

# Public Events at a Historic-Religious Site Highgate Cemetery in London as a Cultural Practice

Marie-Therese Mäder

Aside from being a place for burying and remembering the dead, Highgate cemetery also serves as a historic site and public space. This double purpose is embraced by the website of the cemetery: «Highgate Cemetery has some of the finest funerary architecture in the country. It is a place of peace and contemplation where a romantic profusion of trees, memorials and wildlife flourish.»<sup>1</sup> The Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust (hereafter, the Trust), a registered charity, runs the page. Referred to as *The Friends*, they organise activities for people interested in the cemetery. Among the most popular activities, and the only way to enter into West Highgate Cemetery, are the guided tours presented by volunteers.<sup>2</sup> Besides the daily tours other activities include talks, evening tours, and exhibitions. The Trust orchestrates and regulates all these events by setting opening hours and stipulating the rules for such visits. They set the parameters of what is and what isn't permitted. For example, since 2017 the famous pop singer George Michael has been buried at Highgate cemetery. On the website the Trust announced the following:

George Michael's grave is in a private part of Highgate Cemetery which is not accessible to visitors.

Friends should contact the family for access.

Tributes should not be left at the cemetery as there is no space to receive them. There is an informal memorial in Highgate Village.

George Michael's grave will not be visited on tours of Highgate cemetery.

Some fans have asked how to make a donation in memory of George Michael. If you would like to donate to the Friends of Highgate Ceme-

---

1 <https://highgatecemetery.org/> (accessed June 2, 2017).

2 Traditionally, most of those buried at West Highgate were members of the Anglican church, with some exceptions. In East Highgate the graves of members of other religions, religious traditions, and social-political groups such as Jews, Catholics, Muslims, Atheists, and Communists are also well represented, and this part of the cemetery is accessible without a tour.

tery Trust, the charity which cares for Highgate Cemetery, please click the donate button. The Friends do not make a profit because they reinvest their income to maintain and enhance the cemetery.<sup>3</sup>

The example of George Michael's grave shows how the Trust regulates the cemetery's practices and usages. Obviously there is a private part in West Highgate that is not open to the public. The relatives' wishes may have formed part of the decision to make the grave non-accessible for visitors. But in addition the *Friends of Highgate* probably feared West Highgate Cemetery might become swamped by mourning fans, by their tributes and ultimately turning it into a place of mass pilgrimage as is the case with other tombs in East Highgate notably the grave of Karl Marx.<sup>4</sup> The Trust argues that there is not enough space to receive the tributes, which, on the one hand, is a little surprising given the spatial dimensions of the cemetery. On the other hand, however, the policy might be deemed reasonable remembering the pictures in the press of the huge piles of flowers, letters, candles and pictures among other things in front of George Michael's house in Camden (fig. 1).



Fig. 1: A place for mourning in front of George Michael's house in Camden, London (Image: Georgie Gillard, 2017).<sup>5</sup>

3 <https://highgatecemetery.org/news> (accessed June 2, 2017).

4 See the contribution of Baldassare Scolari in this book and York 2002.

5 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/~-/article-4526732/index.html#i-bca8aaeca2a6faca> (accessed August 19, 2020).

The online text mentions that friends should contact the family for access. Another rule at Highgate says that there is special access available for people with relatives buried in the cemetery. For Highgate Cemetery is not just a historic site but is still in use to serve new interments. The information that the singer's grave isn't shown during tours refers to the organised tours during which the visitors walk through a small part of West Highgate that is inaccessible apart from such guided tours. The Friends of Highgate Cemetery perhaps don't want to arouse false expectations. Nevertheless, besides the religious practice of burials at Highgate, the popular and often sold-out visitor tours in West Highgate play an important role in presenting and experiencing the cemetery. The tours are offered in different ways, such as late tours, tours after dusk, or even as special events on November 1, the feast of All Saints. In addition to the tours talks and other events frequently take place.

In this study I will argue that the tours and other activities at Highgate Cemetery can be understood as a specific form of performative practice comprising a socio-religious dimension to regulate the usage of the cemetery. To understand what kind of practices take place in the context of the cemetery I will ask how this historic-religious site is represented in the complementary materials, notably the website with photos, text and videos, the catalogue, the flyers and the tours and how they comprise performative practices with a socio-religious dimension.

### *To Remember Human Finitude in the Paratexts of the Cemetery*

Highgate Cemetery serves not only as a place for the deceased to rest in peace but also as a space where multiple activities for those left behind are carried out (as described above). These cultural practices are performed in the space of the cemetery and, following Stuart Hall, give meaning to the place:

The emphasis on cultural practices is important. It is participants in a culture who give meaning to people, objects and events. Things 'in themselves' rarely, if ever, have any one, single, fixed and unchanging meaning. Even something as obvious as a stone can be a stone, a boundary marker or a piece of sculpture, depending on what it means - that is, within a certain context of use, [...]. It is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them - how we represent them - that we give them a meaning. In part, we give objects, people and events meaning by the frameworks of interpretation, which we bring

to them. In part, we give things meaning by how we use them, or integrate them into our everyday practices.<sup>6</sup>

Highgate is full of and surrounded by many different meaning-making practices. But how exactly do practices give meaning to a space, by whom are they represented, received and interpreted? To answer this question Gerard Genette, a French literary theorist introduces the term *paratexts* originating from the study of literature but also widely used in film and media studies.<sup>7</sup> The concept describes how a text is presented by means of, for example, the materiality and graphics of a book edition, interviews with the author, or critics. Genette explains how paratexts influence and shape the reception and consumption of a text.

