



Hallow This Ground

Colin Rafferty

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Beginning outside the boarded-up windows of Columbine High School and ending almost twelve years later on the fields of Shiloh National Military Park, *Hallow This Ground* revolves around monuments and memorials—physical structures that mark the intersection of time and place. In the ways they invite us to interact with them, these sites teach us to recognize our ties to the past. Colin Rafferty explores places as familiar as his hometown of Kansas City and as alien as the concentration camps of Poland in an attempt to understand not only our common histories, but also his own past, present, and future. Rafferty blends the travel essay with the lyric, the memoir with the analytic, in this meditation on the ways personal histories intersect with History, and how those intersections affect the way we understand and interact with Place.

Hallow This Ground Details

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From Reader Review Hallow This Ground for online ebook

Trent says

In these essays Rafferty has built his own monument--to myth, to memory, to the steady line of time (past and future)--mining fact and imagination, melding humanity's larger History with a smaller, yet, equally powerful, personal history. Layered with moments of divine introspection and prose that plays with the best part of elegy and grace, Rafferty bookends his collection with the boy he once was and the man he's become. A beautiful collection.

Hannah says

The writing in Hallow this Ground puts you in the moment. As the author travels from place to place, scene to scene- I went along for the ride (the Abraham Lincoln chapter was my favorite!) The informational component was so well done in combination with the emotional that I cried, laughed, scoffed, hmm'ed, learned, and ultimately thoroughly enjoyed Hallow this Ground. Would recommend.

Erin Lyndal says

I wanted to read this book because, having known Colin Rafferty for some years, I know well his compulsion to visit sites of disaster and tragedy. But I finished this book and have been keeping it in my head because the book is extraordinary, both timeless and of-the-moment. In these essays, Rafferty visits sites of tragedies including concentration camps, the wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald, an Columbine High School. Throughout, he deftly presents the public, known history of these sites while peering into his own personal history. Beneath all of this usually lies the question of why he feels drawn to these places, and the answers change the more he sees, the more life he lives. It was bittersweet to read the final essay, which takes place as Obama's inauguration is getting underway, three days before Donald Trump will take the same oath before our nation. One can't really say one but has enjoyed spending time thinking about Treblinka and 9/11, but my inner life is richer for having read this book.

Aaron says

I had high hopes for this book as it called to me for many reasons. Its geography, its history, its personal writing...but I found myself wanting more of the monument and less of Rafferty and I seemed to get the opposite while reading. It's a decent book, but it doesn't go far enough into depth on its purpose: to examine why we build monuments and memorials and our relations to them. It seemed as if he wanted to write about his life and throw some travel writing in to liven it up. It's fine, it's just not what I was hoping for.

Kelly says

Well written, touching essays.

Warren Rochelle says

This is a beautiful book, with stunning, lyrical prose. The essays are about monuments and memorials, and thus about memory and remembering, and why and how and where we choose remember, and what marks our memories, and our personal memories intersect an with history and with place.

Rafferty begins with Columbine and its library where ten students died (two more outside the building), and then the shooters themselves. When Rafferty goes by there, the library was in the process of being destroyed. He notes he has no direct connections to the place, but even so, he takes time out of a trip home to "see the place ... to see what they are going to do with it ... to see what happens afterward" (2). He ends, almost twelve years later, on the fields of Shiloh National Military Park. Along the way, he makes other pilgrimages, to both places of public and personal memories and history, perhaps the most powerful to Auschwitz.

He says he wants the light to shine through. It does, even if sometimes it feels too bright. That's okay. That's how it should be. That I write this on July 4, a day to remember the past and to celebrate it and to celebrate the past and the present as connected, the former shaping the latter, both shaping the future, is quite appropriate I think.

Highly recommended.

Maggie Stough says

Rafferty's personal journey really resonated with me, as I've often fixated on other people's tragedies when my life seemed too boring and untragic. I really liked how fresh some of these over-told and over explored tragedies felt. Each essay wove together so many interesting pieces that I was easily immersed and quickly consumed this work. There's something of interest for everyone in this.

