *The Daisy Chain,* while not a representation of a real death, was similarly concerned with the certainty of salvation and the loss of the ideal young woman. Ultimately, these depictions would resonate with readers, and while we cannot measure reader experiences of

the scenes, we can note the ways in which they can be interpreted. Overall, this chapter has explored the first step in the experience of child and infant death; the illness that mothers would try their hardest to stave off, and the grief when death finally arrived. The next chapter follows on from this, exploring the next stage in both the death culture and the grieving process; the funeral and mourning period.

Chapter 2. The commencement of mourning: death rituals, material culture and memory.

With the time of death, came the beginning of mourning - a period of time in which the family's lives revolved entirely around the death of their loved one. A series of death rituals were conducted, and rules were to be followed on how to behave and display themselves during a person's period of mourning. This chapter investigates the ways in which nineteenth-century death rituals and methods of memorialisation for the loss of children reflected expressions of emotion and grief, and to what extent these customs differed between social classes. This chapter explores the ritual of the funeral, the material objects within the mourning period and for long-term commemoration, such as postmortem photography, relics, and the gravesite. The material culture surrounding these death rituals is examined significantly in this chapter. Jenny Hockey and Elizabeth Hallam, argue that material culture mediates our relationship with the dead, and so objects, images, practices, and places are made to remind us of the person that was lost.[101] This notion is applied to the examination of material culture in this chapter, in that no matter the social class, the rituals and material goods used to commemorate deceased children were attempts to express grief publicly in a culturally acceptable manner. Some historians, such as Thomas Lacquer, have explored how the funeral proved to be a time of expenditure because of the middle-class contemporary idea that material goods were a necessity to display social standing and respectability.[102] It is clear that there were rules and expectations when it came to the appropriate ways in which to mourn and conduct a funeral. Trevor May highlights this, in arguing that the funeral was an opportunity for contemporaries to display the deceased's social standing. May states that too much ostentation from the poor was viewed as abhorrent, but too little on the part of the prosperous was also inappropriate.[103] Cassels Household Guide (1870) demonstrates these expectations of the middle classes. It contained several sections that detailed the ways in which an appropriate funeral should be conducted, even specifying the different price ranges and what should be included. For example, the guide specified that a funeral costing £3.5s

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[101] Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture,*(London: Routlege, 2001)
[102] Thomas Laqueur, "Bodies, Death and Pauper Funerals," *Representations*, No.1(1983)
[103] Trevor May, *The Victorian Undertaker,* (Buckinghamshire: Shire Publications, 1996)

that included -"patent carriage with one horse: smooth elm coffin, neatly finished, lined inside, with pillow &c: use of pall, mourners' fittings, coachman with hat band; bearers; attendant with hat band &c". This is the cheapest it outlines. The most expensive costed £53 which included a coffin inscription plate, brass handles, more mourning dress and more decadent coffin fixings.[104] It is undeniable that the middle-class respectable funeral could be used to display their financial standing through great expenditure of these material goods. Similarly, the notion that death culture was an expression of wealth was not entirely exclusive to the middle classes. Julie Marie Strange notes how it was inevitable that for the working classes, purchases like a private burial plot and funeral paraphernalia signified social status, but the significance of the custom was not based on this alone.[105] It is important to acknowledge that both of these ideas can exist at the same time, that death rituals could signify both social standing and grief. However, this thesis' main framework is the notion that grief was central to the experiences of child and infant death. Therefore, this chapter explores the same material culture and rituals through the lens of grief. Overall, death rituals and material culture signified loss to external onlookers, being an integral aspect to the grieving process and memorialisation of infants and children across all social classes.

The Funeral

The funeral symbolised the closing moment of a person's life, where one was finally laid to rest, buried in the ground, often in the family plot with other loved ones. It was an integral aspect of the grieving process; the funeral was a space in which grief was socially acceptable and expected.[106] Thus, the funeral reflected cultural expressions of loss and grief over the deaths of children. In the nineteenth century, the Church of England burial service was the most common, so this is the type of funeral that this chapter will focus on, but other Christian denominations, and Judaism, maintained separate burial grounds across Britian.[107] The funeral and the subsequent mourning period was where Victorian rigidity and etiquette were significantly prominent. For the upper and middle classes, this

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[104] *Cassells Household Guide: being a complete encyclopaedia of domestic and social economy, and forming guide to every department of practical life* (London: Cassell, Petter and Galpin, 1869)
[105] Julie- Marie Strange, "Only a Pauper Whom Nobody Owns: Reassessing the Pauper Grave 1880-1914," *Past & Present,* Vol 178, No,1 (2003)
[106] Jalland, Pat. *Death in the Victorian Family.* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996)
[107] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*.

was a time filled with expectations to be met and rules to be followed in order to present a respectable funeral to those attending. The funeral could be a time to display the deceased person and their family's social standing in life by spending significant amounts of money to get the best carriages, mourning dress, coffin, and other funeral paraphernalia. Funeral expenses could easily beggar a poorer family in attempting to adhere to the requirements of a respectable funeral.[108] This pressure did not go unnoticed by contemporaries, yet it continued.[109] Both contemporaries and historians have credited the requirements of such splendour to the exponentially growing funeral industry and commercialisation of death culture. A driving force of this expensive funeral industry was the undertaker, a profession that underwent notable change throughout the century. At the beginning of the century, an undertakers' main job was carpentry, to build and provide coffins, and they were usually only based in large towns up until the 1860s.[110] However, undertakers soon transformed into entities that provided upper- and middle-class families with all the necessary material goods to be able to distinguish themselves from the lower classes through the ritual of the funeral. Undertakers had a vested interest in keeping up the ideal of funeral rites signifying social status. It became very difficult for a family to choose a simpler funeral because of the pressure to demonstrate a respectable and appropriate funeral for their loved one.[111] The increased involvement of the undertaker in selling the large array of funeral rites ultimately led to the distaste of the profession by contemporaries themselves. Charles Booth, the social investigator, and author of "Life and Labour of the People of London" commentated on undertakers in his study, distinguishing them from other coffin builders and funeral furnishers because of their intimate role with managing the dead and planning the funeral performance. Booth makes the point that undertakers also had a personal stake in maintaining unsanitary conditions as undertakers were the most successful it times of epidemics or when social conditions were at their worst.[112] Charles Dickens also displayed great distaste towards undertakers and the funeral industry. Dickens continually attacked the pretentious

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[108] Trevor May, *The Victorian Undertaker,* (Buckinghamshire: Shire Publications, 1996)
[109] Yurie Nakane, "Fashioning death: The Victorian Market of Mourning," Tsuda University Thesis. *The Journal of the Asian Conference of Design History and Theory,* no.3 (2020)
[110] May, *The Victorian Undertaker*.
[111] May, *The Victorian Undertaker*.
[112] May, *The Victorian Undertaker*.

funeral performance, even going as far to write his support for the General Interment Bill in two articles in the magazine Dickens edited, *Household Words* (June 1850). The bill was designed to regulate the funeral trade.[113] Overall, despite the agreed upon contempt felt towards undertakers, they remained an integral part of the funeral process, and expensive and ostentatious funeral rites were still prominent right up until the First World War. This presents a clear contradiction; the historiographical notion argues that funerals were purely displays of wealth, yet contemporaries demonstrated their distaste towards undertakers taking advantage of families and continually profiting off of the funeral industry, This suggests that instead, the material goods that upper- and middle-class families continually purchased for funerals had an emotional significance, and thus was deemed necessary for the funeral, instead of being objects used to display wealth and social standing. By examining the upper- and middle-class funeral through the lens of grief, it can be seen that this ritual signified memorialisation and loss in the cases of the deaths of infants and children.

On the other hand, there was a lack of funeral rites in the case of pauper burials, and this impacted a family's ability to grieve their infants and children. Paupers were the poorest of the poor, often they had been sent to a workhouse or barely made any income from the job they had. Therefore, when it came to their deaths, or the deaths of their children, the parish had to fund the funeral provisions.[114] The pauper burial has been explored extensively by historians, as a feared and shameful event due to the lack of material goods. Thomas Laqueur argues that funerals acted as a solidification of reputation in life, and thus to be buried on the parish and receive a pauper funeral created a stigma not just for the deceased but also for the family.[115] It is important to recognise that contemporaries cared about their social standing and reputation, however, especially in the cases of child and infant deaths, it is also logical to suggest that the shame and fear of pauper burials was due to the concerns over dignity, respect and grief. Pauper funerals were meant to be as cheap as possible, and this meant almost completely stripping them of all funeral rights. Mass graves were used instead of private ones, a cheap coffin with

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[113] Catherine Waters, "Materialising Mourning: Dickens, Funerals, and Epitaphs," *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century,* (2011)

[114] Elizabeth, Hurren, Steve King, "Begging for a Burial: Form, Function and Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Pauper Burial," *Social History,* vol 30, No.3 (2005)

[115] Laqueur, "Bodies, Death and Pauper Funerals."

no inscription, and very few attendees. There was a distinct lack of dignity to them.[116] This lack of dignity and the anonymity of pauper graves meant that grief was stunted. Instead of being a place of memory and grief, pauper graves became a site of shame and distress. However, families tried to fight for their deceased children's memory. By using and adapting to the pauper burial, all in attempts to express their grief and love for their children. Nevertheless, working-class funerals were not defined by their fear of pauper burials, or their lack of funeral rites compared to middle-class funerals. Instead, this chapter argues that working-class funeral rites were based on their own ideas of how to express grief and show respect to their deceased, using community to be the heart of their grief.

An important notion to understand is the presence of a strict distinction between public and private grief, in which nineteenth-century public expressions of grief were expected to be much more subdued emotionally. This did not mean emotions were not felt at all - contemporaries were very aware of the emotions that came with loss - but they were reserved for the private sphere. In middle-class families, women were highly discouraged from attending funerals, even mothers, because of the likelihood of an emotional outburst.[117] Cassell's Household Guide(1870) directs that "It sometimes happens among the poorer classes that the female relatives attend the funeral; but this custom is by no means recommended, since in these cases it but too frequently happens that, being unable to restrain their emotions, they interrupt and destroy the solemnity of the ceremony".[118] This highlights that the purpose of a funeral was for it to be solemn, serious, and reflective, therefore it was deemed that emotional outbursts would interrupt this. *The Gentleman's Quarterly Review* (August 1836) also argued for women to not attend. It noted that "they bear a far greater share previously in their attendance on the sick and dying" and so being "incapacitated by distress" and "weariness and even sickness from attention to these last duties" could cause their absence.[119] This demonstrates

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[116] Hurren, King, "Begging for a Burial."

[117] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family.*

[118] Edwin Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britian: A supplementary report on the results of a special inquiry into the practice of interment in towns.* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1842) Project Gutenberg.

[119] Rev. W. Greswell, "The Gentleman's Quarterly Review of August 1836", https://twonerdyhistorygirls.blogspot.com/2017/10/funeral-etiquette-in-early-19th-century.html

contemporaries acknowledgement of the burden of grief, however the likelihood of emotional outbursts due to this were not seen as appropriate for a funeral. Thus, the funeral was not the appropriate place for what was believed to be private grief.

