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Crosses, Cloaks, and Globes: Women's Material Culture of Mourning on the Brittany Coast

Maura Coughlin

Rural women living on the coast of Brittany, from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, countered loss of life and social change with mourning rituals and objects that had local and temporal meanings. Three things, the funerary *proëlla* cross, the widow's cloak, and the marriage globe, marked rites of passage and served as repositories of individual memory, whether interred, worn, or displayed in the home. The material significance of these objects is place-specific: they come from a relatively austere culture, a maritime peasant world of thrift, poverty, and self-reliance. In many forms of visual and literary representation, these objects have come to stand as emblematic of the bodily experience of loss in the communities of the Brittany coast. In this essay, from the perspective of an art historian, I investigate representations of these three things within a rural culture of remembrance, longing, and mourning.

The social processes of mourning and memorializing loss in which these objects functioned were quite different from the quick working through of grief that the post-industrial culture of psychotherapy requires. As part of a complex negotiation of memory and personal history, these material objects of mourning can be read as having a sort of activated agency that served to negotiate physical distance within the family and to make gender identities (often locally specific) appear ever more natural and fixed. In my analysis of representations of the cross, cloak, and globe, I depart from Foucauldian-inflected visual studies that view representations of provincial culture as a set of commodities that have been culturally encoded and packaged for urban consumers.¹ There is a somewhat cynical incompleteness to such arguments that does not leave any room for multiple and shifting experiences articulated—in part—through bodily experience. A feminist focus on lived experiences such as maternal desire, melancholic longing, and the process of mourning shifts the discussion of provincial material culture away from

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considering it a purely visual discourse.² Cultural anthropologists such as Tim Dant suggest that we form lived and embodied relationships with material objects; as scholars we must not immediately distrust these experiences as necessarily imposed from outside authority such as church, patriarchy, or the consumer culture of industrial capitalism.³

Part of my project involves historicizing objects of women's popular religious culture in the French *fin de siècle* context of spiritual longing, popular devotional practices, and national religious movements in France. Popular culture associated with the religious revival has long engendered a masculine, modernist recoil from its kitsch popularity and proliferation. The impulse to categorize rural women's relationships with material culture as excessive and fetishistic can be read as a particularly modernist cultural pattern that reinforces binary divisions of class, gender, and national identities while opposing 'high' and 'low' forms of culture.⁴ It is not my project here to interrogate these binary positions but rather to view women's rural material culture and representations of it as assertions of specifically local meanings, activated with agency that enables performances of identity and resistance to the homogenizing forces of modern consumerism and the institutional packaging of experience.

The place in which the *proëlla* cross, the widow's cloak, and the marriage globe all had meaning is western Brittany, in the department of Finistère, a region named for its location (*finis terra*) at the end of the earth. There, the experience of modernity and its institutions were slow in arriving. Life's most significant and transitional events such as birth, death, and mourning all happened in the home in nineteenth-century Brittany, as there were no social structures to manage or mask these phases of life. As historian Thomas Kselman and sociologist Ellen Badone tell us, in most of France, death rituals became increasingly medicalized and institutionalized over the course of the nineteenth century. When death and dying were taken from the domestic sphere to the antiseptic halls of funeral and nursing homes, these phases of life came to be seen as uncomfortable and best overlooked.⁵ But in Finistère, until the 1960s, the culture of death resisted institutional control by the wearing of full mourning costume, the home wake or *veillée*, and the very local ritual, on Quessant, of using a *proëlla* cross to stand in at the wake for a lost body. Just as these objects changed shape, substance, and meaning over time, modern Breton religious culture was in the process of inventing itself anew and finding new visual forms and rituals. According to Lacombe, many new ritual pardons and pilgrimages were invented in Brittany in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶

To focus ever more closely on the local: to the west of mainland Finistère, the remote island of Quessant was truly insular, with minimal outside contact until the early twentieth century. In French literature and visual culture of the *fin de siècle*, this region signifies the furthest frontier of an agricultural country

that had no internal wilderness. On Ouessant, gender difference determined the way in which one experienced space and place, and it dramatically marked all aspects of everyday life. The island's visible population on any given day was almost exclusively female, for able-bodied men were most often at sea: this region produced skillful, nomadic sailors who moved freely across the water, knowing and reading its temperaments, tides, and currents.⁷ To use the words of Luce Irigaray, Ouessant's men of the sea returned to port with "enough dreams from their trip to last until they set sail again ... enough illusions to live a moment on land."⁸ Island women, however, ventured just as far as the intertidal zone to harvest seaweed and shellfish. Their trips off island were made only for religious pilgrimages and the purchase of livestock. On the treeless island of Ouessant, they improvised what they could from seaweed and driftwood. Agriculture, animal "husbandry," and carpentry were women's work: they worked their small plots of fertile land, thatched roofs, harvested fields, mowed and milled grain, raised children, and tended sheep. This was a place sparsely endowed with natural resources where little went to waste, very little surplus was generated for the acquisition of consumer goods and there was no alternative to its culture of thrift.⁹ Local custom, belief, and ritual: the daily space of *habitus*—the social mediation of body and place—was a culture of women.¹⁰ Visiting French journalist Claude Anet writes in 1908 of the hard-working island women: "not one fisherman was willing to help them. The fishermen know nothing of the earth, they asked nothing of it, they leave it to the women."¹¹

Ouessantine women had the right to inherit property, choose their future husbands, and retain their maiden names. Because men's life on the land was so ephemeral, women maintained the family's claim to the material world. To the outside world, its culture seemed quite self-contained, with little imported or exported, yet ever dependent upon the global mobility of its men on the sea and the local fixity of its women to the island. Anet notes that this situation makes for a family structure with a pronounced temporal flux: "They would marry between two trips, make children who are born when the fathers are already far away—in San Francisco or on the Chinese Sea—with each return visit, the family gained a new member."¹² Gender roles on Ouessant, in this admittedly unusual balance, were thrown dramatically off kilter when, from 1898 to 1910, 300 French troops were installed on the island to guard against a feared British invasion of Brest. The disastrous effects of this occupation were the subject of a novel that won the prestigious Goncourt Prize in 1912: André Savignon's *Filles de la Pluie: Scènes de la Vie Ouessantine*.¹³ Enormously disliked by islanders, it painted island life with the broad brush of provincial caricature. The novel took its title from the nickname that the mainland Bretons gave the dour black-clothed Ouessantines on the rare occasions when they appeared on their shore, implying that the island women brought with them the rainy weather of the island.

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15.1 Ploubazlanec. The Cemetery and the Wall of the Disappeared at Sea. Postcard, circa 1910

Crosses

In Finistère, and on Ouessant in particular, social processes of dying and mourning were articulated and mediated by ritual practices and material culture that gave form to experience. Until the 1950s, the home wake, or *veillée*, was highly ritualized. Clean white sheets were nailed up over windows and around the walls of rooms to cover smoke stains and cracks in the plaster; another canopy of linens hung over the death bed, referred to as the *chapelle blanche*.¹⁴ Flowers, whether cut or artificial, surrounded the body that was displayed upon the table or death bed. Because many Breton peasants' houses had but one room, this practice altered the meaning of space from the domestic to the sacred and called attention to its ritual transformation. After the body was bathed and readied for display, visits began in which friends, family, and neighbors prayed for the deceased. Sprigs of boxwood kept by each family and annually blessed in a special mass were put into use to sprinkle the corpse with holy water. Long-living boxwood made reference to palms in the Christian tradition, but also had pre-Christian Celtic mortuary resonances in Brittany.¹⁵ The ingenious culture of substitution on Ouessant found many ways to compensate for the island's deforestation: a branch of seaweed often stood in for boxwood, just as driftwood, dried animal dung, and seaweed served for firewood and other needs.¹⁶

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On the Brittany coast, many men died abroad or disappeared at sea. Because their bodies would never return to the home soil, mourners lacked both the emotional closure of proven death as well as the physical body as a ritual focus. In the coastal community of Ploubazlanec in the department of Côtes-d'Armor, the cemetery had a "wall of the disappeared" to which are affixed miniature empty tombs and plaques, standing for those the ground is missing (see Figure 15.1). Popular novelist Pierre Loti (b. Louis-Marie-Julien Viaud), in *The Iceland Fishermen* (1886) names a freestanding stone cross in this town the "Widow's Cross," as its location provided a lookout for scanning for returning ships. Postcards and popular illustrations at the turn of the century often reproduce Loti's dramatic staging of loss and longing complete with cloaked widows who mourn yet still look hopefully to the horizon (see Figure 15.2).

