PERSPECTIVES on EMBODIMENT

The Intersections of Nature and Culture

EDITED BY
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ROUTLEDGE
NEW YORK and LONDON

ELEVEN

Disciplining the Dead

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During much of the nineteenth century the boundary between life and death was unclear. [1]

For Americans of the twentieth century, connections between the world of the dead and that of the living have been largely severed.[2]

INTRODUCTION: FROM THE ANNEXATION OF HEAVEN TO THE DYING OF DEATH

Death seems so irreducible a reality that sketching its history might seem foolish. How much can death change? Yet death does change, and its changes tell us much about how the culture in which this happens is faring. Death in America changed radically from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. At mid-century, before the spiritual and material changes occasioned by the Civil War, and as industrialization, urban life, and immigration from Europe were altering the texture of life, death was widely regarded as a simple transition. Dying did not mean an unbridgeable separation from the living, and representations of the dead—in memorial photography, cemeteries, and popular literature—all suggested continuity between the living and the dead. By the end of the century the dead had been relegated to a marginal position in culture, and the sense of connection between the living and the dead had been lost. If Americans of 1850 were guilty of "annexing Heaven,"[3] those of the turn of the century were exulting in the "dying of death,"[4] and celebrating death's disappearance from their lives. Representations of the dead in this later period—in photographs, funeral practices, and cemetery designs—illustrate this alienation between living and dead, and furnish images through which we can think of our current distance from the dead.

PART ONE:
THE ANNEXATION OF HEAVEN:
MEMORIAL PORTRAITS, RURAL CEMETERIES, AND LITERARY HEAVENS

"There is no death", what seems so is transition;
This life of mortal breath
Is but the suburb of the life elysian
Whose portal we call Death.

Poem inscribed on gravemarker of James Pilling [5]

In 1850 people died at home, often without a doctor in attendance. The body was washed, dressed, and laid out by family members. Local carpenters were called in to make a simple coffin.

The middle-class home in which death occurred had special importance, as well as a special fragility. America was urbanizing and changing more rapidly than at any other time in its history: ". . . the proportion of people living in cities (between 1820 and 1860) rose by 797 per cent."[6] As cities grew, relationships among people changed. The changing scale of the city forced all residents to confront new, even alien work and interpersonal relationships,

> to confront the sights and sounds of an accelerated urban economy. . . . This shift from country to city, from farm to factory, was perhaps the most fundamentally dislocating experience in all of American history.[7]

And "most devastating was the break in the ways individuals associated with each other."[8] The network of households linked together by blood ties in the rural world was under pressure as more people moved to cities in which the nuclear family was isolated in its single home. Since work was moving out of the home as industrialization led to the specialization of labor, the home was a nonproductive haven in which wives and mothers offered moral instruction to children and provided a respite from commerce for their entrepreneurial mates:

> Because the home defied economic rationalization and eluded the cash nexus, it came to be seen as a separate social sphere, a retirement or retreat from the larger world . . . . "The central convention of domesticity . . . was the contrast between the home and the world."[9]

The center of this home was the parlor, in which weddings and funerals took place, in which the private life of the family intersected with the world of commerce, the realm of strangers.

> The parlor was the front room of the middle-class home where friends, acquaintances, and carefully screened strangers met formally "in society". Geographically, it lay between the urban street where strangers freely mingled and the back regions of the house where only family members were permitted to enter uninvited. . . . The parlor provided the woman of the house with a "cultural podium" from which she was to exert her moral influence over American society.[10]

This middle-class home, freighted with its new moral significance, was also the site of death. In 1850 young people died, proportionally more frequently, more quickly, and with less effect on their vigorous appearance and youthful beauty. Viral and bacterial infections that acted on major systems—respiratory, gastrointestinal, circulatory—killed young people who had not had time to build up immunity and older people with weak systems.

Wives died in childbirth or from infections and hemorrhages that followed it. Men died of heart attacks, strokes and embolisms, because of a fat-rich diet and the stress of a commercially-driven life.

Others, fewer, died after prolonged suffering. Cancer, which was less common but also less subject to surgical intervention, was the cause of prolonged, tortured deaths, as were tubercular and other infections.

Virtually all of these people died at home in their beds. Hospitals were reserved for the indigent or those without friends or family and were sites of death rather than of cure.

Death at home in the urbanizing nineteenth-century home was somewhat different from death in earlier rural homes because the new urban home was more isolated from a traditional social network and from extended family, and the urban home was a center for moral training and for respite from the stresses of commercial activity.

