DEATH IN BRITISH COLUMBIA 1850-1950

by

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Abstract

In British Columbia between 1850 and 1950 attitudes towards death shifted significantly. In the early decades of white settlement, reactions to death resembled the social norms historians have established for other parts of the Western world during the same period. Death occasioned a moment during which the family (and to a lesser extent the larger community) expressed links with the deceased through magnificent funerals and imposing mortuary art. Centred in the family circle, mortality implied both a desirable escape from daily trials and a future reunion with relatives in a heavenly home.

By 1920, however, facets of this mentalité had undergone an evolution. Many commentators on modern attitudes argue that contemporary society "denies death." Analyses of personal letters and memoirs, government correspondence and reports, funeral industry records, and epitaph inscriptions illustrate that in British Columbia individuals actually confronted mortality in an intellectual, but not a physical, sense. It was the shunning of physical reminders of mortality, as shown by the popularity of embalming, cremation, caskets and funeral parlors, which permitted this intellectual confrontation. Nondescript cemeteries and monuments and the common use of vitalistic euphemisms stress the continuing life of the deceased in the confines of the memory of the mourner. Such links were entirely individual ones, and the individuality of modern attitudes is also apparent in changing perceptions of health. As emphasis shifted from improving the public's well-being to focussing on
personal health, each assumed ultimate responsibility for his or her own health and death.

The importance thus placed on the individual is largely a trait of middle class sensibilities. Changes in mortuary practices all stemmed from bourgeois reforms. Indeed, these shifts represented one means by which the middle class fostered its own identity. Establishing a separate, abhorrent rite for paupers, that is those who had rejected the economic structure of society by not providing for their departure from it, the middle class further affirmed its identity. For twentieth century bourgeois British Columbians, confronting death was an individual, internal, and intellectual exercise.
## Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii
List of Tables .................................................................................................................. v
List of Figures .................................................................................................................. vi
Acknowledgement ......................................................................................................... vii

Chapter I
INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 1

Chapter II
MORTALITY STATISTICS AND THE PUBLIC HEALTH ............................................. 18

Chapter III
DISCOURSES ON DEATH ............................................................................................. 39

Chapter IV
FUNERALS AND CLASS DISTINCTION ....................................................................... 61

Chapter V
CEMETERIES AND MONUMENTS ................................................................................ 92

Chapter VI
CONCLUSION ................................................................................................................. 118

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................. 127

APPENDIX A - GRAVESTONE INSCRIPTIONS - CEMETERIES USED ..................... 139
List of Tables

I. Death Rates in British Columbia, 1881-1951 ........ 28

II. Analysis of Condolence Letters Sent by T. D. Pattullo, 1934-1938 ........................................ 42

III. Average Funeral Expenditures by Status Groups for four-year periods, R. H. Dwyer's Funeral House, Kamloops, 1923-1945 ................................. 82
List of Figures


2. Proportion of Deaths in Public Institutions, 1927-1950 ..................................................30

3. Proportion of Adult Bodies Embalmed by Dwyer's Funeral House, Kamloops, 1917-1945 ....................71

4. Average Expenditure on Adult Funerals, Dwyer's Funeral House, Kamloops, 1917-1945 ......................80

5. Analysis of Epitaphs: Information on Deceased, I, 1871-1950 ..................................................106


8. Analysis of Epitaphs: Mourner's links with the Deceased, 1871-1950 ........................................110
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The British Columbian society that emerged during the mid-nineteenth century founded itself upon metaphors of death. The very act of settlement in the Pacific Coast region was often shrouded in a mist of mortality. "A voyage," to the province, Margaret Ormsby writes, "was seldom completed without an outbreak of smallpox or a death from scarlet fever or from measles." But far more than the immigrants, the natives must have looked upon the whites' coming with a sense of foreboding. Demographically and culturally the incursions of white society entailed the death of much of the Indian population, and the settlers realized and even celebrated this fact. Later, if Vancouver accepted the somewhat unfortunate nickname "the Terminal City," it was because it saw itself as a new home on the coast for expected immigrants. In a recent examination of British Columbian literature, George Bowering found the principal theme to be "the attempt to find or make a home" where "home...means...literally and etymologically, a place where one may lie down." Many members of a highly transient white society found their permanent home in their graves. By the mid-twentieth century, journalist Bruce Hutchison suggested, the search for a permanent home spurred many elderly persons to settle in the province. "It is the normal, accepted ambition of most Canadians," he exaggerated in 1943, "to spend their last days here." Even though death may have wielded a certain
metaphorical power throughout British Columbian history, one would be hard pressed to suggest that it "ravaged" the society. Rather than the communal or societal crises that historians of earlier cultures have detailed, family and individual traumas resulted from death's encroachments on the living of British Columbia.

Almost singlehandedly, the pioneering French historian Philippe Ariès has provided a sweeping historiographical background which has informed all historians of death. In articles which he has published since the 1960s, and especially in his 1977 *L'Homme devant la mort*, Ariès presents his interpretation of the history of changing attitudes towards death: the last thousand years of the history of western civilization offer five distinct, but overlapping, perceptions.

"Tamed Death," the first form, is the time-defying attitude found in the most "traditional" peasant societies. The dying person sensed the approach of his or her death, controlled the last farewell scene, and thus welcomed fate. The Knights of the Round Table and Tolstoi's Russian peasants shared the same, resigned view of what could be termed, to borrow a phrase, the final stage of growth. The first transformation of this traditional view occurred among elite groups in the eleventh century. As it gradually spread to other sectors, "the Death of the Self" accentuated the individuality of the dying person. This baroque attitude emphasized belief in the afterlife, and rich rituals of burial concealed the spectre of death. This
was, in Pierre Chaunu's words, "une mort prédication, une mort cohue."  

During the Enlightenment, death took an appearance of savagery and unfamiliarity. With the concept of "the Remote and Imminent Death," the prospect of mortality seemed fascinating, even erotic, although fearful at the same time. Romanticism and the strengthening bond of the nuclear family transformed this sensibility into what Ariès termed "the Death of the Other." Death became beautiful since it was something which occurred to the "loved one." It was exalted with magnificent ceremonies. Then, at some vague point in time, between 1900 and 1960, a rupture recast Western attitudes towards death. Death is pornographic; people no longer come to terms with their mortality. Modern society denies the reality of bureaucratized and isolated death and, to a certain extent, of the dead themselves. In this period of "the Invisible Death," the terminal moments became, in Susan Sontag's words, "an offensively meaningless event."  

This five part synthesis has not enjoyed uncritical acceptance. Some historians have contented themselves with revising specific details of Ariès' argument. Others have suggested that certain attitudes are temporally misplaced or simply never existed. More than one reviewer has mentioned Ariès' curious chronology and elusive causal reasoning. Nonetheless, Ariès' work remains the benchmark against which more specific historical analyses measure themselves.

Announcing their research into nineteenth century attitudes
towards death in Ontario, Bruce Bowden and Roger Hall felt constrained to admit that

Ontario does not provide a comfortable test case for Ariès' sweeping conclusions about Victorian attitudes. For one thing...Ontarian society is fundamentally a nineteenth century creation.  

If Ontario is not "comfortable," then British Columbia must be even less so. The Pacific Coast region did not house stable white settlements until the late 1840s. Population remained small and isolated until after the 1880s and the completion of a transportation link with the rest of Canada. British Columbian society was a late nineteenth century creation, and therefore here we look at the latter phases of the Victorian era's "Death of the Other" and the establishment of the "Invisible Death" in the twentieth century.

For the period under examination two recent studies provide additional elements of historiographical background.\(^{15}\) James Farrell in *Inventing the American Way of Death* looks at attitudes towards death in the northern United States between 1830 and 1920. Just as Ariès' work can be considered an attempt to provide historical context for Geoffrey Gorer's sociological tract *Death, Grief, and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*,\(^{16}\) Farrell's sets the historical stage for Jessica Mitford's muckraking exposé of North American burial customs, *The American Way of Death*.\(^{17}\) Farrell argues confusedly that both larger societal pressures and conspiratorial cabals of profit- and status-seeking undertakers and cemetery managers caused changes in attitudes towards death. "In directing the dying of death,"
Farrell exclaims in one example of his sometimes excessive rhetoric, "funeral directors tried to create a funeral service that...minimized the importance of death and grief." What had occurred (to take a more literal translation of Ariès' phrase "la mort inversée") was that death was not inverted, but invented. Even funeral directors and cemetery managers, however, probably never enjoyed the power to shape attitudes that Farrell grants them. Ariès has already responded to such a view, suggesting the importance of public demand: "The money earned by funeral directors would not be tolerated if they did not meet a profound need."

Where Ariès, Farrell and many others do agree is on the existence of a crisis in twentieth century attitudes towards death. Chaunu suggests that our views of mortality reflect an intense "crise de civilisation." David Cannadine has recently responded to these doom-sayers with force: "The best time to die and to grieve in modern Britain is probably now." Thanatologists in general and Geoffrey Gorer in particular have, he proposes, overemphasized the psychological benefits of well-established mourning rituals, such as Victorian funereal practices. Despite his claims to the contrary, however, Cannadine fails to marshall evidence that ritualistic mourning was not psychologically beneficial. While he may have demonstrated that individuals indeed felt a strong sense of grief in the twentieth century, he has misread Gorer in suggesting that the latter argued otherwise. It is difficult not to agree with Michel Vovelle's assessment that Cannadine's
logic betrays "un iconoclasme parfois un peu forcé."  

Such studies of attitudes towards death since the mid-nineteenth century seem plagued, to a certain extent, by major deficiencies. Historians studying death must avoid both the rhetorical extremes of Farrell and the confusing conclusions of Cannadine.

Given the recentness of the historian's venture into the field of attitudes towards death, it should not be surprising that theory remains a relatively sparse crop. Historians study death largely as a result of their interest in the subdiscipline, the history of mentalités. Indeed, Vovelle has described the study of attitudes towards death as the "front actuel de l'histoire des mentalités." The largest part of the literature on attitudes towards death betrays a somewhat simple concern, termed by Peter Burke the "reflection thesis." Death deserves study for what it can show us of the historical nature of human nature. Reconstructions of how members of past societies conceived of their mortality are, we are told, interesting in themselves.

Many such studies of past mentalités are indeed of great interest. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's formulation of social interrelationships (among which, death) in a small Cathar community in fourteenth-century Languedoc is one such example, revealing the temporal and regional nature of a long-disappeared world view. For a subject area so recently rooted in the historical consciousness, it is not surprising that so many
studies of attitudes towards death fit into this analytical mode. In fact, since we have begun only recently to understand the historical figurations of mortality, this descriptive stage is highly important.

This same theoretical stance can, nonetheless, be self-defeating. Studying the cemetery landscape of southern British Columbia, for example, Mary Philpot concluded that "it is...an accurate reflection of the way the men who created it conducted affairs in life and death." \(^{28}\) Mentalités provide, it appears, a mirror for larger social realities. Yet when the reflection tells us no more than that Victoria was Victorian, the Fraser Valley agrarian, and the Cariboo region transitory, we have not really learned all that much.

A second group of historians attempts to increase the explicative force of the examination of mentalités, linking changes in mental and cultural structures to social and political relationships. Serving to define and enforce social structure, mentalité or culture\(^ {29}\) becomes a means of domination, even of oppression. Joachim Whaley, in studying funeral rites in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Hamburg, stressed the political and social import of the disposal of the corpse. Burial not only reflected the station of life of the deceased, it also served to reinforce the legitimacy of that station.\(^ {30}\)

This functionalist trend has spawned an even more strenuous interpretation of the role of mentalités. According to Robert Muchembled, popular culture (or in his terms, culture de masse) was foisted upon the peasants and the proletariat,
alienating them from their specific economic conditions of degradation. Popular culture, he writes,

...atténueait la responsabilité des élites dans la conquête culturelle comme dans l'exploitation des masses laborieuses, créant ainsi un écran qui masqua longtemps la réalité de ce qui aurait pu être une lutte de classes.  

The mirror has turned into a screen, and the lower classes have entered a "Brave New World." But this interpretation both excludes any vital participation by those classes in the unfolding of history and implies an impossibility of change. Alain Croix' recent study of death in Brittany applies Muchembled's framework. There, too, cultural change was imposed from above. The "offensive dans le domaine de la mort...," Croix concludes,

...n'est certainement pas consciemment inscrite dans la constitution d'un mode de production capitaliste mais elle est bien, en revanche, cohérente et délibérée.

Other scholars have rejected such simple models of cultural change. "If...there were merely an imposed ideology...," writes the Marxist literary historian Raymond Williams, "it would be...a very much easier thing to overthrow." The anthropologist Clifford Geertz concurs: "Anything may, of course, play a role in helping society work...; just as anything may help it tear itself apart." The emphasis lies in mental processes rather than structures, and the history of mentalités becomes less a study of oppression, and more one of expression.
Death, if we pursue this concept, changes from a screen to a stage, a dimly-lit platform upon which men and women enact, overcome, and succumb to all sorts of social conflicts.

John McManners' French citizens of the Enlightenment played such roles:

Death-beds and funerals have been the points of decisive encounter in the warfare between churchmen and anticlericals which was the central theme of so much of French history from the eighteenth century onwards.  

The conflicts occasioned by the advent of death revealed and indeed represented the most fundamental intellectual and social turmoils of the century. Death, furthermore, served to mediate and express the ambiguities and uncertainties of the larger social transformations of the century.

If, consequently, we can see death in British Columbia as providing a stage upon which social relationships are enacted, we still need to present the players who will live out the drama. Gorer, Ariès, and Farrell all note the significant role the middle class has played in changing attitudes towards death in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. None of them, however, pursue the analysis further, having accepted implicit and vague definitions of the bourgeoisie.

But as Peter Gay points out in his study of nineteenth century bourgeois sensibilities, anxiety over its own definition represented a significant part of the middle class experience. For the historian, the attempt to identify the social group
becomes doubly difficult: "Perhaps the most severe hurdle impeding the enterprise of defining the nineteenth century bourgeoisie is its troubled attempts at self-definition."\(^{37}\) Contemporary members of the middle class and modern historians must accept a negative identification; the bourgeoisie were "neither aristocrats nor laborers," and felt "uneasy in their middle class skins."\(^{38}\)

In light of such an obscure identity, it would not be surprising if the bourgeoisie had recourse to other methods of self-affirmation. Death, this thesis will argue, provided one such means. Tracing the contours of changing attitudes towards death in British Columbia between 1850 and 1950, we can discern an anxious middle class intent on defining itself through its words, rituals, and monuments. British Columbia, that product of Gay's nineteenth "bourgeois century," was probably not much different than the United States in its quintessential bourgeois character.\(^{39}\) Its early settlement directed by the merchant capitalism of the Hudson's Bay Company, British Columbia subsequently took shape under the watchful eye of paternalistic industrialists, entrepreneurs, and government administrators.\(^{40}\)

"Class structures were created," Jean Barman writes, "in British Columbia from the top down."\(^{41}\) The bourgeoisie enacted its own identity, in part, on the stage of death. But as the anthropologist René Girard points out, groups can only define themselves by expelling others.\(^{42}\) The British Columbian bourgeoisie, without attempting to exclude all of the working class from its mentalité, enforced its character by defining
the kind of respect a pauper's death would receive. How the working class responded to the bourgeoisie's self-affirmation is a worthy drama, but not one which will be recounted here.  

Even within the restricted scope of middle class sentiments, a certain degree of conflict characterized attitudes towards death. Most historians propose that the chief conflict in the twentieth century is the repression of our reactions to death. The contemporary denial of death is tantamount, Gorer suggests, to the nineteenth century taboo on sexuality. Death is obscene and pornographic, its reality obscured and obfuscated:

The natural processes of corruption and decay have become disgusting, as disgusting as the natural processes of birth and copulation were a century ago.

Yet the rhetoric of those who suggest that the twentieth century bourgeois denies death is excessive. "The man who elaborates ways to avoid what he cannot cope with does not deny it;" William May argues, "with every twist and turn of his life, he confesses to its reality for him." Michel Foucault has shed further light on our understanding of the "repressiveness" of modern culture.

What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it ad infinitum, while exploiting it as the secret.

For the bourgeoisie, the discussion of sex represented their key to power, their meaning for existence. But if Foucault has
shattered Gorer's premise, we still have the latter's conclusion: death has become pornographic because people were no longer able or willing to speak of it. James Farrell carries this argument to rhetorical extremes. "By 1920...," he writes, "if death would not die, at least it could be banished from thought." Yet psychology teaches us that repression could never be so mechanically complete.

