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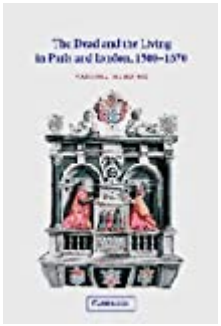

Vanessa Harding. *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500-1670.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. xvi + 343 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-81126-2.

Peter Marshall. *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. xi + 344 pp. $74.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-820773-3.

Clodagh Tait. *Death, Burial and Commemoration in Ireland, 1550-1650.* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. xi + 229 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-333-99741-3.

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Death, Dying, and the Dead in the Early Modern Era

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The gravestone of the Reverend William Lowth, rector of Petersfield in Hampshire, erected in 1732, read: "William Lowth ... being dead, desires to speak to his beloved parishioners and sweetly to exhort them constantly to attend public worship of God, frequently to receive Holy Communion and diligently to observe the good instructions of this place."[1] Such direct interaction between the dead and the living was rare in eighteenth-century England, but two centuries before such direct "contact" lay at the core of religious experience. These three excellent books shed new light on the nature of death, dying, and the treatment of the dead in early modern society.

Tempting as it is to use the old Londoners' grouse about buses (that none comes along for ages and then three come all at once), in fact there has been a healthy and stimulating literature on the history of the dead in early modern society for some time. The doyen of the field, Phillip Aries, claimed that death in modern society had become invisible, whereas for those in past times it was highly visible and a major preoccupation of people.[2] The place of the dead in a wider social perspective has been the subject of studies by Ralph Houlbrooke, David Cressy, and J. Whaley.[3] Claire Gittings's studies of funeral and mortuary processes and culture, and the imagery of death, focus attention on the economic as well as social aspects of death in the early modern era.[4] Nigel Llewellyn's study of *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in English Death Ritual, c. 1500-c. 1800* (1991) also argues that death and its rituals were highly symbolic with a visual language of its own. In short, the thanatology of the early modern period is a rich and flourishing scholarly field into which the seeds of these books fall.

All these books argue the case that death, dying, and the dead were central to people in the early modern era. Indeed this can hardly be doubted by any historian familiar with parish records that include references to, *inter alia*, the women who washed the bodies of the dead and wound them in sheets, to the ravages of plague and other epidemics that visited death on an unmanageable scale on villages and towns, and to the plethora of folk customs and practices that accompanied deaths. The claim of Cranmer's liturgy that "in the midst of life we are in death" which, Aries might claim, is today simply a poetic ornament, was a reality in Tudor and Stuart societies. Perhaps the immediacy of death made it less terrifying for people four hundred years ago, perhaps not, but death was undoubtedly more widely experienced than today. Certainly there is some evidence that contemporaries who experienced a close proximity to death made it less unwelcome; Edmund Spencer wrote "Sleep after toil, port after stormy seas, ease after war, death after life does greatly please." Those who did not feel so comfortable with death were not somehow right-thinking; Sir Francis Bacon wrote that "death is a friend of ours; and he that is not ready to entertain him is not at home." Death also played a far greater role in the inner lives of people in early modern society than it does today. Sin and salvation, redemption and the intercession for the souls in purgatory were constant preoccupations for men and women. Indeed, arguably, the whole foundation of Christianity rested on preparation for death and a clear understanding of the nature of the afterlife. Whereas for the modern mind life is not a dress rehearsal, for the early modern mind it was *exactly* that: a rehearsal for the one event that united rich and poor, men and women, paupers and princes in a single common experience.

