Inventing the Devil and Experiencing Emotion in Seventeenth Century England (By Jo Seto)

It is often tempting to imagine emotions as universal time capsules; as ancient relics that transcend time and space; intangible entities that we naturally inherit from our historical forebears. Internal conditions such as anger, ecstasy and sorrow, often appear universal and permanent: surely all humans in every age, in all geographies, experienced these states in the same fashion. Even when one imagines how past individuals ‘felt’ emotion, it seems intuitive to craft such assumptions upon our own personal and present-oriented experiences of these conditions. It is less glamorous, but perhaps more fruitful, to consider emotions in their actuality: as historical artifacts that are formed and reinvented in different milieus. Utilising this definition of ‘emotions’ as its touchstone, this work delves into an examination of the devil and emotion in the seventeenth century. At a time when individuals imagined their world permeated with diabolical and benevolent spirits, suicidal emotions were perceived as the seductive temptations of a demonic fiend.¹ In order to contemplate the emotional lexicon of this period, this work considers the ‘imagined’ role of the devil in two suicides and further interrogates how these intimate tales of self-murder came to be reinvented over time.

This work is centred on two deaths: the starvation of an Italian apostate, Francis Spira in 1548 and the self-strangulation of an English Baptist, John Child in 1684. In the seventeenth century, these men posthumously achieved infamy as theologians used their

*** My thanks go to Dr. Rebecca McNamara for her invaluable guidance and bibliography on this topic.
As intimate details of their deaths were refashioned into spiritual caveats, the tales of Spira and Child gradually morphed into one biography. In an attempt to salvage these protagonists’ emotional agency, this work seeks to disentangle these narratives; to forage into witness statements and suicide notes, in order to recover two separate individuals that envisioned their demises in distinctly different terms. It also intends to consider why one man starved himself under the torment of a guilty conscience, while the other hung himself to escape a demonic fiend. And also, why one man considered himself abandoned by a formidable and unforgiving God while the other imagined himself plagued by the devil. In contemplating these questions, this work will also cast light on the process in which religious authorities – ultimately outsiders to the inner states of Spira and Child - came to fabricate and impose certain emotions upon these men long after their physical ends.

In salvaging the individual deaths of Spira and Child, the reinvention of the devil in the seventeenth century develops into an unavoidable chapter of this essay. In order to discern why Spira envisioned a terrifying God as the sole author of his fate, while Child instead saw Satan as a major protagonist in his decline, we must consider the devil’s symbolic transformation in this period. Over time, the devil was reimagined as a powerful fiend that was capable of manipulating emotions and cajoling humans to their death. As Satan came to be intimately linked with suicide, individuals began to envision emotions of melancholy and despair as personalised demonic enticements to death. The devil’s

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2 Anon., A warning from God to all apostates; or, the nature, great evil, and danger of apostacy discovered. Wherein the fearful states of Francis Spira and John Child are compared; the latter whereof, under dismal despair, hang'd himself, Octob. 13. 1684 (London: Printed for Christopher Hussy, at the sign of the Flower-de Luce in Little-Britain, 1684).

3 Richard Gilpin, Demonologia sacra, or, A treatise of Satan's temptations in three parts / by Richard Gilpin. (London: Printed by J.D. for Richard Randal and Peter Maplasden, 1677).

4 John Sym, Lifes preservative against self-killing. Or, An useful treatise concerning life and self-murder shewing the kindes, and meanes of them both: the excellency and preservation of the former: the evil, and prevention of the latter. Containing the resolution of manifold cases, and questions concerning that subject;
reinvention in this time provides an apt demonstration as to how shifting contexts and new religious iconography can remodify an individual’s perception of their own emotions. On a smaller scale, it may also highlight why Spira and Child perceived their spiritual fates so differently.

As this paper proposes to be a historical study of emotions, it is also worth considering what such a work entails. Since Lucien Febvre called for a history of the ‘emotional life of man in all its manifestations’ in 1941, historians have differed as to how this vision should appear in fruition.\(^5\) Certain scholars have focused on the binding power of emotions and their ability to articulate a sense of community, while other historians have taken a broader approach and defined various eras with emotional adjectives such as ‘optimism’ or ‘sentimentalism’.\(^6\) This work chooses to employ the dualistic and layered approach suggested by Peter Stearns and Carol Stearns in 1985. For them, historians must consider the subjective experience of how emotions were felt in the past, whilst also observing the surrounding ‘emotionology’ or the context in which these emotions occur.\(^7\) In adopting a concentric approach and progressing from the intimate to the public, this paper will first consider how Spira and Child experienced and perceived emotions of despair and melancholy, and then next consider the emotionology of this period and the devil’s role in shaping feelings and defining acceptable behaviours.

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I. Two Stories

Religious authorities frequently exploited private stories of suicide in order to bolster the biblical adage that self-murder was a grave and heinous sin. Authors of tracts and sermons converted intimate details of individual’s deaths into titillating, salacious morsels that both catered to and cautioned a curious public. In the seventeenth century, two narratives of self-murder were widely circulated and brandished as examples of the sin of self-destruction: the death of an Italian apostate Francis Spira in 1548 and the suicide of an English Baptist named John Child in 1684. These two deaths were often collated by preachers and theologians. By the end of the century, their biographies were virtually synonymous as the two men were relegated to a list of infamous backsliders – ‘Judas, Spira, Antiochus, John Child’ – their stories serving as nothing more than religious name dropping for preachers intending to reinforce religious maxims. Though, if we sever these two narratives from one another, and seek to unpack the finer intricacies of Spira and Child’s deaths, we can once again recover two separate men that envisioned their demises in distinctly different terms.

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8 Anon., A warning from God to all apostates; or, the nature, great evil, and danger of apostacy discovered. Wherein the fearful states of Francis Spira and John Child are compared; the latter whereof, under dismal despair, hang’d himself, Octob. 13, 1684.

