

## Big Boys Don't Cry? Attitudes towards Death in Bach's Leipzig

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A recent survey of the cultural history of tears, one of only a handful of studies of this uniquely human experience, suggests that the weeping associated with grief and the mourning process articulates profoundly private and overtly public responses to death.<sup>1</sup> Grief as private emotion and ritualised mourning as its public display have become sharply separated in modern western culture, a separation that would have baffled Johann Sebastian Bach's generation. Private and public responses to death, however, were already pulling in different directions in late seventeenth-century Lutheran Germany.<sup>2</sup>

The rise in honourable nocturnal burials of high-ranking members of society and, by the early 1700s, of common people, effectively challenged the authority of the Protestant church in dictating how death and its rituals should be observed. Nocturnal burials, in keeping with pre-Reformation custom, had generally been reserved for dishonourable deaths within the Lutheran territories: criminals, aggressive lunatics, suicides and other marginalised figures were traditionally buried without ceremony at night. In its early form, the nocturnal *Beisetzung* (literally 'setting by' or interment), prefaced by a torch-lit procession and often articulated by the secular funeral address, was pioneered by the rich and powerful.

In the early years of the Lutheran Reformation, evangelical supporters of the new faith had sought to do away with funeral rituals altogether. This extreme interpretation of Luther's implicit doctrine of justification by faith alone (Solafideanism) led to burials without the participation of clergy, often held at night. These were widely condemned and effectively prohibited by the civic authorities; indeed, nocturnal burial was high on the list of abuses listed by the first electoral visitation in Saxony in 1527-28. Funeral ritual, as sanctioned by Luther, was swiftly claimed by the nobility and landed classes and adorned with elaborate ceremonies.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tom Lutz, *Crying. The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> See Craig M. Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany, 1450-1700* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 2000), esp. pp. 153-59.

<sup>3</sup> 'Both in Lutheran Germany and in England, one odd result [of the social hierarchy of death] was that during the seventeenth century night funerals came back into fashion for the upper strata of society: having started as statements of the irrelevance of ceremonial in the early

During the early 1670s, city ordinances and church records increasingly acknowledged nocturnal burial as an honourable practice, adopted by noble and wealthy elites to assert their independence from the rulebooks of Lutheran orthodoxy and, above all, the clergy. 'As persons of distinction began to inter their dead at night,' notes historian Craig Koslofsky, 'the general term *Beisetzung* came to refer specifically to honourable *nocturnal* burial' [author's italics].<sup>4</sup> Although the *Beisetzung* initially served as a mark of social distinction in death, it pointed the way towards the eventual privatisation of the Lutheran funeral and the diminution of the role of the clergy as arbiters of the honourable death. By the time Bach arrived in Leipzig in 1723, the grand church funeral service, complete with biographical funeral sermon (*Leichenpredigt*), was already in decline. The passing of important members of society was still marked by oratory and ceremony, although most often presented in forms controlled or at least influenced by the deceased's family and friends.<sup>5</sup> Koslofsky observes that:

By 1700, in the towns and cities of Lutheran Germany the majority of funerals took place in the evening or at night with little or no clerical participation. In the longer term, honourable nocturnal burial opened the way for the family to replace the Christian community as the framework of the funeral.<sup>6</sup>

The implications of this development for Bach scholarship may touch on specific compositions, not least those few motets and cantatas associated with the occasion of a funeral or memorial service. Nocturnal burial and the private expression of grief in Saxony during the early eighteenth century also relate to the composer and his personal engagement with the prevailing culture of mourning. My discussion takes its departure point from the idea that private attitudes to grief, symbolised in the nocturnal *Beisetzung*, directly influenced Bach's work. While his music of grief clearly draws on musico-rhetorical gestures found in countless seventeenth-century German compositions and of a wider expression of stylised grief in visual art and, above all, poetry, it also

Reformation, now they provided an opportunity for sombre magnificence under the lights of many nocturnal torches – and more opportunities to exclude the lower orders', Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 577-78.

