

# Animal, Vegetable or Mineral?

## Performativity of Living Images in Highgate Cemetery

*Ann Jeffers*

The main object of a burial ground is [...] the disposal of the remains of the dead in such a manner as that their decomposition, and return to the earth from which they sprung, shall not prove injurious to the living; either by affecting their health or schooling their feelings, opinions, or prejudices. A secondary object is, or ought to be improvement of moral sentiments and general taste of all classes, and more especially of the great masses of society [...]. Churchyards and cemeteries are scenes not only calculated to improve the morals and the taste, and by their botanical riches to cultivate the intellect, but they serve as historical records [...]. The tomb has, in fact, been the chronicler of taste throughout the world.<sup>1</sup>

The most overwhelming experience of walking in Highgate Cemetery is the perception of nature in a variety of forms: the landscape itself with its variety of trees, shrubs and wild flowers and their equally varied visual representations on the Victorian gravestones as flora, fauna and minerals. This paper considers selected representations of nature in Highgate Cemetery sensitive to Victorian artistic conventions. If Judith Butler is correct when she writes that performativity «does not merely refer, but acts in some way to constitute that which it enunciates»,<sup>2</sup> a study of the construction of meaning in the imagery of the gravestones needs to investigate a number of strands. The socio-historical context of the creation of Victorian cemeteries constitutes an important layer of meaning, as well as the multiple imaginaries at play behind the creation of «garden cemeteries». Allied to this, the explicit interplay between sanitation reform of the nineteenth

---

1 Loudon 1843, 1, 13. John Claudius Loudon was influenced by John Strang who wrote that «a garden cemetery and monumental decoration [...] are not only beneficial to public morals, to the improvement of manners, but are likewise calculated to extend virtuous and generous feelings [...] a garden cemetery is the sworn foe to superstition» (Strang 1831, 58–59, 69).

2 Butler 2011, 218.

century and aesthetics gives rise to a new connection of art related to death. Finally, exploring emblematic meaning of flora and fauna as imaged in the cemetery will help us to understand how these images perform in the context of burial practices.

### 1. *The Socio-Historical Context of Victorian Garden Cemeteries*

While the creation of cemeteries is a Victorian innovation, their historical and imaginary conceptualisation goes back culturally to the classical period. To give a full history of these developments does not fall within the remit of this paper, but it is enough to say that three strands intertwine to construct a meaning of cemeteries as a dwelling place of rest: the biblical idea of the garden of Eden (and the garden in the *Song of Songs*), the Elysian fields and Arcadia.<sup>3</sup> The catalyst for the Victorian connection of a garden with commemoration of the dead comes from eighteenth century garden architects who proposed a model of landscaped gardens, adorned with monuments and sculpture whose function was to commemorate the dead.<sup>4</sup> The word 'cemetery' itself means «sleeping place»<sup>5</sup> and suggests an image of restful peace, far removed from the charnel-houses of nineteenth century England before the Burial reforms mid-century. Garden-cemeteries generally exhibit a fusion of neo-classicism and gothic styles. In fact the latter became associated more closely with Christianity as a whiff of 'paganism' tended to be associated with neo-classicism.<sup>6</sup>

Another important factor in the emergence of the new conceptualisation of the garden-cemetery as a place of reflection on transience, impermanence, love and fame is the work of the Graveyard poets,<sup>7</sup> and in particular Edward Young, *The Complaint: or, Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality* published in 1742. His encouragement to aspire to the 'good

---

3 The most important study of the genesis of garden cemeteries can be found in Curl 2000. See also Rutherford 2008.

4 Notably Christian Cay Lorenz Hirschfeld, *Theorie der Gartenkunst* (1779–1785) and Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Études de la nature* (1776); see Curl 2000, 17–18.

5 Gillon 1972, vii.

6 Augustus Pugin famously argued in *Contrasts* (1834) that the Gothic style is adopted as Christian architecture, cited in Curl 2000, 86.

