Introduction

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WHEN IS DEATH?

When is a person dead? This is a difficult and perhaps impossible question to answer—but it is fascinating to think about and explore. It is a question that has many different meanings and iterations depending on the context in which it is asked. Today, if we ask a physician to calculate when the death of someone has occurred or will occur, we will get approximate times based on particular biological indications drawn from their training and technologies. If we ask a bereaved family the same question we will probably get very different answers based around other, non-biological, indicators, customs, and timeframes.[1] These might include the times when the person lost their identity, when the ritual of burial or cremation took place, or when legal or criminal proceedings decided on death certification, or the status of a present, but "brain dead" person. Asking the same question 200 years ago, of course, would have resulted in a different set of answers altogether.

Dwelling on the question of death timings, then, is like peeling back the layers of an onion—it soon starts to open up a range of further temporal issues and uncertainties about when life ends and death begins.

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When does a person die—really, fully, and absolutely? Is it when signs of life cannot be found in a body? Is it when a person, corpse, or life-force no longer has any agency in the world? Or is it when living people recognise a person as socially dead and outside the frame of everyday relationships? Death as an event is clearly something that comes with multiple temporalities for living and dying people. These death timings cut across biological, social, legal, and ethical ways of defining when a person is and when a person is no longer. How, then, do we begin to investigate the stages, sequences, and chronologies that flow through the time between the end of life and the start of death?

This book arises from a conference entitled "When is Death?" that was hosted by the University of Leicester in 2015. This gathering was part of the work of an experimental interdisciplinary team of researchers at Leicester who were funded by the Wellcome Trust to investigate the power of the criminal corpse in European culture and history.[2] The criminal corpse was chosen as an object of focus because it was a force that harnessed legal, medical, and popular discourses about death and agency in the period 1500–1900. Individually, we researched topics such as the technology of the gibbet, criminal execution and dissection, folk-beliefs about the dead, and bioethics.[3] Collectively, we came to realise that we all had concerns about the "when" of the deaths we were investigating. These included: living individuals who became socially dead; criminals who survived their own executions; and deaths whose timelines were stretched out for decades by the unending spectacles of post-mortem punishment. By looking at the journeys of particular bodies towards and beyond death we argued that the timing of death—something that at first seemed so certain and absolute—was deeply uncertain and open to interpretation. This raised a set of issues and contexts that called for an exploration of the question from multiple perspectives—an interdisciplinary endeavour which led to the contributions in this book.

Scholars working in the field of death studies regularly analyse and discuss the ideas of philosophers and thinkers as varied as Thomas Browne, Fustel de Coulanges, Martin Heidegger, Philippe Ariès, and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. Yet ideas and themes in popular culture provide us with other and equally fruitful routes into thinking about death timings. I suggest that *Weekend at Bernie's* (1989)—one of the more unusual movies of the 1980s—offers us a range of ways to think about the timing of death. The plot of the movie can be summed up as follows:

during a baking hot New York summer Larry and Richard, two employees in an insurance corporation, uncover fraudulent accounting and go to their boss, Bernie Lomax, with the information. Realising that his crimes have been rumbled, Bernie hires a mobster to kill the two young men at a party he will host at his exclusive Long Island beach-house. However, instead the mobster has Bernie killed for having an affair with his wife. Excited about their weekend of partying at Bernie's house, Larry and Richard arrive to find Bernie dead in his chair. Thus begins a black comedic narrative in which Bernie's corpse retains its liveliness in many biological and social ways. Fearing that they will be suspected of Bernie's murder, Larry and Richard delay informing the police. As Bernie's house starts to fill up with partygoers they see that nobody realises that their quiet host, sitting on the couch in a pair of sunglasses, is actually dead. Rather, Bernie's friends greet and kiss him, massage him, haggle with him, and treat him as a living person. Larry and Richard therefore decide to "postpone" Bernie's death so that they might have a fun weekend. They respond to Bernie's social liveliness by acting as his guardian, explaining to the others that he is drunk. Without ever being noticed, they carry him, move his limbs about, and speak for him when the need arises.