One does not always know if one should consider that they [paratexts] belong to the text or not, but in any case they surround it and prolong it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb, but also in the strongest meaning: to *make it present*, to assure its presence in the world, its «reception» and its consumption, in the form, nowadays at least, of a book.<sup>8</sup>

To transfer this concept to a cemetery it can be stated that Highgate is surrounded by different practices that present it as a specific place. One purpose of paratexts is to guide the reader's — or in the case of the cemetery the visitor's — attention in a specific direction. To understand the meaning of the cemetery therefore means to apprehend the practices and discourses that present it:

The paratext thus is empirically composed of an assorted set of practices and discourse of all sorts and of all ages, which I incorporate under this term in the name of community interest, or convergence of effects, which seems to me more important than their diversity of aspects.<sup>9</sup>

Genette highlights two other objectives of paratexts, namely *community interests* and *convergence of effects*. *Community interests* can be understood as the instructions and rulings that meet the intentions of a certain group. In the case of Highgate the intention is shaped and ruled by the trust of The Friends. They fundamentally influence the representation and reception of

---

6 Hall 2013, xix.

7 Böhnke 2007, Genette/Maclean 1991.

8 Genette/Maclean 1991, 261.

9 Genette/Maclean 1991.

the cemetery with the production and coordination of paratexts. The second purpose of paratexts described as the *convergence of effects* captures the meaning-making practices that surround the text. These practices are diverse but are constitutive of how one understands, experiences, and perceives the cemetery in a certain way. Some practices are allowed because they fit into how the cemetery should be perceived and other activities are not. For example it is not permitted to use the cemetery as a picnic area and neither are you allowed to drink, or eat a snack during the organized tours.

Between Stuart Hall's cultural practices and Genette's concept of paratexts are some remarkable similarities. In both concepts, usage and integration into everyday practices constitute the meaning of objects and events. The cemetery doesn't have a meaning by itself. The visitors, the tour guides, relatives and friends of the deceased, and even scholars interpret Highgate and its wealth of statues, steles, and sculptures while visiting it. Furthermore, the public talks, publications about the cemetery, films and the website shape a certain idea of the cemetery and influence its perception. These different media are all interpretations or in Genette's terms 'paratexts' that surround, prolong and present the cemetery.

Not all events or paratexts connected to Highgate take place inside the area of the cemetery. The website, a diversity of publications including books, postcards, maps, and flyers can be consumed independently of a cemetery visit. In this respect they differ from the tours and the talks, during which attendees need to be present at the cemetery. The talks usually take place in the restored Anglican chapel at the entrance to Highgate West cemetery. To differentiate these two types of paratexts Genette distinguishes between *peritexts* and *epitexts*. A peritext «necessarily has a positioning, which one can situate in the relationship to the text itself.»<sup>10</sup> The relationship to the text includes a temporal and spatial connection implying that the peritext is located within the text. In the case of Highgate the peritext is located in the space of the cemetery. For example, to join the tours or to listen to a talk you need to be present at the cemetery. Whereas you can read the website from any place in the world that is connected to the Internet. The same can be applied to the Highgate booklet,<sup>11</sup> the map or the illustrated book that I bought at the giftshop at the entrance to West Highgate.<sup>12</sup> These publications, all edited by the Friends of Highgate

---

10 Genette/Maclean 1991, 263.

11 Bulmer 2014.

12 Parker/Swannell 1989.

Cemetery Trust, lie on my desk. I can grasp them to refresh my memory about the famous personalities buried at Highgate. Genette calls this kind of information *epitexts*:

[a]round the text again, but at a more respectful (or more prudent) distance, are all the messages which are situated, at least originally, outside the book: generally with the backing of the media (interviews, conversations), or under the cover of private communication correspondences, private journals, and the like.<sup>13</sup>

Again the quote from Genette originally refers to the epitexts of books or texts but can be transferred to epitexts of a cemetery. Epitexts circulate spatially and temporally independently and are located outside of the cemetery, as is the case for example with the document *Highgate Cemetery Rules*<sup>14</sup> that is published on the website. It regulates opening times, the safety and conduct of visitors, and sets out rules and restrictions relating to photography and filming, children and dogs at the cemetery, grave passes, vehicles and burials.

The talks and events provide an excellent illustration of how a peritext situates itself in relation to its text, which for our study is the <text> of Highgate cemetery. A preview of the events at Highgate is announced on the website. The preview shows a set of practices and discourses as Genette describes it. By integrating these practices into our everyday life, we implicitly ascribe, according to Hall, a certain meaning to the space of the cemetery. But how can we analyse these meaning making practices? Genette suggests the following questions to analyse the paratexts:

To put this in a more concrete way: defining an element of the paratext consists in determining its position (the question where?), its date of appearance, and eventually of disappearance (when?), its mode of existence, verbal or other (how?), the characteristics of its communicating instance, addresser and addressee (from whom? to whom?), and the functions which give purpose to its message (what is it good for?).<sup>15</sup>

These mainly general questions need to be further adapted to the cemetery's paratexts. It can be asked where, when, how, by whom, for whom and for what aim are the set of practices carried out at Highgate? One purpose of the cemetery's paratexts is that they converge on dealing with

---

13 Genette/Maclean 1991, 264.

14 <https://highgatecemetery.org/uploads/Rules.pdf> (accessed June 2, 2017).

