Death

Ritual, Representation
and Remembrance

WEBSITE
For more information about the journal, please see our website at http://hum.leiden.edu/lucas/jlgc

Death

Ritual, Representation
and Remembrance

CONTENTS

02

Death

DEATH, BE NOT PROUD, THOUGH SOME HAVE CALLED THEE

MIGHTY AND DREADFULL, FOR, THOU ART NOT SOE,

FOR, THOSE, WHOM THOU THINK'ST, THOU DOST OVERTHROW,

DIE NOT, POORE DEATH, NOR YET CANST THOU KILL MEE.

FROM REST AND SLEEPE, WHICH BUT THY PICTURES BEE,

MUCH PLEASURE, THEN FROM THEE, MUCH MORE MUST FLOW,

AND SOONEST OUR BEST MEN WITH THEE DOE GOE,

REST OF THEIR BONES AND SOULES DELIVERY.

THOU ART SLAVE TO FATE, CHANCE, KINGS, AND DESPERATE MEN,

AND DOST WITH POYSON, WARRE, AND SICKNESSE DWELL,

AND POPPIE, OR CHARMES CAN MAKE US SLEEPE AS WELL,

AND BETTER THAN THY STROAKE; WHY SWELL'ST THOU THEN?

ONE SHORT SLEEPE PAST, WEE WAKE ETERNALLY,

AND DEATH SHALL BE NO MORE; DEATH, THOU SHALT DIE.

JOHN DONNE, *HOLY SONNETS* (1633)

FOREWORD

DEATH: THE CULTURAL MEANING OF THE END OF LIFE, THE EVENT FROM WHICH THIS VOLUME ORIGINATES AND AT WHICH I WAS PRIVILEGED TO BE A KEYNOTE SPEAKER, TOOK PLACE IN THE DEPTHS OF WINTER.

Leiden University, cold but beautiful under a blanket of snow, was animated by the delegates to the second biennial graduate conference organised by PhD researchers at LUCAS, the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society. Young scholars, at the start of their academic lives, created intellectual vitality and personal warmth in the deserted lecture halls and frozen streets.

Death is in some respects beyond or outside representation in that it cannot be consciously experienced in full, remembered personally and communicated retrospectively. In the symposium, it was inspiring to hear and see this incomprehensible thing approached and handled as a source of meaningful human activity. The severance and separation produced by death, together with the human need for contact, are at the heart of our need to reproduce and represent in the symbolic realm. Death is in this respect in the midst of the cultural life that makes us human and thus a vital topic for wide-ranging, interdisciplinary study.

This volume's elaboration of the 'cultural life' of the conference title into 'ritual, representation and resemblance' acknowledges cultural life as an

act of mourning: ritual surrounds the unspeakable with communicative acts, representation reaches towards something that is acknowledged as implacably distant or different and resemblance attempts to draw close to and even touch its object of desire. At the same time, the scholarship and ideas of the authors, the energy and skills of the editorial team under the leadership of Jacqueline Hylkema and the anonymous genius of digital technology combine to form part of the ongoing yet always precarious pulse of cultural endeavour. Handled in this way, death becomes regenerative, a source of hope, not despair.

Joanna Woodall

The Courtauld Institute of Art

INTRODUCTION

It is hard to imagine a more universal topic than death. Since the beginning of life, death has been its companion; yet it is always the living who must determine the meaning of life's elusive and silent counterpart. Remembrance is not just a coping strategy for dealing with a loss of life – commemoration and other cultural expressions connected to death in art and literature reflect a society's norms, ideals, developments and changes. The meaning placed on death is dependent on and determined by surviving family, friends, communities, nations and civilizations, and the survivors' cultural backgrounds. Death is a defining factor in many aspects of our social interactions and perceptions of the world, and its representation. Its function and status change over time, reflecting societal, cultural and even technological and scientific advancements.

Death: The Cultural Meaning of the End of Life was the second LUCAS international graduate conference and aimed to explore the different ways in which conceptualizations of death — from classical antiquity to the modern age — have transformed our understanding of this universal topic. The conference, which took place in January 2013, was organized by Odile Bodde, Maarten Jansen, David Louwrier and Jenny Weston, all PhD researchers at LUCAS, and included nearly fifty speakers from various European, North American and Asian universities. Framed by keynote lectures by art historian Joanna Woodall (The Courtauld Institute of Art, London) and philosopher Rosi Braidotti (Utrecht University), the conference featured a diverse range of subjects and fields, including history, classics, film and photography, art history, literature, cultural anthropology and political science, and covered the period from the Roman Empire to the near future.

Like the conference, the articles in this second issue of the *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference* demonstrate the diversity of possible viewpoints concerning the cultural meaning of the end of life. Ranging from the late Middle Ages to the early 1900s, the issue begins by focusing on the Western European tradition and closes with a discussion of the distinctly non-Western tradition of Tantra. The articles examine diverse mediums, from death masks and photographs to frescoes and phantasmagoria shows, and from novels and stories to funerary rites and cultic rituals. In assessing the cultural meaning of these phenomena, the authors employ a variety of methodologies, subjects and approaches, from the classical principles of mimesis and catharsis to affect theory and Deleuzian hermeneutics.

Despite the authors' different disciplinary backgrounds, a number of common themes emerge, which help us articulate some shared characteristics of our subject. What jumps out from the first articles in this issue is the contrast – sometimes clearly delineated, sometimes blurred and oscillating – between a rather distant mode of coping with death, and the more personal and intimate process that is especially prominent in the articles by Sarah Iepson and Emily Knight.

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF LIFE, DEATH HAS BEEN ITS COMPANION; YET IT IS ALWAYS THE LIVING WHO MUST DETERMINE THE MEANING OF LIFE'S ELUSIVE AND SILENT COUNTERPART.

When a human being dies, life ends but the body, the physical appearance, remains – the bereaved can still see and touch it as they come to terms with their loss. Changes in commemorative practices during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were the result of a complex set of dynamics between societal changes, new shifts in religion, and technical developments. This enabled artists and families to create posthumous portraits – or have portraits created – that closely resembled the deceased, and thus transgressed the boundary between the living and the dead. The practice of creating plaster-cast death masks foreshadowed the rise of more accessible types of early photography such as the daguerreotype, which produced a portable image that enhanced the personal experience of mourning.

Sarah Iepson's article elucidates the specific interplay and interaction between the observer, particularly the surviving parent, and the posthumous photograph of a child in nineteenth-century antebellum American culture. The communication between the viewer and the image is described here through the concept of ´affect´. Akin to what science refers to as muscle memory, this article claims that parents perceived the image as allowing continued physical interaction with their deceased child. They were 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, nineteenth-century posthumous photographs of children became more than simple *memento mori* objects. Instead, the photographs were powerful signifiers of physical presence and engagement beyond death.

Similarly, in her article on the death mask of the portrait painter Sir Thomas Lawrence, Emily Knight argues that the mask and its accompanying framework represented a performative collection of objects for early nineteenth-century audiences. The interrelationship between the various elements of the display created an immersive experience and challenged viewers to look beyond Lawrence's peaceful repose and contemplate the full continuum of his life. They could marvel at his creativity and reflect on their own mortality as they considered how death truncated the artist's long creative output. Knight maintains that the entire display represented a cultural shift from pure civic commemoration to the Victorian era's more intimate and personal

relationship with the deceased. Knight draws our attention to an artefact that at first appears self-evident in what it signifies, yet her analysis exposes its dynamic potential for meaning when audiences engaged with it.

Contrary to this tender, understated way of personally engaging with lost loved ones, the more abstract, distant mode is characterized by the way death is perceived – or, by way of coping strategy, deliberately framed – as a phenomenon of nature, something happening outside the proper circle of experience. This perspective prompts different patterns of behaviour, such as, paradoxically, an almost morbid fascination for gruesome but strangely exhilarating images. These cathartic images have been transmitted through different mediums over time, as the late medieval paintings discussed by Fabien Lacouture and Isabelle van den Broeke's nineteenth-century phantasmagoria shows illustrate.

The miracle cycle of the Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece, painted by Simone Martini in Siena in 1324, is Fabien Lacouture's starting point for an examination of representations of the death and resurrection of children in fourteenth-century Italy. According to Lacouture, images of dead children during this period were relatively rare, despite Italy's exceedingly high child mortality rates. The peculiarity of the Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece and its gruesome portrayal of children's deaths therefore provides an opportunity to explore alternative interpretations for such imagery and its reception in Siena. Lacouture asserts that the naturalistic techniques employed by Martini for the miracle scenes enhanced their affective qualities and thus imbued the paintings with a didactic agency.

Isabelle van den Broeke's article presents the phantasmagoria, a magic lantern show popular in the early nineteenth century, as an expression of post-Enlightenment beliefs about the ambiguity of death. Van den Broeke argues that the spectacle, which relied on hallucinatory images of the dead, reflected new popular fascinations with psychology and the macabre. Her research suggests that particular works by Francisco Goya and William Blake were influenced by the visual techniques of the phantasmagoria, and, like their model, reflected the contemporary cultural uncertainty surrounding death.

The pragmatic concern for the effect of death on an audience is also present in the articles by Michiel Verheij and Jostein Hølland, both of which examine how the death of a protagonist is put to use in literature. In addition to the more visual effects of death discussed by Lacouture and Van den Broeke, the texts of the Marquis de Sade and Edgar Allan Poe illustrate the possibilities of death as a literary tool.

Michiel Verheij's concise analysis of Poe's short story 'The Oval Portrait' (1842) focuses on the age-old philosophical debate about mimesis, and the idea that mimetic art by its nature implies death. Verheij compares Poe's withering heroine, 'painted to death' by her artist husband, to Pygmalion's sculpture of the ideal woman coming to life. Verheij reads the story against Plato's criticism of art as an imperfect copy of an already imperfect reality, as well as Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality. He concludes that the oval portrait in Poe's story perfectly embodies Baudrillard's 'simulacrum' – an image that has broken free from any model, thus rendering obsolete Plato's hierarchy of representation – and its ultimate derivative 'simulation': the image replacing and murdering the model.

Jostein Hølland takes the Marquis de Sade's novels *Justine* (1791) and its sequel *Juliette* (1797) as starting points to argue that de Sade deliberately destabilizes the novels' libertine philosophical and pornographic messages through the death of a prominent character. Hølland argues that Maurice Blanchot, the critic who suggested that the story of Juliette echoes de Sade's philosophical project, in fact neglects the crucial role of Justine's character as a mode of resistance against libertine philosophy. John L. Austin's notion of the 'speech act' allows the article to explicate what type of resistance and agency can be ascribed to Justine. Exploring this notion further with Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's hermeneutics, and Georges Bataille's philosophy of transgression, this article gives a daring and innovative reading of the character of Justine.

A further agenda death can serve is illustrated in the articles of Hélène Vu Thanh and Imma Ramos, which also take us beyond the Western-European context. As Vu Thanh demonstrates in her article on Buddhist funerary rituals and the Jesuit accommodation policy in Japan in the period between 1549 and 1614, bending commemorative customs was part of a strategic agenda to accomplish cultural and religious change. According to Vu Thanh, conversion

occurred gradually, as the Jesuits sought ways to implement effective strategies that did not alienate the Japanese. Critical to the initial success of the Jesuit campaign was their method of carefully studying the varied and divergent funeral practices espoused by the numerous Buddhist sects in Japan, which they classified according to religious and cultural function. Rituals that were deemed inherently religious were replaced entirely by Christian practices, while lay customs were adapted in order to ease the conversion process. As the conversion programme gained ground in Japan in the early seventeenth century, the Jesuits further differentiated Christian from Buddhist funerary traditions.

An equally powerful change of ritual is described by Imma Ramos, who examines the shifting ways in which emancipatory death was ritualized in late nineteenth-century Tantric practices of worshipping the Bengali goddess Tara. Ramos focuses especially on the famous Tantric practitioner Bamakhepa, and how his tender mother-son relationship with Tara 'sweetened' the perception of this traditionally terrifying goddess. Bamakhepa's reimaging of Tara, from destructive deity to maternal protector, not only increased her popularity among a broader Hindu audience, but also appealed to Bengali nationalists who used the theme of maternal devotion to protect *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) against British colonial rule.

Together, the articles in this volume illustrate two important modes of dealing with death: the personal, and the pragmatic. Death serves a range of agendas that greatly vary in scope, from the personal to the institutional. At times these agendas overlap, when an individual's engagement with death is coopted for aesthetic, religious, and national purposes. Moreover, the variety of forms used to figure death shape these agenda's, sculpting versions of death to suit the mourner's or the culture's changing perspective on their relationship with the deceased.

However, the question as to the precise relationship between the personal and the pragmatic remains. Where does personal engagement end and where does pragmatism take over? Would the creator of the display surrounding Thomas Lawrence's death mask have been able to anticipate the emotions evoked in the spectator, without first having lived through them? Did the inventor of phantasmagoria shows aim primarily for economical gain, or did he recognize the heartfelt longing many people evidently had to communicate once more with

DEATH serves a RANGE OF
AGENDA'S
that GREATLY VARY IN SCOPE,
from the PERSONAL to
the INSTITUTIONAL ...

MOREOVER, THE VARIETY OF
FORMS
USED TO FIGURE DEATH
SHAPE THESE AGENDA'S,
SCULPTING VERSIONS OF DEATH
to SUIT THE MOURNER'S
OR THE CULTURE'S
CHANGING PERSPECTIVE ON
THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH
the DECEASED.

deceased loved ones? Were the seventeenth-century Jesuits and the nineteenth-century Tantric priest concerned with religious strategies, or were they negotiating practices that better suited their followers' needs? As this volume illustrates, the issue of death defies such clear demarcation lines and broad categorizations. Once more, it reminds us that they are merely a model to represent an infinitely complex reality.

This issue would not have been possible without the help of various colleagues at LUCAS and elsewhere. First and foremost we would like to thank our publisher, Leiden University Library, for its continued assistance and enthusiasm after the journal's successful launch in 2013. We owe particular thanks to Birte Kristiansen at Leiden University Library and to Joy Burrough-Boenisch for all their kind help and advice in the fields of publishing, information technology and academic editing. We are very grateful to all the speakers who submitted their conference papers, to the eight authors for their kind and patient cooperation in the revision and editing process, and to Joanna Woodall for writing the foreword to this issue. In addition, we would like to thank our fellow PhD candidates at LUCAS and research institutes elsewhere who acted as peer reviewers. Particular thanks are due to our colleague Leonor Veiga, whose skills in layout design and patience in the process were invaluable. A last word of thanks goes to LUCAS itself and to its management team, Kitty Zijlmans, Geert Warnar and Korrie Korevaart, for their continued support. Finally, we wish the editorial board of the next issue success with the second volume resulting from the 2013 conference.

The Editorial Board and Series Editor
Linda Bleijenberg, Odile Bodde, Anna Dlabačová, Erin Downey, Janna Houwen, Jenneka Janzen, Adrian Lewis, Sara Polak, and Jacqueline Hylkema

PERPETUAL CORPOREALITY

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

Sarah M. Iepson

Temple University, Philadelphia, United States of America

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.

PERPETUAL CORPOREALITY

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. Wintherthur 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.

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

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.

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.

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

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/.

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.

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

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.

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:

> 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*:

> 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]

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

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.

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.

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

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 stomached 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.

CASTING PRESENCE

THE DEATH MASK OF SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE AS A SITE OF REMEMBRANCE

Emily Knight

Formerly University of Oxford, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT – *When Sir Thomas Lawrence died in 1830, plaster casts were made of his face and right hand. The death mask was placed inside a wooden box with a lid that contained a mezzotint of the artist in life, his chalk, stubs, pencil, and a lock of his hair. This curious collection of objects formed a temporal bridge from past to present, operating as a site of remembrance that surpassed mere physical description. The experience of lifting a lid filled with traces of the artist's life to reveal the death mask concealed beneath, presented the viewer with the absolute and unalterable finality of death. The various elements that contribute to the presentation of Lawrence's death mask declare his existence through trace, touch and abject remains. They mark the point at which commemoration and deified celebration made way for a more encompassing and personal memorial on the brink of the Victorian Age. This article will discuss this key moment in early nineteenth-century visual culture, before photography emerged as the predominant mode of automatic reproduction. It will consider how this process of remembrance created an experience of death that was both haptic and optic, exact and emotional, thereby revealing the contemporary desire to be immersed in the contemplation of a life lived and a fascination with mankind's inevitable end.*

INTRODUCTION

The death mask of Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830) moulded into the shape of his head (Fig. 1), rests on a pillow, his suggested body tucked beneath the covers revealing just a corner of his bed shirt to the viewer. With his lips slightly parted and his eyelids faintly creased, he has an expression of calm repose and appears as if peacefully sleeping. The nature of this display provides an intimate encounter with Lawrence's image. Forming a fragment of the imagined space of the artist's bedroom, it zooms-in on the moment of death itself. To the contemporary viewer an object of this kind was a way of holding onto the image of the deceased. As the body faded away, the trace of its presence remained, and thus it could be contemplated as a means of remembrance, simultaneously drawing attention to the moment of death and one's own finitude. Throughout the nineteenth century mourning practices shifted from the public sphere to the private domain and in this way, Lawrence's death mask and its mode of display demonstrate this change. This study will consider how death is represented in Lawrence's death mask and how its display affected the way in which contemporary viewers interpreted it, in turn revealing early nineteenth-century attitudes towards death and remembrance.

Fig. 1
Death mask of Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830)
1830
Plaster
44.5 x 31.5 cm
© National Portrait Gallery, London

During Lawrence's lifetime, the taking of death masks was a common practice. The vast majority of famous faces in Ernst Benkard's comprehensively illustrated 1929 book, *Undying Faces: A Collection of Death Masks,* preserve the images of a great many men born in the eighteenth and dying in the nineteenth century.[1] During this time, it was common for masks to be commissioned by families and admirers to commemorate the life of a particular person, as well as by artists to create posthumous portraits. Lawrence himself used the death mask of William Pitt the Younger, alongside a portrait bust by Joseph Nollekens in order to create his own posthumous portrait of the British Prime Minister.

The sudden rise in the production of death masks at this time was in part a symptom of the culture of cast-making in general, which was at its zenith during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Casts were used as a way of reproducing architectural elements and sculptural works, preserving and transporting the features of a particular object or building to another place and time. They eternalized the image of something and provided a visual point of reference for items out of sight, at a distance or no longer present. As a result, the plaster cast held a central position in the art education of the time with its emphasis on the copying and referencing of other works of art.[2] Could it be that the widespread interest in visual reproduction of this kind is indicative of the public being in some way ready for the repetitious visual process soon to be found in photography?[3] It is apt therefore, to consider the death mask of an artist who was working in this particular cultural moment when the creation of death masks was at its most prevalent.

THE PRESENTATION OF LAWRENCE'S DEATH MASK

The National Portrait Gallery describes the maker of Lawrence's death mask as "unknown artist". According to Laurence Hutton, however, the mask was made by the sculptor Edward H. Baily.[4] Richard Walker supports this assertion by noting the similarity between Baily's posthumous marble bust of Lawrence and the death mask, suggesting a clear familiarity with the painter's facial features.[5]

1 Ernst Benkard, *Undying Face: A Collection of Death Masks,* trans. Margaret M. Green (London: Leonard and Virginia Woolf, 1929).

2 See the "National Course of Instruction for Government Schools of Art in Britain", reproduced in Stuart Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London: University of London Press, 1970), Appendix C.

3 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1990), 26-27.

4 Laurence Hutton, *Portraits in Plaster from the Collection of Laurence Hutton* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1894), 138-141. This is referenced in Richard Walker, *Regency Portraits* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1985), 311, which also mentions that there is no reference to the making of the death mask in D. E. William's detailed description of Lawrence's death in *The Life and Correspondence of Sir Thomas Lawrence* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831).

5 Walker, *Regency Portraits*, 311.

6 Ibid. 311. Walker suggests that Baily may well have consulted Lawrence's death mask in order to create his posthumous portrait.

7 Such as Sir Walter Scott's death mask at Abbotsford. Cast in bronze, it rests on a cushion with folds of fabric underneath his chin, likewise rendered in bronze. Though it is clear from the large scar across his skull that this can in no way be the kind of 'sleeping portrait' discussed with regards to Lawrence's death mask, it rests in a way that gives it an intimacy

Additionally, the toga-like cloak worn by Lawrence in Baily's portrait recalls the bedclothes draped across Lawrence's imagined shoulder in the sculpted addition to his death mask.[6] The unusual presentation of the mask makes it a particularly intriguing example to consider with regards to the portrayal of death within this context. Though there are other examples in which a death mask has been placed on a sculpted pillow, when viewing the two largest collections of these objects at the Anatomical Museum at the University of Edinburgh and the Laurence Hutton Collection of Life and Death Masks at Princeton University, it is far more common to see the neck of a death mask shaped into a stand than it was to create an imagined real-world setting.[7]

In addition to the sculptural element of Lawrence's death mask, there was a further aspect to its presentation which distinguishes it as an object of note.

Fig. 2
Lid of the original box containing Sir Thomas Lawrence's death mask
Mezzotint by Samuel Cousins, published 22 April 1830
45.7 x 32.5 cm
© National Portrait Gallery, London

Fig. 3
Self-portrait
Sir Thomas Lawrence
c. 1825
Oil on canvas
91 x 71.4 cm
© Royal Academy of Arts, London

At the time of its donation to Britain's National Portrait Gallery in 1911, the death mask was kept within a wooden box with a glass lid (Fig. 2).[8] Encased within the lid, there is a mezzotint of the artist in life by Samuel Cousins after Lawrence's final and unfinished self-portrait (Fig. 3). It is impossible to say what Lawrence intended to paint in the bottom half of his portrait but when Richard Evans made his copy of the work, he felt it necessary to include the artist's palette and brushes in the composition as an emblematic show of his artistic prowess (Fig. 4). Though Cousins's mezzotint closely follows Lawrence's original painting, it is interesting to see that the artist's tools were not forgotten and still found their place in the overall presentation of the death mask. Placed inside the lid in a visible compartment, Lawrence's actual chalk, stubs and pencil, along with a lock of his hair are displayed, thereby mirroring the religious practice of containing actual remnants of a person's body within a reliquary. Coupled with the fact that at the

and sensitivity that is lacking in the more commonly found medical/phrenological casts. Bearing this example in mind, the presentation of Lawrence's death mask is unusual, but by no means one of a kind.

8 The brass handles that were originally affixed to the box arrived at the Gallery a few days later. The Heinz Archive and Library, National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG46/17/35.

Fig. 4
Richard Evans after Sir Thomas Lawrence
Sir Thomas Lawrence
c.1825
Oil on canvas
92.1 x 71.1 cm
© National Portrait Gallery, London

time of its donation, the box was accompanied by a cast of Lawrence's right hand (Fig. 5), the outlet for his creativity, the collection of objects work as a descriptive and literal substitution, "a comprehensive sign", to use Richard Brilliant's phrase, of the artist's mind and body.[9] The addition of this box with its various paraphernalia, therefore, sets Lawrence's death mask apart. The entire display, then, proffers a unique glimpse of how people viewed death and commemorated life at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Fig. 5
Cast of Sir Thomas Lawrence's right hand
Unknown artist
1820
Plaster
© National Portrait Gallery, London

THE AURA OF AUTHENTICITY

9 Richard Brilliant "Portraiture," in *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics,* ed. Michael Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). *Oxford Art Online*: http://www.oxfordartonlint.com/subscriber/article/opr/t234/e0413 [accessed 15 August 2013]. Though Brilliant is discussing portraits in general, I find this a fitting statement for my argument, which I will go on to discuss in greater detail.

10 Joseph Farington, *The Farington Diary, Vol. VII (June 10, 1811, to December 18, 1814)* ed. James Greig (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1923), 84.
11 *The Scott exhibition,*

To the present-day Western viewer, the experience of viewing death masks is unsettling. Death does not have a prominent presence in the visual fabric of our society; largely reserved to scorn wrongdoers or excite pathos is tragic humanitarian crises. The image of death rarely features in funerary rites or mourning practices and has thus come to be considered macabre. To the early nineteenth-century viewer, however, images of the dead and death masks specifically, were far more common and thus interpreted in a wholly different way. They were not considered to be shocking, but rather a means by which the viewers could enact their mourning and reflect on a life passed. In his diary entry dated 23 May 1812, Joseph Farington recorded the great number of people who visited the death mask of the recently assassinated Prime Minister, Spencer Perceval (1762-1812). He described how "many are much affected when viewing [the death mask]".[10] A few years later in the centenary exhibition of Sir Walter Scott, an account of the reaction to the author's death mask was included in the

accompanying catalogue: "there was perhaps nothing in the whole Exhibition of greater interest than the original Mask".[11] These objects possessed a kind of agency that stirred rather than shocked the nineteenth-century viewer. Unlike artistically rendered portraits, the mould from which the cast had been taken had touched Scott's face and thus the death mask possessed something of the man that no other portrait could hope to achieve. It was the coming-into-contact that was important to the viewer; it somehow imbued the cast with an aura of authenticity, forging a direct connection with the deceased.

It is important to note at this point, that the exact meaning of the term 'death mask' has shifted over time and did not in fact, come into its present day usage until fairly recently.[12] In the first half of the nineteenth century, these objects were more likely to be described as "a cast taken after death".[13] When Lawrence's death mask was donated to the National Portrait Gallery at the beginning of the twentieth century, the accompanying note describes it as a "Plaster cast from a death-mask".[14] So whereas we now attribute the term 'death mask' to the cast itself, at this time, it stood for the mould, the negative, the material that had masked the face. The fuller description given in this note, as well as the aforementioned example, seems to emphasize this direct contact beyond our present day usage of the term; it is not simply an image of the dead, but one made directly from the dead. In this way, these objects fall into Charles Sanders Peirce's sign category of 'index', that is, "a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object".[15] So whereas artistically rendered portraiture implies a distancing between the sitter and the artist, the death mask provides us with a solid, indexical image of a person, warts and all. It carries a kind of truthfulness impossible to achieve in a painted or sculpted portrait. As Benkard wrote in his book on death masks, they are, "works of art from Nature's own workshop".[16]

Approaching the death mask as an exact and unalterable image, however, is highly problematic and was certainly considered as such during the early nineteenth century. Teetering on the boundary of impression and exactitude,

MDCCCLXXI: Catalogue of the Exhibition held at Edinburgh, in July and August 1871, on occasion of the commemoration of the centenary of the birth of Sir Walter Scott (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1872), 196.

12 It is hard to provide a specific time in which the term gained its present day usage. Certainly by 1988 the cast of the mould from the face had started to be called a death mask, evidenced by the title of the exhibition of that year in Edinburgh: "Death Masks and Life Masks of the Famous and Infamous from the Collection in the University of Edinburgh's Department of Anatomy", the Tron Kirk, Edinburgh.

13 George Jones, *Sir Francis Chantrey, R.A.: Recollections of his Life, Practice and Opinions* (London: E. Moxon, 1849), 276.

14 The Heinz Archive and Library, National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG46/17/35.

15 Charles Sanders Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: the Theory of Signs," in *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology.* ed. Robert E. Innis (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1985), 8.

16 Benkard, *Undying Face*, 17.

17 Georg Kolbe, "How death

it is an extreme likeness in the sense that it goes beyond our normative sense of portraiture having come into direct contact with the face of a person. It adopts, in fact, a liminal position between Peirce's 'icon' and 'index', in that it both represents and has been directly 'affected' by Lawrence's face. Certain choices, however, could be made within the casting process that prevent this type of image-making from being wholly automatic and exact, and in numerous cases, aesthetic alterations were made in order to render the final object more pleasing to the eye or descriptive of the sitter's status. Lawrence's death mask for example, was augmented after the casting process in order to enhance its function as a memorial. After the cast had set, it was painted with a cream varnish, thereby smoothing the surface and giving the plaster a marble-like appearance. By mimicking the material of commemorative portrait busts, the role of the death mask as an object of remembrance was thus exaggerated.

