

# ***THE RITUAL OF THE EARLY MODERN DEATH, 1550-1650***

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## **1. Introduction**

Death is something which is hardly spoken about nowadays, and it has become the great taboo of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Death is something we have to live with and something that is certain to happen. However, how did people of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries see death?

From the influence of the Middle Ages and the «Dance of Death» to the analysis of aspects of ritual, funerary monuments, and epitaphs, we shall be looking at how the main object of all these practices was to commemorate, and the stress was put on the individual. Also, the family will become very important and the sense of loss when one of its members disappeared.

The Protestant doctrine will have a great influence on the religious ideas of the time, and the important thing will be to dispose of the dead in a decent manner. Therefore, the dead body will become an element of the utmost importance, since that very same body is the one to be resurrected at the end of time.

We shall be seeing that the early modern period, and especially the years 1550-1650, is a time of many changes that will influence the ritual and traditions of later times in relation to death and mourning.

Consequently, the worlds of the living and the dead will never become totally apart, and elements such as the arts of dying, which will proliferate throughout Europe, the vanities, and the consolidation of Protestantism and the influence of Calvin, will lead to a peculiar «English Way of Death».

## **2. The cultural context of the Early Modern Period**

The process of individualism which started in the late Middle Ages reaches its culmination in the years between 1550 and 1650. Every element of ritual is directed to stress the importance of the individual and his worldly remembrance. This is something that started at the top of the social scale but that extended gradually to the other sections of society.

### ***2.1. Demographic facts***

Life expectation at birth was between twenty-five and thirty-five years in the early modern period. Death was present in every family. There were many new-born infants who died, and infant mortality rates were very high. Death

was also present among adults and very few reached a ripe old age. Marriages were often broken by death, and most of a person's closest relatives had died by the time he or she had reached the age of twenty.[1]

It has been argued that high infant mortality led to a lack of emotional involvement. The consequent lack of care increased infant mortality still further. Husbands and wives dared not invest strongly in their emotional relationships because of the threat of death. The consequent callousness led to further mortality and insecurity.[2]

However, these years saw the development of affective relationships among members of a family, that is, between husband and wife, and between parents and their children.

As the anthropologist Alan Macfarlane argues, the pictures of a brutalised society, insecure and obsessed with mortality is not correct. Clearly there are differences in the attitude to death and there are major swings through the period. Yet, an immense amount of material suggests affection, love, spontaneity and a deep and tragic grief, like tombs erected to children or women who died in childbirth.[3]

## ***2.2. Liturgy***

Religion and liturgy have always been essential in relation to death, and great differences can be appreciated, as regards the burial service, before and after the Reformation. There are also slight differences between England and the continent.

The doctrine of the «Resurrection of the Flesh» was the traditional teaching of the Church of England. It was taught in Calvin's *Institutes* (1534) and in Luther's small *Catechism* (1525). It was also the teaching of the Roman Church. As such it has a good claim to be regarded as part of the basic faith of Western Christendom throughout the ages. This doctrine consists in the belief in the resurrection of our earthly bodies at the Last Day.

The main reason why most of the Christian Fathers insisted on the doctrine of the «Resurrection of the Flesh» was their belief that only bodily continuity could ensure provisional survival. At a time when the body was given an immense importance, only the hope of bodily resurrection could keep people's faith alive. The soul would start eternal life immediately after death, but it would have to be reunited with the body to secure a definitive survival.

Although they believed in the immortality of the soul, they felt that this on its own was insufficient. They defended their beliefs by appealing to the requirements of justice, to analogies from nature, and to Biblical testimony.

If in the end all virtue must be fairly rewarded and all vice justly punished, then bodily continuity is necessary for the moral agent to be identified.

In relation to the second appeal, given the belief in a once-for-all act of creation on the pattern of *Genesis 1*, then the act of resurrection cannot be difficult for the all-powerful God. Another analogy from nature for resurrection seemed available to the Fathers in contemplating the mystery of the original

development of each man or woman in his or her mother's womb, or from his or her father's sperm. One final argument from nature must be mentioned: the resurrection of the Phoenix, which was a bird thought to be reborn out of its own ashes.

As regards Biblical testimony, the most important argument for the resurrection of the flesh put forward by almost all the Fathers was that Jesus Christ rose from the dead in the flesh and his resurrection was the first fruit of our resurrection.

The Fathers were unanimous in supposing that Heaven constitutes the ultimate Christian hope, and in seeing our existence on earth as a purely temporary stage. When the Fathers talked of our going to Heaven they were making statements about the location to which they supposed our resurrected and transformed bodies would ascend.

The Fathers also supposed that the resurrected bodies of the wicked would be transferred to ever-lasting punishment in Hell, which they located in the centre of the Earth. They assumed that the damned would burn there for ever without being consumed.[\[4\]](#)

Both St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.) and St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1.225-1.274 A.D.) took pains in stating the different natures of body and soul. St. Augustine thought the soul to be of the same nature as God's, whereas St. Thomas Aquinas believed that at the time of the resurrection the soul would be united to the same body.[\[5\]](#)

The change of attitude towards death in early modern England is apparently the result of the abolition of the doctrine of Purgatory. Whereas in the Middle Ages a countless number of Masses and Prayers for the Dead were said in order to contribute to the salvation of the dead man's soul, now death becomes the decisive moment when the soul's fate was sealed for ever.[\[6\]](#)

The Calvinist doctrine of Predestination came to confirm all this. Every man or woman was predestined to salvation or condemnation depending on God's will. The result was fears, doubts and introspection. Only God knew who were the elect, although there were some people who were sure about their salvation. However, this has little explanation in an Anglican context where one had to prepare for death throughout one's life, and good works would determine people's salvation.[\[7\]](#)

Calvin rejected the Romish doctrine of Purgatory, which made possible our qualification after death through penal suffering, and, at the same time, all prayer for the departed which was connected with it.