This leaves the question of how grief was expressed publicly when visible emotion was so absent. For middle- and upper-class families, material objects could fill this space, in being a shared cultural expression of grief. Funeral paraphernalia functioned as shared symbols that were known to signify to others feelings of loss and grief. This can be applied to all social classes to various degrees, but especially the middle and upper classes who had the most access to

Figure 4 William Chappel, "infant funeral procession," 1870s.

funeral paraphernalia. An additional layer to these signifiers is the differences in the funerals for infants and children compared to that of adults. Nineteenth-century middle-class ideals of childhood significantly influenced the ways in which contemporaries memorialised their children through funeral paraphernalia. For example, white was a colour predominantly used for the funerals of infants and children and the unmarried. Other children under six years old and particularly young girls in attendance also wore white.[120] William P Chappel's illustration, (Figure 4) "Infant funeral procession"(1870s) depicts the coffin carriers to be young women dressed in white, wearing white veils. [121] Another illustration (Figure 5) used by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, called "the tolling bell" (1840s) depicts a funeral procession for an infant illustrating the same thing.[122] Six young girls dressed in white carry a small white coffin. Similarly, a white coffin and coffin furniture was also more likely to be used for children, especially children under two years old. In a study of the funeral book of a local undertaker in Glossopdale,

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[120] Hayden Peters, "Mourning Fashion In White," Art of Mourning, accessed 15th May 2024. https://artofmourning.com/mourning-fashion-in-white/#:~:text=White%2C%20the%20predominant%20colour%20used,the%2017th%20and%2019th%20centuries.
[121] William P Chappel, "Infant Funeral Procession" [Colour Oil on Slate Paper] The MET. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/10454
[122] "The Tolling Bell," [Colour Illustration] 1840s, Art of Mourning. Accessed 15th May 2024. https://artofmourning.com/children-in-mourning-2/

it can be seen that in 1893 white furniture was used in ten out of fourteen child funerals, and in 1894 it accounted for seven out of eleven, and 1895 seven out of nine. However, it is important to note that the selection for parents may have been limited.[123] White has historically symbolised innocence, and purity, and piety in western cultures and these traits were synonymous with the nineteenth century vison of the ideal child. [124] Childhood was beginning to be seen as a period where there should be freedom from work, and children should be guided morally into goodness and remain close to God.[125] Thus childhood was portrayed through the use of white in the

Figure 5 Illustration accompanying the hymn "The Tolling Bell", The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1840s.

mourning dress, coffin and coffin furniture for the funerals of infants and children. Choosing white signified to onlookers the immortalisation of them in childhood. For some this might have comforted, as childhood was regarded as the best time in life, a time closest to God and uncorrupted by adult life. For others it could have articulated the horror of losing a child so early in life, never to be able to grow up.[126] Either way, it was a way for parents to express the specific grief of losing a child. Therefore, funeral paraphernalia was a way to channel grief, to display it to others publicly instead of a verbal or physical emotional reaction, which was not deemed socially acceptable for a public event like a funeral.

On the complete opposite end of the spectrum, the pauper funeral was steeped in stigma and embarrassment, mostly due to the fact that the provisions did not ensure a decent burial that would allow family members to respect and commemorate their loved ones in their death. This lack in provisions came from a shift in pauper burials went the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834) came into effect. The act aimed to significantly cut back on the

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[123] Abbie Shelton, "From Cradle to Early Grave: Death, Burial and mourning for Infants and Children in Glossopdale, 1890-1911", The Open University Thesis (2019)

[124] Kendra Cherry, "The Meaning of the Colour White: Colour Psychology of White" Verywellmind, last mod April 22, 2024, accessed 16th May 2024. https://www.verywellmind.com/color-psychology-white-2795822#toc-psychological-characteristics-of-the-color-white

[125] Alysa Levene, Jean Webb, " Depictions of the Ideal Child in Nineteenth-Century British Literature and Legislature," The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth, vol 12, No 1(2019)

[126] Mary, Gryctko ."Eternal Innocence: The Victorian Cult of the Dead Child," PhD Thesis, University of Pittsburgh (2020)

outgoings of poor relief, including the expense of funerals. It stripped back on most funeral paraphernalia that was included prior.[127] The Brixton poor law union in 1870 outlined that their funeral provisions included, nurse's expenses for preparing the body for burial, a basic wooden coffin, the burial itself, and a basic Christian service.[128] The pauper grave also became synonymous with the mass grave; in order to save both money and space, paupers were buried together with no identification.[129] The lack of identification, and clear demarcation of poverty of the pauper grave, created a strong sense of embarrassment and shame. A mother from London told social investigator Maud Pember Reeves, who was conducting a survey on poverty and infant mortality titled *Round About a Pound a Week* (1913), that she "would rather have my dead child picked up by a dust cart than have it carted through the neighbourhood by the black mariar of the parish."[130] This suggests that the stigma came from the embarrassment of people knowing and seeing her child buried on the parish, making everyone aware of her low social status. Thomas Laqueur, argued that this embarrassment and social isolation of being labelled a pauper ultimately made people fear and resent the pauper burial.[131] While this feeling is undeniable, this argument fails to acknowledge the resentment that would come from the lack of decency, respect and memorialisation that came with pauper burials.

This lack of decency is particularly highlighted through the funeral of the infant son of Elizabeth Thompson, as told by Graham Taylor, an author within the Wigan local history and heritage society.[132] Taylor details how Elizabeth and her three children were entered into the workhouse in 1866 after the death of her husband, and after some time in the workhouse, her ten-month-old son died. The governor of the workhouse arranged for the funeral to take place three days after his death. In this the usual was provided, a basic coffin, a mass grave, and two pall bearers to carry the child to the ceremony. This was the policy for any child under four; adults were given hearses. On the day of the funeral, July

[127] "Poor Law Reform", UK Parliament, accessed 16th May 2024. https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/19thcentury/overview/poorlaw/
[128] Strange. "Only a Pauper Whom Nobody Owns."
[129] Hurren, Elizabeth. Steve King, "Begging for a Burial."
[130] Laqueur, "Bodies, Death and Pauper Funerals."
[131] Laqueur, "Bodies, Death and Pauper Funerals."
[132] Graham Taylor, "Tales from the workhouse – The bizarre tale of the infant funeral," Wigan Building Preservation trust. 2023

17, 1868, Elizabeth, and her sister walked alongside the coffin and pallbearers for the two miles from the workhouse to the cemetery, however the two pallbearers were men in the 70s, and at one point one of them grew tired and was unable to continue. So, Elizabeth took over and carried the coffin herself for a while. However, later on the same pallbearer, once again carrying the coffin, collapsed, dropping the coffin on the floor, and he died that very moment. Elizabeth and her sister, in order to attend the funeral on time and not risk missing it, had to carry the coffin themselves, to the mass pauper grave plot L48 CE (this plot reference, L48 CE, was the recorded identification of where inmates were buried). Two other children were buried alongside him, and the grave was reopened two days later for a further three infants.[133] While this seems like an extreme case completely unforeseen, however it demonstrates the dehumanisation and lack of decency given to loved ones because of the lack of expense and care given to them. The pallbearers were too old, there were very few attendees, the mother had to face the horror of her child being dropped on the street, and the mass grave was disturbed after the burial. Pauper burials, like this one, lacked the decency and respect families wanted to provide for their children and were therefore unable to provide a space for mothers or families to express their grief, instead they created feelings of shame and embarrassment.

Despite the contempt for pauper funerals, they were fiercely fought for when the only other alternative would be no funeral at all.[134] Some families would make use of the pauper funeral while they worked for the funds for their loved one to then be exhumed and reburied. This was relatively common, allowing the deceased to have a private and marked grave. This could only be done through a petition to the relevant burial board and could be a lengthy process. Julie-Marie Strange highlights one example of this.[135] George Argill, in 1889, requested permission from the Bolton burial board to move his three children who had all died within one week and who were buried in a common grave. His request was for exhumation and reburial in a private grave as he himself was sick at the time of their deaths and was unable to purchase the grave until the time of request.[136] This request had to be applied for quickly after the initial burial, as the chances of the

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[133] Taylor, "Tales from the workhouse – The bizarre tale of the infant funeral."
[134] Hurren, Elizabeth. Steve King, "Begging for a Burial."
[135] Julie-Marie Strange. *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britian 1870-1914,* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press:2005)
[136] Strange. *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britian 1870-1914.*

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exhumation being granted decreased when more bodies were buried above them. This switching of graves was not allowed for all cases; many were refused or deferred for a minimum of nine months because the deceased had died from an infectious disease. However, it was seen as normal and most boards were relatively sympathetic to relatives who approached them, leading most cases to be successful.[137] Strange notes that it is unclear how re-interment in a private grave reinstated respectability, as the initial interment had already advertised the family's lack of finance, and therefore they had already suffered the damage to their reputation. The exhumation also had to take place under the cover at night, so the family would not get to rebury their loved ones with a more respectable service; they could not even be there for the reburial due to public health concerns, the loved ones were simply notified that reburial took place.[138] Therefore, the reburial of deceased loved ones had to be about the grave site itself. Strange argues that families using this process were expressing a desire to reclaim the corpse as their own.[139] In having their child placed into a grave they paid for, with a headstone with their name and age, families were able to identify their deceased infants and children and inter them in a decent and private place, where it was culturally accepted to express grief. Ultimately, the pauper funeral was not a funeral anyone aimed or hoped for, especially for their children. It provided minimal funeral rites that gave families the cultural means to express their grief, and the anonymity of mass graves meant that the place of burial could not function as a place of memory for families to revisit or feel a connection to their deceased children. This did not mean that those who faced a pauper burial for their loved ones did not attempt to use it in the best way they could. Families were pragmatic, and if they could not afford anything else, found other ways to grieve their children. Pauper funerals were still necessary, as funerals signified the closure of a life, and thus being subject to a pauper funeral was still likely preferred to not having a funeral for deceased children and infants at all.

It is important to recognise that nineteenth century funerals for infants and children were surrounded by the general concerns around material wealth. The coffin and coffin furniture, hearses and carriages, the service, and the burial plot, were all expenses that

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137 Strange. "Only a Pauper Whom Nobody Owns".
138 Strange. "Only a Pauper Whom Nobody Owns"
139 Strange. "Only a Pauper Whom Nobody Owns".

ranged from basic to ostentatious. However, memory, decency, and respect were central to justifying the need for such expenses. The middle classes sought to buy the best funeral they could afford, to publicly represent their love and respect to their deceased loved ones, including infants and children, at a time where public expressions of emotion and grief were discouraged. On the other end of the spectrum, pauper families suffered the shame and embarrassment that came from pauper burials. While this may have partially been due to the embarrassment of their social standing , it was also due to the parish's inability to provide a decent burial that allowed decency and memorialisation of their children. As much as pauper burials caused embarrassment and shame, they also often stunted the family's ability to grieve by taking away all the important aspects of the funeral. Despite this though, families were pragmatic, and when it was possible they used and adapted to pauper burials to get the memorialisation of their children that allowed them to connect to their loved ones. Therefore, the fear of pauper burials that can be seen in working-class families was the same; it was about the degradation and anonymity that came with pauper funerals. The central purpose of funerals was to be a place of grief for all social classes, whether that was through material items such as the coffin, or through the memorialisation of a private grave.

Relics, photographs, and graves: material culture and memory

The funeral was not the end of the grieving process, rather it was just the beginning, and it was not the only place in which material culture aided the grieving process. Once the funeral ended, the mourning period began, and long-term memorialisation of infants and children were the next steps for grief. Mothers and family members were clad in mourning dress and mementos, such as post-mortem photographs and relics like jewellery, were created and kept safe or put on display in the home. These mementos functioned as an expression of private grief; compared to the funeral that was a place of public grief, mementos and relics were personal and intimate, usually due to the proximity of them either on the person or in the home. They connected the dead to the living.[140] Britian saw a resurgence in relic culture in the nineteenth century. Death relics have been present in British culture since the seventeenth century, however, along with the rise of the funeral

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[140] Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture,*(London: Routledge, 2001)

industry, relics became ever more present. The most common relic in the nineteenth century was jewellery set with human hair, but they also came in the forms of brooches, photographs, even remains such as teeth.[141] Post-mortem photography also developed and became popular from the 1840s and somewhat replaced the use and creation of relics towards the end of the century.[142] Infants and children were the most popular subject of post mortem photographs, and they were not reserved for just the middle and upper classes, some shopkeepers commissioned photographs which would suggest accessibility to the upper working classes.[143] Ultimately, death relics used the remains of the deceased, like their hair, or their photograph and extended memory connections by evoking the person to which the remains belonged to. [144] This connection and memorialisation could bring much comfort to loved ones and allow private reflections and feelings of grief, especially in the cases of infants and children in which the life to remember them by was so short lived. Similarly, the gravesite and headstone performed much of the same function. Alongside headstones, graves were often surrounded by non-functional objects such as fences, gates, benches, flowers, trees, and ponds. Cemeteries were new revised spaces compared to graveyards, due to the changes to burial legislation during the nineteenth century, and they had a very different atmosphere. Cemeteries began to imitate gardens and became places of visitation, rather than places to avoid, like the overcrowded and dangerous graveyards that contemporaries were concerned with.[145] Many designers of the new cemeteries were also designers and creators of public parks and they were regarded as much of a public space as public parks were.[146] Loren N Horton argues that because of the change in place, graves and grave markers became a sort of language, in which certain symbols became

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[141] Deborah Lutz, "The Dead Still Among Us: Victorian Secular Relics, Hair, Jewellery, and Death Culture," *Victorian Literature and Culture,* vol 39, No.1(2011)

[142] Lutz, "The Dead Still Among Us."

[143] Audrey Linkman, "Taken From Life: Post-Mortem Portraiture in Britian 1860-1910," *History of Photography,* vol 30, No.4 (2006)

[144] Hallam, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*.