Aside from a superficial and intended adaption such as this, if numerous casts were taken from the original mould, the detail in the resultant object would be increasingly diminished. If additional moulds were made from these later casts, further softening of the image would occur, which would occasionally necessitate re-working in order to preserve the likeness of the sitter. Furthermore, the very nature of human flesh affected the final mould. As Georg Kolbe (1877-1947) writes in his description of the casting process, "only if the dead are already cold, do they offer an immovable, unchangeable image for our operators".[17] So before the mould was even made, a delay in proceedings could also have an effect on the appearance of the final cast. Of course, the main purpose of the death mask at this time was to preserve the face of the dead at the moment in which likeness-to-life starts to disappear, in much the same way that a photograph freezes a fleeting moment on to paper. Both types of image remain present as the original fades away. The power of the death mask for the nineteenth-century viewer, therefore, lay not in the object's seeming exactitude but in its ability to hold on to the image of a person at a particular moment in time. As the plaster cast dried within the mould, the moment of transition between presence and absence was solidified; it was a filling-out of a person's absence.

masks are taken," in Ibid. 44.

In his book *The Ground of the Image,* Jean-Luc Nancy takes this idea of a presence slipping into absence a step further by saying that the death mask does not capture nor represent the face of the departed, but causes the viewer to contemplate death.[18] It as the contemplative element of this proposition that is particularly apt for the discussion of nineteenth-century attitudes towards death masks, in the way that these objects affected the viewer and aroused a heightened awareness of personal mortality. In artistically rendered portraiture, the viewer experiences a kind of self-reflexive similitude but when viewing an image of death, this process is disrupted; the image forces the viewer to contemplate one's own demise. As Marcia Pointon has described, there is a 'pull towards death' in bodily casts, which underline the fact that life and death cannot be mutually exclusive states.[19] Death is an inherent part of life and during the early nineteenth century, masks like Lawrence's would have demonstrated this fact to the viewers.

ART AND IMPRINT

In the case of Lawrence's death mask, the physical proximity of the mezzotint with his death mask brought the peculiarity between art and imprint into sharp focus. By attaching a portrait of Lawrence in life, the viewer, as it was originally intended, could absorb an image of the artist in his prime before lifting the lid and crossing the boundary between past and present, life and death, to witness the uncanny image of Lawrence's dead face. The process of accessing the death mask in this way is lost in its current display within a plastic box but imagining the act as it was originally conceived provides a potent insight into the ceremonial contact that this kind of display engendered during the first half of the nineteenth century.

The close positioning of these binary modes of representation highlighted the separation between life and death. The first image is a self-portrait, a subjective representation from the artist's own perspective. He meets the viewer head-on with the intense stare of a man who has spent his life looking. Significantly, it is the only portrait of the artist in his later years and possesses an appropriate self-

18 Jean-Luc Nancy, "Masked Imagination," in *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 99.

19 Marcia Pointon, "Inversions: Casts, Masks and Mortality" (paper presented at the Materials of Mourning Conference, University of York, December 3, 2011).

confident composure. In contrast, the death mask beneath is a passive image, in that it lacks animation and expression with its white, hard flesh and closed eyes, preventing direct engagement with the viewer. It represents the absolute finality of death that cannot be avoided or altered in anyway.

The relationship between the elements of this display had further implications with regard to its interpretation. Unlike the instances whereby death masks were displayed much like their painted or sculpted counterparts, Lawrence's cast and the small container in which it was housed converted the image of the artist from commemorative monument to personal memorial. The mask was encountered on a more intimate level and fitted more closely with the Victorian culture of mourning by way of the material artefact that became increasingly pronounced as the century progressed. Deborah Lutz discusses this revival of relic culture during the nineteenth century, which she argues, developed into a more secular and intimate form of remembrance.[20] She proposes that this was the result of a twofold drive to retain proof that the deceased still existed in some way and to focus one's attention on the moment of loss at the point of death.[21] Viewed in these terms, the death mask forced the viewer into an almost liminal position; it was life-affirming whilst also acknowledging the loss of that life. Lawrence's death mask and its display case thus acted as a personal tie to the loss of a loved one, exhibiting traces, remnants and artefacts associated with the artist at the point of his death. Archibald Keightley, friend and executor of Lawrence's estate, originally owned the death mask and so it is likely that he created the box and made the decision to include the other objects as well as the mezzotint.[22] Assuming that this is the case, the care and time that it must have taken to create the final presentation box is testament to the high esteem in which he held Lawrence and suggests a keen desire to memorialize the artist and his life's work. By adding objects that Lawrence touched on a daily basis and an actual remnant of his body, Keightley's commemorative gesture epitomizes Lutz's assertion as to the process of mourning that she discusses in her article.

20 Deborah Lutz, "The Dead Still Among Us: Victorian Secular Relics, Hair Jewelry, and Death Culture," in *Victorian Literature Culture* 39 (Cambridge, 2011) 128. Lutz's article provides a concise history of secular relic culture in Europe, highlighting the similarities with holy relics.

21 Ibid. 128

22 I have been unable to uncover who commissioned the death mask and the presentation box (there are no records which attest to this at the National Portrait Gallery, London nor the Royal Academy of Art in which Lawrence's papers are kept). I can only be certain that Keightley had the mask in his possession at the time of his death as it was passed onto his daughters, who subsequently donated the object to the Gallery in 1911.

23 Georges Didi-Huberman and Thomas Repensek, "The Index of the Absent Wound (Monograph on a Stain)," *October* 29 (1984): 63-81.

24 Peter Geimer has discussed

TOKENS OF REMEMBRANCE

Whereas the death mask is an imprint of the body, in contact with the person by second remove, Lawrence's pencil and chalk related to the artist by way of touch, adding another non-visual facet to the viewer's interpretation of the object. Just like the holy relics of Christian practice, these objects could be viewed as secondary relics, having been owned, used and touched by Lawrence himself. Much akin to a saintly shroud stained by the blood of Christ, the objects were imbued with a fascinating allure, just a small step away from the artist's body.[23] They did not resemble the artist nor were they part of him, but still they inhabited a kind of presence-as-absence, an intangible aura of authenticity, albeit in an entirely different way.[24] As Peirce's theory of indices makes clear, just as "A sundial or a clock *indicates* the time of day", so too did Lawrence's tools indicate his existence and artistic genius, in a sense keeping them alive in the present, and conversely, recognizing that the act of creation was now at an end.[25]

The other significant addition to the lid of the container was the lock of Lawrence's hair. Like his tools, the hair was not a likeness, or a representation of the artist, but the abject remains of his body; it assumed "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite".[26] The hair had not merely come into contact with Lawrence but was actually part of him, which added another dimension to the presentation of his death mask. It proved that Lawrence had been there, that, as Roland Barthes writes, he had "been absolutely, irrefutably present".[27] Preserving hair in this manner was a way of literally holding on to the body – as well as the memory – of a person after death. Much has been written about the use of human hair in jewellery as a mode of remembrance, which is important to consider in light of the inclusion of Lawrence's hair.[28] According to Marcia Pointon, jewellery incorporating human hair started in the Middle Ages and was particularly prevalent in Christian practice, which, she goes on to suggest, is due to a passage from the book of Revelations in which a lock of hair can be taken as a sign of possible reunion with the deceased.[29]

the special significance given holy relics which had come into direct contact with Christ's body. See Peter Geimer, "Image as Trace: Speculations about an Undead Paradigm," trans. Kata Gellen, in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18 (2007): 11.

25 Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic," 13.

26 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an Essay in Abjection,* trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

27 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 77.

28 As well as Lutz, "The Dead Still Among Us", see Marcia Pointon, "Materializing Mourning: Hair Jewellery and the Body," in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation,* ed. Marius Kwint et al. (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 39-57, and Christiane Holm, "Sentimental Cuts: Eighteenth-Century Mourning Jewelry with Hair," in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38 (2004).

Holding on to an actual body part was a way of bridging the divide between past and present, living and dead. By the nineteenth century, jewellery that incorporated locks of hair was commonplace, used as a synecdoche for the deceased. Thomas Laqueur explains that "it became the corporeal auto-icon par excellence [...] the real standing for the symbolic – perhaps not eternally incorruptible but long lasting enough, a bit of a person that lives eerily on as a souvenir."[30]

The use of Lawrence's hair in this case, presented in conjunction with the death mask, is an interesting moment of a meeting between index and symbol, or the real as symbol, as an all-encompassing mode of remembrance. The imprint of Lawrence's face cast in plaster was given a new and weightier significance by this actual vestige of the man. Geoffrey Batchen considers this meeting of signs in relation to various items of jewellery that combine a photograph and a lock of hair, providing a productive point of comparison for my present example.[31] Pointing out the increase in the inclusion of photographs and hair in mourning jewellery during the nineteenth century, he questions if it was necessary to combine the two together, and if so, what the one did to the other under these circumstances. The photograph, he argues, is "present as a visual trace even when absent as a material thing", so why interfere with an image that functions so well with a physical remnant that is so crude and carnal?[32] The same, of course, can be said for the death mask. What did the lock of hair add to the experience of viewing Lawrence's cast, which described his face as opposed to an abstract remnant of his body?

Batchen considers the relationship between the photograph and lock of hair as a way of memorializing the life of a loved one in relation to a commemorative locket in which a photograph has been placed in one side and a lock of hair encased in the other. In this way, the 'unhindered immediacy of representation' that characterizes photography is met face-to-face with the actual remnant of the person depicted.[33] The implication in this coupling, however, is that the one is not sufficient without the other. The photograph does not adequately represent the person depicted, and neither does the synecdochic lock of hair. Batchen's assertion

29 Marcia Pointon, "These Fragments I have Shored against my Ruins," in *The Story of Time* ed. Kristen Lippincott (London: Merrell Holberton and the National Maritime Museum, 1999), 198-201.

30 Thomas Lacqueur, "Clio Looks at Corporal Politics," in *Corporal Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1992), 16-17; cited in Geoffrey Batchen, "Ere the Substance Fade," in *Photographs Objects Histories* (London: Routledge, 2004), 37.

31 Batchen, "Ere the Substance Fade", 32-47.

32 Ibid. 39.

33 Ibid. 39.

that in this juxtaposition the photograph emerges as an image that sacrifices its own materiality in favour of its referent (the person depicted) is similar to Louis Kaplan's argument about the photograph as an invisible, a 'transparent' gateway to the original referent.[34] Can Lawrence's death mask, though, be seen in these terms? Though it is a cast taken directly from his face and mirrors the mechanical nature of the photographic process in this way, its three-dimensionality imbues it with a sense of touch that is lacking in photography. The viewer, rather than having to visually transpose the photograph from image to reality, could absorb another sensory layer provided by the death mask. In this regard, it goes beyond Lawrence's own art by reaching out beyond the dimensional plane of painted portraiture as the eye is cast over its solid form. Interestingly, Batchen reflects on the lack of touch in photography, suggesting that the addition of hair helps to close the gap between the viewer and the viewed and between the image of the subject and their past physical existence.[35] Considering the Lawrence example in these terms shows how the death mask worked doubly to link the past with the present through the tactility of the cast as well as the small tuft of hair.

CONCLUSION

For the early nineteenth-century viewer, therefore, the remembrance of Lawrence provided by this object was both an optic and haptic experience that brought the viewer closer to the artist than was normally the case with death masks.[36] Lawrence's lock of hair and his artistic accoutrements, included with his death mask, presented the viewer with a combination of abject remains, associative markers and physical imprint, all of which worked together to create a more intense portrait experience with its own narrative arc. The 'talismanic' addition of Lawrence's hair furnished the death mask with a mysterious aura that reiterated its effect and in this way, as Batchen writes, "a secular object [was] given a potentially sacred aspect".[37] Even though the viewer encountered an image of death, Lawrence's existence was kept somehow present with the lock of hair, along with the tools he put down as his artistic career and indeed his

34 Ibid. 40.

35 Ibid. 41.

36 Ibid. 41. Batchen uses these terms to describe a daguerreotype encased with a patch of fabric from the clothes of the deceased.

37 Ibid. 41.

life came to an end. The multitude and variety of signs that were given in this example provided an all-encompassing image of Lawrence, acknowledging both his life and death, which acted as a highly effective memorial to the great artist. At the same time, the viewer was called upon to contemplate the moment of death itself, which for some would have led to a self-reflexive acknowledgement of their own mortality.

I do not, however, mean to suggest that the death mask itself was a purely emotional memorial. Even though, in the Lawrence example, the death mask was presented in a way that encouraged a more intimate encounter with the features of the deceased, it did not have the same portability that a piece of mourning jewellery had, and it could not be used in the same way. It could not be carried or worn close to the heart while going about daily activities, but had to be looked at from a static point of view in the way that the viewer would have experienced a commemorative sculpture. It was the pulling-together of Lawrence's death mask with other artefacts and bodily remnants that augmented the way the death mask was interpreted. Seen together, they became life affirming – he used this pencil, this piece of chalk – yet the intimate and theatrical act of lifting the lid of the box and revealing the death mask beneath, brutally reminded the viewer of the man's demise and by inference, their own.

Emily Knight studied History of Art and Visual Culture at the University of Oxford, where she completed her Master's degree in 2012. Her Master's dissertation focused on portraiture and death masks in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries in Britain. She is currently developing her ideas for a PhD project on portraiture in eighteenth-century British art.

WHEN LIFE TRIUMPHS

THE MEANINGS OF CHILD RESURRECTIONS IN SIMONE MARTINI'S BLESSED AGOSTINO NOVELLO ALTARPIECE

Fabien Lacouture

Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, France

ABSTRACT – *This essay discusses representations of death and resurrection of children in the Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece, painted by Simone Martini in 1324. In consideration of recent interdisciplinary studies that have demonstrated the affective agency of sacred paintings in medieval and early modern Europe, this paper examines the performative qualities of Martini's altarpiece, and determines how form and content were manipulated in order to evoke specific perceptions and behaviours in its viewers. Through its violent figurative language, naturalistic painting technique, and unusual subject matter, these disturbing representations of death stimulated a cathartic reaction and hence transformed reality for spectators. By eliciting emotional responses that ranged from shock to relief, the Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece served as a didactic model for a wide audience of viewers.*

INTRODUCTION

But there is something which spoils the sweetness of those moments and inflicts bitter concern: You who suffer to see them cry when they fall and hurt their hands, consider how painful it is to realize that it is at this age they die the most.[1]

1 Giovanni Battista Alberti, *I libri della Famiglia*, quoted by Eugenio Garin, "L'image de l'enfant dans les traités de pédagogie du XVe siècle, in *Histoire de l'enfance en Occident-I. De l'Antiquité au XVIIe siècle*, ed. Becchi Egle and Julia Dominique (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 248.

2 Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "L'enfant, la mémoire et la mort dans l'Italie des XIVe et XVe siècles," in *Histoire de l'enfance en Occident – Tome I: De l'Antiquité au XVIIe siècle*, Becchi Egle and Julia Dominique (ed.) (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 228.

3 See Jennifer Lawler, *Encyclopedia of Women in the Middle Ages* (Jefferson and London: McFarland and Company, 2001), 33.

4 See Efrat El-hanany, *Beating the Devil: Images of the Madonna del Soccorso in Italian Renaissance Art* (PhD Dissertation: Indiana University, 2006), 129; and Micheal E. Goodich, *Violence and Miracle in the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 3.

The lives of children were fragile and tenuous in Italy during the fourteenth century, which resulted in a high infant mortality rate. This was caused first by the recurrent outbreaks of plague that, from 1348 on, devastated Italy for more than a century. Such a ´biological catastrophe´, in Christiane Klapisch-Zuber's words, mostly struck children.[2] However, the 'Great Plague' was only one type of threat faced by children in early modern Italy; accidents and other diseases were also important factors in early deathdeath.[3] To understand the realities of childhood during the waning of the Middle Ages – to borrow the expression of Dutch historian Johan Huizinga – the common dangers they would have encountered in their daily lives must be closely examined. Among texts and images of the period, miracle stories offer a remarkably rich resource for understanding the vulnerability of children in fourteenth-century Tuscany.

The emergence and development of narratives of miraculous resurrections in painting is linked to fourteenth-century perceptions of the great mystery that was death. Paintings depicting events such as the resurrection of a child were most often *ex-votos*, devotional images offered to a sanctuary saint by someone who wanted his or her life or that of a relative to be spared. These images, as many scholars have mentioned, may have served an apotropaic or talismanic function for viewers.[4] The triumph of life over death, as realized in paint through the portrayal of a child's resurrection, may well have been a way to turn malevolence away and incur the saint's protection in real life.

Concerning the resurrection of children, the narrative pattern of hagiographical sources describing the life of a saint is relatively simple, and is recurrent in most of the available examples. The soon-to-be miraculously cured child is the victim of an accident, which prompts his entourage to mourn him and invoke the saint to whom the text or the altar is dedicated to perform a miracle and resurrect the child. The Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece, painted by Simone Martini in Siena in 1324, is a unique example of this type of hagiographical image (Fig. 1). The altarpiece displays at its centre a portrait of Blessed Agostino, surrounded

Fig. 1
Panel of the Blessed Agostino Novello: the Saint Inspired by an Angel and Four of His Miracles
Simone Martini
1324
Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale
© 2013. Photo Scala, Florence. Courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali

Fig. 2
Detail of the first *predella* of *Panel of the Blessed Agostino Novello: the Saint Inspired by an Angel and Four of His Miracles*
Simone Martini
1324
Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale
© 2013. Photo Scala, Florence
Courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali

by four *predellas* representing posthumously executed miracles. Three of these miracle scenes involve children, which are the primary focus of this study. The first scene depicts a child being attacked by a wolf at the doors of a medieval city resembling Siena and other Tuscan towns from this period (Fig. 2). The second panel portrays the fall of a young boy from the balcony of an urban dwelling (Fig. 3). The third panel – the only one to represent an adult – conveys the death of a knight. The final miracle scene depicts a swaddled baby, brought back to life by the saint after being flung headfirst from a swinging cradle (Fig. 4). In each panel, the child's resurrection is conveyed as following the accident, on account of the presence and intervention of Agostino Novello.

Although the Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece is not the first painting to portray miracles involving children, it is unusual for its high proportion of child-related miracles – three-quarters of the altarpiece is dedicated to this theme

5 Andrew Martindale, "The Child in the Picture: A Medieval Perspective," in *The Church and Childhood: Papers Read at the 1993 Summer Meeting and the 1994 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History*

Fig. 3
Simone Martini
Detail of the second *predella* of *Panel of the Blessed Agostino Novello: the Saint Inspired by an Angel and Four of His Miracles*
1324
Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale
© 2013. Photo Scala, Florence
Courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali

Fig. 4
Simone Martini
Detail of the fourth *predella* of *Panel of the Blessed Agostino Novello: the Saint Inspired by an Angel and Four of His Miracles*
1324
Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale
© 2013. Photo Scala, Florence
Courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali

– and for its violent portrayal of death. The current investigation of these two characteristics of the altarpiece moves beyond previous studies – focused mainly on the painting's historical context and naturalism – by emphasizing its affective impact instead.[5] Art historians and anthropologists have demonstrated the significance of the reciprocal relationship between art object and viewer during this period.[6] The aim of this study is to consider the relatively recent assertion that artworks, and especially sacred works, functioned performatively.[7] Hence, it seeks to establish the reflexive process of viewing that the Agostino Novello Altarpiece negotiated with viewers in fourteenth-century Siena,[8] by examining the pictorial qualities and the spatial setting of the painting.

Serving more than a solely devotional purpose, Martini's altarpiece also operated as a didactic aid for spectators with regard to the care and safety of children. In order to demonstrate this crucial ulterior function, it is necessary to consider first the importance of the historical figure of Agostino Novello for the fourteenth-century Sienese community. Once Agostino Novello's significant role has been ascertained, I will discuss the figurative violence of these images and the unique manner in which Simone Martini depicted the scenes. Finally, I will investigate how these images prompted a cathartic experience through their shocking imagery and disturbing naturalism. In a region and period that experienced premature death all too frequently, the acute and varied emotional responses evoked in viewers while looking at the altarpiece transformed their reality, inciting them to act more attentively and protectively towards children.

AGOSTINO NOVELLO: 'CIVIS NOSTER'

The Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece was little known before its restoration in 1945-1946, but has become one of Simone Martini's most analyzed works ever since. Despite the considerable interest in this painting, its violent portrayal of children's deaths and the significance of its aesthetic qualities have never been appropriately addressed. In order to properly consider these aspects and

Society, Diana Wood ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 197-232. Cathleen Sara Hoeniger, "The Child Miracles in Simone Martini's Beato Agostino Novello Altarpiece," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 65 (2002): 303-324. Marie-France Morel, "Le temps de tous les dangers: petite enfance et accidents d'après les ex-voto (XVIe-XIXe siècles)," in *Naissance, Enfance et Éducation dans la France méridionale du XVIe au XXe siècle. Hommage à Mireille Laget: actes du colloque des 15 et 16 mars 1996* (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry III, 2000), 143-192.

6 David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1989). Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

7 Caroline van Eck, "Living Statues: Alfred Gell's Art and Agency, Living Presence Response and the Sublime," in *Art History* 33/4 (2010), 644. According to Van Eck, Gell examines agency without appropriately considering how agency and viewer's responses developed or changed over a period of time.

8 Van Eck, "Living Statues," 648.

determine their influence on audiences, it is necessary to discuss the painting's historical background first.

Max Seidel, in his foundational study of 1985, established that the planned location for the Blessed Agostino's tomb was the Church of Saint Augustine in Siena, where his remains were re-interred after having been buried initially at the hermitage of San Leonardo al Lago, situated just outside the city.[9] Although there is no documentation for the commission of the altarpiece, the painting was probably intended to invigorate the cult of Agostino Novello and to encourage the initiation of beatification and canonization procedures. Nevertheless, devotion towards this figure would remain localized, since it was only in the eighteenth century that Agostino Novello was beatified and his cult recognized by papal authorities.

Agostino Novello, who was born in Sicily and did not settle in Tuscany until the very end of his life, was an unusual choice as a spiritual mediator. Living outside the Siena city walls in a hermitage in San Leonardo al Lago, and thus not in direct contact with the citizens of the city, Agostino differed from the religious figures typically promoted by religious orders in the region, such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, Servites, and Carmelites.[10] This could explain the choice of location for the altarpiece, as it would have been much more difficult to promote the cult of a new saint from the secluded location of San Leonardo al Lago. The cult, moreover, would have needed political legitimation for its activities, which could only be accomplished through an annual procession of the municipal authorities to Agostino's tomb. Transferring his remains to the Church of Saint Augustine, within Siena, would have facilitated this process, while also introducing the cult to the local populace.[11] The sepulchral complex and altarpiece that decorated the tomb, therefore, were measures designed to further cultivate the veneration of Agostino Novello. These needed to be accessible to encourage visitation and pilgrimage, and to elicit prayer and contemplation of Agostino's interment.[12] Given the wide audience that likely interacted with the altarpiece, the choice of subject matter for the *predellas* and their visual language deserve further investigation.

9 Max Seidel, "Condizionamento iconografico e scelta semantica: Simone Martini e la tavola del Beato Agostino Novello," in *Simone Martini: atti del convegno*, ed.Luciano Bellosi (Firenze: Centro Di, 1988).

10 Seidel, "Condizionamento iconografico e scelta semantica," 75. Hoeniger, "The Child Miracles," 307.

11 Seidel, "Condizionamento iconografico e scelta semantica," 75.

12 Most of the surviving descriptions of the sepulchral complex insist on the presence of the altarpiece in the church, which indicates its importance and visibility. See Seidel, "Condizionamento iconografico e scelta semantica," 76, and Martindale, *Simone Martini*, 213.

There are two primary sources for the life and miracles of the Blessed Agostino Novello, which were discovered by Andrew Martindale in 1988. The first is a vita likely written at the convent of Saint Augustine in Siena, while the second was completed by an anonymous Florentine between 1326 and 1342.[13] Intriguingly, these two accounts set forth two completely different series of miracles, totalling eleven miracles in all. The Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece depicts one miracle from each source, including the miracle of the cradle from the Sienese *vita* and the miracle of the balcony from the Florentine account. The other two *predellas*, which portray a child being attacked by a wolf and a knight falling to his death from a mountain, have not yet been linked to any literary source.

The selection of these miracles, in particular the emphasis on resurrections of children, is unusual, given that the majority of Agostino Novello's recorded miracles did not concern children. Moreover, the miracles chosen were performed by Agostino posthumously, which is an unexpected element, since it had become common by the fourteenth century to underscore the earthly life and human qualities of a saint. The altarpiece therefore must be understood as a product of his cult, since Agostino Novello died in 1309, less than thirty years before Simone Martini began the painting. Without surviving documentation, an examination of the content of the *predellas* and what Seidel has described as Martini's 'vigorous figurative language' may provide insight into why patrons chose to promote the cult of Agostino Novello in such a unique way.[14]

REPRESENTING DEATH: NATURALISM AND VIOLENCE IN DOMESTIC SCENES

Death as a subject of representation was not especially rare in fourteenth-century Italy; however, typically it was only alluded to through allegory. Martini, on the other hand, represented the actual moment of death with all of its violence and brutality, in order to enhance the 'thaumaturgical' or miracle-inducing power of the images. According to this logic, the more violent the child's death, the more viewers were shocked by what they saw, thus rendering the resurrection

13 Martindale, *Simone Martini,* 212.

14 Seidel, "Condizionamento iconografico e scelta semantica," 78.

even more miraculous. Many art historians have overlooked this aspect of the Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece, focusing instead on the artist's great skill in realistically depicting the environment of the fourteenth century.[15] Although this is indeed an important characteristic of Tuscan painting from this period, the naturalism must be considered as the first stage in the experience of viewing and interacting with such images. Historian Michel Vovelle underlines the layered meanings evoked by *ex-voto* paintings through the accurate rendition of the domestic and the familiar:

> Behind the apparent simplicity of its message – a gesture of thanks for a granted wish – the *ex-voto* is charged with multiple meanings. At a first level it represents an outstanding testimony concerning the material civilization of a precise period [...]. Quite indiscreetly, as well, it offers, if not the secrets of family life, a glimpse of its composition, and even more interestingly the place attributed to each member of the family [...].[16]

A sense of recognition in fourteenth-century paintings was therefore crucial to creating and conveying meaning. Locations, figures, and objects needed to be both familiar to viewers, and made tangible through naturalistic painting techniques. In the Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece, Martini uses the visual vocabulary typical of ex-votos from this period, representing the type of urban culture that Tuscany, and more particularly cities such as Florence or Siena, wished to embrace. The facades and interior spaces of buildings, for example, are consistent with the architecture of Tuscan cities in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

In their precision and in the repetition of widely recognized motifs, the accidents depicted further enhanced their familiarity. The meticulous portrayal of the cradle in the fourth panel, or of the balcony slat breaking off in the second scene, are elements that would have heightened a sense of recognition in the viewer. Moreover, certain motifs, which were prevalent in both texts and images of this period, would have been understood as archetypes for childhood accidents. The

15 Diana Norman, *Siena, Florence and Padua: Art, Society and Religion 1280-1400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 7-8.

16 Michel Vovelle, preface to Bernard Cousin, *Le Miracle et le quotidien: les ex-voto provençaux, images d'une société* (Aix-en-Provence: Sociétés, mentalités, cultures, 1983), 8. [Translation by the author]

last *predella*, for example, portrays a wet nurse, a very familiar figure in Sienese culture and a typical member of wealthy households. Here the wet nurse has pushed the cradle too hard, causing her helpless charge to fall and perish. Her task was not only to tend to the child, but also to ensure its safety. The mistrust of the wet nurse conveyed here is encountered frequently during this epoch. Many pedagogues insisted on the limited trust families should place in such women, who – not being the natural mothers – were often inept at caring for the children in their charge. Francesco da Barberino, for instance, in his treatise *Il Reggimento e costumi di donna* (1348), urged contemporary wet nurses to be especially vigilant with children as they began to walk, so as to keep them away from heights and to prevent them from falling.[17]

Falling was another frequently deployed pictorial device used to denote a childhood mishap. The fall from the balcony in the second *predella* corresponds to the infant's fall in the scene of the wet nurse, although here the antagonist is the actual mother. The panel was undoubtedly inspired by a fresco executed between 1300 and 1310 by the workshop of Giotto di Bondone,[18] and the same motif returns almost unchanged in the background of Domenico Ghirlandaio's *Miracle of the Boy*, painted in 1485 in Santa Trinità in Florence (Fig. 5). Finally, the attack by an animal in the first panel of the Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece can be seen again – although the wolf has become a horse – in Benozzo Gozzoli's *Saint Dominic Resuscitates Napoleone Orsini* of 1461.[19] The wolf or horse was meant to indicate the child's vulnerability in the presence of animals, domesticated or wild.[20]

Other aspects of the *predellas* were intended to conjure feelings of empathy and parental compassion. The detailed evocation of an Italian city, which occurred only in the three scenes with children, was one of several techniques to encourage engagement with the imagery. Seidel underlines how Martini chose the most suitable visual language to emotionally and spiritually touch the believer who approached the altarpiece seeking help and protection.[21] In the Blessed Agostino

17 See David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch Zuber, *Les Toscans et leur famille – Une étude du Catasto Florentin de 1427* (Paris: Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1978), 559.

