

PERPETUAL CORPOREALITY

AFFECT THEORY AND POSTHUMOUS PHOTOGRAPHS OF CHILDREN IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

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ABSTRACT – This paper elucidates the specific interplay and interaction that the observer, particularly the surviving parent, has with the posthumous photograph of a child in nineteenth-century antebellum American culture. The communication between seer and seen is described here through the concept of ‘affect’: the capacity for the photograph and the observer to engage in a discourse of action that creates an intense emotional and physiological encounter and physical memory. Akin to what science refers to as muscle memory, this paper claims that parents perceive the image as allowing continued physical interaction with their deceased child. They are able to rekindle muscle memories of holding or touching their child as a sensorial product of holding or touching the photograph of the child. In viewing the work as a significant manifestation of the body with which one can continue to interact and engage, this paper argues that nineteenth-century posthumous photographs of children become more than simple memento mori ritual objects that serve to remind us of the inevitability of death. Instead, the photographs are elevated to powerful signifiers of physical presence and engagement beyond death.

INTRODUCTION

This article, which focuses on posthumous photographs, seeks to enrich our understanding of the interplay between observer and the representation of the deceased child during the antebellum period in America. The communication

between object and viewer is more than simply the personal and individually felt ‘punctum’ of which Roland Barthes wrote, but a more collective notion of ‘affect’.¹ Unlike Barthes’ theory, which is dependent upon his own individual memories and experiences, affect theory suggests a more universal or fundamental physical interaction between viewer and object. According to Melissa Gregg and Greg Seigworth’s *Affect Theory Reader* (2010), affect appears in the ‘in-between-ness’ and is best described as

[the] visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension [...] or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability.²

Though Gregg and Seigworth note that there is no singular theory of affect, the broad relevance of the term and its wide applicability support the theoretical use of affect in the present study of posthumous images, as powerful affective connections developed between photographs and observers wherein intense emotional encounters bore physiologically tangible results.

Affect provides a powerful perspective through which to interpret posthumous images of children thanks to the particularity of the photographic medium, the power of death, and the intimate relationship between image and viewer in nineteenth-century America. Some studies, such as Gail Holst-Warhaft’s 2005 article “Remembering the Dead: Laments and Photographs”, find the intersection of affect theory, death, and photography somewhat ambiguous or problematic.³ According to Holst-Warhaft, “it is the ‘very tangibility’ of photography that makes murky the relationship between the image, the memory, and the lament of death”. According to this approach, the fact that the photograph is static and that its impact is contingent upon the association that the viewer makes between memory and the image, affective response to the photograph wanes over time.⁴ While Holst-Warhaft’s point about the personal interplay between viewer and object is

1 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981); and Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds, *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham & London: Duke University Press Books, 2010).

2 Gregg and Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*, 1.

3 Gail Holst-Warhaft, “Remembering the Dead: Laments and Photographs,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25 (2005): 152.

4. Ibid.

acknowledged, this paper argues that it is the ‘very tangibility’ of the daguerreotype that allowed for and inspired a concrete and lasting communicability for the nineteenth-century mourning parent. The daguerreotype was the first practicable photographic process involving a silver-coated copper plate that was exposed to light and chemically developed to reveal an image. Generally small in size, these plates were protected inside a leather or wooden box that is latched closed and can be opened to view the image framed within. It is worthwhile, therefore, to scrutinize some specific examples of posthumous images in order to fully explore the tangibility of these small and personal objects.

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The daguerreotype case opens to reveal the portrait of a young girl dressed in a white gown and cap lying upon a cushion; her eyes are closed as if in sleep, and her cheeks are tinted a pale rose as if flushed (Fig. 1). A soft curl falls upon her forehead and her arms disappear under a sheet pulled up towards her chest. An ornamental gold frame and red velvet border surround the photograph, which rests inside a wooden case, covered in beautifully embossed leather and equipped with two metal latches to lock the closed case. The lining of the container – additional red velvet pressed with an organic floral motif – embraces the visage of the child. While the initial glimpse presents the viewer with a sweet



Fig. 1
Philippa Lee
1853
Tinted quarter-plate daguerreotype
Image courtesy of the Downs
Collection, Winterthur Library,
Delaware

and sleeping angelic figure, the continued gaze informs us of the reality of the image; the girl before the camera is no longer living, but has succumbed to the finality of death.