British Columbian evidence suggests a nuance on the theme of denial; throughout the period under study the tendency was to internalize reactions to death. Shifting from the confines of the family circle at the beginning of the period to the garden of the individual's memory at the end, bourgeois British Columbians shared their reactions to death less and less with each other. They did not, however, deny it. Indeed, we might argue, they confronted it in their minds, if only through the haze of obscure metaphors and euphemisms. This confrontation with death, like Foucault's interpretation of middle class discourses on sexuality, had an end result in aiding in the self-affirmation of the twentieth century bourgeoisie.

This study begins, of course, with the early phases of white settlement. The reasons for ending in 1950 are more arbitrary. Originally, 1950 was chosen because the records of the Dwyer Funeral Home, the first records consulted, ended in that year. More significant, however, was the suggestion by various observers that the increase in literature on death since the 1950s represents a new phase in Western attitudes towards death. The year 1950 was chosen, therefore, in order that we
might resist the temptation of dealing with this "new" attitude. As the conclusion will show, however, the temptation won.

The initial two chapters deal with two separate but of course related aspects of attitudes towards death. In the first, we shall examine the perceptions of the demographic incidence of mortality and the relationship of these perceptions to the middle class led public health movement. The second chapter deals with bourgeois writings on death, such as they appear in diaries, memoirs, and especially condolence letters. In the third chapter we examine the rituals which reflect and embody reactions to death. Finally, we study the evolution of cemetery landscapes to discern how the middle class view the physical consecration of the reality of death.
Notes - Chapter I


8 Ariès does not include this phase in an earlier synthesis: Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present, trans. Patricia Ranum, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

9 Ariès' chronology is rather confusing on this point. See Ibid., pp. 85-103; id., The Hour, pp. 559-601.


13 Ibid., pp. 253-5; Joachim Whaley, "Introduction," in


21 "War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain," in ed. Whaley, Mirrors of Mortality, p. 189.

22 Death, Grief and Mourning, pp. 110-114.

23 "Encore la mort: un peu plus qu'une mode?", Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Cultures, 37,2 (mars-avril 1982), 286.

24 Incidence of death as a demographic fact has also, of course, warranted study. Even many demographic historians, however, permit themselves a glance at mentalités. For example, P. Uhlenberg, "Death and the Family," Journal of Family History, 5,3 (fall, 1980), 313-320.


27 Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village,


29 Patrick Hutton has suggested that "'mentalities' is a code name for what used to be called culture." "The History of Mentalities: The New Map of Cultural History," History and Theory, 20 (1981), 237.


38 Ibid., p. 31.

39 Ibid., p. 5.


41 "Growing up British in British Columbia: Boys in Private


3 Similarly, this thesis will exclusively examine attitudes towards death among the white population of the province. The term "British Columbians" will often be used, for ease of reference, to describe the white society. The native and Oriental populations had very distinct attitudes towards death, at least at the beginning of the period, and a study of their perceptions would demand a history of acculturation and ethnic persistence, far removed from the focus of this paper.

4 For example, see Ariès: "[Society] is also subject to irresistible movements that put it in a state of crisis and impose a transitory unity of aggression or denial. One of these movements has unified mass society against death." The Hour, p. 613.


II. MORTALITY STATISTICS AND THE PUBLIC HEALTH

The American historian Charles Jackson raises the interesting question of the relationship between the demographic incidence of mortality and popular attitudes towards death. "The gradual rejection of social mourning as well as the growing reaction against elaborate funeral practice may be," he suggests, "a quite natural consequence of present death demography."¹ But, according to Michel Vovelle the question is closed, "l'historien des mentalités y a déjà répondu: il n'y a pas de lien mécanique."² We may have to reject the overly mechanical relationship Jackson proposes. Although declining mortality rates between 1850 and 1950 may have influenced attitudes, it is possible to argue that the growing rejection of a fatalistic resignation before death had, itself, a pronounced effect on death statistics. An increasing optimism towards demographic realities, among the middle class at least, expressed itself through the compilation of vital statistics and attitudes towards public health measures. If the death rate, by the end of the period, was lower than it had been at the beginning, the decline was due in part to a greater awareness and acceptance of individual and public responsibilities towards health. And if mortality statistics were more reliable in 1950 than in 1850, this fact must also be due to a shift in attitudes.
In Victoria in 1856 a young Reverend Edward Cridge delivered a sermon on the occasion of local magistrate Thomas Blinkhorn's funeral. Cridge exhorted the mourners to prepare for death: "Time is short, life uncertain, you know not the day nor the hour. If you have not begun in earnest to prepare for this event, you should begin this very day, this very hour." Cridge was not alone in expressing, even promoting, the resignation of uncertainty before the unyielding power of death. The businessman Richard Carr confided to his diary, "we know not what an hour may bring forth, may we be found prepared is my fervent [sic] prayer." Neither Cridge nor Carr aspired to a statistically based life span.

Adults felt the need to confront their imminent mortality. They also hastened to inculcate the same attitude in their children. If a neighbour made Carr's young daughter Emily kiss the corpse of her baby, it was because Mrs. McConnell deemed it necessary for children to be acquainted with death. Similarly an 1867 reader in use in British Columbian schools warned school children to steer away from the "ignominious death of the wicked." Such enforced confrontation probably resulted from personal experience with mortality. Charles Hayward, Victoria's pre-eminent funeral director and later the city's mayor, had lost three of his children at young ages. As a consequence, there is more than pious formalism in the phrase he included in his proud account in 1888 of his sons' scholastic successes:

My two younger sons Ernest (11) and Reginald (8) are being educated at the public school and (excuse my vanity) give promise (if spared) of doing
themselves and the institution credit.  

But Hayward, as probably many others of his period, was actually torn between an unquestioned acceptance of Christian fatalism and a growing belief that human actions should be able to postpone that final hour. Describing the loss of his children to his sister, he wrote with a hint of rebellion, that "we felt at that time how hard it was to bow in submission to His will and feel that He doeth all things well." If any one group were to reject fatalism, we might expect it to be the medical profession. Nonetheless, Dr. John Sebastian Helmcken recorded in his memoirs a view which expresses both the gradually relaxing attitude towards the inevitable immediacy of death and his continued, tentative resignation to fate. Recalling the death of his wife Cecilia at the age of thirty-one in 1865, he wrote: "Indeed in looking back I am almost led to the belief that under more favorable conditions she might have lived - but who knows?" These British Columbians were unsure of the efficacy of human intervention in permitting the fulfillment of demographic promises. They had not yet acquired the statistical consciousness, "the timetable of existence," that would, in John McManners' words, reduce "human relationships to the elemental tactics and sympathies of a programme of survival."  

Since the eighteenth-century, ever increasing portions of the bourgeoisie were won over to the recognition of the "timetable of existence." Such a recognition entailed facing
the grim reality of death. The conceptualization of health by physicians during the Enlightenment demanded, philosopher Michel Foucault argues, a direct confrontation with mortality.

The life/disease/death trinity was articulated in a triangle whose summit culminated in death; perception could grasp life and disease in a single unity only insofar as it invested death in its own gaze.  

Consequently, it is no surprise that the public health movement in British Columbia should by the late nineteenth century vehemently condemn the popular attitude of fatalism. The second annual report of the Provincial Board of Health decried the fact that

people commonly speak of death from diptheria, typhoid fever, consumption, cholera, etc., as a visitation from God. Modern scientists know they are nothing of the kind, that the Almighty has nothing to do with such disasters, but that death from such causes arises from ignorance and the non-observance of the laws of hygiene.  

The Provincial Board furthermore owed its very existence to the mortality crises of the late nineteenth century. The colonial government had passed legislation in 1869 providing for the establishment of a central board of health, but this board would only sit during a time of emergency and would disband after the threat had passed. In 1894, a smallpox epidemic and a menace of cholera led the provincial government to establish a permanent Board of Health. Only the public recognition of the ravages of death was able to goad the provincial government into action on more than an ad hoc scale.
But the most striking way in which the proponents of better sanitary and medical measures faced death was in the use of statistics. "The public health movement," Terence Murphy suggests, tracing its origins, was "built on medical statistics." George Emery asserts that in nineteenth century Ontario mortality statistics provided the necessary justification for the movement's activities: "Civil registration developed fully through alliance with the public health movement." Thus, when reporting on the installation of sewers in Victoria in the 1890s, a city official cited a declining death rate as proof of the measure's effectiveness. In 1911 a contributor to the Public Health Journal, in estimating British Columbia's mortality statistics, wrote, "the annual death rate of a city, province or dominion is its health balance sheet." Death rates provided both a reason and a measure for the work of the health authorities.

But accurate statistics did not inevitably lie within the grasp of the public health movement. John McManners, in examining the beginning of the statistical study of life and death during the Enlightenment, suggests that the act of compiling statistics can be of as much historical interest as the subsequent use historians make of these compilations. Numerical techniques, as more than one early critic noted, denied the uniqueness of the individual.

By the nineteenth century governments recognized the advantages of data collection. In early British Columbia,
colonial authorities reported the annual number of births, deaths, and marriages in the "Blue Books" sent to the Colonial Secretary in London. Although the local councils discussed the subject of legally enforcing the registration of vital statistics during the 1860s, it was the new provincial government which adopted the Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages Act in 1872.

At first the new bureau of vital statistics relied extensively on public cooperation. Death notices were to be supplied by the "occupant of the house wherein the death happened." In the face of general apathy, however, the provincial registrar recommended in 1877 that the act be amended so as to appeal for the cooperation, more specifically, of the middle class. The new clause required registration from "every Minister of other person who buries or performs any funeral or religious service for the burial of any dead body...within thirty days after such burial." But even the bourgeois clergy and undertakers apparently continued to demonstrate reluctance. As late as 1896, the Registrar noted the problems in achieving valid returns concerning mortality.

Published statistics on causes of death illustrate that medical personnel also had difficulty agreeing or complying with the provincial government's wishes. Up to the 1890s, as many as a third of all causes of death were not specified or were ill-defined by the person completing the death return. Only in the 1890s did the proportion of poorly defined causes consistently fall below five percent of the total. [ See Figure I ] In the
Figure 1 - Proportion of Ill-Defined Causes of Death in Government Statistics on Mortality, 1872-1910

Source: Reports of the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages
same decade, the provincial registrar proposed mortality rates for specific British Columbian localities, but government tabulations of province-wide rates do not extend further back than 1911. Also in 1911, the board issued a new death registration form, requiring from the attending physician both the remote and immediate causes of death. Evidently government officials believed by the 1910s that they had successfully awakened a statistical and medical consciousness, at least among the middle class.

The consciousness which more and more British Columbians enjoyed was the fact that the death rate was declining during the period. This was, in the Western world at least, a widespread phenomenon. "The increase in life chances among Europeans since the middle of the nineteenth century," British demographer J. M. Winter notes, "was probably greater than the total gains made over the previous millenium." But the decline was not necessarily evident at all times. Throughout most of the nineteenth century in the United States, for example, mortality rates remained relatively constant.

Between one-fifth and one-third of all children would die before age ten, and the average twenty-year-old could expect from forty to forty-five more years of life.

When mortality rates did drop, British evidence suggests, specific age groups were affected at different periods. During the 1870s, children, adolescents and young adults (ages two to
thirty-five ) were first to register a decreasing mortality rate. Adult aged thirty-five to sixty-five enjoyed increasing life expectancy by the 1890s. Infant mortality ( death before one year of age ) did not diminish until the turn of the century.²⁹

In Canada the crude death rate dropped between 1851 and 1951 from 24.6 to 9.0 per 1000.³⁰ We know from analyses of census materials that in British North America the life expectancy at birth of about forty years in 1850 differed little from the rates prevailing in the United States and Great Britain.³¹ Nonetheless, demonstrating that British Columbian mortality statistics followed the same evolution as did those of Great Britain, the United States or even Canada, is a difficult task.

One complication is the unreliability of the data. Discussion of a crude death rate requires both the number of deaths within a given time period ( a year ) and a population base to place that number in context. We have already mentioned the discrepancies in the death returns. Census material was perhaps more reliable, but it was not entirely satisfactory for our purposes. First, census and death returns deal with slightly different populations. While enumerators received instructions to include the entire de jure population of a locality for a given date, vital statistics present data for a longer period. Secondly, historians have noted some of the problems faced by nineteenth century census takers.³² The 1881 census in British Columbia reflected these problems: the
enumerator for Nanaimo quit his work three days after beginning, and the census was not continued until another census taker arrived about three months later.\(^3^3\) William Ross, the enumerator for the New Westminster area, took from April 9 to June 6 to complete his "statement of facts existing on the 4th day of April, 1881." During that period, it was not surprising, perhaps, that Ross should enumerate at least three people twice.\(^3^4\)

In light of such inaccuracies, a healthy scepticism must accompany a glimpse at the crude death rates that a comparison of census and vital statistics data produces. [See Table I.] While these computations suggest little change between 1881 and 1951, the sheer weight of evidence in other parts of the Western world indicates that such a tendency was unlikely.\(^3^5\)

A second complication in establishing mortality rates in British Columbia is the region's distinctive age structure. In the period under study, it was a province of immigrants dominated by a large proportion of young and middle-aged adults. Nonetheless, over time this age structure matured.\(^3^6\) One of the most significant influences on mortality rates is, of course, the age structure of the population. A standardized death rate takes the changing structure into account. By calculating death rates for various cohorts of ages and integrating the rates into a standard age structure, we may make a more valid comparison of mortality rates over time.\(^3^7\) The standardized death rate shows an almost continual decrease in the mortality rate after 1881.
Table I - Death Rates in British Columbia, 1881-1951

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>CRUDE DEATH RATE (per 1000)</th>
<th>STANDARDIZED DEATH RATE (per 1000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Dominion censuses; Reports of the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages for the Province of British Columbia; Reports of Vital Statistics, Provincial Health Board.
If, as it appears, mortality rates were declining in British Columbia, it remains relatively difficult to explain the reasons for the decline. British and American demographers have argued that the sustained decline in mortality before the 1930s relied more on improving living conditions than on medical technology. Better sanitation and nutrition dramatically increased the life expectancy of the population. In the case of Vancouver, Margaret Andrews similarly suggests that changes in hygiene and food preferences supplemented public health measures in improving the health of the population. The public health movement did not represent the sole reason for Vancouver's declining mortality. Nonetheless, the degree to which the population had accepted the authority of medical experts by the 1920s demonstrated a public willingness to agree with the rhetoric of the movement.

An appropriate measure of the public's acceptance of the medical profession's authority may be statistics on the place of death. A significant addition to the Reports of the Vital Statistics Branch in the 1920s, the percentage of British Columbians dying in public institutions increased from the already high rate of 43.4 percent in 1927 to 60.7 percent in 1950. [See Figure II]

Concomitant with the growing acceptance, by the 1920s the rhetoric of the public health movement was undergoing subtle yet important shifts. Where public health officials had previously expressed the necessity for sanitary and medical reform by warning of the threat to the community, they now exalted the health of the individual. "If you will not assume
Figure 2 - Proportion of Deaths in Public Institutions, 1927-1950

Source: Reports of the Provincial Health Board.
responsibility for the health of the other fellow and his children," the government's 1921 Report on Health Insurance urged, "then you must do so for the sake of yourself and your own."\(^2\) Public health authorities, inheriting the declining zeal of Canada's urban reformers, and feeling that they had dealt too long with "the negative side of health," recognized that they "must carry the gospel of health to the people."\(^3\) It was a gospel in which "health replaces salvation;" as Michel Foucault argues, "positive medicine marked...the beginning of that fundamental relation that binds modern man to his original finitude."\(^4\) In making the individual responsible for his or her own health, modern medical philosophy also handed over the responsibility for death. Recognizing this shift in its 1923 report, the Provincial Board of Health acknowledged,

The old public health was concerned with the environment, the new is concerned with the individual; the old sought the sources of infectious diseases in the surroundings of man, the new finds them in man himself. \(^5\)

The daily confrontation with death that medical philosophers had laboured under since the Enlightenment now fell to the lot of the average middle class citizen. An increasing awareness of death rates, of the concept that individuals lived out biologically allotted numbers of years, showed that the fatalism born of uncertainty that had typified attitudes up to the 1890s was itself dead.