18 Workshop of Giotto di Bondone, *A Child of Casa Sperelli Falling from a Tower*, Fresco, c. 1300, Assisi, Lower Church of San Francesco, North Transept.

19 Benozzo Gozzoli, *Saint Dominic Reuscitates Napoleone Orsini*, 1461, Tempera on panel, 25 x 35 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

20 "Make him flee the presence of horses and dogs, and other animals, and prevent him from giving bread to dogs or roosters". Francesco da Barberino, *Il Reggimento e costumi di donna* (Roma: Stamperia de Romanis, 1815), 267.

21 Seidel, "Condizionamento iconografico e scelta semantica," 77.

22 See Georges Vigarello, *Le corps redressé: histoire d'un pouvoir pédagogique* (Paris: A. Colin, 2001), 13.

23 The artists were inspired by accidents incurred by the children who surrounded them. Martini used here another kind of accident to visually create this one. Indeed, the child is copiously bleeding, but his empty eye-socket is also very visible. This image recalls also accidents due to birds, usually

Novello Altarpiece, this effect is achieved through the violence with which the accidents are represented. As mentioned, in Italian medieval and Renaissance painting a dead child was never painted as such. Instead, death was only suggested through allegory or in a manner that facilitated ambiguity as to the child's condition. Putting aside representations of falls, which are essentially non-violent since the viewers do not see the child actually colliding with the ground, miracle scenes provide the only iconographic format for depicting children's deaths. The Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece draws from this pictorial tradition; however, it moves beyond established precedent in its exaggerated violence and considerable use of blood. This almost macabre zeal for painting blood can be understood as responding to the theory of 'humours' predominant in Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which was first developed by

Fig. 5
Miracle of the Boy
Domenico Ghirlandaio
1485
Florence, Santa Trinità
© 2013. Photo Scala, Florence

Claudius Galenus in the second century CE. According to Galenus' theory, blood, warm and wet, corresponded with the temperament of children, who have a sanguine constitution, fragile and imperfect, and who therefore must be protected at all times. In the scenes of the bloodiest accidents involving the wolf and the wet nurse, Martini has haemorrhagic effusions erupt from the heads of the victims with disturbing precision.[22]

In the miracle scene of the wolf attack, the child's head bleeds copiously and has even lost an eye.[23] In the fourth panel the infant, forced out of his cradle by the careless wet nurse, also bleeds profusely, and a pool of blood surrounds his body. This is even more significant, since it deviates from the narrative of the miracle. As Martindale has explained, the baby's head was deformed by the fall and his aunt, before begging for Agostino Novello to intercede, tried to reshape it "as if it were made of wax".[24] Martini transforms the accident and renders it more dramatic through the stream of blood that flows from the head of the lifeless infant. Later works produced in Tuscany similarly present death as a bloody and gruesome event. Domenico Veneziano, in his *A Miracle of St. Zenobius* (1442), also depicts death with painstaking precision as a haemorrhagic effusion from the head (Fig. 6).[25] Benozzo Gozzoli as well seems to have had a particular inclination to picture death with an utmost sense of agony. In the *Resurrection of a Dead Child by Saint Zenobius* (1461), the face of the child is mutilated and blood is seeping out from under his body.[26] In Gozzoli's aforementioned *Resurrection of*

chickens and roosters that came into houses and pecked the faces of children left unwatched. A blinded or eyeless socket was the most frequent result of these attacks. See Morel, "Le temps de tous les dangers," 197-198.

24 See Martindale, "The Child in the Picture", 199.

25 See Hoeniger, "The Child Miracles", 310.

26 Benozzo Gozzoli, *Saint Zenobius Resurrecting a Child,* 1461, Tempera on panel, Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Fig. 6
A Miracle of St. Zenobius
Domenico Veneziano
c. 1442
© 2013. The Fitzwilliam Museum,
Cambridge Photo Scala, Florence

Napoleone Orsini the child is portrayed lying lifeless on the ground, while the horse threatens to trample his body and head. Once again, the profusion of blood is intentionally disturbing.

The violence of the accident was also stressed through the reactions of the adults depicted. Women scream in Veneziano's *St. Zenobius*, and beg the saint to bring the child back to life. In other examples, parents repeatedly touch the child to assert his or her corporeal presence. These gestures are traditional rhetorical expressions for bereavement and it is not rare to see them when figures, most often women, encounter death.[27] Returning to the Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece, it was again Seidel who first discussed the painting's violence: "Neither the Sienese painting of previous ages nor the previous works of Simone Martini offer examples of a more dramatic cruelty that could stand comparison with the altarpiece".[28] According to Seidel, this gruesomeness was intended above all to highlight the miraculous efficacy of Agostino. The fact that he appears in each panel to perform the miracle himself strongly indicates the importance of his supernatural intervention through resurrection: without it, the child would not have survived. Nevertheless, such visual carnage was quite uncommon in fourteenth-century Italian painting. If it was meant only to reinforce the power of a saint, then it is likely that other painters would have used similar techniques. Still, the altarpiece's singularity suggests that such violent visual language may have served another purpose.

LEARNING FROM DEATH: A VISUAL CATHARSIS WITH EDUCATIVE PROPERTIES

27 Moshe Barasch, *Gesture of Despair in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art* (New-York: New York University Press 1976), 60.

28 Seidel, "Condizionamento iconografico e scelta semantica", 77.

Why did Simone Martini insist on such an unusual representation of children's deaths? After all, the presence of a wolf or a body lying on the ground would have been enough to convey death to the viewer. Since it is unknown who commissioned the painting, it is unclear whether the altarpiece had an instructive intent or reflected a personal loss experienced by the patron(s). A desire to celebrate the saint as well as the patrons and their families regularly presided

over contemporary commissions, however, as is the case with Ghirlandaio's fresco in Santa Trinità (Fig. 5). Although Ghirlandaio also deploys naturalism to depict death – he represents the boy falling from the balcony after having tried to retrieve his ball with great precision – the central part of the fresco is dedicated to the actual act of resurrection by Saint Francis, who is placed in the foreground above the entire Florentine community. The minor characters, like the accident relegated to the the background and including members of the patron's family, surround the child and, by their presence and prayers, participate in the miraculous event. In this fresco, any act of violence is marginalized in order to focus attention on the celebration of Saint Francis and on the patrons as intercessors. However, this analysis cannot be applied to the Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece, since the *predellas* do not contain any portraits and therefore the emphasis is placed entirely on the accidents and their causes and effects. According to Andrew Martindale, the specificity of the miracles in Martini's altarpiece likely corresponds to a personal preference of the patron – whether a private individual or the city of Siena – for representations of children.[29] A similar commission that may illuminate the purpose of the altarpiece is Veneziano's *A Miracle of St. Zenobius*. Commissioned by the Uzzano family for their family church in Santa Lucia dei Magnoli, Florence, the altarpiece was intended for private display and probably commemorated a personal tragedy suffered by the Uzzano family.

The strangely violent narratives of such paintings were thus meant to communicate with a particular audience. In the case of the Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece, the impact of its representations derives from the identification of the spectator with the painting's imagery. The meaning of the excessive insistence on blood and corpses can be explained by the fortunate outcome of resurrection in the narratives. Indeed, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, parents who witnessed such disturbing scenes in real life must have felt a strong empathy towards their painted counterparts. Writing in 1587, Giovanni Battista Armenini elucidates how these paintings could have affected their viewers:

29 Martindale also advances the hypothesis that the multiplication of children's resurrections could be "a characteristic of the period", in light of the very high infant mortality rate in the fourteenth century. See Martindale, *Simone Martini,* 212, note 6.

> Since the eye is the most perfect among the exterior senses, it moves the minds to hatred, love and fear, more than all the other senses […] and when the beholders see very grave tortures present and apparently real […] they are moved to true piety and thereby drawn to devotion and reverence […].[30]

Although Armenini's text dates from the sixteenth century, it indicates how certain sacred images, by their visual language, could affect viewers by appealing to their emotions. Throughout this period, Italy was burdened with high death rates, especially among children. Klapisch-Zuber, in her research on children in Tuscan cities, provides a thought-provoking statistical study on children born in Florence between 1300 and 1550. It reveals that during this period, about 20% of children died before reaching the age of three – when they left their wet nurse. A further 30% died before the age of ten, and 34% before reaching adolescence, in this period the age of fifteen.[31] These numbers are comparable to other cities on the Italian peninsula. Considering the infant mortality risks that plagued Italy for almost three centuries, it is very likely that representations of children's accidents would have reminded viewers of their own experiences with premature death, whether the child who died was their own or a close relative's.

Viewing the *predellas* of the Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece, moreover, was a cathartic experience for its audience. The lesson of the deeply moving images, however, could not be devoid of hope, which would have resulted in apathetic despondency among viewers. For this reason, Martini coupled each horrific scene of death to one of resurrection. By presenting the moments of death and of miraculous resuscitation performed by Agostino Novello on the same panel, the audience was led through the entire emotional experience of these two extremes. This cathartic process is how the didactic message of the altarpiece was communicated; the conflicting and contradictory feelings associated with life and death provoked parents to thoroughly reflect upon their own roles, behaviours, and actions. Without the inclusion of resurrection in the scenes, viewers would

30 Giovanni Battista Armenini, *De'veri precetti della pittura* (Ravenna, 1587), 34, quoted and translated by Freedberg, *The Power of images*, 2.

31 Klapisch-Zuber, "L'enfant, la mémoire et la mort," 226.

have only encountered fear and would not have picked up on the immediate relevance of the accidents portrayed.

According to Cathleen Sara Hoeniger, such a horrific portrayal of death was the result of an Augustinian desire to encourage not only a sense of responsibility but also of guilt.[32] This is why Martini highlights the lack of attention by adults in the *predellas* depicting falls. In each instance, it was the adult's fault that the child was killed, whether through the negligence of a mother or the carelessness of a wet nurse. The culpability of adults is especially emphasized in the scene of the boy falling from a balcony, in which the child, after having been saved by Agostino Novello, frowns in anger and resentment at his mother, brandishing his fist. This singular gesture was painted for a precise purpose: to indicate that the accident was not the work of fortune, but was the result of the mother's lack of action. The opposition between mother and son stresses the disparity between the mother's negligence and the attentiveness of the men of the family[33]: the mother, stunned by the incident, is alone in the upper register of the painting, whereas in the lower part, the child is surrounded by the masculine members of the family. In the fourth *predella* the same distinction is made, as the wet nurse, who caused her helpless charge to be thrown to its death by pushing the cradle too hard, is conspicuously absent from the procession in the lower part of the painting. The image clearly establishes that, even though Agostino Novello brought the infant back to life, the wet nurse permanently lost her place in the family. Seeing such images may have encouraged wet nurses to be more conscientious, and motivated mothers to take better care of their own children.

Finally, these paintings could have had a didactic purpose for children themselves. We can easily establish a parallel between the resurrection scenes and Francesco da Barberino's prescription for the edification of children. According to Barberino, it was beneficial to impart in a developing child a fear of potential threats, such as accidental falls, animals, sharp objects, and even the dark: "And instil in him the fear of going in the dark, of touching the flames with his hands."[34] These dangers

32 Hoeniger, "The Child Miracles," 326.

33 This masculine group, not mentioned in the story, is an addition by the painter. See Martindale, *Simone Martini,* 212.

34 Francesco da Barberino, *Il reggimento e costume di donna*, 266. See also Herlihy and Klapisch Zuber, *Les Toscans et leur famille*, 559.

are realized in scenes such as Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Miracle of Saint Nicholas of Bari* (1330), in which the young son of a merchant wanders off and falls into a trap the devil has laid for him.[35] While the whole family is absorbed by the celebrations of a banquet, the child sneaks away and before anyone has noticed his disappearance, the Devil, disguised as a pilgrim, strangles him.[36]

CONCLUSION

The Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece scenes had an important performative role for contemporary viewers. Although the altarpiece was intended in part to encourage the growth of the cult of the Blessed Agostino Novello in the city of Siena, it reached a wide audience due to its location and accessibility in the Church of Sant'Agostino. Moreover, its figurative language and subject matter were virtually unprecedented in the pictorial tradition of fourteenth-century Italy. The violence and insistence on blood were unique among miracle narratives from this period, indicating that the altarpiece was meant do to more than merely underscore the miraculous powers of Agostino Novello. The purpose of the portrayed violence was to enhance the affective impact of the altarpiece, in order to trigger a cathartic response and render its didactic message more palpable. The didactic aims of the altarpiece are paralleled in pedagogical literature concerning the care of children of the period.

35 Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Four Stories from the Life of St. Nicholas*, c. 1330, Tempera on panel, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

36 Once again, note the very realistic – and shocking – representation of the strangulation: the child is held in the air, struggling to loosen the devil's hold, and we can even feel his feet writhing in pain.

These images were performative in that they had the power to alter the behaviours of their audience and even prevent future accidents. This process was not magical, even though these images had an apotropaic dimension: the altarpiece was imbued with a didactic agency, impressed upon its audience through the compelling combination of violent incidents and redemptive resurrections. The message could only be effective if the images first shocked the viewers, and then immediately soothed them. In this way, the paintings acted affectively through visual catharsis. The pairing of life lost and life regained within the same panel forced viewers to encounter the death of a child without the infliction of emotional pain.

Miracle stories thus offer a glimpse into children's lives in the Late Middle Ages and of the dangers they regularly faced. Such narratives, moreover, convey a manifest concern for children and the deep distress invoked upon endangerment. Contrary to what Philippe Ariès has claimed, it was impossible to become accustomed to infant mortality, even though its high levels made it a daily occurrence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[37] The Blessed Agostino Novello Altarpiece provides evidence of the pain inflicted on a community when a child died, proving that although such death was frequent, it was never considered normal.

37 Philippe Ariès, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien régime* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973), 250.

Fabien Lacouture is based at the Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne University, where he works as a teaching assistant and is preparing a PhD dissertation on *Children history and representation, from the 14th to the 16th century in Northern and Central Italy*. Lacouture has a particular interest in the Italian Renaissance, and in the representation of children and family in art history. His research on children, family, and women is interdisciplinary in nature, incorporating studies from art history as well as modern history and anthropology.

VISIONS OF DEATH
ROBERTSON'S PHANTASMAGORIA AS A VISUAL PARADIGM FOR GOYA AND BLAKE

Isabelle van den Broeke
Ghent University, Belgium

ABSTRACT – *The phantasmagoria show, a magic lantern spectacle with moving, ghostly projections, visualized the uncanny downside of the secularized attitude towards afterlife and spirits in the early nineteenth century. In the light of the lantern death and spirits were no longer theological concepts, but became ontological, psychological and even haunting ideas. As an optical illusion spectacle and a metaphor for the 'unheimlich' confrontation with inner visions, the phantasmagoria provides an illuminating paradigm to examine the ambiguous visualization of phantasms and apparitions, coined between absence and presence, in early nineteenth-century visual arts. The works of Francisco Goya and William Blake, two artists known for their fantastic art, interest in popular culture and ability to capture the zeitgeist, form an especially interesting research corpus. The visions of these artists were inspired by the visual techniques of the phantasmagoria: transparency, movement, light and shadow. Analyzing their later works within this context enables a greater insight into Goya's and Blake's innovative treatment of the uncanny and 'haunted' perception of spirits and death.*

INTRODUCTION

Phantasmagoria is an interesting metaphor for the analysis of the graphic artworks of Francisco Goya (1746-1828) and William Blake (1757-1827) and their visualization of the contemporary – and extremely popular – concept of 'spectres', or ghostly apparitions. At a time when Enlightenment and secularisation had erased death as a protagonist in everyday life, bloody wars and the newly gained cultural, psychological and popular interest in romantic spirits and gothic spectres made death very present. This new ambiguous perception of death was a symptom of the early nineteenth-century Counter Enlightenment, an outcome of the 'age of reason' famously studied by Isaiah Berlin, and by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their discourse on the dialectics of the Enlightenment.[1] The phantasmagoria show's success was largely based on the counter-enlightened interest in uncanny apparitions. The eerie visualization of dead people, projected in this highly successful illusionist spectacle, attracted many spectators in early nineteenth-century Madrid and London, the hometowns of Goya and Blake.[2] To make the spirits of the deceased and the monsters of the afterlife visible, the phantasmagoria used innovative visual and psychological techniques that make it a convincing visual paradigm for contemporary fantastic arts. In what follows, the influence of phantasmagoria on the graphic works of Goya and Blake will be demonstrated by analyzing how spectacular components of a phantasmagoria show, as performed by its most famous 'hauntrepreneur' Étienne-Gaspard Robertson (1763-1837), share striking similarities with various contemporary artworks by Goya and Blake.

THE PRE-CINEMATOGRAPHIC SPECTRES OF ROBERTSON, GOYA AND BLAKE

The concept of phantasmagoria, coined for the first time in the late eighteenth century and re-used by modern philosophers such as Adorno, originated in a visual spectacle. The phantasmagoria was a popular esoteric and magic show that

1 Isaiah Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," in *The Proper Study of Mankind. An Anthology of Essays*, eds. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012 edition). Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment (Dialektik der Aufklärung)*, transl. Allen Lane (London: Verso, 2010 [1944]).

2 On the phantasmagoria in Madrid, see Rafael Gomez Alonso, *Arqueología de la imagen filmíca: de los origines al nacimiento de la fotografía* (Madrid: Editorial Archiviana, 2002) and Wendy Bird, "Enlightenment and Entertainment: the Magic Lantern in Late 18th- and Early 19th-century Madrid," in *Realms of Light. Uses and Perceptions of the Magic Lantern from the 17th-century to the 21st-century*, eds. Richard Crangle, Mervyn Heard, and Ine van Dooren (London: Magic Lantern Society, 2005), 86-91. On the phantasmagoria in London, see Mervyn Heard, *Phantasmagoria. The Secret Life of the Magic Lantern* (Hastings: The Projection Box, 2006).

reanimated the dead in the post-Enlightenment period around 1800. For a couple of decades it was the most successful spectacle in Europe, and visible evidence for the modern vogue of re-enchantment and secular magic. Its techniques were copied in various ways: literary scholar Terry Castle, for example, analyzes how Thomas Carlyle frequently evoked the French Revolution with a description full of phantasmagorical devices, and describes his evocations as a nightmarish magic lantern show playing on without respite.[3]

The phantasmagoria spectacle that inspired Carlyle was indeed an adaptation of the magic lantern shows known since the seventeenth century, but differing both in technique and imagery (Fig. 1). The phantasmagoria no longer screened traditional fantastic and carnivalesque scenes with buffoons, angels and devils, but brought to life dead people, varying from known revolutionaries to gothic characters to the loved ones of the spectators. In doing so, the phantasmagoria showman or 'hauntrepreneur' did not limit himself to the magic lantern device and its static slides. He used smoke, light effects and real filmic movement of

3 Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 51-52.
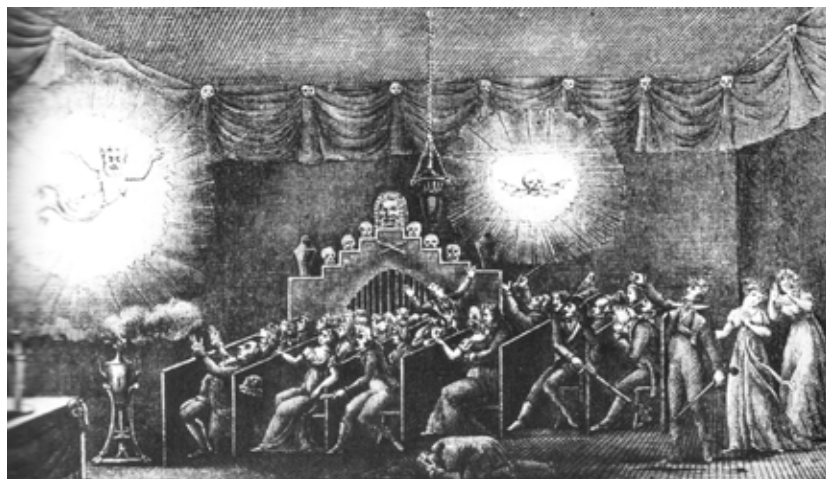

Fig. 1
Illustration of a phantasmagoria spectacle in Etienne-Gaspard Robertson
Mémoires Récréatifs, Scientifiques et Anecdotiques du Physicien – Aéronaute
1831

the lantern to erase the boundaries between the spectator's space and the projection screen. During the phantasmagoria the shimmering and dark images were perceived as real living phantasms. The dead appeared as eerie ghosts.

The most famous hauntrepreneur was Étienne-Gaspard Robert, known as Professor Robertson. This magician-scientist from Liège, who called himself 'professor' in order to enhance his scientific intentions, optimized the technology of the magic lantern and turned it into a so-called phantascope. The phantascope was a projection device that Robertson hid behind a translucent projection screen, which added to the mystery. To make his ghostly projections more convincing, he also equipped the magic lantern with wheels and designed the device to keep the image in focus and in a constant brightness while he moved the apparatus along rails. Although in his memoirs and advertisements he – along with his many followers – stressed that he sought to reveal the charlatanic methods of necromanticism in order to serve enlightened education, the reality was different. During the show, smoke, light effects and a dark setting clarified nothing; on the contrary, the public was confronted with the obscure appearance of lifelike moving spectres. The spectator did not know what was real or unreal. A Parisian witness of Robertson's spectacle described this state thus: "Reason has told you well that these things are mere phantoms, catoptric tricks devised with artistry, carried out with skill, presented with intelligence, your weakened brain can only believe what it is made to see."[4] Media specialist Tom Gunning would later speak of this divided consciousness of the spectator during the phantasmagoria show as a state that was typically modern;[5] he writes that the "Phantasmagoria takes on the weight of modern dialectics of truth and illusion, subjectivity and objectivity, and life and death."[6]

Robertson's realistic, moving cinematic apparitions filled theatres all over Europe. His ghosts were a pure visualization of post-Enlightenment ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding death, and the show's mystery appealed to the public's growing insecurities about death and afterlife. As a popular visual

4 Tom Gunning, "Illusions Past and Future: The Phantasmagoria and its Spectres", in *First International Conference on the Histories of Art, Science and Technology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 11. Accessed at www.mediaarthistory.org/, November 14, 2013.

5 Ibid. 6.

6 Ibid. 1.

show it must have attracted visual artists, especially artists interested in fantasy, the workings of the imagination, and cognitive changes: artists such as Francisco Goya and William Blake, who created their last graphic artworks, respectively the *Disparates* (1814-1823) and *Jerusalem* (1804-1827), in the image of the phantasmagoria.

While no hard historical evidence exists that Goya or Blake ever saw a phantasmagoria show, several contemporary documents make it clear that they knew the spectacle quite well. For example, the poet José Gallardo gave a poem in which he summoned his friend Goya for help in creating an imaginative work of art the title *La fantasmagoría* (1815).[7] Moreover, many of the figures Gallardo evokes in the verses can be found both in the phantasmagoria show and in the *Disparates* prints. For instance, the same haunting formation of dancing witches circling round and round figured in Gallardo's poem, on Robertson's screen (*La danse des sorcières*), and in Goya's aquatint *Disparate femenino*.[8] Similarly, in the case of Blake it is probable that he discussed the show with his friend Henry Crabb Robinson. This theatre critic often visited the old artist around the time that Blake was working on *Jerusalem*. It was also the period in which the phantasmagoria attracted many people, including Crabb Robinson, to London theatres. On 23 September 1821 he wrote in his diary about how the effect of the phantasmagoria had pleased him.[9] Moreover, the fact that these London phantasmagoria shows were known and advertised as 'spectrology' may be related to Blake's abundant use of the term 'spectre' in the illuminated poem *Jerusalem*.[10] The fact that both artists were interested in gothic popular culture and the preromantic perception of death further suggests their familiarity with the spectacle. The phantasmagoria show counted as the summit of popular haunting entertainment. It was a disturbing visual event that neither Goya nor Blake could have missed.

The fact that Robertson was the most copied showman in Europe, and that he occasionally left Paris to visit other cities sustains this hypothesis, especially in the case of Goya. In the lively theatre district where Goya lived, the phantasmagorias of

7 L. R. Tobar, "Goya y la Literatura de su tiempo," in *Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, su obra y su tiempo*, ed. María Carmen Lacarra Ducay, (Saragossa: Institución Fernando el Católico, 1997), 64.

8 Robertson describes his projection of 'La danse de sorcières' in Étienne-Gaspard Robertson, *Mémoires Récréatifs, Scientifiques et Anecdotiques du Physicien – Aeronaute* (Paris: L'imprimerie de Rignoux, 1831).

9 Henry Crabb Robinson, *The London Theatre, 1811-1866, Selections from the diary of Henry Crabb Robinson*, ed. Eluned Brown (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1996), 47.

10 On the advertisements of phantasmagorias, see Heard, *Phantasmagoria*.

Gomez Mantilla and others entertained the Madrilenian public. In 1821 Robertson himself, leaving Paris to travel Europe, went to Madrid to set up phantasmagorias. Contemporary documents reporting on his Madrilenian shows, such as the *Noticias Curiosas Sobre el Espectaculo de Mr. Robertson* (1821), have survived.[11] During Robertson's performances in Madrid, which were discussed in the press and promoted by theatre houses, Goya was working on his *Disparates*. Robertson never travelled to London, where the phantasmagoria was nevertheless famous due to imitator-showmen such as Philipsthal and the duo Schirmer and Scholl.[12] These German followers of Robertson conjured phantoms and spectres of the dead at the Strand, a lively neighbourhood where Blake often strolled and even lived for a while. It was one of these shows that his friend Crabb Robinson wrote about. The shows were all inspired by Robertson's famous Parisian performances at the Couvent des Capucines in their structure, their sequence of experiences and in their culmination of fear.

FEAR OF THE LIVING DEAD

The young Robertson organized his first spectacle in the Paris Pavillon de l'Echiquier in 1798. A year later he moved to the Couvent des Capucines, near the Place Vendôme.[13] His show is a valuable source for visual research, as he left an extensive description of his visual techniques and images in his memoirs (1831). Many of these have a counterpart in the late graphic artworks of Goya and Blake, several of which will be discussed below.

Even before the visitor approached the entrance of the Couvent des Capucines to see Robertson's phantasmagoria, he was confronted with the haunting theme of death. The participant who was lucky enough to get a ticket to a busy late evening performance, had to make his way to the front door through the gravestones of the deceased nuns of the former cloister.[14] The graveyard was the perfect setting to introduce the visitor into the atmosphere of the phantasmagoria. This exterior antichambre to the spectacle incorporated the dialectics of the absence and

11 Anonymous, *Noticias Curiosas. Sobre El Espectaculo de Mr. Robertson* (Madrid: Carrera de S. Francisco, 1821).

12 On the hauntrepreneur Philipsthal, see Heard, "Phantasmagoria-mania," in *Phantasmagoria*, 143-176. On the 'professors' Schirmer and Scholl, see Schirmer and Scholl, *A Sketch of the Performances at the Large Theatre, Lyceum; and a short account of the Origin, History and Explanation of all the late Optical and Acoustic Discoveries called the Phantasmagoria [...],* (London: For the Proprietors, 1805).

13 Françoise Levie, *Étienne-Gaspard Robertson. La vie d'un fantasmagore* (Brussels: Les Editions du Préambule et Sofidoc, 1990), 91.

14 Ibid. 91; and Gunning, *Illusions Past and Future*, 3.

presence of death, an ambiguous perception that defines the phantasmagoria itself. On the one hand death was absent, since the cloister and the old cemetery in Paris's city centre were no longer in use. The cloister, deserted during the Revolution, symbolized the banishing by the Enlightenment of traditional beliefs about the dead, and the focus on the afterlife. But on the other hand the war atrocities, allegorically described by Blake in *Europe, a Prophecy* (1794), and horribly depicted by Goya in *Los Desastres de la Guerra* (1810-1815), were a familiar sight to most of Robertson's visitors.

