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Roadside Crosses in Contemporary Memorial Culture

Everett, Holly

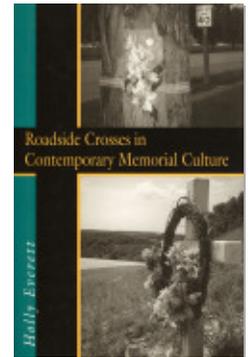
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Notes

Chapter One

1. For detailed studies of memorials and other public mourning for Diana in the UK and elsewhere, see Kear and Steinberg 1999; Wood 1998; Walter 1999; Walter and Biddle 1998.

2. An example of obliteration, followed years later by rectification, has taken place at the former site of Mount Cashel Orphanage in St. John's, Newfoundland. Following the trials that led to the convictions of several Christian brothers on counts of sexual and physical assault in 1989, the orphanage was closed. The buildings were razed in 1992 (Bates 1993). All that remained were several gateposts, painted grey and emblazoned with the Irish cross. In 1997, the land was purchased for the construction of a Sobey's grocery store. In June of 1998, small floral wreaths appeared atop the two main gateposts. Presently, the relocated gateposts are part of a small memorial area, along with a park bench and flower beds, located at the entrance to the shopping center and adjacent subdivision.

3. Johnson's memorial was painted over by unknown persons in early 2001 (Osborne 2001). Johnson's mother, Mary Boyd, who painted the mural in 1989, has since repainted it.

4. Foote discusses this kind of informal, interstitial communication about death sites with particular regard to John Dillinger, Bonnie Parker, and Clyde Barrow (1997, 212).

5. For example, see Young's account of vandalism of a Holocaust memorial at San Francisco's Jewish Museum (1993, 317-19), and Foote's report of similar problems occurring at the Haymarket riot police monument in Chicago (1997, 138-41).

6. While the Turners, as well as Pechilis, focus on established, conventional religious pilgrimage, Marion Bowman discusses New Age pilgrims as well as Christian visitors to Glastonbury. David Hufford's writing here is concerned with pilgrims to St. Anne de Beaupré in Québec.

Chapter Two

1. Atom Egoyan's film version of the book, released in 1997, is set in the Canadian province of British Columbia. No crosses appear in the film.

2. Executed on February 17, 1938 for a crime he did not commit, Juan is now venerated for his ability to aid in the eradication of illness

and for other miracles that have occurred in the area. The shrine incorporates his grave and execution site, marked by several crosses, and a chapel (Griffith 1987, 75-80).

3. Benson also cites observance of the commandment regarding graven images (Exodus 20:4), and the efforts of early Christians to conceal their faith from the Romans as obstacles to the adoption of the cross as a positive symbol (40).

4. The expression of civil religion is, of course, often problematic. Folklorist Sue Samuelson describes a court case in which she was an expert witness for the defense. In December, 1979, the city of Denver, Colorado was sued by a group called Citizens Concerned for the Separation of Church and State, with the support of the American Civil Liberties Union. They charged that a nativity scene on the steps of the city hall was a “religious symbol which should not appear on government property” (1982, 139). The city won the case, and at the time of Samuelson’s writing the citizens’ group was appealing the decision.

Kugelmass cites Jonathan Woocher (1988) and Charles Silberman (1985) in the identification of American Jewish civil religion, which is often linked with the resurgence of Jewish nationalism resulting from the Six Day War (1994, 176-77). The conflict over religious symbolism at Auschwitz offers an example of a contested intersection of Jewish and (predominately) Christian civil religion on the international stage.

5. See McCarty, 1983.

6. California resident Candy Lightner founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) in 1980—a response to her frustrating experience with the justice system following the death of her thirteen-year-old daughter in a drunk driving incident. Originally composed of all female members, the organization now includes people of any age or gender.

7. Woolf writes that MADD crosses are also approved for use in Louisiana, Ohio, and Florida. He further notes a similar highway safety program in Montana, not restricted to drunk driving deaths, where roadside crosses are erected by the American Legion.

