

HISTORIES OF DEATH SYMPOSIUM ABSTRACTS

KEYNOTES

Keynote 1: ILONA PAJARI & KAARINA KOSKI

Histories of Death in Finland

This interview with Ilona Pajari and Kaarina Koski will explore changes, continuities, and exceptions in death beliefs and practices over time in Finland. Drawing on Historical and Folklore studies Pajari and Koski will discuss Finnish ideas about the afterlife and customs of burial and mourning. Pajari and Koski are pioneers of Death Studies in Finland, and head the Finnish Death Studies Association and the academic journal *Thanatos*. They will draw on their experience to situate the development of the field in Finland. Furthermore, the interview will raise questions about the limits and possibilities – the histories and futures – of Death Studies.

Keynote 2: JULIE-MARIE STRANGE

Pet Cemetery: Love, Memory and Grieving for the Animal Dead, 1880-1970

From the 1880s, commercial pet cemeteries opened across the western world. For decades, the popular press in the UK reported on these spaces with a mix of curiosity and derision, associating them overwhelmingly with children, single women and mawkish or inappropriate emotion. This paper takes the sentimentality of the pet cemetery seriously. It considers how the commercial pet cemetery, first, created a 'space for feeling' relating to animal bereavement and, secondly, forged a community of the animal bereaved. In exploring the creation of this community, it also considers who - human and non-human - was excluded and the consequences of such exclusions for love, memory and grief.

Keynote 3: ERIN MILLIONS

When Patients Go Missing: Indigenous Tuberculosis Patients and Death Colonialism in Manitoba, 1940s–1970s

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Final Report pointed to an epidemic of missing First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students who never returned home from government-funded and church-run Indian residential schools. While research and

reconciliation in relation to residential schools in Canada is on-going, similar outcomes for Indigenous men, women, and children who were sent to government-run 'Indian' hospitals and sanatoriums for tuberculosis treatment have gone unrecognized. Like the residential school children who never came home, many Indigenous tuberculosis patients never returned from Manitoba tuberculosis hospitals. Lack of communication and inadequate administration of death and burial in the hospitals meant that the patients' families were not informed of the death at all or given only minimal information. These practices of death colonialism resulted in unresolved grief in Indigenous communities and contributed to a legacy of mistrust in the health care system. Today, patients' descendants continue to search for their loved ones' final resting places. Their efforts are obstructed by colonial archival barriers to accessing historical health records and general lack of knowledge about death and burial at the tuberculosis hospitals.

PANELS

PANEL 1: Collective Commemoration

ANDREW G. NEWBY (Tampere Institute for Advanced Social Research, Finland)

Mass Death and Commemorative Culture: The “Great Famines” of Ireland and Finland Compared

The “Great Famines” of Ireland (c. 1845-51) and Finland (1860s) rank among the worst human catastrophes in modern history [Ó Gráda, 2009]. There are considerable contrasts in the ways in which these famines have been remembered, not only in terms of national historiographies but also in more general commemorative terms. This stems partly from the different constitutional positions of the two countries in the nineteenth century. In the Irish case, the “Great Hunger” was blamed on British misrule and became “a founding myth of Irish nationalism” [Pupavac, 2014]. The Finns, with internal political and fiscal autonomy, found less reason to incorporate the 1860s “Great Hunger Years” into the national narrative, meaning that some Irish commentators have wondered at the Finns apparent “amnesia” over this period of their history [Daly, 1997].

In global terms, it has been noted that “official memorials to the victims of famine are... remarkably rare” [de Waal, 2018]. It is the recent intense memorialization in Ireland which might be considered exceptional, then, rather than Finland (which lacks an official or national memorial to the 1860s). The many imposing memorials to the Great Famine which can be found in contemporary Ireland (and, indeed, among the global Irish diaspora), however, tend to date from the 1990s, and can mask the fact that the Irish, too, have been charged with forgetting the tens of thousands of their unknown famine dead. On a local level, my fieldwork

suggests that memorialization in Finland – especially in areas that suffered the highest mortality in the 1860s – matched Ireland until the 1990s. This paper will analyze the shifting patterns of commemoration in both countries, in a long-run perspective but also with particular reference to centennial and sesquicentennial commemoration and memorialization.

