CEMETERY PLOTS FROM VICTORIA TO VERDUN: LITERARY
REPRESENTATIONS OF EPITAPH AND BURIAL FROM THE NINETEENTH
CENTURY THROUGH THE GREAT WAR

by

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Cemetery Plots from Victoria to Verdun: Literary Representations of Epitaph and Burial
from the Nineteenth Century through the Great War

Abstract

by

HEATHER J. KICHNER

Cemetery Plots considers the rhetoric of burial reform, cemeterial customs, and
epitaph writing in Great Britain from the mid-nineteenth century through the Great War.
The first half of the dissertation studies mid- and late-Victorian responses to death and
burial, including epitaph collections, burial reform documents, and fictional
representations of burial and epitaph writing, especially in the novels of Charles Dickens.
It traces expressions of cultural anxiety about individuality and the preservation of
identity through an examination of Victorian mourning customs and literary
representations of memorialization. The second half of the dissertation studies this same
discourse of burial, epitaphs and mourning in the fiction, memoirs, diaries,
correspondence, and poems produced in response to the First World War in order to
understand how writings about individual memorialization changed in post-war British
literature and culture. By examining how authors such as Charles Dickens, Ivor Gurney,
Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, and Virginia Woolf wrote about cemeteries, epitaphs,
and burial practices, the dissertation demonstrates how the exaltation of individual
identity in nineteenth-century memorialization practices gave way to an increasing
skepticism about the delineation and preservation of individuality in the early twentieth
century, as war writers altered and even disregarded Victorian notions of the individual

when they wrote to remember. The Victorians' consumption of epitaphs, social novels, and reform documents like Edwin Chadwick's *Sanitation Report* provided the chance to develop new ideas about the individual, as well as mourning customs, social standing, and definitions of middle-class identity. By the time Woolf wrote *Jacob's Room*, however, the power and centrality of cemeteries and individual epitaphs had been called into question. Because of the Great War, writers had come to doubt the stability of both language and identity, and their fiction, poetry, and memoirs effectively challenged the ability of individualized burial practices, lengthy epitaphs, or other traditional forms of memorialization to capture the identity of the dead.

Introduction: Arriving at the Cemetery

Here in this grave there lyes a Cave,

We call a Cave a Grave;

If Cave be Grave and Grave be Cave,

Then, reader! judge, I crave,

Whether doth Cave lye here in Grave,

Or Grave doth lye in Cave?

If Grave and Cave here buried lye,

Then Grave where is thy victorie?

Go, reader, and report here lyes a Cave

Who conquers death and buries his own Grave.

—Charles Northend, *Churchyard Literature* (1874)

Charles Northend includes this ten-line epitaph for a man named "Cave" in his 1874 collection of epitaphs called *Churchyard Literature or Light Reading on Grave Subjects*. Northend's book is one of many collections of epitaphs published during the nineteenth century. This epitaph raises particular questions about the presence and absence of bodies and the audience for memorializing writing. The writer of this riddle emphasizes his proximity to the tombstone and beckons the reader to look "here" in "this grave," although reading this epitaph on the pages of Northend's book would have had quite a different feel than reading the text on the tombstone itself. The reader could, however, imagine himself standing next to the grave stone in the cemetery; indeed, the

opening lines invite intimacy, drawing the reader into the riddle. The if-then question posed in the next four lines presents a common epitaph request: the voice from the stone directly addresses the reader and asks for judgment and consideration. The author makes a Biblical reference, Chapter 15, Verse 55 of First Corinthians, but substitutes "Grave" for "Death" when asking, "Then Grave where is thy victorie?" The spatial impossibility invoked by the epitaph seeks rhetorical power over death. If the Grave holds Cave but the two words represent similar vacant spaces, then how can one hold the other? It questions the act of burial itself and concludes that if both Cave and Grave are buried, then death loses its grip. Again using a popular epitaph tactic, the writer engages the reader to go forth as a witness to "report" this victorious conclusion. In this, as in many similar epitaphs from this period, the reader is invited to play significant yet shifting roles as interpreter, judge, and reporter.

The "Cave" epitaph raises many issues that are central to this dissertation, which addresses the changing relationship between acts of burial and acts of writing about burial from the mid-nineteenth-century through the First World War. Like the dissertation, the "Cave" epitaph questions how writing can represent the human body; it demonstrates how memorializing writing can become highly intertextual, and how writing and remembrance are interrelated. Both the "Cave" epitaph and this dissertation are concerned with the words we use to "name" bodies and graves, and both scrutinize the relationship between epitaphs and burial that became particularly charged during the nineteenth century.

During the eighteenth century, the poetic epitaph, made popular by writers like John Donne, John Dryden, and Robert Herrick during the seventeenth century, continued

to increase in popularity.[1] During both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the English poetic epitaph became "a vital literary genre" (Scodel 5). Yet during this period, scant attention was paid to the writing of actual, useful epitaphs that might decorate tombstones, especially for the middle classes, because individual plots with gravestones for any but the wealthiest citizens were yet uncommon. Instead, most churchyards housed communal graves, and, although a few social critics questioned this practice, little action took place to address the situation. Connections were not yet being made between burial practices, public sanitation, and good health, though these associations eventually shaped the burial reform movement in the nineteenth century and helped to transform popular assumptions about individual burial and memorialization. While some epitaph collections appeared during the eighteenth century, most of them, like Thomas Webb's *A New Select Collection of Epitaphs* (1775) and Thomas Caldwall's *A Select Collection of Ancient and Modern Epitaphs* (1796), focused on what the collectors considered to be "the most remarkable inscriptions" and epitaphs written for "eminent personages." It was not until the nineteenth century that most collectors provided actual, utilitarian inscriptions for use on individual grave stones. By the nineteenth-century, epitaph collectors no longer exalted "select" epitaphs about "eminent" members of society, but instead wrote upon varied epitaphic subjects with a broader audience in mind. This change in assumptions about how epitaphs were produced and consumed—both on gravestones and in literary collections—arose in part as a result of the burial reform movement in England, as changes in burial practices and laws began to proliferate in the 1830's. A new emphasis on individualized burial revitalized concerns for personal and

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[1] For a detailed analysis of the rise and fall of epitaphic poetry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Joshua Scodel's *The English Poetic Epitaph: Commemoration and Conflict from Jonson to Wordsworth*.

distinct memorials on gravestones, and epitaphs became both more widespread and more desirable commodities as part of this process. By the early twentieth century, however, the onset of World War I challenged the meaning and value of epitaphs, and both war writers and novelists began to question the power of these memorializing verses and to envision how commemorators might honor the dead in new ways. This dissertation traces these changes in the cultural meaning and memorializing function of epitaphs and epitaphic language from the nineteenth into the twentieth century, and charts the intricate relationship between burial practices and forms of individual and collective commemoration during both periods—focusing in particular on the Victorian burial reform era and the years during and immediately after World War I.

My discussion of the changing literary and historical conventions of epitaph writing and the value placed upon individual burial is situated within a much wider culture of mourning during the nineteenth century. This period is often distinguished by a fascination with death and the customs and rituals associated with mourning. This explains why James Stevens Curl calls his seminal work *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (2000). The nineteenth century saw the creation of extensive funeral ephemera, the growth of the undertaking trade, and an onslaught of royal funerals.[2] It also ushered in public debates about more problematic burial issues, and fostered legislation addressing grave robbing and medical experimentation on corpses as well as new

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[2] James Stevens Curl discusses funeral ephemera, such as mourning garb, memorial cards, and children's books, all important accessories associated with ostentatious mourning during the Victorian era, in Chapter 7 of *The Victorian Celebration of Death*. He also covers "The Royal Funeral" in Chapter 8. Clare Gittings traces the rise of the undertaking trade in England to the rise of individualism in *Death, Burial, and the Individual in Early Modern England*. Gittings links the rise of the profession to increasing commercialization and specialized professionalization. Paul Fritz also provides a discussion of the history of the undertaking trade in his article "The Undertaking Trade in England."

technologies addressing fears of accidental burial.[3] Queen Victoria's perpetual state of

mourning after Prince Albert's death in 1861 distinguishes the era; after Albert's passing,

Victoria wore black for the remainder of her sixty-four year reign and never truly forsook

her seclusion and depression.[4] There was criticism that Victoria had become obsessed

with her grief; this, in turn, raised questions about how to grieve, how long to grieve, and

how much to grieve. The Queen turned to the one of the most significant pieces of

mourning literature for solace: Alfred Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850). Victoria

said the elegy brought her solace and helped her through her extended mourning for

Albert. Tennyson's poem not only voiced the poet's own personal struggle with grief but

also raised more general questions about science and faith. *In Memoriam*, an epic model

elegy, helped to define the grief-centered culture of the Victorian period and remains one

of the most important poems written in the nineteenth century.

Public mourning again shrouded England upon Queen Victoria's own demise in

1901. Her funeral was the most full and magnificent of its kind since the Duke of

Wellington's ceremony a half-century earlier (Wolffe 232). Queen Victoria was interred

beside Prince Albert in the Frogmore Royal Mausoleum, a final resting place she

designed for them to share, behind a stone door marked with her words: "'farewell best

beloved, here at last I shall rest with thee, with thee in Christ I shall rise again" (*Kings*

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[3] The best source of information on body snatching anxieties and the ramifications of the Anatomy Act of 1832, which designated that the bodies of those who died in workhouses were appropriated for medical dissection, is Ruth Richardson's *Death, Dissection, and the Destitute*. For a discussion of premature burial, see Martin Pernick's article, "Back from the Grave: Recurring Controversies over Defining and Diagnosing Death in History." The fear of premature burial during wartime conditions resurfaced before and during World War I. In 1896, the Association for the Prevention of Premature Burial was founded. Their publication called *Premature Burial and Its Preventions* includes concerns about the war wounded; they desired to help men "on the battlefield, where…there are probably hundreds hurriedly buried" (15). For another discussion of premature burial concerns during the Great War, see Eric Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I*.

[4] For a detailed discussion of Prince Albert's death, see Chapter 7 of John Wolffe's *Great Deaths: Grieving, Religion and Nationhood in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000); Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, 222-48.

and Queens). After Victoria's death, "obituary columns, public meetings, and church services, culminating in the funeral itself, testified to the depth of national and world-wide emotion focused on this single human being" (Wolffe 2). The death of Prince Albert and the mourning of Queen Victoria underscored the complexity of mourning during a time when the very act of remembrance was under scrutiny.

Questions about remembrance naturally came into play with the onset of burial reform legislation during the nineteenth century when several public health, interment, and burial ground acts were legislated. The desire for individually-marked graves certainly predates nineteenth-century reform, but expectations about individualized burial and commemoration were renewed at the apex of graveyard crowding in Victorian cities and during the development of Victorian middle-class aspirations. The beginning of significant burial reform activity can be traced to the incorporation of the General Cemetery Company in 1832 and the consecration of Kensal Green, the first public commercial cemetery, in 1833. Six other commercial cemeteries followed in Kensal's wake (1836-41), and this led to legislation such as the Cemetery Clauses Act in 1847, which provided general guidelines for the establishment and oversight of these grounds, which were run like businesses. During the second half of the nineteenth century, focus and power shifted away from the joint stock cemetery companies and into the hands of bureaucrats and, eventually, local authorities who would run burial boards, oversee public grounds, and set burial fees. With the Metropolitan Open Spaces Act in 1877, several overused burial grounds closed for burial and were re-envisioned as public gardens. As I will go on to show in Chapter One and throughout the dissertation, these and other

Victorian burial reforms highlighted the complex and evolving relationship between public health, social mobility, and the cultural value of individual identity after death.

This dissertation focuses on a wide variety of genres. It studies not only epitaphs and epitaph collections, but also novels, poems, documents, letters, and diaries to consider how memorializing practices negotiated definitions of selfhood, status, propriety, and public recognition. The novels discussed in the first two chapters include Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852), *Little Dorrit* (1855), and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), with briefer discussions of works by Elizabeth Gaskell, Wilkie Collins, Sheridan LeFanu, and Bram Stoker. These novels incorporate scenes of gravestones, interment, and epitaph writing. Some of these fictional burial scenes are serious in tone; others, like those in *Carmilla*, *The Woman in White*, and *Dracula* are more fantastical. Although a fictional fascination with cemeteries, epitaphs, and grave markers surfaced often in nineteenth-century Gothic literature, these texts are not at the center of this project. Rather, the works I discuss most extensively here are concerned with mass burial, sanitation reform, and the difficult task of memorializing the dead. I am thus most interested in works that bear witness to the social ramifications of burial reform.

The second half of the project features works concerned with burial practices and mourning challenges brought on by the First World War, including Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* (1922), Robert Graves' *Good-bye to All That* (1929), Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930), Edwin Campion Vaughn's Memoir *Some Desperate Glory* (1917), and war poetry by Ivor Gurney. These literary and cultural discussions in the second half of the project pick up over twenty years after those works discussed in the first half. In intervening years, from the 1890's to World War I, England

underwent numerous changes, including shifts in population, political unrest, and the Boer War (1899-1902).[5] Yet because the Boer War was so much smaller in scale than the First World War and, as in previous wars, the dead were buried in mass graves (Trumpener 1096), the Boer War did not seem to inspire the level of cultural anxiety about burial and remembrance that we find in contemporary writings about the Great War. World War I marked a significant change in the treatment of the war dead when officials inaugurated new methods of remembrance and Britain tried, with limited success, to individualize victims of war. The second half of this dissertation thus focuses on this second period of change in British commemorative practices, along with the wartime conditions that precipitated them. It argues that, as a result of the First World War, Britain confronted anew some of the problems addressed in the burial reform era and developed new methods of tribute—such as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier—that sought to address, and at times embrace, the anonymity of the wartime dead.

As a result of this renewed confrontation with mass burials and anonymous corpses, moments in Virginia Woolf's fiction echo Victorian themes of death and identity. Woolf fictionalizes the challenges and burdens of memorialization, often in the context of war, as seen in the grief-motivated plots of *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse*. Like Dickens, Woolf includes central memorializing scenes, but Jacob Flanders and Septimus Smith seem more present—more wholly characterized in death—*after* their bodies are broken or banished from their narratives. Their

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[5] Although there were a few additional burial laws enacted, burial legislation generally declined during this period.

"corpselessness" becomes powerful in its own right.[6] Both *Bleak House* and *Jacob's Room* feature cemeteries, but Woolf manages to convey identity more in terms of spirit than body. Although she punctuates *Jacob's Room* with moonlit cemeteries and inscribed tombstones, these elements do not bestow identity upon the dead or even play a significant role in the process of memorialization. They seem rather like vestiges of the past, identifying markers that have lost their commemorative power.

Thus, by comparing the memorializing practices of these two periods through their literature, *Cemetery Plots* considers burial customs and epitaph writing in relation to the production and disruption of individual identity.   The first half of the dissertation focuses on actual and fictional epitaphs, burial tropes, and reform documents to elucidate Victorian ideas about mourning and individuality, while the second half charts the resurgence of burial issues and cemeterial themes in World War I poems, fiction, and memoirs. Ultimately, the project argues that the memorializing power of epitaphic language idealized in Victorian literature and culture began to decline when war writers, facing the absent and fragmented bodies of battle, took on new commemorative challenges and questioned the previous century's methods of individualized remembrance.

Important Terms: Memorialization, Identity, Burial, and Epitaph

This project focuses on memorialization, a term that can refer to countless practices and forms of remembrance. Memorialization takes place through gravestones and statues but also through mourning customs and rituals. In this dissertation, I use the

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[6] Here, I am indebted to Allyson Booth, who uses "Corpselessness" as the title for Chapter One of *Postcards from the Trenches* (21-49). Booth argues that when the British government did not allow the burial of the war dead on English soil, they also obliterated the soldiers' sense of home.

term "memorialization" primarily to mean words or structures meant to honor, remember, and/or represent the dead. Memorials often involve writing, and writing can express grief, both individual and collective, as writing seeks to locate, identify, name, and personalize the dead. Burying, demarcating and labeling corpses are ways to organize death and assert control at a moment when humans feel the least powerful. Epitaphs— words written to identify, describe, or honor the dead—are the main forms of memorialization considered here because when burial became more individualized over the course of the nineteenth century, so did the written forms that accompanied it. By studying burial practices and the development and language of epitaphs, we can more carefully analyze the fascination with death that surfaced in Victorian fiction and culture. Writer-reformers like Charles Dickens, Edwin Chadwick, and George Alfred Walker addressed concerns about social and memorializing responsibilities and sought remedies for cemeterial overcrowding and unidentified graves. Many nineteenth-century novels presented themes of burial atrocities, mistaken epitaphs, and disrupted graves—all of which related to fears about the relationship between class, propriety, and acts of memorialization.

The concept of identity also permeates this project, and of particular importance is the term "individual identity" as it relates to burial, epitaph, and acts of remembrance. Certainly, different concepts of identity exist when we consider any process of individual personal development or cultural formation. My concern here, however, is with the process by which the living seek to shape, define, or demarcate the individuality of the dead through acts of memorialization. Because nineteenth-century burial reform brought attention to individual bodies in distinct and separate burial spaces marked by grave

stones, it influenced the idea of how individuals were remembered. In this context, an individual's identity is the accumulation of both personal and social data that shapes the person's status and reception in society. Identity is never fixed; when it comes to epitaph writing, it is probably at its most fluid. Whether people's epitaphs are self-penned or formulated by others, identity is often expressed in ways that are more fanciful than factual, more anecdotal than documented. In death, people's characteristics, status, aspirations, and achievements are often established by those who are charged with remembrance and with capturing identity through language. Tombstones are designed to work metonymically; that is, their meaningfulness is based on an understood contiguous association between corpses and grave markers. The markers act as reminders and extensions of the dead, and corresponding epitaphs (that serve, at the very least, to identify the grave with a name and perhaps birth/death dates) preserve the memory of individuals. A tombstone is usually intended to represent one body buried beneath it. Whether it was during the cemeterial overcrowding of the nineteenth-century cemetery or the devastation of World War I, when mass and anonymous burials disturbed this process of signification, epitaphic language no longer worked; the metonymic relationship between bodies and stones became unreliable. In these periods, writing, whether fictional or epitaphic, became a means of achieving appropriate remembrance, as well as a means to examine and repair the loss of individual identity in death.

The term "epitaph" comes from the Greek "epitaphios," which translates literally into "on the tombstone." Epitaphs operate in three primary ways: they indicate the identity of the dead, they reveal their resting places, and they serve as focal points for the living—either to facilitate mourning or to provide more detailed information—even

entertainment—to people passing by. The audience for epitaphs varies greatly, so epitaph writers have especially challenging tasks. In fact, the two main audiences for this writing are completely different; epitaphs are meant to engage both those intimate with the dead as well as complete strangers merely passing by. They seek to reach those who knew and cared for the deceased, but also people who had not even met them. Furthermore, epitaphs can express two voices: one is that of the dead themselves, and the other is that of mourners. With some epitaphs, the message seems to come from the grave; with others, the message comes from the living writer's point of view in words of pain, loss, hope, or admonition. The epitaph writers' many and varied responsibilities— capturing identity, considering audience, consoling mourners, remembering individuals— complicate the task of memorialization through a piece of writing on a tombstone.

Although often poetic in form, epitaphs are more akin to narrative in that, in their most basic form (name plus birth and death dates), they identify a person and convey the linearity of life that could be associated with storytelling.[7] One of the ways we construct meaning and attempt to capture reality is through our ordering of time in narrative form. As Hayden White puts it, "Narrative is… a human universal act… the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted" (1). The narrative of life begins at birth and ends at death, and epitaphs remind us of life as constructed in an organized, linear fashion. At the least, epitaphs point out birth and death dates and suggest a life lived in between; longer, more embellished epitaphs provide fuller characterizations. They might include the relationship of the writer to the

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[7] While considering the linguistic theories of Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida, Karen Mills-Courts, in *Poetry as Epitaph: Representation and Poetic Language*, compares poetic techniques to those of the epitaph writer, concluding that poem are actually similar to inscribed tombstones that simultaneously evoke presence and absence. Epitaphs and poems can both be seen as writing that must balance the Heideggerean idea of language as incarnative and the Derridean concept of language as disembodied free play.

deceased, along with the personality, occupation, or hobby of the dead, or even the circumstances of his or her demise. They can tell stories on behalf of those who can no longer speak for themselves.

Epitaphs are ostensibly related to burial. The term "burial" is often synonymous with "interment." Both "burial" and "interment" can refer to the placement of a corpse into a subterranean grave or an above-ground tomb; this project primarily uses "burial" to refer to placement of the corpse into an earthen grave unless otherwise noted. During the nineteenth century, a textual concern for the preservation of individual identity after burial was dispersed through bound collections of epitaphs and scores of reform documents. The connection between burial reform and epitaphs makes sense because once corpses rested in individual plots rather than mass graves, the British could revitalize the practice of providing one tombstone and verse per body. Stones adorned with at least basic identifying language provided the name and lifespan of the deceased. Memorialization in this period went beyond simple identification, though. As Karen Sanchez-Eppler points out, "The reformers' stance on health and sanitation was variously reinforced by a sympathetic concern for the sentiments of the survivors, a newly voiced need to protect the repose of the dead, and the notion that the graveyard should be a place of moral edification" (416). The reorganization and careful management of burial space meant that epitaph writers could now assign individual identity to the dead, but, as Sanchez-Eppler suggests, meticulously-maintained burial grounds reinforced the boundary between the living and the dead and encouraged the idea of the cemetery as a site for reflection and remembrance. Suddenly, there was a proper way to mourn, and "it [was] not possible to mourn, the reformers argued, in a graveyard scattered with bones"

(Sanchez-Eppler 424). Sentimentality was infused into the burial scene, and epitaphs were a critical part of imparting feeling. Until this time, the desire for burial in churchyards, in holy ground, had superseded the desire to be individualized and recognized, but the development of the idea of meditative spaces and the rise of the middle class encouraged the resurgence of epitaph collections. As they were encountered in both texts and cemeteries, epitaphs took on a new quaintness and earned renewed appreciation during the Victorian era.

Writers and compilers of epitaph collections bemoaned dilapidated gravestones with unreadable epitaphs. Anonymous mass interments in churchyards conveyed disrespect toward the forgotten deceased, whose bones were left to mingle with others' remains in common burial plots. Collections of epitaphs raised issues of linguistic competence, creativity, and propriety, while reform documents tackled the problem of overcrowded burial spaces and missing epitaphs. This proliferation of cemeterial writing was both reflected in and, in part, shaped by the fiction of the period. Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Sheridan LeFanu, and Wilkie Collins used fictional epitaphs and cemeterial scenes to consider the importance of individualized burial, where single bodies were interred under individual tombstones with respective epitaphs.

Correlations exist between actual, collected, and fictional epitaphs. The appearance of epitaph collections during the nineteenth century suggests a perceived need to collate these bits of human identity. This raises another set of questions relating to a culture of mourning. What common purpose did collected and fictional epitaphs serve? What common structures did they share? What precipitated an outpouring of collections, and who was their intended audience? How did these collections serve readers? Was

reading an epitaph in a collection a different experience than reading it in a cemetery or in the pages of a novel? Despite their many differences, the collection and dissemination of epitaphs in these various mediums can be seen as attempts to permanently capture and narrate individual identities.

Nineteenth-century epitaphs, both real and fictional, acknowledge distinct lives and identities even when common and disorderly burial practices challenged notions of individuality. Burial reform legislation and nineteenth-century novels both reinforced notions of the self as "somebody," but when World War I disrupted the ability to recognize, locate, and memorialize individual corpses, war writers began to characterize the anonymous self and to showcase the "nobody." Absent bodies, erased identities, and fragmented lives resurfaced in new forms when World War I writers, triggered by the horrible conditions of conflict, focused on burial duties and used memorializing language when corpses never received proper epitaphs or resting places. It seems that war writing presented a different way of thinking about corpses, a shift from epitaphic writing that identified and located bodies to writing that de-emphasized bodies and pointed to other, more subtle and indirect methods of remembrance.

Critical Background: Important Influences

I reap two main benefits from the rich scholarly heritage that informs this project: a complex historio-cultural canvas and an interdisciplinary approach. I am indebted to historians who have provided cultural perspectives on this era and to literary critics who have demonstrated ways of connecting literature and culture. Writers from various disciplines have examined death in relation to nineteenth-century social conditions, but

few have studied how particular aspects of memorialization, such as cemetery design, burial practices, grave marking, and epitaph writing, correspond to the codification of burial laws and the rise of new cemeterial customs. Anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer's 1965 study *Death, Grief, and Mourning* was one of the first to examine individual, familial, and social aspects of mourning. Although Gorer specifically emphasizes the bereavement process and styles of mourning in his study of 1,628 grief-stricken British men and women, his discussion of the disposal of bodies and importance of gravestones as part of the mourning process paved the way for projects like mine. Two influential books appeared in the 1970's that also laid the groundwork for my scholarship. John Morley, in *Death, Heaven and the Victorians* (1971), examines how consumerism and social status governed the mourning process in nineteenth-century Britain. Focusing on the work of grave-diggers, the terrain of the cemetery, and the importance of objects used during bereavement, Morley was one of the first scholars to address the moral influence of the cemetery and the vast process of burial reform as it unfolded. In *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (1972), James Stevens Curl focuses on the rise of commercial cemetery ventures in London in the 1830's as part of both a larger attitude of caring for the dead and the major sanitary reforms of the era. Morley and Curl were the first to speculate on how burial spaces reflected social change in Britain. In more recent decades, scholars have taken the study of nineteenth-century body handling and burial spaces a step further. Chris Brooks added an important contribution to the study of the Victorian and Edwardian cemetery with *Mortal Remains* (1989), and studies like *The English Way of Death* (1991) by Julien Litten and Patricia Jalland's *Death in the*

Victorian Family (1999) explore the contrast between burial etiquette for the rich and the poor and the social aspirations of all classes for proper gravestones.

The two main influences on the World War I portion of this project are Allyson Booth's *Postcards from the Trenches* (2001) and Trudi Tate's *Modernism, History and the First World War* (1998). Booth argues that the war experience rendered language inadequate for both civilians and combatants, and that the way soldiers confronted corpses is linked to the dissolving modernist self. Tate, too, sees war writing and modernism as forms of one another, noting that corpses actually came to signify absence. Both Booth and Tate provide the essential cultural and literary background for my examination of how war poets and modernist writers like Woolf wrote in light of war trauma and loss.

Despite these rich cultural histories, few authors have compared these two mourning-driven eras and the literature produced during these times. Probably the best recent example of a study comparing and contrasting ideas about death in both eras is Julie-Marie Strange's *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (2004). Strange provides a rich analysis of how the poor mourned their dead and adds an epilogue titled "Death, Grief and the Great War" to take up the impact of the war on cultures of death and grief. Although she is a historian and does not address literary concerns, Strange considers working-class responses to deaths of soldiers in light of the way loss was experienced before the war. Strange reacts to the fact that many historians, focusing on the vast loss generated by the war, recognize a shift from the Victorian "celebration" of death to a quiet, more privatized culture of grief after World War I. In his 1982 essay "War, Death, Grief, and Mourning in Modern Britain," David Cannadine, too, focuses on

this shift, and argues that the transition to bereavement helped civilians cope with loss.[8]

Cannadine calls for "a more complete and rigorous historical framework within which to set contemporary analysis of death, grief, and mourning" and calls it time "to re-assess the view that the Victorians, by their publicized ostentation, had successfully come to terms with death" while recognizing a "need… to pay due regard to the… impact of the First World War" (241). This is where my own project intervenes. In *Cemetery Plots*, I demonstrate how the epitaphs and burial scenes so important in nineteenth-century writing could no longer suffice after the Great War when anonymity became an avenue for grief. I examine responses to death in a way that provides not only a historical but also a literary framework through which we can understand the complex ideas of individuation and commemoration and the ways those ideas changed from Dickens to Woolf. By examining the changing literary conceptualizations of corpses, cemeteries, and epitaphs from the Victorian burial reform era through World War I, we can witness how formal epitaphs dissolve, burial concerns resurface, and writers confront a new, more comfortable acceptance of anonymity in memorializing the dead.

Individual Chapters

This project begins by raising questions about nineteenth-century England's need to individualize and identify the dead in burial and about how grave marking and epitaph writing practices corresponded to demands for burial reform during this period. It considers burial reform history alongside Victorian literature and asks how the need to locate, sort, and label dead bodies and represent them in writing shaped some of the

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[8] Cannadine argues that the "golden age" of grief in England was not actually during Victorian times, but during World War I.

novels produced during the second half of the nineteenth century. Chapter One, "Grave Concerns: Novel Responses to Nineteenth-Century Cemetery Reform," provides an overview of the burial history that informs much of the project, focusing on the important decades when private cemeterial ventures came to replace churchyard burial grounds. Then, the chapter moves from that history into a discussion of *Bleak House*, where Dickens exhibits not only an example of a deplorable and overfilled paupers' graveyard, but also the psychological need for burial that was rooted in the Victorian cemetery reform movement. Dickens shows how offensive burial conditions were vividly present in the minds of many Victorians and the terrain of Victorian cities. In a reflection of these concerns, the cemetery becomes the place in Dickens fiction where characters rediscover their origins.

While Chapter One focuses on acts of burial, Chapter Two, "Of Tomes and Tombstones: Altering People and Plots," considers epitaphs and memorializing writing. In particular, it focuses on Victorian epitaph collections and fictional scenes of epitaph writing, especially in Dickens. The chapter begins by considering the growth of epitaphic writing into its own established enterprise, a phenomenon that reflected the Victorian proclivity toward linguistic remembrance. It discusses both authentic and fictional epitaphs to consider the complicated issues of authorship, readership, and individuality they raise. Both *Little Dorrit* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* offer scenes of epitaph writing that relate to the many epitaph types and conventions outlined in the first half of the chapter. In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens shows how the troubled and jilted John Chivery composes several versions of his own epitaph while in *Drood*, Dickens portrays how Thomas Sapsea, a self-centered author, writes an epitaph for his wife that erases her

identity and substitutes his own. Both fictional accounts present the complex task of the epitaph writer and the sometimes parallel responsibilities of epitaph and novel readers.

Chapter Three, "Cemeterial Déjà vu," focuses on the period from 1914 to 1918 in England when the First World War caused both personal and national loss. I argue that the casualties and indignities brought on by the Great War recalled—and even mimicked—the horrors of nineteenth-century urban burial grounds. At first, the spectacle of anonymous death during the Great War seemed even more terrible and acutely painful in light of the sanitation improvements and burial reforms that had taken place during the nineteenth century. The memoirs, novels, and poems generated during and after the war presented the unrecoverable and fragmented bodies of the war dead, and reactions to the anonymous dead echoed the complaints of pre-reform nineteenth-century England. Writing became the vehicle for the expression of grief when war reignited burial concerns and presented a new cemetery problem. Like Chapter One, this chapter starts with some background about the atrocious burial conditions brought about by wartime and the frequent inability to provide individual gravesites. Working mainly with the war memoir *Some Desperate Glory* by Edwin Campion Vaughn (1917) and several war poems by Ivor Gurney, it shows how writers discovered ways to memorialize missing bodies and broken identities linguistically.

Finally, in an Epilogue titled "Filling Jacob's Shoes: Absence, Silence, Anonymity and the Altered Role of Epitaph," I demonstrate the eventual acceptance of anonymity in memorialization by examining scenes from Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* in light of the phenomena of the Cenotaph, the Unknown Solider, and the Moment of Silence—all commemorative constructs meant to bring about post-war healing. This

chapter suggests how epitaphs became diffused and eventually replaced by what we might call "epitaphic narratives" in modernist writing. In addition, this epilogue examines how post-war writing in newspapers, journals, and novels, as well as public monument-making, demonstrates a coming-to-terms with death as it had occurred during World War I, and it presents a hesitant but increasing acceptance of anonymity in death. During this process of reparation through writing, absence and silence became central to this newly-conceptualized process of memorialization.

As lack and void became symbolically central in British memorial culture, they also became more pronounced in writings of the time. The cultural changes brought about by the Great War manifested themselves in a kind of writing that overlooked the corpse and the cemetery instead of making it a textual focal point. For Dickens and other nineteenth-century authors, discovered corpses and revised epitaphs reflected a Victorian culture deeply concerned with naming, recording, and remembering. The Great War complicated these concerns, so for Woolf and many other post-World War I writers, new forms of remembrance superseded inscriptions and gravesites. Epitaphs were no longer the central way to perpetuate memory, and there was honor in anonymity, as one author demonstrates as he addresses the Unknown Soldier: "Because you are nameless and were forgotten, we chose you" (J.B. 23).

Chapter One

Grave Concerns: Novel Responses to Nineteenth-Century Cemetery Reform

> Then [he] comes with his pauper company to Mr. Krook's
>
> and bears off the body of our dear brother here departed to a
>
> hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, where malignant
>
> diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and
>
> sisters who have not departed.
>
> —Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (1852)

Crowded Places and Written Spaces: Making Room for the Dead

In his introduction to *Bleak House*, J. Hillis Miller calls the novel "a document about the interpretation of documents" that "accurately reflects the social reality of Dickens' day" (11). *Bleak House* traces connections between people from all levels of Victorian society and especially portrays the burdens of the homeless poor in the urban slums of London. The above passage from *Bleak House* depicts the moment in the novel when Mr. Krook, the illiterate owner of a rag and bottle shop, and Mr. Tulkinghorn, the Dedlock family lawyer, find the corpse of Krook's "nameless" lodger, Nemo, after Nemo has died of an opium overdose. With death at the forefront in the novel—nine characters in all die during the novel's progression—one of the central symbols of the book is the paupers' graveyard, "pestiferous and obscene," where Nemo, not treated at all like a "dear brother" should be, is taken for burial. Nemo's identity is obscured for much of the novel, and questions arise, not only about his identity, but also about the treatment of his

corpse. Dickens presents a case of lost identity when, because of poor burial practices and the carelessness of the living, an individual gets lost in a malevolent social system that mistreats both the living and the dead. Nemo's body ends up piled indiscriminately in a communal grave in a "hemmed-in churchyard," his identity erased as completely as his name.

The way Dickens' omniscient narrator characterizes the paupers' graveyard is remarkable; in passive voice, he describes the churchyard burial grounds, "where malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed" (202). Here, the narrator presents both the victims and perpetrators of the crime: the "dear brothers and sisters who have not departed," refers to both the poor who live around the despicable burial ground and the ruling classes who are responsible for the cemetery's condition and Nemo's abandonment. Yet all classes are connected through the stream of contagion that runs from the graveyard through the slums and out to the suburbs of London. The narrator goes on to say that the witnesses to this mockery of a funeral procession "are very complacent and agreeable" as they watch the spectacle of Nemo's body as it is deposited "into a beastly scrap of ground" and call it "Christian burial" (202). As Hillis Miller puts it, "Dickens wants to tell how things got as they are, and to indict someone for the crime" (13). This passage from *Bleak House* corresponds to mid-century social concerns about burial practices, contagion, and identity, as Dickens raises questions about how his culture handled the bodies and identities of their "dearly" departed, and who should be held responsible for the maintenance of public health and the integrity of both the living and the dead.

With these concerns in mind, this chapter examines conditions of burial overcrowding in early to mid-nineteenth-century London and the ways Victorian writers pursued cemeterial reform and novelists portrayed the mid-century urban cemetery. It considers how narratives such as Dickens' conveyed deplorable burial conditions and attempted to help solve the "cemetery problem." During the 1830's and 1840's, privately-run London cemeteries replaced churchyard burial grounds that could no longer adequately house the dead, while mid-century writing—mainly epitaphs in collections, collected stories in reform literature, and fictionalized accounts of burial in novels— brought the relationship between individual corpses and graves to a middle-class readership. Cemeterial reform documents and novels like *Bleak House* both reflected upon and informed one another during this period. Charles Dickens' decrepit graveyard sits at the center of the novel as an ugly reminder of the need for reform; however, Dickens also introduces burial rhetoric in other scenes to underscore the psychological need for individual burial and memorialization in a text about mistaken identity and lost children. *Bleak House*, then, through both description and symbolism, reflects concerns about unburied bodies and unresolved feelings, about massive societal challenges and personal psychological growth.

While writers like Dickens addressed the complicated act of remembering, reformers attempted to remedy the formidable offenses of common graves and disturbed bones. The major social change brought about by nineteenth-century law was a shift from church to governmental control over burial spaces. For centuries, burial in or near a church or churchyard confirmed religious conformity and proper social standing. The practice of churchyard burial dates back to 732 when St. Cuthbert obtained papal

permission to add churchyards to churches. Lynne Anne DeSpelder explains how churches themselves became interment spaces and were erected atop the graves of saints and other important church figures or well-to-do patrons (65). Individualized burial became popular during the 1100's but was usually reserved for the wealthy; additionally, during some periods, a proper burial was not even possible. For instance, plague conditions during earlier periods of English history forecasted burial overcrowding to come in the nineteenth century. Burial historian Charles Box speaks of those "pestilent periods" when "London had been sorely tested for burying places." He recounts plague outbreaks in 1348, 1500, 1603, 1625, and 1665 when tens of thousands perished at a time and filled "all the churchyards in London" (107). In earlier periods, the wealthy or pious could remedy spatial concerns by simply consecrating new churchyards, but for the middle class, a growing emphasis on individual identity ran counter to packing churchyards full of anonymous and forgotten corpses.