9 Stephen Jerome, Seauen helps to Heauen Shewing 1. How to avoid the curse. 2. How to beare the crosse. 3. How to build the conscience. 4. How with Moses to see Canaan. 5. Simeons dying song, directing to live holly and dye happily. 6. Comforts for Christians against distresses in life, and feare of death. 7. Feruent prayers, to beare sicknessse patiently, and dye preparedly. The second edition: much enlarged by Steuen Ierome, late preacher at S. Brides. Seene and allowed (London: Printed [by T. Snodham] for Roger Jackson, and are to be solde at his shop, neare to the Conduit in Fleetstreete, 1614). p. 20.
Francis Spira was a renowned civil lawyer and a respected Protestant, born in Cittadella, near Padua.\textsuperscript{10} Venerated for his eloquent and grave speech, Spira was a revered member of his community and appeared to be outwardly ‘blessed’ with a wife, eleven children and ‘wealth in abundance’.\textsuperscript{11} In November 1547, Spira was denounced by the Inquisition in Venice and commanded by the Papacy to return to his hometown and publicly apostatise.\textsuperscript{12} It is at this moment that Spira’s spiritual torment began. Burdened by the thought of the task he had to perform in Cittadella, Spira was accosted by a heavenly voice on his journey home. The godly voice urged Spira to refuse to denounce his Protestant faith in Cittadella, promising him that an ‘eternal reward’ awaited him in heaven, a reward far more substantial than earthly possessions. It also encouraged Spira to consider the plight of ‘Peter in the dungeon’ and the ‘martyrs in the fire’: these individuals physically suffered for their faith but were duly rewarded with Eternity.\textsuperscript{13}

Though, no sooner did the heavenly voice fade, when the ‘Flesh’ also began to communicate to Spira in an attempt to persuade him to continue with the renunciation. The Flesh implored Spira to consider the safety of his progeny, as well as the earthly possessions that he would forfeit if branded a heretic. It urged him to imagine the ‘loathing stinking dungeon’ he would be imprisoned in and the ‘bloudie axe’ and ‘burning fagot’ that would procure his death.\textsuperscript{14} Tormented by these conflicting voices, Spira arrived in Cittadella, torn between considerations of Eternity and the ‘Flesh’. Propped up in front of an audience of two

\textsuperscript{10} As sources on Spira largely concentrate on his death, little is known about how this native Italian came to spiritually identify as a Protestant believer. Anne Overell has proffered the convincing thesis that Spira was a member of the pious spiritual group, which would have exposed him to Protestant texts during his residence in Venice. Though regardless of the means by which Spira came to adopt Protestant doctrines, it becomes evident that these beliefs were profoundly absorbed by Spira, serving as a rudder for his spiritual conscience, and perhaps to his detriment.

\textsuperscript{11} Nathaniel Bacon, \textit{A relation of the fearefull estate of Francis Spira in the yeare, 1548} (London: Printed by I. L[egat] for Phil. Stephens, and Christoph. Meredith, at the golden Lyon in Pauls Church-yard, 1638). pp.1-2.


\textsuperscript{13} Bacon, \textit{A relation of the fearefull estate of Francis Spira in the yeare, 1548}: p.13.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., pp. 15-17.
thousand people, Spira renounced Protestant doctrines and pledged his obedience to the Supreme Bishop, shortly before swooning and fainting in front of a surprised crowd.\textsuperscript{15}

On Spira’s return home, the godly voice continued to haunt our poor protagonist, declaring that Spira had jeopardised his eternal salvation and all for the ‘windie applause’ of the world.\textsuperscript{16} Wracked with guilt and spiritually tormented, Spira plunged into a deep bout of melancholy, refusing sleep and roaring and tossing up and down in his sheets. Some of his concerned companions journeyed with him to Padua where three eminent physicians offered up their prognosis: Spira’s malady had arisen from some ‘grief’ or ‘passion of his mind’, stirring up many ill humours in his body, which had gradually ascended to his brain.\textsuperscript{17}

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\caption{Anon. A Warning from God to All Apostates... Wherein the Fearful States of Francis Spira and John Child Are Compared. London: Printed for Christopher Hussy, at the sign of the Flower-de Luce in Little-Britain, 1684.}
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\textsuperscript{16} Bacon, \textit{A relation of the fearefull estate of Francis Spira in the yeare, 1548}: p.32.
\textsuperscript{17} John Wilson, \textit{The Scriptures genuine interpreter asserted, or, A discourse concerning the right interpretation of Scripture wherein a late exercitation, intituled, Philosophia S. scripturae interpres, is examin’d, and the Protestant doctrine in that point vindicated : with some reflections on another discourse of L.W. written in answer to the said exercitation : to which is added, An appendix concerning internal illumination, and other operations of the Holy Spirit upon the soul of man, justifying the doctrine of Protestants, and the practice of\end{flushright}
However, Spira shunned their diagnosis, claiming that his disease could not be cured by ‘potions, plasters, nor drugs’ but only by Christ - only He could lift the wrath that He alone had placed upon Spira. Convinced that God’s heart had hardened against him, Spira’s condition deteriorated until he eventually became convinced that a legion of demons possessed him: ‘I am verily persuaded indeed, that God hath left me to the power of the divells’. Believing himself forsaken, Spira refused to eat, slowly transforming into a body of sinew and bones, and eventually dying in spiritual torment and agony at the age of fifty.

Following his demise, Spira’s death came to possess new meaning. The final moments of his life were transformed into the ‘most famous story of the Italian Reformation’, serving as a caveat to those tempted to renounce or forsake their faith. Michael MacDonald has noted that by the second half of the 1550s, Spira’s end had deteriorated into an ‘archetype of apostasy’, retold in Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* as an ‘inversion of the tales of steadfastness and saintly suffering’ that otherwise filled the volumes of his work. Serving as the Reformation poster-boy for backsliding, Spira’s decline also came to serve as a demonstration of Godly vindication. Matteo Gribaldi’s account of Spira’s death, published in 1570, remarked that God had embedded a ‘gnawing worm’ in Spira’s heart, so that ‘daily he might be fill with error, confusion and desperation’. Penning a treatise in 1597, Thomas Morton similarly wrote that Spira’s final moments of torment were emblematic of the serious Christians, against the charge of enthusiasm, and other unjust criminations (London: Printed by T.N. for R. Boulter, 1678). pp.44-45.

‘gnawing and terrifying conscience’ that God had ‘prepared for the wicked in the world to come’.  

