

# Public Memory and Private Grief: The Construction of Shrines at the Sites of Public Tragedy

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*Recent violent deaths involving children in the Oklahoma City bombing and the Dunblane massacre have led to active expressions of private emotion in a public forum. In this study, we examine the rhetorical aspects of spontaneous shrines that develop on the sites of such public tragedies. Our analogue for the creation of these shrines is the private form that mourning activity took in the nineteenth century, often in response to the death of a child. A comparison of the objects and messages left at the Oklahoma City and Dunblane shrines to private mourning rituals of the last century reveals a common cultural meta-narrative. By promising continuity and certainty in a time of chaos, this meta-narrative rhetorically negotiates the earliest stages of public and private grief.* **Key words:** public memory, shrines, mourning rituals, cultural meta-narrative, commemoration

ON April 19, 1995, a homemade fertilizer bomb carried in a Ryder rental truck exploded outside the Murrah Federal Office Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The lives of 168 people, including 19 children and 1 rescuer, ended as a result of the explosion. Before the rescue efforts were abandoned, a spontaneous shrine of flowers, teddy bears, and other objects began to form in front of the rubble where eighty people still lay buried.<sup>1</sup> The remains of the Murrah building were later razed and the site covered with grass in the understanding that an official memorial to the victims would be built at that location. An eight foot tall chain link fence was built around the site, and this "perimeter of pain,"<sup>2</sup> as one journalist called it, became an ongoing shrine to the victims of the explosion. Hundreds of visitors came to the site, bringing teddybears and toys, scribbled messages on scraps of paper or colorful posters with photographs to attach to the fence. Reaching as high as they could, they entwined flowers, homemade crosses, and religious medallions in the links of the fence. By mid-December, 1995, the General Services Administration began to archive the incredible variety of personal items and messages that had collected on the fence. Today, over two years after the explosion, the fence continues to be patchworked with objects brought by visitors to the Murrah building site.

On March 13, 1996, Thomas Watt Hamilton, a non-descript loner suspected by some of being a pedophile, walked into the primary school in the small village of Dunblane, Scotland. Hamilton headed straight for the gym where the Primary One class of five and six year olds was having recess. Using four automatic pistols, Hamilton shot the teacher Gwenne Mayor and the little girls sitting in the "sharing circle." He continued through the gym shooting other children before turning the gun on himself. Sixteen of the children and their teacher died. Twelve children and two other teachers were injured.<sup>3</sup> As news of the tragedy spread, townspeople and visitors were drawn to the site, bringing flowers, toys, and messages to place reverently on the sidewalk or tie to the railing in front of the school. Then-prime minister, John Major, and opposition leader, Tony Blair, stood quietly together before the growing mass of teddybears, toys, and votive candles blanketing the entrance to the school. Queen Elizabeth and Princess Anne brought

sprays of flowers that they gently placed in the middle of the damp sidewalk, several feet in front of the rows of bouquets that now banked the front wall.

In this study, we will examine the “shrines” that developed at the fence surrounding the now-vacant lot where the Murrah building once stood in downtown Oklahoma City and on the front sidewalk before the Dunblane primary school. As Carlson and Hocking said of those who bring objects to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, those who join in the construction of these spontaneous shrines are also “rhetorical pilgrims.”<sup>4</sup> Both the objects that compose these shrines and the choice of site itself may be read as rhetorical strategies used as part of a national (and, in some cases, international) healing process. In this essay, we will use a method of analogic criticism to examine the rhetorical aspects of these spontaneous shrines. Because these violent incidents transcend the private grief of immediate family and community, they blur any concept of a boundary between what has historically been called the public and private spheres. Our analogue for the creation of these shrines is the private form that mourning activity took in the nineteenth century. Largely dominated by women, these active expressions of private and individual grief<sup>5</sup> were a means of adjustment, often to the most emotionally unacceptable of deaths, the death of a child. In the late twentieth century, the very violent and public deaths in Oklahoma City and Dunblane, each involving the deaths of children, led to a need to express private emotion in a public forum. Now transcending gender and moved from the private home to the larger community, the active expression of grief in the construction of spontaneous shrines allows the actor to communicate what Bodnar called “comradeship with and sorrow for the dead.”<sup>6</sup> The construction by individuals of these shrines provides a creative means to seek both individual solace and collective redemption in the face of public tragedy.

### Public Memory

Such spontaneous shrines as those in Oklahoma City and Dunblane give us new insight into the process of commemoration, the rhetorical negotiation of grief, and the initial stages in the forging of a collective, public memory. One clear aspect that emerges from the literature is the negotiated nature of public memory. The need for such negotiation arises from the power that a public monument has, according to Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci, to “‘sacralize’ individuals, places, and ideas.”<sup>7</sup> Griswold speaks of a monument’s further power to “advise” and “instruct” the public about the future at the same time that it “reminds” them of the past.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Browne describes public memory as “a shared sense of the past, fashioned from the symbolic resources of community.”<sup>9</sup> Ideally, it is through the communicative, symbolic process of seeking a collective understanding of the past that the more immediate and pressing concerns of the present and future may be addressed.<sup>10</sup>

Many recent studies of public memory have focused upon the tensions between official and vernacular expressions of collective grief and remembrance. Any ideal of a collective construction of public memory tends to dissolve in light of the unequal power of various community voices to be heard. For Savage, such inequities guarantee that “[p]ublic monuments do not arise as if by natural law to celebrate the deserving; they are built by people with sufficient power to marshal (or impose) public consent for their erection.”<sup>11</sup> If it takes power to construct official monuments, such monuments—once constructed—tend further to consolidate power for cultural leaders. But such official, univocal expressions do not stand alone. Rather, Bodnar sees public memory as arising

from "the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions."<sup>12</sup> Official expression tends to emphasize an abstract ideal that apparently does not threaten, and in many ways supports, the status quo. Thus, official monuments speak in a symbolic language of "timelessness and sacredness," emphasizing such abstract notions as patriotism, courage, and chivalry in order to promote social unity.<sup>13</sup> Challenging these official interpretations are the vernacular expressions of average people who take part in public commemorations and visit public monuments. Belonging not to any one social class, these "ordinary" people view the past through a local and more personal lens.<sup>14</sup> Vernacular expression is that of the individual. According to Browne, it substitutes a language of "rights" for the official language of "duty," and it exists in the "realm [of] the secular, the here and now."<sup>15</sup>

It is in this clash of official and vernacular expressions that the rhetorical nature of public monuments emerges. These sites, where public memory has been given concrete form in monuments or memorials, are not univocal celebrations of our collective past but are, in Bercovitch's term, "rhetorical battleground(s)."<sup>16</sup> The very life of such monuments is in their "expressive form," and therefore they open themselves to textual analysis.<sup>17</sup> As "produced" rather than given texts,<sup>18</sup> these memorials remain (as Bodnar described public memory itself) "a product of elite manipulation, symbolic interaction, and contested discourse."<sup>19</sup>

Recent research has greatly expanded the texts examined to further understand the communicative process of public memory. One monument in particular, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., has received considerable scholarly attention. It is perhaps natural that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial should attract attention from rhetorical scholars because of the rancorous discourse that accompanied the construction of the official memorial. Following the selection of Maya Lin's design in the juried competition, there was an outcry by certain veterans—an opposition joined by a number of those involved with the official selection process. The Lin design was finally accepted with the addition of a supplemental statue, *Three Fightingmen*, and an American flag both of which now form an entrance into the memorial park.<sup>20</sup> The "realistic" statue, modernized, yet in keeping with past war sculptures, possesses little of the power and generates far less of the positive emotional response now attributed to the original "wall."