Philippa Lee, the young girl in the photograph, was the eldest daughter of Ann Eliza Gardner and Cassius F. Lee. The Lee family had its roots in Alexandria, Virginia, where Cassius Lee was a partner in the merchant firm Cazenove & Company and owned an estate known as Menokin.⁵ An 1870 census indicates that the large Lee family farm was more valuable than most in the area and notes that its value in that year was \$30,000.⁶ Despite being the first cousin to Robert E. Lee, Cassius' fortune came primarily from the substantial inheritance of his second wife and Philippa's mother, Ann Eliza Gardner.⁷ Philippa was born on 8 March 1847, and, according to her mother's journal and family genealogy, she "departed this life after a short illness – December 24th, 1853". The first of seven children born to Ann and Cassius, Philippa died just a few months after the birth of Edmund Jennings Lee in June of 1853.⁸ The cause of her death is not named, but a closer inspection of the photograph reveals an ulcer upon her lips, which was likely a symptom of her illness. Several extant family documents discuss the death of Philippa. One presents a factual and genealogical record of her death, but her father's journal clearly laments the loss of his daughter with this entry:

Saturday. Died. On the 24th of December 1853 [the day the family were keeping Christmas that day occurring on a Sunday] at 3 o'clock my beloved child Philippa Lee in the 7th year of her age. We trust she is a happy unsorrowed spirit where sorrow and death are unknown.⁹

While the emotional expression of the journal entry is evident, the detached nature of the genealogical entry reveals the familiarity of death during the nineteenth century.

5 The document notes that the main house was built around 1850, shortly after the property was acquired. Philippa would have spent the last three years of her life in this estate house. Peter A. Leach and Sarah Traum, *Documentary Study for Safeway Redevelopment, 3526 King Street, Alexandria, Virginia* (Alexandria, VA: John Milner Associates, Inc., 2012), 6.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 In the family documents, Philippa's parents spell her name in two distinct ways: Philippa and Phillippa. For the sake of consistency in this paper, I have chosen to use her mother Ann Gardner's spelling of Philippa. All information about Philippa Lee and her family comes from Winterthur Museum Library and is part of the Cazenove-Lee Family Papers, Collection 83. This quotation comes from Mrs. Cassius F. Lee, Series 5, Box 5, Folder 21.

9 The death of the couple's sixth child, William Gardner, is also lamented in Cassius Lee's journal, but no photographic image of this child exists in the collection. Winterthur Museum Library, Collection 83, Cazenove-Lee Family Papers, Notebooks of C.C. Gardner, Cassius F. Lee, Series 5, Box 5, Folder 18.

In addition to Philippa, the Lee family would also lose a son named William Gardner, who lived only three short days. The passing of William is not mentioned in the journal, though the record of his birth and death does appear alongside the entries for his siblings in the genealogy. Perhaps Philippa's death was deemed more significant, more poignant, or more devastating due to her age or her status as the eldest child. This seems to be confirmed by the existence of the posthumous daguerreotype as well as numerous photographs depicting the other surviving members of the family. Interestingly, neither the journal nor the genealogy mentions the creation or commission of the posthumous representation.

Photographic images like the one described above are hardly unique in nineteenth-century American visual culture; in fact, they are ubiquitous artifacts of mourning that pervaded antebellum life. However, there is much debate among scholars about the meaning and interpretation of these works, especially concerning how surviving family members viewed, perceived, and related to them. Were they simply, as Jay Ruby suggests in his 1984 article "Post-Mortem Portraiture in America", an act of "normal and even therapeutic" behaviour for mourners?¹⁰ Or, are they to be viewed more critically, as Karen Sanchez-Eppler implies in her publication *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (2005), as a complex socio-economic "commodification of affect and social relations in an ever more urbanized, industrialized, and impersonal America?"¹¹ There is little doubt that the proliferation of these objects confirms their commercial status and sentimental importance in nineteenth-century American culture. The present study pushes beyond the discourses of sentimentality and commercialism pursued by scholars like Ruby and Sanchez-Eppler to discuss the complex relationship between viewer and photographic image.