Anonymous burial plots were supplanted with more individualized memorials beginning in the twelfth century when "the coming of the new individualism [brought about a] growing tendency to preserve the identity of the person buried in a particular place" (DeSpelder 65). Churchyard burial continued over the centuries, but it did not take long for English churches and churchyards to fill up. As early as the 1580's, citizens perceived burial overcrowding in churchyards as a problem (Jupp 21). Intramural burial had become "fashionable among the more well-to-do members of society," so it became a necessary post-death occurrence (Curl 28). In respectable burials, the body was "boxed" or "chested" in a coffin and became part of a larger set of boxes. For a proper burial to take place, the coffin would again be nested within churchyard walls, and further

contained within the confines of the city. In *Mortal Remains*, Chris Brooks points out

that individualized burial outside church auspices did not come about until the

seventeenth century when nonconformist movements initiated the idea of alternative

unconsecrated burial spaces. Precedent was set for nonconformist grounds when Bunhill

Fields opened in London in 1665. Like the churchyards, these dissenters' grounds filled

quickly. At this time, despite objections, officials were already proposing that cemeteries

should exist outside of towns and cities (Brooks 3). Obviously, a problem that eventually

reached its climax in London in the 1830's and 1840's and its resolution during the

1850's and later had been lingering for centuries prior to those pivotal decades.

By the eighteenth century, a thriving commercialism in urban areas made the

death trade possible. Between 1700 and 1725, the funeral-furnishing trade became firmly

established in London with funerals provided for varying costs, depending on class and

the status one could afford in death (Litten 99). As Clare Gittings points out in *Death,*

Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England, death began to commercialize

during the 1700's because of the dual developments of the rise of the undertaking

profession and the popular idea of honoring individuals in death. Conditions of

churchyard burial grounds worsened as the population boomed after 1750. Brooks points

out that the population of London grew from 600,000 in 1700 to almost one million in

1800 (5). Arguments for correcting the churchyard burial problem were rare because of

an obvious motivation: profit. Burial fees kept the churches financially comfortable, so

clergy tended to quiet protests about the poor state of their churchyards. By the early

nineteenth-century, churchyard burial was still a routine practice despite centuries of

evidence about burial space limitations and sanitation problems.

In the meantime, during the eighteenth century, a burial reform movement began to take shape. France seems to have been a half-century ahead of England in interment reform. For centuries, the Cimetière des Innocents, established during the twelfth century, was the main Parisian cemetery into which had piled up the remains of generations of Parisians. By the late eighteenth century, the stench of putrefaction and the danger of epidemics were so great that a general outcry arose demanding demolition of the site. Between 1785 and 1787 all human remains were moved from Cimetiere des Innocents and placed in Paris' Catacombs (Brooks 6). This led to the consecration of Paris' first public cemetery, Pere Lachaise, in 1804. Brooks explains how the site changed the way burial grounds were conceptualized, because "plots for burial were offered for sale in perpetuity" for the first time. "The grave itself became real property," and the ownership of land transgressed the boundaries of death (7). Of course, Pere Lachaise was highly segregated, and only the rich could afford perpetual care. Five-year leases were available for those who could afford them, but common graves were all the poor could obtain (Brooks 8). Nevertheless, the consecration of Pere Lachaise in early-nineteenth-century Paris marks a major shift in the way people thought about the treatment of the dead and the way cemeteries were envisioned.[9]

     No actual movement toward new cemeteries in England came until the 1820's. As mass graves of commingled bones threatened to spill over churchyard walls, individuating the dead became both a sanitary and a social issue. The anonymous conditions of mass burial raised the parallel specters of contagion to the living and lost

[9] In an addendum to his 1830 collection *Churchyard Gleanings*, William Pulleyn writes, "were every place of sepulture like unto the celebrated one of Pere LaChaise at Paris… how much more consistent and comfortable they would be with the mild spirit of Christianity, instead of the disgusting receptacles which disgrace every large town in England" (260). Such authors were obviously linking their roles as epitaph collectors with the important burial reform work they knew was necessary.

identity for the dead and provoked new concerns about the conditions of burial and the adequacy of memorialization. As cemeteries decayed, permanent, undisturbed gravestones became a luxury instead of a universal marker of death and remembrance. During this crisis, writing on stones could not represent bodies, for the number of gravestones in a churchyard rarely corresponded to the number of bodies buried there.

The capitalist instinct was to solve the problem through private cemetery companies that sought to provide services to the middle and upper classes. In "The Origins and Progress of the Cemetery Establishment in Britain," historian Julie Rugg underscores the importance of the "pioneering work of cemetery companies" that operated outside the Church of England (117). The first public commercial cemetery in England was The Rosary in Norwich in 1819, maintained under a nonconformist minister, The Reverend T. Drummond. The Rosary burial ground offered a plot to whomever could afford one (Brooks 8). While cemetery historians like Brooks and Curl argue more heartily for the undeniable influence of Pere Lachaise in British cemeterial reform, Rugg traces the roots of reform not to Pere Lachaise, but to Manchester and George Hatfield's joint-stock dissenters' ground, The Rusholme Road Proprietary Cemetery, founded in 1820. She argues that "the origins of the cemetery establishment in Britain should be traced to Manchester rather than Paris" (112). Ultimately it seems that ideas from both Pere Lachaise and the dissenters' grounds in England made later burial reform progress possible.

Early public burial grounds like The Rosary and Rusholme Road, all commercial ventures, served mainly nonconformists in this decade. Finally in 1824, George Frederick Carden, a "barrister and philanthropist," took the initiative to design a plan for

new grounds outside the dissenters' tradition and became the main burial reform figure in London (Curl 44). Not surprisingly, Carden took Pere Lachaise as his model. Brooks addresses the slow but steady move toward reform that Carden initiated:

> Land in London was expensive and difficult to obtain, and the financial
>
> interests vested in the parish churchyards were intricate and well-
>
> entrenched. It was not until 1830 that Carden managed to organize the
>
> first public meeting to discuss the provision of a general cemetery for
>
> London, and not until 1832 that proposals took form with the
>
> incorporation of the General Cemetery Company. (11)

Movement away from churchyard burial was slowly becoming a reality. But financial problems brought on by the financial crisis of 1825 caused delay (Curl 44). Finally in 1830, Carden reiterated his idea of a publicly-sanctioned commercial space; he used the term "cemetery" instead of "burial ground" (Curl 49). His semantics suggest how the idea of interment spaces was evolving and changing from places imagined as sorrowful spots reserved to mourn the dead and house bones into garden locales designed to please visitors and promote individualism and sentimentality after death.

Eventually, with help from John Claudius Loudon, a landscaper and writer, and Sir John Dean Paul, a financial backer, the newly-formed General Cemetery Company incorporated in 1832 under Carden's leadership and purchased land for Kensal Green (Curl 51; Brooks 10-11).[10] This marks the first major advancement toward the establishment of public cemeteries. Burial became commercialized, as greed superseded need, as John Morley indicates: "The joint-stock companies had begun to build the new

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[10] Melanie L. Simo presents a more detailed examination of Loudon's contribution to British cemeterial design in her article "John Claudius Loudon: On Planning and Design for the Garden Metropolis."

cemeteries long before the reformers won any victories," and, consecrated in 1833, Kensal Green was the result (41). General Cemetery Company planners would sell the plot, and the purchasers could erect whatever size or type of monument they desired. This appealed to those willing to spend hefty sums for impressive tombstones. Morley notes that Pere Lachaise "was a cemetery designed to appeal to the romantic and to the snob" (45-6), and Kensal Green would follow suit. From the onset, social rank determined the degree of propriety associated with interment, and, not surprisingly, the wealthy produced what the English deemed the most respectable burials.

Kensal Green was an instant success, and the grounds and vaults quickly housed deceased occupants of appropriate social rank. Some of the most famous graves included Augustus Frederick, the Duke of Sussex and Son of King George III; painter William Mulready; statesman William Molesworth; and writers William Makepeace Thackeray, Wilkie Collins, and Anthony Trollope. The climate of sophisticated mourning combined with the spectacle that Kensal Green became made it an attractive place for middle and upper-class visitors. Morley suggests, "the cemetery cause perhaps gained from the cemeteries' association with the rich. To be buried in a cemetery" like Kensal Green "became a sign of some affluence" (41). The most expensive and respectable type of interment, brick vault burial, was "only suited for those in comfortable circumstances" (Morley 42). At this point in cemeterial history, money secured a aesthetically- and socially-appropriate natural setting for burial. It bought individual interment for the upper classes and took the departed wealthy away from deplorable churchyards in the city.

Overseers paid little attention to cemeterial layout and graveyard aesthetics before the mid-nineteenth century. Author-designers like Loudon stressed the element of careful planning that should accompany designing cemeteries outside the city. They presented cemeteries no longer as depositories for the dead, but as parks; they were spaces designed for the public appreciation of nature and for outdoor enjoyment. The June 12, 1831 *Sunday Times* reported that at St. Martin's burying-ground, "Crowds of ladies perambulated the vaults for some time, and the whole had more the appearance of a fashionable promenade than a grim depository of decomposing mortality" (Qtd in Holmes 105-6). Although the idea had been to separate the dead from the living, spacious cemeterial gardens transformed burial places into recreational spaces. Locals near Highgate, another joint-stock venture, opposed the establishment of the cemetery there, "but its flowers and trees, its quietness and seclusion, made so favorable an impression that people... purchased keys... to walk within the cemetery whenever they wished" (Morley 50). It would seem likely, then, that as part of this pleasure of promenading, tombstones were taken more seriously and provided reading enjoyment for visitors.

The cemetery companies certainly instigated major changes in burial practices and altered interment spaces. Between 1820 and 1853, at least 113 of these companies formed to finance new land for burial (Rugg 105). But even though public commercial cemeteries like Kensal Green catered to the rich, the idea of social mobility and self-aggrandizement in death was starting to develop, along with a sense of overcrowding not altogether different from the bursting churchyard grounds. Kensal did not offer graves to the poor, but certain men aspired to middle-class status after death. For instance, not far

from the Duke's grave were plots boasting impressive monuments to citizens such as Andrew Ducrow and St. John Long. As Chris Brooks points out, these men "were hardly typical members of the middling sort" (12). Ducrow was an equestrian trick rider and son of a circus strong man while Long was a self-appointed "doctor" who peddled his own medicinal cures and was found guilty of manslaughter after a patient who used his patented medicine died. Brooks explains how

> these monuments and their histories provide one of the keys to understanding Kensal Green's appeal to the nineteenth century. In a rapidly changing society, the prizes of individualism also brought the penalties of unstable rank and uncertain status. Kensal Green granted full freedom of individual expression… A memorial in Kensal Green, particularly a substantial one, was also a badge of belonging and expression of middle class membership. (12)

Those clients who could pay the price of membership could erect a monument even if the deceased was of questionable social standing. Even though Kensal Green was associated with affluence, it also represented an opportunity to obtain middle class status in perpetuity. If a quack and a trickster could garner monuments not far from royals, then nineteenth-century ideals of self-assertive individualism were at least becoming as important as, if not more than, actual social status.

Although there was some room to gain social standing in the cemetery, and although there was some discussion of and hope for affordable burial for all classes, Kensal Green and the other public cemeteries to follow did little to provide "respectable" burial for the poor. Following Kensal Green, six more joint stock cemeteries opened

outside London's residential areas between 1837 and 1841, including West Norwood (1837), Highgate (1839), Abney Park (1840), Nunhead (1840), Brompton (1840), and Tower Hamlets (1841). Abney Park and Tower Hamlets took a less conventional path and offered a somewhat affordable burial to the working classes. Abney, funded by the Congregationalists, opened without official act of Parliament and was not consecrated by the church (Curl 103). In addition, an Abney burial came minus the hefty fees charged by the original joint-stock cemeteries, such as Kensal Green and Highgate. Tower Hamlets also made burial available to the working poor at minimal cost. But these grounds did not offer the same kind of "respectable" burial that middle class people expected and received when purchasing plots. In Tower Hamlets, interment "was relatively cheap," but "its financial returns came from a policy of filling common graves and packing them together as densely as possible" (Brooks 29). Obviously, it did not take long for the new grounds to resemble the glutted and disheveled churchyards that they were meant to remedy and replace. One cemetery observer described Tower Hamlets, as "untidy... where gravestones are tumbling and lying about, apparently unclaimed and uncared for, amongst dead shrubs and rank grass" and Abney Park as "a mass of corruption underneath" after only being open for only fifteen years (Holmes 255-256). The graves purchased for middle class bodies, in some circumstances, were not treated much differently than those of the poor.

Likewise, Kensal quickly filled up with not only bodies, but also huge pieces of monumentation and mausoleums that gave the cemetery an immediately crowded aspect. Curl sums it up:

Abney Park and the other join-stock cemeteries began to go the same way as the small graveyards they had replaced: the early nineteenth-century cemeteries filled up too, and although Abney Park catered for the burial of the proletariat (mostly in common graves) with more success than did other private-enterprise cemeteries, its provision in that regard was wholly inadequate to solve the problem as a whole. (108)

By the 1840's, complaints about the joint-stock grounds echoed those about churchyard overcrowding raised in the earlier part of the century. Also, the city continued to grow, infringing upon the private cemeteries originally constructed far from highly-populated areas. Later decades would not look kindly upon Kensal Green. In *Hand-Book of London* (1850), Peter Cunningham scoffs at Kensal's elaborate "conspicuous" tombs: "There is a great deal of bad taste in art exhibited in the cemetery" (42). Near century's end, Isabella Holmes, too, criticizes the cemetery, making it clear that simplicity in memorialization would have been more appropriate for the new grounds:

There is a special interest attached to Kensal Green Cemetery from its having been the first, but I think it is also the worst... [It] is truly awful, with its catacombs, its huge mausoleums, family vaults, statues, broken pillars, weeping images, and oceans of tombstones, good, bad, and indifferent. (255-6)

Holmes sees cemeteries like Kensal Green as clear wastes of money and land, embodiments of inflated taste that did little to remedy the problem of too many corpses and too little space. She is astounded to see "the rich lavish their money" on such trivial

expenses, while the "poor go into debt to buy mourning" and "deny themselves the necessities of life... in order to set up a tombstone on a grave" (257).

This was when two major burial reform figures and public health advocates entered the burial reform conversation. George Alfred Walker in *Gatherings from Graveyards* (1839) and Edwin Chadwick, in his "Interment Report" and "Sanitary Report," (1842) sparked public interest in the dilemma of overcrowded burial spaces and deteriorating tombstones.[11] Walker was a surgeon while Chadwick was a bureaucrat.[12] Both men approached the problem by attaching the trend of cemeteries to broader aims of public sanitation and health, and, through their writing, both provided a middle-class audience with story after story of the horrors of offensively-glutted cemeteries. In his tome, Walker seeks to paint a broad picture of the history leading up to the cemetery mess. He writes, "A Work expressly on the Burial Places of the Metropolis is, I believe, a novelty in this country" (III). He says he hopes to provide a "comprehensive history of the modes of Interment among all nations" while "England looks on, a silent and unmoved spectatress of some of the most offensive and dangerous encroachments upon the security and sanctity of the 'resting places' of her dead" (VI). His accounts of

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[11] I don't mean to exclude Henry Mayhew's *London Labor and the London Poor* (1851) from my discussion. Mayhew's study is important to any history of the poor and marginalized in London, but Chadwick and Walker both deal more exclusively with cemeterial conditions.

[12] In *Making a Social Body*, Mary Poovey uses Chadwick's 1842 *Sanitary Report* to define the social domain and demonstrate how "the sanitary idea" helped to determine the regulation of individual bodies and its relation to the formation of the modern state (115). In Chapter 6, "Domesticity and Class Formation: Chadwick's 1842 *Sanitary Report*," she argues that the way the British conceived of their own regulated bodies and the bodies of those around them contributed to the consolidation of English bureaucracy. For an examination on Walker's relationship with Chadwick and how Walker's work informed Chadwick's, see Mary Elizabeth Hotz's "Down Among the Dead: Edwin Chadwick's Burial Reform Discourse in Nineteenth-Century England."

disturbed, mass, and disrespected graves moved readers because of the horrible details included and the sheer number of stories shared.[13]

Walker discusses not only the state of dishonored corpses but also the shameful state of grave markers as he resurrected the complaints against churchyard burial that had first been heard prior to joint stock enterprises. He offers his observations about numerous churchyards and private burial grounds in which "many of the tombstones have sunk into the ground" (172). In his 1839 *Gatherings*, Walker includes a description of Ewer Street Chapel and Burying Ground:

> The burying ground appears to have been raised nearly six feet from the
> original surface, and is literally surcharged with dead; it is now closed,
> and presents a very repulsive aspect. It might be instructive to know the
> number of bodies here inhumed; perhaps,-- but dead men tell no tales,--
> the exhumed might present a formidable array. The vicinity is
> disgustingly dirty. (179)

Walker is obviously repulsed by what he observes: bodies rising to the surface weekly or even daily because of shallow burials and the recycling of grave space. He admits his curiosity and wants to know the actual number of bodies buried in so confined a space, but concludes that it really does not matter-- whatever the number the exhumed bones would constitute "a formidable array." He cannot actually discover how many bodies are inhumed because of the reticence of the dead. Since they will not speak to him and "tell tales," the vulgarities of their unrest remain buried with them.

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[13] For a more detailed discussion of Walker's contribution to the cemetery reform movement, see Chapter 4, "Crisis, Uncertainty, and Change," in James Stevens Curl's *The Victorian Celebration of Death*.

Reformers, like novelists, valued their positions as storytellers; they were relating stories on behalf of the dead. With conditions like those described by Walker in 1839, it is clear that graveyard upkeep was not a top priority in many cemeteries, and stones rarely remained in their originally-placed vertical positions, making epitaphs pointless pieces that could not be consumed or appreciated as part of the mourning process. Tombstones often mimicked the position of the horizontal bodies beneath them, and the instability of epitaphic language paralleled the unstable nature of the grave marker, as "Verses and quotations [were] often misplaced on tombstones" (Hakewill 16). Not only were bodies disturbed; so, too, was the identifying and descriptive language meant to honor them.

Addressing both churchyard and joint-stock cemetery problems, Chadwick relates his tales to promote public health as well as to criticize the selfish intentions of those set to profit from the burial trade.[14] Mary Poovey points out that Chadwick's report "was probably the most widely read government document of the Victorian period," and that it "helped constitute social norms" and "contributed to the constitution of class identities" during the nineteenth century (116-17). Chadwick reinforces Walker's reports but pays more attention to the burial customs and fates of working class corpses. Throughout the 1840's and 1850's, pit burial continued to be a standard practice for pauper interment. Chadwick reports that paupers often abandoned the bodies of their progeny rather than subject them to the humiliation associated with a parish funeral. Paupers' pit burials were commonplace, especially during times of disease. Either bones would be heaped

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[14] For other analyses of how Chadwick influenced the public health movement and discussions of the reception of his report, see Anthony S. Wohl's, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*, Frank Mort's *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England Since 1830* and Peter Logan's *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in 19th-Century Prose*.

upon other bones in mass burials, or bodies would hardly have time to decompose before they were disinterred to make room for the next burial. Parishes included separate sections in their cemeteries for undesirable paupers' burials. Charles Box reports similar conditions at Bayswater in 1850, when "only by boring in the burial ground could a spot for a new grave be found... There were several private grounds-- chiefly for the poorer classes-- situated in crowded localities, and of limited extent" (107). Loudon, too, reports on common graves with "no monument, into which the graves of the poor and of paupers are deposited... as many in one day as will fill the graves" (2). He is particularly attentive "to the interment of the poor, of paupers, and of such persons who desire no monuments for their graves." Loudon's language is deceptive; sources point to a working class "desire" for monuments even when they were impossible to obtain (Picard 296; Litten 164; Holmes 257). Finally, reformers were addressing the need for burial spaces for all classes, and "the interdependence of the modern forms of individualism and administration" were shaping change (Poovey 114).

While reformers like Walker, who presented a combination of reported conditions and effective anecdotes, encouraged the removal of the dead from the spaces of the living, churchyards and burial grounds were closed, and the dead moved into closer proximity of the living through writing. Writing presented overcrowded burial spaces from a distance and provided readers a safe way to observe dangerous cemeterial conditions while they appeased their curiosity about the dead. It was also at this time that readers were able to peruse epitaphs in collections and participate in remembrance without even visiting a cemetery. In this way, corpses remained present in both the minds and daily lives of Londoners. Burial reform documents attempted to remedy social

ills while novelists employed metaphors of the grave and narratives of transient and unstable identity to consider the changing process of memorialization, the preservation of individuation in death, and the appropriate treatment of corpses. Soon, readers were consuming fictionalized versions of the cemetery problem while also considering burial reform documents and pending legislation.

Convincing the British public that burial outside the city was a necessity was a difficult feat. Charles Box reports, "There were, doubtless, many who felt a repugnance to the idea of being 'buried without the city'" (107). Walker campaigned for over nine years with medical and public support for laws designating that burials occur outside London (Jupp 31). Chadwick the bureaucrat took a bolder and more comprehensive but less popular approach; he, too, supported extra-mural interment, but he suggested national cemeteries run and financed by the government and, even less acceptable, the temporary use of graves. In Chadwick's plan, the government would institute the re-use of graves in ten-year cycles (Jupp 43) and handle the body from death to the grave (Brooks 36). Recent historians view his ideas as ambitious but socially inappropriate; for instance, Brooks suggests that Chadwick based his ideas on a falsely-assumed "high degree of social cohesion" in England in the 1840's (37). Peter Jupp calls him "astonishingly impractical" in his vision (35). Other planners like Loudon were equally inappropriate. Loudon proposed that each district designate a "temporary cemetery" beside its permanent one, where the dead would fill graves for fourteen years, at the end of which this piece of probably rented field might "revert to its landlord, and be cultivated, planted, or laid down in grass" (29). This suggestion could hardly ease anxieties about mass burial, especially for the poor, who desired the same respectable and

permanent burial as others. Regardless of the limitations of their plans, Walker,

Chadwick, and their imitators, through the stories they told, made clear the need for

burial reform legislation. Beyond that, they made reading stories a critical part of the

burial reform process.

In the years following Walker and Chadwick's publications, from about 1845

onward, there was an increased rate of cemetery building, and by 1847 burial reform

legislation finally began to appear. The Cemetery Clauses Act of 1847, although

insufficient, ignited a string of legislative steps that would eventually lead to some

practical solutions. The main achievements of the 1847 Act were that cemetery

companies had to build walls at least eight feet high to enclose their grounds and that

those grounds should not exist within two hundred yards of dwellings (Brooks 41; Polson

164). It did not, however, address the burial crisis for the poorer classes, nor did it enable

cemeteries run by local administration (Brooks 42). Chadwick's influence was yet to be

completely felt, but by 1848, the first Public Health Act began the process that would

establish public cemeteries throughout England (Brooks 43). Concern about burial issues

following another cholera epidemic in London in 1849, along with the formation of a

General Board of Health in 1850, encouraged the 1852 enactment of the first of many

burial acts now known collectively as "The Burial Acts," which appeared between 1852

and 1906 (Polson 164).[15] Jupp points out that the first few acts set in motion between

1852 and 1857 provided the answer to the burial crisis of the 1830's and 1840's and set

up a working system of public interment (49). Local Burial Boards with inspectors under

their guidance could ensure the maintenance of all burial grounds.

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[15] For a more detailed look at important burial reform dates, events, and legislation, see the chart at the end
of this section on page 51.

During this time, burials became somewhat more affordable for all citizens, but, of course, burial without an inscribed monument was all many working class families could afford. Bartlett bemoans the plight of the poor even after burial legislation and the establishment of new grounds:

> When one thinks of the thousands in London who must look forward
> to a burial in the pent-up church-yards in the city, it makes the heart
> ache to think of burying a kind mother so—of following a dear sister to
> such a grave. Yet thousands from poverty *must* do so. Contrast with such
> spots the sweet though lovely burial ground in the country, with its tall
> cedars, its solemn cypresses, and its grassy mounds, over which affection
> lingers and weeps… Oh the contrast! (130)

Clearly, burial reform initially did little to resolve the problems of the lowest classes as rural cemeteries catered to the wealthy. Bartlett continues, "It is only the privileged ones who are buried in such places, only the rich and powerful. Wealth in London helps a man after death. It can and does lay his aching bones to rest in a quiet spot, it covers over his grave with flowers, amid the songs of birds" (131). The working classes could afford a proper burial, but it was the middle class who enjoyed monumentation; the poor still paid for anonymous interment. At this point, though, the price-gouging, private cemetery companies were fading into the background. Kensal Green and the other popular joint-stock grounds continued to bury the dead, but they became ancillary to public cemeteries.

It took nearly a century's worth of outcry for real change to occur in the burial reform debate. Julie Rugg notes, "By the 1850's the virtual monopoly of the churchyard in accommodating the last remains of the deceased had been irrevocably broken," (112)

but problems did not dissipate overnight. In *The Sanitary Evolution of London*, Henry Jephson describes the lingering deleterious effects of burial overcrowding: "Even when this [practice] stopped, years had to elapse before the condition of intramural burial grounds and vaults would cease to vitiate the air around them" (55). As late as 1897, Isabella Holmes wrote about disturbing burial spaces. She describes one converted burial ground and pays particular attention to the fate of the grave markers:

> When, for instance, a burial-ground becomes a builder's yard, tombstones are very much in the way, and they are soon converted into paving-stones. Some years ago, a few inscriptions were still legible on the stones which paved the passage from Spa Fields to Exmouth Street, but by this time even these must be worn away. But if it is denied by the owners of these yards that they are burial-grounds, there is one method of proving it... by digging down into the soil. It will not be necessary to make any deep excavation before the spade turns up some earth mixed with human remains, which, once seen, are always recognisable. (202, 205)

Holmes notes how tombstones lose their textual function and become an inconvenience transformed into something more immediately useful. Instead of honoring the writing on the stones, the texts are eventually worn away by careless footsteps. No matter how worn, though, Holmes reminds her readers that even though the bodies beneath are out of sight, they are all too close to discovery. Nearly fifty years after Walker and Chadwick's work, observers and readers could still find plenty of graveyard horror stories to shock and appall.

As the turn of the century neared, a final act solidified the place and purpose of public cemeteries. In 1899 the London Government Act created twenty-eight city borough councils to replace Burial Boards and provide the local coverage that metropolitan cemeteries required (Jupp 44). By the end of the century, most London cemeteries run by local authorities ensured that economic status (although the rich could still buy the biggest and most decorated monuments) had nothing to do with acquiring at least an acceptable interment. Brookwood Cemetery in Surrey and others like it— grounds originally opened as private ventures—competed for contracts available each year from the many London boroughs for the burial of their poor: "Brookwood probably buried half of East London, and to facilitate this Waterloo Station had a special casket-loading platform… to accommodate funeral parties" (*Victorian London Cemeteries*). Finally, municipal cemeteries had replaced urban churchyards and private ventures permanently, and the poor found some relief in an acceptable burial after death.

Burial grounds became a place for nineteenth-century England to sort out cultural priorities. While private churchyards gave way to open, public spaces, writing about the cemetery problem brought burial conditions into the private lives of Londoners. Texts— reform documents, epitaph collections, burial treatises, and novels—provided a forum for the reshaping of individual remembrance. Conditions too wretched to experience in person came to readers through discourse. Bodies that dissolved into dust were written into texts and memorialized. The "written" cemetery became the place to sort out issues of identity and the place to establish some kind of order while London literally sorted through bodies. Cemeteries became cultural symbols, spaces where severe contradictions between what a culture believed and what a culture enacted became apparent. They were

sites that juggled social attitudes and individual aspirations, helped to sort out the politics of remembrance, and corresponded with nineteenth-century fictions of identity. As Mary Poovey notes, reformers' documents shaped the idea of the middle class by "simultaneously condemn[ing] members of the working-class for failing to live up to middle-class standards… and suggest[ing] that the poor are—and will remain—different from those who write about them" (117). The result of both burial reformers' stories and those presented in novels was "struggles among men of all classes for the opportunity to achieve domestic life" and the proper death "normalized by Chadwick's *Report* (Poovey 131). The desire to bury the dead in separate graves, mark those graves with individual stones, and honor the departed with distinct and personal epitaphs suggests the growth and encouragement of individualism even after death, and this development was bound with the ideals and desires of a new middle-class readership.

IMPORTANT BURIAL REFORM EVENTS

YEAR	EVENT/LAW	IMPACT/RESULT
1832	General Cemetery Co. is incorporated	Marks the first step toward the establishment of public burial grounds
1833	Kensal Green consecrated	Led the way for the opening of six other commercial cemeteries, 1836-1841
1836	Act of Parliament 6&7 Will. 4 c. 136	Enabled the London Cemetery Co. to establish new cemeteries "Northward, Southward, and Eastward of the Metropolis"
1847	Cemetery Clauses Act	Provided guidelines for the establishment and running of commercial cemeteries
1848	First Public Health Act, 11&12 Vict. c. 63	Set the stage for the legislative process that would establish public cemeteries throughout Britain; created General Board of Health that could create new cemeteries
1850	Metropolitan Interments Act	Made London a Metropolitan Burial District under the General Board of Health, which could take over joint stock companies and close unfit burial grounds
1852	Metropolitan Burial Act	Empowered vestries to establish burial boards; as a result, several public cemeteries were formed
1857	Burial Act Consolidation	Consolidated many burial acts to establish a national system of public Cemeteries
1877	Metropolitan Open Spaces Act	Dictated that several burial grounds be closed and laid out as public gardens
1884	Disused Burial Grounds Act	Prevented the erection of buildings on disused burial grounds
1900	Burial Fees Act	Enabled burial authorities to fix fees for burial, subject to approval by home secretary; fees must be uniform for consecrated and unconsecrated parts of the burial grounds

Dear Brother "No One": Sordid Depositories and Buried Secrets in *Bleak House*

Victorian readers may have had trouble distinguishing between an authentic burial tale and a similar account found in a novel. Novelists and social reformers shared the task of providing written descriptions of burial spaces, and sanitation writers often drew upon literary works to reinforce their arguments. For example, after quoting *Bleak House* in his *Sanitary Evolution of London*, Henry Jephson concedes, "The master hand of Dickens has given a more vivid picture of one of these places than any to be found in parliamentary Blue Books" (36). In *The London Burial Grounds*, Mrs. Holmes quotes Longfellow and various other poets to capture the "memorializing spirit" and directs readers to a scene from Dickens' *Old Curiosity Shop* to express her concerns about how the dead are buried and commemorated.[16] Numerous writers wove together burial reform documents and literature to demonstrate and publicize societal concerns about mass burial and lost identity. In this way, the history of burial practices and the literature of reform became highly intertextual.

Writer-reformers pointed to vivid scenes from Victorian literature to detail cemeterial conditions, and novelists presented scenes of lost and fractured identity at the moment of death or after interment to underscore authentic social dilemmas. From Dickens' *Bleak House* to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, nineteenth-century novels repeatedly blur distinctions between life and death to express cultural anxieties about mortality, individuality, and memorialization. Victorian novelists include scenes of epitaph reading, long-lost burial grounds, despicable paupers' interments, and mishandled

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[16] This comparison brings to mind John Kucich's analysis of *The Old Curiosity Shop* in his article "Death Worship among the Victorians." He argues, using Dickens' novel as his prime example, that the Victorians valued the transcendence of death for its own sake, "grounding it in culture, making culture, in turn, transcendent through its reverence for death" (59).

corpses in genres ranging from realism and the industrial novel to gothic and detective fiction. In these varied genres, tombstones routinely lie; "dead" people whose names are written on their gravestones are discovered alive, and graves are found disturbed but unoccupied. Novels like *Carmilla* and *The Woman in White*, although in a much less earnest and conscientious way than *Bleak House*, introduce readers to scenes of mistaken identity and mishandled bodies to suggest the importance of permanence in identity, specifically after death. They function as expressions of central concerns in the burial reform debate, and their fictional epitaphs and burial plots raised crucial questions about identity and class. Together, nineteenth-century collections of epitaphs (as discussed in chapter two), reform documents, novels, and stories about epitaphs and burial grounds became textual sites for investigating the production and dissolution of identity. The dominance of burial themes and the equivocation of epitaphs in Victorian fiction revealed an authentic concern about the preservation of individuality in death.

When authors adopted actual burial scenes, like those Walker describes in *Gatherings from Graveyards*, into fictional settings, it became difficult to separate narrative and social concerns. For example, in *Mary Barton* (1848), Elizabeth Gaskell includes a funeral procession scene of the burial of a factory worker.[17] Advocating "the simple walking funeral," over the "grotesque funeral pomp of respectable people," the narrator nevertheless complains that the "tombstone" is wooden and temporary, "a mockery of stone respectabilities which adorned the burial-ground" (82). Gaskell exposes the deplorable conditions of pauper burials, as the man's body is added to the pile of corpses lying "within a foot or two of the surface; when the soil was shovelled

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[17] For a more detailed discussion of Mary Barton and the condition-of-England debate, refer to Chapter 7, "Homosociality and the Psychological: Disraeli, Gaskell, and the Condition-of-England debate" in Mary Poovey's *Making a Social Body*.

over, and stamped down, and the wooden cover went to do temporary duty over another hole" (83). Here, the transitory wooden grave marker defies its very purpose; it serves only to mock permanence and remembrance, not to fulfill its duty to enduringly identify and honor a singly-interred body beneath. In his burial treatise, Charles Box describes nearly- identical circumstances in the country churchyards he observes:

> The most indifferent observer... cannot fail to be struck with the efforts made among the poorest of the locality to perpetuate the memory of a lost member of their family, and, where stone the exceeded the limits of finance, wood has been made to serve the purpose. Unfortunately, the old oak, deprived of its vitality, is far less able to contend with the elements... than stone; and these elements operate as severely upon inscriptions as they do upon the rustic structures themselves. (116)

Here, the disparities between stone and wood mark the disparities between classes and their respective abilities to provide a proper burial. Gaskell legitimizes her fictional description with a note claiming that she bases it on "one churchyard in Manchester," but her note concludes with understatement: "There may be more" (83). Gaskell used abject burial sites and impermanent tombstones to call attention to poor interment conditions and to make clear larger thematic concerns about burial and class.

Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853) served as the model for later burial narratives. In it, he sets up the cemetery problem with which so many nineteenth-century readers would have been familiar. Beginning with J. Hillis-Miller, many critics have noted the novel's "double narrative," the shifts between the third-person, impersonal narrator and Esther's intimate, personal view. While some critics insist that the bipartite

structure renders the story fragmented, others find Esther's voice insightful and the two points-of-view complementary. I see *Bleak House*'s structure as reflecting two very different, yet inextricable, concerns. Like Joseph Fradin, I would argue that the double narrative "carries the dialectic between self and society" (41), and the third-person narrative corresponds to Dickens' reformist tendencies while Esther's voice speaks for individualism, for the concerns of private life and the trials of self-making, as she attempts to negotiate her identity. Simon Joyce relates the novel's usefulness as both character study and social critique: "The opening of *Bleak House* offers a set of tropes through which to connect its cast of characters... and relate to larger questions about the problems of London slums and their link to wider forms of social unrest" (132). Dickens' dual perspectives thus offer a way to consider the health of both individual and social bodies. As Pam Morris has argued in *Imagining Inclusive Society*, the "great gulfs between the classes" lead to a text in which "boundaries cannot hold," and we find that this "collapse of distinction and stability" leads to a marked duality between aggregation and individualism (119). This duality plays out in the two plots, one that represents social concerns and another that embraces a personal perspective.

The double narrative of *Bleak House* locates the cemetery at the center of the novel, and as the plot oscillates from omniscience to individuality, we see Dickens' alternating his dual concern with social reform and personal struggle.[18] While Lauren Goodlad points out, "Dickens attempts to produce an ideological synthesis that, were it

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[18] In "The (Un)Lettered Ensemble: What Charley Does Not Learn about Writing in *Bleak House*," Claudette Kemper Columbus asserts that the individual characters and their secrets in *Bleak House* are what form a "monstrous plot" where characters' "absorption in the pursuit of private interests delimits their cognition and their social interaction" (611). Columbus says the character of individuals in the novel leads to a more general societal malevolence. As far as burial is concerned, she argues, "the eleven death scenes that punctuate the novel not only conjoin burial plots and the novel's plot, but delete the difference between burial ground and burial bed" (611).

successful, would articulate a... relation between the individual and society" (90), I think Dickens is *quite* successful at this synthesis, and the novel establishes a careful and deliberate tension between individual and societal angst. This is apparent in the legalities that glut "accursed Chancery," where an irate Mr. Gridley bemoans his unresolved case to the point of lunacy: "The system, I am told, on all hands, it's the system. I mustn't look to individuals… Is that right or wrong?... I mustn't go to Mr. Tulkinghorn… *He* is not responsible. It's the system. But… I will accuse the individual workers of that system against me, face to face, before the great eternal bar!" (268). Gridley's frightening outburst foreshadows the tension built into the novel's structure. He nervously flits back and forth from blaming the system to blaming those who comprise it. As Audrey Jaffe notes in *Vanishing Points*, "*Bleak House* insists on separation between the individual subject and the world" (128). But the novel also insists on examining the subject *within* that world; Dickens uses the backdrop of the system of public health as the terrain on which Esther seeks answers about her identity. Because of this, the burial ground becomes central, the place in the novel where public and private domains come together, where narrative concerns meet. It is the place where characters join those who have died before them, and where only language can identify corpses and separate one individual body from the next.

Thus, the structure of the novel parallels the concerns of its writer: the omniscient narrator admonishes a fragile society within which we learn about the deaths and struggles of individuals in that society. An oft-cited quote from *Bleak House* comes when the narrator questions the interconnectedness of places and characters in the novel:

What connexion can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the

house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo the

outlaw with the broom who had that distant ray of light upon him

when he swept the churchyard-step? What connexion can there have

been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world,

who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very

curiously brought together! (272)

As J. Hillis Miller posits, "the two narrators are engaged in a search" (14), and it makes

sense that this search is for some way to preserve names and to regain identity, especially

after death. The "connection" becomes clear: the "many peoples in the innumerable

histories of this world" yearn to be recognized, and this concern is made manifest at the

graveyard, where the plights of individual bodies convey the bleak fate of a diseased and

socially damaged community. Nemo's burial ground becomes the symbolic center of the

text, the dark origin and eventual destination of death, namelessness, poverty, disease,

and lost identity that threatens nearly every character in the novel.[19] Dickens lets his

narrative methods collide at the burial ground, where we can examine both individual and

social perspectives. The narrative rifts, the "great gulfs" that seemed to divide the text

and render it into incompatible halves, are indeed "very curiously brought together"

through this focus on cemeterial issues and burial conditions.

