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ISBN 0-315-53802-3

DEATH AND DYING IN ENGLAND: 1600-1680

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**Thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
of the University of Ottawa in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master's of Arts**

University of Ottawa

1988

THESIS RESUME

The purpose of this thesis is to examine English attitudes to death in the years 1600-1680. The methodology used consisted of studying written evidence in the form of diaries, letters, wills, chap-books, poems, plays, sermons and religious tracts. The symbolism of death during this period was also investigated by comparing popular customs, rituals, traditions and art work. The objective was to determine if there was any pattern, motif or recurring structure to its cultural artifacts. The broad themes suggested by the primary sources were then placed in perspective by relating them to existing historical literature on the subject of death.

The first chapter of this thesis is a review of what other historians have written about death in the early modern period. The major problem of preparing a history of death is clearly identified: did the Englishmen and women of the 1600s experience bereavement deeply? The second chapter is an attempt to reconstruct the thoughts and feelings of the often illiterate common people in the face of death. It is an interesting problem to determine exactly what an individual did or felt about his own approaching death or the deaths of family members, rather than what he was encouraged to think or feel by a social and religious hierarchy. To make this distinction clear, the death-related beliefs of the informal culture are sharply juxtaposed against those of the formal culture. The conclusions drawn would suggest that English society by the 1680s had largely secularized death rituals. As a result the spiritual side of the experience of dying became much more personal and introverted.

The third chapter on Puritanism and death is the most important of the thesis. In the wide dissemination of their views on death, the Puritan legacy had a long and powerful life. With the rise of Puritanism, death imagery had broad social and ideological applications. Meditation on death and the threat of possible damnation urged Englishmen of the seventeenth century to a sense of sin and repentance. The creation of such a godly society was intended to hasten the anticipated millenium. Although this death consciousness was all-pervasive, it failed to provide hope or forgiveness.

The purpose of the fourth chapter is to place the experience of death within the context of the development of mechanical philosophy. With the rise of scientific observation and experimentation, the old universe dominated by God and the Devil gave place to a world running according to natural laws. With the new attention focussed on making this world a better place, interest in death waned. To provide insight into this change, John Aubrey's accounts of the deaths of some of the great and unorthodox men of his century are examined to determine how such a philosophical transformation affected the lives, and particularly the deaths, of individuals.

The concluding chapter reviews the important themes suggested by the primary evidence. In response to the question whether people of the seventeenth century mourned deeply the death of loved ones, the answer is a qualified yes. The grief experienced through bereavement was based on a system of internal weights and measures, functioning like a sliding-scale. The more worthy, the more talented, the more spiritually-inclined the indi-

vidual dying was, the greater the response. The greatest tragedy was the death of the young and the vigorous on the brink of his or her maturity. To place this conclusion in a wider context, some comparisons with other centuries are briefly explored.

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PREFACE

The subject of death has attraction for the historian. This is true for the simple reason that contemporary attitudes to this subject are so complex and ambivalent. Very early in my reading on death in the seventeenth century, I learned to mask the area of my real interest by telling friends and acquaintances that my thesis was about family history, a subject to which they reacted positively. When I disclosed my genuine interests, the reaction was often too rejecting or too inquisitorial to make me feel very comfortable. I quickly reasoned that any common human experience that elicited such strong reactions was replete with meaning, symbolism and fascination.

In the course of writing this paper I become aware of the unwritten assumptions upon which societies operate. Part of this consciousness is based on years of observing the complications of intercultural communications. Four years of working with Asia and Asians has possibly made my approach more anthropological. If one learns, with some pain, to honour the cultures of all places, then it is necessary to honour the cultures of all centuries.

In choosing the seventeenth century to study I have selected a period that felt no impediment to thinking, writing, meditating and sermonizing on the theme of death. It was a time obsessed with the subject. The skull and cross-bones were everywhere. I hope that my contemporaries may be interested in what these English witnesses of the 1600's had to say. I also

hope that I have been true, in word and spirit, to the depth of their experiences.

* * * *

It is appropriate to end with a word of gratitude.

I wish to thank my thesis director, Dr. Julian Gwyn, whose encouragement enabled me to believe that I had something useful to say on such a monumental subject. I also wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Alan Macfarlane, King's College, Cambridge and Dr. Ralph Houlbrooke, University of Reading for sharing with me their thoughts on death and the English seventeenth-century. Finally, I would like to thank my typist, Deborah Kiss, for her patience and enthusiasm.

CHAPTER I

A HISTORY OF DEATH: A REVIEW

This thesis will examine English attitudes towards death in the period 1600-1680. The overall objective is to study the recurring symbols, rituals and vocabularies that seventeenth-century writers, commentators, diarists, chroniclers, artists and witnesses use in any discussion or depiction of death. The goal is to discern a structure to these cultural artifacts. Structure will be used in its anthropological context. The anthropologist, E.E. Evans Pritchard, recommended that the term be used as an historical expression to denote a set of relations known to have endured over a considerable period of time.¹

Especially in the last two generations, the influence of the social sciences on the writing of history has been very significant. Historians are no longer content to determine what people of earlier centuries did, but also what they thought and how they felt. There has been a growing consensus that all human behaviour can be seen in terms of sets of recurring symbols that are encoded according to an all-pervading world-view.² The objective of this thesis is to explore the death-related key-words and significant gestures that depict the mentality of the seventeenth-century English community. The writing of the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski would suggest that many societies have a series of rituals, customs and taboos for assisting the individual, the family and the community in the journey from life to death.³ The purpose of this thesis is to look at the circumstances of that journey in the early modern period.

Other societies and centuries have been fascinated and obsessed with death. In the late Tudor-Stuart period, a century diffused with Puritan thought, death had a particular centrality and drama. England in 1600 was a world imbued with such works as Foxe's Actes and Monuments where good fought evil, God battled the Devil. Death was seen as the final arbitrator in this struggle. Traditions and beliefs about death had social and religious connotations in which less theologically-inclined societies would be less interested.

The thesis will concentrate on the years 1600-1680 to highlight any possible changes in English consciousness on the subject to death. This particular interval of eighty years was selected as it is central to measuring the full impact of the Reformation on an attitudes to death and bereavement and the practices of mourning and burial. The same eighty years afford an opportunity to assess the effects of Puritanism at its zenith, its successful control of government and religion during the Commonwealth, and its nadir, in the oppression under the Clarendon Code and with the failure of Charles II to legislate religious toleration. Moreover, this period of English history may be interpreted as an era of new power over nature, as Englishmen become inspired with the notion of relieving man's estate through the discoveries of science.

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie has pointed out the anomaly that while French historians seem "fascinated" with the subject of death, American researchers have been notably silent on this subject.⁴ Le Roy Ladurie suggests this is because American historians are "incorrigibly optimistic". He went on to say that "history is a meditation on death as well as a

reflection on life".⁵ Le Roy Ladurie's comments need some up-dating. It is true that the pioneering works on death have been written by French historians - Philippe Ariès, Pierre Chaunu, François Lebrun and Michel Vovelle. Such scholars have produced histories by comprehensively documenting hundreds of images of death.⁶ It is also true that any review of abstracts of the 1970's and 1980's will indicate that there is still a dearth of English and American historians studying the 'mentalité' of death. Instead, scholars have chosen to concentrate on the narrower theme of disease, mortality rates and burial. There has been no shortage of English-speaking historians who have commented on family relationships in seventeenth-century England. The most notable of these are Lawrence Stone, Alan Macfarlane and Ralph Houlbrooke. They have found that it is impossible to deal with a history of the family without making specific comments on death, a constant factor when considering family life in the early modern period.

Any analysis of English social attitudes on the subject of death must begin with the French historian, Philippe Ariès. Just as Ariès produced the first landmark study of family life, Centuries of Childhood,⁷ he is the most comprehensive chronicler of death in the European context.⁸ Ariès attempts to trace the evolution of attitudes toward death through a thousand years of European history. He focuses on the changes in mentality in the medieval and baroque periods, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ariès describes himself as a demographic historian. He has been heavily influenced by the Annales school of historiography. The proponents of this approach to historical analysis recommend that thousands of documents and events be examined to reveal the broad frame-

work of human history. Ariès adheres to this very structuralist approach and has developed very definite views about what people believed about death in a particular century or cluster of centuries.

Ariès' conclusions may be defined under the following broad themes. From the end of the Dark Ages until about 1300, European man was very accepting of death and greeted the end of life with forbearance and acquiescence. With the improvement in living standards, at least for the urban and the middle-class, there emerged a greater appreciation of life. Death now seemed a crude departure from this new savouring of life's abundance. Medieval artists began to depict the last moments of the dying as the battle between the forces of Satan and those of the angels. Manuals were written on the art of dying well, the artes moriendi, or how-to-do books for the final moments. Ariès links this transition to the rise of individualism. In contrast to the findings of historian Johan Huizinga who believed the late Middle Ages were obsessed with death, Ariès sees,⁹ the often horrific art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, depicting either the dance of death or the human body in various stages of decomposition, as indicative of, not a morbid fascination with death, but an appreciation of the sensory pleasures of life.¹⁰

With the emergence of Baroque consciousness the prevailing mentality again changed. The priest emerged as a more important figure in the family cluster at the death-bed and the concept of purgatory became highly developed and more frequently expressed in art. This occurrence is associated with the growth of stronger family ties. Ariès speculates that the evolution of emotional closeness within the family circle made the

loss of the loved one through death almost insupportable. The age of the nineteenth century is classified as the period when romantic-erotic views of death predominate. Death of the individual or the loved one starts to convey a sense of emotional breakthrough or release.¹¹

In his concluding comments on the twentieth century, Ariès makes a number of critical comments on the technical transformation of death.¹² He believes that death has become an obscenity in polite modern society as it appears to be the main area of human life in which science has not triumphed over nature. He suggests that contemporary individuals are still profoundly uncomfortable with death, as it is an expression of the uncontrollable force of nature.¹³

Throughout his writings, Ariès delineates the central notion that man's historic relationship with death is suggestive of his emotional response to capricious fortune. Attitudes to death are to him highly indicative of the development of either a sense of individuality or a sense of integration with the community.¹⁴ At death the individual is either overwhelmed with a sense of aloneness or with feelings of solidarity within the family. In examining western cultures, Ariès believes that the historian in struggling to determine these various responses to death, is presented with a cultural artifact that provides evidence about the fundamental nature of European civilization.

In an effort to write mass history covering a number of centuries, Ariès has tried to place in sequence a large number of historical images. This is application of the Annales method at its most skillful. He assumes

that any given society is a trove of ancient and modern customs and that only by investigating the long-wave of historical data can one make any real judgements about changes in a society.¹⁵ Although Ariès concedes that his method is intuitive and subjective, it is his intention to make a comprehensive study of changes in human sensibility.¹⁶ Ariès is committed to macro-history. His approach is essentially disdainful of intensive investigation of a particular society on the micro-level.

Although French historians have tended to dominate the study of death, there are a number of English-speaking historians now working in this area. In contrast to the sweeping perspective of Ariès, Leslie Clarkson has written an accessible, straightforward book entitled Death, Disease and Famine in Pre-industrial England.¹⁷ It is indicative of many of the concentrated studies that have recently been produced by current scholars of English history.¹⁸ Clarkson describes his work as historical demography intended for a lay reader. It discusses the growth and movement of population, fertility rates, mortality, marriage age and family size. There are chapters which succinctly summarize levels of disease, medical treatment and incidence of violent death in the early modern era. Clarkson draws a great deal of his evidence from secondary sources. In addition, he works consistently from the thesis that life in the pre-industrial period was 'poor, nasty, brutish and short'. He also leans heavily on a limited number of primary sources which are selectively culled to create an impression that the early modern period was a time of overwhelming pain and sorrow. He refers to Thomas Dekker's comments on the plague as bringing out the opposite of Christian virtues.¹⁹ He fails to

mention that during the great plague epidemics in England, in contrast to experience elsewhere, there was no public panic, no explosion against the rich who could save themselves by fleeing the disease and no scape-goating. Most people faithfully nursed their sick relations, and some, such as Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn, laboured at their posts during plague time instead of seeking the more prudent course of flight.²⁰

Keith Thomas, author of the important work on the seventeenth century, Religion and the Decline of Magic,²¹ had noted death as a topic of great potential interest. It was at his suggestion, that Clare Gittings wrote Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England.²² This book has the twin purpose of commenting on the effect of emerging individuality and attitudes to death, and the "changes and continuities in English funeral practices ... to suggest an interpretative framework within which these alterations might usefully be explained".²³ The theme of individualism appears to have been grafted on a very extensive examination of burial customs. Gittings undoubtedly wished to broaden her focus, suggesting that the growing awareness of the self and its place in the universe caused changes in early modern burial customs. The heart of her analysis is that with the decline of a strong sense of community, society began to handle death and the dead in a different manner. She suggests that in the late Middle Ages, the community had control of the rituals for effectively moving the individual, and his or her family, to a sense of acceptance of death as a natural and inevitable process. With the Reformation, a more particularized atomist society emerged, leaving the nuclear family bereft of a sense of group solidarity to mitigate the sense of personal loss. As each life was seen as precious, each loss through death

was inconsolable. She demonstrates this transition by reference to trends towards the institutionalization of individualized sermons for the diseased, lavish church monuments, growing discomfort with the close proximity of the dead buried beneath church floors, and the increased use of coffins instead of mere shrouds.

Some of her arguments have been verified and others contradicted by the recent findings of Keith Wrightson and David Levine. In a yet unpublished article,²³ they have examined church and public records of the community of Whickham in the north-east of England. Wrightson and Levine were drawn to this area because it was an example of early coal-mining community. Owing to that non-agrarian, cash-based commercial activity, its demographic patterns were based on a high degree of transiency in its population. Although this essay is primarily concerned with the steep mortality rates of the parish, Wrightson and Levine devote several pages to the 'mentality' of death in this region.

Although the time periods analyzed are not explicitly set out in this article, the town of Whickham began to convert to a coal-mining region in the late 1500's to first decade of the 1600's. Wrightson and Levine state that, in this early period, most individuals composing their wills on their death-beds gave detailed instructions on how their estates should be managed, how their funerals should be organized and what degree of hospitality should be expended at the post-funeral meal. This done, these Whickham inhabitants died seemingly content in the efficacy of these arrangements and their religious faith. With the arrival in the town of a free-floating population of coal-miners, this sense of neighbourhood and commu-

nity declined. By the early to mid-seventeenth century, Whickham testators began to leave only very general instructions concerning legacies and burials. Usually such arrangements were left exclusively to the discretion of executors. Money might be set aside for charity, but the community hospitality and largesse that was traditional after funerals was controlled or eliminated. Instead, more intimate post-funeral private dinners for the immediate family began to replace the more communal gatherings. Obviously the strong sense of parish life had dwindled and the nuclear family had gained in importance. It is difficult to say whether this alteration of social customs is indicative of a greater sense of the importance of the individual. The more personal and detailed instructions for death-related ceremonies of the sixteenth century had given place to less individual control, but greater family involvement. The interpretation of attitudes to death may be more idiosyncratic and complicated than the structuralist approach would suggest.

Lawrence Stone is the pre-eminent historian of the English family and its development through 1500-1800.²⁴ In his major work on this subject, the author chronicles the evolution of the affectively-bonded nuclear family which he dates from the end of the eighteenth century. Stone views the history of the family as a series of great cycles, alternating between the poles of repression and indulgence. Stone documents these changes by a close and detailed examination of legal arrangements, structure, customs, power, affect and sexual practices. As in Ariès, his study also entails situsting the notion of the individual within the context of his family, his society and in his relationship with his God. To accomplish this task, Stone must deal with the theme of death and its effects on the emotional

relationships he describes. Stone's scholarship is so complete and so significant to an understanding of the social culture of the seventeenth century that it is imperative to make reference to a number of his important findings.

Stone has prepared a demographic model of the early modern family. His research suggests that the norm in English family life took the following form:²⁵

Marriages were contracted late, and were normally broken early; couples rarely survived together for very long after their children had left home; remarriages were very common, less than half of the children who reached adulthood did so while both their parents were alive; and only a small minority of parents lived long enough to become an economic burden on their children in their old age. In the average family of the seventeenth century, a man would be one of four, five or six children, two or three of whom would have died before the age of fifteen. At twenty-six or twenty-seven he would marry a girl of twenty-three or twenty-four and have four, five or six children. Two or three of them would die young, and the remainder would be sent away from home at about the age of twelve. After less than seventeen years there was a fifty percent chance that the marriage would be broken by the death of himself or his wife.

Stone regards this family structure as porous and unstable and contends that the emotional bonds between family members were not close or intimate. In describing the tension between the demands of the individual and those of the community, Stone contends that, in terms of love and caring, society tends to have more compassion and warmth as time goes on. "The only steady linear change over the last four hundred years seems to have been a growing concern for children, although their actual

treatment oscillated cyclically between the permissive and the repressive".²⁶ In developing this linear model, Stone has bleak things to say about the emotional life of our ancestors. His acid-test for determining the degree of affective attachment between family members is the reaction of individuals in the seventeenth century to the death of their relatives.²⁷ Stone acknowledges that England had lower mortality levels than France. He also insists that because of the still high rate of infant death, English parents had to limit severely their emotional response to their children.²⁸ He theorizes that nothing better illustrates the resigned acceptance of the inevitability of significant infant mortality, than the practice through the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of giving a new-born child the same name as one who had recently died. This custom, Stone supposes, indicates a lack of a sense that each child was singular and therefore entitled to its own name.²⁹

Stone has attracted enormous criticism for espousing this viewpoint. Stone, like Ariès, himself concedes that his evidence only applies to the literate population of the centuries that he investigates. Stone remarks that the "...nature of the surviving evidence inexorably biases the book toward a study of a small minority group, namely the literate and articulate classes...."³⁰ Stone's model for the emotional relationships of the early modern period has been evaluated and found wanting by a number of modern commentators. The past has its champions who believe that the fathers, mothers, husbands and wives of earlier centuries were no more or less depraved and heartless than those of the present century. It may be noted that historians of the 1980's seem to take this revisionist view when commenting on the same literature that Stone studied.

In evaluating the works of historians, one is frequently struck by the possibility that scholars in their reading of original documents continually bring their own prejudices, memories and phobias to bear. It seems very difficult for a scholar in analysing any historical problem not to write of his or her own experiences. It may be useful to acknowledge such basic assumptions before attempting historic research. Lawrence Stone appears to work from the assumption that early centuries were brutal; other historians take an approach which credits the people of the early modern period with a greater emotional responsiveness. On balance, Stone has laid bare one of the key problems in analysing late Tudor and early Stuart responses to death: the degree of closeness in family relationships.

