

Aspects of Acceptance and Denial in Painted Posthumous Portraits and Postmortem
Photographs of Nineteenth-Century Children

Kathryn Beattie

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ABSTRACT

Aspects of Acceptance and Denial in Painted Posthumous Portraits and
Postmortem Photographs of Nineteenth-Century Children

Kathryn Beattie

The Victorian romanticizing of death, childhood and the family helped people to cope with flux and uncertainty in an era of social upheaval. Faced with high infant mortality rates, Victorian parents used culture in diverse ways to mourn and remember their dead children. But to believe that with the reality of high infant and child mortality rates came total acknowledgement and resignation is an inaccurate assumption. In fact, many Victorian parents both accepted *and* denied the deaths of their children. The simultaneous acceptance and denial of death is personified in both the painted posthumous mourning portraits which represented the dead child as alive and often life-size, and the much smaller, blatant images of corpses found in the postmortem photographs. This thesis considers these two types of mourning images which flourished side by side for over sixty years, and addresses the question of why the same society would find two such seeming opposites – in format and subject – equally suitable and acceptable as forms through which to remember a deceased child. It is only when we realize that Victorian society actually dealt with death simultaneously in two extremely different ways – denial and romantic acceptance – that these ostensibly contradictory types of images begin to make sense.

For Martin

(1946-2000)

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INTRODUCTION

When infant Louis-Joseph Papineau died in 1855, his parents hired the photographer Thomas Coffin Doane to make a memorial image of his corpse (fig. 1). The resulting small, hand-held daguerreotype is an unconcealed acknowledgement of Louis-Joseph's death but at the same time a poignant remembrance of his existence. When nine-year-old Diana Porteous died in 1900, her parents commissioned artist William Brymner to paint a life-like, full-length, posthumous mourning portrait of her which would hang in the family library for fifty years (fig. 2). The image of a seemingly alive Diana initially appears to be a denial of her death but at the same time its very existence must have been a constant reminder of her permanent absence. Opposites in terms of size, medium and content, these two different kinds of portraiture reflect very well some of the ways in which bereaved Victorian parents reacted to the deaths of their children.

Faced with high infant mortality rates, Victorian parents used culture in diverse ways to mourn and remember their dead children. They wrote letters on special black-bordered stationery, read and wrote poetry and kept personal diaries. They read consolation literature, wore mourning jewelry and followed strict codes of mourning dress. They installed moving and often life-like grave markers in cemeteries and commissioned death masks, postmortem photographs, painted posthumous mourning or memorial portraits, and portrait miniatures.

The nineteenth century was fraught with major social, religious, political and economic change resulting from the industrial revolution, the gradual onset of secularism,

the rise and increase of the middle class, and the urbanization of much of the population in Europe and in North America. The fact that Victorians reacted to death the way they did was an indirect reaction to the turbulent times in which they lived. Historian David Stannard states that “death was often celebrated at this time – almost desperately – as a joyous liberation from life’s bruising realities and as a return to the heavenly embrace that soon would unite families for an eternity of bliss.”¹

With such high infant and child mortality rates it is understandable that Victorian parents did accept and acknowledge the deaths of their children. However, as Lucy Peel, a settler near Sherbrooke, Quebec writes in 1834: “On Tuesday last dear Celia had been dead two months, I constantly think of her, there are some things that can never be got over, and one, is, the death of a child, you may become calm and resigned to the loss, but there must ever be moments when your grief will return.”² I would suggest that no matter how common the deaths were or how accepting the bereaved parents were, no parent wanted to admit that their child was dead and on some level an edge of denial must have existed. It should be noted here that it is not the objective of this thesis to suggest a dichotomy between denial and acceptance but rather the opposite. The Victorians accepted and celebrated death while simultaneously often denying it.

I will address this two-pronged reaction to death by looking at the role that posthumous portraits played in the mourning processes of bereaved nineteenth-century parents – whether through promoting the fantasy that the deceased child was still somehow alive (a strategy that is most obvious in painted posthumous mourning portraits

¹ David Stannard, “Sex, Death and Daguerreotypes: Toward an Understanding of Image as Elegy,” in *America and the Daguerreotype*, ed. John Wood (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), 93.

² J. I. Little, ed., *Love Strong as Death: Lucy Peel’s Canadian Journal, 1833-1836* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001) 140.

but also evident in many postmortem photographs) or through acknowledging the blatant reality of the corpse (an approach quite readily associated with postmortem photographs). The two seemingly opposing ways of remembering a dead child reflect the paradox of the Victorians' simultaneous acceptance and denial of death. Yet there is much more to these mourning portraits than the obvious denial and acceptance initially noted through the 'living' and 'dead' images. In fact both types of portraits contain aspects of denial and both contain aspects of acceptance. It is the objective of this thesis to ascertain how and why this combination of denial and acceptance was implemented and thus how these poignant images can contribute to our understanding of the Victorian culture of death.

Painted posthumous mourning portraiture is a relatively new term, coined by Phoebe Lloyd in her 1980 article "Posthumous Mourning Portraiture." Lloyd explains her criteria for the genre thus:

Since the bereaved wished their dead to be restored to them as living presences, it is necessary to define the 'life' portraits as posthumous. And because families commissioned the portrait during the mourning period, the mourning function has been included in the designation."³

The majority of posthumous mourning portraits of children consist of full portraits such as *Portrait of Frances Gertrude Lawson*⁴ (c.1873, fig. 3) or head and shoulder portraits such as *Portrait of Emily Anne Leeming* (c.1847, fig. 4). In most of these images the children gaze directly out at the viewer and are often represented in some familiar setting.

³ Phoebe Lloyd, "Posthumous Mourning Portraits," *A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America*, ed. Martha V. Pike & Janice Gray Armstrong (Stony Brook, N.Y.: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980), 71.

⁴ Painted posthumous mourning portraits were produced to view in the privacy of the home and the official titles that they have today would have been given when they entered public institutions.

Lloyd also states that death symbols such as cut flowers, urns and particular colours were incorporated into nineteenth-century posthumous mourning portraits – often several in one portrait.

Until 1839 and the advent of photography, the painted posthumous mourning portraits were either painted directly from the corpse⁵ or from sketches taken just prior to the death of the child, as in the sketch by American portraitist Shepard Alonzo Mount (1804-1868) of his granddaughter Camille just before she died⁶ (figs. 5 & 6). More commonly, the artist painting a posthumous portrait did not know the deceased child and had to rely on more than just the measurements of the corpse to paint a good likeness. Artists sometimes painted the portrait from an existing ‘living’ one of the dead child or used a sibling who had similar eyes or hair as a model.⁷

After 1839 there was a definite melding of photography and painted portraiture as is demonstrated by the many posthumous portraits that were painted from already existing photographs of the children when they were alive. Evidence of this appears in the photographs that were used to paint the *Portrait of William Corbridge Coombs* (1890, figs. 7 & 8) and the *Untitled (Portrait of Young Boy, William Lumbers)*, (c.1900, figs. 9 & 10).⁸ It is assumed that the *Portrait of William Cawthra* (c.1883, fig. 11) was painted

⁵ Lloyd, “Posthumous Mourning Portraits,” 73.

⁶ Shepard Alonzo Mount was present when Camille was ill, sketched her likeness before she died and painted the final portrait after her death.

⁷ Lloyd, “Posthumous Mourning Portraiture,” 73. In the case of the full-size posthumous mourning portrait *Sarah Louisa Spence* (c.1833), “[e]very effort was made by the artist to achieve an exact likeness. He took measurements from the corpse and worked with a lock of her hair for color. Sarah’s parents also supplied [the artist] with a double portrait of her and her mother, painted when the child was five. Her half-sister was called in to pose because she had the same hazel eyes.

⁸ There is some question as to the identity of the boy in the portrait *Untitled, (Portrait of a Young Boy, William Lumbers)*, (c.1901). The photograph from which the portrait was painted has been identified in the Lumbers Family Fonds (City of Toronto Archives) as William Cooper Lumbers (1877-1940). There is also another photograph in the same photo album of a teenaged boy also identified as William Cooper Lumbers. No record was found in the Lumbers family genealogy of another Lumbers boy who might have died around that time. However, according to the archivist at the Peel Heritage Complex, a family member is

from a photograph since it was painted in Florence eighteen years after his death. Although the photograph is not available, we know that the *Portrait of Hamilton King Meek* (1890, fig. 12) was also painted from a photograph.⁹ It has been suggested that William Brymner painted the posthumous portrait of Diana Porteous (fig. 2) from an existing photograph.¹⁰

Nineteenth-century posthumous mourning portraiture evolved gradually over three centuries. As far back as the mid-sixteenth century, there is evidence of painted mortuary portraits of children's corpses which were especially popular in the Netherlands and in Hungary¹¹ (fig. 13). However, it was during the seventeenth century that this practice became more common, many of the existing examples being Dutch ones (fig. 14). Attempts were sometimes made to make the corpse seem alive but usually, at this time, by positioning the body vertically, not by painting the eyes open.¹² Despite the popularity of the seventeenth-century funeral portraits very few examples have survived. Anton Pigler suggests that they were usually painted by mediocre or little-known artists and that the inferior workmanship he notices might explain why many of the funeral portraits from that time period have now disappeared. When a good artist did paint the portrait it was usually saved because of who the artist was and not necessarily because of the identity of the deceased child. This follows through to nineteenth-century American posthumous

adamant that although this portrait may not be of William Cooper Lumbers, it is definitely a posthumous one and that the boy in the painting, referred to as "Little Will" died as a child. For this thesis I will therefore continue to refer to it as a posthumous portrait and use the name William Lumbers.

⁹ The artist has written on the bottom left corner of the portrait – "from photograph."

¹⁰ It is the opinion of Conrad Graham, Curator, Decorative Arts at the McCord Museum, that Brymner may have painted Diana's portrait from an existing photograph.

¹¹ Anton Pigler, "Portraying the Dead. Painting – Graphic Art," *Acta Historiae Artium* IV: 1-2 (1957), 33.

¹² Pigler, 5. Pigler gives the example of the *Portrait of Orsina de' Grassi* c.1540 in which the artist has painted the dead woman as upright and apparently in the act of reading but her face was taken from the corpse and that is why the eyes which are actually closed appear to be looking down at the book. I could find no portraits of children like this but this does not mean that they were never painted.

mourning portraits, most of which were painted by little-known, self-taught, itinerant artists.

Jay Ruby claims that the practice of painting mortuary portraits came to the United States around the late seventeenth century but very few seem to have survived – the earliest recorded example being that of a deceased adult painted in 1664.¹³ Although *Rachel Weeping* (1772-1776, fig. 15) by Charles Willson Peale does fit the mortuary portrait description, the American tradition, like Europe's, faded over the course of the eighteenth century. To date there is no known record of a mortuary portrait of a child painted in seventeenth- or eighteenth-century Canada.¹⁴

According to Lloyd, around 1830, nine years prior to the advent of photography, American parents began to request painted posthumous mourning portraits in which their dead children were represented as if still alive – that is, not merely images of propped-up bodies appearing to be alive but ones where they are actually making eye contact with the viewer/mourner (fig.12). Even as early as 1824, evidence of this practice is found in the form of *Portrait of John McGill Crookshank* (1824, fig. 17). This trend continued into the early twentieth century in spite of the fact that portrait photography was on the rise and regular painted portraiture was on the decline.

Known Canadian examples of painted posthumous mourning portraiture are not so numerous as the American ones. I have discovered ten through my research: *Posthumous Portrait of Sarah Diana de Tessier Percy Porteous*, (1901, fig. 2), *Portrait of Frances Gertrude Lawson*, (c.1874, fig. 3), *Portrait of Emily Anne Leeming*, (c.1847, fig. 4),

¹³ Jay Ruby, *Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America* (Cambridge, Mass./London: The MIT Press, 1995), 30-31.

¹⁴ The only record of early mortuary portraits in Canada seems to be those of nuns such as Marguerite Bourgeoys whose memorial portrait was painted immediately after her death on January 12, 1700, (fig. 16).

Portrait of William Corbridge Coombs, (1890, fig. 8), *Untitled (Portrait of Young Boy, William Lumbers)*, (c.1900, fig. 10), *Portrait of William Cawthra*, (c.1883, fig. 11), *Portrait of Hamilton King Meek*, (1890, fig. 12), *Portrait John McGill Crookshank*, (1824, fig. 17), *Posthumous Portrait of Isobel Richardson, Stanstead, QC*, (1843, fig. 18) and, *Portrait of Alice Walker*, (c.1891, fig. 19). Of these ten portraits, five were painted by little-known or unknown artists while five were painted by recognized and respected Canadian artists of the time - Horatio Walker (1858-1938), Cornelius Krieghoff (1815-1872), Paul Peel (1860-1892), William Brymner (1855-1925), and Robert Harris (1849-1919).

The history of painted posthumous mourning portraiture is not so clear in Canada as in the United States. During the nineteenth century, Canadians were very much influenced by all things British and it cannot be ignored that this painting tradition may partly have come from Great Britain.¹⁵ However, evidence does point to the probability that the practice also overflowed here from the United States for two reasons. First, many Canadian parents and artists would have been aware of the American practice. Numerous eastern Canadians had American family or business connections and traveled back and forth to New York, Boston and Philadelphia with regularity. In 1824 when the Crookshanks were visiting family in New York City, their eight-month-old son, John, died and they commissioned the mourning miniature of him before they returned home to York (now Toronto)¹⁶ (fig. 17). Certainly, a man like Charles Porteous, who was very

¹⁵ The National Portrait Gallery (London) has no examples. It is difficult to know how popular the painted posthumous mourning portrait tradition was in Great Britain without doing extensive research on the topic. My limited search uncovered none but of course this does not mean that they do not exist.

¹⁶[Arlene Gehmacher], "Mourning Miniature," *The Beaver* (April/May 2005) : 6-7. Of the ten Canadian painted posthumous mourning portraits, this miniature is the only one of an infant. The children's ages in the other eight portraits range from two to thirteen years.

much interested in the arts and a major patron to Canadian artists, would have been aware of American artistic traditions when he commissioned the posthumous portrait of Diana (fig. 2). At the same time many Canadian artists traveled to the United States either to further their artistic education or their careers. Horatio Walker was living and working as an artist in New York City when he painted the mourning miniature of his deceased daughter, *Portrait of Alice Walker*, (c.1891, fig.19) and would certainly have been aware of both the mourning miniature and the posthumous mourning portrait traditions.¹⁷

Secondly, American itinerant artists traveled regularly into Canada. There was no one type of artist who painted posthumous mourning portraits, but the itinerant artists of the American northeast were responsible for a large majority of the American ones. Since most of the itinerant artists active in Canada at the time were American¹⁸ they might have brought the posthumous portrait tradition with them. The *Posthumous Portrait of Isobel Richardson, Stanstead, QC* (1843, fig. 18) is one instance where this occurred; the attributed artist, Horace Bundy, was an itinerant Vermont painter.¹⁹

Whether the posthumous mourning portraits were painted by strangers or family members and whether they were taken from corpses or from existing photographs, they were held very dear by the grieving parents. Nineteenth-century American cleric Lyman Beecher refers to a miniature that his wife made of their dead child when he writes to another of his children: “After the child was laid out, she looked so very beautiful that

¹⁷ David Karel, *Horatio Walker* (Québec : Musée du Québec, 1986), 228-229. Karel suggests that although there is no record that Walker painted miniatures when in the employ of Notman and Fraser in Toronto, he did very likely paint copies of existing photographs. This would at least have given him the experience of painting very small portraits.

¹⁸ J. Russell Harper, *Painting in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966) 117.

¹⁹ Conrad Graham, telephone interview, c. 8 Dec. 2003. Mr. Graham, Curator, Decorative Arts at the McCord Museum in Montreal, attributed this portrait to Bundy. Graham claims that although there is no documented proof that Bundy traveled and painted in Canada, the chances of his moving back and forth across the border are good. Stanstead was a major coach stop on the Canada/U.S. border in the mid-nineteenth century and if Bundy did travel to Canada he would very likely have done so at this crossing.

your mother took her pencil and sketched her likeness as she lay. That likeness, a faint and faded little thing, drawn on ivory, is still preserved as a precious relic.”²⁰

In 1839, barely nine years after posthumous mourning portraits began providing grieving parents with painted images of their dead children as if alive, the daguerreotype was invented in France and with it came postmortem photographs. Nineteenth-century postmortem photographs are the antithesis of painted posthumous mourning portraits in size, colour and subject matter. Whereas the posthumous painted portraits often portrayed the dead child as alive, life-size and in colour the postmortem photographs represented the actual corpse in black and white (sometimes they were tinted) in comparatively small images. Daguerreotypes measure anywhere from 8 x 7 cm. to 13 x 10 cm., *cartes-de-visite* measure 10.5 x 6.5 cm., and cabinet cards measure 16.5 x 10.5 cm. By comparison the largest painted posthumous portrait being discussed in this thesis measures 123.83 x 91.44 cm. Although considerably smaller than the painted portraits, the postmortem photographs elicit an equal, if not stronger, response from the viewer. Unlike the full posthumous portraits that hung publicly on parlour walls, the much smaller daguerreotypes or *cartes-de-visite* fit into the viewer's hand, providing a more private and personal means to mourn a child. The intimate mourning miniature of Alice Walker (fig. 19), although a 'living' painted posthumous mourning portrait, is closer to the daguerreotypes and *cartes-de-visite* in terms of how it was/is viewed.

²⁰ Barbara Cross, ed., *The Autobiography of Lyman Beecher* (Cambridge, Mass.: Bellnap Press of Harvard University, 1961), quoted in Ruby, *Secure the Shadow*, 34.

Daguerreotypes and *cartes-de-visite* offered visual portrayals that reflected another way in which many Victorians on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean wished to imagine their dead children: as asleep (fig. 20). Photography studios such as Southworth & Hawes in Boston reassured bereaved parents of this fact: “We take great pains to have Miniatures of Deceased Persons agreeable and satisfactory, and they are often so natural as to seem, even to Artists, in a deep sleep.”²¹

When postmortem photography first became popular, children most often died at home; their bodies were usually prepared for burial at home by a family member, often the mother, and it was directly from home that the body was removed to the cemetery. It is therefore not surprising that most of the corpses were photographed within the domestic setting. The children’s bodies were photographed in cribs and bassinets (fig. 21), in perambulators (fig. 22), on couches, and in caskets (fig. 23). They were most often dressed in white,²² but sometimes not. Although the general poses were often similar there were certainly many variations on the view depending on the position of the camera – from above (fig. 24), from below (fig. 25), from the side (fig. 26). The Notman photographic record books demonstrate that the parents were often given the choice of several different views of the corpse. For example, in the case of Mrs. Blackader’s baby there are three different views of the baby in the bassinet and one view of Mrs. Blackader sitting looking down at her baby’s corpse (fig. 27).

There were very likely many instances in which the taking of a postmortem photograph was impossible or deemed inappropriate. Perhaps the parents were away at

²¹ Ruby, *Secure the Shadow*, 53.

²² Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 167 & 169. White symbolized the innocence and purity of the child. “Babies were carefully buried in their chrisoms, or baptismal robes, as proof that the child had been baptized.” The white christening gown was popular in the nineteenth century in both the Roman Catholic and Protestant religions.

the time of the child's death or the family lived in a remote or rural area and no photographer was available. Maybe the child's body was so emaciated or mutilated by illness or an accident that a photograph seemed unsuitable. In cases like this, if a mother was fortunate enough to have an existing 'living' photograph of her dead child she might have one taken of herself while holding the image of the child as seen in *Portrait of woman displaying image of a child and holding a pansy*²³ (1854, fig. 28).

While painted posthumous mourning portraits continued to be popular amongst the wealthy, the less expensive photographic process enabled a much wider population to remember their loved ones through postmortem photographs. Of course the inclusion of the middle and lower classes did not exclude the wealthy upper class from remembering their deceased children through this new medium, and evidence suggests that prominent members of the Montreal élite such as the Blackader (fig. 27), the Drummond (fig. 29) and the Ogilvie families (fig. 30) also chose to remember their deceased children through the less expensive, much smaller, more intimate and certainly more realistic postmortem photographs.

In at least one respect the corpse was a perfect subject: it remained motionless during the ten to thirty minutes exposure time required to obtain a crisp image.²⁴ The first postmortem photograph was, in fact, not taken for memorial purposes but rather technical ones. In 1839, just months after the first daguerreotypes were invented, Dr. Alfred Donné writes: "J'ai obtenu déjà très beau résultat en prenant l'image d'une personne morte."²⁵

²³ The fact that the mother is dressed in the last stages of mourning (lavender) and that she is holding some violets in her hand confirms that this is a mourning portrait.

²⁴ Ralph Greenhill and Andrew Birrell, *Canadian Photography 1839-1920* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1979), 24.

²⁵ Letter written by Dr. Alfred Donné and read at les Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Sciences, 14 October 1839, quoted in Joelle Bolloch, "Photographie après décès : pratique, usages et fonctions," in *Le*

It did not take long for postmortem daguerreotypes to become popular and they very soon became an important part of every photographic studio's business.²⁶ Indeed, the superb clarity of postmortem daguerreotypes as opposed to the often fuzzy living portraits of the time, is a direct result of the medium's technical need for absolute stillness which was easily met by the corpse. It was as if, in discovering the possibility of photographing a corpse, Western society had reverted to the seventeenth-century painted memorial portrait tradition in which an image of the actual corpse was used as the means for remembering a lost child (fig. 14).

Although daguerreotypes lost their popularity by the 1850s, the demand for postmortem photographs continued and, in fact, increased. In 1854, André Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri patented the technique that produced the *carte-de-visite* photograph, a technique that allowed the photographer to take eight different poses on one negative rather than the single exposure allowed in the daguerreotype.²⁷ A single print with eight images resulted and were cut and pasted on cardboard mounts measuring 10.5 x 6.5 cm. Parents could now order, inexpensively, as many images of their dead children as they wished and mail them to friends and family.

Why did so many families insist on such a direct representation of a corpse by which to remember their loved ones? Was it merely because at last many more parents could afford to have an image of remembrance made or was it more than this? What did grieving parents see when they looked at postmortem images of their children? Did these

Dernier Portrait (Paris : Musée d'Orsay, 2002) 112. "I have obtained a very good result by taking the image of a dead person."