That shared experience of death, and its consequences, is treated in different ways by these three books, but the tensions arising from death is paramount. Clodagh Tait, Lecturer in History at University College, Dublin surveys dying, death, and funeral practices in largely rural society Ireland, in which Protestants and Catholics coexisted, uneasily and sometimes violently. Vanessa Harding, Senior Lecturer at Birkbeck College, University of London, treats the dead in London and Paris as an aspect of urban history, in which order, government, and ritual interacted with corpses. The tension arose from the demand for space for which the living and the dead competed. Peter Marshall, Senior Lecturer in History at Warwick University, traces the theological tensions that arose from the decline of the doctrines of purgatory and intercession for the dead during and after the Reformation. Tait's book is the only one of the three that considers the process of dying in detail. Dr. Tait argues that to the modern mind, dying represents failure, whereas for many in medieval and early modern Ireland dying could be a triumph. But dying also had a moral ambivalence in early modern society. There was dying "well" and dying "badly." Dying "well" was to have learned the lessons of life. Leonardo da Vinci wrote that "as a well-spent day brings happy sleep, so life well used brings happy death." Irish clergy emphasized the importance of spiritual preparation for death and Jesuits were especially keen to win deathbed conversions from Protestants. Here too the cultural contrast with today is stark: the sudden heart attack or instant death is seen today, perhaps, as a blessing, but four hundred

years ago was felt to have denied people the opportunity to prepare for death. Dying, for both Irish Catholics and Protestants, was associated with the disposal of property: charitable bequests, testaments, and the caricature of the unscrupulous clergy persuading people to make deathbed endowments of the Church–the mortmain that was outlawed from Edward I's reign onward. In such decisions the dying prepared not only for their own departure but readied the world for their absence. They also made dying a communal concern, spreading out beyond the individual to his family, parish, and the wider community. "Bad" deaths included those from famine, war, and disease; the method of dying–and particularly the denial of preparation–was a sign of providential disapproval. Dying might be a cause of grief, but excessive grief was inappropriate. Joanna the Mad's peripatetic pilgrimage with the corpse of her husband, Phillip the Fair, was an example of such misplaced excess of grief; it was also implicitly a rejection of God's will. Harding argues that in both London and Paris dying was highly ritualized and that some social practices became "para-rituals." In Paris a deathbed was likely to be dominated by the clergy, and thus represented continuity with the past. In post-Reformation London deathbeds were far more likely to be secular with such matters as will and testaments treated as lay rather than ecclesiastical matters.

The presence of the corpse after death in the house in Irish tradition, possibly for three or four days, meant perhaps that the impact of the moment of death was lessened. But a plethora of death lore and practices kicked in: ringing bells, washing the body, laying out, embalming for the rich, biers, lychgates, wakes, death messengers who were said to visit the living, and the rest. The community joined in these rites with guilds often lending biers and cloths for the funeral. Funerals themselves in Ireland were profoundly doctrinal as well as social moments. The wealthy enjoyed heraldic funerals with sermons, feasts, processions, and even orders of precedence for mourners. Catholic funerals also entailed elaborate ceremonial, whereas Protestants preferred simplicity, even night funerals to avoid display. In 1641 the House of Commons expressed concern at elaborate funerals because Catholic funerals implied opposition to the government in Ireland. Riots occurred at some funerals, as in 1623 at the funeral of Lady Killeen, and in opposition to Catholics their priests were sometimes assaulted at funerals.

The dead, that is the remains of the dead, caused serious problems for the living. This is the theme of Harding's book. Comparing London and Paris in the century and three quarters that straddles the Reformation, Dr. Harding uses the treatment of the dead to develop new ideas of the management of space in the early modern town. The sheer scale of the problem presented by the dead is staggering: London buried between three and seven thousand a year, even eleven thousand in a time of plague; whereas Paris, a third larger than London, buried between seventeen and twenty thousand a year. As in Ireland, food shortages, weather, and disease were as much factors in mortality in London and Paris. But there were subtle differences between the two cities. Paris had large hospitals to which the ailing and dying often went, thereby removing the weight of death from many suburbs–in terms of both numbers and experience. In contrast, London's hundred or more parishes, each with its own graveyard, brought the treatment of the dead to more officials and parishioners than in Paris, which had forty-five parishes and fewer, larger, graveyards. Thus the experience of death in London was closer to each inhabitant than perhaps it was in Paris. The regulation of the dead and their graves was also complex. In London, churchyards filled quickly, and despite reuse, parishes sought additional burial grounds, though people had strong preferences for traditional burial sites, close to their ancestors and hallowed for generations by Catholics as much as by Protestants after the Reformation. To deal with demand, parishioners developed fees to try to use market forces to regulate it. Double fees were exacted for graves of particular location, for night burials, and for those without the right of residence in the parish. For those who could not afford such fees, grave pits and unmarked graves that were subject to multiple occupancy was the norm. Paris tried to relieve the pressure with compulsory purchase of burial grounds and charnel houses that enabled bones to be cleared from the graves. Yet in both cities the demand for space created tension between the living and the dead. Graveyards had also to be used for secular purposes: markets, assembly places, thoroughfares, and even places of work–not least the stationers' trade in St. Paul's churchyard in London. In both cities overflow graveyards were unpopular but were quickly adopted by religious dissenters: Quakers and nonconformists in London and Huguenots in Paris. Otherwise they were to be resorted to only in time of epidemic and were associated with poverty, overcrowding, illness, and negligent sextons. The breakdown of the use of traditional burial places had an unsettling effect.

