

Cemeteries and the Decline of the Occult: From Ghosts to Memory in the Modern Age

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's dog, the most urban of canines having spent his life almost entirely in Florence and London, held strong views about the »occult city.« He was terribly upset, so his biographer Virginia Woolf tells us, that his mistress had begun standing on the balcony with »her great eyes staring as if she saw something marvelous outside.« »This preoccupation of Mrs. Browning with the invisible grew upon her,« frightened him. He was alarmed that the guests who visited the Brownings at the Casa Guidi, where they lived in the middle years of the century, would sit around a table and seem to hear and see something that was not there. He started with »the wildest apprehension,« Woolf reports, as their table tilted. Yes, the table did tilt but such things happen when one leans too hard on one side. He himself had upset a table and been scolded for it. From his perspective so near the ground the guests were wittingly or unwittingly creating evidence of a spirit's presence. Any dog could see – or rather not see – that; why he wondered had the tables at 50 Wimpole Street back in London never stood on one leg.¹

I raise Flush's views– for such was the dog's name– because many shared them and because they might help us to shift slightly the *Fragstellung* of the conference that gave birth to this volume. Perhaps the occult is not, as its organizers' suggested, the unknowable but the controvertibly knowable. Or more precisely the occult is an enormously rich domain for debate about what is known and what is knowable, about how something is known or knowable, and about on whose authority these decisions ought to be made. The occult is one long invitation to epistemological discourse, to paraphrase Foucault on sexuality. This, I want to suggest, makes it representative of some very big claims about the modern world and specifically about the modern West's relationship to knowledge.

The progressive press in the Ottoman Empire of the early twentieth century certainly thought they knew what spiritualism specifically, and the occult more generally, represented: all that was ridiculous in imported western culture and politics. It was feminizing; it was fake; it was an ephemeral solution to the presence of death that made manifest the weakness and spiritual bankruptcy of Europe; it was hokum and taking it seriously was a sign of submission to foreign cultural domination and indigenous superstition. Spiritualism was modernity, or in any case, modern epistemology gone bad.²

The question of the occult in its epistemological form goes much further than the late nineteenth century that is the focus for many of the studies presented here and takes place in a wide range of cultural venues: literature, theater, laboratory, as well as less carefully controlled experiments in which a debate was carried out, exploited, and expanded. It is a very large domain indeed that extends into the whole vast world of secret knowledge: Rosicrucianism, astrology, alchemy, as well as the various domains of the modern occult like psychokinesis, mind reading, channeling, and the many forms of spiritualism.

The subtitle of this essay – From Ghosts to Memory – suggests where it might fit into this vast world of the occult city. It is about the place of the dead among the living: what are they, where are they and where ought they to be; how do we know. It is a formulation that pushes us back chronologically. I will start in the middle decades of the eighteenth century because that is when modern cemeteries begin but, for the more general question about the status of the dead among the living, other dates might serve as well. 1852, for example, when table turning spirits from upstate New York came to London, only one year after the Great Exhibition had proclaimed that Britain was in the vanguard of a brave new world of progress. January, 1762, would be another option, when the ghost of a woman lured to London and then murdered, the soon to be notorious Cock Lane ghost, revealed herself by knocking at a house in Cock Lane. In February a distinguished committee that included the great Samuel Johnson took up the ghost's promise – made by further knocks – that she would make her invisible self manifest by still more knocking on a coffin in the vault of St. John, Clerkenwell. The committee was met by silence at the appointed hour.³

We could go further back to 1707 when the novelist Daniel Defoe, like an earlier day Author Conan Doyle, attested to the reality of the apparition of a certain Mrs. Ved. Or we could go back almost a half century more to the 1660's when the arguments for or against ghosts were part of the controversies around Hobbesian materialism. The status of Hamlet's father fits into the prehistory of this discussion. In fact, a science of ghosts and more generally of spirits and unknown forces – one might include Reginald Scot's attack on witchcraft here – begins precisely with the great modern debate about the nature of knowledge and of how we know. It continues from roughly the 1660's right up to now. Its structure has changed little. Witnesses are interrogated and impugned, worldviews clash about what is knowledge, what counts as evidence, and who is to make the definitive decision about truth or falsehood.

The cemeteries I will discuss were in general not friendly to ghosts; the rise of memory dealt a deathblow to the spectral creatures that haunted churchyards. Places of the dead, once home to all manner of strange and occult traffic, became peaceful parks where the dead slept decorously guarded by an unprecedented display of commemorative paraphernalia.

Let me anticipate an objection. Strange things of an occult nature did happen in the new cemeteries. Blaise Cendrars reports one such incident at Appolinaire's funeral. Just after he passed the grave of Alan Kardec, founder of French psychism, he saw the grass over the new grave of the poet shape itself into a head that looked like the dead man's. Out of the »thick glacial mist,« came a voice: »Appolinaire is dead; soon he will return.«⁴ Think too about the end of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* that takes place in Highgate, high on a hill above Hampstead Heath in north London, and one of the most spectacular and beautiful of the new places of the dead. These places were, as Foucault remarked, heterotopias and anything, including the appearance of spirits and the undead was possible. But that said, the cemetery as a place of memory assumed that the dead were gone. Spirits were old fashioned even if spiritualism was modern and they tended to keep out of the well-ordered, rational, hygienic park that became the home of the nineteenth century dead.