The meeting of the new urban middle-class home and its moral idealism with the dead, especially the young dead, produced representations of the dead that inscribed the dead in a "cult of domesticity," and kept them alive within the family. Memorial portraits, the monuments in rural cemeteries, as well as the design of such cemeteries and the descriptions of the dead in Heaven in consolation literature, all placed the dead, as if still alive, in the protective bosom of the family—as if, in a world in which traditional kinship and community ties were breaking down, every family member, dead or alive, were vitally important and not to be surrendered, and as if that person were still a subject for moral training and protection from the larger world.

The home as the site of moral instruction and of death, and the home

as centered in the parlor, all played a role in the new photographic representations of the dead. The middle-class dead were routinely photographed in the home in which they had died and they were routinely depicted using the conventions of the miniature portrait. The subject, if depicted alone, was usually standing or sitting, either facing the camera directly or looking off slightly to one side. If the portrait was a family portrait, the scene was often of a parent and a small child, the parent seated and the child perched on the father's or mother's knee. If the portrait was of a very small child, or an infant, the subject was usually pictured as if asleep, stiller than a living baby could ever be.

These three styles of portrait were transferred directly to the dead, with no alterations in pose or composition. There was no concession made to the fact that the subject was not alive. He or she was pictured in everyday clothing, sitting on a love seat or sofa in the family parlor, or standing by a small table, or sleeping in her crib. Most often the subject's eyes were closed, as if they might be in a light sleep. There were sometimes tell-tale symbols, like roses held in the hand, that indicated that the subject was dead. At other times the subject's eyes were open and it was difficult to tell whether the subject was alive or dead .

One effect of these portrait-like images of the dead, who looked as if they were alive, was to keep the dead family member among the living. This "living" member, or her representation, would remain with the family, displayed in its case in the parlor, to be looked at and mourned over as the years passed. These images were often a consolation to the living, especially if they were of young children, because they represented people who would never be sullied by commerce, and who were therefore innocent and pure, thus instantiating the central values of the middle-class home. If the dead were kept safe, as images, in the bosom of a home seen as a haven, they also made the home safe by representing the sort of moral innocence that homes promoted.

Furthermore, in an age when Americans believed strongly in an afterlife, memorial photographs represented a family member who was gone, but also a family member whom one could look forward to seeing again in Heaven.

I want to suggest, in addition, that the dead were kept "alive" in the home, and especially in the parlor, as portraits, because in portraits one's character gets revealed. The history of portraiture in the West strongly suggests, as Brilliant among others argues,[11] that being the subject of a portrait indicates a certain pre-eminence in the one portrayed. It meant that one was either sufficiently powerful or notorious or good to warrant such a depiction.

Ordinary individuals became fit subjects for portraits during the late Renaissance because, with the increased secularization of life and the emergence of a middle class, successful patriarchs of this class were considered men of sufficient probity to warrant portraitic memorialization. Later, the wives and children of such individuals also became subjects of portraits, because they too were felt to be of sufficient moral presence to justify such memorials. Their wealth was evidence of worthiness, based, as it was believed to be, on hard work, prudence, and good personal habits.

This turn to portraits of private citizens was encouraged by the republican ideologies that prevailed in the United States, though the practice was discouraged by Puritan theology. If most of the dead were believed to be condemned to Hell, making and showing portraits of deceased people was in highly questionable taste.

However, a new religious optimism mitigated this diffidence. Most Americans by the 1850s believed that nearly all of the dead were saved. Depictions of the deceased were representations of the saved, as well as of the morally upright, and thus pictures of the dead could reveal the saved condition and high moral character, or innocence, of the deceased.

Photographic representations were believed to be even better means for representing moral probity and innocence than were painted portraits, because of their greater verisimilitude. If, as was commonly believed, "outer physical features could be clues to inner character,"[12] and portraits "could express the essence of the subject, the true moral character,"[13] then daguerreotypes, with their almost preternatural clarity, could be seen as "the completely true depiction of nature."[14] Holgrave, Hawthorne's daguerreotypist protagonist in *House of the Seven Gables*, summarizes the age's typical response to photographic representations: "While we give it credit only for depicting the merest surface, it actually brings out the secret character with a truth no painter would ever venture upon, could he detect it."[15] Thoreau concurs. He believes that ". . . the daguerreotype reveals how an exact and accurate description of facts can release symbolic resonances and implications."[16]

Thus, the post-mortem photograph became a precious and accurate record of the worth of the deceased, and it entered the parlor as a part of the family's self-representation to the outer world. Daguerreotype portraits were photographic substitutes for the "missing" family members; when one met and visited the family in its parlor, one also met and visited its worthy dead.