All this led to a simplification of the services connected with death and the burial service stages were reduced. As G. J. Cumming observes, in the *First Prayer-Book of Edward VI* (1.549), the burial service had seven stages: in the deceased's house (Vespers); procession to church; service in the church; Mattins and Mass; procession to the grave; committal; and, procession back to church. In the *Second Prayer-Book of Edward VI* (1.552), the service for the «Order for the Burial of the Dead» is shortened, and it is to be said at the

graveside. Here emphasis is put on the resurrection of the flesh. The soul is commended to the mercy of God and the body is committed to the earth.[8]

Calvin's doctrine on last things was followed very closely by the Liturgy, exposed mainly in his *Psychopannychia* (1.542) and his *Institutio* (1.534). He saw death as a separation of soul and body. He asserted, like Luther, the sleep of the soul in the intervening state between death and the final resurrection. The life to come begins with death because the soul, freed from the body, enters the sphere of blessedness; by the same token, the soul of the impious will be held imprisoned in terrible expectation of their final condemnation. The body came from the earth and must return to the earth; the soul, which he called «The Temple of God», is of God and must return again to Him. Calvin thought that the pre-eminence of the soul is based on the fact of creation, because it is the image of God in man or woman. It is also based on the fact of redemption, that is, the restoration through Christ of the divine likeness, which had been destroyed by the Fall. For Luther, the resurrection was also the restoration of the unity of body and soul in a new higher form. The Last Day and the Second Coming of Christ are linked. This body of ours will be resurrected and transformed into a glorious body.[9]

The «Order for the Burial of the Dead» makes a distinction between celestial and terrestrial bodies, and between natural body and spiritual body. A prayer is said for the dead person to be one of the elect, so that he or she can have the hope of resurrection in Christ.

In general, The Reformation tended to reduce the importance given to the clergy's role in religious experience. Much of the Protestant devotional literature that prepared people for death was intended for domestic use without any professional religious instruction. The funeral sermon emphasized the didactic potential and was a form of remembrance. Death was designed as an experience from which the bereaved could learn and the blessed gain a glimpse of the joys of regeneration. In this sense, the «Dances of Death» and the *artes moriendi* had this didactic function, although they tried to show people how to live and die well.

### **2.3. «Dance of Death»**

Ariès defines the «Dance of Death» as «an eternal round in which the dead alternate with the living. The dead lead the dance; indeed, they are the only ones dancing. Each couple consists of a naked mummy, rotting, sexless, and highly animated, and a man or woman, dressed according to his or her social condition and paralyzed by surprise. Death holds out its hands to the living person whom it will draw along with it, but who has not yet obeyed the summons. The moral purpose was to remind the viewer both of the uncertainty of the hour of death and of the equality of all people in the face of death. People of all ages and ranks file by in an order which is that of the social hierarchy».[10]

The medium employed varies considerably. There are poems and prose works, manuscripts and printed books, paintings on wood, stone or canvas,

stained glass-windows, sculptures, embroidery, metal work, engravings on stone or metal, and woodcuts.[\[11\]](#)

An example in England of carvings and painted panels of the «Dance of Death» is the Priory at Hexham in Northumberland, and the carvings and panels at the Parish Church of Newark-on-Trent made of stone. An example of glass-window of the «Dance of Death» is that at St. Andrew's, Norwich.

The «Dance of Death» has its roots in the Middle Ages, but we must seek the home of the «Dance of Death» in the cloisters of the Innocents in Paris. The pictures came first and the text was given to elucidate or amplify their meaning. Holbein's designs for the «Dance of Death» were also famous throughout Europe by the time he died in 1543. In England the *danses macabres* at St. Paul's were very well-known. To the North of the Cathedral there was a cloister of large dimensions which surrounded a plot of land known as Pardon Churchyard. On the walls of this cloister the «Dance of Death» was depicted on wooden panels. The verses of the English «Dance of Death» were written by John Lydgate.[\[12\]](#)

There are several possible origins of the «Dance of Death». One is that the *danses macabres* developed out of the illustrated sermon, an object lesson. Many of the picture series begin or end with the preacher in his pulpit.

Another theory is that the «Dance of Death» is a further development of the *Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead*. This poem originated in France in the thirteenth century. It is *evident* that the *Legend* has some features in common with the «Dance of Death». Both have the didactic prologue, the dead who confront the living characters, and the division into classes. However, in their fundamental idea the two works diverge considerably.

Another possible origin is the *Vadomori* poem, which is a short Latin poem written in France in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. The poem shares with the «Dance of Death» the division of the characters into classes, with the descending order of precedence. In both works Church and State have an approximately equal representation; both have the speeches to Death. However in the *Vadomori* poem Death does not appear at all. There is no reply to the speeches of the doomed.

It has been also said that the Mendicant friars were specially associated with the «Dance of Death» because they wanted to provoke some fear in the people so that they would lead a «good life».

The *danse macabre* is a dance of death, not a dance of the dead. This is because it is Death who claims its victims, not differentiated representatives of the grave who attach themselves to individual people. The multiplicity of the dead is due to the medium used by the artist. The dance is a symbol of death. The symbolism used may have been partly suggested by previous poems and pictures.[\[13\]](#)

#### **2.4. *Ars Moriendi***

The «Dance of Death» is closely related to the *ars moriendi* or «Art of Dying».

A good life made possible a pious death, and for practical purposes had been reduced to the seven principles known as the «Works of Charity». These were admonishing the sinner; sheltering the homeless; clothing the naked; visiting the sick; visiting the prisoners; and, burying the dead.

In the fifteenth century, the iconography of the Last Judgement was replaced by a new iconography that was popularized by the printing press in the form of books containing woodcuts, individual images that each person contemplated in his own home. These books were the treatises on the techniques of dying well, the *artes moriendi*. Each page of the text was illustrated with a picture, so that those who could not read could catch the meaning.

Attention is now focused on the moment of death. The bedroom became the arena of a drama in which the fate of the dying man was decided for the last time. Supernatural beings have invaded the bedroom and are crowding around the bedside. On one side are the Trinity, the Virgin, the whole court of heaven and the guardian angel; on the other side, Satan and his monstrous army of demons. It is up to the dying man to triumph with the help of his guardian angel and his intercessors, and be saved, or to yield to the temptation of the devils and be lost. Memories of his life will come to his mind. If he shows preference for earthly things, his soul will be condemned for ever; if, on the contrary, he shows attachment to celestial matters, he will be saved.[\[14\]](#)

This is related to the abolition of the doctrine of Purgatory. The fate of the dead person is decided at the very moment of dying. Neither prayers nor penal suffering will help his or her soul gain salvation, only what he or she has already done in life will determine the dead person's fate.

The English way of death of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is a mixture of beliefs in the Final Moment and the new theories brought about by the Reformation.

Books of the art of dying proliferated during the early modern period among Protestants and Catholics alike.

