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## **Problematic Advocacy and Victorian Public Health in Gatherings From Graveyards by Dr. George A. Walker**

Olivia Ladner  
*The University of Southern Mississippi*

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Problematic Advocacy and Victorian Public Health in *Gatherings from Graveyards* by  
Dr. George A. Walker

by

Olivia Ladner

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Honors College of  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of Honors Requirements

May 2022



Approved by:

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Dr. Alexandra Valint, Ph.D., Thesis Advisor,  
School of Humanities

---

Dr. Joseph Peterson, Ph.D., Thesis Co-Advisor,  
School of Humanities

---

Dr. Matthew Casey, Ph.D., Director,  
School of Humanities

---

Sabine Heinhorst, Ph.D., Dean  
Honors College

## ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the problematic advocacy of Dr. George A. Walker in his public health pamphlet, *Gatherings from Graveyards*. In his work, Walker calls for the removal of urban cemeteries from within London and other cities in Great Britain due to concerns about public health safety. He cites miasmatic theory as the reason for the spread of disease from rotting corpses and unkept cemeteries in the British metropolis. Though he blames Parliament for the state of urban cemeteries, he continuously cites poor communities and neighborhoods as the sole sources of disease and does not conduct investigations into the state of upper-class burial grounds. In this thesis, these patterns of redirected blame on the Victorian lower classes are examined and Walker's double-edged argument of science and morality is brought to light. While Walker does specifically blame Parliament for the lack of any legal action taken on the state of urban cemeteries, he perpetuates problematic ideologies surrounding London's destitute population. Walker also uses moral and religious arguments alongside his scientific observations, which are closely examined in the context of the Victorian Era. Nineteenth-century literature, such as *Oliver Twist* and poetry by Oscar Wilde, is also analyzed to provide further context into how the Victorians viewed burial and death culture as a whole.

***Keywords: Victorian Era, Cemeteries, Public Health, Great Britain, George Alfred Walker, Social Class, Nineteenth Century***



## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to a group of very special, very supportive people who helped me through bouts of writer's block, deadlines, and multiple rough drafts. Thank you to my mother and Kim, Alex, Sarah Jane, Tanner, and Thomas for always being supportive of my long information dumps, frustrated rants, and read-alouds that I know were not the easiest things to deal with. Thank you.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Keywords: .....	iv
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER I: A HISTORY OF VICTORIAN BURIALS .....	5
CHAPTER II: VIEWS ON PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL CLASS .....	13
CHAPTER III: MORALITY, RELIGION, AND WALKER .....	32
CHAPTER IV: WALKER AFTER <i>GATHERINGS FROM GRAVEYARDS</i> .....	51
CONCLUSION:.....	55
Works Cited .....	57

## INTRODUCTION

Public health may seem like an issue that is easily understood within the context of the modern world, but that has not always been the case. The concept of public health, in official terms regarding government action and priority, did not develop until the mid-nineteenth century in Western Europe. In Great Britain, the first official public health activities from the government came in the form of The Public Health Act of 1848 in which Parliament established “a Central Board of Health” that worked to improve health-related infrastructure (UK Parliament). Countries, such as England and France, experienced exponential population and workforce growth due to the industrial revolutions that occurred during the early and mid-1800s. This, in turn, would eventually cause substantial increases in disease outbreaks due to the living and working conditions of the lower classes as George Rosen describes in his book *A History of Public Health*. Rosen details the governmental oversight of the poor and working classes during this time of societal upheaval and industry which lead to overcrowding, congestion, and further neglect (Rosen 113). Working conditions and factory employment lead to a cycle of migration and settlement as those employed were forced to live and move on their occupation’s terms rather than their own.

The areas where these individuals lived were located within inner-city, urban environments where the well-off had fled to avoid the conditions that the lower classes tended to bring. Such neighborhoods were described as “wretched slum districts” that were “intersected by narrow lanes from which in turn sprang a maze of small and ill-ventilated courts” (Rosen 113, 114). These living quarters would be filled, often overcapacity, by workers and their families and lacked any sort of privacy from other

occupants. It is rather easy to see how these neighborhoods would turn into disease hotspots due to these aforementioned conditions.

While Rosen focuses on the hazards of the living, one important factor in the development of public health policy in both France and England was, in fact, the dead. Urban cemeteries and churchyards were at the center of a unique public health crisis during the Victorian Era in Great Britain. The state of these cemeteries was incredibly poor during this era, as overcrowding continued to grow and upkeep greatly declined. Individuals interred within these grounds mostly belonged to the working class and poor, which added to the neglect caused by government officials, churches, and the upper class. As previously noted, social class played a significant role in the treatment of the living and dead, as can be seen through accounts and reports on the decaying states of neglected urban cemeteries.

Dr. George Alfred Walker, a Victorian surgeon, furthers this claim through his book *Gatherings from Graveyards, Particularly those of London: with a concise history of the modes of interment among different nations, from the earliest periods. And a detail of dangerous and fatal results produced by the unwise and revolting custom of inhuming the dead in the midst of the living.* which details public health concerns relating to London's rotting cemeteries and his investigations of the relationships between disease and the dead. The book, published in London in 1839, acts as a harrowing push for cemetery upkeep, infrastructure, and revival that centers the blame on the British parliament and churches that own the befallen inner-city graveyards. Walker's narrative embodies the growing concern for public health and safety from the dead that had not been previously acknowledged by British medical officials or other persons in scientific

authority, save for social reformer Edwin Chadwick in connection to Parliament's Poor Laws.<sup>1</sup> Within the first few pages of the book's "Preface," Walker explicitly states his mindset on the conditions of London's cemeteries:

Burial places in the neighborhood of the living are, in my opinion, a national evil—the harbingers, if not the originators of pestilence; the cause, direct or indirect, of inhumanity, immorality, and irreligion. (Walker III)

This excerpt highlights Walker's professional and personal opinions on the issues of London's cemeteries and dead. The conditions of these burial places are a direct threat to Great Britain and its people, as seen in Walker's claim that they are "a national evil" (III). Through his listing of "inhumanity, immorality, and irreligion" (Walker III), Walker specifies three incredibly significant points of social inadequacy that Victorians would have frowned upon, yet in his mind, those who would want to avoid such negligence have actually created and allowed it to fester through the decay of London's graves. Great Britain, in Walker's eyes, used to be a nation of religion, morality, and humanity, but that has changed. This listing makes it clear that Walker fully believes that the state of urban cemeteries has removed all semblance of these aspects from the nation. Overcrowding, desecration, and foul conditions have now made Great Britain the exact opposite of its once valued reputation. This viewpoint is also a direct attack on social status and incompetent governing; poor cemeteries are the places of suffering and rot, but not those of the wealthy that were located outside of urban areas. Though Walker claims

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<sup>1</sup> According to VCU's Social Welfare History Project, "the poor laws gave the local government the power to raise taxes as needed and use the funds to build and maintain almshouses; to provide indoor relief (i.e., cash or sustenance) for the aged, handicapped and other worthy poor; and the tools and materials required to put the unemployed to work" (Hansan).

that all urban cemeteries pose a threat to public health, his investigations into London's graveyards and subsequent findings only come from poor burial grounds. Nowhere in his work does he mention visiting upper-class cemeteries, which creates a class gap in his argument.