Let me begin with two contrasting views about these new kinds of parks to suggest the extent to which they were understood to be an aspect of modernity and progress that was not hospitable to the occult. William Mudford writes in the January of 1841 issue of *Bentley's Miscellany* about his visit to Kensal Green, the first English cemetery that had been founded by a joint stock company in 1833. He says that he was reluctant to accompany the friend who asked him to go. His posture is conservative. »My friend asked me so that I might be converted, and give up certain notions I entertained touching the rather cockneyish sentimentalities which we now hear about pretty, ornamental, nay even beautiful places for the dead. Death and prettiness! Beauty and the grave! What ill-assorted images (...) What a violation of all those tender recollections of the departed, whose well springs are gloom, and silence, and solitude.« But he agrees to go because, he had never been to a cemetery before; he had never visited Père La Chaise when in Paris. (Kensal Green, in short, represents a new category of space in the world metropolis, an English adaptation of the French paradigm.) He admires his friend and he »knew that there must be something in these fashionable collection of graves and gravestones.«⁵

Needless to say he was not impressed. He passed through the gates with his mind prepared for amusement, the same feeling, he reports, that he might have had entering the Zoological Garden. Yes, the flowers and landscaping were beautiful but they had mostly been planted by the cemetery company and thus had none of the emotional resonance they would have had if those who loved the bodies buried here had planted them. He did not like the sense that he was meant to feel pleasure in these gardens; he did not like the hundreds and thousands of names that dot the landscape written on a »fantastic variety of forms.« Every name a stranger both to the visitor and to each other; this is a public ground and the wide public makes use of it. And most of all he did not like the absence of historical associations that he would have found in the parish churchyard. In other words he does not like the civilization that the cemetery represents. Only the catacombs that the burial entrepre-

neurs had on offer seemed to have what to him are the appropriate associations with death.

A few months later in the August 1842 issue of *Ainsworth Magazine*, Laman Blanchard, an editor and sometime secretary of the Zoological Society, writes about his visit to Kensal Green. It is in many ways more conventional – the noise, desecration, the nasty smells of the city churchyard contrasted to the sweet smells, the quiet isolation, of the new »Asylums for the Dead.« (That in itself is a telling metaphor in a world in which all sorts of people were being segregated in asylums. Cemeteries, in other words were places where the dead were safely incarcerated.) Sorrows are soothed, anguish and terror softened by the well-kept garden. This is the sort of landscape before which one can calmly contemplate even ones own death. But for my purposes it is the opening sentence which suggests the stakes in the division of opinion I have illustrated: »Change (the capital C is made into an illustration of the gateway of a neoclassical cemetery gate through which a funeral procession is about to pass, T.L.) – so busy in this eventful century with Life – is busier yet with Death. There is no late step in the progress of opinion or the habits of society so broad as the distinction between the city Churchyard and the suburban cemetery. Nor is it possible for change to take a healthier or wiser direction.« In city churchyards, in the mingled heaps, the bones of ones forefathers, »the pure and exquisite sentiment that should embalm the memory of the dead is stifled.« And, of course, conversely, in sweet smelling parks their memory is preserved.⁶

I want to suggest that the secular, explicitly landscaped, memorial park, i.e. the cemetery, as opposed to the churchyard or other sacred or customary space – is so precisely the invention of a critical period in the history of our times – the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century – that thinking about its origins and meaning might allow us to understand what, if anything, is distinctively modern about death, and particularly about the place of the dead among the living in modernity. Cemeteries were meant to keep their memory alive and present while everything else about them was safely out of sight, smell, touch and communication. Smooth not lumpy from the accumulation of generations of bodies, carefully landscaped to look like an ordinary park, clean and sweet smelling, far from settlements, cemeteries were places in which the dead were discretely quarantined; they were to stay where they had been put. Cemeteries were not explicitly anti-occult; the topic seldom came up in contemporary discussions of these memory gardens. But they were manifestly not friendly to the strange, secret, unauthorized roaming about of spirits. Memory is not about actual communication with the dead but with keeping them alive in the ongoing historical narratives of the living.

We know that unlike the poor, the dead are not always with us or at least not always in the same way. In fact, beginning in 1804, when Père la Chaise opened its gates, they began to move decisively away from the living into cities of their own: out of churchyards and other religious spaces in which their bodies had been jumbled together in close proximity to each other and the day to day comings and goings

of the living; into geographically distant – and for the middle class far more private – representations of where they had once dwelt. The moved onto/into their freehold properties in the necropolis.