So, if the old Catholic death specialists used the belief in the Final Moment to instruct *moriens* that it was never too late to repent, the new Protestant death specialists preserved the same belief to give information whether he was of the elect. Both Catholics and Protestants used the belief in the Final Moment to instruct the living on how to die well, without despair, with hope for the «real» life that was about to begin.[\[15\]](#)

However, the new arts of dying establish that one must think about death throughout one's life, not at the moment of death or in the presence of death. By then it can be too late for salvation.

Protestant reformers thought that men should meditate on a death that invites man's reason not to become attached to life. In the spiritual treatises of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the main purpose is no longer to prepare the dying for death, but to teach the living to meditate on death. Examples of these treatises are William Perkin's tract entitled *A salve for a sicke man, or A*

*Treatise containing the nature, differences and kindes of death; as also the right manner of dying well* (1.595); Christopher Sutton's *Disca Mori* (1.600); and William Drummond's *A Cypresse Grove or Philosophical Reflections against the Fear of Death* (1.623). The last dying speeches of criminals who were to be executed deserve special mention. This was a very popular genre of literature. These dying speeches included a confession of crimes and a profession of faith, so that the felon was given the opportunity of dying well. However, execution benefited both the state and the victim: the criminal had to praise the justness of the state's actions, and in return he was allowed to control his final instant. Thanks to this process he could save his soul.[\[16\]](#)

Death becomes a beautiful and edifying death after the horror and agony of illness and pain, characteristic of the Middle Ages. One must prepare for death throughout life, setting an example of how to live and die well.

## **2.5. Wills and Epitaphs**

Two essential elements in the development of the individual in the early modern period were wills and epitaphs.

When the will reappeared as a common practice in the twelfth century it was primarily a religious document, required by the Church even of the poorest persons. Wills were drafted and preserved by the curate as well as the notary.

From this developed the modern will, which consists of two equally important parts: the pious clauses and the distribution of the inheritance. The pious clauses occur in an immutable order: first comes the declaration of faith, which paraphrases the *Confiteor*; next comes the redressing of wrongs and the forgiveness of injuries. Then comes the choice of burial. Finally, the instructions regarding the funeral procession, candles and services, charitable endowments, the distribution of alms, and any obligations involving epitaphs or memorial plaques. This was also the place for the pious bequests. Only a portion of the patrimony reached the heirs, although, gradually, wills began to have the same function they have nowadays, as the individual was growing in importance.

The early modern period was an age in which more wealth began to be in the hands of members of the new emerging bourgeoisie. The concept of personal wealth arose and the new fortunes made passed on to the hands of the heirs of these men and women. Thus, a correlation was established between attitudes towards wealth and attitudes towards death.[\[17\]](#)

Eternal salvation is not incompatible with earthly fame. It is often, indeed normally, associated with it, but the two are not longer necessarily separable. The epigraphic literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries illustrates this.

Epitaphs had several functions. First of all they were a statement of the deceased's identity, and of the date of his or her death. Some constituted an appeal to the passer-by to pray for the repose of the soul of the dead person. This is closely connected with the growing importance of the

individual, of the personal history of the man or woman that was buried there. A communication is established between the dead person and the passer-by, because as mortal beings we all have the same fate. The objective is to call the attention of the living and to remember that person who is dead but who was once alive. The deceased's identity and his or her social aspects are emphasized. Consequently, the authors of wills seek for their graves the most frequented spots.

Later on, epitaphs expanded to include those virtues then considered to be the attitudes of sanctity or nobility and the age of the deceased. However, eventually the funerary inscription becomes common to an entire family. It associates the first to die with his or her spouse and children or, if he or she is young, with his or her parents.

Inscriptions of this type are composed of two parts, sometimes placed in different parts of the tomb. The first is devoted to the eulogy, the biographical notice of the deceased; the second to the survivor who commissioned the epitaph and laid the monument.[\[18\]](#)

The normal Elizabethan and Jacobean epitaph was historical, describing who the subject was and what he or she did. Here is an example:

Edward Grimstone, the father of Ris Hangles, Esquire,  
died 17 March 1599.

By twice two Kings and Queenes his life was grac'd,  
Yet one religion held from first to last,  
Justice he lov'd, and truth, and common good  
No lesse than th'issue of his privat Bloode;  
His yeares, more than Himself, did others please,  
For counsel and discourse of Warre and peace.  
His life was rule to lives, his death a mirror,  
One felt not vaine care, nor the other terror.[\[19\]](#)

This epitaph also illustrates the art of living and dying well, which this man possessed.

However, from 1600 to the Civil War we also find a new note, the verse epitaphs, full of the conceits dear to the poets of the age, but often very charming. Many Civil War epitaphs describe cruel sufferings under the Parliamentary forces.

An example of verse epitaph is that on the tomb of Lord Justice Tanfield (1625) at Burford, which are lines by a wife on her husband:

Here shadows lie            So shall I bee  
Whilst earth is sadd,        With him I loved,  
Still hopes to die            And he with mee  
To him she hadd.            And both us blessed  
In bliss is hee            Love made me poet,  
Whom I loved best;        And this I writt;  
Thrice happy shee            My heart did do it,  
With him to rest.            And not my wit.  
Weever (1631)[\[20\]](#)

This other epitaph is an example of Civil War epitaph and is on the tomb of a child of nine, dead in 1646, erected by his mother at Marholm, near Peterborough:



To the courteous souldier  
Noe crucifix you see, noe Frightful Brand  
Of Superstition's here. Pray let me stand.  
Grassante bello civili.[\[21\]](#)

A good epitaph should be brief or poignant, although they are too often verbous and pompous, and often unconsciously humorous (to a twenty-first century reader). Many of them were dedicated to dead people belonging to the lower stream of society.[\[22\]](#)

In the sixteenth century, composing one's epitaph was a way of meditating on death. Some of them were intended for publication, as one of the classic form of the posthumous eulogy. They even constituted a literary genre.[\[23\]](#)

They were under the control of the College of Arms, together with monuments. Epitaphs were a complex amalgam of individuality and convention. This is because of the new concept of the family which was being born and the importance attributed to the good works carried out in life by the individual in order to be one of the elect. That is why the social aspect of the deceased was emphasized. More often than not they used a standard formula. The epitaph on the monument of Robert Grays (d. 1635) in St. Mary Magdalene, Taunton, is a good example:

Taunton bore him, London bred him:  
Piety trained him: Virtue led him:  
Earth enrich'd him: Heav'n carest him:  
Taunton blest him: London blest him:  
This thankful town, that mindful City  
Share his piety and his pity.  
What he gave, and how he gave it,  
Ask the Poor and you shall have it.  
Gentle reader, Heaven may strike  
Thy tender heart to do the like,  
Now thine eyes have read the story,  
Give him the praise, and God the glory.[\[24\]](#)