Although mortality statistics were perhaps not, as one prominent public health reformer in the United States desired it
in 1913, discussed with the regularity of weather reports,\textsuperscript{6} members of the British Columbian bourgeoisie had begun to acquire a statistical consciousness of mortality by the turn of the century. An 1896 textbook of health warned school children that "total abstainers at age 20 had a life expectancy three times that of moderate drinkers."\textsuperscript{7} A correspondent provided Charles Hayward with various municipal and provincial death rates throughout the Dominion, demonstrating perhaps to the funeral director's chagrin that in 1911 Victoria had the lowest rate of seven major cities.\textsuperscript{8} More convincing, possibly, is the statement Dr. F. F. Wesbrook included in an argument against the imposition of an extended period of university education. In an entirely unassuming and offhand fashion, he made his case "notwithstanding the increase of human longevity."\textsuperscript{9} It is an indication of the widespread acceptability of the new health religion by the end of the period that we find in the British Columbia Electric Railway Papers a letter from Vancouver's Medical Health Officer to the president of the company. "As you are aware," wrote Dr. Stewart Murray (and without a doubt A. E. Graver was aware), "an informed public can determine their own morbidity and mortality rates, within certain limits."\textsuperscript{50}

In Vancouver in 1947, Rev. C. Swanson delivered a sermon on the occasion of the funeral of the city's mayor, G. G. McGeer. McGeer having died suddenly at the age of fifty-nine, Swanson said, "He died as few of us will die, at the very zenith of his powers."\textsuperscript{51} Swanson and probably most of the mourners firmly believed that they would die having filled out a full
complement of years. They knew, too, that to a certain extent their life chances depended upon their attitudes towards their own health.

The relationship between the incidence of mortality and popular attitudes towards death is thus an exceedingly complex one. The middle class public reform movement demanded a shift in conceptions. Where individuals were once content to entrust their fate to God, increasingly, their medical fate became their own responsibility. They became aware not only of the likely causes of death, but also, with ever more comprehensive statistics, its likely hour. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the acceptance of a health religion also brought about the material lowering of death rates by the end of the period. It was not by denying death, but by continually confronting it with a death-centred medical philosophy, that middle class British Columbians on both individual and public levels were able to contain its ravages. Because they proved successful in facing and overcoming the spectre of mortality, the definition of a "good" death was now based less on the hope for salvation than on an increasingly well-known demographic reality.
Notes - Chapter II


2 "Les attitudes devant la mort: problèmes de méthode, approches et lectures différentes," Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Cultures, 31, 3 (janvier-février 1976), 126. This is essentially the same article as the one which appeared in Archives de sciences sociales des Religions.


7 PABC, Hayward Family Papers [hereafter HF], Charles Hayward to Mrs. Ablitt, June 4, 1888; v. 1, p. 244. In a previous letter to the same sister, Hayward requested that she "remember me kindly to your husband and to the four little ones who...I trust will be spared to be your comfort." March 7, 1888, v. 1, p. 211.


10 Death and the Enlightenment, pp. 74-5.


17 Edward Munro to George Duncan, Secretary, Provincial Board of Health, July 29, 1898, Third Report of the Provincial Board of Health, (1898), p. 1300.


19 Death and the Enlightenment, p. 94; Murphy, "Medical Knowledge," 301-2.


See, for example, A. Brookes, "'Doing the Best I Can': The Taking of the 1861 New Brunswick Census," Histoire sociale-Social History, 9, 7 (May, 1976), 70-9.


The method is outlined in Louis Henry, Population: Analysis and Models, trans. Etienne van de Walle and Elise Jones, (New York: Academic Press, 1972), p. 136. The province's age structure in 1951 was used as the constant. Since vital statistics reports do not include data on the demography of the Indian population, it was necessary to remove the natives from the base cohorts. Although this task was relatively easy for 1931, 1941 and 1951, none of the previous censuses provide information on the age structure of this group. In fact, the 1891 census does not even give a figure for the Indian population of the province. (Fisher gleaned a number from the Department of Indian Affairs Annual Report for that year, Contact and Conflict, p. 202). For decades previous to 1931, we have calculated the age distribution assuming the same divisions as in 1931. As a result of all these calculations,
the standardized death rate is scarcely less "crude" than the crude death rate.


40 Ibid., pp. 243-257; in "The best advertisement a city can have: public health services in Vancouver, 1886-1888," Urban History Review - Revue d'histoire urbaine, 12, 3 ( January, 1984), 19-27, Andrews shows the middle class nature of public health reform in early Vancouver.

41 Id., "Medical Services," p. 34.


44 The Birth of the Clinic, p. 197-8.


48 HF, John Dean to C. Hayward, n.d., v. 42.

University of British Columbia, The Library, Special Collections Division [hereafter UBCSC], British Columbia Electric Railway Papers, Murray to Graver, Aug. 11, 1947, box 29, f. B780.

PABC, G. G. McGeer Papers [hereafter GGM], Add. MSS. 9, v. 4, f. 3.
III. DISCOURSES ON DEATH

Except perhaps insofar as the material reality of statistics is concerned, death, literary theory tells us, is a cultural construct. Societies and individuals establish metaphorical meanings for mortality, obscuring or illuminating its impact and influence. "It is impossible," said La Rochefoucauld, "to look directly at the sun or at death." If looking at death is impossible, it is still possible to write about it; writing about it may, indeed, make up for not being able to face it directly. Ariès demonstrates that in the nineteenth century when death hid behind a mask of beauty, it was exalted in lyric poetry. In the twentieth century, however, he continues, the discourse dried up: "Death has become unnamable." Yet British Columbians, throughout the period between 1850 and 1950, have always written about death. Memoirs, family correspondence, diaries, and most importantly condolence letters reveal their intimations on mortality. The vagaries of archival collecting ensure that these scattered sources almost invariably present middle class viewpoints. Nonetheless, these bourgeois discourses cast light on Ariès' interpretations of changing attitudes towards death, emphasizing the continuity, rather than the break, in tradition. They also expose the complex evolution
of the historical forces which first saw the community, then the family, and finally the individual play the primary social role in reacting to a death. In the end, they show that the individual confronted death, internalizing his or her reaction to it.

Where in societies of the ancien régime, death occasioned the participation and sympathy of the entire community in the commemoration of the dead, by the nineteenth century mourning had become a family affair. With the strengthening of the affective bonds of the small nuclear family, the immediate relatives of the deceased revelled in the privacy of their grief. Condolence letters, which propose the consolation of the mourners and the expression of personal sentiments towards the deceased, testify both to the family's pre- eminent role in modern mourning and to the problems inherent in this historical tendency. To examine the mentalité of the authors of condolence letters, to write the "intellectual history of non-intellectuals," we have to look at both intentions and implications.

Rules of etiquette have long suggested the sending of condolences on the occasion of a death. An early nineteenth century treatise on politeness, written in France and translated for an American audience, prescribed a letter of condolence "if we are at a distance." Later books stressed that "short notes of condolence, expressing the deepest sympathy, are usually accepted, and help to comfort stricken hearts." Letters should
be short and prompt; it was assumed that they were destined for members of the immediate family.¹⁰

A study of some of the condolence letters written by or for British Columbians between 1850 and 1950 demonstrates the centrality of the family's role in the mourning process. With a small number of exceptions, relatives received all the condolences. The condolences sent by Premier T. D. Pattullo between 1934 and 1938 provide an apt if somewhat obvious example. Of the 112 letters he wrote, only one letter was identifiably not sent to the immediate family: it commemorated the death of a member of the Vancouver Yukoners Association. Nine letters made no reference to the relationship the deceased shared with the recipient. Pattullo addressed all the remaining letters to the immediate family: spouse, parent, sibling or child of the deceased. [See Table II] Letters to spouses constituted the largest group, three-fifths of the total.¹¹ Other exceptions, as the cliché goes, prove the rule. Dr. G. F. Amyot wrote to John Marshall on the death of the latter's superior, Provincial Health Officer Dr. H. E. Young: "I feel I can understand your reaction. He also seemed like a father to me but I have not nearly the claim on that that you have." Concurring with Amyot's sentiment, Marshall wrote to another correspondent that Young "was more of a father to me than a head of a Department."¹²

Although condolence letters stressed the close relationship of the deceased with the recipient of the letter, the authors' relationship with the mourner was often more intimate than their
Table II - Analysis of Condolence Letters Sent by T. D. Pattullo, 1934-1938

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELATIONSHIP OF DECEASED TO RECIPIENT</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE (OF LETTERS WITH RELATIONSHIP SPECIFIED)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>10&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 115<sup>2</sup> 100.0

<sup>1</sup> Includes letter sent to Vancouver Yukoners Association.

<sup>2</sup> Three letters mentioned more than one death.

Source: PABC, British Columbia Premier, GR 1222, General Files, box 122, f. 1; box 131, f 1; box 140, f. 2.
links to the deceased. Of the three hundred condolence letters Charlotte McGeer received on the death of her husband, for example, about two-thirds were from women. Although Gerald McGeer, the mayor of Vancouver and a senator, would presumably have had a large number of male acquaintances, these did not respond in equal proportion to the widow's friends. This strong (but not rigid) constraint of knowing the mourners explains the almost apologetic tone of some correspondents, who felt it necessary to justify their interventions. It was only after establishing how well he knew businessman R. P. Rithet that D. Campbell could say to the widow "under these conditions, then, I feel that I have the right to tell you and his family how sincerely...I feel a real sense of personal loss." When a stranger felt moved to send a note of condolence to Mrs. McGeer, she added the wish, "hoping you do not think me too personnel [sic]." But another of McGeer's correspondents, B. P. Lewis, perhaps stated the timidity best: "I hope I do not intrude on your sorrow by offering you, and your family, my deepest sympathy..." These writers noticed themselves impinging upon the grief of the nuclear family. They recognized, possibly, that they were partially subverting the historical process which had placed the control of mourning within the family.

Others recognized the ambiguous intentions of this form of discourse when they considered its utility. Some admitted, with forthrightness, that condolence letters had little success in relieving sorrow. Hugh Mackie, for example, conceded after his
son's death, that

everybody has been most sympathetic to us, people written of whom we have hardly heard,...resolutions of condolence by the local Council...but all these things make not the least difference, in such circumstances.¹⁸

Some writers, in sending sympathy, confessed as much, thereby committing an intellectual error which required backtracking. One of Mrs. McGeer's friends acknowledged in the case of her own bereavement, "I will never forget the agony of all the letters." But not wishing to be a conscious participant in McGeer's agony, she had to add quickly, "as well as the great feeling of being given so much attention."¹⁹ If both recipients and authors testified to the futility of condolence letters, the real implications of the conventions must be more complex.

First, condolence letters express the problem of centering reaction to deaths within the family circle. As the middle class family, from the eighteenth-century onwards, monopolized mourning, outsiders of different degrees of closeness to the deceased or his or her relatives sought expression for their grief and empathy. "I know no other way," wrote L. S. Anderson on the presumed war death of his friend, the son of provincial cabinet minister R. L. Maitland, "to give vent to my sorrow, than to sit down and drop you people a few lines..."²⁰ Having lost the wider role in mourning that the community enjoyed in previous eras, unrelated sympathisers had few recourses other than writing. Writing condolence letters represented, consequently, an attempt - albeit a feeble one - to
subvert the family's monopoly on mourning.

Secondly, condolence letters reintegrate the mourners, temporarily isolated in the privacy of their bereavement, back into society. Obviously, a letter demands a response. An 1833 treatise on etiquette sniffed, "their grief cannot excuse them from answering us, although it is not immediately necessary." By enjoining the mourner to write, the social pressures of condolence letters realize his or her re-entry into society. Pattullo, for example, received many notes of gratitude. In more than one way, then, the condolence letter, while respecting the privacy of family mourning, subverts the same process and appears to establish society's ultimate primacy over the family.

This discussion has considered the British Columbian condolence letter as a literary form with certain unchanged intentions and implications during the period investigated here. The rest of this chapter will focus on the slight yet significant modifications in the discourse on death which appear in an analysis not only of condolences, but also of diaries, memoirs and personal correspondence.

According to Ariès, death in the nineteenth century exuded a macabre, erotic attraction. Art and literature glorified the beauty and peace of fleeing from the living world. Death was something to anticipate and discuss. H. P. P. Crease, later a judge in the provincial Supreme Court, provided a poetic example of this discourse. In 1841, some seventeen years before his arrival in British Columbia, Crease penned "A Dirge," a
rather excessive outpouring of morbid sentiment:

Sleep on, sleep on, ye resting dead;
The grass is o'er ye growing
In dewy greenness. Ever fled
From you hath care;

------------------------
Sleep on, sleep on: Ye do not feel
Life's ever-burning fever—...

------------------------
Sleep on, sleep on; your couch is made
upon your mother's bosom;

------------------------
Sleep on, sleep on: I would, I were
At rest within your dwelling—...

We can extract five elements from this excerpt which we can subsequently follow through various other nineteenth century writings on mortality: death was peaceful and natural; it was an escape, yet it promised a reunion; most obviously, it was desirable.

It is possibly a timeless convention when discussing the death of a loved one to assure oneself that the death was a "good" one. Yet, as we saw in the last chapter, the nature of a "good" death evolved over time. In nineteenth century British Columbia crossing the bar was, ideally, a natural and peaceful movement. Describing her uncle's death in 1856 in her diary, Martha Ella wrote, "he...awoke coughing and it broke a Blood vessel and was suffocated he never spoke again." Leaving a blank which "death" or "end" would presumably fill, Ella reassured herself, "I never witnessed a more happy ___ than his, I trust he has gone to rest..." The condolence letters Dr. Helmcken received in 1865 referred in a rather vague, organic sense to death as a "change." "For [Helmcken's infant son] the
change," wrote brother-in-law and Hudson's Bay Company official A. G. Dallas, "is no doubt a blessed one."  

Charles Hayward, who viewed himself as Victoria's leading funeral director and who, therefore, probably had rather normative attitudes towards death, agreed with his brother-in-law's reaction to his sister's demise: "I join with you in the fervent hope that our last hours like hers may be peace..." One of Hayward's correspondents, having acknowledged that her loved one "had suffered so long," took refuge in the fact that "for about eight hours before he passed away he suffered no pain at all and died without a murmur at midnight." When writing about deceased relatives and friends, it was important to stress the peacefulness and naturalness of the moment of death.

In a nineteenth century shaken to its foundations by religious doubts, death could only be peaceful and natural where there existed a certain degree of assurance in the afterlife. The exchange of an earthly home for a heavenly one implied both a separation and a future reunion. "I hope, dear Helmcken," consoled Henry Piers,

the good hope you have of your dear wife's present happiness and meeting her again in a better and an unchanging world, comforts, and supports you.  

Death was an escape from the tribulations of everyday life. Of Victoria's Roman Catholic Bishop Mgr. Demers, who in 1871 "a doucement succombé sous le poids de l'âge et des infirmités," a Catholic missionary wrote, "sa belle âme est allée recevoir le prix de ses mérites dans un meilleur séjour." F.-X. Blanchet
undoubtedly recognized the signs of impending salvation; he was much less generous with the souls of various wanton settlers in other parts of the Pacific Coast region. Death in the comforting arms of religion, which ensured the happy reunion, was the most sublime. Charles Hayward hastened to notify Mrs. Harries that her father, the night before he "expired without a struggle," "expressed himself so much comforted with the religious exercises."\(^3\)

Not everyone in the nineteenth century found the same reassurances in religion, however, and two cases demonstrate some consequences of disbelief in the heavenly home. Sarah Crease begged her father, John Lindley, in his ill-health, to come to terms with Christ:

> You doubtless can grasp - dearest Father to what I allude - Should I never see you again in this world, can I have the inexpressible comfort of hoping and believing that you at least, will be safe in a better?\(^3\)

Hugh Gillis, before he committed suicide in 1872, declared "may God have mercy on my soul," although even in his disturbed state of mind, he had recognized that he had little hope of happiness in an afterlife. A witness at the coroner's inquest testified: "Mitchell said the supper is getting cold, the deceased said everything will be colder by and bye."\(^3\) For a suicide, death obviously constituted an escape from reality, as indeed it had also for Crease. Yet Gillis recognized that by disobeying God's laws, he would not enter the heavenly home.

When both the escape and reunion promised by death could be
assured, however, the dying person ideally showed no fear. It was, in fact, a literary convention to find death attractive. In an admission quite astounding to our ears, Walter Colquhoun Grant, the pioneer farmer on Vancouver Island, disclosed almost nonchalantly to a correspondent that he had contemplated "suicide by hanging drowning or otherwise." It is the juxtaposition which is revealing. Grant had just discussed his loneliness; he "never saw a creature save my own men and a few rascally Indians." Death (or the contemplation of it) was a substitute for the dearth of social relationships. For others, death promised a desirable release from earthly concerns. "Rest must have been a welcome word," for one dying man; Hayward wrote of a friend, "death has no terrors." Having surpassed seventy years of age, J. H. Glass wrote to Hayward, expressing the wish that "may it be your, and my good fortune to enter unto this perfect rest, bye and bye."