15 Genette/Maclean 1991, 263.

death and its diversity of aspects. People accomplish together various practices in the public space of the paratexts to remember human finitude. Jay Winter uses the term «performative acts» to describe such practices of remembrance:

The performance of memory is a set of acts, some embodied in speech, others in movement and gestures, others in art, others still in bodily form. The performative act rehearses and recharges the emotion, which gave the initial memory or story imbedded in its sticking power, its resistance to erasure or oblivion. Hence affect is always inscribed in performative acts in general and in the performance of memory in particular.<sup>16</sup>

According to Winter performative acts are mediated through the body or expressed in art and connected with emotions in order not to forget. At Highgate a diversity of acts is performed during the various cultural practices. These performative acts include a wide spectrum in dealing with death and can be considered as memory practices aiming at the «resistance to the erasure of oblivion.» These acts of memory may dispose of a religious dimension in such a way that they are dealing with the uncontrollable sphere of the *conditio humana*, namely death. Fritz Stolz describes this aspect as one of the general aims of religion.<sup>17</sup> Religious practices often transform the uncontrollable into a controlled sphere as «religion has to provide a general orientation: it has to tie the experience of the uncontrollable to the controllable aspects of reality, and it has to transform uncontrollable into controllable fields.»<sup>18</sup> Accordingly a cemetery can be understood as a space where the uncontrollable is transformed into a controllable sphere. Transformation processes can take place in the diversity of performative acts of peritexts and epitexts. In the following discussion it will be asked how the events organized at Highgate between September and December 2016 deal with death and human finitude in the single performative acts of peritexts and epitexts that are embraced as cultural practices. The website of Highgate cemetery with the announcements of the events and references will be used as source materials.

---

16 Winter 2010, 12.

17 Stolz 1988, 80.

18 Pezzoli-Olgiati 2004, 123.



*Highgate Events as Practices to Resist the Erasure of Oblivion*

In August 2016 a diversity of events and activities were announced on the Highgate website.<sup>19</sup> Two special tours and four talks took place, one of which included a magic show. The events were scheduled between September 3 and December 20. The following analysis asks in what way the practices described in the epitexts and peritexts of the cemetery are connected to acts of memory.

The event *Bats in the Cemetery* on September 3, 2016 starts with a presentation by Huma Pearce, an ecologist. She introduces the bat species at Highgate that the attendees will later be looking for in the cemetery (fig. 2).

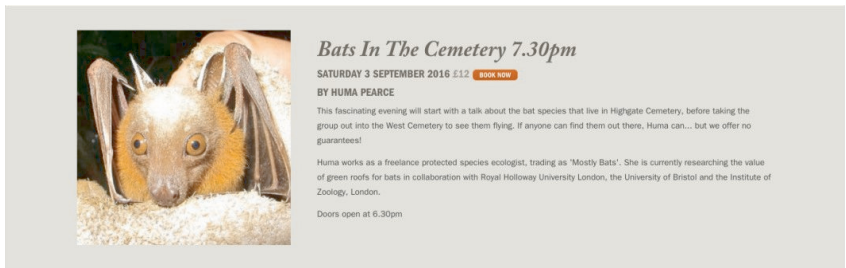


Fig. 2: *Announcement of a talk and a special tour in which the participants are looking for bats (Image: Screenshot, <https://highgatecemetery.org/>).*

The event and especially the walk takes place during the evening because the bats are nocturnal and the likelihood of observing one is higher at that time. Many other animals live in the cemetery but bats bear a dualistic meaning because of their night activity. On the one hand their creepy image connects them to daemons and ghosts and especially vampires. On the other hand they are perceived as animals that may fight against evil powers like the devil or witches and they are appreciated as bringing good luck. It can be suggested that a focus on bats at Highgate combines daemonic and mystical dimensions with the actual place of the dead. The combination of

---

19 Unfortunately, the preview of the events from 2016 is no longer accessible on the website. The screenshots of the announcements were taken in August 2016. The quotations from the announcement will therefore not be referenced.



the cemetery and the act of bat-watching fosters a specific religious narrative of the supernatural aspects of death.<sup>20</sup>

Three other talks give an insight into religious-historical topics. Lee Jackson «obsessed with the social history of Victorian London»<sup>21</sup> and author of several books about the same topic<sup>22</sup> explains in *Grave Nuisance, a Sanitary History of the Victorian Cemetery* how the dangerous sanitary situation of the cemeteries in the London churchyards resulted in the construction of the Victorian cemeteries outside of London (fig. 3).



**Talk: Grave Nuisance, a Sanitary History of the Victorian Cemetery 7.30pm**

THURSDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2016 6.17 [BOOK NOW](#)

BY LEE JACKSON

The graveyards and burial-grounds of early nineteenth-century London were full to overflowing, deemed as 'plague-spots', harbouring disease and decay. But there was a great reluctance to address the problem of the capital's oversubscribed churchyards: clergymen wanted to retain their customary burial fees and the government was unwilling to interfere.

Lee Jackson, author of *Dirty Old London*, will explain the 'sanitary' origins of the Victorian cemetery, from the cholera epidemics of 1832 to the horrors of Eton Chapel, and the Spa Fields scandal of 1845. He will focus on two little-known figures - George Carden, self-styled 'Founder of the system of ex-urban sepulture', and the burial reform agitator George Walker - explaining how, after decades of struggle, London finally obtained a decent burial for most of its citizens.