7 The most famous graveyard poems were Robert Blair's *The Grave* (1743), Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1750) and most important of all, Edward Young's nine volumes *The Complaint* (1742–1745). See also Niels Penke's contribution to this book.

death» through the exercise of Christian virtues, as well as his exploration of the relationships between nature, reality and God,<sup>8</sup> set the standard for thinking about death for the next century at least. This romanticisation of death is mirrored in paintings and sermons where death-bed scenes are given prominence, with repentance and forgiveness as a primary focus, moving away from final judgement scenes and depictions of Hell of an earlier period.<sup>9</sup> Heaven becomes a happy place where families will be reunited.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Nineteenth Century Sanitation Reform and Aesthetics

While there is no doubt that there is a long tradition behind the conceptualisation of the garden cemetery, the impetus came from the appalling conditions in urban centres that prevailed in intra-mural church graveyards. *The Times*, on 24<sup>th</sup> Sept 1846 declared that Chadwick «[h]ad accumulated and epitomised a mass of evidence of such a revolting nature, that the wonder was that so frightful a practice could have been so long tolerated. [...] The bodies were piled [...] until they reached a depth of 10, 20, and 30 feet, the topmost body being only a few inches from the surface [...] The putrescence accumulation raised every churchyard in London an average 10 feet high [...]»<sup>11</sup>

The sanitary reforms themselves coincided with the evangelical revival with its agenda of «ameliorism»: moral improvement was understood to be key to a vision of a «clean» world, giving rise to the «sanitary gospel» and the association of sanitation with virtue.<sup>12</sup> However it would be a mistake to divorce or limit the discourse on sanitation from aesthetic concerns: John Claudius Loudon himself, one of the most prominent landscape architects at the time, was clear that the dominant models of (visual) sense perception inherited from the 18<sup>th</sup> century needed to be actively displaced in order to make way for the sanitary aesthetic.<sup>13</sup> A more holistic understanding

---

8 Curl 2000, 5.

9 Pat Jalland gives William L. Walton's depiction of *Albert's Death* (1862) and *Fading Away* (1858) by Henry Peach Robinson as examples of the «good death». See Jalland 1996, 40.

10 Jalland 1999, 236.

11 Quoted in Herman 2010, 307.

12 Brown 2013, 16.

13 The Victorian era attempted to redefine taste as a mechanism of public health and social justice: see Cleere 2014, 9. These developments are especially clear in Chadwick's report of 1846 and in John Ruskin's work who sanitised Victorian aesthetics in *Modern Painters* in 1843.

of beauty thus submitted visual values to the smell test.<sup>14</sup> Hence the importance of implementation of the burial reform: urban space where the living and the dead cohabited put Londoners at risk from graveyard «miasma»,<sup>15</sup> with corpses of the poor often kept at home until the cost of the funeral was met.

All these strands contribute to the creation of an «ethicohygienic space.»<sup>16</sup> This expression is very useful to help us explore the performativity of burial places as spaces which need to suggest «a specialisation of virtue».<sup>17</sup> The implementation of the «right» kind of conduct is provided by the general setting of cemeteries as «gardens», and by the visual «emblems» found on the gravestones. The meaning of «emblem»<sup>18</sup> emerges through an interplay between title, motto and visual image, to which is often added a prose commentary. The focus on the object is to draw spectators into visual representation and involve them emotionally. In this context, the realm of nature is read symbolically. Animals, flowers and minerals are understood to provide educational lessons. This is made explicit in numerous writings, poetry, sermons and critical essays on art as the work of John Ruskin exemplifies.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. *Victorian Emblems: Flowers as Women's Emblems*<sup>20</sup>

Thus musing in a garden nook  
Each flower is as a written book.

---

14 Kant encapsulates eighteenth century aesthetic sensibility: «Which organic sense is the most ungrateful and also seems the most dispensable? The sense of *smell*» (Kant 2006 (1798), 50, italics in original).

15 «The sense of smell in the majority of the inhabitants seems to be destroyed, and having no perception even of stench which are insupportable to strangers, they must be unable to note the excessive escapes of miasma as antecedents to disease, [...] olfactory reform of the poor was [...] intimately linked with their moral reform.» Chadwick in his *Sanitary Report* cited in Curl 2000, 5.

16 Brown 2013. This term is coined by Osborne/Rose 1999, 741.

17 Brown 2013, 12–13.

18 For a comprehensive analysis and history of the use of emblems see Manning 2004.

19 In the *Eagle's Nest* for instance, John Ruskin speaks about birds providing educational lessons (102, 113, 156, 169); see also *Proserpina* for his thoughts on flowers as «emblems» and *Deucalion* on geology.