ANNA HUHTALA (University of Tampere, Finland)

An Entire Nation in Mourning: Public Perception of Violent and Accidental death in Finland in the 1920s and 1930s

Meaningless death is one of the biggest threats to meaningful life. Therefore, how death is handled publicly and how a community manages to fortify its own values are important matters. I argue that sudden, unexpected death poses a particularly great threat. This research concentrates on public handling of violent and accidental death during 1920s and 1930s in Finland by using Finnish newspapers and quite seldom-studied broadside ballads as the primary source. The aim is to investigate how newspapers with different political backgrounds and broadside ballads depicted sudden deaths during that divided period of time when unemployment and criminality figures were high in Finland, mainly the result of Prohibition, the division of political groups, the anti- democratic movement and the global depression. I analyze four cases from that time. By using content analysis, I study what themes and strategies different media used to offer consolation for those unexpected deaths? How did those transform a sudden death into a good, meaningful death and promote belief in the future of the society? I draw on previous historical research on death and theories of media-anthropology. The concepts of good death and imagined communities in addition to the ritualization of death by the media are central aspects of this research. Studies on mourning and emotion also offers tools for the analysis.

KAREN REMMLER (Mount Holyoke College, USA)

The Afterlives of Refugee Dead: What Remains?

Drawing from a larger project that examines the relationship between the actual forensic and legal treatment of refugee dead and their political function and cultural representation through digital media, my paper will argue that the remains of refugee dead carry not just evidentiary weight as subjects of systemic violence, but also symbolic value as a measure of the ability of cultures to mourn not only their own dead, but also those of “foreigners.” Specifically, I will analyze the incorporation of the remains of refugees who have perished while attempting to reach Europe across the Mediterranean Sea in proper burials performed by three different entities: 1) local citizens in the spaces in which the remains are recovered, such as Lampedusa, 2) virtual memorialization through organizations that monitor the plight of refugees, and 3) through the actions of the politically charged artist collective, the Center for Political Beauty.

I place these actions in stark contrast to the juridical and bureaucratic logic to which refugees are subjected when alive. Given the current attention to the plight of these refugees I will explore how the remains are processed and honored, and how this process mirrors or complements artistic and visual renditions, not only of the dead as such, but also of the rituals associated with mourning and proper burial.

PANEL 2: The Teachings of Death

CHIPAMONG CHOWDHURY (Theravada Buddhist Monk/ Chautauqua Institution, USA)

The Account of the Buddha's Death

Throughout its long history, death has been crucial in the formation, institutionalization and expansion of Buddhism in India. The biography of the Buddha describes that his death is not only the center of Buddhist reflection, meditation and social practice but also a subject of public discourse and commodity. For the Buddha, death is the “the greatest of all teachers”. Indeed the Buddha was very successful in explaining death. The Buddha's death is surrounded by colorful cremation ceremonies, funeral festivities, mourning events, relics veneration and construction of commemorative monuments (*stūpa*), all of which deserve to be explore from historical contexts. These stories or histories of the Buddha's funeral events were hugely influenced on the cremation and funeral of the Buddhist monks in South and Southeast Asia. The Buddha's narrative also reveals that the physical death of the Buddha led to conflicts and fights among Buddhist kings as mentioned in *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* –the most comprehensive account of Buddha's death. Thus, death-narrative of the Buddha has been central to imagination, debate, political engagement and poetic expression in Indian Buddhist literary history. Based on the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* and South Asian Buddhist vernacular sources, in this paper I recount the histories of the Buddha's death, his cremation, and funeral events.

JUNFU WONG (University of Cambridge, UK)

Preparing the Spirituality for Death: Lay Reinterpretation of Daoist Cosmological Death in Premodern China

Chinese religious scriptures of the premodern period presented fruitful accounts about the beliefs and burials of death. Daoist texts particularly perceived death as an opportunity to change bodily form rather than a cessation of being. During the fifth and sixth centuries, practitioners and parishioners believed that through relentless efforts of practicing, they could escape from their corporeal form by achieving a transcendental state that could eventually lead them to an everlasting condition. Such a promise became the foundation of the death cognition formed by lay people for preparing and practicing dying. Such a death cognition

further built upon an eschatological ideology that became extremely prevalent among lay societies around the fifth and sixth centuries. Notably, this ideology suggested that a forthcoming fatal calamity shall kill all sentient beings. Living under this sense of anxiety but knowing that they still had the chance to become everlasting beings, lay people prepared their final death through daily ascetic practices. Furthermore, they started to arrange a set of scriptures coherently to generate their idea of afterlife. By this autonomous process, lay people tried to surmount the fear of death through envisioning the scene of afterlife. Following these premises, this paper attempts to explore the preparation and application of death among lay people. It elaborates the idea of death preserved across a range of religious scriptures that gives lay people practical suggestions for confronting death. Furthermore, this paper studies the death cognition of lay people that presented some different concerns.