In this thesis, I argue that while Walker purports to blame Parliament for the state of the nation's graveyards and their danger to the living, he actually blames the poor for both. Although Walker seems to critique all urban graveyards, his case studies only consist of graveyards for the poor. Walker's rhetoric throughout *Gatherings from Graveyards* perpetuates the belief that the poor themselves were dangerous: that they brought disease, dirt, and ruin to London and its burial grounds. My thesis includes four chapters. The first explains how wealth and class affected Victorians' burials and funerals. The next two chapters analyze two strands of Walker's criticism of current cemetery practice: his concern for public health (urban cemeteries were medically dangerous to the living) and his concern for the sanctity of the dead (urban cemeteries disrespected dead bodies). My fourth and final chapter follows Walker's problematic actions after he published *Gatherings from Graveyards*. My argument highlights how Walker's class prejudice undergirds both his rhetorical strands in his book, as well as his actions after its publication. Throughout this thesis, I will incorporate analyses of literature from the nineteenth century—including Charles Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist* and poems by Oscar Wilde, Thomas Hood, and Letitia Elizabeth Landon—to illuminate and contextualize Walker's points.

## CHAPTER I: A HISTORY OF VICTORIAN BURIALS

To understand Walker's arguments and the class differences that are embedded in his rhetoric, the way that each class handled their dead needs to be explained. While it is said that death is the great equalizer, burial and mourning rituals from this time period show a clear gap in funerary customs between the different social classes. Wealth was a major factor in how someone was buried and mourned; the rich could have decorative, proper funerals while the poor struggled to even afford the cheapest of wooden coffins. Walker's belief that disease originated from the graveyards of the poor is rooted in how these classes were able, or unable, to take care of their dead during and after burial.

The Victorian Era was an age of industry, wealth, and status, but not all Victorians enjoyed the same benefits of commerce and capital. By the 1840s, destitution was rampant across Great Britain and maintained a strict divide between social classes. Poverty and lack of means not only affected the living poor but also their dead. Agatha Herman describes the working class's objection to "dying in the parish" (306) in her article "Death has a touch of class: society and space in Brookwood Cemetery, 1853-1903." "Dying in the parish" was another name for a pauper's burial, commonly found in urban churchyards. When someone was buried in such a way, the grave signified the lack of possessions and status of the deceased (Herman 306). Public aversion to this form of burial emphasized how important status was, even in death. The state of poor and pauper burials will be explored further in later chapters, though it is not an exaggeration to say that they were truly left behind when dealing with their dead. From pit burials to crude, makeshift coffins, there were few resources for the lower classes to properly bury their dead. The overcrowded, unkempt cemeteries that Walker observes in *Gatherings from*

*Graveyards* are a result of this wealth and resource disparity. The cemeteries of the working and upper classes mostly lacked the hazardous conditions that prevailed in urban graveyards, leading Walker to target the poor in his arguments on public health and safety. His lack of evidence from upper-class cemeteries also lends to this claim; why would Walker not include evidence of overcrowding, neglect, and filth from upper-class burial grounds? Due to the wealthy having the means to care for their dead and cemeteries, these burial grounds would not have been in the same state as those of the poor. Rather than including the conditions of wealthy cemeteries, which did not pose the same threats to public health, Walker omits them from his argument but still uses a collective narrative regarding urban cemeteries to not specify the poor as the sole source of health risks.

The Victorian working class, as Julie Marie-Strange describes, “removed themselves from a prosperous middle-class culture” concerning their death and grief culture (144). The working class included an expansive and diverse population of Victorians who each had unique bereavement practices and beliefs surrounding the death of a loved one. Some of these aspects include but are not limited to: symbolic burial rites, gestures and memorials, and private emotion (Strange 147). The working classes tended to favor respectful funeral and burial practices over what society deemed “respectable”; they wished to remain faithful to grieving and remembering the one lost rather than have outward appearances overpower the event. Though it is hard to describe a typical working-class funeral and gravesite due to the varying beliefs and backgrounds of the population, Strange notes that the core values of funeral ceremonies remained constant among the group.

The graveside service, which would likely take place at an unassuming plot, was an ingrained component of the working-class funeral ritual. The rites acted in both religious and secular practices; they separated the dead from the grieving, led the dead into the afterlife while instilling the bereaved within the living world, and incorporated the living and deceased in their respective realms (Strange 159). At times, some scholars may reflect on working-class funerals as stoic events and perceptions of grief, but the significance and symbolism that resonated within these burial rites acted as a nonverbal expression of sorrow and bereavement. Mourning fashion also enabled this class to express grief: the working class was dedicated to wearing black, or as close as they could get to black clothing, in honor of a deceased individual. If a person lacked black clothing or could not afford it, some would turn to buy, then pawn mourning clothes or choose to dye their garments black for the ceremony. A shared language of nonverbal grief did not signify the lack of emotion but expressed it in a way that fits into the working-class lifestyle.

Just as the working class and poor had unique burials and funerals, the upper-class and wealthy mourned in their own way. This socioeconomic group is well-known for the epitome of Victorian funerals; there were ornate hearses drawn by strong, black horses, breathtaking tombs and mausoleums, and ceremonies of pomp and circumstance. The wealthy also had their own mourning fashion, which Sonia A. Bedikian details in her article “The Death of Mourning: From Victorian crepe to the little black dress.” Wealthy widows were notorious for their mourning fashion, which was worn for over two years after the death of a husband. Widows would follow a timeline of phases that took place after certain periods, each with their own form of dress. First mourning took place during



the first year after the death when a woman would wear a complete mourning garb set, which included a black crepe dress, bonnet, and veil (Bedikian 39). The second mourning started a year and one day after the beginning of first mourning when a widow would change her wardrobe slightly. She would omit some of the heavy crepe from her dress and be allowed to wear non-lustrous black jewelry. This period lasted for nine months (Bedikian 39). During third mourning, also known as ordinary mourning, a woman was allowed to replace the crepe trim of her dresses with black ribbon, lace, and embroidered trim. This period lasted for three months (Bedikian 39). A woman would then enter half-mourning, which could last anywhere from six months to a lifetime. Half mourning garb was closely designed to emulate popular fashion but was only made in acceptable colors, such as mauve, white, and gray. Unlike women, men were not expected to mourn for long periods of time and their mourning costumes became less and less popular throughout the Victorian Era. By the late 1800s, men's mourning garb was only worn by undertakers and their men (Bedikian 39). After her husband's death, Queen Victoria submersed herself in mourning. She would embroider handkerchiefs with black tears, order servants to lay out Albert's clothing every morning, and sleep with a photograph of him post-mortem every night (Bedikian 40). Though men were expected to remarry and mourn quickly, some women never came out of mourning, including Queen Victoria.