<sup>4</sup> Koslofsky, *Reformation*, p. 137.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p.133 ff. for more on this process: 'In the late seventeenth century the communal funeral established by the Lutheran state churches of the Empire was drawn into competition with a new kind of honourable funeral. The new ritual was exclusive, declericalized and nocturnal' (p. 133). Koslofsky has also charted the distinctly Lutheran approach to remembering the dead, as expressed in the biographical funeral sermon. 'By focusing on the biographical sermon, the Lutheran funeral apprehended the dead individual as part of the absent past, a completed story ready to be retold in the funeral sermon. Narrative and history/biography had replaced *memoria* [the social presence of the dead in medieval society]', he notes in 'From Presence to Remembrance: The Transformation of Memory in the German Reformation' in Alan Confino and Peter Fritzsche (eds.), *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> Koslofsky, *Reformation*, pp. 158-59.

projects a distinctly personal, private response to loss, one that reflects the dignified, regulated *Beisetzung* ritual of the early 1700s.<sup>7</sup>

If, as John Butt argues, Bach 'saw music as a fundamental tool of religion and essential to his religious life',<sup>8</sup> it seems reasonable to suggest that prevailing attitudes to death and mourning would consequently surface in his work. This is more than a matter of fashion: the nocturnal *Beisetzung* was part of the cultural world known to Bach; likewise, its social foundations, governed by the expression of private grief, were firmly constructed during the musician's formative years and continued to develop throughout his adult life. In effect, two types of funeral co-existed during Bach's lifetime, one marked by communal display of the deceased's social status, the other conducted, often in silence, at night.<sup>9</sup> The shift in favour of private nocturnal burials offers one reason why so few of Bach's compositions can be attributed to specific funeral occasions. Among the composer's works with a known or putative funerary connection, those for members of the nobility were almost certainly intended for traditional daytime ceremonies (for example, the cantata *Klagt, Kinder, klagt es aller Welt* BWV 244a, for the funeral service of Prince Leopold of Cöthen on 24 March 1729).

In his assessment of the rise of *Beisetzungen*, Craig Koslofsky concludes that the practice of nocturnal burial satisfied 'a desire for more private mourning and a sincere interest in reducing funeral pomp'.<sup>10</sup> From a professional point of view, Bach stood to gain financially from the fees generated by church-governed funerals.<sup>11</sup> He famously complained to his friend Erdmann of the good health of Leipzig's citizens in relation to his so-called *Accidentien* or funeral fees; the 'silent' *Beisetzung* would also have limited the earning potential of funerals. In terms of

<sup>7</sup> For more on the possible connections between ceremonial funeral music and public funeral oratory, see Gregory S. Johnston, 'Rhetorical Personification of the Dead in 17<sup>th</sup>-century German Funeral Music: Heinrich Schütz's *Musikalische Exequien* (1636) and Three Works by Michael Wiedemann (1693)', *The Journal of Musicology* 9/2, 186-213. It seems to me that, for all their concern with death and the transitory nature of life on earth, German composers before Bach were chiefly preoccupied with sorrowful expression either as part of a communal, ceremonial rite or, more generally, as stylised musical complement to the contemplation of grief. For the latter, see Philipp Heinrich Erlebach's two-part anthology of arias, *Harmonische Freude musicalische Freunde*, published in Nuremberg in 1697 and 1710. Erlebach takes great trouble to frame the emotional responses desired from his 'musical friends', vividly so in the case of *Meine Seufzer*. The aria is prefaced by the direction, 'Seine Not recht überlegen wird manch Tränenbad erregen' ('To think rightly on one's affliction will provoke a flood of tears').

<sup>8</sup> John Butt, 'Bach's Metaphysics of Music', in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> See Koslofsky's research of parish registers in early eighteenth-century Germany, *Reformation* p. 151.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 152.

<sup>11</sup> See Arnold Schering, *Musikgeschichte Leipzigs*, vol. 2: *Von 1650 bis 1723* (Leipzig, 1926), p. 77ff.; Christoph Wolff, *Bach: The Learned Musician* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 410-11, 544. Schering suggested the possibility that 'many' of Bach's 'death cantatas' were wholly or in part performed 'at sickbeds and deathbeds of prominent citizens' (*Musikgeschichte Leipzigs* vol. 2, p. 54). It is equally possible, in view of our present knowledge of the widespread practice of nocturnal burial, to suggest that his works, whether identifiable funeral cantatas and motets or simple chorale harmonisations, were performed at many *Beisetzungen*.