Only on Ouessant were men confirmed to be lost at sea mourned in a home wake in an invented ritual called *proëlla*, in which a small, handmade wax cross stood in for and symbolically repatriated a lost body.¹⁷ *Proëlla* wakes began in 1734 with the use of small wooden crosses. Wood was replaced by wax in the mid nineteenth century and the practice carried on until 1962. Echoing the symbolic substitutions and transformations of transubstantiation, the ritual object was a visual focal point in the wake and funeral.¹⁸ When a family learned that an absent member was definitively lost, a *proëlla* wake occurred that night at their home. There, a senior widow known as the *veilleuse*, or the *diseuses de grâces*, recited traditional prayers for the dead in a mixture of Latin and Breton. The *veilleuse* in folklorist Anatole Le Braz's short story "Le Sang de la Sirène" incants: "the bad waters have kept your remains, your bones will not rest in the soil of Ouessant. But your soul



15.2 Portz-Even cross, named the "Widow's Cross" by Pierre Loti. Postcard, circa 1910. Reproduction courtesy of the CRBC-UBO-Brest



15.3 Proëlla Tomb, Lampaul Cemetery, Ouessant.
Photograph by author, summer 2006

is here, in our midst. We feel your breath on our faces.”¹⁹ In this tale, a tinted photograph of the deceased, “the sort favored by the naïve tastes of men of the sea,” accompanies the *proëlla* on the tabletop.²⁰ Literary and ethnographic sources tell us that a funeral mass was held the next day in the church, with the cross standing in for the body. The cross was then transferred to an urn mounted on an inside wall of the church and the contents of this urn were later transferred (either on All Souls’ Day or on the occasion of a bishop’s visit to the island) to the miniature mausoleum (built in 1868) in the cemetery (see Figure 15.3). The structure in Figure 15.3 bears the inscription: “Here lie the *proëlla* crosses in memory of sailors who have died far from the land, in wars, in sickness and in shipwrecks.”²¹ Although descriptions of the *proëlla* wake are featured in several literary accounts, such as Le Braz’s tale, there are very few visual representations of this ritual object.²² It is the small tomb, charged with the memories of so many, whose scale we understand by reference to our bodies that tower above it, that appears in many images of island life as a poignant reminder of the island’s losses. Many visitors to the island, who repeatedly draw, describe, and photograph this object, claim to have seen nothing but women’s names in the cemetery.²³

Cloaks

In histories of the visual culture of modern France, clothing is often read as a marker of Baudelairean fashionability, provincial cluelessness, or timeless rustic life. Anthropologist Webb Keane explains that moralizing attitudes that have held sway from medieval religious reformers (concerned with distraction from spiritual life) to Marxists (concerned with fetishism) regard clothing as a superficial vanity, a misplaced concern that distracts from more important matters.²⁴ Countless painters and illustrators who worked with Breton subject matter (who in general willfully misread the signs of modernity in the Breton landscape) mistook markers of modern bourgeois and local identity, such as the wearing of starched lace head *coiffes*, to be signs of age-old rural culture surviving into the present.²⁵

In the late nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, adult women of Ouessant dressed in black and denoted their marital status by the simple white coiffe of the wife or the heavy black cloak or *mantelet* of the widow. The black local costume of the late nineteenth century, made of industrially manufactured cloth held together by an elaborate array of pins, was a recent invention: early nineteenth-century travel texts depict widows and the other adult women of Ouessant in quite different attire.²⁶ But long after mainland Breton women shed traditional dress for provincial bourgeois fashion, Ouessantines kept to a local costume. When island women did set foot on the mainland, they were often mocked for this visible refusal of off-the-rack French modernity—an

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old fashioned stubbornness that went along with speaking Breton rather than French.²⁷ Unlike men's festive embroidered costumes in the Bigouden region of Finistère, the men of Ouessant had no local costume: most dressed as the nomadic French sailors they were.