Doors open 7pm

Fig. 3: Lee Jacksons talks about the sanitary situation before the construction of Victorian cemeteries (Image: Screenshot, <https://highgatecemetery.org/>).



**Talk: Material Memories: Victorian Mourning Jewellery 7.30pm**

THURSDAY 27 OCTOBER 2016 6.17 [BOOK NOW](#)

BY DR NATASHA AWAIS-DEAN

Through their physical proximity to the body, jewelled goods are highly personal objects. Jewellery has the power to create strong memories, either through its materiality or in invocations implied through inscriptions. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Victorian mourning jewellery.

In this talk, Natasha Awais-Dean illustrates the art of mourning jewellery in this period and explores its sentiment and significance to the people who wore it.

Doors open at 7.00pm

Fig. 4: The picture shows a pendant made with the deceased's hair (Image: Screenshot, <https://highgatecemetery.org/>).

20 Paul Wirz provides an overview of the meaning of bats in art and religion in different geographical regions across the globe from India, China, Japan, South and North America to Europe. See Wirz 1948, 275–278.

21 [http://www.victorianlondon.org/lee/about\\_the\\_author.htm](http://www.victorianlondon.org/lee/about_the_author.htm) (accessed September 5, 2020)

22 Jackson 2014.

Natasha Awais-Dean, a historian, explains the practice of mourning jewellery in Victorian times (fig. 4). The topic explains practices connected to death as part of the material culture in the Victorian era.

The third talk in this series of religious-historical topics is *Death and Burial: from Père Lachaise to Highgate*. Dr. Seth Gopin, a retired lecturer in art history provides an insight into the practice of mass burials in Parisian church yards (fig. 5).



**Talk: Death and Burial: from Père Lachaise to Highgate 7.30pm**  
TUESDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2016 £7 [BOOK NOW](#)

BY DR SETH GOPIN

Though Paris is the city of love and romance, it is also the place where the modern traditions of Western death and burial were established.

Dr Gopin's lecture will trace the tradition of mass burial in Parisian church graveyards to the new modern idea of the world's first cemetery, Père Lachaise, in 1804, to Highgate Cemetery in 1839, then seen as the culmination of the ideal of burying in a cemetery.

Dr Seth Gopin is a man of a great many interests and talents. After retiring from his post as lecturer in Art History, and a popular dean of academic affairs at Rutgers University, he worked for the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile as editor of their North American newsletter. He also worked as a background actor in many successful TV shows and films. He was knighted by the French prime minister for his groundbreaking work in popularizing the history of the city of Paris to Americans.

Doors open at 7pm

Fig. 5: *The memento mori figure is not immediately connected to the topic but is at least a catchy subject (Image: Screenshot, <https://highgatecemetery.org/>).*

The final announcement of a talk in the 2016 series revitalises the life of a famous early 20<sup>th</sup> century magician, regarded as the 'best magician in his day', David Devant who is buried at Highgate cemetery (fig. 6).



**BE AMAZED! The Magic of David Devant 7.30pm**  
TUESDAY 20 DECEMBER 2016 £10 [BOOK NOW](#)

BY IAN KEABLE

David Devant was considered the best magician of his era, at a time when magic was at the height of its popularity. He was a superb and charming performer, a wonderful inventor of magic tricks, wrote extensively on magic and was one half of the most famous partnership in British conjuring history: Maskelyne and Devant. In 1905 he was appointed first president of the Magic Circle and in 1912 was invited to appear at the first ever Royal Variety Show. Forced into early retirement through ill health at the age of fifty-two in 1920, he died in 1941 and was buried in Highgate Cemetery.

Ian Keable is a professional magician and lecturer, with an extensive knowledge of magic history. He is a member of the Inner Magic Circle with Gold Star, and has also received The Magic Circle Comedy Award.

Ian will not only be talking about, and illustrating, the magical life of David Devant, but will also perform a couple of Devant-inspired magic tricks.

Doors open 7pm

Fig. 6: *The Magician David Devant and his performances are at the centre of this talk (Image: Screenshot, <https://highgatecemetery.org/>).*

Ian Keable, a lecturer and magician with «an extensive knowledge of magic history»<sup>23</sup> according to the announcement will not only talk about David Devant but he will also perform «a couple of Devant-inspired magic tricks.» Illustrated by a black and white portrait of the magician, the combination of talk and performance is announced. Again a specific topic connected to the cemetery is chosen. Similar to the bat talk by Huma Pearce the presentation is enriched with a practice that involves the attendees actively. Magic tricks are usually interactive so that the spectators participate in the performance. The «Devant-inspired tricks» can be understood as a kind of memory practice that revitalises and passes on a magic legacy. The audience of the talk become part of this act.

Another event refers to an explicit Christian practice and takes place at East Highgate. All Saints' Evening is celebrated on November 1 (fig. 7). Grave owners, the Friends of Highgate Cemetery trust and children under 18 years have free access. Everybody else needs to pay £4.