8. Liungman observes that St. Andrew’s cross (so-called because according to legend, out of humility Andrew refused to be executed on a cross identical to that on which Jesus Christ was crucified) predates Christianity and adorns prehistoric cave walls in Europe. Additionally, it was a figure in both early Chinese ideography (representing the number five) and Egyptian hieroglyphics (divide, count, and break into parts)

(1991, 139, 322). Coincidentally, crosses of this kind are routinely marked with pencil or red brick on two different structures believed to house the remains of New Orleans' alleged voodoo priestess Marie Laveau (Tallant 1983, 127, 129). Drawing the crosses is part of a ritual in which the visitor offers a wish or request.

9. Although unsure of the details, my father, an area resident, confirmed that a serious automobile accident in which at least three people were killed had recently occurred at the site.

Chapter Three

1. In the mid-1980s the road was thick with small white crosses. It now appears that the majority of these have been removed as a result of on-going highway repair and improvement projects. Correspondingly, both Foote and Henzel attribute the absence of crosses on stretches of road known to be deadly as indicative of government intervention (Foote 1997, 171-2; Henzel 1991, 97-8).

2. This statement on the cross may be based on an oft-quoted line among "Star Trek" fans from the 1982 motion picture *Star Trek II-The Wrath of Khan*. A dying Spock utters the words to his long-time friend, James Kirk.

3. A dreamcatcher is an artifact of Native American origin consisting of a hoop encircling a web of, for example, wool or twine decorated with beads, crystals, or feathers. Hung above one's bed, the dreamcatcher captures bad dreams while allowing good dreams to pass through.

4. One of Tara's favorite movies was *The Lion King*, and she collected snow globes.

5. Gerald Pocius also notes differences between Catholic and Protestant iconography in home decoration (1986, 125). Of particular significance to the present discussion is his reference to the popularity of angels in Protestant popular prints (147). Leonard Primiano discusses the recent upsurge in this popularity in "Angels and Americans," 1998. Angel figurines are frequently left at Austin's memorial sites, including cemeteries. For a discussion of the historical use of angel imagery and cemetery statuary, see McDannell 1995, 125-127.

6. Although leaving a stone at a roadside memorial coincides with Catholic Mexican and Mexican-American custom as documented in Mexico, Arizona, etc., most stones and rocks present at memorials in the Austin area appeared to be decorative (e.g., spelling out initials or forming a border around the assemblage) or meant to stabilize the cross.

At only one cross (Fig. 3.6), did the rocks not appear to be decorative *or* supportive.

7. While I did find car parts at the memorials, I did not observe any that were incorporated into the structure of the cross itself, as reported by Arrellano (1986, 42).

8. While the data presented here does not lend itself to an examination of floral symbolism, the topic is certainly integral to death custom (see, e.g., Carmichael and Sayer 1991, 16-21; Drury 1994; Goody 1993; Walter 1990). The red rose, for example, has long been understood as symbolic of martyrdom, as in the annual commemoration of the fourteen female victims of the 1989 Montréal Massacre.

Chapter Four

1. See, for example, the work of Olivia Cadaval (1985) on the Day of the Dead celebrations in Washington, D.C.; James Griffith's (1992) observations of both Mexican-American and O'Odham customs in southern Arizona; and Kay Turner and Pat Jasper (1994) with regard to the custom in south Texas, particularly its economic aspects.

2. For related studies, see Sciorra, 1993, concerning Our Lady of Mount Carmel Grotto in Rosebank, Staten Island, and Cooper and Sciorra, 1994, documenting memorial murals in New York City.

3. Tammy's parents and Nathan's mother are the primary caretakers of the memorial for the three teenagers. Jeff's mother, to whom Susan refers here, has not been involved.

4. Grief work, as described by Jack Kamerman, involves the expression of grief facilitating a return to normal levels of functioning and may include, for culturally variable periods of time, "*bodily distress, a preoccupation with the image of the deceased, guilt, hostility, and alteration or loss of normal patterns of conduct*" [emphasis in original]. Although grief work is necessarily "painful and difficult," failure to work through bereavement may result in severe, and sometimes pathological, grief reactions (1988, 66-7).

