

◆ Introduction

The Politics of Remembrance

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Voto a Dios que me espanta esta grandeza
y que diera un doblón por describilla . . .

(I swear to God such grandeur leaves me stunned.
I'd pay good money to describe it well . . .)

—Miguel de Cervantes
“Al túmulo del Rey Felipe II en Sevilla”
(Trans. Alix Ingber)

Societies commemorate certain individuals and erase the memory of others.¹ In Spain, no one driving northwest out of Madrid can miss the enormous white memorial cross in the mountains. The Valle de los Caídos (Valley of the Fallen) monumentalizes the fallen souls who fought for the dictator Francisco Franco and for the leader of Fascist *falangista* political party, José Antonio Primo de Rivera. Anyone growing up in Spain from the 1940s through the 1980s, would have been acutely aware of who was officially remembered and who was not. Memorial plaques inscribed with Rivera's name were posted on churches throughout Spain. Most who saw the commemorated names knew people who had not been officially remembered, such as the prisoners who had worked on the construction of the Valle de los Caídos and whose remains lay buried in unmarked graves.

Today, most of the plaques have been removed from the churches, but the visibility and materiality of the white cross represents a real issue that can only be spoken about in terms of invisibility and immateriality; ghosts still haunt a Spanish society that has not recovered from the trauma induced by Franco's politics of remembrance. The appearance of similar ghosts that haunt the national imaginary in the American Spanish-speaking world, join and confound the Spanish case. In those countries where former dictator

regimes have ended, debates about historical memory occupy national agendas that often parallel Spain's own. Mexico, however, distinguished itself from the Spanish case by opening the National Museum of Death in Aguascalientes in 2007, an act that monumentalizes the notion of death as part of its unique national memory.

As a mirror for these recent events, this volume of *Hispanic Issues On Line* examines death and afterlife in the early modern Hispanic period. The geographical scope of the following volume includes Spain, America, and North Africa, and it is organized in a dialectical fashion to underline that contradictory mentalities about death do not exist in a vacuum of polar opposition, but in confluence and in flux.² Working through death and afterlife in the early modern Hispanic world is also a working through mourning in contemporary Spain and the Spanish-speaking world. Moreover, the study of death and afterlife has taken on special urgency today, not just as a means of moving beyond past political ideologies, but because of the way that technology is radically altering the assessment of death and how societies remember.

The essays in this collection look to the physical mechanisms linking the deceased to tangible political and societal realities in the Hispanic world in the early modern period. For instance, in the sixteenth-century catafalque in Seville dedicated to Charles I, America is represented as a strange, indescribable creature. One sixteenth-century historian describes the catafalque as having allegorical figures that represented different parts of Charles' kingdom. Spain is a serious matron, Italy is a beautiful damsel, Germany is an eagle crowned with an imperial crown, and America is a "un disforme monstruo marino, sin tener perfección para recibir cierto nombre" (qtd. in Lleó Cañal 15) (deformed sea monster that is incomplete and impossible to name). Scholars have studied the catafalque in Seville that is dedicated to Charles I. They have been even more interested in the later catafalque, also in Seville that is dedicated to Philip II, especially as it is described in Cervantes' famous poem (for example, see Forcione; Gaylord; Lezra; and Martin). Very few, however, have examined the nature of the funerary monument to the monarch in vice regal New Spain.

Produced in New Spain, the imperial catafalque to Charles does not depict America as an allegorical monster. Rather, it reflects an integration and equation of different cultural systems through carefully formulated iconographic juxtapositioning. In chapter one, Elizabeth Olton describes the state management of death through the presentation of the catafalque in Mexico City dedicated to Charles. The construction of this ephemeral monument in Mexico City, only 38 years after the conquest, carried with it specific ideological purposes; it commemorated the dead emperor whose body is remembered and celebrated through ongoing ritual. Like all catafalques, this one combines elements from classical Rome. However, in contrast to catafalques to Charles in Spain, Mexico's monument

incorporated American aspects, such as the depiction of *tezontle* stone instead of marble. Olton's physical description of the monument is more than historical recreation; the description of the monument reveals the paradox of how an example of hybrid Roman-American architecture dedicated to the dead Charles transmitted a univocal, powerful message of a single, unified Spanish empire.

