Death and its Dominions:

Graves, Gravestones, and Grieving in Nineteenth-Century America

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"AND DEATH," AS Dylan Thomas famously wrote, "shall have no dominion," except, it seems, in the case of the American historical profession, which has recently developed a quite serious and sustained fixation on the contents of and the commemorative practices surrounding the many cemeteries of the American Civil War era.

With the exception of *From Slate to Marble: Gravestone Carving Traditions in Eastern Massachusetts, 1770-1870* (2006), James Blachowicz's study of gravestone carving traditions in Massachusetts, which really addresses a tangential historiography, the books here - and these constitute only the most recent examples of an upward trend in what one might term Civil War mortality studies to appear in the last few years - suggest that, finally, the social history of America's most destructive conflict might be fully underway, albeit prompted by different historiographical forces. Drew Gilpin Faust's *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (2008), and Caroline E. Janney's *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (2008), derive, in part at least, from a broader interest in Civil War memory studies, or rather in selective memory studies, since both are focused on drawing to the fore hitherto neglected aspects of the conflict as these relate to death, to the memorialisation of the dead, and to gender. Faust also, but Mark Schantz to a greater degree in *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (2008), speaks to the renewed interest in the broader

cultural and religious context of the war; whilst Blachowicz, a Professor of Philosophy, provides a crucial reminder that *media vita in morte sumus*, a reminder expressed in the form of ostensibly mute slate and marble via gravestone carving traditions that both symbolised and were themselves part of the validation of a New England lineage stretching back to colonial times. The dead, as all four studies remind us, are with us always, but their message for the living has changed over time; compared to the present day, certainly, the dead occupied a more central and significant position in American communal life and its physical expression even before death in the Civil War ascribed new political, indeed national connotations to the American way of death in the nineteenth century.

The wider literature on the dead of war is dominated, of course, by another conflict entirely: the First World War. Drew Gilpin Faust's work, in particular, reveals the influence of the European responses to the 'war to end all wars,' as analysed by, among others, Samuel Hynes (*A War Imagined*, 1990), Paul Fussell (*The Great War and Modern Memory*, 1975), Jay Winter (*Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 1995) and, of course, Modris Eksteins (*Rites of Spring*, 1989). Faust does not engage directly with this literature (only Winter and Fussell receive a passing mention in her work, and only the latter is accorded an actual citation) but she nevertheless seems to be striving to position the response to death in the American Civil War within the debate on modernity as that has been expounded in relation to the First World War. "Sentimentality and irony," she proposes, "grew side by side in Americans' war-born consciousness." To track this process, Faust extracts from what is a substantial European literature on death and dying in the early modern era the concept of the 'Good Death' and seeks to apply this to antebellum Americans. The response to death before the Civil War was, she argues, informed by the "tradition of *ars moriendi*," or the art of dying, one that was disseminated in antebellum culture both via "reprints of earlier texts and through more contemporary

considerations of the Good Death," including religious sermons and popular literature by Charles Dickens and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Antebellum Americans were, of course, more familiar with, and physically proximate to, death, dying, and the dead than our modern medicalized culture accommodates. Both Faust and Mark Schantz begin their explorations of the subject by highlighting just how brief American lives could be in the decades before the Civil War, although their focus is on disease and does not, oddly perhaps for works that are concerned with the violence of war, include the relatively high mortality rates from violence - mechanical or human - in this period. With an average life-expectancy of just over four decades, an average arrived at partly due to the high infant mortality rates of the era (which ran at ten times that of the developed world today), the antebellum grip on life could be tenuous even if the body in question managed not to succumb to the period outbreaks of cholera, Yellow Fever or decline gradually into an early grave from the effects of consumption (tuberculosis). Schantz cites the case of Philadelphia between 1834 and 1837, where stillbirths alone "ranked among the top three causes of death," sometimes briefly overtaken by scarlet fever and always trumped by consumption. A similar pattern was identified some years ago now by Robert Wells, in his study of Schenectady (*Facing the King of Terrors*, 2000) that revealed the devastating toll tuberculosis took on antebellum Americans, and their shifting personal and communal responses to the 'King of Terrors' over a two-hundred year period that included the Civil War era. However, where Wells trod cautiously through the two decades surrounding the war in the search for longer-term cultural shifts surrounding the treatment of death, Schantz adopts a broader approach to a subject, indeed *the* subject that, he argues, constituted an American obsession: "If we can say one thing about death in the early nineteenth century," he suggests, "we might argue that it emerges not simply as *a* peripheral topic of

historical investigation but as *the* major story."