Yet, if the discourse and symbolic compromise over official cultural expressions of Vietnam are intriguing, they are perhaps less interesting than the vernacular co-opting of the memorial that started soon after its dedication in 1982. It began with the parents of a dead soldier leaving a worn pair of cowboy boots at the memorial. Soon after, a Maryland mother left a letter to her dead son.<sup>21</sup> Visitors continued to leave a wide assortment of objects at the wall: flags, medals, poetry, discharge papers, teddy bears, drawings.<sup>22</sup> In their study of the objects left at the wall, archived since 1985 by the National Park Service, Carlson and Hocking show "how visitors are made rhetors by the power of the Memorial."<sup>23</sup> By the addition of these personal objects, the memorial's focus shifted from official statements about patriotism, valor, and the survival of freedom to a vernacular focus on those individuals who did not survive the war.<sup>24</sup> The very personal nature of the objects—old photographs, baseball caps, diaries—serve, as Bodnar says of other war memorials, to "restate the human pain and sorrow of war."<sup>25</sup> And each addition to the base of the monument changes the text of the memorial until such time as it is removed to be archived. This constant addition and subtraction guarantees an on-going transformation of text and an inclusion of multiple voices, often with contradic-

tory stories about war, loss, and grief.<sup>26</sup> In many ways, this determined and personal altering of an officially designed and constructed memorial is the triumph of the vernacular, the ability that Bodnar claims average people have to use actions of leaders in their own way.<sup>27</sup>

If the Vietnam Veterans Memorial provides an example of vernacular adjustment of official expression, there are other instances where the vernacular expression of public memory *precedes* any official commemoration. For example, in the time just following the Civil War, the need to deal with personal loss, the devastation of war, and (in the South) the reality of defeat led to vernacular expressions of public mourning. Beautiful cemeteries were constructed and became sites for processions of individuals bringing flowers on Memorial day and for unofficial public commemorations, often orchestrated by women. Although decades of official commemoration of the Civil War would follow, the early vernacular interest was in finding a public expression for private, individual grief.<sup>28</sup> Today, the construction of spontaneous shrines following such public tragedies as the bombing in Oklahoma City and the shooting of schoolchildren in Dunblane precede any official attempts at commemoration. They are a form of public memory that deals with incidents in the very recent past (sometimes only a few hours or days past) and, as such, they are largely expressions of pure vernacular culture.

In acknowledging the political and negotiated aspects of commemoration, Jay Winter reminds us that these “‘sites of memory’ are also ‘sites of mourning’.”<sup>29</sup> For vernacular purposes, commemorative sites are initially and primarily places that serve as a focus for mourning, for the “set of acts and gestures through which survivors express grief and pass through stages of bereavement.”<sup>30</sup> Van Gennep and others have described death ceremonies as one of the most familiar rites of passage of the life cycle.<sup>31</sup> According to Rosenblatt, Walsh, and Jackson, these rites of transition allow the deceased to move from “the world of the living to the symbolic world of the dead.”<sup>32</sup> At the same time, Van Gennep claims, such ceremonies move the bereaved from their former roles and status (“separation”), through the role of mourner (“liminal state”), and finally to their new roles defined by their loss (“aggregation”).<sup>33</sup>

Victor Turner asserts that it is natural for all mourners to occupy the phase of “ambiguity, a sort of social limbo” that van Gennep called “limen” for the Latin word “threshold.”<sup>34</sup> Yet, the unnatural trauma of the death of a child forces a very different transition. First, it is important to understand children’s deaths, particularly the violent deaths in Oklahoma City and Dunblane, as individual and collective trauma, defined by Kai Erikson as “a blow . . . to the tissues of the mind. . . . It invades you, takes you over, becomes a dominant feature of your interior landscape—‘possesses’ you.”<sup>35</sup> Any notion of an orderly progression through bereavement is negated as the event hurls the mourner into a liminal state that Victor and Edith Turner describe as “betwixt and between all familiar lines of classification.”<sup>36</sup> The confusion and intense pain of this state may be seen in the question of the Oklahoma City mother who lost all of her children in the blast and numbly asked, “Am I still a mother?”<sup>37</sup>

In this study, we are interested in exploring the creation of shrines at Oklahoma City and Dunblane as forms of secular ritual used to negotiate this special liminal passage following incidents of violent death. We will follow Terrence Turner by defining ritual as “formulaic patterns of symbolic action for ordering or controlling relatively disorderly or uncontrollable situations.”<sup>38</sup> The particular value of ritual is that it is essentially active, seeking order and meaning out of chaos and senselessness. When a death is particularly

devastating, the need to understand, transcend, and find redemption leads the bereaved to find consolation in action. Passive mourning that suppresses grief, rather than externalizes it through action,<sup>39</sup> is inadequate to the personal or societal task of coming to terms with the loss. Active mourning rituals provide what Frederick Bird calls "embodied vocabularies" to convey and alleviate the intense feelings of survivors in "situations where the use of discursive vocabularies tend to flatten the depth of feeling."<sup>40</sup> The shrines at Oklahoma City and Dunblane, although spontaneous and individualized in their construction, provide "stereotyped scripts"<sup>41</sup> that rhetorically negotiate the initial period of liminality immediately following the tragedies.

Ritual forms rely for their efficacy upon a certain redundancy of symbols and meanings.<sup>42</sup> In saying this, we are not claiming that the shrines are univocal or that the encounter of visitors with the sites are less than individual and personally meaningful. However, even in studying the diversity of individual encounters with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Peter Erhenhaus uses Wittgenstein's idea of "family resemblances" to note the similarities among the objects and messages brought to the memorial.<sup>43</sup> During liminal periods, such as the ones immediately following the deaths of loved ones, there exist "seedbeds of cultural creativity,"<sup>44</sup> in Victor Turner's phrase, where we search for new forms of meaning but ground them in the cultural shorthand of images and themes that provided comfort in the past. Browne states that it is precisely the "unpredictable sweep of events" that we seek to control by anchoring them in a "compelling meta-narrative"<sup>45</sup> that gives structure and cultural rationale to chaos.

Of particular interest to this current study is the idea that public memorials serve as a source through which we may interpret the cultures that constructed them.<sup>46</sup> We agree with Middleton and Edwards that there is a "link between what people do as individuals and their socio-cultural heritage."<sup>47</sup> Because we are viewing the replication of themes and symbols in these shrines as a cultural performance, we will confine our study to the dominant white, middleclass, and Christian cultures of Oklahoma City and Dunblane.<sup>48</sup> This cultural frame will extend to our comparison of nineteenth- and twentieth-century death and mourning practices, as we seek to discover how, in Winter's words, "older [cultural] motifs took on new meanings and new forms"<sup>49</sup> in Oklahoma City and Dunblane. After we establish our analogy between private mourning rituals of the nineteenth century and the twentieth-century construction of shrines, we will examine specific objects left at Oklahoma City and Dunblane for rhetorical themes lending insight into the negotiation of the earliest stage of public and private grief.

### Death and Mourning

Our analogue between mourning practices of the nineteenth century and today's creation of spontaneous public shrines actually rests upon the differences between modern death and the way death was commonly experienced in the last century. For centuries, rarely was death sudden; in fact, a sudden death was considered a great calamity, robbing the dying of both time for repentance and a chance to experience the culminating moment of a life.<sup>50</sup> Men and women achieved their greatest individuality on their deathbed. Surrounded by family and friends, the dying person was an active participant in an event of great importance not just to the individual but to the community.<sup>51</sup> In early America, too, death and burial were community affairs presided over by the family of the dying. According to David Sloane, it would be family members who "cleaned the body, dug the grave, built the coffin, and sometimes even carved the

gravestone."<sup>52</sup> Until the end of the nineteenth century, death was near to hand and intensely personal. The knowledge that death could result from seemingly minor illnesses and infections led the average person to qualify speaking of future plans with such phrases as, "if I live."<sup>53</sup> The possibility of death was uppermost in the minds of mothers facing confinement for childbirth, parents of newborns, and anyone setting out on a long journey. What appears to modern eyes as a morbid preoccupation with death was simply a rational response to an inevitable and largely uncontrollable event.

Because death often came at an early age and because both death and preparation for burial commonly occurred in the home, Lewis Saum claims that "[l]ittle in the shape of an institutional shield stood between the lay person and the untidy details of disease and dying."<sup>54</sup> By the time that a person reached adulthood, there was a good chance that he or she had experienced at close hand at least one death of a sibling, grandparent, or parent. Jacobs provides insight into the personal experience of the death of family members by average people during the last century:

They knew the smell of a deathbed, the breath of a dying grand-parent, the dust in a shaft of light seeping through curtains, the passing of a mother in childbirth, the heft of a coffin being hoisted from a wagon and lowered into the ground. Throughout human history, death, like birth, had been close at hand, an everyday experience.<sup>55</sup>

Familiarity may not have lessened concerns over death, but it provided an understanding of the final moments of life and an element of control over the burial and commemoration process.