AGITA MISĀNE (Riga Stradiņš University, Latvia)

Perception of Death and Dying in Latvian Traditional Culture and Mythology

This paper will discuss how death and dying is perceived in Latvian traditional (premodern) culture. What we know about the topic can be deduced from folklore sources and some very limited written medieval and early modern accounts. These suggest that death was understood as an event extended in time and comprising features of physical and social death. Generally, individuals started to attain the qualities of being dead some time before their physical deaths. This happened, evidently, when he or she was confined to bed due to illness. At some point, ritual activities were conducted to secure “good”, i.e. painless and peaceful physical death. After the life functions of the body had ceased, another set of rituals followed to secure a safe passage of the deceased into the otherworld. The sources conflict as to the location of the otherworld – some point to its location in the West while other folklore material indicate simply a location in some proximity to individual’s home. The attainment of the death qualities also seems to be gradual. In the Autumn, between Michaelmas and Winter solstice revenants (veļi, sometimes also translated as shades), the deceased had capacity of seasonal returning and visiting their respective families and partaking in “revenants feast”(veļu mielasts) when tables were laid for them, usually in barns. The paper will also discuss Pre-Christian and Christian elements in the perception of death in the Latvian culture.

KARIN DIRKE, ANNIKA BERG & ANDREAS HELLERSTEDT (Stockholm University, Sweden)

Teaching Death: Constructing a Research-based Course on the Intellectual History of Death

This presentation will discuss challenges, benefits, and possibilities in the construction and teaching of The History of Ideas of Death, a course given at Stockholm University beginning

in 2019. The course is taught within the discipline of the History of Science and Ideas, and it discusses philosophical, religious, scientific, and everyday conceptions of death, in their social and historical context. We study historical sources which confront the theme of death directly, but also cultural practices which uncover implicit ideas and attitudes. We provide a long-term historical perspective, stretching from the Classical and medieval art of dying all the way into modern fears of nuclear extinction. Subthemes handled along the way include changing medical theories of the dead body, changing views on acceptable ways of using the bodies of the dead for the benefit of the living, and social taboos surrounding death and human and animal carcasses.

We will argue that historians of ideas provide a distinctive approach to the study of death both in terms of subject matter and in terms of methods and perspectives. Furthermore, focusing on this existential subject may help us develop elements of our own methodology. Finally, we will argue that a thematically organized course, applying a long-term perspective and considering the complex interaction between theory and practice, can inspire new directions of research based on the approach formulated in the course.

PANEL 3: Politics & Change

ANASTASIA PAPUSHINA (Central European University, Hungary)

A Failed Experiment: Reinventing Death and Mourning in 1920s' Soviet Russia

Following 1917, the Bolsheviks experimented with all spheres of life, death included. Secularization, legislative changes, propaganda of cremation and making a pantheon of Soviet heroes were all aspects of a massive project aimed at creating "a new death for a new man." Despite the strong governmental backing, innovations in the sphere of death could hardly substitute for older traditions; specifically, the traditional distribution of gender roles and class-based hierarchies of burials persisted throughout the whole Soviet century against the background of the spirit of innovation.

This paper presentation focuses on the history of Soviet death during the crucial decade of the 1920s when newer and older norms and practices clashed and coexisted. The study covers some of the traditions and innovations in the sphere of death, paying special attention to social factors (i.e. class and gender position) influencing the ways to die and mourn, and the problem of equality/inequality of access to the "good death." Concluding remarks contain some observations about the emotional aspects of the Soviet mourning. Based on both official sources and ego documents narrating death, burials, and mourning in the 1920s, the study allows us to better understand the roots of the serious and traditional attitude towards death and commemoration that still predominates in post-Soviet Russia against the worldwide trend towards "death positivity."

