

Review

Author(s): Martin Gorsky

Review by: Martin Gorsky

Source: *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 84, No. 4, Europe in the 1950s: The Anxieties of Beginning Again (December 2012), pp. 965-967

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/667643>

Accessed: 26-06-2016 21:09 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



*The University of Chicago Press* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Modern History*

setback of Irish nationalism. Cullen—an exceptionally powerful leader of the Catholic hierarchy—despised the nationalism that he had observed earlier in his career in Rome and, if there must be a nation-state in the British Isles, favored one that embraced the whole United Kingdom. However, following Cullen's demise in 1878, the bishops moved toward direct support of (constitutional) Irish nationalism, culminating in 1884 with what Larkin has described as a "concordat" with the Nationalist Party: an agreement to support the party in return for the party's defense of the Church's interests, especially in the vital matter of education.

In these latter days of what some call a "post-Catholic Ireland," and in which even a devout Catholic may refer (slightly ahistorically) to the southern Irish state between 1922 and Vatican II as a "confessional state," we are in a position to create a new Irish history that will supersede both master narratives—nationalist and sectarian—currently in contention. Colin Barr has made a brilliant contribution to that objective by addressing an important episode of Irish history not by looking for Ireland's uniqueness, but by attending to Ireland's presence in larger patterns of European history.

DAVID W. MILLER

*Carnegie Mellon University*

### **Death in War and Peace: A History of Loss and Grief in England, 1914–1970.**

By *Pat Jalland*.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. xii+317. \$55.00.

In his classic study of death over the *longue durée*, Philippe Ariès identified an "absolutely new type of dying," which emerged in the industrialized West after World War I. Gone was the public ceremony of mourning and the ritualized disruption of community life. In its place came the concealment of something disturbing and improper, as death was removed to the hospital and grief to the private realm. A similar notion of profound transformation informs Pat Jalland's new study of death and mourning in Britain between 1914 and 1970. The national context and narrow time frame allow her to access a much richer vein of source material than that which informed Ariès's magisterial sweep. Thus while she too emphasizes the medicalization of death and the suppression of grief, she provides an account replete with personal testimony, social analysis, and literary evidence. The book's achievement is to weave this material into a new and compelling interpretation.

Jalland's analysis is distinguished particularly by the pivotal importance attributed to war in refashioning cultures of grieving. The first major theme is the experience of loss faced by the families of soldiers who died in World War I. Drawing heavily on letters and diaries, she builds her picture of responses to bereavement through depth studies of selected individuals such as Rudyard Kipling and the Cecil and Bickersteth families. These show how the manifestation of grief was constrained by the need to rationalize death within the larger narrative of national military endeavor. This in turn distorted what might in peacetime have been a direct emotional expression and began a separation between the public and private spheres of grieving.

Change was not smooth, and the interwar years saw both the persistence of older norms of grieving alongside new technologies for managing disposal of the corpse. Continuities are illustrated through another unusual form of mass death: sudden disasters that took the lives of coal miners. These and other examples testify to the enduring presence of ritual and religious comfort within Northern working-class communities. At the same time modernity was arriving in the form of the crema-

torium. Its efficiency and architectural attractions appealed to progressive middle-class supporters, while its champions, such as the agnostic Sidney Cockerell, celebrated its potential for a new style of funeral: peaceful, dignified, and unpretentious.

The Second World War was the more major watershed, as both combat overseas and the Blitz on the Home Front made untimely death and bereavement a commonplace. Again the mass experience is constructed through close readings of personal tragedies set down in intimate records. These range from the visual horrors of civilian death from bombing to the agonies of relatives whose loved ones went missing in combat overseas. They also reveal how a new emotional landscape was set in place to cope with grief which was at once personal and communal and which could not undermine national morale. Thus in public mourners presented the stoic resolve to keep calm and carry on, while reserving true depth of feeling for the solitude of private life.

The final chapters move to postwar medicalization, in which the proportion of those dying in a hospital rose swiftly from around 40 percent (1957) to around 60 percent (1973). The story contains elements of progressive betterment, moving from the lonely deaths of the poor in ex-workhouses through the arrival of the hospice movement and improved palliative care, to the start of psychological research into grief and innovations such as bereavement counseling. Central to the postwar section is Geoffrey Gorer's influential "map of death" of 1963, both for its survey findings and for articulating the claim that loss of ritual created social and individual harms. Jalland's critical discussion accepts some of Gorer's findings but also shows how his class perspectives and religious skepticism obscured modes of grieving that would have complicated his conclusions. The closing chapters pursue one such theme, the enduring place of Christian solace, alongside new developments such as the green burial movement and the media-driven return of public mourning.

Overall then, a significant proportion of this text is allotted to deaths of young adults, sometimes in accidents but particularly in war. This means a concentration in the book on unusual deaths and comparative neglect of the emerging demographic imperative, of mortality in older age, often after chronic illness. Even the postwar influenza pandemic of 1918–19 is cursorily dispatched in four pages out of the three chapters dedicated to the Great War and its aftermath, despite its famously high mortality. These judgments go to the heart of Jalland's thesis. War blunted the emotions against civilian sufferings and granted higher cultural value to the soldier's death in action. This effacing of flu mortality, she argues, foreshadowed "the silences surrounding domesticated deaths in the interwar years" (34). If it was the First World War which began the transition away from open and expressive mourning (especially on the part of women) then it was the Second which completed it. The legacy that endured after 1945 was the new norm of wearing a brave face and suffering in silence.