20 To explore this concept of «emblem» and its implications for reading representations of flowers, see Höltgen 1986.

And rich the stores of holy thought  
That by these blossoms fair are brought.  
Flowers are the gems that children love,  
Yesterday men delight to see,  
And they bring a thousand memories  
Of by-gone days to me!<sup>21</sup>

There is a long history of the association of women with nature and in particular with flowers<sup>22</sup> but this crystallised during the Victorian period when fragility, size and impermanence were seen to be a common denominator of women and flowers. These stereotypical associations regarding love (and the lack of) and death dominated the lives of Victorian women:<sup>23</sup>

The hand of affection twines the rosy wreath for the brow of the fair bride;  
and the cherub child, who passes away to the spirit-land,  
bears on its blossom, to its silent resting place,  
as the last sad offering of love,  
a stainless flowers, - fit emblem to its unsullied purity.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, a discussion of the meaning of flora, fauna and minerals needs to take account of the emergence of 'natural theology' during the course of the nineteenth century,<sup>25</sup> a set of ideas inherited from the eigh-

---

21 A poetic variation on Mary Howitt's *Holy Flowers* quoted in Adams 1864: 31–34. For more detail on Victorian flower 'emblems' in poetry and art see Phillips 1825.

22 See Seaton 1995. The most popular of all English language flower books is Frederic Shoberl's *The Language of Flowers; with illustrative poetry* (1839). The interest in biblical lands in the nineteenth century gave rise to a number of influential books about Bible plants combining religious, literary, historical and botanical concerns e.g. *The Scripture Garden Walk* (1832), Marian Callcott, *A Scripture Herbal* (1842) and Henry Osborn, *Plants of the Holy Land* (1861). This mirrors the interest in botany in the ancient world with studies of flowers in Homer and Vergil, and in England, a substantial literature on Milton and Shakespeare, Tennyson and Burns. See for instance: Henry N. Ellacombe, *Plant-Lore and Garden Craft of Shakespeare* (1878).

23 There are numerous books on the language of flowers. Here are some of the most important: Anne Pratt, *Flowers and Their Associations* (1840), Robert Tyas, *Favourite Field Flowers; or, Wild Flowers of England Popularly Described* (1848–1850).

24 Anna Elizabeth in *Vase of Flowers* (1851), quoted in Seaton 1985, 7.

25 Natural theology might be traced to Jean-Jacque Rousseau and Alexander Pope (see his *Essay on Man* of 1733); see Scourse, 1983, 10, 49, 50, 53. William Paley popularises the idea at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Scourse 1983, 50).

teenth century romantic view of nature.<sup>26</sup> Ruskin is a well-known proponent of this idea,<sup>27</sup> making explicit connections between the observation, and enjoyment of the natural world with an intellectual and spiritual appreciation of God's creation. This is explored in a number of publications, including *Proserpina* on flowers, *Love's Meinie* on birds and *Deucalion* on geology.<sup>28</sup> *Proserpina* is especially relevant here as its title alludes to the nature of the goddess who returns from the dead. O'Gorman sees in this image an invitation to the reader (and viewer) to see in every season a «renewal of nature, the ceaseless energy of the natural world, its perpetual capacity to restore life, like an endlessly recurrent resurrection.»<sup>29</sup> The durability of the shoot and wood strikes Ruskin as «a manner of immortality, or at least usefulness after death.»<sup>30</sup> Ruskin, by combining art, science and religious spiritualism articulates the Christian hope of the soul's immortality.

The nineteenth century embraces natural theology in a variety of ways, and is expressed in particular in the popularity of «Flower preaching.» «Flower preaching» as an expression of Victorian religious life draws clear associations between the spiritual life of Christ symbolised by the wonders of the natural world, in particular flowers.<sup>31</sup> This theme is explored at length in all the language of flower books I have looked at. There are many examples of primary associations with morality and social conventions as the following poem by Christopher Smart shows:

For there is no Height in which there are not flowers.  
For flowers have great virtues for all the senses.  
For the flower glorifies God and the root parries the adversary.  
For flowers have their angels even the words of God's creation.  
For the warp and woof of flowers are worked by perpetual moving spirits,

---

26 See Scourse 1983.

27 See O'Gorman, 2015. Ruskin's contribution cannot be underestimated: he inaugurated an aesthetic founded on a direct engagement with the natural world while showing how art is a civilising influence. See Wildsmith 2000; Hewison 1993; Landow 1993.