²⁶ Although the postmortem daguerreotypes were first taken in France and there are many examples of French postmortem photographs of children, the largest numbers exist in the United States.

²⁷ Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1982) 64.

photographs and daguerreotypes help the grieving parents to accept the death or were they also used as tools of denial?

In seeking to answer questions such as these, I refer, for the most part, to the images of Canadian children made between 1824 and 1901. The children in these artworks are overwhelmingly from Protestant English-Canadian families of the middle and upper classes in Ontario and Quebec. With regard to painted posthumous portraits, I refer primarily to the ten Canadian ones that I have discovered in my research as listed on Pages 13 and 14, although I do utilize some American examples in my discussion when the need arises. Four of the Canadian portraits were not made by Canadian artists, two of which were not even painted in Canada, but they are all of Canadian children, were commissioned by Canadian parents, and were hung in Canadian homes.

Most of the Canadian painted portraits that I refer to were painted by artists who were family members, friends, or acquaintances of the bereaved parents or who happened to be in the right place at the right time. Horatio Walker laboured over the mourning miniature of his daughter Alice after her death on 6 December 1890 (fig. 19). Emily Anne Leeming's father, John, was Cornelius Krieghoff's principal agent in Montreal²⁸ (fig. 4). It is well documented that William Brymner was not only a friend of the Porteous family but also painted murals for the dining room in the Porteous summer home on Île

²⁸ Dennis Reid, "Some Discoveries Following Upon the Publication and Exhibition of *Kriehoff: Images of Canada* Relating to the Artist's Montreal Period," *The Journal of Canadian Art History* 24 (2003): 103. In this article Reid attributes the portrait of Emily Anne to Cornelius Krieghoff (p.104).

d'Orleans just prior to Diana's death and therefore would have been acquainted with her²⁹ (fig. 2). Paul Peel happened to be home in London, Ontario visiting his ailing mother in 1890, when he was commissioned to paint from a photograph the mourning portrait of Hamilton King Meek a year after his death³⁰ (fig. 12). Unlike the American itinerant artists, many of whom made their living from this tradition, there is no existing evidence that these Canadian artists painted any other posthumous portraits.

With respect to photography, I refer to a group of postmortem images consisting of daguerreotypes, *cartes-de-visite*, cabinet cards and framed photographs, most of which are in the Notman Collection at the McCord Museum (Montreal), the Photography Collection at Library and Archives Canada (Ottawa), and the Photographic Collection at the Archives of Ontario (Toronto). In order to situate the Canadian practice within a broader context I will incorporate some American examples of postmortem photographs into my arguments and comments.

The location and identification of posthumous images of Canadian children is attended by some difficulty, and more so in the case of paintings than of photographs. In comparison with the United States, demographics must have played a major role in the low number of known Canadian painted posthumous mourning portraits of children. But the lack of significant numbers of these posthumous portraits in Canada may also be a question of recognition, and it is possible that many of them have not yet been identified as such by the Canadian public collections where they are housed.

²⁹ Janet Grace Mills Braide, *William Brymner (1855-1925) The Artist in Retrospect*, M.F.A. Thesis (Concordia University, 1979), 45.

³⁰ Paul Peel's father was a marble and stone carver with a thriving monument business who became a founder and director of the Western School of Art and Design and was the school's drawing master for many years. Dr. Harry Meek was a respected physician who later became a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Western Ontario's Medical School. Both the Peels and Meeks were well-respected London families who were very like acquainted.

It is remarkable that there are so many 'living' painted portraits of children from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Canadian public collections and that so very few have been identified as posthumous.³¹ Conversely, according to a Sotheby's employee's estimate, at least 75% of the American children's portraits from the nineteenth century sold through the auction house up to the 1980s were posthumous mourning portraits.³² It is difficult to determine whether nineteenth-century painted portraits of children are actually posthumous ones because they look so life-like and also because documentation regarding the subject (i.e. names, birth dates and death dates) is often unavailable. Also, contemporary viewers, if not familiar with the language of Victorian death symbols, fail to identify the portraits as posthumous. When doing her research, Phoebe Lloyd discovered fifty American portraits that had previously been identified as portraits of living children which were in fact posthumous ones. To date, except for myself, no one has done a comparable search for these posthumous portraits in Canada³³ and I feel certain that with continued investigation more will surface, whether in public or private collections.

According to Phoebe Lloyd, nineteenth-century painted posthumous mourning portraits "do not enter the public domain unless their artistic merit or commercial value supersedes their memorial function."³⁴ Therefore the low numbers of posthumous portraits of children in Canadian public collections may be due to the fact that many of them were painted by little-known artists and still remain in private family collections.

³¹ Eric Nicolai, *Portraits of Children in Quebec Art 1800-1860*, M.A. Thesis (Laval University, 1990).

³² Phoebe Lloyd, "A Young Boy in His First and Last Suit," *Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin* 64 (1978-1980): 111.

³³ Arlene Gehmacher (Curator, Canadian Art, Dept. of World Cultures, Royal Ontario Museum) is currently writing about the posthumous mourning miniature, *John McGill Crookshank* (1824). Dennis Reid mentions Emily Anne Leeming's posthumous portrait but only because of its relationship to Krieghoff. See Reid, 103-104.

³⁴ Lloyd, "Posthumous Mourning Portraits," 73.

Posthumous mourning portraits were never meant for public museums or galleries but for remembering the deceased child within the privacy of the family home, and were usually hung in a prominent place there. We know that the posthumous portrait of Diana Porteous hung on the library wall in the Porteous home on Île d'Orleans from the time it was completed in 1901 until Diana's mother died fifty years later.³⁵ It then hung on Diana's sister's wall for another forty years until she died, at which time it was left to a great-niece who donated it to the McCord Museum one hundred years after it was painted.³⁶ Likewise the posthumous mourning portrait of Emily Anne Leeming (fig. 4) has been passed from generation to generation since it was painted in 1847 and remains in a descendant's possession today. There is no question that the present owner is very attached to the portrait and the part the young girl played in her family history. The posthumous portraits of children, therefore, seem to have been not just a means for the immediate family to mourn their loss but as a record for following generations.

Compared to the painted posthumous mourning portraits, examples of postmortem photographs are more common, and due to their subject matter, much more easily identified as posthumous. While news of the daguerreotype's discovery reached the Canadian media quickly (by the spring of 1839) and was received with as much excitement as south of the border,³⁷ the number of Canadian postmortem photographs is, predictably, much lower than in the United States. Canada in the 1840s and 1850s was still very much a rural population.³⁸ In 1850 Toronto's population was just reaching

³⁵ Patrick Nixon, personal interview, May, 2003. Mr. Nixon, a nephew of Diana, remembers seeing the portrait of Diana on the library wall when he visited the grandparents as a little boy.

³⁶ Sarah Humphries, telephone interview, 22 April 2003. Mrs. Humphries is Diana's great-niece.

³⁷ Ralph Greenhill and Andrew Birrell, *Canadian Photography: 1839-1920* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1979), 21-22.

³⁸ In 1850 Toronto's population was 30,000 and Montreal's was 50,000. In 1867 eighty per cent of the combined Ontario/Quebec population remained rural.

30,000 and Montreal's had barely topped 50,000. Lovell's *Canadian Directory* of 1851 reported only eleven daguerreotypists in the whole of Upper and Lower Canada, but by 1865 the *Canada Classified Directory* reported more than 360 photographers.³⁹ In comparison, the state of Massachusetts in 1855 had nearly four hundred daguerreotypists who made over 400,000 daguerreotypes in 1854. At the same time New York City is said to have had 1000 people employed in the daguerreotype business.⁴⁰ In the 1850s Western Canada had not as yet experienced its boom of settlement and therefore it is not surprising to find so few postmortem photographs in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. In fact the Western examples that I have found are all dated after 1900.⁴¹ Although explanations for the lesser numbers can be found partly in population and demographics, Toronto daguerreotype collector Steven Evans suggests that collectors are unable to identify many daguerreotypes as specifically Canadian because so few are signed.⁴² It is therefore evident that this thesis is but a first step in finding and identifying Canadian postmortem photographs and, given the difficulties, that there are probably many images still to emerge.

A literature review suggests that the topics of death and posthumous portraiture are well-represented in published form. What I discovered initially is that in dealing with painted posthumous portraits and postmortem photographs there is potential for

³⁹ Katherine Tweedie and Penny Cousineau, "Photography: The Wet Collodian Process" *Historica: The Canadian Encyclopedia*, 3 Dec. 2004 <<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com>>.

⁴⁰ Stannard, "Sex, Death and Daguerreotypes," 95.

⁴¹ My search included the Manitoba Archives (Winnipeg) and the Photographic Archives at the Glenbow Museum (Calgary).

⁴² Steven Evans, email correspondence, 27 Nov. 2004. Also see Greenhill and Birrell, 29.

disagreement on what exactly a portrait is. Martha Langford states: "A post-mortem photograph of a person is rarely considered a portrait despite all efforts at lifelike representation."⁴³ This is an understandable claim since the 'vital spark' of the living person is definitely missing in the image of a corpse. However, I believe that the postmortem photographs *are* portraits because they do one of the key things that portraits are supposed to do: that is, in Marcia Pointon's words, "[p]ortraits often stand in for the absent person and serve to maintain a link between the dead and the living."⁴⁴ In this thesis, therefore, both the posthumous paintings and the postmortem photographs will be referred to as 'portraits'.

Phoebe Lloyd's 1980 work on painted posthumous mourning portraiture of children opened up discussion of this virtually ignored genre. Lloyd sets out her parameters for these posthumous mourning portraits and addresses them from a strictly American point of view, suggesting that the genre was indigenous to the United States and more specifically to the northeastern states. According to Lloyd, posthumous mourning portraits were painted and completed quickly, sometimes within days of the death, so that they could be incorporated into the immediate mourning period.⁴⁵

Although the ten Canadian portraits remain broadly within the parameters that Lloyd has set out for posthumous mourning portraiture, there are some differences in the Canadian portraits that will be addressed. For instance Lloyd does not consider mourning miniatures, or portraits that were painted many years after the death, both of which occur

⁴³ Martha Langford, "The Black Clothing of Things," *Border Crossings* 14.2 (Apr. 1995): 25.

⁴⁴ Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1993), 5.

⁴⁵ Lloyd, "Posthumous Mourning Portraits," 81. Camille's parents were fortunate in that her paternal grandfather was visiting the family when she became ill. He took several sketches and measurements of her head prior to her death and painted the portrait within seven days of Camille's death.

in the Canadian examples. Many bereaved parents did not have easy and quick access to a portraitist at the time of the child's death and two of the Canadian portraits being discussed in this thesis, the *Portrait of William Corbridge Coombs* (fig. 8) and the *Portrait of William Cawthra* (fig.11), suggest that Lloyd's temporal criteria might usefully be broadened. The Coombs portrait was painted from an existing photograph two years after the death and the Cawthra portrait was painted eighteen years after the death. The fact that the portraits were painted so long after the deaths of the boys suggests two things about these particular parents and how the loss of their children affected them. Firstly, the parents might initially have used the existing photographs of their children as their 'posthumous mourning portraits.' Secondly, although these parents may have come to terms with their sons' deaths they continued to mourn them, through the painted portraits, for many years and probably for the rest of their lives.

Another important category that Lloyd barely touches upon in her writings on the genre is that of the artist as mourning parent painting a posthumous portrait of his/her own dead child. When parents commissioned an artist to paint a posthumous mourning portrait, it was the finished product that was incorporated into the mourning and remembering of that child. In the case of mourning parents who were also artists, mourning and grieving also occurred during the process of creating the image. They would, of course, still have had the finished product to remember their dead child by, but the work itself must have been tremendously meaningful. Unlike most artists, mourning artist-parents would not have been constrained by specific requests from those who were commissioning the portraits, and it is therefore not surprising that many of these images do not fit into the pictorial mourning trends of their times. Seventeenth-century British

ceramicist John Dwight created two sculptures to memorialize his six-year-old daughter who had died on 3 March, 1674. Although Dwight created a traditional seventeenth-century mortuary image in *Lydia Dwight on Her Deathbed* (fig. 31), he also created a second “living” portrait of Lydia (fig. 32) – a practice that was unusual for the time. During a period when dead children were most often portrayed as anonymous angels, either on their way up to or already in heaven, Dwight portrayed Lydia as herself. I will develop the Canadian aspect of this special category of portraiture – the artist as mourning parent – in Chapter IV.

In my search for posthumous portraits and some explanation as to why there seem to be so few Canadian examples I found Eric Nicolai’s MA thesis, *Portraits of Children in Quebec Art 1800-1860*, enlightening. He makes it clear that *living* portraits of children were very popular in Quebec at the time, which might lead one to conclude that if parents already had a living painted portrait of their child they would not necessarily feel the need for a posthumous one. Nicolai does broach the subject of posthumous mourning portraits but only in passing, citing a single Quebec example – *Posthumous Portrait of Isobel Richardson, Stanstead, QC* (1843, fig. 18).⁴⁶ This is very likely due to the fact that the existence of such portraits in Canada was still virtually unknown in the years leading up to 1990 when he wrote his thesis. In fact, just one other of the Canadian portraits being addressed here, the *Portrait of Hamilton King Meek* (1890, fig. 12) was known to be in a public collection in Ontario at the time that Nicolai completed his thesis.

Much more literature regarding nineteenth-century postmortem photographs exists although most is American-based. Jay Ruby’s seminal study, *Secure the Shadow: Death*

⁴⁶ Nicolai, *Portraits of Children in Quebec Art*, 52-53. The *Portrait of Sarah Diana de Tessier Percy Porteous* was still owned by a Porteous descendant when Nicolai wrote his thesis.

and *Photography in America* (1995), covers the practice of postmortem photography from its beginnings in 1839 right into the late twentieth century. Although Ruby makes a point of noting that postmortem photography was not indigenous to the United States, he refers only to American examples. His is a study of postmortem photography in general and includes discussion of children, adults and even pets. Conversely, Geoffrey Batchen, in his *Forget Me Not: Photography & Remembrance* (2004), does not focus specifically on postmortem photographs but on photography in general as a mode of remembrance of special moments, friends and family - living and dead. His discussions of the photograph as object helped me in my considerations regarding the importance of materiality in nineteenth-century postmortem photographs.

Several social history books and articles have been written about the Victorian material culture of death.⁴⁷ Pat Jalland's *Death in the Victorian Family* (1996), though rarely mentioning posthumous portraits, does give the reader an overall view of how death was treated within the family in the nineteenth century. Jalland's approach to the subject is remarkable since she observes the Victorian attitudes toward death in the family through "experiential history" and believes that "the people of the past must first speak to

⁴⁷ See: Geoffrey Batchen *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance* (Amsterdam/New York: Van Gogh Museum/Princeton Architectural Press, 2004); Eleanor Brown, Victorian visual memory and the nineteenth-century "departed" child," *The Archivist* 115 (1997): 22-31; Margaret M. Coffin, *Death in Early America: The History and Folklore of Customs and Superstitions of Early Medicine, Funerals Burials and Mourning* (New York/Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1977); Ann Douglas, Heaven Our Home: consolation Literature in the Northern United States, 1830-1880, in *Death in America*, ed. David E. Stannard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1974), 49-68; Valerie Eveans, "In Mourning," *Material History Bulletin/Bulletin d'histoire de la culture matérielle*, 23 (1986): 49-52; Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2001); Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray, ed., *A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America* Stony Brook, N.Y.: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980); John Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians* (London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971); Ellen Marie Snyder, "Innocents in a Worldly World: Victorian Children's Gravemarkers," in *Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture*, ed. Richard E. Meyer (Ann Arbor/London: UMI Research Press, 1989); Henk Van Setten, "Album Angels: Parent-Child Relations as Reflected in 19th Century Photos, Made After the Death of a Child," *The Journal of Psychohistory* 26.4 (Spring 1999): 819-834.

us in their own words, if we can retrieve them, and that their most significant texts are often those in which their innermost lives are revealed.”⁴⁸ This “experiential history” is very relevant to my thesis since it is important to have some idea of how and why Victorian parents used the posthumous images, from a personal rather than a social perspective.

As I discovered when reading the literature, it would be very easy to get caught up in the intricacies of Victorian mourning society (to be discussed in detail in Chapter I). To consider the posthumous images through the single lens of social history can only do them and the reader an injustice since from a social history perspective discussion is focused on the subject matter, not the formal or aesthetic qualities of the works. But there is much more to the posthumous painted portraits and the postmortem photographs than the fact that they represent one way that Victorian parents dealt with the death of a child. Most of the images being discussed in this thesis can, in my opinion, stand alone as works of art and warrant consideration of their formal and aesthetic qualities. Therefore, my methodological approach will be a combination of a formalist reading of many of the images combined with a social historical approach to the posthumous portrait tradition itself.

I have organized my thesis into an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. Chapter I includes a discussion of the history of death, social aspects of Victorian times, the part that the death of children played in that society, and how parents remembered and mourned their deceased children. Chapter II addresses the ways in which posthumous

⁴⁸ Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 2.

mourning portraits and postmortem photographs were used as tools with which parents could deny and distance themselves from their children's deaths. Chapter III suggests the ways in which the posthumous portraits and photographs might work in the opposite way – that is to acknowledge and accept the death. Denial and acceptance are addressed in separate chapters for purely organizational reasons and it must be remembered that these two different reactions to death were not dichotomous. The grieving process consists of several stages which Elisabeth Kübler-Ross recognizes as: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.⁴⁹ It would seem at odds with her chronology that I discuss denial, the first stage, alongside acceptance, the final stage. However, even Kübler-Ross writes that these stages “will last for different periods of time and will replace each other or exist at times side by side.”⁵⁰ Hence, nineteenth-century parents might have looked at the painted posthumous portrait of their dead son or daughter wanting to see him or her as alive and yet at the same time acknowledging the reality of the child's absence and death. In Chapter IV, I consider *Portrait of Alice Walker*, (1891, fig. 19) by Horatio Walker as a case study and demonstrate how this very small mourning miniature can be seen to exemplify the idea of simultaneously denying and accepting a child's death through posthumous portraiture.

Painted posthumous mourning portraiture became fashionable in the early 1830s and continued to be so even after 1839, when postmortem photographs became popular with the invention of the daguerreotype. Both these pictorial means of remembering deceased children continued into the early twentieth century. It is fascinating to consider the two types of mourning images and to address the question of why the same society would find

⁴⁹ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, Touchstone edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997, c.1969).

⁵⁰ Kübler-Ross, 147-148.

two such seeming opposites – in format and subject matter – as equally suitable and acceptable forms with which to remember a deceased child. It is only when we realize that Victorian society actually dealt with death, simultaneously, in two extremely different ways – denial and romantic acceptance – that these ostensibly contradictory types of images begin to make sense.

CHAPTER I

CONTEXT

*... ..do you not think that the death of a dear little child is a very peculiar sorrow? It seems to me that I have seen people in more anguish under the loss of little children than in any other affliction.*⁵¹

⁵¹ Nehemiah Adams, *Agnes and the Little Key; Or, Bereaved Parents Instructed and Comforted* (Boston, 1857) 30, quoted in Sylvia D. Hoffert, "“A Very Peculiar Sorrow:” Attitudes Toward Infant Death in the Urban Northeast, 1800-1860,” *American Quarterly* 39.4 (Winter, 1987): 601.

During the nineteenth century, Canada, like the rest of the western world, underwent major political, economic and social change. From 1850, through the years leading up to and following Confederation in 1867, Canada was also caught up in the exciting stages of nation-building. During these same years the country changed from a “family-based agrarian economy, in which men, women, and children all played distinct but interdependent productive roles,” to “one featuring mechanized male-dominated production.”⁵² As industry took over, the cities grew as a result of the increasing labour market. Urban industrial jobs were filled by immigrants to the city both from rural areas of Canada and from Europe and Asia, to the point where by 1900 “60% of the labour force was non-agricultural.”⁵³ A new and thriving middle class developed on the heels of the rapid increase of industry and commerce. At the same time, women and children were increasingly being removed from the public to the private sphere of domesticity where they were believed to be protected from all the changes going on in an ever-increasing fast-paced public life.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Victorian children, who had been sequestered with their mothers in the domestic sphere of the home, now represented innocence and purity in a world full of sorrow and “all the evils incident to human life.”⁵⁴ This new ‘childhood’ was, however, “a privilege extended only to the middle and upper classes until the early years of the twentieth century”⁵⁵ and one principally limited to urban

⁵² Cynthia R. Comacchio, *The Infinite Bonds of Family: Domesticity in Canada 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1999), 15.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 15. In spite of this migration to urban centres, agriculture continued to be a major contributor to the Canadian economy well into the twentieth century.

⁵⁴ Hoffert, “A Very Peculiar Death,” 609.

⁵⁵ Comacchio, *The Infinite Bonds of Family*, 8.

families, where children's labour was not essential to the family economy and where educational opportunities were more extensive. The children I refer to throughout my thesis are all from urban, middle- and upper-class families.

While this new domestic significance was being placed upon children, additional changes in attitudes toward the family were occurring which were specific to the New World. Neil Sutherland, in his book *Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth Century Consensus*, claims that nineteenth-century Canadians "believed the welfare of Canadian society was ultimately bound together with the health of the family."⁵⁶ In addition to the view that childhood had 'gone private', Sutherland claims that "concerned Canadians did not view the family as a sentimental end in itself, but as a means; it was the social agency that had the prime responsibility for ensuring that the whole of the next generation represented the best that Canadian society could produce."⁵⁷ Anna Davin takes this belief one step further when she writes: "Children, it was said, belonged 'not merely to the parents but to the community as a whole'; they were 'a national asset', 'the capital of a country'; on them depended 'the future of the country and the Empire'; they were 'the citizens of tomorrow'."⁵⁸ This was doubly true in newly developing countries like Canada, where nation-building was well underway in the mid-nineteenth century. Canadian children were, therefore, not merely much-loved 'innocent' members of individual families but were also representatives of the new country's future.

During the same time that such value was attached to children, both privately and publicly in Canada, there continued to be a very high infant and child mortality rate.

⁵⁶ Neil Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth Century Consensus* (Toronto/Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 17.

⁵⁷ Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society*, 20.