This emphasis on the critical impact of war, expounded through the scaling up of individual experience to locate a broad cultural shift, makes for a powerful case. It also leaves plenty of scope for future scholars to interrogate further. While Jalland clearly acknowledges the importance of demographic and medical factors, as well as the role of changing kinship structures in undermining the domiciliary death, these form a lesser element of her analysis. Yet it is extremely difficult to calibrate the relative significance of all these determinants, particularly when the source material is so scant. It is also hard to stand apart from the normative assumption that the modern way of

death is fundamentally unhealthy because it must entail a suppression of grief. Other national or comparative histories of similar rigor and empirical richness to this one should enable a fuller test of the arguments advanced here.

MARTIN GORSKY

*Centre for History in Public Health, London School of Hygiene  
and Tropical Medicine*

**Sex before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England, 1918–1963.**

By *Simon Szreter* and *Kate Fisher*. Cambridge Social and Cultural Histories, number 16. Edited by *Margot C. Finn* and *Colin Jones*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. viii+458. \$95.00 (cloth); \$32.99 (paper); \$26.00 (Adobe eBook Reader); \$26.00 (Mobipocket eBook).

What is the history of sexuality? The field has grown exponentially over the past two decades, acquiring the trappings of academic respectability—conferences, journals, monograph series, tenured posts—and becoming a staple of undergraduate curricula. Despite these centripetal forces, however, I increasingly wonder whether the historical project that seeks to understand how sex and sexuality have been constituted, experienced, and regulated in the past is on the brink of incoherence. This is not about prescribing a disciplinary singularity of method, practice, or subject: much of the field's vitality comes from its pluralism. At the same time, there seems a growing dissonance between divergent strands of inquiry. On the one hand, vibrant and often politicized social historical scholarship has taken up the sexological impulse to chart past behaviors and attitudes. On the other hand, explicitly queer or feminist critical histories—often generically characterized as “Foucauldian”—seek to historicize and problematize regimes of sexual difference and “normality” and the notion of “sexuality” itself. There has been fantastic work at the interstices of these projects, yet more than ever historians of sexuality seem to be talking about different things.

Raymond Williams might surmise that in Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher's *Sex before the Sexual Revolution* sex is ordinary. This is the latest iteration in a long tradition of scholarship exploring experiences of sex and gender in particular class contexts. Following pioneering scholars like Elizabeth Roberts, the authors use interviews with eighty-nine men and women who married in the 1930s and 1940s “to provide a sophisticated and empirically based portrait of sex and intimacy” in mid-century Britain (1). Ordinary does not mean mundane: the lengthy conversations cited give a rich sense of everyday encounters, bodies, and knowledges—revealing, bracing, moving, and funny. Despite recent work on the problems of life histories—on how memories of the sexual past are reshaped through the contexts of the present—the authors are breezily optimistic about oral history's possibilities. “Skilled interviewing” and a “free-flowing interview process” combine and “minimize . . . the possibility that respondents systematically conceal significant or important aspects of their lives” (3–4). The interview is somewhere between a therapeutic intervention and a technology through which to identify the “truth” of the past. Building up a “confiding relationship of trust” enables “the recollection of sensitive, shameful or socially unacceptable experiences” (6) and ensures that “the silent history here uncovered is . . . that of a private and personal interior world” (18).

However skeptical we might be about such claims, Szreter and Fisher develop a systematic and provocative challenge to our understanding of sexual cultures within marriage. Successive chapters explore the formation of sexual knowledge in youth, the

Pat Jalland has been a Professor of History at the Australian National University since 1997. She has published in British women's history, Anglo-Irish history, and the history of death and bereavement in Australia and Britain. Her eight books include *The Liberals and Ireland* (Harvester, 1980); *Women, Marriage and Politics* (OUP, 1986), winner of the 1987 Western Australian Literary Award for non-fiction; *Death in the Victorian Family* (OUP, 1996), winner of the New South Wales Premier's Prize for History, and *Changing Ways of Death in 20th Century Australia* (UNSW Press Centre for History in Public Health, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine). Search for more articles by this author. Full Text. PDF. Add to favorites. Download Citations. Track Citations. Documenting the cause, management of, and attitudes towards death, dying and bereavement in England between 1914 and the 1970s, *Death in War and Peace* is split into three parts. The first oscillates between varied narratives of the First World War, between comradeship and heroism in battle and the home front's agonising uncertainty and quests to find out what had happened to men on the front lines. Such is the poignancy of Jalland's writing and use of extracts that it is difficult to read this section in anything more than short bursts. Following on from the First World War, she reco *Death in War and Peace: A History of Loss and Grief in England, 1914-1970* by Pat Jalland ISBN: 9780199651887 Published by Oxford University Press on September 27th 2012 Genres: History, Europe, Great Britain, Modern, 20th Century, Social Science, Death & Dying, Social History Pages: 336. Len's Summary: A study of death and mourning in British society. Buy this book on Amazon. View the book's Goodreads page. At the time of this writing *World War One Illustrated #13* has just gone to the printers and members should be receiving their copies shortly. My first two-year term as President is almost at an end. We have been successful in getting our publications back on track and in improving the regularity of our social media posts on Facebook.