This uncanny experience in the old cemetery was fully exploited by Robertson in his phantasmagoria. During the projection he presented a miniature coffin that opened and closed via a mechanic component, to suddenly reveal a skeleton.[15] The unexpected movement of the scene made it appear real, although the smoke and light projection kept it blurry and ambiguous. The optical illusion of the rising skeleton, supported by visual effects that hindered a clear view, also appears in Blake's and Goya's graphic works. In a sketchy way, with rough lines and strokes, leaving out details and creating a *sfumato* effect, both the *Disparates* drawing *Dos personajes asomándose a una salida luminosa* (1816-1819) and plate 58 of *Jerusalem* reveal a skeleton that comes to life. Robertson, Goya and Blake all used images of the rising dead in *sfumato* to visualize the underlying fear the visitor must have felt wandering around the cemetery – a new fear of death in a secularised society.[16]

A GALVANISTIC SPECTACLE

15 Levie, *Étienne-Gaspard Robertson*, 302. This projection 3D-model is conserved in the Musée National des Technique, Paris.

16 Adam Kotsko, *Awkwardness* (Winchester: O-books, 2010), 13.

After the visitor left the cemetery and entered the former cloister, he walked down a long corridor. With growing tension and expectation, he encountered the first exhibition hall, the 'salon de physique'. Here Robertson demonstrated some scientific experiments as a prelude to the show, using illuminating sparks to make the legs of a dead frog move. Thus, he offered the visitor an insight into the newly discovered power of electricity, or as he called it, galvanism. Robertson described

this new wonder in his memoirs: "Expériences sur le nouveau fluide connu sous le nom de galvanisme, dont l'application rend pour un temps le mouvement aux corps qui ont perdu la vie".[17] Blake depicted the same electric life-giving sparks in plate 9 of his *Jerusalem*. Influenced by John Birche's *Essay on the Medical Application of Electricity* (1803), he engraved dead bodies surrounded by little stars, his own metaphor for the life-giving power of electricity.[28] In this way, both Robertson and Blake exploited the dialectics of the Enlightenment in the way Adorno and Horkheimer later defined the concept. As science seemed to overturn the authority of the Church and religious revelation, it took on a strange new, marvellous power. Galvanism was not presented simply as a physical force, but as a power that enabled man to animate the dead.

DARKNESS AND IRRATIONALITY

The quasi-scientific show of animating the dead was the perfect introduction to one of the first pre-cinema shows, where figures were animated on screen. After the galvanistic spectacle in the 'salon de physique', Robertson opened a huge archaic door covered with mysterious hieroglyphs. Behind this portal the real phantasmagoria spectacle took place. Likewise, Blake started his illuminated book *Jerusalem*, a book full of spectres of light and shadow, with an image of his protagonist Los, who is seen from the back pushing open an enormous door surrounded with mysterious signs. Like Robertson, Blake invited the viewers in to contemplate his visionary scenes and images.

The audience then entered a dimly lit room draped in dark curtains. Robertson hung the draperies to blur the contours of the room,[19] creating a universe where the real world and the magical world, the world of the living and the world of the dead, converged. Such uncanny draperies are also found in Goya's *Disparate claro* (1815-1823) and Blake's *The Ghost of a Flea* (1819). In both works the curtains are a visual technique to create a magical, unclear space – a phantasmagorical setting. Thus, in this Gothic period of confusion and cognitive

17 Robertson, *Mémoires Récréatifs*, 287.

18 Peter Ackroyd, *William Blake* (London: Ballantine Books, 1997), 260.

19 In his memoirs, Robertson explains his obscuring technique: "Il faut pouvoir disposer d'une salle de soixante à quatre-vingts pieds de long, sur vingt-quatre au plus de largeur; elle doit être peint ou tendue en noir. [...] Le rideau blanc [the projection screen] qu'il faut provisoirement dissimuler à la vue des spectateurs par un rideau d'étoffe noire." Robertson, *Mémoires Récréatifs*, 325.

uncertainty between Enlightenment and Counter Enlightenment, Robertson, as well as Goya and Blake, alluded with their (pre-)cinematographic shadows to the unclear fusion between irrationality and reason, darkness and light.

Next, while searching for a seat in the dark room, Robertson's spectators would have seen bat-like figures swaying from the ceiling, or the occasional owl-image standing in the corner. In an anonymous etching of the phantasmagoria auditorium a moving bat, a well-known symbol of irrationality, is positioned in the centre while a static owl, the symbol of reason, stands in the corner (Fig. 2). Thus, in Robertson's phantasmagoria, the bats flew overhead, repelling the owl. Blake clearly portrays the bat-owl dialectic in his work *Hecate* (1795, Fig. 3). In it, the owl stands still. He has stopped while the bat energetically flies in. Goya's equivalent of the bat-owl representation is famously depicted in *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos* (1797, Fig. 4). It is noteworthy that this print recently gained a new interpretation as a growing number of researchers acknowledge this work not as a glorification of reason, but as a warning *against* the hegemony of reason.[20] 'Sueño' does not only mean 'sleep', it also signifies 'dream'. When pursuing to the extreme the enlightened dream of an almighty

20 Erik Oger, *De rede en haar monsters* (Kapellen: Uitgeverij Pelckmans, 2008), 10; and José Monleón, *A Spectre is Haunting Europe. A Sociohistorical Approach to the Fantastic* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 22.

Fig. 2
Phantasmagoria
Anonymous print
Nineteenth century

Fig. 3
Hecate
William Blake
1795

Fig. 4
El sueño de la razón produce monstruos
Francisco Goya
1797

reason, reason turns into its opposite: unreason. While Robertson's scientific and seemingly enlightened intentions took on haunted and magical proportions in the auditorium, Blake and Goya's defence of enlightened ideas, which coloured earlier works, transformed into an apprehension of the dark side of the Enlightenment, blackening *Jerusalem* and the *Disparates*.

When the phantasmagoria show actually began the lights went out entirely and the public was suddenly seated in the dark. This was an overwhelming and fearful experience in an era when theatre lights brightly lit the stage as well as the auditorium.[21] 'The dark space helped create an inward and individual experience, even though other visitors were present. This darkness and the brightness of the projected images served Robertson's spectacle, as the resulting sense of isolation helped make it the first cinematic performance where images on the screen felt like images in the mind's eye. This evolution towards an obscure

setting with individual spectres originating from the fantasizing brain can also be found in the graphic art of Goya and Blake. Goya's parade of monstrous humans in his *Disparates* is set against a black aquatinted background. Likewise Blake experimented with the technique of monochrome graphics and white-line etching to visualize his dark visions in *Jerusalem*.

RAISING THE DEAD IN SMOKE, LIGHT AND MOVEMENT

To open the phantasmagoria show Robertson stepped forward while reciting the following words:

> Citizens and gentlemen, [...] I have stated in the press that I will revive the dead, so I will resuscitate them. Those of the company who desire the apparition of people that they loved and from whom life has been taken [...] need only speak up; I will obey their command.[22]

Robertson's memoirs describe some of the resurrections of his audience's loved ones. For these performances he used smoke to enhance the transparency and

21 Gunning, *Illusions Past and Future*, 2.

22 "Citoyens et messieurs, [...] j'ai dit dans la presse que je ressuscitais les morts, je les ressusciterai. Ceux de la compagnie qui désirent l'apparition des personnes qui leur ont été chères, et dont la vie a été terminée [...] n'ont qu'a parler; j'obéirai à leur commandement." Levie, *Étienne-Gaspard Robertson*, 81. Translation by the author.

Fig. 5
Disparate funeral
Francisco Goya
1814-23

ghostlike effect of the projection image. Like a necromancer he threw some vitriol and phosphor on a smouldering tripod, and in the circling smoke the image of the dead appeared. One of Robertson's descriptions mentioned an emotional encounter between an old woman in the audience and her dead husband who appeared in the smoke. A parallel of this first anecdote can be found in Goya's *Disparate funeral* (1814-1823, Fig. 5). The *Disparate* shows the ghost of an old man appearing amidst an excited audience. An older woman in the foreground stretches her arm towards him. The aquatint with its infinite alternation of small black and white dots creates a smoky and unclear scene, a phantasmagoria technique to depict the non-bodies of the dead. That this smoky, ghostly body was seen as typically phantasmagorical can be deducted from the use of the word 'phantasmagoria' in contemporary art criticism. In 1851 Louis Peisse, a French art critic, wrote in *Le Revue de Paris* the following words about Jean-François Gigoux's painting *Galatée* (c. 1852):

> In the work of M. Gigoux, the studio with the statue is filled with a bluish smoke that seems to be coming from the furnaces of an alchemist; the body of Galatea posed on a pedestal in the centre naked and white, seems to detach itself from the steamy background as a phantasmagoric apparition.[23]

His description, in fact, evokes a typical phantasmagoria scene. A second anecdote that Robertson wrote in his memoirs portrays a similar scene:

> A young man asks for the apparition of a woman whom he had tenderly loved, and the phantasmagorian throws in the brazier some grains of phosphor: soon we see a woman, the breast uncovered, the hair floating and captivating her young friend with a tender and painful smile.[24]

Both the descriptions of the phantasmagorical female body – or rather non-body – perfectly apply to one of Blake's *Jerusalem* plates: the 'venus pudica'

23 "Dans le tableau de M. Gigoux, l'atelier du statuaire est rempli d'une fumée bleuâtre qui semble provenir des fourneaux d'un alchemiste; le corps nu et blanc de la Galatée posée sur un piédestal, au centre, se détache sur ce fond de vapeurs comme une apparition fantasmagorique." L. Peisse, "Salon de Beaux arts," *Revue de Paris* (Brussels: Meline, Cans et Compagnie: 1852), 213. Translation by the author.

24 "Un jeune merveilleux sollicite l'apparition d'une femme qu'il a tendrement aimé, et le fantasmagorien jette sur le brasier quelques grains de phosphore: bientôt on aperçoit une femme, le sein découvert, les cheveux flottants et fixant son jeune ami avec un sourire tendre et douloureux." Robertson, *Mémoires Récréatifs*, 217. Translation by the author.

in plate 81, with "le sein découvert […] détachée sur le fond de vapeurs comme une apparition fantasmagorique".

Blake, Goya and Robertson used smoke, light and a dark non-space to visualize the phantoms of the brain – the mental spectres hovering between reality and fantasy, life and death. The traditional supernatural figures of devils and angels, with their wings and well-formed bodies, transformed in the late eighteenth century into unclear, perceptual and impalpable 'thoughts' of the brain.

LOOMING SPECTRES

In the next part of the phantasmagoria show Robertson further decreased the frontiers between life and death, objectivity and subjectivity, reality and fantasy, or inner and outer. Their illuminated transparency, the screen and the smoke gave the ghosts their typical diaphanous phantom bodies. The flickering light and twisting smoke also created the illusion of a body in movement. This magic of real filmic animation proved to be an important innovation of the phantasmagoria show. To enhance this effect in the next part of the show, Robertson introduced the cinematic 'looming effect' for the first time.[25] After the séance part, when the ghosts of the dead appeared at the audience's demand, Robertson hid himself with his phantascope behind the screen. There he chose, as a film director would do, a succession of images to project on the screen. While projecting, he moved the lantern towards or away from the screen, rolling it smoothly along brass rails. Such movement caused the projected image to either enlarge or decrease in size.

Goya used this phantasmagorical moving effect in some of the ink drawings he created in the same period as the *Disparates*. One of them shows the back of a phantom as if he is retreating. Goya titled the drawing *¿Cuantas baras?* (How many lengths? C. 1820).[26] This title undoubtedly referred to the words used in the advertisements for the phantasmagoria in Spain: "La ilusión será tan perfecta

25 Stephen Bottomore, "The Panicking Audience? Early Cinema and the Train Effect", in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 19 (June 1999): 189-190.

26 The drawing belongs to Goya's album C, no. 125 (c. 1815).

que se verán algunas figuras correr en apariencia muchas lenguas de distancia
[…]" (The illusion will be so perfect that you will see figures as if they are running
a great distance).[27] The illusion of the phantasmagoria figure that appeared to
be charging out to the public is also found in Goya's drawing *¿Que quiere este
fantasmón?* (What does this phantasm want? C. 1820, Fig. 6). In this title Goya
articulated the feeling of uncertainty provoked by the haunting movement of
the shimmering phantasmagoria figure. In the drawing Goya depicts a ghostlike
figure that, with arms and eyes wide open, advances toward the viewer.

The novel looming effect truly shook up the phantasmagoria audience. Women
fainted and men rose, striking out with their canes against the apparently
threatening phantom.[28] The images really came to life: not only did the ghosts
move, they seemed to move toward the audience and haunted the viewer. The

27 This advertisement for
a Spanish phantasmagoria
(1805) is mentioned in Luis
Miguel Fernández, T*ecnología,
espectáculo, literatura.
Dispositivos ópticos en las letras
españolas de los siglos XVIII y
XIX* (Santiago de Compostela:
Publicacións Universidad de
Santiago de Compostela, 2006),
231.

28 Gunning, *Illusions Past and
Future*, 4.

Fig. 6
¿Que quiere este fantasmón?
Francisco Goya
c. 1820

Enlightenment had just banished magical beings and supernatural ghosts, and now Robertson brought them to life before the eyes of the much-confused onlooker. Castle describes this modern psychological effect as the 'haunted mind'. People felt they could not trust their own reason or perception: all was subjective to illusions and uncertainty. In his definition of the phantasmagoria Adorno formulates this characteristic as follows: "Ohnmächtig begegnet der Träumende dem Bilde selbst wie einem Wunder. Das Ding [...] wird ihm vorgegaukelt als absolute Erscheinung".[29]

In Blake's *Jerusalem* the looming effect is enhanced by the opposition between the giant figure that seems to come towards the viewer open-armed and the smaller figure that turns back into the light (Fig. 7), as if Robertson was first pulling his phantascope further away from the screen to enlarge the figure and then pushing it closer again to decrease it. Similarly, Blake presented the smaller, receding figure from the back. This *rückenfigur* is another phantasmagorical effect. Robertson often switched the lanternslide of the frontal figure with a slide of the back of the figure, this way enhancing the looming effect. His most renowned back-and-forth scene was the apparition of the *nonne sanglante*,

29 Theodor Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), 87.

Fig. 7
Jerusalem, plate 15
William Blake
1804-1827

inspired by the 'bleeding nun' from Matthew Lewis' gothic novel *The Monk* (1796). This phantasmagoria figure also received much attention in Spain. The famous *monja sangrante* of Robertson's Madrilenian phantasmagoria resembled the haunting figure in *¿Que quiere este phantasmón?* Both Robertson's *nonne* and Goya's *phantasmón* are dressed in brightly lit white dresses and strive forward with open arms (Fig. 8). On a second lanternslide Robertson painted the nun as seen from behind (Fig. 9). Accordingly, in the drawing *¿Cuantas baras?* Goya makes his *phantasmón* in the white dress turn its back to the viewer in retreat (Fig. 10). The artist was clearly inspired by Robertson's phantasmagorical looming effect, and, like Robertson, put the effect on the viewer or the participation of the onlooker in primary place. Blake and Goya thus prefigured the credo of modern

Fig. 8
Nonne sanglante (front)
Etienne-Gaspard Robertson
c. 1798

Fig. 9
Nonne sanglante (back)
Etienne-Gaspard Robertson
c. 1798

art as described by Marcel Duchamp: "it is the onlooker who makes the image."[30] With his looming effect Robertson literally confronted the viewer with the ambiguity of an unclear image, which the onlooker had to finish or interpret: "le fantôme s'avancait jusque sous les yeux du spectateur."[31] Adorno also refers to the phantasmagoria's ability to seize the onlooker's own imaginative participation when he states that the "Phantasmagorie das Produkt der eigenen Arbeit vor Augen stellt, ohne das die Arbeit zu identifizieren wäre."[32]

THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF THE PHANTASMAGORICAL

Phantasmagoria is not only interesting as a visual paradigm for the late graphic works of Goya and Blake, but also as a cultural analytic model. The late eighteenth-century concept of the phantasmagorical perfectly described the counter-enlightened status of the spirits of the dead as haunting phantasms that hover between real and unreal. Significantly, contemporary intellectuals such as Thomas Carlyle used the term to describe phenomena that expressed the modern dialectics of presence and absence, subjectivity and objectivity, inner and outer, reality and fantasy. Carlyle, for instance, describes the French Revolution and its deadly consequences as a phantasmagoria, or an ambiguous event full of cognitive and visual uncertainty. He warns in his *French Revolution*: "[…] the Reader, who looks earnestly through this dim Phantasmagory of the Pit, will discern few fixed certain objects"[33] He stresses the phantasmagorical quality in his narration of the storming of the Bastille: "Such vision (spectral yet real) thou […] beholdest in this moment: prophetic of what other Phantasmagories, and loud-gibbering Spectral Realities, which thou yet beholdest not, but shalt!"[34]

In the twentieth century Theodor Adorno would employ the concept in the same way, by referring to the phantasmagorical as "the absolute reality of the unreal".[35]

30 Dario Gamboni, *Potential Images. Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 9.

31 Robertson, *Mémoires Récréatifs*, 311.

32 Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner*, 87.

33 Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, volume 3 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1871), 38.

34 Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, volume 1 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1871), 165.

35 Gunning, *Illusions Past and Future*, 11.

Fig. 10
¿Cuantas baras?
Francisco Goya
c. 1820

He uses phantasmagoria to describe the haunting and alienated aspects of modern life and modern subjectivity,[36] and defines it as the uncanny survival of 'supernatural' ghosts inside the human consciousness, a definition echoed by Castle. For Adorno, phantasmagoria mirrors subjectivity by confronting the viewer with a product of his own labour, but in such a way that the labour put into it is no longer identifiable. The dreamer helplessly encounters an image of his own making as if it were magic.[37] Ghosts and images of the afterlife are not fantasy, as the Enlightenment thinkers would have suggested, but are rather phantasmagoria, neither absent nor present. Therefore, phantasmagoria is a suitable concept to analyse the distinctly modern cultural meaning of the dead as one of uncertainty, fear and ambiguity: a meaning established in the era of Robertson, Goya and Blake.

36 Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner*, 87.

37 Ibid., 87.

Goya and Blake created the *Disparates* and *Jerusalem* in the post-Enlightenment period, which was characterized by a changing and ambiguous perception of death. On the one hand, Enlightenment erased death as an omnipresent theological idea that affected everyday life, while simultaneously secularisation moved the focus from the hereafter to the here and now. At the same time, however, the Spanish Peninsular War, the Terror and the aftermath of the French Revolution, and famines in Madrid and London – Goya's and Blake's hometowns – kept death immediately present and visible.

The notion of spirits took on the same ambiguous aura. While Enlightenment had negated the traditional spirit world as a world of superstition, necromantic séances, esoteric entertainment and Gothic culture flourished in European cities around 1800, making the ghosts of the dead seem very much alive. Adorno and Horkheimer reflected on this ambiguous reversal of rational enlightenment in their *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944), which analyzes how the disenchantment of the Enlightenment evolved towards the re-enchantment of the modern period. In the introduction to their famous analysis Adorno and Horkheimer explain this return of wonder and cognitive insecurity as follows: "Believing that without strict limitation to the verification of facts and probability theory, the cognitive spirit would prove all too susceptible to charlatanism and superstition, it makes a parched ground ready and avid for charlatanism and superstition."[38] Terry Castle describes this early nineteenth-century ambiguous relation to death in terms of psychology and Freudian uncanniness: "The rationalists did not so much negate the traditional spirit world as displace it into the realm of psychology. Ghosts were not exorcized – only internalized and reinterpreted as hallucinatory thoughts."[39] Applying it to art, phantasmagoria as a cultural analytical concept in turn lends itself well to the analysis of the late graphic series of Goya and Blake, which also visualize the new modern and uncanny attitude towards spirits and the dead. Both the *Disparates* and *Jerusalem* conclude the search of the artist exploring the tradition of visionary and fantastic art. The traditional angels, devils and other mythical figures give way to subjective and imaginary phantasms. Influenced by

38 Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* xiii.

39 Castle, *The Female Thermometer*, 51-52.

post-enlightened ideas, Goya and Blake seem to replace the collective traditional spirit world with individual hallucinatory thoughts. The titles of their series clearly incorporate the invisible spirit world's new status of ambiguity. Goya uses the word 'disparate' to describe his final aqua-etchings; his imaginary creatures in ink on paper are indeed disparate. They float between the real and unreal, between the worlds of the living and the dead. In a recent study, fantastic literature specialist Tzevetan Todorov states that Goya's *Disparates* are no longer fantastic, but rather phantasmatic.[40] Held against the light of phantasmagoria, this means that Goya's fantastic figures are no longer unreal creatures belonging to a supernatural world, but rather unreal appearances that seem to reveal themselves in the visible world. The images are phantasmagorical; they represent what Adorno calls ´the absolute reality of the unreal´.[41] Similarly, Blake's title, *Jerusalem, The Emanation of The Giant Albion*, describes his protagonists in the illuminated book as emanations or apparitions. On plate 4 of this psychomachia, Blake labels his images "Phantoms of the Overheated Brain".[42] This poetic phrase can be explained via Castle's argument about the cognitive impact of the internalization of the supernatural as hallucinations of the human mind. Considered in this context, Goya's and Blake's graphic series are a succession of phantoms that demonstrably reflect the ambiguous status of apparitions and spirits of the dead in the post-Enlightenment period.

EPILOGUE: PHANTASMAGORIA AND FILM

The phantasmagoria's most attractive and novel feature was its ability, for the first time, to show moving pictures that seemed to approach the viewer. Robertson's moving, cloudy and fading images appealed to contemporary fears about the convergence of the visible and invisible worlds. Robertson made his figures and monsters volatile, as if they were animated on the mental screen. For this reason the phantasmagoria spectacle is considered both a gothic technology and a pre-cinematographic medium. This argument gives a new dimension to Anne Hollander's definition of Goya's drawings and prints as 'proto-cinematographic'.[43]

40 Tzvetan Todorov, *Goya à l'ombre des Lumières* (Paris: Flammarion, 2011), 244: "La nouvelle image n'est plus *fantastique*, elle est fantasmatique."

41 Gunning, *Illusions Past and Future*, 11.

42 William Blake, "Jerusalem. The Emanation of The Giant Albion," *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, revised edition, ed. David Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 144 (plate 4).

43 Anne Hollander, *Moving Pictures* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 253-255.

With this term Hollander refers to the way earlier graphic art has an emotional impact similar to that of later filmic images. The argument offered here, connecting Goya's work to the phantasmagoria, a real optical device, makes the filmic quality and subjective impact of the works of Goya and Blake even more pertinent.

CONCLUSION

Like Robertson's cinematography, the graphic works of Goya and Blake prefigure the ability of film to capture the modern dialectics of life and death. Their works incorporate questions still current in modern epistemology and perception, questions that influenced early modern art. Goya and Blake researched the tension between reality and illusion in art, between the embodiment of the visual experience and the disembodiment of the visual representation, between the outer world and inner world, between the intention of the artist and the individual imagination of the onlooker, and between a clear, legible image and an unfinished, potential image.

The bodies of Robertson's, Goya's and Blake's (pre-)cinematographic figures demonstrate Castle's inward-turn of the supernatural world and Adorno's definition of the phantasmagoria as a visual, subjective, imaginary world. With their new visual techniques of smoke, light and shadow they questioned the materiality and reality of the human body in art. It is an effect that perfectly suits filmic projection and graphic art, which are both in their own way ephemeral media. This decorporalization or immaterialization of the image went hand-in-hand with a greater attention for the subjective perception of the viewer, or in other words, the corporalization of the viewing experience. The dialectics of the decorporalization of the presentation and the corporalization of the perception is a paradox specific to the phantasmagoria that contributed to the development of modern art.

The *Disparates* and *Jerusalem* represent typical post-enlightened dialectics

between life and death, reality and fantasy, apparition and illusion, guided by the visual techniques and thematic scenes of Robertson's phantasmagoria. It is not just the phantasmagoria as a metaphor that sheds more light on Goya's and Blake's late graphic works; the phantasmagoria as a contemporary cinematographic spectacle is an innovative source of visual techniques – dematerialisation, floating bodies, smoke and light effects – which inspired Goya and Blake to visualize new ideas about subjective perception and imagination in eerie phantasms.

Isabelle van den Broeke studied Art History and Arts Management at the Universities of Ghent, Salamanca and Antwerp. She has recently obtained her doctorate in Art Science. Her research focuses on early nineteenth-century graphic art, fantastic art and popular visual culture.

DEATH BY REPRESENTATION

MIMESIS BETWEEN MURDER AND IMMORTALITY IN EDGAR ALLAN POE'S "THE OVAL PORTRAIT"

Michiel J. O. Verheij

Leiden University, Netherlands

ABSTRACT – *This paper explores the intimate connections between art and death on the basis of an analysis of the short story "The Oval Portrait" by Edgar Allan Poe. This story can be interpreted as a metaphor for the act of artistic creation and its ambiguous relationship with living reality. Poe gives us an inversion of the famous myth of Pygmalion: instead of a lifeless artwork becoming a living girl, he describes the transformation of a living girl into a static work of art. Artistic representation, the tale seems to suggest, by its nature implies the destruction of the very reality it depicts. This idea is best understood against the background of the age-old debate on the nature of mimesis – the relation between the image and the original. Poe's story, it will be argued, provides a remarkable perspective on Plato's influential condemnation of art, and constitutes a vivid demonstration of poststructuralist theories of 'simulacra', 'simulation', and 'hyperreality'. "The Oval Portrait" dramatically confronts us with the murderous capacity inherent in the principle of representation.*

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a wounded traveler, taking refuge in an abandoned castle in the Italian mountains. The man enters a small room inside the castle, and lies down on

the bed to recover from his wound. He begins to study the paintings that cover the walls, and in a little book found on his pillow, he reads the history of their creation. His eye is especially caught by a small portrait of a young girl, which has a mesmerizing and somewhat unsettling effect on him. The expression of this portrait is extremely lifelike. Turning to his little book, our traveler starts to read the story behind this fascinating painting. He finds out that the portrait depicts the artist's bride. This painter was so obsessed by his art, so taken up by his struggle to create the perfect representation of life, that he failed to notice how his wife's health steadily declined as he was painting her. With every brushstroke the vital powers faded from her body. When at last the artist had finished his portrait, he exclaimed triumphantly: "This is indeed Life itself!" – only to find that his wife had died.

Thus ends the short story "The Oval Portrait" by Edgar Allan Poe. As this brief summary makes clear, Poe's story raises issues that are central to the topic of this volume, focusing as it does on the intimate connections between art and death. The following paper will not, however, address examples of the cultural or artistic representation of death, but will instead consider the idea of representation itself as involving a form of death. I will discuss the way in which the story of "The Oval Portrait" brings out a fundamental paradox at the heart of the artistic process, and dramatizes its ambiguous relationship with living reality. The thematic structure of Poe's tale will be shown to involve an exact reversal of the famous story of Pygmalion as told by Ovid, both stories offering contrasting images of the nature of artistic creation. I relate the comparison of these two stories to a discussion of the perennial debate concerning the nature of mimesis. "The Oval Portrait", it will be argued, offers a remarkable window from which to consider Plato's infamous criticism of art, as well as the poststructuralist notion of the 'simulacrum'. Specifically, the tale can be read as a vivid demonstration of Baudrillard's theory of 'simulation', in which the model is replaced by the image and reality gives way to 'hyperreality'.

REPRESENTATION, MURDER, IMMORTALITY

"The Oval Portrait" can be read as an allegory or metaphor for the act of artistic representation in general. The tragic history of the painting dramatically evokes an underlying opposition between art and nature, between the image and the original. In the course of the portrait's creation, the painted version of the girl gradually develops into a rival of the living girl. While the artist was working to create an absolute likeness of his wife, his real wife was slowly withering away. The more the picture began to attain a 'life' of its own, the more the girl's powers began to fade – until, in the end, the painting achieved the ultimate lifelike perfection, and there was nothing left of the model: the wife has literally been 'painted to death'. The conclusion of this story seems to be that the perfect imitation can only be achieved at the cost of the death of the original. In other words, the creation of true art goes hand in hand with the destruction of nature, of life itself. The picture mirrors the original, but at the same time replaces, and in a sense abolishes, it. The inherent paradox lies in the fact that, while destroying the life of the model, the artist has simultaneously given shape to a new kind of life. Although the girl dies, at the same time she obtains immortality because of the painting; she lives on forever inside her portrait. The painter emerges from the story both as a killer and as a creator of new, eternal life. As this brief analysis already shows, Poe's story implies an ambiguous and complex relation between the realms of art, life and death. The tale revolves around the paradoxical connection of creation and destruction, murder and birth: all these opposites are united in the act of artistic creation.