[145] Loren N. Horton, "Messages in Stone: Symbolism on Victorian Grave Markers," *The Palimpsest,* vol 70, No.2(1989)

[146] Ken Worpole, "Cemeteries, Churchyards and Burial Grounds," Commission for the Architecture and the Built Environment, (2007)
https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/fileadmin/uploads/dc/Documents/cemeteries-churchyards-and-burial-grounds_.pdf

standardised to mean certain things which were portrayed to passers-by.[147] There were several symbols that were used specifically for the graves of children and infants, such as lily of the valley, used for female children, that symbolised purity and innocence, or two roses and a bud that symbolised the death of a child compared to a fully bloomed rose for a child.[148] These symbols around graves functioned as a public expression of grief over the loss of infants and children, as well as symbolism of ideas of childhood and the individual child. This ultimately allowed the gravesite itself to function as a place of memory and connection between the deceased and the loved ones. Graves were, therefore, essential to grief.

Mourning dress, while also part of the funeral, was an integral aspect of the Victorian mourning period. This followed the funeral, in which the family of the deceased entered a period of mourning, and specific mourning attire had to be worn. For women this consisted of heavy black crepe dresses, veils and bonnets.[149] It is important to note that the ritual of wearing mourning dress over the period of mourning was exclusive to the middle-class experience; working-class families did not have the time or money to spend on several items of mourning dress to wear long-term or to go into social exclusion for a period of time. Instead, working-class families would wear black accents like shawls, scarfs and armbands rather than the whole garb because it was usually all they could afford, often pawning whatever garments they did get after the funeral.[150] The mourning period was dependant on the relationship with the deceased. Much of the historiography on mourning focuses on the experiences of the widow, likely because the mourning rituals were strictest and longest for them.[151] Queen Victoria herself set an extreme precedent for contemporary widows by wearing her mourning dress for the rest of her life after the death of her husband Albert in 1861.[152] However, mothers, not just widows, were also governed by the rules of mourning. A publication, *Manners and Rules of Good*

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[147] Horton, "Messages in Stone."

[148] Horton, "Messages in Stone."

[149] Sonia A. Bedikian, "The death of Mourning: From Victorian Crepe to the Little Black Dress," *Journal of Death and Dying,* vol 57, No.1(2008)

[150] Julie-Marie Strange. "She cried very little: death grief and mourning in working class culture, 1880-1914," *Social History,* 27, no. 2 (2002)

[151] Rebecca N. Mitchell. "Death Becomes Her: On the Progressive Potential of Victorian Mourning," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol 41, No.4 (2013)

[152] Bedikian, "The death of Mourning: From Victorian Crepe to the Little Black Dress."

Society, written by "Member of the aristocracy," outlined all the required mourning periods and dress codes for different relations. It wrote, that for the death of a child the period was twelve months in total, wearing black for ten of those months, the last two months the mother would dress in half mourning. Half mourning was a lesser state of mourning in which other colours such as greys and deep purples could be introduced into wardrobes along with more elaborate fabrics such as silk or velvet.[153] Touches of white could also be included in their dress after three months. There was a specific rule for family members who had lost "very young children or infants" in which the mourning was shortened by half of the period for a child, or even being reduced to three months.[154] *Manners and Rules of Good Society,* went on to note that, when mourning sons and daughters; the seclusion was six weeks as far as general society was concerned, but invitations to balls and dances should not be accepted until after six months. However, the publication did not specify the seclusion period for very young children and infants. Instead, it noted that for "all other periods of mourning," seclusion from society is not considered a requisite.[155] This distinction for very young children and infants could suggest that the deaths of children and infants were considered less impactful by contemporaries, and thus required less mourning than that of adults. However, Pat Jalland argues that the deaths of children were viewed as the most distressing deaths because of the loss of hope and potential of life, especially compared to elderly family members. Jalland also argues that contemporaries acknowledged the deep relationship between the child and mother, thus recognising the specific feelings of loss and grief a mother would feel over the loss of a child or infant. Jalland highlights a quote written by Lady Desborough in1893 expressing this relationship, "none of them so deep and high as a mothers love- it is the highest shape love wears on earth." [156] Thus, it would not make sense for the short mourning period for deceased infants and children to signify less grief

[153] Silvia Scopa, "Forget me not- revealing Victorian mourning customs", National Trust for Scotland, last mod May 2018, accessed May 16th 2024. https://www.nts.org.uk/stories/forget-me-not-revealing-victorian-mourning-customs#:~:text=There%20were%20also%20different%20stages,the%20wearer%20with%20the%20deceased.
[154] Member of the Aristocracy, *Manners and Rules of Good Society, Or, Solecisms to be Avoided by a Member of the Aristocracy*,(London: Frederick Warne, 1888) https://victorianweb.org/history/mourning/6.html
[155] Member of the Aristocracy, *Manners, and Rules of Good Society.*1888.
[156] Jalland. *Death in the Victorian Family.*

to contemporaries. The short mourning period could instead be due to the short nature of the infant or child's life, not the gravity of a mother or loved one's grief. Overall, mourning dress and the subsequent mourning period functioned as a socially acceptable, material expression of public grief, despite the fact that mourning and mourning attire was used less in the cases of infants and children. [157]

Another long-term signifier of grief was the consumption of post-mortem photography. Modern media has shown significant interest in the Victorian tradition of post-mortem photography, often labelling it as a morbid and disturbing practice. This modern perspective fails to recognise the pragmatic and emotional reasons behind the practice. Post-mortem photography grew popular in the second half of the nineteenth century. Photography as a technology was on the rise through this period, after its first emergence in the 1840s. Its first major commercial application was in portraiture. Post-mortem portraiture was already an established practice, since paintings of the dead can be traced back to the fifteenth century, but photography sought to continue this tradition.[158] This commission of the death portrait was popular with the middle classes. It even extended to the few upper working classes, overall becoming much more accessible than its predecessor.[159] The photograph represented something entirely different to a painting. Susan Sontag, a writer and critic on modern culture, argues that a painting acts as an interpretation of something, close but not an accurate reflection, however, photographs are miniatures of reality.[160] Thus, the popularisation of photographs of the dead suggests a shift in the possibilities of memory, in that photographs allowed for the memory of the deceased to live on in more accurate and preserved terms. This may explain why post-mortem photographs of infants and children were exceedingly common in the nineteenth century. There were several genres of post-mortem photographs used to portray the deceased. They were categorised as: 'alive but dead,' in which the corpse was posed to

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[157]Mitchell, "Death Becomes Her: On the Progressive Potential of Victorian Mourning."
[158] Linkman, "Taken From Life."
[159] Luca Tateo, "The Cultures of Grief: The Practice of Post-Mortem Photography and Iconic Internalized Voices," *The Journal of Human Affairs,* vol 28, No.4 (2018)
[160] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977)https://writing.upenn.edu/library/Sontag-Susan-Photography.pdf

Figure 7 Carte-de-visite "Ada Brown and her mother" 1867

appear alive; family or group portraits, and 'the last sleep.' The group portraits were much more prominent in America and less popular in Britain, with the exception of portraits of mother and child.[161] Figure 6 is an example of a British a 'carte-de-visite', a "small print", of a mother and child post-mortem photograph.[162] Within it the mother is looking down at her dead child, who she is cradling in her arms. The child's eyes are closed, and their hands are positioned on top of one another. While these were not as common, the configuration of a mother cradling her dead child demonstrates how post-mortem photography was entirely concerned with grief, as it memorialises and almost immortalises the love and deep relationship the mother had with her child. The 'last sleep' was the most popular genre for infants and children, in which the corpse was positioned to look peacefully sleeping. This genre is somewhat reflective of the Christian notion that death is a temporary sleep for the departed until judgement day where the body would be resurrected. [163] The popularity of the 'last sleep' for children and infants suggests it was the way parents wanted to remember their child. Following Sontag's notion, the photograph depicting the child in a restful and peaceful state, so close to their living state, represented an accurate memory of the child for those viewing it. An example of this genre in practice is the photograph of Alfred Owen, aged ten months. This photograph is the only post-mortem photograph held in the Victoria and Albert collection. [164] This photograph depicts Alfred lying in an armchair, tucked neatly into a blanket, and propped up on several light-coloured pillows, wearing what looks to be a nightdress. His eyes are closed, and his arms are positioned by his side. This makes the impression that Alfred was sleeping, however, it would have been acutely

Figure 6 Photograph of Alfred Owen, aged 10 months, Victorian and Albert Collection.

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[161] Linkman, "Taken From Life."

[162] "Ada Brown and her Mother," [Black and white photograph] 1867, Wigan Archives, in Audrey Linkman "Taken from life: Post-mortem portraiture in Britian 1860-1910" *History of Photography,* Vol 30, No.4 (2006).

[163] Tateo, "The Cultures of Grief."

[164] "Alfred Owen" [sepia photograph], V&A collection (Britain:1868) https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O38486/photograph-unknown/

obvious to contemporaries that Alfred was dead. The fact that he was lying on a chair and the wallpaper under the window indicates that Alfred was placed in the parlour, rather than the bedroom where children would usually sleep. Instead, the parlour was a grand room of the house, used mainly for visitors, therefore portraying Alfred laid out for viewing rather than napping. Additionally, the intricate shawl covering the back of the chair would demonstrate this further as its intricacy suggests it was only used for special occasions, such as laying out a body for viewing.[165] Therefore, this image of Alfred, while being obvious to viewers that he was dead, still went to the effort to portray Alfred as sleeping. This suggests that the memory of Alfred as a sleeping child was the ultimate goal of the photograph.

One reason behind the popularity of photographs such as Alfred's was because infants and children lacked any photographs from when they were alive, either due to the shortness of their lives or due to a lack of funds for photographs while the child was alive. While this was not always the case as there are instances where children have had living photographs, their family still commissioned a post-mortem photograph. It was common for the only surviving photograph of children who died young to be their death photograph. Thus, post-mortem photographs often functioned as a family's only memory of their child, and for very young infants, acted as proof and testament that they entered life entered life at all.[166] Both of the post-mortem photographs above were in the format of a "carte-de-visite" which meant a small print. This was a popular type of post-mortem photograph, mostly due to its size. The fact that it was small meant it could easily be carried around and shared with friends and family. This sharing of the photograph of the child functioned as a form of communal grieving. Photographs could capture memories that survived after burial, which often took place within the week following death, they could slow the disappearance of a short memory of a child's life through viewing.[167] Therefore, portraying the child in the image as either alive or sleeping enabled parents

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[165] Nicola Brown, "Empty Hands and Precious Pictures: Post-mortem Portrait Photographs of Children," *Australian Journal of Victorian Studies,* 14, 2 (2009)

[166] Linkman, "Taken From Life."

[167] Laurel Hilliker, "Letting Go While Holding On: Postmortem Photography as an Aid in the Grieving Process," *Illness, Crisis & Loss,* vol 14, no.3 (2006)

and family members to grieve the child or infant they knew, not as remains or a body void of life.

A central part of long-term mourning was also the grave site. Significant legislative change around burial from the 1840s onward facilitated a shift in the way in which people viewed burial. Rapid urbanisation meant that deaths in urban areas were severely disproportionate to those in rural areas, in addition to the facilities they had in cities were unable to keep up with the numbers of bodies, often people were dying away from their home parish and needed to be buried in cities and urban areas. Therefore, burial spaces quickly became overcrowded in very close proximity to living inhabitants.[168] This overcrowding caused major concern, similar to the concerns around keeping the bodies in the home when laying out the dead. There were worries around the impact of full graveyards near inhabitants, spreading dangerous miasma and thus disease. The Public Health Act,1848 was passed as a way of combatting this issue. It created the centralised Board of Health, as well as local boards of health, to oversee issues of public health, including overcrowded burial grounds. Within this act, the local boards could apply to the general board about closing churchyards, however, it made no provision for new cemeteries. This act was ultimately short lived.[169] There were several subsequent burial acts from 1852, in which the boards of health did continue, and cemeteries were opened across the country, including the big seven across London, such as Highgate Cemetery, Nunhead Cemetery and Brompton Cemetery. Cemeteries became very different spaces from church yards. They were fashioned mostly in a garden style and gravesites could be more individual and decorated due to the newfound space. Thus, there were several important aspects of the gravesite: the location itself, the headstone and the surrounding area which could house other non-functional objects like fences, gates, benches, ponds, or urns.[170]

In the cases of children and infants, where there was no requests or plan laid out by the deceased as adults might have, it was important for the family to pick the appropriate

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[168] "Sepulture and the City: The Social Role of Burial and Interment Spaces in Early 19th Century Britian and Their Impact on the Leeds General Cemetery Company," University of Leeds (2017)
[169] Julie Rugg, "Nineteenth-Century Burial Reform in England: a Reappraisal," *Histoire, Medecine et Sante* (2019)
[170] Horton, "Messages in Stone."