One custom has wholly passed away, namely the hanging up of epitaphs by admirers. These were written on boards and placed on or near the tombs. Significantly, Donne had one of these epitaphs by an admirer, as his biographer Walton states.[\[25\]](#)

## ***2.5. Funerary Monuments***

Commemorative art becomes one of the main instruments of worldly remembrance in the early modern period. It reflects a transition from the attitude of fear typical of the Middle Ages to a sense of loss and grief characteristic of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Worldly remembrance is essential in an Anglican context when familiar ties were much stronger than they had been before. This is because of the new concept of the family which was being born and the importance attributed to the good works carried out in life by the individual so as to be one of the elect. That is why the

social aspect of the deceased is emphasized. This is clearly shown on the funerary monuments of the period. Evolution took place in relation to the forms of funerary art so that the gothic style was left behind. Italianate forms made their appearance and new types were being portrayed. Once more the individual was asserting his or her importance.

As the natural body decayed, the ritualized monumental body prevented the social body from being overwhelmed by a similar fate. The monumental body was to be set up at the place of burial to mark its site and was designed to stand for ever as a replacement for the social body. As a subsidiary function, it also acted as a reminder of the living form of the natural body.[\[26\]](#)

Commemorative art both describes the past life of the deceased and establishes the person's future reputation. The place an individual occupies in the collective memory and in the private thoughts of a relative is partly shaped by the image set by the monumental body. In the case of monarchs, these monuments were erected to stress the continuity of the lineage and the rights to the throne. They were to sustain the Political Body of the monarchy despite the natural death of an individual prince.[\[27\]](#)

In the Protestant tradition the very presence of tombs acted as reminders of mortality; Protestant monuments were designed to be read as examples of virtue.

The monumental body had to respect certain demands made on the visual culture of the death ritual, specifically those of continuity and differentiation. Monuments could suggest continuity in a variety of ways: by their location, design, material, iconographic programme, inscription, and heraldry.

Differentiation was concerned with social differentiation. Class and rank were vital questions, not only when it came to designing an effigy but also when deciding where it should be set up. They were also relevant as far as height was concerned. Great height was desirable as it guaranteed that the monument would remain in the eye of the congregation and catch the attention of the visitor. Height became even more desirable as the floor space was increasingly filled with monuments.[\[28\]](#)

Around 1600 elaborate tombs began to be erected to a broader social range than hitherto, a trend that continued through to the nineteenth century. Men in what were to be called the professional classes started to lay claim to monuments: judges and other lawyers in robes and coif, merchants in their civic gowns, dons and clerics. The parish clergy were represented either in surplice or black gown often with a skull cap and almost always with a Bible, usually as half figures seen above the pulpit. The higher post-Reformation clergy, even bishops, usually wear a square cap. Bishops wear the rochet, and some of them the mitre. Also writers, with pen in hand, members of the army and the navy, musicians, actors, and even foresters, miners, gamekeepers, housekeepers, servants, watchmakers, and wrestlers were represented. Peers and country gentlemen were very commonly represented, and children became a new feature of funerary art.[\[29\]](#)

All this is related to the development of a society in the modern sense, where new social classes are emerging and new bonds are created that need to be represented. In this sense the middle third of the seventeenth century in England was a period of enormously fruitful experimentation in the development of new tomb types, and these reflect Anglican ideas about death.

One of these new tomb types was the shroud tomb on which the recumbent image of the deceased wears a shroud which covers, but reveals and defines, the organic, undecayed body. They are a combination of classical architectural motifs and the late medieval tradition of the *transi*. The appearance of the tomb type does not seem to be related to burial or liturgical practices.

The tendency to associate the *transi* with the hope of salvation appeared in England in the early sixteenth century, and by the turn of the seventeenth century the image of the *transi* in a shroud was almost always accompanied by some reference to the Resurrection either in visual images or inscriptions. The shrouded figures are represented as dead, with eyes closed, and there is no evidence of any decay of the body.

A good example of this kind of monument was that erected to Donne in St. Paul's Cathedral. Walton talks about it in his biography of the poet.[\[30\]](#) It was done according to Donne's ideas displayed in the painting he had drawn just a few days before he died. It seems to have been Donne's intention to represent the resurrection of the body; the shrouded figure is rising from the funeral urn, and what seems at first glance to be a couching attitude, suggests rather that he is still emerging, and has not yet drawn himself erect. The monument was facing the east in the old St. Paul's Church and it illustrates Donne's preoccupation with the resurrection of the body at the Last Day.[\[31\]](#)

Donne and the people of his age believed in the similarity between death and sleep, so that at the end of time we would wake up to the resurrection of our bodies. This play on the closeness of sleep and death is a metaphor that goes back to venerable classical sources. It can also be related to Puritan ideas about death and the afterlife. Death was the sleep of the body, which would be reunited with the soul, already in heaven, at the Last Day. There is a tendency to associate this tomb type with women.[\[32\]](#)

The second of these types was that of tombs erected to women who had died in childbirth. The appearance of this type does not seem to coincide with any change in childbirth mortality rates. These women may be depicted as either semi-recumbent or actually in bed, wearing night-clothes, but their children are always wrapped in swaddling. Sometimes the dead infant appears in a cradle. This group of tombs show a concern with death in childbirth that became characteristic of the age.

These two new types have been analysed in depth by Judith M. Hurtig and reflect a new freedom in expressing emotions and affection between husbands and wives and between parents and children, and the growth in the status of women and their roles as wives and mothers. The poignant element of loss and separation is also introduced.[\[33\]](#)

All this is closely related to the fact that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are a period of transition from the structure of the open medieval family, which was based on the concept of kin and lineage, to that of the modern, closed, conjugal family.

This is why on English tombs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the husband and/or wife generally either recline or kneel in prayer and their children often segregated by sex, kneel at their sides or behind them. The husband or wife are not iconographically differentiated and the children are usually represented as adults, and if small children as diminutive adults. The image conveyed is that of the family as a clearly defined dynastic unit.[\[34\]](#)

Returning to funerary art and monuments in the Anglican context of sixteenth and seventeenth century England, funerary monuments showing figures were legitimate because they were not representations of religious figures and because they were intended to act as examples to the onlooker.