While it is important to note that not all wealthy individuals threw extravagant funerals and that these ceremonies were not considered to be the norm, these people did have the income and capital to afford more complex funerals, coffins, and services. They could also afford the aforementioned fashion that came with the traditions of mourning. Ruth Richardson provides examples of funeral commodities that only the wealthy and

upstanding could afford both in and outside the cemetery in her book *Death, Dissection, and the Destitute*. Victorian coffins were usually crafted from sturdy wood and sealed with nails and bars, but new inventions and designs provided further protection from graverobbers, such as the triple coffin. This design held the normal shape of a coffin but was built with alternating layers of lead and wood (Richardson 80). This design created a firmer seal and sturdy exterior that dissuaded graverobbers from procuring the corpse inside; these coffins were not as easily opened, and the assumption was that graverobbers would not exert extra effort to procure the body. The wealthy also invested their money into “vaults, mausoleums, [and] guarded gravesites” to deter graverobbers and resurrectionists, while displaying their status among the simpler graves of a cemetery (Richardson 80-81). The wealthy were not alone in their intentions to stop body snatchers, though, as the middle and working classes could pay extra for doubled coffins and deeper graves. The poor also found protection in filling coffins with layers of soil and sticks, a less effective deterrent, but still an example of citizens wanting to protect their dead and avoid anatomization (Richardson 80-81). As stated previously, the wealthy were also able to have stone mausoleums built to house their dead, which became increasingly popular during the rise of the garden cemeteries of London, England.

When Walker published *Gatherings from Graveyards*, there were already a few extramural cemeteries in operation within Great Britain. In other words, there was already a solution to Walker’s argument. People were being buried outside of London and other large cities; however, only the wealthy were able to access the newer, nicer options. One of the first extramural cemeteries in Great Britain was St James’s Cemetery in Liverpool, a city in northeast England. According to James Stevens Curl, it was built

between the years 1825 and 1829, costing nearly 21,000 pounds (19). Though it was located outside of the city, it was the primary burial place for all Liverpoolians for many years, as it contained a section for poor burials (Curl 19). Another early extramural cemetery was Kensal Green Cemetery, located outside of London. Constructed during the 1830s, it was the first burial ground to be built by the General Cemetery Company for Londoners and included specific grounds for the lower classes (Curl 21). In the same year that Kensal Green was consecrated, the Glasgow Necropolis was established in Scotland to house yet another major city's dead (Curl 21). It is interesting to note that there were large, spacious, and well-kept cemeteries located outside of London and other cities in Great Britain, but the poor were often not afforded the luxury of being interred within them. Curl includes this issue in his book, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, where he writes that the poor who were buried within extramural cemeteries were interred within common graves. These graves, which were high-density burial sites, contained numerous bodies and led to overcrowding in the lower-class sections of these cemeteries (109). While most extramural or "garden" cemeteries were known for their decorative mausolea and architecture, one such cemetery catered specifically to the working and lower classes. The Tower Hamlets Cemetery, as it was called, contained a drainage scheme that allowed its seven-acre landscape to house over 130,000 common graves, which each held at least ten coffins each (Curl 109, 110).

Walker's argument that overcrowding occurred within London cemeteries fails to acknowledge that the extramural cemeteries outside of the city would eventually experience the same problem. The poor were destined to experience overcrowded, shared burial spaces no matter where they were buried. Walker's claims simply further the

notion that as long as the upper classes did not have to experience these sights and smells, it was not an issue. Common graves can also be seen in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837) when Oliver works for an undertaker. In the fifth chapter of the novel, Oliver states that a woman's funeral was compressed into four minutes, after an hour of waiting for the clergy, and her coffin was quickly packed into the grave. He notes that she is not the only occupant, "for the grave was so full, that the uppermost coffin was within a few feet of the surface" (Dickens). This shows her family's lack of wealth and social class, as the burial parallels the practice of using common, high-density graves. Dickens also emphasizes the fatality of being destitute in London when Oliver overhears the conditions that the deceased woman had been living in prior to her death. The woman's mother states, "I say she was starved to death. I never knew how bad she was, till the fever came upon her; and then her bones were starting through the skin" (Dickens). The poor could not sustain themselves due to their lack of resources, which only exacerbated disease and illness.

Each socioeconomic class mourned, remembered, and buried their dead in ways unique to each wealth bracket. The destitute were often not given the chance to control a burial or funeral, but they still mourned and grieved as the other classes did. The poor attempted to avoid being "buried in the parish" and did their best to fight resurrectionists through their own means. The working class found solace in simple graves and symbolic funeral rites; they mourned by having funeral tea and kept mementos of their dearly departed to remind themselves of a loss as they returned to work. Their nonverbal language of grief and mourning created a bond between the working class that was not stoic or cold; it was understood and respected. This can be seen in *Oliver Twist* in which

a working-class widower “had never once moved, since he had taken his station by the grave side, started, raised his head, stared at the person who had addressed him, walked forward for a few paces; and fell down in a swoon” (Dickens). The royal and wealthy built grand mausolea that deterred body snatchers and cemented their place in history through marble and granite. Cemeteries flourished with a multitude of gravesites from simple headstones to ornate private chapels and Gothic tombs. Money divided the classes and their funeral practices, but grief connected them. The set standards and traditions of each social class and how they buried their dead provide insight into how Walker’s arguments fail to acknowledge the strict conditions that the poor had to comply with to bury their dead. Lack of money and resources prohibited the poor from having any real choice to where their dead were buried; the lower class did not willfully choose to overcrowd urban cemeteries because it was their only option.

## CHAPTER II: VIEWS ON PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL CLASS

The main argument that Walker threads throughout *Gatherings from Graveyards* is that the living and dead should not have any contact due to the risk of disease and other public health concerns. Walker makes it very clear that his research, which includes his findings on miasmatic theory and his investigations into London's urban cemeteries, supports his aforementioned claim. He believed that disease was directly linked to the rotting corpses and atrocious conditions of London's graveyards. These public health concerns are then linked to the areas in which Walker wrote about in this work. The cemeteries that contained the warning signs and risk factors for the spread of disease were limited to poor neighborhoods and communities, such as Clement's Lane, Whitechapel, and Drury Lane. The neighborhoods listed in *Gatherings from Graveyards* correlate with research done by Charles Booth, a sociologist from the late Victorian Era. Booth conducted detailed surveys throughout London and compiled his findings into his famous "Poverty Maps." These maps, documenting information from 1886-1903, clearly show that Walker's investigations into urban cemeteries took place in areas that were labeled as "Mixed. Some comfortable others poor," "Poor 18s. to 21s. a week for a moderate family," "Very poor, casual. Chronic want," and, finally, "Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal" (Booth). These claims, observations, and correlation from Booth's research show a direct relationship between public health and poverty.