⁵⁸ Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshops: A Journal of Socialist Historians* 5 (Spring 1978): 10.

Because these rates were so elevated during the nineteenth century both in Europe and in North America, the death of children could never have been very far from parents' consciousness. In Montreal in 1880, 777 deaths of infants under one year of age were reported.⁵⁹ In Toronto in 1901, 160 of every 1000 babies under the age of one year died.⁶⁰ When perusing the entries on the pages of the City of Toronto Death Registrations, every page has at least one or two, if not more, listings of children.⁶¹ Causes of child and infant deaths were divided into four main groups: infectious diseases (i.e., smallpox, diphtheria, whooping cough), bronchitis and pneumonia, diarrhea and gastro-enteritis, and congenital debility⁶² (see Appendix II). Infant and child mortality in Canada was greater in cities than in rural areas⁶³ and most urban parents were well aware of these statistics. Sadly, many parents lost several if not all of their children to premature deaths, a fact reflected as early as the late eighteenth century on one Halifax grave marker:

Here Lies Interr'd the Bodies of the Children of John and Sarah
Lawson:

John Shattford Lawson	8 Sept. 1772	1 yr. 8 m.
John Lawson Jr.	8 Dec. 1776	1 7
Sarah Love Lawson	27 Sept 1778	1 5
Thomas Richard Lawson	30 Mar. 1779	14 days
Robert Lawson	3 Feb. 1783	8

⁵⁹ Patricia Thornton and Sherry Olson, "A deadly discrimination among Montreal infants, 1860-1900," *Continuity and Change* 16:1 (2001): 105.

⁶⁰ Katherine Arnup, *Education for Motherhood: Advice for Mothers in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 14.

⁶¹ Death Registration, MS 935, reel 46, Archives of Ontario. Each page contains six entries. Of the pages I looked at for 1886 most listed at least one child or infant death but many listed as many as three to four per page as seen on pages 743, 744, 751, 758 and 761 which cover the month of September, 1886.

⁶² Marvin McInnis, "Infant Mortality in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada," in *Infant and Child Mortality in the Past*, ed. Alain Bideau, Bertrand Desjardins and Héctor Pérez Brignoli (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 264. McInnis states that "no readily available and manifestly reliable national series of statistics on infant mortality exists for Canada prior to the 1920s." (p.262) However, studies have been done on specific areas and cities such as Toronto and Montreal.

⁶³ McInnis, "Infant Mortality in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada," 266.

Elizabeth Sarah Lawson

12 Jan. 1784 3 3⁶⁴

How did nineteenth-century Canadian parents deal with the knowledge that there was a very good chance that at least one of their prized “[futures] of the country and Empire” would die before he or she reached five years of age? When a much-loved child actually did die, many Victorian parents dealt with the loss with the help of deep religious faith, consolation literature, prescribed mourning rituals, diary- and letter-writing, and discussions with family members.

Religious belief played a key role in Victorians’ lives throughout the nineteenth century. During this time most English Canadians were devout Protestants – Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Anglican, Quaker, Salvation Army, etc. Evangelicalism, a philosophy based on the four gospels which preached salvation by faith and Atonement,⁶⁵ significantly influenced most of the Protestant denominations. Pat Jalland writes that the Evangelical movement “played a major role in defining Victorian morality, religious seriousness, and in transforming behaviour and even politics and family life” and that it played a “central role in relation to death and dying.”⁶⁶

Religious thought of the time encouraged bereaved parents to accept that when a child died he or she had gone to a better place and had been saved from the life of lost

⁶⁴ J. Russell Harper, *A People’s Art: Primitive, Naïve, Provincial, and Folk Painting in Canada* (Toronto/Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 80.

⁶⁵ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 333.

⁶⁶ Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 20.

innocence and hardship that awaited him or her in adulthood. As Sophia Eastwood, a nineteenth-century émigrée to Upper Canada, writes in a letter in 1857:

I must tell you Sarah has just lost her baby. It was a little boy about six months old. He was named after both his grandfathers, Alfred Standen. It is a great grief to Sarah and Richard as they thought so much of their little son, but they should not grieve for him for he is better off than he could ever be on this earth.⁶⁷

At the same time church leaders recognized the great pain and test of faith that parents experienced when their children died. As a consequence many of them wrote and published consolation literature “to explain the meaning of such deaths in Christian terms and to show mourners how their faith could console them.”⁶⁸ Ann Douglas, in her article “Heaven Our Home: Consolation Literature in the Northern United States, 1830-1880” (1974), defines consolation literature “to include not simply actual mourners’ manuals, but also prayer manuals, poetry, hymns, fiction and biographies whose purpose is clearly consolatory; whose authors, in other words, are writing to reach and comfort those suffering bereavement or loss.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Beattie, *A New Life in Canada: The Letters of Sophia Eastwood, 1843-1870* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press Inc., 1989), 52. Sophia Eastwood was “born in Sussex, England and immigrated to Upper Canada in 1843. Sophia, her husband Alfred, and five of their nine children settled in the Canadian woods in 1844. She died in 1893.” (Beattie, 13).

⁶⁸ Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 122.

⁶⁹ Ann Douglas, “Heaven Our Home: Consolation Literature in the Northern United States, 1830-1880,” *American Quarterly* 26.5 (Dec. 1974): 496, N 2. Some examples of nineteenth-century consolation literature are: William Branks, *Heaven Our Home* (Boston, 1864) and *Life in Heaven* (Boston, 1865); Theodore Cuyler, *The Empty Crib* (New York, 1873), *Beulah Land: or Words of Cheer for Christian Pilgrims* (New York, c.1896), and *God’s Light on Dark Clouds* (New York, c.1882); Nehemiah D. D. Adams, *Agnes and the Key of Her Little Coffin By Her Father* (Boston: Whipple, 1857); William Holcombe, *Our Children in Heaven* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1870); Daniel C. Eddy, *Angel Whispers: or, The Echo of Spirit Voices* (New York: Dayton and Wentworth, 1855); and Mrs. H. Dwight Williams, *Voices from the Silent Land: or, Leaves of Consolation for the Afflicted* (Boston, 1853); Rev. E. Wallace Waits, *Our Home in Heaven, or Thoughts for the Season of Solitude and Sorrow* (Chatham, N.B.: World, 1882); Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Gates Ajar* (London, Ont.: E.A. Taylor, 1869); Fanny Bate, ed., *Gems of Hope in Memory of the Faithful Departed* (Guelph, Ont.: c. 1899).

Most consolation literature fostered acceptance and acknowledgement of the death of a child through religious explanation as seen in Fanny Bate's introduction to *Gems of Hope: In Memory of the Faithful Departed*:

We are too unmindful of the blessed dead. We live too little in their fellowship. We forget that they are still members of the one body, although hidden from us by the veil of death: brothers and sisters in the family of God; although they have passed into the inner chamber of our Father's home. They are not dead. They are more truly living than ourselves: for they have laid aside all that is mortal, and they are now all life. They walk before the Lord in the 'true land of the living.'⁷⁰

Consolation literature was full of passages that extolled the advantages of a child's early death:

O, there is nothing sad about a child's death save the grief in the parent's heart. The little ones go right out of a world of sin and suffering to a world of joy. How many sorrows they escape, how many temptations, how many troubles! And they will meet again. Parents and children will feel themselves together, recognize each other as children and parents.⁷¹

The belief that children were saved from the perils of the world when they died was also reinforced through fiction. "The Empty Cradle," an article written in 1847, describes how a fictional mother dealt with the loss of her child: "She feels that heaven was the only atmosphere where her precious flower could unfold without spot or blemish, and she would not recall the lost."⁷²

In some examples of consolation literature, although the actual death of the child may have been acknowledged, the description of death's accoutrements sometimes reflected attempts at denial. This is seen in American Nehemiah Adams' *Agnes and the Key to Her Little Coffin* (1857). Adams explains that the design of children's coffins had been

⁷⁰ Fanny Bate, ed., *Gems of Hope: In Memory of the Faithful Departed* (Guelph, Ontario, 1899), 3.

⁷¹ Rev. E. Wallace Waits, *Our Home in Heaven, or, Thoughts for the Season of Solitude and Sorrow* (Chatham, N.B.: World, 1882), 111.

⁷² "The Empty Cradle," *Godey's Lady's Book* 34 (Jan. 1847): 12, quoted in Hoffert, "A Very Peculiar Sorrow," 608.

greatly improved and that they no longer had “broken lines and angles [. . .] They look like other things, and not like that which looks like nothing else, a coffin.[. . .]You would be willing to have such a shape for the depositing of any household article.”⁷³ Adams continues his list of improvements of coffins, explaining that there was now a soft lining and a nameplate inside the coffin and that the old “remorseless screws and screw-drivers” had been replaced with a lock and key. These physical alterations to children’s coffins could be seen as a desire to soften, to some degree, the reality of death.

In addition to the solace that bereaved Victorian parents found in their spiritual beliefs, society provided them with detailed guidelines for mourning that they were expected to follow. Adhering to a given protocol must have given the grieving parents some sense of order in a world turned upside down with the death of a child. Rules of etiquette dictated that fathers officially mourn their children for three to six weeks and wear a black armband for the duration. Mothers officially mourned their deceased children for one year, during which time they were not to appear at social functions and were expected to wear appropriate mourning dress.⁷⁴ Memorial cards (fig. 33) were mailed to family and friends, correspondence was written on black-rimmed stationery (fig. 34), and the windows of middle- and upper-class homes were draped with black crape.

As mentioned earlier, nineteenth-century fiction and poetry are full of references to children’s deaths. Magazines such as *Godey’s Lady’s Book* in the United States and *The Victorian Magazine* and *The Literary Garland* in Canada regularly published poetry and

⁷³ Adams, *Agnes and the Key of Her Little Coffin*, 15, quoted in Douglas, “Heaven Our Home,” 508.

⁷⁴ According to etiquette guides, mothers were expected to wear bombazine and crape for the first six months, black silk for three months and half mourning colours such as mauve or violet for the last three months of the year-long mourning period.

short stories describing the deaths of children. Consolation poems were often saved with a postmortem photograph of the child (fig. 35) or even written on the backs of the photographs (fig. 36). Countless images of dying children on their way to heaven were available in magazines and books (fig. 37) and sheet music such as *Little Sister's Gone to Sleep* found its place on many a family piano. Some nineteenth-century women, such as Canadian Lady Marie Belleau, included images of dead children in their scrapbooks⁷⁵ (fig. 38).

In spite of the different coping tools available, the death of a beloved child very often created a void that was next to impossible for many parents to fill. One mother writes: "Days have passed since my sweet babe has lain in the silent ground. I go about my domestic duties in moaning, sighing over the melancholy void that death has made."⁷⁶ For nineteenth-century Canadian author and poet Susanna Moodie, the grief and loss felt from the death of her son did not lighten with the passing of years. On the first anniversary of his death she wrote a poem expressing her grief (see Appendix III) and nine years later her pain and bereavement had still not diminished when she wrote: "Oh, agony unspeakable! The writer of this lost a fine talented boy of six years – one whom her soul clave – in these cruel waters. But I will not dwell upon that dark hour, the saddest and darkest in my sad, uneventful life."⁷⁷

It is easy to assume that because the Victorians were so caught up in a death culture replete with specific rules for mourning, that they would have expressed their personal

⁷⁵ Lady Belleau (Marie Reine Josephte, 1811-1884) kept an album beginning before her marriage in 1835 until the year before her death (1884). The album consists of 73 folios and most the works in it were executed in pencil or water colour on the album pages. The album also includes photographs, a lock of hair and pressed flowers.

⁷⁶ Hoffert, "A Very Peculiar Sorrow," 601.

⁷⁷ Susanna Moodie, *Life in the Clearings*, ed. Robert L. McDougall (Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1959), 27.

loss in as direct a manner as they followed their strict mourning codes, but Sylvia D. Hoffert states that “many parents suffered in relative silence.”⁷⁸ This was certainly the case with Duncan Campbell Scott, the Canadian poet and senior civil servant in Ottawa, and his wife, who lost their only child, Elizabeth, in 1907. After her death Scott barely mentioned his daughter again – even to friends and family.⁷⁹ The emptiness of the Scotts’ lives after Elizabeth’s death is described in a letter from Rupert Brooke to a friend: “They had a child – daughter – who died [. . .] And it knocked them out. She, a violinist, never played since; he hasn’t written, till the last few months. Their house was queerly desolate. It rather went to my heart.”⁸⁰ Much earlier, in 1834, Lucy Peel while living near Sherbrooke, Quebec, wrote of the very private pain that her husband, Edmund, experienced when their daughter, Celia, died: “He is very quiet, seldom cries except when alone with me; but he sits like a statue, talks of nothing but Celia, and, when any one but I, am present, never speaks from morning till night.”⁸¹

Whether they spoke of their loss or not there appeared to be a need for nineteenth-century parents to have some way of mourning, holding on to and staying connected to their deceased children. Some had posthumous portraits made or kept articles of clothing, a favourite toy, or a blanket to remember the child. Duncan Campbell Scott kept an assortment of toys belonging to his deceased daughter displayed on the hearth in the music room for forty years, until his death in 1947.⁸² Saving a lock of hair belonging

⁷⁸ Hoffert, “A Very Peculiar Sorrow,” 603.

⁷⁹ Sandra Gwyn, *The Private Capital: Ambition and Love in the Age of MacDonald and Laurier* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1984), 464.

⁸⁰ Gwyn, *Private Capital*, 465. Scott wrote only one poem memorializing Elizabeth, shortly after her death. (See Appendix IV).

⁸¹ J.I. Little, ed., *Love Strong as Death: Lucy Peel’s Canadian Journal, 1833-1836*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University, 2001) 132.

⁸² Gwyn, *Private Capital*, 464. Further evidence of how the Scotts continued to hold on to Elizabeth after death is demonstrated in the contents of the Scott Fonds at Library and Archives Canada, which contain

to the child was a popular way to remember a deceased offspring; typically, the hair was either made into a piece of mourning hair jewelry or was saved in the back of a locket or in a framed case (fig. 39). Hair, since it does not decompose, was considered precious because it was an actual part of the child which a parent could keep forever. As Ann S. Stephens wrote in 1855:

Hair, that most imperishable of all the component parts of our mortal bodies, has always been regarded as a cherished memorial of the absent or lost. A lock of hair from the head of some beloved one is often prized above gold or gems, for it is not a mere purchasable gift, but actually a portion of themselves, present with us when they are absent, surviving while they are mouldering in the silent tomb.⁸³

How parents remembered and memorialized their dead children ranged from very personal remembrances like hair to very public memorials. Hamilton King Meek's mother commemorated her son's death even after her own death in 1928 in two ways. She left a gift of \$165,000 to the Victoria Hospital in London, Ontario to create "the Hamilton King Meek Memorial Laboratory, an important medical research facility which still exists today."⁸⁴ Mrs. Meek also bequeathed her art collection, including the posthumous portrait of Hamilton (fig. 12), to the City of London and was named The Hamilton Meek Memorial Collection.⁸⁵ The Porteous family erected a memorial on the

examples of Elizabeth's writing and art work from the time she first learned to write to the last letter she wrote to her parents just prior to her death.

⁸³ Ann S. Stephens (1810-1886), ed., "Foreword," *Frank Leslie's Portfolio of Fancy Needlework* (New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1855), quoted in Valerie Evans, "Mourning," *Material History Bulletin* Spring (1986): 51.

⁸⁴ Curatorial file for *Portrait of Hamilton King Meek*, Museums London, London, Ontario. See also John R. Sullivan, *Growing to Serve: A History of Victoria Hospital, London, Ontario* (London, Ont.: Victoria Hospital Corp., 1985), 123. The Meek Memorial Laboratory building also housed "the maternity, eye, ear, nose and throat, out-patient and radiological departments plus the cancer clinic." The building is still in use today.

⁸⁵ London Regional Art and Historical Museums (Ont.), *The Collection, London, Canada* (London, Ont.: London Regional Art and Historical Museums, 1990), 21. The Hamilton King Meek Memorial Collection eventually formed the basis of the collection of what is now Museums London.

grounds of their home on Île d'Orleans as a lasting reminder of their deceased daughter, Diana.⁸⁶

Phillippe Ariès claims that in the nineteenth century the deathbed scene changed from one of calm acceptance to one full of emotion, sorrow and denial on the part of the survivors. This change resulted from the concern for one's own death being replaced by the concern for the death of others – “la mort de toi.”⁸⁷ With this concern for “thy death” came the “exaggeration of mourning” which Ariès claims was significant because it resulted in the fact that survivors did not accept the deaths of others as easily as in the past. Although many scholars today disagree with Ariès and maintain that even prior to the nineteenth century losing a loved one was never easy to accept, the fact remains that this non-acceptance of another's death did evolve during the Victorian era when the private self was being differentiated from the public self and “emotional attachments were replacing the traditional economic bondings of the family systems.”⁸⁸ People began to identify more with their own private family members, “realizing that it was only through these significant others that one's true, unique self was made possible.”⁸⁹ Consequently, although fully aware of the reality of death, Victorians began to look increasingly for ways to deny the deaths of loved ones.

⁸⁶ Mr. Patrick Nixon, personal interview, May, 2003. There is no available image of this memorial but Mr. Nixon claims it was erected in the Italian Garden near the river and remembers seeing it as a young boy.

⁸⁷ Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Towards Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 56.

⁸⁸ Michael C. Kearl, *Endings: Sociology of Death and Dying* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 43.

⁸⁹ Kearl, *Endings*, 43.

According to historian Kenneth Ames, for many Victorians “death did not really occur. People did not die. They went to sleep.”⁹⁰ Certainly sleep was a crucial metaphor in helping Victorians come to terms with death. Canadian Catharine Parr Traill seems comforted in her description of the death of a neighbour’s infant when she writes in the mid-1800s: “The deep sleep, in which I left it, was its last – it breathed its little life away so peacefully, that it might indeed be said, that it fell asleep and wakened in Heaven.”⁹¹ Innumerable references are made to sleep when referring to death in nineteenth-century fiction and art. Charles Dickens, in his novel *The Old Curiosity Shop*, refers to the dead Little Nell – “No sleep so beautiful so calm, so free from traces of pain, so fair to look upon.”⁹² Popular British and American sculptures such as Thomas Crawford’s *The Babes in the Woods* (c.1850, fig. 40) depict dead children as passing “unfearingly into eternal slumber.”⁹³ Paintings like *The Empty Cradle* (n.d., fig. 41) by British artist W. Archer represented the death of a child through the metaphor of sleep. Many nineteenth-century grave markers refer to the dead as “Asleep in Jesus” or represent some aspect of sleep such as a crib (fig. 42) or the figure of a sleeping child (fig. 43) all of which “poetically stressed the continuing presence of the deceased.”⁹⁴ Cemeteries were referred to as a last

⁹⁰ Kenneth Ames, “Ideologies in Stone: Meanings in Victorian Gravestones,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 14 (1981): 654, quoted in Ruby, *Secure the Shadow*, 63. James Farrell writes: “Americans employed many analogies and images that express ‘the modern belief that the process [of death] is easy.’” Woods Hutchinson acknowledges that “while disease is often painful, death itself is gentle, natural, like the fading of a flower or the falling of a leaf.” In an article entitled “Sleep and Death,” however, John H. Gardner highlights the most popular image of painless death in periodical literature. One writer states matter-of-factly that “in fact, it is as painless as falling asleep.” Dr. E.L. Keyes believes it “to be more than probable that the final act of dying is as simple and painless as going to sleep – and practically, we all die daily, without knowing it, when we go to sleep for the night” quoted in Ruby, *Secure the Shadow*, 64.

⁹¹ Catharine Parr Traill, “The Bereavement,” in *Pioneering Women: Short Stories by Canadian Women Beginnings to 1880*, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1993) 47.

⁹² Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop* (chapter 71), quoted in Laurence Lerner, *Angels and Absences: Child Deaths in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville/London: Vanderbilt University Press, 1997), 96.

⁹³ Information panel, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, N.Y. Small reproductions of sculptures such as *Babes in the Woods* were popularly displayed in Victorian parlours and sitting rooms.

⁹⁴ Douglas, “Heaven Our Home,” 508.

resting or sleeping place. After spending time in Greenwood Cemetery (New York) next to his dead son's grave, The Reverend Mr. Cuyler wrote: "The air was as silent as the unnumbered sleepers around me; and turning toward the sacred spot where my precious dead was lying, I bade him, as of old, 'Goodnight!'" Cuyler goes on to describe the cemetery as "simply a vast and exquisitely beautiful dormitory."⁹⁵

In spite of the popular belief that the Victorians were accepting of death and had actually romanticized it, what went on in public and how individual parents reacted in private were often two very different things. Even high-profile religious leaders like the Commander of the Canadian Salvation Army, Thomas Coombs, and his wife, questioned their faith when it came to losing their young son William:

When they got the news of the death of their boy it was sad news for them [. . .]it was a heavy blow to them both [. . .]. It seemed hard for [Thomas Coombs] to understand why God should have broken the thread that held the little one to life and seeming usefulness; and he had cried in his sorrow. "Lord, I cannot understand why you have done this [. . .]"⁹⁶

However, William's obituary was one of religious rationalization and acceptance, comparing him to "a flower of so much promise bowing to the will of Him who doeth all things well [. . .]"⁹⁷ (see Figure 44 for the complete obituary). Hence, to suppose that with the combined reality of high infant and child mortality rates and devout religious belief came resignation and/or acceptance is an inaccurate assumption; in fact, in the tumultuous times of the nineteenth century Victorian parents often searched for and found ways to both deny and accept the deaths of their children. One of the most successful

⁹⁵ Theodore Cuyler, *The Empty Crib* (New York, 1873), 158 & 173, quoted in Douglas, "Heaven Our Home," 61.

⁹⁶ "Commissioner's Return. A Wonderful Welcome Home at the Temple," *War Cry* 4 Aug. (1888): 2.

⁹⁷ "Gone to Heaven," *War Cry*, 7 July (1888): n.p.

ways in which this combination of denial and acceptance manifested itself was through the Victorian traditions of painted posthumous mourning portraiture and postmortem photography.