Bach's engagement with personal grief and mourning, however, the decline in communal funerals for high-ranking individuals and corresponding rise of 'classless' family burials offered a model for the expression of private grief in music.

The stark facts of Johann Sebastian Bach's immediate experiences of death, shocking as they are when compared with modern western expectations, would not have been exceptional in late seventeenth-century Germany. A sister, two brothers and an uncle died during Sebastian's infancy. At the age of nine he lost his mother, whose passing was followed within a month of the boy's tenth birthday by the death of his father. The obituary list was further extended with the deaths in early childhood of a daughter and two sons by his first wife Maria Barbara, the distressing loss of their third son Johann Gottfried Bernhard in his early twenties, the sudden death of Maria Barbara herself in 1720 and the subsequent deaths of four daughters and three sons by his second wife Anna Magdalena.

Private and public expressions of grief coalesce in many of the texts that Bach chose to set. In addition to the theological, sermonising nature of Bach's cantatas, persuasively reduced in Eric Chafe's analysis to the Lutheran 'allegory of faith',<sup>12</sup> there also stands a reflection of personal loss and pain. Forkel pointed out that Bach 'laboured for himself ... he fulfilled his own wish, satisfied his own taste, chose his subjects according to his own opinion, and, lastly, derived the most pleasure from his own approbation'.<sup>13</sup> Although Forkel is here elevating Bach's status as a German genius, his assessment of the personal creative drive rings especially true in the case of the composer's public expression of private grief and his responses to texts dealing with extreme sorrow.

The loss of a marriage partner in early modern society would have deeply affected the lives of bereaved family members. The support of mourning rituals and of what today we would call the extended family offered spiritual and practical help, allowing a widow or widower the chance to honour the deceased and also providing normative conditions for rapid remarriage. Maria Barbara Bach's sudden death in July 1720 plunged the Bach family into a state of turmoil. The 35-year-old court musician, for all his Lutheran upbringing and past experiences of bereavement, must have experienced what Arnold Toynbee isolated as the 'capital fact' about the relationship between the living and the dying: 'There are two parties to the suffering that death inflicts; and, in the apportionment of this suffering, the survivor takes the brunt.'<sup>14</sup>

It seems likely that within a few months of Maria Barbara's death, Bach chose the Weimar version of Cantata No. 21, *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*,<sup>15</sup> for

<sup>12</sup> Eric Chafe, *Analyzing Bach Cantatas* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel (eds.), *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, revised and expanded by Christoph Wolff (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 478.

<sup>14</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *Man's Concern with Death* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1968), quoted in Denis Joseph Enright (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 119.

<sup>15</sup> First performed on 17 June 1714, although based on earlier material. See Martin Petzoldt, "Die

performance during Vespers at St Catharine's Church in Hamburg. If Bach intended Cantata No. 21 to serve as a memorial to his wife during his trip to Hamburg in the autumn of 1720, its re-use provided an immanent meaning that certainly mattered more to the composer than to the St Catharine's congregation: traces of suffering and sorrow left by Bach's original choice of texts here assumed a highly personal significance. To paraphrase Forkel, Bach's approbation of his work delivered relief from grief and pain.

Bach's cantata for the feast of the Purification, *Ich habe Genug* BWV 82, was first performed on 2 February 1727, shortly after the death of his first child by Anna Magdalena. Here the bass soloist explores three states of being, moving from world-weariness, through desire for eternal rest, to close with a joyful welcome song to death. The poignant interplay of voice and instruments in the work's central aria, 'Schlummert ein, ihr matten Augen' ('Slumber now, you weary eyes'), underlines Luther's understanding of death as a form of sleep, from which the souls of the faithful would ultimately rise on Judgment Day. The work presents a paradigm of the 'good death', as set down by Luther when his thirteen-year-old daughter died in pain from the effects of a long illness. The church leader called on the carpenters to hammer home the nails into the girl's coffin, joyful that her soul was already at rest. However, Luther wrote that, 'The flesh doesn't take kindly to this. The separation troubles me beyond measure. It's strange to know that she is surely at peace and that she is well off there, very well off, and yet to grieve so much!'<sup>16</sup>