10 Jay Ruby, "Post-Mortem Portraiture in America," *History of Photography* 8 (1984): 202.

11 Karen Sanchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2005), 102.

Certainly, this analysis, like others dealing with posthumous photography, is concerned with memory and experience. Rather than discussing the well-documented function of posthumous imagery as purely memorial, this article

suggests that the photographic medium perpetuated physical engagement with the deceased subject while constructing memory of the departed. In this discussion a distinct type of affect governs these image types, due to the peculiar sense of agency embodied in them. Akin to what science refers to as ‘muscle memory’ (when the mind recalls a particular repetitive motor skill so that it may be undertaken without conscious effort), nineteenth-century parents perceived photographic images as allowing them continued physical interaction with their deceased child.¹² Accordingly, parents rekindled muscle memories of holding or touching their child as a sensorial product of holding or touching the photograph of the child. Moreover, the inclusion of relics of the departed – a lock of hair encased behind the image – also facilitated engagement with the physical body of the deceased and encouraged viewing the work as a quasi-living manifestation of that body.

Such attention to the affective power of the engagement with the image directs the present article, although in a different manner and historical register. The analysis of nineteenth-century postmortem photography in this study addresses the sensorial product of the physical engagement between viewers and the visual artifact. This discussion takes into account the metaphorical and symbolic way in which individuals used the photographic manifestation of their lost child to maintain a concrete physical relationship. Though there are several ways of presenting this relationship, this article focuses primarily on the image of the child as the ‘sleeping angel’. While further considering each of these categories enumerates the variety of ways in which nineteenth-century photographers conceived of images of the dead, focusing on one here clarifies the complexity of the relationship between object and viewer. The conceptual strategies of the photographs directly impacted the way in which the viewer engaged with and was affected by the image. While many scholars contend that portraits of death or of the dead function in a consistent manner within a particular cultural time or place, this discussion argues that a far more complex and varied reality existed.

12 For more on the science of muscle or motor memory, see Richard A. Schmidt, *Motor Control and Learning: A Behavioral Emphasis* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999); John W. Krakauer and Reza Shadmehr, “Consolidation of Motor Memory,” *Trends in Neurosciences* 29, 1 (2006): 58–64.

The heavy eyelashes drooped softly on the pure cheek; the head was turned a little to one side, as if in natural sleep, but there was diffused over every lineament of the face that high celestial expression, that mingling of rapture and repose, which showed it was no earthly or temporary sleep, but the long, sacred rest which “He giveth to his beloved.”¹³

This excerpt from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), the woeful death of Little Eva, illustrates the mid-nineteenth-century cultural construction of conceptual representations of childhood mortality. Eva, in chapters 26 and 27, faces not only death, but also the “dawning of immortal life” and the passage “from death unto life”.¹⁴ Before her untimely departure, Eva implores her family and friends to “not live idle, careless, thoughtless lives” so that they will “become angels, and be angels forever”.¹⁵ Eva’s death is described as a deep sleep from which the angelic child will never awaken. In this way, the incredibly popular character of Eva becomes the literary sleeping angel figure that helped inspire photographers and bereaved parents to utilize the same model when depicting a deceased child in visual terms.

13 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 1852), 293.

14 Ibid. 291-292.

15 Ibid. 285.

16 Both the Thanatos Archive and Antique Photo Album sites allow members to search the database and include a forum in which members exchange information about the images or share additional image or content. “Thanatos Archive,” <http://thanatos.net/>. “Antique Photo Album,” <http://www.antiquephotoalbum.nl/>.

The aforementioned photograph of Philippa, her death occurring during the same year as the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, exemplifies the most common type of representation of the dead child: the sleeping angel. Designed specifically to deny the reality of death, the sleeping angel pose presented the viewer with an opportunity to look at the child as if he or she is quite alive and peacefully dreaming. The immense popularity of this image type is seen in the vast number of daguerreotypes, tintypes – a slightly later photographic process of exposing a chemically treated tin plate, and other early photographic prints made in the mid to late nineteenth century. Large online databases such as the Thanatos Archive and the Antique Photo Album, along with physical collections like the Burns Archive in New York City, attest to the historical popularity of posthumous, memorial, and mourning photographs, as well as the contemporary interest in these images.¹⁶ Within these substantial collections, a few prime examples of the posthumous