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Although his death came to be spoken of in the same breath as Spira’s, John Child conceived his own demise in distinctly different terms. Child was a leading Baptist teacher, a man of ‘austere countenance’ and ‘piercing eyes’ who had zealously devoured the scriptures in his youth. In his twenties, he moved from his hometown in the hamlet of Spittle Fields to London. Later in 1682, during the High Church’s persecution of dissenters, he published a controversial pamphlet titled *The Second Argument* in which he renounced his allegiance to the Baptist sect and called on all non-conformists to return to the Church of England. Following a public backlash against his treatise, Child fell into deep despair, expressing the conviction that he had gravely sinned against ‘God’s children’. Two months before his death, Child – with tears in his eyes – confided to a companion that he had written the pamphlet out of malice and penned his work by the devil’s instigation. Utterly dejected, he

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22 Thomas Morton, *Two treatises concerning regeneration, 1. Of repentance, 2. Of the diet of the soule shewing the one, how it ought to be sought after and may be attained vtio, the other, how it being gotten, is to be preserued and continued* (London: Printed by Thomas Creede for Robert Jackson and Raph Jackson, 1597). p. 30.

23 Anon., *A warning from God to all apostates; or, the nature, great evil, and danger of apostacy discovered. Wherein the fearful states of Francis Spira and John Child are compared; the latter whereof, under dismal despair, hang’d himself, Octob. 13. 1684*: p. 8.


25 Anon., *The English Spira being a fearful example of an apostate who had been a preacher many years and then apostatized from his religion, miserably hanged himself, October the 13th, 1684 : giving an account of his despair and divers conferences had with him by several ministers and others of his friends : together with his answer, and papers written by his own hand / left attested by Mr. T. Plant, Mr. H. Collings, Mr. B. Dennis, Mr. B. Keach* (London: Printed for Tho. Fabian, MDCXCI, 1693). p. 9.
cried out that he had ‘no hope’ of receiving salvation and that his state was worse than Cain’s, Judah’s and even Francis Spira’s.\textsuperscript{26}

A few months later, Child hung himself underneath the cellar stairs of his residence, leaving only a parting letter which provides some clues as to how he perceived his spiritual condition in the final moments of his life. After declaring his wife innocent of any involvement in his death, Child emphasised his guilt at having authored \textit{The Second Argument}, claiming that he had become a ‘Promoter of the Devil’s designs’. Child wrote that he had acted in concert with the ‘Ministry of Darkness’ and had been driven to murder himself under a ‘diabolical influence’.\textsuperscript{27} Close to his death, Child had recognised his spiritual follies, however it was Satan who had subsumed and hardened his heart, ultimately causing him to ‘forget God’.\textsuperscript{28}

An account of John Child’s suicide was circulated shortly after his death in 1684, portraying him as a frail, tormented man who had succumbed to the devil’s temptations.\textsuperscript{29} Even his last departing note - an immensely intimate artifact - was published and flaunted as an illustration of the dangerous snares of a demonic fiend.\textsuperscript{30} As stories of Child’s death proliferated throughout England, Spira’s own narrative came to be revived and coloured by the details of Child’s spiritual demise. Preachers remodified Spira’s end and recreated novel

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 9.  
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., pp. 41 & 59.  
\textsuperscript{28} Thomas and Benjamin Dennix Plant, \textit{The mischief of persecution exemplified, by a true narrative of the life and deplorable end of Mr. John Child, who miserably destroy’d himself Octob. 13, 1684 giving an account of his despair, and divers conferences had with him by several of his friends : together with his answer and papers written by his own hand : also a discourse of the nature and office of conscience, with a postscript shewing the reason of its publication at this time / attested by us, Tho. Plant, Benj. Dennis.} (London: Printed for Tho. Fabian, 1688). pp. 41-59.  
\textsuperscript{29} Anon., \textit{Sad and lamentable news from Brick-lane in the hamlet of Spittle Fields, or, A dreadful warning to such as give way to the temptation of the devil, in the deplorable example of Mr. John Child once a famous anabaptist teacher who falling into despair; committed a barbarous and unnatural murther upon his own person, on the 13th day of Octob. 1684. Together with the circumstances that attended it, likewise his behavior towards such ministers as prayed with him, and administered other spiritual consolations, as also what else materially happened on the sad occasion, being worthy the perusal of all Christians, and published to the end, that it might deter others from falling into the like snare.} (London: Printed for A. Banks, 1684).  
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
versions of his death, attributing his decline to a personal susceptibility to demonic temptation. Delivering a sermon in 1694, Benjamin Keach remarked that it was ‘through Satan’s temptation’ that Spira had renounced Protestantism and then starved himself to the grave.\(^{31}\) Spira’s death thus came to be redefined as an instance of self-murder as the devil was interposed, by seventeenth century theologians and preachers, as a conspirator in his downfall.

There were comparable qualities that united the deaths of Spira and Child. Both Protestants had expressed the conviction that their fate was held in God’s hands. On one occasion during his torment, Spira had exclaimed to a companion: ‘I had a taste of his sweetnesse, peace and comfort: now contrarily I know God not as a father but as an enemy!’\(^{32}\) In a letter to a friend, penned two months before his suicide, Child had similarly conveyed the belief that God had forsaken him and revoked ‘his Tallent’ and the ‘influence of the divine Spirit’.\(^{33}\) Though, there were also stark variants in the original versions of these mens’ deaths. The devil had never featured as a major protagonist in Spira’s initial narrative nor is it certain that Spira perceived his death as an instance of suicide.