It is quite remarkable how many social interactions the corpse has in the movie. Over the course of the weekend Bernie smokes, waves, and goes waterskiing; he is "murdered" a further two times by the mobster assassin (who comes to question his own sanity when Bernie won't die); and even has sex with his mistress who visits the beach-house to find out why he had not been in touch. This prompts the immortal line: "This guy gets laid more dead than I do alive!". Even more remarkable is the fact that, despite the sweltering weather on Long Island, Bernie's body does not decompose nor show any signs of rigor mortis.

Weekend at Bernie's demonstrates how forms of life and liveliness can continue beyond biological death if the person is still a part of social life. In this fantasy of death denial, the "when" of Bernie's death is not recognised by his friends and is pushed into a distant temporal horizon by the two young men so that they can enjoy themselves in his company. In an even more macabre turn of events, Bernie's corpse is reanimated—really this time—through voodoo magic in the sequel, *Weekend at Bernie's II* (1993). In other words, corpses have power and social lives through their own actions/reactions and the actions/reactions or assumptions of living people.

THE TRADITIONAL IRISH WAKE

In its celebration of life and social interaction amid death, the plot of *Weekend at Bernie's* has much in common with the ritual of the traditional wake in Ireland. This funeral custom was a prominent feature of early modern and modern Catholic Irish culture and it still occurs today, albeit in a different form. In its earlier form, the wake was a special period of time marked out from the normal course of events by the watching over of the corpse before its burial, usually for two nights. Wakes in Ireland involved a ritual of sequences and timings that exposes some of the paradoxes surrounding death. On the one hand, the corpse became a time-telling object, displaying all the biological indications of death, but on the other hand the corpse continued to be regarded as socially alive and an active participant in the merriment of its send-off. We can therefore think of the wake as a ritual time during which the person and the corpse slowly transitioned to other states. The living marked these journeys by "resetting" the time of death through these customs.

We can trace out three temporal stages in the wake, each with their own crossing-cutting timelines: The first stage came in the lead-up to the wake; before death has arrived, it already has a temporal horizon. There was a general desire for death to be "done well" and it was known for the poor to endure privations in order to scrape together the means for a "fine wake" and a "decent funeral".[4] Old and sick people were seen as most likely to die in the short-term and this held out the tantalising possibility of a merry wake for the young people in the village. One commentator told the story of visiting a man who was ill with consumption, but expected to live, and found the kitchen full of men and women dressed in their Sunday best. Asking them why they were there, the man received the answer: "'We are waiting for the wake'. I inquired who was dead, 'No one; but the man within is all but dead and we are chatting a bit that we may help the widow to lift him when the breath goes out of his body'".[5]

Another nineteenth-century folklore collector reported:

> So great was the amusement carried on at an Irish wake-house, that all the persons of both sexes were anxiously on the look-out for the deaths of certain old men and women in the parish. When some of the young men met a very old poor woman, the usual salutation was: 'How are you to-day, Biddy? you are living a long time. What time will you give us the pleasant night over you? We are expecting it now for the last seven years, and you are still as tough as ever, though you are near a hundred years old!'[6]

Irish folklore is full of examples of signs that a death was impending: when a crow lands on ones shoulder; when a frog enters a house; hearing a crying or knocking at the door. If the corpse at a wake was not stiff, people interpreted it as a sign that another person would die soon enough. Omens observed on the funeral walk also presaged a new cycle of death: when a gap developed in the cortege it was said that there would be another death in the village. This folklore echoed vernacular senses of time as being fragmented and contingent—futures could be known and, to some extent at least, predicted and controlled. When a death was sudden, untimely, or was that of a child, it is notable that wakes were more private and mournful than the traditional merry wake.

Through customs relating to clocks and watches, folklore also shows us that people literalised the idea that death was timed by stopping the household clock when a person died. This is a story collected on Rathlin Island:

[Informant] 1: The clocks always stopped [at the time of a death].