image trope of the ‘sleeping angel’ exist. In many of these images, the child appears lying upon a bed or couch as if in slumber. In an example called *Unknown Child* from the Antique Photo Album collection, the child’s head rests upon a pillow, cocked slightly to the side, with hands delicately placed upon a white ruffled garment (Fig. 2). A plaid bedsheet covers the lower half of the body, and the camera angle encourages the viewer’s perspective to be that of the adoring parent looking down upon a resting child. Deceptive props and colouring techniques often aid in the creation of an illusion of life. Or, at the very least, help to convince the viewer that the child has been caught sleeping by the photographer.

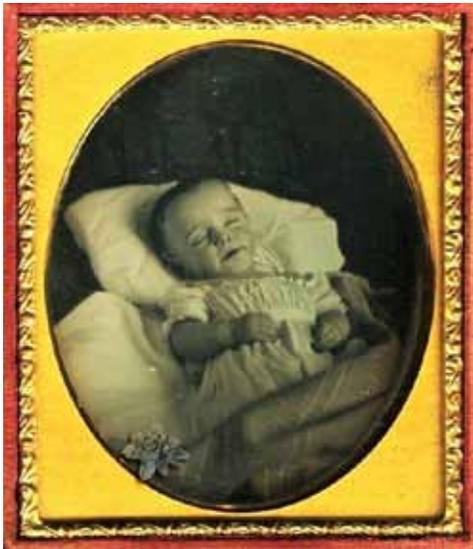


Fig. 2
Unknown Child
 c. 1850s
 Quarter-plate daguerreotype
 Image courtesy of the Antique Photo
 Album Collection

In an early description of posthumous daguerreotypes, the photographer N.G. Burgess noted that images of the dead tended to be obvious as such, but he made an exception for images like that of the *Unknown Child* and Philippa: “all likenesses taken after death will of course only resemble the inanimate body, nor will there appear in the portrait anything like life itself, except indeed the sleeping infant, on whose face the playful smile of innocence sometimes steals even after death”.¹⁷ Photographs like this provided the viewer

¹⁷ Jay Ruby, *Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 69.

with the opportunity to deny the reality of death and accept the child as a peacefully resting angel. However, the ubiquitous nature of images like these made it impossible to completely overlook the physical and metaphysical presence of death. Despite the photograph's intention of deception and the viewer's willingness to accept the illusion, posthumous representations rarely completely dispelled the specter of death.

This acceptance of the illusion of life, while difficult to understand from a modern point of view, lines up with the nineteenth-century popular interest in practices like Spiritualism. Once as pervasive in American culture as the images described above, the Spiritualist movement capitalized on a growing discontent with evangelical religious order and authority while simultaneously providing 'proof' of the everlasting life and spiritual immortality promised by religious ideology. It managed to achieve both of these ends through the communion of living and dead, through the work of mediums who could speak to the souls of the deceased, and through the belief that the dead still walked among us as spiritual beings. In particular, Spiritualism provided "consolation and reassurance to bereaved Americans who [...] could no longer accept the harsh views of evangelicalism about the fate of their loved ones".¹⁸ Ann Braude's publication *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (2001) provides an excellent study of how Spiritualism might relate specifically to women and the loss of a young child. One example appears in the life of Annie Denton Cridge who lost her son, Denton Cridge, a few months after his birth.

18 Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 6.

19 Ibid. 1.

According to the obituaries for Denton Cridge, Annie's separation from her child was momentary, as she recounted watching his spirit leave his body to join the spirits of his previously departed grandparents. However, Denton's spirit did not actually depart this world. In her first Spiritualist moment, Cridge states that she "held her child in her arms every day".¹⁹ Though Cridge states that the child that she held "weighed nothing", one of the enduring tenets of Spiritualism was manifestations; physical engagements with the departed soul, which Braude notes

was the “real and effective source of consolation”.²⁰ Braude goes on to state that these manifestations were the avenue through which surviving family members and friends were able to reconnect with the departed. Furthermore, it is this reconciliation with the deceased, through simultaneous spiritual and physical manifestation, that led many Americans to seek out the aid of the Spiritualist medium. While the most direct link between Spiritualism and photography arises in the 1860s with William H. Mumler’s spirit photographs, there is a correlation between the desires of those seeking Spiritualist engagement with the deceased and the rise of the ubiquitous posthumous portrait.