Generally speaking, in Finistère, the widow's heavy black woolen cloak, fastened with a silver clasp at the neck, was worn to the wake, the funeral, and high mass for several Sundays following the death of a close relative. Wearing the cloak in high mourning was an outward expression of one's respect for the dead and for social codes of propriety, penance, and self-mortification. The penitential aspect of mourning fell to women; Breton men did not tend to alter their appearance apart from the wearing of a black armband during the mourning period of a close relative.²⁸ Cloaking the bereaved female body performs the sort of piacular rite (first described by Emile Durkheim) in which female family members are separated from outside contact while dutifully mourning according to familial and social expectations.²⁹ In Ellen Badone's interviews of elderly women in Finistère, many recount fainting at mass from heat and discomfort in the woolen cloak that compounded the effects of fasting. After the death of their husbands, many widows on Ouessant remained cloaked for the rest of their lives and as such were visible, prominent members of the community who performed a range of social and cultural roles. Mourning's liminal state did not seem to definitively conclude; the culture did not reward getting past or forgetting death, so one went on, but all had changed.

The Breton mourning cloak was not timeless, nor was it always made in the exact same manner; it did not merely stand as a sign for grief; it made rituals of mourning possible. What mattered was the way that this clothing acted as a focus and expression of emotion, both declaring the subject in mourning and shielding the subject from revealing all signs of her grief in public. In a scene from Le Braz's story, "Le Sang de la Sirène" the French narrator observes a group of cloaked women at a *proëlla* wake:

On the other side of the table, the "funeral trestle", in the Breton vernacular, three women are seated on benches, all three enveloped in similar mantles, thick black cloaks with stiff folds, their hoods pulled down over their bowed heads. Custom dictates, it seems, that on such occasions the "new widow" is attended by the two widows of the island at whose homes the most recent *proëllas* have been held ... the three motionless and veiled figures remained enigmatic, similar to three Fates, the goddesses of death, shrouded in their long funeral vestments.³⁰

Writing in the early twentieth century, sociologist Max Weber famously stated that the modern world was becoming increasingly "disenchanted" as belief in the magical and sacred receded to its as yet uncolonized margins.³¹ It was at just this time, prior to World War I, that paintings of Breton peasant widows, cloaked in grief, made the career of French painter Charles Cottet.

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But for the modernist logic of primitivism that seeks out these residual forms of enchantment, it would seem backward for a male artist to forge an international and modern reputation on the depiction of aged rural women. As feminist art historian Griselda Pollock astutely observes, “in the play of canons, it is one of the failures of art history to have been unable to account for the cultural significance of rural genre in general, and the majority of its specific aesthetic economies.”³² In seascapes and images of Breton women in mourning, a project he collectively termed “in the country of the sea,” Cottet articulated a “place myth” of coastal Brittany—consonant with the popular literature of Loti and Le Braz—that marked it as a land of death, ruled by superstition and natural peril.³³ His work appealed to middle-of-the-road critics and arts administrators of France’s Third Republic, who found in his tonal, realist style an alternative to both academic history painting and the ephemeral, bourgeois subject matter and sketchy brushwork of Impressionism.

Cottet was not a Breton by birth; he was a younger contemporary of Paul Gauguin and his Nabi followers at Pont Aven, but he was not based in the bohemian artists’ colony.³⁴ Equally distant from the utopian pastoralism and avant garde, exaggerated color of Pont Aven paintings, Cottet’s melancholic and somewhat ambivalent images of widows articulate and localize very particular relationships to place. Along with Le Braz and Loti, Cottet found in coastal Brittany the residual, resistant, and marginal form of enchantment he sought; a great paradox is that Ouessant was then at its highest level of population (*circa* 2,800 in 1900), and was experiencing a very recent upwelling in popular belief, the celebration of local saints, and newly invented rituals (such as pilgrimages and pardons). Unlike many of his contemporaries, Cottet rarely painted its pious, female culture as sensual or in harmony with nature. Like Le Braz, he fixed upon this region as the “land of death.”³⁵ Often grouping together generations of women, Cottet paints mothers and daughters waiting by the water’s edge or sitting together in mourning.