The long-term effect of the Reformation was most strikingly apparent in the absence of specifically Christian imagery. Decorative features were obelisks, cherubs, allegorical female figures, clusters of fruit, grapes, and funerary urns. In addition there appeared a whole range of symbols of death and mortality such as skulls, bones, hourglasses, personifications of Time, spindles and thread, and so on, which were related to the vanities, so common in these years.

There were three main categories of monument: simple tomb-chests, free-standing canopied monuments and standing and hanging wall monuments. Coats of arms were now displayed as oval cartouches. The most striking aspect of effigies in this period is their great variety. This can be seen not only in the postures and hand positions adopted by individual effigies, but also in the range of particular groupings of figures on individual monuments and the increasing skill of craftsmen in expressing emotion between them. Postures remained the same, but there was a more realistic, relaxed treatment of the human figure. Hands were frequently placed in less formal, though sometimes highly eloquent, positions on the breast or at the side of the body, or the effigy was shown holding a symbolic or devotional object. The frontal demi-figure was also in vogue; however, by being displayed in an oval or circular surround, it was often reduced in effect to head and shoulders bust. Pedestal busts became wide-spread in this period. Notes of affection between spouses were introduced and there appeared a preoccupation with symbolism and allegory. Wall tablets, especially the cartouche type, multiplied in these years.[\[35\]](#)

One essential characteristic of funerary art throughout the years 1550 to 1650 which deserves special attention is heraldry. Chivalry was but one part of a complex pattern of social relations which existed in post-Reformation England. It was a species of social practice restricted to an elite and used in a corporate way by this elite to preserve its distinction. Under the code, quite characteristic patterns of behaviour were expected of both sexes.

Heraldic image, not only based on blood lineage in the Tudor and early Stuart period, was thought to be able to instil virtue and therefore reinforce the sense of order. Heraldry not only identified the subject's birth and virtue, but also acted as an exemplary model. This was set in the pious context of the Reformation. Therefore, heraldic elements such as the coat of arms, and, in some cases, sword, helmet, gauntlets, and other heraldic devices were displayed on monuments. To these were often added family trees and epitaphs emphasizing the descent and virtues of the deceased, as well as the physical occupation of land and power within the early modern English State.[\[36\]](#)

Special mention deserves the burial vault which, although it had medieval precedents, constitutes a manifestation of the new sense of family that was being born in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The practice of building burial vaults began with the monarchy and people of the aristocracy, and then extended to the wealthy class. It was not until the third quarter of the sixteenth century that we can see an increase in the number of landed-gentry and noble families taking advantage of a more liberal and relaxed ecclesiastical system to construct for their exclusive and perpetual use places of subterranean sepulture within parish churches. If space did not permit the opening of a new vault, there was always the possibility of paying for the addition of a chapel if not an entire aisle, the foundations of which could be dug especially deep to provide for a burial vault.[\[37\]](#)

A burial vault is a subterranean chamber of stone or brick capable of housing a minimum of two coffins of a height of no less than 1.74 metres. There was no need for its presence to be identified in the floor of the church. Whilst some remain bare stone or brick, others are rendered or lime-washed; some might have drainage and ventilation, others lit by natural daylight or not at all; some may have an integral charnel pit or cistern, whilst others make no provision whatsoever for decayed remains; some might have access steps. The neat arrangement of shelves or *loculi* space often contrasts with the earlier vaults, in which coffins were stacked on the floor one upon another.

Families had to secure a faculty from the diocese, that is, a document which allowed them to build a vault within a church, each application having to meet with the approval of the vicar and churchwardens. Vault construction must have caused disruption to the schedule of divine service. It was not uncommon for earlier earth burials to be disturbed, and these family vaults multiplied throughout the early modern period.[\[38\]](#)

### **3. The dead body and the Early Modern Period**

The «Theory of the Two Bodies» was a prevailing one throughout the early modern period. The natural body comprising the biological matter was one aspect; the social body, that is, the individual's place in society, was another. Both rituals and artefacts tend to focus on the balance between these two states. Ritual was developed in a way in which it could satisfy the requirements of civilized behaviour, to dispose of the corpse with a due regard

for feelings. It also helped the culture take the steps necessary to safeguard the social fabric, thus resisting the challenge that individual deaths made to the well-being of the community and even of the state.[39]

Body and soul were two different things, and people were worried about the degree of separation between the body and the soul. There seemed to be a series of miraculous phenomena, such as the movement of the dead body, or bodies that failed to decompose. Superstition also grew around the dead body, and there were some curious beliefs. One of them was the healing of certain illnesses by the contact with certain parts of dead bodies. There was also the popular belief that the bodies of those who had been murdered would bleed in the presence of the murderer.

Obsession about the dead body led people to provide for the preservation of the corpses, and among the commonest practices were the embalming of the body or its interment in soils that were good to preserve it. Many wills show this preoccupation as well as the fear of being buried alive. Another common practice was to bury the viscera in one place and the bones in another. Sometimes it was only the heart that was buried in a different place.[40]

The corpse was believed to have metaphysical attributes, and there was a transitional state between life and death. This is closely related to the preparation of the corpse for the grave, that is, the washing, the closing of the eyes and the mouth, the straightening of the limbs, the clothing either in a shroud or in a winding sheet, and the covering of the face. Several customs were observed such as the watching, the waking, and the viewing of the corpse. Nevertheless, most practices were aimed at helping the dead person's soul.

The dead body would have its final abode in a coffin, although the poor went to the grave in a shroud. Great personages had lead coffins for their dead bodies, so that they could be preserved for a longer period of time.

The importance of the individual and of the idea of an individual destiny is behind the importance given to the corpse or dead body. Because it is our earthly bodies that will be resurrected, we have to dispose of corpses in a respectful way and prepare them for the grave so that when each individual body is summoned for judgement at the Last Day, this body of ours will have the right appearance to be in God's presence.

### ***3.1. Aspects of Ritual***

The early modern period is a watershed in the history of funerary customs, between medieval and modern practices, containing elements from both periods.

It has been said by sociologists, anthropologists, and historians alike that humanity is an animal that buries its dead with dignity.[41]

Parts of the preparation of the corpse for the grave were embalming and the use of winding sheets and shrouds.

Calvin's doctrine of the resurrection of the body exercised a great influence on the different aspects of ritual. Because our very bodies were to be resurrected at the Last Day and transformed into glorious bodies, it was necessary to give the corpse the adequate treatment as a preparation for that occasion.

Embalming is in fact chemical preservation. Apart from preserving the body for the Day of Judgement, two more important facts have to be taken into consideration: delayed burials and monarchical and aristocratic deaths.