In contrast, Sloane tells us, the twentieth century increasingly has been a story of Americans being "isolated from death."<sup>56</sup> Death has been turned over to professional hands and increasingly takes place in the coldly efficient atmosphere of a hospital or nursing home. According to Jacobs, in 1940, 70% of deaths still occurred in the home; forty years later saw 80% occur in hospitals and nursing homes.<sup>57</sup> Today, the right to die in one's own home must be carefully negotiated through an organization such as hospice and is only granted to patients meeting certain criteria. Although visitors are allowed and the closest relatives may keep a nearly continuous vigil at the bedside, hospitals are not equipped to accommodate family for any extended period. It thus becomes a matter of luck and good timing if a close friend or relative is beside us when we die. If family and friends are unlikely to experience our deaths, there is only a slim possibility that we will consciously experience our own. According to Stannard, common practice today is to sedate a patient into a "pre-death comatose state," a point in time referred to as "social death."<sup>58</sup> Because of the increased ability of medicine to postpone our deaths, death appears to be a "failure" of the medical profession.<sup>59</sup> Under the guise of pain control, the failures can be allowed to slip away without taking undue time from other potentially more successful cases.

After death, we are given into the hands of further professionals. The funeral industry became so self-perpetuating that legal sanctions exist against the very same family-conducted funerals that were the norm until this century.<sup>60</sup> As conducted by professionals, the modern funeral is a triumph of theatricality and denial. Phillippe Aries describes the task of the mortuary cosmetician to create "the illusion of a living being. This almost-living person will receive his friends one last time, in a flower-laden room and to the sound of sweet or serious—never gloomy—music."<sup>61</sup> Modern society too has "banished death."<sup>62</sup> Except for a very small group of intimates, the deceased vanishes with

little impact on the larger community.<sup>63</sup> The deceased is removed to a suburban cemetery where none but close family will ever visit, his or her position is filled at work, and, Aries states, “[s]ociety no longer observes a pause; the disappearance of an individual no longer affects its continuity. Everything in town goes on as if nobody died anymore.”<sup>64</sup>

As delayed mortality and the intervention of professionals into the death and grieving process have further moved death from our personal experience and control, there has been a corresponding change in the way grief is appropriately displayed. Since the 1960s death and grief are no longer taboo topics in England and America,<sup>65</sup> but if grief may be openly discussed, it does not mean that it may be openly shown. Active grieving is considered a private act, properly conducted in seclusion.<sup>66</sup> Just as society pretends that the death never occurred, the bereaved are expected to assist with the charade by a proper controlling of emotions. It is quite a change from the past, when grief—if not felt—had to be simulated, to the new convention of highly controlled mourning.<sup>67</sup> One model for such control was Jacqueline Kennedy, and other public women have been lauded for the “dignity” they brought to the public grieving process. Today, many families preside over visitations at the funeral home, receiving lines following the funeral at the church, and home receptions following the graveside service. Discreet tears may be shed. However, displays of grief that much exceed this level will at best be considered inappropriate and at worst will result in the bereaved being ushered from public view.

The cumulative result of postponed mortality, professional control of death and mourning, and societal discouragement of public grief is a widening rift between the individual and the reality of death. Without a sense that a community will mourn their passing, Stannard claims that many people confront death with only “a sense of its meaninglessness and of their own insignificance.”<sup>68</sup> Repeatedly, scholars have made this connection between a culture’s attitude toward death and that culture’s sense of community purpose and meaning.<sup>69</sup> Ironically, in the late twentieth century, as the individual is further removed from his or her own personal death, the deaths of strangers are made increasingly available in mass-mediated form. Ever since the so-called “living room” war in Vietnam, films of the deaths of others often top the evening news.<sup>70</sup> Of course, these deaths are not “real” in terms of the sensual experience of death (the direct sights, smells, and sounds so familiar in the past) but safely exist in what Jacobs calls the “airless remove” of mediation.<sup>71</sup> They are, however, reminders of the sudden, violent nature of public death.

As a sense of local community dissolves, as our own relatives (and ourselves) are removed beyond personal control to die in hospitals, we are provided with mediated substitute families whose violent deaths are replayed in our living rooms. Jack Goody perceptively points out the inter-relationship of loss of local community, detachment from personal death, and mediated tragedy: “The lack of *communitas*, of *gemeinschaft*, the growth of individualism, involves a certain withdrawal from each other’s personal problems including their deaths and their dead, unless these occur within the context of national calamity.”<sup>72</sup> Although the sheer number and distance of mediated deaths tends to numb us, occasionally a particular tragedy will break through the feeling of mediated unreality. The chaotic scenes of parents running toward the Dunblane school, the one mother calling out “Victoria! Victoria!” as she ran, the blank-with-horror faces of parents in Oklahoma City, broke through barriers of mediation and national boundary. Under such conditions, the deaths of strangers can seem more real than deaths in the local

community. For a brief time, a sense of national community is formed and individuals feel both the grief that is often repressed in personal contexts and a need to actively respond.

A major point of analogy between private nineteenth-century mourning practices and these particular cases of the twentieth-century erecting of public shrines is the involvement of the death of a child. Certainly, spontaneous shrines develop after public tragedies where children are not involved just as many of the same mourning practices in the last century were conducted for the death of a spouse, parent, or other adult. Yet, today we share with those in the last century a sense that the death of a child is, as Smart calls it, "the least natural of deaths"<sup>73</sup> and thus the event that crystallizes our need to deal with grief whether in private or public forums. Joan Hedrick refers to the death of a child as "one of the most common and profound events of nineteenth-century family life,"<sup>74</sup> although, she stresses, familiarity did not lessen the blow. During the Victorian period, the eighteenth-century tendency to treat children as small adults gave over to a view of the child as "an object of special care" to be nurtured in the heart of the insular family.<sup>75</sup> Yet sentiment increased at a time when infant mortality remained high and, Jacobs tells us, commonly the average person "had seen some of their children, nieces and nephews die as infants. Sometimes the same hands that cut their umbilical cords cleaned their bodies before rigor morris [sic] set in."<sup>76</sup> The fragility of young life at the time is reflected in such common practices as always relating the number of children who survived to the total number of offspring.<sup>77</sup> Children often remained unnamed until they reached several months or over a year in age. This practice gives meaning to a common term used for both living and deceased infants, the "little stranger."<sup>78</sup> Such tactics became both totems to ward off evil and a distancing from the child, intended as a buffer against the trauma of possible loss.

These tactics point to Erikson's claim that one of the primary tasks of culture is to help "camouflage" the actual level of risk surrounding us.<sup>79</sup> Thus, some twentieth-century parents find comfort that infant and child mortality from natural causes has declined so dramatically. There is a natural reluctance to replace these concerns with fears about violence, whether the accidental violence of a car wreck, the neglectful violence of deadly airbags or dangerous toys, or the intentional violence of abuse or kidnapping. It is the latter category of violence caused by evil intent that lent such horror to the Oklahoma City Bombing and the Dunblane massacre. As one visitor to the fence at the Murrah building site put it, "Standing here makes you never feel safe again."<sup>80</sup> It is the interruption of mundane, seemingly predictable life with sudden, unforeseeable death that shocks us. A visiting businessman to Oklahoma City reflected this fear, saying:

One minute you drop your kids off at day care, and the next minute, they're gone. I just can't get that out of my mind, how quickly life can change. I just want to go home and hug my sons.<sup>81</sup>

This emotion found an echo in the words of Chris Fields, the firefighter whose photograph holding the body of one-year-old Baylee Almon was the lasting image of the Oklahoma City disaster. As he fingered a teddy bear left at the fence, he said, "You think your family is going to be there every day, but after something like this, you know it can all change in one second."<sup>82</sup> The focus in both statements is on time, the shift of fortune in "the next minute," "in one second." Those who have undergone a serious trauma have a heightened sense of the dangers of the world and a lessened sense of personal



immunity. Trauma shifts the lens of our worldview from basic trust in order and continuity to a dread of "a kind of natural malice that lurks everywhere."<sup>83</sup>