The image of the waiting widow at the shoreline was hardly Cottet’s artistic invention. Many Pont Aven artists, such as Paul Gauguin, depict women at the water’s edge, not as spirits of nature frolicking in the foam for the viewer’s delight, but looking into the unknown and contemplating mortality. Also posed by the sea, the melodramatic sorrow of the fisherman’s widow appears in many academic paintings, such as Evariste Luminais’ *The Widow or The Fisherman’s Family* (1865, Musée d’Orsay, Paris) and Emile Renouf’s *The Widow of the Isle of Sein* (1880, Museum of Fine Arts, Quimper). Many popular images and photographic postcards also capitalize on this image. Experiencing grief, at this very edge, between states of liquid ocean and dry land, physically articulates the position of the widow in this liminal, threshold place.

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15.4 Charles Cottet, *In the Land of the Sea. Grief*, also called *The Victims of the Sea. Grief*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 264 × 345 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Image in public domain, photograph by Art Resource

Cottet's large-scale painting, *Victims of the Sea, Grief* (also called *In the Land of the Sea. Grief*) (see Figure 15.4), clearly updates the premodern Catholic *pieta*, setting the scene in a harbor in Brittany (Isle de Sein). Stone calvary groups in this region (fifteenth to seventeenth centuries) similarly group together mourning women around the body of Christ and the lamenting Virgin (*Mater Dolorosa*). Marked by color and divided by gender and proximity of land or water, the crowd at the harbor surrounds a verdigris corpse recently plucked from the sea. Three women in mourning cloaks, dramatically grieving, hover above the corpse: two women in black and a young girl anchor the earthbound side of the composition, while four ages of men stand before red sails on the right. Cottet's earlier *Marine Grieving* (Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp, 1903) is a *pieta* group that lacks a visible body; mourning is a state of mind experienced by all ages of women who suffer loss as child, wife, and mother of the departed (we cannot know it for sure, but the absent mourned body in Cottet's works always seems implicitly male). In her voluminous cloak, the elder widow has a Marian gravity and a corresponding lack of sensual

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presence; perhaps one could say her form embodies a state of penance. Again Catholic visual culture provides the model: the Virgin mourns, she sacrifices her son, her self, and her body does not bleed or die: come Ascension its physical move will be spatial, not entropic.³⁶ Cotte's Parisian critics remarked upon his fascination with the cloaked Breton widow who seemed to stand for death itself rather than a temporary state of mourning. Echoing Le Braz's comments on the cloaked widow as a specter of death, novelist and art critic Paul Adam describes Cotte's widows' "resigned faces that are covered in wrinkles, or wan and sad, on the look out for the next imminent calamity."³⁷

Globes

A third object in the material culture of mourning on Ouessant is the marriage globe: a glass-domed collection of personally significant objects that have a significant presence in many regional museums dedicated to the folkloric and material culture of Brittany (see Figure 15.5). Marriage globes contained a range of symbolic objects that could include a bride's wedding crown, her bridesmaid's bouquets, small mirrors that might (dependent on their shape or placement) represent fidelity, the union of two souls, the number of children



15.5 Marriage Globes, Ecomuseum of Old Trades, Lizio, Brittany.
Photographed by the author, May 2008

desired by the couple, or the number of years of the couple's engagement. The extensive website of the Ecomuseum in Lizio (Morbihan, Brittany) lists the elaborate iconography of the globe. The personal collection began the day after the wedding and was added to throughout a woman's life: baptismal souvenirs, locks of hair, religious images, and porcelain angels commemorating still-born children might fill the dome.³⁸ As literary critic Susan Stewart writes, souvenirs of individual experience tend "to be found in connection with rites of passage (birth, initiation, marriage and death) as the material sign of an abstract referent ... [s]uch souvenirs are rarely kept singly; instead they form a compendium which is an autobiography."³⁹ As reliquaries of the commonplace rather than the sacred, the globes' collections are marked by bodily presence and traces of social interaction. Before the practice ceased in the mid-twentieth century and globes thereby became collectible (yet unmarked) antiques of a bygone era, the marriage globe had no intrinsic value outside of the family. In the Ouessantine cottage, the globes were placed on the shelf above the hearth that served as an informal family altar: a meeting place of a woman's local culture of piety (in images of local saints and local pilgrimage mementoes) and the exotic souvenirs brought home by the family's (male) global travelers.