[Informant] 2: Well, I had never heard that story about clocks or anything else to do with clocks. And there was a man here died…he was very ill, and he died this night…And here, Francis had not long got that clock and it kept excellent time, only had it a few weeks. And for some reason, what time…did he die? And here the clock had stopped at that exact time. Well…I thought that was a bit funny, the clock should stop then you know. I was standing, the day of the funeral and he'd to go by that way you see, to go up to the chapel, the body was to go up there and Francis was away at it, and I was standing here…I was watching them going by up there, you know, following the funeral. Honest, I'll never forget it, and the clock all of a sudden, just as the body went by started 'tick tock tick tock', it started up again. It scared me stupid. I says, 'Why should it start up again then?' You know, this was about two days later, the clock started. It was the weirdest thing.

Inf. 1: You see, it was always the custom, they always stopped the clock whenever someone died in the house, they used to stop it as soon as they died.

Inf. 2: So you wouldn't go into the house and ask them.

Inf. 1: Aye, that was the reason, that, when you went in, you just looked at the clock and then you knew what time they died at.[7]

Old people used to say that if the cock crowed at midnight it was a sign of impending death, or that strange sounds in the clock presaged death.[8] It was also believed that the "dead man's tick", a sound in the wall like the ticking of a clock, indicated a death was imminent.[9] The wake, then, was the ritual time after the clock—or the passing of normal time—was temporarily stopped.

The second stage in the wake commenced after the moment of death was noted. However, this moment was dangerous and not easy to time. In Connemara, County Galway, when a man was dying of consumption it was customary to tie some unsalted butter in a piece of cloth and hang it up in the rafters. Just as the sick person gave his last breath, the consumption left the body and looked to enter another. If there was a relative present it would enter them, but if not it would go up into the butter, which was then taken down and buried. The relatives, meanwhile, stayed outside the house "til he's dead—and wel dead".[10]

When a person died in Ireland, news spread quickly. Work in the fields ceased and preparations were made to care for the corpse and stock the house (or barn) for the wake with funeral provisions (pipes, tobacco, alcohol, etc.). In the meantime, the corpse was laid out and prepared by female mourners. The body was first allowed some undisturbed time so that the soul could communicate with God before the women washed the corpse, wrapped it in a sheet, habit, or suit, and then placed it on its back on a table, door, or bed. In many cases a crucifix was placed on the breast and rosary beads were entwined in the fingers. It was important that no tear was shed on the body during this stage (which took two to three hours) because it had not "settled" yet. Ritualised crying, or "keening" [Irish: *caoineadh*] would only begin after the women's preparations were done and they withdrew from the body. This stage of preparation and caring for the body also served to mark and pass over a time of physiological changes. The settling of the corpse was coincident with the periods of rigor mortis and algor mortis, during which muscles contract, the joints are immobilised, the body cools, and the skin loses its elasticity. In this context, caring for the corpse by positioning it peacefully, closing the eyes, and tying the jaw, also performed the crucial task of ascertaining that the person really was biologically dead.

The third stage of the wake was a time to ritually mark the bonds that bound the living and the dead. Like death rituals in other cultural contexts, the motivations for attending a wake in Ireland were varied: people gathered around the corpse in order to celebrate life and remember

the dead; to guard the corpse from evil; to ensure that death had really occurred; and to placate the soul of the dead.[11] Wakes traditionally took place over two nights before burial on the third day, and the corpse was never to be left alone. This wake-time was passed, then, in a slow manner with candles always burning, or as often as the householder could afford. Wake-time was not simply passed in an unconscious manner—rather, people stayed awake through structured time. Time was periodically marked out by rituals and rhythms that reminded mourners about the presence of the corpse and the well-being of the dead. With seats arranged around the walls, encircling the body, the *bean chaointe* [keener] led periodic laments; spontaneous or planned rosaries were said; and the priest visited to lead prayers for the dead. This scene was described by an English traveller in the seventeenth century:

> [The mourners] spend most of the night in obscene stories, and bawdy songs, until the hour comes for the exercise of their devotions; then the priest calls on them to fall to their prayers for the soul of the dead, which they perform by the repetition of Aves and Paters on their beads and close the whole with a *de profundis* and then immediately to the story or song again, till another hour of prayer comes; thus is the whole night spent 'till day.[12]

These moments had the power to effect reconciliation between the dead person and his or her surviving friends and family and achieve their incorporation with the inhabitants of the afterlife.[13] There was, then, another temporal horizon gestured at in the prayers for the dead, for the amount of time that the soul of the deceased spent in purgatory concerned those who attended wakes. In 1813, a Purgatorian Society was founded in Dublin and, for the price of a penny a week, every subscribing member was entitled to have post-mortem masses said for them and their family to relieve the burden of time spent in purgatory. Members of the society also recited the Office of the Dead Latin at wakes.[14] The time being passed by the dead in the afterlife after burial was also marked by the recurring recital of prayers by the living as well as the custom of the "month's mind" requiem mass.