Père la Chaise was not literally the first cemetery built by Europeans. Park Street in Calcutta opened in 1767 and soon filled with tombs that look like they might have come from roads leading out of a Roman city but in fact were on the edge of Sir Elijah Impey's deer park. It came into being not because it was near some sacred site but because the construction of a new western crossroad required that the body of Mr. James Woods, a writer at Council House, had to be moved. Hundreds followed him. Like the European cemeteries of the nineteenth century memory seemed to elide mention of dead bodies. All but one of the extant thirty grave markers in the old St. John's Churchyard where the British founders of Calcutta were buried say something to the effect that »here lyeth interred the body«, or »here lies the body.« Only sixteen percent of twohundredfiftyfive graves in the new cemetery make such a claim. Almost all the rest with the exception of some children's graves speak about memory.⁷

Certainly other colonial cemeteries take precedence over Père la Chaise as do of course the Islamic cemeteries, especially those of Constantinople, which Mary Wortley Montagu and William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge and a host of others so admired. But these antecedents should not detract us from the fact that Père la Chaise was, and was understood at the time to be, a radical innovation in the spatial geography of the dead in relation to the living and of dead bodies in relation to each other. It very quickly became the symbol of – almost a name for – a kind of burial place which triumphed wherever the bourgeoisie triumphed or hoped to triumph. It was a place where the dead tended to stay safely secluded from the living; a haven in the occult city. It was also a place in which a certain class of the still living could imagine a new world order of the departed: one in which lineage gave way to history and in which there were no »strangers« – as there were in the churchyard – because anyone with means and talent could gain entry on the same category as anyone else; one in which the historical specificity of a place and the autarchy of the parish gave way to self consciously planned landscapes – picturesque, natural, fanciful or dull – which could be anywhere and mean anything and belong to anyone.

Briefly put, I want to suggest that the cemetery reveals – and is the result of – two distinct but intimately related features of imagining death and the community of the dead in modernity. The first has to do specifically with the dead body. Increasingly absorbed into the language of medicine, hygiene, and chemistry, metaphysically meaningless, it became unbearably repulsive in its purely and essentially material decay. It tended to have very little to do with anything that might live on, with specters or spirits. William Hale, archdeacon of London in the 1840's and 1850's may well have been self interested in his opposition to the cemetery but he was right that the motives of its proponents had, as he said, »their origin in a philo-

sophical (and I might add visceral, T.L.) distaste for the emblems and the reality of death.« And as the decaying dead body became an object of scientific attention it became also a source of acute anxiety and distaste, an anxiety which, I want to suggest, was displaced onto the monument and onto custom built places of memory. Père la Chaise, as John Claudius Loudon, one of the greatest British landscape architects of the century put it, was »dedicated to the genius of memory,« a place where, like the ancients, we moderns can contemplate death »never *polluted* with the idea of a charnel house (...) nor the revolting emblems of mortality.«⁸ Memory cleanses.

The second, has to do with community. The bourgeoisie who are the self conscious creators and the exclusive – or in any case exclusively visible – inhabitants of the cemetery imagine therein a new world of their creation: a new community of the dead, represented in the clean, sweet smelling, wholly novel real and symbolic geography of the cemetery, gives a certain weight, solidity, and credence to a new community of the living. This is a community of the here and now, with family, commerce, and the institutions of civil society at its core. The dead are to be remembered, even visited in their decorous new homes, but they were to keep to themselves. The psychism among the English expatriate community in Florence that so upset Flush that warm summer day was perhaps a reaction to this new, if relatively short lived, form of segregation (The English cemetery in Florence today is in the middle of a roundabout.)⁹

The problem of filth and of smell lies at the core of what the modern cemetery represents. Advocates of these new places for the dead spoke the language of »public health«, the language of that new, secular conception of the dead body which is so chastely effaced – not represented – in a Père la Chaise (or at Highgate in the north London village of the same name or a Mt. Auburn in suburban Boston). But it would be to miss the critical cultural meaning of these new spaces if we were to tell the history of the cemetery as the relatively simple story of heroic, prescient doctors, enlightenment philosophers, and bureaucrats who recognized the danger to the health of the living of the corrupting flesh in their midst and agitated successfully to have it cast out. Of course there was crowding in the old churchyards and, of course, they could not hold the tens and hundreds of thousands of new dead. Villages became cities and something had to be done not just to house the living and the no longer living.

But such a functionalist account needs to emphasize the culturally more intricate role that public health and a scientific materialist world view played in creating new spaces for the dead. If dirt is »matter out of place«, if it is, like death »essentially disorder«, »an offence against order« as Mary Douglas famously characterized it, the question before us is why the dead body came to be understood as »out of place« where it had been put since at least the sixth century and why specifically the cemetery, of all possible solutions to the problem of disposing of corrupting human flesh, became the solution to making the dead clean again, to bringing order to

the disorder of death.¹⁰ It is not writ in heaven that, as happened in London in 1852, the Commissioners of Sewers should have replaced the Church as the legally recognized administrators of the city's burials. It was the »Nuisances Removal and Diseases Amendment Act« of 1851 that brought inspectors from the Board of Health to new industrial cities and what had been quite county towns to inquire into the state of burial grounds. The dead had been shifted over into the realm of rubbish and slime.

The burial grounds of the old regime were, almost by their nature, crowded. The vestry of the London parish of St. Botolph Bishopgate noted in 1621 that the churchyard was »buried so full,« there was scarcely room for a child; ever lengthening burial registers apparently do not reflect the problem. The Cimetière des Innocents absorbed some two million Parisians in an area of 60 x 120 meters during the seven centuries before its closure in 1780: that is, roughly 300 bodies per square meter. Clearly the ground had long been »full« by any modern standard well before eighteenth century doctors turned their attention to the problem. The prosperous or socially ambitious English middling sorts who, from the seventeenth century on, chose burial within the church itself scarcely enjoyed more space, privacy, or rest. Ground beneath the pavement filled up fast. When Samuel Pepys in 1664 sought internment in the middle aisle of St. Bride's for his brother, the sexton promised – after accepting a 6d tip – that he would »jostle them (dead bodies that were already there, T.L.) but (would, T.L.) make room for him.«¹¹