Schantz delves into the myriad of sources that reflect America's reactions to death in this period, including "crime novels, poetry, diaries, newspapers, public health reports, slave narratives, sermons, lithographs, paintings, speeches, and photographs," selecting from these a representative sample through which to access the world-view of the early republic and antebellum eras toward death and, by extrapolation, the cultural context within which so many Americans approached the war that broke out in 1861 and from which at least 620,000 of them never returned. "Answers to the question of why so many men perished in the war have typically been mapped on terrain occupied by military and political historians," Schantz observes, but these have tended to downplay the significance of the "wider cultural matrix in which the war was fought." What Schantz proposes is that this matrix "made it easier to kill and be killed," in effect it "facilitated the carnage of war."

In positing this premise, Schantz is challenging, or at least modifying, the current "reigning paradigm" of the war, one that he sees as "fundamentally optimistic' in its narrative thrust of heroism, nationalism, and, ultimately, emancipation. Certainly many historians do tend to dwell on the war's emancipatory outcome as justification for a scale of slaughter that was, by American standards of the time at least, quite staggering, and only accepted because, Schantz argues, America before the Civil War was a "death-embracing culture," and as such, fundamentally alien even to modern viewers of *Six Feet Under*.

There is no doubt that some aspects of American cultural reactions to death would strike the modern reader as bizarre and perhaps even slightly macabre. Nineteenth-century philosopher and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, the 'sage of Concord,' was so distressed by his wife's early death that he felt prompted to open her tomb a year later, possibly to stare death in the face the

better to come to terms with it or, perhaps, simply to check that no medical student had acquired the corpse in the meantime. His aunt, however, Mary Moody Emerson, went further; she dwelt on the subject of death to such an extent that her normal attire was a shroud, worn in preparation of the life to come, and whose bed, with even greater forethought, was shaped like a coffin. Although such behaviour fell at the extreme end of the spectrum, historians such as David Stannard (*The Puritan Way of Death*, 1977) have nevertheless criticised the early-mid-nineteenth century American approach to death as "characterized by self-indulgence, sentimentalization, and ostentation."

Certainly there was no getting away from death in this period, not just in the usual practical sense but in the broader cultural one, and nowhere was this more clearly expressed than in the rural, or Park Cemetery Movement that first took shape in America in the Grove Street Cemetery in New Haven in 1796 but which was more famously encapsulated in the later (1831) Mount Auburn Cemetery in Boston, and in Philadelphia's Laurel Hill (1836) and Brooklyn's Greenwood (1838), among others. It is Mount Auburn that Schantz focuses on, in particular its dedication by U.S. Supreme Court Justice and law professor, Joseph Story, whose address positioned the cemetery at the heart of American tradition, a pastoral retreat for the living as much as a rural repository for the dead.

Although, suitably armed with guidebooks, Americans were encouraged to visit these new 'Gardens of Graves,' perhaps deriving some 'melancholy pleasure' from the contemplation of the life hereafter whilst simultaneously developing their patriotic perspective on what it meant to be an American, it is always difficult to assess quite what message visitors to these cemeteries took away with them. Schantz would have it that the script for the Civil War to come was written on the marble headstones and in the implicit invocation of the classical tradition merged with

America's own revolutionary past that the rural cemetery provided, but there is surely a difference between dying in one's country and dying for one's country. The Civil War, of course, by its very nature made this distinction less of an issue in some respects, but even as "repositories for masculine accomplishment" the rural cemeteries need not necessarily have predisposed Americans to lay down their lives in that conflict, assured though they may have been that their "heroic achievements would be prized forever by posterity" – assuming, of course, that the posterity in question had the wherewithal to purchase a lot in a rural cemetery. Noting that the contemporaneous example of Père Lachaise in Paris, with which Americans were familiar, was fast being filled with memorials to the Napoleonic War, Schantz nevertheless avoids the significance of the cult of Napoleon that was so dominant in America at that time. Instead he proposes that it was to Pericles's famous funeral oration for the Athenian dead or Homer's *Iliad* that Civil War soldiers turned for precepts on how to fight, and how to die; through such examples, in effect, they refined their version of the 'Good Death' and applied it in a martial context.