SAMIRA SARAMO (John Morton Center, University of Turku, Finland)

Finnish Immigrants and the Politics of Death in Early Twentieth Century

In early twentieth-century North America, dangerous working conditions and clashes between workers and bosses claimed many Finnish immigrant lives. Drawing on the Finnish socialist press and immigrants' life writing narratives, this presentation analyzes the ways the Finnish North American Left equated capitalism with death on rhetorical and everyday ways. The presentation will take a close look at how the Italian Hall Tragedy (1913), the Hollinger Mine Disaster (1928), and the deaths of union organizers Viljo Rosvall and Janne Voutilainen (1929) were mourned and commemorated, paying particular attention to uses of emotion. An examination of how these deaths have been written about allows us to see how Finnish immigrants articulated desired socialist futures, shaped by notions of the "natural" life cycle, gender, ethnicity, class, and morality.

EMILY COLLINS (NHS Oxford Deanery, UK) & DAVID HARRAP (Queen Mary University of London, UK)

Modern 'Arts of Dying': Can Modern Palliative Care learn from Medieval Death Literature?

Modern palliative care is holistic in its approach, aiming to assuage both physical and emotional pain of the dying. Dame Cicely Saunders, founder of the modern hospice movement, introduced the concept of 'total pain', which recognizes the contributions of emotional and spiritual distress to a patient's overall experience of pain. However, in modern practice, there is no widely accepted schema for describing or interpreting the emotional experiences of the dying. Such a schema is much to be desired from the point of view of a) enabling practitioners to interpret and appropriately respond to patient distress and b) to give patients a set of referent points by which they may interpret their own experience. This paper makes no claim to have invented one but rather, by bringing together the perspectives of both a medical practitioner and a historian, aims to take the first, tentative steps towards developing one. This paper discusses a small number of examples from the vast medieval and early-modern literature of *artes moriendi* (arts of dying) and their descriptions of deathbed experience and asks whether they might speak to the imperatives of modern palliative care.

PANEL 4: Families in Mourning

MARY MCDONALD-RISSANEN (Independent Scholar/JMC Council, Finland)

Narratives on Women's Death in 20th Century Women's Diaries, Obituaries and Folk Songs

Based on my study of 20th century women's diaries "rural women at the turn of the century silently witnessed their own and their neighbours' struggles in coming to terms with the inevitability of death's intervention. The farm animals were important for the welfare of the farm, but anticipation of their birth and the sadness of their death is charged with emotion seldom recorded when a similar fate occurs among humans" (*In the Interval of the Wave: Prince Edward Island Women's Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Life Writing*, 92).

G. Thomas Couser, in "The Obituary of a Face: Lucy Grealy, Death Writing and Posthumous Harm in Autobiography" claims that the obituary is the most widely disseminated life writing genre and thus the one most widely consumed by the public. Here I will juxtapose how women represented themselves and their lives in their diaries with how they were written up in their obituaries. Reading women's self-representation with her public representation gives evidence of Couser's contention that as the obituary memorializes, it also marginalizes its subject.

Numerous songs from the same period poetically feature women's encounters with love and their eventual death in beautiful seaside settings. In "Crooked Ribs, Modern Martyrs and Dull Days" I examine these representations of women, death, and nature and how "the natural landscapes of the shore, the outer limits of society, figure strongly as a place of resolution for women once they have left the security of home" (*Regenerations: Canadian Women's Writing*, 168).

ANN-MARIE FOSTER (Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland)

The Ephemera of the Dead: Family Commemoration Made Public

This paper explores how families who had lost a loved one in war or disaster sought to shape the public memory of the dead through small pieces of printed paper, in Britain, in the first four decades of the twentieth century. When someone died in war or in an industrial disaster, families did not have control over the bodies of the dead; during wartime the government laid claim to soldier corpses and, after a disaster, officials organized the burial of the dead. Given this inability to hold a family funeral, people instead sought to control the public memory of the deceased in other meaningful ways. They primarily did so through the control and dissemination of memorial ephemera, such as photographs, memorial cards, notices in

newspapers, and the publication of memorial pamphlets. Studying this material illuminates the family dynamics of memorialization. Who commissioned these pieces of printed ephemera varied; sweethearts gave photographs of the deceased to the press, circumnavigating the traditional role of the parent or wife, and siblings commissioned specially created memorial books. Through these ephemeral items, the ways in which families attempted to influence cultural remembrance was embedded in everyday mourning practices. This paper argues that these low-level cultural outputs were a direct response to the lack of agency the families felt over the ownership of the corpse, and that this influenced their need to control the public memory of the deceased. Through memorial ephemera family commemoration was made public.