CHAPTER II

ASPECTS OF DISTANCING AND DENIAL

*Within the shrouded room below
He lies a-cold – and yet we know
It is not Charlie there!
It is not Charlie cold and white,
It is the robe, that, in his flight,
He gently cast aside!
Our darling hath not died!⁹⁸*

⁹⁸ Anonymous, “Little Charlie – A Lament,” in *The Mount Auburn Memorial* (Boston: Safford, Brown & Co., 1861), 64-65, quoted in David Stannard “Sex, Death, and Daguerreotypes,” in *America and the Daguerreotype*, ed. John Wood (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1991), 103.

There is no doubt that the nineteenth-century posthumous mourning portraits of children “were one part of a wall of denial erected by the bourgeois culture of the times to resist direct confrontation with the steadily rising tide of secularism and the finality and even the reality of death.”⁹⁹ Likewise, postmortem photographs, in spite of their blatant images of corpses, were used as tools of denial; the early daguerreotype images were frequently manipulated so that the corpse appeared alive, the later *cartes-de-visite* and cabinet cards often presented the corpse as asleep and eventually, by the end of the century, the corpse was no longer the focal point of the picture. These posthumous paintings and postmortem photographs, two seemingly opposing ways of remembering deceased children, did in fact serve the same purpose for many parents in that both could function as attempts at the avoidance of, and the physical distancing from, the death of the child. It is the aspects of denial that can be found within the posthumous portraits that will be addressed in this chapter.

The most obvious element of denial in the painted portraits is the fact that the children were painted as if alive and were often situated in familiar or domestic surroundings. Placing the life-like images of children in familiar settings made it easier for the parents to remember them there rather than imagining them as buried in a coffin in the ground. Thus, the *Posthumous Portrait of Sarah Diana de Tessier Percy Porteous* (fig. 2) shows Diana standing in a field of daisies similar to those which would have been familiar to her on Île d’Orleans near her home and its immediate surroundings.

⁹⁹ Stannard, “Sex, Death and Daguerreotypes,” 101 & 103.

Both painted portraits and postmortem photographs often included special toys or objects belonging to the dead child. William Lumbers (fig. 10) standing next to his tricycle, the Barnett boy's favourite games, toys and books laid out next to him (fig. 45), a baby sleeping in its bassinet or pram (figs. 21 & 22), all might have given the parents some concrete connection to their dead child.

According to Phoebe Lloyd, a good American example of how posthumous portraits often aided in the avoidance of the actual death of a child is *A Portrait of Camille*, (1868, fig. 6) by American genre painter, Shepard Alonzo Mount. Unlike the traditional portraits of children being taken up to heaven on clouds or by angels, Mount preferred to represent the deceased child as alive and still connected to earth. The time piece which in portraiture was traditionally used as a reference to the hour of death is, in Camille's portrait, a reference to the hour of her birth – a reminder that she had indeed lived.¹⁰⁰ The added fact that the watch belonged to Camille's grandfather and was known to be a favourite plaything of hers must have created fond and happy memories for the bereaved parents.¹⁰¹ In painting the posthumous portrait of Camille as he did "Mount deftly avoided confronting the finality of his niece's death."¹⁰²

Head and shoulder portraits were also popular as painted posthumous mourning images but unlike the full portraits which often contained death symbols, many of the smaller images contain absolutely no suggestion or hint that the subject is deceased. Neither the *Portrait of Emily Anne Leeming* (fig. 4), the *Portrait of William Cawthra* (fig. 11), nor the *Portrait of Hamilton King Meek* (fig. 12) give any indication that they are

¹⁰⁰ Phoebe Lloyd, "Posthumous Mourning Portraiture," in *A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America*, ed. Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong (Stony Brook, New York: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980), 81.

¹⁰¹ Lloyd, "Posthumous Mourning Portraiture," 81.

¹⁰² Lloyd, "Posthumous Mourning Portraiture," 81.

posthumous portraits, though we know they are so by virtue of their dates and documentation. (See Appendix I.) The backgrounds are blank with no reference to death. Although the colours used for Hamilton Meek are on the somber side there is nothing in his dress that would suggest that he was deceased when the portrait was painted. William Cawthra is dressed a bit more romantically in a white dress, which could be suggestive of death, but he appears very much alive with his rosy colouring. Emily Anne Leeming is wearing a fancy frock as many little girls did when posing for living portraits at the time. Certainly no hint of death exists in her skin tone or the background. All three children look out at the viewer and the parents may have taken comfort in being able to make eye contact with their children – if only through the means of a two-dimensional image.

The fact that many of the posthumous portraits were painted from already existing photographs or daguerreotypes taken when the child was alive could also be seen as a sort of denial or avoidance of the death. The question then arises: Why, if these parents already had a living image of their dead child, did they feel the need for a painted posthumous portrait? The answer may have to do with painting's verisimilitude of size and colour. Although very realistic and true to life, the photographic images were black and white and initially very small. To be able to look up at an image, often life-size, of their child in living colour must have been a true gift for the families who could afford these painted portraits. Shepard Alonzo Mount describes in a letter how family members treasured the last image of Camille (fig. 6):

All the family seemed surprised, and delighted with it. And to me it was real joy, to have been the instrument of affording so much comfort to all. Joshua and Edna [the parents] would sit before it for an hour together. And Mr. and Mrs. Searing [the grandparents] are in raptures with it. I have

framed it and hung it up for all to see and love – for next to the dear babe herself – it is now the idol of the family.¹⁰³

By contrast, the very nature of postmortem photographs, with their blatant images of corpses, may seem to go against everything I have written to this point regarding the nineteenth-century denial of death. Not so. Although the reality of the death is always in evidence through the fact of the photographed corpse, some of the early postmortem daguerreotypes of children seem to be attempts at creating an image in which the dead child appears to be alive and looking out at the viewer/mourner. Unlike the painted portraits where the artist began with a blank canvas to create a subjective image of a living child, the postmortem photograph of an existing corpse had to be physically manipulated in an effort to make the child appear alive. This might be effected by arranging the body prior to taking the photograph or by merely physically turning the photograph itself. As one nineteenth-century French photographer describes:

Chaque fois que nous avons été appelé à faire un portrait après décès, nous avons vêtu le mort des habits qu'il portait habituellement. Nous avons recommandé qu'on lui laissât les yeux ouverts, nous l'avons assis près d'une table, et pour opérer, nous avons attendu sept ou huit heures. De cette façon nous avons pu saisir le moment où les contractions de l'agonie disparaissant, il nous était donné de reproduire une apparence de vie. C'est le seul moyen d'obtenir un portrait convenable, et qui ne rappelle pas à la personne pour laquelle il est cher, ce moment si douloureux qui lui a enlevé ce qu'elle aimait.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Letter from Shepard Alonzo Mount in New York to his son William Shepard Mount in Galveston, Texas, May 15, 1868, in *The Museums at Stony Brook, New York*, quoted in Lloyd, "Posthumous Mourning Portraiture," 165.

¹⁰⁴ Joelle Bolloch, "Photographie après décès : pratique, usages et fonctions," in *Le Dernier Portrait* (Paris : Musée d'Orsay, 2002) 126. Translation: "Each time that we have been called to do a portrait after death, we have dressed the deceased in the clothing he usually wore. We recommend that the eyes be left open, we sit the deceased near a table and to proceed we wait seven to eight hours. This way we are able to seize the moment when the contractions of agony disappear; it was asked of us to reproduce a life-like

Corpses were propped in chairs with the eyes left open (fig. 46). In some cases, open eyes were actually painted over the closed ones and the supine image was simply rotated so that it resembled a traditional three-quarters portrait (fig. 47). Nevertheless, the fact remains that the images were those of corpses,¹⁰⁵ and attempts to make the children's bodies seem life-like were not always successful. Although the postmortem photograph of Master J.B. Draffin has been rotated so that the corpse appears to be sitting up and in spite of the softening of the image's edges, it is not successful in portraying the photograph of a 'living child' (fig. 48). Indeed, many of the altered portraits seem to magnify the reality of the corpse rather than avoid it.

The 'alive but dead' images did not fall out of style when daguerreotypes lost their popularity. Parents in the late 1800s were still welcoming postmortem photographs that attempted to make their dead children appear alive. The fantasy seems almost to succeed in portraits such as *Mrs. Parant's dead child*,¹⁰⁶ (1886, fig. 49) where, except for a bit of lace on the top left hand corner, there are no death symbols present – neither flowers,¹⁰⁷ nor white burial dress nor crossed hands – and the child's seemingly sparkling eyes, give the impression of looking directly out at the viewer. Even the baby's hands appear to be clutching the edges of the blanket. Other examples abound. Were it not for the tiny

appearance. It is the only way to have a suitable portrait that does not bring to memory the painful moment when the loved one passed."

¹⁰⁵ In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century memorial portraits the practice of rotating the image from horizontal to vertical was common but the eyes were always left closed.

¹⁰⁶ It should be noted that the titles for the Notman Collection's photographs were taken from William Notman's own inscriptions under each picture in his record books.

¹⁰⁷ Cut flowers were often used as symbols of death in the nineteenth-century. Some examples of nineteenth-century flower books: Sarah C. Edgerton *The Flower Vase, Containing the Language of Flowers and Their Poetic Sentiments* (Lowell: Powers and Bagley, 1844); Robert Tyas *The Language of Flowers: or Floral Emblems of Thoughts, Feelings and Sentiments* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1869); Kate Greenaway *Language of Flowers* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1884); John Henry Ingram *Flora Symbolica: or, The Language and Sentiment of Flowers, Including Floral*.

flower placed in the child's right hand in *Mrs. George Drummond's dead child*, (1886, fig. 29) this could be the image of a child just about to close its eyes for a nap. Likewise, Notman's image of a *Dead child laid out for funeral*, (c.1895-1910, fig. 25) shows a seemingly healthy and robust baby who, if not for the cross-shaped flower arrangement in its hands, could have been having its christening portrait taken.

Nancy Martha West casts additional light on the Victorian enthusiasm for postmortem photographs when she compares them to the relics of saints so popular in the Middle Ages. The Concise Oxford Dictionary states that 'relic' is a "part of [a] holy person's body or belongings kept after his death as [an] object of reverence; memento, souvenir."¹⁰⁸ These medieval relics *were* the saints and functioned as sources of supernatural power. The fact that the actual relic consisted of mummified body parts, teeth or bones did not concern the worshipper. It was, rather, the "intimate connection to the saint that endowed them with value."¹⁰⁹ In the case of the nineteenth-century postmortem photograph, what seemed to matter most to the parents was the connection that the image could provide to their deceased child.

West continues the relic comparison when she suggests that as with relics from the Middle Ages, the first postmortem portraits were kept in beautiful reliquaries. Like the medieval reliquaries, the daguerreotype cases were meant for more than just physical protection.

They dramatized the experience of viewing daguerreotypes like the solemn ritual that surrounded the opening of a saint's grave or reliquary. Opening and closing of the case allowed the viewer a brief experience of

¹⁰⁸ J. B. Sykes, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 7th edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 877.

¹⁰⁹ Nancy Martha West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Charlottesville/London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 147.

witnessing the miraculous, followed by the reverent gesture of returning the image to its undisturbed space.¹¹⁰ (fig. 50)

In this same vein, Roland Barthes claims: “The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; [. . .]. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze.”¹¹¹ Barthes believed that instead of a “truth-to-appearance,” the key to the reality of photography is a “truth-to-presence.”¹¹² In other words, for Victorian mourning parents the postmortem photograph of their dead child was more important as proof of the child’s existence than as an image of a corpse. Geoffrey Batchen describes it as “a matter of being (of something’s irrefutable place in space and time) rather than of resemblance.”¹¹³ This focus on “being” rather than “resemblance” suggests an understanding of how nineteenth-century parents might have found even an image of their precious child’s corpse – no matter how ravaged by illness and death (fig. 51) – a comforting remembrance. They did not see the image of a lifeless emaciated corpse – they saw their child.

One of the difficult things to come to terms with when death occurs is the reality of decomposition. Prior to the practice of embalming, a corpse began to decompose very quickly. A postmortem photograph would have been the last visual link that parents had

¹¹⁰ West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*, 148. Although daguerreotypes of living people were also treated in this same way, for the purpose of this thesis I refer only to postmortem ones.

¹¹¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections of Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Noonday Press, 1981), 81-82, quoted in Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance* (Amsterdam/New York: Van Gogh Museum/Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 74.

¹¹² Batchen, *Forget Me Not*, 74.

¹¹³ Batchen, *Forget Me Not*, 74.

to their dead child in the material form in which they knew him or her and would have provided an image that was immune to decomposition, remaining the same as long as the photograph existed. Thus a postmortem photograph of the dead child would have enabled the parents to continue to remember their child as asleep long after decomposition set in.

The Victorians' penchant for reframing the death of a child in terms of sleep is fully manifested in postmortem photography. Consequently, the many postmortem photographs which portray the deceased children as sleeping peacefully make perfect sense, as do the poems and words referring to that 'eternal sleep' that are often found on nineteenth-century children's grave markers¹¹⁴ and were written on the backs of *cartes-de-visite* or placed inside daguerreotype cases (figs. 35 & 36). In many instances these 'sleeping' portraits represent more successful fantasies of the children as still living than the ones that were propped up in chairs or had the eyes painted open. Some are so realistic that unless the twenty-first-century viewer is informed that the child is dead, he/she will likely assume it is a living, sleeping child. *Mrs. Morrice's Dead Child*, (1886, fig. 52) and *The Dacier Baby*, (1887, fig. 53) both represent what appears to be robust looking infants with no signs of illness or death. Mrs. Morrices's baby's hands are lying in a relaxed and natural position and those of the Dacier baby's are crossed but not in the traditional way. There are no flowers present in either of the photographs. The only subtle clue to their posthumous state might be the background of draped lace in the Dacier portrait.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ One of the most popular texts found on nineteenth-century children's grave markers was "Asleep in Jesus."

¹¹⁵ Eleanor Brown, "Victorian Visual Memory and the "departed" child" *The Archivist* 115 (1997): 26.

It was frequently important to bereaved parents to preserve not only the dead child him/herself but also the entire family structure. Another instance of denying or avoiding the death of a child, therefore, can be seen in family photographs which include children's corpses alongside surviving family members and in painted family portraits as if the deceased child was alive. Historically, seventeenth-century family portraits acknowledged deceased children in cherub form, not recognizable as individuals (fig. 54). Nineteenth-century painted family portraits also often included deceased children but by this time they were portrayed as recognizable individuals. The American painting, *Mourning Picture* (1889, fig. 55) by Edwin Alonzo Elmer (1850-1923), provides an example of one set of parents' desire to remember their family as it was before the death of their daughter. This posthumous image was therefore not just a remembrance of the deceased daughter but of the life that her family experienced prior to her death. Another American posthumous family portrait, *The Carryl Children* (after 1861, fig. 56), which does not include the parents, represents five deceased children each at the age of his or her death.¹¹⁶ Unlike the Elmer painting, which represents how a particular family had actually been, the Carryl parents in seeing four of their five dead children playing together must have witnessed the ultimate fantasy of what their family life might have been. Of course both of the portraits were also visual records of the families.

Similar representational conventions are present in photographs. The Notman Photographic Collection contains countless photographs of family groupings – some of both parents with their offspring, many of mothers and their children, and some of fathers

¹¹⁶ Lauren B. Hewes, "The Family in Portraiture," in *The Art of Family: Genealogical Artifacts in New England*, ed. D. Brenton Simons and Peter Benes (Boston: New England Historical Genealogical Society, 2002), 124. The Carryl portrait was painted after the death of the oldest child in 1861. The child on the rocking horse and the infant on the floor both died in 1857. The boy on the left died in 1859 and the bust on the fireplace represents a child who died in 1845.

with their children. This desire to record the family's existence did not change because one of the members – especially a child – died. Hence, a family portrait such as *Mrs. Balcomb (Group) (Master Balcomb, Dead)*, (1901, fig. 57), which includes the corpse of the dead boy lying on the sofa in the foreground, would have become the treasured last record of the family as it was. It is difficult to imagine that the parents were denying the reality of the dead child when it was lying in the parent's arms or beside them (fig. 58), but these images seem to be not so much an avoidance of the child's death as a visual record of a family as it had been prior to the child's death – or at least as closely as it was possible to approximate that recent past.

Like many observers, I have focused on ways in which nineteenth-century posthumous mourning portraits provided a record for the parents that the child had actually existed. However, this was not necessarily their only function. As the Notman record books attest, it became more and more popular in the nineteenth century for living babies to be photographed in their mothers' arms. This practice extended to mothers whose babies had died before a living photograph could be taken (fig. 59). The two traditions should not come as a surprise since motherhood was, in Victorian times, regarded as an affirmation of female identity: "confirmation that she had entered the world of womanly virtue and female fulfillment."¹¹⁷ These photographs may also have served as verification for bereaved mothers that they had indeed fulfilled their social responsibility. Children were part of the social identity of Victorian parents, especially

¹¹⁷ Dr. Lynn Abrams, "Ideals of Womanhood in Victorian Britain"
 <http://bbc.co.uk/society_culture/welfare/idealwomen_07.shtml> (26 Feb. 2005), 6.

mothers, and therefore the presence of a child, even a dead one, in its mother's arms might have confirmed this to the mother herself and to anyone to whom she showed the photograph.

Gordon Riches and Pamela Dawson, in their 1998 article "Lost Children Living Memories: The Role of Photographs in Processes of Grief and Adjustment Among Bereaved Parents," address the issues of twentieth-century bereaved parents and their use of 'living' photographs of their dead children in the grieving process. Although Riches and Dawson are discussing contemporary bereaved parents and the photographs referred to are not postmortem ones, what they suggest could apply just as readily, if not more so, to nineteenth-century motherhood. As well as being a record of the child's existence, Riches and Dawson suggest an added reason for the use of photographs in the mourning process:

The death of an offspring leaves parents with an identity that has internalized the patterns of parenthood but with the object of their relationship no longer there. Parenthood is a social status as well as a biological relationship. Parental identity is constructed and maintained through interactions with offspring, with other parents and with cultural definitions of parenthood. When the child is gone, the reciprocal nature of the relationship ceases.¹¹⁸

In other words, the reasons that a Victorian mother owned a postmortem photograph of her child may have been twofold – to confirm the existence of the child and to verify her role as a mother. *Mrs. G. Grant's dead child, Montreal, QC, (1878, fig. 60)* seems to accomplish both these facts. This ethereal image, reminiscent of Berthe Morisot's romantic 1872 painting, *Le Berceau (The Cradle)* (fig. 61), is more evocative of social relationships and aesthetic considerations (motherhood, composition, mood, light) than

¹¹⁸ Gordon Riches and Pamela Dawson, "Lost Children, Living Memories: The Role of photographs in Processes of Grief and Adjustment Among Bereaved Parents," *Death Studies* 22 (1998): 128.

death. In both the painting and the photograph the viewer gets an impression of a mother watching over her sleeping baby without seeing the infant's face clearly. In the photograph, although the wreath on the bassinet and the mother's black dress serve as signals to the viewer that the baby is very likely dead, one can easily look past the corpse and the grieving mother and appreciate the ethereal beauty of the image. This photograph may have allowed the bereaved mother to relive the experience of the tender moment of watching her baby sleep rather than dwelling on the sadness of its death. Thus some images suggest that the mother/child photographs may have been less a recording of the child's death and more a reassurance or confirmation of the fact of fulfillment of the role of motherhood. In confirming these two facts, however, such images might have served, in a sense, to deny the changes that death wrought on the mothers' own identities, as well as on those of their deceased children.

As the nineteenth century came to a close, physical distancing from the corpse and the photographs themselves became more and more obvious, and the focus was less on the child and the family and more on the mourning ritual. The constant changes and improvements in developing processes and the continuing technical advances of the camera were partly responsible for enabling the photographer to successfully move away from the subject. However, in many cases, with the photographer's increased withdrawal from the subject, the corpse often became lost in the details of the photograph. One must look closely to realize that there is actually a child's corpse hidden amongst the froth of blankets in *Mrs. Blanchard's dead baby*, (1881, fig. 62).

The images in which the deceased children are most distanced from the viewer are often those of corpses in coffins. In the case of the Kimber baby (fig. 63), the coffin is placed on a table in a very refined looking room, where it seems to blend in with the rest of the furniture. Although initially the viewer's eyes are drawn to the white of the coffin lining and the baby's clothing, they do not remain on the corpse for long. There is too much else in the photograph to notice and wonder about – the source of light, the window, the beauty of the Chinese pots, the question of the identity of the person in the intricately framed photograph. The tiny coffin and corpse are only part of an intricate black and white composition of light and shadow. In these instances, postmortem photographs seem to have softened the reality of the corpse and to have become a remembrance of death rather than of the dead child itself. Where previously the corpses had been the focal point in the image, now the accoutrements of the death and the funeral took over and a more aesthetic value began to be placed on the photographs.

Kent Bowser refers to this change in postmortem photography as an evolution “from a sub-genre of portraiture to a documentation of funeral ceremonies and customs.”¹¹⁹ Funerals were becoming more and more orchestrated by funeral directors, with less and less input or control from the bereaved family. The extreme manifestation of this process is exemplified in *Mr. Cleghorn's dead child*, (1900, fig. 64) where it is easy to miss the child completely amongst the mass of floral arrangements. One might wonder if it was not more a display of the lavishness of the flowers than the child itself. Or perhaps the parents, although feeling the need for a visual record of the funeral but not wanting to face an unconcealed photograph of the corpse, preferred a more distanced image.

¹¹⁹ Kent Norman Bowser, *An Examination of Nineteenth-Century American Postmortem Photography*, MA Thesis, Ohio State University, 1983, 4.

Bowser suggests that during the last quarter of the nineteenth century there is a correlation between the changing attitudes towards death and the way corpses were photographed. He claims, and rightly so, that as the nineteenth century drew to a close, society was moving further away from the acceptance of death. Several factors were the catalyst for this change. Children continued to die at a much higher rate than they do now; in fact, as the nineteenth century came to a close and the twentieth century began, the mortality rate actually rose.¹²⁰ But at the same time it was becoming more common for children, who had always died at home, to die in hospital beds, away from the intimacy of the domestic setting. During this same time the funeral business was beginning to boom and once embalming became an accepted practice, corpses were viewed in the funeral home, where the funeral director very often influenced the mourning customs. This moving of the bodies to the controlled environment of the funeral home resulted in a gradual physical withdrawal from death and the corpse.