Schantz's explanation of what the 'Good Death' might have meant to Civil War soldiers is itself derived from, although it extends beyond Faust's use of the concept. Essentially, to die a 'Good Death' was to die in the bosom of one's family, ideally in old age, affairs in order, surrounded by family who were ready to receive one's last earthly utterance through which the life just ending could be defined, and the state of the soul departing assessed. Kin were essential to this aspect of death's ritual, as they were there to bear witness to the termination of an individual narrative and verify the soul's readiness to enter the 'heavenly country' of Christian tradition. In cultural terms, the paradigmatic 'Good Death' that both Schantz and Faust highlight was that of Little Eva in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* whose demise, Schantz argues, "gave popular

expression to the blessed quality of the passage to heaven." As Faust points out, this kind of representation of the 'Good Death' revealed how far its elements had become "separated from their explicitly theological roots and had become as much a part of respectable middle-class behaviour and expectation in North and South as they were the product or emblem of any particular religious affiliation."

This may have been so, but there are dangers inherent in extracting a theological precept from its original context and arguing that, in effect, a watered-down version permeated a subsequent age. If, as Schantz persuasively argues, the modern world struggles to comprehend the "death-embracing" culture of nineteenth-century America, how much further were antebellum Americans from the fourteenth and fifteenth century social, cultural and theological beliefs that devised the notion of and necessity for instruction in the art of 'holy dying,' for the 'Good Death' in the first place?

Schantz, at times perhaps too confidently, discusses antebellum attitudes toward the afterlife - the "heavenly country" of the title - without acknowledging the huge significance of eschatological debate in this period, on both sides of the Atlantic. Contemplation of the 'four last things' - death, judgment, heaven and hell - informed so much of antebellum culture, and Faust draws this aspect out rather more clearly; but both works, by avoiding, to a great extent, the larger literature on the theological context of the 'Victorian cult of death' posit a kind of American eschatological exceptionalism which, given the transatlantic nature of, for example, the consolation literature consumed by Americans in this period, seems unsustainable. The *ars moriendi* was never, of course, a static set of precepts, and certainly it altered over time to stress the importance of the 'Good Life' as preparation for the 'Good Death.' This required the kind of constant *memento mori* that aspects of nineteenth century culture certainly seemed to inculcate. Schantz discusses, among other

examples, the pamphlet *Emblems of Mortality* (1846), based on the 'dance of death' and revealing the King of Terrors in his many guises, trickster, confidence man and musician, and a selection of poetry that appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* between the 1840s and the outbreak of the Civil War. If the former, with its skeletal representations of death removing rich and poor alike from their earthly existence was a straightforward *memento mori* in many respects and, with death as the great equalizer, a potent message for a republican age, the "vast literature of death" in poetic form presented a more nuanced and multi-faceted interpretation not just of death but of what happened next.

"As the rural cemeteries instantiated a didactic landscape of memory," Schantz observes, "the poetry of death provided an imaginative landscape in which Americans could learn the lessons of life and death." Above all, such poetry presented heaven as a reality, a final destination for one's loved ones and, ultimately, oneself that "salved the pain of earthly separation for its readers." On the one hand, then, such poetry did function as a *memento mori*; it dwelt, sometimes obsessively, on the corpse, took its readers "directly to the bedsides of the dying and the dead," and "fearlessly confronted the reality and inevitability of life's cessation while simultaneously holding out the promise of eternal life." At the same time, such poetry itself revealed the shift that had taken place in the *ars moriendi* tradition, one identified by Philippe Ariès in his seminal 1977 study, *The Hour of Our Death*: the shift from a focus on "one's own death" (*la mort de soi*) to a concern with "thy death" (*la mort de toi*), the death of others. Poetry, however, at least not the poetry that appeared in print, was not the only evidence of this transition.