The technique, which was born during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, had four stages. To prevent putrefaction the soft organs were removed and then buried either at the place of death or separately with the body. Then the inner cavities were sluiced out with various aromatic and disinfecting fluids prior to sewing up. The third stage involved the treatment of the exterior of the body with preserving spices, applied either as an ointment or a paste. Finally, the corpse was tightly wrapped in cerecloth, a waxed linen, and the seams further sealed with beeswax so as to establish a near airtight condition. This done, the cocoon was enclosed in a leaden coffin, very much like a mummy case, before being lodged in its outer wooden case.

If death had occurred abroad, especially in the case of monarchs, the *mos teutonicus* method was sometimes employed. This consisted of cutting up the body into pieces and boiling it in wine or vinegar, until fat and flesh separated from the bones. The skeleton was then shipped home for burial and the remainder deposited at the place of death. Butchers were probably called in to perform the task. After the fifteenth century the technique was still employed for monarchical corpses.<sup>[42]</sup>

However, one of the main reasons why embalming decreased during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was distaste on the part of the nobility, not so much with the practice itself as with the thought of having so many people manipulating the body. Nor did the general public have a very high regard for embalming, believing it to be another unnecessary luxury meted out to the corpses of the rich.<sup>[43]</sup>

Until the second and third quarters of the seventeenth century not all bodies were buried in coffins, but they did have shrouds. There are, however, two types of shroud, one all-enveloping with top-knot and flowing drapery at the feet, and the other knotted at top and bottom. Hands could be in an attitude of prayer, crossed on the chest, or placed over the groin. It was the custom, should a child die before it was one month old, that the chrymson cloth was used as the head covering to funerary swaddling.

The practice choice of material was important, a status symbol almost. The laying-out and washing of a corpse, the «dressing and trimming» as it was known, might have been performed by a member of the family, though by the early seventeenth century it was more usual, both in town and country, for this service to be provided by the coffin-maker. He would have a number of lowly women on his books living in the locality whom he could call upon at short notice to attend. Limbs were straightened, bowels emptied, and orifices

plugged. Once washed, the body was dressed in a shirt, cap and winding sheet if male, or shift, ruffle-edged cap and winding sheet if female. Chin-clothes were usually removed, the tapes of the head-gear producing the same effect. Occasionally, the women dressing the corpse might introduce sprigs of sweet-smelling herbs, such as rosemary, bay, or thyme, in between the inner garments and the winding sheet. These herbs helped to mask the odour of death.

How long these shrouded corpses lay above ground depended on a number of factors: whether or not an autopsy was required, the undertaker's schedule, the availability of a grave-digger, or a parish coffin if it was needed, the wish of the family or any specific instruction left by the deceased. Nevertheless, it appears that three days was the average length of delay.<sup>[44]</sup>

Another element in the disposing of the dead with dignity was the coffin. The coffin was a status symbol, its finish and furniture indicative of the social standing of the deceased. The introduction of the reusable parish coffin in the sixteenth century signalled a marked improvement in the decoration of coffins supplied for the nobility and gentry.

The coffin with a gabled lid and sides tapering towards the feet was the one in use at the beginning of the early modern period. From about c. 1575 a new style appeared: the coffin is angled at the shoulders and the gable lid retained. The traditional wood for coffins is elm. The anthropoid coffin is associated almost exclusively with the burial vault, and was made of lead.<sup>[45]</sup>

The transportation of the dead has, generally speaking, been of the greatest interest to bereaved relatives. Consequently, humanity has developed a system whereby the corpse can be reverently handled and decently transported to the place of disposal.

The majority of the populace were buried in the graveyards of the parish church, and transportation was a simple matter of either carrying the coffin at waist height, on the shoulders or by means of a hand-held bier. Nevertheless, transportation was slightly more complicated if a body had to be brought from a dwelling in an outlying part of the parish.<sup>[46]</sup>

These practices show how aspects of ritual were dealt with in the early modern era, showing a transitional stage between the traditional practices of the Middle Ages and those characteristic of modernity, which saw the emergence of the undertaking profession.

### ***3.2. The Common Funeral***

Poor people's funerals were not so well documented as those of the royalty and the leading aristocracy. However, life was thought to begin at baptism and to end at burial, so that the poor, like the rich, wanted to dispose decently of their dead. Many practices of the later Middle Ages were still taking place, especially the secular ones, such as the funeral procession, the wakes, the ringing of the bell, or the funeral feast. Nevertheless, many religious practices changed with the Reformation, and the funeral took a more secular air.<sup>[47]</sup>



Associations and fellowships of the lower orders often participated in the funerals of their comrades, fellows and brothers, and loaned equipment for the purpose. Relatives without such support would simply apply to the churchwarden to hire but what was necessary or what they could afford.

Almost without exception each parish had its own burial guild and it was them who provided the necessary transport and coffin to get the body from the house to the church. The number of guild members attendant at a funeral depended on the size of its membership and the rank of the deceased, but never less than four. The family and friends having gathered at the house of the deceased, the guild representatives would congregate outside awaiting the arrival of the priest and parish clerk. Meanwhile, two or more of their brethren went into the dwelling with the parish coffin to encase the corpse, which had already been prepared for the grave. This could be the signal for those inside the house to come out and form into an orderly procession. The priest assumed that all was ready, and would signal to the parish clerk to lead the cortège off to the church. First would go the clerk ringing the bell, then the priest followed by the coffin, with the relatives and friends bringing up the rear. Coffins were rarely shouldered, rather they were carried at waist height on short poles.

On arrival at the church the body was taken straight in and placed at the entrance to the chancel, feet facing east, on two low stools. Once in position the hearse was brought forward and placed around it. Then the corpse was transported from the church to the grave itself. At the appropriate moment it was lifted up from the coffin stools, turned a full 180 degrees and, with the procession reformed in a like manner to its entrance, they went into the church yard. Then the coffin was opened, the shrouded corpse taken out and passed to either the sexton and his mate or the members of the guild already standing in the grave waiting to receive it.

With the dissolution of the guilds, every responsibility fell on the parish clerk and the coffin-maker. All the ritual was accompanied by the religious services already described in 3.2. above, which were shortened and changed with the Reformation.

Food was habitually consumed, partly as hospitality, but also to act as a focus for ideas about the redemption of sin: the refusal of the dole would have been grossly disrespectful to the deceased and to the bereaved. There were also wakes.<sup>[48]</sup>

The funeral in a Christian manner was held to assist the passage of the soul to the hereafter, at a time when there was no clear distinction between body and soul.