The young dead, considered innocent, instantiated in their photographs the virtues that the home existed to inculcate and protect. And the older dead stood for the fact that even those who had engaged in commerce outside the home were, finally, defined by their membership in the family and, in death, reintegrated in their recaptured moral innocence (for death was seen as a great cleanser) into the pure family life from which they had emerged into the world.

The family-based retreat from the urban world offered by the middle class home and its gallery of post-mortem portraits was mimicked almost exactly in the rural cemeteries that flourished during this period, where one could find monuments carved in the shape of children sleeping in their cribs that, as Snyder writes, ". . . establish clear visual correlations between the child and the home."[17]

The first rural cemetery, Mount Auburn in Cambridge, was planned by horticulturists to recall a simpler rural past in which Americans lived closer to innocent and pure Nature and to each other. Rural cemeteries were laid out in hilly terrain, and were laced with broad, winding "streets" that gave onto unexpected vistas and hidden glades and dells. They were heavily planted with trees, shrubs, and flowers, and dotted with a wide variety of monuments, mausoleums, chapels, and crypts.

They were like the middle-class home, and the middle-class neighborhood, in two respects. First, rural cemeteries were planned around the nuclear family. Every cemetery lot was sold to individual families, who were free to design its monuments and plantings without asking permission from the cemetery administration so that "the family dominated the landscape of the dead."[18] Americans saw the rural cemetery "grave as a home in which the deceased rested with family and friends. Just as the family was the central unit of civil society, so also would it be the organizational unit of the rural cemetery."[19] As Sloane puts it, "Within these picturesque grounds, lot-holders wished to celebrate their heritage and success. Family lots became means through which middle class Americans could commemorate their families."[20] And families took such a hand in designing and separating their plots that later cemetery managers complained: they "decried the tendency in . . . people to be as exclusive and private in their lots as in their dwellings."[21]

This leads to the second tie between rural cemeteries and the home and neighborhood. Both were retreats from the world of commerce and both privileged moral training and reflection: "Conceptions of home, suburb, and the rural cemetery as utopian retreats served as a safety valve"[22] and "Like the home the grave was portrayed as a haven in the heartless world"[23] where people found "an asylum from their industrialized work place."[24]

In rural cemeteries, "Those yearning for a sense of community lost found gratification."[25] and "Rural cemeteries were promoted as an answer to the confusion and complexity of urban life,"[26] because "Americans identified domestic tranquillity with . . . horticulture."[27] "Supporters had designed them to fulfill the same sanctuary functions as the home was traditionally supposed to serve."[28] Just as the tranquillity of the bourgeois home made it a site of moral education, so in the tranquillity of the rural cemetery people found instruction: as Justice Story looked out on Boston, and into Mount Auburn, standing on one of its heights, he was moved to reflect: ". . . we stand on the borders of two worlds, and . . . we may gather lessons of profound wisdom by contrasting the one with the other."[29] Religious worthies like William Ellery Channing and John Pierpont "argued that pastoral cemeteries served as schools of moral philosophy and catalysts for civic virtue," because their natural tranquillity offered the chance, among the memorials to the dead, to "contemplate the meaning and management of their lives."[30] As Alexander Everett of Boston wrote: "How salutary is the effect which a visit to its calm and sacred shades will produce on souls too much agitated by the storms of the world."[31]

If rural cemeteries, and their family lots, were analogous to the bourgeois home in the ways cited above, the dead in rural cemeteries were also characterized very much as they were in memorial portraiture. In the rural cemetery the dead under the ground were most often represented above the ground either by monuments that gestured toward home or by forms like obelisks and urns that gestured toward Egyptian and classical symbols of immortality. Thus, as in the case of post-mortem portraiture, the dead were represented as in some sense living: "The rural cemetery became home to monuments that were stonework versions of mourning paintings."[32]

This theme of death-in-life in the context of membership in the family was strikingly evidenced in the common children's gravemarkers , small beds or chairs in which children were gently sleeping. These monuments "establish(ed) clear visual correlations between the child and the home, the purity of nature, and symbols of childhood."[33] Thus, the bed sculptures refer to the nursery, seen as "a moral incubator."[34]

And in all these references from monument to child to home, "Euphuistic sepulchral inscriptions like 'asleep in Jesus', a favorite for children's graves, poetically stressed the continuing presence of the deceased,"[35] because in the economy of the sentimental American middle class family at mid-century,

> It is absolutely essential that the deceased not truly die.The planned and picturesque new "rural cemeteries" promoted and rapturously described by the same groups who produced consolation literature . . . were dedicated to the idea that the living and the dead still cared.[36]

As Miss Martineau, an English visitor, remarked, "'A visitor from a strange planet . . . would take this place (a rural cemetery) to be the sanctum of creation. Every step teems with the promise of life.'" [37]

The rural cemetery was thus seen as an analog of home, as a site of life, and the monuments gestured toward a reaffirmation of the immortality of

the dead, and toward home. These monuments in their size and seriousness, and in the fact that they recorded the life and death of the beloved deceased, in incised inscriptions on the stone, also reaffirmed, as did the photographic portraits, the innocence and moral probity of the dead, their worthiness to be included in these cemetery analogs of home.