For Spira, Satan was only imagined in the periphery as it was the consuming wrath of a tyrannical and unforgiving God that had truly drained his vitality. Imagining himself deserted and orphaned by his heavenly Father, Spira had resigned his body to a host of demons, allowing his flesh and bones to rot into dust. In the early modern period, starvation

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31 Benjamin Keach, A golden mine opened, or, The glory of God's rich grace displayed in the mediator to believers, and his direful wrath against impenitent sinners containing the substance of near forty sermons upon several subjects (London: Printed and sold by the author and William Marshall, 1694). p. 44.
32 Bacon, A relation of the fearefull estate of Francis Spira in the yeare, 1548: p. 84.
33 Anon., The English Spira being a fearful example of an apostate who had been a preacher many years and then apostatized from his religion, miserably hanged himself, October the 13th, 1684 : giving an account of his despair and divers conferences had with him by several ministers and others of his friends : together with his answer, and papers written by his own hand / left attested by Mr. T. Plant, Mr. H. Collings, Mr. B. Dennis, Mr. B. Keach: p. 24.
was never categorically recognised as suicide and it is possible that Spira had been merely fasting as a form of ‘controlled penance’ to cleanse his body of ‘impurities’ and ‘steel’ his shaken spirit.\textsuperscript{34} Though in contrast, Child had recognised his own death as an act of self-murder where the devil had functioned as the instigator and executor of his spiritual agonies. While Spira had imagined his mind tortured by a ‘continual butchery of his conscience’, Child instead saw himself grappling against a diabolical tormenter; a tormentor that had persuaded him to pen a blasphemous pamphlet, shortly before cajoling him to his death.\textsuperscript{35}


\textsuperscript{35} Bacon, \textit{A relation of the fearefull estate of Francis Spira in the yeare, 1548}: p. 77.
II. Reinventing the Devil

The modification of Spira’s death into a parable on self-murder is a transformation that cannot be separated from the reinvention of the devil in the seventeenth century. In a period where suicide was considered an unnatural and abhorrent act to perform upon oneself; a transgression against the sixth commandment: Thou shalt not kill and a violation of natural and civil law, punishable by funerary desecration – Spira and the devil both came to be reimagined as individuals and entities that they formerly were not.\textsuperscript{36} As the witch craze reached frenzied heights and theologians emphasised that Satan’s malice had never ‘worke[d] more prevalently then now’, the devil was reinvented in the popular imagination.\textsuperscript{37} In the middle ages, the laity had largely conceptualised Satan as a bestial, monstrous and easily duped jester.\textsuperscript{38} Though later in the seventeenth century the devil was reimagined as a shrewd and seductive tempter that could disguise his savage qualities and infiltrate the human realm.

The devil’s enhanced appeal and his intimate linkage with suicide in this century transformed popular perceptions of self-murder. Individuals progressively came to visualise emotions of despair and melancholy as Satan’s personalised enticements to death. The devil’s reinvention in this period marked a new shift in religious iconography. On a broader level, his transformation provides an apt demonstration as to how individual self-perceptions of emotion can dramatically alter with new contexts. On a smaller scale, his reinvention may


\textsuperscript{37} Peter Stanford, The Devil: A Biography (London: Mandarin Paperbacks, 1997). p. 154; Anon., A Sad caveat to all Quakers. Not to boast any more that they have God Almighty by the hand, when they have the devil by the toe (London: Printed for W. Gilbertson in Giltspur street without Newgate, 1657). p. 4.

also provide us with a vital clue as to why Spira and Child imagined their deaths so differently.

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The devil imagined in the middle ages was an inchoate model in comparison to the ‘Satan’ that was popularly imagined in the seventeenth century. In the context of the crusades, religious propaganda frequently linked the devil with the Orient. As a result, the devil in the medieval period came to symbolise a subhuman and debase foe - the perennial but undoubtedly vanquishable nemesis of the western world. As popular perceptions of the devil’s appearance were influenced by folklore and pagan gods, descriptions of his exterior came to be composed of a bizarre assortment of animal parts. For instance, in the eleventh century, Raoul Glaber, a monk from Champeaux, described the devil’s countenance on one of the three occasions that the fiend had appeared to him. According to Glaber, Satan possessed a ‘scrawny neck’, ‘pointy hairy ears’, ‘fangs like a dog’, ‘a humped back’, ‘wobbling buttocks’ and was adorned with ‘dirty’ garments. For Glaber, as for many of the clergy and laity in the middle ages, the devil was not perceived as an alluring, seductive fiend; rather, he was envisioned as a shadowy, vaguely-defined and lowly bestial creature. The devil’s animalistic qualities only served to emphasise the often comedic and trifling role that he played in human lives. While he was capable of pestering or frightening humans at their bedsides (as he often did to Glaber), his ability to surpass these actions was considered to be subject to the dictates of God.

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., p. 13.
In the popular mystery plays, developed from the tenth to sixteenth centuries, the devil was characterised as a comedic figure that was easily duped by Christ and the Virgin Mary’s chicanery.\(^{43}\) One of the most popular medieval plays, *The Harrowing of Hell*, follows Christ’s descent into the underworld as he salvages the tortured souls of Moses, King David, Abraham and John the Baptist – all biblical luminaries that have been forced to languish in hell before the advent of Christ’s crucifixion.\(^{44}\) The devil is depicted as a humiliated and defeated creature, watching helplessly as Christ marches up to Hell’s gates, causing the devil’s porters to flee and addressing Satan:

> “Be quiet Satan!
> Thou art defeated.
> Thinkest thou I died for nought?
> By my death mankind is bought.

> Thou shalt be in bondage for ever
> Till the coming of doomsday”.\(^{45}\)


\(^{44}\) James Orchard Halliwell, *The Harrowing of Hell: A Miracle Play* (London: J.R. Smith, 1840). pp. 12-14. This 1840 version represents a compilation of various medieval scripts and plays that were used in staging ‘The Harrowing of Hell’ for audiences in the fourteenth century.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., p. 20.
The devil imagined in the middle ages could be duly tricked and conquered by Christ’s magnificent glory. Even in individuals’ daily lives, Satan was conceptualised as a bothersome prankster that could be outwitted by human actions.\textsuperscript{46} If one happened to sneeze, a simple ‘Bless you’ would surely obstruct the devil from protruding into one’s soul through their open nasal passages.\textsuperscript{47} If one happened to spill salt (which represented spiritual purity), throwing a fragment of the mineral over one’s shoulder would surely hit Satan in the eye and thwart any possible pranks.\textsuperscript{48}

The perception that there were finite limits upon the devil’s power to interfere within the human realm persisted even in the fifteenth century. The \textit{Malleus Maleficarum} (1486) noted that the power of the demonic realm was monitored by heavenly quarters and that God’s power was far superior to the devil’s – whether it was a case of creating ‘real animals’ (demons could only materialise imperfect creatures such as rats and frogs) or effecting apparitions into the human imagination.\textsuperscript{49} Even in his final days, Francis Spira had never envisioned his spiritual agonies as a struggle between himself and a powerful demonic fiend. It was only Satan’s henchmen – his demons – that had pestered Spira with trivial pranks. Speaking to a companion, Spira complained that these devils frequently came into his chamber, putting ‘pins in his bed’ and ‘making a noise and business’.\textsuperscript{50} However irksome such hoaxes were, these pranks did not compare to the new powers the devil was imagined to possess over one century later.