The unrelenting anguish of Cantata No. 21's 'Seufzer, Tränen, Kummer, Not' ('Sighs, tears, grief, need') or the extreme expression of grief that pervades the inconsolable aria 'Ächzen und erbärmlich Weinen' from the Leipzig Epiphany cantata *Meine Seufzer, meine Tränen* BWV13 not only reinforce the Lutheran vision of earthly sorrow but also confirm the personal relationship that existed between Bach and death's presence in the world. This private expression of grief-made-public reflects a shift in cultural politics during Bach's lifetime that might be interpreted as a manifestation of a wider move by civic society against the power of the church.<sup>17</sup>

Established attitudes to the formal treatment of death and mourning were certainly in a state of flux during Bach's lifetime. The nocturnal *Beisetzung* was championed by Pietists in its early years, and routinely condemned by orthodox Lutherans.<sup>18</sup> However, honourable nocturnal burial came to rival stubbornly

kräftige Erquickung unter der schweren Angst-Last". Möglicherweise Neues zur Entstehung der Kantate BWV 21', *Bach-Jahrbuch* 79 (1993), pp. 32-46.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Koslofsky, *Reformation*, p. 153.

<sup>17</sup> The extension of civic power in Leipzig in the eighteenth century's opening decades touched on many areas of life formerly governed by the church. See Tanya Kevorkian, 'The Rise of the Poor, Weak, and Wicked: Poor Care, Punishment, Religion, and Patriarchy in Leipzig, 1700-1730', *Journal of Social History* 26 <Ruth is this correct? Looks a bit odd! [seems to be 1992]>, pp. 163-81 for the interesting case of the St George poor house and penitentiary. The rise of the nocturnal *Beisetzung*, which successfully undermined the predominance of the fixed Lutheran funeral ritual, with its procession of the clergy, hymns sung by the school choir and funeral sermon, is also emblematic of the paradigm shift away from church authority.

<sup>18</sup> See Koslofsky, *Reformation*, pp. 144-48.

persistent pre-Reformation strategies for comforting the bereaved, such as the administration of the deathbed Eucharist and prayers of consolation, which had long allowed the Lutheran faithful to grieve in private.<sup>19</sup>

Central authority and the promulgation of the concept of absolute, divinely ordained rule took hold in the German states in the years following the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.<sup>20</sup> Bach was guided and occasionally checked by these pastoral and temporal powers. His formative experiences of death, likewise, were surely informed directly by the letter of Lutheran theology and the compendious ordinances for church and congregational governance that it generated. Luther and the early Protestant reformers set about separating the dead from the world of the living,<sup>21</sup> a task fired by their determination to sweep away 'superstitious' beliefs in Purgatory and proscribe intercessions and vigils for the dead.<sup>22</sup> As an orthodox Lutheran, Bach would have accepted that faith alone prepared the way for salvation. In the early years of the Reformation, the Solafidean doctrine influenced restrictions in the range of deathbed ritual. This outcome, however, helped lift the status of the solemn public funeral ceremony and accelerated the move away from Roman Catholic practices, not least the administration of extreme unction.

The Lutheran funeral rite became institutionalised long before Bach's birth. In his handbook for Lutheran pastors, Urbanus Rhegius set down the roots of ritual practice when he noted that:

A Christian should and must speak respectfully of funerals and ... cannot allow bodies to be shamefully discarded, without any honour, when God's word teaches us that on the last day such bodies will be made like the body of Christ the Lord.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> On the transition from the Catholic *ars moriendi* to the Lutheran 'art of dying', see Susan Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual. An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 138-90. Philippe Ariès first outlined a typology of death in his seminal lectures, *Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). As Karant-Nunn points out, Ariès' work here and in later studies is viewed from a Catholic perspective and makes little allowance for attitudinal changes toward death caused by the Reformation. Ariès does, however, offer a useful assessment of the church-ordered mourning and funeral rites as developed from the end of the middle ages to the eighteenth century, underlining their conventional limits on the extent of personal grief (see *Western Attitudes* pp. 67-68). Wider perspectives on nocturnal burial, as developed in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, can be found in Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England*, (London: Croom Helm, 1984), pp. 188-215; Julian Litten, *The English Way of Death*, repr. with corrections (London: Robert Hale, 1992), pp. 163-65, and Vanessa Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 196-97, 227-28.

<sup>20</sup> See MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House*, pp. 669-72.