KATHERINE PARKIN (Monmouth University, USA)

“Joy Turned to Sorrow”: Stillborns in Howard County, Indiana, 1890–1940

This paper will analyze married heterosexual couples in Howard County, Indiana, between 1890–1940 who marked the unexpected loss of full-term infants born dead with newspaper announcements, burials with engraved headstones, and remembrances that extended to the end of their lives. Men and women who had stillborn children publicly shared their heartache with their community. Most burials of stillborns in Howard County do not appear to have been in babylands; families mourned and buried remains in family plots. Over time the naming patterns for stillborns moved from identifiers like “baby girl” to given names, including sometimes naming stillborn sons for their fathers. While some cemeteries in the United States appear to have excluded stillborn infants, informed perhaps by a Catholic denial of a burial on church grounds to those who had not been baptized, this ideology had little bearing in a part of Indiana dominated by white Protestants. Increasingly in the 1930s there were more accounts of stillborns being born in hospitals in larger cities, which did not necessarily isolate grieving families and may have, in fact, allowed them to publicly assert that by embracing modernity and science that they had done everything in their power to avoid the dreaded outcome. Parents in Howard County, Indiana, understood stillborn infants as part of their family and mourned them infant to the end of their own lives.

MAGGIE MAYHEM (Activist/Doula/Independent Scholar, USA)

My First *memento mori*: Death Imagery on Baby and Infant Products

There is a saying among the Kalenjin people of Kenya claiming that “when a woman is pregnant, her grave is open.” Fear of maternal, fetal, and infant demise have cultivated significant taboos and diverse cultural practices to fend off death and promote healthy pregnancies, positive birth outcomes, and healthy infant development. Maternal and infant mortality are serious and devastating issues so it comes as no surprise that many (but certainly

not all) cultures have strong prohibitions about mixing pregnancy and/or infancy with death rituals or imagery believing it may be hazardous to encounter death at a time when life is emerging. As medical science advances reducing the maternal and infant mortality rates, death imagery is becoming increasingly common on baby goods. Clothing, toys, and decorations depicting macabre images are increasingly prevalent in both mainstream mass production as well as independent handcrafts. This presentation will examine the significance of this shift and the growing popularity of death iconography in baby goods as a mark of rebellion, counter culture affiliation, consumerism, and as a form of engagement with the thin line between life and death.

PANEL 5: “Good death” & The Making of the Self

JACQUELINE HOLLER (University of Northern British Columbia, Canada)

Sorrow, Rage, and Laughter: The Emotions of Death and Dying in Early Colonial New Spain

A mother curses God for the death of her child. A nun falls into despair at the suicide of a friend. A sailor scandalizes shipmates with a blasphemous response to a death at sea. As these anecdotes suggest, death was no stranger in early colonial New Spain. Aside from the massive toll taken by successive waves of epidemic disease throughout the sixteenth century, ocean crossings, childbirth, childhood, illness, and violence claimed the lives of many colonial subjects.

Not surprisingly, given both the ubiquity of death and the cultural influence of the Catholic church, the idea of a “good death” served as a hegemonic ideal in the colony. Scholars such as Antonio Rubial and Antonio García-Abásolo have documented the persistence of this ideal in sermons, wills, and many other sources, particularly those associated with the elite. But what of the distance between ideal and reality, between elite and plebeian cultures, between the “good death” of an individual and the sorrow of those left behind? Using descriptive sources, principally documents drawn from the archives of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, this paper studies death through the lens of emotion, in particular the emotions of those present at death. The paper asks: *how did the emotions that accompanied bereavement in early colonial New Spain both reflect and contest the ideals associated with ars moriendi? Which emotions and behaviours were licit for the grieving, and which illicit?* Through assessing the emotions that surrounded death, it is hoped, we may access both the cultural power and the limitations of “the good death.”