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spot. It is important to recognise that this would be limited by finances, and working-class families would have less choice than those of middle-class families. Families could choose plots that were with family already buried or in a plot with a pleasant view or in a particularly pretty spot. This would have been influenced by the Christian notion of resurrection, as graves would be the temporary home for the body before judgement day, thus giving the body the best place to rest in the meantime. However, it was also driven by grief. Families would pick a spot which they thought would reflect the love they felt for their child. As well as this, the gravesite was one of the last pieces they had connecting themselves to their dead children. Thus, even though the gravesite had no impact on the deceased, the gravesite, and cemeteries as a whole, was important for the living. It functioned as a place of memory and became a place that was both a physical space, as well as a space in one's mind that was a representation of that person's memory.[171] Therefore, the placement and presentation of such a space is entirely representative of how that person is remembered and grieved by their loved ones. It was a site of remembrance and connection. The headstone aided in this by being an explicit way of commemorating the deceased. Basic headstones contained the deceased's name, date of birth and death, and sometimes religious scripture. Additionally, there were often grave markers and symbols that became a sort of language that would create a message about the person that could be easily interpreted by passers-by.[172] Children's grave markers were unique, and special designs were created exclusively for children's headstones that often-conveyed messages about the sanctity of childhood. Childhood in the nineteenth century was defined by purity and innocence that was highly valued in the industrial society that of the nineteenth century, thus when children died, they immortalised these notions and remained safe in this state.[173] These feelings permeated the cemetery

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[171] Elizabeth A. Wright. "Rhetorical Spaces in Memorial Places: The Cemetery as a Rhetorical Memory Place/Space," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly,* vol 35, no.4(2005)p54
[172] Horton, "Messages in Stone," p64
[173] Ellen Marie Snyder, "Innocents in a Worldly World: Victorian Children's Gravemarkers," in *Cemeteries Gravemarkers* edited by Richard E Meyer (University Press of Colarado:1989)

through the grave markers and symbols. Lambs, doves and flowers were all markers used on headstones specifically for children, as well as sculptural depictions of children, however, these were less common due to the cost of them. They were often realistic in size; a popular stance for the sculpture was as a sleeping child.[174] Figure 8 is a gravestone in Charminster Graveyard (Bournemouth) marking several children who had died under the age of five in the late 1880s and 1890s. This headstone depicts a small child in the arms of an angel, who is also a child; the small child's face cannot be seen as it is facing the angel, and there is a scroll beneath them, however the writing is unclear.[175] The inability to see the child's face is probably because the grave was the site of three children, and so the statue was aimed to represent all three at once. The feature of the angel cradling the child could represent the children's safety and acceptance into heaven. Thus, the parents, in their grief, might have chosen

Figure 8 Grave of Herbert Lawrence, aged six months, died 16th Jun 1883 & Lindsay Hall, aged One year and Two months, died 8th Feb 1892 & Margaret Clara, aged 3 years, Died 8th Dec 1899

this statue to remind them, that despite their children's short lives, they were safe in the afterlife. This message would have also been clear to passersby, since the size and detail of the gravestone was expensive. However, it also made the gravestone stand out in the cemetery, which may suggest that the parents wanted people to see it, sharing their memory even with strangers. Ultimately, gravesites and headstones, even more simple graves that may have had very little imagery at all, were a place which held the memories of children and infants. Parents could revisit to grieve and remember their children and could communicate their memory to others.

Altogether, material culture like photographs, mourning dress and gravestones, were integral to the memorialisation and commemoration of infants and children for upper- and middle-class families. Mourning dress was an explicit and public symbol of grief, despite the advice that mothers were required to wear mourning dress for children for a

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[174] Snyder, "Innocents in a Worldly World."
[175] "Grave of Herbert Lawrence", [colour photograph of grave], (Charminster: 2022)

shorter time than a widow, and even shorter for very young infants. This did not take away from the wearer's ability to be given the time to grief, because of others' ability to see the loss that the mother had sustained, as well as the social isolation that came with the mourning period. Post-mortem photographs of children were also an expression of grief and memorialisation. In capturing the image of the child, family members could have a physical memory, often when memories of children were few and far between due to the short nature of their lives. The fact that these photographs were often displayed in homes highlights that their function was to encapsulate the child's memory and allow the family to be reminded of them, even years after their death. Thus, they became an important part of a family's long-term grief for their child. Gravesites and headstones were similar to this. By using symbols and statues, and even just the placement of a grave, allowed the child's memory to be present and represented in the long term. Visitation to gravesites meant that family could be reminded and feel physically close to their child, no matter how long had passed since their death. Overall, grief was the driving force behind the creation of such material, rather than the attributed middle-class predisposition to display their wealth. There is no doubt that some rituals or materials may not have been helpful or wanted in every situation of loss, as grief is such an individual feeling, however, to assume that the only reason a person would spend such money on things like gravestones and mourning dress, similarly to funerals, was to display their social standing and wealth ignored the presence of grief entirely.

Conclusion

Material culture, of both funerals and long-term mourning, was ultimately more than just a display of wealth and social standing. This chapter has highlighted the ways in which families across both social classes, but primarily the middle class, expressed grief, less through emotional outbursts and rules, but through culturally shared rituals and materials. The distinction between public and private grief was integral to the nineteenth -century culture of mourning, in which displays of emotion at the funeral or in other public settings was deemed inappropriate. Therefore, during the funeral and subsequent mourning period, material culture, such as the coffin, mourning dress, and even the gravestones, could articulate their grief through the shared understanding of what they represented. It cannot be denied that the notion of social standing and pride did impact

the desire for such material objects, however, to suggest this was the only contributing factor to the prominence of such material is reductive. Ultimately, middle-class families, in displaying their social standing and paying out such expense for funerals and mourning paraphernalia, signified to others that their child was receiving the best sendoff they could afford, honouring their memory, and exemplifying the love felt for them. On the other hand, the pauper burial was permeated with feelings of shame and embarrassment; the shame over the demonstration of low social standing and poverty, as well as the complete lack of funeral rites and memorialisation that allowed no space to grieve. The anonymous, cheap and degrading nature of pauper funerals, in which children were buried in mass graves, with no headstone and very little funeral rites at all, gave no space for parents to express their grief in the culturally accepted way. However, despite this families were pragmatic and attempted to honour their dead children anyway they could, either through saving and buying their own name plate for the coffin, or even going so far as to exhume and rebury their child in a private burial plot once funds were raised. Overall, the resentment and fear of pauper burials was rooted in the family's inability to memorialise and honour their infants and children with the so few rituals provided, thus exemplifying how these rituals and material objects were expressions of grief, as much as they were signifiers of social status.

Chapter 3. Murder, neglect, and desperation: the mother's role in infant mortality.

Motherhood has been a recurring theme throughout this thesis. Mothers had the closest relationship to infants and children in life and in death; as the primary caregivers to sick and dying children and the chief mourners of their dead infants and children. This chapter continues this focus on the mother, however, instead of focusing on the collective representation or individual feelings of grief, this chapter focuses on the outside contemporary concern over the mother's role in the deaths of infants and children. This chapter explores how contemporary social commentators and reformers excluded a mother's grief from the experience of child and infant death, and instead concerned themselves with the ways in which mothers, especially working-class mothers, put their children at risk or outright killed them. This is explored in two ways; by analysing the ways in which women accused of committing the crime of infanticide were treated by the judicial system and in Victorian newspapers, and in examining the increased concern over falling birth rates and perpetually high infant mortality rates. Infanticide in the nineteenth century was a contentious issue, in which some viewed women accused of infanticide as monsters killing innocent newborns, but others viewed the mothers as desperate, helpless, or insane. It was generally accepted by contemporaries that the crime was on the rise, and the women accused of the crime were sexually immoral, evil, and calculated murderers for profit.[176] However, executions were rapidly decreasing, especially for infanticide. Instead, many of the accused were sentenced to a lesser charge of concealment of birth in order to evade execution. The charge of Concealment of birth meant the perpetrator hid the birth, or the death of a still born child from authorities. Anne Higginbottom notes that most of the accused were treated with what seems a surprising leniency. Higgenbottom argues that few women were convicted of infanticide, and those who were found guilty routinely received pardons. She highlighted that after 1849, no woman was hanged for the murder of her own infant under one year

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[176] Aeron Hunt, "Calculation and Concealments: Infanticide in Mid-Nineteenth Century Britain," *Victorian Literature and Culture,* vol 34, no.1 (2006)

old, legitimate, or illegitimate.[177] Margaret Arnot argued in her work that existing scholarship mostly focuses on the poor seduced mothers and their lenient legal treatment for killing their infants, despite the other representations in Victorian media of a more monstrous character. Arnot highlights that there were great contradictions and blurring of lines between the notion of women being bad, or mad, or unnatural, and the victimisation of mothers who committed infanticide.[178] This chapter, while focusing primarily on the ways in which women accused of infanticide were treated with leniency and sympathy, also highlights the complexity of such experiences of infant death.

The contemporary examination of the reasons behind the high infant mortality rates, and the attempts to resolve them, demonstrates such complexities even further. Similarly to the cases of infanticide, the use of baby farms also presented an evil and murderous danger towards infant and children. "Baby farming" was used to describe situations where women accepted payment to care for children who were not their own. However, in many cases, children were neglected, drugged or even outright murdered in order for baby farmers to increase profits.[179] There was a general pressure from the middle classes for working-class mothers to spend more time caring for their children since women's employment was seen as contributing to the causes of infant mortality, and baby farming only enhanced this concern. Another reason attributed by contemporaries to the high infant mortality rate was the presence of artificial feeding, most prominently by working-class mothers. There was a national movement of blame placed on mothers for the high infant mortality rates, often blaming their ignorance as a factor.[180] The journal *Public Health*, in its first year of release (1888) published articles addressing infant health and disease prevention, and infant feeding was singled out as one of the most prominent methods of disease spread, with infantile diarrhoea as one of the most preventable causes of high infant mortality rates. Milk depots, which were facilities that supplied cow's milk, were highly discouraged, and breastfeeding was encouraged as the only

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[177] Hunt, "Calculation and Concealments."

[178] Margaret L. Arnot, "Perceptions of Parental Child Homicide in English Popular Visual Culture 1800-1850". Law, Crime and History, No 1(2017)

[179] Margaret L. Arnot "Infant death, childcare and the state: the baby farming scandal and the first infant life protection legislation of 1872". Continuity and change, Vol 9, No2(1994)

[180] Danika Bonham, "From the Mouths of Babes: Infant Mortality and Medicalised Motherhood in County Durham, England, 1892-1914," Thesis, University of Saskatchewan(2018)

combatant to such diseases.[181] This blame also heavily featured in household guides, despite their target audience being middle-class mothers. This blame contradicted other, more sympathetic outlooks on the state of working-class motherhood, as it did not recognise poverty or illegitimacy as a reason behind artificial feeding. Instead, it pushed the narrative that working-class mothers were ignorant or even neglectful. Ultimately, this chapter explores the ways in which middle-class perspectives of the role of the working-class mother in child and infant deaths was contradictory and reflected the complexities of wider societal issues.

Infanticide: monster mothers or desperate women?

Infanticide was a serious cause for concern for the state and nineteenth-century social commentators and reformers. The crime of infanticide, being the murder of a child under the age of one, was perceived to be on the rise in nineteenth-century society. In 1860, the coroner for the Eastern Division of Middlesex reported to the Home Secretary that he had witnessed a doubling of cases of infants dying of suffocation, and a fourfold increase in child murders from March 1859 to October 1860.[182] The most common method of infanticide at this time was "overlaying," which referred to suffocation and smothering more broadly. Other methods were present though, such as neglect, malnutrition, starvation, drowning or strangulation.[183] At the Old Bailey Courthouse, for the duration of the nineteenth century there were 203 cases of infanticide recorded - of these cases 114 people were acquitted and 83 were found guilty of infanticide. However, amongst those found guilty, only 18 were found guilty of murder, and 3 of those were found insane. The other 65 were found guilty of concealment of birth rather than murder.[184] While infanticide carried a sentence of execution, as it can be seen in the statistics from the Old Bailey, execution could be avoided by being charged with the lesser crime of concealment of birth, or by pleading insanity. Thus, while there was growing concern over cases of

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[181] Bonham, "From the Mouths of Babes."