Although I agree with Bowser's point regarding the changes in the postmortem images, I feel that it is also important to augment his emphasis on social practices with consideration of the materiality or the "object-ness" of the images themselves. If looked at chronologically, Bowser's suggested changes are recognizable but they do not move seamlessly from one to the next as the years pass. The thing that does noticeably and consistently change is the size of the images – from the small and intimate daguerreotypes

¹²⁰ Katherine Arnup, *Education for Motherhood: Advice for Mothers in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 14. One hundred and sixty of every thousand babies died before the age of one in Toronto. 166, FN 8. "between 1897 and 1911, approximately one out of three babies died before reaching the age of twelve months." 165, FN 5. "Although infant death rates appear to have been lower at first in most seventeenth- and eighteenth-century North American communities than they were [in the less healthy cities and towns of western Europe, they began to rise in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as cities grew in the new world." (Beth Light and Alison Prentice, Introduction to chap. 5, 'The Work of Wives,' in Beth Light and Alison Prentice, ed., *Pioneer and Gentlewomen of British North America* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1980), 133.

and *cartes-de-visite* to the slightly larger cabinet cards to the even larger photographs meant for framing and hanging on the wall. With these much larger images, which seem to begin appearing around the mid-1870s, postmortem photographs began moving to the parlour walls, where the large painted posthumous mourning portraits had been hanging since the 1830s. Therefore at the same time that the photographer moved his camera away from the corpse, the viewer withdrew physically from these later postmortem photographs, examining them from a greater distance.

The denial of, and the distancing from the death of a child by nineteenth-century parents was a common part of the grieving process and can be demonstrated in posthumous mourning portraiture – both painted portraits and postmortem photographs – of the time. The parents distanced themselves both physically and emotionally from the deaths through coloured life-like painted portraits which they viewed from a distance as they hung on the wall. Postmortem photographs accomplished the same degree of denial, but in different ways, from altering the photograph to make the child look alive, to presenting the corpse as if the child was merely asleep, and still an integral part of the living family. The postmortem photographs also gradually developed from very small and intimate hand-held remembrances of a deceased child to larger framed photographs which hung on the wall, once again physically distanced from the parents. Nevertheless, despite all attempts to mask or deny death, even the most life-like and realistic examples of both types of posthumous portraits must have been, by their very existence, sad reminders of the very real absence of the deceased child.

CHAPTER III

ASPECTS OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND ACCEPTANCE

In the twentieth century, the prevailing method of dealing with permanent separation is to put it out of mind. In the nineteenth century, the tendency was to keep it in mind, to retain the presence of the deceased person in any way possible. Visual images [. . .] provided some of the most effective and emotionally satisfying means of doing so.¹²¹

¹²¹ Dan Meinwald, "Memento Mori: Death in Nineteenth Century Photography," in *California Museum of Photography Bulletin* 9.4 (1990): 3.

Although Victorians did look for ways to deny or to distance themselves from the death of a child through posthumous portraiture it needs to be remembered that this denial occurred simultaneously with acknowledgement and eventual acceptance. From a twenty-first-century perspective, the images that most obviously convey the acknowledgement of death would be the postmortem photographs of the corpses in coffins (fig. 23) or of visibly dead bodies, emaciated by illness. In several close-up images such as *Sarah Christiana Bain, dead child* (1863) no efforts were made to mask the fact of death (fig. 65). A cloth band, used to hold the jaw shut, has not been removed and the dark circles under the eyes, evidence of illness, remain untouched. Even as the years progressed and greater distance was instated between the photographer and the corpse, images remain in which there was no attempt to mask the ravages of illness or a difficult death. In *Mr. Hunter's dead child, Montreal* (1869, fig. 51), the mouth is left slightly open and the effects of dehydration remain apparent. To look at images such as these is to acknowledge the presence of death, whether now or in the 1860s. Apart from these most obvious examples, nineteenth-century posthumous portraits function as tools to acknowledge and/or confront the death of the children in three additional ways – through the physical disposition of the body, through death symbols, and through the materiality or object-ness of the portrait.

Even in the more peaceful, alive-looking postmortem photographs, for most parents there could have been no complete escape from the fact that the image was that of a corpse. Children most often died at home surrounded by their parents and close family

and it was common for family members to prepare the body for interment.¹²² One husband describes, in 1832, the care that his wife took over preparing their baby's body for burial: "Despite her sadness and the trembling of her hands, she found comfort in preparing the body to be wrapped in its shroud as it lay in her arms."¹²³ Because of this very intimate and familiar contact that many mothers had with the corpses of their children, it is not surprising that they would find postmortem images acceptable and often welcome tools of mourning.

When first looking at *Mrs. Walker's dead baby, Montreal, QC*, (1868, fig. 66), one initially sees a baby asleep in its crib. The title, however, clearly indicates the presence of death and upon looking closer one realizes that this must be so for two reasons: First, the baby has cut flowers in its hands, a common symbol of a life cut short. Second, the bars on the one side of the crib have been completely removed. If the baby were alive the bars would have merely been lowered. A similar clue is visible in the photograph *Missie Holden, deceased* (fig. 21). Although this child initially appears to be peacefully asleep, few mothers would leave their living sleeping baby lying in such an unstable position high above the rails of a bassinet. In yet another instance, *Missie McKeogh* (fig. 67) appears to be asleep atop some cushions in a tiny bed which seems much too small for her. The precarious balancing of the bed on a chair leaves no room for any safe movement from a living child. In all three of these images although attempts have been made to make the corpse look life-like, the acknowledgement of the death remains in the physical disposition of the body.

¹²² Sadly, sometimes the parents were away from home when the child fell ill and died as is the case with Alice Walker and William Corbridge Coombs.

¹²³ Sylvia D. Hoffert, "A Very Peculiar Sorrow": Attitudes Toward Infant Death in the Urban Northwest, 1800-1860," in *American Quarterly* 39.4 (Winter, 1987): 602.

Death symbols inserted into painted posthumous portraits were another tool of acknowledgement used by the Victorians. Because nineteenth-century viewers were so well-versed in the language of death symbols,¹²⁴ they would have readily recognized even the most life-like of portraits containing these clues as posthumous ones just as readily as the blatant images of corpses in coffins. These symbols were also often in evidence in postmortem photographs. Even in ones where the children are seemingly asleep, they are dressed and draped in white – the mourning colour of children.¹²⁵ Many of the photographed corpses have wreaths of flowers on their heads and hold sprigs of cut flowers in their hands (fig. 68), details which are reminiscent of the previous seventeenth- and eighteenth-century memorial portraits (fig. 69).

Symbols used to represent death in the nineteenth century were varied and often more than one appeared in a single posthumous portrait. In the painted portraits, the colours red, black and white, all of which signified death and mourning, were often included in the child's clothing¹²⁶ (fig. 8). An extreme example of multiple uses of death symbols is found in the American painted posthumous mourning portrait, *Unidentified Child*, (c. 1835-1845, fig. 70):

Water, used for baptism, represents purity, rebirth, and eternal life. A ship seeking safe passage to another shore symbolizes the soul in search of heaven. The clouds behind the ship, veiling the blue sky, signify the presence of the unseen God [. . .] a [tree] stump, suggesting a life cut down in its prime. Twining around the tree stump is ivy [. . .]. Ivy is indicative of life after death because it clings to dead trees and continues to grow green, thus symbolizing the eternal life of the soul after the death

¹²⁴ Lloyd, "Posthumous Mourning Portraiture," 73 & 75.

¹²⁵ Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 167.

¹²⁶ Lloyd, "A Young Boy in His First and Last Suit," in *Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin*, 64 (1978-1980): 106.

of the body [. . .]. Roses, an ancient symbol of death [. . .]are strewn around the body of the child in a circular manner, much like a garland or wreath, commonly placed on house doors as a sign of death [. . .]. The child holds in one hand [. . .] a doll dressed mostly in black, the color of death, mourning, and sorrow.¹²⁷

Horace Bundy's *Posthumous Portrait of Isobel Richardson, Stanstead, QC* (1843, fig.18) contains only one symbol, an urn, to suggest that it is a posthumous portrait.¹²⁸ In Brymner's *Posthumous Portrait of Sarah Diana de Tessier Percy Porteous* (1901, fig. 2), Diana holds a picked rose, symbolizing a young life cut short,¹²⁹ as she stands in a field of daisies, flowers which represent innocence and imply the presence of God and the hope of resurrection.¹³⁰ The *Portrait of Frances Gertrude Lawson*, (c.1874, fig. 3) portrays a young girl holding a bunch of flowers, signaling to the viewer that this is a posthumous portrait.

Ada Hume-Butler's *Portrait of William Corbridge Coombs*, (1890, fig. 8) exemplifies how an existing photographic portrait (fig. 7) of a child prior to his death was converted into a 'living' posthumous mourning portrait by acknowledging his death through symbols. The Coombs family moved from England to Canada in 1884 when William's father, Thomas, became the first Commissioner of the Canadian branch of the Salvation Army. Soon after William's death in 1888 in Toronto, the Coombs family moved to Australia to serve there in the Salvation Army from 1889 to 1896. Naturally, they must have taken with them the photograph of William as a remembrance of him. It was during

¹²⁷ Barbara Rothermel, "Mourning the Children: An Interpretation of the Symbols in Two Posthumous Portraits," in *Folk Art* 22. 4 (Winter, 1997-98): 62.

¹²⁸ Although the urn is difficult to see in the reproduction because of the dark background, it is definitely visible on Isobel's right in the actual portrait.

¹²⁹ Lloyd claims that "a plucked rose, a symbol of death from ancient times, is the most common motif in posthumous mourning portraits." See Lloyd, "A Young Boy in his First and Last Suit," 106.

¹³⁰ Kate Greenaway, *Language of Flowers* (London: Routledge, 1884), 15.

the time in Australia in August 1890, when William had been dead for two years, that Ada Hume-Butler¹³¹ painted the posthumous portrait.

The original photograph shows a young boy sitting in a relaxed position leaning on his left elbow with his left hand supporting his head and looking out pensively, almost sadly, at the viewer (fig. 7). This is not necessarily the photograph of an unhappy little boy but more likely a result of his having had to sit very still for the photograph to be taken.¹³² William's right hand lies relaxed on his right thigh and his left leg is curled up under his dangling right one. The drapery covering most of the chair seems to be floral and the background appears to be a painted backdrop in a photographer's studio.

Because William's pose in the painting reflects almost exactly that of the photograph, the viewer might not immediately note the differences. In the photograph William's suit is understandably monochromatic but in the painting, red trim has been added. As well, the drapery has been changed to solid red, a colour often linked to death in the nineteenth century. But in this particular portrait red, a significant colour in the Salvation Army, represents "the precious blood by which we were all redeemed."¹³³ Seen through the eyes of Salvation Army members, William would have appeared to be wrapped in a blanket of redemption. The painted backdrop has been replaced with a flat undecorated wall. On a low shelf to William's left sits a potted plant. Ivy, symbolizing "the eternal life of the soul after the death of the body," grows into the painting from

¹³¹ Dr. Caroline Jordan, email correspondence, 30 November 2003. Jordan, the author of a recently published book on nineteenth-century Australian women artists is not aware of Hume-Butler and suggest that she might have been a portrait painter/photographer or if she was an amateur painter perhaps a member of the Salvation Army and/or a friend to the Coombs family.

¹³² Of note is a Coombs family photograph taken after William's death in which another son is sitting in almost exactly the same position as William (fig. 71).

¹³³ "Commissioner's Return," *The War Cry*, (4 August, 1888) 2. Red "stands for the Blood of Jesus Christ" as quoted in *Chosen to be a Soldier: Orders and Regulations for Soldiers of the Salvation Army* (Originally prepared by The Founder Revised and issued by the authority of The General (London: International Headquarters, 1977), 24.

outside the frame. In looking at the photograph and the painting side by side, it appears that William's parents might have worked through some of their grief and mourning through the two images – from the reality of the 'living' photograph to the painted portrait with its death symbols.

A symbol, Charles Peirce claims, is a sign "whose special significance or fitness to represent just what it does represent lies in nothing but the very fact of there being a habit, disposition, or other general rule that it will be so interpreted."¹³⁴ Nineteenth-century viewers would have learned almost by osmosis what the death symbols in posthumous portraits meant to their society. In addition, 'symbolic' is "a mode in which the signifier does *not* resemble the signified but is arbitrary or purely conventional – so that the relationship must be learnt."¹³⁵ The ivy in William Coombs' portrait is not actually "the eternal life of the soul after the death of the body" but rather a sign learned by the Victorians to mean so. Although red was also a learned representation of death in general in the nineteenth century, the case of William Corbridge Coombs demonstrates how some symbols from the past continue into the present with the same meaning, depending on the context. Members of the Salvation Army, whether in the nineteenth, twentieth, or twenty-first centuries, did and do recognize the same symbolic meaning for red – the blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, a contemporary viewer can only recognize the death symbols in nineteenth-century posthumous portraits when he/she has a prior knowledge of what they mean and how they work, as in the case of a Salvation Army member viewing the Coombs portrait.

¹³⁴ Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Writings Vol. 4*, ed. Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss and Arthur W. Burks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931-1958), 447, quoted in Daniel Chandler, "Semiotics for Beginners," 29 Aug. 2005 <<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem-gloss.html#5>> .

¹³⁵ Chandler, 29 Aug. 2005.

Nineteenth-century painted posthumous mourning portraits with their life-like and often life-sized images of children might seem, from a twenty-first century perspective, to deny completely the death of the child. However, the family whose child's posthumous portrait hung on the wall was very much aware of the fact that their child was dead, as was anyone who viewed the portrait at the time. It is our contemporary eyes that mistake many of these portraits as those of living children, and in missing the meaning of many of the death symbols, conclude that the parents might only have been denying the death through commissioning an image of a living child.

A daguerreotype, sensitive to light and very fragile, requires the protection of a case. It was always one of a kind because there was no negative with which to make an extra copy. Just as there could never be another child like the one who died, so there could never be another copy of that particular daguerreotype. These combined characteristics resulted in a very private and precious object of remembrance for parents and family. As Elizabeth Barrett writes when describing her reaction to a postmortem daguerreotype in the nineteenth century:

It is not merely the likeness which is precious – but the association and the sense of nearness involved in the thing [. . .] the fact of the very shadow of the person lying there fixed forever! [. . .] I would rather have such a memorial of one I dearly loved, than the noblest artist's work ever produced.¹³⁶

The later, less fragile *cartes-de-visite* and cabinet cards were not such personal and individual objects of mourning since multiple copies could be made at very little expense,

¹³⁶ Quoted in Ruby, *Secure the Shadow*, 49.

but they were still small enough to require close-up viewing. It would not have been unusual for the bereaved parents to mail *cartes-de-visite* such as the one in Figure 72 to friends and family shortly after the death of a child and this act in itself signified that the parents had acknowledged the death.

Acknowledgement of death can therefore be found in the object-ness of the daguerreotypes and the *cartes-de-visite*. The small postmortem photographs are meant to be held in the hand close to the body, and through this physical contact there is, in most instances, no avoiding the fact of the dead child. Because of this, I would suggest that the degree of acknowledgement of the hand-held postmortem photographs can be gauged by the degree of physical contact involved in viewing them. In other words, the more intimate the viewer's physical contact is with the object (i.e., the hand-held cased daguerreotype or the mourning image mounted in a three-dimensional brooch), the higher the degree of acknowledgement of the death. There is no possibility of physically distancing oneself from an image that is so small it must be held closely and intimately in order to see it. It is true, of course, that owners of daguerreotypes could, if they chose to, simply close the case and put it away out of sight and mind. But to the extent that they were functioning pictorially, as images, the very intimate nature of the daguerreotypes makes it possible to acknowledge and remember the death of a child in a very personal and physically intimate way.

Roland Barthes claims: "Touch is the most demystifying of all senses, unlike sight, which is the most magical."¹³⁷ What happens when these two opposites, visual magic and physical reality, reside in one object/image? Geoffrey Batchen refers to locket and

¹³⁷ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Paladin, 1973), 90, quoted in Batchen, *Forget Me Not*, 32.

brooches when he describes this “sensory consummation of sight and touch”¹³⁸ but it could just as easily be applied to daguerreotypes and the small *cartes-de-visite* which, though made of paper, were also viewed close up. For to truly experience a daguerreotype you must hold it in your hands. Although Figure 50 is not three-dimensional, at least the idea of size and the action of opening and closing the case can be experienced. Even in this facsimile it is apparent that one holds more than an image – it is almost like holding the deceased child himself – and herein lies the uniqueness of miniatures, daguerreotypes and the small *cartes-de-visite*. The combination of the close-up image of the subject and the parent’s ability to hold the image-object in his/her hand allowed him/her to remain close to the lost loved one, metaphorically speaking. At the same time this closeness could also function to promote awareness of the child’s death.

No matter how life-like the painted posthumous portraits or the postmortem photographs seem, the fact that they were commissioned in the first place and hung on walls or displayed in albums or frames as constant reminders of the absence of the children, demonstrates at some level a clear acknowledgement by the parents of the children’s deaths, no matter what the content. The added tools of acknowledgement found in the physical disposition of the body in the photographs, in the inclusion of death symbols in both the paintings and the photographs, and in the materiality or object-ness of the daguerreotypes and *cartes-de visite*, reinforce the fact that nineteenth-century parents did indeed accept and confront, to some extent, the deaths of their children through posthumous imagery.

¹³⁸ Batchen, *Forget Me Not*, 32.

CHAPTER IV

PORTRAIT OF ALICE WALKER: A CASE STUDY

What a comfort it is to possess the image of those who are removed from our sight. We may raise an image of them in our minds but that has not the tangibility of one we can see with our bodily eyes.
(Flora A. Windeyer in a letter to Rev. John Blomfield, November 1870)¹³⁹

¹³⁹ "Death the Last Taboo, Victorian Era," 4 April 2004
<www.deathonline.net/remembering/mourning/Victorian.cfm> .

In the two previous chapters, recognizing the confronting and denying mechanisms at work within nineteenth-century posthumous images is fairly straightforward. Most of them follow the standard conventions for posthumous mourning portraiture – be they death symbols incorporated into a ‘living’ portrait, the physical distancing from the viewer, or the cold hard fact of the photograph of a corpse. The *Portrait of Alice Walker*, (c.1891, fig. 19) is not so straightforward. It contains the denial component of the characteristic ‘living’ painted portraits, but no death symbols appear in the composition, nor does the subject look directly at the viewer as if to preserve contact. Unlike the larger painted portraits there is very little physical distance between the miniature and the viewer, a proximity which exemplifies the material characteristics of the object-image and the corresponding acceptance of death through the physical closeness of the portrait. Besides the denial/acceptance issues found in the actual image, there is an added factor – the mourning parent was also the artist and so *painted* rather than *commissioned* the portrait. Thus any elements of denial and acceptance present in the image are likely also to have marked the painting process. Hence, the Alice miniature, because of its additional complexity in combining acknowledgement, acceptance, confrontation and denial, can be seen as a culminating case study of how, in the nineteenth century, the differing responses to death could be incorporated in one image.

Horatio Walker painted the mourning miniature of his nine-year-old daughter, Alice, sometime in 1891, after her death on December 6, 1890.¹⁴⁰ This exquisite miniature is set

¹⁴⁰ David Karel, *Horatio Walker* (Québec: Musée du Québec, 1986), 228. Karel writes of the miniature: “This portrait, probably painted after the child’s death, may have been created in 1891.” It should be noted

in a gold brooch and is stored and protected from light in a leather case which could also have been used to display it when it was not being worn (fig. 73). Walker deviated from the standard when he painted his posthumous portrait of Alice. The image is devoid of death symbols, except perhaps the traditional white dress. Walker has painted only Alice's head and shoulders and has again broken with the norm and averted her gaze from the viewer. The only real clue to signify that this is a posthumous mourning portrait is the inscription on the verso: "Alice Pretty Walker, Born June 28, 1881, Died Dec. 6, 1890" (fig. 74).

Portrait of Alice Walker was certainly not the first time Horatio Walker had made an image of his daughter. He painted *Alice* (fig. 75) in 1884 when she was three and a half years old. In this oil portrait, despite the fact that Alice is placed in an ethereal space with no apparent connection to earth, the loose lively brushwork and vibrant colours create an image of a little girl who is very much alive, with her mop of bright curly hair, her ruddy complexion, and her direct gaze. There is also a later undated pencil drawing of Alice which may have been a preparatory sketch for a future portrait that was never painted (fig. 76). The drawing has no background and portrays a young girl, dressed in nondescript clothes with a severe collar, who is, once again, gazing with great determination and directness at the viewer.

Contrary to the larger oil portrait, Alice in the miniature seems anchored to the brooch frame, and by extension, to the clothed body of the brooch's bearer, who would have almost certainly been a member of Walker's immediate family. This 'anchoring' might be translated as Walker making one final attempt at keeping her with him on earth. In

here that Walker was known to have painted some of his portraits both over existing photographs and from photographs. However, Karel suggests that Walker may have painted the miniature from the small drawing from life he made of Alice (fig. 77). (Karel, 229).

poignant contrast to the brooch's fixity, however, are the portrait's own visual characteristics. The robin's egg blue background seems more heavenly than the earthly vibrant blue of the oil's background. In terms of brushwork and colour, the miniature is the antithesis of the oil portrait. Out of the necessity of painting such a small image the brushwork is extremely fine. Watercolour on ivory was known for its translucent properties that enabled the artist to create realistic as well as idealistic effects with the skin tones, and Walker makes fine use of this quality in his portrait of Alice.

Judging from the close similarities of the three portraits of Alice, the likeness is probably true, but the muted colours and the ashen nature of her complexion as compared to the oil portrait leads the viewer to suspect that Alice is not of this world. Although more realistically painted than the oil portrait, the miniature represents a more idealized Alice.¹⁴¹ There is a calmness and relaxed element about her face that, although seen often in the countenance of a living sleeping child, is very rarely witnessed in a waking one. Why did Walker not portray her as looking directly out at him with those piercing eyes of hers? An easy answer is that he already had his 'living' oil portrait of Alice. However, I believe Walker painted this much softer portrait of his daughter as an act both of denial and acceptance – denial in that she is awake and looking out of the portrait but acceptance in that she is not looking directly at him but off into the distance to a place he cannot go.