If the image were independent of its frame and case, viewers might mistake Philippa’s rosy cheeks as signs of life, and the image itself as a sentimental representation of a peacefully sleeping youth. Children were notoriously difficult to capture at the outset of the photographic era of the nineteenth century due to their inability to remain still and the long exposure times of the daguerreotype. In rare cases, such as *Sleeping Child* (1865) by Oscar Rejlander, the photographer actually managed to capture the living child as a figure at rest (Fig. 3). The emphatic aestheticism of Rejlander’s photograph contrasted strongly with the more realistic and affective image of Philippa. Rejlander’s portrait was steeped in art historical traditions of idealization most closely associated with the representation of putti – small, male, winged infant figures that appear in the art of the Renaissance and Baroque periods. The latter iconography, originating



Fig. 3
Sleeping Child
 Oscar Rejlander
 c. 1865
 Platinum print
 Image courtesy of Royal
 Photographic Society, National
 Media Museum, Science &
 Society Picture Library, London

20 Ibid. 1 and 49.

in the Greco-Roman tradition, appeared in Guido Reni's influential seventeenth-century *Sleeping Cupid*, where the angelic cherub is aligned with the presentation of the perfect and idyllic sleeping child (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4
The Sleeping Cupid
 Guido Reni
 Seventeenth century
 Oil on canvas

In both Rejlander's and Reni's works, the figure of a plump infant lies upon bed sheets before a cascading curtain. Without the benefit of colour to juxtapose the crisp whiteness of the sheet with the flushed skin-tone of the child, Rejlander's photograph relied upon texture and pattern. The smooth paleness of the infant's body contrasts beautifully against the deep-toned and richly patterned fabric of its surroundings. Both the stylized composition and the idealized representation promoted the allegorical understanding of these images and allowed Rejlander to align photography with the classic aestheticism of painting. Moreover, by alluding to the subject of the sleeping cupid, Rejlander's image capitalized on the sentimental idealism of the nineteenth century.

In light of the popularity of such sentimental imagery during the nineteenth century, some viewers could have mistaken a photograph like that of Philippa for one of a flushed and sleeping youth, taken in a still and reclining pose. The cognitive conflict that viewers must have felt upon recognizing the postmortem condition of the angelic sleeping child would have been compounded by the tension between the peaceful repose of sleep and the endless state of death. Despite the attempt by artists to masquerade the postmortem images of

cherubic, sleeping children, the onlooker became poignantly aware of what Burgess referred to as the “sombre hue of death” that conspicuously pervaded the image.²¹ Unlike Rejlander’s photograph, the posthumous presentation of a child lacked the aesthetic appurtenances of the idealized sleeping cupid in favor of realistic representation. In particular, Rejlander’s combination of the full-length figural form with a natural and lifelike pose contrasts strongly with the stiff posture of the figure of Philippa. While the posthumous image represents a nearly full-length figure, the stiff pose of the sitter denies the aesthetic appeal apparent in Rejlander’s image. In the case of the image of Philippa, the closely cropped image that focuses in on the figure contrasts with Rejlander’s composition, which plays with the aesthetic juxtaposition of the child’s form and the carefully chosen decorative elements.

The nineteenth-century experience of the image of the ‘sleeping angel’ becomes more palpable when its use or function is taken into account. Small images like that of Philippa would certainly have been tucked away in a private location: a chest of drawers, a memory box or hope chest, or other personal space. Even if displayed, it is likely that it would have stood upon a bedside or dressing table in a private bedroom, rather than the more public rooms of the home.²² Moreover, the very physicality of the daguerreotype lent itself to a private, personal experience. Holding the object in the palm of the hands, the owner needed to unlock and open the case, revealing the photograph within. The soft, velvet lining of the daguerreotype case, complete with pressed decorative patterns, protected the presentation of the body within. Echoing the deliberate curl upon Philippa’s forehead, the curling pattern on the velvet lining encouraged the viewer to touch the object with a finger – an act that would effectively mimic the stroking of the departed child’s hair. The significance of this type of touch is evident in diary entries and personal letters that speak of the last embrace between mother and child, as in the 1821 letter by Susan Huntington: “I took him in my arms; and, in a few minutes, he breathed his last sigh, as sweetly as ever a spirit disencumbered itself of its earthly habitation; and, before I knew it, he was in heaven”.²³ Of particular significance to this discussion, the direct