28 O'Gorman 2010.

29 O'Gorman 2010, 284; see also Seaton 1985.

30 Ruskin 1886, 25:328–329.

31 See for instance the Free Church of Scotland minister Hugh Macmillan: «there is not a leaf, nor a flower, nor a dewdrop, but bears His image» (Macmillan 1867, vi).

For flowers are good both for the living and the dead.  
For here is a language of flowers.  
For there is a sound reasoning upon all flowers.<sup>32</sup>

Flowers are seen as civilising and carry with them associations of virtuous lives.<sup>33</sup> While this is not a new idea, but stretches as far back as the gardens of Eden and the *Song of Songs* in the biblical world, through Roman times with Ovid and medieval associations of flowers with Mary for instance, the language of flowers acquires new impetus during the nineteenth century sanitary reforms. Kant's prioritisation of the visual gave way to the prioritisation of smell, which I suggest might be one of the criteria in choosing flowers as emblems on gravestones. The visual experience of a scented flower is enhanced by the memory of its perfume, and by its intellectual, moral and spiritual associations thus contributing to a full-body performance.

### 3.1 Rose

Representations of roses are ubiquitous in the Victorian cemetery (fig. 1). Its symbolic importance cannot be underestimated given its association with love and pleasure since classical times. Roses were cultivated in the medieval enclosed garden for their association with Mary and in their red variety with Christ's passion. Its religious meaning became secularised by the eighteenth century, an era which looked for new ways of using flowers to represent human concerns. The association of roses with Romantic and Graveyard poets built up associations with the pleasure and sorrow of ruins. Allied with this, Linnaeus's classification of flowers based on their sex-

---

32 Christopher Smart, *Jubilate Agno*, Fragment B 492–512, quoted in Branch 2006, 168.

33 See a number of examples and further bibliography in Seaton 1995, 35–36. Rose Porter, *The Story of a Flower and Other Fragments Twice Gathered* (1883) is a collection of short stories where flowers save souls, often portrayed in the hand of a dying and repentant sinner. These stories are common also in women's periodical press and in literature for children. Flowers can recall a lost soul to its better self, or unite lovers or influence someone to lead a sanctified life. On literature for Sunday school American children see Alcott 1855, 25: «through this simple Flower we will keep the child pure and stainless amid the sin and sorrow around her. The love of this shall lead her on through temptation and through grief, and she shall be a spirit of joy and consolation to the sinful and the sorrowing.»

ual differentiation further contributed to a change in the status of flowers. Roses are seen as representing ephemeral beauty, love and virtue:

Roses ephemeral beauty, love,  
thou art all that's lovely, innocence,  
simplicity, I am worthy of you  
Crown of roses, recompense for virtue.<sup>34</sup>

Another poem from popular literature alludes to virtues of peace and faithfulness:

But when thy Roses came to me,  
My sense with their deliciousness was spell'd;  
Soft voices had they-that with tender plea,  
Whispered of peace, and truth, and constancy unequal'd.<sup>35</sup>



Fig. 1: *Rose Emblem, Highgate East Cemetery* (Image: Ann Jeffers 2017).

34 Saunders 1999, 190–193. Saunders reproduces *The Book of Memory* by Fanny Robinson (1802–1872) with illustrations. Each illustration is accompanied by a poem.