This reflection offers a transition to the third site of representation of the dead, the descriptions of Heaven offered in consolation literature. If middle-class homes and rural cemeteries were family-centered havens in a heartless world, "oases of safety," within which the beloved dead were kept "alive," these same themes are even more clearly presented in the descriptions of Heaven offered in consolation literature. Consolation literature, as defined by Ann Douglas in her essay "Heaven Our Home," consisted of "openly fictionalized and avowedly factual accounts of deathbed scenes and celestial communication . . . whose purpose is clearly consolatory, whose authors, in other words, are writing to reach and comfort those suffering bereavement and loss." This literature, which "crowded the bookstalls in the decades before the Civil War," crossed many genres, including "prayer manuals, poetry, hymns, fiction and biographies."[38]

I will restrict most of my attention to the work of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, the most popular consolation novelist, who wrote a series of books about Heaven and edited a book containing poems that she claimed were written by dead people and transmitted to this world through spiritualist mediums. The novels that will be the focus of my special attention are *The Gates Ajar* and *Beyond the Gates*.[39]

In both novels the protagonist—in each case named Mary—lives and dies, or appears to die in a middle class home occupied primarily by women. The themes that dominate both works are familiar ones. First, the novels argue forcefully and at length that when a loved one dies, she is not lost or changed, save to be improved. The familial dead are still interested in the living, still care about the living, and are even physically close to the living. In *The Gates Ajar*, Mary is talking to her aunt Winifred about whether her brother, who was killed in the Civil War, still loves her, and whether there can be contact between them.

> "Roy loved you. Our Father, for some tender hidden reason, took him out of your sight for a while. Though changed much, he can have forgotten nothing. Being only out of sight . . . not lost, nor asleep . . . he goes on loving. To love must mean to think of, to care for, to hope and pray for."
>
> "But that must mean—why, that must mean—"
>
> "That he is near you. I don't doubt it."[40]

Family ties survive death. Roy "is near." This theme is repeated in *Beyond the Gates* when the other Mary returns to witness her funeral and by her unseen presence soothes grieving family members.

Not only can we love and care beyond death; in Heaven, families will be reunited, and live in homes that resemble the idealized havens described in this essay.

> Do you think you'll see him again? You might as well ask me if I thought God made you and made Roy, and gave you to each other. See him! Of course you'll see him as you saw him here . . . (and) . . . he will still love his sister as himself . . . (because) . . . He is not any the less Roy, who will love you . . . and be very glad to see you.[41]

This family reunion theme is played out more literally in *Beyond the Gates*, when Mary notes that Heaven is made up of homes that are perfected versions of middle-class American homes:

> Was Heaven an aggregate of homes like this? Did everlasting life move on in the same dear ordered channel—the dearest that human experiment has ever formed—the channel of family love? Was there always in the eternal world "somebody to come home to?" And was there always the knowledge that it could not be the wrong person? Was all that eliminated from celestial domestic life?[42]

If family love and the home are important, so is the idea that Heaven itself, like a capacious home, is the perfect haven from a heartless world. Heaven has beautiful landscapes like a rural cemetery, and, like such a cemetery, cities in which there is no poverty, violence, or drunkenness—and no commerce.

> Chiefly, I think, I had a consciousness of safety—infinite safety. All my soul drew a long breath—"Nothing more can happen to me."[43]

Thus, as safe haven, Heaven is a "continuation of the domestic sphere", and is also a continuation because in Heaven, the moral values praised in the home are exalted as they are not on earth. In Phelps's Heaven the highest honor was given to women who had sacrificed for others or endured pain without complaint.

Finally, Phelps's Heaven surpasses the middle-class home and the rural cemetery in denying death to its dead inhabitants. The dead in Heaven, unlike the dead in rural cemeteries, are not asleep; nor are they, like the dead in portraits, immobile. The dead have "lives" that are more vital than their earthly lives, and have bodies that are improved versions of their earthly ones:

I saw that I myself was not . . . greatly changed. I had form and dress, and moved at will, and experienced sensations of great pleasure and, above all, of magnificent health.