The reason for this is clear enough. Ground was limited and there were few market mechanisms in place to allocate it efficiently. Specifically – at least in the English case – the compacting, composting, jostling and intermingling of corpses and coffins, in various states of repair – was a permanent condition, an inevitable consequence of two doctrines: the first that of »ubi decimus persolvebat vivus, sepeliatur mortuus«, (literally the right to be buried where one had paid tithes but generally the common law right to be buried where one had lived); and second, implied by the first, the doctrine that ground of the churchyard was, as Lord Stowell put it in the celebrated eighteenth century case of *Gilbert v. Buzzard* »the common property of the living, and of generations yet unborn, and subject only to temporary appropriation«. Thus no body could claim any space forever and, Stowell continued, »the time must come when his (the corpse's, T.L.) posthumous remains must mingle with and compose a part of the soil in which they were deposited remains.«¹² Churchyards were, quite simply, giant compost heaps that grew in their lumpy way from generation to generation; the churches themselves were sometime two or three meters below the latest level of their surrounding grounds. (Readers of Goethe's *Elective Affinities* will remember that one of Charlotte's landscaping innovations in the churchyard was that graves were to be leveled, as they are in the modern cemetery, and the ground kept smooth for resowing)¹³.

The key question is the one raised by Alain Corbin about smell; in this case, why did corruption become pollution, why did the »exhalations arising from the

putrefaction of dead bodies« – their odor – come to be regarded as so particularly noisome? As Archdeacon Hale argued in 1854, his churchyard of St. Giles Cripplegate was essentially made of the compost of seven hundred year's of burial and smelled, at the surface and in samples taken from six feet down, like compost, like ammonia. »The earth«, he says, »had the qualities which are attendant upon every heap of the farmer's treasure upon every highly cultivated field.« How can the physiologist say, as ammonia evaporates: »avoid this place because it is dangerous to health.«¹⁴

One answer to this question is that doctors and their allies came to understand that great mounds of rotting flesh within cities really were a health hazard and more generally that the demands of new enterprises and new urban infrastructure required that the dead be moved elsewhere. Certainly opponents of burial reform thought that their cherished old churchyards were being muscled out by what they regarded as meretricious progress. The rector of St. Thomas the Apostle inveighed against »the desecration of Churches and Churchyards and the subsequent erection of Assurance Offices and other Temples of Mammon on their once hallowed ground«. An opponent of the Midland Railroad's claim for a right of way into its new station pointed facetiously to its »uncontrollable desire to come to London«, to its schemes to gain a foothold on a hallowed spot and to its being on the verge of »disturb(ing, T.L.) thousands of bodies« with its viaduct and tunnels as they passed over or under St. Pancras Churchyard. But at the end of the day, a local historian looking back from the waning years of the nineteenth century was surely right in how he categorized these opponents of new spaces for the dead; »seeing how beautiful the gardens are (once the viaduct was built, tunnel bored and bodies removed the ground that was left was turned into a park, T.L.) one wonders at the bigotry and narrow mindedness of those who so long fought against the reforming spirit, and preferred to keep the grounds in their unsanitary and neglected condition.« Churchyards were in the way of the march of progress.¹⁵ And, no-one could defend the leaking of oily, smelly exudates from bodies into urban wells and other drinking water supplies.

But in fact the case for the public health dangers of old churchyards was by no means as persuasive as proponents of reform claimed. Dead bodies – and certainly not vapors of dead bodies – do not cause disease and, more to the point, contemporaries knew it. Edwin Chadwick got a chilling letter, the sort one would not want to get just before going to press from an expert in ones field, on the eve of the publication of his famous and inflammatory 1843 report on internment in towns and cities. It was a comment on a draft version from his colleague and Benthamite fellow traveler Southwood Smith and it was not encouraging: »The foundation of the whole subject«, Smith writes, »is that animal matter in a state of decomposition is injurious to health (...) Now it appears to me that the Evidence of that fundamental truth in your report is neither so strong, so succinct nor so varied as it might be.« Basically, he says, the report is not what is »necessary to produce a powerful im-

pression on the public mind« and recommends »*greatly* strengthening the evidence.« There was little poor Chadwick could do at that point.¹⁶

But he might have known. When the reforming medical journal *The Lancet* discussed the question in the 1840's various correspondents pointed out that the eighteenth century evidence that was being adduced for the danger of bodies, even when supplemented by such massive compilations of horrors as Dr. George Walker's 258 page long *Gatherings from Graveyards, Particularly London* (1839) did not make the case. One physician, for example, pointed out how many dissections they all had done without getting ill. And it did not go un-noticed that the very same doctors and public health advocates who were so eager to move dead bodies out of churchyards had also been the great advocates of the Anatomy Acts which made the unclaimed bodies of the poor available for sustained medical use. The epidemiology that purported to show the dangers of intramural interment was also weak, entirely anecdotal, and easily parried by equally ad hoc counter evidence. As Matthieu Orfila, the distinguished professor of jurisprudential medicine at the Sorbonne, pointed out in 1800, the evidence that dead bodies were particularly dangerous was either apocryphal or exaggerated or irrelevant: purported injuries were not due to »putrid exhalations.« He reports – as do the pathologists I have consulted – that he and his assistants have done many exhumations and autopsies, taken no special precautions and have not taken ill.¹⁷