Once more the complexity of differentiating between the living and the dead can be seen in the case of the executed felon. The dead body was held to have sensory feeling, hence the desire to punish the dead corpse once life had been extinguished. This makes sense only against the background of a society in which the decent interment of the dead was a matter of the utmost concern.<sup>[49]</sup>

Criminals who died in prison were usually buried by their relatives in his parish; those who were executed were usually interred in the churchyard of the

parish in which the gaol stood. Sometimes, murderers' bodies were used by anatomists, who were not very popular. Suicides received the same treatment as criminals.

Children were buried in the same manner as adults, and the burials of virgins had similarities with the ritual of marriages. The deaths of these people, usually in the prime of life, posed a severe threat to society, a threat which was then reduced through the imagery of the ritual. Still-born babies had to be interred by midwives; they were not regarded as human-beings because they had not been baptized.

The Church could punish people with excommunication, that is, by denying Christian burial. This was again very important for a society which believed in the resurrection of our earthly bodies at the end of time. The fact that a body was not buried in holy ground meant that this hope would never be fulfilled.[\[50\]](#)

### ***3.3. Royal and Heraldic Funerals***

Royal funerals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were magnificent events, where the main issues were political power and the continuity of the monarchy. The spectacle of the great public funeral, with its enormous procession, numbering a cast of well over a thousand, with its magnificent chariot bearing the coffin with its life-like effigy of the deceased monarch, with the hearse beneath which the body was placed for the funeral service itself, was still in vogue in the early modern period.[\[51\]](#)

The reasons for the use of the effigy are complex. Initially, it served a practical function. Given the primitive nature of embalming procedures it was a substitute for the corpse and allowed for a greatly protracted funeral preparation and ceremonial. As time went on, however, the effigy came to play a crucial symbolic role and was linked to the theory of the king's two bodies. It displayed the regalia and was a manifestation of power.[\[52\]](#)

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, royal funerals and the funerals of the aristocracy were under the control of the College of Arms. The funeral paraphernalia they displayed constituted the heraldic funeral.

The heraldic funeral had its roots in the Middle Ages and was not, in many ways, concerned with the deceased at all. Indeed, in political terms, the main reason for holding the ritual was to stress the continuing power of the aristocracy and to prove that it remained unaffected by the death of one of its members; this can be clearly seen in the funeral of Sir Philip Sidney.[\[53\]](#)

However, this view of society, in which no one was indispensable and everyone could simply be replaced by another person, was greatly at odds with the growing feeling of individualism, with its emphasis on personal uniqueness.[\[54\]](#)

Heralds would attend the aristocratic funerals and issue a certificate giving the pedigree of the deceased, and details of his or her death and burial. They represented the authority of the monarchy. The College of Arms supervised everything in relation to the funeral procession, the accoutrements displayed,

and even the work of painters and other tradesmen involved. They were also responsible for the decoration of the home and church with black cloth and other heraldic displays. Everything was done according to the rank of the deceased, and mourners were offered a banquet while waiting. Relatives were enforced to participate and pay the heralds' fees; mourners had to be of the same sex of the deceased and of the same status. There were the chief mourner, the heir, and the principal mourners who were aristocrats.[55]

At the church, after the sermons and the psalms, the officers of the College of Arms supervised the most dramatic and important part of the whole heraldic funeral, the offering. The symbolic blessings of Church and State were merged in passing on the accoutrements and power of the dead aristocrat to his heir. When all the accoutrements had been offered by the principal mourners, that is, coat of arms, sword and shield, the various banners, pennons and standards carried in the procession were offered. The transfer of titles and power also took place.

The company of mourners would leave the church before the interment. A few people, however, did remain to see the actual interment. At least one herald would attend and some household servants. Before the vault was finally closed, the achievements and banners were laid upon the coffin again. A token handful of dust would be sprinkled on the coffin and then the burial ceremony was complete.

Afterwards the mourners were treated to a banquet to cement the relationships and display the wealth and power of the new table holder. The leftovers were given to the poor with the same purpose, who had also taken part in the funeral procession. These were given alms, mourning clothes, and tapers, according to the rank of the deceased.[56]

Henry VIII and Elizabeth I had heraldic funerals, as well as James I. However, after the Commonwealth the heraldic funeral began its decline and in many cases it had already been substituted by nocturnal burial. On the other hand, the emerging bourgeoisie was trying to imitate the funeral display of the aristocratic and powerful, undermining its meaning. The College of Arms disappeared with the growing role of the undertaking profession.

It is significant that the heralds were those responsible for this important aspect of social policy. The science they practised was a late medieval invention, which employed visual signs as symbolic ways to identify individual members of families and indicate their rank. In a hierarchical society and with the levels of degree carefully distinguished, the heralds symbolized the stability and order of the State.[57]

### ***3.4. Nocturnal Funerals***

The nocturnal funeral made its appearance at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and lasted in some quarters, until the middle of the eighteenth. Primarily these funerals were performed for the lesser nobility and

there were several reasons for their popularity. They constitute an individualistic response.

The main reason was the constraint imposed by the heraldic rituals. The nocturnal funeral allowed the nobility to take matters into their hands and negotiate privately with a funeral furnisher of their own choice, thereby dispensing with elaborate preparations. Therefore, noblemen and courtiers began to be buried at night by torchlight.[\[58\]](#)

However, there was also an element of drama represented in the fact that death resembles night and dusk, the body sleeps in the shadows. Nevertheless, the light that the torchlights shed was a symbol of that light we will reach in the presence of God in heaven.

There were no regulations as to the sex of mourners and the whole burial service could be watched, including the interment. There was not a funeral sermon either. Coercion for attendance disappeared. Therefore, the main reason was of an economic nature, so that people could do away with the heraldic trappings, the compulsory crocodile of mourners, the provision of mourning cloaks and the expensive banquet.

Charity was neglected, but not in all cases. Many families made provision for private donations to charitable and philanthropic institutions as well as specific bequests to livery companies and to the poor.

Another reason for the adoption of a nocturnal burial was the revolt, especially of women aristocrats, at the embalming of their bodies. Equally important was the fact that this kind of funerals took very little time to organize.

Nocturnal funerals represent the transition from the public to the private funeral. Torches expressed the frailty of human life, a concept related to Puritan writings and the ideas of the Established Church. For the first time there was an open expression of the feelings of the participants. Grief, sorrow, and a sense of loss became the characteristic note in a practice that reveals the importance of the individual and of his place among his relatives in society.