The gravestones of the era tell a similar story, as James Blachowicz shows in *From Slate to Marble*. Whilst Schantz and Faust only circle the graveyard (as historians they do prefer their evidence to be written down, and preferably on paper), Blachowicz, by contrast, focuses entirely on what the stones

themselves have to tell us about death in America between 1770 and 1870. His study is really devoted to gravestone carving as a craft tradition, to the men who maintained that tradition and to its changing imperatives over time, yet his evidence, and the evidence of the hundreds of gravestones he has photographed and catalogued, reinforces Faust and Schantz's conclusions as well as those of earlier scholars regarding the shift in attitudes toward death, and shows how this found physical expression on the graves of the early republic and antebellum period.

In what is an amazingly researched, crafted and quite beautifully presented work simply crammed with visual evidence and accompanied by a CD-Rom incorporating additional images and a searchable databases for the use (one imagines) of genealogists, Blachowicz regards graveyards as, in effect, 'outdoor museums' for an underappreciated aspect of the American craft tradition. Yet in fact, as anyone who has explored cemeteries knows, they are social documents in their own right, ones through which can be traced the development of a community, its social structures, its shifting concerns – whether these be the unwelcome attention of body-snatchers or the state of the departed soul. Blachowicz's focus is not on the rural cemetery, which served a different purpose, but on individual burial grounds in Plymouth, Kingston, Cape Cod, Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. One of the most striking aspects he highlights of death in the early republic was the uniformity of its representation: in a pre-industrial age, where uniformity was of no practical or commercial value, the symbolism of death was nevertheless remarkably consistent and constant, suggesting a shared understanding of death, it rituals, and its representation.

Over time, however, this symbolism changed, with the more overt *memento mori* of the skull, the hourglass, even the skeletal figure of death itself being replaced by cherubs, usually winged, or naïve portraits of the departed, which in turn gave way to what became the dominant death motif, the willow and urn, or

tomb, frequently, though not invariably, with a female figure leaning on it. Where the earliest images were, Blachowicz notes, "designed to remind passersby of their own mortality as well as the judgment and possible punishment to come," over time the "fear of retribution and sense of sinfulness" became "an assurance of salvation and reward." The intermediate stage of the winged cherub pointed to the soul's ascension to another world, but the willow and urn were "symbolic of what is left behind." This "secularization of religious consciousness," ultimately expressed in the willow and urn motif, replaced the injunction 'Remember Death' to the plea 'Remember Me.'

By the period of the Civil War, in effect, the 'Good Death,' certainly as commemorated beyond the rural cemetery, was expressed in memorials and monuments to the departed; cemeteries, the 'dormitories of the dead' (the etymological root of cemetery being a 'sleeping place' or dormitory) replaced burial grounds, and the afterlife itself "more and more resembled a secular Elysium than a Christian heaven entered after a final accounting." This message was reinforced in the rural cemeteries, which expressly forbade the use of black slate markers with their too obvious overtones of corruption and death; a new "psychological attachment to the whiteness of marble" signified that the idea of judgment had "ceded more and more to a kind of Unitarian natural theology of which the rural cemetery was itself a symbol." In short, whether perusing the pages of the *Southern Literary Messenger* or promenading through a cemetery, antebellum Americans could take comfort from the fact that death had been, in Blachowicz's word, "defanged,' just at the point when death was about to impact on their world in ways they could not have imagined.

The Civil War necessarily upset the death dynamic of the antebellum era as this is detailed by Schantz and Faust's concept of the 'Good Death,' since the soldier tended to die far from home; not necessarily on the battlefield since the weaponry of