[182] George K. Behlmer, "Deadly Motherhood: Infanticide and Medical Opinion in Mid-Victorian England," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences,* vol XXXIV, no.4(1979)

[183] Paige Mathieson, "Bad or Mad? Infanticide: Insanity and Morality in Nineteenth Century Britian," *Midlands Historical Review,* Vol 4 (2020)

[184] "Infanticide in the 19th century – Cases from London's Old Bailey" History Is Now Magazine, last mod October 11th 2015. http://www.historyisnowmagazine.com/blog/2015/10/11/infanticide-in-the-19th-century-cases-from-londons-old-bailey

infanticide, the courts continually found most defendants not guilty, and those that were found guilty were mostly convicted of concealment of birth, not infanticide. Since this is a major contradiction, this chapter analyses the ways in which the women accused were treated sympathetically by the courts, and the motivations behind this. The pattern of fewer executions for infanticide was also part of a larger general shift in the first half of the century away from the previous "bloody code" enacted in 1723, which imposed the death penalty for over 20 offences. In 1832 Lord Dacre stated, "in this enlightened age, the frowning aspect of the barbarous and bloody code, whatever might have been its effect formerly, had lost all its terrors". Wherefore, the 1830s saw a series of reforms that swept away the majority of England's capital statutes, leaving the death penalty almost exclusively for murder.[185] Thus, as most cases of infanticide were not found to be cases of murder, the general turn away from capital punishment is reflected in these cases.

Alongside this, most nineteenth century newspapers reported the perceived increase of infanticide in the middle of the century with widespread distain and horror, both because the loss of such innocent life was viewed as abhorrent, but also because it reflected a cultural disintegration of society.[186] Disdain for mothers who committed such acts was particularly apparent in working-class broadsides. However, this was not the only perspective, since there was also a continual thread of sympathy and compassion for the mothers who committed infanticide in prominent middle-class newspapers, such as The Times. Overall, the motivation behind middle-class sympathy for accused mothers was twofold: it reflected the notion that committing this crime was a sign of mental illness which acted against a woman's nature, and recognised the increasingly difficult position women were put in when they had an illegitimate child. The nineteenth-century perspective of femininity and the ideal woman was based on the notion of domesticity and morality. Ultimately, it was viewed that women belonged at home and being a mother was highly valued in Victorian society. This was supposedly due to a natural predisposition for women to become mothers and be the moral guides within the family unit. Therefore, for women (and most especially mothers) to commit the crime of

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[185] Phil Handler, "Forgery and the End of the 'Bloody Code' in Early Nineteenth-Century England," *The Historical Journal,* vol 48, no.3 (2005)
[186] Behlmer, "Deadly Motherhood."

infanticide could be seen as going against their nature.[187] The perspective of the medical field reflected this ideal. It established that infanticide was an indication of insanity due to the acknowledgement that infanticide was largely caused by desperation and an unnatural victimisation of women who could not fit the Victorian ideology of femininity.[188] Pairing this with the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834), this meant mothers of illegitimate children were entirely financially responsible for their child and financial hardships. Both the courts and middle-class observers and reformers expressed compassion for mothers who were driven to commit acts of infanticide or concealment of birth.

It is important to note that at the Old Bailey Courthouse, there were only 3 cases out of the whole 203 in which the court granted insanity. However, it can be seen through case records that an increased use of doctors' testimony in criminal cases led to fewer executions of those charged with infanticide. The doctor's role in assessing the accused often led to conclusions that, while insanity may not be the case, the accused was suffering from melancholia or another temporary state that meant they acted in a way that was not ordinary. The case of Annie Cherry in 1887 details that Annie was accused of murdering her child a few days after birth by drowning the infant in a pot and burying it in the garden. She was staying with her sister and her sister's husband when she gave birth to the child and told them that she gave the child away to a "gypsie man" but later went back on this story and told them she had drowned the child and even let them know where to find the body. A doctor shortly after the crime was reported to have questioned Annie and her sister and found that her labour had lasted around 30-40 hours and, after that, Annie was not the same; "She became dull and silent, and would sit for hours without speaking, that she had been gay and cheerful in her manner before her confinement." Annie also told the doctor that she "could not help myself, it came over me to do it." The doctor diagnosed her with temporary post-natal melancholy and thus claimed insanity at the time of the act. While Annie was found guilty, the court recognised her as being of unsound mind at the time of the act and she was detained instead of sentenced to death.[189] While there was only a small chance that the accused were found

[187] Lynne, Vallone, "Fertility, Childhood and Death in the Victorian Family." *Victorian Literature and Culture,* Vol 28. No.1, (2000)
[188] Mathieson, "Bad or Mad? Infanticide"
[189] "Annie Cherry. Killing; Infanticide. 23rd May 1887". The Proceedings of the Old Bailey. (accessed May 2024) Browse - Central Criminal Court (oldbaileyonline.org)

insane, the argument of insanity as a cause for infant mortality was often used appropriately in times where the accused acted out of character. In the case of Annie, she was not herself after the birth, and committed an act she would not do in usual circumstances, and the outcome of the trial reflected that. Post-partum mental illness is widely recognised and accepted today, but in the nineteenth century it was new and based on outdated ideals of the feminine nature. This, however, does not discredit the attempts to aid and help women instead of punishing them for a crime they would not ordinarily commit. George K. Behlmer stated in his work that "if a woman did go to trial for murdering her infant, she would be certain, to escape execution", arguing that doctor testimonies claiming things like temporary melancholia or puerperal mania swung the courts almost entirely to "pardoning child-murderesses." This argument suggests that many women 'escaped justice' through doctor testimonies.[190] It is undeniable that doctor testimonies had a significant impact on the outcomes of infanticide cases, however, to suggest that these testimonies negatively impacted the outcome of such trials, completely invalidates both the often more than difficult circumstances these mothers faced, as well as any kind of post-partum mental illness. Ultimately, the sympathetic outcome of such cases demonstrated compassion for mothers and did not take away from the grief of losing infants in such a way by doing so.

As well as increased use of doctors' testimonies, judges also relied on character witnesses that allowed the court to establish more about the accused's circumstances, and ultimately, led to a more sympathetic outlook. In 1806, many years before the reforms of the "bloody code", Hannah Diana Connoly was accused of murdering her illegitimate child. Witnesses, like the landlady where Hannah lodged at the time of the death of her infant, stated that she was unaware that she was pregnant when she first came to stay, however Hannah came to the landlady, in which "she told me she was very bad." When she was questioned if Hannah told her in what way she was bad, the landlord replied "yes, in the same way as another woman is, she was out of order." A neighbour was also questioned, who went to visit Hannah and found her after the birth in which the neighbour stated "Upon that we sent for a midwife, she came and saw these things; after the midwife had looked at them I awaked the prisoner... she appeared as if she had been

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[190] Behlmer, "Deadly Motherhood."

drinking". The neighbour then said, "I asked where the child was, she replied she had no child." Witnesses repeatedly stated that Hannah had denied a child there at all, or said it was not hers, and the child had been wrapped and covered in linens. During the trial, the cross examination raised several questions regarding the father of the child, and it was established that Hannah was a widow of four years, and the father of the deceased child was a married man. The case concluded with Hannah being charged with concealment of birth rather than the murder.[191] This conclusion was influenced by witness testimonies, as there were several statements on how Hannah denied the child, demonstrating concealment. The judicial records do not make any statements about violence or how the child actually died, suggesting a lack of murder. In many cases, it was extremely difficult for courts to prove the child was born alive, especially in cases where overlaying was suspected. Doctors could not easily determine whether respiration had occurred, and even if they could it did not necessarily prove that the child lived beyond the first breath, and it was a requirement of most jurors that life be determined before a trial for infanticide could proceed.[192]

The case of Jane Hale, who was also accused of murdering her illegitimate child in 1836, demonstrates how debates around stillbirth or murder were integral to the outcome of some infanticide trials. Two physicians examined the infant post-mortem, as the child was found with wounds to the face and neck and a bruise at the back of the skull, which was thought to be the cause of death. However, both physicians found that "we could form no opinion on whether the child was alive or dead when the wound was given" and established that the lungs were "remarkably small…from their appearances, that they inhaled very little air." The witnesses from the time of the infant death all reported that they did not hear a child cry. One physician stated that they thought that "the child had been perfectly separated from the mother alive, I should attribute its death to the violent expulsion of the mother." However, the other physician concluded that "It must have been in a very low state of life – it must have died immediately after it was separated from the mother – I should say it had not cried – I should say it was born alive to a certain extent,

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[191] "Hannah Diana Connolly. Killing; infanticide. 17th September 1806." The Proceedings of the Old Bailey, accessed may 2024. https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=t18060917-48-off255&div=t18060917-48#highlight
[192] Behlmer, "Deadly Motherhood."

so to enable it to live, if she had the proper attendance."[193] Jane was reluctant to share that she was pregnant, even when asked by her employer, and when she fell ill, despite her employer mentioning that she thought Jane was in labour, Jane denied it. The day she gave birth, Jane was set to leave her employment as servant as her employers thought she was with child. Ultimately Jane Hale was found guilty of concealment of birth, not murder, as many good character testimonies were given, alongside the uncertainty that the child was born with any chance of life. In both cases of illegitimacy, these mothers refused to admit to the birth at all, for the shame of being pregnant and unwed and possibly even the ignorance of pregnancy, thus leaving them to have the child alone and unequipped, leading to unsafe births, and no medical help in times of infant distress.

The notion that illegitimacy was the cause for concealment of birth or for infanticide was strongly argued by contemporaries, especially medical professionals and groups concerned with the welfare of children. Individual medical practitioners, coroners, and institutions like the *British Medical Journal* warned that the lack of provisions for mothers of illegitimate infants and children would create an epidemic of infanticide.[194] The shame and societal pressure around having illegitimate children was immense, it was seen as immoral and the sign of a 'fallen woman'. Waiting for marriage before engaging in sexual intercourse was not only the ideal, but the expectation, despite the fact that between 1860 and 1890 30,000-40,000 illegitimate infants were born each year in England and Wales.[195] To have an illegitimate child meant that women were no longer viewed as respectable, and valued members of society, and to have such a tarnished character could ruin employability or social standing.[196] Therefore, the pressure some women found themselves under when in these circumstances could lead to extreme stress and feelings of hopelessness, leading some to commit the act of infanticide, or give birth entirely alone in unsafe conditions, leading to the concealment of birth in times of accidental infant death or still birth. Moreover, the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834)

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[193] "Jane Hale. Killing; infanticide. 28th November 1836," The Proceedings of the Old Bailey, accessed May 2024. https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/record/t18361128-53a

[194] Ann R. Higginbotham, "'Sin of the Age': Infanticide and Illegitimacy in Victorian London," *Victorian Studies,* vol 32, no 3 (1989)

[195] Virginia L. Grimaldi, "Single, Unwed, and Pregnant in Victorian London: Narratives of Working Class Agency and Negotiation," *Madison Historical Review,* vol 14 (spring 2017)

[196] Grimaldi, "Single, Unwed, and Pregnant in Victorian London."

outlined that mothers of illegitimate children could not seek support from the father, instead the only poor relief she could find was from a workhouse.[197] Therefore, many working-class women who found themselves pregnant outside of wedlock were put in a seriously difficult financial position, unable to work for having very little options for childcare, unable to gain support from the father, and facing the possibility of entering the workhouse which carried a significant stigma and danger for infants. Some opposers of the law suggested this would encourage more child murder.[198] Furthermore, the act also recategorized the way in which the poor were viewed; it defined the poor to be either 'deserving', which included the mad and the sick, or 'undeserving'.[199] In this sense, women who committed these acts in times where they would not ordinarily, due to post-birth sickness, could be considered mad and thus deserving of more lenient punishment. Moreover, while the poor law considered "bastards" to be the sole burden of the mother, the central problem of poverty highlighted in the act was the unemployed able-bodied man. It was unclear and lacking in words of advice for women who had been deserted or fell victim to an absentee husband.[200] Thus, while the law was harsh and partially the reason for mothers' hardships, it also left room for questions over the worthiness of the able-bodied woman who could not work due to a child. Ultimately, the debate and concern over the issue of infanticide and illegitimacy was nuanced and the sympathetic outcomes of the court cases reflected this. In reducing executions and prosecutions for the full crime of infanticide, contemporaries acknowledged the difficult and complicated position many women were in.