In their letters, condolences, diaries and memoirs, nineteenth century British Columbians did not hesitate to write about death. They assured each other that death was peaceful, natural and alluring, and that the finality of its escape would be tempered by an eventual reunion with loved ones. Describing death in increasingly natural and domestic terms, they rendered the dead and their afterlife, as Ann Douglas points out, accessible to the living. British Columbians of the new century would accentuate these life-like metaphors. This shift can be explained largely in terms of three themes.

The first is the slight redefinition of the "good" death.
As we saw in the last chapter, an expansion of statistical knowledge recast death, for a part of the middle class at least, in a demographic idiom. In addition, death was best if it silently and painlessly stole the dying person. This theme is not really much different from the peaceful and natural death of the nineteenth century, though perhaps more anaesthetic and contrived. Often death could remain silent only if there were a conspiracy to keep it a secret. Having learned that his "Japanese man" was afflicted with a fatal cancer, Charles Hayward instructed his daughter to inform the soon-to-be widow but not the soon-to-be deceased. The cultural divergence between his and his servants' reactions was worthy of inclusion in a letter to his sister.

It was poor Flossy's unpleasant duty to give his wife the Doctor's verdict, who in turn at once (against remonstrances) told it all to Tora; who bears the dreadful news well, saying that being a soldier, and a Jap, he has no fear of death.  

Silence went hand-in-hand with painlessness. War deaths by their very nature, challenged the view that people died at a ripe age. Still, patriotism required that they be described as "good" deaths. After making the traditional appeal to national sentiment, the authors of condolence letters reassured the next-of-kin that death was painless. The news that her nephew "was killed instantly...by piece of shrapnel in neck," was meant to console Annie Southcott. Similarly, when R. L. Maitland's son died in the air in the Second World War, an Air Vice-Marshall sent his
personal word of consolation[...]. I am confident that the passing of life in these circumstances is either as instantaneous as the going out of a light or that if injury occurs without unconsciousness, Nature applies an immediate and merciful anaesthetic in the instantaneous onset of shock, dulling, if not completely obliterating the pain element.

Maitland responded that he found the letter "very kind and I might say comforting.

Mayor McGeer's sudden death was more tolerable, the widow learned, because it was "so quick and painless"; "to pass over quietly in sleep is a wonderful way of crossing to the other side." Just as illuminating is a case where death was not quick and painless. Mrs. D. H., prematurely making her husband's funeral arrangements, confided in Reginald Hayward, "I am too fond of him to wish him to stay in the condition he has been since July 4th. That is not life." Perhaps literary and social critic Susan Sontag is wrong in suggesting that "part of the denial of death in this culture is a vast expansion of the category of illness as such." Rather, part of the twentieth century confrontation with mortality was a redefinition of what constituted "good" deaths (and lives).

The second theme in the British Columbian discourse on death is the amplification of what Ann Douglas discovered in her study of nineteenth century American consolation literature: the extension of the sentiments and surroundings of the mourners to encircle the dead. In the twentieth century, the living built upon the metaphor of a home-like heaven. The dead increasingly acquired attributes of the living, and euphemisms for death
mirrored the latters' activities.\(^5\) One common euphemism in British Columbian condolence letters, for example, was to see death as a journey. Reginald Hayward consoled Mrs. G. S. Holt on her father's passing: "We cannot keep our dear ones forever; they must all go on that journey from which no traveller returns."\(^6\) Gladys Mackie, in writing to her mother, referred to her nephew's accidental death: "God bless you Mater dear - and help you soon to see the bright side of this, Peterkins latest adventure."\(^7\) The dead ventured unto a new home, but what did they do there? Many mourners granted them a period of rest, yet some extended the Protestant work ethic to the afterlife. The Rev. George Pringle, thanking Premier Pattullo for the condolence letter sent on his brother's death, predicted, "he's at work somewhere in God's universe."\(^8\) Nor had Gerry McGeer died: "your dear husband is living and loving and working on."\(^9\) Yet if the dead were still alive, they generally did not ( despite the claims of Spiritualists )\(^50\) let anyone know. Rather, the living became their mouthpieces, often making somewhat presumptuous, ventriloqual statements. Not only were the living, by describing the afterlives of the dead, encircling them in a vocabulary of vitality, they inserted this vocabulary into the mouths of the dead. "Don't grieve too deeply," Peter Mackie's grandmother learned, "- he would be so sorry."\(^51\) In describing the death of William John Maitland, F. V. Heakes desired, "if possible, [ to ] be the voice of your son expressing his noble wish that those he loved should not unduly suffer at his passing."\(^52\) Mrs. McGeer was to learn more than
once that "if your husband could have chosen his going for himself he would have chosen the way it happened."53 By usurping the right to speak for the dead, and describing death in increasingly vitalistic phrases, the writers of condolence letters were not denying death, but demonstrating a willingness to confront it, if only in somewhat obscured terms.

Of course, this life-like discourse on death represented an intellectual exercise, one that the writers performed only with a certain degree of difficulty. A third theme, and one that appeared in an infinite number of forms, was the concept that words were an insufficient means of dealing with death. Significantly, the first time such a phrase appears in the condolence letters studied was just after the turn of the century.54 In 1902 Wentworth Bell wrote to his mother upon his father's death, "I wish I could say exactly what I feel, but am afraid I cannot."55 Numerous writers used words to express the belief that "words cannot express my deep sorrow."56 Ella Rowland, using an appropriate medical metaphor, perhaps stated it best to Charlotte McGeer: "Words are a poor medicine with which to express one's feelings at a time of sorrow."57 The protests that words were futile to the contrary, however, this theme does not suggest, as it superficially might seem, that death had become unnamable. For if the writers of condolence letters really believed that words were useless, the letters would be shorter and fewer than they were. Rather, by proclaiming the futility of words, they drew attention to the fact that their reactions to the specific death were much deeper
than anything they could write. They kept their own counsel, refusing to share it with the grief-stricken family. Instead, they internalized their reaction to the death, encircled it in their own vitality, and encased it in their own memory. In so doing, they were undoing, in part, the subversive process that writing condolence letters represented. While condolences apparently established the primacy of the community over the grieving family, by refusing to communicate their innermost feelings and by announcing this failure, the twentieth century authors of condolence letters established the primacy of the individual over both the family and the community.

The reflections of one British Columbian provide an illuminating case study of the implications of this attitude. For Emily Carr, death was not fearful. Rather it was a continuation of life freed from the constraints of earthly and corporal bonds. "Perhaps death is like that, the soul tearing itself free from the body."\(^5\)\(^8\) Death was best, for Carr also, if it was silent and painless. Referring to her sister's last illness, she brooded: "Anything would be better than that slow eating of disease. That is horrible."\(^5\)\(^9\) Thoroughly modern, Emily Carr's view was nonetheless quite conventional. Despite her professed assurances about death, however, one final piece of evidence might shed more light on her rhetoric. In her last picture, *Woo*, finished in the month before her death, Carr depicted her beloved pet monkey with a strikingly sinister and untrusting countenance.\(^6\)\(^0\) This quality was absent from her other paintings. Perhaps, we might speculate, in the face of imminent
death, which her declining health consistently pointed out to her, she was showing signs of wavering faith and fearlessness. Possibly her art reveals the deficiencies of the twentieth century middle class discourse on death; a somewhat impoverished individualism created in part by the obscuring vocabulary failed to respond to the fears of the dying person.

Foucault argues that death had become since the nineteenth century "constitutive of singularity; it is in that perception of death that the individual finds himself." Despite the cultural constructs which societies and individuals establish to come to terms with mortality, the individual must in the end face death alone. Writing about death probably inhibited and replaced the act of confronting it directly.

But death, between 1850 and 1950 in British Columbia has always been namable. From proposing a peaceful, natural and desirable escape from reality, anticipating a future reunion with loved ones, metaphors shifted to emphasize an anaesthetic, silent, vitalistic death, which the individual intellectually faced alone. The middle class commitment to discoursing about mortality increased the responsibility, and most likely the singularity, of the individual in confronting his or her own death.
Notes - Chapter III


2 Cited in McManners, "Death and the French Historians," p. 130.

3 L.-V. Thomas, "La mort et ses issues," Archives de sciences sociales des Religions, 49, 2 ( avril-juin, 1980 ), 179: "On peut se demander si parler de la mort, c'est-à-dire la transformer en objet de discours, ne revient pas, finalement, à empêcher qu'elle ne parle. Et sous prétexte qu'elle ne dit rien ou pas grand-chose, à parler à sa place..."

4 The Hour, pp. 473-4.

5 Western Attitudes, p. 106.

6 McManners, Death and the Enlightenment, pp. 462-3; Aries, The Hour, pp. 609-10.


8 Mme Calnart [ Elisabeth Félice ( Canard ) Bayle-Mouillard], The gentleman's and lady's book of politeness and propriety of deportment, dedicated to the youth of both sexes, trans., ( Boston: Allen and Tickner, 1833 ), p. 213.

9 John H. Young, Our Department or the Manners, Conduct and Dress of the Most Refined Society, ( Detroit: F. B. Dickerson and Co., 1883 ), p. 301.


11 PABC, British Columbia Premier, GR 1222, General Files, box 122, f. 1; box 131, f. 1; box 140, f. 2.

12 PABC, J. T. Marshall Papers, Add. MSS. 321, Dr. G. F. Amyot to J. T. Marshall, Nov. 6, 1939; J. T. Marshall to Dr. H. W. Hill, Nov. 25, 1939, v. 1, f. 5. On the

13 GGM, v. 4-5.

14 Sixty percent of Pattullo's letters commemorated the death of a male. PABC, British Columbia Premier, GR 1222, General Files, box 122, f. 1; box 131, f. 1, box 140, f. 2.


18 PABC, Mackie Family Papers, Add. MSS. 1164, H. Mackie to A. Mackie, April 16, 1918, box 2, f. 4.


20 PABC, Maitland Family Collection, Add. MSS. 781, Anderson to Mr. and Mrs. Maitland, Dec. 21, 1943, box 7, f. 3.


22 Ariès, The Hour, pp. 409-74. Although the terms nineteenth and twentieth centuries will be used to categorize the attitudes discussed here, the break was not, of course, so distinct. It is worth noting that the division can also be seen, in British Columbia, as generational. The nineteenth century attitude reflected the views of the first large group of settlers, such as Charles Hayward, Richard Carr and H. P. P. Crease. Their daughters and sons (as well as the new waves of immigrants) provide examples for the twentieth century: Reginald Hayward, Emily Carr, T. D. Pattullo, Hugh Mackie, and Charlotte McGeer.


"Your dear wife, through faith in her Redeemer, has changed her earthly home for a better - a heavenly one."

26 HF, Hayward to Mr. Haynes, March 16, 1898, v. 4, pp. 412-3.

27 HF, Alice How to Hayward, January 10, 1902, v. 36.

28 Morley, Death, Heaven and the Victorians, pp. 102, 111.


31 HF, Hayward to Mrs. Harries, March 18, 1887, v. 1, p. 2.

32 PABC, Crease Family Papers, Add. MSS. 55, Sarah Crease to John Lindley, January 17, 1864, v. 11, f. 1, pp. 11-17.

33 PABC, Attorney General, GR 431, Inquisitions, Case of Hugh Gillis, v. 1, f. 1872, case 15.


35 HF, Alice How to C. Hayward, January 10, 1902, v. 36; Hayward to Mrs. Ablitt, March 6, 1904, v. 6, p. 156. This latter comment referred to Mrs. Cridge.

36 HF, Glass to Hayward, May 29, 1919, v. 40.


38 HF, Hayward to Mrs. Ablitt, Oct. 18, 1915, v. 9, p. 610.

39 City of Vancouver Archives [hereafter CVA], Southcott Family Papers, Add. MSS. 113, W. H. Hayward, Captain and Paymaster of First Canadian Pioneer Battalion to A. Southcott, Nov. 4, 1916.

40 PABC, Maitland Family Collection, Add. MSS. 781, F. V. Heakes, Air Officer Commanding, Western Air Command to

\[41\] GGM, Mary to McGeer, Aug. 18, 1947, v. 4, f. 3; Nelly Selby to McGeer, Aug. 12, 1947, v. 4, f. 3.

\[42\] HF, Mrs. D. H. to R. Hayward, July 25, 1939, v. 56. In cases where business correspondence with the Haywards was of a decidedly personal nature, only the initials of the correspondent will be used.

\[43\] Illness as Metaphor, p. 55.

\[44\] The Feminization of American Culture, pp. 207-8.

\[45\] Charmaz, Social Reality of Death, p. 79.


\[49\] GGM, Gertrude H. Brick to C. McGeer, Aug. 13, 1947, v. 4, f. 2.

\[50\] Ramsay Cook has recently demonstrated that Spiritualism, in Canada at least, was a not atypical manifestation of modern attitudes towards religion. "Spiritualism, Science of the Earthly Paradise," Canadian Historical Review, 65, 1 (March 1984), 4-27.

\[51\] PABC, Mackie Family Papers, Add. MSS. 1164, Grace Mackie to Annis Mackie, April, 1918, box 2, f. 4.

\[52\] PABC, Maitland Family Papers, Add. MSS. 781, Heakes to R. L. Maitland, Sept. 27, 1944, box 7, f. 4.


55 PABC, Peter Warren Bell Papers, Add. MSS. 661, Bell to Mrs. P. Warren Bell, Feb. 11, 1902, f. 6, p. 28.


57 GGM, Rowland to McGeer, Aug. 12, 1947, v. 4, f.3.


59 Id., Hundreds and Thousands, p. 250.

60 The picture is reproduced in Tippett, Emily Carr, p. 272.

61 Birth of the Clinic, p. 171.
IV. FUNERALS AND CLASS DISTINCTION

One important aspect of the twentieth century discourse on death that the last chapter did not confront is the increasingly vocal criticism of contemporary attitudes towards death. Much of this criticism has focussed on the eccentricities of the North American burial ritual. Jessica Mitford's muckraking exposé, *The American Way of Death*, well illustrates the opaque nature of this debate. For Mitford, contemporary North American funerals are extravagant and meaningless, inventions of the profit-crazed undertaker; the excessively commercialized funeral deserves no place in a rational society.¹

But anthropologists furnish a less contentious view of mortuary practices. Set in a cross-cultural perspective, the American funeral, Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf contend, no longer appears singularly expensive and inscrutable. Rather, the death ritual provides the key to understanding the civil religion which constitutes the "American Way of Life."² Maurice Bloch extends the analysis even further. A study of funerals reveals not only certain structures of a society, it also brings to light a dramatic moment during which these structures are themselves created.³

Pursuing this latter premise, we will argue that in British Columbia between 1850 and 1950, funerals cultivated social
cohesion on a small scale and fostered social distinctions on a larger scale. On one hand the ceremony reinforced individual, family and community ties with the deceased and with each other. On the other the changes in funeral practices over the century represented different attempts at class self-definition. This chapter explores these themes of cohesion and distinction.

The ceremonies surrounding the union of British Columbia and Vancouver Island in 1866 reminded the former governor of a burial rite: "a funeral procession, with minute guns would have been more appropriate to the sad melancholy event." James Douglas' reflections aptly demonstrate the pomp of a nineteenth century funeral. They also illuminate the misplaced nostalgia of twentieth century commentators. "Simplicity to the point of starkness," Mitford supposes,

the plain pine box, the laying out of the dead by friends and family who also bore the coffin to the grave - these were the hallmarks of the traditional funeral until the end of the nineteenth century.  

Although it has, indeed, become a modern tradition to refer to such a funeral, historians of the period assert that such starkness was not a hallmark of the nineteenth century ceremony. Rather, the Victorian mortuary ritual often entailed a degree of extravagance and ostentation which would make today's funeral directors envious. In British Columbia the situation was complex; nineteenth century funerals juxtaposed simplicity and extravagance.
One of the earliest funeral accounts still extant is that of Cecilia Helmcken. She was buried in 1865 by Richard Lewis. Advertising "Mahogany and Lead Coffins, English and American Trimmings, constantly on hand," Lewis acted, apparently, as a part-time undertaker, being listed in an 1868 city directory as an architect, and in 1871 as a City Councilman, undertaker and builder. At a time when colonial estimates provided a $700 yearly salary for firemen working on government dredging contracts, and the Clerk of the Land Office earned $1000 (to take only two examples), Lewis conducted Mrs. Helmcken's funeral for the rather large sum of $187. The burial of her infant son, who succumbed a few weeks later, as well as the reinterment in the brick vault of two children who had predeceased her, added a further $52.50 to the bill.