Ralph Houlbrooke chronicles the English family from 1450 to 1700.³¹ He writes thoughtfully on the subject of death and the broken family. Death struck down so many young people that it was a common occurrence for most people to lose, at a comparatively young age, first a parent and then a spouse. Thus many families were fractured by death and reconstituted by re-marriage. The Cinderella story of a vicious step-mother and unloving step-siblings was a common reflection of fact. Houlbrooke looks at death almost exclusively from within the matrix of the family, but he has insightful comments on the effects of death on the domestic life of this period. After the Reformation and the triumph of the notion of the priesthood of all believers, death began to fall under the control of relatives and friends rather than clergymen. Family members sought to ease the passing of a loved one and help them to die a 'good death'. The role of the family did not cease upon death but was commemorated in the wide-

spread use of brass memorial tablets with lavish visual representations or literary explanations of the deceased's place in a community or family-tree.

Houlbrooke sees the familial attitudes of previous centuries as relatively consistent with those of twentieth-century mores. Although he concedes that some individuals abused their children, most people were loving parents and considerate spouses. Houlbrooke dates the establishment of the nuclear family at before 1500 and argues that there was very little change between 1450 and 1700. He suggests that evidence of "widespread culpable neglect and infanticide has so far proved difficult to demonstrate".³² Houlbrooke verifies this point by inferring that widespread neglect would have left demographic traces. Postulating that if female babies were not as desirable as male babies, and assuming that a large number of children were badly treated, then girls must have suffered the most. Where then, Houlbrooke asks, is there evidence that males significantly outnumbered females in earlier centuries?³³ In advancing this theory, Houlbrooke contradicts the findings both of Philippe Ariès and Lawrence Stone. Moreover, he challenges the wisdom of these historians in their view that constant threat of illness and death made people of the early modern period callous. Houlbrooke insists that:³⁴

Psychohistorical methods involving a priori reasoning, the application of controversial psychological theories, comparisons between radically different societies and the wrenching of evidence out of context has led to unsound conclusions on such subjects as the effects of early modern methods of upbringing and of premature deaths of parents, spouse and children.

Houlbrooke doubts whether psychohistory has any real validity, arguing convincingly that just as it is difficult for modern psychotherapists to make confident statements about the problems of most of their patients, it may be impossible to do this for people who lived several centuries earlier.³⁵ Houlbrooke subscribes to the view that there is a great consistency in human experience and that the chronicles of our ancestors should be treated with sensitivity and respect.

Similar sentiments have been echoed by Keith Wrightson in English Society: 1580-1680,³⁶ by Alan Macfarlane in The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition³⁷ and by Steven Ozment in When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe.³⁸ Recent historians in the 1970's and the 1980's have been strongly influenced by social anthropology - particularly by the work of Princeton anthropologist Clifford Geertz³⁹ on the traditional societies of Java and Bali. These academics suggest that the theories of Stone (and other like-minded historians, such as Lloyd de Mause⁴⁰ and Edward Shorter),⁴¹ which imply that the past was invariably a brutal place, have essentially a one-dimensional view of history. This approach argues that societies progressed from varying forms of savagery and lack of 'modernity' to a greater quality of enlightenment, sophistication and humanity. The historian-anthropologists observe that this approach is just as contemptuous of past societies as industrial civilizations are of aboriginal groups of hunters and gatherers. All cultural collectivities have elements of refinement and sophistication, but they are expressed in different and incomparable ways. As modern western society is complex, ambivalent and contradictory, so was that of our ancestors.

Wrightson analyzes English family culture of the seventeenth century like any other ethnological sub-set. He takes a fresh look at kinship patterns, which may be characterized as personal and impermanent.⁴² No clear distinction was made between the relatives of one's mother and the relatives of one's father.⁴³ Furthermore, there seemed to be few injunctions, by law or custom, to care materially for one's relatives.⁴⁴ This fact may be supported by reference to wills of the period. His comments suggest a very individualistic society with a fair degree of personal mobility and choice. He emphasizes that the concept of neighbourliness or horizontal friendship seems to have been well-developed.⁴⁵ In contrast to Stone's depiction of the emotional brutalities of the seventeenth century, Wrightson's early modern people seem to have well-developed relationships, based on mutual need, close geographical proximity and personal identification. It is worth observing that this focus on friendship, rather than family, emphasizes the degree of control and freedom experienced. From his extensive study of wills of the period, Wrightson confronts Stone on his theory of the emergence in the seventeenth century of the restructured, patriarchal, nuclear family. He also rejects Stone's structure of evolutionary cycles in human relationship, stating:⁴⁶

In the present state of our knowledge it would seem unwise to make too sharp a dichotomy between the 'patriarchal' and the 'companionate' marriage and to erect these qualities into a typology of successive stages of family development. It may well be that these are less evolutionary stages of familial progress, than the poles of an enduring continuum in marital relations in a society which accepted both the primacy of male authority and the ideal of marriage as a practical and emotional partnership.

Wrightson believes that Stone's references are too fully drawn from the experience of the aristocracy, where alliance and property were of more urgency than emotional response. He does not feel this true for more middle-class experience.⁴⁷ It seems reasonable to assume that among the greater part of the common people marriage partners were freely chosen, subject to the advice of friends and a sense of obligation to consult or inform subsequently parents if they were alive and within reach.⁴⁸ The postulation that marriage was based on love or companionship is borne out in recorded reactions to death.⁴⁹ Wrightson reinforces his argument with several examples of sufferings of individuals over the death of their marriage partners.⁵⁰

Steven Ozment examines European history in its entirety during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He too challenges Lawrence Stone's speculations on the nature of conjugal and parental love in the early modern period. Ozment refers to Stone's assertion that frequent remarriages by widows and widowers were indicative of indifference. Ozment reverses Stone's view by suggesting that remarriage of bereaved spouses connotes that such individuals found it very difficult to operate in their society without the emotional and material consolations of a companionable marriage.⁵¹ The witnesses he cites make frequent reference to their deceased partners in their writing. The fact that inhabitants of the modern period had immense practicality does not cancel their emotional or affective characteristics. They were simply both hard-headed and caring. On the subject of the death of children Ozment says:⁵²

The premium placed on infant life in the sixteenth century is suggested by the severity of the penalties against premeditated infanticide or child murder. In Hamburg, a person convicted of this crime was buried alive or speared (a penalty perhaps designed to approximate the helplessness experienced by the slain infant) or drowned...Hermann von Weinsberg reports a woman drowned for murdering her daughter's illegitimate child.

Ozment has carefully examined the figures on infant mortality in Europe in the Reformation period. His sources establish the death rate for children at running from 300-400 per 1,000.⁵³ Ozment compares these statistics against some interesting twentieth-century figures reckoning the death rate in India in 1960 for children under five at 257 per 1,000.⁵⁴ No one would suggest that Indians of 1960 loved their children any less than say the English loved their children in 1960. Ozment inverts Stone's argument by hypothesizing that the frequent death of children would cause parents to love the surviving offspring more.⁵⁵ Practicality did not cancel their emotional or affective characteristics. Finally, Ozment contends that Stone has misread Christian stoicism for indifference in the emotional life of individuals of the sixteenth and seventeenth century.⁵⁶ Excessive grief was disturbing to the Reformation consciousness as it was felt to be indicative of uncertainty in the parent's mind of his own hope or his hope for his child's salvation. Luther, whose grief over the death of his own children was insupportable, was still concerned that such emotion was a temptation that the Christian must resist.⁵⁷

Alan Macfarlane has borrowed extensively from anthropological theory. His pages are sprinkled with reference to models applied or developed through extensive study of aboriginal or tribal people. One might

characterize Macfarlane's approach as that of intensive study of a number of selected topics, such as the diary of Ralph Josselin⁵⁸ or witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England.⁵⁹ From this intensive research he carefully extrapolates patterns of behaviour to challenge accepted historic truth or perceptions on wider social and economic themes. This methodology is probably most completely carried out in his study The Origins of English Individualism. In this volume, Macfarlane contests the theories of Karl Marx, Max Weber and Lawrence Stone. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, his principal contention was that English society of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can in no way be characterized as 'peasant' - based as it was on an increasingly market-driven economy, late marriage, the nuclear family and social and physical mobility. He also theorizes that the English were different from other European societies, particularly in terms of development and level of monetization.⁶⁰ It especially is on the issue of the emergence of the nuclear affective family that Macfarlane takes issue with Lawrence Stone. He is convinced that the evolution of a tight family circle, as opposed to a looser, more extended peasant culture, is not linked to capitalism, industrialization or urbanization, but has been a constant in the English social fabric since the Middle Ages. In much of Macfarlane's work the emphasis is on the 'short-wave' in opposition to the 'long-wave' of the Annalists and the other giants of structuralism. He argues for both extensive and intensive cross-referencing of seventeenth-century works in the light of modern anthropological theory.⁶¹ His pages are replete with references to other original sources - particularly on extant diaries of the early modern period - which should be analyzed and tabulated against his own research. Macfarlane also seeks to test modern anthropological models of human behaviour in

light of research on the seventeenth century, assessing the customs and rituals of the past in the same manner as modern experience. He recommends an individualistic response to the distinctive personalities of earlier centuries.

For the purposes of this study, Macfarlane's most important work is his close examination and commentary on the diary of Reverend Ralph Josselin, vicar of Earls Colne, Essex. Josselin thought, wrote and sermonized on the subject of death. Both as a compassionate man and as a Puritan clergyman he meditated on the nature of death among his family and tried to place it in a moral context. Josselin was a devoted husband and father. As a churchman he was particularly interested in the problems of human mortality and his reflections are contained in several funeral sermons - still an innovation at the time.⁶² There is much in Josselin's diary to say about the grief experienced over the death of a loved one, as obviously it was a subject of great concern to him. He recommended Christian stoicism for to grieve was to express doubt in the efficacy of religion.⁶³ To quote Josselin,⁶⁴

[W]hen others go the Tombs and Graves to mourn,
Christians go to the graves to rejoyce...I have
thoughts of my sweetest Daughter [his first child
Mary, dead at eight years of age] now with comfort,
who have had thoughts of her like the bitterness of
death."

In addition to his living as a clergyman, Josselin was a successful yeoman farmer. Despite this rather comfortable income, Josselin invested between a quarter and one-third of his total income on the upbringing and settle-

ment of his children. Approximately one-third of the money extended was wasted as it was spent on children who died, usually at a young age.⁶⁵ Josselin must have been frequently reminded of the emotional and material destructiveness of death. It is on the emotional side that he lingers in his diaries, recording the deep anguish of loss and heartache. It should be noted that he made judgements concerning the extent of his loving attachments, an infant counting less than a child of eight. Macfarlane tells us that for Josselin:⁶⁶

How intensely he felt his children's deaths seems to have been directly connected with the age of the child; the ones who died very young, or before they could make emotional ties with their parents, or those who died after they had grown up and left home, were not felt as such a deep loss as the only child who died in the intervening years.

Josselin records in a sermon the antidote for such grief. The "...way to comfort is by running to other employment, diverting thoughts..."⁶⁷ At the same time as Josselin mourned his dead, he tried to fit God's seeming vengeance in a moral framework. Imbued with a general sense of his own sin as the cause of such personal catastrophe, Josselin could even fasten on such trifles as the excessive time he spent on chess as being appropriate for punishment by death.⁶⁸ In a more reflective moment, Josselin hypothesized that maybe God needed the company of his children.⁶⁹ Macfarlane suggests that this necessity of placating or bargaining with a relentless God, who punished by death, may have resulted in closer conformity with social norms.⁷⁰

God was seen as a stern father figure, who punished human failings on the human level; Josselin had taken himself from God, therefore God 'hath taken away a sonne', A terrible reciprocation. Guilt would be the constant companion of a man who held such views, self-examination an almost daily occurrence as⁷¹ he strove to live up to the ideals he had set himself.

In any examination of the historiographic material on the subject of death, mention should be made of the important statistical work of E.A. Wrigley,⁷² R.S. Schofield and the much more impressionistic, but still statistically-based studies of Peter Laslett.⁷³ The demographic investigations of such scholars suggest the society of the seventeenth century was much less bleak and forbidding than that described in the volumes of Stone and Ariès. Again, allowing for the possibility that English experience may have been very different than the rest of Europe, Wrigley, Schofield and Laslett suggest an environment that was perilous, but not horrific. The English inhabitant of the early modern period did not live on the sharp edge of the Malthusian scissors. Famine and low wages were not found by Wrigley and Schofield to be significant factors in the cause of death. They concede that they might be a contributing co-efficient, weakening the population for epidemics of infectious disease.⁷⁴ Starvation was not commonplace in the Stuart landscape. Wrigley and Schofield attribute this balance to a "fertility-dominated low-pressure system".⁷⁵ They conclude:⁷⁶

Endemic and infectious diseases made infancy and early childhood dangerous, but during most of English history between Elizabethan and Victorian times a young man or woman of 20 could look forward on average to a further 35-40 years of life.

O happy England! Although Laslett has not so completely based his work on numbers, he comes to a very similar conclusion. The English controlled their birth and death rates by delaying marriage until a couple could set up housekeeping on their own. When times were hard this had the effect of delaying marriage, thereby reducing fertility and the subsequent demand on resources.⁷⁷ The English population did not suffer in an endless cycle of population expansion, hunger and then starvation that was the constant of French experience.⁷⁸ Laslett confronts "lugubrious statements" made by other historians on the subject of death.⁷⁹ He refutes the suggestion that half of all English children died before the age of ten.⁸⁰ Laslett contends that child mortality never rose above a quarter of the population from the sixteenth century onward.⁸¹ He also rebuffs Lawrence Stone's statement that "Barely any inhabitants [of the seventeenth century] could hope to live out their lives in a community which did not experience at least one of these psychologically devastating events, during which... a third and a half of the population would disappear."⁸² Laslett contradicts this assertion, saying "...the death of one-third of the population in a matter of months from any cause, pestilence, famine or war, was unknown in any English community, in city, town or country..."⁸³ Obviously, the English landscape was not marred by scores of dying people.

In any discussion of death in the England of the seventeenth century, mention should be made of the work of David Stannard. Although Stannard's interest lies in an interpretation of death within the American Puritan culture, his theological sources are largely English. Moreover, Stannard has thought deeply about the significance of death in English

intellectual history. His particularly relevant theory of the inherent conflict of predestination and early childhood death will be explored later in discussion of death and Puritanism.⁸⁴

After this review of modern historiography on the subject of death, it is useful to make some comments on the different lines of approach. Not only are there a variety of historians - Ariès, Stone, Houlbrooke, Wrightson, Ozment and Macfarlane - to choose from, but there is a range of interpretations on which to make judgements. Stone, Houlbrooke, and Wrightson have read almost identical sets of documents and come to very different conclusions. There is also wide disagreement in the utility of studying the short-wave of history (100 years) versus the long-wave of history (1000 years). The long-wave advocates such as Stone and Ariès, argue that history has a structure and that it is the historian's obligation to expose its essential composition through extensive longitudinal study. Others, favouring the shorter wave, ask the observer to pay close attention to the words of dead speakers and to judge them only in their unique context. They postulate that it is necessary to put the behaviour of our ancestors into a reasonable framework for the intellectual understanding of those who will come after. They recommend that we apply psychological or anthropological models so that our observations may be compared systematically by future scholars.

The task of the researcher of the seventeenth century seems clear: to listen attentively to the singular message of the dead witness, but to remain sufficiently suspended in judgement to understand the language of the larger society. Perhaps then the structure will make itself known.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Social Anthropology and Other Essays, (New York: The Free Press, 1962), p. 181.
- ² Natalie Z. Davis, "Anthropology and History in the 1980's, "The New History: The 1980's and Beyond", ed. by Theodore K. Rabb and Robert I. Rotberg (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982) pp. 267-276 and Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Culture, (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1973) pp. 127 and 140.
- ³ Bronislaw Malinowski, Magic, Science and Religion (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954) pp. 48-53 and 60-61.
- ⁴ This article has been reprinted in English in Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's volume The Territory of the Historian, trans. Ben and Sian Reynolds (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 273-286.
- ⁵ Ibid, p. 283.
- ⁶ See Fernand Braudel, The Structures of Everyday Life: Civilization and Capitalism, the 15th-18th Centuries 3 Vol. (New York: Harper and Row, 1979-1986).
- ⁷ Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life, trans. by Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962).
- ⁸ Philippe Ariès, The Hour of Our Death, trans. by Helen Weaver, (New York: Vintage Books, 1981). Philippe Ariès, Images of Man and Death, trans. by Janet Lloyd, (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985).
- ⁹ Johan Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1949), p. 138-151.
- ¹⁰ Ariès, Images of Man and Death, p. 158.
- ¹¹ Ariès, The Hour of Our Death, pp. 436-442, 456-7.
- ¹² Ibid, pp. 559-601.

- 13 Ibid, pp. 602-4.
- 14 This theme of individualism is very important and will be picked up in comments on the work of Alan Macfarlane.
- 15 Ariès, The Hour of Our Death, p. xvii.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Leslie Clarkson, Death, Disease and Famine in Pre-Industrial England, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975).
- 18 A study on death in English history by Ralph Houlbrooke is currently in preparation.
- 19 Clarkson, op. cit., p. 74. The original quotation is from Thomas Dekker The Wonderful Year, ed. by F.P. Wilson (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1925).
- 20 Samuel Pepys, The Diary of Samuel Pepys, ed. by Robert Latham and William Matthews. (London: G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1972), Vol. 4, pp. 187-306, and John Evelyn The Diary of John Evelyn ed. by John Bowle, (London: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 204, also Paul Slack, The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1985), pp. 290, 294.
- 21 Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971).
- 22 Clare Gittings, Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England. (London: Croom Helm, 1984) particularly pp. 10, 13, 15, 102, 110, 114, 121, 122, 144.
- 23 Keith Wrightson and David Levine, "Death in Whickham" forthcoming in Death and the Social Order: Essays in Memory of Andy Appleby, ed. by R. Schofield and J. Walters, particularly pp. 44-50. This was kindly shown to me by David Levine in draft form.
- 24 Stone's landmark study is The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977).
- 25 Ibid, p. 60.

26 Ibid, p. 683.

27 Ibid, p. 70.

28 Ibid.

29 Stone may be challenged on this point. See Steven Ozment, When Fathers Ruled, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 166.

30 Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 12.

31 Ralph A. Houlbrooke, The English Family: 1450-1700, (London: Longman, 1984).

32 Ibid, p. 139.

33 Ibid, p. 56.

34 Ibid, p. 156.

35 Ibid, p. 25.

36 Keith Wrightson, English Society: 1580-1680, (London: Hutchinson, 1982).

37 Alan Macfarlane, The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).

38 Steven Ozment, When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1983).

39 Clifford Geertz, The Religion of Java, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1960).

40 Lloyd de Mause, "The Evolution of Childhood", The History of Childhood, ed. by Lloyd de Mause (New York: The Psychohistory Press, 1974), pp. 1-73.