35 Burke 1856, 23.

### 3.2 Ivy<sup>36</sup>

Ivy is another plant which is often represented on gravestones. In the language of flowers, Ivy is associated with friendship, reciprocal tenderness, fidelity in friendship, and constancy in matrimony. This plant was already given in ancient Greece to a newly-wed couple and becomes the symbol of women's love and constancy in the Victorian period. Shoberl, author of one of the most influential books on the language of flowers illustrates this when he quotes the following:

«Nothing can separate it from the tree which it has once embraced: it clothes it with its own leaves in that inclement season when its dark boughs are covered with hoar-frost. The faithful companion of its destiny, it falls when the tree is cut down: death itself does not release its grasp, and it continues to adorn its verdure to the dry trunk which once supported it.»<sup>37</sup>

### 3.3 Lilies<sup>38</sup>

In pre-Christian times, lilies are associated with fertility or royalty, making an easy transition to religious concepts (fig. 2). White lilies have been associated with Mary since the medieval period when white was seen as the colour of purity, it is this latter meaning which prevails most on gravestones. However, the emblematic meaning of flowers is not limited to a single set of meanings as Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale* demonstrates:

Pink Hawthorne and the pastoral Eglantine,  
Fast fading Lilies and broad spreading Leaves,  
Fair May's bright garland,  
But lovely things are fleeting- Spring's sweet flow'rs  
Are fugitive- and swifter still than these  
Will love dissolve into forgetfulness.

---

36 Saunders 1999, 180–181. Ivy was well-attested on ancient Jewish tombs: see Crewe 2009, 26–28.

37 Shoberl 1839, 31.

38 Saunders 1999, 182–183.

In this poem, Keats warns of the transience of life. However, the lily also has a biblical antecedent in «the lilies of the field»<sup>39</sup> which gave rise to the following:

Art thou that «Lily of the field»,  
Which, when the Saviour sought to shield  
The heart from blank despair,  
He showed to our mistrustful kind,  
An emblem of the thoughtful mind,  
Of God's paternal care?<sup>40</sup>



Fig. 2: Lily Emblem, Highgate East Cemetery (Image: Ann Jeffers 2017).

---

39 Gospel of Matthew 6:28.

40 Shoberl 1839, 86.

### 3.4 *Poppies*

Another flower which appears on gravestones is the poppy: this illustrates well the natural theology of the time. As the earth goes through seasonal cycles, the poppy is a reminder of continuing hope in the midst of transience.

Life is like a furrowed field, methinks the Poppies say,  
Broadcast sown with care and grief, which spring up day by day,  
But ever there, mid crops of care, some bright-hued joy appears,  
To teach that men should hope again, for smiles amid their tears.  
White emblem of sleep.  
Red is consolation.<sup>41</sup>

The cycle of elements displayed in plant death, decay and reappearance in another guise forms the basis of botano-theology.<sup>42</sup> Even decay has a moral design: «Thus it has pleased Providence to display further diversity of power [...] that even in this world the general destroyer Death is controlled and bound by the will of the great Ordainer.»<sup>43</sup>

## 4. *Victorian Emblems: Animals*

Alongside flowers, another common emblem is the representation of animals. Although there is a great variety of animal «emblems» I have selected some of the most representative.

### 4.1 *Peacock*

The use of peacock imagery goes back to antiquity: a symbol of beauty and glory, it becomes associated with Christianity as an image of God's omniscience. Aristotle's view that peacock's flesh does not rot gave rise to its association with immortality<sup>44</sup> and their medieval iconography associates them with baptism and spiritual rebirth.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Miller 1847, 88.

<sup>42</sup> Scourse 1983, 58.

<sup>43</sup> Scourse 1983, 58.

<sup>44</sup> In alchemy it symbolises the transformation of base matter into gold.

<sup>45</sup> Werness 2004, 319–321.

## 4.2 Ouroboros and Snakes



Fig. 3: Ouroboros Emblem, Highgate West Cemetery (Image: Ann Jeffers 2017).

Another unexpected animal encountered on the gravestones at Highgate are representations of snakes (fig. 3). They often appear on the gates of mausolea as can be seen in a number of examples taken from the «Magnificent Seven» Victorian cemeteries in London. The ouroboros, a snake biting its tail is another recurring image. Taking their symbolic value from snakes' life-cycle, and in particular from the shedding of their skin, snakes have generally been seen as healing,<sup>46</sup> with a further association with immortality as the Gilgamesh narrative demonstrate. These symbols of rebirth and rejuvenation recur in the ancient world, both in Greece and in ancient Egypt. The latter provides us with the myth associated with the ouroboros as Amduat, the many coiled serpent, «who surrounds the world.» As such the ouroboros symbolises «the pre-cosmic primal state in