<sup>21</sup> See 'Banning the Dead and Ordering the Living: the Selective Retention of Catholic Practice' in Karant-Nunn *Ritual*, pp. 138-90.

<sup>22</sup> On Luther's evolving views on Purgatory and the notion of separating the dead from the living see Koslofsky, *Reformation*, pp. 34-39.

<sup>23</sup> Urbanus Rhegius, *Wie man fürsichtiglich und ohne Ärgernis redder soll von der fürnemisten Artikeln Christlicher lere*, 1<sup>st</sup> German edition (Wittenberg, 1536) edited by Alfred Uckeley (Leipzig, 1908), p. 40.

Rhegius and other reformers stressed the importance of honouring the deceased to ensure that, as Luther put it, 'the article of the resurrection may be firmly implanted in us'.<sup>24</sup> Luther raised the status of the funeral rite and public mourning still further in the 1540s, citing the holy patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who 'commanded sternly that their burials be conducted with much splendour'.<sup>25</sup>

Two words emerge as emblems of the Lutheran funeral: honour (*Ehre*) and comfort (*Trost*). Above all the Lutheran 'art of dying' selectively preserved aspects of Catholic practice to leave the bereaved with a sense that the deceased's memory was honoured and his soul comforted. Confession, absolution and the Eucharist were administered to the dying person on his deathbed. The pastor, meanwhile, informed family members of reasons to be cheerful, indeed, reasons to thank God for their imminent loss. Absolute faith in Christ would be sufficient to overcome the sharpness of death, the individual's legacy of sin, and the horrors of hell.

Orthodox Lutheranism taught that the dead were sleeping in their 'little beds of rest' (*Ruhebettlein*); other comforting words downplayed the pre-Reformation notion of the 'bad death', although popular belief preserved a lasting fear of meeting a violent or unexpected end without prior administration of the final sacrament.<sup>26</sup> 'Christians,' wrote Luther, 'look at it [death] as a journey and departure out of this misery and vale of tears (where the Devil is prince and god) into yonder life, where there will be inexpressible joy and external blessedness.'<sup>27</sup> By the end of the sixteenth century, the pastoral power of Luther's church was supported by rules governing the preparation for death and its public recognition. Martin Moller's *Manual on Preparing for Death*, remained a primary source of clear guidance for the laity and clergy for well over 100 years after its publication in 1593.<sup>28</sup>

Bach's family members, regardless of the conviction of their Lutheran faith, would surely have been aware of the spirit, if not the detail, of Moller's definition of the blessed death: 'To die blessedly means to end one's life in the correct and true faith, to commend one's soul to the Lord Jesus Christ, and with a heartfelt desire for external blessedness, to go to sleep gently and pass on over.'<sup>29</sup> Moller also supplied advice to all those in the dying room. The decessant and his family

<sup>24</sup> Joachim Carl Friedrich Knaake and others (eds.), *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar, 1883- ), vol. 35, p. 483; Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (eds.), *Luther's Works* (Fortress Press and Concordia Publishing House: Minneapolis and St Louis, 1955- ), vol. 53, pp. 326-27.

<sup>25</sup> Pelikan, *Luther's Works*, vol. 53, p.326-27.

<sup>26</sup> On the idea of the 'bad' Lutheran death, see Karant-Nunn, *Ritual*, pp. 162-70. The use of death-related chorales and counterpoint in the preparation for a good Lutheran death is examined by David Yearsley in his *Bach and the Meanings of Counterpoint* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 11-18.

<sup>27</sup> Translation from Ewald Plass (ed.), *What Luther Says: An Anthology* (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), vol. 1, p. 381.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Moller, *Manuale De praeparatione ad mortem. Heilsame und sehr nützliche betrachtung wie ein Christen Mensch aus Gottes Wort sol lernen Christlich leben und Seliglich sterben* (Görlitz: Ambrosius Fritsch, 1593).

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Karant-Nunn, *Ritual*, p. 163.

members were encouraged to deliver periodic 'sighs' (*Seuffzer*): these represented sorrow for earthly sin and a sense of desire or yearning to enter God's kingdom.