**East Cemetery candle-lighting late opening for All Saints' Evening**

**TUESDAY 1 NOVEMBER 2016 TICKETS £4. FREE FOR GRAVE OWNERS, FRIENDS OF HIGHGATE CEMETERY TRUST, AND UNDER-18S ACCOMPANIED BY ADULTS.** [Book now](#)

East Cemetery open until 7pm, last entry 6.30pm

All Saints' Day is a day for the general commemoration of those who have gone before us. Many grave-owners at Highgate Cemetery already place candles on their graves around this date and this late opening is to give a wider opportunity for reflection and remembrance.

This opening is restricted to the main terraced paths of the East Cemetery: as far as Marx to the east and the Chester Road gate to the south. If graveowners wish to visit their graves in other locations in the East they may do so entirely at their own risk. The West Cemetery will not be open.

- Candles will be available for sale. You may bring your own candles, which should be in fireproof containers. Bring matches too!
- Each person should bring a torch
- Please wear sturdy shoes, especially if it is wet
- Under 18s must be accompanied by an adult.
- Uncovered glass containers will be removed following the ceremony, as will any extinguished candles.

Fig. 7: Lighted candles are put on a grave to remember the deceased (Image: Screenshot, <https://highgatecemetery.org>).

Traditionally friends and family members visit the graves of their deceased on All Saint's Evening. As demonstrated by the fact that there is an entrance fee, other people, cemetery tourists, are also expected to attend the religious celebration. In this case there is no introductory talk, as the practice is anchored in a religious tradition and people attending the celebration are presumed to be mostly familiar with the proceeding and its meaning.

23 See footnote 19.

The described events, talks and performances follow different purposes but all of them are connected on different levels, as epitexts or peritexts, to the cemetery. Through these acts Highgate becomes a place to remember the dead or to think about and deal with the participant's own finitude or to reflect more generally on human mortality. Be it a walk through the cemetery at dusk to spot bats, to get to know the Victorian burial politics or the purpose of Victorian mourning jewellery, to understand the practice of mass burials, to revitalise the tricks of the magician David Devant, or to participate in the celebration of All Saint's Evening. These paratexts include practices with specific acts in which the participants are meant to be emotionally involved. The participants might feel curiosity, joy, fear or even uneasiness depending on their personal and cultural background. Beside these scheduled events the daily tours provide the most important means of generating and nourishing tourist activities as well as providing revenue for the Trust.

In the following section I will analyse the important and popular cultural practice of guided tours at West Highgate. I participated in three tours in September 2015, September 2016, and August 2017 from which one specific tour (2016) will be analysed with a focus on the tour guide and the performed acts of memory.<sup>24</sup> It will be asked how the guide includes and addresses the participants, what is selected for remembrance during the tours and for what purpose and function?

### *The Socio-Religious Practice of Guided Tours*

The organised tour took place on September 8, 2016 with fifteen participants (Ps). The tour started at 15.30 and ended at 16.45. I took field notes during and after the tour and recorded the audio during the tour. As I participated in the tour myself the data has been gathered by a participating observation.<sup>25</sup> I was able to take photos that helped me to remember the posts where the tour guide (TG) stopped to provide the Ps with information. On the map below (fig. 8) the order of the twelve posts and the direction of the tour are indicated.

---

24 There has been extensive scholarly research on tourism and the role guides play in this field. For an overview of the field and the specific aspect of tour guides see Weiler/Black 2015, 21–44.

25 Kawulich 2005; Merkens 1992.



Fig. 8: The map is pictured on the back of the flyer that is distributed at the entrance to the cemetery (Image: Marie-Therese Mäder 2017).

The applied method of gathering data in the field and later interpreting it evaluates how the tour shapes the reception of the cemetery. The data is analysed by a combination of two approaches namely sociological hermeneutics of knowledge and grounded theory.<sup>26</sup> The analysing process has been adapted to the collected data of the field notes and is divided into three steps.<sup>27</sup> In the first step the audio recording has been transcribed. Next the transcribed text has been extended with the photographs namely the photos have been assigned to the text so that text and images are synchronized in space and time. Finally, the text has been divided into different kind of actions accomplished by the TG and the Ps. This included ver-

26 Boehm 1994; Strübing 2014, 461–470.

27 Reichertz 2015, 522–523.

bal and nonverbal actions. This ‘open coding’ was initially carried out without categorising them. In a second step, the so-called axial coding has been applied,<sup>28</sup> that categorised the actions with codes. To most of the actions several codes have been ascribed. The third step connects the codes and field notes to a meaningful whole in the process of selective coding.<sup>29</sup>

In the process of data interpretation the concept of paratext has been retained. As already mentioned it is understood as an *assorted set of practices* and discourse of all sorts for the *community interest* and *convergence of effects*.<sup>30</sup> As in the paragraph above the term *action* is closely related to *practice*. Actions are used in a more descriptive way whereas *practice* will be applied as soon as the actions are related to each other and interpreted.

In this context the definition of *community* embraces the social actors that are involved in the activities at Highgate namely the Friends of Highgate, their invited guests and the attending visitors. All of them constitute the endeavour of Highgate Cemetery in different ways. Regarding the tours the participants are divided into two main groups, namely the tour guide, acting in the name of the Friends trust and the participants of the tour. The *convergence of effects* is understood as the diversity of practices resulting in the presentation and interpretation of the cemetery. In the following analysis the general actions during the tour are discussed. Then in a second step and to be understood as selective coding<sup>31</sup> the information provided and exchanged during the tour is divided into peritexts and epitexts. Once again referring to the concept of paratexts discussed above, ‘peritexts’ refer to events and facts taking place inside the cemetery and ‘epitexts’ to information and events located outside the cemetery. In this instance epitexts had also been uttered inside the space of the cemetery during the tour but their reference is more loosely connected to the cemetery than is the case with peritexts. In the following analysis the three categories — actions, peritexts- and epitexts — are discussed with the assigned codes and illustrated with examples from the field notes (fig. 9).