VERA LIND (Northern Illinois University, USA)

Beautiful Suicides: How Early Modern Suicides Attempted to Imitate a Good Death

It might seem counterintuitive to investigate attitudes concerning the beauty of the dead body and rituals of dying by studying early modern suicides, since many people judged these acts as a sin and crime; however, archival evidence from Germany shows that distinct ideas on the physical presentation of bodies, and awareness of the *ars moriendi*, the rituals of dying, were present in suicide cases. Regardless of their method, often people who committed suicide tried to minimize the physical damage to their bodies. Some tried to shoot themselves without destroying their face, and hoped to have their body found as soon as possible. Others shaved and got a haircut before taking their own life, or neatly folded their clothing before jumping into water to drown themselves. Early modern suicides also imitated the social and religious rituals associated with a “good” death. Many said their goodbyes and gave away prized possessions, had a last meal or drink, and prayed. These examples tell us about early modern ideas concerning death and suicide, as well as the origin of modern attitudes surrounding the physical reality of death. The historical examples are connected with cultural ideas regarding the five senses. Decay, the smell of rotting flesh, deformed bodies, etc. are then, as now, regarded as an assault on the sense of smell, vision, and touch. They also demonstrate religious ideas of physical resurrection and magical beliefs. Many wished to be judged as a neat, orderly person who still preserve Christian dignity, despite the suicide. The attempt to transform suicide into a “good” death, despite knowing otherwise, was also an act of defiance. Today the same concerns are still with us. The physicality of death is hidden. There is still a distinct definition of a “good” death. Artists picturing dead bodies and faces, especially in photography, still demonstrate the search for aesthetics in death.

IMMANUEL MIFSUD (University of Malta, Malta)

“A Modest Requiem for Leli”: Performing the Thoughts of a Dying Man

In 2016 I was commissioned to write a poem about death to be presented during an evening event marking All Souls Day. I wrote a 260 hendecasyllabic lines poem which was eventually transformed into a fully fletched Requiem for chamber orchestra, accompanied by six actors, life-size puppets and visual projections. The poem verbalizes the very last thoughts of a dying man which are composed of images picked from his childhood and the memories of his first amorous intrigues, mingled with moments of tragic lucidity when he realizes that he is actually on his death bed. In the dying man’s confused state of mind, death becomes a short trip by train and boat to the ‘other side’ where his long departed loved ones are waiting eagerly for his coming.

In this presentation, I shall be exposing and discussing the sources which informed the poem. Among these sources, I shall discuss real-life experiences of mourners and how these inspired the thoughts ascribed to the dying man in the poem. Another source which I shall refer to is Arnold Böcklin's series of paintings *Die Toteninsel*, to which the concluding part of the poem makes explicit reference. I shall also draw attention to folk beliefs and popular games which are related to the theme of death and to which there are references throughout the work. I will show excerpts from the Requiem (presented in Maltese with English subtitles).

PANEL 6: Spaces of Death

POVILAS DIKAVICIUS (Central European University, Hungary)

Somber Celebrations: Multifaith Funerary Rituals in 17th Century Vilnius

Theatrical and mournful, funeral processions were a common sight in the streets of Vilnius. The bodies of citizens were carried from their homes into a church or a final resting place, escorted by masses and ringing bells, surrounded by candle bearing lamenters, and carrying signs of the communities that lost a member. In some cases, these fundamental aspects were supplemented by audial and visual splendor, involved large numbers of people, from wealthy merchants to alms-seeking paupers. Numerous flags of guilds and religious brotherhoods would contrast the black clad group, while bells, songs, and cries echoed through the city. The coffin and inanimate body of the family member, a faithful Christian, merchant, and a guild member would command attention of every onlooker, reminding them of their own mortality. Funerals claim attention because they speak of the inevitable fate every mortal will face.

My paper focuses on the funeral processions which make use of religious signs in a multifaith environment. Vilnius was home to communities adhering to five Christian denominations, in addition to Jewish and Muslim faithful. All of them had distinct views towards last rites and internment and that might have lent itself to social upheavals due to disagreement on some questions of existential importance and interconfessional tension. However, it was rarely the case that violence broke out. In my paper I scrutinize last wills and other sources to reconstruct the material aspect of funeral processions and interpret them through the theory of semiotic anthropology to explain the social and political importance of such events.

GIAN LUCA AMADEI (Independent Researcher, UK)

“And my mother became that beautiful fire”: Crematoriums in a Changing London

In a letter written on Saturday, 22 February, 1913, the English playwright George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) described to his friend (English stage actress) Stella Campbell (1865–1940), the eventful day of his mother’s funeral and cremation at Golders Green Crematorium in London. In his letter Shaw vividly recollects key moments such as the funeral ceremony and witnessing the coffin of his mother being loaded in the cremation furnace. Despite the witty tone, Shaw’s descriptions are spatially accurate, and very helpful to understanding how the crematoria spaces were designed and used at the time. From his journey by Underground to Golders Green Crematorium to his visit to Hampstead Garden Suburb (while the cremation of his mother’s corpse was taking place), Shaw’s descriptions and reflections, could be read as the signs of a major shift in death culture that was taking place within the urban social context of London.