5. For a closer examination of the relationship between roadside memorials and corresponding burial sites, including those discussed in this chapter, see Everett 2000. J. Joseph Edgette (1997) has explored such connections between a number of sites in Pennsylvania.

6. Here Vicki refers to "homecoming mums," large, elaborately decorated chrysanthemums traditionally worn by women to high school homecoming football games. The Cavalettes is the school's dance team,

of which Tara was a proud member. Taking the mum “as a keepsake” might be interpreted as a variation on the idea of the “linking object” introduced by psychiatrist Vamik Volkan (1972, 215-221) and further developed by, for example, Worden (1991, 84-86) and Silverman and Nickman (1996, 81). Here, the linking object is not a former possession of the deceased, but has been indelibly associated with her by its placement at the cross.

7. In addition, because of the transience of such memorials, speedy documentation by folklorists is imperative. The memorial for Heather Lamay and Lisa Wendenburg is already gone, and that for Tammy, Nathan, and Jeff has seen at least four incarnations. As noted above, Kwolek-Folland’s call for vernacular architecture studies to consider transient, as well as permanent characteristics of vernacular structures, is certainly applicable here.

8. See Pocius, 2001, for a similar discussion of grave decoration in Newfoundland, with particular emphasis on the importance of distinguishing between wilderness and culture in ritual decorative practice.

9. See also Kay Turner’s discussion of women’s home altars in this regard (1999, 83-89).

Chapter Five

1. Functionalism does not adequately account for social conflict or change, but rather, resulting from its origins in the idea of socio-cultural evolution, embraces only those aspects of culture contributing to (re)integration (Doucette 1993, 132-33, Oring 1976, 67-80). See, for example Radner 1993, and Greenhill and Tye 1997, for essays concerning the subversive in traditional culture.

2. I decided to focus on students at Crockett High School, in south Austin, for several reasons. Firstly, as an alumnus of the school, I was able to work with a former teacher of mine and make a connection with the participating students on the basis of shared experience. Secondly, Crockett is located in an area of the city in which there are a number of roadside crosses, not the least of which was across the street from the school (the memorial for Jacorey Williams, Fig. 3.14). Thirdly, the school is attended by a mix of students, from different ethnic and economic backgrounds, that loosely mirrors the city’s larger population. While given an option to include their names and phone numbers if they were interested in speaking with me privately, participants were not required to include any personal information.

3. As previously noted, however, acts of vandalism have occurred. The site on Guadalupe street maintained by Susan Crane and Margie Franklin has been disturbed more than once. The crosses memorializing Daniel London and Beth Early (Fig. 3.4-5) were stolen, along with the flowers left at the site, in June of 1999 (Banta 1999).

4. The “memorial libation” is an ancient memorial ritual with a long pedigree in African and African diaspora cultures (see, e.g., Cooper and Sciorra 1994, 77; Georgia Writers’ Project 1940, 59, 114, 237-38).

5. Greenway relates further :

William of Malmesbury, writing in the early twelfth century, tells of his ancient predecessor, Aldhelm, standing beside a bridge, singing secular ditties until he had gained the attention of passers-by, when he gradually began to introduce religious ideas into his songs. Twelve hundred years later Jack Walsh, who had never heard of Aldhelm or his biographer, posted his Wobbly band beside a highway and sang religious songs until he had gained the attention of passers-by, when he gradually began to introduce secular ideas into his songs (1960, 13).

6. Quotation from Terence H. Qualter’s *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare* (New York: Random House) in Denisoff 1966.

7. See also Buckley and Cartwright 1983, 13.

8. I use “kitsch” here, as does Primiano, to indicate “affection and joy at the absurd or outrageous aspects of the ethnic, regional, and national [material] expressions of the [Catholic] tradition” (1999, 198). For another discussion of popular usages of Catholic iconography, see Cosentino 1996.

9. In the past, road maintenance crew members have routinely refused to disturb the assemblages.