Again, Walker's main argument in *Gatherings from Graveyards* is that the dead and urban cemeteries pose a threat to public health. He details the grotesque, overcrowded conditions that London's urban cemeteries festered in and uses his observations and research to urge Parliament to pass legislation that would remove

cemeteries from within the city's limits. He cites miasmatic theory as the main source of illness outbreaks in the city. In his research, he claims that these miasmas come from decomposed organic matter, which includes human remains, and spread disease through the air. When inhaled, these miasmas infect people with diseases, as seen in Walker's claims. He emphasizes the dangers of miasmas produced from vaults and exhumed graves, stating that "putrid exhalations" can cause asphyxia and "give rise to fatal disease" (Walker 118). Throughout the text, Walker notes again and again that miasmas are common in poor areas where people live in close contact with butcher shops, markets, and cemeteries, including his neighborhood of Drury Lane, where the streets were filled with "filth" and "poverty" that furthered the likeliness of disease outbreaks (148). Stephen Halliday furthers these points in his article "Death and miasma in Victorian London: an obstinate belief." He analyzes how Victorian medical professionals correlated disease outbreaks with foul odors. From the 1830s to 1860s, miasma theory was seen as the leading cause of cholera outbreaks as doctors considered smells themselves dangerous (Halliday 1469, 1470). Halliday includes a quotation from Neil Arnott, a Victorian physician, telling the Royal Commission for Enquiring into the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts about the danger of miasmas:

The immediate and chief cause of many of the diseases which impair the bodily and mental health of the people, and bring a considerable proportion prematurely to the grave is *the poison of atmospheric impurity* [his italics] arising from the accumulation in and around their dwellings of the decomposing remnants of the substances used for food and from the impurities given out from their own bodies. (Halliday 1469)

The miasmatic theory was prevalent among medical practitioners throughout the early and mid-nineteenth century, which is why Walker, a doctor himself, cites it so frequently in *Gatherings from Graveyards*. Using these findings, Walker presents his evidence in the form of *Gatherings from Graveyards* to bring awareness to lawmakers and other influential upper-class citizens. Parliament had previously ignored, according to Walker, warning signs and moral obligations pertaining to these issues.

Walker explicitly criticizes Parliament's lack of action within his "Preface" as he details sanitary measures taken by both the United States of America and France: while both nations had taken "prohibitions" towards organizing the dead, with France leading the cause, 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" (Walker VI). Here, Walker specifically labels British urban cemeteries as "dangerous," hazardous, and "offensive" to the living, while simultaneously defiling the "resting places" of the dead. He also personifies the British empire as unmoving and unseeing, paralleling Parliament's lack of acknowledgment and action on these issues. In the same passage, Walker defines the conditions relating to the care of graves as "sanitary regulations" (Walker VI) which lends to the claim that his book is one of the first to identify and critique London's graveyards as a public health concern in the empire. This quotation shows that Walker holds Parliament accountable. He also states that only Parliament can fix this problem: "...Governments could only be brought to legislate upon the subject, from the calamitous and depopulating consequences" in regards to cemetery sanitation (Walker VI).



Walker once again reiterates this sentiment when he claims that his “conviction” for writing *Gatherings from Graveyards* is to finally have the “interference of the Legislature” (Walker 10) that has yet to come despite the growing concerns towards urban cemeteries. He critiques the lack of action taken to better the health of Londoners, but there is more to his rhetoric and argument than what meets the eye. While Walker seems to take the humanitarian approach of standing up for the less fortunate, in this case, London’s vulnerable poor communities, he continuously uses rhetoric that perpetuates a cycle of anti-lower class ideologies.

This anti-poor sentiment continues throughout the text as Walker associates specific medical and disease terminology with the hazardous environments within poor and lower-class areas. One of the first linkages between the dead and disease can be found in the “Preface” where Walker cites urban cemeteries as having “clearly traceable” connections to “effluvia” (Walker V), or an unpleasant odor, secretion, or discharge. Walker also connects miasmatic theory to the deplorable state of urban graveyards later in the text. After the “Preface,” when Walker moves on to specific case studies concerning cemeteries, sanitation, and personal investigations both within England and outside of the country, his tone of frustration and anger against the conditions of the poor continues and strengthens.

In a forty-page section labeled “Description and State of Some of the Metropolitan Burying Places,” Walker describes his personal investigations and observations of numerous London burial grounds. In his introduction to this section, Walker claims that his investigations will educate the reader on the dangers of urban burial grounds and prove that the common man is surrounded by these hazards in his

everyday life, though he does not include any descriptions of burial grounds for the upper class. He continues his argument on how human decomposition is linked to miasmatic theory through personal accounts of patients who suffered from typhus within neighboring communities; they were exposed to rotten organic matter, filthy living conditions, and poverty-stricken areas which only exacerbated fevers and other symptoms of the disease (Walker 148). Walker's claims here show his connection between the poor and public health, citing that poor communities and neighborhoods are the sources of health hazards. It is important to note that Walker never provides any indication that wealthy neighborhoods pose the same threat that poor areas do.

There is a prelude to these claims as Walker includes a quote describing how "*the exhalations from animal putrescency are productive of TYPHUS FEVER, and fevers marked by a diminution of power in all the function of the body...*" (Walker 148). He makes a connection between human decomposition and known research on how rotting organic matter, such as vegetables and animal carcasses, can lead to disease through the inhalation of miasmas. Walker concludes this small section of research by stating that his findings led him to believe that both public and private burial places within London are the origins of disease outbreaks and other health-related issues. This portion of the chapter provides evidence and scientific research that strengthens Walker's overall argument that urban cemeteries are a public health concern; he provides context and data concerning the relation between putrefaction and disease, while also using shocking language and rhetoric that cements the seriousness of his claims. London's people and, in turn, the rest of Great Britain, were at an incredible risk of contracting diseases as long as they lived amongst the dead, therefore, cemeteries should be removed from urban areas

and relocated outside city limits. These points create a clear idea that Walker viewed dead bodies as a threat to health; the dead do not belong in the city. The following sections highlight Walker's investigations into individual cemeteries and detail his findings. Despite the great amount of research and evidence Walker presents, he still fails to provide any sort of remarks on the upper-class burial grounds found within London. Without a diverse and complete data sample, Walker's argument forms a gap between the different social classes due to this lack wealthy cemeteries.

Walker describes the thoroughfare of Clement's Lane as narrow and encapsulated by sources of putrefaction, ranging from slaughterhouses to four individual burial grounds. These include the "Green Ground" cemetery, the private Enon Chapel grounds, an Almes House graveyard, and, finally, the vaults and grounds of St. Clement Danes (Walker 149). Clement's Lane, consisting of approximately 200 yards, was a neighborhood that was filled with the smells of the dead. Keeping with Walker's research on the connection between putrefaction and disease, this small area with a high volume of decomposing matter appeared quite hazardous to public health. Finally, he notes that the inhabitants of Clement's Lane tended to be very unhealthy as typhus rapidly spread and ravaged this neighborhood with particular ferocity (Walker 150).

