

Blanco, Maria-Jose and Ricarda Vidal (eds.). 2015. *The Power of Death: Contemporary Reflections on Death in Western Society*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn. 260 pp. Pb.: \$100.00 / £63.00. ISBN: 9781782384335.

This volume aims to combine the study of the contemporary aspects of death as entertainment with death as the natural end of life (p. 4). It also combines disciplines and approaches to the study of death from arts and humanities and social sciences. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that in some chapters death is taboo and generalised while in others it is omnipresent and individualised. Death in this volume is observed from various points: music, the visual arts, exhibition practice, the media, literature, serial killers, longevity, euthanasia, cemeteries and bereavement; in some cases, intimately personal and in others from institutional perspective, all with reference to Western society (p. 4). The essays are organised around five broad themes: *Death and Society*, *Death in Literature*, *Death in Visual Culture*, *Cemeteries and Funerals*, and *Personal Reflections on Death*.

The main weft that goes through almost all chapters of the volume is that the diagnosis of death's disappearance from everyday life is no longer valid. Several authors argue that death has returned to public consciousness with renewed power after a period of suppression (for example chapters 4, 9, 10, 18, etc). This may be true in the context of the presence of death in Western everyday life, but this cannot be used as a general statement about the presence of death in Western society, as this volume clearly shows. In sports, art, music, media and literature, death has never left "the building". In all these different practices, death has been present and inspiration during the period of 'the pornography of death' (Gorer 1955). It is true that in the Western societies individual death was marginalised and institutionalised with the changes in everyday life. However, at the beginning of 21st century it seems that it is more present and individualised than ever (see chapters 16, 17, 18).

From this reviewer's point of view, the volume gives an overview of different contexts in which death has a different role and is in a different position. It seems that depending on the everyday life context death adapts its vernacular meaning. A good example of that is chapter by Lala Isla, who compares between death customs of UK and Spain and focuses on changes that happened in the previous thirty-five years, or the customs of her childhood in Spain which was at that time more "traditional" culture and UK were modernisation changed everyday life and customs much sooner than in Spain (Chapter 17). The same thing can be observed throughout the volume. Chapters focusing on more traditional communities are presenting case studies that could be observed in older anthropology of death literature with topics about funerals and new roles of some traditional elements in modern contexts (Chapter 13), while chapters coming from societies that went through changes earlier problematise death and its role in art, sport, literature where it is mostly present in those societies (see chapters 3–14). This reviewer would observe as the final stage of death relationship in the West were the way we die becomes a personal decision; see Chapter 16, by Natasha Lushetich, and Chapter 18, by Briony Campbell

In a way, the volume takes us on a journey from funerals with elements of native faith, through adaptation of funerals in modern times and new circumstances in which old traditional elements are selectively being used in new practices such as Guineans and Bangladeshis funerals in Lisbon (Chapter 15); to societies in which death is not present in everyday life but is aestheticised and “happening to someone else”; and finally coming to chapters about euthanasia and “dad project” in which people confront their own death in very personal way with no institutions and/or customs, beliefs, practices, surrounded by their family and friends, and they decide when to die (Chapter 16), and how to die (Chapter 18).

This volume shows that perhaps death was not, and is not, a taboo in the modern Western world but it merely exists on a different level. Looking at the coverage of the chapters it seems that death as distant death, imagined and aestheticised is still prevailing in the Western world since only a few chapter focus on individual dying and dead body. It seems that death at one side is slowly emerging from a familiar context and becoming institutionalised and alienated, and on the other side it is becoming private and personal more than ever. Reading this volume, we could conclude that death rituals and practices are constantly going through transformation depending on the context in which they exist.

From a technical point of view, it is commendable that chapters reference each other although chapters are very diverse, looking at different aspects of death and dying, and coming from broad range of disciplines. Nevertheless, the reader gets a feeling of integrated and interconnected volume.

This very interesting and inspiring volume has but one weakness. Discussing death in Western society, problematising dark tourism and commemorations (visiting places connected to death as a tourist or a pilgrim, or as a tourist/pilgrim) such as Holocaust concentration camps, World War I and II commemorations, graves of celebrities and national heroes (secular pilgrimage) is unavoidable. These very important practices of the Western (but not just Western) world should have their place in this volume.

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