We then come to the question of why this grieving parent might have chosen the miniature form with its painted, living image of his daughter as a remembrance rather than a more up-to-date postmortem photograph of her corpse. Although the most obvious answer would be that Walker was a painter, there might have been other reasons. The Walkers were away traveling when Alice died at home and so did not have the option of

¹⁴¹ Karel, *Horatio Walker*, 229.

having a postmortem photograph taken even if they had so desired.¹⁴² To have been absent when Alice died must have made it doubly difficult for the parents to accept and believe that she was dead.

From all accounts, Walker was a very private man with regard to his family life. Existing scholarship regarding the artist makes no direct mention of how much sadness Alice's death must have caused him and his wife, but inferences are there. Newlin Price alludes to the sadness and loss when he writes of Walker: "We must, however, draw a curtain on his family life. It was, as all who live must know life, beautiful and exquisite, sad."¹⁴³ The only other documentation to be found that demonstrates how Walker might have felt at the loss of a child was written by himself in a letter to a friend who had just lost a family member: "On my return find your letters and paper, with the announcement of a death in your family, which I am very very sorry to hear – and know well the sorrow of such a thing, as I had just such trouble myself two years ago."¹⁴⁴ Walker's seeming lack of obvious feeling may be related to the gendered expectations placed on emotionality and hence mourning. Historian Jenny Hockey explains that during the latter part of the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century "emotional control was expected of men"¹⁴⁵ during periods of mourning. The miniature of Alice is therefore the only concrete evidence available at this time to suggest the extent of Walker's grief and mourning process.

¹⁴² Dorothy Farr, *Horatio Walker, 1858-1938* (Kingston, Ont.: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1977), 16.

¹⁴³ F. Newlin Price, *Horatio Walker, LL.. S.A.A. N.A. R.I. R.C.A.* (New York/Montreal: Louis Carrier & Co., 1928), 6.

¹⁴⁴ Karel, *Horatio Walker*, 39. Since the letter is not dated we cannot be sure whether Walker was referring to Alice's death in 1890 or his son's who died in his early twenties.

¹⁴⁵ Jenny Hockey, "Changing Death Rituals," in *Grief, Mourning and Death Ritual*, ed. Jenny Hockey, Jeanne Katz and Neil Small (Buckingham/Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001), 187.

Because of the private nature of his personal life it would seem natural that rather than paint a life-size portrait of his daughter Walker would have been drawn to the extremely private and intimate nature of miniature painting as a means to remember Alice. Perhaps, also, Walker felt that representing Alice's body was not a necessary factor in expressing her essence. Susan Stewart suggests that in the case of the miniature "the face becomes an object of contemplation independent of the life of the body."¹⁴⁶ Although Stewart is referring to miniatures exchanged between living men and women, her ideas can also be applied to a mourning miniature. She claims that "the miniature projects an eternalized future-past upon the subject," "consoles in its status as an 'always there'," and "guarantees the presence of an absent other".¹⁴⁷ Did painting a miniature of his dead daughter enable Walker to have Alice "always there" and guarantee her presence even after she had died?

Even with the mourning rituals of Victorian times to help ease parents through the initial crisis of a child's death, the void remained. Many bereaved parents struggled for ways in which to keep their dead children with them. Some, like Susanna Moodie, sought solace through writing while others, like Duncan Campbell Scott, dealt with their grief with the aid of something concrete – a piece of clothing, a shoe, a favourite toy. We see this also in Charlotte Schreiber's painting *Relics*, (n.d., fig. 77), where the bereaved mother is grieving over her dead child's dress and tiny shoe. The author of *The Loved and the Lost* (1856), a consolation novel, confirms the need for something concrete with

¹⁴⁶ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 126.

¹⁴⁷ Stewart, *On Longing*, 126. For development of these ideas in relation to miniature portraiture see Kristina Huneault, "Always There: First Peoples and the Consolation of Miniature Portraits in British North America," in *Art and the British Empire*, ed. Tim Barringer, Geoff Quilley and Doug Fordham (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

which to remember a loved one: “Nothing is too little to yield us some sweet portion of condolence. Again and again we hang over a book, a toy, a simple article of dress or ornament of the dear departed. It is priceless to us now.”¹⁴⁸ Not for Walker a toy, a shoe, or an article of clothing. He created his own tangible, three-dimensional object through which he could physically hold onto Alice even after death – not only through the finished product but more importantly, I believe, during the process of creating it.

This creative process can be seen as a tool used by the mourning parent/artist to deal with the death of his/her child. Ben Jonson, in 1603, wrote a moving and, according to Laurence Lerner,¹⁴⁹ technically flawless poem for his dead seven-year-old son. (See Appendix V.) Lerner suggests that Jonson wrote such a skillful poem not because he was unfeeling and more interested in his craft than in his grief, but rather in order to “[pay] his child the compliment of not abandoning his skill when he [wrote] the epitaph.”¹⁵⁰ Lerner also suggests that “the very technical skill of the poem becomes a sign of the emotion.”¹⁵¹

Like a poem, the making of a miniature is a painstaking and time-consuming act requiring much skill, patience and forethought. We have no idea how long it took Walker to paint his miniature – it was known to take anywhere from five days to two months to complete a good one. Walker is known to have painted his large canvases with great fluidity and speed, which might suggest that he would have completed the miniature quickly. However, the much smaller surface of the ivory disk combined with the very fine brushwork may have required him to slow down his process. During what may have

¹⁴⁸ Anonymous, *The Loved and the Lost* (New York, 1856), quoted in Ellen Marie Snyder, “Innocents in a Worldly World: Victorian Children’s Gravemarkers” in *Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture*, ed. Richard E. Meyer (Ann Arbor/London: U.M.I. Research Press, 1989), 23.

¹⁴⁹ Laurence Lerner, *Angels and Absences: Child Deaths in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville/London: Vanderbilt University Press, 1997), 215-216.

¹⁵⁰ Lerner, *Angels and Absences*, 213.

¹⁵¹ Lerner, *Angels and Absences*, 214.

been hours, days or weeks, while Walker toiled over his miniature he remained, metaphorically, in close contact with Alice. In spite of the fact that the *Portrait of Alice Walker* is the only known miniature by this artist, it exemplifies an exceptional technique.¹⁵² Perhaps Walker, through his meticulously painted miniature,¹⁵³ was paying his daughter the same compliment Jonson had paid his son and expressed his emotion through his painting skill.

A portrait miniature is much more than a two-dimensional posthumous mourning portrait. It is a very private expression of love and remembrance in the shape of a three-dimensional object – a brooch in this case – which was meant to be worn, to be held in one's hand, or just to be looked at while it lay displayed in its case. But when the artist, Horatio Walker, and the mourning parent become one and the same person, the equation shifts slightly.¹⁵⁴ While other parents would have used the finished commissioned image of their dead child to help them deal with their loss – and indeed, Mrs. Walker might well have done so – I believe that Walker used the actual process of painting to fill his. It is not, therefore, merely the deviations from the compositional guidelines that make this posthumous mourning portrait interesting, but rather the idea of Walker's grieving process being interwoven with that of the painting process. One could speculate that perhaps laboring over a two-inch ivory disk in his studio, alone and in communion with

¹⁵² Karel, *Horatio Walker*, 229.

¹⁵³ Walker had trained as a limner in Toronto at the photography firm of Notman and Fraser. However, he is best known for his large landscape and genre paintings, all of which demonstrate a much looser brush stroke and less naturalism than that found in the miniature.

¹⁵⁴ Although many artists lost children to death, not all of them painted posthumous mourning portraits of their deceased children. Rembrandt's first three children died in infancy but no funeral portraits are in evidence. Benjamin Robert Haydon, a nineteenth-century American painter, lost four children but sketched only one after death (Lerner, 242). Nineteenth-century Quebec portraitist Théophile Hamel lost three of his five children to death in childhood but there is no evidence of his having painted their posthumous portraits (Nicolai, 55).

“Alice” might have given Walker a very personal and private outlet through which to come to terms with, to mourn, and to accept his loss.

Certainly no one will ever know what was going through Horatio Walker’s mind as he painted the miniature of his dead daughter or gazed upon the finished brooch in later years. However, what is evident is his delicate, gentle treatment of paint in creating an idealistic portrait in which he situates his deceased daughter somewhere in that liminal space between life and death – caught forever within the confines of a gold brooch.

CONCLUSION

Nineteenth-century posthumous mourning portraits provide a small window onto how some Victorian parents mourned and remembered their deceased children. Although the painted portraits and the postmortem photographs each conform to general conventions, when looked at individually they are as varied as the subjects in the images and as individual as the parents who commissioned them. Some of the portraits are obvious images of denial as demonstrated in the ways in which the deceased children were portrayed – the life-like painted posthumous mourning portraits with absolutely no hint that the child is deceased, the postmortem photographs portraying the dead child as asleep, the photographs of corpses which have been maneuvered into sitting position with eyes open, or the photographs where the closed eyes have actually been painted open. At the same time many of the posthumous images seem to reflect acknowledgement – death symbols in the painted and photographic portraits, photographs of corpses either lying in their coffins or reflecting no effort to hide the ravages of a painful illness. And then there are the portraits where aspects of denial and acknowledgement appear in the same image such as the photographs of children where if not for a cut flower in their hands, could easily be mistaken for a living, sleeping child. Bereaved parents clearly had choices that they could make regarding how they would remember their deceased children through portraiture.

A page from one of the Notman record books provides us with insight into some of the choices that bereaved parents may have made regarding just how alive they might or might not have wanted their deceased children to look. On one particular page there are

two images of the same child, *Mrs. Sepsed's dead baby, Montreal, QC*, (1902, fig. 78). The upper view could easily be taken for a living sleeping baby with no clues or signs that a death is involved. In the lower view, with the addition of a bouquet of flowers across the baby's body, the image immediately becomes an obvious postmortem photograph. One might wonder which view these particular parents chose to have made into *cartes-de-visite* to send to their friends and family. Did they prefer a photograph of their dead infant that could pass for a living baby? Or did they want to include some sort of sign – the flowers in this case – to confirm, even in such a natural life-like portrait, that their child was indeed deceased?

No matter how hard we try to enter the past, we can never fully succeed and our understandings of it are always coloured by our contemporary viewing perspective. Not least of these is the fact that we see images of long-dead children who mean nothing to us. However, there is more to experiencing nineteenth-century posthumous portraits than what is represented in the image. This is very relevant to this thesis since the Notman Photographic Collection, the source for most of the postmortem photographs I refer to, has been digitized and the photographs are principally consulted in this fashion.

Elizabeth Edwards claims that “the relationship between photograph and memory and the way it obtains its privileged position as a conduit of memory is refracted through the photograph's materiality.”¹⁵⁵ Looking at nineteenth-century postmortem images of children in digital form becomes problematic since we have been removed from an integral part of the photograph – the object. Geoffrey Batchen claims that “digital imaging remains an *overtly* fictional process. As a practice that is *known* to be nothing

¹⁵⁵ Elizabeth Edwards, “Photographs as Objects of Memory,” in *Material Memoirs*, eds. Marius Kwant, Christopher Breward and Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford/New York: Berg, 1999), 221.

but fabrication, digitization abandons even the *rhetoric* of truth that has been such an important part of photography's cultural success."¹⁵⁶ Therefore, the digital form that the image has been given removes the photograph even further from the contemporary viewer making it even more impossible to understand the significance that these postmortem portraits might have had for the parents of the subjects. If and when we are able to view them as the original owners did – by holding the object-image in our hands (albeit gloved) – we may be deceived into thinking that the past has now been rendered accessible. But Keith Moxey argues that an artwork is opaque and that “values of the present will inevitably be placed on the image because that is where we are.”¹⁵⁷ Therefore, when I hold the object-image in my hands I can only see the opaque image of *a child's corpse*. Bereaved and grieving nineteenth-century parents saw past the surface into the object and saw *their child*.

Edwards is also concerned with the way in which photographs are used as “objects in social space.”¹⁵⁸ She asks: *What* is displayed – *where*? And *what* is hidden – *where* and *why*? In the case of the nineteenth-century postmortem photographs viewed in today's world of computer technology, the *what* and *where* are digital databases displayed on computer monitors. And what is hidden? The objects – the actual daguerreotypes or *cartes-de-visite*. Where? In dark, sterile, temperature-controlled vaults. Why? Their physical fragility and age is certainly a logical reason, but the decision has an affective result.

¹⁵⁶ Geoffrey Batchen, “Ghost Stories: the beginnings and ends of photography,” in *Art Monthly Australia* 76 (Dec. 1994) : 6.

¹⁵⁷ Keith Moxey, “Impossible Distance: Past and Present in the Study of Dürer and Grünewald,” lecture at Concordia University, 3 October 2003.

¹⁵⁸ Edwards, “Photographs as Objects of Memory,” 223.

Removing the objects/images of death so far from the viewer both physically and metaphorically further reinforces contemporary society's attitude to death – in many cases avoidance. Have these postmortem photographs in fact, as Ruby claims, been “put out of sight ‘behind the scenes’”? Perhaps archivists realize that many twenty-first-century viewers may only be interested in the image of death and not the feelings that the combination of object and image – touch and sight – might instill. Perhaps this combination is no longer necessary since the direct mourners of the deceased have long since died. Perhaps being put in actual physical contact with the object-image might be perceived as too personal and force the twenty-first-century viewer into acknowledging that death really is a reality. One could wonder just what or who is being protected by the gloves and the digital distance – the fragility of the daguerreotypes and the *cartes-de-visite* or the contemporary viewer's perceived sensibility?

It is important to realize that our contemporary culture is just as wrapped up in the simultaneous acceptance/denial of death as the Victorians were – but with a twist. Unlike the Victorians, who simultaneously romanticized, acknowledged and denied ‘real’ death, we romanticize fictional death and avoid ‘real’ death. Perhaps my sensitivity to the nineteenth-century dynamic reflects this twentieth-century fact. Contemporary viewers have become numbed by the daily barrage of images of death and devastation in the news media. Granted, we are touched and concerned for the many tragedies, but when it comes right down to it the dead child on the front page of the newspaper or on the television screen is usually on the other side of the world. The reaction to the images of real death is often the same as that of fictional death – not real. At the same time television programming is inundated with shows pertaining to death – *Cold Case*, *CSI*, *CSI Miami*,

CSI New York – all of which expose the viewer to frame after frame of dead bodies, graphic postmortems and violent murders. But as Jay Ruby suggests and I believe, although society today seems comfortable with viewing images of strangers' real and fictional deaths, most find it difficult to view an actual dead body. More often than not contemporary viewers consider the 150-year-old images of children's corpses, photographed at the request of the parents and kept as loving mementos, as grisly, macabre and distasteful. It is interesting how just the opposite was true in the nineteenth century, when staged photographs such as *Fading Away*, (1858, fig. 79) were considered to be in bad taste but photographing the actual corpse immediately after death was not.¹⁵⁹ Fiction and reality have unquestionably traded places.

There has definitely been more attention given to Victorian postmortem photography in the last five years. In the past two years alone there have been several exhibitions – mostly of daguerreotypes – in which postmortem images could be seen by the general public.¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, in exhibitions such as *The Dead* (1995-96), although it contains some twentieth-century postmortem photographs that were commissioned by parents, it is the idea of death in general that is being considered. Andres Serrano, for his *Morgue Series* (1994), photographed corpses in a morgue, including some of babies, as in *Fatal Meningitis II*, (fig. 80). I would suggest that Serrano's photographs of corpses are

¹⁵⁹ Robert Leggat, "Robinson, Henry Peach" *A History of Photography* 3 Nov. 2005 <<http://www.rleggat.com/photohistory/history/robinson.htm>> When first exhibited, *Fading Away* caused controversy amongst the viewing public who felt that the subject was not suitable for photography. "One critic said that Robinson had cashed in "on the most painful sentiments which it is the lot of human beings to experience." It would seem that it was perfectly in order for painters to paint pictures on such themes, but not for photographers to do so."

¹⁶⁰ *The Dawn of Photography: French Daguerreotypes, 1839-1855* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, September 23, 2003 – January 4, 2004; *The Art of the American Daguerreotype* at The Art Institute of Chicago, June 21 – September 2003; *Le dernier portrait* at the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, March 5 – May 26, 2002; *Of Blood and Affection: Family Postmortem Photographs* at Gallery TPW (Toronto) Sept.-Oct., 1997; *The Dead*, at the National Museum of Photography, Film & Television (UK) October 5, 1995-January 7, 1996; *Looking at Death*, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts (Harvard University) March-April, 1993.

in the same category as the graphic ‘fictional’ and far-away ‘real’ deaths that the twenty-first-century viewing public is exposed to every day in the media because his photographs are those of nameless corpses. There seems to be no intimacy in *Fatal Meningitis II* because of the anonymity of the baby and because of the large size of the image (125.5 x 152.4 cm.). Viewers of this photograph, therefore, may not find it as difficult to look at as the nineteenth-century postmortem photographs. It is the idea that someone had their child’s corpse photographed specifically to use as a memento that confuses and discomfits many viewers today.

The reason that so few postmortem photographs have survived to the twenty-first century is very likely as Jay Ruby claims: “Given our current attitudes toward death, which were formed by the 1920s, it is safe to assume that many people, both in [North] America and Europe, destroyed their family’s post-mortem photographs because they were appalled by them.”¹⁶¹ In my own extensive family collection of nineteenth-century *cartes-de-visite* there are no postmortem images – possibly due to my grandmother’s purging.¹⁶² She did, however, acknowledge the deaths of some of the children by recording them on the backs of existing ‘living’ photographs (fig. 81). But it is also just as likely that many images of death, mourning and remembrance remain today as family heirlooms several generations after the death of the subject. Whether or not they are looked at with the fondness that they had originally been, is another question. Ruby suggests that in fact: “The disappearance of photographs of the dead could be an

¹⁶¹ Jay Ruby, “Post-mortem Portraiture in America,” *History of Photography* 8.3 (July-Sept 1984): 209

¹⁶² Toni Booth, email, 11 Nov. 2004. Toni Booth of the National Museum of Photography, Film & Television (Bradford, West Yorkshire, UK) suggests that although postmortem photography was practiced in the UK, there is “still some debate as to how widely, due to the relatively small numbers of examples which survive.” This could be another explanation for the lack of postmortem photographs in my grandmother’s collection since most of her extended family lived in England.

illustration of the theory [. . .] that more and more aspects of life are put out of sight “behind the scenes.”¹⁶³ We are therefore indebted to photographers such as William Notman (Montreal) and James Topley (Ottawa), who, by keeping such meticulous records of their photographs, have provided us with good examples of the genre.

The nineteenth-century painted posthumous mourning portraits, with their alive-looking subjects, are much less difficult for twenty-first-century viewers to look at and to understand. More often than not, unless ‘posthumous’ is included in the title, the portraits are not recognizable as such to the twenty-first-century eye, and they are viewed as delightful images of nineteenth-century children. But even when we learn from the title that the portrait is posthumous we are not affected in the same way as when we look at postmortem photographs with their blatant images of corpses. Hanging on museum walls with a comfortable physical distance between them and the viewer, they allow for a much less personal encounter than do the small and intimate daguerreotypes and *cartes-de-visite*. It is also much easier for us to understand why nineteenth-century parents might have desired ‘living’ posthumous images of their dead children, since this is the accepted norm for contemporary parents – although more often through photographs than through painted portraits.¹⁶⁴

Death is a fact of life and although it became one of the major taboos of the western world in the twentieth century, it did not disappear. Children continued to die (although

¹⁶³ Ruby, “Post-mortem Portraiture in America,” 210.

¹⁶⁴ There are some contemporary portraitists who will paint posthumous portraits, though very few. Those who advertise on the internet claim they will paint posthumous portraits from photographs. British portraitist Lucy McKie paints on the average of three posthumous portraits per year, all of which are from photographs. She says: “interestingly, every single time the person will always say “They are alive in the picture!” and stress that the picture has in some way brought them back a little, and it happens every time without fail [. . .]. Somehow, it crosses a barrier that photography cannot – I’m not entirely sure why this is, but it’s interesting to think that even despite the great photography we have at our finger tips nowadays, the age old posthumous portrait continues.” Lucy McKie, Email, Oct. 16, 2004.

never again in such great numbers as in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) and parents continued to mourn and remember them through portraiture, whether living or postmortem images. Like death itself, posthumous portraiture never disappeared, but went underground, and is just beginning to emerge as an accepted means to mourn and remember a deceased child.

Painted posthumous portraits and postmortem photographs are particularly characteristic of the nineteenth century but they are not unique to it. Throughout the twentieth century, postmortem photographs continued to be taken (figs. 82 & 83). But these images became increasingly associated with a ghoulish morbidity and as the practice lost its social acceptability postmortem photographs were kept hidden. Fortunately, from the end of the twentieth and into the beginning of the twenty-first century, there are signs that attitudes are changing once again. In many contemporary maternity wards and neonatal units, when a baby dies the staff encourages the parents to have a photograph of their baby's corpse to help them deal with and acknowledge not just the death of the baby but its existence, no matter how short.¹⁶⁵ Even today, postmortem photographs provide evidence that parents continue to remember their deceased children in this way. Private individuals have begun to make postmortem photography an accepted possibility as seen in the case of Americans Cheryl Haggard and Sandy Puc,¹⁶⁶ (fig. 84). But in spite of the fact that these two women are successfully breaking old

¹⁶⁵ One woman, who wishes to remain unnamed, recounted to me that when her newborn baby died in St. Boniface Hospital in Winnipeg she was given a kit containing a postmortem photograph of her baby, the baby's foot and hand prints and the tape measure used to measure its birth length.

¹⁶⁶ Sean Kelly, "One Mother's devastation leads to images of healing" *Denver Post* 20 June 2005, n.p. Americans Cheryl Haggard and Sandy Puc' created a volunteer organization, Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep, which "plans to offer bereaved [parents] a photo session, an 8 x 10-inch portrait and a DVD for free. Haggard and Puc' hope to enlist photographers to help and to get hospitals to inform parents about the option. They also plan to form a support group for families." For more information on this organization see: www.nowilaymedowntosleep.org

barriers by advocating the confronting and accepting of a child's death through postmortem photographs, the title of their non-profit organization, Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep, alerts us to the fact that like the Victorians, an edge of denial remains.