Walker's first account of a specific cemetery pertains to "Green Ground" within the Clement's Lane thoroughfare. He describes horrible scenes of open graves, scattered human remains, and grave desecration. Walker also mentions that open graves are situated directly next to houses and buildings, causing the walls to reek with fluid and offensive odors (Walker 152). The relationship between smells and corpses furthers his argument that the dead are hazardous, disgusting, and a threat to the public. He also

witnessed grave diggers carry baskets filled with bones away from the grounds and out of sight as they repurposed the coffin wood that previously housed the bones. There is a letter excerpt from the *Times* that details a bystander's account of witnessing such atrocities, but Walker remarks that this was not a novel issue; it occurred frequently in "Green Ground" and other urban cemeteries throughout London (Walker 151). This practice would be especially dangerous within the lens of miasmatic theory: not only were people breathing in fumes from overcrowded cemeteries, but they were also having direct contact with decomposed human remains. Walker establishes the connection between smells, miasmatic theory, and corpses.

Walker continuously states the dangers of putrefied matter while also emphasizing moral debates within the text. He is using scientific theories to appeal to those in medical and scientific authority; doctors and politicians would be educated in the nature and manner of diseases and miasmatic theory. On the other hand, Walker also emphasizes the moral responsibility to protect and honor the dead. The actions of these grave diggers, as well as the decayed state of the cemetery, would be seen as a problem in need of solving by the common Londoner. His rhetoric and language are theatrically concise and effective in raising the attention of both commoner and aristocrat, doctor and politician, and victim and perpetrator. *Gatherings from Graveyards* contains a theme of victimizing the poor and vilifying those in power who stand by and let this burial problem only get worse. This theme, however, not only victimizes the poor but also subliminally villainizes them along with those in power; it is a cycle of perpetuating problematic views on the lower classes. While lawmakers fail to act, the poor are blamed for simply existing and living under their given circumstances. Walker has reason to

criticize those with the ability to enact change but also places the blame on those who cannot afford to alter their way of life.

Through his firsthand accounts of “Green Grounds” and other graveyards, Walker localizes the public health risks of urban burial to poor and working-class neighborhoods. This is a not-so-subtle declaration that London is in danger due to the negligence of poor communities and, by association, the wealthy’s insistence on ignoring and moving away from the problem. The text speaks for itself in this regard, as Walker once again blames Parliament while pinpointing the dangers of urban burial: “...the evil can only be effectually destroyed by an enactment of the Legislature, prohibiting altogether interment within cities, towns, or densely populated villages” (Walker 152). Here, the burial issue spans outside of London as Walker lists other cities being also at risk. Instead of London’s public health being jeopardized, Walker now frames it as a national, if not imperial issue. As Walker advocates for better treatment of the poor, though, he again emphasizes the catastrophic, deplorable conditions of their neighborhoods. He stands up for the poor, but in the same vein, perpetuates the idea that the lower classes cannot take care of themselves and allow their neighborhoods and cemeteries to get past the point of no return.

### **French Sociology and Walker’s Work:**

Walker’s correlation between the lower classes, disease, and risks to the larger public was not a unique opinion during the nineteenth century. Historians Dominique Kalifa and Louis Chevalier both analyzed societal opinions of the destitute in France and England in their books *Vice, Crime, and Poverty: How the Western Imagination Invented the Underworld* and *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes in Paris during the First*

*Half of the Nineteenth Century*, respectively. Though these historians focused on France's social history, they both discuss nineteenth-century commentaries on London and Great Britain in their relation to French societal issues.

Chevalier details how the upper classes viewed the poor in both Paris and London through the use of social surveys and statistics. Walker's claims that poor neighborhoods allow for the festering of disease and deplorable conditions are reiterated in the third chapter of Chevalier's book, where he writes that the lower and working classes were seen as dangerous due to their effect on society. The poor were seen as the "most liable to disease," lived in the worst districts of cities, and harbored criminal activity (Chevalier 294). This perspective directly correlates to Walker's claim that poor areas were the most at-risk places for disease to spread due to the filth in which the lower class lived (Walker 148). Chevalier also includes information on the issue of overcrowding in London, which Walker also focused on. The abundance of living and dead bodies exacerbated health risks, crime, and other societal issues in Great Britain, particularly in the nation's capital. The poor were viewed as "irredeemable" and a threat to the "common wealth" (Chevalier 134), which parallels the attitudes that Walker fed into with his rhetoric in *Gatherings from Graveyards*. The poor were a problem and threat that needed to be dealt with to protect London.

Chevalier also includes an excerpt from *La ville monstre* (1842), a collection of travel observations by Flora Tristan, to emphasize Europe's distaste for British lower-class society. Flora Tristan was a socialist writer from France who wrote about the failings of British society and connected these conditions to Paris and other French cities. Her observations came from the same period that Walker was active which allows for a

fairly consistent picture of London. Tristan wrote that the English had stripped the veil of poverty and “all social sores that corroded the capital of Great Britain” (Tristan 133). This rhetoric places the poor as detriments to proper society; Tristan equates the poor with wounds that needed to be treated and healed. Rather than viewing a group of people as living, breathing individuals, Tristan and Walker both frame this social class as a collective issue. Chevalier takes these historic accounts and illustrates the common belief system that the French and British shared concerning the poor, which, in turn, contextualizes how Walker’s rhetoric perpetuated problematic ideals of the lower classes.

In *Vice, Crime, and Poverty*, Kalifa highlights similar viewpoints to those seen in *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes*. Kalifa notes in his introduction that the lower class, or “underclass” as he refers to it, was thought to be comprised of a population of “prostitutes, beggars, thieves, assassins, prowlers, rag-and-bone men, convicts, and so on who are all born from the unclean cross-fertilization of vice, crime, and poverty” (Kalifa 15). This stereotypical overview of an entire socioeconomic class highlights the general contempt that nineteenth-century European society held against the poor. This broad prejudice against the poor enables Walker to blame this group rather than the upper classes. A population of undesirables is a much safer, understandable source of public risks than those in the respectable tiers of society.

Kalifa discusses the threat of miasmas in French colonies, specifically the Kasbah of Algiers, which relates to Walker’s research. In the Kasbah, “the air is tainted, full of nauseous emanations from excrement, decomposing animals, and the lingering smell of bad meat” (Kalifa 29); this description resonates with Walker’s descriptions of lower-class neighborhoods. Here, Kalifa incorporates medical research into the judgment of

lower classes as poor areas were thought to be the source of high volumes of miasmas.

This train of thought is continued when Kalifa discusses Henry Mayhew's comments on the conditions of Whitechapel, London:<sup>2</sup>

...he described the small trades of Whitechapel in the 1860s, identified them as the collectors of dog turds, the rag-and-bone men, the rat killers, the slaughterers, those who hunt for worms and eels in the Thames. Filth carries vermin, infection, scabies, and other skin maladies. This is the reason any new arrival in an asylum or workhouse is first stripped of his rags and then led into disinfecting steam.