- 41 Edward Shorter, The Making of the Modern Family, (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1975).
- 42 Wrightson, English Society, p. 43.
- 43 Ibid, p. 46.
- 44 Obligation under Tudor Poor Laws went no further than parents and children; grandparents and grandchildren, Ibid, p. 45. Wills seldom make reference to expectations of parents that their children should care for them in their old age. Ibid, p. 114.
- 45 Ibid, pp. 45 and 51-52.
- 46 Ibid, p. 104.
- 47 Ibid, p. 71.
- 48 Ibid, p. 78.
- 49 Ibid, p. 102.
- 50 Ibid, p. 103.
- 51 Ozment, When Fathers Ruled, pp. 161 and 212.
- 52 Ibid, p. 217. The original reference is from Hermann von Weinberg and is contained in Das Buch Weinberg II Konstandin H8hlbaum p. 316 and Bambergische Halssgerichts und rechtliche Ordnung, 1507.
- 53 Ozment, op. cit., pp. 216-217. Stone says one third of all children - of peer and peasant - died in the mid-1600's before age fifteen. Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 55.
- 54 Ozment, Ibid, p. 217.
- 55 Ibid, p. 166.
- 56 Ibid, pp. 168-69.

- 57 Ozment, op. cit., pp. 168-69.
- 58 Alan Macfarlane, The Family Life of Ralph Josselin, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1970).
- 59 Alan Macfarlane, Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).
- 60 This view is also held by authors as diverse as Montesquieu (see Macfarlane, The Origins of English Individualism, p. 78) and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, op. cit., p. 233.
- 61 Macfarlane, The Family Life of Ralph Josselin, p. 166 footnote.
- 62 Alan Macfarlane, The Family Life of Ralph Josselin, p. 221. On the "newness" of the funeral sermon see Patrick Collinson, "Magistracy and Ministry: A Suffolk Miniature" Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism, (London: The Hambledon Press, 1983), p. 462.
- 63 Macfarlane, The Family Life, p. 167.
- 64 Ibid, p. 221.
- 65 Ibid, p. 50.
- 66 Ibid, p. 165.
- 67 Ibid, p. 221.
- 68 Ibid, pp. 175-176.
- 69 Ibid, p. 168.
- 70 Ibid, p. 174.
- 71 Ibid, p. 176.
- 72 E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, The Population History of England 1541-1871, (London: Edward Arnold, 1981).

73 Peter Laslett, The World We Have Lost, (further explored) (London: Methuan, 1965).

74 Wrigley and Schofield, op. cit., p. 354.

75 Ibid, p. 451.

76 Ibid, p. 453.

77 Laslett, op. cit., pp. 106-152.

78 Le Roy Ladurie, The Territory of the Historian, p. 233 and see also E. Le Roy Ladurie, The Peasants of Languedoc, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976).

79 These other historians are unnamed.

80 Laslett, op. cit., p. 112.

81 Ibid, p. 112.

82 Lawrence Stone, The Causes of the English Revolution, (New York: Harper und Row, 1972), quoted in Laslett, p. 137.

83 Laslett, op. cit., p. 137.

84 David E. Stannard, The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture and Social Change, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

CHAPTER II

DEATH AND POPULAR CULTURE

The vast majority of people who died in the 1600's were illiterate. It is difficult to reconstruct their thoughts or feelings without reference to the symbolism captured in their rites and rituals for the dead and the dying. By examining these traditions, we hope to obtain testimony about the experiences of common people in the face of death.

Death is a universal human experience. The iconography of Hans Holbein's Dance of Death pictorial series puts great emphasis on the fact that death invariably visits both prince and pauper. Although the Dance of Death symbolism did not have the same popularity in England, there were examples of both conformity and incongruity in how church and state decreed death should be treated, and how ordinary Englishmen and women mourned and buried their dead.

In most societies there exists a formal culture which sets out rules for social living and an informal culture which governs the circumstances of everyday life. The informal culture suggests what people really think and how they act. The formal or informal cultures may closely resemble each other or be sharply divergent. The most obvious personifications of formal culture are the literate members of the political nation, lay and clergy: the 'thinkers' about the implications of life and death. The popular culture includes the common people uninvolved in the machinery of ruling or enforcement. Their role is more participatory and less speculative. In setting up these poles of formal and informal culture, one must be careful to make the distinction that they do not pertain to class,

income, or level of education. It is tempting to speculate that the hungry and wretched do not have strong philosophical opinions because they did not have the time, energy or sophistication to be interested in abstractions. This theory may be weakened by citing the fact that over half the Marian martyrs listed by Foxe and whose social status was known were agricultural labourers.¹

The formal culture was fairly easy to identify in early modern Europe. It included the classical tradition, composed of both medieval scholasticism and platonic and neo-platonic thinking, overlaid with Renaissance and Reformation intellectualism. In contrast, the culture of the common people was transmitted in market-places, village schools, and taverns. The dominant images of popular culture are found in folk songs and stories, broadsheets and chapbooks, sports and festivals.²

The English Reformation brought about an impressive collision between the formal and informal cultures in terms of how death should be interpreted by the individual and the community. Before the ideas of the reformed religion reached England, the rites of death followed the customs of the Middle Ages. The concept of purgatory as a form of half-life after death where souls might be cleansed of their sins was well established. A departed soul's time in purgatory could be considerably reduced by the intercession of prayers of the family or clergy, who were paid for this service. The customs pertaining to death had the cathartic effect of allowing the individual to make arrangements before death to lessen his fear and guilt. An analysis of north country wills between 1525-1540, reveals that testators willed large sums for such religious practices as

prayers for the dead, requests for the Office for the Burial of the Dead, masses, and the tolling of the church bell. In psychological terms, a bereaved family found an outlet for grief and an ongoing connection with the deceased in providing prayers to reduce the time in purgatory allotted to the departed soul.

To the reforming mind of the sixteenth century, this arrangement of heaven and hell perpetuated the concept of a cruel God. While in theory Purgatory was necessary to purify the soul from the wages of sin, to those now anxious to break from the traditional church, its existence suggested that an individual might be condemned to longer torment because of the inadequacy of the prayers of family or a rapacious clergy.³ This social and religious framework for dealing with death ended with a proclamation of Edward VI in 1543. After that time any money willed for the purpose of prayers for the dead - and some legacies had been enormous, impoverishing the families of the deceased - would be confiscated by the Crown. The rationale for this legislation was that such gifts were superstitious.⁴ Max Weber said that the magical tradition which had begun with the Hebrew prophets and had combined with Hellenistic scientific thought was now repudiated as a vehicle for salvation. "The genuine Puritan" he noted "even rejected all signs of the religious ceremony at the grave and buried his nearest and dearest without song or ritual in order that no superstition, no trust in the effects of magical and sacramental forces on salvation, should creep in".⁵

The most obvious change was promulgated in the Book of Common Prayer. The prayer book of 1549 contained much shortened remnants of

the Roman Catholic burial service translated into English. The revision of 1552 drastically reduced the already abbreviated ceremony, omitting all psalms, prayers for the dead, and the order for Holy Communion. With the Elizabethan Settlement, some compromise was made between Catholic and Calvinistic elements by merely including distinct prayers for the repose of the dead - arguing that this was part of the apostolic tradition - and retaining the Calvinistic burial service emphasizing election as a prerequisite for salvation. Desire to purge the funeral service of all superstitious elements remained high among Puritans, and there was a further simplification of the funeral service legislated in the Directory for the Public Worship of God during the Commonwealth. With the restoration in 1660 of Charles II, the text of the Common Book of Prayer of the Elizabethan Settlement, was re-introduced with a few modifications.⁶ This alteration of the burial service was indicative of the ebb and flow of the process of religious Reformation in England that lasted over one hundred years. It essentially ended in the late Stuart period in exhaustion, compromise and plurality.

The funeral services outlined in the Edwardian Book of Common Prayer had been considerably reduced. Now there was further controversy whether funeral sermons should be preached at the time of burial to supplement the reformed burial rite. One fraction agreed with John Knox, who forbade such sermons in his Book of Discipline, believing that sermons were a surviving relic of the 'trental' masses observed at popish funerals.⁷ Other reforming clergyman argued that such sermons had the advantage of teaching the need for godliness and repentance. They contended that the shortness of time allotted for spiritual awakening and the variety of exis-

tence was illustrated dramatically by the presence of the dead at such sermons. Ultimately, funeral sermons proved too powerful a tool for expounding sound doctrine not to be often incorporated into the service for the dead. Later tracts of published sermons had wide readership and become a staple of the Stuart book-trade.⁸

The social changes wrought by the Reformation went deep. The language and custom of death changed radically in the next forty years. After 1540 memorial brasses stopped asking passers-by for prayers; their vocabulary now states Hic jacet (here lies) instead of Orate pro anima (pray for my soul). It should be added that the blunt "Hic jacet" was often completed by the expression "in the hope of a joyful resurrection".⁹ Wills ceased to call upon the Saints and the Virgin. Money, instead of being left to perpetual chantries, was willed to family members or charities; with the elimination of purgatory, altars for prayers for the dead were torn down.¹⁰ As God's judgement on the soul was now beyond human intercession, prayers uttered by family for the soul's rest were useless. This destroyed one of the great mystical controls of the Church: responsibility for burial and memorial. The result was a considerable and almost deliberate secularization of several important cultural rituals in the life of the seventeenth-century individual. The traditional apparatus of intercession had been eliminated. Although there was public support to dispense with prayers for the dead and do away with this important source of revenue for the Church, there was no enthusiastic outflowing for the personally demanding doctrine of justification by faith alone. Indeed, in the wills and memorial inscriptions of the period, there is a sense of uncertainty, vagueness, and indifference to the changing nature of religion.¹¹

The iconography of memorials for the dead also began to change. There was to be no more depiction of any symbols associated with Catholicism, such as the cross, the annunciation, the trinity or saints. Instead Elizabethan and Jacobean sepulchral artisans decorated their work with selected fruits and flowers (emblematic of the Resurrection) picks and spades, scythes, coffins, skulls and cross-bones. The urn, so fascinating to Sir Thomas Browne, was frequently chiselled into stone or cut into brasses. If it was represented aflame, it signified eternal life; if closed, it symbolized mortality.¹²

Catholicism was often tolerant of folk culture, either borrowing rites that readily adapted themselves to transformation into Christian festivals (June 24, St. John's day, incorporated the bonfires of the Nordic festival of mid-summer) or simply ignoring what pagan customs existed in the confident belief that they would eventually die out. With Puritanism the level of personal application required for salvation may have been simply too much for many individuals. The result was often stubborn resistance to religious change or apathy. When John Perry, a militant Puritan, sought help from the Queen and Parliament in 1587 for the evangelization of Wales, he said "that for one Welsh parish that had a quarterly sermon, twenty had none... our people are either such as never think of any religion, true or false, plainly near-atheists, or stark blinded with superstition. Some were near-papists, saying 'it was a good world when a man might have a pardon for his sins....for 4d'".¹³ The old religion had met a number of the needs of the old agarian society. The reformed religion of the town and the middle-class placed large demands on the busy husbandman intent on a good harvest and healthy cows.

Death began to be increasingly divorced from the religious context. In a reaction to a religious rite of dying, many people with money and education became interested in the classical notion of glory and fame.¹⁴ As the concept of public reputation grew, families became aware that "the evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones".¹⁵ Death was seen not just as a spiritual milestone but was placed in the context of the achievements of a lifetime.¹⁶ Huge monuments were constructed often on the former sites of altars for the dead. This statuary might represent entire families, including members both dead and alive.¹⁷ Children felt as proof of their family piety that they should erect monuments to their parents, often giving comprehensive details of parents' marriages, offspring, careers, appointments, and ancestry.¹⁸

The grandiose quality of these artistic representations with their fascination for the things of this world had not escaped contemporary observers. John Webster in 1614 puts into the Duchess of Malfi's mouth the following speech:¹⁹

Most ambitiously. Princes' images on their tombs do not lie, as they were wont, seeming to pray up to heaven, but with their hands under their cheeks, as if they died of the toothache. They are not carved with their eyes fixed upon the stars, but as their minds were wholly bent upon the world, the self-same way they seem to turn their faces.

The expenditure on such monuments in the late Tudor and Stuart periods and indeed the whole community-based customs marking a death could be very large, depending on the individual's rank in a parish. The cost of at least one substantial funeral monument equalled more than the

value of the family home.²⁰ The norms for well-to-do people could extend up to twenty per cent of the deceased's estate.²¹ In addition to tombs, elaborate sums might be spent on large community processions to the site of burial and receptions afterwards. The status of the dead individual in his neighbourhood was reflected in the number of mourners, the number of black gloves distributed at the funeral as emblems of mourning, the quality of black or white scarves for the bereaved to wear, or in the case of very lavish funerals, mourning rings.

A number of important ancient customs relating to death and burial were retained after the Reformation. These endured as authorities regarded them as merely indicative of custom rather than superstition. The most noteworthy of these folk traditions relates to the deaths of the unmarried or to those women who died in childbirth. It is difficult to find one overwhelming reason why the nature of these deaths rendered many communities in the pre-industrial period more anxious than the deaths of the very young or the very old. Certainly many societies in times of crisis experience uneasiness and conflict about the meaning of family, sex and children. We can see some of these complexities recorded in documents relating to death and frequently on funeral brasses. Reflecting this uncertainty, evidence suggests that people of the seventeenth century were ambivalent about the concept of virginity. There are numerous funeral brasses that suggest that a child or young person's innocence should stand in their favour at the time of judgement. "A virgin pure not stain'd by carnal lust...That now she lives with him a maid of honour" is a quotation indicative of this belief.²² Ben Jonson's epitaph on the death of his daughter Mary also expresses this viewpoint:²³

Here lies to each her parents' ruth
Mary, the daughter of their youth; ...

At six months' end, she parted hence
With safety of her innocence
Whose soul heaven's Queen (whose name she bears)
In comfort of her mother's tears,
Hath plac'd amongst her virgin-train.

Although these witnesses might testify to the merit of innocence in God's sight, we also understand from memorial brasses, poems, letters, and journals of the same period that the death of an individual, after physical maturity but before marriage, was perceived as tragic. Separate ceremonies were developed to accent an acute sense of loss to the family of the deceased and the community.

Death rates were high in the early modern period. Thomas R. Forbes, who has studied extensively mortality in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has stated the death rate was about 100 times the 1968 rate. "In Shakespeare's day, of every 100 babies born in St. Botolph's parish [in London] about 70 survived to their first birthday, 48 to their fifth, and 27-30 to their fifteenth".²⁴ Forbes' figures should also be placed in the context of Wrigley and Schofield's findings that a young person of 20, between the Elizabethan and Victorian period, could look forward on average to a further 35-40 years of life.²⁵ Infancy and early childhood were the very dangerous periods. If we compare this demographic evidence with information from the diary of Ralph Josselin we know that he invested up to one-third of his income on the upbringing of his children. As his expenditure increased with the age of the child, the death of a young person in his twenties seems catastrophic in emotional and economic terms. This meant being cut off in the years when an individual

might be expected to make the maximum contribution to his community and family. If we are to trust evidence from memorial brasses, particular emphasis was placed on the failure of the individual to produce a child to take his or her place.

It is not remarkable that peculiar death rites were developed for individuals dying before their prime. A virgin (or an unmarried person) was given a white funeral, that is the coffin and the mourning scarves were white. Sprigs of rosemary might have been carried and in the event of the death of an unmarried woman, the female pall-bearers might also be unmarried and attend the procession with their hair loose to indicate their maiden state.

A garland, fresh and faire
Of lillies there was made
I signe of her virginity
On her coffin lain:
Six maidens, all in white,
did beare her to the ground;²⁶

It was the custom in some parts of England to bury any woman who had died at the birth of a child in a coffin conveyed under a white-sheet held by four women.²⁷ The most poignant of all funeral sculptures of the period often depicted the figure of a mourning father hovering distractedly over the carved form of his dead wife and new-born child.²⁸ A number of epitaphs reflect in the pathos of such deaths:

Set by me James Tucker to the
Memory of Marie my dear wife
To when the birth of my Son was
The means of death: July:13:1656.²⁹

In some areas of England an infant was christened on the coffin of a mother who had died in childbirth.³⁰ Frequently women who died delivering babies were buried at night.³¹ It seems certain that English society was intent on dramatizing the sense of loss and frustration that such deaths evoked.

Shakespeare's drama reflects on the issues of his society. In his depiction of Ophelia, he explores the tragedy of women who do not fulfill their biological potential in successful maternity. We may suppose that Ophelia is a virgin, but her right to burial in consecrated ground is complicated by the uncertainty whether or not her drowning was a suicide. Normally, such an act would disqualify her for internment in a churchyard. Through the mediation of the King, and owing to the particular pathos of Ophelia's case, Laertes tells us that:³²

As we have warrantise: her death was doubtful;
And, but that great command o'er sways the order
She should in ground unsanctified have lodg'd
Till the last trumpet; For charitable prayers,
Shards, flints, and pebbles, should be thrown on her,
Yet here she is allowed her virgin crants,
Her maiden strewments, and the bringing home
Of bell and burial.

It is clear the failed figure of the adult Ophelia - never a wife, never a mother - was intended to move the audience of early 1600's. Indeed, the anxiety of the community in commemorating the burial of the failed and childless woman had larger significance in Shakespeare's or his public's eye than such ecclesiastically technical questions of whether she qualified for burial in hallowed ground or not. The flower most commonly associated with the death of the unmarried was rosemary - "for remembrance" - which

is the symbol that Shakespeare chooses to identify with Ophelia.³³ Sprigs of rosemary were also used to celebrate marriages, often garlanding the bride.³⁴ Throughout the early modern period there was common juxtaposition of the symbols of death and fertility. The burial of the unmarried person also parodied the wedding ceremony with its use of white. The same antithesis was also expressed by the fact that christening robes were frequently used as shrouds³⁵ and a bride would often include a burial shroud in her trousseau.³⁶ The language of tombstones and memorial brasses make repeated references to Christ as the bridegroom³⁷, as well as almost invariably stating an individual's marital status, and if married, whether he or she was childless or not.

With the Reformation, burial customs became regulated by the formal culture. Although some customs such as the white burials escaped orthodox censure, others like the funeral wake were condemned and suppressed. The culture of western Europe had in earlier centuries placed great emphasis on the custom of members of the community, relatives and well-wishers sitting up with family members with the corpse throughout the night before burial. This period of wakefulness was literally known as the wake. Its existence has been well-documented in Ireland and it is mentioned in the folk-lore and ballads of much of western and northern Europe. Often it was the occasion of drunken rowdy games and horse-play. If we can rely on evidence of twentieth-century Ireland, such boisterous activities were only considered appropriate on the death of the old.³⁸ This is certainly in keeping with the peculiar rites that were developed to mark the death of those cut off in their prime.