A plethora of studies focuses exclusively on the Iberian Peninsula in assessing early modern Hispanic mentalities of death. In contrast, in chapter two Carolyn Dean, like Olton, studies death and afterlife in the Americas. Here, Dean reveals an instance in which the univocality of the state-sanctioned monument to the dead in the Spanish empire is undermined. While Olton shows how hybridity in a mortuary monument aligns itself with the Spanish institutional celebration of the imperial body, Dean describes another instance of hybridity (the coeval existence of Spanish and Inka funerary rites) that survives surreptitiously, frustrating the Spanish institutional celebration of the imperial body.

Dean underlines concepts involving death in the Inka culture—and those governing “life”—which were markedly different than Spanish concepts. According to the indigene belief system, the *samay*, or animating breath that gives things life, did not disappear with the mortal death of the body. For this reason, the Inka preserved human corpses, lived side-by-side with them, and even dressed and conversed with them. Aside from occupying corpses, the *samay* was embodied in great monolithic stones. Monuments to an ancient Inka ruler could take the shape—his being was incorporated—in a great rock. The incorporation could also take shape in a portrait. Dean illustrates how the Inka notion of embodiment, that is, the continued persistence of the *samay* in other shapes, continued within the confines of the Spanish territory, unnoticed and uncontrolled by authorities. Fault lines form in the single imperial commemorative voice to the dead, because monuments to the dead take shape in unexpected and subversive places.

While the death of imperial or elite members of society was decidedly cause for public commemoration, even the passing of commoners was noted, most especially when the scope of fatalities was enormous. In the early modern Iberian world, pandemics and disasters abounded. Philip's II physician, Francisco Hernández, was sent to America to observe the natural world and he described a dreadful fatal disease that swept through parts of New Spain in 1576. In “On the Illness in New Spain in the Year 1576, Called Cocoliztli by the Indians,” Francisco Hernández writes: “The fevers were contagious, burning, and continuous, entirely pestilential, and in a great many cases, lethal. The tongue dried out and turned black. Intense thirst . . . their eyes, and the whole body, yellow. . . . Almost nobody who suffered a relapse could be saved” (qtd. in Varey 83). How were deaths and the souls of dying indigenous people understood by the Spaniards? In

chapter three, Michael Schreffler analyzes a natural disaster, the great earthquake of Cuzco in 1650, in order to understand Spanish mentalities about the valuation of death and God's hand in causing it. Following the methodology of this collection that studies images and texts to enrich and deepen early modern Hispanic mentalities about death, Schreffler studies key literary and pictorial representations of the Cuzco earthquake. The discrepancies between the number of people acknowledged as dead by Spanish authorities, and the actual body count, are illustrative of colonial class and caste designations. Schreffler shows how a record of the dead connects to the seventeenth-century construction of "personhood," and how it is reflected in the understanding of urban architecture, itself, as a conveyor of the will of God. The arrival of a Final Judgment pervades both writings and visual representations of the earthquake. The earthquake becomes the vehicle through which God eliminates vestiges of idolatry and redeems the righteous. Such millenarianist constructions, well over a century after Spanish colonization, suggest a preoccupation with ongoing, indigenous, cultural practices that were perceived at odds with the dominant Christian model.

The representation of death in Mexico is often unique from the rest of the Spanish-speaking world. Today in New Mexico, stories of Doña Sebastiana (Santa Muerte) are popular in *corridos*, and "La Santa Muerte" has been a favorite patron of drug traffickers. This religious figure, possibly a conflation of the Virgin Mary and the Aztec death goddess *Mictlancihuatl*, assumes the role of Grim Reaper, while, simultaneously, receiving petitions from the lovelorn and those requiring protection. In one of the most emotively powerful essays in the collection, Elisa Mandell studies another crafting of death unique to New Spain: portraits of dead children that preserved the memory of the deceased while pointing to their posthumous apotheosis as *angelitos* (little angels). The author illustrates how the popular cultural strategy of portraiture adapts dominant religious ideology in making a saint of the one who is most near and dear. While the tradition of painting portraits of dead children existed in early modern Spain among the elite, the cultural practice uniquely took root across class lines throughout Mexico.

In chapters five and six, Frédéric Conrod and Lauren Kilroy examine Jesuit epistemology as it maps roads to heaven and hell. In 1767, the Spanish would officially extirpate the Jesuits from their lands, and an assessment of the Jesuits is especially important in describing marginal strains of Counter Reformation thinking about death. Salvation is achieved through the interpretation, or, in Jesuit terms, the *meditation* of a simple image, whether it be Satan or the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In the first of these two essays on the Jesuits, Conrod focuses on an image of Satan. Through a two-dimensional and colorless representation of Satan, the mystic projects him- or herself into a three-dimensional richly vivid Hell in which all the

senses are activated—from feelings of cold and fire, to the sounds of wailing, to the taste and smells of bitterness and sulfur. The overwhelming sensorial experience of these infernal images can then lead to salvation, and the mental projection, itself, is a simulation or virtual universe, inspired by an image devoid of depth.