David Olimpio says

This book is smart and full of important insights on history and life. It's also everything good essay-writing should be. My favorite passage: "Allow the monument to become the history. Believe in the kiss on my cheek. Believe the words on the plaque at my feet. Because if we relied on facts instead of stories, we'd never know where to stand; never know where our heroes were born or where they lie buried; never know where we were or where we are."

R. Johnson says

In essays that take us from the field where flight 93 crashed on 9/11 to a bumpy road between two concentration camps at Treblinka, Colin Rafferty contemplates the personal in the public memorials marking

some of history's most tragic events. Part memoir, part new journalism, part lyric, and part immersion, *Hallow This Ground* is more than a collection of essays. Rafferty leads the reader to a complete whole as thematic ties bind these essays together even as, individually, they stand alone.

At a time when Civil War monuments are hotly debated, Rafferty reminds us that a memorial, no matter which side of history you are on, is at best an approximation of the people and events it attempts to honor. And as we see the experience of each place grow personal for the author, we can't help but bring our own experience to the read as well, creating a book that is so many things at once—warm, thoughtful, timely, informative, and wholly enjoyable.

Amanda says

Rafferty's language is powerful and poignant, and this is a must read for public grieves in a time of public grief.

Sam says

This collection originally made it to our shelves because the author, Mr. Rafferty, teaches at my wife and I's alma mater. After reading *Hallow This Ground*, I can safely say that any fan of memoir, essay, or recent American/European history would be lucky to have it on their shelf, regardless of where they studied.

After just a brief glance, and hearing that the work was organized around the theme of 'memorial,' I thought this book would be along similar line's to *Assassination Vacation* (a book of essays dedicated to the assassinated presidents of the USA). Rafferty roams more widely though--he goes across the Atlantic to Poland and Germany, as well as through the Pacific to Hawaii. This collection has pieces of varying length, and I really like how it is paced. There are a number of shorter, interlude pieces. "A is for Ancestry," one of these (a meditation on the significance of scars), easily stands with Rafferty's longer pieces, ending on this powerful note: "The scar is the history of the self, written on the body" (30).

In my opinion, the strongest essays are the 3 about the author's visits to Holocaust memorials (Treblinka, Auschwitz, and Berlin). For one thing, as Rafferty asserts in "Victims," Auschwitz has, more or less (through Spielberg film and Slayer song), served as my idea of the entire Holocaust (perhaps better called 'Shoah') even though it was not the most active concentration camp. So, learning about Treblinka was chilling:

"Although it was the second-most lethal camp, it lacks all the evidence Auschwitz provides ... Auschwitz remains the best-known camp because of the thousands of survivors who walked out of it alive, because of the evidence abandoned by the Germans in the face of the advancing Red Army ... Eight hundred thousand people died, and at the later trials of the officers, only fifty-four survivors of Treblinka were left to testify" (61-62).

Rafferty skillfully alludes, showing instead of telling (as I was advised to do in a creative writing class at the university where Rafferty teaches, albeit by a different professor). "Notes Towards Building the Memorial in Somerset County, Pennsylvania" never directly mentions the event its memorial will commemorate; "This Day in History" repeatedly brings up important events from September 10th, while really speaking about the

following day.

As I always feel guilty admitting when I read about tragedies, I learned quite a bit from this book. I know now that the Edmund Fitzgerald is more than a beer from Great Lakes Brewing Co. I know about the second-most deadly building collapse in US history. It seems oddly appropriate to read Rafferty's account of the days leading up to President Obama's first inauguration ("They're saying that they expect two million people for the inauguration") as our current president refuses to stop talking about the alleged crowds at his own first (hopefully last) inauguration ceremony.

Like Claudia Emerson (the other creative writing professor from the University of Mary Washington whose work I have read), Rafferty writes about Fredericksburg, VA, my hometown. Seeing the city through the eyes of someone that didn't grow up there is always helpful--to get a fresh and thoughtful perspective of the place where I learned to drive and didn't appreciate Civil War battlefield field trips in middle school. I hope Rafferty continues to teach there for a long time, and that he keeps writing essays of this quality. If so, his students and readers will be very lucky indeed.

Rachel says

Linked essays about various types of monuments and memorials. Very thoughtful, lyric at times, powerful in a subtle way.