the period more usually provided only the entry point for disease, rather than the exit point of life, but frequently in the company of strangers. "One of the Civil War's greatest horrors," Faust stresses, was that by killing soldiers, by "suddenly, obliterating them on the battlefield and depriving them of the chance for the life-defining deathbed experience," all traces of the 'Good Death' came to be removed from their demise. The sadness at losing loved ones far from home was not something Americans could easily come to terms with. Indeed, one of the grave-markers in Blachowicz's study, commemorating the death of Augustus Eldridge of the 26th Massachusetts in 1864, reveals this clearly. Eldridge's gravestone, indeed, conveys a great deal of information, including the cause of death - typhoid fever - and the patriotic declaration "I die for my country" beneath a representational carving of the stars and stripes. However, the bulk of the stone is given over to a verse which laments Eldridge's death "far away from the home where his loved ones dwell" and alone "where no mother's tears on his pillow fall …. No brother was near to clasp his hand," the second verse continues, "No sister his eyes to close/But far far away in a stranger's land/He sank to his last repose."

Augustus Eldridge's family were, at least, able to draw some comfort - one hopes - from knowing what had happened to their son; with some fifty percent of the Civil War dead unaccounted for, a very great many families were denied that knowledge. How Americans coped with this kind of loss is one of Faust's main concerns. When it comes to the war itself, Schantz sets the stage but Faust gets much more involved with the grim scenery, with the practical as well as the emotional responses to death on a scale never before seen in America. This is not death as coyly conveyed in the pages of the *Southern Literary Messenger*; this is slaughter as graphically portrayed by Ambrose Bierce. The structure of the work encompasses all aspects of death in the war, from the individual death of the soldier to the responses of the home communities: "Dying;

Killing; Burying; Naming; Realizing; Believing and Doubting; Accounting; Numbering; and Surviving," comprise Faust's divisions, which extend beyond the death of the body to consider the many ways in which the war changed America, and how battlefront and home front communicated in a desperate attempt to approximate, to some degree, the 'Good Death' of the antebellum period.

Of course they could not do so; not only was the deathbed location impossible, but one of the main tenets of the Victorian-era death ritual was its discretion, and the avoidance of discussing death in the presence of the dying – hardly an option in a war situation with corpses, and parts of corpses, strewn around on the field and outside the medical tents. Nevertheless, people tried. In letters home from soldiers themselves, and in those from the strangers who nursed them, families were frequently (although it must be said not always) offered some degree of comfort, some sense that although death had not taken place at home, nevertheless it had been met and treated with dignity. "The notion of the Good Death, so often embodied in the condolence letter," Faust proposes, "represented an initial collaboration between the dying and the living in managing death's terrors."

Yet whether discussing the great efforts expended to identify the dead, or the development of embalming as a procedure for ensuring that some families could retrieve a body from the battlefield, or tracing the emotional impact that killing had on the soldier, it is death's terrors that Faust draws out. If dying was an art, Faust suggests, the Civil War made it into modern art, with the difference that the dying really was something anyone could do. This is very far from Schantz's "death-embracing" culture in several crucial respects. Civil War soldiers may have approached the conflict with thoughts of Homer running through their heads, they may have been thereby predisposed to attempt heroics on a grand, possibly Greek, scale, they may been

culturally conditioned to die; but one thing that the volunteer soldiers of the Civil War armies were not conditioned to do was to kill. Their solution, according to Faust, represented a form of death in itself: as human "life diminished sharply in value," she argues, "the living risked becoming as dehumanized as the dead," and the response from the troops was "to think of themselves not as men but as machines - without moral compass or responsibility."

This assessment clashes somewhat with the evidence concerning the lengths gone to by soldiers to assuage the fears of non-combatants at home, and indeed their own reaction to death. Even as they acknowledged that it was not like death 'at home,' and even as they described its horrors (and Civil War troops could be quite shockingly graphic in the information they sent home), the fact is, death, even by the war's final battles, as the slaughter in the Wilderness and at Petersburg took the war onto a new plane of destruction that did, in many respects, resemble the First World War – even then, death still had the power to shock them into comment. Even if the comment in question might be one of bravado, death no longer had the power to shock them. The real evidence of dehumanization, of course, would not be something the historian could easily use; it would, in fact, be no evidence at all.