\textsuperscript{46} O’Grady, \textit{The Prince of Darkness: The Devil in History, Religion and the Human Psyche.}, p.54.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Gribaldi, \textit{A notable and maruelous epistle of the famous doctour, Matthewe Gribalde, Professor of the lawe, in the Vniuersitie of Padua: co[n]cernyng the terrible iudgemente of God, vpon hym that for feare of men, denieth Christ and the knowne veritie: with a preface of Doctor Caluine}: p. 12.
The devil that emerged in the seventeenth century was a very different ‘Satan’ to the figure imagined in the middle ages: this devil was astute, deceptive, alluring and while still bestial, now capable of sophisticated disguise.\textsuperscript{51} Writing in the early 1600s, Professor of Divinity Matthew Kellison remarked that the devil had never ‘disguise[d] himself ever so much’ – sometimes he appeared as a ‘young gallante’, at other times a ‘mortified religious man’ or an ‘angel of light’.\textsuperscript{52} While he still possessed ‘staring eyes, stinking savour, horned head and forked feet’, the devil was thought to ‘wrapp and lapp him selfe from top to toe’, sometimes even in the form of a pastor’s habit.\textsuperscript{53} Satan retained his innately savage and barbaric nature however, it was now thought possible for him to disguise such qualities in an attractive and civilised façade. While his bestial qualities had formerly provoked comedy, they now inspired terror as individuals imagined that his monstrous power could be cloaked, hidden and then unleashed upon unsuspecting humans.

\textsuperscript{51} Knights, \textit{The Devil in Disguise: Deception, Delusion and Fanaticism in the Early English Enlightenment}: p. 193.
\textsuperscript{52} Matthew Kellison, \textit{A survey of the new religion detecting manie grosse absurdities which it implieth. Set forth by Matthevv Kellison doctor and Professour of Diuinitie. Diuided into eight booke} (Printed at Dovvay [and Rheims]: By Laurence Kellam [and S. Foigny], at the signe of the holie Lamb, 1603), p. 157.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 184.
Satan the ‘icon’ transformed in this period as his new capabilities were not confined to sophisticated disguise alone. Theological works on suicide refashioned the devil as an intellectually polished fiend, proficient in the art of seducing humans into violent, self-inflicted deaths. Speaking at a lecture in 1631, Robert Bolton warned the audience to never attempt to dispute or debate with Satan. Such attempts would be rendered futile as the devil was ‘an old Sophister of above five thousand years standing in the school of hideous temptations and hellish polices’, while humans were mere ‘novice[s]’.

Religious authorities also came to emphasize human frailty and innocence, as the devil was reimagined as a powerful spiritual predator. Writing in 1653, preacher William Denny described the devil as a ‘beast of prey’, a creature metaphorically endowed with ‘tearing paws’ and a ‘devouring mouth’ that actively sought to tempt Christians into suicide. Also writing in the 1650s, philosopher Jakob Böhme urged his Lutheran counterparts to keep constant watch for their demonic adversary: ‘[he goes] abroad, as a roaring Lion, seeking whom he may devour’.

Moods and feelings came to be perceived as a spiritual battleground, as individuals reimagined the devil as a powerful ruler with an active interest and investment in human emotions. Feelings of despair, melancholy and sadness were coloured with new religious significance as individuals envisaged these moods as personalised, satanic enticements to self-murder. A new market of pocketbooks and self-help manuals blossomed in order to

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54 Robert Bolton, *Instructions for a right comforting afflicted consciences with speciall antidotes against some grievous temptations: delivered for the most part in the lecture at Kettering in North-hampton-shire* (London: Imprinted by Felix Kyngston for Thomas Weaver, and are to be sold at his shop at the great north-dore of Saint Pauls Church, 1631). pp. 545-56.


56 Jakob Böhme, *A consolatory treatise of the four complexions, that is, an instruction in the time of temptation for a sad and assaulted heart shewing where-from sadness naturally ariseth, and how the assaulting happeneth : hereto are annexed some consolatory speeches exceeding profitable for the assaulted hearts & souls, written* (London: Printed by T.W. for H. Blunden, 1654). p. 49.
provide readers with the best techniques for resisting demonic urges. Denny’s frankly titled manual: A Christian Adviser against Self-Murder (1653) painted an extremely attractive portrait of the devil and suicide, advising readers that Satan’s temptations were ‘subtle, frequent’ and almost ‘irresistible without God’s grace’. Denny’s audience were also warned that passions and desires formed dangerous emotional gateways to the act of killing oneself. Christians had to maintain constant vigilance to prevent the devil from injecting them with fierce ‘passions’ – a force so destructive that it could pull off the ‘Beautiful Mask’ that adorned Life, revealing an unbearable and frightening ‘Uglesse’.

Preachers further advised their congregations to self-regulate their internal conditions as emotions were either designated as holy or sinful. Denny’s manual for resisting suicide advised readers to ‘give as little Freedom to Thy Passions as thou cans’t’. Feelings of despair, melancholy and desperation were to be swiftly mollified as such emotions were ‘Wild Horses’ that threatened to suddenly run ‘away with the Whole Man’. Paradoxically, manuals that advised against self-murder also portrayed emotions associated with suicide as immensely enticing. Denny characterised Satan as a seductive tempter that offered humans ‘momentary pleasures’ and emotional ‘Poyson’ disguised in a ‘cup of gold’.