21 N.G. Burgess, “Taking Portraits After Death,” *The Photographic and Fine-Art Journal* 8 (1855): 80.

22 Though the photograph is undated, Theodore Robinson was active in America between 1852 and 1896.

correlation between the physical engagement of touch and the departure of the soul to heaven indicates an intermingling of physical and spiritual ideals, like that discussed in relation to the Spiritualist movement.

This intermingling of material and incorporeal occurs when the viewer observed the image of a young child enclosed within the daguerreotype case in much the same way that the physical body of the deceased was safely placed within the casket for burial. The difference, of course, was that the surviving family members, particularly the parents, could re-open the daguerreotype case and view their child's face long after the casket and body had been buried. This diary entry by Elizabeth Prentiss clearly expresses the poignant pain of loss and the longing to see the child's face once more:

23 Susan Mansfield Huntington, "Letter from Susan Mansfield Huntington, November 6, 1821," in *Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Susan Huntington, of Boston, Mass., Consisting Principally of Extracts from Her Journal and Letters; with the Sermon Occasioned by Her Death*, ed. Benjamin B. Wisner, 2nd ed. (Boston: Cocker & Brewster, 1826), 294.

Here I sit with empty hands. I have had the little coffin in my arms, but my baby's face could not be seen, so rudely had death marred it. Empty hands, empty hands [...] and unutterable longings to flee from a world that has had for me so many sharp experiences. [...] God help me, my little lost Eddy!²⁴

The overwhelming desire to recall the baby's face provides a key motive for a parent to commission a postmortem photograph. Moreover, the desire to envision the child as a perpetually extant spiritual being is maintained physically through the daguerreotype image. As noted by the author W.A. in an 1834 edition of *Mother's Magazine*:

24 Elizabeth Payson Prentiss, "Diary of Elizabeth Payson Prentiss," in *The Life and Letters of Elizabeth Payson Prentiss* (New York, NY: A.D.F. Randolph, 1882), 137.

Be not rash, therefore, to speak of that infant which perished like a blossom from your arms, as a fleeting and unimportant thing. That infant mind which here on earth was folded up like a bud, expands and blooms in the light and warmth of heaven.²⁵

25 W.A., "On the Death of Infants," *Mother's Magazine*, May 1834: 76.

Since viewers could physically interact with the object and the image, and since the figure appeared to be both sleeping and flushed with life, the daguerreotype became a corporeal memorial to the deceased. While the posthumous painted portrait was

capable of bringing the child 'back to life' in a more convincing and realistic manner, it also created a physical distance between the viewer and the subject. The painted portrait creates a different response by elevating the child's spiritual significance and allowing the viewer to pass over the physical loss and cleave to the thought of spiritual redemption and everlasting heavenly life. In contrast, the daguerreotype focused the viewer's attention on the physicality of the object and the perpetuation of tactile engagement with the visage of the lost loved one.

The daguerreotype image, however, within its elaborate case and with its general inability to capture a child in true life-like manner, functioned as a permanent display of physical loss. In addition, it served as a palpable object with which the parent or surviving viewer could somatically interact. In the face of death, parents could fictively continue to embrace their lost child by holding and caressing the daguerreotype. It enabled the family to maintain a corporeal engagement with the child, despite the physical loss through death. While the image of Philippa certainly provided the family with a reminder of the young girl's short life, other images, like the painted portraits, functioned to perpetually unite the family.