Dickens was acutely aware of the deplorable living conditions of the urban poor

and was appalled at the analogous conditions of their burials. Dickens shows how the

working classes spent their lives crammed into suffocated dwelling places and suffered

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[19] For another perspective on how the novel's mysteries of identity work, see Chapter 3 of Soultana
Maglavera's *Time Patterns in Later Dickens.* Maglavera explains how mystery-oriented analepses are key
to the way characters' identities are revealed in *Bleak House*.

the same unseemly crowding upon their deaths.[20] The text is packed with burial images and themes that reach beyond the cemetery's walls. He begins his story with the Court of Chancery's images of degradation, "decaying houses" and "blighted lands," as well as the fog, which hovers over "its dead in every churchyard" (51). The novel ends with similar images of death—this time at Chesney World, haunted by "an old family of echoings and thunderings which start out of their hundred graves at every sound" (931). With *Bleak House*, Dickens adds his voice to those calling for burial reform and fulfillment of "the obligations at home" while highlighting various themes: the threat of anonymity and lost identity, the importance of naming and identification, the ubiquitous nature of contagion, and the collapse of distinctions between classes.

Dickens' burial ground with its "heaps of dishonored graves" (868) becomes the site of lost identity in the text, the centripetal force that shapes and pushes the narrative. He underscores the tragic loss of self at the burial site where Nemo—"no one"—lies interred. Because of its overcrowded state, the burial ground is the place where everyone—yet no one—rests. Simultaneously, Dickens presents Esther Summerson's story, a narrative motivated by an impassioned search for identity.[21] *Bleak House's* dual narratives present juxtaposed yet related stories of lost identity; the text bemoans the fates of the illegitimate, the nameless, the poor. Through this juxtaposition, Dickens is able to reveal the actual tensions that existed because of mass gravesites.

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[20] Efraim Sicher addresses the design of domestic space in "House and Home: *Bleak House*," Chapter 3 of *Rereading the City, Rereading Dickens: Representation, the Novel, and Urban Realism*. Sicher says, "*Bleak House* is a novel which mediates between the private space of the home and the public" (149). His discussion of the overcrowded slums and proliferation of cheap lodging houses makes a nice conceptual counterpart to the overcrowded burial spaces discussed here.

[21] Timothy Peltason offers a good discussion of Esther's search for identity in "Esther's Will." Peltason focuses on Esther's initial reticence and growing understanding of her needs, calling her narrative a "story of her progress in healthy self-love" (673). In "Esther Summerson Rehabilitated," Alex Zwerdling calls this process "the blossoming of Esther's working intelligence" as she becomes "more self-confident, independent, and unapologetic" (433).

The burial ground draws the reader in with its realism; Dickens notes every deplorable detail while he transforms it into a symbolic void in the text, the hollow center that links and blurs noble and poor, healthy and diseased, individual and society. It becomes a metaphor for the ubiquitous corruption that ignores social injustice and poverty, an organizing symbol of more widespread and dangerous social problems. We first hear about the pauper's graveyard when the body of Nemo, the unidentified copyist, is found dead in his hovel above Krook's shop.[22] The scene of discovery, though, hardly focuses on Nemo's corpse:

> Then the active and intelligent… comes with his pauper's company to Mr. Krook's, and bears off the body of our dear brother here departed, to a hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed; while our dear brothers and sisters… are very complacent and agreeable. Into a beastly scrap of ground which a Turk would reject as savage abomination, and a Caffre would shudder at, they bring our dear brother here departed, to receive Christian burial. (202)

Dickens introduces the burial ground not to invoke pity for the fate of Nemo or to showcase his corpse, but to underscore the careless attitudes of the living toward the dead, along with their potential infection *by* the dead. They do little to treat Nemo like a "dear brother," and their indifference suggests their own downfall. Dickens captures the horrible conditions of many churchyards of the time; they are overfull and vile, reminders of social malignance that will not forgive the neglectful complacency of the living. The

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[22] Christopher Herbert goes so far as to argue that Nemo might be considered the central character of *Bleak House*. In "The Occult and *Bleak House*," Herbert offers that despite the fact that the reader only gets one glimpse of him, Dickens characterizes him as almost an invisible ghost in the novel.

cemetery is the place where social inequalities are most vivid and injustices most pronounced as eyes meet fleshy horrors and not heavenly resting places.

The other important facet of this scene is Nemo's name—or rather his namelessness. Dickens links conditions of namelessness with the language and conditions of burial. The narrator points out that although the copyist's "coffin stands ready," Nemo has left no more a trace on his world, no more a sense of identity, of a life lived "than a deserted infant" (196). He represents all those left to rot unremembered in "hemmed-in" spaces. Nemo's situation recalls the plight of many unidentifiable dead, vanished identities erased by the chaotic namelessness of the churchyard. The text implies that many secrets remain buried with the "no ones" of society, with those whose identities lie buried and blotted out.

To emphasize the contrast, Dickens moves from the scene of Nemo's demise and the subject of namelessness to his introduction of Jo, a character who is certain of nothing but his name: "Name, Jo. Nothing else that he knows on" (199). Jo seems to truly inhabit his moniker and to understand its meager yet important value despite his humble status as street sweeper at Tom-all-Alone's. When Esther and Charley find him sick and alone, they offer him shelter, which he initially refuses. "I can lay amongst the warm bricks," he explains. Charley counters with, "But don't you know that people die there?" Jo sees death as ubiquitous and equalizing, as he hints at his association with Lady Dedlock and Nemo and their connection: " 'They dies everywheres,' said the boy. 'They dies in their lodgings—she knows where; I showed her—and they dies down at Tom-all-Alone's in heaps. They dies more than they lives, according to what I see.' " (488). As the primary observer and bearer of "the truth" in the text, Jo is the only participant who

seems to recognize and almost embrace his plight, and he is the sole character who reflects on the larger, more serious ramifications of the intermingling of bones and loss of names and identities. He cannot always articulate what he thinks, and he admits his ignorance of language, "every scrap of it" (274); nevertheless, he becomes the communicative link (of both information and disease) in the novel, the characterized connection between the contaminated grave site and upper class Chesney, between the mysteries of the text and their resolution.

Burial images and themes continue to emerge as other characters struggle to either discover or conceal their identities. Esther, in a way that foreshadows her familial connection to Nemo, admits early in the text that she is unsure of her identity. During her night-long layover at the Jellyby's residence on their journey to Bleak House, she retires, and with Caddy asleep on her lap, she contemplates her own existence:

> At first I was painfully awake, and vainly tried to lose myself, with my
> eyes closed, among the scenes of the day. At length, by slow degrees,
> they became indistinct and mingled. I began to lose the identity of the
> sleeper resting on me. Now it was Ada; now, one of my old Reading
> friends… Now it was the little mad woman… now someone in authority
> at Bleak House. Lastly, it was no one, and I was no one.   (94)

Here, Esther's bleary dreaminess begins in sober reality as she attempts to "lose herself" in her social setting, "among the scenes of the day." She is an active participant of what has transpired in the narrative. But as she loses her own self and the identity of the sleeper on her lap, she almost evaporates into daily scenes, settings that take her back and forth in time, from place to place. She first imagines the sleeper on her lap as various

"friends," then as the frantic madwoman, and finally as some nondescript authority figure before both she and the authoritative "it" become "no ones." In this scene, Dickens highlights the potential loss of the self as Esther comes to the realization that she has no authentic identity.

Esther is so confounded about her origins and her roles that her confusion carries over into her narration. She says, "I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages" (62). Her self-consciousness as storyteller comes, in part, from her insecurities about her roots and about where her assumed-dead parents are buried. She wishes she could at least connect with her parental heritage by playing the part-- by donning mourning garb and visiting her parents' gravesites: "I had never worn a black frock, that I could recollect. I had never been shown my mama's grave. I had never been told where it was" (63). Esther expresses a complete lack of control in her own life, rooted in her disconnection from her parents and their burial place; this severance, however, comes from knowledge withheld. Her passive language suggests that she relies on others to complete her life story. She has not "been shown" the grave, nor has she "been told" its location, which suggests she is powerless to discover her authentic identity. She cannot recognize her true biological inheritance since she has not mourned, visited a burial site, or consumed stories of her parents' demise.

Esther is so burdened by her fractured life story as she understands it that she requires an audience—her beloved doll. She repeats her story to the doll much in the way Esther's revealed mother, Lady Dedlock, struggles with her own burdens and secrets. The way she describes and treats the doll stands in contrast to the descriptions of other actual children in the text. Esther speaks of the toy as sitting "propped up in a great

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arm-chair with her beautiful complexion and rosy lips, staring" at her (62). The doll serves as an authentic confidante, boasting a healthy glow and red mouth. She even returns Esther's gaze. Esther "opens her heart" only to the doll and knows that her toy, like an actual person, "expects" her each day when she comes home after school. But the relationship ends when Esther's godmother dies and is buried, and she must leave the estate. When Esther's life moves into a new stage, she gives her doll an authentic burial, one befitting a real person, to mark the event. She describes the burial on the day she leaves: "A day or two before I had wrapped the dear old doll in her own shawl, and quietly laid her… in the garden-earth, under the tree that shaded my old window" (70). The act is so private that the reader is not privy to the moment of the burial and hears about it only after the fact in past tense. The godmother leaves all her property to Mrs. Rachel and not Esther, but Esther claims her piece of it; she marks her place in the estate's history by interring the doll there. It is a permanent and enduring act and the only way she can become part of the heritage of the place. She enacts a symbolic shrouding and burial that allows for closure to that part of her life.

Another symbolic burial takes place when Esther accompanies Mrs. Pardiggle to the brickmaker's house later in the novel. The disparity between Esther's animated, interred doll and Jenny's lifeless, displaced infant is remarkable. The "poor little gasping baby" (156) is much less vibrant and pretty than the doll and becomes less lifelike as the visit continues. Esther interacts with her doll as if she is alive, but all the baby's mother can do for her child is stare at her: "She only looked at it" (159). The pronoun Esther uses to describe the baby is not even gender specific, and, soon after this description, the child dies and shrinks into a "small waxen form" (162). Whereas Esther buried her doll

in the ground like one would a real child, she treats the baby's corpse like a doll: "Presently I took the light burden from her lap; did what I could to make the baby's rest the prettier and gentler; laid it on a shelf, and covered it with my own handkerchief" (160). Even though the reader hears about this occurrence the moment it happens— Esther even says "presently" to emphasize this—it is conveyed much less dramatically and urgently than the burial of the doll. Esther is very deliberate about her actions after the child's death; however, despite her desire to do something to help the infant "rest" perpetually, all she can do is cover it with a cloth. In *Bleak House*, the doll receives a proper burial while the baby sits on a shelf under a mock shroud that can hide it but cannot allow it to rest in peace. It sits there, like a knick knack or object viewable in a museum. Esther revisits it, "raising the handkerchief to look upon the tiny sleeper underneath" (162). She realizes that like an object put on display, the baby, despite the previous conversations about the filth of the house, has been "composed afresh and washed, and neatly dressed" (162); still, the handkerchief has been replaced and continues to cover the child, along with a tiny bunch of herbs. The covered infant symbolizes the minimal but meaningful gestures of the poor to honor the dead, but neglects one major part: actual burial in the ground.

Esther's matter-of-fact description of such a strange symbolic gesture points to a focus in *Bleak House* on bodies that cannot be buried and the pitiable destination of working class corpses. The young man of the house makes their plight clear. The family cannot read the pamphlet the energized Mrs. Pardiggle has left to promote her brand of hopefully-contagious morality; likewise, they cannot keep their struggling children alive by pretending. He screams,

'An't my place dirty? Yes, it is dirty… and we've had five dirty and on-
wholesome children, as is all dead infants, and so much the better for
them, and for us besides… I an't read the little book wot you left. There
an't nobody here as knows how to read it; and if there wos, it wouldn't
be suitable to me. If you was to leave me a doll, I shouldn't nuss
it.' (158)

The man's comments point not only to their own helpless position when it comes to both
education and parenting, but to the ironic difference between the nursing baby and
Esther's doll. Judging from their disparate descriptions and peculiar positions in the text,
it would be reasonable to bury the infant and nurse the doll. Neither a book nor a doll is
of any use to the struggling family because words and pantomimes only mock their tragic
lives. All Esther can offer is pity.

The death scene at the brickmaker's is rooted in pity and its role in the act of
observation. Esther gazes upon the happenings like she is watching a drama unfold on
stage, and Esther and Ada's pity for the initial state and eventual fate of the baby drives
the scene. The family, the "actors" in the sad drama, "take no notice" of Esther and Ada,
their audience, even as the two women look long upon the unfolding events. Esther
realizes that there is "an iron barrier which cannot be removed" (159) between her and
the brickmaker's family, so she maintains her role as an observer and reporter throughout
the visit. She remarks at how "touching" the whole scene is as she repeatedly mentions
both Ada's "pity" and "compassion" upon the child's death (160). Strangely, though,
Ada initially cries out not to Jenny, the baby's mother, but to *Esther* after the infant
perishes: "O Esther!' cried Ada, sinking down on her knees beside it. 'Look here! O,

Esther, my love, the little thing! The suffering, quiet, pretty little thing!'" (160). The emphasis is on the women's shared experience as witnesses, and Ada's outburst seems as much a gesture of pity for Esther as an exclamation bemoaning the baby's demise. The "little thing" that has created the moment of heightened sympathy recedes as Ada addresses Esther. Because of this, the reader can understand a connection to Esther's own sad life as a child who suffers from loss of distinct identity. Esther's ritualized burial of her doll alongside the symbolic burial and shrouding of Jenny's child exhibit the psychological need for burial in the novel, and point to the nameless, pitiable dead. Esther equates namelessness with entombment as, later in the novel, she reads the letter Lady Dedlock leaves to explain her situation; to Lady Dedlock's knowledge her baby "had been buried-had never been endowed with life-had never borne a name" (569). Esther's identity as a "no one" comes from her father who is literally unnamed and her mother, who conceals her identity. When the first and third person narratives finally merge and secrets are revealed, identity becomes clear: "Both narratives trace a movement from an apprehension of the self as a 'nobody' to the occupying of a position as 'somebody'" (Jaffe 149). Once feelings are put into language—either vocalized or written down—roles become clearer, and Esther inherits her identity. She moves from the role of observer into the role of a true actor in her life, and Ada's pity is no longer necessary.

Dickens explores what happens when language fails when Lady Dedlock seeks information from Jo at Tom-all-alone's.[23] Her visit "disguised" as a servant only serves

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[23] Claudette Kemper Columbus addresses the failure of language in "The (Un)Lettered Ensemble," when she argues that characters' predatory social interactions with one another produce the illiteracy that permeates the novel. She argues, "If society is infected, the natural desire to have a place in the world ends in illiteracy" (622).

to further emphasize the expansive gap between their respective classes.[24] The two rendezvous amidst "piles of bones" and scurrying rats for a "talk" even though they speak what amounts to two different languages in an encounter that highlights burial anxieties and the failure of communication. Jo admits early on "not to have the least idea of all that language!" To him, written letters on street signs are mere "shapes" and "mysterious symbols" that perplex him. His social rank inhibits his comprehension: "What does it all mean, and if it means anything to anybody, how comes it that it means nothing to me!" (274). Despite the fact that Jo is "blind and dumb" to everything he sees, he is bright enough to immediately recognize that Lady Dedlock is no servant; he calls her "lady" from the initial moment of their meeting, although he resorts to calling her a "jolly servant" after her refutation of her aristocratic title. The encounter locates class differences in their inability to communicate: Lady Dedlock asks Jo not to speak to her. She wishes him, without language, to show her the places Nemo lived, wrote, and died. She wants to take in visually "all those places that were spoken of in the account [she] read, the place he wrote for, the place he died at... and the place where he was buried." She gives him precise instructions to nod at the places: "Don't speak to me unless I speak to you" (277), and Jo makes sense of her directions although he finds her spoken words "rather hard." At the location of irretrievable identity, language dissolves into a series of quick nods and surreptitious gestures, furtive signals and horrified glances.

Despite their insufficient understanding of one another, Lady Dedlock manages to uncover some answers through Jo. As Jo shows her Nemo's barren living quarters, she

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[24] David Plotkin provides an extended connection between Jo and the condition of London in "Home-Made Savages: Cultivating English Children in *Bleak House*." He discusses the idea of both poorly-kept home and poorly-kept country, and describes Jo as a representative child as he "dramatizes what happens to children when they do not have proper families or homes" (18). Plotkin argues that Dickens manages this by presenting Jo as a character both strange and familiar.

glances up through a window at the place where Jo saw him "stritched out" (278). The

description of Nemo's empty casket-like space foreshadows Lady Dedlock's own "dark

and cold" deserted chambers after her death. When the odd duo reaches the burial spot,

they must talk from outside the gated grounds; this barrier, however, clearly does little to

prevent contamination. They stand just outside the gate and peer inside. Then, Dickens

presents their conversation as Jo tries to point out Nemo's grave:

> 'He was put there,' says Jo, holding to the bars and looking in.
>
> 'Where? O, what a scene of horror!'
>
> 'There!' says Jo, pointing. 'Over yinder. Among them piles of bones, and
>
> close to that there kitchin winder! They put him wery nigh the top. They
>
> was obliged to stamp upon it to git it in. I could unkiver it for you with
>
> my broom, if the gate was open… It's always locked. Lock at the rat!'
>
> cries Jo, excited. 'Hi! Look! There he goes! Ho! Into the ground!'
>
> (278)

Jo's basic language emphasizes the basic and crude nature of the "burial." Nemo was

"put there," not laid to rest. It is almost as if the two are standing outside a cell, viewing

the imprisoned. Lady Dedlock cannot make out the actual gravesite. Even though Jo

acts as if he is pointing very precisely and carefully to the exact burial spot, he is actually

designating some vague space "over yonder" and "among piles" of human

decomposition. The rotting corpses are literally nearer to domestic spaces, "close to"

kitchens where people sit eating and carrying on with life. Jo uses the word "top" in

reference to Nemo's position almost as if being at the peak of the pile of bones is a

privilege. Before the scene ends, Jo's excitement over the rat that has scurried into the

ground stands in stark contrast to the bones that even stamped on are barely covered. A person lies unburied, but a rat can find a safe haven underground.

Dickens contrasts Lady Dedlock's death in pauper's weeds with her actual resting place: she "lies in the mausoleum in the park" (929), far from the paupers' burial ground in the mighty Dedlock family vaults. But the fact that Lady Dedlock flees and Esther and the others find her in paupers' dress outside the gates of the graveyard suggests how, with a burst like the combustion from Krook's shop, the "heaps of dishonoured graves" have taken their vengeance; they explode on the scene in "a thick humidity... like a disease" (868), striking at low and high alike. Although how Lady Dedlock dies "is all mystery," as the novel draws to a close the reader may assume that she succumbs to both an unbearable grief and the effluvia emitted from the burial place at Tom-all-alone's, that those "deadly stains," claim her life. Dickens' story, like Jo's, is infused with contagious secrets, most of them buried like latent ghosts waiting to burst forth from their coffins.[25]

Dickens' commentary on "life in action close on death" and, its inverse, "death in action close on life" (202) will serve to warn about the indiscriminate nature of contagion and the power of retribution stemming from the anonymous corpses rotting in the churchyard; further, it addresses the ways that burial stories lodged themselves in the Victorian imagination and produced psychological ideals about identity formation. The burial ground becomes the physical and thematic as well as physical link between the two

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[25] In "The Occult in *Bleak House*," Christopher Herbert focuses on the ghostly atmosphere of Tom-all-Alone's and the way repressive, large-scale social problems take on "a ghostly and terrifying aspect" (105). Allan Pritchard focuses on some of the same issues in "The Urban Gothic of *Bleak House*," where he analyzes the layout of the city, the violent deaths, and the general horrors of the urban setting. The graveyard could definitely function as one of the horrors at its center.

narratives and the two worlds that Dickens describes.[26] The symbolic burials and search

for resolution in Esther's narrative, as well as the omniscient social commentary, both

point to the graveyard, as the double narrative locates it at the center of the text. By using

the cemetery as the central symbol of *Bleak House*, Dickens exhibits the contradictions

apparent in a society that wants to name, acknowledge, and identify, but instead shames,

dishonors, and forgets its dead. His fictitious burial site acts as a threatening gap at the

center of the novel, and he portrays burial grounds and uses cemeterial rhetoric to

demonstrate how his characters bury secrets, negotiate identity, and find closure. While

readers consumed the pages of *Bleak House*, they were confronting challenges about not

only their health, but also their psychological fitness. Horrible burial conditions were a

sanitary issue, but they also affected the psyche. Reactions to burial reform encouraged

both the production of tales and great personal introspection. Many writer-reformers saw

the value in colleting and sharing "the same dreary and miserable stories of the

overcrowding of graveyards" (Holmes 216), and Dickens found ways to not only

contemplate the literal gravesite, but also the psychological need for burial, the Victorian

desire for permanent and meaningful closure.

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[26] In her article "*Bleak House, Vanity Fair*, and the Making of an Urban Aesthetic," Sambudha Sen focuses on newspapers and registries as forces that record and bring together unlikely people from the different social realms of the novel.

Chapter Two

Of Tomes and Tombstones: Altering People and Plots

No difficulty stands in the way of improving churchyard

literature... because a great deal is expected from it.

—Charles Box, *Elegies and Epitaphs* (1892)

Introduction: Epitaphic Language and the Representation of the Dead

Chapter One focused on the actual treatment of bodies, and how novelists and

social reformers confronted and wrote about cemeterial sanitation issues and the

psychological need for individual burial. This chapter focuses on nineteenth-century

epitaph collections and traces the importance of epitaphs in Victorian literature and

culture. While there were some epitaph collections published during the eighteenth

century, most were concerned with writing for an educated readership and passing on

proper models of the form. But in a late eighteenth-century collection like John

Bowden's *The Epitaph Writer* (1791), we begin to see a new emphasis on the practical

uses of epitaphs. Bowden's collection holds "six hundred original epitaphs… designed

for those who write or engrave on tombstones" (i). Bowden is an early example of a

collector who was redefining the purpose of the epitaph collection; he emphasizes the

distinctiveness of his tome: "If any such book has, of late, been published, it has escaped

the knowledge of the author of this" (i). He goes on to explain that previous collections

were "fitter for the libraries of the Learned and Curious than for the Use and Purchase of

the Artist" (i). After the turn of the century, more authors shared Bowden's purpose of

presenting epitaphs for actual use, in addition to the goals of amusement and edification.

After public cemeteries became a reality and Kensal Green was founded in 1832, such

collections were both presented and perceived as useful and appreciated. Thus, in *A

Selection of Texts for Tombstones* (1865), Nash Stevenson hopes "in the selections given,

some may be found which may be suitable" (5), and Charles Box says in his 1892

collection *Elegies and Epitaphs* that he hopes he has provided "sufficient choices" for

those who desire an epitaph appropriate for a loved one's grave (v).

Mid- and late-nineteenth-century authors of epitaph collections took their roles as

"collectors" very seriously and, as evidenced in Box's quote above, they began to carve

out a particular genre of "churchyard literature" or "tombstone literature" (iv). It seems

that the effects of burial reform worked to inspire collectors who sought, as Box points

out, "to improve churchyard literature as well as the churchyards" (v). In their bound

collections of usually one to three hundred pages each, they emphasize accuracy and

presentation. In his introduction to *Churchyard Literature* (1874), Charles Northend

writes, "It is believed that the specimens in this volume are correct copies" (3). In his

volume *In Memoriam*, one collector identified as M.F. shares, "It will be seen that… the

Whole inscription has been copied, and, as nearly as possible, the form of the Epitaph is

shown in type" (Introduction). There was clearly honor in accurate transcription.

Collectors also sought to intricately categorize epitaphs by type or by subject, so many

collections open with detailed tables of contents.

Although some Victorian collectors actually copied epitaphs in churchyards or

cemeteries, others produced highly intertextual works by borrowing from other

publications. M.F. connects his collection with his personal fondness for visiting gravesites:

> The whole of the following Epitaphs have been copied by myself, from the various places named, in moments snatched at intervals during several years of occupation as a Commercial Traveller… I hope the perusal of them may afford somewhat of the please I have experienced in colleting them. (Introduction)

M.F. presents his epitaphs in a way that makes his reader feel connected to the cemetery and the leisure activity of collecting verses. Another collector, William Henney, likewise says, "The Editor of the following sheets having… been curious to visit the depositories of the dead," now "offers them to the Public" (56). One the other hand, Northend, for instance, explains his method of borrowing texts: "This volume contains a great variety of inscriptions… gathered from various sources. Many of them have… appeared in one of our best and most popular magazines (Harper's). Quite a number have also been taken from two English works (Pettigrew's *Chronicles* and Palmer's *Epitaphs*)" (3). William Gates admits that although he "humbly claims some merit for the large portion of original matter that will be found" in his collection, "he cannot withhold his obligations from more early collectors" (iv). The collectors seem to share a reverence for the past, but they also do not hesitate to elevate their own status as compilers and sometimes composers of such pieces.

So, while British society was learning of the increasing numbers of unidentified corpses filling mass graves in London churchyards, epitaphs filled the pages of volumes, like those discussed above, for eager Victorian readers. Few scholars have looked

closely at epitaphic writing as the primary response to death—at how it was collected, distributed, and consumed, its relation to disturbing social problems such as mass interment and pit burial, or its attempts to re-establish appropriate methods of remembrance.[27] During the nineteenth century, epitaphs in various contexts—on stones, in novels, and bound in collections—became a primary medium for the "telling" of stories and for establishing places for the dead in both individual and collective memory. This chapter focuses on real and fictional epitaphs to study issues of authorship and readership. It examines the relationship between corpses and language in a way that pinpoints individualization and remembrance as concepts central to nineteenth-century life and culture, and it analyzes how epitaphic language and grave reading began to contribute to the novel's treatment of corpses.

Mourners become authors when they tell stories at the end of a life to assess its quality, to retain some essence of a person, and to consider how they might remember— or encourage others to remember—the dead. The bereaved use the grief process to construct meaning in relation to themselves; indirectly, mourning encourages the living to interpret the quality and purpose of their own lives, as well as those who have died. One discursive way to address and begin to comprehend death is to employ and respond through language. Elegies, obituaries, funeral cards, sermons—all are intended to soothe loss through language. Here, however, I am concerned with how epitaphs became the primary vehicle for linguistic remembrance in the nineteenth century, how it became fashionable to write or read epitaphs that attempt to speak for and represent the dead.

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[27] Other studies devoted to the examination of epitaphs focus either on the poetic epitaph or on Wordsworth's ideas about epitaphs. For those topics, see Joshua Scodel, *The English Poetic* Epitaph; D.D. Devlin, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Epitaph*; Karen Mills-Courts, *Poetry as Epitaph*; Esther Schor, *Bearing the Dead*.

Epitaphs have been written for centuries as memorialization, and it is not surprising that this form of writing became increasingly popular as part of a larger nineteenth-century culture of mourning. Epitaphs flourished and grew into a formidable genre that showed the Victorians as fascinated not only with mourning as a process, but also with issues of grief and death as they related to authenticity, propriety, and self conceptualization.

Simply defined, epitaphs are inscriptions, usually chiseled onto tombstones, written to honor and remember the departed. Epitaphs help the living decide how lives are evaluated, defined, and demarcated. Furthermore, like novels, epitaphs frequently promote self-examination in the context of considering others, and they encourage people to contemplate the individual roles they play and the social positions they occupy. In epitaphs, writing becomes the primary response to death as language works to encapsulate identity.[28] Memorial inscriptions are a method of limiting and capturing disorderly lives; they assign a beginning and an end to life experiences and reveal the central ideals, values, aspirations, and characteristics of both the dead and the living.

Writers have produced epitaphs for centuries, but their literary and cultural significance underwent important developments during the nineteenth century, a time that saw massive burial reform and new rural cemeteries. This chapter is devoted to a discussion of how people wrote, evaluated, collected, shared, and read epitaphic pieces. Charles Dickens provides fine examples of both epitaphic authorship and readership: in *Great Expectations* he initiates his tale with orphaned Pip at graveside, reading his parents' tombstone, while in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, he uses an inscription-writing parody to showcase the painstaking task of the epitaph's author. These fictional accounts

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[28] A useful reference here is Karen Mills-Courts' *Poetry as Epitaph*. She argues that epitaphs are unique in that they are representational. The epitaph substitutes itself for a presence that is absent, essentially, "as voice heard only because it is lost" (2).

help us arrive at some central questions about reading and writing epitaphs: How and to what degree does writing (and do epitaphs) make death understandable? What responsibilities reside with the epitaph writer? What do readers of epitaphs expect? What, in other words, is the relationship between tomb and tome?

I begin with examples of real epitaphs that underscore the challenges epitaph writers face and the various satisfactions that epitaph readers seek. I detail some common characteristics of epitaph writing, various epitaphic genres, and possible ways to consider the relationship between language and death. Then, I consider how Victorian novels incorporate cemetery scenes and epitaphs. In *Great Expectations*, for example, a text which focuses on upward social mobility and humble beginnings, Charles Dickens' main character, Pip, begins his journey on a grand search "for the identity of things" (1). He knows his father's name only "on the authority of his tombstone" (1). His parents' grave site becomes Pip's touchstone to his original identity.[29] Although epitaph writers and collectors often recognize the inadequacy of language to account for and represent the dead, mourners nevertheless hope and expect that it will. Dickens explores this paradox in the opening scene of *Great Expectations* in which Pip, who has never seen his parents, studies their graves and replaces not only their visible bodies, but their personalities, with their gravestones: "My first fancies regarding what they were like were unreasonably derived from their tombstones" (1). Recognizing his "fancies" as "unreasonable," Pip nevertheless looks at the "shape of the letters" on his father's tombstone and concludes that his father must have been "a square, stout man with curly

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[29] In "Repetition, Repression, and Return: *Great Expectations* and the Study of Plot," Peter Brooks argues that the first part of *Great Expectations* involves Pip in need of a plot, initiating "in the search for a beginning" (505). Brooks focuses on Pip's self-naming and how the novel presents texts to be decoded and deciphered, such as the tombstone the Pip "reads" in an attempt to discover his origins. He points out how the entire text is actually about the process of reading and interpreting.

black hair," while "from the character and turn of the inscription" about his mother, he figures that she "was freckled and sickly." Studying the "five little stone losenges, each about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside their grave" as five little brothers who gave up their fight to live, he pictures the stones as babies, "born on their backs with their hands in their trouser pockets" (1). Pip thus sits at the graveyard with "his family," a mother, father and siblings present only in the form of tombstones, symbolic representations of the bodies he has never seen and the identities he has never known. As this chapter concludes, I move to close readings of epitaphic scenes in two other Dickens novels, first paying attention to John Chivery's malleable self-composed epitaph in *Little Dorrit*, and, finally, concluding with a look at the problem of epitaph-writing in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

Because epitaph writers' compositions often appear in stone rather than on paper, grave readers often forget about authorship; the words on the stones provide the dead with voices, and those interred seem to tell their own stories. These narrative acts reveal not only how cemeterial language attempts to mark and represent bodies in respective graves, but also how cemeteries become sites associated with reading, interpretation, and storytelling-with issues of point of view, imagery, tropes, and characters.

It comes as no surprise that epitaphs were embraced as part of a larger nineteenth-century culture of mourning; however, epitaphs flourished during this period and developed into a formidable genre that reveals the Victorians as fascinated with not only mourning as a process, but also with issues of grief and death as they relate to authenticity, taste, propriety, and self-conceptualization. Epitaphs took on special literary and cultural significance in the nineteenth century that corresponded to major social

changes, including the growth of the middle class, the creation of new physical spaces to house the dead, and the impact of industrialization on British culture. Fictionalized in novels and bound in collections, epitaphs provided ways to express the tension between individual and social needs, to confront the complexities of remembrance, and to acknowledge the desire for identification and expression. Victorians seem to have felt an urgent need for recognition and remembrance, and recovering names and identities from near-anonymity became crucial. Epitaph collectors frequently addressed the social factors that encouraged memorialization. Nash Stephenson confirms, "the cemeteries and the churchyards, even of the most remote villages, amply testify to the deep-rooted feeling which exists in all classes of society to preserve and perpetuate the memory of the departed" (3). In the preface to his 1886 collection of epitaphs *Quaint, Curious, and Elegant* Henry James Loaring emphasizes, "Under the greatest bodily sufferings man still feels the endearing tie of life, and is solicitous not to be forgotten, and he who preserves a monument, records a name, or rescues an inscription that is nearly effaced, is entitled to remembrance" (v). Underscoring both the poor condition of many gravestones and the need to memorialize and be remembered, Loaring praises those who preserve cemeterial language, who "rescue" inscriptions that may no longer be readable (1). He describes an ideal sort of reciprocity involved in memorialization. If someone restores a monument or delivers a name from oblivion, he or she is "entitled" to personal commemoration. People could memorialize through the preservation of writing—by copying down faded inscriptions on tombstones and, eventually, by publishing them.

The first recognized British collection of epitaphs appeared as early as 1619 with John Weever's seminal work *Ancient Funeral Monuments*. A century later John LeNeve

published another key work in the history of the genre, a five-volume collection called *Monumenta Anglicana* (1719). Victorian readers would likely have been familiar with Samuel Johnson's *An Essay on Epitaphs* (1740) and William Wordsworth's three *Essays upon Epitaphs* (1810), works that analyzed the purpose of and need for appropriate epitaphs. Johnson was primarily concerned that epitaph writers present examples of virtue and that they follow guidelines for writing appropriate, eloquent epitaphs. In "Decomposing: Wordsworth's Poetry of Epitaph and English Burial Reform," Karen Sanchez-Eppler points out how Wordsworth, too, comments upon the "critical evaluation of epitaphs," but she goes on to demonstrate how his *Essays*, although they predate most reform activity, might also be read as a critique of burial reform, a reaction to the changes burial reformers would eventually impose. Wordsworth was concerned about "conceptions of the relations between the dead and the living, burial and commemoration, loss and language" (Sanchez-Eppler 418). According to Sanchez-Eppler, Wordsworth thought epitaphs could unify the dead and the living, and he saw a need for fluidity of this boundary. But Wordsworth worried that to remove corpses from the presence of the living would deny the witnessing of death itself and thwart necessary reconciliation between the living and the dead. He did, however, praise epitaphs as the ultimate method of reconciliation because epitaphs could provide absolute truth in their public expressions of private loss. Wordsworth understood, even before burial reform activity had advanced during the nineteenth century, that the "debate over burial practices encompassed a debate over linguistic practices" (Sanchez-Eppler 425) because he recognized how language and death were interrelated, and how epitaphs could potentially replace corpses and deemphasize death's presence.[30]

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[30] In her article, Sanchez-Eppler analyzes some introductions from epitaph collections discussed here,

A profusion of epitaph collections, many with authors cross-referencing one another and engaging in dialogues about proper remembrance, emerged during the nineteenth century. This outpouring of collections suggests that epitaphs served an increasingly important purpose for the reading public in a rapidly-changing British culture. The collection that seems to have ignited a fervent interest in epitaphic writing is Thomas Joseph Pettigrew's *Chronicles of the Tombs: A Select Collection of Epitaphs* (1857). Pettigrew's contemporaries recognized him as one of the first writers to provide a comprehensive history of the genre and to take the collection and publication of epitaphs seriously; his name turns up repeatedly in prefaces to collections, and collectors often reprinted epitaphs from his 522-page volume. In his "Preface," Pettigrew establishes his purpose for studying cemeterial literature:

> It is remarkable that so little has been written, in the English
>
> language, on Epitaphial Inscriptions. With the exception of a
>
> short Essay, by Dr. Johnson, there is scarcely anything to be
>
> found in relation to the subject-- nothing at all approaching to
>
> the character of a history. I have, therefore, thought it not
>
> unworthy of attention to trace Monumental Inscriptions
>
> generally, from the earlier period to the present time, and
>
> have endeavored to make such a Collection of Epitaphs
>
> belonging to our own country. (iii)

Pettigrew seeks to establish a standard "history" of burial and to provide a British collection that identifies a national style and sensibility. He possesses what John Gillis

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particularly William Pulleyn's *Church-yard Gleanings* (1830) and Augustus Hare's *Epitaphs for Country Churchyards* (1856). Sanchez-Eppler examines the ways these writers present a notion of language as displacing the corpse and how that notion is divorced from Wordsworth's ideas in *Essays*.

calls "an intense awareness of the conflicting representations of the past" and the need to institute memory as a primary "basis of national identity" (8). Establishing the history of burial practices and commemoration provided a clearer sense of how people might commemorate in the present. Similarly, Loaring calls epitaphs "a connecting link between the past, the present, and the future" (preface). By focusing on individual epitaphs, collectors like Pettigrew, Loaring, and their contemporaries were able to provide snapshots that spoke to an industrializing England and its growing urban middle and working classes. Epitaphs seem to have been connected to a more rural past with which urban dwellers were losing touch. The collection and dissemination of epitaphs can be seen as an attempt to permanently capture and narrate individual identities while at the same time addressing their relationship to family, nation, and class. In *Death, Heaven, and the Victorian Family*, Pat Jalland addresses the various types of writing (such as family memoirs) that consoled Victorian mourners. She demonstrates how both writing and publishing mourning literature routinely accompanied bereavement and facilitated not only individual, but communal, grief (387-8). Epitaphic collections provided private and individualized consolation while, on a mass scale, they filled a distinct societal need. The growth of a middle class wanting desperately to be recognized and remembered fostered a renewed, more serious, interest in cemeterial literature in the nineteenth century. John Gillis explains how "middle-class Victorians were the first generation to deny death and have trouble letting go of the dead" (11). They were also a generation deeply invested in identity formation and struggling for authentic social status.