By retracing the steps of Shaw’s spatial and emotional experience, I will attempt to outline what cultural changes were taking place in early twentieth-century London when cremation started to be embraced as a disposal solution. This paper also intends to speculate if and how the unique proximity of Golders Green Crematorium, Hampstead Garden Suburb, and the Underground transport infrastructure inadvertently formed a new model of modern living (and disposing of the dead). I will also question to what extent this could be understood as the beginning of a new relationship between life and death in the urban space of the early twentieth-century London.

ARNAR ARNASON (University of Aberdeen, Scotland) & SIGURJON BALDUR HAFSTEINSSON (University of Iceland, Iceland)

Mourning for the More-than-Human

Many have observed, or argued, that contemporary western societies, broadly conceived, are moving towards a greater openness, positivity even, towards death and the public display of grief. While this development does perhaps not constitute a return to the ‘tame death’ that Aries spoke of, it certainly points to a situation at some remove from the ‘taboo’ around death, the ‘wild death’ that Gorer and Aries, respectively, argued had overtaken ‘modern’ western societies. The point has been made, that examples of this new (alleged) openness towards death, include the emerging possibilities to mourn losses that until recently remained hidden. In many contemporary western contexts, for example, aborted fetuses and stillborn babies, that not so long ago would have been disposed of without ceremony, are not publicly mourned. Similarly, pets, whose non-humanity until recently removed them from processes of public mourning, are now legitimate objects of the public expression of grief. In this paper

we focus on the mourning of the glacier Ok in Iceland, to ask if this trend is now extending to the loss of natural phenomena. Bringing together the recent literature on the more-than-human and the new materialisms, on one hand, and literature that speaks of the links between 'modernity', mourning, and loss, we ask if the trends hinted at above signal a change, a rupture, or the continuation of mourning that has always been part of the programme of modernity.

DOCUMENTARY SCREENINGS

REBEKAH LEE (UK)

The Price of Death (2013, 30 minutes)

"The Price of Death" explores the cost of death in contemporary South Africa through the intertwined stories of Dikela Funeral Services, a family-run business based in a sprawling township in Cape Town, and the grieving family who hires Dikela to organize a funeral in a remote town 1000 kilometers away.

HELEN WHITNEY (USA)

Into the Night: Portraits of Life & Death (2017, 2 hours)

We don't know how. We don't know when. But death comes to us all. To be human is to wrestle with this truth. "Into The Night; Portraits of Life and Death" explores the way we think about death and mourning. Not in general, but our own in particular. It is the great unanswered question: How do we live with death in our eye? To borrow from Dylan Thomas: Do we go gently or raging against the night? With equanimity or denial? Or do we see death as something to be fought and even possibly conquered, a challenge increasingly pursued by some of the brightest scientific minds? Finally, what are the stories we tell ourselves as we go into the night - or into the light? Whether shaped by religion, science, art, the natural world, the power of love, do these narratives sustain us, or do they fall away at the end?

"Into the Night" features fascinating men and women, from various walks of life who grapple with these questions. Young and old, believers and unbelievers, the well-known, and the obscure. However varied their backgrounds, they are united by their uncommon eloquence and intelligence and most important by their dramatic experience of death. Each has been shocked into an awareness of mortality. Whether through a dire prognosis, the imminence of their own death, the loss of a loved one, a sudden epiphany, or a temperament born to question, these are people who have truly awakened --and are forever changed.

PERFORMANCE

ART TEATRO (Finland)

Dance Macabre

The magic artist Ms. Pauliina conjures wonder after wonder and evokes secrets from the spirit world in her performance, *Dance Macabre*. The show includes circus, magic, and comedy in the style of the 1890's. Ms. Pauliina's assistant is Mr. Slava Volkov.

Pauliina Räsänen is a circus performer and director from Finland. Her specialties are Swinging Trapeze, Aerial Silk, and Duo Acrobatics. Her performance and life partner is World Champion of Sport Acrobatics Slava Volkov. They founded ArtTeatro, a circus and variety arts company, in 2008 in Finland. ArtTeatro specializes in creating stunning showstoppers, variety and circus acts, and full-length shows that combine emotion, sensuality, and high-level acrobatic skills.