---

28 Strübing 2014, 467–468.

29 Strübing 2014, 468–469.

30 Genette 2010, 262.

31 Strübing 2014, 468–469.

Paratexts	Categories	Number of codes
actions	82	
TG talking		55
Ps walking and talking		25
Interaction TG with participants		13
TG giving instructions		11
Ps waiting		9
Ps by themselves		7
peritext: inside the cemetery	43	
technical-practical-cultural facts		21
art-historical facts		19
religious reference		5
vandalism		6
flora and fauna		3
restoration of the cemetery		3
epitext: outside the cemetery	25	
stories about personalities		18
friends of highgate		5
personal story of the tour guide		3

Fig. 9: Table with the absolute numbers and names of codes categorized by peritext and epitext.

During the three tours that I participated in I could observe that the guides follow a more or less fixed path through the cemetery telling largely the same stories about the graves and monuments, the deceased, and the people involved in the construction and maintenance of the cemetery during the heyday of the western part. These narratives are told to visitors whilst walking among the graves, steles and monuments. The tours represent a practice in a historic-religious site involving religious symbols, biographical stories, a park facility and historical facts.

Most of the *actions* (see the table in fig. 9) are repeatedly carried out during the tour. The Ps walk behind the guide, chat with each other or just wait until the TG starts to talk. The TG mainly talks, but he also occasionally gives instructions to the Ps. More often towards the end of the tour the Ps sneak away to take pictures or to look at other things than the ones included on the official tour route. The TG then requests the Ps to follow him more closely with the following wording on different occasions: «We are going up this way guys, sorry.»<sup>32</sup> Interactions between the TG and Ps

32 Mäder 2016, 19:12.



also frequently take place, be it between the group as a whole or just one person and the TG. In general the TG asks remarkably few questions and concludes a question on several occasions with: «It's no trick question!»<sup>33</sup> The questions often relate to practical or cultural aspects of the cemetery, such as the following example: «Why are the bodies put in by feet first? Because the relatives wanted to talk to their heads.»<sup>34</sup> As in this example the TG often answers his own questions. In general it is fair to say that the interactive part of the tour is very low. Most of the time the Ps listen to the guide and talk with each other while they are walking from one post to another.

At the posts the TG mostly conveys specific information about the cemetery. Six different kinds of peritexts can be discerned. Technical, practical and cultural facts are the most common. For example the TG explains that a grave is 20 feet deep and all made of brick so that the coffins can be stacked. «And the actual inside doesn't go straight, the bricks go slight bending. It's not full.»<sup>35</sup> Then a little less often art-historical facts are explained: «The half covered urns. It means the person is cast away but half covered means that the souls have room to leave to go to heaven. That's how they depict it.»<sup>36</sup> The other four categories of peritexts are also mentioned several times. These are references to vandalism like the following wording: «...remember I had been talking about vandalism and what they did...crazy people we don't know much of the history but we do know that it was really badly vandalised. It was before the friend's of Highgate took it over involved.»<sup>37</sup> The references to vandalism highlight how the Friends saved the cemetery from vandals by taking care of it. Equivalent to the quantity of vandalism references (five times) religious references are mentioned. They often comprise art-historical facts as the example mentioned above shows. Similar to that comment is the following description referring to a religious dimension: «The empty chair is the same actually as the urn with the shroud on it. The empty chair means the life has gone. The shroud half-over means the soul has had room to leave and go to heaven.»<sup>38</sup> Then the TG refers occasionally to the restoration work of the cemetery. This was the case when a P asked: «Is there still the line of chestnut trees? It says that in the literature. They separated the areas.» The TG an-

---

33 Mäder 2016, 22:20.

34 Mäder 2016, 22:20.

35 Mäder 2016, 13:2.

36 Mäder 2016, 7:3.

37 Mäder 2016, 18:7.

38 Mäder 2016, 13:1.

swers: «Yes they are trying to build a nice safe path. But it's too dangerous to go there.»<sup>39</sup> He further mentions the high costs and efforts that need to be invested in the restoration of Highgate. A last version of a peritext is the reference to the flora and fauna at Highgate that are also sporadically highlighted: «Inside [of a vault in the Egyptian Avenue] is a species of spider. I am not sure how they got in there. But they can't even go out at night. It has to be complete pitch black to survive. And now they are in these walls. But don't worry...» Bats, the old tree population and the birds are also mentioned in this category. The peritexts mostly contain facts and deal remarkably seldom with the symbolic dimension of the cemetery. The facts are based on observations, an expert or an insider-knowledge such as the mechanics of the burials, the stories about vandalism, and the future or past restoration projects.