Pettigrew was one of tens of collectors whose published tomes inspired epitaph reading. The many volumes of the genre printed during the nineteenth century in Britain

were, in effect, cemeteries replicated in print. Authors prefaced their collections with long forwards and discussed everything from the history of the epitaphic form to the varying purposes of their extensive collations. The titles of these collections suggest a new audience for what their authors called the "literature of the churchyard" or "tombstone literature" (Tinsley 1873; Box 33). For example, 1865 brought the Reverend Nash Stephenson's *A Selection of Texts for Tombstones*, and in 1874, Charles Northend compiled *Light Reading on Grave Subjects*; these two titles and others like them indicate a shift from thinking of stone as the primary medium for epitaphs to thinking about them on the pages of books. This new context for epitaphs changed their purpose, use and reception.

In epitaphic collections, Pettigrew and other collectors responded to what John Gillis refers to as "the new imperatives of individualism" (10). On the pages of books, an epitaph could be read as a highly-individualized and personalized piece of writing, as a solitary voice speaking to an invested reader. Reading epitaphs was like reading miniature pieces of fiction, each with its own narrating voice and distinctive tone. The appearance of these volumes raises a number of questions about the role of epitaphic writing in nineteenth-century culture. What common purpose did collected and fictional epitaphs serve? What precipitated an outpouring of epitaphic collections and who was the intended audience for these tomes? Was reading an epitaph on paper a different experience than reading it in a cemetery?

Victorian readers encountered epitaphs in both cemeteries and in bound texts. Starting in the 1830s, those who strolled through the newly-established and beautified rural cemeteries read epitaphs in their intended setting: on the tombstones themselves.

During the early- to mid-nineteenth century, rural cemeteries replaced the overcrowded churchyards of London. Kensal Green (1837) and Highgate (1839) are two of the earliest and most famous of these venues, cemeteries which were more akin to parks and gathering places. Epitaphs continued to serve the basic purpose of marking and commemorating the dead and facilitating proper mourning for those who missed them, but epitaph reading became an increasingly popular leisure-time activity. By mid-century, the idea germinated that old cemeteries should be refashioned and kept open to the public, and government officials pursued laws that made it illegal to build on any grounds that had been previously established as burial spaces. Eventually, the Open Spaces Act of 1881 made this sentiment into law and insured the permanent protection of previously-misused burial grounds. Isabella Holmes, identified as "Mrs. Basil Holmes" in her book, is author of the 1896 *The London Burial Grounds*, a comprehensive history of burial practices in England. Holmes penned a long chapter titled "Graveyards as Public Gardens." She reports that by 1877 seven disused burial grounds had been made into public gardens, and that this practice flourished due, in part, to the Earl of Meath's formation of the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association in 1882, which converted 320 grounds by the end of 1895 (232-3). Holmes advocates for the practice of transforming graveyards into appealing public spaces:

> I would not say that a converted graveyard is a better garden than
> a converted square, but yet there is something more interesting about
> it-- it is so very human; and where there are monuments to notable
> persons... they form something with an historical flavour about it
> which is attractive to look at. (246)

Recasting old burial grounds as recreational public spaces reinforced what cemeteries built outside the city had begun in the 1830s, and these memorial "gardens" continued to authenticate epitaphs as subjects of interest and as acceptable—even popular—reading material. Epitaphs provided the "something more interesting" that Holmes refers to, and this interest in something "so very human" moved from these memorial gardens onto the pages of books. Epitaphs were meant to be not only read *in situ*, but also collected and coveted, studied and shared in print form. Collectors often emphasized both indoor and outdoor settings for epitaph reading when they expressed the dual enjoyment experienced by both themselves as collators and their readers as consumers of their volumes. Readers could take part in the new activity of strolling around park-like cemeteries and reading epitaphs, and they could subsequently relive that experience from the comfort of their own residences. Epitaphs were no longer something readers had to read and appreciate out of doors; their appearance as "texts," as the subject of "light reading," underscores their prominent entrance into print form and a growing need to understand memorialization as a textual, and thus literary, experience.

When epitaphs moved from the physical spaces of graveyards into literary and narrative spaces in novels and collections, the epitaph-reading experience became more private while it simultaneously became more popular and mass-produced. While collectors underscored the "process" of composition and collection, they also emphasized the role of epitaphs as distributed "product." For example, one compiler describes his role as both collector and purveyor: "To the Reader: The Editor of the following sheets having... been curious to visit the depositories of the dead, and to copy these monumental inscriptions that appeared to him the most remarkable, now offers them to the Public"

(Henney preface). The collector experiences a private moment when he discovers an epitaph, savors the process of transcription and his role as mediator, and then transforms his personal pleasure into a product for a consuming public. Collectors hoped to replicate for readers the pleasant feelings and meaningful moments they had experienced when they copied down favorite epitaphs. M.F., the anonymous author of one collection, notes, "I hope the perusal of [the epitaphs] may afford somewhat of the pleasure I have experienced in the collection of them" (preface). Collector William Gates states in his *Collection of Epitaphs and Monumental Inscriptions*, "The compiler of this work... is induced to offer the product of his industry to the public, in the hope that it may prove neither uninstructive nor unentertaining in the perusal" (iv). Gates emphasizes the value of epitaphs in the literary marketplace when he refers to his compilation as a "product" and calls his collecting duties "industry." M.F. similarly notes in the title of his book his identity as a "commercial," as well as a literary, figure. We see how collectors understood their roles and how collectors took their own private experiences of epitaph reading and offered them for public consumption. For example, Charles Tinsley thinks of his collection in this way: "At first the curiosities collected were simply intended for the author's own private amusement; they have now, however, swollen to such proportions that he has been induced to give them to the world" (vii). Tinsley makes it sound as if he hardly had a choice but to publish the epitaphs as they overflowed his private collection. In turn, readers of collections could re-privatize and personalize the epitaphs when they read them in published volumes; Tinsley may provide them "to the world" after they have "swollen" beyond his control, but reading epitaphs was still a private, individualized act.

Collectors' egos, too, seem to have swollen. As producers, many of these collections' editors spend more time talking about themselves-- their pleasures, collection practices, hopes for their volumes-- than about the art of epitaphic writing itself. They inadvertently reveal the problem with memorialization: it is difficult to overcome personal desires and egos when commemorating others. Tinsley and others magnify their own roles and contributions; their prefaces include generous self-praise, along with lengthy proclamations about their fulfillment of public duties in the publishing of such tomes:

> When a man wishes to gain publicity for a Work of his own,
>
> it may, perhaps often be expedient to explain the scope and
>
> nature, and the motives which prompted it. In the present
>
> instance, however, it is the performances of other people
>
> which the compiler of this volume has ventured to introduce
>
> to public notice; but, nevertheless, it is thought desirable to
>
> precede its contents with a few introductory and explanatory
>
> words. (M.F. preface)

The reader watches this writer as he fluctuates between self-promotion and letting the epitaphs speak for themselves. He begins this excerpt feeling the need "to explain," then solicits "other people," but concludes by offering "a few introductory comments and explanatory words" anyway. He then discusses himself-- everything from his rationale for the study to his boyhood fondness for visiting churchyards and copying epitaphs. He recounts the work involved in producing the collection with some false modesty; the book appears in print only because he has "yielded to repeated requests" to publish it. He

cannot help but add that he believes no "more genuine a Collection has... hitherto been published" (M.F. preface). Ironically, he experiences the same oscillation between egocentrism and humility as epitaph writers struggled with themselves.

As collectors offered their products to a reading public, they altered the experience of epitaph reading and the purpose of epitaphic literature. Collected epitaphs no longer existed for the primary purpose of memorializing individuals. To hold a collection in one's hands and read pages of epitaphs helped readers make memorialization more concrete. As John Gillis explains, "memories and identities are not fixed things, but representations or constructions of reality"; these compilations became mementos for their readers—representations of identities constructed to make mourning and remembrance more tangible. Collections of epitaphs created a space for the living to embrace memories of the dead while simultaneously learning something about their need for commemoration, the way language replaces bodies, and the constructions of their own selfhood.

Epitaph writers often self-consciously imagine the reactions their pieces will elicit and the potential audiences for their compositions, and many epitaphs address readers directly. At Wood Ditton in England, William Symons' epitaph relates that despite his penchant for "a sop in the dripping pan," he died when he "could not eat." The epitaph ends by supposing potential reader response: "My neighbors, they perhaps will laugh / When they do read my epitaph" (Loaring 170). Another epitaph warns, "Tread gently, reader, near the dust / Committed to this tomb-stone's trust" (*A Collection* 166). A stone memorializing Lady Southampton near Exeter Cathedral reads, "Let this marble tell / What heav'nly worth in youth and beauty fell." (*A Collection* 29). Another, to the

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memory of Margaret Scott, proclaims, "Stop, passenger, until my life you've read; / The living may get knowledge by the dead" (*A Collection*102). Inscriptions like these demonstrate the assumptions that epitaphs make and their expectations about authorship and reading. They suggest how cemeteries and burial grounds were transformed from forgotten repositories to places for reading, learning, and interacting, for conversing with both those written about, as well as with other readers. A common epitaphic conclusion captures many epitaphs' dual intentions of honoring and describing the dead while challenging their audience: "Thus ends the record of the pious man; / Go and do likewise, reader, if you can" (Pettigrew 126).

Epitaph writers assume that their words will be read, and many verses suggest an audience of willing, participatory readers. Admonishments constitute one of the most common epitaphic modes, and almost as popular are requests for some kind of assistance. Often, the dead speak to the living, and the experience is made personal by a proper address to individual readers. Sometimes epitaphs, like this one from *A Collection of Epitaphs* titled "On Robert Hope," address reading within the context of mourning, as an integral part of the grief process:

> READER, it grieves me that I cannot bring
>
> A sea of tears to drown my sorrows in,
>
> For the lamented death of my dear father,
>
> Whose soul God lately to himself did gather...
>
> Oh, grief stops my eye-streams! Pray, Reader, then
>
> Lend me some tears till I can weep again.   (13)

Rather than speaking from the grave, the voice in this verse clearly belongs to a son or daughter of the deceased who invites the reader to participate in two interdependent acts: reading and weeping (a literal "read it and weep"). In order to sympathize with the grief-stricken persona of the verse, the reader's eyes must consume the lines, and then those eyes must reciprocate by "lending some tears." In this epitaphic exchange, the writer has leant heartfelt words and expects equally-heartfelt, "borrowed" tears in return. Even though the highly-personal death of a father has devastated the "I" that initiates the epitaph, that "I" becomes "we" when the reader is invited to take part in the related activities of reading and grieving.

At times, reading becomes so essential to the grieving process that the seemingly-germane expression of sorrow becomes secondary. A verse from Loaring's collection similarly focuses on the eyes, but the author bypasses expressions of mourning altogether to prioritize the act of reading. Here, the speaker is the dead man:

> Reader, of these four lines take heed,
>
> And mend your life for my sake;
>
> For you must die, like ISAAC REED,
>
> Tho' you *read* till your *eyes ache!* (189)

The only way an epitaph like this one could be more personal would be to address its reader by name. The exhortation acknowledges its audience and states death's inevitability before concluding with an emphatic punning reference to the act of reading—reading gravestones so feverishly that it is not emotionally difficult, as we might expect, but physically painful. Reading supplants mourning and becomes the primary way to process death. This writer admits that reading can be more painful than

grieving when the eyes ache more than the heart. Ultimately, the epitaph points out that coming to terms with death involves careful reading, even though reading epitaphs "till your eyes ache" in an attempt to understand death cannot help you avoid it.

Epitaphs indeed encourage readers to face their own mortality. They function primarily in two ways: practically, they indicate the identity and placement of the dead. They also serve as linguistic communications from or about the dead, either to facilitate mourning or to provide information and even entertainment to those who knew the dead or to strangers passing by. As written pieces revered by family and friends, as well as strangers, epitaphs occupy an ambiguous space between documentation and fiction. Readers might be looking for particular genealogical information, such as a birth or death date, or they might be more interested in the varied and engaging "stories" that epitaphs offer, such as the cause of death, status in life, profession, or relationships with the living. These non-essential but intrinsically-interesting pieces of personal information encourage readers to keep reading and to read attentively. Although often written in verse, epitaphs are akin to narrative in that, in their most basic form (including name, birth date and death date), they identify a person and convey the linearity of life that can be associated with storytelling.

In 1892 Charles Box wrote *Elegies and Epitaphs: A Comprehensive Review*, one of the most luxuriously-produced and comprehensive collections of epitaphs. He presents an overview of "the origin, design, and character of Monumental Inscriptions and of other Necrological Literature," and includes over 300 "epitaphs or mottoes, classified to suit the exigencies of different times of life" (title page). Box combines epitaphic material with prose sections that discuss cemeterial overcrowding and disused

burial grounds. He explains, "Inscriptions were not always confined to rhymes... In some cases, epitaphs were carried to extravagant length" (15). Longer epitaphs engage many of the critical features of narrative: character, setting, diction, narrator, and sometimes plot. Like novels, they promote self-examination and curiosity about others, and they encourage experiments "with possible selves" and teach people about the roles they play, their "places in the real world" (Lentricchia 69). Memorial inscriptions assign a beginning and an end to life experience and reveal central themes, roles, and characteristics of the dead, as well as of the living.

The challenges in and intricacies of epitaph writing can vary depending upon whether or not a person writes his or her own epitaph prior to death. Little is said to address this possibility in nineteenth-century collections of epitaphs; it seems that in most cases, the bereaved wrote verses about lost loved ones. Even though some epitaphs stray from expressions of grief, they often contain messages from the living: words of pain and loss meant to express the grief of the bereaved. In this sense, the words function to console the writers themselves. These varied responsibilities—capturing and representing identity, remembering individuals, consoling mourners—complicate the task of epitaph writers. They must distill and convey the essence of the dead and submit to, even in lengthy epitaphs, an economy of expression amidst the experience of grief.

Wide variance in length and style make epitaphs a subject ripe for criticism. Most editors of epitaph collections appreciated the formal versatility of the genre: "The examples chosen must suffice to show that the epitaph was not shaped to any particular model, restricted as to length, or guarded by any prescribed form of expression" (Box 19). Nevertheless, self-appointed monitors of epitaphic propriety voice their frustrations

in consolidating middle class taste. Although collectors present pages of less-than-reverential epitaphs, choosing the right epitaph was supposed to involve discretion, restraint, and good taste; writers of epitaphic and burial manuals make that clear. Some authors bemoan the fact that the "graveyard has too often been chosen as the medium for jests, epigrams, acrostics, anagrams, chronograms, and other devices exemplifying the worst taste" (Box 114), and they abhor the acknowledgment of such disrespectful ditties in bound collections. Box includes a particularly harsh invective in his preface:

> If perchance this volume should be opened with the expectation
>
> of its affording the reading "a fund of amusement," disappointment
>
> will most assuredly ensue. Any subject suggestive of serious thought
>
> and meditation demands a corresponding treatment... Sad it is that
>
> the dead should supply a tempting theme for the jester, and the
>
> valley of dry bones an exclosure for the growth of unholy weeds.

Box's moral language demonstrates the social and religious function of epitaphs. Failing to see the entertainment value in epitaphs, he warns his reader about the potential danger of "unholy weeds." Similarly, Jephson declares, "It is sad to see how unsuitable, how almost ludicrous" are many of the epitaphs he encounters (x). The idea of the tasteful epitaph-- defined predominantly as simple and direct-- surfaces as early as 1830 in *Tributes to the Dead*, wherein the Reverend Luke Booker claims editorial jurisdiction over all the epitaphs that appear on the stones in his churchyard:

> Hence are the walls of our churches and their contiguous cemeteries,
>
> instead of exhibiting 'Sermons on Stone, and good in every thing,' too
>
> often disgraced by chronicles of the dead which excite emotions certainly

quite the reverse of seriousness to the living… and to prevent their

occurrence in my own parish, I requested the different stone-masons

always to let me see the form of inscription brought to them before they

transferred such form to its abiding station on stone.   (viii)

Like editors of later collections who choose which epitaphs to include in their tomes, this

reverend appoints himself the churchyard arbiter of epitaphic propriety. He represents a

substantial faction of clergymen-turned-epitaph-collectors who took it upon themselves

to monitor the quality of epitaphs. The Rev. Nash Stephenson declares, "An epitaph

should speak in a threefold voice. It should commemorate the dead; it should comfort the

mourner; and it should edify the general reader" (4). He suggests that the record of the

departed's birth and death and a brief, yet poignant, piece of Scripture will suffice. In

Hare's 1856 volume *Epitaphs for Country Churchyards*, the author includes the "best and

simplest" Scriptural passages and some "brief sentences" to be considered for

inscriptions (x). Some clergymen hoped to provide suggestions to the bereaved. In *A

Wreath for the Tomb* (1862) The Rev. George Mower Webb says, "a wish to assist you in

the choice of a suitable epitaph has led me to make this little compilation" (preface).

This group of churchmen hoped to elevate the mourning process to a suitably respectable

national standard by providing appropriate selections and encouraging the words of

tasteful memorialization.

Longer narrative epitaphs could provide fuller characterizations, including the

relationships of the deceased, along with their favorite activities, professions or

circumstances of death; however, lengthy epitaphs were often considered overdone. But

composers of epitaphs were also highly conscious of the multiple rhetorical constraints of

the form. When writers tired of providing the usual descriptors of lives, they sometimes wrote about their own tasks or about general epitaph-writing tips. Loaring includes an epitaph for "a writer of long epitaphs" in his collection:

> Friend, in your epitaphs I'm grieved
>
> So very much is said.
>
> One half will never be believed,
>
> The other never read.   (147)

The author's blunt stanza—itself following typical guidelines for concision and clarity—expresses sadness not for the passing of the *subject* of the verse, but for his ineffectual *writing*. The author is "grieved" about the inferior epitaphs written by the dead man instead of grieving in his own piece. This epitaph writer uses the inscription to comment upon the best way to memorialize, and comments on two things that happen when readers face extensive epitaphs. He suggests that writing at length increases the chances of embellishment while it simultaneously risks losing readers' attention. This verse, expected to memorialize, turns into an epitaph about epitaph writing; its focus shifts self-reflexively from writing about lives to writing about writing, and its author ironically neglects to memorialize while he bemoans other poorly-written verses.

Writers of epitaph collections point first to personal and then to public reasons for their works. Many of these collectors reveal that they take pleasure in wandering churchyards and recording inscriptions. Webb claims, "a wish to assist you in the choice of a suitable epitaph has led me to make this little compilation" (preface). An author identified as M.F. explains that his personal "liking for visiting Churchyards" during evening strolls while traveling lent itself to publication when "by many [he was] urged to

print" the fruits of his wanderings and decided to "yield at length to these repeated

requests" (Introductory). In his *Epitaphiana; or The Curiosities of Churchyard*

Literature (1873), Samuel Tinsley expresses how his private hobby turned public:

> Amidst the multitudinous engagements of the writer he has, during the last
>
> twenty-two years, found time to collect the following curiosities of
>
> churchyards... When the author has found himself in a village with a spare
>
> moment, it has frequently been engaged in perusing the literature of the
>
> churchyard. (Sometimes, much to his chagrin, he has been locked out, and
>
> so disallowed the indulgence of his desires.) At first the curiosities
>
> collected were simply intended for the author's own private amusement;
>
> they have now, however, swollen to such proportions that he has been
>
> induced to give them to the world. (vii)

As burial was shifting from private to more public domains, so were inscriptions copied

in private by an individual hand being offered as a courtesy to a public readership. The

writers of epitaphic collections argued that the public needed these volumes to choose the

perfect epitaph in commemoration of loved ones.

By the 1850s, the idea of exercising taste became even more urgent since the

working classes were more likely to take part in individualized memorialization, and

writers identified members of the poorer classes as the perpetrators of poor taste. Disdain

for the poorer classes often supplants mere concern for their ability to mourn properly. In

A Selection of Texts for Tombstones (1865), The Reverend Nash Stephenson spells out

his concern with allowing all classes to write their own inscriptions:

> The cemeteries… amply testify to the deep-rooted feeling which exists

in all classes of society to preserve and perpetuate the memory of the

departed. Unfortunately, in too many instances, the judgment and

capacity of those, with whom rests the selection of the memorial, are not

equal to their intentions, and hence are found in God's acre so many…

offenses against good taste, and so many records of the dead painfully

repugnant to truth… An endeavor partially to remedy such an evil is the

object of this Tract. (3-4)

Here, Nash automatically associates the need for "all classes" to memorialize with the

threat of poor taste. He implies that the lower classes, despite good intentions, lack the

"judgment and capacity" to devise sufficient inscriptions. The idea of instituting proper

burial conditions for all classes was beginning to germinate

Epitaphs repeatedly acknowledge their own failure and the impoverished nature

of memorializing language. This text underscores the impossibility of a successful,

authentic epitaph:

[Name]. We trust

The lingering gleam of his departed life

To oral record; and the silent heart;

Depositories faithful, and more kind

Than fondest epitaph. (M.F. 86)

This writer admits that unspoken emotions are more authentic and genuine than the

words written in an epitaph. The author would trust "oral record" and "the silent heart"

before he or she would rely upon memorializing words. Truthfulness is repeatedly called

into question by epitaph writers; there is seldom an implicit expectation that readers will

take the epitaph's words at face value. For instance, Pulleyn includes the following

exchange in his collection. He presents it as an epitaph that he has copied for his volume,

albeit an unconventional one:

> Two persons lounging in a churchyard, one of them reads the following
>
>   lines:
>
> 'A loving son, a parent dear
>
> A faithful friend, he lieth here.'
>
> 'It is an honest epitaph,' said one, ' if it be a true one.'
>
> 'Oh,' said his companion, 'I can vouch for its truth, for I knew the
>
> Deceased well, and he directed the inscription himself.' (91)

The pun on "lieth" sets up the remaining conversation about epitaphic honesty.[31] It

underscores the skepticism underlying the whole process of epitaphic authorship.

Victorian epitaph collectors and authors of fiction realized the problems in writing

epitaphs, and the potential for conceit when writing one's own memorializing words.

The popular epitaphic phrase, "Here lies so-and-so" is transformed into "Here *lies* the

epitaph writer" when a tombstone's veracity is called into question. The words on

tombstones provide basic information and sometimes entertainment, but they also reveal

that language itself provides an unreliable representation of identity.

Although epitaphs are, in theory, written to honor the dead, the faces of

tombstones sometimes provide a place for the writers of epitaphs to express less

convivial feelings. While most inscriptions relate at least a hint of sympathy, sensitivity,

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[31] It seems necessary to mention the bearing of John Kucich's *The Power of Lies: Transgression in Victorian Fiction* on this discussion. He writes, "The Victorians themselves were well aware of the… desirability of theatricality in self-presentation." This kind of dramatic presentation plays into both the tone of Victorian epitaphs and the fascination with deception in many of the pieces. What Kucich calls "a recognition of the relationship between the staged self and deceit" (28) comes into play.

or consolation, some writers use tombstones to settle disputes, sever relationships, or simply distribute insults. Many take up the subject of truth telling and, in what some epitaph experts of the time would have considered inappropriate, defame the dead; the convenient double meaning of "lie," the word most often found in epitaphs, encouraged verses like this one:

On A Lyar

Good passenger! here lies one here,

That living, did lye every where. (*A Collection* 2)

Apparently this person exchanged one type of "lying" for another when he entered the grave. The writer of the verse establishes a positive tone by flattering the reader ("good passenger") and sets up expectations of a traditional epitaph, only to turn abruptly in the second line and insult the dead. Epitaphs like this provide a creative space where writers can use language to satisfy their own personal grievances.

Ultimately, like burial reform stories, epitaphs grappled with the effectiveness of language in tale telling, "On Captain Jones, a great traveller and story-teller," ends with a playful turn not on the Captain's marvelous talent for sharing his adventurous tales, but on his veracity:

Tread softly, mortals, o'er the bones

Of the world's wonder, Captain Jones;

Who told his glorious deeds to many,

But never was believed by any.

Posterity, let this suffice:

He swore all's true, yet here he *lies*. (Loaring 195)

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The witty use of the word "lie" describes both Captain Jones' position in the grave and his penchant for storytelling. The epitaph initially honors the Captain, remembering him as "the world's wonder." In line three, the reader senses a shift in emphasis from the performance of his "glorious deeds" to his oral dissemination of them as he shared them with others. By line four, the epitaph's preoccupation is clear; instead of acting as the world's marvel, the epitaph reveals that the world wondered if Jones' tales could be true. Line four puts it bluntly, in absolute language: he "never was believed by any." Future generations should remember him not as a talented spinner of yarns, but as one who propagated deliberate falsehoods. What is most remarkable is that the epitaph writer asks readers to do something similar—to listen to him and believe his words. In actuality, readers might condone Captain Jones' "lies" because he is a storyteller and question the intentions of an epitaph writer who chooses to slander his subject rather than honor him. Epitaphs are ultimately unstable and subjective. When Pip likens his parents to their gravestones in *Great Expectations*, it is no wonder he calls his graveyard assumptions "unreasonably derived"; oftentimes, it seems, stone masons and epitaph writers were more concerned about artistry and storytelling. They got so absorbed in the creative process that their subjects were sometimes the last thing they remembered.

"Stop, Reader!": Graveyard Genres and Cemeterial Amusements

Tombstone literature implies a particular, although sometimes broadly-defined, readership. One collector specifies his intended audience in his preface: "The book may possess some interest not only for sympathetic readers, but also for reflective minds and students of human nature" (M.F.). Collector William Pulleyn defines a broadly-imagined audience in terms of both feeling and edification:

By the serious-minded, much will be found in this small volume

that will accord with their feelings; by the curious, much that is

interesting; by the lovers of Epigrammatic wit, selections of the

choicest morceaux. The gay and thoughtless, the ambitious and

worldly-minded, may also find in it matter for serious and

humiliating reflection, while all may derive amusement from it;

his object being to avert the broodings of melancholy, and the

visionary chimeras of a diseased imagination, without giving

office to any. (iii-iv)

Pulleyn recognized that readers would use his collection in distinctive ways. With this

single genre, he can appeal to "the serious-minded," "the curious," "the thoughtless," "the

ambitious," and "lovers of... wit." Collectors suggest their intended audience through the

types of epitaphs that they select and how they present them. While most collections

include epitaphs of the noble and famous, many give ample space to other, more

common, types, such as the "moral," "admonitory," "witty," "humorous," "satirical,"

"curious," or just plain "interesting." Although we cannot always understand collectors'

personal criteria for selection, one thing is certain: they felt the need to represent epitaphs

categorically.

While I will go on to examine some of these categories, it is important to

recognize that epitaphs include many common features, such as the sudden shifts in

point-of-view which suggest the intimate relationship between voices from the grave and

living readers. The shifts in perspective are sometimes jolting, like this one which begins

traditionally, but surprises the reader by concluding with a strong first-person voice:

> Here lieth Matthew Hollinshead,
>
> Who died from cold caught in his head.
>
> It brought on fever and rheumatiz,
>
> Which ended me-- for here I is.   (Loaring 158)

The last line helps the writer achieve his rhyme, with "here I is" complementing the difficult to match "rheumatiz," but in choosing those words to accommodate his rhyme scheme, the writer abruptly changes point-of-view. This epitaph acknowledges the typical "Here lies" form, but also reminds the reader that the dead person is not only described from an impersonal, third-person perspective but is also present, involved in his own memorialization. The third-person narrator handles the cause of death, and the deceased appears in the final line to confirm both the cause of his demise and his final resting place.

Sometimes epitaph writers reverse this pattern by beginning with a strong "I" and concluding with a focus on the reader. The most common opening lines for epitaphs allow the dead to call themselves to mind when they directly address the reader. This first-person epitaph, and many like it, use the figurative device *prosopopeia*, a form of personification which acts as a voice from beyond the grave. The first lines of this verse accost the reader and demand immediate attention:

> Stop, reader! I have left a world
>
> In which there was a world to do;
>
> Fretting and stewing to be rich--
>
> Just such a fool as you.   (*Everybody's Book* 93)

This salutation starts by focusing on the dead, the "I," speaking from the grave.[32] By the end of the epitaph, the consequences of the "I" have shifted to apply to the reader, the "you" of the verse, who is drawn into the errors of the deceased. This type of epitaph appears in several different variations, many of which conclude by insulting the reader while simultaneously asking the reader to identify with the speaker-- a surprising device for a genre so deeply connected to and invested in its audience. Other speakers adopt a more seriously cautionary tone while vacillating between first and second person, the dead and the reader:

> As you are in health, and spirits gay,
>
> I was, too, the other day;
>
> I thought myself of life as safe
>
> As those that read my epitaph. (*Everybody's Book* 99)

This epitaph reminds the reader that death is inevitable while drawing attention to the act of reading itself. Epitaphs like these identify the dead as the "narrators" of stories and suggest that only in death can readers join epitaphic speakers as messengers of wisdom and admonishment. In this way, the dead indeed tell tales. However, these admonishments present a paradox: the reader is expected to read attentively but is also presumed incapable of understanding the words of the epitaph while living.

Even more interesting are epitaphs that boldly engage readers, only to turn them away. This epitaph defies the principle commemorative purpose of identifying the dead by thwarting readerly pleasure and satisfaction:

> Reader, pass on!-- don't waste your time

---

[32] Paul deMan provides a useful discussion of this concept in "Autobiography as De-Facement," Chapter 4 in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism.*

O'er bad biography and bitter rhyme:

For what I am this crumbling clay ensures:

And what I was is no affair of yours. (*Everybody's Book* 94)

This verse acknowledges the failure of commemorative language and uses memorialization as a pretext to warn readers about the mendacity of "bad biography and bitter rhyme." It calls attention to itself as a text by beckoning to readers and then causes them to question their motives for reading in the first place. The speaker reveals that he knows exactly what the reader seeks in his text but refuses to engage in a traditional cemeterial exchange. Another epitaph suggests something similar about its audience:

Here lies Pat Steele.

That's very true:

Who was he? What was he?

What's that to you?   (Pulleyn 102)

This epitaphic voice is sage enough to predict the very questions that its reader will ask. It directly identifies its audience as strangers to the dead person, as people who read to find out more about "Pat Steele" but can never really know "who he was," or the essence of his personality. "What was he?" suggests that after the reader discovers Steele's identity, his or her next question will focus on a way to judge Steele or assess his life through his nature, profession, or good deeds. But the stone stops there and offers no answers; it admits to metonymically representing Steele's body, but refuses to represent his identity.

Some epitaphs reverse this strategy: instead of thwarting the desire to read, ask questions and learn more, they encourage extra-textual research. That is, while Steele's

epitaph brings an abrupt cessation to the act of reading, some epitaphs implore the

audience to read more. M.F. reports the following lines are from a tombstone in

Landport Cemetery, Hants:

> In Memory of
>
> REBECCA,
>
> The Affectionate Wife of
>
> WILLIAM SMITH, SENR.,
>
> whose transition from Earth to join
>
> the blood brought throng, took place
>
> according to Eternal Destination on the
>
> 22nd day of March, 1843, in the 57th
>
> year of her age.
>
> To know her worth read the last six verses in the last
>
> chapter of Proverbs.   (1)

Like Pat Steele's epitaph above, this one acknowledges that its reader will want and need

more information. It implies that the language on the tombstone is insufficient to capture

the identity of the deceased. To find out more about the dead woman, the epitaph reader

should consult the Bible and read about her strength, dignity, kindness, and virtue. The

reader would understand the reference after reading verse 31: "Reward her for all she has

done. Let her deeds publicly declare her praise" (684). The brevity of the epitaph cannot

convey the essence of the person it is meant to represent, so the reader is encouraged to

consult another text.

Other epitaphs forego accosting, insulting, or advising readers and instead aim to impress and entice them to move beyond reading passively, to experience the peculiarities of language and actively participate in linguistic games. In this way, a genre meant to honor the dead is transformed into a venue to showcase the epitaph writers' clever manipulation of language. Collectors reserved special places in their volumes for anagrammatic, punning, or acrostic epitaphs. These texts demand more of the reader, while underscoring both the skill of the epitaph writer and the careful discernment of the epitaph collector. In most of these epitaphs, the ability to create a clever pun surpasses the decorum of proper and reverent commemoration:

> This tombstone is a Milestone;
>
> Hah! How so?
>
> Because beneath lies Miles who's
>
> Miles below. (*Everybody's Book* 133)

Texts like this one convey the basic information necessary to identify the dead. In this case, the reader cannot help but detect and remember the name of the deceased, a word that appears repeatedly in this verse. But the name is also devalued; it moves from its central position as a proper noun-- the commemorative frontispiece of the epitaph-- to that of a common noun. The name loses its primary significance as a personal identifier and becomes the word manipulated to fulfill the pun, flatter the writer, and amuse the audience.

Some epitaphs are even more ambitious with puns and word play, especially when the names of the deceased lend themselves to manipulation. When it comes to such linguistic maneuvers, epitaph writers seem preoccupied with puns about coffins and other

burial spaces. "Epitaph on a Dentist" jests, "View this gravestone with gravity / He is filling his last cavity" (Safford 40). Loaring includes a verse found in a cemetery near Salisbury about Richard Button: "Oh! Sun, Moon, Stars, and ye celestial Poles, Are graves then dwindled into *Button-Holes?*" (173). He also includes this verse about a clergyman named Chest:

> Here lies at rest, I do protest,
>
> One Chest within another;
>
> The chest of wood was very good--
>
> Who says so of the other?   (194)

Another speaks of a "Mr. Box" in a similar fashion: "Here lies one *Box* within another" (Loaring 155). This type of epitaph generally includes a question or riddle posed to the reader. Epitaphs like these are clearly more interested in interacting with readers than reporting life statistics. They actually befit death because death itself is so confounding, so inexplicable. These kinds of riddle-epitaphs remove some of the seriousness of death by allowing readers to fixate on a much less somber conundrum.

Some epitaphs offer so little information that there is not much for readers to report. In his collection, Tinsley and others include several variations on an epitaph that admits its own linguistic and representational failure:

> She was!
>
> But words are wanting to say what!
>
> Think what a wife should be,
>
> And she was that. (143-4)

This lazy epitaph writer does little more than convey his wife's former existence. He first connotes his wife's mere existence: "She *was*!" From there he explains that language cannot adequately describe her identity: "But words are wanting to say what!" He then concludes with a narrative dodge by transferring his responsibility to the reader of the epitaph: "Think what a wife should be, And she was *that*." A narrative designed to honor the body in the grave below it with distinct meaning ends instead with an empty pronoun: "that." He asks the reader, who never knew his wife, to finish the narrative task which he has begun. He thereby defies the very purpose of the epitaph: to convey "the truth" about the person it describes-- to focus upon the identity of the dead.

While we expect gravestones to correlate metonymically with bodies because they often come to represent our only knowledge of the bodies they replace, some epitaphs call attention to the misrepresentation or absence of bodies. Epitaphic memorialization is thus not always dependent upon the presence of the body of the deceased. Some epitaphs problematize how many bodies an individual stone and verse may represent, and many incorporate outright lies by confirming the presence of a corpse in one line and then admitting its absence in the next. An epitaph in Watton Churchyard, Norfolk, reads: "Underneath this sod lies John Round, / Who was lost in the sea, and never was found" (Loaring 173). Another reads, "John and Lydia, that blooming pair, / A whale killed him and her body lies here" (Safford 19). A child admits the absence of its siblings beneath multiple grave markers: "Under these stones lies three children dear; / Two are buried at Taunton and I lie here" (Safford 15). Some verses take the time to express sadness that corpses cannot be paired with grave markers. This epitaph found at Nettlebed, Oxfordshire completely refutes its purpose and contradicts its own claims:

> Here lies Father and Mother, and Sister and I;
>
> Wee all died within the space of one short year;
>
> They all be buried at Wimble, except I,
>
> And I be buried here. (*Everybody's Book* 74)

The speaker offers a wishful misrepresentation in the first two lines of this epitaph and then admits his mendacity in the third. Although epitaphs like this one purposefully defy the tombstone's function of representing bodies, they also convey the subject's severe sense of isolation; we understand his desire to at least be *named* with the rest of his family (or they with him). The following verse offers a similar tension between absence and presence, although somewhat more honestly. The writer suggests what would have been ideal burial circumstances for this family:

> Here lies JOHN HIGLEY,
>
> whose father and mother were drowned
>
> in their passage from America.
>
> Had they both lived they would have been buried here. (*Everybody's* 133)

The narrator speaking from this grave admits that the stone should have represented three bodies when it actually stands for one. The language of such tombstones points to other locations-- sometimes other burial grounds, but, more often, to unknown places that tombstones do not or cannot demarcate. In Grantham Churchyard, Lincolnshire, Loaring copied John Palfreyman's epitaph, which describes a lost opportunity for proper burial. It expresses the expectation that it will, someday, fulfill a vow to memorialize once a final body is added to the family grave:

> John Palfreyman, who lyeth here,

> Was aged four and twenty year;
>
> And near this place his mother lies,
>
> Also his father, *when he dies!* (170)

In this case, writing conveys not what is, but what will eventually happen. Instead of representing a present body, the language supplants the dead son with the living father who expects to join his family in the grave. One kind of absence replaces another. Once the father's body is interred, though, the expectant language on the epitaph will become ineffectual; the epitaph will remain focused on a future time even after all three bodies lie buried in the grave.