---

46 As their association with Hippocrates suggests.

which the sun God, and all creation, nightly renewed himself.»<sup>47</sup> The biblical world's view of snakes is clouded by the Genesis 3 account and the book of Revelation 12 and 13 where the association is with temptation and forces of destruction. One of the markers of the Victorian age is a movement towards secularisation and an embracing of classical values. This goes some way to explaining the presence of snakes as «emblems» of renewal and immortality in the cemetery.<sup>48</sup>

#### 4.3 Dove<sup>49</sup>

As the first domesticated bird, doves have had symbolic roles in human culture for a very long time as a messenger (fig. 4). Ancient Mesopotamia and ancient Greece provide associations with love and fertility while the biblical tradition offers a more complex picture.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, in Christianity, doves are associated with peace, a reminder of covenant<sup>51</sup> and immortality<sup>52</sup> as their visual presence in the catacombs testifies. Finally, the dove as Holy Spirit both at the annunciation, and at Christ's baptism suggest that doves represent divine love, and the promise of immortal life. Further associations with gentleness, temperance and faith during the medieval period strengthen their emblematic life and make it particularly appropriate for expressing tenets of faith as well as (temperate) emotions connected with the death of a loved one.

---

47 Werness 2004, 377.

48 Werness 2004, 376–382.

49 Werness 2004, 142–145

50 The sacrifice of turtledoves as part of a purification ritual is described in Lev 14:30.

51 These ideas come from the telling of the flood narrative in Gen 6–9.

52 Werness 2004, 143 mentions that the catacombs were called *columbaria* by the Romans who believed that the souls of the dead lived there.



Fig. 4: Dove Emblem, Highgate West Cemetery (Image: Ann Jeffers 2017).

#### 4.4 Lion<sup>53</sup>

The most spectacular representation of a lion on a grave at Highgate Cemetery is that of a man whose occupation is recorded as someone who traded in animals.<sup>54</sup> Thus the most obvious performative meaning is that of mnemonic for the person for whom the sculpture was made. However, in view of the emblematic character of the lion as an image, we also suggest that it functions at other levels. The Ancient Near Eastern world de-

---

<sup>53</sup> Werness 2004, 254–259

<sup>54</sup> George Wombwell (1777–1850) was a famous showman who founded the first ‘traveling menagerie’ in 1810. Wombwell’s tame lion, Nero, is the model for the sculpture. See ‘George Wombwell’ In ‘Public Amusements of the Week’ *Lloyd’s Weekly London Newspaper*, 31 May 1846: 6, [www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk) (accessed May 18, 2014).

veloped a complex web of associations between lions and notions of justice, power, victory and resurrection as well as lion as guardian (fig. 5). Notwithstanding its biblical associations with the tribe of Judah, and its subsequent association with the evangelist Mark and Jerome, the lion's connection with its emblematic function in funerary art originates from medieval heraldry.<sup>55</sup>



*Fig. 5: Lion Emblem, Highgate West Cemetery (Image: Ann Jeffers 2017).*

---

<sup>55</sup> Werness 2004, 259 gives the example of Richard I, «Lionheart».

#### 4.5 Pelican<sup>56</sup>

An old legend mentioned by Hope B. Werness about how the female sacrifices its blood for her chicks contributed to its association with the sacrificial death of Christ.<sup>57</sup> This image of self-sacrifice pervades the imagery in Christian art and can be understood to be an apt symbol of the pervasiveness of life after death (fig. 6).



Fig. 6: Pelican Emblem, Highgate West Cemetery (Image: Ann Jeffers 2017).

---

<sup>56</sup> Werness 2004, 323–324.

<sup>57</sup> She quotes the *Physiologus*, a medieval book of moralised beast tales which describes that after the pelican kills its chicks, the mother tears her side and the blood that pours out ‘resurrects’ the chicks after three days. Werness 2004, 324.

## 5. *Some Reflections on the Performativity of Representations of Plants and Animals*

Reading these images of the natural world with their multiple references to the ancient world and also to nineteenth century associations, they «perform» in a number of ways. The most down to earth meaning of landscaped cemeteries was a response to Chadwick's «miasma» theory, the gases and smells of the decomposed bodies which were understood at the time to be a danger to the health and well-being of the living. The trees and shrubs were understood «to absorb deleterious gases»<sup>58</sup> and thus to perform a cleansing role in urban developments.