Luther's church provided certain spiritual comforts to the bereaved, codified in the years after the Reformation by the attachment of social and cultural significance to the funeral ritual and to public displays of mourning. 'Funeral masses and intercession for the dead are gone,' preached Martin Luther at the funeral of Elector John of Saxony in 1532, 'but we do not want to let this act of worship [namely the funeral] fall away.'<sup>30</sup> Lutheran funerals soon became ordered, regulated affairs, dominated in the case of wealthy individuals by the high-flown funeral sermon.<sup>31</sup> Less affluent families were served by a few prescribed words of comfort from a pastor.

Death's isolation, a central tenet of Lutheran theology, may have been wrapped in reassuring similes referring to sleep, little beds and eternal rest. But the separation of the dead from the living surely remained a test of faith for those faced by the sudden loss of a family member, especially the father or mother of young children. The Lutheran deathbed and funeral rituals and the comforting eschatology of the honourable death may have mollified Bach's direct experience of death, by no means uncommon in his world. The public nature of death, with the family and a pastor in attendance, and the honourable funeral helped maintain a sense of equilibrium, drawing the bitter personal consequences of plague, famine or war within a framework of understanding. However, the orderly treatment of death by the church authorities surely could not have cushioned Bach from the disturbing loss of his parents, his first wife and eleven of his children.

The orthodox Lutheran funeral rite's formal structure presupposed a period of grief and its outward manifestation, mourning. Recent behavioural studies of the mourning process suggest that the basic nature of grief, as opposed to specific mourning rituals, has changed little in the European Christian experience.<sup>32</sup> Personal loss causes disruption and a sense of abandonment, forcing the bereaved to contemplate his or her mortality and prompting sorrow for the dead. The Lutheran Catechism promised that Christ was the true deliverer of redemption from human sin: faith in the Holy Trinity offered the only hope of salvation. Death, in the Christian tradition accepted by Luther, could not happen without God's will. Matthew's Gospel offered a comforting view of the divine plan and support for Lutheran eschatology: 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of

<sup>30</sup> Koslofsky's translation in *Reformation*, p. 81; *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 36, p. 237.

<sup>31</sup> Around 300,000 printed funeral sermons have survived in German archives and libraries. For a bibliographic survey of printed sermons, see Rudolf Lenz, 'Gedruckte Leichenpredigten (1550-1750)' in Lenz (ed.), *Leichenpredigten als Quelle historischer Wissenschaften* vol. 1 (Cologne and Vienna: Böhlau, 1975), pp. 36-51. See also 'VD17 - Das Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachraum erschienenen Drucke des 17. Jahrhunderts', (<http://www.vd17.de/inhalte-e.html>) for extensive bibliographic details of printed sources.

<sup>32</sup> Glennys Howarth and Oliver Leaman (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* (London: Routledge, 2001), s.v. 'Loss', 'Funerals, historical perspective'.

more value than many sparrows' (Matthew 10: 29-31). Death also underlined the variety of earthly comforts and served as a warning for the wicked to turn to God.

Public displays of grief were tolerated and even encouraged as part of the honourable Lutheran death. Indeed, the absence of outward manifestations of grief, especially tears, was perceived as ungodly, not least because the emotional response to death was God-given. The church authorities attempted, however, to circumscribe the indulgence of grief, citing scriptural authority and repeating the warning found in Sirach 38: 17-18?

Let your weeping be bitter and your wailing fervent; observe the mourning according to his merit, for one day or two, to avoid criticism; then be comforted for your sorrow. For sorrow results in death, and sorrow of heart saps one's strength.

The imposition of church authority on Lutheran deathbed ritual and the concomitant erosion of personal connections with the dead (such as those associated with the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory), were in keeping with the orthodox church's battle to remove individuality from the supremely individual moment of death. Susan Karant-Nunn, in a detailed study of ritual in early modern Germany, neatly summarises the agency of power at work here: 'Whether the participants were conscious of it or not,' she says, 'in Lutheran Germany deathbed transactions constituted another small arena where the forces of worldly domination and surrender continued.'<sup>33</sup> The normative function of the honourable burial that dominated Bach's childhood experiences of death reinforced the social importance of the well-ordered Lutheran death rite.