It is often said that having children makes us hostages to fortune, and the immense grief over the death of a child is a reflection of both our desire to protect and our inability to do so. The fact that children were among the victims in Oklahoma City and were the primary targets in Dunblane had an impact on both the amount of public grief and the form that grief took. The focus on the children in the Oklahoma City blast (and the fact that symbols of childhood, teddybears, were used to represent all the victims at the memorial service) became a point of tension for some families. Tina Tomlin, whose husband was killed in the Murrah bombing, said, "I am so tired of hearing about the 19 children. There were 168 people killed, and they were all somebody's children."<sup>84</sup> Yet, it is in the death of children where the nineteenth-century parent meets the twentieth-century public, for in these deaths they "share a loss of unfathomable proportions."<sup>85</sup>

### Analysis: Public Memory and Private Grief

Our intent in this study is to uncover the cultural meta-narrative underlying the objects and messages left at the spontaneous shrines of Oklahoma City and Dunblane. In seeking the genesis of the primary themes that compose this meta-narrative, we turn to the private rituals used to assuage grief in the previous century. A primary cultural aspect of the nineteenth century was the creation of private memorials in the home—daguerreotypes of the deceased, hair woven into wreaths for mourning loquets, embroidered or painted memorial pictures, mourning scrapbooks or quilts—many of which reached the level of "funerary art." For Joan Hedrick such private rituals were an important part of the grieving process:

As hands moved mechanically, then more purposefully and tenderly, watering plants, weaving strands of hair into braids and fashioning the braids into intricate knots and the knots into wreaths, a healing took place that was outside the discipline prescribed by Calvinism, perfectionism, or any other male theological scheme. It was a therapy, and one often closely linked with artistic creation.<sup>86</sup>

Today, the surviving remnants of such private rituals as post-mortem photographs or mourning rings are often viewed as morbid or perverted.<sup>87</sup> Yet, the bereaved of today often point to the bureaucratic rituals they have conducted after a relative's death—with the bank, insurance companies, social security, and veterans affairs agencies—as a coping mechanism that similarly gave them "something to do" in the days and weeks following the death.<sup>88</sup> We believe that the desire to bring objects to a shrine following a national tragedy reflects this same need for ritual, a desire to do something for the dead and for ourselves. Just as Hedrick described in the case of private mourning rituals, it provides "a structured response to insupportable feelings that, without outlet, might prove overwhelming."<sup>89</sup>

Our initial step was to read the objects, messages, and ritual forms that appeared at the Oklahoma City and Dunblane shrines, seeking in "fragmentary, separate, and evidently unsystemized" elements the underlying "systematic relationship"<sup>90</sup> which Moore and Myerhoff claim is a key to ritual meaning. Three distinct but interwoven themes appeared repeatedly in various forms: 1) the site as a sacred focus of commemoration, 2) the victims as "special children," chosen and set apart from the rest of the world, and 3) the afterlife as a continuation of earthly existence, where the dead continue their

involvement with the living. By conducting a simultaneous reading of extant nineteenth-century objects and ritual forms, we discovered that these themes found in modern public shrines have roots in the private mourning rituals of the past century. By providing a model for public grief, private mourning rituals also provided a cultural meta-narrative constructed to ease the passage through mourning. This meta-narrative, which we will discuss later in this essay, provided a conventionalized rationale that worked to assuage private grief in the past and that offers stability and meaning in the wake of violent death today.

### *Theme One: The Importance of the Site of Death*

At first consideration it may seem peculiar that spontaneous commemoration should take place at the site of the tragedy, rather than at the gravesite of the victims.<sup>91</sup> It may be argued that in instances where there are many victims, the site provides a point of commonality allowing convenient commemoration of all the dead at one time. Yet, in this attraction of mourners to the actual place of death, we see the power of scene in the Burkean sense of the word. According to Burke, domination by scene reveals a certain constraint on the agents involved,<sup>92</sup> a confession in these cases of the public's impotence in preventing the tragedy. Thus the site of the tragedy takes on symbolic admonitory power to remind us of our helplessness in the face of evil.

Beyond its ability to admonish, the site of these public tragedies takes on a sense of the holy. As Phillippe Aries said of soldier's tombs located on battlefields, "the site of the martyrdom is the object of a worship that is no longer familial and private but now collective."<sup>93</sup> This sense of the holiness of the site of death is acknowledged by the Oklahoma City officials who moved the fence closer to the former site of the Murrah building to allow visitors closer contact with what was described as "the 'sacred ground'."<sup>94</sup> Thus, visits to these sites, as Erhenhaus noted about visits to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, take on the ritual form of a "secular pilgrimage,"<sup>95</sup> as offerings and occasionally relics belonging to the martyred are brought to the site.

In the past, the sense of veneration favored the deathbed over the gravesite. According to Saum, "to an almost unnerving degree, the imagination, emotion and memory of humble America hovered about that sacrosanct place."<sup>96</sup> The deathbed provided a site where the dying could instruct the living, providing both a moral lesson and a final benediction for those soon to be left behind.<sup>97</sup> Literary creations of the time, such as Little Eva with her loving dispensing of locks of hair, provided models of holy leave-taking.<sup>98</sup> Those who clustered around the bedside sought eagerly for signs of inward grace in the dying, signs that would later be recounted as proof that the deceased had found redemption. Just as an unattended death was contemplated with horror, being kept from the deathbed of another was considered, Saum tells us, "a striking deprivation."<sup>99</sup>

With sudden and violent death, the site of the tragedy is also the deathbed of its victims. In one sense, the presence of mourners at the site is a deathbed vigil after the fact. Survivors face the guilt that they were not in attendance at the death, that the victims were ripped and not eased from this world. One mother who lost her only daughter in the Murrah blast said, "I just have to go sometimes even though it brings me to tears standing there knowing that's where my daughter was."<sup>100</sup> Although visitors to the Murrah site report an overwhelming sense of pain, according to the Washington Post, "many say they have found solace at the bomb site for reasons they cannot fully

explain."<sup>101</sup> Contact with the site is transformative, allowing an incremental step toward accepting the inconceivable. Tina Tomlin, widowed by the Oklahoma City blast said, "Going [to the site] just makes it real."<sup>102</sup> Certainly for the crowds that heaped flowers and teddy bears and lit votive candles at the front of Dunblane School, the transformation was difficult. They stared at buildings where children "were conducting their daily routine in a place where they felt completely secure,"<sup>103</sup> and saw a place that had suddenly turned, in the words of the ambulance crew chief, into "a medieval vision of hell."<sup>104</sup> Yet, any voyeuristic response to the site of public tragedy is mitigated by the action of bringing flowers and objects. Such active involvement invites engagement by the viewer and, as Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci said about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, discourages a "touristic, consumptive response."<sup>105</sup> Instead, it invites the viewer to add to the text, to help write the final story of the tragedy, and thereby regain control over the scene.

### *Theme Two: The Cult of the Special Child*

The second theme to emerge from the shrines at these tragedies is the special nature of those involved, especially the children. There is a tendency to treat the victims as somehow "set apart," as chosen in some way to undergo a violent death in order to instruct the rest of society. As the chosen, the victims are given a general absolution for any faults and, in light of their victim status, declared uniformly good. As a spraypainted wedge of concrete at the first makeshift shrine in Oklahoma City read: "BLESS THE CHILDREN & THE INNOCENT."<sup>106</sup> Notice that there is little need to proclaim the children as innocent. The early Puritan view of children as "depraved and polluted" and in need of strong guidance if their souls were not to be lost<sup>107</sup> has completely given over to a view of childhood as a time of purity and innocence. Thus, a recurrent phrase used in news stories about Dunblane, "the massacre of the innocents" rings true for modern readers.<sup>108</sup>

In the nineteenth century the idea of "the special child," the child destined by God for eternity, developed as one means to deal emotionally with the death of children. After the death of her eighteen month old son, Charley, Harriet Beecher Stowe speculated:

Is there a peculiar love given us for those God wills to take from us. Is there not something brighter and better around them than around those who live—Why else in so many households is there a tradition of one brighter more beautiful more promising than all the rest, laid early low.<sup>109</sup>