We have quite detailed descriptions of wake customs in John Aubrey (1626-97), the famous seventeenth-century antiquarian and biographer. Aubrey notes that in his day, such funerary revelry had retreated to the corners of the kingdom.³⁹ We may account for the disappearance of such customs for a variety of reasons. Christopher Hill has suggested that wakes were an aspect of popular culture that was suppressed by the Puritans as ignorant, disorderly and possibly superstitious.⁴⁰ Keith Thomas agrees with this opinion, citing wakes as a manifestation of a broader folk culture that faded with the creation of a more educated urban England.⁴¹ Clare Gittings has theorized that such an aspect of a communal peasant society had given way to a more atomistic, individualistic culture.⁴² John Aubrey himself explained that such quaint and interesting folk rites died out in the revolution and disruption of the civil war.⁴³ Whatever the combination of reasons, if we judge from the chap-books, the best-sellers of the period, godliness and death were very serious subjects that evoked broad popular interest.⁴⁴ It is a safe deduction that in this cultural milieu, which was being transformed into a more mobile, literate and urban environment, old customs, such as wakes, were fading. In their place, most bereaved relatives wished to pay homage to their dead with substantial measures of food and drink after the funeral rather than horse-play and games before the burial. This transition may have been more easily done in England than rural Ireland, as more cash was available to finance such hospitality. Adam Martindale, an informant rather lower on the social scale than most commentators of the period, says "... considering how good a father he had been, and how fashionably he (in the time of his prosperity) had lived among his neighbours, we thought it convenient to bring him home handsomely out..."⁴⁵ For Martindale, what the

neighbours thought appears to be more pressing than placating his father's ghost.

It is frequently possible to see the formal and the informal culture confront one another in events causing intense communal anxiety. As with the premature deaths of the unmarried or those in child-birth, the same acute social discomfort is manifest in documents relating to early deaths on the gallows or scaffold. A pamphlet, published in London in 1651 recording the execution for treason of John Gibbons, relates the unhappiness of Gibbons' friends at his early death in the following words: "...where they (friends) see being before their eyes a man in the prime of his years, and in the flower of his youth cut off as an untimely fruit, and as a tree that burdened the ground, therefore they are sorry;." Gibbons himself, possibly in an effort to calm his friends, is noted as saying: "...I come to this Scaffold, to this place, with as much willingness as ever Bridegroom did receive his Bride".⁴⁶ Gibbons' choice of words is telling. Although such imagery is common in memorial brasses, he may also be referring to the custom of condemned criminals arriving to their hangings dressed as bridegrooms.⁴⁷ An oral tradition - if not actual tradition - suggested that if a criminal received an offer of marriage at the gallows then he might be released.⁴⁸ Magical properties were also assigned to those who were so often and so dramatically cut off in their prime. The touch of hanging corpses was sought as a cure for various types of skin maladies.⁴⁹ John Aubrey says "Tis certain, the touch of a dead Hand, hath wrought Wonderful Effects".⁵⁰ Even the nail upon which a hanging took place was considered to have magical healing properties.⁵¹

Public hanging provides some insight on how the formal and informal culture interacted. Public riots sometimes took place when the bodies of hanged criminals had been consigned to surgeons for dissection.⁵² As this practice became more common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a number of folk traditions were thus violated. It was believed that a criminal who was not given proper burial by his friends and community might not rest and might walk seeking vengeance upon those with whom the ghost had quarrelled in life.⁵³ Moreover, the actions of the surgeons' men, seizing bodies for dissection after execution, seemed a double insult to the community. It appeared that the establishment was not content with taking the physical life of a frequently young member of a neighbourhood. By denying burial, the legal and policing authorities were eliminating one of the most important anxiety-relieving occasions, funeral rites. The community itself felt attacked by the formal culture.

Hangings also illustrate the power of the official culture in the seventeenth century. At the foot of the gallows, fearful of the punishments of the next world for the crimes of this world, most criminals confessed their misdemeanors and their lives of sin.⁵⁴ Such confessions ranged from that of the Earl of Essex for his unsuccessful coup d'état to those of common murderers. Such last words were regularly published in chapbooks and pamphlets and had wide readership. For expiring individuals, community norms seemed to have the greatest urgency at the time of death. There is an interesting echo of Dr. Faustus' repentance on his death-bed.

J.A. Sharpe in his article "Last Dying Speeches" notes that the extensive "gallows literature illustrates the way in which the civil and religious authorities designed the execution spectacle to articulate a par-

ticular set of values, inculcate a certain behaviour model and bolster a social order perceived as threatened".⁵⁵ At the same time the strong concept of "dying well" inherited from the Middle Ages and bolstered by current Protestant literature, may have extracted admissions of guilt from some hardened criminals reluctant to step into the next world without some blessing from both the formal and informal culture.⁵⁶ We are reasonably certain that such confessions were made in pursuit of spiritual forgiveness as the one group that failed to be persuaded to confess was those dying for their religious convictions.⁵⁷

During the process of religious Reformation, there was dissension about what rules should be used to acknowledge death. For a period there was serious discussion about whether there should be any ecclesiastical involvement at all.⁵⁸ A number of arguments were presented why ceremonies or sermons, commenting on the passing of the dead, might be useful metaphorically for parishoners. The compelling reason for instituting the funeral sermon was so that it could emphasize the shortness of life, the necessity for repentance and the danger of sin.⁵⁹ Concentration on death was viewed as a method of meditating or focussing on the transitory nature of life itself.

With the religious content de-emphasized, the social life of the community became featured in post-Reformation and seventeenth-century burials. Burial and memorial became increasingly secularized. Not content with constructing large memorials to the dead, the well-to-do, or well-placed in a parish, might also spend large sums on embalming the body; on the ceremonies at the burial involving the distribution of gloves, scarves, or

rings and also the post-funeral reception which might include generous quantities of wine and rum. Burial customs reflected accurately on the position and contribution of the deceased to the community. The poor and the young were buried quickly.⁶⁰ Friends and neighbours expected the entertainment scheduled after a funeral to be indicative of the deceased's rank in society. The loss to the community in terms of rank and status had to be addressed appropriately.⁶¹ The community had a strong sense that the right thing, in social terms rather than in the moral or spiritual sense, had to be done for the dead. So persistent was this premise that the public obstinately disobeyed public ordinances that they should not flock in large numbers to the graveside in time of plague.⁶² In anxiety-provoking times of death, the norms of folk culture demanded that the rituals developed to assuage grief and doubt should take precedence over other public directives.

With the Reformation, the formal culture had chosen to intervene strongly in the personal life of English society. To a very large extent the informal culture responded with apathy or the secularization of burial and commemoration. As a result, the spiritual side of the journey from alive to dead (as opposed to the social side, now celebrated with prodigious quantities of cakes and ale) become much more personal and introverted. The personal and introverted side of life would receive much more scrutiny with the rise of Puritanism, the subject of the next chapter.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Margaret Spufford, Small Books and Pleasant Histories, (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1981), p. 195.
- ² Peter Burke, Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, (London: Temple Smith, 1978), pp. 24-29.
- ³ K.L. Wood-Legh, Perpetual Chancies in Britain, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 305.
- ⁴ Lorraine Attreed, "Preparation For Death in Sixteenth-Century Northern England", The Sixteenth-Century Journal, XIII, No. 3, (Fall, 1982), pp. 49-50.
- ⁵ Weber, Max, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. by Talcott Parson, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 105.
- ⁶ Gittings, op. cit., pp. 40-56.
- ⁷ Frederic B. Tromly, "'According to Sounde Religion': The Elizabeth Controversy over the Funeral Sermon", Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies, XIII (1983) p. 295, and Patrick Collinson, The Elizabethan Puritan Movement, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967) p. 370.
- ⁸ Patrick Collinson, "A Magazine of Religious Patterns", Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism, p. 520 and F. Tromly, "'According to Sounde Religion'", p. 299 and p. 311.
- ⁹ Ernest Suffling, English Church Brasses, (London: The Tabard Press, 1970), p. 317 and p. 320.
- ¹⁰ R. Whiting, "'For the Health of my Soul': Prayers for the Dead in the Tudor South-West", Southern History, V (1983), pp. 68-94, and particularly pp. 81-82.
- ¹¹ Ibid, p. 89.
- ¹² K.A. Esdaile, English Church Monuments: 1516-1840 (London: B.T. Batsford, 1946) p. 90 and Sir Thomas Browne, 'Urn Burial', Religio Medici (London: Dent, 1965).

- ¹³ J. Penry, Three Treatises concerning Wales, ed. by D. Williams (Cardiff, 1960) pp. 29, 32-39, quoted in Christopher Hill's "Puritans and 'the Dark Corners of the Land'", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Fifth Series, XIII, (1963), p. 81.
- ¹⁴ Duncan Harris, "Death in the Renaissance", Mosaic, XV (1982), pp. 13-28.
- ¹⁵ William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, Act III, Scene II, lines 76-77.
- ¹⁶ Harris, op. cit., p. 16.
- ¹⁷ A.L. Rowse, The England of Elizabeth: The Structure of Society, (London: Cardinal edition, 1973), p. 22.
- ¹⁸ E.M. Symonds, "The Diary of John Greene (1635-57)", The English Historical Review, XC (1929), pp. 106-117, p. 113 footnote.
- ¹⁹ John Webster, The Duchess of Malfi, ed. by Fred B. Millett, (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Crofts Classics, 1953), Act IV, Scene II, lines 165-170.
- ²⁰ Patrick Collinson, "Magistracy and Ministry: A Suffolk Miniature", Godly People, p. 467.
- ²¹ Stannard, op. cit., p. 113.
- ²² Mill Stephenson, Monumental Brasses in Surrey, (Bath: Kingsmead Reprints, 1970), p. 467.
- ²³ Ben Jonson, "On My First Daughter", The Faber Book of Epigrams and Epitaphs, ed. by Geoffrey Gregson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), pp. 79-80.
- ²⁴ Thomas A. Forbes, "By What Disease or Causality: The Changing Face of Death in London", Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century, ed. by Charles Webster. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 139. It should be noted that these figures are particularly high as they relate to an urban area. Mortality rates for the countryside would not be so steep.
- ²⁵ Wrigley and Schofield, op. cit., p. 451.

- 26 Charles Hindley ed. "The Bride's Buriall" The Roxburghe Ballads, (London: Reeves and Turner, 1873), pp. 246-251.
- 27 Frederick Burgess, English Churchyard Memorials, (London: Butterworth Press, 1963), p. 250.
- 28 K.A. Esdaile, op. cit., p. 122.
- 29 A.B. Connor, Monumental Brasses in Somerset, (Bath; Kingsmead Reprints, 1970), p. 21.
- 30 Vivian C. Fox and Martin H. Quitt, Loving, Parenting and Dying: The Family Circle in England and America, Past and Present, (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1980), p. 258.
- 31 Frederick Burgess, op. cit., p. 250.
- 32 William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act V, Scene I, lines 233-41.
- 33 "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray, love, remember:" Hamlet, Act IV, Scene V.
- 34 For the use of sprigs of rosemary at weddings see Phillis Cunning and Catherine Lucas, Costumes for Births, Marriages and Deaths, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1972), p. 138 and F.P. Wilson, The Plague in Shakespeare's London, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), p. 32 and Thomas Joseph Pettigrew, Chronicle of the Tombs, (London: H.G. Bohn, 1857), p. 269.
- 35 Lou Taylor, Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History, (London: George Allen and Anwin, 1983), p. 167.
- 36 Richard Davey, A History of Mourning, (London: Jays, 1889), p. 34.
- 37 Burgess, op. cit., p. 227, and Stephenson, op. cit.. A representative quote says "By death espoused to her heav'nly king", p. 472.
- 38 Sean O'Suilleabhain, Irish Wakes and Amusements, (Cork: Mercier Paperbacks, 1967), p. 26. See also S.J. Connolly, Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1982), pp. 148-165.

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- 41 Thomas, op. cit., pp. 66-67.
- 42 Gittings, op. cit., p. 107.
- 43 J. Aubrey, "Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme", p. 207.
- 44 Margaret Spufford, op. cit., pp. 195-201.
- 45 Adam Martindale, The Life of Adam Martindale, ed. by Richard Parkinson (Manchester: for the Chetham Society, 1845), pp. 119-20.
- 46 John Gibbons, The Perfect Speeches of Mr. John Gibbons as it was Delivered by Himself in the Scaffold at Tower Hill, Friday 22 of August 1651, (London: 1651), p. 1.
- 47 Peter Linebaugh, "The Tyburn Riot Against the Surgeons", Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England, ed. by Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E.P. Thompson and Carl Winslow, (London: Allen Lane, 1975), pp. 109-116.
- 48 See reference in footnote number 37 and also Peter Linebaugh, "The Tyburn Riot Against the Surgeons", pp. 109-116 and Charles Hindley (editor) "Song of an English Merchant borne at Chicester" Roxburghe Ballads, p. 409-416. This ballad records such a deliverance from the gallows by virtue of a marriage.
- 49 Linebaugh, op. cit., pp. 109-116.
- 50 John Aubrey, Miscellaneous, (London: 'for Edward Castle', 1696), pp. 91-98.
- 51 Marc Bloch, The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France, trans. by J.E. Anderson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 93.

- 52 Linebaugh, op. cit., pp. 106, 109.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 J.A. Sharpe, "'Last Dying Speeches': Religion, Ideology and Public Execution in Seventeenth-Century England", Past and Present, CXII (1985), pp. 114-67.
- 55 Ibid, p. 148.
- 56 Ibid, p. 160.
- 57 Ibid, p. 155.
- 58 The Directory for Public Worship of God compiled at the Westminster Convention in 1645 called for no ceremonial observance of death.
- 59 Tromly, "'According to sounde religion'", pp. 293-312.
- 60 Stephen Porter, "Death and Burial in a London Parish: St. Mary Woolnoth 1653-99", London Journal, VIII (1), 1982, pp. 76-80.
- 61 Clarkson, op. cit., p. 67.
- 62 George Bell, The Great Plague in London in 1665, (London: The Bodley Head revised edition, 1951), p. 131 and Samuel Pepys, op. cit..

CHAPTER III

DEATH AND THE PURITAN

One can review in the Pepys' library at Magdalen College, the collection of seventeenth-century chapbooks dealing with godliness collected by the great diarist as part of his interest in popular literature. Strongly influenced by Puritan ideas, we see how far these works have travelled from the Christian message of love and forgiveness. The theme of death and decay has pushed God somewhat off-stage. Certainly the vision of Christ as the saviour, the merciful, the friend of the poor and sinning, is nowhere to be found. Instead, an obsession with the brevity of life prevails. Readers of such inspirational literature were advised that there was only a short time to repent and find God. What actually is to be experienced in the next world is unclear, the emphasis is on sainthood in this life and vindication at the Last Trump on Judgement Day.¹

For Puritans, death was regarded as an ideological tool to evoke a sense of repentance and godliness, thereby hastening the creation of a New Jerusalem. Despite the visual ubiquity of the symbol of death, the skull, the Puritan view of death is often difficult to decipher as the Puritan mind itself alternated so readily between self-hatred and self-regeneration.² To help understand the seventeenth-century mind, it is necessary to examine closely the beliefs of the English Puritan movement. All social attitudes are composed of interacting and interconnecting systems of thought. Although Puritanism was hardly universal, it influenced the entire century. In addition, it is important to consider closely what

Puritans believed about death as their Calvinistic heritage would have great effect in America, and by means of the Scottish diaspora, their attitudes would travel to British settlements and colonies world-wide.

Before embarking on an explanation of how Puritans interpreted death, it is worthwhile first to define the term. Puritans, themselves, did not use the word to describe their religious beliefs. Instead, they referred to themselves as the Saints, the Elect, the Godly and the People of God.³ Their religious experience was characterized by a sense of intense calling and often dramatic conversion. The theology was that of John Calvin. Although, it might be suggested that Puritans differed from many Anglicans, not in what they believed, but in how God should be worshipped,⁴ Puritans were united in their opposition to the authority of Archbishop Laud and the Arminians. They sought to reform the Church of England of all rituals, of all symbols or ceremonies deemed superstitious, or that might suggest the influence of the Church of Rome. Puritans identified themselves as a perceivable group and the capacity of the Saints to recognize one another in the face of an ungodly and hostile world was a central part of their inner cohesion as a movement.⁵

The core of their system of belief was a passionate espousal of the transforming effects of the gospel on themselves, as individuals, and on their society. Great emphasis was put on the preaching of God's word. The Puritan experience of faith was so compelling, that the Godly felt it necessary to witness continually to the fact that their counsel was of God, while that of their adversaries came from the Devil. Indeed, the Puritan

saw his role as that of a pilgrim through life's tribulations and as a warrior against the flesh, sin and the Antichrist.⁶

Puritanism was a creed fraught with inner contradictions. On the one hand it could release enormous self-confidence; on the other hand, it insisted that most men were destined to Hell from the beginning of time. According to the Calvinistic view, free men completely lacked the competence to win salvation by lives of goodness and charity. Powerless to change what was written in the Book of Life, Puritans felt the hand of God heavily upon them when contemplating their own deaths or that of family members.

Historians from Max Weber to Christopher Hill have commented on the immense sense of energy and vitality that a belief in one's salvation could give to the Puritan believer. Many individuals literally felt that they walked with God, that their lives were testimonies to their experience of grace and, upon death, they would receive their eternal reward. From this powerful intellectual and psychological starting point, a number of other concepts quickly evolved. With God's help, it now appeared possible to control more effectively the human environment. Numerous Puritans, believing fervently in altruistic public service, hoped that man's betterment on earth might be achieved and human life could be extended.⁷

This concept of man being in league with God to do his will and create his kingdom on earth would contribute to other forces leading to open rebellion, civil war, execution of a king, and the killing of the Archbishop of Canterbury. It was devoutly believed that God was on the

Puritan side and that success in battle offered proof for this conviction. Attitudes to life, and more importantly death, would change when God moved to the banner of that notable sinner, Charles II. In despair, many Puritans could only conclude that God's kingdom was obviously not of this world. Adherents of the vigorous creed of Calvinism which had inspired men to turn the world upside down were shaken and divided, unable to participate in the life of church or state, they would be forced into poverty and hardship.⁸

The serpent in the Calvinistic garden was doubt of salvation. Predestination could work both ways. The fate of the Saints was glorious, but that of the damned was horrific. The difficulty was the ability to know the difference between the elect and the damned. No issue put this essential problem under more examination than death. As the following quotation from the first book of The Pilgrim's Progress illustrates, mindfulness of death created an awareness of sin.⁹

Christian. Why, what was it that brought your sins to
mind again?

Hopeful. Many things; as - ...

If I heard the bell toll for some that were dead; or
If I thought of dying myself; or
If I heard that sudden death happened to others;

Calvinism taught that all men were by nature sinful. An exacting God who moved in ways totally mysterious to men had marked some for his own and others for damnation. There was no possible reprieve from this sentence. No sacrament, no priest, no life-time of good works was helpful. Christ had died only for the elect. The real difficulty was that it

was impossible to learn from the conduct of others who was saved and who was condemned. Moreover, confidence in one's own election might be considered as the sin of pride, the failing of Faustus, the damnation of Lucifer. Conversely, lack of faith in redemption was also a sin.¹⁰

We know from the diary of the Puritan vicar, Ralph Josselin, that belief in his pre-ordained salvation could desert him. Josselin went into spiritual crisis when his faith faltered. He wrote on December 14, 1656 "...if I should miscarry, and be eternally miserable, how sad would be my condition."¹¹ Many years later, in the grip of his final illness, he begged God to remove fear from him.¹² We can be almost certain that the fear to which Josselin refers is not of his physical death, but spiritual death. John Bunyan lived his early life in terror of this same spiritual oblivion.¹³ His novel of spiritual quest of pilgrimage was a response to the troubling difficulty of determining who was marked by the Beast or by God.