(Kalifa 28)

Mayhew's observations provide insight into how Victorians viewed the lower class and further contextualize Walker's reasons for blaming the poor for London's graveyard and disease problems.

Both Chevalier and Kalifa illustrate how European societies, particularly those of France and Great Britain, harbored ill assumptions and beliefs toward the poor and lower classes. Their books contextualize Walker's rhetoric by highlighting the stereotypes that the poor were boxed into: they were dirty, criminal, and a threat to society. Walker used these widespread opinions to frame his argument around London's poor graveyards and neighborhoods being the sources of disease and other public health risks. With common belief comes common acceptance, which Walker perpetuated through his rhetoric of the

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<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica* notes that Mayhew was an English journalist and sociologist, a founder of the magazine *Punch* (1841), who was a vivid and voluminous writer best known for *London Labour and the London Poor*, 4 vol. (1851–62).



lower classes being liable for the state of urban cemeteries and surrounding neighborhoods. The poor, against their will, took the blame for Walker's proposed issues due to his rhetoric even though he claims that Parliament's lack of action is the cause of decaying urban cemeteries. Walker's argument officially blames Parliament, but his rhetoric removes the upper class from the issue and, instead, holds the lower classes accountable for not taking care of their dead.

### **The Treatment of London's Urban Cemeteries:**

Walker begins his explanation of the conditions surrounding London's urban cemeteries by evaluating the substantial gap between the metropolis's scientific excellence and its lack of concern for the horrid state of graveyards and cemeteries within the city limits. He uses a judgmental tone and critical language when describing these disparities between opulence and negligence. He goes as far as to describe those in positions of authority as "aloof" to this pressing matter due to other responsibilities and attentions elsewhere (Walker 2). This sentiment can be seen in the quote "...yet *they* have not attempted to rouse the public mind to the consideration of a most important, though latent cause of disease and death..." (Walker 2). Walker's emphasis on authoritative negligence lends to the frustration he felt towards Parliament's supposed ignorance and inaction. Walker's language also acts as an admonishment of Parliament for neglecting its duty to protect and serve London.

As he voices his critiques of authority, Walker also returns to the topic of public health and how it is vital to the success and prosperity of everyone, regardless of social class. He states that without health, "riches, honours, and distinctions" (Walker 6) are

essentially worthless. Walker raises the question of what good these ceremonials are without a long life to enjoy them; this appears to be directed towards the wealthy upper classes as the working class and poor did not have the luxury of such decorations. Again, the wealthy were the ones in positions of power who could address the concerns and issues brought to attention by Walker. On the surface, he is not holding the poor responsible for the health risks and state of graveyards- Walker deliberately uses language and terminology that specifically applies to the wealthy, upstanding, and powerful. This section is another example of Walker attacking Parliament and the upper class's morality and duty to uphold the values and reputation of London. After this scathing introduction to this chapter, titled "Metropolitan Burial Places," Walker then moves on to his observations on the state of cemeteries within the capital, which will contradict his initial claim that the powerful are responsible and not the poor.

As he introduces the environment and nature surrounding urban cemeteries, Walker specifies that these particular burial places of utter disrepair belong to the poor. Due to their circumstances in life, the suffering and anguish they experienced while living follows them into the grave. He personifies these poor graveyards as hungry, unforgiving beings, writing:

...for in these so-called burying places, the receptacles of the dead, are situated; their insatiable appetite, yet unglutted, is constantly devouring fresh victims, and these again are ejected, after a slight sojourn, to make room for the succeeding occupants, who retain their situation only by the interest or caprice of a hireling grave-digger. (Walker 6)

Not only does Walker personify graveyards as villainous, starving creatures in this quote, but he also alludes to the ever-present problem of bodysnatching during the Victorian Era. The shallowness and fragility of poor and pauper graves provided easy opportunities for resurrectionists to steal corpses for the growing study of anatomy during the mid to late 1800s; Walker also references the murderers William Burke and William Hare (Walker 6, 7) to further illustrate the heinousness of the era of anatomy.<sup>3</sup> These points add to the overarching theme of sympathy for the poor that Dr. Walker continues to voice throughout the text which is juxtaposed by the rhetoric he chose to use when discussing destitute neighborhoods and burial grounds. The descriptions of poor burial grounds also act as a question of Parliament's moral authority; Walker appears to criticize Parliament's lack of action concerning burial grounds because those in power should have a moral and religious obligation to protect London's dead while also ensuring their reputation as respectable, honorable men.

Context concerning these types of graves can be seen in the research of Richardson, again. Pauper burials marked the death of a destitute individual and often lacked components of a respectable funeral, such as sturdy coffins, gravestones, and burial shrouds (Richardson 274). The bodies were often buried naked or wrapped in paper and the families of the deceased were offered no "last look" and no say in where the body was buried (Richardson 274). These burials were paid for by the state and, therefore, only required the bare minimum when providing for the dead poor. Mass graves were also used to bury the destitute, outnumbering the number of bodies that

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<sup>3</sup> William Burke and William Hare were pair of infamous murderers for profit who killed their victims and sold the corpses to an anatomist for purposes of scientific dissection (Britannica).

regular pauper graves usually contained; a regular pauper grave could have as many as twenty individual dead, while mass graves exceeded this greatly (Richardson 274). This information provides historical context as to why Walker's account of pauper graves illustrates the desolate nature of dying poor and, therefore, vulnerability to body snatchers and other miserable conditions related to burial in Victorian lower-class districts.

Walker then moves on to detail his current mindset regarding sanitation and London's lack thereof. He continuously claims that his findings are based on research both from the past and present, even emphasizing the point that "*English*" writers have reviewed and concluded similar data (Walker 10). The italicized print, of course, calls emphasis to the fact that English men have researched and collected the same results as Walker but also allows for the assumption that he was making a point to his audience that British scholars were concerned about this issue. Again, this emphasis on Great Britain as a country and identity continue the theme of moral, patriotic, and religious obligation to protect both the living and the dead. Within his "Preface," Walker wrote about how other countries, namely France, had made concrete efforts to solve the problem of urban burials and how decomposing dead affected the living. Perhaps he thought that the mention of nations other than Britain was not enough to persuade his audience to act; if British citizens and scholars are concerned about these issues, then that may be enough to prove that his arguments are valid and should be taken seriously. The mention of France could also be seen as a jab to Parliament and Britain's reputation as a whole; other countries were making efforts to better the conditions of the living and the dead, so why was Britain not doing the same? Walker ends the chapter with his thesis, printed in bold and

capital letters, stating that there should be an “ENTIRE REMOVAL OF THE DEAD FROM THE IMMEDIATE PROXIMITY OF THE LIVING.” (Walker 11)

**Further Observations in Urban Cemeteries:**

Within the parish of St. Martin, Walker details the state of disarray and incompetence that had befallen the Drury Lane burial grounds. He notes that thousands of bodies had been interred within mass graves and pit burials, which had caused the soil to become saturated with “disturbed and mutilated” corpses (Walker 163). The high volume of decomposition and putrefaction, Walker notes, was a pressing issue for citizens’ health and wellbeing. The pit burials, filled with an innumerable number of dead, were haphazardly covered by only wooden planks and lacked proper protection and measures to conceal and contain miasmas. Since pit burials were very common amongst the lower-class dead, this can be seen as another example of Walker’s insistence on demeaning the funerary practices of the poor and connecting foul, dangerous smells to cemeteries. Walker’s belief in miasmatic theory provides further evidence as to why he would continue to emphasize how bad these burial grounds smelled.