Furthermore, the images perform as mnemonic of the person who is buried there, a means of remembrance of his/her functions or qualities. This is important for the Victorian period which sees a rise in the formation of the individual and felt that individual achievements needed to be recorded and celebrated. One way to live this was through the creation of «personal markers».<sup>59</sup>

Thirdly, the images form a complex network of symbols which point to a Victorian belief system about death.<sup>60</sup> Doves for instance are a symbol of earthly love and marriage, but their presence on the tombstone also hints at spiritual values shared by the mourners. Indeed, heavenly reunion of lovers and family members were increasingly part of funeral sermons in the course of the 19th century.<sup>61</sup> William Branks, a clergyman, argued that personal recognition of family in heaven would be combined with continuing affection for those remaining on earth and described Heaven as a «home with a great and happy family in it».<sup>62</sup> These symbolic representations contribute to the idea of immortality as an afterlife shared with God and the earthly family and became the mainstay of Christian funeral sermons during the Victorian era which frequently referred to the departed as «those who have gone before».

58 Curl 2000, 69.

59 Gillon 1972, ix.

60 These often connect with ancient symbols which might represent belief in the afterlife. See Crewe 2009, 80–81.

61 «As Hell ceased to be a fiery furnace, Heaven became a cosy fireside where long-lost loved ones congregated», Hilton 1988, 335–336.

62 See William Branks, *Heaven our Home*, Edinburgh, 1861, iii, iv, viii cited by Jalland, 1999, 237. For more examples, see Bickersteth 1866 and Wheeler 1990, chapters 2–4.

Finally these symbols must not detract from another purpose: they domesticate grief and bereavement, by transforming the stark realities of death into an emotionally restrained, temperate, moral and civilised death and function as state control to keep its nation in good moral order. In this respect, the images function as an aid to the performance of the 'good death', good for the state and political power.

### *Bibliography*

- Adams, H.G., 1864, *The Language and Poetry of Flowers*, Philadelphia: J. P. Lipincott & Co.
- Alcott, Allison Louisa May, 1855, *Flower Fables. Moral Lessons for Children*, Boston: G.W. Briggs & Co.
- Bickersteth, Robert et al, 1866, *The Recognition of Friends in Heaven*, London: J. Nisbet & Co.
- Branch, Lori, 2006, *Rituals of Spontaneity. Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Wordsworth*, Waco: Baylor University Press.
- Brown, Tim, 2003, *The Making of Urban 'Healtheries'. The Transformation of Cemeteries and Burial Grounds in Late Victorian East London*, *Journal of Historical Geography* 42, 12–23.
- Burke, Anna, 1856, *The Illustrated Language of Flowers*, London/New York: G. Routledge & Co.
- Butler, Judith, 2011, *Bodies That Matter. On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, London/New York: Routledge.
- Callcott, Maria, 1842, *A Scripture Herbal*. London, Digital store 1218.f.2. UIN: BLL01017557828.
- Cleere, Eileen, 2014, *The Sanitary Arts. Aesthetic Culture and the Victorian Cleanliness Campaigns*, Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.
- Crewe, Cynthia M., 2009, *Plant Motifs on Jewish Ossuaries and Sarcophagi in Palestine in the Late Second Temple Period: Their Identification, Sociology and Significance*, *Melilah. Manchester Journal of Jewish Studies* 2009/1, 1–90.
- Curl, James Steven, 2000, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing.
- Ellacombe, Henry N. 1878, *Plant-Lore and Garden Craft of Shakespeare*, Exeter: printed for the author.
- Gillon, Edmond V., 1972, *Victorian Cemetery Art*, New York: Dover Publications, Inc.
- Herman, Agatha, 2010, *Death has a Touch of Class. Society and Space in Brookwood Cemetery, 1853–1903*, *Journal of Historical Geography* 36, 305–314.