The average Londoner, however, did not consume these legal transcripts or witness trials of cases of infanticide. Instead, their knowledge came from crime reporting in newspapers, which was on the rise. In mainstream and elite newspapers, such as *The Times*, crime reporting became increasingly prominent, covering arrests, trials, and executions, often taking the form of entertainment.[201] However, due to the stamp tax,

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[197] Higginbotham, "'Sin of the Age.'"
[198] Higginbotham, "'Sin of the Age.'"
[199] Pat Thane, "Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England". *History Workshop*, No 6(1978)
[200] Thane, "Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England."
[201] Sydney, O'Hare, "Wilful Women: Representations of Female Murderers in the London Times from 1805 to 1880".Crime and Punishment (2018).

until 1855 mainstream newspapers were inaccessible to the working classes, and broadsides instead became an integral aspect of working-class culture.[202] Middle-class newspapers followed the sympathetic outlook of the courts in most cases, reporting that in that often infanticide resulted from poor circumstance, desperation and poverty, especially when offenders were seen to be remorseful during their trials.[203] The Times disproportionately covered cases of infanticide over other female murders or manslaughter, despite these cases being equal in number of occurrences; the Old Bailey reported 60 convictions of each crime between 1805 and 1880. This suggests that readers were specifically interested in such cases, likely due to the notion that acts of infanticide were entirely against women's nature, making them unusual and often tragic stories. The sympathy behind the reporting of infanticide in The Times was not for the benefit of the individual women in the stories, instead it highlighted the wider issue of infanticide, for example informing the readers of the inequities of the New Poor Law in its "Bastardy clause".[204] Similarly to the British Medical Journal, The Times, under the editorial leadership of Thomas Barnes, opposed the New Poor Law for its contribution to infanticide, which led to stories told of illegitimate infants murdered because of the desperation and poor circumstance of the mother. One article, "Coroner's Inquest" in 1837, reported the suspicious death of three-week old Thomas Lockyear, which was "attributed to the unnatural maltreatment of the mother, a young unmarried female, 19 years of age". The article detailed how Miss Lockyear was witnessed to have "great agitation of the mind" on the evening when the child was found dead, "placed very gently" in a dust hole with "No marks of violence." The article goes on to remark how the parents of the unmarried mother, who she was living with, had fourteen other children to provide for already and how Miss Lockyear "appeared to have great dread of being compelled to support her offspring without the assistance of the father".[205] Ultimately, the details of the case paint the picture of a scared young woman, who was not her usual self at the time of the death, in which she did not violently kill the child, instead the child was left in the

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[202] Arnot, "Perceptions of Parental Child Homicide."

[203] O'Hare, "Wilful Women."

[204] Nicola Goc, "Infanticide in 19th- Century England," *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Criminology,* Accessed May 2024, https://oxfordre.com/criminology/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264079-e-219.

[205] "Coroner's Inquest," *The Times,* Tuesday September 5, 1837, p7.

dust hole, and died from neglect there. This was sympathetic to the mother, but also added to the narrative that this was a greater issue that needed a solution; something that the New Poor Law was not offering, in order to save innocent children and young women.

Broadsides, however, were significantly less sympathetic. Broadsides, single sheet papers sold on the streets for half a penny, were exclusively a working-class medium. However, by the 1850's these were decreasing in popularity due to the abolishment of the stamp tax on newspapers in 1855.[206] This meant that the price of mainstream and more middle-class newspapers became more affordable to some working-class people, thus reducing the need for the cheaper alternative, broadsides. Before this, broadsides themselves were incredibly popular, and the most prevalent genres were the crime and execution broadsides. Within this, infanticide was a prominent feature; they were often graphic and explicit in their descriptions and illustrations of the murder of infants and children. Unlike more mainstream newspapers, broadsides clearly expressed an emotive response to the killing of innocent infants and children, portraying the accused as monstrous and evil.[207] Illustrations were particularly important aspects of broadsides, as they compounded the graphic portrayal of the crimes and increased the emotional resonance among readers.[208] One broadside published in 1828, reported on the case of Sara Mitchel, a mother imprisoned for theft and awaiting trial, who took her infant into prison with her, a common practice, and killed her child there. The illustration (Figure 9) depicts Sara holding her infant by the ankles and throwing it across the room. Her breasts were exposed in the image, suggesting that she was breastfeeding only moments before, and her face was drawn full of anger. The child was killed from
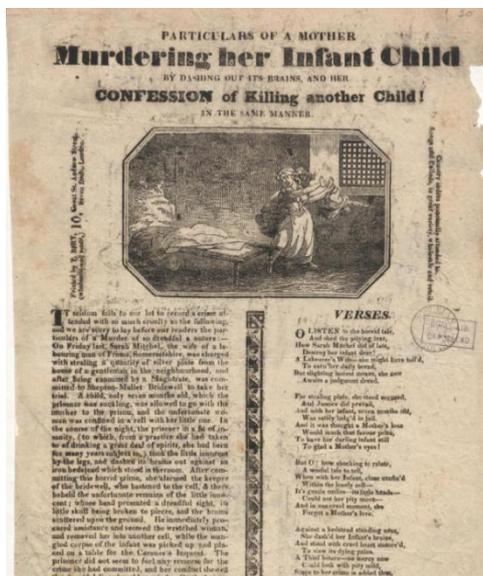
Figure 9 Broadside of the Sara Mitchel case

[206] "Broadsheets and other single-sheet items". National Library of Scotland, accessed June 3rd 2024.https://www.nls.uk/collections/rare-books/collections/broadsides/#:~:text=Early%20form%20of%20tabloid%20press,a%20halfpenny%20or%20a%20penny
[207] Arnot, "Perceptions of Parental Child Homicide."
[208] Arnot, "Perceptions of Parental Child Homicide."

a blow to the head, and the text in the broadside graphically described "the little skull being broken to pieces, and the brains scattered upon the ground." Further on it details how Sara had admitted to killing another infant two years prior in the same way. [209] This graphic telling of the infant's death was sure to invoke anger and sadness from the readers, over such a horrific end to such an innocent life at the hands of the mother, who was meant to keep her child safe. However, the broadside did also state that she was "an unfortunate woman…in a fit of insanity." [210] Sara was found insane at her trial and thus not guilty. Thus, there was a conflicted message, of a mother acting so monstrously toward an infant, but the explanation of insanity suggested a hint of compassion or reasoning. While middle-class newspapers found sympathy in times of both insanity and financial hardship, it would be logical to suggest that working-class audiences could not be sympathetic to mothers who killed their children in times of financial hardship as readers themselves faced similar economical obstacles. However, in times of insanity, possibly more compassion could be felt. Ultimately though, the broadside ends by condemning Sara, "A thief before-no mercy now, could look with pity mild, since her crime is added thus, the murder of her child!"[211] The gruesome death of the innocent infant was the heart of the story, and the judgement of her guilt still stood. Overall, broadsides were significantly less sympathetic towards accused mothers of infanticide, portraying the gruesome and graphic details of the cases to both entertain and harbour emotive reactions from their readers over the horrific losses of infants and children.

Ultimately, infanticide was a prevalent social issue during the nineteenth century and was a particularly distressing component of nineteenth century experiences of infant and child death. The murder of infants, was, and remains to be, a horrific and saddening crime, and was viewed as such by contemporaries. However, the changing perspectives on poverty and capital punishments, along with the Victorian ideals of motherhood, created a sense of sympathy for the accused mothers in both the judicial system and in mainstream newspapers. The idea that women were acting outside of their nature and often in desperation due to illegitimacy and financial hardships, drove the court's sentencing to avoid execution and the newspapers sympathetic outlook on the mothers

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[209] Arnot, "Perceptions of Parental Child Homicide."
[210] Arnot, "Perceptions of Parental Child Homicide."
[211] Arnot, "Perceptions of Parental Child Homicide."

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accused of killing their children. Working-class audiences, on the other hand, displayed significantly less sympathy to the accused mothers through the creation and popular consumption of broadside, in which cases of infanticide were graphically detailed and were explicit in their framing of the accused as evil and devious mothers. However, there were still instances where the broadside acknowledged women who were insane or acting out of their ordinary nature. Overall, the sympathy presented by the courts and mainstream newspapers did not take away from the sadness and grief the wider community felt over the losses of infants, and working-class broadsides only emphasised this more, with the abhorrent nature of infanticide at the centre of their stories.

Fixing the issue: Neglectful mothers and reducing infant mortality.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, and into the beginning of the twentieth century, social commentators, medical officers, and legislators were increasingly concerned over the falling birth rates and continually high infant mortality rates across the nation. Despite high infant rates plaguing the century from the very start, and even the beginnings of a decline in those rates, the concern and moral panic was at an all-time high. While it was likely that sadness and horror over the loss of so many infants did not reduce, this newfound determination to solve the issue can be pinpointed to two new concerns: the Boer Wars in the 1880s and the 1890s; and the series of epidemics of infant diarrhoea in 1898-1900. The Boer Wars highlighted, through the number of rejections of working-class men from the armies, that the physical conditions of the working classes were declining, while the epidemics demonstrated that infant health were continually and increasingly poor. The declining health of working-class men and poor infant health was highlighted as an issue for populating and protecting the empire, in that the fewer infants who survived meant less British adults to protect and serve the empire, and those that did make it were raised in poor health all the way through adulthood and so would struggle to continue empire expansion. The influential work by J.R Steely, in *The Expansion of England* (1883) argued this very issue.[212] In this sense, children became viewed as a national asset, thus making it increasingly important for the

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[212] Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood." *History Workshop,* no 5 (1978)

state to intervene and ensure the improved health and welfare of children and infants. In order to be able to fix the issue, investigations into the root of the issue were thus required. This section explores the reasons found for, and solutions to, the high infant mortality rates from these investigations from the state and social reformers. Such inquests offer a direct insight into the middle classes' experience and explanations of working-class infant mortality. The main reason the middle classes found for the poor infant health was the care they received from their mothers. From the use of alternative feeding, baby farms and the general ignorance of working-class mothers, middle-class reformers argued that working-class mothers repeatedly put their infants and children at risk.[213] However, this was not an wholly accepted notion. Many women's advocate societies argued that working-class women often had no choice, their need to work and have an income forced them into using unsafe childcare and feeding methods and neither did they have the time and resources to learn the best methods of care. Therefore, whatever the motivation was to fix the infant mortality rate, there was great contention around the reasons behind them. There was a contradiction between blaming and shaming mothers for ignorance and illegitimacy, and sympathy for mothers who had few choices but to send their children away or being unable to breastfeed. Therefore, while fixing the issue was the goal for both the state and middle-class reformers, these contradictions were ever present.

Household guidebooks, social commentators and regional medical officers of health were concerned with the quality of care that mothers were providing for their children. A major focus of this was feeding, especially alternative feeding to breastmilk.[214] In the early nineteenth century, spoon feeding animals milk (usually cow's milk) was a popular alternative to breastfeeding, however due to poor storage and sterilisation of milk, as well as unclean feeding devices, one third of all artificially fed babies died in their first year of infancy. There were other developments in alternative feeding over the century, but it was not until 1896, when a new boat shaped bottle was developed, that spoon feeding was replaced. Alongside this, by 1883, there were twenty-seven patented brands of infant food globally, that were powdered animals' milk with additional carbohydrates and

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[213] Dyhouse, Carol. "Working-class mothers and Infant mortality in England, 1895-1914", *Journal of social History,* vol12, no.2, (1978)
[214] Dyhouse, "Working-class mothers and Infant mortality in England,"

starches. These formulas though generally lacked nutrients like vitamins, minerals and proteins.[215] Despite these developments, the focus on preventing infant deaths came down to the encouragement of breastfeeding and cleanliness, thus discouraging and even condemning any kind of artificial feeding.[216] This discouragement was not only reserved for working-class mothers, middle-class women were also strongly discouraged against the use of a wet nurse, and instead were expected to breastfeed their children themselves. An advice book, "*The young wife's own book: A Guide for mothers on health and self-management*" (1880) stated:

"*The mother's milk is the proper food for her babe, and it is beyond doubt that the rate of infant mortality among those who are nursed by mother is less than among those suckled by a wet nurse, and far less among those who are weaned from birth...Every mother should consider it her absolute duty...to suckle her infant for at least six months.*"[217]

This advice targeted both working-class mothers who might wean their children early or artificially feed, and middle-class mothers who might pass on the role of breastfeeding to a nurse. The language used in the advice was explicit in its suggestion that breastfeeding was the only appropriate method of feeding. For example, the use of the word "duty" suggested that the role of breastfeeding was not a choice, but instead an obligation for the good of the child. This wording implies that mothers should feel ashamed if they made any choice to not breastfeed. As well as this, the text is direct in stating simply that babies die at the hands of their mothers when they do not breastfeed. This tone of advice would create immense pressure for women, not just to be perceived as a "good" mother, but also in making them anxious about their role in keeping their children alive , especially when they could not act in accordance with the advice.[218] It cannot be denied that the approach in encouraging breastfeeding was based on facts and concern over infant life, as babies were dying more often from artificial feeding due to a lack of knowledge of bacteria and sterilisation that was not available to nineteenth-

[215] Emily E Stevens, "A History of Infant Feeding", *The Journal of Perinatal Education,* vol 18, no.2 (2009)
[216] Dyhouse, "Working-class mothers and Infant mortality in England."
[217] George Black, *The Young Wife's Advice Book: A Guide for Mothers on Health and Self-Management* (London, New York: Ward, Lock, 1888)
[218] Pascale Sophie Russell, "Infant feeding and internalized stigma: The role of guilt and shame." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology,* vol 51, no.9 (2021)

century mothers.[219] However, it can be acknowledged that the majority of women who did not breastfeed had a myriad of reasons not to, such as physical restrictions to breastfeeding, or needing to return to work due to poverty or being an unmarried mother, or even post-partum illness. Therefore, the strict narrative that breastfeeding was the only option for healthy infants would have failed to address the issues leading to alternative feeding.