The way in which the process of murderous representation functions in this story has been compared by several critics to the concept of vampirism.[1] During its creation, the painting is sucking the life-powers out of its model and using these powers to start leading a life of its own. In one particular sentence of the story, this link with vampirism is especially prominent: "He [i.e. the painter] would not see that the tints which he spread upon the canvas were drawn from the cheeks

1 See e.g. James Twitchell, "Poe's 'The Oval Portrait' and the Vampire Motif," *Studies in Short Fiction* 14 (1977): 387-393.

of her who sat beside him."[2] We seem to witness a kind of transfusion, whereby the life and vitality are transferred from the girl to the painting. The image can be said to be feeding on the original like a vampire, and the portrait is almost literally painted in the girl's blood. This reading, however, merely involves the replacement of one metaphor by another. If the tale itself was already read as a metaphor for the destructive nature of art, then the introduction of the vampire theme only adds a second one. The implication of the story remains the same: the creation of art implies the abolishment of the original; the girl falls victim to what we may call 'death by representation'.

But this is not the only way to explain the disastrous history of the oval portrait. There is also a more personal side to the tragedy, which, although somewhat less relevant to our present purposes, should not be left unmentioned. A second explanation for the death of the girl may be found in her unhappy relationship with her husband, the artist. The tale strongly emphasizes the painter's complete obsession by his artistic endeavours. His passion for art was so extreme that the man could be described as "having already a bride in his Art" before marrying the girl of flesh and blood.[3] From the beginning, it seems, art has been the girl's rival for the love and attention of her husband. As a result, she is "dreading only the pallet and brushes and other untoward instruments which deprived her of the countenance of her lover".[4] The painter seems to spend most of his time with his first 'bride', neglecting the human love that his wife has to offer. During the creation of the portrait, the artist only has eyes for his product, failing to notice the slow deterioration of his wife as a result. These elements of the story offer a more personal or emotional reason for the girl's death, as opposed to the representational one described earlier. Within these two interpretations, the unlucky girl has two different rivals: art – her husband's first love, and her mirror--image in the portrait, which is robbing her of her life and slowly replacing her. These two rivals, it seems, can in fact be regarded as one and the same. The portrait may be considered to represent art as a whole, as it is the embodiment of the painter's passion for art, and the focal point of his artistic ambition. At the

2 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Oval Portrait," in *Edgar Allan Poe's Annotated and Illustrated Entire Stories and Poems,* ed. Andrew Barger (New York: Bottletree Books, 2008), 428-430.

3 Ibid. 429.

4 Ibid.

same time, on a different level, the painting represents the real, living girl. It is, after all, an image in her likeness. In this way, the portrait presents an image of the first bride and the second bride at once. In my view, the painter's desire to depict his wife in painting should be seen as an attempt to merge the two brides into one; to create a unification embodied in the painting.[5] But this attempt fails: although his wife is translated into a painting, she dies in the process, and in the end the first bride – art – is triumphant.

PYGMALION REVERSED

An important point of reference for "The Oval Portrait" is the story of Pygmalion as told by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*.[6] Pygmalion was a sculptor who created a beautiful, lifelike statue of a girl and subsequently fell in love with it. With the help of the goddess Venus, the statue was granted the gift of life, and the artist married his now living creation. Ovid and Poe's stories possess remarkable similarities, as well as significant differences. Both stories involve a gifted, inspired artist, striving to create the perfect artwork: the perfect lifelike image of a girl. The essence of this artwork is closely bound up with the identity of the artist's wife. However, the consequences of the act of artistic creation described in the two stories are extremely different: whereas Pygmalion succeeds in creating a living bride for himself, the work of Poe's artist results in the death of his bride. In both cases, the boundaries between art and living reality are crossed. In relation to the image representing the artist's wife, we witness a confusion or conflation of the realms of art and nature. But the crossing of boundaries that occurs in Poe's story turns out to be an exact reversal of the one in the Pygmalion myth. Instead of an artwork becoming a living girl, "The Oval Portrait" shows us the transformation of a living girl into an artwork.[7]

Just like Poe's story, the myth of Pygmalion can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the artistic process in general. Pygmalion's achievement represents the ability of the true artist to equal life – even to create life – by means of his art. It will be

5 This view is shared by Elisabeth Bronfen, "The Lady is a Portrait," in *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 111-112.

6 *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), X.243-297.

7 A difference is of course that, in the Pygmalion story, the statue and the girl are one and the same, while in "The Oval Portrait", the artist's bride and the painting are two distinct entities. However, as the existence of the girl is so intimately linked with the existence of the portrait, the girl's life decreases in proportion to the progress of the painting. I think it is justified to speak of a transformation in this case as well, as the living girl is translated or transformed into her portrait.

evident that these two allegories offer completely different pictures of the nature of representation and of the relation between art and reality. Where Pygmalion succeeds with his creation in bringing life into lifeless and inanimate material, the artistic ambition of Poe's painter leads to the exact opposite: it reduces real life to an inanimate object.

PLATO AND THE QUESTION OF MIMESIS

Both of these stories are, of course, fundamentally concerned with the age-old question of mimesis – the relation between the image and its original. Mimesis is one of the oldest terms in literary and aesthetic theory, and has been a central concept in this field of study from the very beginning. Whether we choose to translate it as imitation, emulation, representation, simulation, dissimulation, doubling, correspondence, depiction, or resemblance, it is clear that this has in fact always been the fundamental issue underlying all efforts to make sense of art and its place in the world. The precise nature of the mimetic process, and the ontological status that should be ascribed to the artwork as a result, have been subject to extensive and varied discussions throughout the centuries.[8] There are many ways to approach this question, but nearly every new treatment of the topic takes the form of a direct response to the writings of the philosopher who initiated the discussion – Plato. In fact, the stories told by Poe and Ovid can be most usefully compared when related to Plato's famous ideas about art and representation. A brief outline of the basic traits of his theory will demonstrate more clearly the relevant issues at the heart of these stories.

In Book X of the *Republic*, Plato launches a notorious attack against artists (specifically poets) and their creations. Starting point of his critique is the idea that art is always a representation of something else; every form of artistic creation necessarily takes nature as its model. According to this theory, the basic principle of mimesis involves the imitation of objects in the physical world. It is an attempt to create – through the medium of art – a copy or likeness of the objects that

8 For an influential history of the concept, see Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), first published in 1946. More recent studies include Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis: Culture, Art, Society,* trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Matthew Potolsky, *Mimesis* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

present themselves to our senses. However, as is well known, Plato considered the material world of sensory perception already as an imperfect copy of the transcendental world of eternal and immutable forms or Ideas. Consequently, the artistic product is found to be a representation of a representation, twice removed from the original. As an example of his theory, Plato discusses the fashioning of a bed. Whenever a craftsman creates a bed out of wooden material, he will imagine in his mind a general prototype of a bed, and shape his material after this image. In other words, the process implies the existence of an original form of bed that precedes the one created by the craftsman. Now, if an artist would decide to paint a picture of a bed, he will use as his model the wooden bed produced by the carpenter. This example presents us with three different beds, each with its own ontological status and its own measure of truthfulness. First we have the eternal prototype, the product of a divine creator. This original should be regarded as the one true bed. Secondly, there is the physical bed, created by the craftsman in the image of the transcendental Idea. Only in the third and last place do we find the painting, presenting a likeness of the material object, thereby occupying the lowest place on this representational ladder. Not surprisingly, Socrates and his interlocutor reach the following conclusion when it comes to the artists' occupation:

> 'I think the most suitable thing to call [the painter] would be a representer of the other's creations,' he said.
>
> 'Well, in that case,' I said, 'you're using the term "representer" for someone who deals with things which are, in fact, two generations away from reality, aren't you?'
>
> 'Yes,' he said.
>
> 'The same goes for tragic playwrights, then, since they're representers: they're two generations away from the throne of truth, and so are all other representers.'[9]

9 Plato, *Republic,* trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), X.597e.

It is important to note that, according to Plato, every subsequent imitation necessarily fails to live up to the standard of the original. The carpenter is only

capable of creating an imperfect and inferior copy of the Idea. The same applies in turn to the painter, who does not depict the wooden bed as it *really* is, but merely as it *appears to be*. A painter, after all, is only focused on the external characteristics of the object he is representing, not on its true nature. A painting can create a suggestion of presence, but in reality this suggestion rests only on the outward appearance of the artwork. In other words, the art of representation according to Plato is based exclusively upon a superficial contact with the objects that are represented. The artist has no true knowledge of the things he is depicting. As Socrates remarks: "An image-maker, a representer, understands only appearance, while reality is beyond him."[10]

The chain of imitations we have been describing is accompanied by a steady decline in truthfulness. Plato's theory presents us with a sliding scale of copies, each new one being of lower status than the previous in relation to reality and understanding. As a result of these mediations, an artwork can only take its audience further away from reality, instead of pointing towards it. In Plato's view, art becomes a treacherous and deceptive medium, placing itself between us and the original, leading our minds away from the truth.

PLATO, PYGMALION, POE

Let us now return to our initial two stories: what do Plato's ideas about mimesis tell us about "The Oval Portrait" and Pygmalion's statue? Firstly, if we read the myth of Pygmalion as an allegorical tale about the nature of art, it could be regarded as a positive response to the severe criticism put forward by Plato. Instead of a deceptive copy of life – an inferior derivative of the physical world – Pygmalion's statue actually becomes a real living girl. This story demonstrates that true art can transcend the status of mere representation and ascend to a higher level, where it becomes the equal of real life. This idea contrasts strongly with one of Plato's sarcastic comments about painting in the *Phaedrus*: "The offsprings of painting stand there as if they are alive, but if anyone asks them

10 Ibid. X.601b.

anything, they remain most solemnly silent."[11] Instead of just looking like a real living girl, Pygmalion's statue eventually is an actual living presence. And although the girl does not speak in Ovid's story, we may assume that, with the power of life, she has also obtained the faculty of speech. In other words, the chain of multiple mediations has been broken, and the artwork has climbed up one step on the ontological ladder. As Schmitz-Emans has put it: "Es geht damit um die Legitimation des ästhetischen Gebildes, das sich aus dem Status bloß tertiärer Wirklichkeit befreit."[12] The gap between the image and the object depicted, which was at the basis of Plato's criticism, has been bridged. In this context, it is important to note that Pygmalion's statue was never created as an imitation of a real living girl. Pygmalion did not use a model and he did not try to make an ivory copy of the girls he saw around him. In fact, he did just the opposite; he turned away from living women, disappointed by their shameful behavior. As Ovid tells us: "Pygmalion had seen these women spending their lives in shame, and, disgusted with the faults which in such full measure nature had given the female mind, he lived unmarried and long was without a partner of his couch."[13] As a result of his revulsion, Pygmalion rejects the presence of women of flesh and blood, and decides to create a new, superior female form: "with wondrous art he successfully carves a figure out of snowy ivory, giving it a beauty more perfect than that of any woman ever born."[14] Pygmalion does not merely try to imitate life, but he tries to surpass it. When the statue comes alive at the end of the story, the girl is the equal of any living being, only more beautiful than nature could ever have created. Instead of a mere surrogate, as Plato would have it, Pygmalion's creation is even better than the real thing.[15]

Turning now to the "The Oval Portrait", we see a very different picture emerging. Whereas the myth of Pygmalion paints a hopeful and triumphant picture of the abilities of artistic creation, Poe's story, on the other hand, reverses this whole image, and demonstrates the destructive power of art. By dramatically illustrating the dangers and limitations of representation, the tale seems to mark a return to the negative viewpoint of Plato. Here we encounter

11 *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianabolis: Hackett, 1995), 275d.

12 "It deals therefore with the legitimation of the aesthetic artefact, which liberates itself from its status of merely tertiary reality." [editor's translation] Monika Schmitz-Emans, "Der neue Pygmalion und das Konzept negativer Bildhauerei: Zu Varianten des Pygmalionstoffes in der modernen Literatur," *Zeitschrift fur Deutsche Philologie* 112 (1993): 165.

13 *Metamorphoses*, X.243-246.

14 Ibid. X.247-249.

15 This statement of course somewhat oversimplifies the matter. If we follow Plato's theory of Forms closely, the enlivened statue still only possesses a reality of the second degree. After all, physical life is still a representation of the Forms, but the living statue does succeed in freeing itself from Plato's condemnation of the artwork, and obtains an ontological status at least equal to that of the physical world.

again Plato's main theme, the antagonism between image and reality, and the damaging effects of the attempt to represent the physical world. Poe presents the death of the girl as the result of the creation of the painting, thus suggesting that art can become an enemy of reality. The implicit idea would be that artistic representation will only end up replacing the original object by a lifeless copy erected in its place.[16]

Another element of the story that is reminiscent of Plato is the 'chain' or 'ladder' of consecutive representations and imitations. This structure, as we have seen, was fundamental to Plato's theory of art. Like Plato's example of the multiple beds discussed above, "The Oval Portrait" presents a multi-layered sequence of different copies. In the first place, there is the living, flesh and blood bride of the artist herself – who is, obviously, represented or translated onto the two-dimensional surface of the canvas. But a new layer is added when the wounded traveler, who is also the narrator of the story, begins to describe the portrait he is looking at. He provides a detailed formal description of the external characteristics of the artwork:

> It was a mere head and shoulders, done in what is technically termed a vignette manner; much in the style of the favourite heads of Sully. The arms, the bosom, and even the ends of the radiant hair melted imperceptibly into the vague yet deep shadow which formed the background of the whole. The frame was oval, richly gilded and filigreed in Moresque.[17]

With this verbal rendition of the painting, the narrator repeats the process of representation that led to the creation of the artwork in the first place, thus adding yet another link to the chain. His description is two steps removed from the living model, and – according to Plato's theory – three steps removed from the original Idea. A final mimetic level is created by Poe's short story itself, which provides the narrative framework within which all these other images are presented.[18]

16 It should be noted that this 'moral' interpretation would ascribe a form of implicit self-criticism to Poe's story. After all, the writing of a story also involves a form of representation of 'real life'. The same problem famously applies to Plato's own writings, as they are themselves of a literary and 'mimetic' nature. However, a fuller analysis of the meta-poetical and self-reflexive character of Plato and Poe falls outside the scope of this article.

17 Poe, "The Oval Portrait," 429.

18 In this way, the description by the narrator can be seen as analogous to the murderous act of the artist, and the narrator becomes an accomplice to the crime of representation. Cf. J. Gerald Kennedy, *Poe, Death, and the Life of Writing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 61.

SIMULACRA AND SIMULATION: POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF REALITY

To conclude our discussion, I will make a large jump in time, and pick up the debate about mimesis in our present age by briefly looking at the works of several poststructuralist thinkers. The story of "The Oval Portrait" can best be read as a perfect demonstration of the notion of the 'simulacrum', even though it was written long before this term attained its present significance. Although the idea of the simulacrum, just like that of mimesis, goes back to antiquity, it was taken up again in the latter part of the twentieth century by Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida,[19] who explicitly addressed Plato's mimetic theory in an attempt to release art from his long-standing critical assessment, and offer a way out of the eternal mechanism of representation. These thinkers try to establish an inversion of Plato's own formulations, suggesting the possibility of a copy without a true or singular original. In this 'reversal of Platonism', it is proclaimed that we no longer face the question of making a distinction between essence and appearance, or model and copy. Instead, these distinctions should be entirely abandoned. In this context, the simulacrum stands for an image that has completely broken free from any single original. This line of thinking should make it possible to envisage a situation where there is no longer any hierarchy, no ontological ladder of imitations – the simulation is itself the essence. This idea of an image without a model puts an end to art's crucial dependence upon resemblance or similitude, and calls into question the ability to distinguish between what is real and what is represented.

19 See esp. Gilles Deleuze, "The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy," in *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 253-79; and Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

The same concept is also present within the work of Guy Debord, albeit in a much more pessimistic manner. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, he argues that early capitalism, based on the production of commodities, has been superseded by a new capitalism based on the production of images. Instead of products, we are now being sold mere appearances. Consumers are no longer striving to satisfy their needs, but are merely trying to live up to the artificially created images of desires. Debord famously proclaims that "all that was once directly lived has

become mere representation."[20] In other words, mimesis is now woven into the fabric of reality itself.

The most famous theorist of the simulacrum, however, is undoubtedly Jean Baudrillard, whose ideas will provide a fitting conclusion to this discussion. Baudrillard's bleak vision of the postmodern condition shows some similarity to Plato's negative views on the nature of the image. Like Plato, he points out that copies and imitations lead us away from the truth and obstruct our perspective on reality. However, the specific content of Baudrillard's critique is far removed from Plato's theories. According to Baudrillard, in our present consumer society, characterized as it is by globalization and the omnipresence of mass media, there is no longer a place for the concepts of truth or authenticity. Reality has disappeared beneath a proliferation of superficial signs and images. These images – for instance the advertisements we are daily forced to watch on television – have gradually supplanted and superseded every trace of 'real life'. Signs have taken the place of the concepts and objects they were meant to refer to, and the reality that used to hide behind the surface has evaporated. The central thought of Baudrillard's work is his provocative claim that nature has been ousted by culture, and authenticity replaced by a deceptive illusion, a phantom – a simulacrum. This simulacrum may give the impression of gesturing toward an object in reality, but in fact it refers to nothing but itself. The underlying fundament has been lost, and we are left with nothing but a sign. In other words, the simulacrum indicates the absence, rather than the presence, of the thing it appears to represent.

To illustrate his theory, Baudrillard refers to the short story "On Exactitude in Science" by the Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges.[21] In this story, the inhabitants of a country have taken up the aim to create a map that indicates every single element of the landscape with the utmost precision. In order to achieve this end, the map has to be produced at a scale of 1:1 – that is to say, it ends up covering the entire surface of the country. As time goes by, the paper

20 Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 12.

21 Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext[e], 1983), 1ff.

of the map deteriorates and disappears, and only a few fragments remain scattered throughout the landscape. Although it offers a vivid illustration of the process of simulation, in order to really fit Baudrillard's theory, the ending of Borges' story should be adapted. Not the map, but the landscape itself should slowly disappear. After all, according to Baudrillard, it is reality itself that gives way to the sign: "If we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there."[22] The production of the map ushers in the death of the landscape; the picture replaces the object being pictured. The overabundance of images conceals the fact that, behind these signs, there is no longer any corresponding reality left.

At this point, we have left the realm of representation, and entered that of simulation. After all, the notion of representation presupposes the presence of some form of external reality that is depicted in the image; it suggests a distinction between the original and the imitation. With the simulacrum, this distinction can no longer be made, and we can therefore no longer speak of representation – the image points to nothing outside itself. In a condition where everything is mere surface without depth, we can no longer distinguish between real and fake, or true and false. In this way, the simulacrum generates its own form of reality, or rather hyperreality, as Baudrillard calls it. He explains the process as follows:

> The age of simulation thus begins with a liquidation of all referentials – worse: by their artificial resurrection in systems of signs [...]. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself, that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double.[23]

In short, Baudrillard's theory ascribes to images an inclination to displace reality, to destroy any object they represent until only the image itself survives. He describes this destructive quality in words which strongly bring out the

22 Ibid. 2.

23 Ibid. 4.

connection with Poe's story of "The Oval Portrait": "Thus perhaps at stake has always been the murderous capacity of images, murderers of the real, murderers of their own model."[24]

More than Borges' story about the creation of the map, "The Oval Portrait" may be read as an exact dramatization of Baudrillard's vision: the real girl is replaced by the sign, the image destroys the model. The copy gradually attains a form of (hyper) reality exceeding that of the original, which is slowly but surely fading away. In the end, the girl dies, and all we are left with is the surface of the oval portrait.

24 Ibid. 10.

Michiel J. O. Verheij studied Classics and Literary Theory at Leiden University. He received his Master's degree in 2011 with a thesis on Michel Foucault's reception of Stoic ethics. He is currently writing his dissertation in Leiden on the figure of Orestes in Greek literature of the archaic and classical periods. While his main passion is the study of Greek tragedy, he also maintains an interest in contemporary ideas about the nature of art and literature.

ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN

MARQUIS DE SADE'S MURDER OF JUSTINE
AS AN END TO NARRATIVE

Jostein Hølland

Sandnes, Norway

ABSTRACT – *This article approaches the two novels* Justine *(1791) and* Juliette *(1797), written by Donatien-Alphonse-François (Marquis) de Sade, in a twofold manner. On the one hand, it regards them as a vehicle for philosophical reflection; on the other, it investigates the murder of the character Justine, necessitated by the role Justine comes to serve for the plot, as a moment documenting the breakdown of libertine Sadist philosophy. Her death can be translated as a sign and symptom of a problematic marriage between narrative and philosophy. Justine can be regarded as a disruptive protagonist who overturns the Sadist philosophical aspects of the texts, and is thus the protagonist on whom the narratives are founded and structured. Criticizing Maurice Blanchot's attempt at thinking de Sade as a philosopher of libertinism, thereby overlooking the function of the role of Justine, this article proposes a reading of de Sade's 'murder' of Justine that follows George Bataille's notion that de Sade's language is a 'victim-language' and it investigates this 'language' from the point of view of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's hermeneutics.*

INTRODUCTION

There are two accounts of Justine's death in Marquis de Sade's (1740-1814) corpus. One published in 1791 with the title *Justine, ou les Malheurs de la Vertu* (Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue),[1] and one published in 1797 as *La*

Nouvelle Justine, ou les Malheurs de la Vertu, suivie de l'Histoire de Juliette (The New Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue, with the story of Juliette).[2] *Justine* (1791) and *Juliette* (1797) share character assemblage and ending, as well as plot and narrative, and should be considered to interlace as different timelines of the same narrative universe. In the 1791 version, Justine tells the story of her life to two interested strangers, Monsieur de Corville and Madame de Lorsange. The final scenes reveal that one of the listeners, Madame de Lorsange, is in fact Justine's long-lost sister Juliette. Shortly after this revelation, Justine is struck by lightning and killed in front of a traumatized Juliette, who then resolves to follow Justine's virtuous path and "takes a Carmelite's veil."[3]

The 1797 account consists of two parts: the first part contains an adapted version of the story of Justine from 1791, and the second part expands the overall narrative by reinventing the character of Juliette as a libertine who is holding Justine captive and making Justine the audience for a recounting of her own life story. De Sade thus creates a diptych in which the two sisters' telling of their life stories are put into dialogue with each other. The conclusion to the narrative, however, remains the same in 1791 and 1797. After Juliette has recounted her libertine escapades, the naked Justine is chased out the door, and killed by a bolt of lightning.

That the stories of *Justine* and *Juliette* are put into dialogue with each other in 1797 does not mean, however, that the two characters are similar in function. If we afford Justine and Juliette the same function within the narrative, we would have to see them as different models of behaviour, one of which, Juliette, meets the author's approval and survives. Indeed, this is how the lightning strike is explained by the libertines in the 1797 edition: "'She is dead!' cry the villains, clapping their hands and hastening to where Justine lies upon the ground. 'Come quickly, Madam [directed at Juliette], come contemplate heaven's handiwork, come see how the powers above reward piety and goodness.'"[4] This view of things, however, assumes the power behind the lightning to have a conscious

1 Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade, "Justine," in J*ustine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, & Other Writings*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1990), 447-744.

2 Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade, *Juliette*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1968). There are three different versions of *Justine*, the earliest dated 1787 was never printed, the second *Justine* from 1791 is the one I am using, the third version published in 1797 rewrites the story of Justine and appends and reinvents the character of Juliette who has now become a libertine with her own story (cf. Austryn Wainhouse, "Foreword," in *Juliette* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), vii-x; "Bibliography," in *Juliette* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 1197-1205.

3 De Sade, *Justine*, 743. Cf. Ibid. 741-743.

4 De Sade, *Juliette*, 1190. This divine 'handiwork' is also implied in the 1791-version in its subtitle "virtue well chastised," implying that Justine's death, in the end, was a deserved and just one.

5 I might be overestimating de Sade's own position, but see for example *Dialogue between a Priest and a Dying Man*, written in 1782, or the section on religion in the pamphlet "Yet another effort, Frenchmen, if you would become republicans", attributed to the character Le Chevalier in *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (1795), for accounts of nature and god as viewed by the libertine, that elevates the scientistic understanding of nature at the expense of supernatural explanations. If we take these texts seriously and see them as part of the same universe as the stories of Justine and Juliette, we would have to admit that the idea of allowing nature to take her course, as regards the fate of Justine, is uttered against the background of a wholly materialistic understanding of the world. A realization that, I will argue below, opens up a radically different understanding of the character of Justine. Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade, "Dialogue between a Priest and a Dying Man," in *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, & Other Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1990), 161-177; and "Philosophy in the Bedroom," in Ibid. 177-371. For the pamphlet see ibid. 295-339.

desire to kill Justine. Thus, the 'nature' in de Sade's fictional world is perceived by his libertine characters as having agency, which is problematic in light of de Sade's own atheism.[5] Since the lightning can have no conscious desire to kill Justine, as the atheist world view holds, we should rather conclude that de Sade intends her death to be an accident, even if it takes place within such a loaded and ostensibly divine setting.

As I will outline below, both novels are, for their narrative progression, dependent on the resistance the character of Justine offers. Justine's refusal to follow the libertine philosophy creates a tension in the narrative that permits a deconstruction of libertine philosophy. This means that although the libertine characters are protagonists on the level of plot – they decide what happens next – Justine steers the narrative and could be said to act as a protagonist on a structural level.

For the author, killing Justine becomes necessary because of her entanglement with the story on the structural level; de Sade must kill Justine in order to bring the narrative to an end. Hence, I argue that de Sade, through the inclusion of a victim for his practitioners of libertine philosophy, constructs a plane of meaning on which his narrative becomes autocritical: it achieves a deconstruction of the 'Sadist' discourse as promoted by his own libertine heroes. This argument depends on a reading of the death scene of Justine in which the lightning strike that kills her can be translated in a twofold manner. Firstly, the lightning strike is understood as meaningless and accidental in the fictional universe of the plot; this approach is founded in de Sade's own materialistic and atheistic worldview. Secondly, I argue that this accident is staged by the author as a betrayal of the role he has given Justine: this means that a criticism of the libertine ideology is introduced through the character of Justine. Both the 1791 *Justine* and the 1797 *Juliette* are structured in such a way that it is Justine, the victim, who marks the ultimate borders of the texts. The most tangible way in which this happens is that Justine's death concludes both texts. Justine's role in the text is such that it

cannot happen without her: in order to bring the narrative to a halt, de Sade is forced to murder Justine. De Sade is thus 'culpable' for Justine's death, but this article assumes it is a murder that serves the plot in an ironic fashion rather than constituting a blanket license on the philosophical outlook of the libertine. The murder of Justine finalizes the narrative, but by doing so de Sade simultaneously affirms her position as a character without which the narrative cannot happen. If we are to read de Sade's novels as literary rather than philosophical discourses – which we have to do, as long as they rely on narrative techniques to develop their philosophical elements – we must consider Justine as the character who turns the philosophical message on its head and functions as the measuring stick against which the Sadean narrative must be judged.

In order to achieve this reading this article adopts Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's hermeneutics, in particular their notions of the 'assemblage' and the 'abstract machine' as developed in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980).[6] These notions will allow a view of the literary text (the assemblage) in which meaning is seen as developed from functions working alongside each other within the text. Furthermore, the argumentation relies on Georges Bataille's idea of 'transgression' and his observation that de Sade's language, in its attention to detail when describing violence, should be identified as a language invested in the experience of the victim instead of the libertine perpetrator. Secondly, I will criticize Maurice Blanchot's neglect of the function Justine's character is assigned in opposition to the libertine, which leads Blanchot to conclude that the meaning of the Sadean narrative is located in the libertine discourse. Lastly, I will make use of John L. Austin's notion of the 'speech act' in order to properly situate what type of agency can be ascribed to Justine.

THE SADISTIC ASSEMBLAGE: DELEUZE AND GUATTARI

Only through establishing the manner in which Justine is constituted in the text is it possible to make a judgement on what she is actually doing in and to the text. In

6 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 2008).

order to do this, I adopt Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's hermeneutics, which operates from a structuralist point of view and is aimed towards describing the text as a product of different forces and functions acting both upon and within it.