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Illustrations

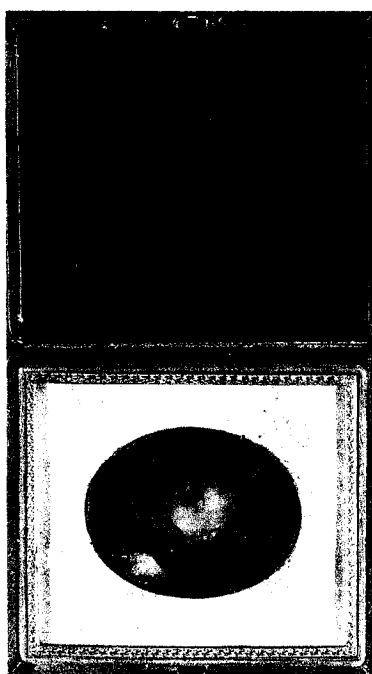


Figure 1 Thomas Coffin Doane (1814-1895), *Postmortem portrait of Louis-Joseph Papineau (March 16, 1854-February 6, 1855), baby son of Louis-Joseph Papineau, 1855*. Daguerreotype, Image (oval): 5.5 x 4 cm., closed case: 8.5 x 9.5 cm. Library and Archives Canada.



Figure 2 William Brymner (1855-1925), *Posthumous Portrait of Sarah Diana de Tessier Percy Porteous, 1901*. Oil on canvas, 95 x 67 cm. McCord Museum.



Figure 3 Robert Harris (1849-1919), *Portrait of Frances Gertrude Lawson*, c.1874. Oil on canvas, 60.3 x 45.7 cm. Private collection.



Figure 4 Cornelius Krieghoff (1815-1872), *Portrait of Emily Anne Leeming*, c.1847. Oil on canvas, 52 x 45 cm., Private collection, Ottawa.



Figure 5 Shepard Alonzo Mount (American, 1804-1868), *Drawing of Camille*, 1868. Pencil on paper, 35.6 x 28.0 cm., The Long Island Museum of American Art, History and Carriages, Stony Brook, NY.



Figure 6 Shepard Alonzo Mount (American, 1804-1868), *Portrait of Camille*, 1868. Oil on canvas, 43.2 x 35.6 cm., The Long Island Museum of Art, History and Carriages, Stony Brook, N.Y.



Figure 7 *Photograph of William Corbridge Coombs*, before June, 1888. Cabinet card, 16.5 x 10.5 cm., Peel Heritage Complex, Brampton, Ontario.



Figure 8 Ada Hume-Butler (Australian), *Portrait of William Corbridge Coombs*, 1890. Oil on canvas, 91.80 x 71.40 cm., Peel Heritage Complex, Brampton, Ontario.



Figure 9 Hunter & Co. (Toronto), *Photograph of William Lumbers*, before 1900. Cabinet card, 16.5 x 10.5 cm., Peel Heritage Complex, Brampton, Ontario.



Figure 10 Harry Spiers (1869-1947), *Untitled (Portrait of Young Boy, William Lumbers)*, c.1900. Watercolour on paper, 63.50 x 51 cm., Peel Heritage Complex, Brampton, Ontario.



Figure 11 M. Gordigiammi (Italian), *Portrait of William Cawthra*, c.1883. Oil on canvas, 52 x 45 cm., Peel Heritage Complex, Brampton, Ontario.



Figure 12 Paul Peel (1860-1892), *Portrait of Hamilton King Meek*, 1890. Oil on canvas, 42.6 x 33 cm., Museum London, London, Ontario.



Figure 13 Anonymous, *Boy on his deathbed*, 1584. Location unknown.



Figure 14 Johnnes Thopas (c.1620-c.1682), *Girl Belonging to the Van Valkenburg Family on Her Deathbed*, c.1682. Oil on panel, 58 x 71.5 cm., Van Valkenburg Stichting.



Figure 15 Charles Willson Peale (American, 1741-1827), *Rachel Weeping*, 1772 & 1776. Oil on canvas, 94.3 x 81.9 cm., Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Figure 16 Pierre LeBer, *The True Portrait of Marguerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700)*, 1700. Oil canvas, 62.2 x 49.5 cm., The Marguerite Bourgeoys Museum, Montreal.



Figure 17 Anthony or Nina Meucci (American), *John McGill Crookshank*, 1824. Watercolour and gouache on ivory, 3.25 x 3.5 cm., Royal Ontario Museum.



Figure 18 Attrib. Horace Bundy (American, 1814-1883), *Posthumous Portrait of Isobel Richardson, Stanstead, QC*, 1843. Oil and graphite on canvas, 74.8 x 60.3 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 19 Horatio Walker (1858-1938), *Portrait of Alice Walker*, c.1891. Watercolour and gouache on ivory, 4.5 x 4.0 cm. (oval sight), set in gold brooch. Library and Archives Canada.



Figure 20 Southwork & Hawes (Boston), *Postmortem photograph of unidentified child*, c.1850. Daguerreotype, full plate, International Museum of Photography, George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.



Figure 21 Notman & Sandham, *Missie Holden, deceased, Montreal, QC, 1880*. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper - Albumen process, 10 x 15 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 22 Wm. Notman & Son, *Mrs. Hill's dead baby, Montreal, QC, 1889*. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper - Albumen process, 17 x 12 cm., McCord Museum.

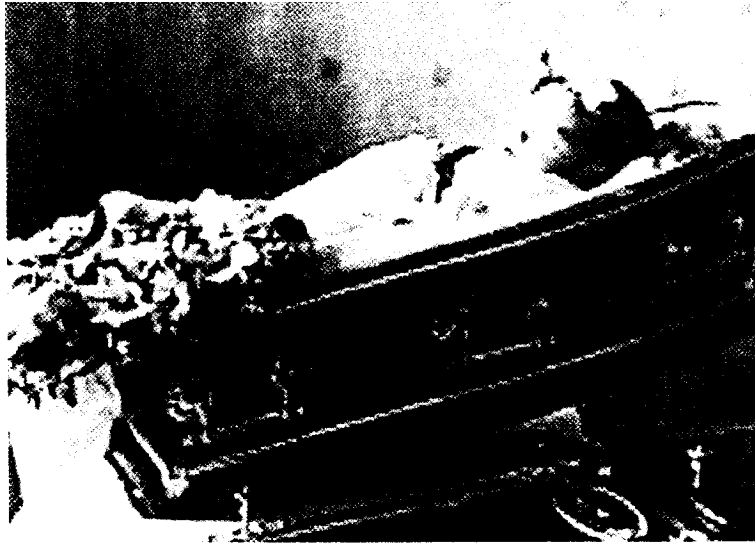


Figure 23 Notman & Sandham, *J. Edgar's dead child, Montreal, QC, 1877*. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper - Albumen process, 6.2 x 9.5 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 24 William Notman (1826-1891), *Miss Porteous in bed, Montreal, QC, 1863*. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper - Albumen process, 8.5 x 5.6 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 25 Bartle Brothers (Toronto), *Dead child laid out for funeral*, c.1895-1910. From glass plate negative, size n/a, Archives of Ontario.



Figure 26 Notman & Sandham, *Mr. M. Foley's dead child*, Montreal, QC, 1878. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper - Albumen process, 12 x 17 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 27 Copy of page from one of William Notman's record books, 1890. McCord Museum.



Figure 28 Eduard Clement (French), *Portrait of woman displaying image of a child and holding a pansy*, 1854. Salted paper photograph, 13.4 x 12 cm., Alkazi Collection of Photography, New York.



Figure 29 Wm. Notman & Son, *Mrs. George Drummond's dead baby, Montreal, QC, 1886.* Silver salts on paper mounted on paper - Albumen process, 17.78 x 12.7 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 30 William Notman (1826-1891), *Alexander Walker Olgilvie's dead child, Montreal, QC, 1863.* Silver salts on paper mounted on paper - Albumen process, 8.5 x 5.6 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 31 John Dwight (British, 1635-1703), *Lydia Dwight on her Deathbed*, c.1674. Stoneware, hand-modeled & salt-glazed, 25 x 20 x 11 cm., Victoria & Albert Museum.



Figure 32 John Dwight (British, 1635-1703), *Lydia Dwight Resurrected*, c.1674. Stoneware, hand-modeled, salt-glazed, 24 x 9 cm., Victoria & Albert Museum.

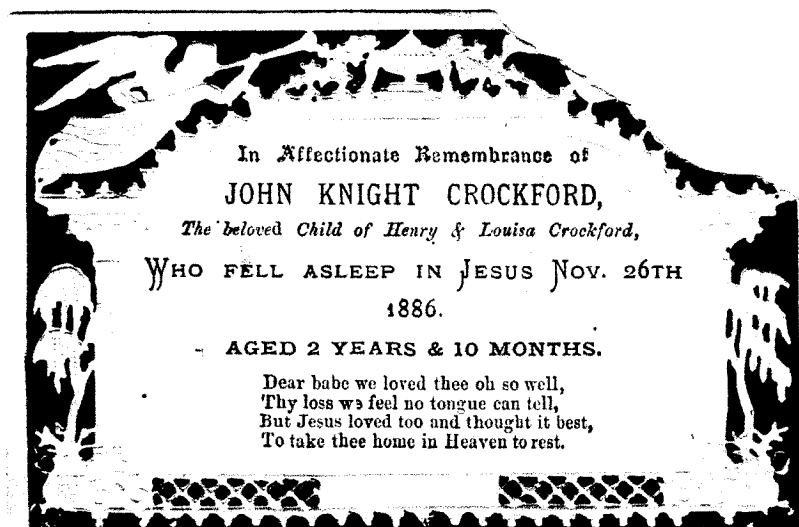


Figure 33 *Memorial card*, 7.8 x 11.5 cm., Collection of the author.



Figure 34 *Mourning stationery*. The thicker the black band, the more recent the bereavement.

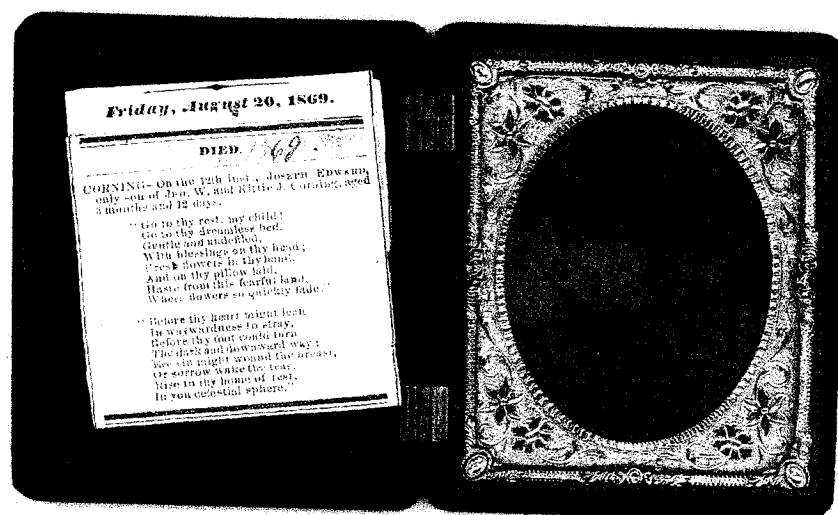


Figure 35 Anonymous, *Postmortem of Baby Eddie*, 1869. Tintype, sixth plate, Location unknown.



"In the quiet
 Pause not here to weep
 Scarcely on earth she smiled
 Ere she fell asleep.
 Only a little child
 God to us had given
 Pure and undefiled
 Only fit for heaven
 Only a little child
 That our love possessed,
 That our ears beguiled,
 That is now at rest.
 Only a little child
 Sweet as peace and blessed,
 We were unreconciled
 And at last at rest.

Figure 36 Anonymous, *Postmortem portrait of child*, c.1870. Cabinet card. Location unknown.



Figure 37 Currier and Ives (New York), *The Mother's Dream*, c.1860. Lithograph on paper, 37.8 x 27.9 cm., Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan.

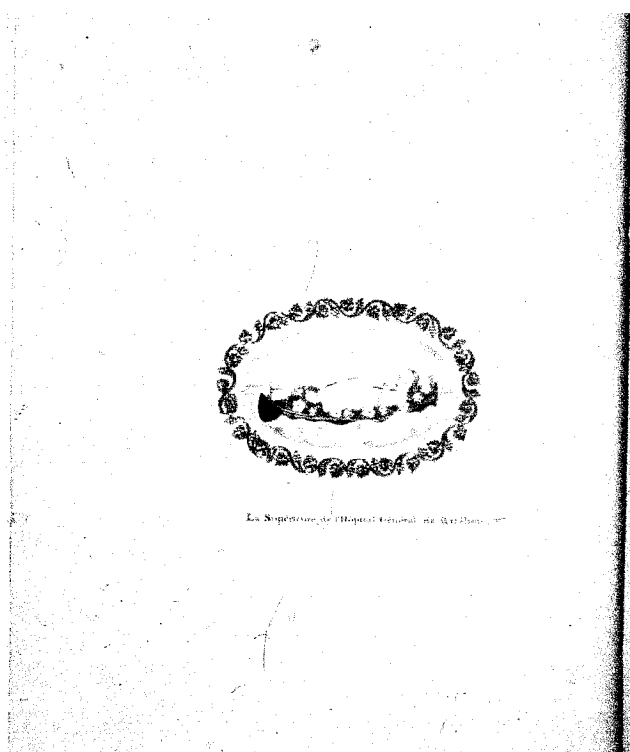


Figure 38 Anonymous, *A Dead Child on a Bed of Flowers in a Boat*, n.d. Watercolour over pencil, heightened with gum Arabic, with metallic border on mustard paper, page: 279 x 227 cm. oval: 4.6 x 7.4 cm. Folio 39 from Lady Belleau's Album, Library and Archives Canada.

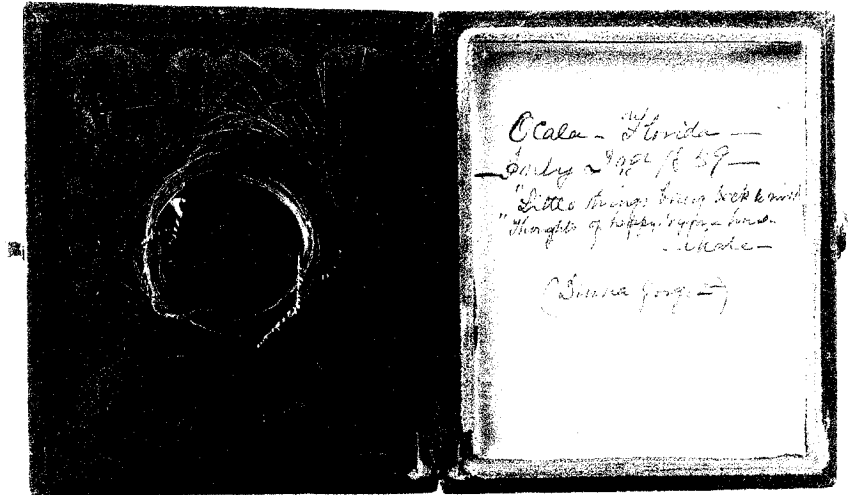


Figure 39 Makers unknown *Kate*, c.1859. Leather daguerreotype case with handwritten inscription and lock of hair, 7.0 x 12.0 x 0.3 cm. (open). Private collection.

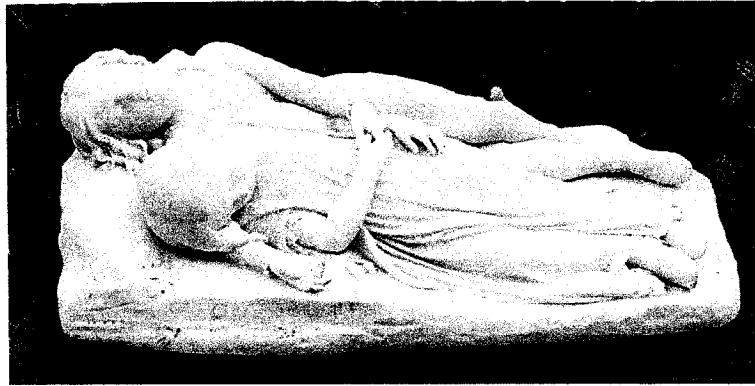


Figure 40 Thomas Crawford (American, c.1813-1857), *The Babes in the Woods*, c. 1851. Marble, 43.2 x 124.5 x 85.1 cm., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 41 W. Archer (British, 1839-1935), *The Empty Cradle*, n.d. Oil on canvas, 40.6 x 56 cm. Museum of Childhood, Edinburgh.

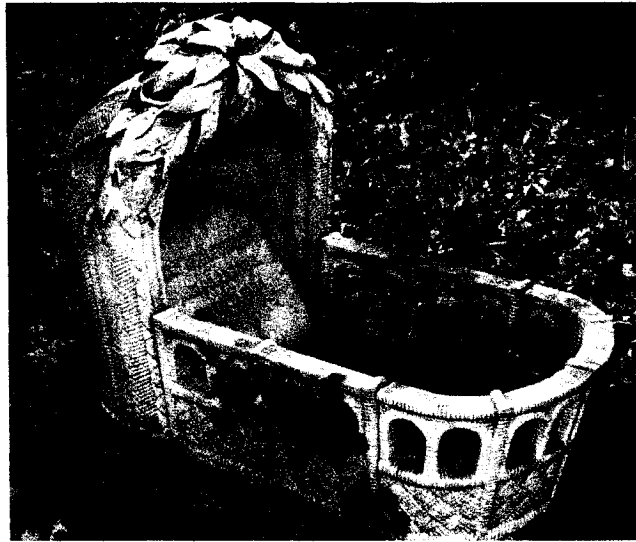


Figure 42 Tomb of a Baby in Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, Mass.



Figure 43 Tomb of a Child in Loctudy Cemetery, Finistère.



GONE TO HEAVEN.

It is our painful duty to announce the release from heavy suffering of our little comrade

WILLIAM CORBRIDGE,

SECOND SON OF

Commissioner and Mrs. Coombs,

who died at Toronto on the morning of the 26th June, in his seventh year. The fragrance of his sweet memory will long live in the remembrance of the many of our comrades who from time to time have been brought into the society of the Commissioner's family, whilst those who have almost daily watched the unfolding of a flower of so much promise, bowing to the will of Him who doeth all things well, will ever look back with thankfulness upon the lesson of a life, however prematurely closed, that has taught from day to day the truth, how really and truly the Child Jesus still lives amongst us, in His own little ones on earth. Let us remember our Commissioner across the seas in what, with all its light and hope, must indeed be a heavy trial and sorrow.



SATURDAY, JULY 7TH, 1888.

Figure 44 Obituary for William Corbridge Coombs in *War Cry*, 7 July 1888.



Figure 45 William Notman & Son, *Mrs. Barnett's dead child, Montreal, QC, 1911*. Silver salts on glass – Gelatin dry plate process, 25 x 20 cm. McCord Museum.



Figure 46 Anonymous, *Last Portrait*, c.1858. Daguerreotype, Sixth plate. Location unknown.



Figure 47 Anonymous (American), *Postmortem photograph of an unidentified child with eyes painted open*, 1870-1890. Tintype, 21.2 x 16.4 cm., Center for Visual Communication, Mifflintown, PA.



Figure 48 William Notman (1826-1891), *Master J.B. Draffin, Montreal, QC*, 1864. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper – Albumen process, 8.5 x 5.6 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 49 Wm. Notman & Son, *Mrs. Parant's dead child, Montreal, QC, 1886*. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper - Albumen process, 17.78 x 12.7 cm., McCord Museum.

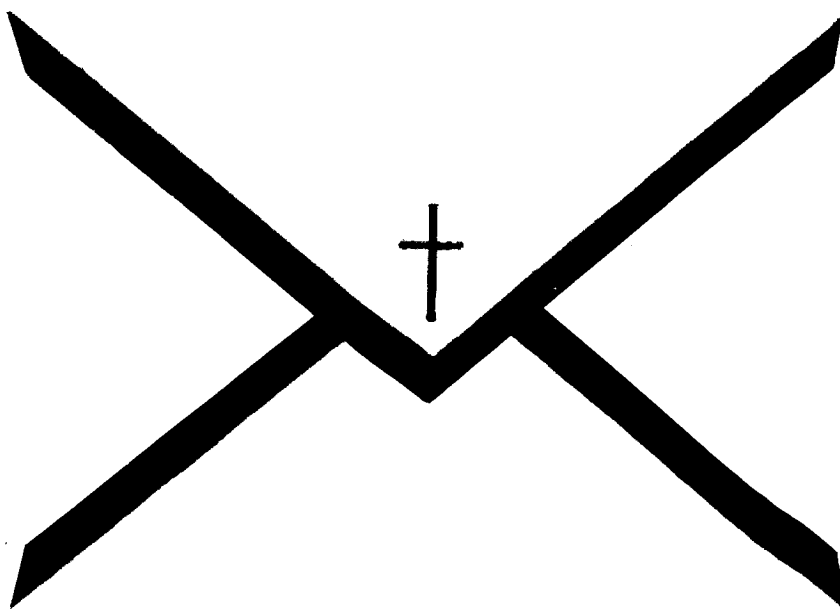


Figure 50 Example of hand held image. *Postmortem of Baby Eddie, 1869*.



Figure 51 William Notman (1826-1891), *Mr. Hunter's dead child, Montreal, QC, 1869*. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper – Albumen process, 10 x 13.7 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 52 Wm. Notman & Son, *Mrs. Morrice's dead child, Montreal, QC, 1886*. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper - Albumen process, 17.78 x 12.7 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 53 William James Topley (1845-1930), *The Dacier Baby*, 1887. From glass plate negative, 11.4 x 16.5 cm., Library and Archives Canada.



Figure 54 Jan Mijtens (c.1614-1670), *Willem van den Kerckhoven and His Family*, 1652 (and 1655). Oil on canvas, 134 x 182 cm., Haags Historisch Museum, The Hague.