This was not the only advice book that used this narrative. Charles Vine's *"Mother and child: Practical hints on nursing, the management of children, and the treatment of the breast"*(1868) stated:

 "It is the bounden duty of every women to nurse her own child; and the mother who, through indolence or carelessness, neglects to perform this duty; incurs a vast amount of responsibility, deprives herself of a sweet privilege, and robs her infant of that nourishment which God designed for its special use and support".[220]

Vine pushed the same narrative, but was more direct in placing blame, suggesting that mothers lost out on such a precious time by being neglectful, ignorant, and even sinful in passing up the opportunity to breastfeed their child. The advice in guidebooks would have been particularly aimed at middle-class women, which meant that middle-class women were just as at risk of blame in the goal to reduce high infant mortality rates as working-class mothers. The advice in guidebooks on breastfeeding was indicative of the overall primary response and solution to alternative feeding and the high infant mortality rates in general: education. Medical officers were imperative in this movement. The focus of most medical officers though was on working-class mothers. Their notion of why women were breastfeeding was rooted in the presumption that working-class women were ill-equipped for motherhood and completely ignorant of child rearing, and if this was not the case, it came down to downright laziness.[221] This perspective completely negated to acknowledge the socio-economic burdens of working-class life. Women themselves

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[219] Jessica Cox, "Breast or bottle feeding: the debate has its origins in Victorian times," last mod September 2019. Accessed June 2024. https://www.brunel.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/articles/Breast-or-bottle-feeding-the-debate-has-its-origins-in-Victorian-times
[220] Charles Vine, *Mother and Child: Practical Hints On Nursing, the Management of Children, and the Treatment of the Breast,* (Oxford: Frederick Warne and Company, 1868)
[221]Bonham, "From the Mouths of Babes."

often suffered from malnutrition and overexertion which meant that for many mothers breastfeeding was not even possible, thus to feed their baby at all, bottle or spoon feeding was their only option, which with the lack of time, money and sanitation was also incredibly difficult to do.[222] Additionally, the Factory Act of 1891 made it illegal for women to return to work within four weeks of giving birth, which meant that previously to this there was no protection for women who, out of financial necessity, had to return to work almost immediately.[223] The Factory Act's limitation on women's employment after birth would have aided the encouragement of breastfeeding infants, however, even with this protection going forward, four weeks did not align with the amount of time that mothers were expected to breastfeed their infant in order to prevent infant death. Therefore, working-class women still could not meet the standard of motherhood that was seen as necessary to keep their child alive, let alone to be a good mother.[224] Ultimately, no amount of education on breastfeeding or child rearing would have enabled a working-class mother to have the resources required to reduce the high rates of infant mortality. This middle-class pressure meant that the grief that came with losing an infant were now interjected with feelings of guilt and blame for their inability to be a good mother, in cases where mothers could not breastfeed. Moreover, the narrative of ignorance fed into the middle-class narrative explored in the earlier chapters, that working-class mothers did not grieve their infant and children because if they did, they would do more to ensure their health.

Another concern regarding high infant mortality rates was the use and existence of baby farms. The term "baby farming" was used from the 1860's to describe establishments where women accepted payment to care for children who were not their own and mothers would often visit their child once every few weeks.[225] This new term emerged because it was not until the 1860s that doctors and societies started to investigate baby farmers, as there were no regulations to govern these until 1872 and many deaths of infants were ruled as natural.[226] Visitation was not always wanted or expected instead in a lot of cases, a lump sum was paid for the adoption and the child was taken in, for the

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[222] Bonham, "From the Mouths of Babes."
[223] Cox, "Breast or bottle feeding: the debate has its origins in Victorian times."
[224] Bonham, "From the Mouths of Babes."
[225] Arnot "Infant death, childcare and the state."
[226] Dorothy L. Haller, "Bastardy and Baby Farming in Victorian England," Loyola University (2009)

mother not to return. However, there was also no real regulation on adoption until the early 1900s and so places such as baby farms went mostly unchecked, making them incredibly susceptible to abuse. It was often the case that infants would be neglected or even murdered in order to increase profits. Baby farmers would either take in already sick children for a lump sum and let them die of malnutrition or fluid on the brain from repeated drugging, or healthy infants for whom they could get repeated fees weekly, and slowly starve them to death or drug them. This was so to not raise suspicions with the often young, struggling mothers who visited on occasion, until the infant eventually died.[227] Therefore, this became a major concern for the protection of infant and child life, and the reduction of infant mortality rates. Similarly to the recorded cases of infanticide, baby farms were particularly popular in cases of illegitimate infants. While it was the view of middle-class reformers that working mothers leaving their children to be cared for by anyone else, married, or unmarried, were neglecting their maternal role and duty in attending work, what was considered worse than this was the use of baby farmers by unmarried mothers of illegitimate children. The New Poor Law act (1834) made it so mothers of illegitimate infants had sole responsibility for the child and could not petition the father for any financial aid and received very little if any poor relief.[228] Therefore, mothers had to find a way to support themselves and their infant in any way they could. This then led to an increased use of baby farms. The women who ran these baby farms often procured infants and children to look after through advertisements, and these advertisements were predominantly targeted at desperate unwed mothers who were unable to procure work while caring for their illegitimate child. Ultimately, there were very limited work opportunities for mothers of illegitimate children due to the stigma of having such a child. This was coupled with the physical obstacles of finding childcare for the child, as many of the more reputable places and orphanages refused illegitimate children. But baby farms were spaces in which, for a fee, no questions were asked, no personal information given so were a seemingly innocent environment that cared for the children in its care.[229] Therefore, illegitimate children were the most vulnerable to the

[227] Haller, "Bastardy and Baby Farming in Victorian England."
[228] Haller, "Bastardy and Baby Farming in Victorian England."
[229] Haller, "Bastardy and Baby Farming in Victorian England."

abuse of baby farms, and by extension mothers of illegitimate children could be viewed by middle-class reformers as to blame for the deaths.

The state responded to baby farms by enacting the Infant Life Protection Act (1872), in which local authorities were given the powers to enter the homes of working-class women in order to monitor and inspect childcare taking place in a domestic circle. [230] The case of baby farmers Margaret Waters and Sarah Ellis in 1870, was an influential case that contributed to the enactment of the bill, despite medical officers and social commentators voicing their concerns over the general correlation between working mothers and infant mortality for decades before this.[231] Margaret Waters and Sarah Ellis were found in possession of eleven emaciated and dirty infants, who had been drugged and starved. (Figure 10)[232] After their arrest, five of the children died from their emaciated state. Waters was found guilty of murder in her
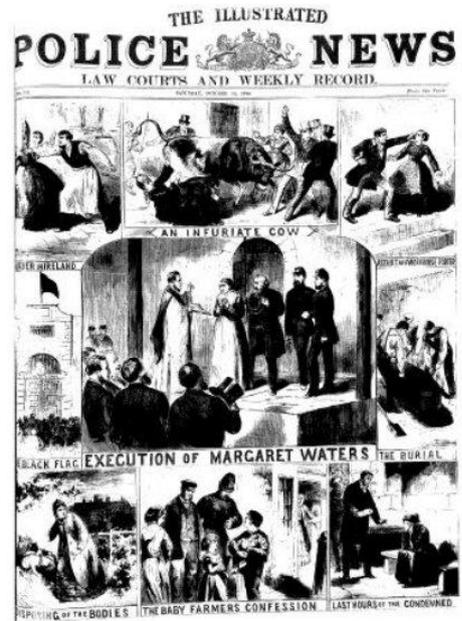

Figure 10 Execution of Margaret Waters

trial and was hanged for her crimes, and Sarah Ellis, her sister and accomplice, was charged with obtaining money under false pretences and sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment.[233] While there was clear blame placed on the women who actually committed the crimes, there was also the contentious place of the mother in the crime to be considered. The magazine, *The Spectator* in October 1870, wrote an article that covered the case which particularly described the evil nature of Margaret Waters. However, it also considered the role of the mother in the crime. It stated that:

"There may always be some doubt of the expediency of inflicting the most terrible of all punishments on the wretched mothers who, at the very moment of birth get rid of their own offspring. But when a woman cooly and deliberately takes children into her keeping;

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[230] Joanne Pearman, "Bastards, Baby Farmers, and Social Control in Victorian Britian," PhD Thesis, University of Kent (2017)
[231] Arnot "Infant death, childcare and the state."
[232] "Execution of Margaret Waters,"[Black and white newspaper illustration] The Illustrated Police News, in The Shields Gazette, "New rights for women helped end baby horror" (2016)
https://www.shieldsgazette.com/news/new-rights-for-women-helped-end-baby-horror-384815
[233]Arnot "Infant death, childcare and the state."

using such devices as serve to blind eyes which are not over suspicious, and calling in doctors to prescribe for slight attacks, while leaving laudanum and the want of food to do their work....when all this is done for gain".[234]

This article compared the mother and the women who committed the crime. It suggested that the evil that came from killing infants for profits cannot be punished in the same way as a "wretched mother." This exemplifies the complicated perspective of mothers giving up their children because of serious and extenuating circumstances. Similarly to the sympathy given to mothers who committed infanticide themselves, many middle-class commentators applied this to the mothers who gave their children to baby farmers, whether they knew their child's death was imminent or not. The Woman's Liberal Federation published a pamphlet "The Protection of Child Life" (1890) which had a similar outlook. The pamphlet was written after the Infant Life Protection Act of 1872 and highlighted its insufficient nature, stating that "the act leaves unprotected all children over one year of age and all under one who happen to be alone... It makes no adequate provisions for securing the registration and inspection of baby farms".[235] The act was susceptible to loopholes that allowed baby farming to continue as local authorities tended to hesitate looking into what appeared to be "innocently run childcare".[236] Overall, the pamphlet urged those in charge to actually protect the children who are at stake, not by eradicating childcare institutions, but by implementing regulation and registration that would allow for children to be cared for in controlled settings. The pamphlet argued that doing this sufficiently meant women, married or unmarried, would be given the option to work and ensure the safety of their child. Earlier, the Committee for Amending the Law in Points Wherein it is Injurious to Women, wrote a pamphlet in 1871, "Infant Mortality; its Causes and Remedies", in which it argued for the protection of legitimate childcare establishments:

"Legitimate baby farmers can and should be placed under supervision and illegitimate infants, when parents are inadequate to their maintenance, should have a place to go

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[234] "The Trade of Murder," *The Spectator,* 1st October 1870, p11.
[235] Women's Liberal Federation, *The Protection of Child Life,* (Pamphlets)1890.
[236] Arnot "Infant death, childcare and the state."

without putting obstacles in the way further increasing the practice of abortion, or substitute for indirect desertion and infanticide".[237]

The pamphlets were ultimately sympathetic in their view towards all mothers who used or needed baby farms, arguing for the creation of actually safe and regulated childcare. While this perspective is to be expected from the Women's Liberal Federation and, the Committee for Amending the Law in Points Wherein its Injurious to Women, who both continually advocated for women's rights, it is important to note that both pamphlets were primarily concerned with the protection of infant life. Overall, the idea of childcare for working-class mothers and mothers of illegitimate children was contentious for middle-class reformers and the state. While the New Poor Law deemed illegitimate mothers underserving of any help, the state and middle-class reformers were concerned with the welfare of infant life, which included illegitimate infants. The feelings of horror and abhorrence towards baby farms was strong, and most of this was directed at the women who were taking money to kill infants and take advantage of desperate women. Overall, the experience of infant death at the hands of baby farms was filled with concern over the unnecessary deaths of infants, but also the reasons as to why women were forced to place their children in such unsafe conditions.