In chapter six, Kilroy examines the Jesuit icon of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, focusing on its presence in viceregal Mexico. The image of the heart is a sign that summons the medieval logic of analogy since it invokes a series of Christian experiences, including Christ's crucified body, the experience of Corpus Christi, the sacrament of the Eucharist, and the Passion of Christ. Aside from its medieval analogical logic, the image of the heart is, paradoxically, a sign of a modern logic of the body; it is an anatomically-correct heart that can be viewed on its own (separate from the body). In this sense, it can be understood as a way of seeing that surfaced after the mid-sixteenth century rise of anatomical study in which the body was cut and its interior scientifically explored for the first time.

The visual representation of the Sacred Heart in the Jesuit context can be understood as a meta-commentary on Conrod's explanation on the importance of the meditation on a single image, because, as Kilroy notes, José de Páez' painting of the heart is not only the mnemonic heart capped with crown of thorns, but it is also an image of two men contemplating the image. The painting, then, offers a prescriptive representation of the Jesuit founders contemplating the central image of the Sacred Heart. In the Jesuit worldview, one must meditate to come to knowledge of the truth found through a simple figure; that is, language devoid of lyricism, or an image devoid of style and depth, inspires the Jesuit practitioner to find a rich, profound, imagined world. In practical terms, the spiritual director gives the practitioner a short, simple directive, in words or image, which inspires the realization of a rich infernal or heavenly landscape.

Francisco de Quevedo, disillusioned that things no longer *were*, but just appeared to be, writes in the last line of one of his most well-known sonnets: "No hallé cosa que no fuese recuerdo de la muerte" (116) (And I found nothing on which to set my eyes that was not a reminder of death) For Quevedo, an image or word is not a window that illuminates afterlife, but one that only reveals death. In chapter seven, Carmen Pereira-Muro examines the critical comparison that is often made between Quevedo and Hieronymus Bosch. Where Conrod and Kilroy examine afterlife through Jesuit simplicity, Pereira-Muro examines complexity in representations of afterlife. She argues that, despite the long critical connection between Quevedo and Bosch, Bosch's images and Quevedo's words cannot be uncritically joined under the comforting epistemological fantasy of the Same that connects art and literature in a reductionist way. Indeed, in contrast to the Jesuit hermeneutics that takes an image or word as a means to comprehend

afterlife, Francisco de Quevedo shows how the image or the word reveals nothing but an illusory satisfaction of the arrival of meaning.

In this collection, the two essays on Jesuit thinking reveal the importance of images and words in religious constructions of the afterlife, and Pereira-Muro's contribution highlights the role of images and words more generally in those constructions. The last three chapters of the collection turn to the study of certain images and words in showing the success and failure of state-imposed punishments in early modern strategies of the politics of remembering. Very few critics have examined why "dogging" was employed as a punishment in the sixteenth century Americas, but not employed on the Iberian Peninsula. In chapter eight, Lori Boornazian Diel examines a state execution in New Spain illustrated by the image of a man who is "dogged" to death; that is, he is publicly executed through a dog attack, a punishment that follows medieval and Roman precedents, in which an animal serves as a reflection of the punished person and is used to eliminate the bestial elements of society. Like the royal catafalque, the state execution by dogging is a spectacle. The intent, however, is punitive rather than celebratory, and the object of the dogging is construed as a body that the state publicly forgets and seeks to officially erase. Hernán Cortés ordered the execution of a leader from Cholula, a sacred city in central Mexico, to assert his authority. Diel shows how the representation of death by dogging reflects the imposition of order on both ideological and tangible levels. Like the catafalque, Diel's colonial artist offers an image of an imperialized American landscape in which the image of a dogged, indigenous man inscribes a myth of political stability.