This belief that the favorite child may well be lost led to an emotional conundrum for parents: how to enjoy a child who was unusually bright, beautiful or good without making God aware of your preference? Hedrick maintains that, at the same time that Calvinist doctrine taught parents to accept God's will, it was hard for a loving parent not to see God as "a capricious Ruler whose sickle and sword brought a heavenly discipline."<sup>110</sup> One solution was to try to maintain some emotional distance from the child, as one Josiah Crosby was admonished to do in a letter from a friend on the birth of his daughter, "dont . . . set too mutch by it."<sup>111</sup> This was common advice not only to avoid counting too much on a future that the child may never have but also to temper one's adoration of a child who may be coveted by a jealous God. A second strategy to mitigate the loss of a child was to embrace the death as a form of Christian victory. A Christian child who died early and innocent was guaranteed a heavenly throne, and parents tried to see the value of death before their child was soiled by the world. Thus, according to

Sloane, cemeteries became "scenes of adoration of dead youth,"<sup>112</sup> as deceased children became triumphant symbols that "the last shall be first."<sup>113</sup>

The desire to make the losers into winners, to let the weak triumph, and particularly to allow the innocent to transcend the evil of the violent act may be seen in twentieth-century shrines. One of the most consistent messages at each shrine was an assurance to families, in the words of one journalist, "that their children were now little angels in a place beyond all pain."<sup>114</sup> At the Dunblane shrine, the word ANGELS was spelled out by separate bouquets of white flowers, each forming one of the letters. A gold angel of mercy pin with a colored ribbon, symbolic of the children killed, was handed to firefighters seeking victims in the rubble of the Murrah building.<sup>115</sup> At each shrine, many of the stuffed animals had, or were given, angel wings, and even messages that did not proclaim the dead children as angels themselves described them as now in the company of angels.<sup>116</sup> This designation of the dead children as angels makes clear not simply the admission of the children to heaven but their privileged status in the hierarchy of heaven. And just in case their special children should be overlooked in the next world, one card at Dunblane made a specific plea: "Dear Jesus, Take Special Care of Abigail and Melissa."<sup>117</sup>

There was some constraint in portraying the dead of Dunblane and Oklahoma City as "chosen" or special children, so as not to value them over the children who survived. News coverage tended toward group photographs and descriptions of the everyday group play of the primary school and daycare center. Still, the toddlers at the all-too-aptly named daycare center in the Murrah building became America's Children, symbols as much as actual children. They stood for all children lost through violence, accidents, or neglect. As such, they became the "special children," destined for heaven, who offered whatever lesson the mourner chose to glean from their deaths.

### *Theme Three: "Heaven Our Home"*<sup>118</sup>

The third theme to emerge from these spontaneous shrines is the vision of a heaven that is largely a continuation of earthly existence. Nineteenth century, particularly antebellum, thought emphasized the beauty of a heaven that could be entered by most people and the ability of those left behind to maintain their contact with the dead.<sup>119</sup> Envisioning heaven as a place much like the earthly domestic sphere,<sup>120</sup> where babies would awaken once more and family life would resume uninterrupted, provided particular comfort. Heavenly gates and streets of gold needed to be scaled down to a domestic setting where mourners could regain in the next life the sense of control taken from them by sudden, unbidden death in this life. Heaven would be, as Ann Douglas put it, a "place where they would dominate rather than be dominated."<sup>121</sup>

The specific objects and notes left behind give us a solid insight into the prospect of heaven held by visitors to modern shrines, a vision that has changed little from the previous century. First, it is important to note that this is largely a Christian vision. The belief that there is a heaven and that the victims have been purchased an entree into that heaven may be seen in the preponderance of Christian symbols brought to the shrines. Into the fence surrounding the Murrah site, visitors wedged tin medallions of the Virgin Mary and palm fronds during the Easter season. It has become part of the particular ethos of that site to fashion crucifixes from twigs and other scraps found on the ground and leave them in the fence.<sup>122</sup>

Many of the messages left at these sites imply (or state) that the dead are merely

sleeping and offer wishes that they may "rest in peace." Perhaps the most touching of all the messages was found at the Dunblane site: "Sleep well, little chicks." The idea of death as sleep is of ancient origin, predating Christianity but not at odds with a Christian conception of heaven. St. Paul described some of the brothers who had seen the risen Christ as having "gone to sleep," and the martyr St. Stephen is described in the Acts of the Apostles as falling asleep in the Lord.<sup>123</sup> Describing death as sleep is a natural metaphor. Because the dead appear to be asleep, we tend to whisper in funeral homes in the presence of the "sleeper."<sup>124</sup> The nineteenth-century rural cemetery movement (and even the term cemetery comes from a Greek term meaning "to lull to sleep"<sup>125</sup>) allowed a sense that the deceased were not truly gone but merely resting in a beautiful location. In the Victorian popularity of the inscription "asleep in Jesus" for children's graves, we can see the hope expressed in modern shrines that these children will awaken as if from a nap to continue the games interrupted by violent death.

In the past, according to Phillipe Aries, "[i]f the dead slept, it was usually in a garden full of flowers."<sup>126</sup> Flowers, the primary objects brought to each shrine, are now intricately bound up with our sense of mourning, so much so that it is hard to fathom that graveside flowers reached widespread popularity only in the previous century. For the ancient church flowers were a symbol of purity and innocence, and because the cut or picked flower is symbolic of life cut short, Victorian tombstones occasionally included a depiction of a flower with its stem severed.<sup>127</sup> Because Victorian flower memorials were often prepared for display within the home, symbolic concerns merged with practical need. As symbols of undying memory and everlasting life, white or occasionally purple funeral bouquets were dried—or made out of wax—and displayed under glass domes.<sup>128</sup> Today, shrine bouquets will be left outdoors—to bake and fade in the Oklahoma sun or to end in a sodden mass in the drizzle of Dunblane. Their fragile nature speaks more of the frailty of human life than everlasting life to come. Instead, many bouquets attempt to symbolize the lives lost. At Dunblane, one bouquet was composed of sixteen red roses, one for each child killed.<sup>129</sup> Even the flowers brought by Queen Elizabeth to the Dunblane shrine consisted of a simple spray in the nursery colors of pink, white, and yellow.<sup>130</sup>

Objects left at shrines usually reveal a sense of continuing involvement with the dead. Just as when we slip sentimental items into the coffin to be buried with the deceased, the interchange is a private one between ourselves and the dead. Privately in individual funerals and publicly in these shrines, the impulse to leave something for our loved ones to use in the next world reflects a need to view the deceased as not truly dead.<sup>131</sup> The large number of toys left at shrines—balloons, dolls, endless teddy bears, and other stuffed animals—indicates hope, as one Dunblane note read, that the children are now "playing with the angels."<sup>132</sup> In our minds, too, the dead are still tied to earthly time and presumably still care about holidays. At the Oklahoma City shrine, a little teddy bear peered out of the top of a Christmas stocking bearing the message, "Merry Christmas Ashley, Love, Mamma, Daddy, Zack & David."<sup>133</sup> A sense that the dead children were cheated out of the opportunity to grow up is mitigated by marking their continued growth in an unseen realm. A poster that bore birthday stickers and a portrait of a toddler killed in the blast read, "Happy Birthday, Blake Kennedy. Love, Mom and Dad."<sup>134</sup> This continued involvement with the dead is two-way, leading to messages—and even vicarious gifts—from the dead left at the shrines. A white knit sweater was secured to the Murrah building fence with the instructions, "If you are cold or need a sweater, take this

one. My friend would want you to have it and be warm. At 9:02 a.m., April 19, she was working in the social security office. She was killed."<sup>135</sup> It was the same combination of sentiment tied to practicality that saw the earlier popularity of mourning quilts, commemorating specific family members. Designing and sewing the quilts allowed an active expression of grief in a memorial to be passed on to others. Yet, like the sweater on the Murrah fence, it warmed a family member in a gesture of generosity and continuing concern for the living on the part of the dead.<sup>136</sup>

Finally, but most importantly, the belief that the dead live on in a world closely connected to (and much like) this one, leads mourners to seek redemption from "the waiting dead."<sup>137</sup> As Carlson & Hocking discovered in their study of objects left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the fact that visitors' notes left at these shrines generally address the visitors themselves or the victims indicates a tendency to choose mortification over scapegoating as a redemptive strategy.<sup>138</sup> Common to these messages is an intense sense of guilt that the mourner was unable to prevent the victim's death. This guilt for our failure to foresee evil and protect those in our charge is most clearly shown in a note at the Dunblane shrine, "May God take better care of you than this world ever did."<sup>139</sup> A stuffed dog at Oklahoma City wore a Red Cross sticker bearing a message that in this context was heavy with regret, "Help can't wait."<sup>140</sup> Many of the notes at Dunblane simply said, "Why?"<sup>141</sup> perhaps an attempt at guilt transfer vaguely directed at a God who would let such evil befall the innocent. Simply the number and the personal nature of the objects left at the sites—baby shoes, tee-shirts, tennis shoes, key chains—reveal the variety of rhetorical strategies used as each visitor seeks a measure of individual redemption.<sup>142</sup> Although these deaths were public and the mourning collective, the individuality of offerings seeks a personal understanding of the loss and blurs the line between public and private grief.