Christianity has always put emphasis on the importance of the next life. As has been illustrated by Ariès, Catholic and continental thinking on death was vast and rich. The great English historians of the Puritan seventeenth-century, Christopher Hill and Patrick Collinson, however, have made only passing reference in their books to burials, funerals, wills and sermons. They have never engaged the subject in its entirety. For this reason, it is advisable to approach this theme with some specific examples of how Puritan ideas affected the Puritan interpretation of death before moving to a conclusion.

In any consideration of death and Puritanism, it is important to look at how Puritanism could influence the personal life of its adherents. In 1628 Lady Joan Barrington lost her husband, Sir Francis Barrington. Both were in their seventies and had been married 49 years. Sir Francis had lived more than a full life and was an ardent witness to his Puritan faith. After his death, his widow lapsed into profound depression. We know this from a series of letters, still in existence, to Lady Joan Barrington from her children, clergymen and friends.¹⁴ None of Lady Joan's correspondents seem very sympathetic to her anguish or crisis of faith. Instead, she was given very exact advice on how best to deal with her grief.¹⁵

He lived in honour, dyed in peace, forewent God's heavy judgement - most like to befall us - and shall rise in glory eternal. Oh, sister, rejoyce; good madden rejoyce, rejoyce ever contrary to flesh and blood, rejoyce for his departure, show your humble thanckfullness to almighty God that hath these many years yoke fellowed in your bosome one more then an angel...

Sir Thomas and Lady Mary Eliot (Lady Joan's married daughter) had a slightly lighter touch in suggesting "Lett us not therefore morne as men without hoope, but rather lett us shew forth our fayth on behalfe by rejoycing more at his salvation..."¹⁶ Still, Lady Joan was not comforted and was so deeply upset by the suggestion of one clergyman that her faith was in serious question, that she refused to see him.¹⁷

This anecdote of Lady Joan Barrington is indicative of the dilemma with which sincere seventeenth-century English Puritans were faced. Surrounded on all sides by the often sudden deaths of friends and relatives, they were instructed by their faith to bear such burdens with

resignation - assuming that their loved ones were destined for eternal life. To doubt was to admit to uncertainty of God's grace or to the unsuitability of the deceased for God's salvation. This denial of death in the early part of the century was ubiquitous. Such statements were even expressed in secular literature. Ben Jonson could say:¹⁸

He that feares death, or mournes it, in the iust,
Shewes of the resurrection little trust.

Although this denial of grief must have been an enormous burden, the men of the Reformation had, at least initially, dealt with death in a very positive manner.¹⁹ Kathleen Cohen, who has studied the imagery of tombs of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, had observed the profound difference in the organization and presentation of English memorials after the change in religion.²⁰ She cites the example of the tomb in St. Paul's of John Colet, reforming cleric, father of the New Learning, friend of Erasmus, and colleague of Sir Thomas More. In the artistic symbolism used in the tomb, Cohen insists that there is a new emphasis on death as the door to life. Death becomes a loving approach to God.²¹ She finds echoes of the same attitude in Milton's phrase in Paradise Lost that to the faithful "death [is] the gate of life".²² John Donne was so fascinated with the subject of death that he posed for his portrait in his shroud. He also preached his last sermon on death, using himself as the subject.

Joy in the possibility of resurrection is poignantly conveyed in examples of tomb sculpture. It is clearly exemplified in the tomb of Sir John Denham (father of the poet). In a counterpoint to the stacks of

bones depicted in the lower part of the tomb, the shrouded figure of Sir John emerges from the imprisoning folds of his burial linens to greet the summons of the Last Judgement. This funerary sculpture is a powerful work of humanism, expressed in the vigour and masculinity of Sir John's triumphant upraised arm, and is a testimony to ultimate victory through faith in God.²³

Certainly the Puritan relationship with life, death and the universe was radically different from the earlier English beliefs. Not content with revising the liturgy, the reformers sought to attain what Max Weber called the disenchantment of the world. The medieval world-view interpreted the universe as a battleground between the forces of good and evil, of God and the Devil. This cosmos was also alive with supernatural beings.²⁴ The task that confronted the upright man was to find the grace and courage to understand God's will.²⁵ This urge to make plain the secrets of the universe took the form of exhaustive study of the Bible. Such men as John Milton, Sir Isaac Newton, and John Bunyan firmly believed that God's will was knowable, that by intensive concentrate on biblical texts one could master prophecies, comprehend the forces of destiny and control life.²⁶

This attempt to explain all circumstances of life as part of a logical order ran into difficulty. The Dance of Death seemed to play the same havoc with lives of the elect as those of the sinner. A correspondent of Lady Joan Barrington put these thoughts succinctly when he wrote to her describing his doubts saying "Tho thus I complaine, (I bless God) when I am at the poynte of death I still hope, and indeed some tymes have such

refreshings, that the sweet thereof invites to trust thro God kill. I cannot attribute these feares to any thinge more than to melancholli..."²⁷ Lady Joan's correspondent does not wish to suggest that he ever doubts God's grace without there being a physical reason for such a fleeting thought. It is remarkable to catch a glimpse of the mask slipping to expose the frightened individuals behind the Puritan composure, alternately fortified and tortured by their exacting faith. Modern commentators have observed that death frequently overwhelms the individual with profound feelings of vulnerability, helplessness and inadequacy.²⁸ Such thoughts were particularly wounding to the Puritan as he struggled so fiercely to understand the logic of God's will. This very failure to find an acceptable explanation for human mortality was believed in itself to be indicative of a lack of grace.

The tensions of living a life of pilgrimage, of taking up one's spiritual burdens shaped an intense, but anxious, Puritan family life. Often, the love of God struggled with the love of man. The architects of the Reformation had sought to enhance the marital relationship and the family. The daily celebrations of religious life had been removed from the church and the priest to the home. Morning and evening prayers were led by the father for his wife, his children, and his servants. In the priesthood of all believers, such households were little commonwealths as all family members assisted each other on the road to salvation. To encourage greater fidelity within marriage, husbands were instructed to love their wives with deep affection. Sex was not so clearly linked to procreation, but regarded as a bridge to affection and mutual comfort. Celibacy was viewed dubiously and the family now became a focus for intense emotional life.²⁹

Although we have every indication that parents loved their children effusively, the Puritan household had a number of particular difficulties. However innocent children may seem, and we see repeated evidence of this concept on funeral brasses, they were necessarily tainted by original sin. In addition, because of the early death of many children, the Puritan parent only had a short time to assist the child in his discovery of inner grace. The child might become an expression of the parent's own helplessness and state of inadequacy. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, the great sociologist of death in this century, has said that death is often viewed as the punishment of God. The very actions of grieving, chest-beating, or refusing to eat may be ritual for self-punishment or assuage the guilt that the individual may feel for the loss of a loved one.³⁰

It may be argued that the efforts of Puritan parents to beat salvation into their children were at variance with their religious beliefs that one's spiritual fate was determined by the Book of Life written before the foundation of the world. It was part of the Puritan dilemma that their religious convictions were in conflict with the human desire to hope and to believe that human action would influence destiny. This internal struggle explains why Puritan parents appeared alternately loving and condemning. They were obsessed by the short time that each had to impose discipline, to kill sin, and to foster the necessary religion to suggest "grace". It also provides insight into why the horrors of hell-fire were impressed so early on young children. Indeed literature of the period designed for children was filled with admonitions to conversion and repentance.³¹ As kind a woman as Lady Grace Mildmay could write to her daughter "All that

are conceived and born into this worlde shall either be saints in Heaven, elect children of God, or be damned reprobates cast out from God into Hell... Wherefore it is a matter of great importance to bring up children into God, and to cause them to Forsake the vanities and follies of this short and momentary life..."³² Ralph Josselin preached Sara London's funeral and "favoured to stir young persons to bee good"³³. The sternness of these admonishments and the emphasis on repentance is indicative of the desperation that a parent felt to be assured of his or her child's salvation in the face of such frequent childhood deaths.

The seventeenth-century Puritan mind had great difficulty in integrating death into its consciousness without believing it a form of punishment. This seems a common psychological projection as human consciousness tries to interpret the universe as orderly and logical. It was particularly characteristic of Puritan consciousness, so preoccupied with punishment in general. We know that Ralph Josselin was concerned that God might have killed his son as a chastisement for his father's love of chess.³⁴ Lady Warwick says "And at last, it pleased God to send a sudden sickness on my only son, which I then doated on with great fondness. I was beyond expression struck at it; not only because of my kindness of him, but because my conscience told me it was for my backsliding."³⁵ Richard Baxter says that "...God called my sin to remembrance by his heavy hand on my dear wife."³⁶ It is a preoccupation of the religious individual to try to place all occurrences within a perceived concept of God's plan.

To compound these disquieting emotions, the Puritan consciousness had also to deal with the difficult problem of predestination. David Stannard has written extensively on death in the seventeenth century in an early American context.³⁷ In order to explain the context of the early American experience, he necessarily drew on English sources. Stannard has discussed the serious conflict in the Puritan mind on the subject of death. He hypothesizes that when intellectually confronting the subject, the Puritan response fell under two banners: confidence that this was the logical completion of one's life pilgrimage and an opportunity to enter into God's glory. At the same time, the Puritan was asked to hold in his mind's eye the conflicting notion that even though his life might have been filled with repentance and good works, these attributes were essentially useless as only God knows his elect, predestined from the beginning of time. Moreover, any confidence the individual might have of his own personal election or sense of God's grace might be interpreted as self-deceiving smugness or the sin of pride. Stannard illustrates this argument by quoting from William Perkins' Salve for a Sicke Man.³⁸ Although Perkins wrote at the end of the sixteenth century, his works were read and reprinted well into the seventeenth century. Perkins' reasoning is somewhat ambivalent, stressing the importance of an upright life of good works, he attempts to set his argument back on track by relating the death-bed scene of John Knox. As he draws near the end, Knox is recorded as wrestling with doubt which he personifies as the Devil.³⁹ Knox tries to comfort himself with thoughts of his many trials and triumphs in the cause of true religion. Surely he must merit eternal life by "my fedelite in my ministrie". At last, he realizes that this sense of certainty is the Devil's deception and that there is no salvation without divine grace.⁴⁰ Realizing that this fate has been determined before the

foundation of the world, Knox dies somewhat cheered by the symmetry of his religious faith.

The Puritan dilemma was to see death as both a punishment and a reward.⁴¹ This conflicting attitude would explain the Puritan obsession to record the minute details of daily occurrences; the constant seeking of reassurance of God's grace even when there could never be such assurance; and the immense awareness of sin in oneself or others. The seventeenth-century Puritan had the burden of being hopelessly caught in the web of his own ego; daily he anticipated the last lonely struggle with death. Stannard suggests that no society could withstand this dissonance, the struggle to hold two conflicting notions at the same time.⁴² Ultimately, the Puritan vision would fade.

The history of Puritanism is ultimately one of defeat. The Puritan movement as a whole failed to gain the hearts and minds of the majority of Englishmen and women. Yet Puritan concept of death was to have wider currency than strictly among those who wished to reform the established Church. People were content to draw their beliefs on death from the larger culture, not caring very much whether these opinions came from the Puritan or Anglican schools of thinking. We can surmise that concepts were often interchangeable and that there was great mutual borrowing. If John Donne and John Milton saw death in much the same imagery, then it is likely that more ordinary people may have had comparable views. Evidence is found in Daniel Defoe's novel on the great plague epidemic of 1665. Although Daniel Defoe wrote in 1722 many years after the fact, details of that period were still well within his family's memory. Des-

cribing the events of the epidemic, Defoe deplored the death-centred rantings of dissenting and conforming clergymen alike during a period of such human devastation. The important consideration in the quotation cited below is not that both Anglican and Puritan raved about death, but they did so in a similar manner.⁴³

But we had some good men, and that of all persuasions and opinions, whose discourses were full of terror, who spoke nothing but dismal things; and as they brought the people together with a kind of horror,... not guiding them, at least not enough, to cry to heaven for mercy.

The Church of England was restored, indeed, with the restoration of the monarchy about four years before; but the ministers and preachers of the Presbyterians and Independents, and of all the sorts of professions, had begun to gather separate societies.

But the visitation reconciled them again, at least for a time, and many of the best and most valuable ministers and preachers of the Dissenters were suffered to go into church where the incumbents were fled away... the people flocked without distinction to hear them preach, not much inquiring who and what opinion they were of.

The distinction between Anglican and Puritan attitudes to death is similarly blurred when we consider the wide circulation of chapbooks. Margaret Spufford, basing her conclusions on an extensive study of chapbooks, has suggested that the Puritan mind-set extended well beyond their numbers. In her analysis of popular literature as printed in the chapbook format, a third dealt with religion. In vast numbers of these books death figured predominantly. Death is, in fact, a tool to urge the sinner to repentance. God is depicted not as a merciful Saviour, but as an exacting Judge. In the large collection of popular literature assembled by Samuel Pepys, over half the volumes dealing with serious or religious themes were concerned with death-bed testimonies, meditations on death

and the Last Judgement.⁴⁴ Apparently, the vengeful inquisitorial God of the Puritan had a wide public. Dr. Spufford's findings would also suggest that Anglican readers were buying in great quantities books that would appear Puritan in tone and preoccupation. Within this context it is difficult to separate the orthodox Anglican viewpoint from the Puritan.

We also have evidence that the individuals found in both Anglican and Dissenting camps could be very diverse. Ralph Josselin was of both Puritan and millenarian inclination. He served in the Church of England all his life, spending his later years attempting to dodge official insistence on the wearing of Church vestments. John Milton, who emphatically denied belief in predestination⁴⁵, the son of an at one-time Catholic father, brother of an ardent Recusant, must still be considered a Puritan. The same plurality of conflicting views might be illustrated by the funeral ceremonies for Oliver Cromwell. After Puritan vicars had denounced elaborate burial ceremonies as superstitious, the Lord-Protector's funeral was as ostentatious as any Stuart king's. Political exigencies had obviously prevailed.

The connection between Puritanism and death is further confused by the great diversity in religious beliefs of the time. In Josselin's immense diary there is not a single direct reference to hell or to damnation.⁴⁶ We can conclude that many Puritans emphasized the glory of resurrection after death rather than the fear of judgement. Conversely, many also dwell on human depravity and unworthiness. It is true that the majority dealt with death as they lived their lives, either full of hope or pain. Alan Macfarlane, in a recent conversation, discussed Josselin's curious reticence

on the subject of heaven and hell. He suggests that Puritan views on the next life were often undeveloped. In contrast, there was often an intense 'this world' consciousness and obsessive concentration on the brevity of time.⁴⁷ It should also be pointed out that Josselin's visions of the millennium were of seemingly more interest to him than his expectations of future life. It is possible that a 'logical religion' like Calvinism did not provide sufficient poetic imagination to envision a blissful heaven.

There were other strategies to deal with death besides those of the Puritan. Many were drawn from classical and medieval sources. Nor did Protestants refrain from borrowing even from orthodox Catholic thought. In Catholic cultures there were strong traditions stressing the importance of the "good end". In the late fourteenth and fifteenth century, treatises appeared on the art of dying - the artes moriendi. In literary and pictorial representations of the period, the final battle for each human soul took place in the bedroom of the dying man - often depicted as a stock character, *Moriens*, a moribund Everyman. Angels and Devils would alternately scuffle over who had the greater right to the soul of the dying. Account sheets would be brandished and the expiring individual would be tempted to despair. In assessing the likelihood of the individual achieving salvation, great importance would be attached to the manner in which the individual left his life.⁴⁸

With the Reformation, this tradition was adopted with some modifications. William Perkins, in his essay on the right manner of dying, relates the story of Knox's temptations in his final moments. Here Knox's Devil takes the form of faith in a lifetime of good works - a worthy Calvinist

horror. A more detailed account of this tradition in a Protestant context was recorded by Philip Stubbes in A christal glass for Christian women.⁴⁹ Although this work was written in 1591, it was reprinted and influential well into the seventeenth century. In this tract Stubbes attempts to mythologise the death of his wife, Katherine. The usual scene of medieval temptation is played out as Katherine Stubbes confronts Satan's hordes by summarizing the main tenets of Calvinist doctrine. On her deathbed she gives a passionate confession of faith in the reformed religion and is witness to her salvation by the force of grace alone. Before she departs this life, Mistress Stubbes enjoins her husband not to mourn for her.

Other English writers of the period, among them Puritans, stress a stoical approach to death. Long integral to both Christian and classical traditions, these notions had the advantage of being shared by both Catholic and Protestant commentators.⁵⁰ Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, drew on both the classical stoic tradition and a number of Catholic writers in preparing a number of books for a Protestant audience on the art of dying well.⁵¹ The calmness with which the individual greets death was thought to be indicative of his mastery of self and the degree to which he had achieved true understanding. Stoicism, in the Elizabethan-Stuart understanding of it, recommended suffering without complaint, fortitude and disdain for the things of this world. The early modern era Stoic was instructed to appreciate human relationships, but he was constantly mindful that friends, wives and children were merely lent to him.⁵² It is noteworthy that Mary Sydney's own mother had been publicly lauded for an "excellent death".⁵³ Her brother, Sir Philip Sydney's death,

denying himself water to succour a fellow soldier, became a myth of English culture.

Stoicism permeates a great deal of English intellectual writing of the time. Erasmus had advised living each day as if it were one's last and to face death with total serenity.⁵⁴ Many examples of this attitude may be found in the literature of the seventeenth century. The funeral sermon of the ardent Protestant Sir Robert Harley describes, as one of his legacies to his children, his fine example in dying, saying as he expired "I have taught you to live, and I hope I shall teach you to die."⁵⁵ Francis Osborn wrote an immensely popular book in the middle of the seventeenth century filled with "Polonius"-style advice to his son. "Now you are Taught to Live, there's nothing I Esteeme Worth Learning, but the way to Die."⁵⁶ Puritan writer, Richard Rogers, records that his father "desired that he [his father] might leave behind him a good example of his death unto others."⁵⁷ The tradition, consistent with stoicism, that the final moments of an individual's death were indicative of the whole nature of his or her life and expectations of eternal life, remained strong in English culture.

Literature of the late Elizabethan, early Stuart period censures intense mourning as subversive to the rule of reason and indicative of impiety and lack of self-control.⁵⁸ Despite the fact these attitudes persisted until well into the seventeenth century, there was more tolerance for grief and sympathy for bereavement as the century wore on.⁵⁹ Milton felt free to express deep grief over the loss of friends or on the death of a wife.⁶⁰ Poet Henry King was to author moving and personal poems on

the death of his spouse.⁶¹ Grief became so respectable that the clergyman giving the funeral sermon for Anglican divine Jeremy Taylor in 1667 referred to Taylor's grief and despair over the death of his three sons as follows:⁶²

..it pleased God to visit his family with sickness, and to take to Himself the dear pledges of His favour, three sons of great hopes and expectations, within the space of two or three months and though he had learned a quiet submission unto the divine will, yet the affliction touched him so sensibly that it made him desirous to leave the country;..."