We find similarly problematic epitaphs and absent bodies highlighted in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* when Swales, the old man who frequents the graveyard, admonishes Mina and Lucy about the mendacity of tombstones. The burial ground becomes the center of fleeting identity, unexplainable death, and absent bodies; at the same time, it is the site of the production of language and writing, one place where Mina keeps her journal. Swales rages about "them that, not content with printin' lies on paper an' preachin' them out of pulpits, does want to be cuttin' them on the tombsteans" (65). The stones are so heavy that they tumble down because of the heaviness of their falsehoods. Many of them state "Here lies the body" when actually, Swales cries, "there bean't no bodies at all... Lies all of them, nothin' but lies of one kind or another!" (65-6). He points out a particular epitaph and its futility:

> Edward Spencelagh, master mariner, murdered by pirates off the coast
>
> of Andres, April, 1854... Who brought him home, I wonder, to hap him
>
> here? Murdered off the coast of Andres! An' you consated his body lay

under! Why, I could name ye a dozen whose bones lie in the Greenland

seas above... 'or where the currents may have drifted them. There be the

steans around ye. Ye can, with your young eyes, read the small print of

the lies from here." (67)

Swales turns up dead-- indirectly of a broken neck from a fall on their graveyard seat on

the cliff, presumably murdered by Dracula, but more precisely "in some sort of fright, for

there was a look of horror on his face... Perhaps he had seen Death with his dying eyes"

(85). Swales perishes in sight of the deceptive epitaphs he laments, broken like one of

the crumbling tombstones.

The epitaphs in Victorian churchyards, published in collections and novels all

suggest nineteenth-century expectations and beliefs concerning proper recognition, social

aspirations and meaningful memorialization. Epitaphs share common concerns about the

reliability of commemorative language, the growing desire for self-making, and the

demands and expectations of attentive readers. Epitaph writers vary form and content to

experiment with the ways that identity appears in writing and to raise concerns about how

readers access the identity of the dead and conceptualize their own existence. Narrative

acts replace bodies, and although voices from beyond the grave might bemoan the

absence of a body, they attempt to account for that corporeal absence through the

accumulation of language. Epitaphic narrative voices engage in debates about readerly

presence and expectation; the voices of the dead elicit responses, encourage further

reading and control linguistic exchanges. They question readers' motives and intentions

and ask, "Why do you care about this text?" and "Why are you reading this epitaph?"

Word games, insults, puns, confessions-- all of these facets of epitaph writing suggest an impulse to learn, question, and entertain through the act of reading.

Epitaphs in *Dorrit* and *Drood*: A Life Revised, A Life Embellished

While epitaph collections were increasing in popularity, nineteenth-century novelists featured similar concerns about individuation and identity in death. Authors described graveyard visits and epitaph-reading scenes as they presented themes of authenticity, absence, and ambiguity. In Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860), for instance, a tombstone receives its own narrative in one chapter, but tells a false one. The language on the stone belies the body in the grave and generates anxieties about class and identity when Lady Glyde is found alive, and a pauper's body occupies her grave. In Collins' mystery, Walter Hartright's reading of Laura, Lady Glyde's epitaph is interrupted by the presence of a stranger, and that stranger is Lady Glyde herself. Her physical presence directly negates the words on her tombstone as Hartright views both body and text simultaneously. Similarly, Sheridan LeFanu's *Carmilla* concludes with a scene of epitaph reading and frenzied cemeterial searching when no one is sure whether or not Carmilla's body is actually dead or—if it is—where it is buried. The final scenes of the novel juxtapose the supposed certainty of a name on a tombstone with a completely different and horrible reality: the buried "Mircalla" is the living "Carmilla," and her body is not at rest in its grave. The "sinister absence" of Carmilla in the final scenes reveals to the narrator that she has been the victim of a vampire. These novels obviously capitalize on the fantastic and the fanciful as fears about missing bodies and disturbed graves

permeate them; nevertheless, they demonstrate an increasing reliance on the trope of the cemetery and consider the ambiguity of the epitaph in the fiction of the time.

Charles Dickens includes epitaphs as integral parts of the story in *Little Dorrit* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. These novels point to the same issues of audience, voice, and form that captivated actual epitaph writers and collectors.[33] *Little Dorrit* shows the potential of the epitaph writer to shape reality and how characterization can work through epitaph. Like actual epitaph writers, John Chivery struggles with audience conceptualization and demonstrates how epitaphs can be much more fluid and interactive than it might seem. Even though epitaphic pieces are, in theory, crafted as final tributes, Dickens shows that their permanence is fleeting. Chivery's constantly-changing epitaph—crafted for many of the same reasons that novelists write stories—elicits respect, sympathy, and understanding from his reader, who is invited to engage in his narrative through the changes he makes to his epitaph. Just as committed to the epitaph-composing process is writer Mr. Sapsea in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, although his composition is somewhat less audience-dependent. While Chivery takes the reader along as he revises his piece, Sapsea enters the text having already spent months upon months writing his wife's epitaph and seeking to add just the finishing touches. In *Drood*, the epitaph-reading scene underscores the responsibilities involved with remembrance and the authenticity and complexity of memorializing language. As both of these characters struggle with their egos and pen their epitaphs, we can see parallels with real epitaphs in the ways that the characters focus on writing, reading, and revision.

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[33] In some ways, *Little Dorrit* shares a purpose similar to that of *Bleak House* when it comes to expressing desires for individual burials and epitaphs, as well as the desire for improved social conditions. We might consider Lionel Trilling's argument that the novel is "about society in relation to the individual human will" (148).

Chivery reconstructs his epitaph as his plotline changes.[34] The narrator describes

him as "small," "weak," "gentle," and "faithful." Most importantly, he is "Poetical" and

"expansive," so the reader expects his generosity when it comes to sharing his feelings;

he promises to be a successful epitaph writer. In Chivery's initial scene of epitaph

composition, we find him imagining his future with Amy Dorrit. His daydreams

contemplate their future together as he speculates about their eventual conjugal union.

They will "glide down the stream of time" together (256) until their lives peacefully

conclude. His musings are capped by a churchyard scene and an assessment of his

ideally-pretended life with Little Dorrit: "Young John drew tears from his eyes by

finishing the picture with a tombstone in the adjoining churchyard, close against the

prison wall" (179). That stone, he imagines, will offer a long and satisfying epitaph:

> "Sacred to the Memory of John Chivery, Sixty years Turnkey, and
>
> fifty years Head Turnkey, of the Neighboring Marshalsea, Who
>
> departed this life, universally respected, on The thirty-first of December,
>
> One thousand eight hundred and eighty-six, Aged eighty-three years.
>
> Also of his truly beloved and truly loving wife, Amy, whose maiden
>
> name was Dorrit, Who survived his loss not quite Forty-eight hours,
>
> And who breathed her last in the Marshalsea aforesaid. There she was
>
> born, There she lived, There she died." (179)

Chivery's epitaph ignores mortality and offers an optimist's view, the "best case

scenario" for his life's synopsis. Here, no death encourages writing; no body

decomposes while he composes. It seems that the act of writing the epitaph has somehow

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[34] In "Voice and Register in *Little Dorrit*, John Frow discusses how the novel moves through various competing registers, different "modes of language." Frow focuses much of his discussion on the Gothic register, which includes elements like church vaults and graves, to which we might add Chivery's epitaphs.

superseded mortality. Rather than preserve identity through memory, his epitaph keeps

his confidence and hopes alive. Like the actual epitaph collectors of the nineteenth

century, for Chivery, a healthy ego and sense of purpose are associated with authorship.

He is secure as the author of his fate, assuming he will live a long life. Little Dorrit,

although a character in Chivery's epitaph, is unaware of her role in this life-long drama.

In it, she can only survive her grief for two days before following Chivery to the grave.

The epitaph charts his future desires while it reveals his disengagement from reality.[35]

Instead of the epitaph recording history, it operates as a form of wish-fulfillment and

articulates Chivery's desire to wed Little Dorrit.

In its first incarnation, this epitaph is a formal model of the genre. It begins in the

traditional form, "Sacred to the Memory of," even though Chivery is predicting the future

rather than preserving the past. He demonstrates his desire for social recognition and his

need for "universal respect" from both his wife and society. It is more than formally

pleasing; it also shares the expected pieces of information that a reader might wish to

know, including the pertinent names, ages, and dates. It exhibits an ideal life lived and

suggests to the reader that both epitaphs and novels can have happy endings.

It is from this point that the epitaph transforms as Chivery's romantic ideas

darken. He revises his epitaph three times during the novel as his expectations confront

reality, and with each revision the epitaph shortens. During his first revision, he takes

less time and care in shaping his verse after he realizes Amy's authentic love for Arthur

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[35] A counterpart to this discussion might be Diane Elam's "*Little Dorrit* and Debt," where Elam explains how memory functions for Dickens in the novel. She says, "Memory remains impossibly split between a past that has never been present and a future for which the meaning of the past has yet to be" (174). This conceptualization of memory could apply to Chivery, whose epitaphs move fluidly between past and present and engage various moments in time.

Clenham. After she initially refuses Chivery's affections, his revised epitaph reflects his severe disappointment and self-pitying thoughts:

> "Here lie the mortal remains of John Chivery, Never anything worth mentioning, Who died about the end of the year one thousand eight hundred and twenty-six, Of a broken heart, Requesting with his last breath that the word 'Amy' might be inscribed over his ashes, Which was according directed to be done, By his afflicted parents." (185)

Here, we find more characters in the epitaph; but the author's existence is suddenly not "worth mentioning" and he offers only a vague time frame for his death as occurring sometime around the year's conclusion rather than an exact date. In this way, Chivery contradicts the purpose of the epitaph altogether. Instead of boasting about his life, it asks the reader to disregard it. Here, Dickens fictionalizes the kind of actual epitaph where the reader is invited to sympathize, to read and weep along with him in his sorrow. The death mourned is the death of a potential relationship and the demise of fragile hopes. He expresses his own devastation while he solicits pity from the reader, like so many authentic epitaphs in the graveyard would have done.

The third epitaph is impromptu and less detailed. It follows a scene of emotional outbursts between Little Dorrit and her father and continues to reveal Chivery's histrionic responses to Little Dorrit's rejections. He composes this "entirely new" epitaph "on the spot" after he leaves the prison. This time, the piece does not appear in quotation marks in the text, making it less interruptive, and it seems less a "composition" than a necessary but peripheral expulsion of feeling. Chivery "went his way" composing "to the effect that"

> Here lay the body of John Chivery, Who, Having at such a date,
>
> Beheld the idol of his life, In grief and tears, And feeling unable to
>
> bear the harrowing spectacle, Immediately repaired to the abode of
>
> his parents, And terminated his existence, By his own rash act. (311)

As Chivery feels increasingly dejected, his epitaph suffers in content and form. Here, Chivery has committed epitaphic suicide, and the writing supplants the actual act. As his hopes wane, so do his literary talents, but the reader understands that Chivery, despite his sad tale, has faced his inner conflict and expunged his grief. The piece is less documentation and more fictionalization, and it begins to become more a part of the text of the novel rather than a formal piece set off in its own punctuation and in it own formal space. Like authentic epitaphs, Chivery's demonstrates that memorialization is sometimes more reliant on fiction making than on fact reporting. It shows how the more the epitaph writer deviates from formal and conventional elements, the more interesting—and possibly even the more real—the epitaph becomes. When it moves beyond reporting the facts, it draws readers into a more captivating story.

Interestingly, though, Chivery's final epitaph retreats from these innovations and returns to the formality of earlier versions. It summons its audience directly and acknowledges unknown readers in typical epitaphic fashion, calling out, "Stranger!" before pleading for respect. Chivery demands more from his audience at this point even though his listeners are not intimate with him. The chapter concludes with his most formal verse, set off in dominant capital letters:

> STRANGER!
>
> RESPECT THE TOMB OF

JOHN CHIVERY, JUNIOR,

WHO DIED AT AN ADVANCED AGE

NOT NECESSARY TO MENTION.

HE ENCOURAGED HIS RIVAL, IN A DISTRESSED STATE,

AND FELT INCLINED

TO HAVE A ROUND WITH HIM;

BUT, FOR THE SAKE OF THE LOVED ONE,

CONQUERED THOSE FEELINGS OF BITTERNESS,

AND BECAME

MAGNANIMOUS.   (613)

At this point, Dickens allows the epitaph to comment on actual events in the plot whereas the initial epitaphs more clearly represented a wish for Chivery—and many possible endings for the reader. The verse's newly-instituted formality suggests Chivery's blunted feelings; he sees his readers as cold and distant, not particularly sympathetic to his story. At the same time, his epitaph reveals honesty with himself, a certain peace with his life's circumstances and his failure in love. Throughout this composing process, his revisions parallel his state of mind as his character moves from denial, through forms of bartering, anger, and, finally, painful-but-necessary acceptance. It seems his epitaph regains some of its original form as Chivery becomes more resolute and regains his confidence.

We see, through this composing process, how expectations of audience and writerly needs shape epitaphic writing. The reader is privy to almost all basic epitaphic forms as Dickens offers, through Chivery, examples of nearly all the popular epitaphic genres of his time. The first epitaph is even-toned and expository; it serves mainly to tell

the story of a life (hoping to be) lived, albeit an imaginary one. It also appears in an epitaph's most respectable form, a "Sacred to the Memory of" verse, replete with all the proper details. Chivery's second epitaph, a common form, focuses on his body and its location: "Here lie the mortal remains" and includes a basic request (that the word "Amy" mark his ashes). His third epitaph (second revision) retains but alters the "Here lay the body" opening. Despite its late entrance into the text, the fourth and final epitaph reminds us that the genre is based on the coupled acts of reading and writing. Chivery's final piece clearly anticipates that readers will return for more, to see how things conclude. The false epitaphs produced early on encourage more writing and reading. Even though epitaphs suggest finality, they often open new pathways for continued conversations, personal interaction, and imagined stories. In a novel so intently focused on overcoming the past, Chivery ironically uses an epitaph to shape his present and even his future. Perhaps Dickens was suggesting that our fortunes lie not in wealth or material goods, but in how we shape and design our own identities.

We encounter another type of identity formation in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Since Dickens died during its writing, readers never reach a denouement; however, in the first four short chapters that lead up to and include the scene showcasing epitaphic writing, Dickens raises issues about the frailty of identity in death and the complicated process of commemoration. Thomas Sapsea, dubbed "the purest Jackass in Cloisterham," anticipates a visit from John Jasper, the black-haired, deep-voiced uncle of

the eventually-missing, possibly-murdered Edwin Drood.[36] While Sapsea waits for

Jasper, he examines a particular document:

> By Mr. Sapsea's side on the table are a writing desk and
>
> writing materials. Glancing at a scrap of manuscript, Mr.
>
> Sapsea reads it to himself with a lofty air, and then, slowly
>
> pacing the room with his thumbs in the armholes of his
>
> waistcoat, repeats it from memory: so internally, though
>
> with much dignity, that the word 'Ethelinda' is alone audible. (63)

What Dickens withholds until pages later is the nature and content of the piece itself--

that Sapsea's unusual masterpiece is an epitaph, a piece of writing composed to adorn the

tombstone of his deceased wife. The resoluteness Sapsea exhibits and Dickens parodies

reflects the gravity with which Victorian England treated funereal customs. Although an

auctioneer by trade, Sapsea enters the text as a hyper-revisionist author, a conscientious

writer equipped with both the proper setting and materials necessary for the completion

of his greatest literary masterpiece. It appears that he takes his authorship deadly

seriously and that a feeling of superiority accompanies his role as writer; he rereads and

edits "with a lofty air" and "with much dignity," (63) so engrossed in his task that he

enters a kind of trance, thumbs hooked in his armholes, wearing a path upon the floor

beneath him. When Sapsea reveals the epitaph, the reader understands the reason for his

one muttered word: the name of his deceased wife, "Ethelinda," a "character" in the

mystery known only through his commemorative composition.

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[36] It has been speculated that John Jasper indeed killed his nephew. For a thorough discussion about the character of John Jasper, see Gerhard Joseph's article, "Who Cares Who Killed Edwin Drood? or, on the Whole, I'd Rather be in Philadelphia."

Like many of the epitaph collection editors, Dickens underscores the subjective nature of storytelling—and epitaph writing—in Thomas Sapsea's literary creation. Dickens titles the chapter containing Mrs. Sapsea's epitaph "Mr. Sapsea." We hear, as Sapsea tells Jasper, that the late Mrs. Sapsea has now been dead about nine months and her monument is now "settled and dry" and ready for its epitaph. In an amount of time which suggests the duration of pregnancy, Sapsea has produced his tribute to her, a carefully-crafted, sixteen-line epitaph. Just prior to its exhibition, Sapsea recounts his relationship with his late wife. From the beginning, Sapsea implies, his wife, endowed with the ability "to revere" her husband, is rendered speechless; throughout the relationship, language fails her. Sapsea recounts how he proposed marriage to her and describes her reaction: "she did me the honor to be so overshadowed with a species of Awe, as to be able to articulate only two words, 'O, Thou—' meaning myself" (64). Mrs. Sapsea is "overshadowed" indeed, but not in the way Sapsea imagines; he overlooks his wife's feelings and skips straight to her worshipful praise of him. He goes on to describe both her language and appearance as subsumed into his own:

> Her limpid blue eyes were fixed upon me, her semi-transparent hands
> were clasped together, pallor overspread her aquiline features, and,
> though encouraged to proceed, she never did proceed a word further...
> we became as nearly one as could be expected... But she never
> could, and she never did, find a phrase satisfactory to her perhaps-
> too-favorable estimate of my intellect. To the very last... she
> addressed me in the same unfinished terms. (66)

Here, the reader sees Sapsea's "perhaps-too-favorable estimate" of himself. In this scene, Mrs. Sapsea sounds as if she is already on her death-bed, eyes "fixed," hands "transparent," mumbling broken phrases; it is as if Sapsea provides a glimpse of her death before he attempts to represent her life. Her reaction to his marriage proposal is fragmented and unfinished, and, like many editors of collections who exaggerate their own roles, Sapsea says more about himself than his wife in paying tribute to her. Mrs. Sapsea's silence, evidently the result of her husband's overbearing personality, serves his self-aggrandizement.[37] Husband and wife certainly become "one" in this scene because Sapsea absorbs his wife into his own identity, reducing her voice to a simple, laudatory phrase about himself.

But Mrs. Sapsea is not the only one who leaves things in "unfinished terms." Sapsea, the "solitary mourner," insists upon showing Jasper his masterpiece. Dickens provides the epitaph for the reader as it would appear before Jasper, for, as Sapsea reminds Jasper, "the setting of the lines requires to be followed with the eye, as well as the contents with the mind":

Ethelinda

Reverential Wife of

MR. THOMAS SAPSEA,

AUCTIONEER, VALUER, ESTATE AGENT, &c.,

of the city.

Whose Knowledge of the World,

Though somewhat extensive,

---

[37] Charles Mitchell provides a discussion of Mr. Sapsea as the character in the novel who is "most patently deficient in inner self" (232) in his article "The Mystery of Edwin Drood: The Interior and Exterior of Self."

Never brought him acquainted with

A SPIRIT

More capable of

Looking up to him.

STRANGER PAUSE

And ask thyself the Question,

Canst Thou Do Likewise?

If not,

WITH A BLUSH RETIRE. (67)

Of the fifty-three words in the epitaph, only four apply to Mrs. Sapsea: "Ethelinda," her

first name, which is never paired with her last (although Mr. Sapsea's name is listed in

full); "Reverential," the one descriptive word Sapsea provides, and only as it applies to

her reverence for *him*; "Wife," which directly names her relationship to him; and, further

on, "spirit," which ironically echoes the state of nonexistence to which Sapsea has

rendered his wife's identity. She is no longer a defined personality, but a "spirit," a pale

specter of her former self. In the space where Jasper expects a defining description of

Mrs. Sapsea, he instead finds a detailed presentation of her surviving husband-- his

occupation, intellectual ability and demand for reverence. As the epitaph draws to a

close, we find Sapsea asking the reader, in traditional epitaphic language, to "pause" not

to revere his wife or even to consider mortality, but to remind the passerby that Sapsea

himself is worthy of "reverential" and relentless praise.

Through Sapsea, Dickens parodies the genre of the epitaph and demonstrates how

epitaphs function as sites of lost identity. Writing, he implies, the method of

communication that we expect to provide explanation in the face of death, cannot offer adequate commemoration. Dickens' fictional epitaph recalls countless actual epitaphs like it that readers would have encountered in collections. Like the collectors of epitaphs (and some of the writers), Sapsea fluctuates between self-promotion and a desire to represent the dead responsibly. Dickens' account would resonate for a society yearning to be remembered and striving to remember others, but his readers would also recognize that the language on tombstones, no matter how poignant or witty, presents its own linguistic predicament. Although Sapsea takes his task seriously, Dickens characterizes him as a self-aggrandizing fool, an egotistical man who cannot help but write himself into his text. By underscoring the tortured process of epitaph composition, Dickens questions the motives of epitaphic remembrance and authorial voice.

Thus, we find Chivery and Sapsea are not so different after all. As authors of epitaphs, they take their duties seriously, recognize the need for revision, and demonstrate a steadfast faith in the concept of audience. Both show a dire need for sympathy, self-preservation, and acknowledgement, and they operate in their texts mainly as author-storytellers. In these two novels, the centralized corpse and symbolic burial ground are replaced by a focus on memorializing language. Likewise, corpses themselves receded into the background as Victorians focused more closely on issues of epitaphic representation and struggled with issues of authorship—with how they should remember individuals through witty, amusing, and, ultimately, powerful language. This consideration of authorship suggests a cultural concern about how individuals should be remembered, and about how capturing lives in stone was a serious task, a duty with everlasting results. *Little Dorrit* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* introduce the idea of

powerful, dramatic stories told through memorialization, even when the memorializing verses ignored—even defied— honesty. In reality, though, the cemetery offered markers much more final than the revisable epitaphs found in the pages of books.

Chapter Three

Cemeterial Déjà vu: War Writing and the New Cemetery Problem

Let my carcass rot where it falls.

—Byron (1822)

And now look here the sun's begun to set.

A nice mass-grave is all that I shall get.

—Alfred Lichtenstein, "Leaving for the Front" (1914)

Introduction

The first two chapters of this project examined how nineteenth-century epitaphs in collections and fictional epitaphs in novels negotiated tensions about proper commemoration and mass burial, and how novelists and sanitation officials produced writing to respond to burial reform and a growing concern for individual remembrance. Moving from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth, Chapter Three discusses the resurgence of burial themes and anxieties in writings generated by World War I. It argues that as English civilians and combatants experienced the erasure of identity in death, writing emerged that accounted for—and even attempted to replace—absent bodies. The war erased an entire generation of young men whose identities were not fully formed and produced severe cultural trauma for their loved ones and survivors. War poets, memoirists, and novelists struggled to define what it meant to "survive" war and to explain their own experiences of loss and mourning in the face of severe trauma. Often dissociating themselves from their own potential deaths, they provided fleeting but

heartfelt written tributes to comrades rather than actual epitaphs, and articulated their interior struggles to retain individuality. Like nineteenth-century civilians, World War I combatants often turned to writing, and they had to decide how to handle broken bodies and inadequate epitaphs, or—even worse—missing bodies and absent epitaphs. When epitaphic tributes and proper burials were impossible to provide, remembrance took place in writing.

After providing some background about the poor burial conditions during war and the psychological trauma combatants endured when they handled dead comrades' bodies and faced their own mortality, this chapter explores the ways in which war writing detailed how soldiers communicated burial concerns and how they mourned, remembered, and persevered. War memoirist Edwin Campion Vaughn, for instance, portrays his struggle to fulfill his duties and maintain selfhood in his *Some Desperate Glory: The World War I Diary of A British Officer* (1917).[38] Memoirists like Vaughn fixate on bodies that are often faceless, unidentifiable, and unburiable during battle and repeatedly deliberate about the individuation of the dead whom they are often forced to bury. War poets also participated in this dialogue about burial and identity, and war poems became a forum for soldiers' outrage concerning the loss of identity accompanying wartime. I focus on a sampling of war poems, most by Ivor Gurney, that function both as memorialization for the war dead and poignant social statements about the deplorable conditions of mass burial and loss of distinct identity during the war. The chapter concludes with examinations of Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That* (1929) and Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930), texts that combine fictional elements

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[38] Vaughn kept his war diary during August and September of 1917. After he died in 1931, the diary went unnoticed for decades. It was eventually published under its current title in 1981.

with autobiography to demonstrate how deplorable burial conditions led to weighty philosophical meditations upon the deindividuation of identity through war.

Wartime Identity in Death: Nineteenth-Century Burial Problems Revisited

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the burial reformers' din abated and writer-taphophiles rested their pens; England had exhausted nearly every facet of the cemetery problem. Burial legislation had finally begun to regulate costs for interment and terminate the long-practiced custom of churchyard burial. The more careful arrangement of bodies and more aesthetic presentation of burial grounds required much more actual space than in previous centuries, and cemeteries became a more prominent aspect of the landscape. Reformers and writers of epitaphic collections had demonstrated the importance of recognizing individuals in death, whether the commemorated were servants or aristocrats. Civilians would no longer tolerate unsanitary mass burial grounds where gravediggers piled the dead high or discarded old bones to make space for new corpses. While some civilians preferred the new, more hygienic and carefully-planned cemeteries, others turned to the practice of cremation. Burial reform transformed cemeteries into sites that celebrated individual identity and remembrance rather than convenient depositories for the anonymous and forgotten dead.

The onset of World War I induced severe cultural retrogression in relation to nineteenth-century burial reform, and writers renewed concerns about how memorialization should take place and how England should acknowledge its dead. Missing bodies, premature burial, mass graves, unreadable epitaphs-- these horrors once central to nineteenth-century burial reform literature and epitaphic collections became

renewed provocations for cultural anxiety and literary exploration as a result of the conditions of war. This chapter will demonstrate the cultural and literary angst generated when war conditions necessitated a return to mass burial on such a wide scale and when the lack of proper headstones and epitaphs reinstituted the cemetery problem for the British—only this time on foreign ground.

While historians like Thomas Laqueur have recognized the Great War's important innovations in individualization of death and burial when compared to the mass burials of earlier wars, they often overlook the sharp contrast between Great War burial conditions and the reforms that had taken place during the preceding century. They also neglect the distinct parallels between nineteenth-century interment horrors and the conditions of battlefield burials in the First World War. Laqueur briefly compares conditions during prewar military efforts to nineteenth-century burial problems, but he ultimately focuses on the state effort to organize and individualize burial efforts and to name all soldiers, especially the missing. Similarly, in her article "Memorials Carved in Granite: Great War Memorials and Everyday Life," Katie Trumpener addresses how England sought to name and individualize its dead without acknowledging the reforms that inspired and articulated the importance of that very individualization decades earlier. This chapter argues that the Great War threatened to and did obliterate a century's worth of burial progress, and wartime conditions reintroduced, on a massive scale, the struggle to maintain individual identity in death and the horror of unidentified corpses left behind in mass graves. A century-long battle for cemeterial organization and individual recognition in death had culminated in the societal belief that mass graves (with the exception of family vaults) and anonymous interments were no longer acceptable in any

context—even during wartime chaos. Nineteenth-century British society had worked to individuate the dead and to address the complexities of memorialization, and nineteenth-century authors had explored how to write the identities of the dead. But once the Great War began, mourners and writers had to devise new ways to handle missing bodies and unknown soldiers.

Trench warfare made soldiers feel lost—like the earth had swallowed them. Paul Fussell argues that because soldiers spent so much time underground in an earthen labyrinth, they became fixated on the contrasting sky. It was the comforting sight of the sky "that had the power to persuade a man that he was not already lost in a common grave" (51). The height of anxiety about the proper identification and mass burial of the dead actually came in the middle of the war with the official decree of 1916 that soldiers' bodies could not be returned home; they would be "buried where they fell" in battle (Hynes, 271) or supposedly "interred in centralized war cemeteries near where they had died" (Bourke 225). This instigated societal outrage, and what became known as the "cemetery problem" took on new proportions. The term applied to this twentieth-century social issue recalled the original "cemetery problem" during the nineteenth century. This crisis affected England as a recurrence rather than an occurrence.

Scholars agree that the governmental attempt to provide decent burials was commendable; officials organized war cemeteries, chaplains provided ceremonies, and battalions instituted markers, but the random nature of the slaughter permitted only modest success. Joanna Bourke provides the most critically-comprehensive discussion of the impact that missing bodies had on civilians in *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (1996). She assesses that the bodies of over 200,000 British

soldiers were never recovered after the war ended (229). John Keegan reports there to

have been as many as 500,000 unrecoverable or unidentifiable dead. Missing bodies left

behind were likely confined to mass graves, often without any accompanying writing to

locate and identify them. Keegan summarizes the circumstances that made proper

recovery and burial futile:

> Many of those who died in battle could never be laid to rest.
>
> Their bodies had been blown to pieces by shellfire and the
>
> fragments scattered beyond recognition. Many other bodies
>
> could not be recovered during the fighting and were then lost
>
> to view, entombed in crumbled shell holes or collapsed trenches
>
> or decomposing into the broken soil battle left behind.   (422)

The absence of corpses generated severe anxiety from civilians who had lost brothers,

fathers, and husbands in the war. Citizens on the home front never encountered the

vulgarities of fragmented bodies or faceless corpses; however, the most difficult facet of

death for them to face was its absence. Cannadine establishes that "those at home saw no

death, no carnage and no corpses, but experienced *bereavement*" (213). This exclusion of

bodies from the mourning process became the most problematic and sensitive topic of the

war.

In previous military engagements, the bodies and names of the dead were often

forgotten. Crimean graves housed nameless and forsaken corpses, and following the

Boer War—despite the governmental gesture of marking non-commemorated graves with

small iron crosses—most graves remained scattered and most bodies anonymous.

Thomas Laqueur addresses this in his lengthy discussion of handling the war dead in

"Memory and Naming in the Great War," and a chapter in *Commemorations.* Naming like this in wartime was unprecedented and was a crucial component of World War I— what he refers to as "the planting of names on the landscape of battle" (153).[39] According to G. Kingsley Ward and Edwin Gibson, "there was no previous Army policy of noting and maintaining grave sites." And even though "some graves of the South African (Boer) War at the turn of the century had been marked," those demarcations were certainly temporary. (44) Corpses once again fueled outraged discussions, vexed the pages of diaries, and begot literature, as the war violently destabilized the ordering of bodies and the previous century's newly-instilled veneration for individual corpses. Allyson Booth relates that with the Great War, "the burial of dead soldiers separately rather than in a common grave represented a departure from a long historical tradition, as did commemoration of the individual dead rather than the collective victory" (41). In earlier campaigns, mass graves were considered an acceptable way of disposing of the dead, especially for low-ranking combatants. Gavin Stamp reveals, "After Waterloo, for instance, while the bodies of officers were taken home for burial, the private soldier was left in unmarked mass graves... As wars became larger in scale... so the popular concern for the fate of the individual soldier increased" (6). This phenomenon reached its apex with the mass slaughter of World War I, and had as much if not more to do with burial

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[39] In *Memory, Masculinity, and National Identity in British Culture, 1914-1930*, Gabriel Koureas also addresses naming on war memorials: "Inscriptions exemplified a new era of remembrance which… preserved the name of the soldier" (46). But Koureas is quick to point out that this process of naming, although it suggests a certain individuation, was also quite reductive in terms of soldiers' identities. In other words, names could not adequately capture identities, and names on war memorials tended to represent erased lives only in terms of war; these names did not represent a whole life lived, only the part of that life touched by war.

guidelines established for civilians during the nineteenth century as it did with the scale of battle.[40]

The absence of dead bodies correlated with naming the dead. Laqueur explains how memorialists of the Great War broke with historical precedent by making names at battle venues the primary focus of national mourning (163-4). One collection of war burial grounds, *Graves and Epitaphs of our Fallen Heroes in the Crimea and Scutari*, shows a sketch of Cathcart's Hill cemetery, a plot of land housing rough rows of ninety-nine graves and monuments providing meager details about Crimean War deaths in 1855. This drawing includes four grave-digging soldiers—two talking and two digging holes—and the tome concludes with four pages of very general, all-encompassing epitaphs. Many of these "epitaphs" were forced to represent scores of combatants' dead bodies. For example, in one case an epitaph on a single stone announces 430 war dead: "to the memory of / 18 serjeants / 12 drummers / 420 rank and file / who were killed, / or died of wounds, / or disease during the war" (Colborne 2). Even though the inscriptions on the stones list officers by title, they neglect proper names. Before Fabian Ware, initiator of the War Graves Commission, worked to record the names of all British war dead and grave locations during and after World War I, those who had made the greatest national sacrifice went undocumented and unnamed.

Graves and Epitaphs of Our Fallen Heroes points to another major difference between the Great War and previous military engagements: for the first time, rank and

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[40] In "Memory and Naming in The Great War," Thomas Laqueur discusses the First World War as ushering in a "new era of remembrance… the era of the common soldier's name." While Laqueur's emphasis on the gathering of scattered bodies and attempts to bury and mark individuals as different from former military burial practices holds merit, what he fails to account for is the complete uniformity in the presentation of World War I soldiers' graves. Even though there was an attempt to individualize soldiers in cemeteries, their ultimate resting places offered nothing distinctive that might individuate them or distinguish them from fellow deceased combatants.

file soldiers were, in some ways, given the same treatment as high-ranking officers. In the Crimean graves collection, the map shows several solitary tombstones displaying the names of captains, colonels, and lieutenants individually (although not by proper name) while other stones simply list a large number of "rank and file" soldiers. In this particular cemetery, rank was also demonstrated by the use of varying types and sizes of stones. Mass graves might be covered by a large slab tombstone, while officers' received monuments and larger stones. The Great War equalized combatants in several ways. When burials were hasty, rank mattered little. In addition, the glorified Unknown Soldier buried in Westminster Abbey needed only to be identified as an "unknown" and not a high-ranking officer. But class concerns played out differently on the battlefield. Combatants' mass burials prompted heightened awareness and anxiety since war burials encouraged associations with nineteenth-century paupers' pits. War produced circumstances like those Charles Box had described during the previous century when "the poorest of the locality" (117) had to settle for wood rather than stone to perpetuate the memory of loved ones. Before the War Graves Commission began their task of gathering graves and organizing cemeteries and memorials, temporary wooden crosses, many quickly constructed during the chaos of fighting, dotted the battlefields. The similarities were startling.

One way to honor the dead and to recover lost identity was through monument making; however, an additional type of memorialization commanded public attention. Samuel Hynes notes that "monument-making was taking place in the publishing world, too. Anthologies of poems by dead young war poets, with monumental titles... volumes of brief lives of the dead; letters from the Front" assisted with the mourning process of

countries devastated by war. These artifacts "preserve—artificially, anachronistically, like objects in a museum—the spirit in which these young men went to war" (277). The war poets held distinct positions as both writers and those who had experienced the war. The intersection of poetry and history made the war poets' presentation of the struggle to maintain individuality and identity even more powerful.

The beginnings of Modernism as a movement and World War I shared the cultural milieu of the early twentieth century. As Allyson Booth puts it, "the Great War was experienced by soldiers as strangely modernist and modernism itself is strangely haunted by the Great War" (6). Although they are often more strictly linear than high modernist narratives, war memoirs provide the reader with the same exposure to rapid, fragmented thought and self-conscious deliberation. Soldiers routinely problematize identity because they experience such utter isolation from the rest of the world; the continual confrontation of death instigates their removal from the external environment, a detachment from the trauma that Eric Leed says "had once rendered experience unambiguous and self identifiable" (23). In this sense, it is not difficult to understand the similarities between, for instance, the conceptualization of alienated combatants and the ethereal yet vivid characterization of Jacob Flanders in Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*. Jacob represents many soldiers whose identities were, because of war experiences, dynamic and difficult to characterize.

Soldiers were constantly reminded of their own transience, their potential erasure by the chaos of war. Wilfred Owen's poem "With an Identity Disk" demonstrates the soldiers' preoccupation with fractured selfhood and fleeting memorialization.[41] Each

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[41] Owen is best known for his poem "Dulce Et Decorum Est," and most criticism focuses on this piece. See these articles: Daniel Hipp's "By Degrees Regain[ing] Cool Peaceful Air and Wonder: Wilfred Owen's

British combatant was issued two "identity disks" bearing their name and number to wear (what we usually call "dog tags"). Fabian Ware was said to have instituted this new double-tagging method to help in ordering and naming the dead. Upon a soldier's death, one disk was usually sent to the next of kin. The identity disk received attention in countless diaries and memoirs from the war. It was distinct in its association with both war and civilians since one disk remained with the body while the other was sent home to the bereaved. Memoirists describe the gruesome search for these tags on bodies that were nearly disintegrated. This practice prompted Owen to write: "Let my death be memoried on this disk. / Wear it, sweet friend... / ...kiss it night and day, / Until the name grow vague and wear away" (11-14). Even though the disk is a tangible showcase for the soldier's name, the poem emphasizes how the disk, too, was impermanent and subject to erasure over time. Owen foregrounds this impermanence when he replaces the line "Wear it, sweet friend" with the more impersonal and realistic usage of wear: to "wear away." Soldiers often documented this removal of the identity disk as the final act of respect for bodies that no longer appeared human. The disks provided some solace for the bereaved, although they sometimes served as the sole remnants of the dead; they labeled otherwise unrecognizable masses of decay. Thomas Brookbank describes the "noxious task" of burying bodies in watery shell holes "with as much reverence as time and circumstances would permit. Where possible, groups were buried together after identification disks, which all soldiers wore round their necks... were removed" (13). H.J. Knee recalls the horror after battle and his participation in mass-grave digging, where there were "Corpses, corpses everywhere in various stages of mutilation... [forced]

War Poetry as Psychological Therapy"; Paul Norgate's "Wilfred Owen and the Soldier Poets"; Tadeusz Slawek's " 'Dark Pits of War': Wilfred Owen's Poetry and the Hermeneutics of War."

to lie forever in a filthy muddy grave far, far from home and kindred. Knee's burial party laid to rest between forty and fifty bodies in this one outing: "As there were so many shell holes everywhere we were able to link them up until we had a deep trench capable of holding them all" (3). The gaping wounds of the battle terrain often became makeshift graves to save work for the grave-digging parties and to expedite the burial process before battle continued. During burial duty, Knee remembers removing all personal effects, "such as money, watches, rings, photos, letters, and so on; one identification disc had also to be removed; the other being left on the body... A small white bag was provided for each man's effects, the neck of which was to be securely tied and his identity disk attached thereto. It was a gruesome job!" (2). Knee's account demonstrates the transference of human identity from the defunct and faceless corpse to the effects bag, replete with its own "neck" that would now wear the disk that once identified its combatant.