And there was certainly nothing specific to the dead that made church vaults and deep graves especially dangerous as proponents of new burial places claimed. In another context all of this is sorted out more clearly. James Curry, a distinguished physician in Edinburgh and one of an international community of medical men who had begun to study what »exactly« constituted death from a physiological perspective, argued persuasively that there is indeed a common problem in mines, sewers, pump-wells, the holds of ships, and burial vaults: the absence of freely circulating air. He pointed out that the fumes from charcoal burning, fermentation, and other chemical processes produce something that makes air unhealthy: carbonic acid gas – CO₂. Decaying bodies, in short, are not the problem; bad air, meaning air that is not periodically refreshed, is. This research had clinical implications – rescuing the apparently dead from their stupors required making oxygen available to them – but it had no immediate implications for burial policy.¹⁸

The question is why the argument about public health was so successful. There are many local stories but at a more abstract level I want to suggest that a new group of people managed to capture smell for its world view. Vicq d'Azir, one of the leading French proponents of cemeteries and a widely translated authority, gives it away: in the old, superstitious days, he says, we carried »our beliefs so far as to persuade ourselves that the emanations from the bodies of the saints were capable of warming the hearts of the faithful and encouraging in them impressions favorable to zeal and piety.« It was against this »superstition« that the Enlightenment fought. And once triumphant the relation of the living to the dead would change:

now carefully hidden the body would appear, he hoped, only in its aesthetic representation, in new memorial practices linked specifically to the disappeared body. Vicq suggests cenotaphs, mausolea, tombs, epitaphs, either empty where the bodies used to be if necessary, or far better, in new memorial parks.¹⁹

Public health thus does lie at the heart of the new regime of the hidden dead body but indirectly. The dead body had decisively shifted its grounds from the realm of the spirit to the realm of the flesh. The conservative clergy again got it right. Public health advocates had captured the conversation. Parkes' *Dictionary of Hygiene*, the Rev. Joseph Dodd, points out, had claimed that »the question of burial should be placed entirely on sanitary grounds«, if it is to »be judged rightly.« Christians had to address this kind of claim – this appropriation of the body by medicine – if they wanted to sustain a sacral understanding of the body. Archdeacon Hale was more precise. He links »the modern Hygiest advocating the entire separation of the mansions of the dead from the houses of the living for the sake of public health,« and the modern Epicurean who holds the same view because »nothing is so painful to him as the thought or sight of death.« Stripped of »superstition«, revealed in all and only its natural boldness, doctors and the enlightened public retreated in the case of its now exclusively materialist realities. Death, in other words loses its lineage – its metaphysical centrality; the discourse and agitation of public health is more of a symptom than a cause of the displacement of the dead into new spaces.²⁰

I have so far sketched in a cultural interpretation of one path – the public health route – to the cemetery – and have only gestured toward the other trajectory: the active imaging by an ascendant class of a new community of the dead who are known to the living through memory. I want now to give some content to that idea and to the process whereby this happened. It is not quite right, as Gray wrote in the most popular poem of the second half of the eighteenth century that »The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep / Each in his narrow cell for ever laid.« In fact, as I have suggested, bodies were jostled quite a bit and few enjoyed a narrow cell to be occupied forever. But it is the case that Grey's *Elegy* spoke of an ideal – a »congregation of the dead«, as the clergyman James Hervey wrote – a historically rooted community of the dead belonging alike to a particular place. It was an ideal which held enormous appeal on the eve of its destruction.²¹

Some of course had never belonged to the community, the most prominent group being, of course, Jews but including also »strangers« to the parish, i. e. those with no customary claim to being buried there such as vagrants and prostitutes. In times of epidemic the dead were buried where they found room. Also, small dissenting groups sometimes had separate burial grounds although they often put their dead to rest in the parish churchyard. There were also moments of overt aristocratic rejection of the old system: Lord Carlisle's mausoleum, far from sacred ground at Castle Howard – the first in Europe since Roman antiquity – harkened back to an earlier, pre-Christian regime of the dead. And there were the tombs of a nas-

cent, far flung, empire: the extraordinary seventeenth century freestanding tombs of the great east India merchants of Surat whose Latin inscriptions and European pseudo heraldry on an essentially Saracenic buildings set amidst tropical foliage produced the sort of weird bricolage effect that would so attract and repulse visitors to the nineteenth century cemetery. Then in the 1760's there was Park Street, Calcutta, and, following it, many more colonial burial grounds almost all in the grandest neoclassical style. In fact, those we might think of as the dead, those with no particular parish attachments, were amongst the earliest inhabitants of the new cemeteries in the metropolis: Major John William Pew of the Madras Army, Lady Bonham, wife of the commander in chief of Hong Kong, Major General Casement of the Bengal Army, various East India Merchants, all at Kensal Green for example. Clearly the old community of the dead was breaking down and the cemetery became a radically new sort of space in which it was possible to imagine a new one. Or rather, the community of the autarchic dead of the parish gave way to a society of the dead from anywhere and everywhere.²²

A new necro-geography also came into being. In the church and churchyard »custom« dictated that bodies be buried with their heads to the west and feet to the east more or less in alignment with the liturgically prescribed orientation of the church which in turn had some long standing relationship to its built environment. Churchyards were around churches thus stood on the sites of holy wells, or the chapels of Saxon manors, or earlier burial mounds, or at medieval cross roads. That is, they were historically rooted and they were located in the midst of daily life. Cemeteries were located where land was cheap which meant at a distance from commerce and alternative better paying occupancy. They were nowhere in particular and within them graves were aligned in no particular direction.