Similarly, when Governor Frederick Seymour died in 1869, the purchase of "yards of black crape, black velvet, glazed calico and black ribbon" enriched his funeral and many merchants of Victoria. One young boy, at least, enjoyed the pageantry of burial ceremonies. Thinking back on his youth in Victoria, Edgar Fawcett wrote

I had a great weakness for funerals, and living only a block from Quadra Street, I attended scores in my day. I naturally liked the naval funerals best, for there were soldiers and sailors, and bands of music, with three volleys over the grave, so I missed few. 11

In her recollections of the lugubrious funerals of early Victoria, Emily Carr remembered those directed by Charles Hayward, a competitor of Richard Lewis.
Hayward's hearse had six enormous black plumes waving over the top of it. They swayed and writhed and were considered most dignified and in very good taste...Crêpe streamed from the hats of the undertaker, the driver, the widows' bonnets, the carriage whips and the knobs of the house doors where death waited for the hearse...Funerals were made as slow and nodding and mournful as possible.  

The Victorian funeral, at least for those who had access to or who could afford an undertaker, unfolded in ostentatious blackness and languor.

Yet not all the early settlers of British Columbia were able to indulge in the expense of such prominent ceremonies. Death often occurred far from the purview of family and undertakers. Funerals in such instances closely resembled Mitford's "traditional" burials. Informing James Douglas of Chief Trader Paul Fraser's accidental death in 1855, Donald Manson promised, "I shall see the body interred and arranged as well as our means admit." A journalist has subsequently suggested that their means permitted little ceremony; Fraser "was buried without even a rough box, without candle, book or bell, and not very deep, due to the nature of the terrain." Likewise, when a group of travellers making their way overland to British Columbia from the Canadian colonies in 1862 lost one of their company to the hardships of the voyage, they buried him in a small canoe. On Archibald Napier's death at Bella Coola in 1875, George Pierce, apparently the nearest white man, took charge of the former's burial, assuring the coroner that he had a coffin made for the deceased. In these cases, the whites closest to the deceased in a geographical rather than a
sentimental sense oversaw the last rites, constructing a makeshift coffin and conducting the impromptu interment.

Such simplicity was a hallmark only of certain British Columbian funerals. The distinctions lay largely between urban centres and sparsely settled regions. Wealth and class may have also been significant factors, but here the documentation is scant. Carr reports the case of Lean and Fat O'Flahty, who were able to engage someone's services to embalm their mother's corpse, but who then themselves had to look after transporting the coffin to the wharf. The respects they were able to pay their mother allowed none of the pomp of other nineteenth century funerals. Other early urban funerals, if this case is at all indicative, probably reflected larger social distinctions of wealth and class.

While demonstrating social distinctions, simple and extravagant funerals also promoted social cohesion. The improvised burial ceremonies of isolated regions reaffirmed links between the whites who oversaw preparations. From testimony at the inquest into Archibald Napier's death, it appears that there was a large contingent of Indians present in Napier's house. Pierce's haste in obtaining a coffin must betray, consequently, a desire to ensure a Western burial for Napier and thus express unwavering solidarity among the white population. Similarly, at the costly funeral, the gathering of the mourners at the deceased's residence and the procession to the cemetery demonstrated cohesion in the family and the community. Carr recounted that
every friend of the dead who owned a chaise or buggy and some hired hacks joined in the procession. Nobody thought of crossing the path of a funeral; people stood holding their hats in their hands with heads bowed patiently until the procession had passed.  

In nineteenth century funerals, dark colours, silence and slowness served to focus the attention of the larger population on the death of an individual. Death occasioned one of the few moments during which members of the community were able to affirm the social order which encompassed them all. The mourners expressed their links not only with the deceased, but also through him or her with one another.

By the 1880s, the North American funeral was undergoing change. In this period Mitford's and Farrell's "American Way of Death" began to take shape. Mitford, as we have seen, imputes blame for the innovations to the undertaking profession. Farrell is more comprehensive, censoring an entire middle class mentality for the new directions.

Central to the changes was the creation of a profession of funeral directors. When undertakers, in addition to supplying commodities, began to offer a large range of services, they established, Farrell argues, an authoritative control over death rites. Organizing themselves into professional associations, they attempted to protect and improve their profitable position.

Charles Hayward, whose extensive business records allow us to use his company to trace the outlines of the funeral industry
in British Columbia, first opened up a business in Victoria as a building contractor. His carpenters manufactured coffins according to demand, but the demand apparently remained small until the 1880s. In 1888, Hayward informed his sister that he had resolved to dispose of his sash and door manufacturing sidelines in order to devote his time to undertaking and contracting. In doing so, he followed a route blazed by many American undertakers; indeed, his earliest ties were with the business in the United States. In 1889, he attended a convention in Portland of the Northwest Funeral Directors Association. He imported much of his merchandise from the Oregon Casket Company, and corresponded with it when he wished to ensure that his concern remained "up to date."

By the twentieth century, however, the British Columbia Funeral Company (as Hayward christened it in 1916) purchased more and more of its goods from Canadian, often Vancouver based, suppliers. Hayward's letters reflected an increasing distance between Canadian and American materials and methods. He explained in 1914 that

our American cousins go in for elaborate expensive funeral cars, costing many thousand dollars, but our community do not as yet take kindly to the idea, for which we are thankful.

Reginald Hayward, by the time that he took over his father's firm, had acquired similar attitudes. Always mindful of the possibility of public criticism, he responded quickly to the "sharp practices" of certain American companies. When an El Paso funeral home sent a bill exceeding a quoted price, Hayward
scolded, "Funeral Directors in this part of the Country do not tolerate this kind of thing."  

Another way in which British Columbian funeral directors differed from their American colleagues was their lack of success in establishing a common front. During the period under study no government control regulated the establishment of undertaking concerns.  

In 1911, the first provincial association formed to demand official recognition, and subsequent attempts followed in the early 1920s, the late 1920s and the early 1940s. Despite one funeral director's dire warnings that "there are many matters of grave importance to us all which should be brought to the attention of the proper authorities," the industry proved unsuccessful in pressing its demands. A desire to restrict competition probably accounted in part for these persistent attempts. No less important, however, was the desire to obtain official acknowledgement of professional, and consequently middle class, status.  

By 1917, the term "mortician" was spreading throughout North America, undoubtedly because it "sounds a bit like physician." But even the funeral directors' endeavours to identify themselves with those paragons of middle class values, doctors and priests, likely had little conclusive effect. "There is, perhaps," the undertakers assured themselves in 1911, "no profession, after that of the sacred ministry, in which high mortality is more imperatively necessary than that of the Funeral Directors."  

Likewise, in 1944, when labour leaders were threatening to organize workers in funeral homes, Reginald
Hayward complained that "they seem to forget that this profession is similar, in a way, to the medical profession." He based this rather suspect conclusion on the premise that "you cannot set the time of death." This deployment of suspicious analogies further demonstrated the undertakers' desire to establish a protected niche in bourgeois society.

In this way, the funeral director dealt in illusions, both for his own benefit and for the sake of the client. The rest of this chapter examines these latter dissemblances. Here it suffices to point out some implications for the undertaker himself of his trade in illusions. In the final analysis, the term "funeral director" described better than any other the undertaker's function. "In his role as stage manager," Farrell suggests, "the American mortician directed a drama which contrived a catharsis of death." Still, the undertaker was also an actor on his own stage. The façades he promoted relied on the client's participation. The drama would fall apart if the bereaved failed to express their approval or if they brought attention to oversights. "I want to thank you," a not atypical letter stated, "for the quiet and orderly way in which the funeral of my dear young husband was conducted." More instructive are the instances when some aspect went astray. When water was found in the shipping case of a casket sent by a colleague to Victoria, R. Hayward proffered an explanation. "I don't think he [the client] swallowed that," Hayward related, "but I am positive he will never say anything to Mrs. L. about it." The client's realization of the falseness of an illusion
was not as great a source of fear as his or her verbalization of that deceit. Writing to another associate, Hayward reassured him that although the embalming operation had not been entirely successful, "we have heard of no complaint from anybody and that is the main thing."  

The funeral represented a consensual drama, in which the acceptance of certain façades was most important. For funeral directors, middle class status was the paramount fiction; for the clients, it was a forced appearance of naturalness and quietness.

A highly unnatural way of achieving naturalness lay in the chemical treatment of the corpse. Farrell traces the modern popularity of embalming back to the American Civil War, when entrepreneurs preserved thousands of soldiers' bodies in order to send them home for burial. If post-mortem mobility soon legally required embalming, the procedure also became common in local funerals. Hayward's earliest company records indicate that he was already embalming in 1887. Yet embalming, which found its strongest supporters among the middle class, did not gain instantaneous acceptance. "It is a pity," Charles Hayward grumbled in 1893, "that so much prejudice and misconception exist in the minds of the general public with regard to embalming."

Before long, however, the prejudices evaporated. As the funeral accounts of R. H. Dwyer's Kamloops based operations demonstrate, the large majority of adult corpses were embalmed by the 1920s. [ See Figure III ] In Victoria, the small number

Note: Cases per year range between 18 and 49.
of requests after 1920 to forego embalming were, if not altogether ignored, at least quickly forgotten.\textsuperscript{2} Even the nature-loving Emily Carr reflected a dislike for the process of biological decay. Describing her sister's corpse, she wrote,

\textit{It was like being introduced to a new Lizzie, this radiant person in the coffin...I want always to remember Lizzie's coffin face. It was so completely satisfied.}\textsuperscript{3}

Others of Hayward's customers did not hesitate to compliment the embalmers on their handiwork. "The peace on the face of my late husband as he rested in his casket," wrote Mrs. M. E. R., "gave us strength."\textsuperscript{4} Likewise, funeral directors praised or chided each other on their degree of preservative dexterity. When embalming did not work, dire consequences might arise. McKague's Ltd. of Saskatoon criticized the B. C. Funeral Co.,

\textit{As we were unable to say anything good about the case we were certainly not going to say anything otherwise but the family saw the case here and it is they who have made the objections to their solicitor.}\textsuperscript{5}

Desired by the client, preservation of the corpse was no less important to the funeral director. Indeed, by the 1920s, any claim to a professional mortician's status required embalming skills. "Whidden of Duncan is no Undertaker," Reginald Hayward commented, "he only sells caskets and conducts funerals."\textsuperscript{6}

Embalming, consequently, represented both for the undertaker and the client, a central facet of the twentieth century burial rite. Extending this analysis, as some have done, and suggesting that the widespread acceptance of embalming
indicates a desire to deny death,\textsuperscript{47} has however some unlikely implications. As Huntington and Metcalf query,

\begin{quote}
If Americans really associated preservation of the corpse with perpetuation of life, would there not be a demand for true mummification, as there was in ancient Egypt? \textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

Embalming served only to create a life-like appearance for the corpse until such time as the mourners might arrange the funeral and interment. It represented no more or less that the creation of an illusion, an illusion which aided the bereaved to commit a peaceful prototype of the deceased to the graveyard of their memories.

If embalming was the premise to the funeral director's argument for professional and bourgeois status, the sale of containers for the dead body provided his profits. Originally the coffin, whose tapered form stressed the fact that a human body lay inside, was the most common receptacle. Despite some variations of style and price in coffins, the undertaker's fortunes, Farrell suggests, awaited the introduction of the casket. Rectangular, mass-produced caskets "differed from coffins in richness and ostentation, in shape, in name, and in purpose."\textsuperscript{49} Like the practice of embalming, their acceptance in Victoria was not immediate. Asked in 1890 whether the market justified the local manufacture of casket, Charles Hayward responded in the negative. Only the upper classes bought the containers.
The use of caskets is strictly limited in this place to the best funerals, the balance being hand made coffins, covered with black cloth and which we all make up.  

Not all bourgeois burials enjoyed the presence of a casket. The businessman Richard Carr, for example, was interred in a coffin in 1888. Nonetheless, by the time R. H. Dwyer began furnishing funeral goods in the Kamloops area in 1917, he referred invariably to caskets.

Purporting to protect the earthly remains of the deceased from the elements, the casket achieved widespread popularity in the twentieth century. Indeed, clients often sought this illusion of protection. Monica Storrs, a lay missionary in the Peace River district in the late 1920s, reports the time she "had been commissioned by Mrs. Foster to buy something to cover [her son's] coffin because she hated the thought of its rough unstained boards." At least one client of the Haywards saw the outer box maintaining the shape of the freshly dug grave as a functional extension of the casket. W. G. wrote to ascertain if the box's lid had been placed in her friend's grave after the funeral. Assured that it was, she replied, "It is some comfort to know that...the casket would have more protection."

Relatives received a rude shock in 1922 when they discovered that a Maxwell Steel Vault which promised perpetual protection for the deceased had not fulfilled its guarantee: "Besides being full of water, the top of the vault was very badly dented in." The funeral industry promoted illusions of preservation, and a wide range of illusions was available. "An undertaker's
account," Reginald Hayward informed more than one prospective client, "depends almost entirely upon the class of casket selected which varies to almost any extent." With the Canadian industry admitting to a four-fold mark-up on caskets in 1951, the source of the funeral director's profits was easily discernable.

By the 1910s British Columbian funeral directors were divising other means of ensuring their profit margins and professional status. The erection of funeral parlors confirmed their authority over the burial rite. Whereas the deceased was previously returned after embalming to the residence from which the funeral would take place, now the mortician provided quarters for the deceased and his or her visitors. The construction of parlors permitted a more material expression of the undertaker's presence. When Charles Hayward decided in favour of a parlor in the 1910s, he examined plans for other establishments throughout North America. One Toronto building, he noted, "left a favorable impression, having something of a Church-like appearance." New premises, Hayward thought, might favour the professional façade.

But a parlor did more than assuage the para-religious pretensions of the mortician; it also provided a house-like atmosphere for the funeral. When R. H. Dwyer built his parlor in Kamloops in 1917, a local newspaper reported that, "In opening the new building he has provided accommodation that relieves one from unnecessary evidence of the business."
Vancouver's T. Edwards Company, in a brochure featuring their memorial chapel, promised that "Absolute privacy is afforded the family." In a like vein, Reginald Hayward, asked in 1943 why Mrs. W.'s corpse did not go immediately to the crematorium after the funeral service, explained that the crematorium had been busy that day. Consequently, he related,

we felt it would be nicer for Mrs. W. to lie here overnight, where we have a night staff on the premises, and she would not be left alone, rather than take her to Royal Oak [Crematorium] and leave her locked up alone all night.

The private and familial illusions that the parlors promoted probably constituted their strongest selling point.

Although parlors respected and reinforced the privacy of the deceased's family, there was no doubt as to who controlled the establishment. When Mrs. McN. could not disguise her grief at Hayward's parlors in 1925, her companions turned to the undertaker's authority. "Your friends," Reginald Hayward later explained, "thinking you would collapse quietly asked me to try and get you to go home." Emily and Alice Carr fell prey to the same control when they attempted to visit their sister's remains at "those loathsome parlors:"

She was not ready. Another service was being held in the chapel. A hard-voiced, rouge-lipped, noisy woman was in the office where we sat waiting. She took the nightdress and stockings in a cold, callous way and said, 'You can sit in the office and wait.'

But Carr was not content to confide her displeasure to her journal. Breaking a family tradition, she defied Hayward's
authority and instructed that her remains be interred by the McCall Brothers Floral Chapel.  

The largest long-term challenge to the undertaking industry was the increasing popularity of cremation. Sanitation, scientism, and savings were the keywords of the cremation movement in Great Britain. Economic excuses, however, were never paramount in British Columbia. Given the limited number of crematoria, most bodies were still embalmed and placed in caskets before being sent to the nearest establishment. Indeed, for a long time, cremation was seen as complementary to the traditional ceremony rather than opposed to it.

At first cremations took place only among an elite group. The poet and government functionary Charles Mair, for instance, instructed Reginald Hayward in 1917 to see to his cremation. Similarly, when ex-premier Sir Richard McBride died in London in the same year, his corpse was cremated and the ashes shipped back to Victoria for burial. Although the body could have been embalmed for shipment, R. F. Green noted somewhat grudgingly that he regarded the course of action "a very sensible idea under the circumstances." Not everyone accepted the practice. Mrs. M. R. confided that "my husband's people are annoyed I believe at the cremation but it was Tommy's last wish." Yet the increasing number of correspondents requesting information from Hayward concerning cremation testified to a rise in popularity throughout the latter part of the period. In fact, although the Secretary of the Cremation Society in London still
spoke in 1952 of "very little success" in some facets of the movement in British Columbia, in the same year 1630 bodies, comprising 13.5 percent of all burials, were cremated. Like other aspects of the funeral business, cremation relied on a number of illusions. Mr. Angus returned to Hayward's parlors in 1934 after a visit to the Vancouver Cremation Society declaring himself (somewhat ambiguously) "off the idea for life." Having witnessed the crushing of bones into small fragments, Angus realized that the term "ashes" did not accurately describe the residue of cremation. Previously, Reginald Hayward had suggested that the Society insulate urns with cotton batting so as to muffle the rattling of the crushed bone, which "causes a very gruesome sound when we hand it over to relatives." Cremation depended on the false impression that it created an amorphous amount of ashes.