### Conclusion

Despite their incredible variety, the objects composing the shrines at Oklahoma City and Dunblane share what Alan Radley calls a "mnemonic quality," a link to past relationships with the lost.<sup>143</sup> Then, too, the ritual of visiting the site and constructing the new on the ashes of the old, is itself a "mnemonic device" that helps mourners "keep in mind certain thoughts and sentiments."<sup>144</sup> Myerhoff claims that ritual action "persuade[s] the body" before the mind.<sup>145</sup> The repetition of messages becomes, as Carlson and Hocking put it, "self-incantatory," urging a particular understanding on a chaotic, inexplicable event.<sup>146</sup> This understanding, found in the meta-narrative of the Oklahoma City and Dunblane shrines, is a highly conventionalized one: the children are "not dead but sleepeth." (Luke 8.52) The site of death is a threshold, a gateway the children crossed to wake and resume their games in a world similar to this one. It is the same story we murmur privately to grieving parents, and its "deliberately archaic language,"<sup>147</sup> in Winter's phrase, promises continuity and certainty, rhetorically easing the earliest moments of the passage through grief.

The gymnasium at the Dunblane School has been torn down and replaced with a memorial garden. The remaining buildings, however, continue to function as a school in a process Foote calls "rectification," where a site of tragedy is "put right and . . . reintegrated into the activities of everyday life." It is the common outcome when a site is considered an "innocent bystander" to the senseless violence that occurred there.<sup>148</sup> However, the Murrah building, symbolic in its functioning of the Federal Government,

will receive the "sanctification" of an official monument.<sup>149</sup> The final memorial design, chosen by the families of victims and an evaluation committee, includes such conventional elements as a reflecting pool, a grove of trees (symbolizing rescuers and helpers), and a low wall inscribed with the names of survivors that will encircle the "survivor tree," a solitary elm that withstood the explosion. Unique to the memorial are nine rows of 168 stone and glass chairs, each engraved with a victim's name. Nineteen of the chairs will be child-size.<sup>150</sup> Even this image is essentially Victorian; it is the empty chair by the fireside that none but the missing loved one can fill.

This study has shown that there is much in common between public mourning at twentieth-century shrines and the private grief rituals of the nineteenth century. Despite changes in our concepts of death and grief, we share with those of the last century a sense that death is, in Goody's words, "the most critical, the most final, of crisis situations, which capitalizes culture and social organization for actor and observer alike."<sup>151</sup> Then, as now, the death of a child was the most unacceptable and disturbing death and provoked an increased need to find active expressions of grief. The similarity of themes in yesterday's private and today's public rituals may be gathered in Jacob's description of post-mortem daguerreotypes:

Even the most bathetic of the nineteenth-century death photographs—angelic sleepers amidst super-abundant flowers and elaborate coffins—carry with them the lingering hope of a hereafter in an age when traditional faith and the conceit of an anthropocentric world continued its retreat.<sup>152</sup>

In the twentieth-century shrines we can see that same lingering hope in the hallowing of the site where the special child crosses over to a heaven that is basically a continuation of earthly life.

On December 26, 1996, six year old JonBenet Ramsey was murdered in her Boulder, Colorado home. Almost as soon as her death was made public, a small shrine began to form in the front yard of the house where JonBenet was killed. It included a single pink rose, a teddy-bear, and a white cross with the inscription, "We'll see you in heaven." Other shrines at the site where Susan Smith drowned her two young sons in South Carolina, where young pizza restaurant employees were killed in New Orleans, or even at the sites of roadway accidents<sup>153</sup> make clear that this impulse to spontaneous, vernacular commemoration is widespread. It seems that the site of a public tragedy will remain what Browne has called "a site of symbolic action, a place of cultural performance."<sup>154</sup> As such, these sites give further understanding both into the way mourning is rhetorically negotiated and into the permeability of the boundary between public and private grief.

### Epilogue

As this study was going to press, Diana, Princess of Wales, and her companion, Dodi al Fayed, were killed in an automobile accident while fleeing "paparazzi" in Paris. As soon as the news of Diana's death was made public, spontaneous shrines appeared composed of flowers, balloons, poetry, and enlarged playing cards of the Queen of Hearts bearing Diana's face. Primary sites in London, particularly Kensington Palace, Buckingham Palace, and St. James's Palace, saw the construction of shrines so massive that the press struggled for adequate descriptions. The "hundreds of thousands of bouquets" before Kensington Palace were portrayed as "flowing from the palace gates into an enormous

cross of grief."<sup>155</sup> The "bouquets had turned into thickets,"<sup>156</sup> it was a "sea of flowers,"<sup>157</sup> and Westminster Abbey was "drowning anew in flowers."<sup>158</sup> Mourners built shrines at any location symbolic of Diana: the crash site and hospital in Paris; Althorp, her family home; Harrods, the department store belonging to Dodi al Fayed's father; and British embassies and consulates in other countries. Even more people conducted what Leah Vande Berg calls "living room pilgrimages,"<sup>159</sup> rising early to watch televised coverage of Diana's death and funeral.

Yet, for all its incredible scale, this grief for a young princess was not without precedent. In November 1817, Princess Charlotte, daughter of the Prince Regent, died soon after the birth of her stillborn son; and, Laurence Lerner tells us, "all England was plunged into grief."<sup>160</sup> Mourning was so widespread that one contemporary journalist claimed, "chilling regrets and unavailing laments seem the mournful inmates of every mansion house and cottage."<sup>161</sup> Bombazine, a favorite mourning material, was soon in short supply; the royal family was scrutinized for appropriate signs of grief; and Princess Charlotte's attending physician was so publicly vilified for negligence that he shot himself a year later.<sup>162</sup> The deaths of two princesses, 180 years apart, raise questions concerning the meaning of public grief for an individual when conducted on a national scale.

In the case of Diana, the primary question is this: why was liminality experienced by so many that they felt compelled toward ritual action? Certainly part of the answer lies in Diana's mediated presence in our lives. The fact that the public knew and cared about her translated into an improbable belief that she knew and cared individually about them. But if the intimacy was an illusion, the grief was not. An intense level of identification is apparent in the myriad number of shrine cards and posters that proclaimed her "one of us"<sup>163</sup> and in the eager adoption of Tony Blair's sobriquet, "the people's princess."<sup>164</sup> Many observers sought political meaning in the "floral revolution"<sup>165</sup> and in the faces of mourners who were disproportionately young, female, and black—"New Britain," one journalist claimed, "rather than Old."<sup>166</sup> One striking image was a young man in jeans and a mohawk whose floral tribute of five white bouquets spelling Diana's name must have cost the best part of a week's wages.<sup>167</sup> Yet, this was not a political identification, for though they now dubbed her their "Queen of Hearts,"<sup>168</sup> they were never her subjects. They identified with her not as child of privilege but as child of divorce, not as fairytale bride but as betrayed wife, and not so much for her charisma and successes as for her anxieties and failures. Unlike Princess Charlotte, Diana died not in childbirth but in giving birth to a new life for herself. In her death she was cheated of the late 20th century right to a second chance.