CONCLUSION

Though posthumous photographs were taken of adults, adolescents, toddlers, infants, and even pets, there is a striking difference between them. While there are, of course, exceptions to every rule, many postmortem photographs of adult sitters tended to be less allegorical and more obviously direct in their depiction of death. Images of children assuaged the viewer's grief by suggesting a graceful, delicate, and peaceful death or, as I argue, a corporeal continuity between life and death. Representations of fully matured individuals, on the other hand, were often more straightforward and more blatantly direct about death and its presence. Though photographers were always careful and cautious to depict the departed loved one in the best possible manner, there was less attempt with

older sitters to deny death's presence. Though not unheard of, it is less popular to see an adult figure propped up in a chair or presented in such a way as to convince the viewer of their animation. Moreover, while it is not uncommon to see images of 'sleeping' adults tucked into bed or lying upon a couch, it is also not rare to see images that blatantly expose death through the display of running bodily fluids or obvious causes of trauma.²⁶

As Stanley Burns suggests in his notations for an 1857 tintype of an old woman with discharge coming from her nose, the inclusion of such graphic detail as the bloody discharge could reflect the belief that, "death should not be beautified, but shown in its natural, often horrific state".²⁷ This same attitude that one should be confronted with the realities of death is clearly not applied to images of young children. Obviously, this notion of death as horrific loss, as painful departure, and as sad end, is far more easily stomachached when it pertains to an individual who has lived a full life, achieved adulthood, and pursued the pleasures and misfortunes inherent in existence. The lessons to be gleaned from the death of a mature person are far different from those to be taken from the passing of an infant or toddler.

Similarly, each interaction with an image that depicts the death of an adult suspends a particular set of affective forces between viewer and work. These forces are in contrast to those experiences when the image reveals the lifeless body of a young child. The nurturing sensations of touching or embracing the physical body that seem to pervade the writing of nineteenth-century women in relation to their departed children does not seem to exist in the same way when they speak of losing elderly parents or middle-aged siblings. While the loss and emptiness created by death is felt initially in the same way, the process of bereavement and the affect of posthumous images are distinct.

The understanding of these images is further elucidated when the changing notions of childhood innocence and forgiveness of original sin that pervaded

²⁶ Stanley B. Burns, *Sleeping Beauty II: Grief, Bereavement and the Family in Memorial Photography* (New York: Burns Archive Press, 2002), images 17 and 20.

²⁷ *Ibid.* image 20.

nineteenth-century life are analysed. The calls to God to protect and care for the child departing this world by a 'good death' and the repeated declarations that the child was to be reborn in heaven suggest that the notion of youthful innocence was a driving force in the mourning process. So often, obituaries describe the departed, both child and adult, in terms of their piousness and religious qualities. This seems to have been particularly true for children, who escaped the wickedness of original sin before finding peace in heaven. While the concept of meeting again in heaven would also apply to the loss of parents or older friends and family, the importance of a sinless passing was particularly significant in the case of a deceased child.

In contrast to the posthumous painted portrait, the daguerreotype carried with it a more private or personal connotation matched only by the delicate art of miniature portraits, immensely popular from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century and less so in the nineteenth and twentieth. The typically larger painted image hanging upon a wall conveyed a particular sense of spiritual guidance to the family and to other viewers of the work; the child appears hanging above the viewer and is often depicted as an idealized and angelic figure. Moreover, the way in which the viewer engaged with that image was distinctly different from how one would visually bond with a small photographic image. As noted above, the act of holding the daguerreotype of a departed loved one or family member was a particularly intimate, corporeal experience. It allowed for the physical tie between the deceased and the survived to continue. This physical interaction was impossible in the larger painted portrait, a medium inherently distanced by its material nature and aesthetic conventions.

For a parent, there was nothing that could replace feeling the weight of embracing a child. Many parents spoke of the quick development of their children and how the sweetness of infancy was soon lost to the age of the toddler. Just as the state of childhood was momentary, so the state of existence was transitory. However, the posthumous photograph, particularly those of young children, toddlers,

and infants, provided proof that each second of that process of maturation was significant and that those moments could be extended and re-experienced through the image. These depictions of children, in many ways, denied the separation of death and the fleeting quality of life while extending the union of living and dead.

Sarah Iepson recently received her PhD in Art History from Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and is an Associate Professor at the Community College of Philadelphia. Sarah's dissertation, "Postmortem Relationships: Death and the Child in Antebellum American Visual Culture", explores the relationships between image and viewer, with particular focus on posthumous representations of children. Sarah specializes in the art of the United States in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, with a particular interest in itinerant portrait painting and photography and the role of these image types in the construction and reflection of cultural trends and norms.