In chapter nine, Mariana Zinni examines a representation of state punishment that is openly at variance with imperial order. Zinni offers a fascinating example of a punitive death that is not exemplary for the state, but rather is exemplary for paradoxically undefined, new American coordinates. Lope de Aguirre, a failed Spanish conquistador who made his way down the Amazon River along what would become the Venezuelan coast, was part of a sedition that is, arguably, the first statement of American independence. During his Amazonian expedition, Aguirre orchestrated a reign of terror that included a series of brutal executions, including that of his daughter. Eventually, Spanish colonial authorities responded in kind and, after his hanging, ordered his body drawn and quartered. As noted by Diel in chapter eight, such a public desecration of the captive's body is intended to reaffirm authority, first, by recuperating the space usurped by the traitor and, then, by reestablishing the sovereign coordinates of that space. Thus, in the case of Aguirre, the quartered body sent to the four points of the South American kingdom would have symbolically reinstated geographical order and signaled the civility of an unblemished territory. The traitor's head, the source of sedition, was

supposed to be paraded in a spectacle of capital punishment that returned imperial order.

Yet, the Aguirre case does none of this, and the alignment between body and empire is symbolically interrupted. Spanish authorities did not, and could not, parade his head because, in this instance, they were faced with elements outside of recognizable paradigms. Since Aguirre explores an undefined territory (the uncharted jungles of the Amazon), how can the empire reintegrate that which had never been defined as part of its space? Since the traitor is not a legitimate traitor to state order (he admits his own insanity), how can his quartered body and the head (that houses insanity) serve as an *axis mundi*, that is, a microcosm of a severed and restored Spanish empire? The Aguirre case thus dislocates and signals a constitutive breach in the Spanish imperial project.

In chapter ten, Ana M. Rodríguez' analysis of *A Topography and General History of Algiers* (1612), a work that depicts Spanish captives in North Africa, focuses especially on graphic moments of violence. In part, her location of *A Topography and General History of Algiers* within the popular genre of martyrology suggests the literary construction of Spanish captives as contemporary saints. Rodríguez also shows how the book reflects a propaganda project that sought to maintain Hispanic political interests in North Africa. But Rodríguez is most interested in revealing, as in the case of Zinni, a case of epistemic instability.

In the narrative of *A Topography and General History of Algiers*, the protagonist is not a specific character, but the human body itself. Just as the Spaniards defined the language of who died (that is, they controlled the construction the memory and commemoration), they, too, normalized the torture of bodies. But that civic normalcy collapses; Algiers, like Aguirre's jungle, is an incomprehensible location to the Spanish mind. In contrast to Spain, the tortured bodies in Algiers are not inscribed as exemplary saints. The inclusion of an incomprehensible geographical region as part of the Spanish space destabilizes the meaning and location of the body. That corporal indeterminacy threatens to convert the grand imperial catafalque into an unmarked grave that holds no body or nobody.

The early modern Hispanic world provides a mirror for the study of death in Spain today, but Ana M. Rodriguez' suggested idea of the disappearance of the body signals a broader reason for the study of death. If the location of the body cannot be identified, it can potentially exist anywhere. Pre-modern and indigenous notions do not define the skin as a border that separates the human subject from a greater cosmos. Moreover, contemporary theories of death in the post-human age, such as systems theory, share much in common with pre-modern and indigenous notions of the human: the body increasingly melds to the technological, and the bounds of personhood are increasingly identified beyond the physical contours of the skin. In the Hispanic-Inka world, the body might take shape in a

“natural” living object, the stone. Today, the body might take shape in an “artificial” living object, such as within the fabric of a microchip, cyberspace, or a computer network (Hans Moravec speculates that a human brain equivalent could be encoded in less than one hundred million megabytes [166–67]).

Quevedo describes a bleak landscape, in which, wherever the eye turns, death appears. But the illusory finality of death is no where to be found in the twentieth first century. We build museums to death, since death, itself, has died. The “game over” button has been replaced by one that says “play again,” and a Deathbook culture follows Facebook’s footsteps. The human reappears after the body disappears. A study on death, then, not only works through the mourning that follows the politics of remembrance, but also illuminates contemporary, post-human reflections on the death of death.

Notes

1. We would like to thank the *Early Modern Images and Texts Association* (EMIT) that helped in the organization of a conference hosted by Texas Tech University in 2008, the event that inspired this volume.
2. The geographical focus of Carlos Eire’s *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain* is the metropole, and he examines Catholic theology in Counter-Reformation Spain in shaping mentalities of death and afterlife. Eire focuses on the models of good deaths of two chief social types: the monarch Philip II as the apex of secular authority, and Saint Teresa as the apex of sacred power. He also examines the crafting of death through its expression in last wills and testaments in sixteenth-century Madrid. He shows mentalities about death to be “ever in flux” in a dynamic correlation of polarities.

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