- Hewison, Robert, 1993, John Ruskin and the Argument of the Eye, in: Whelchel, Harriet (ed.), *John Ruskin and the Victorian Eye*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, in association with the Phoenix Art Museum, 28–51.
- Hilton, Boyd, 1988, *The Age of Atonement. The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1795–1865*, Oxford: Clarendon.
- Höltgen, Karl Josef, 1986, *Aspects of the Emblem. Studies in the English Emblem Tradition and the European Context*, Kassel: Editions Reichenberger.
- Jalland, Pat, 1999, Victorian Death and its Decline, in: Jupp, Peter C./Gittings, Clare (eds.), *Death in England: An Illustrated History*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 230–255.
- Jalland, Patricia, 1996, *Death in the Victorian Family*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kant, I., 2006 (1798), *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Landow, George P., 1993, How to Read Ruskin. The Art Critic as Victorian Sage, in: Whelchel, Harriet (ed.), *John Ruskin and the Victorian Eye*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, in association with the Phoenix Art Museum, New York, 52–80.
- Loudon, John C., 1843, *On the Laying Out, Planting, and Managing of Cemeteries; and on the Improvement of Churchyards*, London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans.
- Macmillan, Hugh, 1867, *Bible Teachings in Nature*, London, General Reference Collection DRT Digital Store 4378.b.37. UIN: BLL01018929072.
- Manning, John, 2002, *The Emblem*, London: Reaktion Books.
- Miller, Thomas, 1855, *The Poetical Language of Flowers, or the Pilgrimage of Love*, London: Saunders.
- O’Gorman, Francis, 2010, Ruskin, Science and the Miracles of Life, *The Review of English Studies* 61/249, 276–288.
- O’Gorman, Francis, 2015, Religion, in: O’Gorman, Francis, *The Cambridge Companion to John Ruskin*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 144–156.
- Osborn, Henry, 1861, *Plants of the Holy Land. With their Fruit and Flowers*, Philadelphia: J. S. Lippincott & Co.
- Osborne, T/Rise, N., 1999, Governing Cities. Notes on the Spatialisation of Virtue, Environment and Planning, *Society and Space* 17, 737–760.
- Phillips, Henry, 1825, *Floral Emblems*, London: Saunders and Otley.
- Porter, Rose, 1883, *The Story of a Flower and Other Fragments Twice Gathered*, New York, A. D. F. Randolph & Company.
- Pratt, Anne, 1840, *Flowers and Their Associations*, London: General Reference Collection DRT Digital Store 723.b.19. UIN: BLL01017523747
- Ruskin, John, 1886, *Proserpina: Studies of Wayside Flowers, While the Air was yet Pure Among the Alps, and in the Scotland and England which my Father knew*, New York: Lovell, Coryell and Co.
- Rutherford, Sarah, 2008, *The Victorian Cemetery*, Oxford: Shire Publications.

- Saunders, Gill, 1999, *The Country Flowers of a Victorian Lady*, Introduction and Commentary, London: Apollo Publishing, reproduces Robinson, Fanny, 1802–1872, *The Book of Memory*.
- Scourse, Nicolette, 1983, *The Victorians and their Flowers*, London: Croom Helm.
- Seaton, Beverley, 1995, *The Language of Flowers. A History*, Charlottesville/London: University Press of Virginia.
- Seaton, Beverly, 1985, Considering the Lilies. Ruskin's 'Proserpina' and Other Victorian Flower Books, *Victorian Studies* 28/2, 255–282.
- Shoberl, Frederic, 1839 (1835), *The Language of Flowers; with illustrative Poetry: To which is Now First Added, the Calendar of Flowers*, Philadelphia: Lea et Blanchard, 5. American ed.
- Strang, John, 1831, *Necropolis Glasguensis; with Observations on Ancient and Modern Tombs and Sepulture*, Glasgow: Atkinson & Co.
- Tyas, Robert, 1848, *Favourite Field Flowers; or, Wild Flowers of England Popularly Described*, London: Houlston and Wright.
- Werness, Hope B., 2004, The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in Art, New York/London: Continuum, 319–321.
- Wheeler, Michael, 1990, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wildsmith, Claire, 2000, «Candid and Earnest». The Rise of the Art Critic in The Early Nineteenth Century in Hewison, Robert, *Ruskin's Artists. Studies in the Victorian Visual Economy. Papers from the Ruskin Programme*, Lancaster University, Aldershot/Brookfield, CT: Ashgate, 15–32.