Many Puritan diarists made a habit of compiling an inventory of their daily routines and perceptions with the religious purpose of keeping themselves up to some spiritual mark. They record lives based on prayer, self-examination, and religious reading. Frequent mention was made - within such diaries and also in sermons - of the efficacy of meditation.⁶³ Richard Baxter, recording the spiritual breakthrough of his wife from a life preoccupied with frivolous gaiety to a more Puritan awareness, recounts that she shut herself away to meditate upon a human skull.⁶⁴

The emotional symbolism of the skull and cross-bones is complex and powerful. The Puritan clergy had certainly used the imagery of death as an admonishment for repentance. However, the iconography of death had meanings in the early modern period that are difficult to grasp. What was common to almost all religious groups was that death had a fascination, a status, an 'élan' that is completely missed by a modern reader who identifies a skull and cross-bones as a label for poison. Interest in the subject of death appears to be a leitmotif for a certain spiritual fitness, the mark of the religious athlete. The symbolism was so attractive and ultimately so secular that Theodore Spencer, in his book on death and Shakespeare,

records that London prostitutes took to wearing death's-head rings on their index fingers.⁶⁵ Portrait painters delighted in including in their work skulls, hour-glasses, bubbles, mirrors or smoke as indicative of the ephemeral nature of life. The seventeenth-century mind might as easily have absorbed these constant reminders of death as the contemporary mind might view the symbols of Halloween, completely forgetting that the face carved on the pumpkin is the death's-head.

In the study of human mortality, the Puritan mind converges on Catholic mysticism. It has been said that Puritanism lacked a system of mysticism; in its plodding earnestness, it depreciated aesthetic or intellectual values.⁶⁶ It satisfied itself instead with spiritual zeal. Puritans wished to emphasize their spiritual attainments by their rigorous self-control.⁶⁷ They did not withdraw to some private ecstasy, although their lives were spent in continuous worship.⁶⁸ The emphasis in their religious services was not on the liturgical elements of the faith, but the reading of God's word.⁶⁹ At the same time, and in apparent contradiction to the above, reforming Protestants put great emphasis on metamorphosis. The two sacraments that were preserved in the purified religion were those of transformation - the eucharist and baptism. Lacking such traditional methods of achieving ecstatic vision by mortification, deprivation, or isolation, the Puritans became fascinated by another method of achieving heightened spiritual awareness, the contemplation of death.

In the political and social chaos of the 1640's, Englishmen experienced a political and social freedom from the hierarchy of the church and the state.⁷⁰ New questions were asked about the nature of God and the

universe. God, final judgement and death began to be interpreted in very different ways. Although it is difficult to prove a direct linkage between Puritanism and the rise of science, Puritanism created a climate of intellectual tension, nourishing an atmosphere of dissent and speculation. Many people began to believe strange or divergent things. Others sought nothing less than to reverse the Fall of Man.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Access to the Pepys' Library, Magdalen College, Cambridge University, was granted by the kind permission of the librarian. The flavour of the bound collection of 'petty godlinesses', mostly tractarian literature, may be conveyed by the following title, which is a representative example - An Almanack But For one Day or the Son of Man Reckoning with Man upon an High Account - Day, Printed by J. Clarke, W. Thackeray and T. Passinger.

² Charles Lloyd Cohen, God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 16.

³ G.E. Aylmer, "Collective Mentalities in Mid-seventeenth-Century England: The Puritan Outlook", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Fifth Series XXXVI, (1986), p. 1-25.

⁴ M.M. Reese, The Puritan Impulse: The English Revolution, 1559-1660, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1975) p. 12.

⁵ Peter Lake, Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) p. 12.

⁶ Lake, Ibid, p. 279 and p. 282 and Michael Walzer, The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics, (New York: Atheneum Press, 1968) p. 145.

⁷ Christopher Hill, The Century of Revolution 1603-1714, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co. Inc., 1961), pp. 81-82, 168-69.

⁸ Christopher Hill, God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p. 221.

⁹ John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress, (London: Collins, 1953), p. 150.

¹⁰ Weber, op. cit., pp. 98-118.

¹¹ Macfarlane, The Family Life of Ralph Josselin, p. 168.

¹² Ibid, p. 169.

- 13 Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 174.
- 14 Arthur Searle ed., Barrington Family Letters 1628-1632, (London: Camden Fourth Series, Vol. 28: 1983).
- 15 "Letter from Richard Whalley to Lady Joan Barrington", Barrington Family Letters, pp. 29-30.
- 16 Ibid, p. 32.
- 17 Ibid, pp. 65-68.
- 18 Ben Jonson, "On Death" Ben Jonson, ed. by C.H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947) Vol. VIII, p. 37
- 19 It is said that Martin Luther wore a large gold death's-head ring. While this visual image that is indicative of the late medieval artistic fascination with death, the ring bore a startling triumphant inscription, "O mors, ero mors tua - O death, I will be thy death." Virginia Moore, Ho for Heaven, (New York: Dutton & Company, 1946), p. 136.
- 20 Kathleen Cohen, Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tombs in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 125-7.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 125-7.
- 22 John Milton, "Paradise Lost", Poetical Works (London: J.M. Dent, 1909), Book XII, line 571.
- 23 Katherine Esdaile, English Monumental Sculpture Since the Renaissance, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1927), pp. 27-28 and plate XXVII.
- 24 Lawrence Stone indicates that this quotation is from Max Weber in his article "The Disenchantment of the World". New York Review of Books, XVIII (2 Dec, 1971), pp. 17-25. He does not footnote his citation. It does not readily appear in Max Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Weber refers to the Reformation as the logical conclusion in "The great historic process in the development of religions, the elimination of magic from the world", The Protestant Ethic, p. 105.

- 25 C. Hill, God's Englishman, p. 238.
- 26 Ibid, p. 223.
- 27 Searle "Letter from Thomas Bouchier to Lady Joan Barrington", January 20, 1631, p. 176. It should be noted that melancholy was considered to be the result of an overabundance of black bile.
- 28 Stanislaw Grof, Beyond the Brain: Birth, Death and Transcendence in Psychotherapy, (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1985), p. 165. Actually, Grof is quoting Alfred Adler. Unfortunately he provides no footnote.
- 29 Ozment, pp. 50-99, 132-177 and Wrightson, pp. 89-118.
- 30 Elisabeth Kübler-Ross "On the Fear of Death", Passing: The Vision of Death in America, ed. by Charles O. Jackson, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), p. 212.
- 31 James Janeway, A Token for Children, (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1977), p. 12-15. First published in 1671.
- 32 R. Weigall ed. "The Journal of Lady Mildmay", Quarterly Review, CCXV, (1911), pp. 119-38.
- 33 The Diary of Ralph Josselin, ed. by Alan Macfarlane, (London: by Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1976), p. 562.
- 34 Ibid, p. 114.
- 35 Autobiography of Lady Warwick, ed. by Crofton Croker, (London: for the Percy Society, 1848), p. 18.
- 36 The Autobiography of Richard Baxter, introduced by J.M. Lloyd Thomas (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1931), p. 240.
- 37 David E. Stannard, "Death and Dying in Puritan England", American Historical Review, CXXVIII, (December, 1973), pp. 1305-30.

- 38 William Perkins, A Salve for a Sicke Man or a Treatise Containing the Nature, Differences and Kindes of Death; as also the Right Manner of Dying Well, (Cambridge: John Legat, Printer, 1597).
- 39 This tradition of wrestling with the forces of evil on one's death-bed is medieval in inspiration and could be drawn in its entirety from any wood-cut illustration of the fourteenth or fifteenth century of this theme.
- 40 Perkins, Salve for a Sicke Man, p. 55.
- 41 Stannard, op. cit., p. 1313.
- 42 Stannard, op. cit., pp. 1329-30.
- 43 Daniel Defoe, A Journal of the Plague Year, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1966), pp. 46-47.
- 44 Spufford, op. cit., pp. 138-139, 195-196 and 200-201.
- 45 Weber, op. cit., p. 101.
- 46 Macfarlane, The Family Life of R. Josselin, p. 168.
- 47 Interview with Alan Macfarlane, King's College, Cambridge University, February 15, 1988.
- 48 Ariès, The Hour of Our Death, T.S.R. Boese, Death in the Middle Ages, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972).
- 49 Philip Stubbes, A christal glass for christian women, London, 1591.
- 50 Isabel Rivers, Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979), p. 49.
- 51 Mary Ellen Lamb, "The Countess of Pembroke and the Art of Dying", Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, ed. by Mary Beth Rose, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), pp. 207-226.
- 52 Rivers, Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry, p. 247.

- 53 Mary Ellen Lamb, op. cit., p. 211.
- 54 Ariès, The Hour of Our Death, pp. 302-303.
- 55 Thomas Taylor Lewis ed., Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley, (New York: Camden Society, 1968), p. xxxvii, the preface of this volume contains a funeral sermon for Sir Robert Harley.
- 56 Francis Osborn, Advice to A Son, (H. Hall, printer, 1656), p. 188.
- 57 Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward, Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries, ed. by M.M. Knappen, (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1966), p. 118.
- 58 G.W. Pigman, Grief and the English Renaissance Elegy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 2.
- 59 Ibid, p. 104.
- 60 John Milton, "Sonnet XXIII", Poetical Works, ed. by Ernest Rhys (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1909), p. 457.
- 61 Henry King, "Exequy to his Matchlesse neve to be forgotten Freind" and "The Anniverse: An Elegy" The Poems of Henry King ed. by Margaret Crum, (Oxford: At Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 68-722 and 72-73.
- 62 Rust, George, "A Funeral Sermon for Jeremy Taylor August 13, 1667", Jeremy Taylor: The Whole Works, ed. by Reginald Heber, (New York: George Olms Verlag, 1969), pp. cccxiii-cccxxvii.
- 63 Robert Bolton, Mr. Bolton's Last and Learned Worke on the Four Last Things, (London: John Okes for Michael Spark, 1637, 4th edition), p. 62.
- 64 Baxter, op. cit., p. 262, appendix I.
- 65 Theodore Spencer, Death and Elizabethan Tragedy, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), p. 4.

- 66 A.G. Dickens, The English Reformation, (London: Fontana, 1967), p. 434.
- 67 Walzer, op. cit., p. 53.
- 68 Walzer, op. cit., p. 54 and Patrick Collinson, The Elizabethan Puritan Movement, p. 356.
- 69 Collinson, Ibid, p. 358.
- 70 Hill, The World Turned Upside Down, p. 361.

CHAPTER IV

DEATH AND THE SCEPTICS

Although some men in the 1600's occupied themselves with building the New Jerusalem, defeating the Anti-Christ and awaiting the millenium, others wanted to challenge the whole order of their universe, to make it more human and this-worldly, to make of life a science. Bored and frustrated by the struggle of competing views of the next world, learned men concentrated on what they could experience and test, using their senses and intellects. Instead of waiting for the joy of Heaven, they wished to create a better life on earth. This concentration on this world would lead to a different interpretation of death.

By the middle to the latter part of the seventeenth century, there is considerable evidence that some Englishmen and women had ceased to believe in a God as described by the Church of England. Owing to this diversity in religious outlook, interpretation of the meaning of death changed for at least some sectors of English society. Throughout the pages of such diarists, John Evelyn and Ralph Josselin, there are frequent references to the dangers of atheism in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Sir Walter Raleigh and his circle of Thomas Hariot and Carew Raleigh had been the subject of continued accusations of atheism.¹ Daniel Defoe, drawing from his childhood memories of the great plague and the experiences of family members, depicted a group of tavern rowdies who made vehemently strong statements against God and the possibility of everlasting life during the great plague epidemic of 1665.² Ideas refuting or questioning the possibility of life after death were circulating by 1680.

John Aubrey the great biographer and collector of folk-tales and anecdotes, frequently commented on death as a major rite of passage that provided insight into his society.³ Intrigued by scepticism, Aubrey made notes on the deathbeds, the circumstances and final moments of non-believers. In his general compilation of folk tales and traditions, Aubrey was particularly interested in assembling and comparing ghost sightings. Observing the erosion of the magical framework of his culture, Aubrey is nostalgic for the supernatural. In addition, ghosts by the latter part of the seventeenth century had a new social significance. The occurrences of apparitions was cited by religious and intellectual commentators, such as Richard Baxter and Joseph Glanvill, as reliable witnesses to the existence of God. John Aubrey devoted considerable attention during his antiquarian studies to the subject of death, collecting inscriptions on church monuments and tombstones and assembling collections of ghost stories. The very nature of such antiquarian interests suggests a degree of social self-consciousness and an incipient historic sense. Aubrey, in measuring such changes in popular culture, obviously found death of consuming interest. He recorded with enthusiasm the prevalence of such ancient customs as sin-eating (a process by which a paid, usually outcast, member of the community would consume food at the graveside of an individual to symbolize the taking on of his sins); and the custom of awaiting in the porch of local churches on Midsummer's Eve Day for the ghosts of all who would die in a given parish in the coming year to pass by.⁴

In his celebrated Brief Lives, Aubrey noted a similarity in the death of some of the notable figures of the seventeenth century. In Aubrey's account of the deaths of Sir Walter Raleigh, Thomas Hariot, Edward

Herbert and John Selden, there are clear references to their sceptical views as expressed at the time of their deaths. Aubrey obviously found this insight important and frequently relates the details with humour. "In his (Raleigh's) speech on the scaffold, I have heard my cosin Whitney say (and I thinke 'tis printed) that he spake not one word of Christ, but of the great and incomprehensible God, with much zeale and adoration, so that he concluded that he was a-christ, not an atheist."⁵ Aubrey then referred to this change, arguing that Raleigh had such expectation of life after death that he clearly was not a atheist.⁶ About Thomas Hariot, Aubrey wrote:

He made a Philosophical Theologie, wherein he cast-off the Old Testament, and then the New-one would consequently has no foundation. He was a Deist. His Doctrine he taught to Sir Walter Raleigh, Henry, Earle of Northumberland and some other. The Divines of those times look't on his manner of death [by cancer of the nose] as a judgement upon him for nullifying the Scripture.⁷

Aubrey provides a trenchant commentary on the death of Lord Herbert. Edward Herbert, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, was the author of an important philosophical work De Religione Gentilium (1663) which has been inaccurately called the charter of the Deists. It was written to prove that all great religions are organized around five basic principles. Aubrey records Lord Herbert's death as follows:⁹

James Usher, Lord Primate of Ireland, was sent for by him [Edward Herbert] when in his death-bed, and he would have received the sacrament. He say'd indifferently of it that if there was good in any-thing 'twas in that, or if it did no good 'twould doe no hurt. The Primate refused it, for which many blamed him. He [Edward Herbert] then turned his head to the other side and expired very serenely.

In Aubrey's account of the final moments of John Selden, Thomas Hobbes appears, taking the role of the archangel of sceptics:¹⁰

He [John Selden] died of a Dropsey; he had his Funerall Scutcheons all ready moneths before he dyed. When he was neer death, the Minister was comeing to him to assoile him. Mr. Hobbes happened then to be there, sayd he, What, will you that have wrote like a man, now dye like a woman? So the Minister was no let in.

These changes in Aubrey are cited to indicate a transformation in thinking that took place between approximately 1600 to 1680. The onset of this period might be best characterized by the death-scene in Christopher Marlowe's play Dr. Faustus. Faustus is the quintessential man on the brink of eternity. In defiance of God and his society, he trades his soul for knowledge. Although Faustus is a figure of grandeur, like Milton's Satan, his sin of presumption and pride became his undoing and he is humiliated before God on his death-bed.¹¹

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight
And burned is Apollo's laurel bough
That sometime grew within this learned man,
Faustus is gone: regard his hellish fall,
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise
Only to wonder at unlawful things
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits
To practice more than heavenly power permits.

Faustus is the prototype of the Renaissance magician or scientist. His universe is not centred on God, but on the abilities of man. Ultimately, he desires to undo the Fall of Man by extending the human life-span.¹² His very creation by Marlowe is a recognition that the most

dynamic figure of the seventeenth century is no longer the man of God, fighting stale battles, but the man of science. The number of Englishmen engaged in scientific investigation would multiply with the passing of time. Interest in the material investigation of the universe and technical knowledge would finally culminate in the creation of the Royal Society.

We may be able to trace this evolution of mentality in other facets of English life. In 1600, educated people of Western Europe believed themselves to be in the centre of a limited cosmos and at the mercy of supernatural beings beyond their control. By 1700, many educated people also living in Western Europe understood that they were living in an enormous universe on a tiny planet which rotated around the sun. Although sin still prospered, Satan no longer figured in their daily lives, and they had a greater appreciation of the forces of cause and effect. If one were to narrow one's focus from Western Europe to England, one might note that the last person to be burned in England for heresy was in 1612, the last man found guilty of political crime and tortured was in 1639, and the last witch was hanged in 1685. These English dates were about one century ahead of similar changes in continental Western Europe or even in Scotland.¹³ At the same time Englishmen had begun to organize some form of social relief in the shape of hospitals, poor houses, orphanages, and asylums. Although similar religiously-run foundations had been in existence since the Middle Ages, these new organizations sprang from a collective and secular sense of public responsibility for the unfortunate. In an effort to control the random nature of life, banks and insurance companies were instituted to protect investments.¹⁴ English society had a developing sense of social obligation to plan for misfortune and initiate self-help.¹⁵

The reasons for this profound change are many and complex. For the purpose of this study, it is important to understand why people began to interpret the occurrence of death as less the will of God, less the final test for the practicing Christian, and more as a natural happening, essentially random in nature. The world view as suggested by the circumstances of Faustus' temptation had altered by 1680. Instead, individuals were able to see life in more pluralistic and secular terms. God may not have retreated from human consciousness, but his opponent, Satan had almost vanished. The concept of chance now figured in human calculation, weighing the issues of life and death. Individuals began to accept morality within the broader philosophical context suggested by Aubrey.

One factor which contributed to this wider world view was education. Keith Thomas, in the opening chapter of his giant book on the decline of magic in the seventeenth century, states that by 1660 there was one grammar school for every 4,400 persons.¹⁶ By early in the century every boy, even on the far edges of the kingdom, could find in his neighbourhood a school that was competent to prepare him for entrance to Oxford or Cambridge.¹⁷ By 1660 no less than 2½ per cent of the adult male population had received some form of advanced education at Oxford or Cambridge or the Inns of Court.¹⁸ Lawrence Stone had described the years 1560 to 1640 as "one of exceptionally intensive intellectual and artistic training, squeezed between centuries of ignorance on the one hand and centuries of dilettantism on the other."¹⁹ With access to education, with experience in both civil war and politics, Englishmen's vision of themselves would change. While still studying the heavens for signs and portents and their hearts for secret sins, they also sought answers in the mysteries of the human body and the storehouse of the earth.