The one dangerous illusion that the method fostered, as far as funeral directors were concerned at least, was the belief that the act of cremating a corpse released the bereaved from attending to it any further. Reginald Hayward found it necessary to remind numerous clients that he had in storage the ashes of a loved one and was awaiting instructions regarding disposition. Mrs. J. W. admitted to him that, "on June 20, 1929 my dear Husband was cremated by you people and at that time I was so upset I did not have the thought what to do with his ashes." For the unhappy funeral director who housed Mr. W.'s ashes for six years, reminding clients that cremation was not the final word on a death was becoming a relatively common task.
Hayward undoubtedly realized that such disinterest marked a distinct lack of concern for the earthly remains of the dead, a trend which potentially threatened both his profits and his line of business.

But such challenges awaited the future. During the period under examination, British Columbians shared a funeral rite not much different from that prevailing in the rest of North America. Funeral expenditures in the province, however, if we are to accept criticism of expenses elsewhere as being accurate, followed a rather singular evolution. Taking the financial records of R. H. Dwyer's funeral home in Kamloops as roughly indicative, we see that the average expenditure on funerals did not increase dramatically between 1920 and 1945. [See Figure IV] At no time did the average cost exceed $170. In 1948, a journalist complained in the *Canadian Forum* that, "The general price for a funeral is between three hundred fifty and four hundred dollars." Perhaps British Columbians were leading the country in their attitudes towards burial costs.

As we have seen, most changes in funeral customs arose out of a middle class mentality. It should not be surprising, then, to find that class distinctions in terms of expenditures had become vague by the 1920s. Indeed, sociologists studying a small American town in the 1960s found a similar ambiguity among class-differentiated expenses. In Kamloops, for two four-year periods in the 1920s, the lower status group paid a greater average amount than the upper status group. The situation was
Note: Cases per period range between 54 and 81.
reversed in later periods. [See Table III] Furthermore, although the smallest bills usually implied burial among the lower status group, for the highest priced funerals the case was not so clear. Of the nineteen accounts between 1923 and 1945 equal to or surpassing $300, ten were for lower status funerals. Apparently bourgeois citizens of Kamloops, unlike their Victorian predecessors, had decided that financial solvency was not to be the distinguishing criterion for modern funerals.

In 1913, in a move destined to frighten morticians throughout the province, the United Undertakers Ltd. had criticized the high cost of funerals in an advertisement which appeared in the Vancouver Province: "Death is solemn and impressive," the company intoned, "but its impressiveness is not added to by extravagance." Not alone in her wish in 1937, Mrs. D. H., in arranging her husband's funeral prior to his death, instructed Hayward that, "We neither of us believe in 'ornate' or 'showy' funerals, so be as simple as possible." Long before social critics like Jessica Mitford took up the cause, the British Columbian middle class had redefined the funeral as an "unextravagant" event. Indeed, Mitford's exposé probably fits quite well with the redefinition among the middle class throughout North America.

The evolution of pauper burials provides further evidence of the recasting of attitudes towards funerals. As anthropologist René Girard demonstrates, social groups can only achieve self-affirmation by expelling others. In their construction of their own burial rites, bourgeois British
Table III - Average Funeral Expenditures by Status Groups for four-year periods, R. H. Dwyer's Funeral House, Kamloops, 1923-1945

<table>
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<th>PERIOD</th>
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<th>AVERAGE COST</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
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<td>$178.52</td>
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<td>1931-34</td>
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<td>$174.98</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>1942-45</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>$182.07</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>$157.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Financial records of Dwyer's Funeral House; Kamloops newspapers; Wrigley's British Columbia Directories.
Columbians also created a separate ceremony for paupers. Describing one case in 1888, Charles Hayward deplored, "the commonest shell, hurried to the cemetery in a wagon...and without the least form of burial service." Mrs. O. A. Craig also discovered to her shock and grief of what a pauper burial consisted. Having located her son's grave in 1924, she had his body exhumed.

The box my sons remains was placed in was all broken in on the top, no lining on the inside of the box, no rough box on the outside, and no robe, nothing but his underwear [sic], on. She found little solace in the assurance that "they were all buried in that condition."

While, as we have seen, the terminology of caskets and coffins had ceased to distinguish upper class burials by the 1910s, for paupers the differences persisted. The City of Vancouver's agreement in 1916 on charity funerals with the firm of Center and Hanna prescribed a "coffin [with] four handles and furnishing suitable for burial of pauper dead." In 1929, Victoria's funeral directors colluded to criticize the city council's by-law which provided only "a decent coffin" and "sometimes the preservation" of the remains.

By 1944, however, the same group complimented the City Welfare Department for its generosity: "A good funeral is given, and the City cannot be reproached for the way they bury their indigent dead." Although the same might not be said of other cities, Victoria apparently accentuated less strongly the distinction between pauper and non-pauper funerals by the 1940s.
It is, of course, no coincidence that more should be spent on pauper funerals at the same time that middle class mourners were increasingly stressing the simplicity of their burial rite. The distinctions that wealth had once afforded had given way to new, intellectual ones.

As the previous chapter showed, middle class British Columbians writing about death expressed their attitudes in increasingly vitalistic terms. The illusions of the funeral ceremony showed a similar evolution. The deception Reginald Hayward promoted in 1943 is indicative.

We got for your mother the nicest flannelette nightgown we could procure which looked well on her giving her the appearance of restfully sleeping in her casket. 86

By accepting the authority of the funeral director, the bereaved relegated their well-preserved loved ones to bed-shaped caskets which resided in hotel-like accommodations. The myth of peaceful sleep was indeed paramount, but this fact does not necessarily warrant the vituperative attacks made on it. For as Christopher Crocker notes, to employ metaphors of sleep in reference to the dead imbues them with a special kind of life. 87 Obscuring the death of the deceased conveniently hastened their entry into the perpetual life afforded by individual memory. Mitford is not incorrect in accusing the North American funeral director of wanting to transform "a common corpse into a Beautiful Memory Picture." 88 But it would be naive to believe
that only undertakers understood themselves as creators of illusions. Their purpose was to remove obstacles to the deceased's entry into the memory of the mourners. As S. C. Humphreys argues, "the attempt to avoid or deny the existence of death by no means implies a lack of concern with the dead."^89

Obscuring the realities of death did, however, imply a growing lack of concern with the physical remains. Hence, in British Columbia, cremation was increasingly popular by 1950. With the corpse safely out of sight or the natural processes of decay disguised, death was becoming an intellectual exercise in which the memory carried the deceased into a new life. Mourners now reacted to death in individualistic terms; the social ties formerly expressed by and through burial rites developed into an intellectual, internal cohesion which the mourner shared only with the deceased.

This individualism was part and parcel of the bourgeois innovations in funeral practices. Foucault has argued that the nineteenth century middle class attitude towards sexuality "has to be seen as the self-affirmation of one class rather than the enslavement of another."^90 Like the funeral directors searching for professional and middle class status, the British Columbian bourgeoisie defined and contrived its distinctiveness, in part, through its mortuary practices. Where wealth and regional distinctions and community cohesion marked the early funerals in the province, individual intellectual cohesiveness and collective middle class distinctiveness were the hallmarks of the twentieth century British Columbian funeral.
Notes Chapter iv

1 American Way of Death. From her reading of one Canadian trade journal, Mitford suggests that Canadian practices are the same as those south of the border, p. 66. In an action which probably says as much of Canadian attitudes towards reform as of the problems in the funeral industry, McClelland and Stewart commissioned a funeral director to write a Canadian version of Mitford's book. "Coriolus," Death, Here is Thy Sting, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967). "Coriolus" is, perhaps to no one's surprise, much less harsh than Mitford on the embattled undertaker. He argues for internal reform to stave off the ultimate affront, a socialized funeral industry ('Morticare'), p. 113.


4 Cited in Ormsby, British Columbia, p. 219.

5 American Way of Death, p. 17.


7 British Columbia and Victoria Directories, (Victoria: 1868 and 1871).

8 Victoria British Colonist, Feb. 1, 1865.


10 Ormsby, British Columbia, p. 229.


12 The Book of Small, p. 114.

13 PABC, Paul Fraser, Miscellaneous material relating to, M/F 862, Manson to Douglas, July 29, 1855.


16 PABC, *British Columbia Attorney General, GR 431, Inquisitions, Case of Archibald Napier, v. 1, f. 1875, case 48.*

17 *The Book of Small*, p. 129.

18 Ibid., p. 114.


21 Ibid., pp. 147-9.

22 HF, Charles' son Reginald described his father's early years of business in letters to the Canadian Funeral Service, April 21, 1936, v. 53 and to Howard Buswell, Feb. 1, 1946, v. 62.


26 HF, Hayward to Mrs. Ablitt, Mar. 18, 1914, v. 9, p. 305.

27 HF, Reginald Hayward to Peak-Hagedon Funeral Home, April 21, 1925, v. 27, p. 237; also R. Hayward to Butterworth and Sons, Seattle, Sept. 27, 1917, v. 18, p. 76.


32 HF, Hayward to F. J. Harding, Secretary, B. C. Society of Morticians, Nov. 1, 1944, v. 61.


37 HF, R. Hayward to J. K. Brenner, July 1, 1930, v. 33, p. 278.


41 *Victoria Daily Colonist*, Oct. 29, 1893, p. 6


43 *Hundreds and Thousands*, pp. 252-3. But compare a younger, more organic, Carr who declared to shock her acquaintances, "Good decent corpses for me, Miss Green, worms wriggling in and out, hurrying the disagreeables back to dust, renewing good mother earth." *Growing Pains*, p. 93.


48 *Celebrations of Death*, p. 195.

49 *Inventing the American Way*, p. 169.
HF, Hayward to Thomas Semmens, Apr. 14, 1890, v. 2, p. 81.


UBCSC, Financial Records of Dwyer's Funeral Home, Kamloops, A x A 1/1, [ hereafter DFH ], Funeral accounts.


HF, W. G. to B. C. Funeral Co., June 12, 1936, v. 53.


HF, Hayward to D. B. K., April 30, 1908, v. 12, p. 43.

Eric Cecil Morris, "They serve the living," Canadian Business, 24, 5 ( May, 1951 ), p. 53. The figures are for the industry in central Canada. The mark-up in the United States, the article reports, was generally five-fold.


Kamloops Standard-Sentinel, April 17, 1917, p. 10.

T. Edwards Co., "View of Our Memorial Chapel," (n.p.: n.d.) [CVA]. Reginald Hayward advertised in the Victoria Daily Times of Jan. 21, 1932 that "A new modern mourners room has been added for the use of bereaved families who can now, if desired, enter and depart from funeral services, privately, without contact with the congregation." HF, v. 34, p. 133.


HF, Hayward to Mrs. McN., Mar. 7, 1925, v. 27, p. 204.

Hundreds and Thousands, pp. 252, 250-1.

HF, Rev. Donald Gordon to R. Hayward, Mar. 16, 1945, v. 61; Tippett, Emily Carr, p. 277.

Albert Freeman, Crematoria in Great Britain and Beyond,
Funerals for children under ten years of age were not included in the Kamloops sample. Only complete funerals, that is ceremonies in which Dwyer supplied the casket and performed the interment, are included. No instances where the corpse was shipped to or from Kamloops were retained.


The occupations found either in published obituaries or in the provincial Directories were classified according to the criteria of T. Hershberg and R. Dockhorn, "Occupational Classification," Historical Methods Newsletter, 9, 2 and 3 (March-June, 1976), 59-98 and R. Hauser, "Occupational Status in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," Historical Methods, 15, 3 (summer, 1982), 111-126. Status rankings one and two are considered 'upper status' and include such occupations as doctor, rancher, businessman and clerk; rankings three to five are 'lower status' and include construction workers, janitors, brakemen and teamsters.

Vancouver Province, Aug. 27, 1913, p. 17.


80 HF, Hayward to J. S Yates, Hon. Secretary, Royal Hospital, July 3, 1888, v. 1, pp. 260-1.

81 PABC, British Columbia Attorney General, GR 1323, Correspondence Series, Mrs. Craig to Attorney General, April 22, 1924, f. G-96-1.

82 CVA, Vancouver Health Department, 103 B 1, Operational Files, Memorandum of Agreement, March 6, 1916.

83 HF, Reginald Hayward and other funeral directors to mayor and members of Finance Committee, Aug. 10, 1929, v. 33, p. 50.

84 HF, B. C. Funeral Co. and other Victoria funeral homes to E. G. Snowden, Administrator, City Welfare Department, April 5, 1944, v. 61.

85 Reginald Hayward wrote to Simmons and McBride in 1943: "Over here Vancouver is often mentioned among the Funeral Directors, as the City which really buries its poor as a full fledged pauper...The days should have passed long ago when Municipalities do little more than bury their poor like animals." HF, Nov. 19, 1943, v. 61.

86 HF, Hayward to Miss P. W., Nov. 24, 1943, v. 59.


88 American Way of Death, p. 66.


John McMillan died in 1895 in Wellington. The tombstone his family erected over his grave aptly reflected many aspects of nineteenth century attitudes towards death.

Another link is broken
In our household bond
But a chain is forming
In a better land.¹

Death, for McMillan's mourners, emphasized both escape and reunion; in providing the key to heaven, it was also desirable. The monument also stressed the familial nature of grief. Ariès argues that, in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries, a family centred "cult of the dead" inspired changes in burial grounds throughout the Western world. For the middle class reformers who established them, the new, pastoral cemeteries represented "places to visit where relatives and friends liked to gather around the graves of their dead."²

In the twentieth century, however, both cemeteries and the monuments which populated them lost their pastoral charms and became increasingly invisible. This change revealed the extent to which the memory had replaced the graveyard as the final resting place for the dead loved ones. The shifting themes of cohesion and distinction that a study of British Columbian
funerals demonstrates also documented themselves in the evolution of mortuary landscapes between 1850 and 1950.

The early white settlers of British Columbia undoubtedly brought with them recollections of how their home societies disposed of their dead. Dr. Helmcken recorded in his memoirs the uneasy feelings he entertained during his explorations of the burial vaults of his parish church in London. Relatively common up to the early nineteenth century, such burials were generally reserved for persons of status and wealth. Others had to content themselves with less distinguished resting places. Entrapped within the confines of burgeoning metropoles, churchyards and graveyards, often no more than mass burial pits, bequeathed memories of miasmatic vapours and exposed rotting remains. Reformers invoked sanitary and sentimental justifications to close the old burial grounds and open new garden-like cemeteries outside of urban areas.

A similar underlying current of pragmatic naturalism may also have influenced some early British Columbian burials. In isolated areas, or among specific groups in society, in fact, the dead were not even interred in graveyards. Helmcken buried two of his infants in his own garden, transferring them to a cemetery only on the death of their mother. Travellers to the interior of the province thought it noteworthy, but not shocking, to find graves alongside the trails they were following. As late as 1892, Charles Mair employed his poetic licence to express his enthusiasm over the lack of a graveyard
near Kelowna:

Everybody dies a natural death, and people are buried in their backyards, or under their favorite fruit trees. It is perfectly delightful. 

Such were the haphazard borrowings from North American and European influences that a student of rural graveyards exclaimed that, in comparison to Ontario's burial grounds, "it is not so easy to stereotype the British Columbian cemetery." Nonetheless, in the urban areas of the province, the evolution of cemeteries traced a similar course to the trends in other parts of the Western world.

The nineteenth century garden cemetery was, in David Stannard's words, "the refuge of the psychologically overburdened family." Through its contrived isolation, peacefulness and beauty, the new burial grounds both expressed cohesion between the communities of the living and the dead and exalted the immutability of the family's solidarity. Thus, when Lady Franklin visited Victoria in 1861, Alexander Grant Dallas, a director of the Hudson's Bay Company, took her to the local graveyard one Sunday after church. It was a matter of civic pride as well as pious familial grief to show the distinguished traveller his child's tomb. Indeed, in the early years of settlement, there was a great deal of public discussion about the form of the new civic cemeteries.