### ***3.5. Mourning***

Mourning was a stage in the death ritual that was aimed at the bereaved and had little to do with the fate of the deceased. In order to ease the psychological burden of bereavement, mourning allowed the individual time in which to spread the potentially damaging effects of the loss. After the period of mourning, no further personal demonstrations of grief were tolerated.

Mourning made an important distinction between public and domestic practices. Public mourning was almost totally concerned with signifying practice rather than with psychological therapy. By this stage in the death ritual the natural body was virtually forgotten and culture's concern was to support the accumulation of meanings attributed to the social body. Primarily, the rank of the deceased was respected by the rules of mourning. Mourning was officially divided into phases: an intense period was followed by an intermediate phase, or phases, before normal behaviour could be resumed.[\[59\]](#)

In general, mourning dress among the richer classes was circumscribed by the rules that applied to the clothes of such people: the laws of sumptuary. New fashions were extremely rare. Modesty and decorum, not novelty, were emphasized, but those small innovations that were permitted were immediately subsumed within the system of rank. The adjustments in fashion demanded by mourning costume affected women and men in different ways. Rules were not applied so vigorously to men as to women.

Colour, other than black, white, or their close neighbours was never encouraged in the early stages of mourning. However, white could also be suitable if the deceased was regarded as an example of virtue. Young virgins of either sex came into this category. Some times black and white were mixed. Men who wore cloaks rather than longer robes also carried dull, black swords in sheaths of the same colour. Purple and mauve were adopted as appropriate mourning colours for royalty.[\[60\]](#)

Objects of mourning were also produced. Rings were made in quite large numbers for distribution among friends and other mourners. They fall into standard types, all within the *memento mori* tradition. Pictures were also produced and some of them were small enough to be carried on the person. These commemorative objects reinforce the image of the social body.[\[61\]](#)

### **3.6. *The Vanities***

The vanities are an invitation to melancholy and are very typical of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They are very closely connected with the Puritan mentality that pervaded the years 1550-1650.[\[62\]](#)

Men and women liked to surround themselves, in their bedrooms and studies, with pictures and objects that evoked the swift passage of time, the illusions of this world, and even the tedium of life. These pictures and objects were referred to as vanities and combine two elements, an anecdotal one that provides the subject or theme, and a symbolic one, an image of time and death.

The purpose of the macabre was no longer to reveal the subterranean work of corruption. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the skeleton is the end of life, a simple agent of Providence today and of nature tomorrow. In his allegorical role, he is also replaced by Father Time, a kind and venerable old man. The skeleton need not be whole in order to play its role. So the skull and crossbones were separated from the rest and multiplied in a kind of heraldry, or combined with other symbols such as the hourglass, the church clock, the scythe, or the gravedigger's shovel. These symbols not only invaded funerary art but also those familiar objects that were the vanities.

A vanity may also be a portrait. The subject is often painted, sculpted, or engraved looking at a skull or holding a skull in his hand. The group portrait is sometimes like an allegory of the Ages of Man in which the skull and skeleton are the attributes of old age.

Finally, a vanity may be a still life in which the objects, either because of their function or because of their worn look, evoke the passage of time and the inevitable end.

All these objects (furniture, clothing, jewellery) were an invitation to conversion, but they also expressed a melancholy awareness of the uncertainty of life. This melancholy expressed a permanent sense of the constant, though diffuse, presence of death at the heart of things.

#### ***4. Conclusion***

The early modern period, and especially the years 1550-1650, is a time of profound and rapid changes. New political, social, and religious attitudes and ideas bring about a new mentality in relation to death and the dead body.

From the analysis of the ritual of the period, we conclude that we are concerned with an age where death was present in every aspect of life. This establishes a contrast with our present societies in which death is not spoken about and the death ritual has been reduced to its minimum.

It is also a period of transition which takes many elements from the Middle Ages. Aspects of ritual such as the common funeral, royal and heraldic funerals, the funerary procession, funerary customs like wakes, distribution of alms and doles, mourning, and so on, are developed versions of those of the Middle Ages. Even wills and epitaphs have their origins in the practices of those years, and the new arts of dying are closely related to the *artes moriendi*.

Beliefs such as death as sleep and the hope of resurrection were not new. However, the Reformation and the Puritan mentality brought about a new view on death. Although these changes tried to impose simplicity on the death ritual, worldly remembrance became a matter of the utmost importance. Death was seen as the death of the individual, which was being born by then. Wills and epitaphs of the period illustrate this.

New notes of grief and despair were introduced in connection with the new sense of family and family bonds. These can be seen displayed on the funerary art of the age, where individual features of the dead person were shown, and new elements of realism and naturalism were adopted. Whole families were represented on monuments which also preserved social differentiation.

Social differentiation was essential in a society based on a hierarchic structure and is reflected on every aspect of the death ritual. It helped to keep the order and the authority of the state, and to preserve the power in the hands of those who were at the top of the social organization.

In this sense, although the first step was to dispose of the dead with dignity, the main thing was to preserve the social body of the deceased. Mourning was aimed at helping the bereaved. Worldly remembrance, as far as funerary art was concerned, was focused on the life and deeds of the individual as a social being. This became especially relevant to the mentality of the Reformation.

Death was now a subject of meditation and reflection. One had to prepare for death, that is, to live and die well. Everything had to remind man of his near death, and the vanities are a very striking example of this new mentality.

At a time when a separation of body and soul is kept, the soul is given precedence, and is prepared for the afterlife. Nevertheless, the belief that the same body will be reunited with the same soul makes people be worried about the fates of their dead bodies, especially those of the lower social orders. At the same time as the emerging bourgeoisie and even the lower classes try to imitate the funeral paraphernalia of the rich and powerful, the upper classes want to put an end to the pomp and excessive expenditure of their funerals. The liturgy was simplified in the reign of Elizabeth I in accordance with the ideas of the period.

These years also begin to show the characteristics of the ritual of the modern era. A new trade, the undertaking profession, will make its appearance in the following years; the sense of loss and grief that begins to be expressed now will reach its deepest expression later on.

To conclude, I want to emphasize the presence of death in every aspect of the lives of the people during this period. The individual and his position in society are the object of commemoration in funerary art and the centre of the death ritual. Transition is the key word to describe the changes in relation to the practices and attitudes of the years 1550-1650: they are a middle ground between the Middle Ages and modern times as regards the views on death and the dead body.

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