Beautiful, too, I suppose we shall be, every one. We shall find them (our bodies) vastly convenient.

Given: a pure heart, perfect health . . . the elimination from . . . life of anxiety and separation.[44]

Phelps's Heaven serves as the third site of the representation of the ıad in antebellum America. In all three the dead appear in a family/home tting, and in each the dead are defined by the moral values of innocence, ırity, and sincerity that were dear to the middle-class home. In each case e dead, as represented, are kept alive in the home/cemetery/Heaven, as the beleaguered middle-class home at mid-century, isolated from its ral roots and separated from the world of commerce, could not afford to : any of its members, and especially the young innocent dead, go, lest the ıme become more vulnerable to the amoral world of commerce that :ked just beyond the parlor door, and which had already, perhaps sur-ɔtitiously, penetrated the parlor and begun the long process of wresting ntrol of the domesticated dead from their various morally protected vens.

ıRT TWO:
IE DYING OF DEATH:
ıSKETS, EMBALMING, AND THE LAWN PARK CEMETERIES

ıe exile of the dead began when the family began to put the dead under : control of the world of commerce, which had been barred from the ddle-class home. As soon as a daguerreotypist entered the parlor of the ırgeois home to "shoot" a dead person, a contest for control of the dead ły and how it would be represented, between the home and the world commerce, had begun. It was a contest that the home and family could : win.

Over the last four decades of the nineteenth century funeral profes-nals took increasing control of the body and the ways in which it could shown. Funeral directors and cemetery managers as well as casket man-cturers and florists, symbolically or literally entered the parlor of the ırgeois home and transformed the scene of death, increasing the dis-

tance between the living and the dead, rendering memorial portraits, rural cemeteries, and consolation literature obsolete. These professionals took control of the rural cemetery and "rationalized" it, wresting control from families, turning an unprofitable if lovely site of mourning into an orderly and profitable, if less appealing, abode for the dead. The professionalization of death also led to a lessening of sentimentality. The object that had been a beloved family member worthy to be kept safe in the parlor in a photographic image, and which had had a post-mortem career in Heaven, was now taken away by professionals, embalmed and made up, and placed in a huge casket, immobilized rather than invigorated by death, prised loose entirely from its homely setting and reinserted in a funerary scene from which it could no longer emerge into a new life.

The Civil War marked a watershed in the contest over who would control representations of death. For the first time a major war was photographed. Matthew Brady and his assistants pictured camps, supply trains, arms depots, and battlefields. In the last category of images were pictures of what battles left behind—the corpses of the dead.

Hegel, in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, wrote that Greek classical art was foreclosed as an aesthetic option by the crucifixion of Jesus.[45] The image of his once-beautiful, near-naked body twisted and bloody on the Cross redefined the simple appeal of the classical male nude, and indicated that Jesus's tortured body was trying to express a meaning too grand for any body in classical repose to express. Classical bodies, Hegel argued, are the last Western example of beauty in art in which there is a fit between the body represented and the idea it is required to express because in classical art the body perfectly and fully expressed what the ancients understood about the human soul and how it can inhabit bodies.

Something analogous to the death of classical art happened to post-mortem photographic portraits after the Civil War. The terrible images of battlefield death, in which the bodies of men were depicted sprawled in public, possibly rendered memorial portraits a cultural impossibility, as the twisted body of Christ rendered serene classical representations of the body impossible. Memorial photography survived the war, but after 1860 photographs of the dead were no longer portraits.

The second effect of the Civil War on representations of the dead had to do with how the war dead were deployed in graveyards. In 1855 the Cincinnati rural cemetery, Spring Grove, had hired Adolph Strauch, a German landscape architect, as its new director. Strauch found the rural cemetery far too disorderly a place. The variety of monuments, whose size and shape each family controlled, the plethora of different chapels and crypts and statues, sprawled across a landscape heavily planted with any number of different trees and shrubs, suggested to Strauch both a lack of

months. The combination of a transportation system that was good enough to get bodies home but not good enough to get them home rapidly, made some form of preservation of the bodies of the war dead desirable. This is where embalmers entered the picture, a picture from which they have not been removed. As Habenstein and Lamers write: "by the time the last shot had been fired, this mode of preservation had secured for itself a permanent place in American funeral customs."[53]

Embalming the dead, which has never become the custom in other industrialized nations, became more popular in the United States until by the turn of the century it was more common than not. Americans grew accustomed to dealing with the embalmed dead during the Civil War. Second, Americans were more mobile than most other peoples, and families tended to disperse themselves over wide ranges of a large country. Relatives might have to travel from several distant states to participate in the funeral. Embalming made it possible to keep the dead body in an acceptable condition until such relatives could arrive.