However, in relation to the *ars moriendi* tradition, which is so central to Faust's argument even if its full lineaments remain underdeveloped, as far as soldiers were concerned, the message always had been, and possibly remained even in the nineteenth century, rather more ambiguous. As Ariès noted, societies "founded on chivalric and military ideals" – and we might extend that to the Confederacy in its imaginative form at least – had no difficulty in incorporating the death of the warrior in ritual form, even if that ritual took place far from home. On the other hand, there was a tendency in the thirteenth century to set the death of the soldier apart from the 'Good Death' unless the

soldier in question fell in a just war, and traces of this perspective appear again in the Civil War. For African American troops, according to Schantz, the 'Good Death' was "the death experienced by free men battling to end evil in the world," as opposed to the 'Bad Death' which was "the death experienced under the crushing weight of slavery.' This tension between the 'good' and 'bad' death extended to the 'good' (Union) and 'bad' (Confederate) warrior and complicates, but also informs, the reactions to death in the Civil War, the establishment of national cemeteries for the Union dead, the exclusion of the Confederate 'traitor' from national symbols of grief and glorification. The result, as both Faust and Janney's work shows, was a separate Confederate commemorative tradition.

As an historian of the South, and the author of a study of Confederate nationalism, Faust is perhaps unsurprisingly comfortable with the memorial activities of the South but consequently rather dismissive, at times, of the war's impact on the North where, she notes, mourning was "less universal." This becomes evident when she discusses what she sees as one of the most significant shifts that the Civil War brought to the 'Good Death,' namely that "death was no longer encountered individually" and "its actuality became the most widely shared of the war's experiences." For "those Americans who lived in and through the Civil War," she stresses, "the texture of the experience, its warp and woof, was the presence of death." This is, of course, a statement capable of being read in more than one way, and Faust does seem to mean by "lived through" more than simply "survived." One thinks here of Walt Whitman, whose antebellum fascination with death burst into full bloom in the war and who, when asked in 1888 if he ever looked back to his Civil War days' replied: "I never left them."

For the Confederacy, the war was perpetuated through mourning; in the new rituals surrounding the fallen soldier a new "impersonal connection with the dead" was established, "one

independent of any direct ties of kin or friendship." This new ritual was expressed in part through the funeral sermons for the fallen; more "considered, more polished than condolence letters written from the front, the funeral sermon was intended for distribution to a wider audience than simply next of kin," and they reinforced the impersonal, yet nevertheless strong emotive ties between the dead and the living which Faust argues, "was a critical evolution in the understanding of war's carnage." Through these new public rituals "the fallen were being transformed into an imagined community for the Confederacy, becoming a collective in which a name or identity was no longer necessary …. These soldiers could no longer contribute to the South's military effort," she observes, "but they would serve other important political and cultural purposes in providing meaning for the war and its costs." The Confederate dead represented what she terms a "shadow nation of sacrificed lives," and it was one that would, indeed, cast a significant shadow over the post-war South.

When it comes to the commemoration of the Confederate dead, most people think first of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, but this is a fallacy that Caroline Janney's study seeks, and succeeds, in refuting. Before the UDC ever came into existence, Ladies Memorial Associations (LMAS) across the South organized themselves in support of the Confederate soldier, the Confederate dead, and the Confederate nation. Her particular focus is on the LMAS of Virginia, specifically those in the cities of Winchester, Fredericksburg, Petersburg, Lynchburg, and Richmond "because of the diversity of wartime and postwar experiences they offer"; in Richmond alone, three LMAS emerged the year after the war ended. Their activities, which centred on although were not solely devoted to commemoration of the dead, represented mourning with a political and gendered purpose.

Women had always, of course, been central to Victorian

mourning ritual before the war, but the sheer number of deaths, and subsequent funerals during the war necessitated an alteration of response: unable to maintain antebellum mourning rituals, Confederate women did more than set aside traditional mourning dress. Challenging the conclusions of historians who propose that Confederate women moved back to the domestic sphere as soon as the war ended, Janney reveals a story of politically-motivated activity on the part of white southern women that did not cease, but grew in significance in the period of Reconstruction, albeit activity motivated by what she describes as the "astronomical number of casualties" that the war produced. As death moved out of the private, domestic sphere and into the public arena, Confederate women, in effect, followed the direction of the hearse; they, too, moved beyond the private sphere, set aside the black crepe veils, which in any case they could hardly acquire anymore, and adopted a new and public role within the post-war South.