British Columbian communities reached agreement that burial grounds should be distinct and isolated from the living. In recommending the approval of the Anglican Bishop's plan for New
Westminster, Colonel R. C. Moody wrote to Governor James Douglas that "His Lordship impressed upon me the immediate necessity of a Burial Ground outside the limits of the City." Likewise, when B. P. Pearse judged the viability of various sites in Victoria, he stated that "nearly all of these lots would be suitable for a Cemetery, being well away from the City..." As a result, when Victoria established Ross Bay Cemetery in 1872 and Vancouver created Mountain View in 1887, both sites were quite distant from populated areas. Civic officials were only reflecting the accepted notions that cemeteries offered a menace to the public health. A petition for the closure of the small graveyard established by the Hudson's Bay Company in Victoria in 1848, cited the facts that

remains partially exposed are exceedingly offensive to the passers by and to persons residing and holding property in the neighbourhood...these remains becoming more and more decomposed in the heat of summer increase are likely to infect the air, produce malaria, and breed disease. 

As late as 1895, Nanaimo's Board of Cemetery Trustees considered closing the Old Cemetery because a public health official warned of the dangers of infection. Concerns for the living, rather than the dead, resulted in the isolated location of cemeteries. But this did not mean that the living were unconcerned about the dead.

Rather, in cemeteries, British Columbians established cities for the dead which mirrored in many ways the communities of the living. The burial grounds, the middle class proponents
of the movement argued, should stress the overall unity of the community. "The lines of demarcation between separate portions," H. P. P. Crease stated, "should not be such as to prevent the Cemetery being laid out as a whole." Furthermore, public interest had a great deal to do with the shape the graveyards took. "I felt impressed today with the importance of doing something to improve our public Cemetery which is in a disgraceful condition," Rev. Edward White recorded in his diary in 1867 in New Westminster, "went to the president of the Council and something may be done." In Victoria in 1868 a public committee proposed draining the Quadra Street Cemetery, constructing walks and planting it with ornamental trees and shrubs. By creating gardens out of burial grounds, the dead were being rendered, despite their distance, accessible to the living. In doing so, cemetery committees stressed the links between the living and the dead, and to a certain extent the cohesion of the community itself. But in a more striking sense, the nineteenth century cemeteries stressed the cohesiveness of the nuclear family. Early photographs of Ross Bay Cemetery illustrate the point. Virtually all the graves were enclosed by some form of fence, iron railing or concrete curbing which carried into the necropolis ideals of privacy and property. The early British Columbian cemeteries with their emphasis on the family, on peacefulness and beauty, and on the idea of an escape for the dead from the urban sprawl of the young cities and their promise of a reunion in fenced private plots reflected many aspects of nineteenth century attitudes towards death.
In the face of rapid urban growth in Victoria and Vancouver, the isolated nature of the cemeteries was soon lost. As old sites filled up, debates over the creation of new burial grounds revealed that in the twentieth century, attitudes towards cemeteries were changing. Where once cemeteries had been a source of civic pride, many now saw them as a direct challenge to suburban self-esteem. Vancouver overcame the problems of overcrowding in Mountain View by expanding the original site. In 1920, the South Vancouver Board of Trade complained to its Member of Parliament, "We have no ambition or desire to become a City of the 'dead.'”

Another petition in 1935 to the city's mayor stated the problem more clearly.

South Vancouver should be entitled to as good a class of home as the Point Grey district, but on account of this Necropolis, (City of the dead), the district is ruined. (Why should the dead reduce the value of our homes?)

The reference to Point Grey is appropriate since only nine years previously, a concerted protest by politicians at every level of authority averted plans for a private cemetery in the suburb. A committee report argued successfully to the provincial premier that

people do not wish to live near a cemetery if they are able to afford homes elsewhere. Such an attitude appears to be caused by a desire to be spared the depressing effects of continuous passing of corteges and of seeing the conducting of interments.

Faced by a suburban public unwilling to accept daily reminders of death, in the twentieth century a successful cemetery was one
which dissimulated its morbid nature.

In the late 1920s, during the period in which Vancouver's City Council flirted with the possibility of disposing of its dead in an acreage it had purchased in Burnaby, it commissioned a report on the ideal forms a modern burial ground should take. "In order to prevent this undue animosity," the author noted, recognizing the suburban opposition to cemeteries, "the modern cemetery, resembling a park, with its tablet system of memorials, has been evolved." The stone jungle of upright monuments of the nineteenth century garden cemetery gave way to manicured lawns and almost invisible memorials. Cemetery ordinances were increasingly strict concerning the size and shape of monuments. The 1924 by-laws of Burnaby's Ocean View Burial Park set out very specific conditions for the erection of monuments. Similarly, in those sections of Mountain View Cemetery opened after 1933, only flat, horizontal tablets were permitted. Informing an English client of the rules in Victoria's Royal Oak Cemetery, which replaced Ross Bay in the 1920s, Reginald Hayward explained:

> it is the intention of the Board of Managers this God's Acre shall be when completed a burial park for the dead rather than an ordinary type cemetery, therefore upright stones which often topple over, are not allowed. This modern type of cemetery is now largely being used throughout Canada and we can assure you they are far prettier than the cemetery of the old type.

Modern cemeteries promised easier, more efficient maintenance. They also, Farrell argues, "eliminated suggestions of death." Furthermore, by disallowing fences and curbings, they
eliminated the emphasis on the family. Philpot notes that enclosures had largely disappeared from the rural cemeteries of southwestern British Columbia by 1925.\textsuperscript{31} The report commissioned by Vancouver's council remarked a similar trend. Where once four-grave units had been popular among purchasers of cemetery plots, two-grave units were increasingly in demand.\textsuperscript{32} The reunion of the entire nuclear family at the time of death was less and less likely. Cemetery regulations, and apparently society in general, were frowning on the expressions of privacy and property that were so common to graveyards of the nineteenth century. In 1940, the owner of a plot in Mountain View declared his intention to cover it with a sheet of concrete. His neighbour complained to the mayor,

"I feel that it is detrimental to the general body of plot-holders in the Cemetery...to allow others indiscriminately to cover up their plots with an unsightly slab of concrete."\textsuperscript{33}

The City Council agreed; if individuals wished to express property and family ideals, they would have to employ less material means. To a large extent, expressing cohesion with the dead became an intellectual exercise which no longer needed the cemetery.

Nonetheless, the cemetery remained an appropriate place to create and recognize social distinctions. Having made the decision, at least in urban areas, to amalgamate all sectors in one cemetery, nineteenth century British Columbians still
permitted religious groups to establish rights over specific areas. In 1860, Roman Catholic Bishop Demers of Victoria complained to Governor Douglas that the Anglican Church was not respecting his congregation's privileges in the Quadra Street Cemetery. With the opening of Ross Bay in 1872, various churches received portions of land. Emily Carr remembered the strange visual effects of the religious divisions:

The first graves in Ross Bay Cemetery looked very lonely and far apart, because Episcopalians could not lie beside Nonconformists, nor could Catholics rest beside Episcopalians.  

In the 1870s, debate arose over the propriety of granting land to religious groups. Victoria's Cemetery Trustees petitioned the Legislative Assembly in 1875 to maintain the clergies' rights. Likewise, in 1876 New Westminster's Cemetery Board, caught up in government restrictions, demanded the power to divide its property among the denominations. In the end, communitarian forces of the period compromised with the churches' tenacity. In 1879, the Legislature passed an Act requiring the payment in Ross Bay of $300 an acre for the retention of privileges. Only the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian Churches paid the sum, and other sections were opened to the public.

British Columbian society proved much more successful in preserving racial differences than it did religious distinctions. The Church of England, at the time of the opening of Ross Bay, vehemently argued that
the ground...be confined to the purposes of Christians' Burial only, to the exclusion for instance of the heathen...(The Buddhist may, and certainly will as the Chinese become wealthy, have his heathen ceremony and affix his heathen inscriptions in the midst of Christian symbols.)

Although the trustees permitted Oriental-Canadians to inter their dead in the cemetery, Chinese, Japanese, and East Indians had access only to an isolated section. That this portion of the burial ground was undoubtedly the least desirable land was shown by the fact that a strong storm later washed part of the section into the sea. Racial restrictions recurred throughout the province. The by-laws of the Ocean View Burial Park Company outlined in 1924 that

No person of Asian or African blood in any degree whatsoever shall be buried in any part of the Burial Park, except in that portion allotted and set apart for such purposes.

The report on Vancouver's cemetery likewise suggested in 1928 that a separate portion be allotted to Canadians of Oriental origin. Philpot also notes that such divisions found their way into many rural graveyards.

No less, and possibly more, important were the contrasts distinguishing graves dug in pauper sections. Plots varied in size, location and price, making the ability to buy a plot confirmation of social status. "In the urban cemetery," historians of nineteenth century Britain have argued, "...the class structure which was developing could be neatly demonstrated by the lines on a map or plan." In British Columbia, as we saw in the last chapter, the bourgeoisie
manufactured its own distinctiveness, in part, through its manipulation of regulations referring to paupers. Provincial legislation required the provision free of charge of burial grounds for paupers; it made no demands as to the sort of ground accorded for the purpose. Charles Hayward, who earlier had complained of the rude conduct of pauper funerals, was quick to suggest a money-saving plan for the burial of the unidentified dead of a shipwreck: "At least four probably five could be placed in two plots, and the expense considerably reduced." Such cavalier attitudes towards the interment of paupers on the part of undertakers explained why Reginald Hayward dissuaded a client from purchasing a cheaper grave. "They are good dry graves," he explained, "but are where the charity cases are put, hence not particularly desirable." Nor were these sentiments necessarily the delusions of funeral directors. "Certain it is that had I been an hour later in arriving," the brother-in-law of an almost unidentified drowning victim dramatically informed the latter's brother, "poor Tom would have been buried as an unknown body in a pauper's grave." Mrs. M. F. Kelly asked Vancouver's mayor why her husband's grave was so poorly tended, stating, "one would think it was a section set aside for paupers." In a similar vein, a meeting of Victoria's morticians learned in 1942 that "a buyer...ordered a $20.00 grave through his Funeral Director and...was mortified to find the grave dug in the pauper section." To the end of the period, the thought of a pauper grave struck fear into the hearts of British Columbians. Indeed, poverty even overcame the
racial restrictions so important to local cemetery boards. Cemetery records for the first years of operation of Mountain View report the adjacent burials between December 22, 1888 and January 5, 1889 of James McAhealy, a "Chinaman," William Sweeny, and Kandi, a "Jap." The paths of poverty certainly led to different graves than did the paths of glory.

Even the paths of glory, though, led in the twentieth century to increasingly nondescript cemeteries and headstones. The earliest cemetery legislation accorded local boards the jurisdiction to accept or refuse personal monuments. In the heyday of Victorian mortuary art, however, a wide variety of columns, obelisks, pedestals, sarcophagi, and tablets dotted the landscape of the garden cemeteries. Most of these memorials had a vertical axis, as if by reaching towards heaven they breached the distance between the deceased and his or her mourners. Philpot demonstrates that the vertical nature of British Columbian tombstones peaked around the turn of the century. In addition, she shows that they reflected the designs, themes and materials current in other parts of North America.

By the 1920s, horizontal headstones, set flush to the lawn, took the place of the diverse styles. "By 1925," Philpot notes, "tombstone art seems to be directed towards functional purposes rather than artistic expression." Stereotyped and shortened, epitaphs became increasingly unremarkable. Uniformity was, in fact, universal among those buried as war veterans. Subsuming individual identity to the larger, national cause, cemetery
officials vigilated over the regularity of the rows of monuments. In 1931, Mountain View's Superintendent J. B. Gray complained of a "disagreeable circumstance":

Yesterday afternoon a marker was placed on the grave of B. Blitch, and this stone bears the inscription 'In loving memory of' contrary to specification.  

In 1942, the erection of a cross on a soldier's grave occasioned a similar crisis. A city official wrote to a representative of the army, "I feel that we shall have to remove the cross so that uniformity may be preserved." Although uniformity was never so rigid in other parts of the cemetery, the diverse monuments of the nineteenth century found only a faint echo in the twentieth. In this sense, the war veterans probably typified only an extreme example of the modern tendency. In most cemeteries, the monuments (and epitaphs) for all groups in society had become smaller by the end of the period. The decreasing size of the monument complicates somewhat the analysis of serial trends in inscriptions. But Michel Vovelle, in referring to the tombstone in his study of mortuary inscriptions in the United States between 1660 and 1813, notes that, "it is the testimony of the family of the collectivity, more than of the deceased himself, but is sensitive also to the passage of time." 

For an example of British Columbian trends, we have utilized two main sources of evidence. The Kamloops mortician R. H. Dwyer acted as a regional distributor for the Art Monument Company of Vancouver, ordering 109 tombstones for local clients between 1945 and 1950. The order forms show that the
average cost was $90.99, although prices ranged between $30 and $237.\footnote{57} Clearly, gravestones were not restricted uniquely to the most prosperous sectors of society.

Various genealogists have in their compilations of tombstone inscriptions provided a second source of information. We have for thirty-three cemeteries (some 818 stones) lists which appear to include the entire epitaph for dates ranging from the 1870s to 1950. Scattered throughout the southern half of the province, the lists over-represent small, rural communities.\footnote{58} This fact, however, may present advantages. Although Philpot notes that stones shipped to the interior of the province tended to be smaller and less ornate than those in coastal areas,\footnote{59} urban cemeteries probably adopted strict regulations on tombstone size earlier than the less populated areas. In any case, a quantitative analysis of epitaphs provides some very clear tendencies.\footnote{60}

Vovelle shows that American epitaphs illustrated a growing mastery over the facts of the deceased's life by the beginning of the nineteenth century. For example, tombstones almost universally noted the age of the dead and frequently the place of birth as well.\footnote{61} The trend reversed in British Columbia. Between 1870 and 1950, it became less and less common to provide precise vital information such as the exact dates of death and birth and the age of the deceased. [See Figure V] Likewise, there were important decreases in the number of epitaphs referring to other aspects of the deceased's life. Notations of the places of origin or death declined, and if the
Figure 5 - Analysis of Epitaphs: Information on Deceased, I, 1871-1950

Source: See note 57.
data on occupations are slightly more vague, this fact is due to the rising number of war veterans who died in the latter part of the period. Their tombstone specifications required an indication of their military occupation. [See Figure VI]

At the same time that there was a decreasing emphasis on the individuality of the deceased, it became less and less clear just what he or she was doing in the cemetery. The use of direct terms such as 'died' or 'death' (obvious euphemisms like 'gone' or 'passed' were also included in this graph) declined dramatically over the period. Even life-like metaphors such as 'rest' and 'peace' increased only marginally, while 'sleep' remained very low. [See Figure VII] Perhaps British Columbians gradually realized that it was unnecessary to indicate the purpose of the deceased's sojourn in the cemetery; perhaps also they were shunning a direct, material confrontation with mortality.

Of course, the shrinking size of the tombstone might provide a facile explanation for these declining trends. One set of graphs, however, suggests the inadequacy of this argument. Mentions of the family ties of the deceased remained relatively consistent over time, as did references to the mourners.62 The survivors, when faced with death, proved unwilling to forsake their links with the dead. This cohesion could only be an intellectual one. The use of the term 'memory' ('remember', 'in memoriam') actually seemed to increase, although unsteadily, through the period. [See Figure VIII] In more than just the sense of a codified move to a horizontal
Figure 6 - Analysis of Epitaphs: Information on Deceased, II, 1860s-1950

Source: See notes 57 and 61.
Figure 7 - Analysis of Epitaphs: Describing Death, 1871-1950

Source: See note 57.

Legend

- Δ DEATH
- × REST
- □ PEACE
- ✗ SLEEP


PCT: 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100
Figure 8 - Analysis of Epitaphs: Mourner's links with the Deceased, 1871-1950

Source: See note 57.
axis, the twentieth century tombstones brought death "down to earth," where the mourners refused to relinquish their ties with the dead and succeeded in their endeavours by encircling the loved ones in their memories.

Cremation, as S. C. Humphreys points out, provided an even more efficient means of encircling the deceased in memories. Ashes could be dispersed in spots reminiscent of the dead person's lifetime. At least two churches in Victoria allowed the burial of cremated remains in their buildings after the 1930s. More significant was the ability to scatter or bury ashes outside of traditional areas. Mrs. M. M. S., Reginald Hayward learned,

expressed the wish that her ashes be buried at a certain spot on a wooded bluff at Sooke Harbour House where she said she had spent the happiest hours of her life.

For people who cremated the remains of their loved ones, no material presence, whether it be the corpse or some form of monument, stood between the deceased and the intellectual process of commemoration.