In *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Deleuze and Guattari raise the question: how do we think about the philosophical context of 'meaning' without making the intentional fallacy of assuming that it is somehow contained in and foregrounded by the object that is being studied as meaningful?[7] While Deleuze talks about 'identity' rather than 'meaning', or more specifically, 'identity' within its process of 'becoming', this article assumes that from a hermeneutic point of view, coming to terms with the identity of something is coming to terms with its meaning. The object of analysis can only be seen as a meaningful object insofar as it is discernibly individuated. This individuation rests on the object's differentiation from other objects, but this difference should not be regarded as a stable phenomenon. Rather, following Deleuze, the individuation takes place in an 'eternal return' of difference, in which the perceiver of the object notices those differences that are strongest. This process is not determined by the object, but by the one perceiving the object and is therefore subject to the political, social and scientific context of the perceiver – which allows for objects to be perceived differently by different perceivers.[8]

However, it is insufficient to simply enumerate the distinguishing differences one claims to have found in a work of literature; something needs to be said about how these differences are produced. In order to preserve the work's 'givenness' (its existence for multiple readers) while at the same time relativizing its intrinsic meaning, Deleuze and Guattari approach the work as a product of functions, more precisely, an assemblage put together by abstract machines. Finding these abstract machines means looking at the structure of the work, what kind of units the work consists of and what relationships are drawn between these units, before analysing the work as a meaningful object. Whereas the notion of the assemblage (a concept that describes any form of discursive unit) answers to the

7 Deleuze lays out the ontology of his approach in the book *Difference and Repetition* (1968). Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (London: Continuum, 2008); Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 2008); and Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London: Continuum, 2009).

8 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition,* 48-52.

work as a meaningful and contained given, it is the abstract machines that work inside the assemblage to produce its discernibility and meaning(s).

On the issue of Justine's death, the abstract machines can be said to allow a shift of focus. In de Sade's novels, a battle goes on between Justine and the libertines for control over the Sadean assemblage, enabling the shift of focus. This battle is not happening on the 'conscious' or explicit level of the plot, but is instigated by the different functions the characters are inscribed with.

How is this shift of focus and deconstruction of hegemonic meaning – that of the libertine philosophy – possible? Deleuze and Guattari conceive of the novel as a site in which what is being formulated is always pregnant with its own deconstruction and transformation. In de Sade, this deconstruction happens at the moment when his text becomes autocritical: when it shifts from a philosophical tale driven by the libertine plot towards a narrative centred on Justine's refusal to accept the libertine's attempt at territorializing and controlling the plot. According to Deleuze and Guattari:

> [T]he territorial assemblage [the discourse] […] territorializes functions and forces (sexuality, aggressiveness, gregariousness, etc.), and in the process of territorializing them, transforms them. But these territorialized functions and forces can suddenly take on an autonomy that makes them swing over into other assemblages, compose other deterritorialized assemblages.[9]

It is the abstract machines that produce the differences that individuate and transform the meaning of the assemblage. These machines allow the territorial assemblage to open onto something else: they constitute 'becomings' rather than static meanings and have the potential to create sites on which the deconstruction of the territorialized assemblage can take place.[10]

Following Deleuze and Guattari, the assemblage – the novel or the Sadean text

9 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 358-359.

10 Ibid. 562. It is worth noting that ´abstract machines´ can have both territorializing and deterritorializing functions inside the assemblage; see also ibid. 244-246 and 565-566.

– is a product of the abstract machines working inside it. Thus, when reading is conceived as the deduction of meaning, and the deduction of meaning is explained as identifying individuating differences, what is produced, in the end, is accidental, reliant on specific encounters, and informed by specific contexts. Taking this into consideration, it is no longer interesting to deduce the meaning of the lightning strike itself. Rather, it becomes crucial to ask what level of the text has become deterritorialized – or made unstable meaning-wise – in order for the lightning to appear?

The lightning that kills Justine appears out of the rupture created in the Sadean assemblage by Justine's function. Justine's death, an accidental encounter between different forces inside the text, becomes meaningful on two different levels: firstly as an event arriving out of the interaction between the abstract machine that is Justine and the Sadean territorial assemblage, secondly it becomes meaningful as an 'accidental encounter'. The accident that kills Justine is significant as an accident in and of itself, in that there is nothing in the lightning strike that produces or incorporates meaning – the lightning strike does not work as an abstract machine on the narrative in the way that Justine does. It is an empty device that brings the narrative to a halt.

TWO LINES OF TRANSGRESSION

In contrast to the developing argument, which sees de Sade as a transgressive author who deterritorializes libertine philosophy through his character Justine, Maurice Blanchot attempts to align de Sade with his sadist libertine characters, and suggests that the story Juliette offers us is the author's 'intended' philosophical project. In order to come to terms with the difference between libertine philosophy and de Sade's own position *vis-a-vis* the novels, it is important to differentiate between the Deleuzoguattarian structuralist hermeneutics, a structural schematic of how a text operates, and the text's content and themes, for which I will employ Georges Bataille's ideas on

transgression. 'Transgression' is generally regarded as a concept that denotes a transgression or deconstruction of a singular hegemonic structure. Here, the notion of transgression is primarily a philosophical and theoretical concept that is useful in order to distinguish between the material matter-of-factness of action or speech and the ideological (ethical, political, economic) spheres within which action and speech take place. Transgression can happen – even in language, which is already an instrument saturated by ideology – because there is always a separation between the material reality of the performance of an action, and the ideological structure that surrounds this performance. For example, ridiculing the language of power by repeating it with so-called 'ironic distance' is a practice that has the potential to be transgressive.[11]

In de Sade's novels *Justine* and *Juliette*, there are at least two different levels on which transgression takes place. There is the *prima facie* 'transgression of norms and customs' in the nature of the practices that are described. This plane of transgression caused de Sade discomfort by making him subject to close scrutiny by the French state apparatus in his own time. Secondly, there is the more subtle 'transgression of power/hegemony' that manifests itself in, according to Bataille, the descriptive language peculiar to de Sade.

Bataille suggests that discourses that try to promote a certain power or hegemonic structure tend to use euphemistic re-inscriptions when they describe the violence power must perform in order to assert itself (such as 'enhanced interrogation techniques', for example).[12] In contradistinction to this, de Sade's language, according to Bataille, is 'honest' in how it describes violence: it is a witness protocol of the injustices inflicted on their victims by the libertines. For Bataille, and this article follows his angle, this suggests that de Sade's interest lies not in developing a master-discourse of libertinage, but rather opens the text up to include the perspective of the victim of the libertine – Justine. Re-inscribing the character of Justine within the philosophy of transgression opens up a different plane of meaning altogether. On this plane, the author de Sade has transgressed upon his

11 Bataillean transgression is primarily concerned with the political situation of reason in that it aims to function as a methodological principle with the help of which 'truth' may be scrutinized for the political situation it tries to make imperceptible. See particularly how the ´madman´ of Bataille's short essay "The Obelisk" transgresses the 'calm grandeur' of the obelisk on Place de la Concorde by pointing out its function as an object placed there in order to make people forget the guillotine that occupied its place during the revolution. Georges Bataille, "The Obelisk," in *Visions of Excess. Selected Writings, 1927-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 220-221.

12 Cf. Georges Bataille, *Eroticism* (London: Marion Boyars, 2006), 187 and 190.

libertine characters through his insertion of their philosophy into narrative – a situation their philosophy cannot survive.

When it comes to labelling de Sade as a transgressive author, these two lines of transgression – the transgression of norms and customs on the one hand and the transgression of the hegemonic discourse on the other – conflict with each other. If we focus on de Sade as a sexual and political libertarian, who writes about sadistic sexual practices and rejects traditional religious taboos, we must understand his authorial voice to be the same as the voice of the libertines who take centre stage in his novels *Justine* and *Juliette*. If we, on the other hand, regard de Sade as a critic of hegemonic power, the libertines who are the empowered agents have been made completely powerless on the literal and descriptive level. In order to read de Sade as a critic of power it is necessary to break the bond between de Sade and the libertine, and instead create a bond between de Sade and the victim of the libertine.

Deleuze points out that in the Sadean world violence and reason are practised in a coextensive and interchangeable fashion.[13] Deleuze's point is that libertine practice is based on a confounding of demonstrative language with violent physical gestures.[14] The Sadean libertine aligns violence and reason in order to secure or territorialize his position, and the libertine experiences violence as an intellectual phenomenon that carries meaning *beyond* its simple employment. In order to achieve this intellectualization of violence, the libertine must redefine the effects associated with it. Pain and bodily injury are still present, but libertine philosophy intercedes that these effects are meaningful beyond their ability to incapacitate those who are made to experience them. The counterfeiter Roland, having tied a noose around Justine's neck and raped her, offers an example of this project in practice. Justine recounts:

> "Well, Thérèse," [Thérèse is the name Justine takes for herself when in contact with libertines] says my butcher, "I dare swear *if you'll tell the truth you'll say you felt pleasure only*?"

13 Cf. Gilles Deleuze, "Coldness and Cruelty," 18-19, in Gilles Deleuze & Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism* (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 9-139. In this text Deleuze attempts to insert the two writers, de Sade and von Sacher-Masoch, into a philosophical context. My conclusion, which elevates de Sade as a writer of narrative rather than of philosophy is therefore in conflict with Deleuze's own assessment of de Sade. Deleuze's observations about the content of de Sade's narrative I nonetheless agree with, it is Deleuze's reading of the structure of the Sadean narrative that I disagree with. The fact that I use Deleuze's own hermeneutics to disagree with his reading of de Sade is accidental.

14 Ibid. 18.

"Only horror, Monsieur, only disgust, only anguish and despair."

"You are lying, *I am fully acquainted with the effects you have just experienced,* but what does it matter what they were? I fancy you already know me well enough to be damned certain that *when I undertake something with you, the joy you reap from it concerns me infinitely less than my own …*"[15]

Roland unveils two moments of libertine politics here. Firstly, in a legislative gesture, he appeals to the theory of hegemony that drives libertine discourse by insisting on defining pain as pleasurable. Secondly, in a policing move, by excluding Justine from potentially subversive participation in the discursive process of libertinage ("the joy you reap from it concerns me infinitely less than my own"), he posits that the act of violence itself is performed in *a priori* reliance on the philosophical definition, the territorializing gesture, given to it by the libertine.

Deleuze points out that libertine reasoning is violent in the sense that it employs a demonstrative language whose purpose is not to convince but to affirm "the solitude and omnipotence of its author."[16] Reason can however only be employed in this manner because the libertine has lifted violence out of this material context of pain and destruction and, in redefining it as pleasurable, has theorized it as the primary moment of a philosophical discourse. The policing effort that Roland displays when he discredits Justine's experience of violence as inconsequential compared to his own theoretical understanding of the situation, marks the moment where libertine philosophy enters the stage of practical politics.

Blanchot adopts an understanding of the roles of Justine and Juliette that contrasts with Bataille's approach to de Sade's novels. Focusing on the transgressive thematics of the novels and seeing the libertine philosophy as an attitude situated beyond questions of moral judgement, Blanchot argues that

15 De Sade, *Justine*, 676; my emphases in italics.

16 Deleuze, "Coldness and Cruelty," 19.

both Justine and Juliette experience torture, but that Juliette has learned to separate these acts from the traditional morals that make them so abhorrent to Justine. Blanchot notes that:

> [A]t base both stories of the two sisters [are] identical, [...] everything that happens to Justine happens to Juliette. [...] Juliette is also thrown in prison, beaten up, promised torture and tortured endlessly. Hers is also a horrible existence, but here is the difference: these evils give her pleasure, these tortures enthral her.[17]

From this understanding, Blanchot moves on to deduce a Sadist ethos: "if one is stripped of one's virtue, what was previously misfortune becomes an opportunity for pleasure, and what was torment becomes voluptuous [...] the sovereign man is inaccessible to evil because no one can hurt him."[18] However, Blanchot's reading puts too much emphasis on the subjective experience of violence harboured by the libertine, as opposed to the structural function violence inhabits in the Sadean narrative.

It is my understanding that it would be inaccurate to explain Justine's refusal as a form of unwillingness to experience, psychologically, the pleasure the libertine derives from performing and receiving violence. Precisely by refusing to take part in the libertine's philosophical redefinition of the effects of violence, Justine undermines the ideological continuity between the libertine master-narrative and the narrative of the books. Justine's rejection of the rational intellectualization of violence promoted by the libertine creates a plane inside the Sadean narrative where violence is still painful, and thus constitutes an act of transgression against the libertine discourse: it affirms her autonomous judgement in opposition to a law-making libertine regime that is trying to reduce her to a predetermined function under its hegemony.

Justine's transgression is a form of violence but not in any physical sense. Rather, it is constituted through language in what John L. Austin calls a performative

17 Maurice Blanchot, "Sade's Reason," in *Maurice Blanchot, Lautréamont and Sade* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 7-43, quoted 19.

18 Blanchot, "Sade's Reason", 19-20.

'perlocutionary speech act'. Austin is concerned with mapping out ways in which speaking alters social relationships and introduces contractual obligations within the social sphere of the speaking agent. The perlocutionary speech act addresses speech on the level of what *effect* one seeks to achieve through the use of speech.[19] By performing her own sovereign judgement rather than accepting the libertine's account of how something should be understood, as the quote above illustrates, Justine enacts herself as a speaker on equal standing with the libertine. Justine's refusal to adjust to libertine discourse and discuss her subjection to the libertine within an idealized sphere of conversation thus establishes her as an agent acting in opposition to the libertine. Her refusal to adjust manifests itself as a physical act of opposition to the hegemonic intention of the libertine, this refusal becomes the vehicle through which the violent nature of Justine's role comes to the fore. The libertine assumes sovereignty by subjecting Justine to his or her discourse, but at the moment when Justine refuses to accept libertinism's account of things and speaks out against it she breaks the intention of the plot. Although this act of 'speaking out' might not really alter her physical subjection to the libertine within the Sadean world, her speech does nonetheless act on the level of the narrative in a way that undermines the libertine's position of authority: it is through her spoken rejection of the libertine philosophy that Justine is affirmed as a difference and as a transgressive agent within the Sadean assemblage. In this sense we can say that even if the libertine is not directly influenced by Justine's speech, her speech does alter the way in which we understand the Sadean plot. Justine's presence becomes formative on the narrative in the instances where she refuses to accept the libertines' attempts at controlling the plot. Justine's function in the narrative is to deterritorialize the libertine philosophy. In doing so, she transgresses the boundaries of the text at the moment when the libertine attempts to secure them.

In short my understanding, in contrast to Blanchot's, is that, firstly, de Sade becomes a transgressive author, and secondly, Justine becomes an important agent on two separate levels of the text: on the level of narrative and on the level of plot. On the level of the narrative, the assemblage, Justine destabilizes

19 John L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 12. Austin's 'performatives' are of a contractual nature and include instances where the speaking party initiates a particular social situation through the use of words alone. Austin distinguishes three fundamental aspects of speech: the locutionary, the illocutionary and the perlocutionary. The notion of the locutionary addresses the fact that something is being said in a meaningful way, rather than in a way that does not make sense. The notion of the illocutionary relates to what is intended in the speech act itself. (Cf. ibid. "Lecture II," 12-25 and 88-89)

the content of the text that is preferred by the libertine. She enters the story, is asked to follow its pace, but continually trips over and creates alternate planes of meaning that do not follow the libertine masterplan. On the level of plot she becomes the pivotal node on which the narrative is built.

Hence, by taking on the role of the victim in the face of the libertine discourse that tries to include her among its faithful subjects, Justine threatens to destroy the unity of the Sadean plot as one wherein the libertine is given reign to explore and impose his or her understanding of the world. De Sade is forced to kill her in order to stop writing and Justine thus becomes the protagonist who sets the tempo of the narrative and whose agency has to be overcome for the narrative to end. De Sade's murder of Justine establishes him as an interested agent of the plot, a transgressive 'abstract machine,' which further destabilizes his role as all-knowing author and, in ironic fashion, should be read as an autocritical move by the author: a move by which he destabilizes the apparent pornographic and philosophical message of his texts.

CONCLUSION

The Sadean narrative is littered with faceless victims, but Justine represents all the libertines' victims. She is the only victim the libertine attempts to argue and reason with, and her refusal to accept the libertine logic therefore becomes a political act in the sense that it signifies a will to oppose power on behalf of those who are not given the opportunity to do so.

Through Deleuze and Guattari's hermeneutics at least three consequences of the Sadean text can be drawn on which a further analysis can be constructed. Firstly, Justine's death is accidental on the level of narrative (the lightning strike), but murder on the level of the plot (de Sade's hand). It is neither the libertine that kills Justine, nor is it the fictional Sadean 'Nature'. Rather, it is de Sade himself who kills her in order to reach a conclusion. Agency is thus shifted from the discursive

power of the libertine to the figure that has resisted this discourse throughout – Justine. By killing Justine, de Sade ackowledges that she is the agent that has come to control the narrative.

Secondly, the Sadean narrative is marked by a transgression of power rather than a transgression on the level of theme. De Sade as a transgressive author is not interesting for analysis in view of the fact that he marries philosophy with pornography. He is interesting because the care with which he scrutinizes and recounts the victimization happening within the narrative destabilizes the pornographic and philosophical message a 'libertine' reading of his books would emphasize. Instead of creating a pornographic language, de Sade creates a language of the victim. This Sadean 'victim-language' is marked by a transgressive function that marginalizes the libertine and foregrounds the character of Justine. Lastly, de Sade is himself an abstract machine and a function of the narrative. This means that de Sade is an agent inside his own book. He does not kill Justine unprovoked – Justine's insistent opposition to the libertine necessitates her death.

Jostein Hølland (BA in History of Ideas from the University of Oslo; Research MA in Literary Studies from the University of Leiden) is currently in the process of seeking a PhD project where either de Sade's works are studied in the context of secular late-capitalist politics or late capitalism is studied separately in the context of its unique cultural production. He is particularly interested in Gilles Deleuze, Georges Bataille, Walter Benjamin, capitalism, and violence.

BETWEEN ACCOMMODATION AND INTRANSIGENCE

JESUIT MISSIONARIES AND JAPANESE FUNERAL TRADITIONS

Hélène Vu Thanh

École Normale Supérieure, Paris, France

ABSTRACT — *Jesuit missionaries landed in Japan in 1549, six years after the country was discovered by Portuguese merchants. They quickly succeeded in converting a small part of the Japanese population, especially in the southern regions of the country. But this nascent Japanese Christianity faced many challenges. A significant stumbling block was the centrality of traditional funeral rites in Japanese society. Wary of upsetting social norms, the Jesuits opted for a strategy known as the 'accommodation policy', by which they tried to identify Japanese ritual elements that could be incorporated or adapted into the Christian liturgy without threatening its doctrinal integrity. This meant understanding precisely the nature and purpose of Japanese funeral rites. Were they, for example, an embodiment of Buddhist beliefs, or were they mere lay traditions and thus compatible with the tenets of Christianity? The Jesuits set out to interpret and classify accordingly the rituals of the many Buddhist sects in Japan. However, as Japanese Christianity gained a stronghold in some regions the accommodation policy made way for a new strategy of differentiation, as evidenced by the introduction of European tombstones.*

INTRODUCTION

"In fact, all [Japanese] rites and customs are so different from those of other nations that they cannot easily be understood and learned in a short time."[1] This

remark in 1583 by Alessandro Valignano, the Japanese mission's most senior official, underlines how difficult it was for European missionaries to understand Japanese society. Adapting their evangelization strategy to the country's cultural specificities proved quite challenging, as indicated in the way the Jesuits tried to deal with Japanese funeral traditions. Indeed, the Jesuits gradually understood that the latter were very important to the Japanese, and that a successful introduction of Christian ways and beliefs in this area would require an acute understanding of how the native rituals related to various Buddhist doctrines the missionaries knew little about.

Francis Xavier was the first Jesuit to settle in Japan in 1549, six years after the discovery of the country by Portuguese merchants. Xavier was also a primary figure of the Society of Jesus, since he founded the religious order together with Ignatius de Loyola. Sanctioned by Pope Paul III in 1540, the Jesuits were intended from the start to serve as the missionary spearhead of the Counter Reformation. Although they acted immediately to christianize new territories discovered by Europeans, the Japanese mission only began in earnest during the 1580s under the leadership of Alessandro Valignano, who supervised the oriental missions. Japanese Christianity made the strongest inroads on the southern island of Kyushu, and it also developed around the capital Miyako (now Kyoto). However, Christians continued to be a minority throughout this period, and were forced often to coexist with the Buddhist majority. According to Charles Boxer, by 1614 the Christian community comprised about 300,000 Japanese, roughly 2% of the population,[2] when Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu outlawed Christianity. The number of missionaries was far from proportionate to that number – there were only 116 of them in Japan in 1614.[3] This understaffing had consequences for the converts' religious practices, which missionaries could control only on occasion.

From the beginning, the Jesuits viewed the Japanese mission as promising and particularly suited to the policy of accommodation. In Biblical exegesis, 'accommodation´ refers to the process of adapting the interpretation of a

1 Alessandro Valignano, *Les Jésuites au Japon*, trans. Jacques Bésineau (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1990), 81: "Finalement, tous leurs rites et leurs coutumes sont si différents de ceux des autres nations qu'on ne peut facilement les comprendre et les apprendre en peu de temps." [translation by the author].

2 Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan 1549-1650* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 320-321.

3 João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, *O Japão e o cristianismo no século XVI* (Lisbon: SHIP, 1999), 45.

– presumably divine – text or doctrine in light of new circumstances.[4] The Jesuits were historically among the strongest proponents of this principle. Following this logic, they reasoned that the Asian 'heathen' could retain major cultural practices, such as ancestor veneration in China or the caste system in India.[5]

Adaptation was carried out with the goal of making Christianity more appealing to a society that was just discovering it. Implementing an accommodation policy required missionaries to learn local customs in order to decide whether they could be compatible with Christian doctrine or if they had to be rejected outright. This meant distinguishing benign cultural elements from religious – hence problematic – ones, which was difficult due to the ambiguity of indigenous practices. The accommodation policy became a major point of controversy among all of the Asian missions. Not surprisingly, funeral rites and practices related to the veneration of the dead, being fundamental aspects of both religion and culture, featured heavily in the debates, although the Jesuits did not immediately realize how important these rites were socially.[6] This article assesses the process through which Japanese funeral rites were interpreted, classified and accommodated, looking in particular at the way the Jesuits justified their opinions and decisions. But first, it is necessary to consider the way the Jesuits perceived and understood Buddhist doctrines about death, which shaped their understanding of Japanese funeral rites.

MAKING SENSE OF BUDDHIST DOCTRINES AND ASSERTING CHRISTIAN DIFFERENCE

The missionaries in Japan were quickly confronted with local funeral traditions and various Buddhist doctrines. The Buddhism they encountered – mostly the Zen, Amidism, Tendai and Shingon sects – is part of the Mahayana branch, which places less emphasis on the figure of the Buddha and more on the role of the *boddhisattvas* – beings that have reached Awakening who nevertheless, out of compassion, refuse to enter Nirvana until all humans have escaped the cycle of birth and death. The *boddhisattvas* gradually evolved into saviour-like divine

4 For this understanding of accommodation, I rely on Ines G. Županov, "Accommodation," in *Dictionnaires des faits religieux*, ed. Régine Azria and Danièle Hervieu-Léger (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2010).

5 On what Roberto de Nobili did in India, see Ines G. Županov, *Disputed Missions: Jesuit Experiments and Brahmanical Knowledge in Seventeenth Century India* (Oxford/NYC: Oxford University Press, 1999). Among the many works on the Chinese mission, see Nicolas Standaert, *L'« autre » dans la mission*, *Leçons à partir de la Chine* (Bruxelles: Editions Lessius, 2003) and Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: the Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

6 Jesús López-Gay, *La liturgia en la misión del Japón del siglo XVI* (Rome: Libreria dell'università Gregoriana, 1970), 196-240.

figures, believed to be rulers of a paradise promised to the faithful. But beyond those general traits, Japanese Buddhism was divided among a number of sects with different beliefs about death and salvation. The missionaries contended with four main branches, each of which were further divided into various sects.[7] Their theories about death and the afterlife often, but not always, differed radically from Christianity's. Some sects were obviously very different from Christianity in their understanding of death, such as the Tendai and the Shingon sects, who purported to help believers escape from *samsara* through perfect knowledge. For the Zen sects, notions of heaven or the afterlife were entirely absent. Conversely, 'Pure Land' Buddhism (Amidism) presented a challenge due to its apparent similarities to Christianity. Amidism centred on the idea of salvation, granted by Amida through rebirth on the 'Pure Land'. Not only could a parallel easily be drawn between the single saviour figures of Christ and Amida, but Amidism's terms could be seen as more generous, as salvation was promised at the mere cost of reciting the name of Amida or simply trusting in his goodness.[8]

One of the first challenges for the Jesuits was to learn about the many Buddhist doctrines about death in order to better explain the Christian canon to converts. Another problem lay with the rites themselves: funerals were a central component of Japanese society, and the Jesuits were concerned they would provoke rejection by imposing radically different practices. The Jesuits therefore chose to impose Christian doctrine gradually by preserving or adapting various rituals in Buddhist ceremonies. This entailed distinguishing elements that were pure reflections of Buddhist beliefs from the benign expressions of lay customs. Missionaries worked to expose Christianity's different message and to explain that salvation beyond the grave could be reached through baptism, faith, and good deeds. This message was sometimes difficult for the potential converts to accept. Amidans, for instance, often felt it was unfair that no redemption was possible for the souls in hell, or that people who were not baptized were among them.[9] Francis Xavier underscored how upsetting this was for newly converted Christians: "[The converts] ask me if God can rescue them from hell, and the

7 Richard Bowring, *The Religious Traditions of Japan, 500-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

8 Although there were several other sects in Japan, I shall not discuss them here as missionaries gave them less importance.

9 Letter by Francis Xavier to the Jesuits in Europe, Cochin, 29 January 1552, in *François Xavier, Correspondance 1535-1552*, trans. Hugues Didier (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2005), 368.

reason why they must ever remain in hell. [...] they cannot stop weeping when they see that there is no remedy for their ancestors."[10]

The Jesuits hence succeeded in conveying specific Christian tenets to the converts. But persuading the converts to incorporate Christian principles into their rituals proved to be a much more complex task, as the meaning ascribed by the Japanese to funeral practices was not always apparent to the missionaries. The Jesuits' need to develop an understanding of such customs was all the more pressing as converts often asked missionaries if they could keep various traditions.

THE PROBLEM WITH FUNERAL RITES IN JAPAN AND THEIR INTERPRETATION BY THE JESUITS

The Jesuits established a classification system of Japanese funeral practices that was essentially a response to the many setbacks they encountered in their pastoral work. While there never was any intention of undertaking an ethnographic study of Japanese society, knowledge about Japanese society was gradually amassed by the missionaries as more issues emerged in the process of adapting Christianity. Eradicating all Japanese traditions was not an option for the Jesuits. Instead, they had to find an adequate balance between the long-term goal of fully integrating Japanese Christianity into the Catholic Church – imposing Christian rites as defined in the European context – and the more immediate need of adapting Christianity to a specific cultural environment in order to help the conversion process – which remained the mission's *raison d'être*. Following the logic of the accommodation policy, the Jesuits tried to distinguish theological from cultural components of the funerary rituals, in order to clarify for both converts and missionaries which practices could be accepted, if only temporarily, and which had to be rejected in accordance with Christian doctrine.

The classification effort was a gradual and tentative process that developed after years of presence in Japan, and it consolidated as the missionaries

10 Ibid. 378: "Ils me demandent si Dieu peut les retirer de l'enfer et la raison pour laquelle ils doivent toujours rester en enfer. [...] Eux, ils ne s'arrêtent pas de pleurer en voyant qu'il n'y a aucun remède pour leurs ancêtres." [translation by the author]

improved their understanding of the various rituals and increasingly deliberated over accommodation procedures.[11] No specific personnel was assigned to the task: classification decisions resulted from numerous discussions between the missionaries in Japan and the Jesuit Curia in Rome.

Various groups competed to impose their understanding of what characterized religious versus cultural concerning each ritual, prompting intense debates across the oceans. Historians can reconstruct the classification process on the basis of two main types of Jesuit sources, chronicles written by missionaries and administrative documents.