57 Sym, Lives preservative against self-killing. Or, An useful treatise concerning life and self-murder shewing the kindes, and meanes of them both: the excellency and preservation of the former: the evill, and prevention of the latter. Containing the resolution of manifold cases, and questions concerning that subject; with plentiful variety of necessary and usefull observations, and practicall directions, needfull for all Christians. By John Sym minister of Leigh in Essex; Denny William, Pelecanicidium or the Christian adviser against self-murder. Together with a guide, and the pilgrims passe to the land of the living. In three books. (London: Printed for Thomas Hucklescott, and are to be sold at the signe of the George in Little Brittan, 1653); Gilpin, Demonologia sacra, or, A treatise of Satan's temptations in three parts / by Richard Gilpin.
58 Denny, Pelecanicidium, or, The Christian adviser against self-murder together with a guide and the pilgrims passe to the land of the living : in three books: p. 5.
59 Ibid., p. 67.
60 Ibid., p. 69.
61 Ibid. At one point Denny even writes: 'Let too hot Passions take some cooling Ayre! And raise a Title unto Heaven by Prayer!', see p.9.
62 Denny, Pelecanicidium, or, The Christian adviser against self-murder together with a guide and the pilgrims passe to the land of the living : in three books: p. 29; Anon., Sad and dreadful news from Kings-street in Westminster, or a most lamentable relation of the untimely end of the Lady Phillips Who was found strangled in
treatise on satanic temptation, Richard Gilpin claimed that the devil knew the objects of ‘fancy’ that propelled humans and utilised this knowledge to mislead Christians into sin and suicide.\(^6^3\) Even solitude – a banal everyday state - came to be designated as a common site of temptation. Gilpin advised readers that Satan often chose the ‘wilderness’ as the place of combat to tempt persons into suicide.\(^6^4\) It was here that Satan sowed discontent or trouble in the human mind, even tempting individuals with ‘instruments of cruelty’ such as knives in order that they might bring their lives to a violent end.\(^6^5\)

The improvement of the devil’s capabilities in this period was not confined to intellectual advancements alone. Satan was also thought to be gifted with psychoanalytical intuition - a gift that enabled him to delve into the emotional circuits of the human mind. In Böhme’s treatise for the ‘sad and assaulted heart’, the devil was characterised as a villain that possessed omnipotent psychological powers.\(^6^6\) Satan was imagined to ‘inject’ reveries and passions into the human imagination and to conjure up elaborate stratagems to attack and conquer the human psyche, just as a ‘cunning Fowler’ lays his net to trap birds.\(^6^7\) Böhme further warned that the devil could even convince persons they were ‘heinous sinners’ forsaken by God and could wrack their conscience with guilt in order to persuade them they were possessed by demons.\(^6^8\) Formerly, such access to human’s desires and internal conditions had been reserved as God’s terrain. Though, now it was a grand demonic fiend

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\(^6^4\) Ibid., p. 14.

\(^6^5\) Ibid., pp. 109 & 326.

\(^6^6\) Bohme, *A consolatory treatise of the four complexions, that is, an instruction in the time of temptation for a sad and assaulted heart shewing where-from sadness naturally ariseth, and how the assaulting happeneth : hereto are annexed some consolatory speeches exceeding profitable for the assaulted hearts & souls, written*

\(^6^7\) Ibid., p.21.

\(^6^8\) Ibid., p.24; Richard Baxter, *A Christian directory, or, A summ of practical theologie and cases of conscience directing Christians how to use their knowledge and faith, how to improve all helps and means, and to perform all duties, how to overcome temptations, and to escape or mortifie every sin : in four parts* (London: Printed by Robert White for Nevill Simmon, 1673). p. 314.
that was liable for manipulating and coaxing Christians into a number of desolate mental states.

The image of an intelligent demonic ruler endowed with psychic powers, transformed common perceptions of self-murder. Popular accounts and canards of true-life suicide stories fashioned their protagonists into innocent and vulnerable victims of the devil’s temptations. A woman who threw herself from a window four stories high in 1685, only to fall to her death into a bramble shrub, was described in a popular account as ‘frail’ and ‘weak’.69 The other featured protagonist of the narrative – the devil – was in contrast, portrayed as a ‘cunning’ villain that had targeted the poor lady in a moment of private weakness.70 Mr. Thomas Creek, an Oxford scholar who hung himself, was remembered as a respectable Clergy-Man that God had endowed with ‘good parts’.71 Yet, it was the devil that had taken hold of Creek and used these ‘parts’ for his own malicious purposes.72 Even John Child was described as a man of ‘eminency’ among Anabaptists, a ‘zealous worshipper’ in his youth and a man blessed with a wife of ‘good parentage and honest report’.73 Under the devil’s influence, Child had been tempted into penning a blasphemous and hypocritical work; and it was also Satan who had cajoled Child into his death shortly after.74

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69 Anon., An account of a most strange and barbarous action how a prisoners wife of Ludgate threw her self from the leads into Black-Fryers on Sunday the 22th of this instant Marth [sic], between twelve and one in the afternoon. (London: Tho. Moore, MDCLXXXV, 1685).
70 Ibid.
71 Anon., A step to Oxford: or, A mad essay on the reverend Mr. Tho. Creech's hanging himself, (as 'tis said) for love With the character of his mistress. In a letter to a person of quality (London1700). p. 1.
72 Ibid., p.3.
73 Anon., The English Spira being a fearful example of an apostate who had been a preacher many years and then apostatized from his religion, miserably hanged himself, October the 13th, 1684 : giving an account of his despair and divers conferences had with him by several ministers and others of his friends : together with his answer, and papers written by his own hand / left attested by Mr. T. Plant, Mr. H. Collings, Mr. B. Dennis, Mr. B. Keach: pp. 1 & 8.
74 Ibid.
The reinvention of the devil transformed how individuals in the seventeenth century visualised and imagined their own mental cognitions. In a time where suicide was considered a grave and heinous crime; where heretics, alleged witches and apostates were condemned and punished; and passions and desires religiously policed, individuals came to perceive thoughts of despair, self-doubt and melancholy as objects that lay outside themselves and states inspired by a demonic tempter. A magnificently alluring devil allowed persons to unburden themselves of their emotional agency by endowing ordinary cognitive states with new spiritual meaning. The perception that devil could influence human emotions, and even convert them into deadly weapons against their owners, transformed how individuals envisioned their intrinsic conditions and moods. Individuals plagued by suicidal thoughts imagined the devil beleaguering them; some individuals even perceived themselves resigning their emotional agency over to this powerful spiritual fiend.