This section is notable due to Walker’s mention of pit burials and mass graves, which he informs were quite the common practice at the time. For context, Richardson’s research can once again be incorporated as she describes in detail the nature of such forms of interment. Pit burials were mass graves containing numerous corpses that were unclaimed or sanctioned for pauper funerals; the bodies within them were usually buried without coverings and treated with quicklime to hasten the time until the pit could be refilled (Richardson 60, 274). Quick-lime, also known as calcium oxide, is a chemical material that was used during the Victorian Era, and still, today, to halt the putrefaction of

corpses and conceal the smell of decay. This was a common practice in the treatment of mass graves, whether it be due to poverty, overcrowding, or mass death from disease.

The Victorian author Oscar Wilde notes this practice in “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” (1898) when describing the grave of an executed man named Charles Thomas Wooldridge, who was hung for murder. Wilde wrote this poem during his time imprisoned at HM Prison Reading and witnessed the aftermath of the execution, emphasizing the ward officers’ nice clothes but the presence of “quicklime on their boots” (Wilde, line 450). Wilde then goes on to describe the pauper grave of Wooldridge:

There was no grave at all:

Only a stretch of mud and sand

By the hideous prison-wall,

And a little heap of burning lime,

That the man should have his pall. (Wilde, lines 452-456)

These lines not only depict the usage of quicklime on a pauper’s grave but also describes the usual conditions for being buried by the state. The man was not given a place in a churchyard or cemetery and was afforded only a small hole within the perimeters of a prison yard. Wilde’s poem provides literary context into how the poor dead were dealt with outside of prison walls, as well, since the conditions of a pauper’s grave did not waver depending on the criminal status of an individual. Wilde does not even consider this small hole a grave, as seen in the first line “There was no grave at all” (Wilde, line 1). This rhetoric implies that a small, nondescript hole was not enough to be considered a grave—to be buried in a true grave meant much more to Wilde. The burial spot in the poem is simply a place to get rid of the dead as if it were a dumpster for garbage.

Sentiments like these further the notion that pit burials and mass graves were no more graves than the small hole dug for the prison. The poor were destined for a cheap, crude grave that would not be theirs alone; they shared their space in life and death, ignored by the state and well-off society. The use of quick lime would also mask the usual smells of decomposition, which connects to how smells were seen as a threat to health.

Though Walker does not mention the use of quick-lime, Wilde's poem showcases substantial literary context into the treatment of London's poor and their dead. Walker's emphasis on the injustices dealt with the city's lower classes fits well with the rhetoric seen in Wilde's piece. Richardson's added historical context also provides additional information concerning the nature of pit burials, which Walker only mentions in passing. It is important to understand how overcrowded and unsanitary the conditions that Walker described are, as it furthers his argument that urban burial grounds were sites of disease and other health risks.

The final area to be examined, though there are numerous other entries to Walker's investigation, is the East End London district of Whitechapel. Though once a prosperous area, Whitechapel's various districts became overrun with crime and poverty, leading to the decaying nature of its graveyards. Walker's clinical observations lack the sympathy and understanding that should be used when discussing areas that struggle with poverty and corruption. He details this digression through his initial introduction of the locality, stating that the vaults beneath Whitechapel Church had entered a dilapidated state. He specifies that Whitechapel had become "extremely disgusting" due to the filth produced by the "lower order of inhabitants." (Walker 168) The exposed, rotted coffins within the vaults emitted a smell that was "very offensive" to the senses (Walker 167).

The connected burial grounds were in no better state, as its rapidly putrefying dead, as Walker concluded, must be the cause and/or catalyst of the rapid development of disease among the poor inhabitants of the district (Walker 168). Though this graveyard was once a place of respect and honor for the dead, it had suffered from indifference and decayed into its then-present state of chaos and foulness. Once again, Walker highlights the noxious smells of cemeteries and perpetuates the idea that these odors led to disease.

Walker remarks that the dead are continuously exhumed by the shovelfuls and strewn across the grounds to make way for new interments. The cemetery was so overcrowded that one would be unable to dig a shallow hole without encountering a recently buried corpse (Walker 168). In some cases, coffins and corpses were only buried in a mere foot and a half of soil. This illustrates how mismanaged urban graveyards were as overcrowding, at least within those burial places for the lower classes were concerned, became a more and more pressing issue. Walker's insistence on documenting the crowding and lack of space within urban cemeteries furthers his argument that the dead should no longer be buried within cities and instead be buried and relocated to intramural graveyards in the countryside. This sentiment also illustrates Walker's continuation of focusing solely on poor, disadvantaged areas. Without any context of wealthy and working-class cemeteries, Walker's argument is framed with the conclusion that the poor are the only ones to blame for miasmas, disease, and cemetery neglect.



### CHAPTER III: MORALITY, RELIGION, AND WALKER

While the bulk of *Gatherings from Graveyards* focuses on scientific investigations and reasoning, Walker also inserts moral and religious aspects into his persuasive argument. There are several examples of Walker using religious language, such as respecting the dead and preserving the sanctity of the grave, which allude to his methodology in convincing Parliament to take legal action towards burial laws in London. Walker pairs these religious themes with common morality when discussing topics such as body snatching and exhuming the dead; he emphasizes the importance of the living being separate from the dead by explaining the moral dilemma of disturbing the dead after burial.

London was steadily, and at times rapidly, expanding and with it so did the city's population; however, urban burial sites did not experience the same growth. There was an abundance of new dead as the population grew, but the cemeteries remained the same size. Walker's narrative makes sense; if cemeteries were moved outside of the city, they would be able to expand as needed to accommodate the growing number of dead. He saw extreme hazard and risk in London's current handling of the dead- exhumation and redistribution of the long and recent dead was not a permanent solution. Even as a temporary solution, these processes were failing, as seen in the burial places detailed earlier. Overcrowding was not solved, and grave desecration had seemingly become the norm. Despite these claims, Walker does not mention Kensal Green or other extramural cemeteries as options for the poor *Gatherings from Graveyards*.