In terms of intellectual history, the avenging Hebrew God and his opponent the medieval Devil had already lost centre stage in human consciousness. Before the scientific tradition had emerged, the path had already been cut by the magical studies of the alchemists, the hermeticists, the cabbalists, and the neoplatonists. The theories propounded by such groups suggested that disease and death were no longer the result of personal sin or even humoral imbalances of blood, phlegm, yellow bile or black bile.²⁰ Instead, they were more interested in an individual's relationship to the universe, to the stars, to agencies outside of the human body.²¹ Using observation, systematic recording, experimentation, and chemical drugs, the seventeenth-century medical practitioner, often steeped in the magical tradition, sought to control disease by exogenic means.

While learned men sought the means to relieve man's estate by studying the circulation of the blood or by experimenting with medicine, on the level of popular culture, the ordinary folk also had healers or diviners who had no trade with formalized religion. Keith Thomas has theorized that these individuals increased their following when the magical, miracle-working practices of the Catholic Church, such as the application of holy water, the use of charms and relics and the blessing of harvests, were eliminated with the Reformation.²² With the change of religion, the entire cultural apparatus often incorporating aspects of old pagan religions and fertility cults - to deal with life's pain and uncertainty - was eliminated. Instead, sixteenth and seventeenth-century man was left entrapped in a emotional and intellectual contradiction. Protestant preachers impressed on him his inherent sinfulness, the legacy of Adam; at the same time they

stripped him of the magical tools of the old religion for keeping such anxiety at bay.²³ Thomas suggests that the logical outcome was an increased demand for the services of the local white witch or wizard, the cunning folk. These people, for a price, would attempt to cure many diseases, assist in love affairs, find lost objects, and detect witchcraft.²⁴ If we may judge from the wide public patronage and habitual customers cunning folk attracted, most of their clientele seemed satisfied. By any means, their solutions were generally less harmful than those of classically-trained doctors. The popularity of wizards and wise women bespoke of a conviction that not all issues of healing were controlled by the state in the form of the licensed healer or the church. Instead, there were other, often not well-defined, traditions that suggested that the earth was pregnant with life and that destiny was determined by supernatural forces, by symbols, sympathies, correspondences and the stars.²⁵

Within this general framework of scholarly and unscholarly magic, the seventeenth-century man of learning became increasingly interested in the systematic study of natural science. This research had the added advantage of being well within the Christian tradition. John Beadle, in his tract, The Journal or Diary of a Thankful Christian, published in 1656, heads two of his chapters with exhortations to "labour to observe God in all things" and "labour to observe all things in God".²⁶ This view is similar to Robert Boyle's contention that science was essentially a religious task and the purpose was to expose God's workmanship.²⁷ The new men of the mid-seventeenth century, Bacon, Montaigne, and Descartes in their appreciation of the forces of nature - in contrast to those of God - travelled the path that had already been marked by the Hermeticists and

the Paracelsians.²⁸ This trend of thought appears to have been responding to the general exhaustion with religious dissension and debate. There was a growing recognition that the religious life was bringing neither peace nor prosperity. Arnold Toynbee hypothesized that this was the turning point for western civilization:²⁹

However, about the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of our Western Christian era, something happened which, I venture to prophesy, is going to loom out in retrospect as one of the epoch-making events of our modern Western history... Catholic and Protestants at home come to the hazardous conclusion that a religion in whose now divided and contentious name they had been fighting an inconclusive fratricidal hundred years war was an inopportune element in their cultural heritage. Why not tacitly agree to cut out the wars of religion by cutting out religion itself and concentrate on the application of physical science to practical affairs - the pursuit which aroused no controversy and which promised to be lucrative.

The theme of science leads to the consideration of the slow emergence of the public health movement. William H. MacNeill, in his volume, Plagues and Peoples, made a number of telling observations on the singularly English approach to death and disease. MacNeill's work is important, for he deals with an extremely wide canvas. He attempts nothing short of a history of disease. His work is significant in understanding English attitudes to death as he has seen clearly how divergent these were from either continental or Asian thinking of the period.³⁰ Although, as Lawrence Stone had pointed out, English doctors were killing as many people in 1700 as two centuries earlier in 1500,³¹ the social framework of disease prevention had changed. The community was actively committed to controlling the environment to reduce the risk of people dying needlessly. In times of plague, towns tried to enforce some standards of hygiene and

to restrict the circulation of people and goods. Instead of relying passively on the will of God, there was a new faith in human initiative.³²

Although practical efforts to control disease were primitive, they were indicative of a larger framework where English society might take action against disease. Among the more heroic steps to stop the transmission of disease might be the story of the small community of Eyam in Derbyshire in the great plague epidemic of 1666. When the plague arrived in the village, the inhabitants under the direction of their clergyman, William Mompesson, decided to erect boundary lines round the village and mutually pledged that no one would stray beyond these markers, spreading contagion to other communities. Although village resolution remained strong, fully five-sixths of the inhabitants of Eyam died as a result of their effort to stop the spread of the disease to the larger community.³³ By the same token, Daniel Defoe's story of the pious waterman in the Journal of the Plague Year faithfully records a 'Christian', but scientifically prudent response to epidemic. Although the waterman is depicted as caring, from a distance, for his stricken family by providing them with food and the necessities, he carefully avoids direct contact so that he can continue making a living. This story Defoe cites as indicative of "a true dependence of a courage resting on God; and yet he [the waterman] used all possible caution for his safety".³⁴

As has been demonstrated above, however incompetent doctors and public health officials were, there was a growing support for their activities in controlling disease and leaving less in the hands of God. As early

as 1661, Joseph Glanvill, a member of the Royal Society, was rallying against the "gospel of ignorance" in his book, The Vanity of Dogmatizing.³⁵ He instructs his reader "that [in] the perfect science of anything it's necessary to know all its causes."³⁶ As early as 1579, Myles Coverdale in his Treatise on Death was urging good Christians to seek the care of physicians and to treat illness with medicine.³⁷ In life and death issues, the doctor had so eclipsed the priest that Richard Baxter suggested that physicians try to attend to the spiritual needs of their patients while administering to their physical needs.³⁸

As for the treatment of the sick and mad, the established church by the mid-seventeenth century found it convenient to proclaim that the age of miracles was over.³⁹ This was largely a political move as, in part, the established church and the medical profession were dismayed by those attempting to heal by faith alone - mostly dissenting preachers. The formal culture attempted to create a climate unfavourable to such "enthusiasms" and began to institutionalize the care of the sick and the mad in hospitals and asylums.

The study of science, the interest in medicine, the inception of a public health movement were all indicative of gradual change. Abandoning the age of miracles and magic, the societal mentality began to take a series of small steps toward a consciousness that was more based on the study of the material world. Educated men became obsessed by defining the world in very concrete terms by use of measurement. Calibration, logarithms, surveying, accounting, calendar-making, statistics, mechanical time-keeping all were developed within the seventeenth century. Newspapers

brought awareness of a larger and a yet more measurable world.⁴⁰ Now that risk-calculation was possible, insurance companies appeared and sold policies against life's disasters. The nature of the old world had been arbitrarily random, visiting sudden death on rich and poor, young and old, good and bad. This was essentially unchanged, but the perception of how life was organized had altered forever as people could understand the nature of risk. Disease and death now appeared to originate in a sphere beyond their control, beyond even the control of God and the Devil.

Gradually the test of many types of knowledge became experimental evidence based on observation and replication. With the greater systemization of knowledge, the universe was viewed as running according to natural laws.⁴¹ If the universe was governed by a humane watch-maker instead of an avenging God of wrath⁴², death as a focus of interest waned. Death had been fascinating as it embodied deep feelings of irrationality and helplessness. When people began to examine the organization of life in the form of statistics, evidence and facts, they did not feel so powerless - even though they still died in great numbers. Paul Slack, who has written a book on the impact of the plague in the Tudor and Stuart periods, has remarked that one of the most striking characteristics of plague distribution patterns was the totally arbitrary way it would decimate some communities and not others.⁴³ This realization might have encouraged fatalism. However, as society was beginning to understand numbers and odds, there was greater acceptance that, although the forces of the universe acted in a random fashion, mankind should labour to harness these forces. Moreover, this realization that the path of disease was arbitrary in nature may have brought a sense of relief, that disaster was not God's punishment for secret sin.

The study of witchcraft has proved a useful device to chart changing social attitudes in this early modern period. It would be more enlightening, in studying social attitudes to death in the same time-span, to look at changes in reactions to ghosts. One of the most pervasive of world-wide beliefs is the notion that the dead may return to earth to contact the living.⁴⁴ In fact, it has been suggested that almost all funerary customs originate from a desire to placate the dead so that they will not revisit the living.⁴⁵ This involvement with the living may take the form of seeking vengeance (as is the case with Hamlet's father's ghost), expressing the need for respectable burial or consoling or admonishing relatives. Ghost sightings reveal much about our unconscious life; what form the ghost's appearance takes or what the ghost has to say suggests a great deal about a society's anxieties. A review of ghost sightings in the medieval period would indicate that the formal and informal culture was collectively pre-occupied with the hereafter. On a very fundamental level, the existence of ghosts and their active testimony about the next world were good arguments for both life after death and purgatory. Ghosts acted as witnesses to the veracity of Catholic teaching, that there was punishment and reward after death. They also contributed to the notion that the living were closely involved with the dead by means of purchasing masses for the rest of their souls.⁴⁶ The mechanisms by which a community might express concern and reverence for the fate of its ancestors were swept away with the Reformation. The Puritans took a very dim view of reportings of ghosts as the existence of spectres would suggest that there was indeed an intermediate state - purgatory - between death and judgement. Moreover, the existence of purgatory could only reinforce other aspects of Catholic belief. After the establishment of the reformed

religion, the appearance of ghosts was officially denounced as the work of the Devil. Instances of ghosts appearing to friends and neighbours of a deceased individual could only underline the Puritan conviction that the Devil was indeed everywhere.⁴⁷

Shakespeare sets forth the ghost dilemma fully in Hamlet. As the son of a possibly Recusant father, Shakespeare would have been familiar with both sides of the ghost argument. Indeed, in the play it is left completely open-ended whether the ghost is in fact the spirit of Hamlet's father, justified in his cause of seeking vengeance or is the handiwork of the Devil contriving to bring destruction to all of the principal characters.⁴⁸

Ghosts became such a social moot point that ordinary people became confused on what they may or may not mean. Ultimately, they did not care. So strong was the belief that a spirit could walk after death that, as Keith Thomas has recorded, the legally-directed method of burial for suicides until 1823 was to place a stake through the heart to prevent the spirit walking.⁴⁹ The normal method of burial for almost everyone - including John Donne, if we may trust his death portrait - was to bind the feet of the corpse to prevent the spirit walking.⁵⁰

These heterodox opinions on ghosts were further bolstered by the wide-spread scepticism of the second half of the seventeenth century. As has been mentioned, numerous intellectuals, if not more ordinary people, ceased to believe in the God described by the established church. Orthodox views on God's will were further challenged by such schismatic groups as Sabbatarians, Socinians, Muggletonians, Philadelphians, Ranters,

Adamites, Fifth Monarchy Men, Grindletonians, Quakers, Levellers, and Diggers. Faced by this anarchy of opinion, ghosts - and for that matter witches - proved convenient allies for church authorities to verify the existence of God and life after death. Ghosts had been so rehabilitated that by the end of the century such conventional individuals as John Aubrey saw the collecting of ghost stories as part of his general antiquarian duties. Indeed, Aubrey expressed nostalgia for an earlier magical world where ghost sightings were more common. Ghosts had become such a useful device to shore up thought against scepticism that while Thomas Hobbes⁵¹ rejected ghosts completely, Richard Baxter - the leader of Presbyterian thought - produced arguments to prove their existence.⁵²

As has been shown, the rise of the sceptic viewpoint may be traced through an examination of the records compiled by John Aubrey noting death-bed scenes and ghost sightings. The very development of such antiquarian interests is indicative that the observer, in this case John Aubrey has moved, mentally and emotionally, from the scenes he is describing to some kind of evaluation and analysis. Aubrey personifies a balance of Restoration cynicism and good-sense. His approach is distant from that of Puritan religiosity, on the brink of Methodism, or that of bucolic peasants holding wakes. Although enormous numbers of people were still dying before their prime at the end of the century, the spiritual and cultural significance of death had been analyzed, documented and recorded in Aubrey's note-books. Aubrey, and his friends, like Hobbes, had placed this important rite of passage within a more mechanical framework.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Thomas, op. cit., p. 167 and A.L. Rowse, Raleigh and the Throckmortons, (London: The Reprint Society, 1964), pp. 176-178.
- ² D. Defoe, op. cit., p. 84.
- ³ Aubrey, John, Aubrey's Brief Lives, ed. by Oliver Lawson Dick, (London: Secker and Warburg), 1960 and John Aubrey's "Remaines of Gentilisme and Judisme", Three Prose Works, pp. 174-182.
- ⁴ For sin-eating, see "Remaines of Gentilisme..", p. 179, for ghosts see Brief Lives, p. XXXVII (the introduction). Although this reference is attributed to Aubrey, no footnote referring to his works has been provided.
- ⁵ Aubrey, Brief Lives, p. 259.
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 259.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 123.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 134.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 135.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 273.
- ¹¹ Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus, ed. by Sylvan Barnet, (New York, New American Library, 1969), Act V, scene iii.
- ¹² Marlowe, Doctor Faustus, introduction by Sylvan Barnet, pp. IX-XI.
- ¹³ Lawrence Stone, "Magic, Religion and Reason", The Past and the Present, (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 171.
- ¹⁴ Stone, "Children and the Family", Past and Present, p. 222.

- 15 Stone, "Magic, Religion and Reason", p. 170.
- 16 W.H.G. Armytage, Four Hundred Years of English Education, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 6-7.
- 17 Thomas, op. cit., p. 4.
- 18 Thomas, op. cit., p. 4.
- 19 Lawrence Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 329.
- 20 E.M.W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 73-79.
- 21 Walter Pagel, Paracelsus, (Basel: S. Kugen, 1958).
- 22 Thomas, op. cit., pp. 51-77.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Peter Burke, op. cit., pp. 106-108.
- 25 Thomas, op. cit., p. 223.
- 26 John Beadle, The Journal or Diary of a Thankful Christian, (London: E. Coles for Thomas Parkhurst, 1656).
- 27 Ian G. Barbour, Issues in Science and Religion, (New York: Harper Torch Book, 1966), p. 37.
- 28 Theodore Rabb, The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 49.
- 29 Arnold Toynbee, Civilization on Trial, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 85-86.
- 30 William H. McNeill, Plagues and Peoples, (New York: Anchor Books, 1976), pp. 208-257.

- 31 Stone, "Magic, Religion and Reason", p. 169.
- 32 Thomas, op. cit., p. 659 and p. 661.
- 33 J. Charles Cox, Parish Registers of England, (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1974), pp. 162-3.
- 34 Defoe, op. cit., pp. 122-127.
- 35 Joseph Glanvill, The Vanity of Dogmatizing, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931). This is a reprint of the manuscript printed in London in 1661. The remark on ignorance is contained in the preface.
- 36 Glanvill, Ibid, p. 214.
- 37 Myles Coverdale, Treatise on Death, ed. by Rev. George Pearson. (Cambridge: Parker Society, XXII, 1846) p. 69.
- 38 Richard Baxter, The Saints Everlasting Rest or A Treatise of the Blessed State of the Saints, Jan. 15, 1649, (London: Joseph Caryl, printer), pp. 504-505.
- 39 Michael MacDonald, Mystical Bedlam, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 177 and lecture by Michael MacDonald, University of Ottawa, November 1984.
- 40 Thomas, op. cit., pp. 652-5.
- 41 Stone, "Magic, Religion and Reason", pp. 168-170.
- 42 Many intellectuals, like John Milton, ceased to believe in a God who would condemn, from the beginnings of time, some people to hell and predestine others for salvation. See L. Stone's remarks in reference above.
- 43 Paul Slack, op. cit., p. 108.
- 44 R.C. Finucane, Appearance of the Dead: A Cultural History of Ghosts, (New York: Prometheus Books, 1984), p. 25.

- 45 Betram Puckle, Funeral Customs: Their Origin and Development, (London: T. Werner Laurie Ltd., 1926), p. 152.
- 46 Finucane, op. cit., p. 85.
- 47 Ibid, pp. 90-120.
- 48 Thomas, op. cit., pp. 589-597.
- 49 Ibid, pp. 589-597.
- 50 Cunnington and Lucas, op. cit, p. 123.
- 51 Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. by C.B. Macpherson, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 636-639.
- 52 Finucane, op., cit., p. 121. Finucane is referring to Richard Baxter's works entitled The Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits...Providing the Immortality of Souls... Written For The Conviction of Sadduces and Infidels.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In the Manchester City Art Gallery there is a memorial portrait of the wife of Sir Thomas Aston. Lady Aston died in child-birth in 1635. The painting represents her as a beautiful, intelligent-looking woman, ironically dressed in mourning for herself. This vibrant figure is juxtaposed against the portrait of Lady Aston as she appeared on her death-bed, a lifeless waxen corpse. Sir Thomas Aston and his son are also depicted in the artwork dressed fully, but lavishly, in black silk or velvet. At the centre of the painting is set a crepe-swathed cradle on which appears a skull with the inscription in Latin, which translated means "He who sows hope in the flesh reaps bones". In the background of the portrait, the painter has presented a celestial globe and unstrung lute resting on a Turkish carpet. Sir Thomas and his son figure as holding a cross-staff, a surveying instrument that was used for navigation.

This portrait illuminates the contradictions of seventeenth-century attitudes to death. Although this art-work might be interpreted as merely a statement of despair, it is much more likely to represent the necessity of faith and man's humility before God. One senses both the intimacy of the husband and wife united in love for each other and their children and the grief of the wife's death by virtue of her attempt to give new life. The sense of tragedy is heightened by the underlying theme of failed potential and blasted beauty. The Astons had obviously delighted in the richness of this world. This is conveyed by the sophistication of their dress and the intellectual cultivation of the objects chosen to surround them. The

oriental carpet, the globe of the heavens, and the navigational instrument all indicate a close involvement with discovery, the stars, new worlds, science, and art. The message is clear: all of this knowledge and vision is indicative of the sin of pride, human conceit, in the face of death. The love of human beings for each other, the intimacy of the family circle is nullified before the wrath of the seventeenth-century God. The Aston painting is remarkable in that it sets out so vividly and honestly the contradictions of life in this period. Although man may have the "apprehension like a god", he ultimately must acknowledge that "he who sows hope in the flesh reaps bones".

The Aston portrait summarizes our purpose in examining English attitudes to death in the period 1600-1680. From a mixture of recurring symbols, rituals, and vocabularies employed by seventeenth-century commentators, diarists, chroniclers and witnesses to delineate death, part of the cultural structure of this age can be detected. Works of art such as the Aston painting, the poetry, plays, memorial brasses and wills all lead one to believe that English culture between 1600-1680 was operating, in its attitudes toward death, from a specific set of unacknowledged assumptions. In a historic period that was fascinated by measurement - and one might refer to the navigational equipment that the male Astons hold - one of the most prominent of this set of assumptions might be entitled the principle of the sliding-scale.