The devil’s symbolic reinvention in the seventeenth century provides a plausible explanation as to why Spira and Child perceived their deaths in different spiritual terms. It also highlights the need to historicise emotions, as new religious iconography and contexts can shape new experiences of internal emotional states. As Satan’s power was imagined to reach its zenith in the seventeenth century, it is reasonable to conceive how John Child came to visualise his final days as a spiritual struggle between himself and Satan. In a letter to a companion written on 30 July 1684, Child remarked that the devil had possessed him with


77 Anon., *A Sad caveat to all Quakers. Not to boast any more that they have God Almighty by the hand, when they have the devil by the toe.*
‘doubts’ and ‘fears’, causing him to ‘trembl[e] night and day’.78 His suicide letter attributed *The Second Argument* to the persuasion of a ‘diabolical influence’ as Child condemned himself as a ‘promoter of the devil’s designs’.79 While Francis Spira had similarly considered himself resigned to the dictates of a demonic realm, he had never envisioned his own despair or ‘tormented conscience’ as a result of Satan’s temptations. Instead, this state of despair had been inspired by his personal decision to apostatise and it was God’s wrath that had truly driven him to the grave.80

The refashioning of both the devil and Spira’s death further demonstrates how new contexts can impose novel interpretations upon individuals’ past emotional conditions. Once considered the poster boy of apostasy, Spira’s biography came to be utilised as a parable on suicide over a century later. In a warning to ‘all apostates’ published in 1684, the deaths of Spira and Child were intertwined into one narrative as the authors remarked that Spira had renounced the Religion he once believed to be the ‘Truth of God’ due to ‘Satan’s temptations’.81 Spira had never actively laid violent hands upon himself. Instead, he had shrunk away into starvation – possibly a mere strategy to cleanse his body of the impure sins and demons he imagined his Flesh to possess.82 Though in a context where cultural imaginings of the devil had altered, the emotional state of Spira’s final moments came to be

78 *Anon.*, *The English Spira being a fearful example of an apostate who had been a preacher many years and then apostatized from his religion, miserably hanged himself, October the 13th, 1684*: giving an account of his despair and divers conferences had with him by several ministers and others of his friends: together with his answer, and papers written by his own hand / left attested by Mr. T. Plant, Mr. H. Collings, Mr. B. Dennis, Mr. B. Keach: p. 14.
79 Ibid., pp. 41 & 59.
80 *Bacon*, *A relation of the fearefull estate of Francis Spira in the yeare, 1548*: p. 31.
81 *Anon.*, *A warning from God to all apostates; or, the nature, great evil, and danger of apostacy discovered. Wherein the fearful states of Francis Spira and John Child are compared; the latter whereof, under dismal despair, hang’d himself, Octob. 13. 1684*.
82 *MacDonald*, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England*: p. 53.
transformed into another standard seventeenth century suicide story about a fragile and vulnerable human that Satan had preyed on during an unfortunate ‘gloomy season’.

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83 Wilson, *The Scriptures genuine interpreter asserted, or, A discourse concerning the right interpretation of Scripture wherein a late exercitation, intituled, Philosophia S. scripturae interpres, is examin’d, and the Protestant doctrine in that point vindicated : with some reflections on another discourse of L.W. written in answer to the said exercitation : to which is added, An appendix concerning internal illumination, and other operations of the Holy Spirit upon the soul of man, justifying the doctrine of Protestants, and the practice of serious Christians, against the charge of ethusiasm, and other unjust criminations*: p. 42.
Writing in 1678, John Flavel, a preacher from Dartmouth, recounted a story of a despondent young man he had encountered on a ship returning from Virginia. Plunging into a deep bout of melancholy after the devil had orchestrated his ruin, the young man attempted to end his life by stabbing a knife into his throat and stomach. Miraculously, the young man survived, however after the ship’s surgeon had stitched up his wounds, it was evident that he only had a few minutes of life remaining. Seizing the opportunity, Flavel approached the young man, whereupon the melancholy patient told the preacher that he hoped ‘in God for Eternal life’. Flavel shook his head and told the wounded man his hopes were ‘ungrounded’. In the final moments of his life, Flavel preached to this wretched soul, perturbing him with thoughts that he was not just a ‘Murderer’ but a ‘self-murderer’ and that he had committed one of the most heinous and grave sins. Realising that he would be denied a passport to Eternity, the young man dissolved into tears and cried out in misery shortly before his life came to a final close.

At first we may consider Flavel’s response as oddly severe and unkind however, considering his context Flavel’s remarks can be regarded as a natural, albeit brusque, reaction to the wounded man’s query. In Flavel’s context – the seventeenth century - suicide was considered a perverse and abhorrent act. Religious authorities emphasised that suicide was a grave transgression: a crime against God, nature and society.

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84 John Flavel, Divine conduct, or, The mysterie of Providence wherein the being and efficacy of Providence is asserted and vindicated : the methods of Providence as it passes through the several stages of our lives opened : and the proper course of improving all Providences (London: Printed by R.W. for Francis Tyton, 1678). p. 68.
85 Ibid., pp. 68-69.
of murder and a violation of civil and natural law that contradicted the innate ‘desire of preservation’ rooted in every being.\(^{87}\) It was unconceivable to consider self-murder as a dignified act of heroism or rational deduction.\(^{88}\) Instead, suicide was considered desperate and shameful; punishment was even meted out posthumously as the corpses of self-murderers were sullied and denied the customary funerary rites.\(^{89}\) As self-murder came to be intimately linked with the devil, the act was increasingly viewed as unnatural, gruesome and sinful.

Speaking at a lecture on demonic temptation in 1631, Robert Bolton warned that it was better to ‘lie in the miseries of Hell upon earth’ than break ‘God’s blessed Law’ and descend into the grave ‘at the Devil’s bidding’.\(^{90}\) For individuals who committed suicide in the seventeenth century, there was little hope of salvation, human sympathy or understanding. Having transgressed biblical and civil laws, these humans were condemned to eternity in Hell and subjected to bodily desecration upon earth.