The end of the century saw the publication of the Report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration (1903) which can be seen as the climax of recognition of all these issues: feeding, illegitimacy, mothers, and work, in terms of the imperial threat of high infant mortality rates. The Committee on Physical Deterioration was appointed in an attempt to sooth the public concern about the state of the nation, following the release of statistics that depicted widespread weakness and physical disabilities in the men volunteering for military service. However, the report did the exact opposite, and revealed that all the concerns seemed to be true. Although it found no clear evidence of physical weakness caused by inherited physical degeneracy, it found considerable evidence of physical weakness caused by unclean environments, ignorance and neglect.[238] The report's recommendations concerning infant mortality

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[237] Committee for Amending the Law in Points Wherein it is Injurious to Women, *Infant mortality: its causes and remedies.* (Pamphlets) 1871.
[238] Bentley B. Gilbert, "Health and Politics: The British Physical Deterioration Report of 1904," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine,* vol 39, no.2 (1965)

were extensive: it highlighted how artificial feeding was a significant contributor, and suggested proper certification of milk supplies, alongside the registration of still births and the requirement of medical certificates detailing cause of death to be required for the death of any child, as well as increased education for girls and mothers through the likes of health societies.[239] All these recommendations echo the suggestion middle-class reformers and medical officers had highlighted previously in connection to the alternative feeding and baby farms. However, the reports central focus was on ensuring the strength of the British race, and continuation of the empire. The report states in its introduction that it there was a "proposed inquiry into the causes which have led to the rejection in recent years of so many recruits for the Army on ground of physical disability", and thus the committee was established.[240] The report was discussed extensively in parliament; one debate stated:

"When experts tell us that we are rapidly approaching what may be called an almost stationary population...will the English-speaking people in fifty- or sixty-years' time be able to populate, to be able to direct, be able to govern, be able even to hold these great inheritances...the most important feature In the report is that which deals with infant mortality".[241]

This demonstrates that it was ultimately a concern that if the birth rate was falling and infant health was low, British children could not defend and fill the spaces left in the empire and if they did not other competing powers would, like the US or Germany.[242] Following the report, local governments boards organised two conferences on infant mortality in 1906 and 1908, and a series of new legislation was enacted in attempts to combat the very issues highlighted in the report, such as new midwife training (1902); notification of births required within six weeks so that health visitors could be in touch (1907) and the Children Act 1908 that made a detailed provision of general child welfare nationally.[243] Therefore, serious change was enacted at the turn of the century for the protection and welfare of infants and children. The experience of grief, or even the

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[239] *Report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration,* (London: Darling& Son, 1904)
[240] *Report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration*.
[241] "Physical Deterioration", 20th July 1905, *Hansard,* House of Lords , vol 149(cc1304-52).
[242] Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood."
[243] Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood."

acknowledgement of horror at the loss of infants at such high rates appear secondary to the need to improve the state of the nation's next generation.

Overall, the increased interest in the infant mortality rates at the end of the century was steeped in contention, between the blame of mothers for their ignorance on alternative feeding or shirking their responsibilities as a mother through work, and sympathy towards women who had no alternative but to feed alternatively or place their children in someone else's care. While middle-class mothers faced criticism, working-class mothers were the primary focus for concern over the welfare of their infants and children. They therefore received the brunt of the criticism but also much of the sympathy from women's societies and other middle-class observers. While the condemnation of the use of baby farms and alternative feeding was justified due to the simple fact that infants were in danger and dying as a result, no amount of education or shame over the use of such methods would have resolved the issue. The attempts to regulate baby farms failed to control the women who were committing such crimes against infants for profits and did not provide an alternative for mothers who needed to work, married or unmarried. Similarly, legislative attempts to provide mothers with four weeks grace from work after birth to encourage breastfeeding did not go far enough. Working-class mothers, and mothers of illegitimate children were unable to financially survive without work, often meaning that mothers did have to place their children in the care of others, thus being unable to breastfeed for the whole of infancy. This was acknowledged by other middle-class commentators who advocated for better legislative power to regulate baby farms and make safe spaces for infant care, in order to solve the issue of high infant mortality rates. At the turn of the century significant change was implemented by the state for the benefit of child and infant welfare, suggesting a response to such concerns. However, the drive to reduce infant mortality seemed to be less about saving infant life and more about protecting the British race and empire. Ultimately, the state's attempts to save infant life and reduce infant mortality rates meant that working-class mothers' experiences of infant death were shrouded in shame and guilt due to the inability to raise healthy children.

Conclusion

This chapter, ultimately, focused on middle-class contemporary perspectives of the role of the mother in the continually high infant mortality rates throughout the nineteenth century, most particularly the role of working-class mothers. Through examining middle-class observer's and the state's attitude towards mothers in the cases of infanticide, and their general ability to raise healthy children, this chapter identified a complex mixture of both sympathy and blame towards mothers for the high rates of infant mortality. This meant that the experience of infant and child death was both filled with the extreme sense of loss over such innocent life and shame, and guilt for working-class mothers who put their children in harm's way or struggled to raise healthy children, as well as considerable sympathy and understanding towards working-class mothers who were in difficult circumstances and lacked much of an alternative. Both the judicial system and middle-class mainstream newspapers continually demonstrated a sympathetic attitude towards mothers who committed infanticide, or found themselves concealing birth due to stillbirth, particularly mothers of illegitimate children who faced such harsh economic and emotional judgement. Similarly, middle-class societies, especially women's societies, argued that the women sending their infants and children to baby farms did so because they were under such pressure to work, or feared the judgement of having to care for an illegitimate child. On the other hand, household guides, medical officers and other middle-class reformers argued that working-class mothers were either ignorant to the ways of child rearing or downright lazy, causing significant harm to their own infants. Even middle-class mothers were held accountable, especially in household guides for shirking their responsibilities as a mother to others, such as using wet nurses. Ultimately, the legislative changes to child welfare at the end of the century, such as the Children's Act (1908), were less of a consequence of these concerns raised by middle-class reformers, or even the sadness over the loss of infants and children, and more a response to the danger of low birth rates and high infant mortality rates that were detrimental to the health and prosperity of the British Empire. These changes meant a significant increase in the standard of care and welfare for children, as after they were introduced, the rate

continually decreased throughout the twentieth century, from around 150 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 1900 to 31.7 deaths per 1,000 births in 1950.[244]

[244] D. Clarke, "Infant mortality rate in the UK 1900-2021, Statista, accessed 11th July 2024. https://www.statista.com/statistics/281501/infant-mortality-rate-in-the-united-kingdom/#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20the%20infant%20mortality,deaths%20per%201%2C000%20live%20births.

Thesis Conclusion

In examining the cultural experiences of child and infant loss across different social classes in the Victorian period, this thesis concludes that grief was as inseparable from the experience as it would be today, across all social classes. This thesis has examined the ways in which both the middle and working classes experienced grief over the deaths of infants and children, challenging some of the previous historiographical narratives explored in the introduction. Historians such as David Vincent, suggested that material insecurity from the working classes meant that grief was not something that families, especially mothers, were able to experience when facing the loss of a child.[245] As well as the notion, argued by historians such as Thomas Lacqueur, that Victorian death rituals, were driven by the need to solidify social standing and display wealth.[246] This thesis argues instead that , whilst social standing and material insecurity were present issues when facing the loss of infants and children, grief was also very present and a driving force of death culture. The way in which this thesis has done this is through using the approach from the history of emotions. The approach outlines that emotions are an important part of contemporary life, and cannot be understated. However, emotions are not universal, and instead are based on cultural environments, therefore modern-day concepts of emotions, such as grief, will not be the same as that of Victorian emotions. The aim of the approach is not to understand contemporary emotions, but instead to know how they are experienced, what caused them and what the effects of such emotions are.[247] Therefore this thesis has examined the Victorian cultural environment, using sources such as material culture, and deathbed literature, to understand how grief was an important and central aspect of experiencing infant and child death.

Chapter one demonstrates the importance of grief through the process of family care for sick and dying children and through contemporary representation of child death through deathbed scenes in fiction. The care and devotion demonstrated by both

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[245] David Vincent, "Love and Death and the Nineteenth Century Working Class," *Social History,* vol 5, no.2(1980)

[246] Thomas Laqueur, "Bodies, Death and Pauper Funerals," *Representations*, no.1(1983)

[247] Rob Boddice, "The History of Emotions*," Past, Present, Future,* no.62 (2017)

middle- and -working mothers in attempting to treat and care for their children, in spite of the acute awareness of the probabilities of death, largely due to the medical field's inability to treat most diseases, indicates a significant sense of love and grief over even the possibility of losing a child. Moreover, the certainty of salvation and portrayal of the good Christian death in child deathbed scenes is reflective of both the author's grief, and the reader's taking comfort for their own grief through the depiction. Chapter two demonstrates the ways in which grief was a driving force behind much of the material culture required in the funeral and mourning period. Overall, material culture, such as coffins, postmortem photography and mourning dress, was a part of a shared cultural language that both signified to others, and allowed the individuals to feel, the grief they felt over the loss of a child, without verbal or physical expressions of emotion, as this was deemed inappropriate by middle-class commentators. This was also demonstrated through the issue of pauper burials, which were highly resented and feared throughout the century. The lack of funeral rites, and thus material culture, signified a lack of decency and memorialisation for the deceased child, taking away the space with allowed families to grieve. Finally, chapter three, centred less on grief, and more about the climax in the concern over high infant mortality rates. It examined the complexities surrounding middle class and government perspectives on the mother's role in high infant mortality, in which both blame, and sympathy was felt for working-class mothers and mothers of illegitimate children. Some contemporaries argued that these women faced significant financial hardship and stigma, which led to cases of infanticide, deaths at the hands of baby farmer, as well as death due to ignorance from the mothers themselves. Others, however, saw these women as evil, corrupt, and neglectful. The concern over the high rates of infant mortality can certainly be attributed to the wider community's grief and horror over the loss of so many innocent children, however this chapter highlights an alternative motive, being the continuation and protection of the British Empire. Ultimately, the feelings of grief over the loss of infants and children cannot be understated, even for working-class families who suffered on a multi-faceted level.

The continuing growth and expansion of the history of emotion into more areas of historical research, such as children and childhood and medicine, suggests a wide

reimagining of many narratives that suggest elements like economics or politics were at the forefront of culture. The consideration of emotions such as grief can become much more widely accepted.[248] It seems against the very nature of human existence to examine historical subjects in a vacuum, devoid of feelings and emotions, especially when it comes to bereavement. Today, bereavement and mourning are just as wrapped up in economic inequality and the capitalist excess of the funeral industry as it was 150 years ago. The average basic funeral cost in the UK is £3953, covering funeral directors, coffins, burial fees and minister fees and life insurance is more important than ever.[249] However, grief is rarely questioned when people today cannot pay, or opt for budget funerals, especially for the death of a child. Therefore, while nineteenth century life differed quite significantly, it still seems unnatural to assume that the financial hardships of the working classes meant a complete inability to feel grief over the loss of their children, or that middle-class families would care more about the expression of social standing than the expression of grief. Thus, the consideration of emotion can expand historical knowledge of contemporary life, as well as humanise historical subjects instead of viewing them as statistics or a homogenous economic being. This thesis, while still limited by the constraints that come with social class categorisation, attempts to view families and mothers as people, who like us, had strong and complicated emotional bonds to their children, which ultimately led to their experience of grief over the tragic loss of infants and children.

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[248] Katie Barclay, "State of the field: the history of emotions," *The journal of the historical association*, vol 106, no.371 (2021)
[249] "Paying for a funeral" Marie Curie, accessed 18th July 2024. https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/bereaved-family-friends/organising-funeral/funeral-payments

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