Other soldiers on burial detail recount similar stories, and the removal of identity disks repeatedly punctuates narratives of wartime burial. The disc became the only thing available to lend personality to corpses-- to give names to lifeless forms. McCauley worked with 150 men whose "task was to search for dead bodies and bury them." He recalls his search for the dead in particularly gruesome detail:

> We worked in pairs, and our most important duty was to find the identity disks... Often I have picked up the remains of a fine, brave man on a shovel. Just a little heap of bones and maggots to be carried to the common burial place... bodies that seemed quite whole, but which became like huge masses of white, slimy chalk when we handled them. The job

had to be done; the identity disk had to be found. I shuddered as my

hands, covered in soft flesh and slime, moved about in search of the disk,

and I have had to pull bodies to pieces in order that they should not be

buried unknown. And yet, what a large number did pass through my

hands unknown? Not a clue of any kind to reveal the name by which the

awful remains were known in life. It was painful to have to bury the

unknown.   (89)

The sheer emotional desperation and personal nature of Knee's search for the tiny

identifying tags contrasts with his admission that burial duty was just a "job that had to be

done," and a distasteful one, at that. He considers the seemingly-whole, yet suddenly-

fragmented, corpses of the dead—the bodies in mere "pieces" that, even broken, reveal

no identity disk and no name to humanize and identify the lifeless forms.

Identities were often left undiscovered because war conditions did not allow time

enough to complete proper burials. Often clergymen spoke a few quick words, if even

that, and soldiers hastily shoveled debris upon piles of bodies. Bodies tended to blend

with the terrain of war, and sheer practicality dictated the final resting places of

thousands of war dead. F.M. Packham was one combatant who took a course on burial

duties to become one of seventeen men (two corporals and fifteen privates) responsible

for interments for his own corps. When the men tackled their task, they instinctively

concocted a cemeterial plan; they "map[ed] out a section for a small Cemetery" and "dug

a few graves ready." All too quickly, corpses filled the available graves, and they were

reduced to "bury[ing] all the Bodies in the area where they were found owing to the large

[number of] dead laying around" (21). Packham's account intensifies the next day:

We started to dig a grave for each body, but found it was taking too long.

We had been told that there were a dozen bodies out in front, but the

whole area seemed to be covered with Bodies. The chaplain agreed to

bury them side by side in larger Graves... So we found a large shell hole

that had some muddy water in it. We placed the Bodies feet to the center.

When it was filled... the men covered the Bodies with earth. During these

operations, I cut off one of the Identity Disks, and a Corporal searched the

Bodies for their personal belongings; these we placed in a numbered bag

corresponded with the metal plate that was hung at the head of the

body. (22)

In an effort to provide some formal name or title to these anonymous corpses at their

burial, Packham capitalizes "Bodies" each time he uses the very physical, yet hauntingly-

anonymous, word in his account. The conditions here are reminiscent of nineteenth-

century communal burials, in which gravediggers rediscovered rotting bodies in muddy

pits and disturbed decaying remains to make room for fresh interments. Wartime

gravediggers routinely settled for mass graves when time did not allow for the proper

care and placement of corpses.

Soldiers were poignantly aware of the likelihood of their permanent anonymity in

death. The inability to communicate the atrocities of war perpetuated the soldiers'

isolation and their contemplation of self-identity, for "the soldier cannot talk about his

experience at the front because he knows he could never convey what he has been

through, nor be ever understood" (Bracco 101). Memoirists and poets attempt to bridge

this gap between experience and understanding, what Hayden White denotes as the

predicament of "how to translate *knowing* into *telling*" (1). Soldiers' lingering neuroses were due, in part, to their inability to communicate. Virginia Woolf's characterization of Septimus Warren Smith, a symbolic unknown soldier whose suicide interrupts Clarissa's party, best expresses the use of this theme in *Mrs. Dalloway*, one of the most telling novels about the war's lingering effects on both soldiers and civilians. The haunted Septimus, who speaks most to his dead comrade Evans, realizes that "he is deserted... quite alone, condemned" (92). He represents the "millions of young men named Smith" (84) who could never convey the atrocities of the war. Septimus cannot convey what he himself cannot understand. He is isolated because "he could not feel" (86).

In his 1921 introduction to *Psycho-Analysis and the War Neuroses*, Sigmund Freud explains that the development of war neuroses is due mainly to identity crises: "Conflict takes place between the old ego of peace time and the new war-ego of the solider, and it becomes acute as soon as the peace-ego is faced with the danger of being killed through the risky undertakings of his newly-formed parasitical double" (2-3). As Freud suggests, soldiers' internal conflict stems from a split between a "peace-time self" and a "war-time self," from two egos that are continually at odds with one another. Combatants strained to perform gruesome deeds that their peaceful selves would not have undertaken, and they struggled with emergent new identities as soldiers. From its onset to its aftermath the First World War instigated crises of selfhood. The erasure of soldiers' identities occurred with the use of the field service postcard. Fussell (183) and Booth (14) mention the government-issued card which soldiers sent home. To let their families know that they were alive, soldiers were to cross out everything except, "I am quite well." This generic form of notification was devoid of any personal rhetoric or indication

of personal identity. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Lieutenant Henry says, "I sent a couple of army postcards, crossing out everything except, I am" (142). Soldiers struggled with their own prospective deaths while simultaneously attempting to identify the corpses of comrades. The ego conflict that Freud describes takes on more complexity when one considers how soldiers, already engaged in interior struggles to fight, encountered and buried dead bodies of fellow soldiers.

The dynamics of wartime identity crises are best described by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* as "death infecting life." A corpse "upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance... It beckons to us and ends up engulfing us... disturbs identity" (3-4). Kristeva's statement is even more poignant regarding wartime. Soldiers' serendipitous encounters with corpses make them question their own mortality. Dead bodies debilitate any civil idea of orderly and carefree existence and render life indeterminate. The sight of a dead body invokes a series of questions about the purpose and meaning of life. Kristeva's analysis provides a useful correlation between the confrontation of death and the disruption of identity during the First World War.

Bodily Fragmentation and Absence: Edwin Campion Vaughn Confronts his "Parasitical Double"

War writers like Edwin Campion Vaughn emphasize the necessity for proper burial for the dead, despite the frequent inability to provide even a modest resting place. Memoir writers repeatedly mention disinterred corpses or the altered bodies of those whom they must bury. In *Dismembering the Male,* Joanna Bourke says that pioneer

troops were organized to bury dead soldiers since trained servicemen had to focus on fighting and the act of burying their own dead disturbed them (214). Although there is evidence to support this claim, several memoir writers who fought in the war discuss the burial of their own dead. Robert Graves discusses time spent "carrying the dead down for burial" (161). Henri Barbusse, much more graphic and detailed than Graves, fixates on the visages of the dead. Barbusse finds "half-moldy faces" and "faces black as tar" on the men he must bury, established in "rows" along the road, "waiting-- some of them have waited long—to be taken back to the cemeteries after dark" (152-3). Barbusse retains a report-like tone as he imposes an impatient volition on the bodies—as if they were still among the living, petulantly awaiting interment. Burial is necessary, despite imperfect conditions: "It was early in the mourning when we got them all out," Vaughn reports in *Some Desperate Glory* as he confronts bodies discovered after a battle: "We buried them in shell-holes and walled in the dugouts with earth and sandbags" (48). Another time the ground and corpses are both so frozen that they end up "covering them with old blankets, and piling the corners with stones, until the ground should be soft enough to bury them" (34). Conditions for burial were anything but ideal, and bodies were often left unburied or were never found in the first place. Vaughn remembers the death of Corporal Everett, of whom he says, "we found no trace; he must have been struck by the shell and blown to atoms" (48). Vaughn demonstrates the use of the written word to commemorate lost combatants and to translate experiences on the Western Front to those on the home front. However, amidst commemoration, a disturbing resonance of war remains. In telling their stories these authors reveal the bitter byproduct of war—the

desperate need to bury not only bodies, but also the traumatic memories which accompany wartime.

Soldiers encountered death in three main forms: whole bodies, fragmented bodies, and absent bodies. Trudi Tate provides a thorough analysis of corporeal presence and absence in death and of the dynamic of the visualization of the war dead. Tate's primary concern is "witnessing" and its relationship with historical understanding. Oftentimes whole bodies remained unidentifiable: faces often disappeared when decomposition stole the physical identity of corpses or violent battle mutilated them. War writers tend to fetishize faces, particularizing expressions, skin color, recognizability, or the shocking absence of identifying characteristics altogether. Memoirist Henri Barbusse recalls the exhumation of a corpse accompanied by another soldier's "voice gasping, 'What *is* that face? ... His face? It isn't his face.' In place of his face we found the hair... the corpse was broken, and folded the wrong way" (346). In his war diary, Edwin Campion Vaughn mourns the loss of his pal Bennett, who is "badly shattered" with "most of his head gone" and Hollins, "who... was unrecognizable" (48). The deteriorated features of the faces of the dead incessantly remind combatants of their own possible anonymous fates.

When facial identification is obliterated, objectified body parts, especially hands and feet, become the focus of numerous memoirists. Siegfried Sassoon remembers "a pair of hands (nationality unknown) which protruded from the soil; one hand seemed to be pointing at the sky with an accusing gesture. Each time I passed that place the protest of those fingers became more expressive of an appeal to God in defiance of those who made the War" (148). Robert Graves recalls "two rats on... blankets tussling for the possession of a severed hand" (138). Barbusse relates a comrade's experience with boot

stealing: "the legs... came unstuck at the knees, and his breeks tore away... There was me with a full boot in each fist. The legs and feet had to be emptied out" (14). He later relates a corpse that is "brought in in such a state" that so as not to lose the fragmented parts of it, they had to "pile it on a lattice" in order to carry it to burial. Barbusse tells his readers, "You cannot make out either end of the body." Bodies that evaporated into nothingness made death even more unknowable. Scenes like those above exhibit how bodies reduced to pieces in the war contributed to a preoccupation with fragmentation, which we also see in literary modernism at this time.

In his 1917 work *Some Desperate Glory: The World War I Diary of A British Officer*, Edwin Campion Vaughn repeatedly fixates on the deplorable conditions of the dead and his confrontation of corpses.[42] This fixation begins rather trivially but progresses to include envisioning and enacting his own death. Vaughn's first interaction with death happens innocently enough; after he overcomes his fear of leaving the trenches, he explores the "scattered rubbish" of the surrounding area, which includes a Frenchman's grave. Vaughn describes his experience in terms of recreational levity:

> Here we found the grave of a Frenchman, with the equipment lying beside
> it, from which I collected a rapier-bayonet as a souvenir. Then we played
> about in the snow, exploring dumps and shell-holes and graves until later
> when the troops returned and we marched back.   (22)

Vaughn gives no serious thought to his exploration of graves and acquisition of the dead man's possessions; however, he juxtaposes such scenes of trivial joviality with serious contemplation of his death and identity. In his ensuing diary entry, he recalls how he

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[42] Allyson Booth includes a brief discussion of Vaughn's trench experience in *Postcards from the Trenches* (55-7). She is concerned with how he encountered death in "a world constructed, literally, of corpses" (50).

listened to the story of his Company's first time at the line, how they were "scattered and lay in shell holes while shrapnel rained about them." He is stunned by the resultant casualties and reports to his reader:

> This story seriously disturbed my rest: it brought danger so close to me...
> I saw horrible pictures of myself lying dead in a shattered trench, or
> helplessly bleeding to death in a shell-hole, with no power to call for
> help... I wished the war would be over before our turn came to go to the
> line.   (23).

Although his encounter with the Frenchman's grave does not urge him to contemplate his own fate, that exploration, combined with the ensuing battle, encourages Vaughn to consider death. He uses visualization, "horrible pictures of himself," to contemplate the experience of death since "death is never possible in regards to ourselves, never something lived through. Our experience with death lies... in the mediated constructs through which we know it" (Friedman 3). The initially-trivial presentation of grave exploration intensifies the impact of Vaughn's ensuing meditative exercise. As Frederick Hoffman puts it, death "must always depend on imaginative speculation" (3), and memoirists allow the reader to participate in their personal imaginings as they assimilate the finality of their own deaths.

After his visualization of other combatants' deaths, Vaughn relates his first burial duty, a job which, he admits, does not bother him as much as he thought it would. An officer informs him of his responsibilities:

> 'There's a job for you tonight,' and he pointed out a cluster of corpses...
> lying flat on their backs, with marble faces rigid and calm, their khaki

lightly covered with frost, some with no wound visible... They lay at

attention staring up into the heavens. This was my first sight of dead men

and I was surprised that it did not upset me. Only the one with the black

face has stayed with me. The thick, slightly curled lips, fleshy aquiline

nose, cap-comforter pulled well down over his head and the big glassy

eyes have become stamped on my brain.   (31-2)

Vaughn reduces the mass of "dead men" to "one" face in particular. The reader can see that although he claims the encounter does not upset him, his ensuing remarks about his "only" memory, the blackened visage "stamped on his brain," negates his initial declaration. He contemplates the "marble faces" of those he must bury amidst the "cluster of corpses," and from that cluster he fixates on one particular face, a visage which later recurs when he comes off duty and tries to sleep. The men are somehow not quite dead, retaining their gaze, "some with no wound visible." Vaughn can relate to this position of limbo as a solider who clings to life but often feels dead inside. The boundaries of Vaughn's identity are loosened and become permeable; he internalizes that black face and, through it, contemplates his own threatened identity.

Soon after this experience, Vaughn describes someone stepping into his cellar, a person whose face he describes using the exact words above: "blackened face, thick lips and aquiline nose, big eyes, cap comforter... It was the face of the dead man that I had buried." (43). During an intense pause, Vaughn describes a mirror-like confrontation with the "dead man":

For fully half a minute we looked in silence at each other, then he asked

me if I could tell him what time the rations would be up. I laughed

> hysterically and made him come in so that I could dispel the awful fright
>
> that his appearance had given me. It was Corporal Harrison, his face
>
> blackened with wood-smoke but his every feature identical with that of
>
> the corpse.   (43)

Again, Vaughn juxtaposes his moment of horror with ironic humor in order to "dispel" his own fears. The reader might assume that Vaughn is dreaming, but the dream gives way to reality, and the corpse is supplanted by the Corporal. The Corporal, for a moment, embodies Vaughn's own fractured identity; he becomes Vaughn's mirror image. Freud's concept of the "parasitical double" is deployed when Vaughn comes face to face with a reflection of his war ego and is reminded of his own fragile, potentially-fragmented self.

The fulfillment of Vaughn's horror-fantasies about his death arrives when he "experiences" his own demise. Soldiers often appropriate the roles of corpses in order to cope with their own potential mortality. Allyson Booth explains this phenomenon:

> During the Great War, the most common soldier's nightmare was of being
>
> buried alive... This fear expresses how profoundly disturbing combatants
>
> found the lack of a clear boundary between life and death to be, for to be
>
> buried alive means literally to occupy the positions of life and death
>
> simultaneously-- to become a conscious corpse. (61)

Accounts of this type of role play permeate war writing. In his poem "Decampment," Ernst Stadler suggests, "perhaps we would lie outstretched somewhere / among corpses. / ...our eyes would glow, drinking their fill / of world and sun" (Giddings, 29). Vaughn

assumes the position of a corpse after previously picturing himself dead and mirroring the mistakenly-identified blackened face of the General:

> A terrific crash flung us in all directions and into darkness...
>
> It felt quite pleasant to be dead. There was such utter quiet and peacefulness. Just a light singing in my ears, restful blackness around me, and a sense of absolute freedom and abandon. I seemed to be standing up, and stretching out my arms I encountered, with a slight disappointment, a brick wall... I now found that during the few seconds when I had believed myself dead, I had closed my note book, snapped round the elastic and returned the pencil to its socket. (44)

Vaughn detaches from himself after the crash and seems to transgress the parameters of his body and identity with his feelings of "absolute freedom and abandon." He isn't sure of his physical position or his state of mind, and he fantasizes about a death filled with relief and tranquility. Although he performs deliberate actions like stretching out his arms and closing his notebook, he dissociates from himself both mentally and physically and offers conjecture rather than certainty about the positioning of his body: "I seemed to be standing up." He is even disappointed when he realizes he is still alive: "It felt pleasant to be dead." He enacts Booth's idea of the conscious corpse by "occupying the positions of life and death simultaneously." The sensation of the brick wall brings him back to his physical surroundings after, for just a moment, he considers his possible death. Even though he assumes himself dead, he has the ability to close and secure his notebook and pencil, almost as if his physical and narrative deaths were one and the same, and his discursive life would end as he breathed his last breath. He does this all,

however, on an unconscious level; he says he "found" that he had closed the notebook without realizing it, devoid of deliberate thought, which makes his writing seem as natural, and as vital, as his breathing.

Vaughn illustrates the interconnectedness between corpses and combatants' identities and the importance of maintaining and preserving identity through writing. Dead bodies intrude upon the consciousness of living soldiers and affirm Kristeva's assertion that "death infects life." Stumbling upon corpses on the battlefield was much different than encountering them in civilian life. During wartime, the unforeseen corpse became a mocking reminder, a mirror image, whispering from beyond the grave, "This could be you." Assuming corpses' positions and then keeping journals or creating poems about the feelings generated by this role play allowed combatants to safely consider, through both thought and writing, what it might be like to be dead. In a sense, as the surviving words of the dead, war writing plays a role similar to that of the "conscious corpse." Death extinguishes the potential for continued writing and brings the narrative to an abrupt close, but the previously-written contents of a notebook like Vaughn's can reveal the soldier's most private recollections even after he dies.

Scribbles on Sign Boards: The Inadequacy of Impromptu Epitaphs

During the war, epitaphs were seldom available to identify and acknowledge the dead. Instead of honorable headstones commemorating individuals, makeshift crosses and mounds of earth marked mass graves. Combatants expressed the need, even during fierce fighting, to provide epitaphs for their fellow combatants. J. McCauley, who claims to have assisted in the burial of over ten thousand dead (known and unknown), describes

how he would often "collect small stones and pebbles, and work out some epitaph above the grave" (90). Chaplains attempted to recite as much of a funeral service as possible over graves, but this task, too, fell just as often to fellow soldiers who were forced to provide the words of solemnity and closure following burials. Wartime elicited meaningful cemeterial language while it simultaneously required linguistic brevity. Post-death pronouncements had to be brief, yet powerful.

It was not uncommon to find makeshift signs bearing the quickly-christened names of cemeteries, hastily-scribbled or chiseled epitaphs on bits of wood, or small stones or tablets with inscriptions added after the war's cessation. Army Chaplain Ernest Crosse relates having to bury men from his unit in July of 1916. Chaplains like Crosse sometimes had the opportunity to assign identity to the dead, albeit crudely; rarely did the number of bodies correspond one-to-one with names. On July 4th, Crosse collects 163 Devons with his burial fatigue "and covered them up at Mansell Copse." The word fatigue refers to menial labor required of soldiers. The next day he labels the mass grave with a board painted with red lead which read: "Cemetery / Of / 163 Devons / Killed July 1st 1916" (3). He places twelve crosses in two rows to mark the cemetery. Ten days later he buries twelve more comrades:

> We brought in Boyd, Carter, and Garner's bodies to Marlborough Wood where a fatigue party had just come in to move at once to the Halte. So being unable to bury the rest I sent an S.B. to bring in their pay books. I then buried the three officers and nine other men who were lying close. I

wired in the cemetery and labeled the graves, calling the cemetery

Westward Ho Cemetery or as the signaler [who] wrote the sign board

preferred, "Westward Hoe Cemetery."   (9)

Crosse starts off by borrowing the title from Charles Kingsley's 1855 novel, but the grim irony of the situation surfaces when the signaler transforms it into "Westward Hoe," a more appropriate tribute to the ragged terrain around them and the broken soil hurriedly thrown on the bodies they have buried. Combatants like Crosse exhibit their desire to label the dead, to assert the finality of death linguistically. If they were unable to record the exact locations of fallen fellow soldiers, they relied on their memories of burial duty to relate details to combatants' loved ones at home. They were often forced to relive the most terrible aspect of the war because civilians so fervently desired details about the dead, and their ability to refer to a particularly-named cemetery leant credibility to their stories and comfort to the bereaved.

Sometimes combatants left behind objects to tell the stories of buried comrades' identities. In 1919 Olive Edis, a recording photographer, recalls her utter shock at the condition and positions of graves: "We saw isolated little graves marked with a cross, just dotted where the men had fallen, anywhere in the mud or on the roadside... One grave had, though nameless, a propeller instead of a cross, marking it as an airman's resting place" (10-11). Even more devastating were the many graves of unknowns:

To some of the crosses clung a label with a blue line across it--

"Unidentified British Soldier"; on some a tin hat, a scrap of clothing,

on one a pair of men's boots... I found some lonely little graves... and

a little tin plate... tied on where the sticks crossed, with an inscription

pricked through it— "Soldat Francais Inconnu." This was all—one of

so many of the same. There was some talk of collecting and moving them,

but it would surely be a sorry job, and incomplete at best. (15-16, 54).

The pieces of clothing left behind could assemble to create the basic form of a man: boots, then clothing, with the tin hat atop the "body." They almost suggest a single, whole entity, although they most likely originate from separate bodies blown apart. The inanimate objects have outlived the soldiers who wore them as the sole reminders of their presence. The sporadic layout of graves and the use of scraps and pieces of clothing to mark burial spots reveal the severity of battle and combatants' need to identify the final resting places of the dead.

There was little hope that graves could be accurately recorded even if they were found. Warfare often destroyed the work of burial parties as soon as they had completed it and shell fire disrupted entire cemeteries. The Imperial War Graves Commission itself acknowledged this in its publications, which they often sent home to fallen soldiers' families. One pamphlet, "The Registration and Care of Graves" in included with the private papers of A.O. Shewan, a company commander at the front, In the pamphlet, the Commission admits the futility of recovery missions:

It... never will be possible to obtain a record of all graves... In some

cases... though graves have been marked the position is too exposed

for a correct plan and survey to be made; in others every trace of a

burial ground having been obliterated by the enemy's shell fire there is

no hope of reconstructing the cemetery so that individual graves may

be recognized. (Shewan)

Eventually, after much anguish, civilians were forced to accept that repatriation of the dead was virtually impossible and that some bodies would never be found, graves would remain unrecorded, and even some whole cemeteries unmapped. Even after the searches for the missing and the sorting of bodies had concluded, war cemeteries in France and Belgium boasted rows of headstones only to conceal the mass burial beneath them (Longworth 34). Following the prohibition on transporting corpses back to England came an even more unacceptable pronouncement: the Imperial War Grave Commission vowed "to adhere rigorously to its uniform pattern of gravestones. No variation was to be allowed, whether in size, design, expense, or material" (Bourke 226). The House of Commons supported this proposal, and the conditions of war dictated civilian compliance. Those without individual stones were represented in name only, on the collective stone tablets of war memorials in France. Even then, many dead remained absent. Private Edgar Oswald Gale was killed in action in August of 1916, but his name was not recorded in the official war office list of the deceased and, in the absence of a locatable grave, his name finally appeared on the Thiepval Memorial in France in 1978 (Gale).

Disinterment was an additional concern; the tidying of graves and formation of more unified cemeteries meant that bodies would necessarily be disturbed. The correspondence between the family of Captain Shewan and the state demonstrates the helplessness of civilians who tried desperately to inculcate proper burial and commemoration. The Imperial War Graves Commission wrote to Shewan's father on October 11, 1919 and explained the location of his grave and that "there is little likelihood of its being disturbed." A letter date January 11, 1920 conveys the exact

opposite: "it has been found necessary to exhume the bodies buried in [Shewan's] cemetery and to re-inter them, and the body of the above mentioned officer has been removed and buried in Flat Iron Copse British Cemetery. The new grave has been duly marked and registered. The re-burial has been carefully and reverently carried out." Several letters following this one give particulars about the placement of the grave and inform the family that no permits are necessary for grave visitation. Officials responded to civilians' yearning for proper burial customs by devising rules and dictating regulations. They reduced the treatment of corpses to a series of impersonal statements. Civilians could no longer write personal epitaphs or purchase grand and costly monuments. Shewan's family was persistent; they continued to request more personal involvement in Shewan's burial and got the following response:

> With reference to your letter of the 8th instant, I am directed to inform you that the expense of making and erecting headstones over War Graves, as well as that of engraving the appropriate religious emblem and regimental badge, and an inscription show in the number, rank, name, regiment, date of death, and... age... is borne by public funds. At the foot of the stone, a space is reserved for the engraving of any personal inscription the relative care to submit for engraving at their expense, not exceeding 66 letters, the space between any two words must be reckoned as one letter. (26)

Like the shortened responses that time allowed for ceremonial statements at gravesides, so too were epitaphs truncated—limited to a purchased space where authentic expression was forced into brevity. The Imperial War Graves Commission tried to make this meager offer sound generous. Rudyard Kipling wrote on behalf of the I.W.G.C.: "The

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Commission feels that relatives should, if they wish, add a short inscription of their own choice as an expression of personal feeling and affection." The reason for the limitation to sixty-six letters was "to avoid unduly crowding the stones with very small lettering, which, besides being difficult to read, does not weather well" *(Graves of the Fallen)*. This very impersonal offer to personalize gravestones only exacerbated the inadequacy of the confines it placed on epitaphic language.

By the "23 instant" of the Shewan family's correspondence with the commission, their concern turned to the gravestone's material and potential permanency. The war office replied to this concern by ensuring that the chosen material, Portland stone, was "as durable as possible." The letter closes with another disappointment: "I very much regret that it would not be possible to have one memorial made of different stone from the others, and I am to assure you that you need have no anxiety on this point." This family, obviously one of thousands in the same situation, requested and was denied every possible personal act of memorialization for their dead son. As the family's worries intensified, the government responded with more documents; the war office included actual photos of Shewan's grave and the cemetery in which it lay with this twenty-third letter. The only way to provide further details or reassure the family was to show the actual resting place to the bereaved.

The war had severely overturned customary rituals and the pomp previously associated with civilian burial and mourning; however, mourners eventually came to accept cemeterial uniformity. Communities and families honored the dead on a local level through the implementation of statues, obelisks, and other memorial constructions. War cemeteries were eventually modeled after English gardens, and bodies that were

recoverable from the ravaged battlefield received separate graves with modest stones. Over 600 such park-like cemeteries remain in perpetual care (Keegan 422). England seemed to have made the best of a terrible situation, but the country's recognition of service did little to lessen the agonizing memories of combatants forced to serve as undertakers, ministers, and gravediggers to their fellow soldiers. The ongoing rows of identical crosses suggest how World War I stripped soldiers of individual distinction. And like so many soldiers' wartime epitaphs, gravesites had to operate in humble simplicity, and, like the civilians of the nineteenth-century, soldiers had to find creative ways to mark, individuate, and remember the dead.

<center>Gurney and the War Poets: Buried in Verse</center>

Like memoir writers, war poets provide a link between what is experienced in war and what is conveyed about that experience. When officials declared that bodies could not be returned home to England, words supplanted corpses. Mourners could not grieve in the presence of the dead, but only in the presence of language-- telegraphs feebly attempting to convey the physical absence of the deceased. David Cannadine addresses this disparity between bodies and words: "Whereas on the battlefield death took the form of cascades of corpses, at home it merely announced itself as a laconic message" (213). Like the aforementioned field service postcard, a written message could never convey the identity of a soldier; however, Allyson Booth, who agrees that verbiage replaced corpses for families on the home front, reveals the complicated process of notification that followed the terse telegram. Letters from friends and/or commanding officers countered the impersonal nature of telegrams, and the seriousness and sincerity with which

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combatants reported deaths was apparent in their efforts. Booth illustrates how the comprehension of death on the home front evolved into a scrupulous process of textual interpretation when "no grave was accessible to receive flowers or epitaphs" (26-27). When words could not appear on a tangible gravestone, words on paper commemorated the dead.

Wartime poets, like memoir writers, provided venues for the expression of grief and opportunities for reparation to begin.[43] Robert Giddings reports that over one-and-a-half million poems were produced as a result of the war (8). In 1916 Poet Laureate Robert Bridges issued an anthology of inspirational readings in order to raise morale and provide comfort. Bridges' words suggest the pivotal role war poets would play: "look instinctively to the seers and poets of mankind, whose sayings are the oracles and prophecies of loveliness and lovingkindness" (Qtd in Fussell 11). The war poets provide monuments in verse, tributes to soldiers whose bodies were lost forever, and their written memorializations often take precedence over tangible burial sites. They occupy unique positions as commemorators since they focus not only on recognizing other combatants, but also on their own memorialization. In war poems, the dead and the living are memorialized together, although in different ways. While war poets share in the honor bestowed upon all soldiers, their traumatic memories defy closure and remain at odds with their attempts to memorialize their comrades. Through their verses, they convey blurred sensations of life and loss, hope and horror, as haunted "living dead." Robert Graves demonstrates this in his poem "When I'm Killed," wherein he advises his reader:

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[43] In "Shell-Shock and the Cultural History of the Great War," Jay Winter explains how the soldier poets' longevity is a testament to the fact that Britain never recovered from the casualties, literal and symbolic, of World War I. Winter calls the work of poets like Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Ivor Gurney "part of the history of shell-shock" (10).

"When I'm killed, don't think of me / Buried there in Cambrin Wood... You'll find me buried, living-dead / In these verses that you've read" (1-2, 11-12). Graves, who survived the war, demonstrates another version of the "conscious corpse," the warrior poet who must live to tell about his experience yet feels psychologically buried by the war's effects.

Some poets, not all of whom fought in the war, wrote actual epitaphs even though the epitaphs, like those in nineteenth-century collections, appeared in print rather than on gravestones. Rudyard Kipling, who lost his son in the war, wrote several "Epitaphs of the War" for recipients such as "A Servant," "A Son," and "The Coward." These succinct poems, some a single couplet long and others not much longer, reduce the enormity of the war into simple, straightforward proclamations. "The Servant," for example, provides a terse comparative assertion: "We were together since the War began / He was my servant-- and the better man" (1-2). Other epitaphs, such as one titled "Pelicans in the Wilderness," touch on missing graves: "The blown sand heaps on me, that none may learn / Where I am laid for whom my children grieve" (1-2). Like many actual epitaphs of the nineteenth century, these poems oscillate in point of view and number, changing rapidly from first to third person, or from singular to plural; in this way, Kipling captures many different facets of war and demonstrates how epitaphs could speak for one lost individual or for a nation's loss. He swings from hauntingly immediate lines like, "My son was killed while laughing at some jest" (1) in the poem "A Son" to sweeping invectives, such as the couplet "Common Form," which encapsulates the entire war: "If any question why we died, / Tell them, because our fathers lied" (1-2). By interchanging intimate epitaphs with lines for the masses, Kipling took epitaphs beyond their traditional function; they became applicable to an entire nation.

Some epitaphs originated from utilitarian motives. In a letter dated August 3,

1919, J.M. Edmonds wrote to a friend, Cockerall (who goes undescribed in the original

documents), asking him to consider his recently-penned epitaphs for use post-war: "You

may like these," Edmonds writes, "If so, kindly bear them in mind in case any friend asks

for a suitable inscription" (Private Papers). Unlike Kipling, Edmonds writes not for

individuals, but for groups of dead, such as those who died early, on Vimy Ridge, or in

the Battle of Coronel. He writes several for general use on war memorials: "These in the

glorious morning of their days / for England's sake lost all but England's praise" (Private

Papers). Edmonds had his handwritten list formally printed on July 8, 1920. The duty of

writing epitaphs went beyond immediate family or friends; the need to memorialize was

so dire that writers offered their services to assist the bereaved, much like they did during

the nineteenth century when collections of epitaphs were written explicitly for mourners'

perusal and use. The act of documenting death's circumstances and effects through

epitaphic writing was one way to help the nation recover.

Ivor Gurney, a war poet whose reputation developed a bit later than Sassoon,

Graves, or Owen, epitomizes the soldier-poet who never recovered from his experiences

on the front line. Most writers focus on Gurney's war experience and career as a

musician.[44] In the introduction to his main collection of verse entitled *Severn and Somme*

(1917), he declares that self-exploration is his focal point: "Most of the book is concerned

with a person named Myself" (Walter, xvi).[45] He continued to write war poetry long after

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[44] Ivor Gurney has been best known as a "poet-composer." He was a vocalist who began composing music
at the age of fourteen. Composer Gerald Finzi encouraged Edward Blunden to publish the first collection
of Gurney's poems in 1954. Most published criticism is on Gurney's musicianship. Michael Hurd wrote
the first biography of Gurney, *The Ordeal of Ivor Gurney*, in 1978. For more on Gurney's life and works,
see Jacqueline Banerjee's article, "Ivor Gurney's 'Dark March': Is it Really Over?"
[45] Two volumes of Gurney's war poetry were published in his lifetime. In addition to *Seven and Somme*,
his collection of poems titled *War's Embers* was published in 1919. It took decades for his work to gain

the war had ended and spent the remainder of his life in mental hospitals. Gurney's tone is often intimate and direct, and he seems particularly aware of his position as spokesperson for the war-ravaged. Samuel Hynes notes that "artists" like Gurney "had come to the war thinking that they were poets and painters, had seen and felt the reality of war, and were finding ways of expressing it on their own terms. They had arrived at the aesthetic of direct experience *through* experience" (167). Gurney's position as a writer and musician must certainly have helped him survive his war experience; he suffered from bipolar disorder, and he spent the final fifteen years of his life in various mental hospitals before dying of tuberculosis in 1937.[46]

Gurney's experiences appear in poems that shift fluidly between individual and communal concerns, sorrowful and celebrative tones, memorialization and forgetfulness. Like many war poets, Gurney thematizes central cultural concerns about proper identification and burial. This was one way to individualize the war dead and work toward self-conceptualization. As Daniel Hipp puts it, "Gurney found his participation in the war to be an opportunity for forging an individual purpose and identity as a soldier… The war itself functioned to solidify the fragmented and misdirected individual" (113). In Gurney's poem "To His Love," the poetic persona acts as an emissary from one fallen soldier to his sweetheart while gradually revealing his own personal fears. "He's gone," he tells her as the four-stanza poem opens, immediately informing the soldier's love that his physical identity has been obliterated: "His body that was so quick / Is not as you /

the recognition of other soldier-poets; 1982 brought P.J. Kavanaugh's comprehensive edition *Collected Poems of Ivor Gurney*, which marked a milestone in the poet's reception.

[46] To read more about Gurney's mental illness, see the forthcoming dual biography of Gurney and his musical partner Marion Scott called *Ivor Gurney and Marion Scott: Song of Pain and Beauty* (2008). The biography is the first on Gurney since Hurd's 1978 book and the first ever on Scott, a pioneering musicologist who strongly advocate for Gurney during her time with him at the Royal College of Music in 1911 and thereafter.

Knew it.../ You would not know him now" (6-8, 11). After this proclamation of lost

recognizability, the speaker implores someone to "cover him over / With violets of pride /

Purple from Severn side" (13-15). In the final stanza, the speaker reaches a frenzy when

he tries to eradicate the mangled body from his mind. He has adjusted his purpose from

the consolation of the bereaved to the purgation of his own psychological horror:

> Cover him, cover him soon!
>
>   And with thick-set
>
> Masses of memoried flowers--
>
>   Hide that red wet
>
>   Thing I must somehow forget. (16-20)

The "he" in the penultimate stanza becomes an objectified "thing" in the final stanza.

The body's vulnerability, once literally exposed within the speaker's sight, continues to

haunt him as, ironically, an artifact of anti-memorial, a "thing I must somehow forget,"

rather than a "person I must somehow remember." The dead soldier is no longer

recognizably human, and the speaker consoles the bereaved not by an exhortation to

remember the combatant, but by his admonition that it is better to contemplate the

conventional funerary flowers than the actual object of bereavement. John Silkin points

out the skillful placement of the word "wet," which momentarily acts as a noun rather

than an adjective to convey the reduction of identity to raw objectification (*Out of Battle*

124). As the body is objectified, the speaker takes the role of the one needing consolation

and "I" intrudes upon the intent originally expressed by the title: the poem ceases to be

"to his love."

"Covering" becomes a watchword in many of Gurney's poems and comes to demonstrate the tension between a desperate yearning for the burial of dead bodies and the shameful nature of improper and clandestine interment. "Covering" is necessary and even hoped for. But Gurney also associates the word with hidden corpses left behind, bodies forgotten after a hurried burial and a few kind words. In "Butchers and Tombs," the speaker questions burial methods and regrets the lack of ritual afforded at graveside:

> After so much battering of fire and steel
>
> It had seemed well to cover them with Cotswold stone—
>
> And shortly praising their courage and quick skill
>
> Leave them buried, hidden till the slow, inevitable
>
> Change should make them service of France alone.
>
> But the time hurries the commonness of the tale
>
> Made it a thing not fitting ceremonial   (2-8)

The speaker expresses the shame that is officially imposed on "common" burial. He goes on to bemoan how "disregarders" of the war, those who could never understand the conditions that necessitated such poor burials, instituted "One wooden cross... for ensign of honour and life gone" (10). Although the uniform wooden marker is meant to identify the soldier buried beneath it, the speaker sees it as inadequate; it does not account for the courage it took for fellow soldiers to inter the body in the first place. The word "leave" further indicates the tension the speaker feels, for it goes beyond describing the burial fatigue's departure from the grave to suggest thoughts of guilt for the abandonment of the corpse.