The place of the cemetery in relation to the city from which it drew its dead, the features and topography of the new burial places, and the orientation of the dead in its grounds – literally the direction in which they were placed – thus changed radically from what had been the case. A cemetery might be near an old sacred space in a city's social if not geographic center. In Glasgow, for example, it is on a rise opposite the Cathedral. But this is fortuitous. The Merchant Adventurers, a venerable guild, had profited in various ways from the land that became the Glasgow Necropolis – some of it had been leased for farming, some used as a quarry, and then in 1828 it was decided that a cemetery would be just the thing: »it afforded a much wanted accommodation to the higher classes, and would at the same time convert an unproductive property into a general and lucrative source of profit«. In short, this new burial place was the result of an economic opportunity seized, of unprofitable land converted to a new and more profitable use. Horticultural societies with a sense that gardens allowed people to »rid themselves of TIME among the final homes of those who have exchanged in for eternity« founded Mt. Auburn near Boston and Spring Grove in Cincinnati. These so-called rural cemeteries were, explicitly, meant to bring the charm and nostalgia of the countryside within reach of the

city while the dead themselves were kept far away. Prosperous members of the public bought plots in these new kinds of parks.²³

Liverpool's first cemetery, like Glasgow's, was also in a quarry, a big advantage since it allowed for tombs in the style of the patriarchs. Highgate had to build this feature into its landscapes but what seemed a disadvantage was turned to gain. On top of the Egyptian Avenue, whose magnificent burial places were a fantasy version of pharaonic antiquity, was the capital's first Macadem road where carriages could glide smoothly over this remarkable tar surface. The cemetery was distant from the city »in a most picturesque situation, and commanding a fine view of the giant city, lying below.«²⁴ The dead, in short, occupied a place noted for its views of where they had once lived. Others of the new places of the dead were chosen for other reasons: Woking, south of London on what had been thousands of acres of wasteland purchased by a for-profit company from Lord Onslow, was on a railway line; special trains brought bodies from Waterloo Station. Trains brought the dead out of cities in Australia too; Sydney's Rookwood Necropolis was placed where it was because of its proximity to tracks. But whatever the specific history of each cemetery, they all took the dead away from living and placed them in a radically new sort of environment: in extra-urban parks in which they were aligned not to wake up at the last judgment facing Jerusalem, i.e. toward the east, but in whatever direction local topography dictated: enjoying a fine vista, facing a fountain or a path.

Cemeteries segregated the dead; they had no place in urban space. More successfully than the home ever was for women, they succeeded in being really a »separate sphere.« Not for the dead the »tumult of a populous city (...) their business with this world is ended (...) The price of corn, the state of the money market, or the rising or falling of the funds are matters which ought to be discussed far away from those we followed.« Not in front of the servants. No wonder that William Hazlitt understands the fear of death as being the fear of no longer mattering in the world of affairs and, projecting back, of never having mattered at all. »People walk along the streets the day or our deaths just as they did before, and the crowd is not diminished. While we were living, the world seemed in manner to exist only for us (...) But our hearts cease to beat, and it goes on as usual, and thinks no more of us than it did in our lifetime.«²⁵ There is in these sentiments an almost Darwinian disenchantment of the world *avant la lettre*, a realization that the world cares little for the individual. Hazlitt's is not the awesome death that so disturbed Dr. Johnson who so much wanted to believe in the Cock Lane Ghost; it is death as being forgotten. Memory, not the afterlife, is its antidote and the cemetery made possible an undreamed of elaboration of personal commemoration and contemplation which the densely populated churches and church yards of the old order allowed only for a very small elite. I do not want to attribute this profound development in how we remember the dead to the lifting of material constraints alone. But, the late seventeenth century architect and playwright Sir John Vanbrugh was right when he argued that the cemeteries he proposed to replace churchyards would permit »noble

mausoleum erected over the dead«, while those now in aisles and under pews in parish churches had at best »little tawny monuments of marble stuck against walls and pillars.«²⁶ Or, probably not at all. Cemeteries made memory hugely more democratic even if it did not make it universally accessible.

Burial in the parish churchyard and church was explicitly for parishioners. Others could and did, for a higher fee, buy the privilege of burial there and matters were never as tidy as principle might suggest. But in general they were representations of what were thought of as autarkic communities. The nineteenth century cemetery was in its essence public and its glory was that anyone could be there: »Russ sleeping next to Spaniard, Protestant next to Catholic, the Jew next to the Turk«, claims the Glasgow Necropolis echoing Père la Chaise. Anyone who could afford a place could be there and the first burial there was in fact a Jew.

The poor, of course, had not been as prominently buried in the churchyard as were the powerful and rights to especially prominent places belonged in various complicated ways to local landed classes. And, of course, as the middling sorts during the course of the seventeenth century started to bury their dead in the floors of the church the poor were further isolated outdoors. But they had to be there for the churchyard to be what it was: the sensibility that so attracted readers of Gray's *Elegy* depended on it.