The close of the seventeenth century marked a shift in popular attitudes towards suicide, as self-murder came to be perceived as an act prompted by inner mental cognitions and not an external spiritual fiend. Robert Muchembled has noted that the demonic realm lost much of its status as medicine and science began to focus on explicating the mysteries of the body, anatomy and its physiology.\(^{91}\) By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the body was perceived as self-contained and not as a porous ‘frontier’ through which benevolent and demonic spirits could transverse with ease.\(^{92}\) These shifts also prompted an alteration in social attitudes as suicide gradually became secularised, decriminalised and even regarded by

\(^{87}\) Pierce, *A discourse of self-murder lately written, and now published as a dissuasive from so horrid and inglorious a thing / by E.P., in a letter to his intimate friend, R.F.*

\(^{88}\) Sprott, *The English Debate on Suicide: From Donne to Hume*: p. 117.


some scholars as a potentially rational act. Defending his friend Charles Blount’s suicide in 1695, Charles Gildon proffered a more sympathetic view of self-murder. Arguing that there were exceptions to the general rules of self-preservation, Gildon wrote that Blount had exhausted and considered these laws and found that such a precept ‘met with various limitations and exceptions’. How could the law of self-preservation be considered absolute, when ‘Honour’ and ‘Virtue’ dictated that such a rule be sacrificed for the ‘public good’ in times of war?

As suicide was secularised and transformed into an ‘object of medical study’, the intimate linkage between self-murder and the devil was disembroiled. More broadly, belief in Satan’s seductive and pervading power declined with the burgeoning of science and the denouement of the witch craze. Consigned to the fate of serving as a literary symbol, the devil was revived in eighteenth century literature and reimagined as a romantic ‘hero’ and rebel during the political revolutions of the 1700s. Jeffrey Burton Russel has noted that Satan’s depersonalisation, ‘his reduction to a symbol’ and his ‘unmooring’ from both the Bible and tradition, unfettered him to ‘float free’ from his customary meanings during this period. Retired from his role as the grand fiend endeavouring to lure humans into self-destruction, Satan progressively receded from the popular imagination as suicide came to be envisioned as a disease of the mind.

93 MacDonald, Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England: p. 16.
97 Ibid., pp. 156-74.
98 Ibid., p. 169.
As the cause of self-murder came to be traced to the human brain, suicide was no longer regarded as a sin or the manifestation of satanic temptation. Suicide instead entered the realm of psychology and was attributed to excessive melancholy and cerebral imbalances. 99 Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which came to serve as a popular medical text during this period, re-diagnosed Francis Spira’s condition posthumously. Attributing his death to melancholy and unfit physicians, Burton remarked that with qualified assistance, ‘good counsel, diet, ayre, exercise’ any ‘passions and perturbations of the minde’ could be duly rectified. 100 A history of the Reformation published in 1689 by Johannes Sleidanus also demonstrated the shift towards bodily explanations for suicide. Commenting that Spira had fallen sick in ‘Body and Mind’, Sleidanus emphasised the prognosis that the physicians of Padua had first offered. Surmising the diagnosis, Sleidanus remarked that Spira’s ‘distempter’ had been contracted by ‘pensiveness and over-eager thinking’ - the best remedy for this being ‘good discourse’ and ‘ghostly consolation’. 101

Popular views on suicide had shifted and once again, the conditions that had prompted Francis Spira to his death were rewritten. A man that had initially envisioned a powerful God consuming his soul and vitality was re-diagnosed as an overly pensive individual that required a little more air and exercise. In observing Spira’s narrative from the present, in a context where medical explanations dominate understandings of suicide, it is immensely tempting to agree with this final explanation of Spira’s death. Surely, Spira was suffering

99 Minois, *Historie du suicide: La societe occidentale face a la mort volontaire* p. 98.
100 Robert Burton, *The anatomy of melancholy vvhat it is. VVith all the kindes, causes, symptomes, prognostickes, and seuerall cures of it. In three maine partitions with their seuerall sections, members, and subsections. Philosophically, medicinally, historically, opened and cut vp. By Democritus Junior. With a satyricall preface, conducing to the following discours* (Oxford: Printed by Iohn Lichfield and James Short, for Henry Cripps, Anno Dom, 1621). pp. 780-83; MacDonald, “The Fearefull Estate of Francis Spira: Narrative, Identity and Emo
101 Johannes Sleidanus, *The general history of the Reformation of the Church from the errors and corruptions of the Church of Rome, begun in Germany by Martin Luther with the progress thereof in all parts of Christendom from the year 1517 to the year 1556 / written in Latin by John Sleidan ; and faithfully englished. To which is added A continuation to the Council of Trent in the year 1562 / by Edward Bohun* (London: Printed by Edw. Jones for Abel Swall and Henry Bonwicke, 1689., 1689). p. 475.
from a psychological malady or some form of depression? However, this only belittles Spira and minimises the emotions and thoughts that vividly coloured the final moments of the life.

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Over a period of three centuries, Francis Spira’s death came to be appropriated for various uses: first, as a parable of apostasy; next a caveat against the sin of self-murder and finally as a case study for melancholy and excessive introspection. Consigned to the fate of serving as a malleable archetype, the emotions that Spira experienced before his death were authoritatively reinvented by a vast array of sermons, treatises, broadsheets and histories. In an effort to recapture the authentic internal conditions that coloured both Spira and Child’s demises, this work has delved into witness accounts, letters, interviews and multiple versions of the two mens’ deaths. However, the vast lacuna that always separates us – the living – from the past and dead, imposes certain limitations to reviving these ‘authentic’ emotions. If Spira and Child were to spontaneously reawaken and ascend from their graves into the present, they could undoubtedly retrieve their emotional agency by articulating the precise internal conditions that prompted them to their deaths. Though such a notion is considerably foolish and historians are denied this luxury. Instead, this immense space that separates historians from the past must inspire us to consider the layered nature of historical sources; the process through which emotions can become unmoored from their owners; and the ease in which new historical figures can authoritatively, yet falsely, speak on behalf of the emotional states of the dead. This realisation also imposes a new responsibility. In reaching out to the past, historians should not impose their own experiences of emotions onto individuals in bygone centuries. Instead, they must approach their sources afresh and appreciate the idiosyncratic nature in which such emotions were experienced and lived.
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