This new and expanded female mourning enterprise was not, Janney stresses, motivated by sentimentalism, although the women involved were fully capable of using the kind of sentiment associated with death rituals as a weapon to achieve their ends. Most of the leaders of the LMAS did not lose male relatives in the war, either because the men in question did not enlist due to age and/or social position; those that did emerge, if not unscathed, at least remained alive. The political was not, then, inspired by the directly personal as far as mourning the dead was concerned; rather, Janney's findings reinforce Faust's argument concerning the new impersonal relationship with the dead that lay at the heart of the 'shadow nation' of the post-war South. Devoted to repatriating the remains of Confederate soldiers, raising the money for memorials, tidying and re-mounding Confederate graves, and organizing Memorial Day activities, the LMAS ensured that the Confederate dead would be interred not just in southern soil, but at the heart of the white South's memory of the Civil War. So far from serving as

supports for the defeated survivors, Janney stresses that the women of LMAS "saw themselves as patriots performing vital civic duties for their communities and the larger South."

Inevitably, perhaps, when it came to the emotive subject of the Confederate dead a clash with the male veterans of the "late unpleasantness" was inevitable, specifically former Confederate General Jubal Early, who had his own views on how the Lost Cause should develop. The gender aspect of Janney's argument is subtle, and again reinforces much of what Schantz and Faust propose about the cultural conditioning that informed the reactions to dying and to the dead. "Death before dishonor," Janney notes, was a "frequent utterance among soldiers (of both sides)," but what this resulted in, at its extreme, was that by April 1865, "death appeared to be the most honorable status for Confederate soldiers." Certainly, through the efforts of the LMAS, the South's landscape became itself a shrine, almost an extended rural cemetery in its function as, to use Schantz's phrase, a "didactic landscape of memory." It promised no resurrection of the dead, yet it did harbour the hope that the cause for which they died might yet survive. Echoing the sentiment on many an antebellum tombstone, one southern author, Sallie Brock Putnam, who in 1867 published her reminiscences of *Richmond during the War*, concluded the volume by looking forward to a future when the white South might rise again: "over every desolate hill and valley, on every wasted homestead, upon every ruined hearthstone," she intoned, "is written as with an angel's pen, in letters of fire, the magic word RESURGAM!"

The post-war white South, certainly as Faust and Janney describe it, perhaps more closely approximated a 'death-embracing' culture than America as a whole in the Civil War era, but this was something that emerged from the carnage of war, not a simply carry-over from antebellum death rituals. The argument that the high infant mortality rates of the antebellum

era predisposed Americans to an acceptance of the parent burying the child does not translate into a willingness to contemplate the death of sons in battle; indeed, given the high infant mortality rates of the period, the survival of any child into his late teens and early twenties may have made such life even more precious, its loss even more devastating. It is, indeed, perhaps not surprising that it was those women who had not suffered personal loss who retained enough emotional strength to found the South's LMAS.

If the "imagined national community" of the Confederacy was firmly located in the local graveyard, that of the Union found expression in the new national cemeteries, such as Gettysburg and Antietam, that emerged from the Civil War. They carried faint echoes of the rural cemetery of the antebellum years, but were more ambitious in conception; they represented the first extended federal space to be constructed on the American landscape, and it was space devoted to the dead. This has, clearly, informed many Americans' reactions not just to the Civil War, but to the dead of war more generally. As these four works show, interest in the subject of death and its rituals in America's past remains high, and the attempt both to comprehend the past and assign meaning to it is ongoing. As far as the Civil War is concerned, although both Schantz and Faust do play a little fast and loose with the *ars moriendi* tradition, and perhaps over-simplify the 'Good Death' ideal, in a crucial sense their work represents part of the tradition itself. Many Civil War soldiers experienced nothing like the 'Good Death,' but that does not mean no one bore witness to their passing, nor assessed the narrative of their life. In some respects, indeed, the historian has become part of the *hors mori* ritual, the witness to a way of life and an understanding of death that the modern world can barely glimpse, yet that informs so much of our current ritual response to, and sometimes denial of "the last great necessity."