The chronicle of the Jesuit Luís Fróis, *Historia de Japam* (1583-1597), remains a key source for understanding how the Jesuits perceived Japanese society and implemented accommodation. Fróis' knowledge was considerable, due to his long presence in the country from his arrival in 1563 to his death in 1597. During this time he was tasked by Valignano to create a chronicle of the mission, in which he recorded several descriptions of Christian funerals. Administrative documents produced by the Society, both in Japan and Europe, consisted of the mission's regulations (*Obediencias*), which were drafted by Valignano and his successor Francisco Pasio, and the correspondence between the Jesuits in Japan and their superiors in Europe. The mission regulations are valuable because they provide critical insight into the institutional aspects of the Jesuit project, and they demonstrate the considerable effort of the missionaries to coordinate accommodation policies within the mission beginning in the 1580s. The correspondence reveals changes in strategy ordered by the Jesuit authorities in Rome for adapting funerary rites. A reconstruction of the process through which the Jesuits classified funerary rites is useful as it suggests that distinguishing religious from cultural practices sometimes proved puzzling to the missionaries. The Jesuits in Rome, for instance, did not always have the same perceptions of Japanese customs as the Jesuits in Japan, and often suggested either less or more liberality in accepting native rituals.

Broadly, there were five categories of classification for Japanese funerary rituals,

11 Alessandro Valignano, *Il cerimoniale per i missionari del Giappone, "Advertimentos e avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues de Jappão"* (Rome: Storia e letteratura, 1946).

which helped the Jesuits determine how to proceed with accommodation and conversion. Some rites were perceived as completely contradictory to Christian doctrine, which were rejected outright. Ancestor veneration was a practice that fell into this category. Adhering to Buddhist customs, Japanese Christian converts asked for prayers to be said for their dead, but the request was denied by Francis Xavier, who reported: "Many weep for their dead, and they ask me if there is any remedy for them through alms and prayers. I tell them there is no remedy for them."[12] In the Japanese mission, ancestor veneration was systematically classified as a religious ritual and not as a social practice of paying respect to the deceased.[13] Francis Xavier was aware that his censure of this rite could slow the progress of conversion, and that the converts would have much trouble coming to terms with severing all ties to their ancestors. Nevertheless, the custom was condemned for breaching the First Commandment, which forbade the worship of anyone or anything but the one true God.

Other rituals were seen as purely social and thus unproblematic, such as the *obon*, or banquet, that was usually held for the *bonzes* (Buddhist monks) and the congregation who attended the funeral. The practice of holding banquets or festivals was not condemned, because no religious implications were identified: the *obon* was held not to venerate the dead, but to thank the *bonzes*, which did not breach Christian doctrine. The Jesuits, aware of how important these celebrations were for the Japanese, allowed them to continue. Nevertheless, even such approved Japanese rituals required adaptation, since the Jesuits could not accept monetary contributions from laity and lavish spending at funerals was considered immoral. They therefore attempted to reorient the practice into one that complied with Christian perceptions of decency and morality. For instance, Dom Bartolomeu (born Ōmura Sumitada), the first lord to convert to Christianity in 1563, expressed soon after conversion his desire to change the way the *obon* was held in Japan. According to Fróis, great celebrations and banquets provided an opportunity for the *bonzes* to enrich themselves, and much money was donated to them. Likely at the suggestion of the Jesuits, Dom Bartolomeu decided to use this

12 Letter from Francis Xavier to the Jesuits in Europe, Cochin, 29 January 1552 in François Xavier, *Correspondance*, 378: "Beaucoup pleurent les morts et me demandent s'ils peuvent bénéficier de quelques remèdes au moyen d'aumônes et de prières. Mais moi, je leur dis qu'il n'y a pas de remède pour eux." [translation by the author]

13 Haruko Nawata Ward, "Jesuit Encounters with Confucianism in Early Modern Japan," *Sixteenth Century Journal* XL/4 (2009): 1045-1067.

money not to hold an *obon*, but to feed two to three thousand poor instead.[14] It is noteworthy that the Jesuits did not discourage the converts from participating in the Japanese funerary festivals, as they did not want to isolate them from the rest of society.

A third class of funeral rituals included practices that, although clearly structured by Buddhist beliefs, were considered so important to the converts that they could not easily be suppressed. These customs were particularly debated as the missionaries searched for ways of cleansing them of any Buddhist elements. An especially problematic custom was the use of monetary donations to alter the spiritual fate of the dead after they had perished. Melchior Nuñes Barreto, head of the Indian mission, visited Japan in 1556 and reported in 1560:

> The Fathers in Japan have accepted that Christians donate money for the souls of their forefathers who died as pagans, because the *bonzes* are convinced that money is needed to rescue the dead from hell; the Fathers, to prevent such idolatry as the *bonzes* are causing, conceded to this superstition.[15]

The head of the Society in Rome, General Diego Laínez, allowed the practice, but urged that the converts be warned that the money had no magical value and that it would not be of any help to those trapped in hell. In 1577, Laínez's successor Everard Mercurian banned the ritual altogether because the missionaries were no longer allowed to receive money from the faithful. For Mercurian, the real issue was not the risk of endorsing superstitious beliefs among the converts, but the practical problem of having the alms managed by the Jesuits in Japan.[16] Later in the sixteenth century, General Claudio Acquaviva settled for a compromise solution, acknowledging that Japanese Christianity was in its infancy and that the practice of holding banquets was a source of great relief for recent converts. Acquaviva therefore deemed it acceptable to receive donations in the name of the dead, but only on the condition that the Jesuits accept the money as donations for the poor. Additionally, this was to be only a temporary arrangement, and the

14 Luís Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, ed. Anabela Mourato et al. (Lisbon: Biblioteca virtual dos descobrimentos portugueses n°10, 2002), volume 1, part 1, chapter 47, fol. 146 v°: "[Dom Bartolomeu] disse ao Padre que determinava dar naquelles dias de comer a dous ou tres mil pobres." [translation by the author]

15 *Documenta Indica IV (1557-1560),* ed. Joseph Wicki (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1956), 513: "[...] Nos Padres do Japão [...] consentião aos christãos rezar e offerecer polas almas de seus pais e avoos que morrerão gentios, e isto porque os bonzos persuadem aos japões que lhes tirarão seus antepasados do inferno com dinheiro que lhes dão; os Padres, pera que os christãos se não vão a falsa idolatria dos bonzos, consentim-lhes a superstição." [translation by the author]

16 López-Gay, *La liturgia*, 211.

missionaries were to encourage newly converted Christians to progressively give up the practice.[17] This transitional strategy of substituting a Buddhist practice for a Christian one can be seen as the expression of what Jesús López-Gay calls a 'principle of substitution'.[18]

A fourth type of ritual comprised elements that were common to both Buddhism and Christianity, such as the use of tombstones in cemeteries. The main difference between these was one of shape. Traditional Japanese tombstones could take many forms, but they were always oriented vertically rather than horizontally (Fig. 1). The progressive nature of the accommodation policy can be seen at work here as well, as the Jesuits initially did not take any measures against the use of vertical tombstones for Japanese Christians. The distinctive traits of the earliest

17 "Ordens tiradas de alguas cartas que N P Claudio Acquaviva escreveo aos Padres Gaspar Coelho e Padre Gomes, Viceprovinciaes de Japão", 1 May 1607, in Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, *Japsin* 3, fol. 26 v°.

18 López-Gay, *La liturgia*, 209.

Fig. 1
Five-tiered Buddhist tombstones
(Hélène Vu Thanh)

tombstones – mostly found in the Kyūshū and Kansai (now Kyōto/Ōsaka) regions, where the missionary effort was most concentrated – consisted of a vertical construction with Christian inscriptions, such as crosses or the trigram IHS of the Society of Jesus. Indeed, it appears that traditional European tombstones, the style of which was completely unfamiliar to the Japanese, were only introduced at a later stage.[19] The earliest horizontal tombstone extant in Japan, for example, located in the former fief of the Arima clan in Datenomoto (now Unzen City), dates to 1604. This suggests that the shift in tombstone orientation was a practice that was established gradually during the second half of the sixteenth century (Figs 2 and 3). The change was probably initiated as the missionaries sought to render the tombstone's Christian function more visible, while also ensuring that converts distinguished the two faiths to discourage the reintroduction of Buddhist customs.

Fig. 2
Nishitabira Christian tombstone
(Hélène Vu Thanh)

Fig. 3
Nishitabira Christian tombstone (detail)
(Hélène Vu Thanh)

According to Kazuhisa Ōishi, by the beginning of the seventeenth century the missionaries became adamant about enforcing the use of horizontal tombstones. Ōishi purports that this new attitude derived from the desire to demonstrate visually that Christian rites were superior to Buddhist practices. Above all the

Jesuits wanted to communicate clearly a Christian understanding of death, and more particularly one that promoted inhumation rather than cremation.[20] Such distinctions were expressed through both the Christian funeral rituals and the use of horizontal tombstones. Therefore, the adaptation of Buddhist tombstones was temporary and only persisted in the regions where Christianity made fewer inroads. As soon as widespread conversion appeared feasible, the missionaries imposed European traditions on the creation and placement of horizontal tombstones, with the intention of making them appear more prominent.

Finally, the missionaries also introduced entirely new rituals in Japan, such as the raising of banners during funerals. This was not part of traditional Japanese funerary customs, as Valignano and Pasio noted in the *Obediencias*.[21] The practice originated in Europe, in particular in the use of banners at funerals by Christian confraternities. The introduction of the practice in Japan was intended to make burial ceremonies more solemn, in order to match the importance granted to funerals in Japanese Buddhism.

The Jesuits hence created an extensive classification system for funerary rites in Japan, and their efforts centred on the identification and isolation of religious and cultural principles in each custom examined. The more a practice was seen as a material expression of Buddhist doctrine, the stronger its rejection by the missionaries. Conversely, if the latter could detect only social implications, the rite would be seen as mere lay custom. In this case, the Jesuits often were inclined to accept the practice, possibly with some modifications. But between these two ideal positions, there was a wide range of situations in which the missionaries had to consider preserving certain funeral rituals most valued by the Japanese while introducing Christian customs gradually.

Such reflections compelled the missionaries to create a funeral liturgy for Japan. One of the earliest testimonies on the subject was written by Father Gago in 1555, who described the progression of a funeral in Japan:

20 Interestingly, the transition from cremation to inhumation does not seem to have troubled the converts much. There is no mention of the issue in the writings of the missionaries.

21 Biblioteca da Ajuda, *Jesuítas na Ásia* 49-IV-56, fol. 37-38.

When a Christian dies, […] many Christians gather and immediately they start building a coffin or a crate made of planks used as a coffin where the body is placed. And those who are poor and cannot afford it do so thanks to the alms given by [other Christians]. The coffin is covered with a piece of silk cloth and it is carried away by four men and a brother, who wears a cross and a surplice, and a servant, who carries the holy water. As to me, I hold a book and I sing a litany, and the Christians respond "Ora pro nobis". And on every side many lanterns are raised to illuminate the procession, something that the Gentiles appreciate greatly and say is characteristic of the Christians' law.[22]

There was no mass – the deceased converted Christian only received a benediction. The Jesuit Gaspar Vilela, who started the mission in Miyako, felt that this manner of burial was a way of educating the non-converted.[23] Fróis describes how Vilela organized such a procession in 1565 for the burial of a Christian noble in Miyako:

And, as Father Gaspar Vilela was intrepid, filled with zeal for the glory of God, and as he knew how important this business was – for it was the first public burial ceremony that was done with solemnity – he went dressed in a brocade cape, carried on a red lacquered litter in the company of numerous Christians who were tonsured like *bonzes*; some were wearing the surplice, others, the alb.[24]

The account continues with descriptions of objects that were carried along the procession, including crosses, retables representing Christ the Saviour, and silk banners on which the symbols of the Passion were displayed. Fróis then describes the Japanese public's reaction:

And as the city of Miyako likes to see novelty, the attendance of the people was considerable; it included men, women, children as well as *bonzes*, and it can be said that, counting both Christians and Gentiles, there were more than ten thousand souls. […]

22 Letter from Baltasar Gago to the Jesuits in India and Portugal, 23 September 1555, in Juan Ruiz-de-Medina, *Monumenta historica Japoniae II, Documentos del Japon, 1547-1557* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1990), 559: "Quando algum falece […] ajuntão-se muitos christãos e ordenão-lhe logo huma tumba ou caixa de távoas que pera isso têm, com a qual enterrão o corpo. E aquelles que sam pobres, que não têm pera isso, fas-se das esmolas dos outros. E cuberta com hum pano de seda levão-no quatro homens, e o irmão com hum crucifixo e sobrepelis, e hum moço com ágoa benta. E eu com hum livro então huma ladainha e os christãos repondem "ora pro nobis". E de cada banda levão muitas lanternas altas com lume, do que estes gentios se convencem muito, e dizem que não á outra cousa senão a lei do christão." [translation by the author].

23 Letter from Gaspar Vilela to the Jesuits in Portugal, 29 October 1557; Ibid. 700.

24 Fróis, *Historia*, volume 2, part 1, chapter 66, fol. 226-226 v°: "E como tambem o Pe Gaspar Vilela era intrepido e zeloso da honra de Deos e sabia quanto isto importava, por ser o primeiro enterramento publico que se fazia com solemnidade, foi em huma liteira acharoada de vermelho,

As they walked, the Christians were reciting loudly the Christian doctrine, and this caused amazement among the Gentiles, for whom the sound of prayers in Latin was something truly foreign and novel.[25]

Funerals therefore appear to have been an important way to render the Christian faith more visible in Japan; its spiritual force could be demonstrated by all the pomp deployed for the ceremony. Moreover, the inclusion of Christian liturgical elements was an effective way to make the ceremony distinct and different from its Buddhist counterpart. The goal of the missionaries was not to transform the funeral liturgy as it was defined in Europe, but to make it appear more solemn, in order to appeal to traditional Japanese conceptions.

These characteristics persisted at the same time that Valignano and Pasio were trying to codify the funeral liturgy with greater precision. In his *Obediencias*, Valignano insisted on the importance of funerals in the eyes of Japanese.[26] In order to compromise, he suggested adding more or less solemnity to the ceremony according to the social rank of the deceased. In the case of an ordinary funeral, the priest was to go alone to the residence of the deceased, and to wear informal attire. In the case of a high profile funeral, the priest was to put on his surplice and to be accompanied by brothers and *dōjukus* (catechists).

The type of burial place varied according to the regions' degree of Christianization. In Takastuki, which was governed by a Christian lord, a Christian-only cemetery was laid out outside the city fortress.[27] Conversely, where the Christians were a minority, they were buried along with non-Christians.

THE LIMITS OF ACCOMMODATION AND FUNERAL RITES

According to the historian Jesús López-Gay, the Jesuits tried to adapt to Buddhist funeral rites by incorporating and redefining them as Christian.[28] While this

com huma capa de borcado e muitos christãos rapados que parecião bonzos, huns com sobrepelizes e outros com alvas." [translation by the author]

25 Ibid. fol. 226 v°.: "E como o Miaco hé muito propenso ha ver novidades, foi grande o concurso da gente, homens, mulheres, meninos e bonzos, que affirmavão todos os christãos e gentios que se acharião alli mais de dez mil almas. [...] Os christãos hião rezando em voz entoada a doutrina christã, que ainda cauzava nos gentios maior admiração, por lhe ouvirem recitar tanto a ponto orações em latim que para seos ouvidos era couza tão peregrina e nova." [translation by the author]

26 Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, *Japsin* 2, fol. 145 v°-147 v°.

27 Fróis, *Historia*, volume 1, part 1, chapter 103, fol. 378.

28 López-Gay, *La liturgia*, 209.

theory does apply to a number of practices, it cannot be considered as a general principle, and López-Gay himself notes that some Japanese elements simply could not be integrated or adapted. If we look closely at the kind of elements that were indeed assimilated, such as the practice of giving alms during funerals, it appears that they had only a minor role in the liturgy. The funeral liturgy itself was not significantly accommodated – with the exception of making burials more or less solemn in accordance with the rank of the deceased.

At the turn of the seventeenth century, major changes in the accommodation policy were implemented, and a new emphasis was placed on the assertion of Christianity's superiority and specificity. At this point, Japanese Christianity had stronger foundations – at least in some regions, such as Kyūshū – and the adaptation of indigenous customs was seen as no longer necessary (Fig. 4). This is when horizontal tombstones began to appear and also the use of banners at funerals was introduced. Japanese Christianity asserted its distinct identity among the country's other religious traditions by introducing European practices that were unfamiliar to the Japanese. Nicolas Standaert describes this process as the 'amplification of difference', a process which resulted in the rejection of elements that were deemed too similar to other religions.[29] Since the Christian community was still a minority in Japan, the Jesuits tried to consolidate and assert the cohesion and identity of the Christians in its stronger bases by suppressing even the most trivial element that could be correlated to the country's non-Christian religious traditions. The converts, in turn, tried to define clearer and stronger boundaries around their communities.

In regions where Christians were in the minority, on the other hand, many converts appear to have continued practicing Buddhism in tandem with Christianity. Fróis, for instance, reported the case of a Japanese Christian who kept reciting *Namu Amida Butsu*, the prayer to the Amida Buddha.[30] Fróis informed the man that he had converted and that such practices had to be abandoned forever. The convert replied that he had once been a great sinner, and that if Christ did not want to save

29 Here Nicolas Standaert is citing Vernon Ruland, discussing the case of the Chinese mission. Nicolas Standaert, *The Interweaving of Rituals, Funerals in the Cultural Exchange Between China and Europe* (Seattle/London: University of Washington Press, 2008), 90-91. This analysis is also valid for the Japanese mission.

30 Fróis, *Historia*, volume 1, part 1, chapter 38, fol. 113.

Fig. 4
Jesuit establishments in 1604
(Hélène Vu Thanh)

him in the afterlife, he hoped that Amida would accept him in his paradise, hence his recitations. By relying on both Christian and Buddhist symbols and practices, Japanese converts sought to increase their opportunity for having their wishes granted. When they found that a symbol did not work anymore, the converts would use another one, a practice that Ikuo Higashibaba called the 'spiritual insurance system'.[31] This example indicates that the missionaries encountered significant challenges in their efforts to protect the integrity of the Christian doctrine. The religious dispositions of the Japanese, shaped by the tradition of Buddhism, made it difficult for notions as fundamental as the exclusive nature of Christianity to take root, especially in regions the missionaries could rarely visit. Moreover, Christian symbols and rituals could be spontaneously given unorthodox meaning by the Japanese, who first experienced them as Buddhists, rather than as Christians. Although the missionaries were aware of these issues, controlling – let alone reforming – such perceptions and behaviours was often beyond their means.

CONCLUSION

The Jesuit method of accommodation in Japan reveals their careful consideration of the religious and cultural nature of Japanese funeral rites and liturgy. While they immediately rejected distinctively Buddhist notions of death, the missionaries understood that it was impossible to completely eradicate Japanese funeral rites, due to their social importance. This accounts for their choice in accommodating funeral rites, but it does not imply an adaptation devoid of analysis and modularity. In fact, accommodation was only implemented after it had been determined whether a specific practice was religious or social, and what aspects of each ritual were to be accepted, adapted or rejected. Such distinctions were made gradually and tentatively, because the Jesuits realized that they could not afford to go against strong cultural habits, even when in some cases they hinted at Buddhist beliefs, as in the case of the alms for the souls of the dead. The Jesuits found a flexible and temporary solution, considering carefully

31 Ikuo Higashibaba, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan: Kirishitan Belief and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 38.

both the religious and social dimensions they identified, but not before intense discussion between missionary circles and the Jesuit authorities in Rome, whom they consulted. Indeed, the accommodation policy was not a static aspect of the Japanese mission but rather a dynamic programme, the dimensions of which were highly debated among the missionaries. It was shaped by the competing missionaries, who frequently disagreed about what should or should not be adapted. The Roman authorities, who often felt concerned or hesitant with the decisions of the missionaries in Japan, also had an important role here.

A growing desire to visibly assert Christianity's religious difference occurred at the turn of the seventeenth century, illustrated by the changes in tombstone styles. The strongest Christian communities thus seem to have affirmed themselves culturally as distinct from the rest of Japanese society, demonstrating that the Jesuit accommodation policy was meant only to be transitory. This cultural assertion eventually aroused the concern of the *shogunate* about Japanese Christian loyalty, and played a part in the outlawing and official persecution of Christianity in Japan.

Hélène Vu Thanh is a teaching assistant at the École Normale Supérieure (Paris). She defended her thesis on the Catholic missions to Japan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries at Paris IV-Sorbonne University in November 2012. Vu Thanh specializes in conversion methods developed by the missionaries and the reception of Christianity by the Japanese, as well as the circulation of knowledge between Japan and Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

THE SWEETENING OF DEATH
BAMAKHEPA'S VISUALIZATION OF TARA AT BENGAL'S TARAPITH TEMPLE

Imma Ramos

University of Cambridge, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT – *Tarapith in West Bengal is regarded as one of the most powerful holy places in India. This paper explores the ways in which the many facets of death have been articulated and conceptualized in Tantric ritual through an analysis of its local goddess, Tara. In particular it will examine the relationship between this deity and the site's most famous Tantric practitioner, Bamakhepa (1837-1911). This will reveal a major development in late nineteenth-century understandings of Tara, as he fundamentally 'sweetened' this once terrifying goddess through his interactions with and visualizations of her. Her reimagined role as a fierce mother would appeal to the Bengali nationalists who hailed India as* Bharat Mata *(Mother India) and, as her sons, were willing to sacrifice their lives to obtain her freedom from British colonial rule.*

INTRODUCTION

A plaque inside Tarapith temple (Fig. 1) explains that it was constructed by businessman Jagannatha Ray and completed by 1818. The original, however, was much older – its foundations are believed to date back to the ninth century. Despite its status, there has not yet been an adequately comprehensive study of Tarapith apart from informative introductions by Gangopadhyay, Morinis, and Banerjee.[1] Its fame today can be largely credited to the charisma and popularity of Bamakhepa (1837-1911), a Tantric practitioner or *sadhaka* who became a *pujari* or priest there during the late nineteenth century and gave the site its spiritually

1 Bipula Kumara Gangopadhyay, *Mahapith Tarapith* (Kolkata: Jaytara Publishers, 2010); Alan Morinis, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition: a Case Study of West Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Sumanta Banerjee, *Logic in a Popular Form: Essays on Popular Religion in Bengal* (London: Seagull, 2010).

powerful reputation. Biographers of Bamakhepa stress his intimate relationship with the temple's resident deity: the inner sanctum enshrines a three foot tall metal *murti* or divinely embodied icon of Tara, a fierce goddess closely associated with mortality and destruction (Figs 2 and 3).[2] However, scholars have largely overlooked the complexity of this relationship, and its accompanying Tantric rituals.[3] Bamakhepa's esoteric practices included meditation on corpses and skulls in cremation grounds, symbols of mortality which revealingly accompany images of Tara. Such rituals were deliberately shrouded in secrecy and were often misunderstood by Orientalist scholars and colonial missionaries. One late nineteenth-century writer commented:

Fig. 1
Tarapith temple
(Imma Ramos)
2012

[Tantric] worship assumes wild, extravagant forms, generally obscene, sometimes bloody. It is saddening to think that such abominations are committed; it is still more saddening that they are performed as part of divine worship. Conscience, however, is so far alive that these detestable rites are practised only in secret.[4]

This article will demonstrate that an examination of the indigenous reception of the iconography of Tara in late nineteenth-century Bengal reveals and illuminates the ´secret´, cryptic meanings behind these rituals which are so closely tied to emancipatory death. Focusing on this tumultuous period of colonial rule in

4 John Murray Mitchell and William Muir, *Two Old Faiths* (Delhi: Asian Educational Service, 1996 [1891]), 53.

Fig. 2 and 3
Murti of Tara (and detail) in the inner sanctum
of Tarapith temple
(Imma Ramos)
2012

5 Particularly penetrative definitions of Tantra, a concept which is famously difficult to define or categorize, have been suggested by Hugh Urban in *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) and by David White in *Tantra in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). *Hindu Tantrism* by Sanjukta Gupta, Dirk Jan Hoens and Teun Goudriaan (Leiden: Brill, 1979) also provides an excellent introduction to the subject.

6 Contrary to popular belief in the West which sees Tantra as mainly concerned with sexuality, the sublimation of material reality through a confrontation with death is one of the most important goals. Hugh Urban offers an insightful look at the way Tantra was 'deodorized' and distorted in the West during the twentieth century in *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power*.

7 McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 121.

8 Gangopadhyay, *Mahapith Tarapith*, 110.

9 Ibid. 281. In her benevolent manifestation, Tara is also a Buddhist goddess and is regarded as a Tibetan national deity. She is generally understood

Bengal, the centre of British power in India, will also uncover the nationalistic sentiments which the British-educated Bengali middle classes (*bhadralok*) would attach nostalgically to indigenous practices, including Tantra, guru, and image worship. Bamakhepa related to Tara as an adoring son might to a mother, subsequently 'sweetening' and popularizing the fierce aspect of her character, which appealed to a widespread desire to promote India as Mother (*Bharat Mata*) in response to British rule.

UNDERSTANDING TARA

Tarapith is a centre of Tantra, a body of beliefs and practices within Hinduism that aims to sublimate material reality.[5] This includes an affirmation of and confrontation with death itself, since material reality is characterized by transience and decay.[6] All phenomena are considered to be the concrete manifestation of divine feminine energy, which *sadhakas* seek to ritually channel through various practices or *sadhanas*, including the invocation of deities such as Tara through rituals of visualization. Through this unity with the divine they strive to attain *moksha* (liberation). In Tantric terms, this liberating union represents the 'ecstasy of death' of the self or the 'I.' As June McDaniel states, "there seem to be two forms [of ecstasy...] One is the realization of radical detachment from the world [...] The other form is the realization of total dependence on the Mother."[7] When this union is achieved all desire vanishes and the cycle of endless rebirths (according to the dominant Hindu belief in reincarnation) comes to an end. As the *Gupta-Chinachara Tantra* explains: "Death in Tarapith immediately grants *moksha*. Even gods wish to die in Tarapith. Thus, go to Tara [...] with deep devotion and respect."[8]

Tara is often referred to as the cheater of death; since Yama, the god of death, is believed to preside over the gates of mortality in the south, the Tara *murti* deliberately faces north, protecting her devotees from demise and granting the blessing of a long life.[9] Tara's iconography exhibits her paradoxical nature, however, and highlights the notion that she is not only the protectress against death, but is

simultaneously death itself, just as a tenth-century Tantric text reveals that Tara is both "frightening and removes fear."[10] The *murti* is adorned with a silver necklace of human heads. Her unbound, wild hair suggests dissolution and chaos, in contrast with the hair of other goddesses which is always braided, symbolic of cosmic order.[11] Her mouth is smeared with red *sindoor* or vermilion, resembling blood. In the tenth-century *Mundamala-tantra* she is called 'She Who is Smeared with Blood' and 'She Who Enjoys Blood Sacrifice'.[12] To meditate on Tara is thus to meditate on death itself. Through this esoteric ritual the *sadhaka* directly confronts his fear of impermanence, and thus overcomes it. It also motivates the *sadhaka* to seek a state of consciousness that is beyond life and death, and beyond duality itself. Tara's macabre iconography reveals a fundamental truth behind Tantric ritual: the universal and inclusive nature of death breaks down conventional social differences between practitioners, a sentiment that would acquire political relevance during the colonial period when Bengali writers stressed the need to unite a country fragmented by caste division.[13] According to a Tantric practitioner who was a contemporary of Bamakhepa, "[i]n Tantrik philosophy, there is no difference between castes, communities, religions, etc. [...] In this sense, [Tantra] is a protest against the Vedic and Brahmanical religion.'[14]

Late nineteenth-century lithographs of Tara which were produced in nearby Calcutta and subsequently circulated around Bengal and the rest of India (Figs 4 and 5) provide a more complete iconography of the goddess, as so much of the *murti* is obscured beneath marigold garlands and the sari she is wearing.[15] The blue lotus she holds in one of her right hands represents her creative aspect, while the left hands, holding a bloodied sword and a knife, represent her destructive aspect.[16] She thus embodies the inherent rhythm of the cosmos, which is created, then destroyed, only to be recreated, according to the Hindu concept of time as cyclical. *Sadhakas* approach her to gain access to this immeasurable power. The origin of Tara's iconography lies in the *dhyanas* or icon descriptions which define her physical form in detail for the purpose of visualization rituals. They stress her fierce, often horrifying appearance, inviting submissive surrender by the devotee.

to have become prominent in Indian Buddhism first, and then gained greater importance when introduced into Tibet. Her place in the Hindu pantheon is less central and she is usually associated with a group of nine other Tantric goddesses, the *Mahavidyas*. For references on the history of Tara in Tibet, see Stephan Beyer, *The Cult of Tara: Magic and Ritual in Tibet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), and for more on her role as a *Mahavidya*, David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: the Ten Mahavidyas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

10 Rajesh Diksit, *Tara Tantra Shastra* (Agra: Sumit Prakashan, 1987), 116.

11 Kinsley, *Tantric Visions*, 84.

12 Diksit, *Tara Tantra Shastra*, 117.

13 Swarupa Gupta, *Notions of Nationhood in Bengal: Perspectives on Samaj, c.1867-1905* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 311.