Figure 55 Edwin Romanzo Elmer (American, 1850-1923), *Mourning Picture*, 1890. Oil on canvas, 70.9 x 91.4 cm., Smith College Museum of Art.

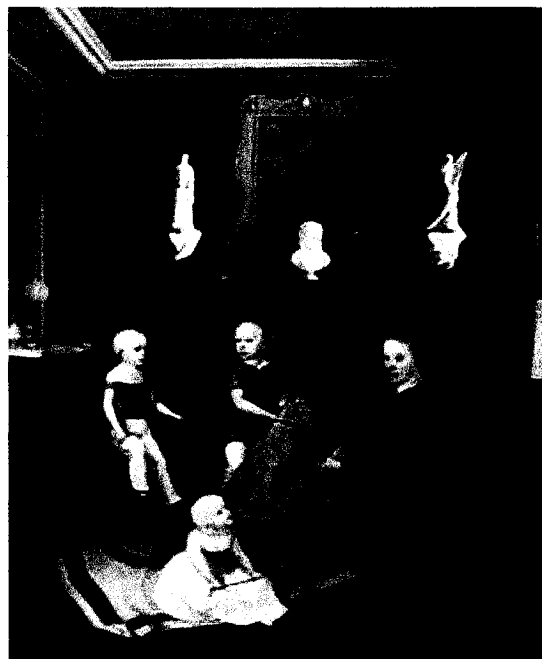


Figure 56 Attrib. Louis Ransom (American, 1831-1926), *The Carryl Children*, after 1861. Oil on canvas, 119.38 x 96.52 cm., Fruitlands Museum, Harvard, MA.



Figure 57 William James Topley (1845-1930), *Mrs. Balcomb (Group) (Master Balcomb Dead)*, 1901. From glass plate negative, approx. 11.4 x 16.5 cm., Library and Archives Canada.



Figure 58 Anonymous, *Postmortem portrait with mother*, c.1849. Daguerreotype, Sixth plate. National Gallery of Canada.



Figure 59 William Notman (1826-1891), *Mrs. Williams and Baby, Montreal, QC, 1892*. Photocopy from Notman record book, 9.5 x 6.2 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 60 Notman & Sandham, *Mrs. G. Grant's dead child, Montreal, QC, 1878*. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper - Albumen process, 17 x 12 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 61 Berthe Morisot (1841-1895), *Le Berceau (The Cradle)*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 56 x 46 cm., Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Figure 62 Notman & Sandham, *Mrs. Blanchard's dead baby, Montreal, QC*, 1881. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper - Albumen process, 17.18 x 12.7 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 63 William James Topley (1845-1930), *The Kimber Baby*, December, 1897. From glass plate negative, 20.3 x 25.4 cm., Library and Archives Canada.



Figure 64 Wm. Notman & Son, *Mr. Cleghorn's dead child*, Montreal, QC, 1900. Silver salts on glass - Gelatin dry plate process, 20 x 25 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 65 Anonymous, *Sarah Christiana Bain, dead child*, copied 1863. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper - Albumen process, 8.5 x 5.6 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 66 William Notman (1826-1891), *Mrs. Walker's dead baby, Montreal, QC*, 1868. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper - Albumen process, 10 x 13.7 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 67 William Notman (1826-1891), *Missie McKeogh, dead child, Montreal, QC, 1863*. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper - Albumen process, 8 x 5 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 68 William Notman (1826-1891), *Corpse of Mr. Gelinas' baby, Montreal, QC, 1872*. Photograph of page from Notman record book, 23 x 28 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 69 Ferdinand Bol (c.1619-1680), *Joost van den Bempden on his Deathbed*, 1659. Oil on canvas, (measurements n/a), Collectie Six, Amsterdam.



Figure 70 Prior-Hamblin School, *Unidentified Child*, c.1835-1845. Oil on canvas, 66.04 x 53.34 cm., Museum of American Folk Art, New York.



Figure 71 Allan & Co. (Melbourne), *Portrait of the Thomas Coombs Family*, c.1889-1896.
Photograph, 10 x 15 cm., The Salvation Army-Australia Southern Territory & Archives, Melbourne.

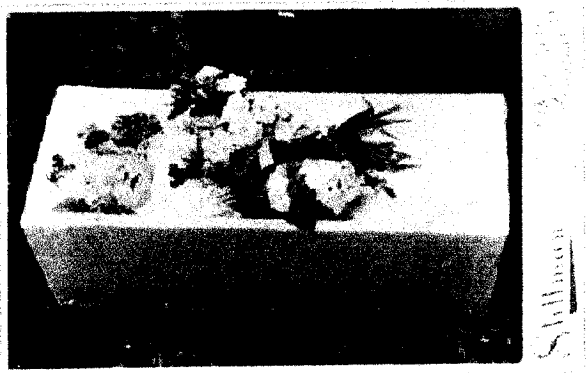


Figure 72 Anonymous (American), *Dead baby in coffin*, c.1860. *Carte-de-visite*, 10.2 x 6 cm.,
 Location unknown.



Figure 73 *Portrait of Alice Walker*, brooch in open case.

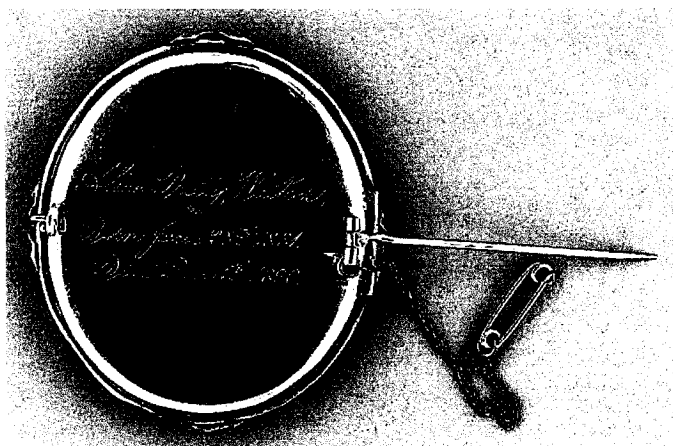


Figure 74 *Portrait of Alice Walker*, verso.



Figure 75 Horatio Walker (1858-1938), *Alice*, 1884. Oil on canvas, 40.6 x 35.6 cm., Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery, Concordia University, Montreal.



Figure 76 Horatio Walker (1858-1938), *Alice*, n.d. Lead pencil, measurements n/a, Private collection.



Figure 77 Charlotte Schreiber (1834-1922), *Relics*, n.d. Oil on canvas, 89.2 x 55.2 cm., Art Gallery of Hamilton.

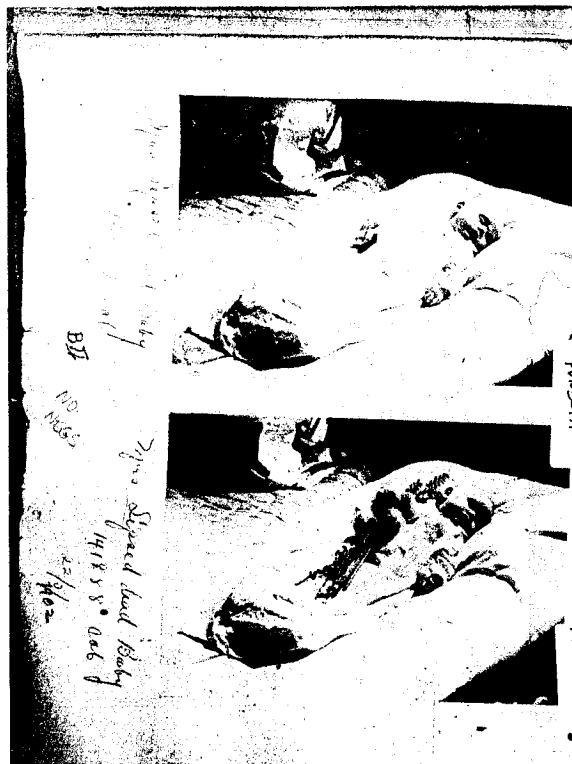


Figure 78 Wm. Notman & Son *Mrs. Sepsed's dead baby*, Montreal, QC, 1902. Photograph of bottom half of page from Notman record book, 28 x 23 cm., McCord Museum.



Figure 79 Henry Peach Robinson (British), *Fading Away*, 1858. Albumen print, 58.4 x 93.98 cm., Royal Photographic Society, Bath, UK.



Figure 80 Andres Serrano (American, b.1950), *Fatal Meningitis II*, 1992. Cibachrome, 125.73 x 152.40 cm., Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

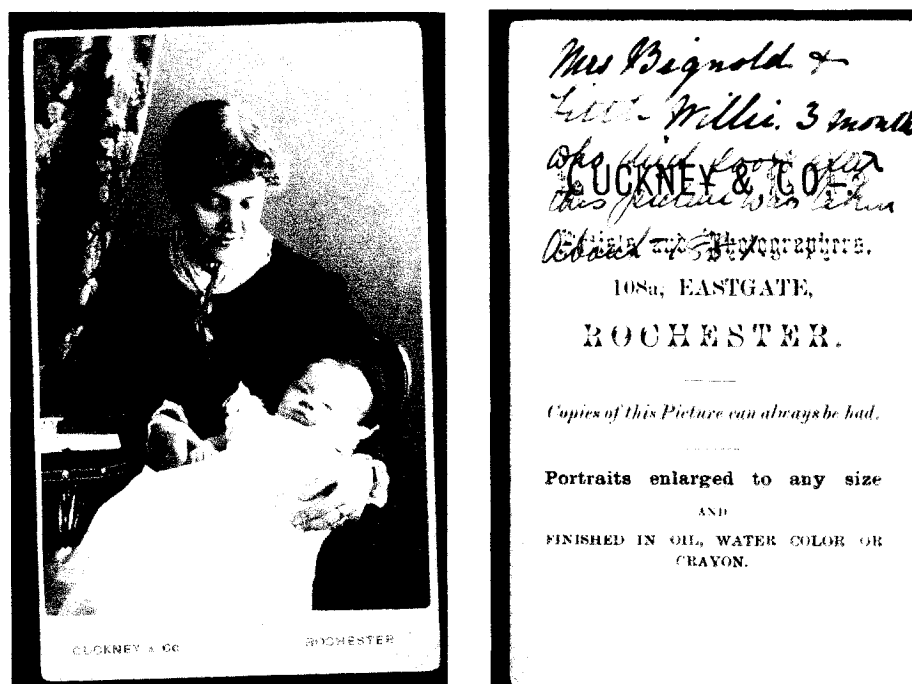
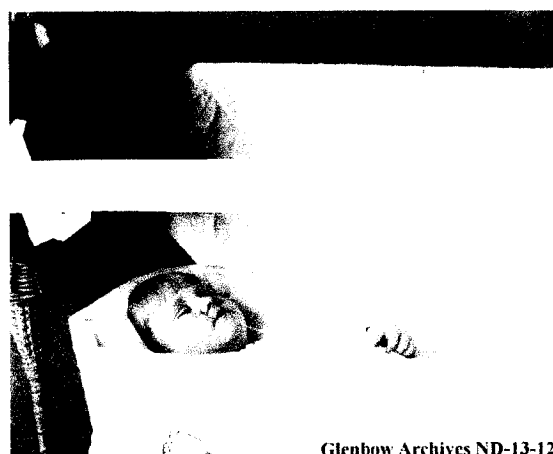


Figure 81 Cuckney & Co. (England), *Mrs. Bignold and Little Willie*, c.1881. *Carte-de-visite* 10.2 x 6.2 cm., Collection of the author.



Glenbow Archives ND-13-126

Figure 82 John W. Gibson (Saskatoon), *Dead baby in coffin, Saskatoon*, c.1930. Black & white photograph, measurements n/a, Glenbow Archives Photographs, Calgary.

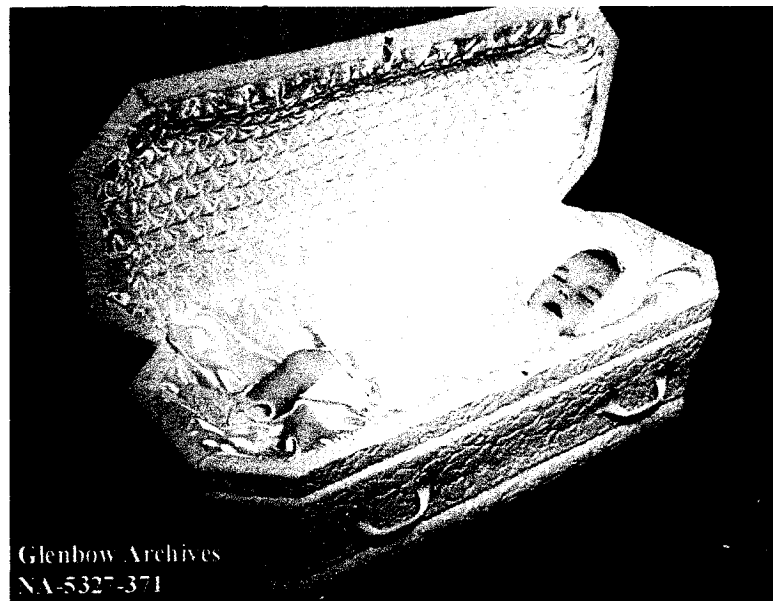


Figure 83 A.E. Cross (Lethbridge, Alberta), *Child in Casket at Martin Brothers Funeral Home, Lethbridge, Alberta*, 1961. Black & white photograph, measurements n/a. Glenbow Archives Photographs.



Figure 84 Sandy Puc', *Maddux Achilles Haggard* 2/4/05-2/10/05, 2005. Digital photograph, 20.3 x 25.4 cm., Private collection.

Appendix I

List of Canadian posthumous portraits and background information of the subjects.**1. Anthony or Nina Meucci *John McGill Crookshank*, 1824. Watercolour and gouache on ivory, 3.25 x 3.5 cm. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.**

Father: The Honorable George Crookshank⁹

Mother: Sarah Crookshank

Number of siblings: none

Born: July 12, 1823

Died: March 3, 1824

Place of death: New York City

Cause of death: croup

Place of burial: unknown

Portrait painted: 1824

From photo: no

Other means of memorializing: unknown

2. Horace Bundy *Posthumous Portrait of Isobel Richardson, Stanstead, QC*, 1843. Oil and graphite on canvas, 74.8 x 60.3 cm. McCord Museum, Montreal.

Father: Charles

Mother: Louisa Isabella

Number of siblings: 2 (one died two months after Isobel at 7 years old, one died in childbirth at age 25)

Born: c. 1831

Died: 1843

Place of death: Stanstead, QC

Cause of death: consumption

Place of burial: Stanstead

Portrait painted: 1843

From photo: no

Other means of memorializing: unknown

3. Cornelius Krieghoff, *Portrait of Emily Anne Leeming*, 1847. Oil on canvas, 52 x 45 cm. Private Collection.

Father: John (1814-1875)

Mother: Sarah (1814-1888)

Number of siblings: 3 babies died before Emily Anne born. Several more died after Emily Anne died. Only 2 sisters grew to adulthood

Born: c.1844

Died: mid-June 1847

Place of death: Montreal

Cause of death: Ship's fever

Place of burial: Mount Royal Cemetery, Montreal

Portrait painted: 1847

From photo: not known

Other means of memorializing: Memorial brooch which was lost but has been documented. Inscription on the back "In memory of Emily Anne Leeming 1844-1847."

4. Robert Harris, *Portrait of Frances Gertrude Lawson*, c.1874. Oil on canvas, 60.3 x 45.7 cm., whereabouts unknown.

Father: Frank

Mother: Gertrude

Number of siblings: unknown

Born: August 15, 1869

Died: April 18, 1873

Place of death: Halifax

Cause of death: not known

Place of burial: unknown

Portrait painted: c.1874

From photo: unknown

Other means of memorializing: unknown

5. M. Gordigiammi, *Portrait of William Cawthra*, c.1883. Oil on canvas, 39 x 50 cm. (oval). Peel Heritage Complex, Brampton, Ontario.

Father: Henry

Mother: Anna

Number of siblings: 3 (One other died in childhood check this)

Born: Mar. 6, 1864

Died: June 16, 1865

Place of death: Toronto

Cause of death: unknown

Place of burial: St. James Cemetery, Toronto

Portrait painted: 1890 (in Italy)

From photo: probably

Other means of memorializing: unknown

6. Paul Peel, *Portrait of Hamilton King Meek*, 1890. Oil on canvas, 42.6 x 33 cm. Museum London, London, Ontario.

Father: Dr. Harry

Mother: Mary

Number of siblings: none

Born: 1884

Died: May 25, 1889

Place of death: London, Ontario

Cause of death: "tragically," tubercular meningitis

Place of burial: Woodland Cemetery, London, Ontario

Portrait painted: 1890 (btwn July and Nov. when Peel was in London)

From photo: yes

Other means of memorializing: Hamilton Meek Laboratory built at Victoria Hospital in London and named in memory of Hamilton; Hamilton Meek Memorial Art Collection donated to the City of London.

7. Ada Hume-Butler, *Portrait of William Corbridge Coombs*, 1890. Oil on canvas, 91.80 x 71.40 cm. Peel Heritage Complex, Brampton, Ontario.

Father: Thomas Coombs (1st Commander of Salvation Army in Canada)

Mother: Nellie

Number of siblings: 4 (all lived to adulthood)

Born: 1882

Died: June 16, 1888

Place of death: Toronto

Cause of death: pneumonia

Place of burial: Mount Pleasant Cemetery (Toronto)

Portrait painted: 1890 (in Australia)

From photo: yes (have the photo)

Other means of memorializing: unknown

8. Horatio Walker, *Portrait of Alice Walker*, c.1891. Watercolour and gouache on ivory, 4.5 x 4.0 cm. (oval, sight). Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

Father: Horatio

Mother: Jeanette

Number of siblings: 1 brother who died in his twenties

Born: June 28, 1881

Died: Dec. 6, 1890

Place of death: New York

Cause of death: Diphtheria

Place of burial: unknown

Portrait painted: 1891

From photo: unknown

Other means of memorializing: unknown

9. Harry Spiers, *Untitled (Portrait of Young Boy, William Lumbers)*, c.1900. Watercolour on paper, 63.50 x 51 cm. Peel Heritage Complex, Brampton, Ontario. William Lumbers' background information not available.

10. William Brymner, *Posthumous Portrait of Sarah Diana de Tessier Percy Porteous*, 1901. Oil on canvas, 95 x 67 cm. McCord Museum, Montreal.

Father: Charles

Mother: Frances

Number of siblings: 10 (all lived to adulthood)

Born: 1891

Died: 1900

Place of death: Montreal

Cause of death: appendicitis

Place of burial: Montreal?

Portrait painted: 1901

From photo: possibly

Other known means of memorializing: A memorial was erected in the Italian Garden of the Porteous house on Île d'Orleans.

Appendix II

Number of reported deaths of infants under one year in Montreal in 1880¹

Contagious diseases (Whooping cough, Diphtheria, Measles, Chicken pox, Smallpox)	58
Delivery complications	38
Neurological (Convulsions, Encephalitis, etc)	110
Weakness (Anaemia, Atrophy, Debility, etc.)	157
Intestinal problems (Cholera, Diarrhoea, Gastritis, Dysentery, Typhoid fever)	278
Respiratory (Bronchitis, Croup, Grippe, Pneumonia, etc.)	62
Tubercular (Meningitis, Tuberculosis)	31
Other (Accident, Nephritis, Paralysis, Urinary)	9
No Report	34
TOTAL INFANT DEATHS	777

¹ Patricia Thornton and Sherry Olson "A deadly discrimination among Montreal infants, 1860-1900" *Continuity and Change* 16.1 (2001): 105.

Appendix III

The Early Lost

The shade of death upon thy threshold lay,
The sun from thy life's dial had departed;
A cloud came down upon thy early day,
And left thy hapless mother broken-hearted –
My boy – my boy!

Long weary months have pass'd since that sad day,
But naught beguiles my bosom of its sorrow;
Since the cold waters took thee for their prey,
No smiling hope looks forward to the morrow –
My boy – my boy!

The voice of mirth is silenced in my heart,
Thou wert so dearly loved – so fondly cherish'd;
I cannot yet believe that we must part –
That all, save thine immortal soul, has perish'd –
My boy – my boy!

My lovely, laughing, rosy, dimpled, child,
I call upon thee, when the sun shines clearest;
In the dark lonely night, in accents wild,
I breathe thy treasured name, my best and dearest –
My boy – my boy!

The hand of God has press'd me very sore –
Oh, could I clasp thee once more as of yore,
And kiss thy glowing cheeks' soft velvet bloom,
I would resign to the Almighty Giver
Without one tear – would yield thee up for ever,
And people with bright forms thy silent tome.
But hope has faded from my heart – and joy
Lies buried in thy grave, my darling boy!

Susanna Moodie²

² Susanna Moodie, *Life in the Clearings*, ed. Robert McDougall (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1853), 26.

Appendix IV

The Closed Door

The dew falls and the stars fall,
The sun falls in the west,
But never more
Through the closed door,
Shall the one that I loved best
Return to me:
A salt tear is the sea,
All earth's air is a sigh,
But they never can mourn for me
With my heart's cry,
For the one that I loved best
Who caressed me with her eyes,
And every morning came to me,
With the beauty of sunrise,
Who was health and wealth and all,
Who never shall answer my call,
While the sun falls in the west,
The dew falls and the stars fall.

Duncan Campbell Scott³

³ Duncan Campbell Scott, *The Poems of Duncan Campbell Scott* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1926), 173.

Appendix V

On My First Son

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy;
 My sin was too much hope of thee, lov'd boy,
 Seven years tho' wert lent to me, and I thee pay,
 Exacted by thy fate, on the just day.
 O, I could lose all father, now. For why
 Will man lament the state he should envy?
 To have so soon scap'd world's, and flesh's rage,
 And, if no other misery, yet age?
 Rest in soft peace, and ask'd, say here doth lie
 Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry.
 For whose sake, henceforth, all his vows be such,
 As what he loves may never like too much.

Ben Jonson⁴

⁴ Ben Jonson "On My First Son" from *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* 6th edition M.H. Abrams, Ed. New York/London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996) 622. Jonson also wrote a poem when his daughter died.