If she was one of us, then her death presages our own; and, in her, we encounter the unfairness of our own demise. Striking at the shrines, particularly those in the busy heart of London, was the "eerie hush," the silent or whispering crowds that made the gateways to Buckingham Palace and Kensington Palace, in one reporter's estimation, "as quiet as a church."<sup>169</sup> Erhenhaus points to silence at memorials as a step "towards self awareness," as an opportunity to "face our own death."<sup>170</sup> In Diana's death we see, stripped of its disguise, the modern risk that we too will die a violent, ugly death with no opportunity for goodbyes. We are groping for personal control; and the grim fascination with the details of Diana's death is, Richard Lacayo tells us, a desire to "reach back somehow to change them . . . maybe to find a different driver for Diana's car, or even just to buckle her seat belt."<sup>171</sup>



In our obsessive fears, second only to the deaths of our children is our fear of leaving them to grow up without us. The pain of the bereaved, the motherless, child is accentuated by its comparative rarity. Before this century, twenty-five percent of American children under age fifteen lost a parent; today, that number has dropped to six percent. If, as Therese Rando says, this is "the first death-free generation,"<sup>172</sup> then Diana's death strengthens our sense that the natural order has been violated. For many, the impetus to sign condolence books and web memorials or to visit the physical shrines was an attempt to make a symbolic visitation to William and Harry. Thus the sight of the two boys at Kensington Palace, shyly taking flowers from the crowd to place by the gates and making the polite small talk of a visitation was symbolically satisfying. And in the pomp of the official funeral, Harry's small wreath of white roses with the handlettered card, "Mummy,"<sup>173</sup> crystalized the personal loss that threatened to be obscured by the magnitude of public mourning.

The sense of unfairness left many shrine messages to emphasize the mythic quality of Diana's life and death. She was, one message proclaimed, "A fairy tale Princess who should have lived happily ever after."<sup>174</sup> Tied to the railing at Kensington Palace was a ballet shoe inscribed with the message, "You were a Cinderella at the Ball and now you are a Sleeping Beauty."<sup>175</sup> Lacking in Diana's death was a sense of narrative fidelity: fairytales do not end this way; Greek tragedies do. All that was left was a defiant reaching for superlatives that would allow Diana to live on and ultimately triumph: "Goddess of Faith, Hope, and Charity,"<sup>176</sup> "Our new St. Diana, canonized by the people if not the Pope."<sup>177</sup>

Finally, in these shrines we see the determined nature of vernacular expression, as the public insisted on its say in assigning blame and structuring its own grief. From the copy of a tabloid paper at one shrine, its name scratched out in black marker and Diana's picture scrawled across with the words, "'61-'97 No More Photos! R.I.P."<sup>178</sup> to the furious note on the Kensington Palace gates, "To the world's press: Are you happy? You've got your picture. Shame on you,"<sup>179</sup> the messages were bitter. Following Earl Spencer's eulogy to his sister with its barbed indictment of world press and royal family, applause seeped from the public outside until it swept through Westminster Abbey. The mourning for Diana was, in Donovan Ochs's phrase, "a ritual wrapped in a spectacle."<sup>180</sup> It structured a diverse national response into a form that Gray found both "soothing" and "cathartic," allowing "a shared context for personal grief."<sup>181</sup> In doing so, vernacular ritual eased the initial steps from national trauma toward some tentative level of individual acceptance.

## Notes

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<sup>3</sup>Rae Corelli, "A Parent's Nightmare," *Maclean's*, 25 March 1996: 22.

<sup>4</sup>A. Cheree Carlson and John E. Hocking, "Strategies of Redemption at the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 52 (1988): 204.

<sup>5</sup>Ann Douglas, "Heaven Our Home: Consolation Literature in the Northern United States, 1830-1880," *Death in America*, ed. David E. Stannard (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1975) 54.

<sup>6</sup>John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1992) 9.

<sup>7</sup>Carole Blair, Marsha S. Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci, Jr., "Public Memorializing in Postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as Prototype," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77 (1991): 271.

<sup>8</sup>Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci 263.

<sup>9</sup>Stephen H. Browne, "Reading, Rhetoric, and the Texture of Public Memory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995): 248.

<sup>10</sup>Bodnar 15.

<sup>11</sup>Kirk Savage, "The Politics of Memory: Black Emancipation and the Civil War Monument" *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994) 135.

<sup>12</sup>Bodnar 13.

<sup>13</sup>Bodnar 13–14.

<sup>14</sup>Bodnar 16.

<sup>15</sup>Browne, "Reading, Rhetoric" 245.

<sup>16</sup>Browne, "Reading, Rhetoric" 240.

<sup>17</sup>Browne, "Reading, Rhetoric" 248.

<sup>18</sup>Browne, "Reading, Rhetoric" 245.

<sup>19</sup>Bodnar 20.

<sup>20</sup>Sonja K. Foss, "Ambiguity as Persuasion: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 34 (1986): 327.

<sup>21</sup>Bodnar 7–8.

<sup>22</sup>Carlson and Hocking 203.

<sup>23</sup>Carlson and Hocking 205.

<sup>24</sup>Foss 335.

<sup>25</sup>Bodnar 8.

<sup>26</sup>Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci 272.

<sup>27</sup>Bodnar 15.

<sup>28</sup>Bodnar 28.

<sup>29</sup>Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 10.

<sup>30</sup>Winter 29.

<sup>31</sup>Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1960) 145–165. Frederick Bird, "The Contemporary Ritual Milieu," *Rituals and Ceremonies in Popular Culture*, ed. Ray Browne (Bowling Green: Bowling Green UP, 1980) 29.

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<sup>34</sup>Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982) 24.

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<sup>36</sup>Turner and Turner 2.

<sup>37</sup>Kenneth L. Woodward, "The Stages of Grief," *Newsweek* 22 May 1995: 43.

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<sup>40</sup>Bird 24.

<sup>41</sup>Bird 24.

<sup>42</sup>Bird 20.

<sup>43</sup>Peter Erhenhaus, "Silence and Symbolic Expression," *Communication Monographs* 55 (1988): 45. For more on family resemblances, see L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. (New York: Macmillan, 1958) 66, 67.

<sup>44</sup>Turner, *From Ritual*, 28.

<sup>45</sup>Stephen Browne, "Reading Public Memory in Daniel Webster's *Plymouth Rock Oration*," *Western Journal of Communication* 57 (1993): 464.

- <sup>46</sup>Richard Morris, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Myth of Superiority," *Cultural Legacies of Vietnam: Uses of the Past in the Present*, eds. Richard Morris and Peter Erhenhaus (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1990) 199–222.
- <sup>47</sup>David Middleton and Derek Edwards, *Collective Remembering* (London: Sage, 1990) 1.
- <sup>48</sup>The large number of African-American victims in Oklahoma City argues for further studies that would explore such cultural differences in mourning as those based on race, ethnicity, and religion.
- <sup>49</sup>Winter 5.
- <sup>50</sup>Phillipe Aries, "The Reversal of Death: Changes in Attitudes Toward Death in Western Societies," *Death in America*, ed. David E. Stannard (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1975) 33.
- <sup>51</sup>Aries, "Reversal of Death" 139.
- <sup>52</sup>David Charles Sloane, *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1991) 119.
- <sup>53</sup>Lewis O. Saum, "Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America," *Death in America*, ed. David E. Stannard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975) 37.
- <sup>54</sup>Saum 34.
- <sup>55</sup>David L. Jacobs, "The Art of Mourning: Death and Photography," *Afterimage*, 23 (1996): n.p. Expanded Academic ASAP, Infotrac.
- <sup>56</sup>Sloane 157.
- <sup>57</sup>Jacobs n.p.
- <sup>58</sup>Stannard, *Death in America*, viii.
- <sup>59</sup>Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981) 586.
- <sup>60</sup>Laura S. Smart, "Parental Bereavement in Anglo American History," *Omega* 28 (1993–94): 58.
- <sup>61</sup>Aries, "Reversal of Death" 156.
- <sup>62</sup>Aries, *The Hour* 560.
- <sup>63</sup>Stannard, *Death in America*, xv.
- <sup>64</sup>Aries, *The Hour* 560.
- <sup>65</sup>Smart 57.
- <sup>66</sup>Aries, "Reversal of Death" 151.
- <sup>67</sup>Aries, "Reversal of Death" 149. Repression of public grief increased during the late Victorian period and has developed markedly during the twentieth century. See Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) 222.
- <sup>68</sup>Stannard, *Death in America*, xi.
- <sup>69</sup>Stannard, *Death in America*, x.
- <sup>70</sup>Jacobs n.p.
- <sup>71</sup>Jacobs n.p.
- <sup>72</sup>Goody 7.
- <sup>73</sup>Smart 49.
- <sup>74</sup>Joan D. Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) 191.
- <sup>75</sup>Hedrick 191.
- <sup>76</sup>Jacobs n.p.
- <sup>77</sup>Lewis O. Saum, "Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America," *Death in America*, ed. David E. Stannard (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1975) 30.
- <sup>78</sup>Saum 38.
- <sup>79</sup>Erikson 194.
- <sup>80</sup>Romano C 6.
- <sup>81</sup>Romano C 6.
- <sup>82</sup>Elizabeth Gleick, "Living With the Nightmare," *Time* 15 April 1996: 60.
- <sup>83</sup>Erikson 194–196.
- <sup>84</sup>Gleick 64.
- <sup>85</sup>Romano C1.
- <sup>86</sup>Hedrick 154.
- <sup>87</sup>Jacobs n.p.
- <sup>88</sup>Rosenblatt, Walsh, and Jackson 109.
- <sup>89</sup>Hedrick 276.