Harding shows that funerals were also a point at which the dead connected to the economy of the living. In Paris the *juves crierurs* exercised control of the valuable

funeral trade in accoutrements and in London also funerals were important moments of consumption and profit. There were "concentric circles of participation" in funerals, from the family to the suppliers of services, the recipients of charity, the clergy, choirs, and even spectators in the cases of large civic and royal funerals. In Paris such participation in funerals implied an explicit reciprocity which demanded intercession and prayers for the dead. Such moments had a unifying effect on the cities, using grief as a mean of social catharsis for other tensions. Harding concludes that the living and the dead co-existed since they shared space, and this created instability. The solutions to the problems created by congestion emphasized the role of civic leaders and created a sense of order in sometimes unstable urban environments. Despite the Reformation, funerals in London had a unifying effect, healing social tensions perhaps because they were closer to the experience of the individual parishioner. But in Paris, where death was removed from peoples' experience, there were more sectarian conflicts, with frequent anti-Huguenot violence and tension.

As Tait makes clear in Ireland, and Harding in London and Paris, death confirmed the social hierarchy by the taxonomy of space. Interior burials in churches, vaults, chapels, and tombs were guarantees for the rich of the permanence of a burial site, and one that was regarded as closer to God. Just as in 1627 the Dean and Chapter of Dublin restricted those entitled to burial in St Patrick's Cathedral, so in London and Paris vestrymen and clergy regulated such privileges. Catholic Paris retained chantries and masses for the dead which eroded the public space available for burial in favor of exclusive and excluding burial space. In post-Reformation London, tombs and vaults were still used, and in both cities their inscriptions and imagery offered multimedia instruction in the duty of the living for the dead. Funeral sermons and prayers also endorsed the social hierarchy as well as such duties. In Ireland burial practices suggested ambivalence to the affective family: women dying in childbirth were often buried with their father's rather than their husband's family. But other types of communities were also suggested: Catholic clergy were often buried together and, despite the canons, the executed and the excommunicated were rarely denied burial rites. Some newly rich families invented vaults and chantries to create the illusion of family longevity.[5] Ireland also had a tradition of disinterment, to permit couples to be buried together, to rebury the dead in battle, and to separate Catholics and Protestants. Religious orders sometimes promoted reburial to ensure endowments were protected.

Monuments in Ireland, claims Tait, had a number of significances. Elaborate decoration might indicate wealth and status; it also suggested Catholicism or Protestantism. Style might suggest geography, since Ulster and Connaught contained fewer elaborately decorated tombs. Occasionally the use of Latin might obscure the meaning of inscriptions, especially by Catholics, and in time some monuments gained folk powers such as the capacity to heal. Inscriptions might be used to defend the actions of the deceased, and in the case of women they often endorsed the virtues expected of wives, widows and mothers. Above all, they spoke to the living about death. They often contained indications that men and women should resign themselves to a predetermined span of life and to the need to prepare for death. Catholic monuments ensured that cautionary tales about purgatory and the need for the living to redeem the dead with masses, charity, and prayer were widely known, whereas Protestant inscriptions emphasized faith in Christ and sinlessness as a means of entering Heaven. Tait's central argument, that in Plantation Ireland death was highly symbolic and that its rituals created a powerful "landscape of the dead," finds its strongest illustration in the study of monumental inscriptions.