Cottet depicts Breton wedding globes in the context of a dead child's wake in a series of macabre paintings (for example, *The Dead Child*, 1897, Quimper (see Figure 15.6); *Wake of a Dead Child on Ouessant*, 1897–99, Nantes; *People of Ouessant at the Wake of a Dead Child*, 1897–99, Paris) that resulted from the moving experience of a child's wake on Ouessant. In each image of this series, one or several women sit beside a dead child in the small living space of an Ouessantine cottage. The social objects of this arrangement align across a range of bodily experience and perform specific ritual meanings. Framing the tiny corpse that is dressed in a white frock and wrapped in ribbons and paper flowers, are lit candles and the dead world of the globes that heighten the composition's effect of "stilled-life." For the body only recently de-animated, death is tragically confirmed and uncannily made present. White linens cover walls and windows; domestic space is thereby purified and the mundane function of the dining table is transformed to the corpse's space of presentation. A branch of either boxwood or seaweed lies in a shallow dish of holy water in the foreground. Wrapping and decorating this tiny body as if an object (like stone calvaries wrapped on feast days) marks the body's transition from recently animate to dead within a process of bereavement.⁴⁰

Just as texts by Le Braz and Loti are often used to explain the use of ritual objects like the *proëlla*, Cottet's images of dead children are often used in ethnographic texts and museum displays alongside exhibits of marriage globes and traditional costumes (for example, the Niou Ecomuseum on Ouessant) to prove to the viewer the banality of death at this time. Citing as proof of peasant fatalism the resigned lack of emotion expressed by the women's faces, these assertions deny the elaborate details of the death ritual and its



15.6 Charles Cottet, *The Dead Child*, 1897. Oil on canvas, 65 × 55 cm.
Fine Arts Museum, Quimper. Image in public domain,
photograph by author

objects. Although a specifically Breton form of Catholicism, this treatment of the child's body is echoed in modern Mexican death rituals in which baptized children were mourned as *angelitos* and were photographed in compositions that seem bizarrely macabre to contemporary viewers holding quite different expectations of childhood.⁴¹ Similar to Cottet's image, in European and American nineteenth-century portrait photography of dead children, the body is often posed as if sleeping in a baptismal gown, surrounded by luscious flowers: such sad sensuality speaks to the physical experience of the mother's last moments with her child. Like saved locks of hair, these images functioned as *memento mori*. But what are we to make of Cottet's paintings which were neither specific portraits nor commissioned works? These paintings did not immediately enter the stream of Breton popular visual culture: they were sent to Paris Salons, dealers, and other international exhibitions where they were labeled barbaric, bizarre or terrifying. Breton-born Gustave Geffroy was one of the few critics to comment at length on their disturbing aspects. He felt that the images failed to generate an emotional response in the viewer who should sense the sadness of a childhood cut short; instead, the presentation of the child's body looked to him too much like a vitrine display of cured meat or pastry, or a candied Christmas Christ Child.⁴²

Although art and popular imagery of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries celebrate the Breton mother as the most natural, fecund maternal body and Breton women were the wet nurses most desired by bourgeois families, the Ouessantines depicted by Cottet suffer from what was a very high child mortality rate in this most rural of regions.⁴³ It was not in the interest of the women of Ouessant to hide these losses, nor was Cottet interested in perpetuating idyllic myths of Brittany.⁴⁴ As art historian Romy Golan tells us in her study of art between the wars, the staggering loss of life during wartime and the declining French birthrate are persistent sources of anxiety in the early twentieth century. In the nostalgic images of the interwar years, mythic representations of rural life and the natural peasant family often countered such modern fears.⁴⁵ Given Cottet's focus on Brittany as the land of death and mourning, it is no wonder that, as curator André Cariou states, his artistic reputation went sharply into decline after 1914. Although a rising star in the Paris of the 1890s, Cottet stops painting in 1913 and slips to virtual obscurity by his death in 1925.