Honour, and its close relative, decency, were valued as marks of the good Lutheran death: the more honourable and decent the death, the greater the honour bestowed on the deceased's relatives, friends and associates. Private mourning was to a great extent overshadowed by the priority of church- and community-dominated ritual. The *Beisetzung* supplied a strong and popular alternative to the traditional Lutheran funeral and also created conditions in which private grief might be expressed outside conventional forms imposed and ordered by the church.

Any attempt to quantify Bach's private grief and apply such speculative observations to his music immediately runs into the conflict waged today by warring aestheticians, while raising the reasonable suspicions of anyone hostile to the vogue for wrapping works from the past in a post-Jungian cocoon of 'shared' emotions. Those in favour of an arousal theory of art, in which 'sad' music compels a response of sadness in its listeners, and those who base value judgments of a work's inherent sadness on its cognitive impact would, I suspect, at least agree that the most lachrymose texts of Bach's sacred cantatas and other vocal works provide a clear context for the musical representation of grief, one that would have been readily understood by congregations steeped in the Lutheran *ars moriendi*. Conversely, the increasingly familiar and developing burial rituals of the *Beisetzung* represent an emphatic shift in popular practice

<sup>33</sup> Karant-Nunn, *Ritual*, p. 170.

away from the fear and pain of death promulgated by Luther and orthodox theologians towards a more comforting and certainly less terrifying interpretation of the end of life.<sup>34</sup>

In the case of Bach's cantata *Ich lasse dich nicht, du segnest mich denn* BWV 157, associated with the Leipzig funeral in early November 1726 of court counsellor Johann Christoph von Ponickau, the evidence of the score itself<sup>35</sup> supports the possibility that the work might have accompanied a burial that almost certainly began at or after dusk. Likewise Bach's 'funeral' motets, *Der Geist hilft* BWV 226, *Jesu, meine Freude* BWV 227, *Fürchte dich nicht* BWV 228 and *Komm, Jesu, komm* BWV 229, could have served to intensify the mood of contemplation engendered during the nocturnal *Beisetzung*. Although the order of service for the Nikolaikirche funeral in July 1723 of Johanna Maria Kees, wife of Leipzig's postmaster – the occasion generally accepted for the compositions of BWV 227 – contains no reference to Bach's motet or the chorale 'Jesu, meine Freude', the work might have been performed during the act of internment for the consolation of the deceased's family.<sup>36</sup>

The currency of nocturnal burial remained strong and endured throughout Bach's lifetime, reinforced by an ongoing decline in official funeral sermons and a corresponding rise in simple graveside ceremonies. Indeed, the practice of the nocturnal *Beisetzung* survived in Germany until the end of the eighteenth century and directly informed the modern idea of the private family funeral. Given the importance of funeral music, not least as a source of income to Bach and the St Thomas School, it seems likely that any musical accompaniment associated with the *Beisetzung* ritual would have followed conventional practice by moving away from clergy-dominated church services to Leipzig's extramural burial grounds. There was no repression of tears of grief. The big boys, Bach among them, wanted to cry and did so freely.

<sup>34</sup> Compare David Yearsley's discussion of Bach's so-called deathbed chorale *Vor deinem Thron tret ich hiermit* and the composer's response to the Lutheran *ars moriendi* in Yearsley, *Bach and the Meanings of Counterpoint*, 1-41. Although the author presents Bach as a faithful student and follower of orthodox Lutheran practice in terms of fearing and preparing for death, I would argue that Bach also drew earthly comfort from contemporary shifts in the interpretation of death as a form of sleep and, hence, burial as a nocturnal practice.

<sup>35</sup> The work calls for tenor and bass soloists, three solo instruments, strings and a vocal ensemble for its final chorale. Alfred Dürr suggests 'Bach's setting may have taken account of local performance conditions', basing his assumption on the cantata's reduced forces: Dürr (trans. by Richard D. P. Jones), *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, revd 6<sup>th</sup> edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 767. Certainly, the nature of the scoring and solo writing would have suited the intimate conditions of the nocturnal *Beisetzung*.

<sup>36</sup> See Martin Petzold, 'Überlegungen zur theologischen und geistigen Intergration', in Karen Lehmann (ed.), *Beiträge zur Bachforschung* 1 (Leipzig: Nationale Forschungs- und Gedenkstätten Johann Sebastian Bach der DDR, 1982), p. 49, and Daniel R. Melamed, *J. S. Bach and the German Motet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 85-86.