Seventeenth-century people were very interested in examining their place in the world and the meaning of life. We know this from their almost obsessive interest in diarizing, their intense desire to discern the meaning

of scripture and their fascination with meditating on death. In all of this weighing and measuring, there must have been some form of broad agreement on what was the point of existence. If common criminals could so readily have been made to confess, there seems to have been broad consensus on what the objective of life was. Although great emphasis has been placed in this study on the degree of individuality, of pluralism and secularism present in the early modern period, there were a few premises that went unchallenged. Almost all seventeenth-century witnesses comment on life as a pilgrimage, a process of moving from one level of understanding to another. The act of dying was regarded with almost universal solemnity. Almost no one, from Marlowe's characterization of Dr. Faustus, to the common criminal confessing at the gallows, could consider death with insouciance. Sir Walter Raleigh, the sometime cynic, describes the mechanism of transformation from alive to dead as follows:

Give me my scallop-shell of quiet,
My staff of faith to walk upon
My scrip of joy, immortal diet,
My bottle of salvation,
My gown of glory, hope's true gage;
And thus I'll take my pilgrimage

Over the silver mountains,
Where spring the nectar fountains;
There will I kiss
The bowl of bliss;
And drink mine everlasting fill
Upon every milken hill.
My soul will be a dry before;
But, after, it will thirst no more.¹

The cluster of thoughts enveloped in the notion of pilgrimage gave meaning to life. What challenged this concept was the death of the young and the promising. There are frequent references throughout the early

modern period to the particularly sad deaths of "hopeful children". The epitaph of John Evelyn is representative of this theme. On Evelyn's tombstone there is mention of the loss of Evelyn's daughters dying "in the flower of their age".² Josselin records on the death of his son Thomas that, "He was my hope".³ Mrs. Alice Thornton reports, on the death of her brother, her mother's profound grief as follows: "This was a great blow added to her former afflictions... beeing deprived in such a heavy matter of the hope of her house".⁴

None of these commentators was as overt as Adam Martindale in calculating the exact value, in monetary terms, of his dead son. Although many Stuart diarists, particularly in reporting on the death of new infants, were not as repressed as modern writers, Martindale is starkly candid on what the loss of his child means in quantitative terms.

... For I did not only part with an only sonne in the best of his time (about 30 years of age) whose education had cost me so deare,... this last losse (after all the rest) may well be computed at 80 or 90lb; besides the charges of the funerall, which those that observed it will say was handsomely done.⁵

Deaths of this nature were accompanied by a profound sense of frustration, insecurity and anger. Although seventeenth-century individuals might have an eye firmly fixed on salvation, this was a society that delighted in numeration - even the elect were calculated in terms of numbers. The concept that vast numbers of young people were cut off in their prime, before their pilgrimages could be complete, before they had time to re-pay in economic or human generation the sums of money and emotion that had been invested in their upbringing, seemed tragic. It is

possible that intuitively Englishmen and Englishwomen of the early modern period realized that the death of mature young people was economically and socially devastating to a culture. Such early mortality did not permit the greater development of a skilled population with specialized roles.⁶

Given this larger societal context, it is not remarkable that Ralph Josselin might search his heart for secret sins which led to the early demise of his children, that clergymen might threaten the depressed Lady Barrington with hell-fire, the heart-sickness of these individuals over the death of their relatives is suggestive that their pain challenged the assumption of their society that reality was ordered according to God's plan. This anxiety would explain the strange burial customs for those cut off prematurely in epidemic or childbirth. Seeing the bodies of young and vigorous men surrendered to the surgeons' men may have caused the same public discord. Like most forces of nature, most communities wish to remain in equilibrium. The death of young or flourishing members of a society did not fit into the perceived plan of the universe. In the face of such bereavement, the community would join ranks to deal with such unbalanced pressures. By developing a ritual of symbolic behaviour, such as dressing condemned men as bridegrooms, the society might dramatize its sense of loss.

This study began with a discussion of the theories of the leading seventeenth-century historians. Several among them, most notably Lawrence Stone, believed that the individuals of the 1600's had not entered into a full emotional life as understood by the twentieth-century mind.

Fathers were brutal or indifferent, mothers passive or heartless and children were fearful and battered. In response, other historians, such as Alan Macfarlane, have argued that in the twentieth century there are many cultures which are living below the material standards of the English seventeenth-century. No one would suggest that such societies do not love their children, do not have happy marriages and do not care for their aged parents.⁷ Many such communities pride themselves on their strong spiritual and emotional life in contrast to the perceived vacuity of the developed world. Macfarlane would argue that necessity does not have an overwhelming influence on the degree of grief that it is functional for a family to suffer over the loss of one of its members.

To explore this concept, it may be useful to look at some nineteenth and twentieth-century evidence. Paul C. Rosenblatt, in his book Bitter, Bitter Tears⁸, attempts, using a Freudian model, to explore mourning as it was expressed by a number of nineteenth-century North American families. Freud, very freely interpreted, hypothesized that before a death could be accepted by a bereaved individual, it was necessary to go through a period of mourning, to do "grief work". Rosenblatt suggests in his book that the length and intensity of such mourning was dependent on the hopes and expectations that were centred on the deceased individual (if he or she was a young person) or the degree of intimacy that had been developed (if the individual being mourned was more mature).⁹ Therefore, the grief associated with the death of a promising child or a long-time spouse might be roughly proportionate in nature. Rosenblatt postulates, like other modern commentators¹⁰, that the most devastating loss is that of the adult child, embodying both memories and long-term expectations.

This finding would correspond to the hypothesis that the seventeenth century had an internal "sliding scale" in registering emotional response to bereavement grief. It may also explain the heavily symbolic ritual of the white funerals for those who died unmarried or in childbirth. Rosenblatt also explains that mourning might also be a particularly anxious time for those who do not have a ritual to evoke grief.¹¹ The pre-industrial period was fortunate in that it had sanctioned rituals, involving complex symbols, to convey particular distress over the loss of some members of the community. In terms of emotional involvement, Rosenblatt believes that the nineteenth-century diaries he has examined reveal that family life of the period was warm and loving. In dealing with the question of rapid remarriage, he comments that most widows had the difficult choice of either being dependent on friends and neighbours to perform the hard physical labour that running their households required or remarrying.¹²

Other historians of the nineteenth century agree. David Vincent in his essay "Love and Death in the Nineteenth-Century Working Class" has added an important caveat.¹³ In discussing the emotional response to a death in the family, he noted that the consideration of the nature of physiological shock comes into play.¹⁴

Many were forced to interrupt work to look after a sick wife or motherless children, but none voluntarily abandoned work just because of grief... The loss of a close relation was so bound up with the maternal problems of life that at worst it seemed no more than an intensification of the misery of existence.

Experiences during the bombing raids of the last World War also indicate that necessity and shock are important factors in determining how the individual will respond to the death of loved ones. Max Hastings in his book Bomber Command devotes a chapter to the history of a bombing raid on the German town of Darmstadt.¹⁵ This city was overwhelmed by shock and grief after the first raid; after the second, the response of the inhabitants was so dulled and mercifully apathetic that in some instances the dead went half-buried for some time.¹⁶

If we might borrow from these more modern experiences, a similar apathy may have occurred with the deaths of those most at risk in the 1600's, the newly-born. It is true that the death of infant children was probably not experienced in the same depth as that of a child with whom the parents had a more developed relationship. Certainly the death of children a few days old bears little comment in the diaries of John Evelyn and Ralph Josselin. Josselin records the death of an infant saying, "This day my deare babe Ralph, quietly fell a sleepe,... it was the youngest, and our affections not so wonted onto it".¹⁷ Such a finding would be consistent with Freud's theory of grief work. The cultural framework of this period would also support this conclusion. Moreover, it should be noted that the literature of the Renaissance puts immense emphasis on the abilities of man in his maturity. Conversely, the child in his powerlessness and his dependence would not be accorded the same significance.¹⁸

Without exaggerating the relevance of the sliding-scale principle, consideration should be given to how this concept affects the themes that have been examined earlier; popular culture, Puritanism, and the rise of

scepticism. In previous chapters, reference has been made to the difference between formal and informal cultures. After the dramatic changes of the Reformation, individuals continued to mourn their dead in a manner more reflective of community norms than of organized religion. Lavish funerals were organized to impress the neighbourhood, not to placate a God or the deceased loved one. Memorial plaques emphasized worldly achievement and family lineage rather than religious experience. In a period of liturgical debate, late Tudor and Stuart Englishmen and women tended to look on life practically and chose funerary or mourning rituals to emphasise those areas of life they found important or which they were confident that they might enact without accusation of non-conformity.

The Puritan experiment which emphasized the logical organization of life according to God's plan failed to take into account the need of the human personality to hope. If we label the tendency to weigh the events of life against practical experience rather than metaphysical speculation, we might infer that the attitudes of pragmatism are in effect similar to those of the sliding-scale. Although strict Calvinism emphasized the predestined nature of human life, the Puritan individual could never nullify the belief that free-will did exist, that personal salvation through human effort was possible. In a religion that emphasized the implacable will of God, resolute individuals were hard-headed enough never to surrender completely their common sense, to interpret all human experience within a strict dualistic framework.

In earlier references to the rise of scepticism, it has been illustrated that from the early 1600's to the writings of Hobbes, from the cultivated

circle of Walter Raleigh to Defoe's public house rowdies, there were groups of individuals who were sceptical about the nature of the Christian God and the necessity of living an upright life. These were men who believed in the veracity of their own world-view and, if we are to credit Aubrey's accounts, wished to die as bravely as their Christian contemporaries. Such non-conformist attitudes were in sharp conflict with their religion-dominated societies and are the most obvious indicators of the rise of individualism. What then emerged was a 'this world consciousness', a triumph of the mundane world of action and reaction rather than the continued exaltation of disciplined religious experience. The dominance of the 'sliding-scale' framework would essentially unify English culture in a more secular, more individualistic society interested in materialistic accumulation, technical innovation and the things of this world.

To place the seventeenth century within a historical framework, it may be useful to compare the conclusions of a recent historian, James Walvin, in his chapter on death and the Victorian child contained in his volume A Child's World.¹⁹ Walvin postulates that Victorian child-directed literature was replete with images of death, dying and the necessity of salvation, owing to the high fatality rate from childhood disease. The Victorians, he suggests, prepared themselves and their offspring by means of this literature, poems and hymns, for the distinct possibility that their children may not reach adulthood. In contrast, similar seventeenth-century books and tracts intended for children or their parents were just as death-centred, but not apparently as maudlin as their Victorian counterparts. In the Stuart imprints, one might deduce a broader rationale, that of assistance in time of death or bereavement. The English landscape of

1600-1680 was more a battleground of abstraction where rival concepts of God had very important political, social and personal implications. If Englishmen of this period were God-obsessed, they were also death-obsessed. Death was, after all, the most dramatic enactment of God's will. If they recreated their God in the form of a tough muscular Judge - an attribute not so readily found in the comparable Victorian literature - it was because the 1600's had an overwhelming conviction that this was how reality was ordered. Such a God was only a reflection of their own intractable, patriarchal natures. Death fits into this overall world-view as an effective tool to impress sinners with God's vengeance. Fear of mortality, the necessity of repentance and salvation through grace was part of an all-embracing ethos. The Victorian literature emphasizing children flying on angels' wings to a sweet Jesus is a possibly emasculated descendent of this earlier mental world.

In the 1800's the dead had a powerful relationship with the living even after death. Walvin describes the seemingly proximate relationship which Victorian tenement dwellers had with dead family members, often sharing the same crowded quarters for days before funerals. He rightly focuses on the urgent need that members of the nineteenth-century poor had for "a proper funeral". In contrast, Stuart Englishmen were probably less inhibited in their response to death and the dead. With the exception of London, they were often healthier and less crowded. We know from the diary of Samuel Pepys that when his uncle's corpse began to smell, it was merely put out the door.²⁰ Pepys does not comment on this, but accepts it as the sensible thing to do. The one reaction that is almost universally missing from the seventeenth century is horror of the physical, as opposed

to spiritual, realities of death. Spiritual death, as seen by the ubiquitous occurrence of criminal confession, was the real issue. By the same token, funerals might be elaborate, if relatives wished to impress the community, but there was no moral or social injunction to provide other than the basic rites. In fact, the Puritans, believing in the Calvinistic dualistic separation of the soul from the body, recommended that burial ceremonies, involving the mere physical envelope of the immortal soul, should be kept to a minimum.

If we can judge from the nature of their scholarship, it is fair to assume that Philip Ariès and Lawrence Stone would have contended that a period of eighty years is too short a span of time for this study to be a true analysis of the mentality of any society. It can be confidently asserted that 1600 to 1680 was a period of eighty years immensely preoccupied with death. With the passing of the zenith of Puritanism, interest in death would not be closely linked with such broader societal issues as the general reform of religion and the establishment of a theocracy. There would have been no public support for the Puritan experiment, if English formal and informal culture had not been transfixed by images of death, visions of the millenium and calls for repentance.

Can the period between 1600 and 1680 be characterized as being distinctive in its attitudes to death? In assessing the degree of social change, one might cite the emergence of a new era of scepticism in the seventeenth-century relationship with God, the Devil, and the hereafter. Many documents of this period make frequent references to the threat of atheism. Possibly wide-spread free-thought was a very real factor in

early modern life. There may also have been a measure of intellectual projection. Certainly free thought must have been a tempting alternative to the inflexibility of conventional beliefs. The failure of Puritan fortunes may also be interpreted as a milestone in the history of social attitudes to death. We see a transition of Puritan thought, from a well-spring of social influence, to that of dissent. E.P. Thompson has written on this transformation of radical political ideology into a more permanent, but despairing non-conformity. Thompson says that the would-be saints of the hoped-for theocracy of the Commonwealth turned from their unsuccessful attempt to attain the crowns of this world to those of the next. This attitude would explain the patient and heroic struggle of Christian in Pilgrim's Progress to reach the eternal city. To gain access to his celestial reward, Christian must first die.²¹ As Bunyan wrote:²²

My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought His battles who now will be my rewarder. When the day that he must go hence was come, many accompanied him to the river-side, into which as he went he said, 'Death, where is thy sting?' And as he went down deeper, he said, 'Grave, where is thy victory?' So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.

Christopher Hill has also noted that while God appeared to be on the Puritan side during the Civil War, He certainly had decamped by the Restoration.²³ Rather than to question God's mysterious ways, the conclusion that the kingdom of God was a moral, rather than a political or social end, meant that death was enlisted to give meaning to the conflicts of life. At least, the pilgrimage to one's eternal reward was more certain

than politics. Death had always been the Puritan's ally. It was a metaphor for the necessity of salvation. With the failure of the Commonwealth and the inability to create God's kingdom on earth, Dissenters could only count on victory in the next life. This was to be a more solitary struggle than the governing of a kingdom.

The Puritan culture of life and death was a coherent intellectual system. It had an abhorrence of magic, human sin and perceived superstition. When one considers that the most important book of the century, outside of the Bible, was Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs', one appreciates that the seventeenth-century interior landscape was one where rival armies of heroes and villains, the elect and the lost clashed. Although death was probably the most important weapon in the Puritan arsenal and the dramatic moment when the spiritual and the physical worlds intersected, spiritual death always had precedence over physical death. It was the threat of spiritual death that gave Puritan ideas their greatest currency and were most completely inculcated into both Anglican and Dissenting thinking. Certainly the Puritan emphasis on death and repentance would reappear in full flower in both Methodism and Victorian Anglicanism.

The Puritan God of life and death strongly resembled his hard-bitten, often warrior Puritan creators. He had a great deal in common with the patriarchal Puritan fathers conducting household prayers twice a day, instructing their families, servants and neighbours in the way of righteousness. He had nothing to do with the wonder-working God of the magician-priest who had an enormous capacity to heal, to forgive and to renew.

The Puritan God, assisted by the angel of death, would live a long time and exists today in aspects of Christian fundamentalism.

If E.M. Forster is correct when he wrote that "the true history of the human race is the story of human affections,"²⁴ then part of all history is a meditation on death. Certainly a powerful, perhaps the overwhelming theme of intimate life in the seventeenth century was sickness and death. It was fortunate that Ralph Josselin, dying himself in 1683, had the vigour of his God, however vengeful, to sustain him. His immense diary records his care and grief for the ill and the dying around him. In considering the circumstances of death in the Stuart period, one is left with the visual image of Josselin plodding earnestly about his parish and his farm; worried over the death of a cow, the sickness of a child; consigning himself to God's mercy, but mindful of the many who died in those hands, capable of loving well; but reserving his bitterest tears for the death of the 'hopeful' child.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Sir Walter Raleigh, "His Pilgrimage", The Oxford Book of English Verse, ed. by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1939), p. 110.
- 2 See epitaph of John Evelyn published as an appendix in The Diary of John Evelyn.
- 3 Josselin, op. cit., p. 567.
- 4 The Autobiography of Mrs. Alice Thornton, ed. by Charles Jackson, (Edinburgh: the publication of the Surtee Society, 1875), p. 66.
- 5 Martindale, op. cit., p. 221.
- 6 Macfarlane, The Family Life of R. Josselin, p. 164 footnote.
- 7 Alan Macfarlane, "Review of Lawrence Stone's book The Family, Sex and Marriage in England: 1500-1800", History and Theory, XVIII, (1979), p. 108.
- 8 Paul C. Rosenblatt, Bitter, Bitter Tears: Nineteenth Century Diarists and Twentieth Century Grief Theories, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).
- 9 Ibid, p. 33.
- 10 Ibid, p. 39. The other modern commentator is Geoffrey Gorer, Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain, (London: The Cresset Press, 1965), p. 8.
- 11 Rosenblatt, op. cit., p. 37.
- 12 Ibid, p. 61.
- 13 David Vincent, "Love and Death and the Nineteenth-Century Working Class", The Western Family in History, (Athabasca University, 1983), p. 172. Reprinted from Social History, V (June, 1980), pp. 223-47.

- 14 Ibid, p. 172.
- 15 Max Hastings, Bomber Command, (New York: Dial Press, 1979), pp. 303-326.
- 16 Hastings, Ibid, p. 323.
- 17 Josselin, op. cit., pp. 113-114.
- 18 Muriel St. Clare Byrne, Elizabethan Life in Town and Country, (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1925), p. 196.
- 19 James Walvin, A Child's World: A Social History, 1800-1914, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982), Chapter II.
- 20 Pepys, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 133.
- 21 E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 32-36.
- 22 John Bunyan, op. cit., p. 317.
- 23 Christopher Hill, The Century of Revolution, p. 170.
- 24 Keith Thomas, "History and Anthropology", Past and Present, XXIV (April, 1963), p. 8. Actually Keith Thomas, according to his reference, is quoting Iris Origo who is repeating E.M. Forster. See Iris Origo in J.L. Clifford ed., Biography as an art..., (London, 1962), p. 213.

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