In the aftermath of World War I, images of Breton widows that had previously referred to the repeated tragedies of a hard rural life in the face of dangerous nature are translated, by Breton nationalist sculptors, into granite and bronze secular memorials to the collective experience of loss of young men in a global theatre of war.⁴⁶ World War II marked a definitive rupture in rural life and local practices, including the abandonment of exactly the sort of mourning costume depicted on Brittany's modern war memorials. Badone observes that in Brittany "the abandonment of mourning is ... related

to the privatization of bereavement, the deritualization of death, and the internalization of emotion related to death.⁴⁷ Objects such as the *proëlla* cross, the mourning cloak, and the marriage globe today are the subject of historical museum displays; formerly ritual objects, they have come to stand for a lost pre-war local particularity of the experience of loss itself.

Notes

Author's note: All translations from French are mine unless otherwise noted. Many thanks to Eric Martinson, Mary Stackhouse, and Bill Olmstead who read earlier versions of this essay.

1. One of the most influential texts that takes this approach is Nicholas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).
2. Particularly pertinent are: Mona Domosh, *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001); Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); and Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
3. Tim Dant, *Material Culture in the Social World: Values, Activities, Lifestyles* (Buckingham, UK and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999), 17–39.
4. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 50.
5. Ellen Badone, *The Appointed Hour: Death, Worldview and Social Change in Brittany* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 44; Thomas A. Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife in Modern France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 4.
6. Phillippe Lacombe, "The Breton Body in Culture and Religion," *Culture, Sport, Society* 4, no. 3 (2001): 31.
7. Victor-Eugène Arduin-Dumazet, *Voyage en France* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1895), 282.
8. Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 50. Also see Paul Jorion, "The Priest and the Fishermen: Sundays and Weekdays in a Former 'Theocracy'," *Man* 17, no. 2 (1982): 275–86.
9. Françoise Péron, *Ouessant, l'île Sentinelle: Vie et Traditions d'une Île Bretonne* (Douarnenez: Le Chasse-Marée, 1997), 129–30.
10. For a useful discussion of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, see Edward Casey, "Body, Self and Landscape: A Geophilosophical Inquiry into the Place-World," in *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*, eds. Paul C. Adams, Steven Hoelscher, and Karen E. Till (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 409–11.
11. "Pas un pêcheur veuille les aider. La terre, les pêcheurs ne la connaissent pas; ils ne lui demandent rien, il la laissent aux femmes." Claude Anet, "Ouessant," *Revue de Paris* (September–October 1908): 544, available at <<http://books.google.com/books?id=ZgHucDDOU8YC&pg=RA2-PA550&dq=anet+%22revue+de+paris%22+ouessant>>.
12. "Ils se marient entre deux voyages, font des enfants qui naissent quand les pères sont déjà loin,—à San Francisco où dans les mers de Chine.— A chaque retour, leur famille s'accroît d'un nouveau membre." Anet, "Ouessant," 544.
13. André Savignon, *Filles de la Pluie: Scènes de la Vie Ouessantine* (Paris: J. Ferenczi, 1924).
14. Badone, *The Appointed Hour*, 62.
15. *Ibid.*, 62–4.
16. Anatole Le Braz, "Le Sang de la Sirène," in *Gens de Bretagne* (Paris: Omnibus, 1994), 212.
17. Le Braz, "Sang de la Sirène," 193. "Proëlla" is a local neologism formed of the Breton words "bro" (land or country) and "elez" (repatriation).