Another important part of the tour is subsumed under the category of epitexts divided into three code groups. The most common consists of stories about personalities buried in the cemetery. This kind of epitext occurs almost as often as art-historical and technical-practical-cultural facts. The TG tells participants about their lives and achievements, such as in relation to the tombstone of George Wombwell with a huge lion on it (fig. 10): «Now George Wombwell was at the time the biggest menagerist in England – or Europe – and he started off life as a shoemaker in Soho. And he wasn't making a lot of money. So he decided one day he was down the docks so he'd find some leather or whatever. And he bought two boa-constrictors off a couple of sailors and put 'em in cardboard boxes and took 'em round all the pubs in the East End. Charged people a penny to open the box and have a look at these pythons. And he ended up with lions, tigers, uhm, camels, giraffes, elephants, uhm – zebra, everything you name it. And he went all over the country. He was one of the biggest in his field. There's a coupla quite funny stories about this guy.»<sup>40</sup>

The stories about personalities mostly overlap with the ones described in the Highgate flyer with the map on the front (fig. 8). These include the coachman James William Selby, architect's wife Mary Emden, General Sir Loftus Otway, financier Julius Beer, writer Ellen Wood know under the name Mr. Henry Wood, and lesbian novelist Radclyffe Hall. These life stories seem to be retold again and again in a dynamic and funny style in order to entertain the Ps. In the way they are presented they resemble more an oral version of a narrative than scripted facts. As biographical narratives

---

39 Mäder 2016, 30:4.

40 Mäder 2016, 19:7.



Fig. 10: *The tombstone of George Wombwell with the lion Nero sleeping on the top of a sarcophagus (Image: Marie-Therese Mäder 2017).*

they are often not directly connected to the materiality of the cemetery and could also be told on another occasion at a different place. In this way the narratives enlarge the cemetery's geographical space with the life stories of the people buried there. These stories are complemented with personal stories of the tour guide. For example in front of the grave of a person who recently passed away, Alexander Walterowitsch Litwinenko, member of the KGB, he mentions: «...they put some radioactive stuff into his tea, uhm, a lot of people say, was he safely buried here? He is, because it was a substitute of Pollonium 210...»<sup>41</sup> The TG tells his personal story about an Arsenal football game he attended where they had to close a whole section of the football stadium. The deceased was at a game in the same stadium before he died and according to the TG they feared «some radioactive stuff» in this section. By sharing these personal stories the TG connects successfully with the Ps.

Finally the third type of epitexts refers to the Friends of Highgate Cemetery trust. The TG highlights several times how much the Friends have done to save the cemetery as in this case where he combines the topic of vandalism with the Friends engagement:

That door, remember I told you about vandalism, ... we didn't replace the door ... but we left this side [points to the destroyed part of the door], because this is what the vandals did, when they got in. They

---

41 Mäder 2016, 15:1.

smashed the locker, they got in there, they smashed it, they slept in there, lit fires in there, awwww! You know these are crazy people, but that was before the actual Friends took over. So we don't know pretty much about the history. What we do know is that it has been badly vandalised. We are gonna move on folks!<sup>42</sup>

The structure of the story is similar to other occasions when the TG mentions the Friends trust in the context of vandalism. He explains how the place looked before it was restored. In front of the Beer mausoleum for example he explains how kids smashed the glass of the windows so that the pigeons flew in and out. «It was full of birdshit taller than me.»<sup>43</sup> Now the Beer mausoleum isn't open any more but the TG shows pictures from the inside and instructs people how to spy through the small windows even though you can't see the gold mosaic. The dramatic story of the mausoleum and how it has been destroyed and refurbished valorises the Friends engagement in the cemetery. Imagining how people scrubbed five feet of bird excrement out of the mausoleum seems quite a challenge and certainly demands some effort and even more dedication.

Personal and interactive moments qualify the category of epitexts. As already mentioned, these texts could also be communicated somewhere else than in the cemetery. The way the TG introduces and narrates these epitexts is often much more engaged and stirring than the presentation of the peritexts. One reason for this could be that the TG and his imagination was often more emotionally involved in these texts compared with the presentation of historical or technical facts.

#### *4. Public Events at Highgate as Socio-Religious Practice*

In the peritext and epitext of Highgate Cemetery many different cultural practices organised as group events are carried out. These social activities are thematically engaged with death in various ways during which acts of memory take place. These acts produce a «sticking power» emotionally and cognitively, to remember human finitude. Together they transform the uncontrollable dimension of death into a controllable sphere where it remains uncontrollable. Therefore the socio-cultural practices at Highgate also dispose of a religious dimension. Three aspects of socio-religious practices in the epitexts and peritexts of Highgate are particularly striking.

---

42 Mäder 2016, 18:7.

43 Mäder 2016, 20:6.

The acts of memory carried out at Highgate contain a socio-religious dimension in the sense that Highgate Cemetery provides a space, in which the visitors can reflect on and are confronted with human finitude. It doesn't mean that all the visitors perceive it in this way but there is at least the possibility. Nevertheless it is conspicuous how few references to traditional religious worldviews or theological concepts are explicitly made during the tour. The few religious references be it «heaven» or «soul» are presented as a given fact, assumed to be known by everybody and are not further explained. What the difference is between a Christian and any other cemetery or what differentiates an Anglican from any other Christian burial space is never discussed.

Secondly there is a difference between public and private practices at Highgate. The public practices present a very temporal and less religious interpretation of the cemetery. Funerals, as more traditional religious practices, are exclusively peritexts and take place in private to pay respect to the relatives and friends of the deceased. On the one hand the guide tells a lot of life stories about the people buried at Highgate during the tours, what they achieved in life and what made them famous to the public. How they died, details about their funeral or why they are buried at this cemetery are seldom mentioned. I assume that many tour participants don't know how an Anglican interment is framed. Also the many art-historical and some more technical-practical-cultural references are often very fact oriented rather than interpretations of the cemetery. On the other hand the temporal-factual way the cemetery is presented leaves space for the participants' interpretations that will be as various as each of them is. They can weave in their own cultural background with its particular frame of knowledge, experience and emotional characteristics. The tour and the events can be used for their personal purposes and interests regarding death.