In this way, the historical process which had caused the creation of cemeteries and the erection of monuments ultimately also implied their disappearance. In the nineteenth century, the family felt the need to commemorate its dead in garden-like graveyards with ostentatious monuments. In the twentieth century, however, the memory replaced the cemetery as the final
resting place. The British Columbian bourgeois, through its city councils and cemetery boards, invoked regulations which dissimulated the burial ground's role as a repository for the dead.

In 1952, the Canadian journalist B. K. Sandwell, in his attack on contemporary funerals, conceded that there was

only one respect in which our funerary behavior has improved in the last fifty years, and that is in the architectural character of our memorials. The usual tombstone of today is vastly simpler, better proportioned and less sentimental than those of our grandparents.66

Sandwell was incorrect in implying that cemetery trends differed from funeral customs. In both cases, among the middle class at least, mourners were shunning physical confrontation with death, only to face it more directly in an intellectual sense. Cemeteries persisted in recognizing distinctions between races and levels of wealth, but in the twentieth century they had perhaps lost their ability to display the cohesiveness of the community. The links modern mourners were able to express with the deceased were individual and intellectual. Thus, when John James Gatenby died in 1944 in Abbotsford, the monument his family erected over his grave demonstrated the changes that had occurred in attitudes towards death: "In memories garden," his family assured him, "we meet every day."67
Notes - Chapter V


2 The Hour, p. 531.

3 Smith, ed., Reminiscences of Helmcken, p. 17.

4 Walvin, "Dust to Dust," 354; McManners, Death and the Enlightenment, pp. 303-4.


9 Philpot, "In this Neglected Spot," p. 16.


12 PABC, Colonial Correspondence [hereafter CC], Moody to Douglas, Feb. 24, 1860, B1337, F919 25.

13 CC, Pearse, Lands and Works Department to Colonial Secretary, Aug. 9, 1870, B1341, F 955 29.

14 John Adams, Historic Guide to Ross Bay Cemetery,


16 City of Nanaimo Archives, Corporation of the City of Nanaimo, Council Minutes, Council as Board of Cemetery Trustees, April 1, 1895, p. 558. Reference supplied by Walter Meyer zu Erpen.


18 CC, Crease to Attorney General, March 27, 1863, B1303, F 61 26a.

19 UBCSC, Rev. Edward White Papers, v. f. 118, Diary, Thursday, August 22, 1867.

20 CC, E. G. Alston to W. A. G. Young, Colonial Secretary, Oct. 24, 1868, B1300 F 13 14.


23 PABC, Attorney General, Correspondence Series, GR 1323, Charles Harrison, Secretary, South Vancouver Board of Trade, to Mr. Farris, M.P., Aug. 23, 1920, B2170, f. V-279-8.


25 PABC, Attorney General, Correspondence Series, GR 1323, Committee Report to Premier and Cabinet, Sept. 16, 1926, B2230, f. C-31-1.


29 HF, Hayward to Miss M. A., Feb. 25, 1939, v. 56.
30 Inventing the American Way, p. 120.
31 "In this Neglected Spot," p. 78.
34 CC, Demers to Douglas, Nov. 8, 1860, B 1324, F 453 4.
35 The Book of Small, p. 114.
36 Petition of Trustees of Ross Bay Cemetery to Legislative Assembly, 1874, Sessional Papers, Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia, (Victoria: Richard Wolfenden, 1875 ), p. 702.
37 T. R. McInnes, Secretary, Cemetery Board to A. C. Elliott, Attorney General, March 2, 1876, Sessional Papers, Journals of the Legislative Assembly, ( Victoria: Richard Wolfenden, 1876 ), p. 743.
39 PABC, Bishop G. Hills Papers, Add. MSS. 1525, Memorial to the Cemetery Board from the Bishop, Clergy and Laity of the Church of England, Sept. 18, 1872, p. 63.
41 VHDCR, By-laws of Ocean View Burial Park Co., 1924, 146 C7, f. 6.
43 "In this Neglected Spot," p. 43.
46 HF, R. Hayward to H. T. M., Aug 18, 1936, v. 53.
47 James Currie to James Thompson, Aug. 19, 1897, Sessional Papers, Journals of the Legislative Assembly (Victoria: Richard Wolfenden, 1898 ), p. 765.
VHDCR, Kelly to S. W. Millar, Aug. 2, 1938, 146 E6, f. 11.

HF, Minutes of meeting of Funeral Directors and Embalmers of Victoria, May 22, 1942, v. 60.

CVA, Public Cemetery, 1887-1889, Register of lots sold, 126 A 5, p. 611.

"An ordinance to make general regulations for the establishment and management of Cemeteries in the colony of British Columbia," 33 Vict., no. 15, Ordinances Passed by the Legislative Council of British Columbia...

"In this Neglected Spot," pp. 49-65.

Ibid., p. 18.

VHDCR, Gray to Dr. McIntosh, Medical Health Officer, July 21, 1931, 146 C 6, f. 1.

VHDCR, Dr. Stewart Murray, Medical Health Officer to Flight-Lieutenant McDonald, June 18, 1942, 146 E6, f. 14.


DFH, Purchase orders, box 3, f. 5.

Lists of monument inscriptions published by the British Columbia Genealogical Society (See Appendix for list of cemeteries); PABC, Cowichan Island Genealogical Club, Add. MSS. 1325, monument inscriptions for Pioneer Methodist Cemetery, Maple Bay, and All Saints Church, Westholme; monument inscriptions for Wellington Cemetery, Nanaimo, compiled by Walter Meyer zu Erpen.

"In this Neglected Spot," p. 68.

It is assumed for this study that choices for epitaphs were made within the year of death marked on the stone. Dwyer's records show, however, that this assumption is not always correct. Between 1945 and 1950, twenty-one monuments (19.3%) commemorated people who had died before the beginning of the decade. Three stones, indeed, remembered persons deceased before 1900. Such purchases would tend to mask changes which occurred in the epitaphs over time. Consequently, any trends that might appear are even more significant than they might appear. The temporal divisions of the tombstones are 1871-1890, 25; 1891-1900, 48; 1901-1910, 73; 1911-1920, 135; 1921-1930, 124; 1931-1940, 178; 1941-1950, 344.
"A Century and One-Half," 537.

Data for the 1860s comes from Joanne Hughes' analysis of inscriptions in the Johnson Street and Quadra Street cemeteries of Victoria. Most of these stones were erected in the 1860s. PABC, Hughes Collection, Add. MSS. 260, "Fraser Valley [sic] Cemeteries and How They Reflect the Social History of the Area," unpub. paper, Douglas College, 1972, pp. 4-5.

These two graphs are almost, but not quite, identical. Mentions of family ties include those with relatives who predeceased the person commemorated (e.g. 'widow of'). References to the mourners only include mentions of living relatives, but also englobe the use of personal pronouns which establish a link with the deceased (e.g. 'In time we will meet her').


HF, Reginald Hayward to G. H. Scarret, People's Warden, Church of our Lord, Mar. 21, 1935, v. 35; R. Hayward to P. G., April 14, 1938, v. 55 (referring to Christ Church Cathedral).


Gravestone Inscriptions, Municipal (Musselwhite) Cemetery, Abbotsford, published by the British Columbia Genealogical Society.
VI. CONCLUSION

In his memoirs, Dr. J. S. Helmcken recorded an existentialist query that had stayed with him throughout his adult life:

This medico...puzzled me once by asking me 'What is death?' to which I made answer 'The cessation of life,' but he would not stand this - and I remember how often I asked the question after - 'What is death?' and ask the question still.'

Undoubtedly, Helmcken was not alone in his uneasy confrontation with mortality. Probably many other middle class British Columbians asked themselves the same question. The cultural constructs they established in response were relatively coherent. This thesis had outlined two different, but closely linked, cultural constructs dealing with death.

The immigrants to the British Columbia region in the nineteenth century shared attitudes towards death similar to those portrayed by historians of other parts of the Western world. Death was a family crisis, yet because it necessarily took the "loved one," it had to be seen as attractive and natural. It was also, as nature should be, unpredictable; Nineteenth century British Columbians often faced the imminent prospect of their own death. They felt little assurance that they were destined to attain old age. This uncertainty was
overshadowed by the belief that death offered both an escape from the tribulations of worldly woes and the ultimate reunion of the faithful family in the heavenly home.

The affluent, urban family celebrated the passing of one of its members with magnificent, black, plodding funerals. The spectacle reaffirmed the links between the deceased and the mourners, and between the mourners themselves. The communal, but family-dominated, aspect of death carried over into the garden cemetery. The graveyard plot reproduced family virtues of privacy and property, and provided a place where the mourners could continue to manifest their affection for the dead. Like life insurance had also done for many nineteenth century North Americans, the pomp of funeral ceremonies and commemorative monuments defined death "as an economic episode." The bourgeois families of urban nineteenth century British Columbia paid their last respects to their dead.

Between 1880 or 1890 and 1920, a large number of facets of attitudes towards death underwent an evolution. Less an economic episode, death developed into an intellectual exercise. The living projected their vitality onto the dead. The dead, in fact, no longer died; illusions of sleep translated the mourners' reactions to death. When writing about the deceased, middle class British Columbians encircled the facts of their demise in a vitalistic vocabulary which emphasized their constant accessibility to the world of the living. Embalming composed the features of the corpse; caskets provided the illusion of a bed; funeral parlors served as temporary
accommodations. Cremation, increasingly popular by the end of the period, removed the responsibility of dealing with the body. Cemeteries also lost importance. Innocuous memorials and epitaphs stressed the fact that the memory was to be the final resting place for the dead. All the changes in reactions to death seemed, indeed, to illustrate a twentieth century "denial of death."

Nonetheless, we must, with Hope Glidden, note that "mentalities may be discerned by cracking culture's codes, taking care not to confuse the code with the message." While the twentieth century cultural construct seemed to deny death, the message, in fact, implied a confrontation with it. Nowhere was this more apparent than in contemporary attitudes to health. The new perception of health focussed on the responsibility of the individual. Ultimately, each was the cause of his or her own death. Institutionalized and anaesthetic, death surrendered to health the individual quest for personal salvation. In turn, as it worked its way through sanitary, dietary and public health measures, this new attitude caused a significant drop in the death rate. By confronting death, twentieth century British Columbians were able to do something about it.

In their discourses, funerals and cemeteries, British Columbians obfuscated the natural processes of death in order to face the disappearance of a loved one in an intellectual and individual sense. If the cemetery was, as Stannard suggests, the refuge for the psychologically over-burdened family in the nineteenth century, the memory was the refuge for the
psychologically over-burdened individual in the twentieth. Disguising the deceased in life-like terms demonstrated how significant that person's relationship had been with the mourner, and how tenacious the mourner was in not wishing to surrender that relationship. Although we do not have to agree with David Cannadine that "the best time to die and to grieve...is probably now," we do not have to accept that the "crise de civilisation" of the late twentieth century begins with contemporary attitudes towards death.

Thus death, within the middle class of British Columbia, expressed unending individual attachments between the mourner and the deceased. Death was also, however, a stage upon which social conflicts were performed. Michel Vovelle has demonstrated how different social classes acted out divergent responses to death in eighteenth-century Provence. On the platform described in this thesis, the principal actors, the middle class of the province, employed reactions to mortality, in part, to contrive their uniqueness and self-affirmation. Death was an expression of individualism. Clare Gittings has recently shown that individualism has formed a significant part of reactions to death since the early modern era. In the twentieth century we argue, this focus on the singularity of the deceased has been extended to encompass the singularity of the mourner. As S. C. Humphreys has suggested,

the process of personal psychological adjustment to grief, rather than the readjustment of a wider
society, is considered now to be the most significant of the processes set in motion by death.\footnote{7}

The uncontrollable grief, which many of today's social critics impute to the denial of death, probably stems rather from individualism accentuated by middle class ideals. It is no coincidence, as Peter Gay notes, that the sociological construct "anomie" typifying contemporary impoverishing individualism was first defined at the end of the bourgeois century.\footnote{8}

Thus, middle class uniqueness meant individual uniqueness. This hopeful self-affirmation relied on the creation of a sector of society utterly distinct from bourgeois practices. Middle class politicians and administrators established abhorrent funeral rites and graveyards for paupers. As cemetery evidence shows, economic distinctions overshadowed even the importance of racial differences when it came to charity burials. Expelling those who had rejected the fundamental precepts of an industrial economy by not even providing for their own departure from it, the middle class up to 1950 at least succeeded in affirming its ideals of uniqueness.

But what has happened to perceptions of mortality since 1950? Despite the claim by various commentators that a shift in attitudes towards death, manifested most openly in a changing academic discourse, is underway in today's society, the trends apparent in British Columbia in 1950 have persisted to the present. Funerals in the province have the lowest average cost in the country, and given the popularity of Memorial Societies,
tend to greater simplicity than elsewhere. Cremation continues to gain acceptance. In 1980, some 53.4 percent of all adult funerals ended in the cremation of the corpse. Cemeteries are becoming less and less permanent places in which to commemorate the dead. One no longer buys plots in Vancouver's crowded Mountain View Cemetery. Rather, one rents them for a forty-year period. By the end of the term, officials reassure the client, no physical traces of the loved one remain.

Health preoccupies middle class individuals more than ever before. Every time one boards a city bus, one confronts at least half a dozen different fatal diseases through advertisements asking for contributions and stating that the donation may make the difference in defeating death. Finally, probably because of the popularity of criticisms like Jessica Mitford's (and despite the comparatively low cost of funerals), the provincial government contributed to the discourse on death in the mid-1970s by commissioning a report on the funeral and cemetery industries. British Columbians, whether in government documents, condolence letters or graduate theses, continue to write and read about death.

But is the "liberating" influence of contemporary writing about death as strong as some historians suggest? Academics and journalists of every type have conducted a voluminous scholarly discourse on the subject. Some, like Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, have reached a large public and have forced medical personnel, for instance, to re-examine bureaucratic controls over the dying patient. This bookish discussion is not really divorced from
other twentieth century tendencies. Rather, death, for these academics, as for other members of the middle class, is an intellectual exercise. Death has become a subject of study, like economics or energy deficiencies, which we expect we may actually do something about, if only we can discourse endlessly about it. As Jacques Chiffoleau suggests,

Il n'est pas certain que le discours prolixe qui se tient depuis quelques années sur ce thème n'ait pas une fonction d'exorcisme. ¹⁴

In the end, we are probably only perpetuating a bourgeois, cultural construct which leaves us as distant from death as ever. Michel Foucault's concluding shot at the persistent bourgeois discussion about sexuality is applicable, perhaps, to contemporary attitudes towards death: "The irony of this deployment [of discourses on sex] is in having us believe that our 'liberation' is in the balance." ¹⁵ The British Columbian middle class, now in the form of an academic elite, continues to talk about death in the late twentieth century. This thesis, then, says as much about the social class of its author as it does of that of its readers.
Notes - Chapter VI


4 "War and Death," p. 189.


8 The Bourgeois Experience, v. 1:


12 Gosse, "Provision of Services."


15 History of Sexuality, p. 159.
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APPENDIX A - GRAVESTONE INSCRIPTIONS - CEMETERIES USED

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St. Mary's Anglican Church Cemetery, Fulford Harbour.
Hill's Community Cemetery, Hills.
Donald Cemetery, Donald.
Zeballos Municipal Cemetery, Zeballos.
Lone Butte Cemetery, Lone Butte.
Stanley Cemetery, Stanley.
Legion Cemetery, Golden.
Henderson Private Cemetery, Golden.
Edgewater Cemetery, Edgewater.
Stone alongside highway, Haida.
Hemlock Valley Road Cemetery, Harrison Mills.
Midway Cemetery, Midway.
Cemetery on the range, Midway.
Rock Creek Cemetery, Rock Creek.
Lac La Hache Cemetery, Lac La Hache.
Felker Family Cemetery, Lac La Hache.
St. Oswald's Anglican Church Cemetery, Surrey (Port Kells).
St. Stephen's Churchyard, Burnaby.
St. Paul's Catholic Church Cemetery, Fulford Harbour.
Bridesville Cemetery, Bridesville.
Stone alongside road, Bridesville.
Roman Catholic Church Cemetery, Alexandria.
Camp McKinney Cemetery, Camp McKinney.
Chase Cemetery, Chase.
Mattey Family Cemetery, Chase.
Municipal (Musselwhite) Cemetery, Abbotsford.
Granite Creek Cemetery, Granite Creek.
Rabbitt Family Cemetery, Tulameen.
Tulameen Public Cemetery, Tulameen.

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