In contrast to these devotional means of timing and relating to death, unruly and boisterous customs were kept to constantly re-socialise the dead person as the body was passing further and further into death and decomposition. These customs—increasingly targeted by ecclesiastical authorities in the nineteenth century as uncivilised and

superstitious—included feasting, alcohol consumption, wake games, and other licentious behaviours. Together, these customs symbolised the hospitality that the dead person, as host, was providing for the guests and the reciprocal celebration and sustenance that the living provided for the dead. The dual role of the corpse at the wake goes some way towards explaining why visiting observers and critics could be shocked by the swift transitions between "holy sorrow" and "orgies of unholy joy" at Irish wakes.[15] They were an enactment of community, with the merriment and mourning of each wake a prelude to another—an endless cycle of death and rebirth, of hosting and being hosted. As Maria Edgeworth put it in her *Castle Rackrent* (1800):

> Deal on, deal on, my merry men all,
>
> Deal on your cakes and your wine,
>
> For whatever is dealt at her funeral to-day
>
> Shall be dealth to-morrow at mine.[16]

Tobacco was a central feature of the merry wake, both as a stimulant with symbolic properties and as a means of passing wake-time. The plate of tobacco was therefore placed on a table over the corpse, or on the corpse itself, or underneath the table, and was offered on arrival to all guests by a young server as the "dealing" or gift of the dead. Tobacco was taken as snuff or smoked in a new clay pipe, and even if one was not a smoker, it was customary to have a few puffs in memory of the deceased and whisper *Beannacht Dé ar anamnacha na marbh* [Lord have mercy on the dead]. Tobacco was also provided at the graveyard and in the west of Ireland it was known for celebrants to leave their pipes on the grave as a token.[17] According to folklore collected in the twentieth century, the origin for the use of tobacco at wakes came from the time of Christ when the watchers over his tomb found it hard to stay awake. Suddenly a plant appeared and beside it was a pipe. One of the watchers plucked the leaves of the plant, put it in the pipe, and smoked it, and since then they are given at wakes.[18]

While the ritual use of tobacco and whiskey, or poitín, were still common features of wakes into the twentieth century, the practise of wake games declined swiftly in the period after the Great Famine (1845–1852) due to a fracturing of communities, steady decline in the use of the Irish language, and clerical criticisms of popular mortuary practices. These

games were often aggressive and played by the young men who had the energy to stay awake all night. They included potato or turf-throwing in the dark, slapping games, wrestling matches, and other rough pranks. There were also many different kinds of mock trials against an unlucky booby, and cycles of "mobbing"—back and forth battles of wits among men that could lead to fights. The dead person symbolically participated in some of these games, as in "Lifting the Corpse", in which a stout man would lie prone on the floor with straight legs and four men tried to raise him off the floor with only one thumb each. The corpse was also a direct participant in rough play by being pushed around, or being made to hold a hand of cards or smoke a pipe. It was also a well-known trick to stitch a distracted mourners' coat-tails to the corpse's winding sheet.[19] The folkloric record is also rich with darkly humorous examples of the dead person "reviving" at the wake: this was typically achieved by the prankster tying a rope around the corpse before rigor mortis set in (especially if the deceased had a hunchback or bow legs) and then cutting it at an opportune moment to make the body sit up and frighten everyone present.[20]

To judge from edicts and directives issued by Catholic bishops stretching back to the seventeenth century, the Church was especially concerned about erotic and transgressive games such as "Building the Ship" and "Building the Fort". In the latter game, young men ran at each other with "spears" before one fell down as if mortally wounded:

> then all the hooded women came in again and keened over him, a male voice at intervals reciting his deeds, while the pipers played martial tunes. But on its being suggested that perhaps he was not dead at all, an herb doctor was sent for to look at him; and an aged man with a flowing white beard was led in, carrying a huge bundle of herbs. With these he performed sundry strange incantations, until finally the dead man sat up and was carried off the field by his comrades, with shouts of triumph.[21]

Clearly these games were linked to courtship rituals between young men and women, and indeed it was frequently said that more love matches were made at wakes than at weddings. This background motivation was brought to the foreground in the practice of mock marriages by mock priests at wakes. In an account of one of these marriages the priest, dressed "in robes of straw carrying rosary beads made of potatoes, surmounted by a frog for a cross" joined together two young people with

the words: "'may the full blessing of the beggars descend upon you; may ye have plenty of ragged children'".[22]

The time spent with the dead was clearly considered necessary for a decent send-off for the deceased and for the community to engage in social interaction surrounding death and burial. However, on occasion, the length of time that wakes took before burial was a cause of concern for the authorities. This was chiefly due to the fact that the timeline of decomposition was not coincident with the social timeline that the body was still a part of. In 1871, for instance, an Irish labourer named Tehan died in Southwark, London, and was waked for some five days. A coroner's inquest report stated that since the man's death his large family had lived and slept with the corpse:

> Since the death of deceased a perpetual 'Irish wake' had been kept up, and every evening the friends of Tehan had met, drunk whiskey, and told tales of the dead, whilst women every now and again howled frightfully. The body was laid on the bed, and surrounded by eighteen candles. For three nights prayers had been said over it, and it had been 'sat by' with great ceremony. The face of the deceased was uncovered, and the body strewn with flowers.

The body "presented a shocking appearance" and was in an advanced state of decomposition. The coroner wanted to abolish the "disgraceful" practice and remove the body to a dead-house, but it was reported that the family resisted this move.[23]

It is a testament to the symbolic importance of merry wakes in Ireland that they continued to be held despite official directives from the Church. This suggests that the ritual activity of wake-time had a functional purpose for both the family affected and the wider community.[24] In gathering people together to mark out the deceased person's transition to a new state, the traditional Irish wake made death timely through rituals and customs. These customs began to fade in the second half of the nineteenth century as mortuary practices became "faster". Wakes were shortened to one night; games and keening were no longer held; and mourners were given less time to work out the paradox of death. As priests ensured that the corpse spent the second night in the Church (the "removal"), the funeral on the third day became the primary rite of passage. The care shown to the dead was reset into another, less socially interactive, timeframe: this is the situation that persists in Ireland today.

CHAPTERS IN THIS BOOK

Thomas Laqueur writes: "Death in culture takes time because it takes time for the rent in the social fabric to be rewoven and for the dead to do their work in creating, recreating, representing, or disrupting the social order of which they had been a part".[25] In their different ways, the contributors to this book address Laqueur's argument, suggesting that the time of death (if indeed there is one single point in time when life can be said to be extinct) is social, as much as it is biological.

In Chap. 2, "Being Dead in Shakespearean Tragedy", Mary Ann Lund looks at how speech acts indicate death timings on the English Renaissance stage. In his tragedies, William Shakespeare used the power of language to stage self-referential games of being dead and playing being dead. A scene in *Othello* provides a good example of this: When Othello first smothers Desdemona, he does not succeed in killing her: "Not dead? Not yet quite dead?". Othello continues smothering her until he states, "She's dead". However, even then, Desdemona's death is not certain at all. Death in Shakespeare, Lund argues, is a participatory process that is dependent on staging, performance, and language.

Moving from drama to political history, in Chap. 3, "'A Candidate for Immortality': Martyrdom, Memory, and the Marquis of Montrose", Rachel Bennett looks at the death and afterlife of James Graham, 1st Marquis of Montrose. Executed as a traitor in Edinburgh in 1650, Montrose was a key figure in the military and religious conflicts which ripped Britain apart in the mid-seventeenth century. However, as Bennett shows, far from being the final stage on Montrose's journey, his execution, or legal death, came some time after his excommunication and social death. This was followed by an exhumation and honourable reburial in 1661, while his scattered body parts were "re-membered" by royalists for centuries afterwards. The "when" of Montrose's death, Bennett suggests, was a matter of political debate and conflict.