In cemeteries they were hidden and expendable were it not that they were needed only to make the enterprise pay. The dirty secret is that in fact the new cemeteries could survive economically only by egregious cheating on the one grave one body program of the public health reformers. Whether in the *fosse commune* of the French cemetery or the British shaft graves that, with careful planning, could hold thirty or forty bodies the poor subsidized the middle classes. Unlike the churchyard imagined by Gray, the nineteenth cemetery could only be »read« by and was readable for them alone.

There is also a peculiar aesthetic incoherence of the cemetery which produced unease in viewers as diverse as the radical liberal political economist, Harriet Martineau, and the high church Tory architect and critic S. A. Pugin. Martineau thought that Mt. Auburn, outside Cambridge, Massachusetts, generally signified much that was good about the new country that, in other ways, she found culturally wanting: unbound by the past, optimistic about the future. But the cemetery's historical incoherence disturbed her. She found it strange that the Egyptian gate with its winged globe and serpent should have a quote from Ecclesiastes – »then shall the dust return to earth« – which belies both the Egyptian theme and the death as sleep in nature motif which dominates Mt. Auburn which she was visiting. She was equally puzzled as to why the Trier born, Boston buried, phrenologist Johann Spruzheim rests under a tomb that is the facsimile of Scipio's (that would be L. Cornelius Scipio Barbatus, consul 298). It is not easy, she says, »to conceive how anything appropriate to Scipio would suit Spruzheim.« The answer turns out to be purely circumstantial and shallow but also wonderfully liberating. The marble arri-

ved just when Spurzheim died and the committee appointed to honor him saved time by purchasing it. Pugin is angrier at the »grossest absurdities« perpetrated by new cemetery companies. There is the superabundance of inverted torches, cinerary urns – but of course no ashes – and other pagan symbols. The entrance gate is usually Egyptian – a kind of orientalist fantasy in Pugin's view which associates – falsely – discoveries along the Nile with the idea of catacombs which the company sells. It is topped by Grecian capitals along a frieze giving the cemetery's name; Osiris bears a gas lamp and various »hawk-headed divinities« look on. Hieroglyphics on a cast iron gate mean nothing; »they would puzzle the most learned to decipher.« And so would the aesthetics of the cemetery more generally.²⁷

The new cemeteries were essentially memorial parks. They were under the supervision of landscape gardeners not priests; they reflected secular tastes with little clerical guidance. A Christian burial place, argued one of their clerical opponents, »should not betray a starchy look. It should not look as if it had been tricked and decorated to give it undue attraction.« There should be no fancy plantings but only yew trees, no flower gardens, not »domestic shrubbery.« But of course this is exactly what made Père la Chaise or Highgate or any of the score of new places for the dead the repositories of family memory that they were. Precisely what conservatives hated is what made them attractive to the spokesmen of progress. An upbeat tourist guidebook for Hull praises city's cemetery director because, in addition to his regular duties, he »also pursues his horticultural labours, *con amore*, and with such taste and industry as to make this otherwise ›valley of gloom‹ a very garden of delights.«²⁸ No spirit or ghost would want to leave such a place for town.

Different styles of monuments – you can buy whatever style you want – about one another. There is in principle no symbolic order, nor historical order. But there is a space in which one could mourn and remember in whatever fashion one could afford in the company of veritable museum of styles and even bodies: Abelard and Heloise and Molière were moved to Père la Chaise; John Knox stood guard over the Glasgow Necropolis. Memories and even bodies could be moved; but ghosts stayed in the place.

All of this suggests that I have gone a very long way around to rediscover the bourgeoisie: in radically new places for the dead the autarchy of the local gives way to openness of the great wide world; a sacred geography gives way to a secular one; home – in this case the home of the dead – is removed from work-old verities torn asunder; all that is solid melts into air. One does not need an anthropology or an archaeology or a cultural geography of death – as one might need in studying the ancient Greeks or Egyptians – to understand the nature of a new civilization that became ascendant in the nineteenth century and to see that cemeteries are an integral part of it.

But death, to paraphrase Levi-Strauss, remains good to think with. It always takes a lot of cultural work to put the dead to rest, but this work takes on peculiarly modern forms after the rejection of a widely accepted transcendental account of

death itself. Enlightenment figures and those who followed in their tradition that substituting History – progress, health, memory, moral and material advance – for religion and superstition would make matters easier. In a way, they did. Occasionally a vampire or so might appear in one of the new places for the dead – London’s Highgate is a case in point – but, by and large, this did not happen very much.

The dead, however, did not stay in the realms of memory and in their own, other, world – their necropolis – far from the crowded city of the living. They returned in new ways and with them came all sorts of other strange phenomena that seemed beyond ordinary knowing. In fact, we might speculate that the epidemic of spirits and of the occult more generally in the second half of the nineteenth century was a response to the radical separation of the dead and the living. It was not an explicit assault on secularism; table knocking and much of the occult experimentation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had little if anything to do with religion in any traditional sense. But nothing in human life represents the world beyond ordinary experience, the world not accessible to ordinary reason and empirical study, more powerfully than death. With the dead banned from the city, we might continue to speculate, something else took their place as placeholders for the unknown, the hidden world. Flush the dog found himself at the beginning of a new phase of epistemological skepticism born of the return of the repressed – the banished dead.