But there is a subtext here. As the details of handling the dead body passed more and more, in the urban setting, from the control of the family and into the hands of professionals who would supply specially made coffins and caskets, grave clothes, carriages, and pallbearers, the practice of embalming became a critically important extra service offered by such professionals. This service added substantially to their income and placed the body much more firmly under the control of the funeral director, because embalming itself was a way of controlling the body and, once embalmed, the body must then be made up and laid out in ways consistent with this expensive preservative procedure.[54]

In fact, this third change imposed on the representation of the dead by the war coincided nicely with another change that does not seem related to the war, but to a concerted effort by funeral professionals to promote a new aesthetic of death, one that privileged "beautiful" corpses and equally beautiful surroundings. In this emergent aesthetic a central part came to be played by the newly named "casket," which replaced the coffin as the normal receptacle for housing the dead body.[55]

Caskets, unlike the more traditional coffin, were generally rectangular rather than shaped to the body. They were also made of more different materials. There were cast iron caskets, bronze caskets, cement caskets, cloth covered caskets, even rubber and wicker caskets, as well as caskets made of all sorts of different woods . What distinguished the casket from the coffin was that whereas the latter had been a simple convenience—a container in which the dead body could be laid out and carried to the grave—the former was designed to display the body, to render it more beautiful by providing it with a beautiful setting.

Even the name "casket" suggested that the dead body was a precious object, a jewel, perhaps, that required an elaborate container in which it could be safely held but also displayed.[56] With the introduction of the casket it was almost as if the body, having entered the commercial nexus created by funeral professionals, had now been transformed into a commodity, to be displayed to the public like something for sale in a shop window or showroom. As Habenstein and Lamers state, "There was an imminent desire on the part of the late nineteenth century burying public not only to display a body in its physical entirety, but to place it in a handsome setting, part of which is comprised by the casket."[57]

The embalmed body and the casket were connected. Before the war the body would be placed in a simple casket, so narrow that the arms of the corpse were most often tied together with a strip of cloth so the body could fit into the container. When it was photographed, it was rarely photographed in the casket, because such a depiction located the body on the other side of a divide between the living and the dead. Once the dead body was imbedded in the coffin, it had left the land of the living and entered a different geography.

The sentimental dead body was, rather, depicted among ordinary domestic scenes, perched on everyday furniture, wearing everyday clothes. It was not encumbered by its setting, but free within it. The new postwar dead were increasingly photographed lying as if asleep in their large, elaborate caskets, their bodies half-hidden, their eyes closed, positioned not to "look" into the camera as if sitting for a portrait, but faced nowhere in particular.

These photographs were not portraits because the dead person was not exactly their subject. Their subject was the funeral scene as a whole, of which the body made up the principal part. In these later pictures the surroundings all had references to death, and implicitly to the difference between the dead body and the bodies of the living. The deep casket in which the body was imbedded; the special funeral clothing; the arrangements of flowers, the very room itself, now no longer an ordinary room in an ordinary house but a room specifically designed for the display of death—all these artifacts captured the body in a chain of signifiers. Its meaning now developed from its relationship to the elements of the funerary scene, not with reference to the living.

It is also the case that photographers, like the family, had surrendered a great deal of their power to control the conditions of representation of the dead. It was now no longer the conventions and aesthetics of portraiture that controlled how the dead were represented even in photographs. Rather, what the photographer was doing was merely recording a scene already composed, according to a new aesthetic and a new convention, by the funeral professional, who had become the new director of the scene of death.

planning and an economic mistake. Rural cemeteries were expensive to maintain because of their twisting pathways, their cluttered grounds, their lot fences, and the large areas devoted to nonproductive "scenery." It was very difficult to do effective gardening and lawn care in such places, and the large lots were not good money-makers. Strauch proposed a different form of cemetery, the lawn park type, in which central cemetery management would have much more control over the size and types of monuments and plantings, and the deployment of headstones across open, unobstructed lawns. Far from being a complex picturesque geography for quiet retreat and contemplation, the newer cemeteries were open lawns on which smaller, more uniform headstones were arranged in orderly rows. There were still plantings but these were far fewer and less dense. Cemetery management chose what to plant, and where. Monuments and mausoleums and chapels were fewer in number, and they were separated from the ordinary grave sites.