Gurney uses similar language in "When I am Covered." In this poem, the speaker, in a maneuver that corresponds to Vaughn's transition from envisioner of to participant in his own death, supposes himself in his own battlefield grave. The first stanza locates the speaker in a damp grave where his body and the earth it rests in amalgamate in the word "clay":

> When I am covered with the dust of peace
>
> And but the rain to moist my senseless clay,
>
> Will there be one regret left in that ill ease. (1-3)

The dust has settled on the combatant's grave, and his body commingles with the earth as he ponders whether or not some unidentified "regret" or "ill ease" lingers over his corpse. The choice of the word "left" allows the reader not only to define it as "remaining," but also echoes a second meaning, a meaning suggesting all the soldiers who were "left," deserted in these shallow interments. Again, Gurney's word "covered" appears, invoking a body tended to, but also hidden. Peace brings newfound solace, but it also overshadows the war dead.

The second stanza picks up from line 3 and finishes the question of regret:

> One sentimental fib of light and day—
>
> A grief for hillside and the beaten trees?
>
> Better to leave them, utterly to go away. (4-6)

"Light and day," though associated with revelation and renewal, nevertheless tell a "sentimental fib" in that no matter how illuminating the daylight, it still shines down upon a mound of earth barely covering a mangled body, a corpse just hidden from sight in a shallow grave. The resultant "grief" will never meet human ears, but can only be

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heard by the surrounding "hillside and trees," the landscape also scarred by war's presence. The word "leave" reiterates the hints of loss and abandonment initiated in line 3 with "left." Although the pronoun "them" seems, at first, to refer to the trees, it becomes clear that it might also refer to both the mourners for this soldier or the dead man himself. In one sense, it points to those at home who will never see or grieve near the speaker's corpse, the mourners whom the dead leave behind as distant witnesses of war. For them, it is better that he "utterly go away," words reminding the reader of the void left by his and millions of other invisible bodies. The word might also refer to the dead, this soldier and many like him who are left behind by both their comrades and the mourners who must continue with their lives.[47]

In the third and fourth stanzas, the speaker describes the tensions between love and loss and begins to see how his loved ones' forgetfulness will help them overcome grief. The reader senses the vacillation of mourners between absolute love for the dead and its counterpart, a "torment" of grief. When the bereaved remember their love for the lost, that fond moment is likely interrupted by grief. They must brace themselves for the intense pain conjoined with love. Similar to the speaker in "To His Love," the persona, in the fourth and final stanza of "When I am Covered," concludes that forgetfulness is the ultimate remedy:

> Better to lie and be forgotten aye.
>
> In Death his rose leaves never is a crease.
>
> Rest squares reckonings love set awry. (10-12)

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[47] The most important source to mention here is Daniel W. Hipp's *The Poetry of Shell Shock: Wartime Trauma and Healing in Wilfred Owen, Ivor Gurney, and Siegfried Sassoon.* Hipp investigates how war poetry functions as a means of communication for these three soldier-poets. It becomes the sole way that they can communicate the war experience.

The word "lie" engages an obvious double meaning; while the usage suggests how the man's corpse literally "lies" in his overlooked grave, it also connotes an equivocation, a stronger form of the earlier "sentimental fib" The proximity of the words "lie" and "forgotten" tempt the reader to extract the words between them, to contemplate graves that "lie forgotten." Death will continue as the victor, as the ironically ever-living, triumphal force over the dead. The final line suggests that the dead's "rest"—although it is not the tradition "rest in peace" associated with civil death—will somehow settle the haunting questionings and weary ponderings of the grief-stricken that love unwittingly sets amiss. In "When I am Covered," Love becomes the culprit and the soldier's body that which is left over, hidden, and forgotten. In verses such as these, Gurney attempted to convey the paradoxical feelings of many Great War survivors, soldiers who felt shameful because while covering the bodies of their comrades, they wished so strongly to retain their own lives; regretful, because while they escaped death, they could not properly preserve the bodies and memories of their friends; and grateful because they realized that during wartime, forgetfulness was a gift.

Novel Resurrections: Graves and Sassoon Return from the Dead

Although they, too, wrote powerful war poetry which buried soldiers in verse, Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon made significant narrative contributions to the body of war writing. Graves was one of several soldiers who had actually heard and read about his own demise. Graves recounts his return from the dead in his poem "Escape" and in his 1929 book *Good-bye to All That*. While recovering at Queen Alexandra's Hospital in London, Graves learned for the first time of his "supposed death" and said

that the joke actually helped to encourage his recovery. People who had nothing but animosity for him penned sweet condolences to his mother. Letters sent to Graves in battle were returned to his father, stating that his body's location was "uncertain," but that he had certainly died of wounds. He even obtained the clipping documenting his denouncement of death from *The Times*: "Captain Robert Graves, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, officially reported died of wounds, wishes to inform his friends that he is recovering from his wounds at Queen Alexandra's Hospital, Highgate, N" (227). Having cheated death and defied the printed word, it is not surprising that Graves couches the most poignant moments of his war experience in *Good-bye to All That* in irony, textual confusion, and, more than anything, gallows humor.

Fellow author and combatant Siegfried Sassoon wrote to Graves, joyfully welcoming his friend's return to the living. Graves and Sassoon shared (in different battalions) the horrible experience of battle and the trials of telling their war stories in prose and verse after the war ended.[48] The two shared moments of camaraderie as well as hostile disputes.[49] Sassoon's own war experience haunted him so persistently that he often felt like he was among the war dead. Graves reveals in *Good-bye* that after Sassoon's return to London, "he wrote that often when he went for a walk he saw corpses lying about on the pavements" (256). Both writer-soldiers choose to blur fact and fiction in their respective prose accounts of the war—Graves in *Good-bye* and Sassoon in his Sherston trilogy, which includes *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, *Memoirs of an Infantry*

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[48] Sassoon is famous for his war protestation. See Samuel Hynes' "Dottyville," Chapter 8 of *A War Imagined*.

[49] The two authors carried on a debate, begun by Sassoon in 1930, about the truthfulness of Graves' *Good-bye to All That*. For more no their disagreements and correspondence, see Allyson Booth , *Postcards from the Trenches*, 83-7 and Jean Moorcroft Wilson, "*Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* and Goodbye to Graves," in *Siegfried Sassoon: The Journey from the Trenches* (233-41).

Officer, and *Sherston's Progress*. Sassoon marketed his trilogy as fiction (with his own

role characterized through George Sherston) although it contains apparent

autobiographical elements. Graves admits his stance on the first page, where he states his

"readiness to accept autobiographical convention," but he foregrounds his book's literary

elements: "I... deliberately mixed in all the ingredients that I know are mixed into other

popular books" (Introduction to *Good-bye*, viii). In one instance, he begins a description

of his first few months by warning that the material he presents is already several times

removed from his immediate recollection and "reconstituted" for the reader: "Having

stupidly written it as a novel, I have now to retranslate it into history" (91). Given the

many inaccuracies in war accounts, Sassoon acknowledges the paradox that "the memoirs

of a man who went through some of the worst experiences of trench-warfare are not

truthful if they do not contain a high proportion of falsities" (vi). Both authors realize the

sometimes-subtle, sometimes-dramatic ways that memory, hindsight and the frailty of

retention transform their stories. They imply that unverified stories and varying personal

perspectives have the power to engender wartime "truth," and that blurring fiction and

nonfiction may be essential to war writing.

  Their confrontations with corpses and body parts in their memoirs lead both men

to consider burial issues and to highlight their own unstable identities. Graves opens his

text with self-description and an introduction to his familial background; burial issues,

however, are never far from his mind. He notes that his mother enjoyed returning to his

grandfather's estate in Germany where his uncle shows him the family's final resting

place: " 'This is the family vault where all Aufesses go when they die. I'll be down there

one day.' He scowled comically." But his uncle's corpse instead lies rotting on a

battlefield; Graves chooses to include this detail parenthetically: "(But he got killed in the War as an officer of the Imperial German staff and, I believe, they never found his body)" (23). Just a few pages later, Graves describes a visit to the Munich morgue, where notables were buried in full regalia. He notes that "strings were tied to their fingers, and the slightest movement of a single string would ring a great bell, in case any life remained in the corpse at all." By including this detail, Graves emphasizes the uncertainty of death. He pictures his dead grandfather laid out in his best vestments, "trying, in a nightmare, to be alive; but knowing himself dead" (27). These words would later apply to his scattered and broken comrades on the front. These prefatory necrological tales help to establish a morose tone that only intensifies when his tales of the corpse-strewn front line begin. Early on, Graves establishes two distinct contexts for death: in civilian life and on the battlefield.

Many of both Graves' and Sassoon's characters are immortalized in their pages only to turn up dead. Graves' fellow combatants are mentioned while living (often in letters) and then, almost routinely, mentioned at their burials. One pal, Jenkins, enters the narrative during his and Graves' exploration of a ruined church. Graves shares every fragmented detail, including "broken masonry, smashed chairs, ripped canvas pictures... a few pieces of stained glass [that] remained fixed in the edges of the windows." Graves retrieves a piece of glass "about the size of a plate" and gives it to Jenkins as a souvenir. Soon after, in a muted textual moment, Graves reports Jenkins' death, spending much less time on his body's violent fragmentation than he did on the objects in the church: "[Jenkins got killed not long after]" (117). The detailed description of objects comes easily to Graves, but he handles bodily fragmentation in one swift, concise statement.

Graves succinctly reports broken bodies; it is more psychologically difficult to describe fractured identities than smashed things. Like Virginia Woolf, Graves puts many of the major deaths in his book in parentheses, reminiscent of the bracketed war death of Andrew Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*: "[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.]" (133). By bracketing death, these authors set it apart from the world of the narrative, from the happenings of daily life. Death becomes more powerful and absolute in its understatement. Reporting death parenthetically could indicate its occurrence at a distance, away from the textual setting. In addition, bracketed deaths, for a memoirist like Graves, become an easier, less emotionally-invested way of confronting the deaths of revered comrades for whom he felt the most sadness. They become reported rather than processed.

When Graves encounters unfamiliar bodies as opposed to those of his closest comrades, he provides more textual description and reflection. It is almost as if he cannot bear to describe and comment upon the deaths of those closest to him; it is too painful. Graves describes soldiers' rather crude treatment of corpses, especially in regard to the propinquity of dead bodies and their incorporation into trench architecture. The easiest corpses to "accept," it seems, are those to which the soldiers can assign a bit of identity-- but not too much. Making corpses part of the structure of warfare depersonalizes the bodies and gives them new purpose. Graves describes scenes in which soldiers relate to one particular aspect of corpses-- age, duty, or perhaps cause of death, for example-- rather than the soldiers' integral identities. The fragmentation of identity and the acquisition of just one primary trait seems to add levity to the treatment of the dead.

Graves demonstrates how humor works to desensitize soldiers when they face death. At one point, he describes "a corpse... lying on the fire-step waiting to be taken down to the cemetery," whose hardened arm extends across the trench. He identifies the deceased as a "sanitary-man" killed while transporting lavatory goods, but makes it clear that he and his comrades had no personal relationship with the soldier. This allows them to treat the presence of the corpse with frivolity: "His comrades joke as they push [his arm] out of the way to get by. ' Out of the light, you old bastard! Do you own this bloody trench?' Or else they shake hands with him familiarly. 'Put it there Billy Boy.'" (113). This partially-identified corpse somehow becomes safe; Graves treats it less seriously, although somewhat more fully. The soldiers seem to share a more intimate kinship with the man in death than they had for him in life. They embrace the filthy corpse, a soldier killed not in the height of battle, but, ironically, while bringing them the few sanitary goods that could make them feel momentarily clean. Instead, the corpse has brought them the presence of death, and instead of reacting with horror, they welcome him as a comrade, as one who-- though already dead-- understands their fears.

Sometimes Graves acknowledges identity in death through the appropriation of personal effects. He becomes obsessed with the corpses he encounters, and he discovers that the easiest way to confront them and validate his experience at war is to loot the bodies and keep souvenirs. These keepsakes-- for example, a gunner's lump of chalk bearing the names of battles in which the gunner had served-- eventually become part of him. The objects that he carries close to his body become almost part of his physical self, as if he has assumed the identity of the dead via their personal effects and made these artifacts part of his own wartime identity. When Graves is injured (the injury that sparks

the false report of his death), he receives substantial wounds in his left thigh, right shoulder, chest, and finger, as well as a minor wound above his eye, caused, he surmises, by a shattered tombstone:

> The wound over my eye was made by a little chip of marble, possibly from one of the Bazetin cemetery headstones. (Later, I had it cut out, but a smaller piece has since risen to the surface under my right eyebrow, where I keep it for a souvenir.) (218)

The chip of marble's persistence to surface becomes a central symbol in Graves' text. It is his final memento, a symbolic image of the dead—both memories of them and their literal memorials—that he houses in his own body. Even though he has it removed, the chip is a retained souvenir of the war that refuses to disappear, a material form of disturbing memories, so easily awakened and so close to the psychological and physiological surface. That little piece of marble acts as a potent metaphor for the resurgent memories of the dead that continue to haunt him. The marble's significance is echoed later in the book when Graves admits that he seldom keeps "records" of his experiences. Records are unnecessary to document war experiences when "the memory of [their] misery survives" (239).

Graves conveys his misery and painful memories of the war by bookending his text with two horrible deaths, both suicides. When he first joins in battle, he witnesses a man lying face down in a shelter with one foot mystifyingly bare. As Graves looks more closely, he suddenly notices "the hole in the back of his head. He had taken off the boot and sock to pull the trigger of his rifle with one toe; the muzzle was in his mouth." He hears an officer order the delivery of a next-of-kin letter: "Usual sort of letter; tell them

he died a soldier's death, anything you like. I'm not going to report it as a suicide" (103).

Graves repeatedly points out the difference between the actual atrocities he describes in

his story and how those in charge distilled and sanitized the same atrocities for a civilian

readership.

Immediately after sharing with his reader this disparity between what happened

and how it was reported, Graves diverts to trivial matters in a new paragraph: "At stand-

to, rum and tea were served out" (103). As the book draws to a close, Graves, afflicted

with severe bronchitis, recalls this initial suicide in light of another one just before he

leaves the war for Oxford, which had been converted to a hospital. He passes through an

area of heavy shelling and inspects his surroundings:

> The chaplain was gabbling the burial service over a corpse lying on
>
> the ground covered with a waterproof sheet-- the miserable weather
>
> and fear of the impending attack were responsible for his death. This,
>
> as it turned out, was the last dead man I saw in France and, like the first,
>
> had shot himself. (243)

Graves describes the language intended to honor the dead man as nonsensical "gabbling,"

language he has heard so often that it is nothing more to him than chatter, and instead of a

funeral pall, a sheet covers the body, hides it from view. Both uncontrollable events and

human emotions-- "miserable weather" and "fear" cost the man his life. Following this

brief and very clinical account, Graves goes off in search of a team of horses, animals

"highly valued, having won a prize at the Divisional Horse Show months previously for

the best-matched pair" (243). After narrating each suicide, he abruptly changes the

subject to trivial matters; he counters the suicides with civilian matters of tea time and

horse shows, which demonstrates his need to depart from these horrible self-sacrifices and to simultaneously make them more shocking. His talk of tea and horses serves the same purpose as the mendacious civilian letters home declaring that even suicides had died honorable soldiers' deaths; he glosses over the most horrible things he has witnessed and turns to things more comfortingly associated with orderly civilian life. It is almost his way of fooling himself, of appreciating a psychological hiatus from the war. The two suicides reflect Graves' state of mind from the beginning of the war to his departure from it. He views the first suicide with open eyes, describing precisely how the man carried out his own death, the resultant gaping hole in his body, the falsified letter sent home; however, he handles the final corpse much differently-- more matter-of-factly and with much less detail. The first suicide is masked by a mendacious letter sent home, while the second is covered and removed from sight with a waterproof sheet. Graves' final souvenir, the marble under his skin, points to the hundreds of bodies he has hastily buried while on duty-- bodies that would never receive headstones or identities. He survives as one of the privileged to return home and receive, eventually, a proper burial.

Both Graves and Siegfried Sassoon avoided anonymous burial on the front. Sassoon spent two full weeks thinking Graves had died, while Graves spent the same duration assuming Sassoon had been wounded. After realizing that his cohort actually survived-- much like his character Cromlech, who vacillates between life and death in *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*-- Sassoon was overjoyed: "I'm so glad in my heart; Robert has come back!" (Qtd. in Wilson 282). Like Graves', Sassoon's prose is replete with lighthearted jabs and trivial inclusions that often seem at odds with the gravity of war. But where Graves sometimes uses personal humor to counter the absolute horror

from war, Sassoon does so to more carefully point out the war's tendency to overcome individuality. The best example of this is when George Sherston ironically admits, as he is lying in a tent awaiting further combat one evening, that his private interaction with a novel was his primary encouragement to stay alive: "I didn't want to die-- not before I'd finished reading *The Return of the Native* anyhow" (71). Sherston then uses the experience to express loss of identity: "It wasn't easy to think one's own thoughts while on active duty" (71). He uses his absorption in the novel to keep his mind fresh and individualized rather than assume the "mechanical... outlook of [his] companions" (72). This is just one instance of Sassoon's apparent concern for the preservation of individuality; he vividly depicts the very private undertakings of Sherston to demonstrate how war robs soldiers of individuation. He makes no apologies for his struggle as a war writer when "the War was too big an event for one man to stand alone in" (134).

As *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* opens, Sherston finds himself away from the battlefield at army school in the spring of 1916. He sets the intimate and familiar tone for the book by starting off with a private act: bathing. The peaceful setting of the civilized camp makes Sherston feel "like a boy going to early school" He keeps "forgetting, for the moment that [he] was at the Front to be shot at" (7). He recalls how one afternoon he soaked in hot water in a dyeing vat, almost feeling as if he were on holiday. He uses the experience to convey how war inherently pits individuals against mass concerns:

> Remembering that I had a bath may not be of much interest to anyone,
> but it was a good bath, and it is my own story that I am trying to tell,
> and as such it must be received; those who expect a universalization of
> the Great War must look for it elsewhere. Here they will only find an

attempt to show its effect on a somewhat solitary-minded young man. (7)

In these opening paragraphs, Sassoon, through Sherston, forthrightly establishes a governing concern of *Memoirs*: how war threatens to thwart individual identity. Sherston does not hyperbolize, calling this "The best bath of my life," but merely "a good bath," worthy of an even-toned, plain-words description and nothing more. The bath's commonness does not detract from its value to Sherston; he uses it to point to his personal story as an individual "teller" rather than to glorify moments lived outside of battle. He sets up the tension between universality and solitude, and he continues to develop this theme of the "Great" War versus "a somewhat solitary-minded young man" as the narrative continues.

Later in the book, Sassoon expands upon this tension between epic generalizations and personal stories as he takes a month's sick leave at home. He begins to drift into memories of his childhood, when thoughts of the war interrupt:

> Remembering myself at that particular moment, I realize the difficulty of recapturing war-time atmosphere as it was in England then. A war historian would inform us that 'the earlier excitement and suspense had now abated, and the nation had settled down to its organization of manpower and munition making.' I want to recover something more intimate than that, but I can't swear to anything more unusual at Butley except a derelict cricket field, the absence of most of the younger inhabitants, and a certain amount of talk about food prospects for the winter. (87)

Here, Sherston underscores the difference between sanitized "mass-speak" and genuine recollection. He can imagine just how the historian, ready to speak to the masses, would describe the moment, but yearns for a more "intimate" story. Although he prefaces his own observances apologetically ("but I can't swear to anything more unusual..."), his list that follows makes the war seem tangible. Absence is the most powerful statement of war's destruction; the vacant cricket field deprived of pleasure-seeking lads and the absence of youth mar the town, while the ordinary conversation about stocking food points to life's onward push-- the reality that life as usual moves on minus the vibrant bodies of strong young men. Sherston's depiction of the town, like his hot bath, allows him to engage his reader in the ongoing struggle soldiers faced to retain their lives as individuals.

Individuals abound in Sherston's story; however, Sassoon introduces characters (most are based on real people) more through absence than presence, and he brings the character to life and erases it in one swift motion. He reveals a man and describes him intimately: "Allgood was quiet, thoughtful, and fond of watching birds... He said he always wanted to go to Germany... [He] never grumbled about the war, for he was a gentle soul." Sherston provides the graciously-personal characterization about Allgood the all-good birdwatcher only to rob his reader-- to blot out the delicacies of Allgood's character as ruthlessly the war had. He ends the paragraph by stating, "A couple of months afterwards I saw his name in one of the long lists of the killed, and it seemed to me that I had expected it." (8). Allgood momentarily surfaces later in the novel, only as a disembodied name: "To-day I had seen Allgood's name in the Roll of Honour" (79). Sherston repeats this process of anti-characterization throughout *Memoirs*, as the reader

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meets characters like "Rees, a garrulous and excitable little Welshman" and "Shirley... a delicate-featured and fastidious young man, an only child." The paragraph introducing these men ends with a blunt barb: "Both Shirley and Rees were killed before the autumn" (140). The reader can only learn about these deleted identities through Sherston's intimate but hasty characterizations. Sassoon's storyteller conveys the reduction of identity by allowing these characters no voice, no action in the story. They exist merely as lists of attributes, qualities and hobbies-- depictions which complicate the tensions between the most personal aspects of individuals and the characters' inability to speak on their own behalf.

In terms of textual presence, the most powerful characterization in *Memoirs* is of David Cromlech, a buddy of Sherston's and member of his Battalion (but not the same Company). Cromlech somehow defies Sassoon's usual method of anti-characterization. Sherston startles at his previous exclusion of Cromlech-- probably his most intimate friend-- from his tale: "We were close friends, although somehow I have hitherto left him out of my story. On this occasion his face was only dimly discernible, so I will not describe it, though it was a remarkable one." (68). Given his propensity for absence, it would stand to reason that Sherston would afford his closest friend the largest, most significant narrative gap-- his complete absence from over a third of the book. But once Sherston introduces Cromlech, he allows his character some development because Cromlech represents calmer, postwar times for Sherston. Unlike his attitude toward Allgood, Sherston seems less expectant of Cromlech's death in the text: "We talked of the wonderful things we'd do after the war; for to me David had often seemed to belong less to my war experience than to the freedom which would come after it" (69). The

reader also senses a difference between the direct description of other comrades and Sherston's vague dodge of a depiction of Cromlech's face, which he simply calls "remarkable" without presenting further detail; his lack of specificity sets him apart from the rest of Sherston's comrades. Cromlech, although belatedly introduced, is categorically different than the other momentary characters Sherston defines; he manages to last longer than a single paragraph. But in the next chapter, eight pages after he introduces him, Sherston receives word "that Cromlech had been killed up at High Wood. This piece of news had stupefied me, but the pain hadn't begun to make itself felt yet, and there was no spare time for personal grief" (77). Sherston had imagined Cromlech to be different somehow-- a survivor, a characterization of post-war freedom. He expects the deaths of other comrades but this casualty "stupefies."

Just as abruptly as he reports his death, about eight pages later Cromlech— bearing a striking resemblance to Graves—is back amongst the living: "I had been feeling much more cheerful lately, for my friend Cromlech had risen again from the dead. I had seen his name in the newspaper list of killed, but soon afterwards someone telegraphed to tell me that he was in a London hospital and going on well" (85-6). Sherston is jolted by the disjunction between Cromlech's death notice (along with "mental obituary notices" he had created) and the telegraph that resuscitates him. Sherston had been right: his friendship with Cromlech promised participation in life after the war. The character assigned the most consistent attention in Sassoon's text is the one who can vacillate between life and death, the combatant who can, like Robert Graves, depart from the war unscathed despite reports to the contrary. Having cheated death, he earns his pages in the narrative and becomes the most solid character of Sherston's story.

As the book closes, Cromlech reappears to argue with Sherston about his antiwar actions and act as his escort to Slateford War Hospital. Cromlech is a survivor; his name does not outlive him during wartime, and he becomes the most solid, most significant character in Sherston's story.

Sherston's most serene moment in *Memoirs* takes place amidst civilians whom he has outlived, as he rests momentarily on an old tombstone in Butley Churchyard. It is at this juncture that he realizes that he does not object to death itself; death amidst the chaos and disorder of war is unbearable, but death in civil life is ritualized and tranquil:

> Gazing at my immediate surroundings, I felt that 'joining the great
> majority' as a homely-- almost a comforting idea. Here death differed
> from extinction in modern warfare. I ascertained from the nearest
> headstone that *Thomas Welfare, of this Parish, had died on October*
> *20th, 1843, aged 72. 'Respected by all who knew him.' Also Sarah,*
> *wife of the above. 'Not changed but glorified.'* Such facts were
> resignedly acceptable. They were in harmony with the simple annals of
> this quiet corner of Kent. (204)

In this old churchyard, Sherston acknowledges the comfort of oft-used epitaphs and the solace of ritualized death. The church itself strikes him as comfortingly and "protectively permanent," and he finds peace among those "whose lives had 'taken place' with the orderly and inevitable progression of a Sunday service" (205). His mind wanders from the churchyard setting to its converse, "the demolished churches along the Western Front" and those buried in France, "their names undecipherable on tilted headstones or humbly oblivioned beneath green mounds" (204). Sherston sharpens the distinction

between "joining the great majority" in war ("extinction") versus in civilian life. During warfare, Sherston knew that the majority of the dead ended up in mass graves, while here, in peaceful Butley, joining the ranks of the dead and receiving a simple epitaph was something on which to rely-- a death more orderly and peaceful than a wartime death.

Sherston slowly repairs his identity after the war and learns how to live with the horrors he has experienced. His war efforts leave him vacillating between feeling defeated and feeling like a war hero, but Sassoon defines his narrator's battle more clearly in terms of the war waged between mass and individual concerns, identity and anonymity. Sherston's churchyard walk shows how much Sassoon himself valued individualized civilian death and posthumous recognition through epitaphs, no matter how simple they were. In *Memoirs*, Sassoon echoes his poem "Base Details," in which he writes, "And when the war is done and youth stone dead, / I'd toddle safely home and die-- in bed" (Silkin 131). He glorifies his hero's-- and every soldier's-- ability to think his own thoughts, formulate his own views, and retain his distinct identity. Sherston's greatest victory comes when he can say, "For the time being I had regained my right to call myself a private individual" (159).

Ultimately, war writers like Vaughn, Owen, Gurney, Sassoon, and Graves exhibit a combination of discomfort and reticence as they relate their personal war stories through memoir, poetry, and prose. They question their abilities as writers because they find themselves at the center of their own narratives. They fill two roles: one as the primary characters in their tales and the other as the only possible narrators of their experiences. They straddle the unstable area between life at home and life on the battlefield, just as they attempt to balance their civilian identities with their war identities.

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This may account for writers like Graves wondering if they are conflating history and fiction, for in war writing, there is room for both attempts to relate stories rooted in the details of war and also those that germinate, mutate, and fade in the minds of storytellers who are psychologically damaged by trauma and loss.

In many of these writings, we see various configurations of doubles, mirror images and alter egos that demonstrate distinct challenges to meaningful acts of self-reflection and empathy for the dead. Gurney wants to banish his dead counterpart from sight not for the sake of propriety and respect, but so that he no longer faces his own vulnerability and mortality in the face of his fellow combatant. Vaughn faces his own fragile identity when he thinks he sees a specter of one of the men he has buried, a walking corpse who turns out to be his Corporal. His confrontation with the dead brings him closer to accepting the possibility of his own demise. Graves and Sassoon find their mirror images in one another as they carve out individual spaces for themselves both psychologically and narratively. They compared their views on the war, as well as their post-war psychological damage. They needed to find someone else like themselves who had survived the war and who had boldly ventured to write about it. They both survived through their writing.

During wartime, officials and war conditions limited the efficacy of writing, so war writers seemed to bear the burden of relating their own histories and took responsibility for acts of remembrance through their authorship. Mourners were no longer free to pen lengthy epitaphs full of personal information; official decree dictated that writers had to economize and limit themselves to a set amount of letters on a gravestone—when gravestones were even erected in the first place. Names that might

have appeared in epitaphs on tombstones in organized cemeteries instead punctuated the pages of memoirs, poems, and novels, and memoirists, poets, and novelists took on the role of the epitaph writer not just by reporting the time and circumstances of death, but also by emphasizing personal aspects of the dead: parts of their bodies, objects they cherished, clothing they wore, and duties they performed. Writing about the dead was one way to bring the identities—not the bodies—of lost soldiers home from the front.

Writing indeed helped combatants share the experiences and salve psychological war wounds; however, despite the ways that writing helped them come to terms with loss, and despite the remarkable progress made in the wartime memorialization of individual soldiers during the Great War, the poetry, memoirs, and narratives of the war were still profoundly haunted by lost bodies and unrecorded identities, communal graves and commingled bodies. The absent corpses and fractured identities of warfare echoed the horrors of urban nineteenth-century graveyards, and the discomfort England felt regarding wartime burial articulated the influence of new civilian burial and memorialization practices that had been developed during the nineteenth century. Clearly nineteenth-century burial reform shaped how, decades later, a country responded to its war dead and played a part in how soldiers, survivors and mourners sought to commemorate the military dead of the First World War. When soldiers could not be literally buried, war writers buried them with words.

Epilogue

Filling Jacob's Shoes: Absence, Silence, Anonymity and the Changing Role of Epitaph

I can see the child quite clearly, and yet I cannot make out how he is dressed… Anyhow, here is our lad on this afternoon of a long-past summer. The Abbey bell is tolling… the choir is singing about a little boy whom we now call the Unknown Warrior. There is the open grave… Dead silence… They come nearer in their procession… The coffin, draped with the Union Jack, is borne about and set in its place over the grave… And the king cast into the grave the earth that had been brought from France… The benediction was pronounced. Dead silence. And then people looked at one another, and their eyes asked, "What next?"

—Arthur Machen, "Vision in the Abbey" (1923)

Why are we yet surprised in the window corner by a sudden vision that the young man in the chair is of all things in the world the most real, the most solid, the best known to us—why indeed? For the moment after we know nothing about him… Such is the manner of our seeing. Such the conditions of our love… The observer is choked with observations… There is no need to distinguish details… Sandra Wentworth Williams woke… The great clock on the landing ticked and Sandra would hear time accumulating, and ask herself, "What for?"

—Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* (1922)

Introduction: Improvisational Commemoration and the Fading Cemetery

Virginia Woolf's third novel, *Jacob's Room* (1922), thrives on silence and absence as the reader comes to know the protagonist, Jacob Flanders, through the impressions of other characters. Jacob punctuates the pages at moments, but only though fleeting glimpses, fragmented conversations, and vague recollections. The novel traces various aspects of Jacob's childhood, his time studying at Cambridge, and his arrival into adulthood. Woolf characterizes Jacob mainly through his empty room. The reader never experiences a death scene even though it is clear that Jacob has died in World War I and won't be coming back home to occupy his room, which might be compared to an empty grave. Also focusing on the gaping space of a grave is Arthur Machen, who wrote the short prose piece "Vision in the Abbey," excerpted above, just a year after *Jacob's Room* was published. Machen constructs a fictional story inspired by reality of the boy who was to grow up to become the Unknown Warrior, his corpse selected randomly, returned from the battlefield, and buried in Westminster Abbey to honor the war dead of World War I.

It is remarkable to note the similarities between the two pieces in tone and theme. In "Vision," the narrator starts with a paradox; he can see a boy "clearly" but cannot make out the details of his attire. Similarly, the excerpt from *Jacob's Room* is focused on vision and seeing. The "manner of seeing" that Woolf's narrator describes involves not attention to detail; instead, love dictates that readers see Jacob most fully, as "real" and "solid," because they "know nothing about him." This is the dynamic that Machen describes in "Vision," as well. The boy feels familiar even though his characterization is vague. Both writers thematize silence and end with hard-hitting questions that beg

impossible answers. Examining these texts side-by-side helps us to understand the tone and mood of many works written about the lost and anonymous men of World War I. Woolf's elegiac text can be situated alongside other, lesser-known works that attempt to characterize the war dead or the Unknown Soldier by focusing on less conventional methods of "seeing" characters. In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf reacts in ways reminiscent of a variety of war writings about lost soldiers, anonymous warriors who never received individual burials.

Chapter Three addressed how the steady erosion of individuality in death because of the absence of soldiers' corpses encouraged other forms of memorialization during the Great War, especially though war writing. Building upon Chapter Three, the Epilogue provides a wider context for understanding the characterization of epitaphs, cemeteries, and the absent dead in texts about unknown soldiers and in Woolf's *Jacob's Room*. The Great War forced writers and other civilians to rethink what commemoration could offer when, post-battle, bodies remained absent, unidentified, and unmemorialized; like many lesser-known writers from this period, Woolf works through these issues in her fiction. In *Jacob's Room*, she allows the unspeakable, the unknowable, and the absent to intersect in a way that demonstrates not only the failure of language, but also the inadequacy of traditional cemeterial and commemorative customs and rituals. In *Jacob's Room*, mourning and memorialization, key processes previously associated with the graveyard in nineteenth-century fiction, occur outside cemetery walls. Thus, this epilogue considers *Jacob's Room* in light of three public structures and events, the Cenotaph, the Unknown Soldier, and the Moment of Silence. It demonstrates how writers coped with the aftermath of The Great War and helped to reshape notions of proper commemoration,

thereby challenging and disrupting the centralized rites and customs that were such fixtures in nineteenth-century literature and culture.

It would not be an overstatement to say that the war obliterated nearly a century's worth of burial reform, and wartime conditions reintroduced, on a massive scale, the struggle to produce individuated remembrance after corpses were left rotting and unburied or hastily interred in mass graves. In *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* Julie-Marie Strange emphasizes the Great War's challenge to extravagant Victorian mourning culture because post-war culture seemed to simplify bereavement. As she explains, the war made nineteenth-century mourning customs impossible: "Families were forced to improvise. That they did so indicates the significance attached to the ownership of the dead and cultural representations of loss as personal forums for negotiating and, ultimately, resolving grief" (273). Indeed, nineteenth-century burial reforms intensified the need to recover, covet, and personalize the wartime dead. When that was impossible, much of this "improvisation" came in the form of writing, as memoirists and novelists like Vaughn, Gurney, Graves and Sassoon shared their war stories.

While writers offered war narratives, public officials sought ways to commemorate the dead and provide public architecture and memorable ceremonies to honor missing and deceased soldiers. Mourners' gazes no longer focused on the body but on stony structures; these memorials and war writing alike incorporated three central themes to signify lack: silence, anonymity and absence. Writers began to emphasize silent scenes and noble "nobodies," and to valorize the missing. In letters, newspapers and novels, they characterized their subjects via specific adjectives, including "voiceless," "unknown," and "absent." Three forms of official governmental reaction to

the war; the Cenotaph, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and the observed Moment of Silence promoted the same glorification of absence, anonymity and silence found in writing about the war. Something had to appease or supplant the desire to view, bury, and name corpses, and so came a shift in architectural and literary acts of remembrance from an imperative to identify and individualize the dead to a new approach that featured the acceptance of the unknown and unidentified. Silence became thematized while language was called into question as the primary interpretable medium; similarly, absence became more valued, more felt and significant in many ways than presence.

During the nineteenth century, epitaphs and epitaphic writings were enough to identify corpses and represent lives, but after World War I, language could no longer function in the same identifying and memorializing way. In *Postcards from the Trenches*, Allyson Booth argues that both civilian and combatant modernist writers found that language could no longer adequately represent experience when it came to interpreting the massive loss caused by the Great War. I would add that writers not only pointed to language's failure but found ways to make anti-language, anti-being, and anti-identity central. In other words, architectural structures, ceremonies, and novels alike valorized the unspoken, absent, and anonymous. The novel that incorporates these concepts best is Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*.

It is the distinct combination of these three types of lack—silence, absence, and anonymity—along with a focus on graveyard scenes that devalue the cemetery that make *Jacob's Room* an effective epitaphic novel. Where nineteenth-century novels often included the actual words on or intended for a tombstone, names and epitaphs mean little in Woolf's narrative. Her mental landscapes replace the formerly-central, literal terrain

of the cemetery found in realist fiction. Woolf understands the limitations of language, the power of silence, and the significance of absence. Allyson Booth recognizes this when she compares Jacob's empty room to a coffin and to memorials to the missing, especially the Cenotaph. She underscores how Jacob's empty, coffin-like room "acknowledges… that perhaps the only honest representation of absence is silence" (49). Vincent Sherry, too, offers an important discussion of the "unspeakability of war" and its presence in *Jacob's Room* in *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (275). But it is the distinct combination of silence, absence, and anonymity in Woolf's novel, through the characterization of Jacob Flanders, a dead solider recognized through his absence, that allows us to witness and understand the transformation of epitaphic narratives after the Great War.

A number of original war documents correspond to Woolf's fictional memorialization of Jacob Flanders. Clippings, letters, and journals describe the search for missing soldiers and describe how civilians initially longed for headstones for the dead and reacted to war conditions that did not allow for epitaphic commemoration. Like many of her contemporaries, Woolf found an unconventional way to console the grief-stricken through her epitaphic narrative. But whereas in nineteenth-century literature epitaphs receive space on the page, in *Jacob's Room* the identifying and memorializing writing on tombstones becomes secondary, depreciative, just as it does in post-war letters and newspaper features. Names and titles, although used regularly to represent the war dead on monuments in actuality, seem insufficient in Woolf's novel. Her cemeterial scenes underscore the futility of the epitaph and function to encourage other less-defined but equally meaningful ways to remember.

