



Death and Dying in the Eighteenth Century

An Interdisciplinary Workshop, followed by a Death Café

Tuesday, 25 September 2018, at the Institute of Modern Languages Research

CALL FOR PAPERS

Deadline for submission of abstracts: Friday, 15 June 2018

This half-day workshop will bring together scholars working across the arts, humanities, and sciences, whose research relates to bodies, death and dying in the long eighteenth century. Specifically, it hopes to explore how approaches to mortality and the afterlife changed in this period, as reflected in the literature, art, medicine, military discourse, and funereal and mourning practices of the period.

In our contemporary, health-obsessed society, death is kept out of sight as well as out of mind. As a result, illnesses – when they come – bring with them psychological traumas and existential doubts that many of us find ourselves unprepared for. The current [Death Café](#) movement and organisations such as [Dying Matters](#) aim to raise awareness about death and dying, and the need to prepare for the end of life. But when did we become so cut off from the experience of death in our everyday lives, and why do we fear it so much?

Medieval and early-modern philosophies of death were founded on St Paul's message to the Corinthians: that true faith in God would conquer death, and lead to an eternal afterlife for the believer (1 Corinthians, 15:55). Enlightenment philosophy was similarly built on the notion of Cartesian dualism: mind (soul) over matter (body). How, then, did the radical changes in political, social and medical thought in the eighteenth century affect notions of mind and body, and how in turn did this affect approaches to death and dying?

Harari, in *The Ultimate Experience* (2009), argued that the centrality of warfare had a profound affect on European society in the period ca. 1740–1856. War, he argued, was increasingly perceived as a 'revelatory experience', showing that the wounding and death of our bodies can teach us something that our minds alone cannot. At the same time, Kowalik (*Theology and Dehumanization*, 2009) explained that 'grief itself is a manifestation of modern subjectivity and is really only first observable in eighteenth-century Europe' (p. 24). Perhaps these developments are related: do both death and loss take on new dimensions – as 'revelatory experiences' – in this period? What were dead bodies able to 'teach' people in the eighteenth-century, and how (and when) did we forget these 'lessons'?

Proposals for **informal 15 minute talks** are invited from participants working in any discipline, and at all career stages. This event is primarily intended as a springboard for interdisciplinary discussion and exchange, which is why participants are asked to keep their talks short and informal.

The workshop will be followed by a Death Café held nearby, which will also be open to interested members of the public. This will provide an opportunity for us to gain new perspectives on our work (as researchers), and to reflect on our own mortality (as people), over tea and cake.

If you would like to participate, please submit a brief (max. 200 word) abstract by Friday, 15 June, to ellen.pilsworth@bristol.ac.uk, indicating whether or not you are also intending to come to the Death Café.