The changes in how cemeteries looked were a mirror of changes in the way they were being run. Postwar cemeteries were in the control of professional managers who sought to make a profit: "'Our modern cemeteries are modern because they are established and managed on business principles.'"[46] And "business principles" included getting control of individual plots and imposing a rigid order on them.

The newly formed AACS (American Association of Cemetery Superintendents) worked from a widespread cultural assumption that "'this is an age of organization. . . . We must cease our individual activities. No man liveth unto himself alone, and no man dieth to himself alone. This is an age of social life, and the social point of view.'"[47] In cemeteries, "Individual rights must be subordinated to the general plan. . . . Civilization consists in subordinating the will of the individual to the comfort and well-being of all.'"[48] This meant that the superintendent must "'assert . . . complete control over the landscape. The first and most important thing is to get control of the ground.'"[49]

This rationalization of the cemetery was mimicked in the large cemeteries the government created for war dead. These military cemeteries, of which Arlington Cemetery is a prime example, followed an aesthetic similar to that embraced by Adolph Strauch. Row after row of identical, small, simple white markers represent the war dead. Rather than being individual members of specific nuclear families, the war dead were incorporated into a larger, fictional national "family" to which each equally belonged. Members of a great national army whose purposes were greater than the individual concerns of any soldier or family, these dead had been homogenized. This blank uniformity, which tends to separate the living from the dead by rendering all the dead alike, was a compensation for the grotesque chaos of the battlefield. That field of chance and unlooked-for death, that field of corpses, was replaced by the perfectly orderly field of clean white stones and lush green grass, undisturbed by the detritus, human and otherwise, of war.

The effect of lawn park and military cemeteries was a greater unity in the cemetery but a greater distance between the living and dead. Sloane gestures toward both tendencies:

> Cemeteries would become more parklike. Monuments would be more formalized and standardized. The artfulness of the landscape would become more obvious and more celebrated.

But:

> This formality . . . represented the distancing of the living from the dead.[50]

Farrell sums up the distancing effect of the new cemeteries in his discussion of the "pictorial ideal":

> The pictorial ideal . . . betrayed a psychological change in cemetery work, as nature became landscape, as panorama became picture, sight supplanted the other senses in experiencing the cemetery . . . the observer took up a mediated relationship with nature. The pictorial ideal presupposed a frame for the picture, and a spatial and psychological distance between the viewer and the view. Rural cemeteries had promoted a complete communion between people and nature, but park cemeteries reduced the connection to a point of visual contact.[51]

By the end of the nineteenth century the cemetery was no longer a surrogate home, the plot no longer a parlor.

The third effect of the war was to install the practice of embalming into the scene of death, a development that would radically change the way the dead looked, and the way in which they were displayed. The ramshackle buildings and the crude signs photographed immediately adjacent to battlefields as the dead were being collected and identified show that embalming was done on a rough and ready basis during the war. It is not entirely clear from the existing records whether the government subsidized such a practice, but the photographs indicate that it was a common practice, perhaps paid for by the families of the deceased.[52]

Embalming occurred because, first, there was a transportation infrastructure, the railroads, capable of moving the dead from the battlefields to their homes in other states. Second, the railroads could deliver bodies but could not do so quickly enough for them to be in any condition to be viewed or handled by family members, especially during the warmer

In this scene the dead body itself had been replaced by a transformed, embalmed, and cosmeticized version of itself. The body represented in prewar photographs was a vulnerable and awkward body, subject to the distortions of rigor mortis, the signs of which are evident in many postmortem portraits. The embalmed body was composed, laid out carefully, in a canonical pose. It was recumbent, as if asleep, hands folded modestly across the lower abdomen. Prewar bodies, however conventional the poses they were permitted to assume, have a greater variety of looks and dispositions. The embalmed body had a single pose, just as the military cemetery had a single sort of headstone. In both cases the dead grew more remote by being cast into a single mold that always symbolizes death.

The embalmed body was also made "beautiful" by the application of specially produced postmortem cosmetics. Daguerreotypes were often lightly painted to reduce the harshness of their high contrast black and white textures. But the embalmed body itself is painted: it becomes auto iconic, a representation of itself, rendering post mortem portraits unnecessary.

Thus, the embalmed, cosmeticized body constituted by the funeral professional reinscribes in itself many of the motifs through which the prewar domestic body was represented. The body itself has become a kind of portrait of itself, though not one that stares back at any camera. It has also assumed, in public, its cemetery pose of sleeping. We need not any longer imagine the dead asleep in their rural cemeteries; they are asleep in the funeral parlor, asleep in their caskets. And this sleep is no longer an interval between wakings. It is permanent.