Although for many of us in Europe and North America, the dead body is a distant and infrequent presence, spectacles like Gunther von Hagens's *Bodyworlds* exhibitions stage face-to-face encounters with conserved corpses for millions of ticket-holders. As Veronique Deblon and Kaat Wils show in Chap. 4, "Overcoming Death: Conserving the Body in Nineteenth-Century Belgium", these types of encounters, and the mixed emotions they provoke, have a long history. Deblon and Wils explore how new conserving procedures were developed in the

nineteenth century in response to a growing disgust at the decaying corpse and a growing desire to create a corpse that looked as if it was sleeping. In Belgium, anatomists responded to this increasingly sentimentalised relationship with the dead by making anatomical preparations in a highly aesthetic manner. Although treated, injected, and embalmed, these prepared bodies and body parts seemed to convey the consoling message that death could be peaceful.

In contrast to this representation, many people were haunted by the disturbing message that some of the dead were perhaps not so "dead" after all. In Chap. 5, "Premature Burial and the Undertakers", Brian Parsons focuses his attention on how the fear of premature burial changed the way dead bodies were cared for and disposed of in nineteenth-century Britain. Far from being an irrational modern iteration of a primeval fear, concerns about premature burial arose due to a deficiency in the law which meant that physicians did not have to check for signs of life before certifying death. Because of this, people developed a range of strategies to ensure that they, or their loved ones, were truly dead. These included: delaying burial; safety coffins; paying for a cremation instead of a burial; or hiring an undertaker to embalm the corpse. In his survey of this landscape of disposal, Parsons concludes that by testing for death, undertakers gained "a new status as quasi-medical practitioners and helped shed the Dickensian image of disreputability inherited from their nineteenth-century forebears".

From Elvis Presley to Lord Lucan, many of the famous or notorious dead circulate as undead in popular culture, returning repeatedly in rumours, purported sightings, and conspiracy theories. Perhaps no figure illustrates this phenomenon more than Adolf Hitler, said to have committed suicide in his Berlin bunker in 1945 (but memorably imagined by *Monty Python's Flying Circus* as living out his days in a small guesthouse in Minehead, Somerset). In Chap. 6, "The Death of Nazism? Investigating Hitler's Remains and Survival Rumours in Post-War Germany", Caroline Sharples looks at the phenomenon of Hitler survival stories and traces their endurance to the failure of the Allies to conclusively identify his remains in 1945. As she persuasively argues, both the Allies and the Nazis before them cast doubt on the timing of Hitler's death in order to further their own interests. When put together with, on the one hand, obfuscation from the Soviet authorities who forensically examined the scene and, on the other, the denazification process (which "disappeared" Hitler's remains and all Nazi iconography),

the reasons for believing his death had not occurred quickly becomes apparent.

In 2016, a survey revealed that 52% of people would like their Facebook page to be updated after they died. This could take the form of replies to those leaving sympathy messages on their page, or the regular reposting of photographs, videos, or other memories of the "dead" person.[26] As our social lives and our social media lives are becoming increasingly interchangeable, online presence after death is taking on palpable and interactive forms. The loss of a loved one is now, perhaps more than ever, paradoxically wrapped up in their throbbing presence, whether through digital recordings, virtual reality, or automated post-mortem activities. Is death now impossible? In Chap. 7, "Death's Impossible Date", Douglas J. Davies explores some of the philosophical intricacies of the question "when is death?" Raising the themes of animacy, grief, burial, and the "mortality paradox", Davies echoes other contributors in this book by claiming that death has an impossible date because "the 'when' of death is not coeval with 'the time of not being'".

In Chap. 8, "The Legal Definition of Death and the Right to Life", Elizabeth Wicks examines the legal implications of modern means of ascertaining death and life. Every day in hospitals and courts, medical and legal authorities are making profound and difficult decisions about the biological status and destination of vulnerable bodies. In October 2016, for instance, a terminally ill 14-year-old girl won a legal fight to have her body cryogenically preserved after death because she "'wanted to live longer'" and have a chance "'to be cured and woken up'".[27] Focusing on debates surrounding the issue of brain death in her contribution, Wicks raises the tension between our legally enforceable right to life and the state's lawful withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment in the case of people in a persistent vegetative state. This withdrawal is, she concludes, "sometimes ethically appropriate, morally good, and respectful of the human being's rights". The right to life, then, "is always limited, both in terms of state obligations and its application to mortal beings".