Notes

- ¹ Virginia Woolf, *Flush*. Edited with and introduction by Kate Flint, Oxford 1998, 100-102.
- ² Cf. Palmira Brummett, *Images and Imperialism in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press, 1908-1911*, Albany 2000.
- ³ For this and the next paragraph see E.J. Clery, *The Rise of the Supernatural Fiction*, Cambridge NY 1995, particularly 13-32.
- ⁴ Cited in Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Cambridge 1995, 20-21.
- ⁵ William Mumford, *A Visit to Kensal Green Cemetery*, in: *Bentley’s Miscellany* 9 (1842), 92 ff.
- ⁶ Laman Blanchard in: *Ainsworth’s magazine. A miscellany of romance, general literature, & art*, 1 (1842).
- ⁷ Calculations based on Asiaticus, *The Epitaphs in the Different Burial Grounds in and about Calcutta*, Calcutta 1803.
- ⁸ William Hale, *Intramural Burial in England not Dangerous to the Public Health. Its Abolition is Injurious to Religion and Morals*, London 1855; John Claudius Loudon. *An Encyclopedia of Gardening* New ed., revised, London 1835, entry 1562 (emphasis added).
- ⁹ I have this on report from one of the editors of this volume, Alexander Geppert.
- ¹⁰ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London 1966, 2.
- ¹¹ Cf. Vanessa Harding, »And One more May be Laid There«. *The Location of Burials in Early Modern London*, in: *The London Journal*, 14/2 (1989), 10 f. R. Latham and W. Mathews, *The*

Diary of Samuel Pepys, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1971, 90 (18 March 1664). My calculation of the density of bodies in the Cemetery of the Innocents is based on its size and the number of skeletal remains supposedly removed when the cemetery was closed. It is meant not as a scientific estimate but as an exercise in showing the order of magnitude of crowding.

- ¹² Gibert v. Buzzard and Boyer, Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Ecclesiastical Courts at Doctors Common, London 1827, 3, 167, and 335-443.
- ¹³ Cf. Johann Wolfgang v. Goethe, Die Wahlverwandtschaften: ein Roman, Frankfurt am Main 2002 (¹1809), Teil 2, Kapitel 1.
- ¹⁴ Hale, Burial, as note 8.
- ¹⁵ H.B. Wilson, Letters to the Parishioners of St. Thomas the Apostle on the Bill no before Parliament empowering the Corporation to take the Churchyard at St. Thomas, 2; A Plea for St. Pancras Churchyard, London 1874; William E. Brown, A Short History of St. Pancras Cemeteries, London 1896, 17.
- ¹⁶ Chadwick Papers, University College, London, Box 46 (emphasis as in original).
- ¹⁷ The Lancet 1 (1839/40), 411-413, and 1 (1840-41) 201 f.; Matthieu Orfila et Octave Lesueur, Traité des exhumations juridiques, Paris 1831, 10.
- ¹⁸ Cf. James Curry, Observations on Apparent Death, London ²1815, 72-75, and 179.
- ¹⁹ Vicq d'Azyr, An Essay on the Danger of Interment in Cities. New York 1824, 28 ff. This piece was originally a translation, with comments by Vicq, of an Italian work of the late eighteenth century.
- ²⁰ Rev. Joseph Dodd, Consecration. Or a Plea for the Dead, London n.d., 2.
- ²¹ James Hervey, Meditations Among the Tombs, London 1778.
- ²² Cf. Pictorial Handbook of London, London 1859, 287; on Calcutta and more generally on the Indian case see Sten Nilsson, European Architecture in India, 1750-1850, London 1969, 130-137.
- ²³ John Strang, Necropolis Glasguensis, Glasgow 1831, preface, and 28-37; George Ticknor Curtis, Mount Auburn, in: New England Magazine 7 (October 1834), 316; quotes in Blanche Linden-Ward, Strange but Genteel Pleasure Grounds: Tourist and Leisure Uses of Nineteenth-Century Rural Cemeteries, in: Richard Meyer, ed., Cemeteries and Gravemarkers, London, and Ann Arbor 1989, 302, and 293-328 generally.
- ²⁴ John Weale, Pictorial Handbook of London, London 1854, 288; see also William Justyne, A Guide to Highgate Cemetery, London 1865; David A. Weston, and Laurel Burge, The Sleeping City: the Story of Rookwood Necropolis, Sydney, 1989.
- ²⁵ William Hazlitt, On the Fear of Death, in: Geoffrey Keynes, ed., Selected Essays of William Hazlitt, London 1930, 168.
- ²⁶ For Vanburgh see Howard Colvin, Architecture and the Afterlife, New Haven 1991, 316 f.
- ²⁷ Harriet Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travel, London 1838, 2, and 227-233; A. Welby Pugin, An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England, London 1853, 12, and plate 5.
- ²⁸ W. Hastings Kelke, The Churchyard Manual. Intended chiefly for rural districts, London 1851, 16. Although Kelke's title suggests that he is interested primarily in rural cemeteries all his criticism is directed at the new urban places for the dead. His mission is to prevent this secular nightmare from having too great an impact on the country churchyard. Cf. The Visitors Guide to the Town of Hull, Hull 1852, 23 f.