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18. Centre d'Aide et de Développement de Sites Internet Culturels, Ouessant—Enez—Eusa—Vie et Traditions, <<http://www.ouessant.org/spip.php?rubrique9>>.
19. Le Braz, "Sang de la Sirène," 200.
20. Le Braz, "Sang de la Sirène," 212.
21. Peron, *Ouessant*, 250–54.
22. Peron, *Ouessant*, 336–7.
23. Anet, "Ouessant," 546.
24. Webb Keane, "Signs are Not the Garb of Meaning: On the Social Analysis of Material Things," in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 183; also see Gen Doy, *Drapery: Classicism and Barbarism in Visual Culture* (London and New York: Tauris, 2002), 60–66, 66–7.
25. Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, "Les Données Bretonnantes: La Prairie de Représentation," in *Avant Gardes and Partisans Revisited* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 80. Also see Denise Delouche, *Les Peintres et le Paysan Breton* (Douarnenez: Le Chasse-Maréé, 1988).
26. Peron, *Ouessant*, 177.
27. Peron, *Ouessant*, 177.
28. Badone, *The Appointed Hour*, 122, 125.
29. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995), 435.
30. De l'autre côté de la table, du "tréteau funèbre", pour parler comme les Bretons, trois femmes sont assises sur des escarpeaux, envelopées toutes trois en des mantes pareilles, d'épaisses mantes de drap noir aux plis rigides, dont les cagoules rabattues ne laissent rien voir du visage incliné sur la poitrine. La coutume veut, paraît-il, qu'en de telles occurrences la "nouvelle veuve" se fasse assister des deux veuves de l'île chez lesquelles furent célébrés les plus récents *proëllas* ... les trois figures immobiles et voilées demeurent énigmatiques, semblables à trois Parques, à trois déesses de la mort, ensevelies dans leurs longs vêtements funèbres." Le Braz, "Sang de la Sirène," 212.
31. See Suzanne K. Kauffman, *Consuming Visions: Mass Culture and the Lourdes Shrine* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 6.
32. Griselda Pollock, "The Ambivalence of the Maternal Body," in *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 50.
33. For a discussion of "place myth" in landscape painting, see Nina Lübbren, *Rural Artists' Colonies in Europe, 1870–1910* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 116.
34. Cottet was born in Le Puy (Haute-Loir) to a family of Savoyard background. The most comprehensive biography and catalog of Cottet's work is André Cariou, *Charles Cottet et la Bretagne* (Douarnenez: Le Chasse Marée, 1988).
35. See Ellen Badone's excellent overview of the literature on Brittany as the "land of Death;" Badone, *The Appointed Hour*, 1–21.
36. Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," trans. A. Jardine and H. Blake, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7, no. 1 (1981), 17.
37. "Dans leurs mantes de veuves, les visages se résignent, carapaçonnés de rides ou bien, blêmes et tristes, épient l'imminence du prochain malheur." Paul Adam, "Salon du Champ de Mars," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 2 (1896): 22.
38. L'écomusée des vieux métiers de Lizio Morbihan, Collection: La Coutume des Globes de Mariage, Bretagne, <http://www.ecomuseelizio.com/collection_04.html>. Also see Bertrand Frélaud, *Fiançailles et Noces en Bretagne* (Rennes: Ouest-France, 2002); Albert Jacquemart, *Flore des Dames: Botanique à l'Usage des Dames et des Jeunes Personnes* (Paris: Loss, 1840); Jack Goody, *The Culture of Flowers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 241.
39. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 139.
40. See Bronna D. Romanoff and Marion Terenzio, "Rituals and the Grieving Process," *Death Studies* 22, no. 8 (1998): 699.

41. Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 121; Daniela Marino, "Prayer for a Sleeping Child: Iconography of the Funeral Ritual of Little Angels in Mexico," *The Journal of American Culture* 20, no. 2 (1997): 37–44.
42. "Pour les gens d'Ouessant veillant un enfant mort, elle (la peinture) va contre son but qui est de créer l'émotion. La scène ne garde que son côté accessoire, puéril, enfantin, à croire qu'il s'agit de l'étalage fleuri et enrubanné de quelques charcuteries ou pâtisseries ou d'un Jésus en sucre de fêtes de Noël. Cottet n'a pas été sans apercevoir cela mais il n'a pas ajouté l'essentiel qui devait y être aussi et qui était la tristesse de l'enfance devenue la proie de la mort." Gustave Geffroy, *La Vie Artistique* (Paris: Floury, 1900) v. 6, 99.
43. Catherine Puget, *Peintres de la Bretagne et quête spirituelle* (Pont-Aven: Musée de Pont-Aven, 2006), 17.
44. Cariou, *Charles Cottet et la Bretagne*, 124.
45. See Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France Between the Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
46. Philippe Bonnet, "Les Sculpteurs Bretons (1900–1950): La Puissance et la Grace," *Armen* 97 (1998): 38–47.
47. Badone, *The Appointed Hour*, 128.

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