Turning to Stone: Empty Tombs, Silent Mourning, and Unknown Warriors

After the war ended, England hastily began to search for a panacea for widespread grief. The war catalyzed an onslaught of bodies of writing and monumental structures to honor and stand for the war dead—texts and memorials that might somehow compensate for lost soldiers. But instead of focusing on specific individuals and their personal characteristics, writers blurred visages and muted individuality in homage to the masses of unknown dead, and architects designed the simplest structures meant to provide universal, rather than individual, solace. Newspaper reports after war's end often praised the efforts of lost soldiers and war heroes without mentioning names even when names were available. Writers created new types of heroes and narratives. In her 1919 article "The Finder," D. J. Thompson presents a mythical hero—an unnamed worker who searched for the missing, and who was said to "represent any number of those performing this task" (Thompson Private Papers). She explains how thousands of unknown men searched for teems of other unknown men. The Finder's "task is to endeavour to trace men who are posted as missing in the war… He is not well-known. He labors in the shadows… He can tell heartening stories of soldiers given up for dead who are alive and well." Thompson concludes her article by focusing on the many "vacant chairs" in England and "many neighbors inventing wonderful narratives of men who have come home months and months after their name appeared in the list of the missing" (Thompson). Storytelling generated hope, and "heartening stories" came to replace absent bodies and identities. Another 1919 article from *The Morning Post* features "The Searcher," a worker akin to the finder who hoped to locate missing soldiers. This worker was a collector of stories, moving "from bed to bed and ward to ward… hearing the many

tales" in an attempt to reunite soldiers with their families (Thompson). In this manner, the war generated both writing and storytelling, but the tales focused on unidentified martyrs. In actuality, few missing soldiers found their way home, but these articles and others like them encouraged hope when bodies to cherish and places to mourn were non-existent.

Officials did not overlook the use of cemeteries as part of national reparation, but most actual grave sites were found at the battlefields themselves, outside England's boundaries. The cemeteries that developers eventually designed included architectural components, but these structures promoted uniformity in death rather than individuality. In 1917, English architects Sir Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker went to France to assess the cemetery situation and the first report was presented by the War Grave Commission, a group founded in 1915 by Fabian Ware, a Red Cross worker. The official decision of the Commission was that all headstones should be identical and should carry names but not ranks. Each cemetery would have an altar-like "Great War Stone" accessible by three stone steps and a Bronze "Cross of Sacrifice" with an inscription designed by Kipling: "Their name liveth forevermore" (Lloyd 40). These universal structures, with simple yet cogent words, were designed to replace traditional individualized funereal and burial practices. But few war dead rested in organized cemeteries in the first place. A.O. Shewan includes a pamphlet on "The Registration and Care of Graves" in his personal post-war scrapbook. It details the duties of the Graves Registration Unit, pointing out that it would "never be possible to obtain a record of all graves" and "a number of graves will be irretrievably lost." Sometimes burial grounds were completely erased by shell fire, with "no hope of reconstructing the cemetery so that

individual graves may be recognized" (1). There was little hope for orderly and customary memorialization.

Not only were individual burials impossible, but so, too, were free-flowing, inspirational epitaphs. Rudyard Kipling addresses this problem in "The Graves of the Fallen," a publication put out by the Imperial War Graves Commission. He first offers hope, suggesting "relatives should, if they wish, add a short inscription of their own choice as an expression of personal feeling and affection" to the stones of the dead in Flanders and France. Just as quickly, though, he cheapens the opportunity for effective commemoration, stating that inscriptions will be at the families' expense and that epitaphs will be limited to "sixty-six letters" in order "to avoid unduly crowding the stones" (11). Where Victorian epitaphs flourished into lengthy narratives (despite the criticism of some who thought excess in poor taste), the concern was no longer about overcrowded graveyards, but overcrowded *tombstones*. Words were expensive, and a new linguistic economy was in effect. Kipling renounces lengthy epitaphs by the conclusion of this work, saying it was unwise to include them because the tiny lettering on such crowded stones would be nearly impossible to read and would not withstand the weather. Another pamphlet on war graves states the pros and cons of engraving epitaphs on soldiers' headstones:

> There is some difference of opinion as to whether leave should be
> given to relatives to add anything further. It is clearly undesirable
> to allow free scope for the effusions of the mortuary mason, the
> sentimental versifier, or the crank; nor can space be given for a lengthy
> epitaph. On the other hand it would give satisfaction to many

individual instances to be allowed to add an appropriate prayer or

words of dedication… I am inclined, therefore, to recommend… a

short inscription of not more than three lines… at the cost of the

applicant… and that the Commission shall have absolute power of

rejection or acceptance. (10)

This decree, too, concerns itself not with bodies, but with words and their potential for

overcrowding the stone or failing altogether. Clearly there was no need to indulge "the

sentimental versifier" any more than was necessary. Here, each word must be powerful

in order for the epitaph to fulfill its obligation to memorialize. This conservation of

epitaphic words limited the ways that the living could remember the dead.

Kipling must have felt some obligation toward memorialization, for in 1919 he

included several short poems under the heading "Epitaphs of the War" in his 1919

collection *The Years Between*. Kipling lost his only son to the war; he looked for over

two years for him before realizing he would not return. John North writes, "Though John

Kipling could be given no last resting place his death was recorded… With no named

headstone, however, his father was denied a tangible focus for his grief" (57). Even

though he could not personalize his son's epitaph, he devised the words that would be

found on over 200,000 graves of unidentified British soldiers: "A Soldier of the Great

War. Known Unto God" (North 58). "Epitaphs of the War" provides some verses that

might apply to various missing family members and loved ones, including "A Servant,"

"An Only Son" and "The Beginner." Kipling, who in his capacity with the Imperial War

Graves Commission had to deny civilians the comfort of long and expressive epitaphs for

their lost brothers, fathers, and friends, realizes that the only place memorials like this are

possible are in the pages of books. Even so, despite the fact that he has countless pages

upon which to write his epitaphs, rather than approaching remembrance in a personal

way, he provides general words that might befit almost any of the missing. Some of the

epitaphs veer from traditional form and content and embrace nature. In one verse,

"Pelicans in the Wilderness," the persona recognizes soldiers' distant, natural graves:

"The blown sand heaps on me, that none may learn / Where I am laid for whom my

children grieve" (1-2). The verse recalls a Wilfred Owen poem as the soldier speaks

from under actively-churning sand that buries and covers him. The way the poem

concludes gives the impression that the dead soldier's family likely grieves as much for

"where [he is] laid" as for his death itself. This corpse, like so many Kipling had to face

in his official work, could not be "laid" to rest, but instead remained hidden from sight,

missing any identifying or reverent language.[50]

Even without epitaphs, the longevity of stony structures promised memorial

perpetuity.[51] A sense of mass grief among the living correlated with the mass burials of

unidentifiable war dead, and a more universal memorial was necessary apart from

cemeterial fixtures. As Allyson Booth points out, "The oppressive absence of

inaccessible corpses prompted British civilians to concentrate on the production of war

memorials" (43). The Cenotaph was one response.[52] Architects originally sought to

erect a "catafalque", but a cenotaph became the more appropriate option since a

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[50] Paul MacKendrick writes about the classical qualities of "Epitaphs of War" in "Kipling and the Classical." He concludes that they have a "lapidary quality" (73). A more extensive discussion of "Epitaphs of War," specifically "The Sleep Sentinel," can be found in Debra Fried's "Repetition, Refrain, and Epitaph," where she discusses how the poem's chiastic pattern underscores how epitaph makes language "repetitive, incantatory, static" (618).
[51] For a longer analysis of architectural responses to the war, see Samuel Hynes' "Monument Making," Chapter 14 of *A War Imagined*.
[52] Geoff Dyer examines poetry, photographs, film, ceremonies, cemeteries, and sculpture in *The Missing of the Somme*. He includes discussions of the Cenotaph and official ceremonies to consider how post-war England remembered. Also on the Cenotaph, see Alex King's *Memorials of the Great War in Britain*.

"catafalque" is a platform used to hold a coffin and a "cenotaph" is a memorial to absent corpses (Booth 33). The Cenotaph became a symbol for corporeal absence and an answer to undefined grief. Booth explains, "By constructing substitutes for absent corpses, these artifacts moved toward closing one of the most important gaps separating the experience of soldiers and civilians" (33). Memorial structures—the Cenotaph in particular—provided focal points for both grief-stricken civilians and fellow comrades, soldiers who may have been present when bodies disappeared.

Just as important as the structure itself was the silent ceremony that accompanied it at the Peace Celebrations at 11:45 a.m. on July 19, 1919. In his 1923 tribute *Cenotaph: A Book of Remembrance in Poetry and Prose*, Thomas Moult refers to this day and relates how mourners considered this public gesture of remembrance more effective, "more complete, less isolated, by sharing the memories of others whose heads bowed also" (11). The mass burial of the war effectuated mass commemoration; on the battlefield bodies were often buried together, and at home the living lamented en masse. The Cenotaph was at first meant as a temporary centerpiece, but it became permanent after its ceremonial use in July, 1919. It stands today in the middle of Whitehall, in what one historian calls "the thick of traffic" (Whittick 44). It became a primary focal point for collective homage, a part of daily life in London. The permanent Cenotaph, unveiled on the one-year anniversary of Armistice Day is embellished only by wreaths of stone and a terse inscription: "The Glorious Dead." The Cenotaph created what Margot Norris calls the "present absence" of the soldier's corpse (36).

On the same day that officials unveiled the Cenotaph, they interred an Unknown Soldier in Westminster Abbey. Accounts vary in the way functionaries chose the

Unknown Solider, and narrative discrepancies perpetuate the mythic quality surrounding the story of England's Everyman.[53] Some sources report that the idea originated when the Rev. David Railton, after viewing a gravesite for an unknown labeled "an Unknown Soldier of the Black Watch," sent an envoy to speak to King George V about using the interment of an unidentified English body to foster mourning. Others suggest that England adopted the idea from France. Accounts emphasize the sense of haste accompanying the retrieval of four corpses, which really amounted to a collection of mere bones. One came from each of four main battlefields: the Somme, Aisne, Arras, and Ypres. The bodies were to come only from graves marked as unknown, and one soldier of the four would be randomly chosen as the Unknown Solider to represent national grief. Unlike in other military engagements, this supreme act of homage disregarded class and rank. The soldier was to be nondescript in *every* way—bearing no name, regiment, or other identifiable factor besides his nationality.

This nameless, faceless soldier and his ceremony garnered the attention of the nation by juxtaposing impressions of singularity and assemblage, individuality and anonymity, presence and absence. Although onlookers cherished the one unknown man who was the focus of the day, writers who described the ceremony lose sight of its individual participants. An author identified as "J.B." in Moult's collection recalls the pall bearers for the Unknown Soldier moving "with the unanimous shuffle of a many-legged insect" (24). Throngs of people gathered to honor both one (the Unknown) and many (all lost soldiers). Individuality diminished as the people assembled: "The crowd

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[53] For various accounts of how the unknown solider was selected, see Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory* (24-8); George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (94-8); Geoff Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme* (20-25); Paul P. Walsh, *Known but to God*; Michael Gavaghan, *The Story of the Unknown Warrior*.

filled every inch of the pavement, packed closely and orderly like slates on a roof" (J.B., 24-5). Families participated in this impersonal ceremony as if they were ritualizing the deaths of their own sons and husbands when they supplanted the missing identity of the Unknown Warrior with the identities of the missing. The Unknown Soldier underscored British nationality while simultaneously acting as a referent for bodies abandoned, far from their nation.

England's answer to missing bodies was to officially reverse the cultural emphasis placed on distinct identity in death during the previous century. By making one unknown the focal point of the mourning process as well as of numerous written accounts, officials offered two aspects of the soldier for the public to identify with: he represented no soldier in particular while he simultaneously represented every lost combatant. *The Times* editorial from 11 November 1920 exhibits this dichotomy: "The ceremonies were impersonal, or, more truly, they are personal to us all." (Qtd. in Bourke 250). Immediately following this glorification of non-identity, however, public reaction included a need to *impose* identity. Vera Brittain exhibits this yearning in her memoir, *Testament of Youth*, when she speaks of a dear friend: "I read... about the burial of the Unknown Warrior who might so well have been Geoffrey" (509). David Cannadine reports that "the papers were filled not only with accounts of the ceremonial, but with fanciful essays within which the life of the Unknown Warrior was re-created" (224). Despite its demonstrated public acceptance of the ceremonial Warrior, British society expressed the continued desire to reinstitute identity, and fictionalized accounts became more important than actual epitaphs.

The combined effect of the unveiling of the Cenotaph and the burial of the Unknown Soldier devalued linear time and underscored the significance of the moment. In his analysis of *Jacob's Room*, Vincent Sherry discusses the novel in terms that could also apply to this ceremonial event. This ceremony, like the novel, "throws over an older notion of cause-and-effect sequence" and "intensifies a feeling of being encapsulated in a given instant of temporality" (271). Actual life stories were left unfinished, and a nation steeped in the virtues of progress fixated on pause, on time suspended. This sense of cessation-- of the ritualized moment-- climaxed at the unveiling of the Cenotaph:

> The Cenotaph, its new Portland stone a pale lemon, rose before us
> naked and beautiful, and by its sudden apparition drawing all the
> significance to the moment itself. After that the great silence, when the
> last boom of Big Ben had ceased to quiver in the air... There was no
> motion... The people stood frozen.   (Moult 24-26)

The Cenotaph is personified here, a ghostly savior, vibrating with intensity and shaping the "moment." It salved the horror of nameless, faceless burial in one glorious instant. Woolf echoes the ceremony's profundity in novels like *Mrs. Dalloway*, when "Time flaps on the mast. There we stop; there we stand" (49). Particularly significant is the description of the crowd, presented en masse like the soldiers' mangled bodies buried in mass graves. The people commingle into one unit until they are frozen with intense feeling. At this moment, silence and anonymity unite to produce consolation, as the Cenotaph figuratively replaced all the obliterated and disfigured bodies with its "naked" beauty.

This kind of reaction to the Cenotaph carries over into much post-war reporting. Moult's 1923 collection of articles includes several short pieces that exhibit the literary responses to the Cenotaph's unveiling and the Unknown Soldier's burial. Ceremonial details involving the cessation of time during the moment of silence on November 11, 1918 (and each year thereafter) far exceed the significance of individual identity. In "The Nobodies who Won," H.M. Tomlinson calls the 1918 moment of silence "a momentary flicker of colour, kaleidoscopic against the gloom of memories we know will never pass" (142). The glorification of that pause continued from year to year. An anonymously-written article from "The Manchester Guardian" describes the author's impression of the national moment of silence re-enacted on November 11, 1920:

> The minute passes slowly, and then the deep boom of the Town
> Hall clock announced the hour... the first stroke of eleven produced
> a magical effect. The effect on the people was curious. They had
> been waiting for the moment, and now that it had come, they seemed
> a little uncertain what to do... everyone stood very still... The stress of
> the moment had passed from the street... The hush deepened... And
> the spirit of memory brooded over it all. (37-8)

Time's languidness sharpens the moment, like Woolf's "drop" of "time tapering to a point" in *The Waves*.[54] Silence exacerbates the "stress of the moment" and helps the "spirit of memory" to function properly, covering the nation like a pall. But the moment, however magical, is fleeting, and the writer concludes by describing a return to regular

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[54] In *The Culture of Time and Space*, Stephen Kern explains how combatants felt about time in the trenches: "Individuals behave in distinctive ways when they feel cut off from the flow of time, excessively attached to the past, isolated in the present, without a future, or rushing toward one" (3). Kerns argues that the experience of war intensified the sense of the present.

time when the magic fades: "But the spell was now near to breaking... In thirty seconds the street racket was as loud as ever, and the policeman on point duty had become an emotionless and very efficient semaphore" (39). The mystical ingredient of one moment, in which people collectively celebrated silence and encountered complete stillness, evaporates into ordinary existence; the policeman changes from a mythical figure into a mere cipher, a reminder of banal moments and ordinary life. Adrian Gregory explains the effect of this type of silence in *The Silence of Memory*: "It signified everything and nothing… The silence [at the ceremony] struck individuals with force. People were swept into the collective emotion" (7, 17).

This combination of silence and anonymity as experienced by civilians seems to have taken place on the battlefield as well when soldiers confronted corpses and were forced to incorporate them into daily life at war. Unrecovered bodies and body parts commingled with the ground to become part of the terrain of battle. Tomlinson recalls an eerie figure whose "body literally was thrown to fill those trenches it had won, and was the bridge across which our impatient guns drove in pursuit of the enemy it had broken" (146). Combatants used corpses as structural components, gun rests, and directional markers in battle, and they had to accept the horror that corpses and body parts would likely resurface as parts of the trenches or parapets. They were handy for patching up gaping holes in the sides of trenches (Packham 15-16). Tomlinson recalls a transformed human "face seamed with lines" that "now looms in memory, huge, statuesque, silent, but questioning, like an overshadowing challenge, a gigantic legendary form charged with tragedy and drama" (146). As the mythical soldier figure turned stony, it loomed "legendary" and invincible, unlike the actual human bodies that had so effortlessly fallen

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to pieces. Tomlinson closes his piece by uniting this figure with silence: "What is that figure now? An unspoken thought" associated with "all unutterable things" (147). Tomlinson's narrative incorporates the two main components of the Unknown phenomenon: anonymity and silence. Because the horrors of war dictate silence, it becomes as powerful as sound. It acts as an ambiguous yet potent force in the stories of survivors and in post-war fiction.

Several short pieces of writing and novels appeared in the early twentieth century featuring anonymous authors, voiceless combatants, the unburied war dead, and purposeful ambiguity. For instance, silence and anonymity play crucial roles in *The Love of an Unknown Soldier Found in a Dug-out* (1918). "Author" John Lane contends that his story came to print via a young officer who initially found the manuscript as "a bundle of papers... in one of the dug-outs of an abandoned gun position" and then gave the papers to Lane (v). The manuscript supplants the spot where the soldier had previously fought; everything that readers might discover about him would come from his writing. His narrative replaces his physical existence. The body of the manuscript, much like the bodies of the soldiers blown to bits around it, indicated no name, unit, or real identifying information other than the story. The piece focuses on "some particular American girl, who had quickened the last days of this Unknown Soldier's life with romance" (viii). According to Lane, if the young woman with whom this unknown was involved recognized herself in the textual details, she could come forward to claim the original papers written by her lost love.

Ostensibly, several young women could—and probably did—read themselves into the story of a gallant and romantic unknown, in the same way that the Unknown

Soldier himself stood for thousands of lost men. The text's potency lies in its original state of dispossession and in its open-ended existence as a document intended to raise questions about identity and voicelessness. The war has silenced the soldier's voice; he expresses his reticence even before his death and tells his love, "Were we to meet, you would not understand my silence" (189). Lane feels that publishing the lost documents was requisite, a "necessary means of making known to the world the romance she kindled in the heart of her lost soldier, which he himself did not tell her" (viii). He provides the soldier a way of speaking from beyond his grave, even though the soldier concludes his memoir by reasserting his silence: "What more is there to be said? The things one always says are inadequate... I want to hold you and say nothing. I want—" (194). He feels that he can never adequately convey what he has experienced during the war, just as he was never able to profess his love, but through Lane, he is able to expresses both his horror and adoration.

Another story based on a silenced unknown is the anonymously-written *To My Unknown Warrior* (1920), which demonstrates just how desperately families wanted bodies to call their own and to honor with proper mourning rituals and burials. The tiny white book includes a dedication "to A.A. in memory of her brother" and begins with a line so many yearned to say: "Boy, Dear, I am so happy. I have found you at last" (7). The author describes the entire procession and burial of the Unknown as if he were her love and as if she were fully aware of his identity. She revels at his superlative place in history, buried among the greatest of the land in plain sight of Poet's Corner at Westminster Abbey. She describes his parents in great detail: his father changing clothes several times to make sure he is dressed just right for the ceremony, saying, "Is my tie

straight?" (13) and his mother, wearing a necklace given to her by her son on his and the author's wedding day. The mother waxes "full of unutterable gratitude that at last she knew where they had laid you" (26-7). The speaker enters into a seemingly real conversation with the Unknown, even though it is completely one-sided. Just as Lane acted as an intermediary voice for a missing soldier, so does this author speak for the dead:

> Somehow I think you must have had your very special wish today--
> the secret which you kept from even me, for you did so hate the
> ordinary epitaph: 'A British Warrior'— that must please you. Forgive
> me if I dare to interpret your beautiful silences. It is always one
> woman's privilege to be the voice of one man's heart. (21)

The "beautiful silences" transform into something interpretable, and, like the lovers' union in *The Love of an Unknown Solider*, the relationship between the writer and the unknown transcends his death. She even declares that she will sneak back to the Abbey later that night, "when all the statues are asleep and the Abbey is silent as the grave" to "whisper to [him] words that no one else shall ever hear" (30).

Ultimately, the phenomena of the Cenotaph and the Unknown Soldier set the stage for non-linear stories about "no ones," while underscoring the significance of absence and the volume of silence. The Unknown Warrior became, despite his ambiguous and nameless existence, a critical post-war character. Authors assigned attributes to, and provided narratives for, the Unknown Soldier either by providing him some chimerical identity or by imbuing him with the identity of actual lost soldiers. The significance of the supreme nobody, the Unknown, engendered stories about all the lost

unknowns of the war. Tomlinson puts it best when he provides an example of what we might call the characterization of anonymity. He explains how boys and men went to fight without question, and death became "a common experience. From the day the Germans entered Belgium a dumb resolution settled on our Nobodies" (142). The media did not bother to collect adequate or accurate information to provide to the recruits, and Tomlinson turns the corporeality of the men into a mysterious absence because of the lack of information:

> We therefore knew nothing of the munitions factories... and were
>
> barely aware that... the hosts of the enemy were stopped dead on the
>
> road to Calais. Whose work was all this? But how should we know?
>
> Who can chronicle what Nobody does? (142-3)

Eager young men volunteered without understanding the severity of the campaigns they entered and gave up their lives and identities. The faces of companions, dear to those awaiting their return home, dissolved into one nondescript and universal "figure of Nobody in sodden khaki" (146). But writers and architects found ways to "chronicle what Nobody does," and England found that "nothingness" did not have to produce feelings of complete loss and dread. The years following the war certainly introduced a climate of recognizable incertitude, but this was somehow tempered by the Unknown Soldier, the Cenotaph and the Moment of Silence, as well as by the volume of writing at this time imbuing these structures, characters, and events with identity and meaning. Some pieces were fictional, some non-fictional, and some a productive combination of fiction and reality. They naturally point toward another more intricately-characterized nobody: Jacob Flanders.

Epitaphic Narrative: The Burial Grounds of *Jacob's Room*

In *Jacob's Room* we find the fictional use of the same tropes that governed post-war architecture and culture. Woolf entertains the question of how to remember an individual at home when imaginations drifted toward foreign places, like "the uplands of Albanie, where the hills are sand-colored, and bones lie unburied" (172). She uses absence, anonymity, and silence to negotiate issues of identity and characterization and to demonstrate how her main character appears solid and well-defined beyond the limitations of a traditionally-told story. Jacob's characterization happens against a backdrop of beaches, museums, and cemeteries, places where people gather to frolic, observe, and think. In statue-filled halls and rubble-strewn settings of stones and bones, Woolf creates a palpable memorialization of Jacob Flanders even though he is often referred to as "the silent young man" without a voice (49, 59, 61, 71). Through his voicelessness, Jacob is figured as an unknown warrior, or quite possibly, the Unknown Soldier himself as William Handley claims (Hussey 110). The text is an obvious tribute to both an individual combatant and to all soldiers. Considering Woolf's personal heartbreak, critics have noted two possible autobiographical inspirations for Jacob: her brother Thoby, who died in 1906 of typhoid, or her friend, the war poet Rupert Brooke, who served with the British Navy and died of blood poisoning in 1915.[55] The elegiac nature of the text is obvious. More than that, though, it serves as a kind of textual epitaph.[56] For Woolf, narrative supersedes tombstones and epitaphs that no longer serve

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[55] John Mepham supports the viewpoint that Virginia Woolf elegizes her brother Thoby in *Jacob's Room.* See Mepham's "Modernism and Mourning" in *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays.* In "Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*: History and Memory," Judith Hattaway describes it as a biography of Thoby, "fragmented and incomplete" (21).

[56] Many critics have examined *To the Lighthouse* as elegy. For instance, see Helen Corsa, "*To the Lighthouse*: Death, Mourning, and Transfiguration"; "Casting off from 'The Castaway': *To the Lighthouse* as Prose Elegy; Mark Spilka, *Virginia Woolf's Quarrel with Grieving.* More recently, Karen Smythe and

their purpose for the bereaved. In a text that emphasizes silence and the fruitlessness of language, epitaphs lose their memorializing function while the novel itself becomes an emblem for both personal and nationwide grief.

In *Fighting Forces*, Sharon Ouditt demonstrates how *Jacob's Room* might be seen as a "mock obituary" because of the way Woolf defines Jacob through a "hierarchy of social indicators" in order to criticize the male-dominant culture responsible for the war itself (176-7). The text includes soldiers' ranks, along with indicators of class and educational institutions attended. What critics like Ouditt have not considered, however, is how Woolf challenges conventional memorialization by punctuating the text not only with masculine symbols of status, but also by locating grief and post-death identity formation outside the cemetery. She alters the requirements for commemoration in her novel by substituting silence for language and a name called out for one chiseled on a tombstone. Jacob is characterized through his absence. By incorporating the unsaid, the absent, and the unknowable, Woolf establishes her own type of powerful epitaph narrative to replace traditional epitaphs; at the same time, she demonstrates the failure of memorializing language and of Victorian commemorative customs in general in light of the war's aftermath. Woolf seems to suggest that visiting stones with inscribed names and epitaphs is an insufficient path toward consolation and healing. War has dictated new ways to comprehend death and grief, and Woolf ushers in this change by offering both comfort and familiarity with her soldier's absence.[57]

Alex Zwerdling have examined *Jacob's Room* as an elegiac text. See Smythe, "Virginia Woolf's Elegiac Enterprise" and Zwerdling's "*Jacob's Room*: Virginia Woolf's Satiric Elegy."
[57] Patricia Rae's collection, *Modernism and Mourning*, contains several essays that explore the connection between Modernism and mourning customs that pertain to Woolf and the context of World War I.

Upon rubble-strew landscapes of stones and bones, Woolf creates a vivid memorial for Jacob Flanders even though he is, as Herta Newman asserts, a hero "able to sustain a seductive appeal in absentia" (35). His amorphous epitaph is not set in stone, but subsumed by the landscape. When Better Flanders wanders through the cemetery with Mrs. Jarvis, the clergyman's wife, to share the magnificent view atop the hill overlooking the quiet moors, she first mentions Jacob in terms of his departure: "Yes, Jacob will leave Paris on Wednesday" (132). Woolf then presents a scene nearly void of sentimentality, one that hints at Jacob's death rather than announces it, as Mrs. Flanders' visit to the graveyard serves mainly to remind her of possessions she has lost: "How many needles Betty Flanders had lost there! And her garnet brooch" (132). Her thoughts drift to Jacob because the brooch had been a gift from him, but she seems distracted and quickly forgets Jacob. She focuses instead of the missing piece of jewelry. Both women shuffle around among little pieces of bone and chalk. Mrs. Flanders pauses to consider a pebble. The narrator explains how all of these things—stones, bones, needles, brooch, and, by association, Jacob—are simply a natural part of the "rich accumulation" of the moors. In this cemetery, epitaphs are ignored rather than read and cherished. Like all other things, they are consumed in their natural surroundings. The landscape, as is expected, swallows up possessions, bodies, and tombstones with conventional epitaphs:

> Yet even in this light the legends on the tombstones could be read, brief voices saying, 'I am Bertha Ruck,' 'I am Tom Gage.' And they say which day of the year they died, and the New Testament says something for them, very proud, very emphatic, or consoling. The moors accept all that too… the moors accepted everything. (133-4)

The writing on the tombstones feels weary and inexpressive. It merely exists in a way that it must, but without authentic, experienced inspiration, and without readerly satisfaction. What seems to bring a sense of peace to Betty Flanders are the personified hills; their thievery suggests that Jacob's body is not to be found or honored at the cemetery, but rather as part of a distant landscape, a wayside memorial that has naturally accepted him and hoards him as one of its possessions.

This merging of the dead with the natural world as part of the mourning process occurs earlier in the text as well. In Chapter Two, Mrs. Flanders reflects on her husband Seabrook's tombstone. She admits, "Though plain, it was a solid piece of work" (15), ignoring the epitaph at first while focusing on its craftsmanship. Eventually, though, she considers the language on the stone, and it becomes clear that the epitaphic space is simply too restricted to house an adequate memorial to her husband. The words on it are ineffectual. Mrs. Flanders recalls having had trouble deciding what to call Seabrook when she designed the stone. She remembers having settled on calling him "Merchant of this city" despite her sense of the title's inadequacy. She cannot even remember why she had chosen to call him that, but comes to a conclusion: "well, she had to call him something. And example for the boys… Had he then been nothing?" (16). At the moment of the potential erasure of Seabrook's identity, Mrs. Flanders realizes how

> he had merged in the grass, the sloping hillside, the thousand
>
> white stones, some slanting, others upright, the decayed wreaths,
>
> the crosses of green tin, the narrow yellow paths, and the lilacs
>
> that drooped in April… over the churchyard wall. Seabrook was
>
> now all that. (16)

In one gesture, Woolf shows how easily the physical mementos of death, the supposed-symbols of the dead, rot, wither, and fade. The bright green paths where Victorian mourners had paraded are here replaced by "narrow yellow paths" while stones lean any-which-way, succumbing to gravity and their place as an extension of the ground. The inscription on his tombstone means little. What matters is how Seabrook becomes part of the earth in a way reminiscent of the soldiers' bodies melding with the landscapes of war. Furthermore, this makes Jacob's distant demise easier to accept as the reader assumes his death, but does not actually witness it or even hear it recounted. His stone's epitaph could not capture his identity anyway because, as Woolf writes in the novel, like letters that "addressed themselves to the task of reaching, touching, penetrating the individual heart," epitaphs fail because, "words have been used too often; touched and turned, and left exposed to the dust of the street" (93).

Despite Jacob's fate, his name is never found on a tombstone or as part of a memorial; nevertheless, it resurfaces throughout the novel. It appears first, of course, in the title and then in various characters' vocalizations. Jacob's brother, Archer, calls for him as the story opens: "Ja—cob! Ja—cob!" (8). Later on, Clara and Bonamy summon him, too. His identity becomes more palpable, more real, as each person shouts his name. Conversely, the names on tombstones seem superfluous. Mrs. Lidget takes a set in St. Paul's Cathedral beneath a famous Duke's Tomb, who, despite his grandness, lacks a name. It is "a magnificent place for an old woman to rest, by the very side of the great Duke's tomb… whose name she knows not" (65). The memorial serves its purpose not through consolation, but through its structure, its use as a place for Mrs. Lidget to sit down. The memorial becomes literally functional but symbolically void. In another long

review of names, an acquaintance even gets Betty and Jacob's surname, a name obviously associated with the war and Flanders Fields, wrong: "Mrs. Sanders was there again… Sanders was a fine young fellow" (102). Getting Jacob's name right matters not. In the novel, remembrance depends more on images and utterances, on moments and memories, on the willingness of the consuming landscape, instead of on inscribed names and graveside visits.

A second poignant example of a missing family name comes with Florinda's story, for "her name had been bestowed upon her by a painter… she was without a surname, and for parents had only the photograph of a tombstone beneath which, she said, her father lied buried" (77). Florinda's photograph suggests the situations of civilians who only had photographs of graves to mourn. In fact, photographs were sometimes the only way for a family to actually view a grave, when one existed for a fallen combatant. In his war scrapbook, A.O. Shewan includes a pamphlet written by Rudyard Kipling on the care of graves that offers this service to the bereaved:

> Photographs of such graves in France and Belgium as are accessible to the photographers employed for the purpose are furnished to relatives on application, free of cost… All applications are carefully noted and photographs are sent as soon as possible, but it will be understood that in many cases weeks or months may pass before photographs may be taken. (Kipling)

Here, the grieving process becomes detached, completely separate from the corpse. Whereas in *Great Expectations*, Pip finds comfort in the family's tombstone as present, tangible, and visible reminders of his lineage, Florinda has only a photograph "for

parents." Instead of remembering her mother and father at the graveyard, she simply and tersely refers to the picture when she discusses them with Jacob: "The tomb of her father was mentioned" (78). Florinda's dilemma represents a post-war misery instigated by such massive loss of life, where feelings of longing are vivid but unexplainable through language. When she needs to mourn for her father or bemoan her missing surname, Florinda can, in one moment, offer the photograph as sufficient explanation.

In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf does more than mock the conventions of wartime obituary; she suggests the complete inadequacy of conventional memorializing rites and customs and offers, in their place, the power of absence and silence. She matter-of-factly recognizes that "highly respectable men, with wives and families at Kentish Town, do their best for twenty years to protect Plato and Shakespeare, and then are buried at Highgate" (109), but she demonstrates that erected hunks of stone and scripted bits of language do little to console, heal, or connect the living to the dead. At moments, Woolf hints at the futility of conventional mourning. Mrs. Jarvis, who claims, "I never pity the dead… They are at rest… And we spend our days doing foolish unnecessary things without knowing why," captures Woolf's sentiment here. In a narrative that challenges the realist mode of presentation, Woolf also challenges conventional methods of remembrance and questions the purpose of the cemetery. She presents it as another part of the landscape and shows how characters digest their grief and honor a lost son, brother, friend despite the lack of a corpse, grave, and epitaph. Though Mrs. Flanders and the reader alike spend much of the text seeking Jacob, by the novel's conclusion the reader has a sense of Jacob's substantiality, or, even more important, a sense of having experienced authentic, uneven, unplanned grief and bitter loss. In some ways, despite the

character's absence, the reader can express the words of the dedication found in *To My Unknown Warrior*: "Boy, Dear, I am so happy. I have found you at last" (7).

Woolf's novel certainly echoes the themes of many post-war writings about "finders" and "seekers." She presents a novel based on a kind of hide-and-seek, on the premise of searching for identity and acknowledging grief in unexpected ways and in unexpected places. Like other writers who took on the question of how to grieve for the war dead, she creates a story that uses silence and absence to mark the changing function of the epitaph in the face of modernity and modern warfare. Her epitaphic gestures leave the reader with the feeling of having adequately mourned Jacob without much fanfare. Celebratory absence and silence shape the text, and the way Woolf's characters grieve demonstrate the less prominent place of the cemetery in twentieth-century imaginations.

As John Kucich explains, "the Victorians made the etiquette of mourning and burial into an elaborate catechism… [They] consciously made death the most important event of an individual lifetime" (58). Death gave the Victorian middle class an opportunity to confirm social standing, test good taste, and demonstrate their understanding of propriety. Dickens understood this, and his burial grounds and epitaphs gave middle-class readers the chance to view, yet separate themselves from, any association with improper or offensive burial and commemorative practices. This was another means to acquire legitimacy. For Woolf and the war writers, proper memorialization moved away from the cemetery. Mourning took place through other means, in fragments and glimpses of identity. In response to the post-war climate, Woolf writes,

> Mentally the change is marked… Instead of feeling all day… that the
> whole people, willing or not, were concentrated on a single point, one
> feels now that the whole bunch has burst asunder and flown off with the
> utmost vigour in different directions. We are once more a nation of
> individuals. (*Diary* 217)

For Woolf, mourning took place at different moments and "in different directions." The literature of the Great War presented grief less as an entered-into "state," and more as something felt sporadically, moment by moment. Epitaphs would continue in literature and culture to express identity and individuality, but Woolf's literary reaction to the damage of war can be seen as a nod to the increasingly depersonalized state of affairs in a world where the glorification of the individual meets its limit.

We might consider how W.H. Auden's 1940 poem "The Unknown Citizen" demonstrates where deindividuation leads, to an eventual life that, dictated by the state, dehumanizes rather than characterizes. Auden's title alludes to "The Unknown Solider" and suggests the modern conflict between individualism and bureaucracy.[58] The subheading under the poem's title informs that we are reading an epitaph "To JS/07 M 378," a "Citizen" who has earned "This Marble Monument… Erected by the State." The unnamed Citizen has lived an "ideal" life, according to the persona:

> He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
>
> One against whom there was no official complaint,

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[58] It is important to note that Auden also wrote the well-known "Epitaph to the Unknown Solider" The aphoristic, two-line verse poses a terse question: "To save your world you asked this man to die: / Would this man, could he see you now, ask why?" On one hand, a reader could assume the poem underscores the futility of war and the man's wasted life—that the soldier would ask why he was asked to make this grave a sacrifice; on the other hand, one might discern that the soldier's life was well spent. In the latter reading, the question posed suggests that the Unknown Soldier would never have questioned his assigned duty.

And all the reports on his conduct agree

That, in the modern sense… he was a saint,

For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.

Except for the War till the day he retired

He worked in a factory and never got fired. (1-7)

Auden's satire of standardization presents the loss of identity and the decline of the individual in a world shaped by "Bureaus," "War," and "the Greater Community" where anonymity is both honorable and worthless. The poem informs the reader, "When there was war, he went" (24) and echoes the loss of the individual identities of thousands of soldiers, combatants who entered the Great War as individuals but congregated into an army and lost their individuality. In Auden's poem, absence, anonymity, and silence are taken to excess, and the piece ends by asking the reader about the Citizen, "Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd: / Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard" (28-9). Auden's poem, like the Unknown Soldier's tribute, and like so many of the writings inspired by the First World War, works as an anti-epitaph, an acceptance of necessary and absolute anonymity at the expense of individuality.

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