Dying and death were powerful features in early modern society, but they did not contain the rich theological complexities of the nature of beliefs about the dead that are apparent in Peter Marshall's book. The central issue of Marshall's book is "the death of purgatory" and the impact of the Reformation on those practices that arose from it. Marshall argues that the fate of the dead was the "hub" of religion in pre-Reformation England. The living saw themselves as soon to join the dead and therefore relieving the suffering of those in purgatory was of immediate importance. Purgatory was the object of considerable thought and study; there was a whole topography that separated, for example, the limbo reserved for unbaptized children from those souls who had died before the incarnation of Christ. Purgatory was brought close to the living by the whole range of funeral practices and the membrane between the living and the souls in purgatory was emphasized by lore, like that of the return of unquiet souls on All Souls' Eve. All of this pressed a weight down on the living: a duty to remember the dead and to relieve them. Masses, anniversaries, and "obits" (services to remember the dead) were used by the clergy to inculcate a fear of the unremembered dead. But of greatest historical importance were indulgences, by which the Church responded to the consumer demand that it had

created. A question that arises from Marshall's study is whether one of the causes of the Reformation was the over-burdensome weight of the obligations to the dead. Certainly Marshall argues that intellectually the dependence of the pre-Reformed Church on purgatory made it vulnerable to demands for reform.

It was, argues Marshall, a coincidence that an emerging evangelical critique of purgatory and intercession emerged at the same time as the Henrican reform agenda. Luther may not have disavowed purgatory (though he did attack indulgences) but Zwingli did. In England, Henry VIII's juvenile theology might have endorsed purgatory, but Simon Fish's attack on the concept emphasized its clericalism, and Anne Boleyn gave a copy of Fish's work to the King. The most developed attack on purgatory came from John Frith, who argued that it was not biblical, served the clergy's corrupt financial interests, and robbed the poor of the true Christ. There were troubling questions that reforming clergy asked: where was purgatory? and why did the pope not choose to release all the suffering souls? The Henrican reforms of the Church in England retained prayers for the dead but restrained sermons on purgatory. In secular circles Cromwell was the most determined enemy of purgatory, proposing its abolition to Parliament and in 1534 outlawing papal indulgences. But for the remainder of Henry VIII's reign there was an ambivalence toward purgatory; the Ten Articles retained prayers for the dead but the language of purgatory became increasingly anachronistic and arcane. If, as Bishop Latimer held, the monasteries were standard-bearers for indulgences and intercession, their dissolution had doctrinal as well as economic consequences. The sale of the monasteries meant that bodies were dispersed and in some cases reburied, and by 1545 the Chantries Act outlawed masses for the souls of the dead.

Edward VI's full-blooded Protestant Reformation attacked purgatory in a more direct way: four thousand chantries were dissolved, and bede-roll and obits were abolished. Only Bishop Gardiner fought a rear-guard action. Purgatory and intercession disappeared very quickly with few protests. A. G. Dickens argued that this was a consequence of the eradication of chantries, and Christopher Haig claimed that the idea was already in decline; in contrast, Marshall argues that there was local resistance to, and subversion of, the eradication of purgatory, especially in Sussex and Essex. Nevertheless, while Cranmer's 1549 prayerbook retained traces of intercession, by 1552 funeral Eucharists were abolished. During Mary's reign, Marshall argues, there was only a half-hearted attempt at a restoration of purgatory, and probably it was only revived as a means of flushing out those who opposed it as a way to identify the enemies of Catholicism. Under Elizabeth, the bishops and clergy "hunted purgatory to extinction" (p. 124). Grindall at York stamped out both purgatory and the customs connected with it, such as ringing church bells for the dead, though even after its formal abolition in 1571 this remained the last vestige of purgatory. James I might have dismissed purgatory as not worth discussing but in such places as Lancashire (which Marshall describes as "the wild west" of Tudor and Stuart Protestantism) it remained popular in isolated pockets.