And finally the Friends of Highgate Cemetery trust are responsible for the cemetery becoming a social and accessible space again. Since the eighties people can visit it again to exchange knowledge and be informed about practices of death. Even though the Trust regulates and controls all activities very closely, they also care for the historic-religious site and maintain it to keep it viable for later generations. More generally said by maintaining the cemetery they also keep up the consciousness that there is a religious space. They use their privilege of access to decide which tombs are accessible for the public and will be restored and which aren't. Obviously their focus is on the historic Anglican burial ground. Therefore it can be said that a privileged group of people regulate and coordinate the access to

Highgate cemetery, its narrative, and interactions between epitexts and peritexts.

Through these different practices conducted in the paratexts of the cemetery it has become a new form of institutionalized place that maintains and provides a public space where visitors can cope with the contingent realm of death. As it has been pointed out traditional religiosity doesn't play a central role in the discussed paratexts. But the way in which the cemetery is presented and interpreted by various practices can still be understood as a temporal socio-religious practice to deal with the uncontrollable and inevitable fact of dying. Highgate and its paratexts transform the uncontrollable end of human life into a series of entertaining events. Death is loaded with meaning through secular practices without asking for any religious account or even a confession. Maybe it's not a full transformation into a controllable sphere but it at least provides a momentary distraction.

### *Bibliography*

- Boehm, Andreas, 1994, Grounded Theory - wie aus Texten Modelle und Theorien gemacht werden, in: Boehm, Andreas/Mengel, Andreas/Muhr, Thomas (eds.), *Texte verstehen. Konzepte, Methoden, Werkzeuge*, Konstanz: Universitäts-Verlag, 121–140.
- Böhnke, Alexander, 2007, *Paratexte des Films. Über die Grenzen des filmischen Universums* (Vol. 5), Bielefeld: transcript.
- Bulmer, Jane, 2014, *Highgate Cemetery. Saved by its Friends*, Norwich: Highgate Cemetery/Jigsaw Design & Publishing Ltd.
- Genette, Gérard, 2010 (1998), *Die Erzählung* (Vol. 8083), Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.
- Genette, Gérard/Maclean, Marie, 1991, Introduction to the Paratext, *New Literary History* 22/2, 261–272.
- Hall, Stuart, 2013, *Representation*, Los Angeles: Sage, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.
- Jackson, Lee, 2014, *Dirty Old London. The Victorian Fight against Filth*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press.
- Kawulich, Barbara B., 2005, Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method, *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 6/2, Art. 43 <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/466> (accessed June 8, 2017).
- Mäder Marie-Therese, *Field Notes, Highgate Tour, September 8, 2016.*

- Merkens, Hans, 1992, Teilnehmende Beobachtung. Analyse von Protokollen teilnehmender Beobachter, in: Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik, Jürgen H. P. (ed.), *Analyse verbaler Daten. Über den Umgang mit qualitativen Daten*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 216–247.
- Parker, Constance-Anne/Swannell, John, 1989, *Highgate Cemetery*, London: Hurwood Press.
- Pezzoli-Olgiati, Daria, 2004, Religion, Reconstruction, Comparison from the Work of Fritz Stolz, *Religious Studies Review* 30/2–3, 123–128.
- Reichertz, Jo, 2015, Objektive Hermeneutik und hermeneutische Wissenssoziologie, in: Flick, Uwe/Kardorff, Ernst von/Steinke, Ines (eds.), *Qualitative Forschung. Ein Handbuch*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 514–524.
- Stolz, Fritz, 1988, *Grundzüge der Religionswissenschaft* (Vol. 1527), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht.
- Strübing, Jörg, 2014, Grounded Theory and Theoretical Sampling, in: Baur, Nina/Blasius, Jörg (eds.), *Handbuch Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 457–472.
- Weiler, Betty/Black, Rosemary, 2015, *Tour Guiding Research. Insights, Issues and Implications* (Vol. 62), Bristol: Channel View Publications.
- Winter, Jay, 2010, The Performance of the Past. Memory, History, Identity, in: Tilmans, Karin/Winter, Jay/Vree, Frank van (eds.), *Performing the Past. Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*, Amsterdam: University Press, 11–34.
- Wirz, Paul, 1948, Über die Bedeutung der Fledermaus in Kunst, Religion und Aberglauben der Völker, *Geographica Helvetica* 3/1, 267–278.
- York, Michael, 2002, Contemporary Pagan Pilgrimages. Comparisons with Medieval Pilgrimage and Twentieth Century Religious Tourism, in: Swatos, William Henry/Tomasi, Luigi (eds.), *From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism. The Social and Cultural Economics of Piety*, Westport: Praeger, 137–158.
- News - Highgate Cemetery, <https://highgatecemetery.org/news> (accessed June 12, 2017).
- <https://highgatecemetery.org/uploads/Rules.pdf> (accessed June 10, 2017).
- [http://www.victorianlondon.org/lee/about\\_the\\_author.htm](http://www.victorianlondon.org/lee/about_the_author.htm) (accessed September 5, 2020).