14 Banerjee, *Logic in a Popular Form*, 166.

15 For more information on the studio behind these prints, Calcutta Art Studio, see Christopher Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: the Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (London: Reaktion, 2004) and Partha Mitter, "Mechanical Reproduction and the World of the Colonial Artist," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 36 (2002): 1-32.

The *dhyana* mantra from the sixteenth-century *Mantra-mahodadhi* states that: In her left hands she holds a knife and a skull and, in her right hands, a sword and

In her left hands she holds a knife and a skull and, in her right hands, a sword and a blue lotus. Her complexion is blue, and she is bedecked with ornaments […] Her tongue is always moving, and her teeth and mouth appear terrible. She is wearing a tiger skin around her waist, and her forehead is decorated with ornaments of white bone […] She is seated on the heart of a corpse, and her breasts are hard. Thus should one meditate on Tara.[17]

Fig. 4
Tara
Lithograph
c. 1885
Calcutta Art Studio, Calcutta
Collection of Shubhojit Biswas

Fig. 5
Tara
Lithograph
c. 1885
Calcutta Art Studio, Calcutta
Collection of Shubhojit Biswas

Dhyanas were written for the mental contemplation of gods by *sadhakas* to evoke and invoke their presence by filling his or her mind with this description of the goddess while ritually approaching her. The aim of Tantric practice is total union or identification with the deity, or to be granted a vision of the deity, and the *dhyanas* are meant to help achieve this. In the case of Tarapith, Bamakhepa famously achieved both, and his vision granted him *moksha*. The combination of written *dhyanas* and the *murti* of Tara shaped his vision. Such rituals of visualization are insufficiently treated in the sphere of visual studies, considering they form such an important part of Hindu iconography and image devotion.[18] Most significant for this case study is the way in which Bamakhepa's relationship with and visualization of Tara shaped his followers' attitudes towards her. For example, his union with Tara led to his consuming offerings left for Tara's *murti* himself, before passing them on to her. This was a subversive act that not only articulated the intimacy of their relationship as Divine Mother and adoring son, but also represented the domestication of this fierce goddess.

UNDERSTANDING TANTRIC RITUAL THROUGH TARA

In order to fully identify with Tara, Bamakhepa, like other *sadhakas*, partook in certain Tantric rituals associated with her. The iconography of Tara informs and reinforces Tantric ritual focusing on death, i.e. the setting, which is the cremation ground, and the ritual instruments, which include skulls, weapons and corpses. *Sadhakas* at Tarapith frequently seat themselves on or near five human and animal skulls in the cremation ground in order to access the power of the goddess (*pancha-mundi-asana*). Meditation while seated on a recently-dead human corpse is also practised (*shava-sadhana*). These *sadhanas* are considered ego-transcending spiritual practices. In depictions of the goddess, cremation fires are visible in the background, which represent another aspect of her character: she is recognized as the cremation fire itself, enabling the cathartic transition from life to death and from one mode of being to another.[19] According to Hindu belief, cremation is the final rite in the course of an individual's existence and

16 Symbolic interpretations of her iconography here are based on interviews with informants I carried out in and around Tarapith. Harish Chandra Das, *The Iconography of Sakta Divinities* (Delhi: Pratibha Prakashan, 1997) is also a helpful source for understanding the iconographical implications of a multitude of Hindu goddesses.

17 Mahidhara, *Mantra Mahodahih*, Vol. 1, ed. and transl. Ramkumar Rai (Varanasi: Prachya Prakashan, 1992), 179-180. Note that Tara's iconography is not always consistent and there are occasional variations. In contrast to this *dhyana*, for example, the Calcutta Art Studio prints represent her with knife and sword in her left hands, and lotus and skull in her right hands.

18 This point is made by Corinna Wessels-Mevissen in a special issue of *Marg* (December 2011) entitled "Visuality of Indian Rituals" in which the relationship between image and ritual as a subject of visual anthropology was introduced from a variety of perspectives. Wessels-Mevissen refers to such rituals as 'mind objects,' suggesting their importance as iconographical 'artefacts' in their own right.

19 Kinsley, *Tantric Visions*, 103.

it ceremoniously affirms non-attachment to the body. As a threshold where transition from life to death regularly takes place, it is a numinous space offering unparalleled access to the spirit world and the beings that inhabit it. *Sadhakas* often attempt to make contact with this spirit world in order to gain supernatural powers, particularly through the practice of *shava-sadhana*. Initiation into Tantric rites is carried out in this setting, involving the symbolic death and rebirth of the practitioner.[20] Appropriately then, the serpents adorning Tara are symbols of transformation, able to shed their skins and become new beings. The cremation ground also represents a 'polluted' space. Bamakhepa is said to have practised his meditation on the skulls of five unclean beings: a human that had died a violent, unnatural death, as well as the skulls of a monkey, snake, mongoose, and vulture.[21] This relates to the Tantric engagement with the impure which, for a *sadhaka*, can be used as an instrument of auspicious power.[22] The affirmation that all is sacred in the material world, including those forbidden things rejected by society, ultimately liberates the *sadhaka* from the material world. Since death represents an aspect of the polluted, Tara herself is an emblem of the forbidden.[23] During the ritual, the *sadhaka* boldly confronts Tara and thereby assimilates and overcomes her, transforming her into a vehicle of salvation.

Iconographically, Tara's bloodied sword of knowledge symbolizes the death of the ego, represented by her garland of severed heads, through the transformative destruction of ignorance.[24] Decapitation during animal sacrifice was and still is common in the Tantric tradition and at Tarapith it is a daily occurrence. The *khadga* ritual decapitation sword used at the temple has a curved blade commonly seen in images of the goddess. The *Tantrasara* stresses the importance of decapitation as the ideal form of sacrifice.[25] Several goats are beheaded daily to satisfy Tara's hunger. Goats are considered symbols of greed, passion and lust so their sacrifice is a symbolic act. The head can be interpreted as a repository of the ego, which is then offered to the goddess to appease her or maintain favour.[26] As an enlightened ascetic or *sannyasi*, Bamakhepa had conquered the eight bondages of the ego or *ashta-pasha* and six cardinal vices or *shahra-ripu* (including hate,

20 Ibid. 235.

21 This story was told to me by several informants at Tarapith (August 2012). See also McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 127.

22 See Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power*, for more on the relationship between 'impurity' and the 'auspicious' in Tantric philosophy and the role of transgression in the attainment of power.

23 Kinsley, *Tantric Visions*, 76.

24 Interviews with informants (August 2012). Also see Kinsley, *Tantric Visions*, 108.

25 Diksit, *Tara Tantra Shastra*, 682-683.

26 Interview with an informant at Tarapith (August 2012).

shame, fear, reproach, sexual desire, anger, greed, vanity, and envy), his own symbolic sacrificial 'decapitation' for Tara.

Tara's sacrificial heads also assumed an alternative meaning during the colonial period. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, images of ferocious Tantric goddesses such as Tara and Kali were very popular in Bengal, including the widespread prints circulated by the Calcutta Art Studio, which had an explicitly anti-British nationalist agenda. Christopher Pinney notes that one colonial official, Herbert Hope Risley, anxiously described a chromolithographic image of Kali as garlanded with what appeared to be European heads, a prediction of the fall of the British Empire (Fig. 6).[27] These goddess images were appropriated by the radical nationalist movement as icons of revolutionary awakening, and envisioned as the supreme images of Mother India (*Bharat Mata*) rising up against her colonizers. As a writer for the Bengali newspaper, Jugantar, stated in 1905:

> The Mother asks for sacrificial offerings. What does the Mother want? […] The fowl or a sheep or a buffalo? No. She wants many white Asuras [demons]. The Mother is thirsting after the blood of the Feringhees [foreigners] […] With the close of a long era, the Feringhee Empire draws to an end, for behold! Kali rises in the East.[28]

The British were not the only ones to be sacrificed – the envisioning of the nation as a suffering mother was popularized through Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's 1882 novel *Anandamath*, which called upon the nation's citizens to protect and restore her, and, if necessary, sacrifice their lives for her.[29]

Tara is also shown standing upon the supine, corpse-like god, Shiva, who is her husband (Figs 4 and 5). According to Tantric ideology, reality is the result and expression of the interaction of male and female, spirit and matter, and Shiva and Shakti.[30] In many Tantric texts, the supine figure lying below Tara's feet is also

27 Pinney, *Photos of the Gods,* 120.

28 Valentine Chirol, *Indian Unrest* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1910), 346.

29 See Julius Lipner, *Anandamath, or, The Sacred Brotherhood by Bankimchandra Chatterji* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

30 As Shakti, or divine feminine energy, Tara is considered superior to Shiva and Tantric texts assert that without her Shiva could not survive and the universe would perish.

Fig. 6
Kali
Lithograph
c.1883
Calcutta Art Studio, Calcutta
Collection of Mark Baron and Elise Boisante

described as a corpse.[31] Fresh corpses are a powerful means of communicating with the goddess and with the spirit world through *shava-sadhana*, during which the *sadhaka* sits on the corpse and meditates on Tara. The *Mantra-mahodadhi* states that such rituals will make a *sadhaka* "fearless and master of various *siddhis* [magical powers]."[32] Troubled spirits who have not yet reincarnated and linger on in the body are the most effective.[33] Once pacified they can grant shamanic powers, including miraculous healing abilities, which Bamakhepa himself attained.[34] Throughout the nineteenth century, diseases such as cholera and malaria ravaged the Bengali countryside. Fear of disease and death, together with an overwhelming anxiety about the future, made Bamakhepa's *siddhis* a popular attraction across the region.[35]

Corpses and skulls are not only instruments for meditating on mortality, then, but also instruments of power. *Shava-sadhana* deliberately invites extreme peril, including ghosts and demonic forces, in order to attract the attention of the goddess.[36] Visionary experience is described most often in Tantric texts as occurring in the cremation ground at night, not only because it is Tara's residence, but also because the proximity to death and primal fear encourage her maternal instincts to protect her devotee. Nigamananda Sarasvati, who took initiation from Bamakhepa, described this experience vividly.[37] Bamakhepa left him in the cremation ground at midnight with three burned bodies, and instructed him to meditate on Tara. Demonic apparitions haunted and distracted him. Bamakhepa would cry "Tara! Tara!" every time Sarasvati's focus wavered. Eventually he felt his ego dissolve in a kind of 'ecstasy of death,' achieving divine union with Tara through a vision of her as a beautiful woman. He requested a vision of her cosmic form, and she became vast, with thousands of heads, tongues, bodies, weapons, grinding teeth, and eyes emitting fire. Tara's transition from beautiful woman to cosmic form in this case reflects the view that Hindu gods and goddesses can be simultaneously represented as converging into a supreme deity, as well as splintering into innumerable minor deities. This paradox results from the belief, according to Hindu mythology, that the goddess is both formless (cosmic and

31 Mahidhara, *Mantra Mahodahih*, 179-180; Diksit, *Tara Tantra Shastra*, 116.

32 Mahidhara, *Mantra Mahodahih*, 214.

33 Interview with an informant (August 2012).

34 McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 133.

35 McLean, "Eating Corpses," 16.

36 McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 120.

37 Nigamananda Saraswati, *Mayer Kripa* (Halisahar, 1382 B.S.), 3-13.

unified) and form-bound (in her local, individual manifestations of Tara, Kali, etc.). Each manifestation represents a *rupa*, or appearance, of the *mula-shakti*, the original, supreme goddess.[38] The transition from benevolent to terrifying also reveals Tara's fundamentally ambiguous nature. For example, Bamakhepa's contemporary, the famous mystic Ramakrishna (1836-1886), once described a vision of the goddess in her capacity as creatress, sustainer, and destroyer of the universe. He saw a beautiful, heavily pregnant woman emerge from the Ganges, give birth, and begin to lovingly cradle her child. Then, suddenly assuming a terrifying form, she devoured the child and re-entered the water.[39]

THE SWEETENING OF DEATH

Despite Tara's strong connection with destruction, she is understood as a creative, nourishing presence as well. Tara is often represented with large breasts and a swollen belly, suggesting her maternal nature.[40] In her *Hymn of a Hundred Names* she is called *Jagaddhitri* or Mother of the World. Tara is thus the very principle of life: she takes it, but also gives it in an endless cycle of creation and destruction. It is this image of Tara as mother that Bamakhepa promoted in his own vision of the goddess. It is said that in 1863 he was granted a vision of her in her capacities as ferocious destroyer and benign creatress: dancing upon a burning corpse, he saw a 'demoness' with long teeth and fiery eyes, wearing a tiger skin and snake ornaments.[41] This is popularly illustrated in contemporary comics about the life of Bamakhepa (Fig. 7). Affectionately she lifted him and took him on her lap and he lost consciousness as she took him to her breast. He has consequently become the symbol of devotion for millions of Bengali *Shaktas* or devotees of the goddess and his charismatic relationship with Tara had a profound impact on the sweetening of death at Tarapith.

The vision of Bamakhepa being taken to her breast echoes another form of Tara presented to devotees at the temple: inside the fierce *murti*, which is hollow and open at the back, is a relic which is only brought out for viewing once a day.

38 Tracy Pintchman (ed.) examines this idea of the goddess as one and many, regional and universal, in *Seeking Mahadevi: Constructing the Identities of the Hindu Great Goddess* (New York: State University of New York, 2001), while John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (eds.) examine the concept of Devi, the great goddess, and the ways various Hindu goddesses are related to her in *Devi: Goddesses of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

39 Swami Nikhilananda, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1952), 21.

40 Kinsley, *Tantric Visions*, 105.

41 Banerjee, *Sri Sri Bama Ksepa*, 36.

This is a rough, uncarved stone with no discernible features. It is now believed to represent Tara in the form of a mother, breastfeeding the god Shiva as an infant. Today it is depicted in popular prints sold to pilgrims as souvenirs (Fig. 8). Originally, however, this relic had been conceived of as the dismembered third eye of a goddess which had fallen from the heavens.[42] It seems probable that Bamakhepa's famous vision of Tara as creatress, and his childlike devotion to her maternal aspect, helped cement the relic's identification with the former legend in popular imagination. According to myth, Shiva drank poison from the cosmic

42 According to several Puranic texts (namely the *Kalika, Mahabhagavata* and *Devibhagavata Puranas*), the Hindu god Shiva carried his wife, the goddess Sati, across India after her death. His grief risked the destruction of the world so Vishnu, God of Preservation, threw his discus and cut Sati's

Fig. 7
Photograph of illustration from a Bengali comic on Bamakhepa sold at Tarapith
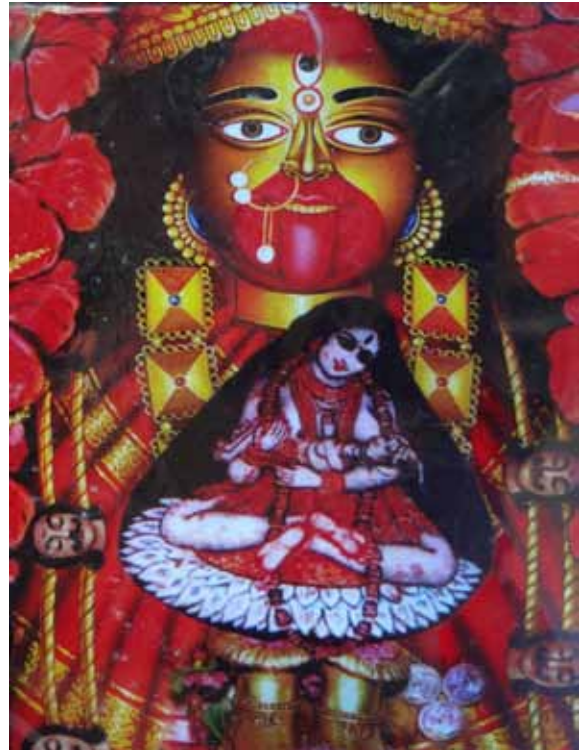(Imma Ramos)
2012

Fig. 8
Contemporary popular print of Tara breastfeeding Shiva, considered to be the image represented on the rock inside the Tara *murti*
(Imma Ramos)
2012

body into pieces; these pieces fell to earth, scattered across the Indian subcontinent, and temples were built to enshrine them. Pieces of Sati's corpse sacralised the earth. The temples became known as *Shakti Pithas*, or Seats of Power. Sati's third eye is said to have fallen and been enshrined in Tarapith. The most extensive work on the *Shakti Pithas* has been done by Dinesh Chandra Sircar in a very short but nevertheless comprehensive overview of the varying listings of *pithas* as found in a selection of Tantric texts written for the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1948), 1-108.

43 This story was told to me by several informants at Tarapith (August 2012), as it was to Morinis, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition*, 167.
44 Rachel McDermott, *Mother of My Heart, Daughter of My Dreams. Kali and Uma in the Devotional Poetry of Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

45 Ibid. 212.

46 As a movement it was stimulated by the court poet Jayadeva's twelfth-century *Gita Govinda*, a poetic text about the love between Krishna and his lover, the cowherdess Radha.

oceans to save the universe and Tara breastfed him to relieve his burning throat.[43] The 1989 Bengali film *Mahapith Tarapith* includes a scene dedicated to this story: temple priests reveal the concealed image to devotees, cutting to a re-enactment in which Tara comes to Shiva's aid. Shiva is simultaneously the goddess's son and husband precisely because her role as creatress implies that everyone is her child and devotee, including her own spouse.

According to local tradition, Bamakhepa was believed to be an incarnation of Shiva, and his relationship with Tara expressed the same dynamic tension shared by the deities. Rachel McDermott argues that Tantric goddesses such as Tara were 'domesticated' during the nineteenth century, particularly through Bengali Shakta poetry.[44] Bamakhepa was very much influenced by the early nineteenth-century Bengali poet Kamalakanta Bhattacharya (c.1769-1821) who was also a Tantric practitioner at Tarapith. Bamakhepa used to recite Kamalakanta's poems, which included verses such as: "Who else but the Mother will bear the burden of Kamalakanta? Ma! Give me shelter at Your feet; take me home."[45] Kamalakanta was a product of a poetic literary movement in Bengal that described the goddess in devotional terms, beginning with Ramprasad Sen (c.1718-1775) in the mid-eighteenth-century. Both poets were influenced by Vaishnava *bhakti* poetry, which spread throughout India from the twelfth to the eighteenth century. *Bhakti* poetry expressed the love felt by the devotee towards a personal deity, usually associated with the god Krishna. Often that love was described in terms of pangs of separation and euphoric union, and this lover-beloved relationship was in turn articulated by poets like Kamalakanta in relation to Tara.[46] It is likely that the 'softening' of the goddess was also for the benefit of Bengali religious sensitivities that stemmed from the impact of colonialism and Victorian taste. As Hugh Urban suggests, "[the] sanitization of Tantra was tied to a specific political agenda: namely, the construction of a new Indian national and cultural identity in the face of two centuries of British colonialism."[47] Bengal was the ancient homeland of Shaktism and the Tantric cult of the mother goddess remains popular today.

In order to protect – as well as promote – this cult during the late nineteenth-century, it became necessary to make Tantric deities such as Tara palatable to colonial tastes, not only amongst the British but also amongst many of the Western-educated Bengali *bhadralok*. Bamakhepa was one of those who popularized Tantra and turned Tara from a terrifying esoteric symbol into a devotional goddess (Fig. 9), making her more accessible to a larger audience. Her horrific side was softened and tamed, thereby making her easier for an ordinary devotee to relate to. In this way one could argue that Bamakhepa contributed to the sweetening of death itself by transforming Tara into a

47 Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power*, 164.

Fig. 9
Photograph of a contemporary pilgrim souvenir of Bamakhepa and Tara from Tarapith
(Imma Ramos)
2012

48 Parimal Kumar Datta, *Tantra: its Relevance to Modern Times* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 2009), 263.

49 Banerjee, *Logic in a Popular Form*, 181.

50 Panckori Bandyopadhyay, *Sahitya* (Calcutta, July-August 1913).

51 Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (Indiana, 2001), 252.

52 Gupta, *Notions of Nationhood*, 78. Such a sentiment would result in the invention of a new Hindu goddess: *Bharat Mata* (Mother India). A nationalist construct, she was meant to inspire patriotic sacrifice. Sumathi Ramaswamy has studied the cultural and visual phenomenon of *Bharat Mata* in *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); "Maps and Mother Goddesses in Modern India," *Imago Mundi* 53, (2001), 97-114, and "Visualising India's Geo-Body Globes, Maps, Bodyscapes," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 36 (2002): 151-189.

maternal icon. Members of the Bengali elite, coming from the increasingly urbanized – and by extension rationalized – environment of Calcutta, came to pay their respects to the famous *sadhaka*, including the following Hindu reformers, driven by spiritual yearning: Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891).[48] On a trip to the city during the 1890s Bamakhepa was also hosted by Jatindramohan Tagore (1831-1908).[49] According to Panckori Bandyopadhyay in a 1913 article for Sahitya, "study of the Tantras was confined to a certain section of the educated in Bengal. Maharaja Sir Jatindra Mohan alone endeavoured to understand and appreciate men like Bama Khepa."[50]

More pertinently, Bamakhepa's popularization of the Tantric goddess also appealed to a wider nationalist agenda. By the late nineteenth century the concept of Mother India had assumed an explicitly political role in Bengal. Reacting against British rule, Hindu nationalists gendered the nation in literature as well as visual culture by borrowing the mythicized concept of motherhood from the prevalence of the Hindu mother cult in Bengal. The personification of India, subjugated by foreign rulers, was a rhetorical device designed to inspire patriotism amongst the indigenous population.[51] The goddess-devotee as mother-son relationship subsequently took on patriotic overtones. Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, the Bengali nationalist and writer (1827-1894) identified the country as a mother goddess, "who always provided her children with nourishment and water to drink."[52] One of Bankim's poems, *Bande Mataram* ('Hail, Mother'), which became the main slogan of the nationalist movement, begins by describing Bengal as a mother that nurtures the population as her children. Tantric goddesses also came to be identified with the land: Kali, for example, was regarded as Bengal personified. Bamakhepa's maternal treatment of the goddess was informed, therefore, not only by the tradition of *bhakti* poetry and colonial taste but also by the nationalist movement's attempt to rally Hindu citizens together by 'maternalizing' the nation. Simultaneously, Tara, like Kali, was a martial goddess that could be used as a symbol of revolutionary violence,

as articulated by the Bengali poet Mukunda Das (1878-1934): "Mother, come with your fierce aspect/ Come with your awful spirits/ Come and dance on this vast cremation ground/ Which is *Bharat* [India]."[53] In this context she could thus be envisioned as both fierce warrior and enslaved victim, both aspects inspiring maternal devotion. In 1921 the colonial administrator Charles Eliot described the *murti* of Kali at Kalighat temple in Calcutta and its role as a nationalist emblem:

> [She is] adorned with skulls and horrid emblems of destruction. Of her four hands two carry a sword and a severed head but the other two are extended to give blessing and protection to her wor¬shippers. So great is the crowd of enthusiastic suppliants that it is often hard to approach the shrine and the nationalist party in Bengal, who clamour for parliamentary institutions, are among the goddess's devotees.[54]

Though there is no evidence that Bamakhepa was involved in revolutionary politics, one of his principal followers certainly was. After Bamakhepa's death, the position of high priest was inherited by his disciple Tarapada Banerjee, who went on to become a Tantric saint known as Tara Khepa. Before coming to Tarapith, Tarapada had been a member of the Jugantar group of anti-British, armed revolutionaries in Bengal. According to some reports, the revolutionary came to Tarapith in order to be initiated into Tantric practices.[55] Condemned by the British, such indigenous practices could be harnessed for their nationalistic potential. The worship of the Tara *murti* was also significant: the very act of image worship assumed nationalistic importance during the colonial period. In 1882 Bankim was engaged in a debate in the pages of the English Calcutta daily, *The Statesman*, with Reverend William Hastie. Hastie claimed, like many other missionaries and colonial officials of the period, that "idolatrous worship [is] sucking the life-blood out of the very hope of their community."[56] Bankim responded in support of image worship, stressing its importance as an intrinsic part of Hindu ritual and, by extension, Hindu identity:

53 Jayadev Goswami, *Charankavi Mukunda Das* (Calcutta, 1972), 218.

54 Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism: An Historical Sketch* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1921), 287.

55 Banerjee, *Logic in a Popular Form*, 157.

56 William Hastie, *Hindu Idolatry and English Enlightenment: Six Letters Reprinted from The Statesman* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1882), 10.

> [Hastie's] arguments are simply contemptible [...] There is nothing I am more desirous to see than the most competent explanation and defence of Hinduism possible [...] nothing is a more common subject of merriment among the natives of India than the Europeans' ignorance of all that relates to India [...] The image is simply the visible and accessible medium through which I choose to send my homage to the throne of the Invisible and the Inaccessible.[57]

His reply can be interpreted as a patriotic promotion of indigenous practice, in reaction to the colonial presence.

CONCLUSION

Bamakhepa's visualization of Tara at Tarapith has revealed the nuanced layers of meaning underlying Tantric ritual. Tara's role as the embodiment of death, simultaneously protecting devotees from it while urging them to confront it, became a significant source of empowerment for Bengalis struggling under the colonial regime. Tantric rites deliberately rejected Brahmanical (Hindu orthodox) rules concerning caste and dichotomies between the pure and impure, and this radical transgression through sadhana attracted great power to the practitioner. These rites also assumed revolutionary potential in their assertion of resistance and personal freedom, making Tantra a veritable counterculture. Many of the Bengali elite sought to reinforce national Hindu identity through the protection of traditional practices and valorization of Shaktism, and were nostalgically drawn to sites such as Tarapith. Bamakhepa's own reputed divine madness ('khepa' literally translates as 'mad') signified resistance against the established social and religious order, instead of the British presence. Through an analysis of the relationship between Tantric ritual and iconography in the worship of Tara, as well as the relationship between Bamakhepa and the temple's *murti*, this article has sought to reveal late nineteenth-century perceptions of the goddess as both martial and maternal.

57 Ibid. 8, 133, 140, and 149.

In 2007 a Bengali television series about the life of Bamakhepa (Sadhok Bamakhyapa) became an instant hit and ran for 1,500 episodes, testifying to this sadhaka's lasting popularity and resonance. Tarapith's cremation ground, a site of Tantric sadhana for generations, continues to be used today. Several sadhakas dwell more or less permanently there, and wandering sadhakas often visit it for extended periods. Today the temple has become a popular centre of devotional worship rather than a site of traditional transgressive rites, which are largely practised on the margins. Pilgrims approach the Tara murti as a benign matriarch, kissing her silver feet and leaving her offerings of coconuts, white silk saris, incense sticks, bananas and, perhaps more in line with her Tantric aspect, bottles of whisky. To have darshan or 'sacred vision' of the murti is the ultimate incentive for pilgrimage, a1nd pilgrims are referred to as 'darshaniyas', those who come to 'see.'[58] Despite this, the significance of the macabre in her iconography as well as in contemporary Tantric practice continues to rest on the relationship between mortality and power, entailing the invocation of one's greatest fear, that of death, in order to give one strength.

58 The concept of *darshan* has been discussed in detail in Diane Eck*, Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Colombia: Anima Books, 1981) and Lawrence A. Babb, "Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37 (1981): 387-401.

Imma Ramos is a PhD student at the University of Cambridge, specializing in indigenous responses to alien rule in India and its manifestation in visual culture from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Her PhD thesis examines how the Bengali population reclaimed traditional Hindu practices during the British colonial period. In particular her current research explores the reception of places of worship consecrated to the Hindu goddess Sati, known as Shakti Pithas, during the late nineteenth century period of cultural nationalism: Kalighat and Tarapith in West Bengal and Kamakhya in Assam.

Cover illustration: *Vanitas* (Edwaert Collier; 1663).