An execution is a usually a strictly timed event: a sentence of death is passed, the defendant's days are "numbered", and the execution itself follows a sequence of rites and behaviours. The "when" of the condemned criminal's death, then, is known for certain. In Chap. 9, "The Last Moment", Jonathan Rée focuses on this disturbing kind of death timing. He suggests that people experience a particular thrill and

empathy when they imagine the final minutes and seconds of a person's life. Surveying examples from literature, philosophy, and the history of crime, Rée finds that the evolution of execution narratives has a lot to do with social attitudes about capital punishment and, in particular, an urge to think about our own last moments of life.

Finally, in Chap. 10, Thomas Laqueur's afterword focuses on the possibility of future breaths—determined by the apnea test in brain death situations—as a way to think about the end of life. Brain dead people may subsist for decades attached to ventilators and participate in the same biological milestones as everyone else (puberty, pregnancy, death). Despite the expanding chronologies of the "living dead" through science and technology, however, Laqueur argues that the "when" of death starts at the time when it is shown that a person will never breathe again without artificial assistance. This particular death sentence, of course, does not discount the reality that becoming dead also takes time in other, non-biological ways of thinking.

In its movement from history and literature, to philosophy and ethics, the contributions in this book attest to a pervasive dynamic between finality and continuance, between death as a concrete biological event and death as a social negotiation. The question we have addressed is inherently interdisciplinary. It will continue to fascinate scholarly and lay audiences alike, because death timings allow us to make sense of who we are as individuals and societies in the midst of time, shorn between long memories and imagined futures on the one hand, and a single irrevocable destiny on the other.

NOTES

1. See Dorthe Refslund Christensen and Rane Willerslev eds., *Taming Time, Timing Death: Social Technologies and Ritual* (Farnham, 2013)
2. See http://www.criminalcorpses.com.
3. See Elizabeth T. Hurren, *Dissecting the Criminal Corpse: Staging Post-Execution Punishment in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2016); Shane McCorristine, *William Corder and the Red Barn Murder: Journeys of the Criminal Body* (Basingstoke, 2014); Sarah Tarlow and Zoe Dyndor, "The Landscape of the Gibbet", *Landscape History*, 36:1 (2015), pp. 71–88; Owen Davies and Francesca Matteoni, "'A Virtue Beyond all Medicine': The Hanged Man's Hand, Gallows Tradition and Healing in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England", *Social History of Medicine*, 28:4 (2015), pp. 686–705; Richard Ward ed., *A Global History of Execution and the Criminal Corpse* (Basingstoke, 2015); Peter King

and Richard Ward, "Rethinking the Bloody Code in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Capital Punishment at the Centre and on the Periphery", *Past and Present*, 228 (2015), pp. 159–205.

4. Samuel Carter Hall and Anna Maria Hall, *Ireland: Its Scenery, Character, &c.*, Vol.1 (London, 1841), p. 221.

5. Ibid., ff. p. 222.

6. John O'Donovan, "Notes to Extracts from the Journal of Thomas Dineley, etc.", *Journal of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society*, 5 (1858–1859), p. 31.

7. Cited in Linda-May Ballard, "Fairies and the Supernatural on Reachrai". In Peter Narváez ed., *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (New York, 1991), p. 58.

8. The School's Collection, National Folklore Collection, Ireland, University College Dublin, Vol. 0102, pp. 143–144, http://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes.

9. Ibid., p. 145.

10. James Mooney, "The Funeral Customs of Ireland", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 25:128 (1888), p. 267.

11. Seán Ó'Súilleabháin, *Irish Wake Amusements* (Dublin, 1967), pp. 171–172.

12. Cited in Patricia Lysaght, "Hospitality at Wakes and Funerals in Ireland from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century: Some Evidence from the Written Record", *Folklore*, 114 (2003), pp. 406–407.

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