The new dead resemble the dead represented in consolation literature, in two ways. The embalmed and cosmeticized dead are more beautiful, with more durable, albeit more immobile, bodies than they ever had on earth. The embalmed dead, like the dead of consolation literature, are "improved." And the new dead have what might be characterized as a new career, as do the dead in consolation literature. Their career is very different: it is their job to be dead, and to remain unchanged in their deaths for as long as possible. The embalmed dead learn no languages and visit no bereaved families. Encased in their rigid bodies, filled with chemicals, imbedded in heavy caskets in concrete-vaulted graves, the new dead are imprisoned beneath the earth, their job to stay there, out of contact with the living.

In the postwar world, in which the control of bodies by funeral professionals altered the ways in which the dead appeared, a new form of the denial of death was taking hold in the culture, one that seems to have continued into our times. Now death is denied by being hidden from view. Even the embalmed body made for display hides the fact that the person represented has died. The dead person is hidden behind the makeup, hidden inside the enclosing casket, and under the minimalist monuments of the memorial park, no longer a dormitory, but a field of memories in which those who are sleeping are not expected to wake up again. If the earlier period annexed heaven and described the dead as if they were still alive, the later period has arranged for death itself to die, banishing the dead to special rooms in special homes, enclosing them in huge boxes, hiding them in parks.

The final phase of this dying of death was the passing of control from funeral professionals to health professionals. Today the dying disappear into hospitals and die hidden behind banks of medical equipment, their features erased by masks and catheters, their bodies overwhelmed by machinery. But that is another story. We have accompanied the dead on their journey from being colonized by the living to being banished from the scene of life. That is far enough for now.

NOTES

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3. Anonymous, "The Annexation of Heaven," *Atlantic Monthly*, New York, Vol. LIII, 1884.
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5. Habenstein and Lamers, "Late Nineteenth Century Funerals," cited in Charles O. Jackson (ed.) *Passing*, p. 101.
6. Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 35.
7. Leroy Bowman, "The Effects of City Civilization," in Charles O. Jackson, *Passing*, p. 154.
8. Karen Halttunen, p. 58.
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12. Barbara McCandless, "The Portrait Studio and Celebrity," from Martha Sandweiss, ed., *Photography in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), p. 55.
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16. Cited in Trachtenberg, p. 22.
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18. Charles David Sloane, *The Last Great Necessity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 7.
19. James J. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), p. 106.
20. Sloane, p. 95.
21. Farrell, p. 120.
22. Farrell, p. 32.
23. Farrell, p. 106.
24. Blanche Linden-Ward, "Strange But Genteel Pleasure Grounds: Tourist and Leisure Uses of the Nineteenth Century Rural Cemetery," Meyer, p. 300.
25. Linden-Ward, p. 300.
26. Sloane, p. 12.
27. Sloane, p. 46.
28. Ann Douglas, "Heaven Our Home," in David E. Stannard, ed., *Death in America* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1975), p. 61.
29. Cited in Farrell, p. 109.
30. Linden-Ward, p. 270.
31. Cited in Linden-Ward, p. 297.
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34. Snyder, p. 16.
35. Douglas, p. 61.
36. Douglas, p. 61.
37. Cited in Linden-Ward, p. 306.
38. Douglas, pp. 49–50.
39. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Gates Ajar* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1883).
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41. *The Gates Ajar*, p. 53.
42. *Beyond the Gates*, p. 126.
43. *Beyond the Gates*, p. 42.
44. *Beyond the Gates*, p. 44; *The Gates Ajar*, p. 122; *Beyond the Gates*, p. 181.
45. G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, trans. by Knox), Volume One, pp. 502 ff.
46. Cited in Farrell, p. 199, quoting Howard Ward.
47. Cited in Farrell, pp. 116–117.
48. Farrell, p. 118.
49. Farrell, p. 119.
50. Sloane, pp. 107 and 120.
51. Farrell, p. 130.
52. See Roy Meredith, *Mr. Lincoln's Cameraman: Mathew Brady* (New York: Dover Publications, 1974), p. 194, Plate 20.
53. Robert Habenstein and William M. Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing* (Milwaukee: Bulfin Printers, 1962). See Chapter Seven.
54. Leroy Bowman, "The Effects of City Civilization," *Passing*, Charles O. Jackson, ed.
55. Habenstein and Lamers provide an account of the development of the casket from the coffin in Chapter Eight of their book.
56. Habenstein and Lamers, p. 270; Farrell, pp. 169, 170.
57. Habenstein and Lamers, p. 285.