- <sup>90</sup>Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, "Introduction: Secular Ritual: Forms and Meanings," *Secular Ritual* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1977) 16-17.
- <sup>91</sup>Of course, erecting shrines at the site of the tragedy does not preclude commemoration at the gravesite.
- <sup>92</sup>Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1969) 12-15.
- <sup>93</sup>Phillipe Aries, *The Hour* 549.
- <sup>94</sup>Romano C6.
- <sup>95</sup>Erhenhaus 52.
- <sup>96</sup>Saum 41.
- <sup>97</sup>Saum 41.
- <sup>98</sup>Douglas 59.
- <sup>99</sup>Saum 44.
- <sup>100</sup>Romano C 6.
- <sup>101</sup>Romano C 6.
- <sup>102</sup>Romano C 6.
- <sup>103</sup>Bill Hewitt, John Hannah, Joel Stratte-McClure, and Sterling Fennell Eason, "Innocents Lost," *People* 1 April 1996: 45.
- <sup>104</sup>Corelli 22.
- <sup>105</sup>Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci 278.
- <sup>106</sup>Irving 134.
- <sup>107</sup>David E. Stannard, "Death and the Puritan Child," *Death in America*, ed. David E. Stannard (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1975) 15.
- <sup>108</sup>Corelli 22.
- <sup>109</sup>Hedrick 191-192.
- <sup>110</sup>Hedrick 154.
- <sup>111</sup>Saum 38.
- <sup>112</sup>Sloane 72.
- <sup>113</sup>Douglas 57.
- <sup>114</sup>Woodward 43.
- <sup>115</sup>Irving 141. Edye Smith was presented with a painting that portrayed both of her young sons, killed in the blast, as angels.
- <sup>116</sup>John Boocock, Dunblane Memorial Web Page <[catalyst-highlands.co.uk/flash.htm](http://catalyst-highlands.co.uk/flash.htm)>, 9/22/1996, n.p.
- <sup>117</sup>Hewitt et al. 44.
- <sup>118</sup>Douglas 49.
- <sup>119</sup>Sloane 146.
- <sup>120</sup>Douglas 55.
- <sup>121</sup>Douglas 68.
- <sup>122</sup>Gleick 60.
- <sup>123</sup>Aries, *The Hour* 23.
- <sup>124</sup>Bertram S. Puckle, *Funeral Customs: Their Origin and Development* (London: T. Werner Laurie, Ltd., 1926) 262.
- <sup>125</sup>Puckle 262.
- <sup>126</sup>Aries, *The Hour* 25.
- <sup>127</sup>Margaret M. Coffin, *Death in Early America: The History and Folklore of Customs and Superstitions of Early Medicine* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1976) 166.
- <sup>128</sup>Coffin 209.
- <sup>129</sup>Boocock n.p.
- <sup>130</sup>Hewitt et al. 48.
- <sup>131</sup>Douglas 60.
- <sup>132</sup>Boocock n.p.
- <sup>133</sup>Romano C 6.
- <sup>134</sup>Romano C 6.
- <sup>135</sup>Romano C 6.
- <sup>136</sup>Smart 56.
- <sup>137</sup>Carlson and Hocking 206.

- <sup>138</sup>Carlson and Hocking 206.
- <sup>139</sup>Corelli 22.
- <sup>140</sup>Irving 134.
- <sup>141</sup>Boocock n.p.
- <sup>142</sup>Carlson and Hocking 204.
- <sup>143</sup>Alan Radley, "Artefacts, Memory and a Sense of the Past," *Collective Remembering* eds. David Middleton and Derek Edwards (London: Sage, 1990) 50.
- <sup>144</sup>Bird 21.
- <sup>145</sup>Barbara Myerhoff, "We Don't Wrap Herring in a Printed Page: Fusion, Fictions and Continuity in Secular Ritual," *Secular Ritual* eds. Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1977) 199.
- <sup>146</sup>Carlson and Hocking 210.
- <sup>147</sup>Winter 85.
- <sup>148</sup>Kenneth E. Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1997) 23.
- <sup>149</sup>Foote 8.
- <sup>150</sup>Lois Romano, "Oklahoma City Unveils Design For Memorial to Bomb Victims," *The Washington Post*, Wednesday, 2 Jul. 1997: A1, A10..
- <sup>151</sup>Goody 8.
- <sup>152</sup>Jacobs n.p.
- <sup>153</sup>The authors are grateful to Adrienne Christiansen for pointing out possible connections between public shrines and the private shrines to dead children described in Jonathan Kozol, *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1995).
- <sup>154</sup>Browne, "Reading, Rhetoric" 237.
- <sup>155</sup>Dan Balz, "In Their Grief, More Citizen Than Subject," *The Washington Post*, 8 Sept. 1997, A14.
- <sup>156</sup>Christine Spolar, "At the Palace Gates, Flowers and Tears—And Anger at the Press," *The Washington Post*, 1 Sept. 1997, A27
- <sup>157</sup>Balz, "In Their Grief" A14.
- <sup>158</sup>Dan Balz and Christine Spolar, "London Still Overwhelmed With Grief," *The Washington Post*, 8 Sept. 1997, A14.
- <sup>159</sup>Leah R. Vande Berg, "Living Room Pilgrimages: Television's Cyclical Commemoration of the Assassination Anniversary of John F. Kennedy," *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995): 47.
- <sup>160</sup>Laurence Lerner, *Angels and Absences: Child Deaths in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1997) 1.
- <sup>161</sup>Lerner 1.
- <sup>162</sup>Lerner 2–8.
- <sup>163</sup>A.N. Wilson, "The Heart of the Grieving," *Time*, 15 Sept. 1997: 42.
- <sup>164</sup>Howard Chua-Eoan, Steve Wulf, Jeffrey Klugar, Christopher Redman, and David Van Biema, "Death of a Princess," *Time*, 8 Sept. 1997: 37.
- <sup>165</sup>Balz, "In Their Grief" A14.
- <sup>166</sup>Eugene Robinson, "The Eerie Hush of Sorrow," *The Washington Post*, 3 Sept. 1997: A24.
- <sup>167</sup>Robinson, "The Eerie Hush" A24.
- <sup>168</sup>*Diana, 1961–1997* (London: Dennis Oneshots Export Ltd., 1997) n.p.
- <sup>169</sup>Robinson, "The Eerie Hush" A24.
- <sup>170</sup>Erhenhaus 46, 50.
- <sup>171</sup>Richard Lacayo, "Who Shares the Blame?" *Time*, 15 Sept. 1997: 52.
- <sup>172</sup>Jerry Adler, "How Kids Mourn," *Newsweek*, 22 Sept. 1997: 58.
- <sup>173</sup>Paul Gray, "Farewell Diana," *Time*, 15 Sept. 1997: 38.
- <sup>174</sup>*Diana, 1961–1997* n.p.
- <sup>175</sup>Gray 40.
- <sup>176</sup>CNN, 4 Sept. 1997.
- <sup>177</sup>Hugh Mulligan, "Amid the Flowers and Tears, Some Admit to a 'Backlash Against Bathos,'" *The Roanoke Times*, 5 Sept. 1997, A12.
- <sup>178</sup>Andrew Morton, "Her True Face," *Newsweek*, 15 Sept. 1997: 64.
- <sup>179</sup>Spolar A27.
- <sup>180</sup>Donovan J. Ochs, *Consolatory Rhetoric: Grief, Symbol, and Ritual in the Greco-Roman Era* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1993) 101.
- <sup>181</sup>Gray 39.