Elizabethan and Jacobean divines struggled to find a replacement for purgatory, but they found it in the first-century practice of prayer for the dead, not as intercession but as a way of strengthening the hope of the living for the resurrection and as charity to the memory of the dead. Such a replacement enabled the Puritans to sustain the concept of the "community of the Godly" within a wider Protestant framework. There remained, of course, some ambiguities. Whitgift could argue that the prayerbook's service for the burial of the dead prayed for both the living and the dead to enter heaven, and funeral sermons might be adapted to the teaching of doctrine; but ringing bells and eating funeral dole remained of questionable doctrine, the latter coming close to the idea of medieval soul-cakes. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the shift of the theological "hot spot" to the Calvinist issue of predestination and election suggested that prayers for the dead were irrelevant–souls predestined to enter heaven needed no intercession from the living. For Arminians, too, intercession was unimportant since, if good works determined salvation, no prayer by the living could influence the salvation of the dead. But such debates, Marshall argues, left a vacuum in the interaction between the living and the dead and polarized the topography of the afterlife into heaven and hell. Some of this was doctrinal "tidying up": consequently baptism could be administered by the laity in extreme circumstances and the unbaptized could enter heaven. Ghosts also had to be resolved as Protestant images of the dead, rather than the unquiet souls of those in purgatory. But these were not doctrinal replacements for purgatory. The Protestant replacement for purgatory was the elevation of the commemoration of the dead. The living had a duty to remember the dead. This enabled an element of syncretism to absorb established funeral and mortuary formulae. Epitaphs could still urge the living to recall the dead, the dying could still endow charities in their names,

and the commemorative culture and economy of funerals could remain.

All three books are valuable additions to the literature on early modern death and dying. Tait provides a survey for the undergraduate and specialist reader alike of death in a rural and doctrinally divided society and, like Harding, is able to contrast Catholic and Protestant practices. Tait offers a view of death that is immersed in Irish lore and folk tradition at a time when metropolitan influences were still relatively weak. It is a valuable addition to the study of early modern Ireland, also, a period still dominated by studies of political history. Harding's book is as much a study of urban history and the tensions of urban life in London and Paris in the period as one of death. Ideas of urban government and good order and those features of urban life that contributed to tension and unity are the focus of her monograph. The dead, for Harding, could destabilize the living in a literal and spatial sense as much as they could emotionally and religiously. Of the three books, Marshall's is the most significant in terms of the way in which historians view the dead and religious attitudes to death in the past. Marshall's book supports the idea of the "long Reformation" which lasted for decades after the breach with Rome. The displacement of purgatory led to a doctrinal vacuum which had to be filled and this in turn led to religious pluralism as people found different doctrines of the dead. For Marshall, the idea of the dead was both a motor and a brake on the progress of the Reformation; purgatory had placed great strains on society, but people were reluctant to leave behind practices that had connected them to the dead for generations. John Fletcher in 1647 wrote in *The Custom of the Country* that "death hath so many doors to let out life," and this idea retained its potency for the living well after the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Marshall's book is the study of a central theme of peoples' lives in medieval England and how they coped with its disappearance. This elevates his book in importance and places it in the category of one of the most important books in religious history to have been written in the last two decades. It will be an indispensable book for students of the Reformation and for the religious life of England after the Reformation.

Notes

[1]. F. Bussby, *Winchester Cathedral, 1079-1979* (Ringwood, 1987), p. 176. For more about Lowth, see W. Gibson, " 'A Happy Fertile Soil which bringeth forth Abundantly': The Diocese of Winchester, 1689-1800," in *The National Church in Local Perspective: The Church of England and the Regions, 1660-1800*, ed. J. Gregory and J. Chamberlain (Boydell & Brewer, 2002).

[2]. *The Hour of Our Death* (1979); *Western Attitudes towards Death from the Middle Ages to the Present* (1976); and *Images of Man and Death* (1985).

[3]. Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1450-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion and Life Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and J. Whaley, ed., *The Mirror of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981).

[4]. *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); and Gittings and P. Jupp, eds., *Death in England: An Illustrated History* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

[5]. For which also see W. Gibson, " 'Withered Branches and Weighty Symbols': Surname Substitution in England, 1660-1880," *The British Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies* 15 (1992).

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