Furthering this point of disgust towards exhumation, Walker detailed a scene of corpse defiling that was especially heinous. He writes that as workers dug the foundation for a new wall of Whitechapel Church, a mass grave was unearthed; the pile of bones was between “eight to ten feet in thickness” (Walker 168). These remains were subsequently strewn about the grounds, remaining visible to public view for some time. To deal with this new amount of human remains, those in charge of graveyard upkeep dug burial pits in other portions of the churchyard and deposited the remains within them; in the process of digging these pits, many coffins and family graves were disturbed with some coffins bursting and even being cut in two (Walker 169). It is important to note that the remark on “family graves” may insinuate that those of higher social standing were affected during this process due to the poor not having the means for familial, private graves.

Finally, Walker provides a brief remark on the “poor ground” of Whitechapel that was situated away from the church, but still connected to the grounds, stating that the area was “thickly crowded with the remains of the dead” (Walker 169). This situation acts as yet another example of the mistreatment of destitute dead during the early Victorian Era; the burial ground portioned off for the incredibly poor was offset from the actual church and sat in a state of ruin and rot. While Walker does not directly discuss social class in relation to this incident, his simple and harrowing description of the “poor ground” acts as a subtle reminder that it was the poor that were cast aside and forgotten in both life and death. And yet, Walker still chose to perpetuate the narrative that the poor brought filth, disrepair, and overcrowding to urban cemeteries instead of focusing on his stated claim that Parliament is to blame for its lack of action.

## **The Treatment of London's Dead:**

Poet Thomas Hood (1799-1845) also wrote on the state of London's treatment of cemeteries and their dead. Hood was an active author and poet from the early nineteenth century, predating the Victorian Era, though he did write in the early years of Queen Victoria's reign. One of his poems, titled "Mary's Ghost. - A Pathetic Ballad" (1826), focused on the areas of concern that Walker researched and wrote about in *Gatherings from Graveyards*. Though "Mary's Ghost" consists largely of blatant criticism of the practice of anatomical dissection, the text also reflects Walker's sentiments of grave sanctity and respect for the dead. Walker does not criticize dissection specifically, but there are several instances of indignation towards exhumation and medical observation of corpses throughout his work.

In "Mary's Ghost," Hood details the fictional account of a woman lamenting her sorrows over being exhumed and dissected after her burial. The poem insinuates that though Mary had moved on to what she thought would be her "rest eternal" (Hood, line 6), the exhumation of her corpse disrupted her afterlife and has caused her and her surviving companions great suffering. Mary states "Alas! my everlasting peace, / Is broken into pieces" (Hood, lines 7-8) after "body-snatchers" had pillaged her grave through the instruction of medical doctors in need of dissection subjects. The poem continues as Mary tells her former lover, William, where her body has gone; she recounts to him how various parts of her body have been sent to different doctors. Hood emphasizes the horridness of Mary's situation, one of becoming a lost spirit without a home, through dry humor as she tells William where her hands, head, and arms have been sent:

The arm that used to take your arm  
Is took to Dr. Vyse;  
And both my legs are gone to walk  
The hospital at Guy's.  
I vowed that you should have my hand,  
But fate gives us denial;  
You'll find it there, at Dr. Bell's,  
In spirits and a phial. (Hood, lines 21-28)

These lines, though fictional and comedic, reflect the cruel reality that many bereaved families faced during the height of medical dissection's popularity. The character of Mary symbolizes the unknown number of corpses that were stolen from their graves to be cut open and studied in the name of science, leaving many surviving family members and friends devastated by such desecration if they were to find that their loved ones had been exhumed. This could happen if a family visited a grave and found the site disturbed from activity not pertaining to the original internment.

Hood's implied distaste for dissection and body snatching is evident from the contents of "Mary's Ghost" and such sentiments are coupled, to a degree, by Walker. While Hood's poem is comedic, his words acted as a critique of body-snatching and illegal exhumation. This is especially the case in how both men attempt to cause an emotional response from the objectification of common morality. Throughout *Gatherings from Graveyards*, Walker makes a point to appeal to his audience's morality when describing the conditions of urban burial grounds; he tends to state his research conclusions first and then follow with how these observations go against British morality

and religious beliefs. This pattern can be seen in the quotations already present in this work. For another example, in Walker's subsection on Trinity Episcopal Chapel's burial grounds, he first notes the excessive overcrowding of the graveyard. The graveyard is also said to be very old, large, and cheap; Walker notes that many Irish are therefore buried there as they are brought from both near and far parishes to be interred (Walker 173). The state of the graveyard is Walker's evidence, while the added information regarding "cheapness" appeals to proper morality and respect. He does not stop there in his persuasion of the upper-class doctors, aristocrats, and politicians that comprise his target audience, as their morality would have been tested by being exposed to how the city's dead were treated. Walker then goes on to describe how a "*school room for children*" (Walker 173) is located directly above one of the graveyard's sheds. This shed is filled with tools, coffin wood, and other materials used in the process of burial and grave upkeep; this fact would, in theory, upset those who read *Gatherings from Graveyards* due to Walker's research on how contact with the dead and burials causes illness. Walker's argument implies that all contact with decomposition is hazardous, so burial equipment that was used regularly posed a second-hand risk to the school children. The emphasis on children being affected by the smells and close contact with the dead appeals to Londoners' morality; children being harmed is a horrible topic, which is why Walker puts so much emphasis in this section.

Another connection between Hood and Walker is their mutual distaste for exhumation; Hood may not explicitly state his opposition to this practice, but his poem's critique implies that he did not fully accept it. It can be inferred that Hood would associate the practice with body snatching, while Walker specifically denounces it in his

work. Walker reasons his objection to exhuming the dead with accounts from various medical doctors who he quotes and summarizes in the section “Observations of Medical Writers Upon the Nature and Effects of Animal Decomposition; with Some Facts, Collected by the Author in his Researches Upon the Subject.” In a footnote that coincides with M. Orfila’s testimony on the dangers of exhumation and dissection, Orfila notes that the risk of infection from a corpse is only likely in the case of someone being “debilitated by previous diseases,” as summarized by Walker in the text (Walker 120). However, Walker challenges Orfila’s statement with his investigations with local gravediggers. Walker counters that regardless of whether or not they have underlying conditions, gravediggers are “seriously affected in the execution of their dangerous and disgusting avocation” (Walker 120). This line not only highlights Walker’s belief in the severity of being exposed to the dead, more specifically those who died from illness but also includes a judgment on the practice of exhumation. The usage of “execution” as the noun acts as an exceptional way to further condemn desecrating burial sites. Execution doubles in meaning, it can both be used to describe putting a plan into action and as putting someone to death. The latter definition is poignant in Walker’s material context; the gravediggers are once again condemning someone to death by disturbing their remains.

The apparent disregard and lack of comment concerning the desecration of individual bodies when dissected is an interesting gap in material. Walker identifies exhumation and mutilation as desecration, so with this in mind, he would have to correlate dissection with similar opinions. Walker was a British medical doctor himself, so it begs the question of whether or not he purposely avoided criticizing dissection even though it aligns with his research and previous criticism. Is the desecration of the dead

only an issue when medical doctors are not involved? It is impossible to truly know Walker's opinion on the matter, but there appears to be obvious bias in the lack of material on dissection. If he intentionally omitted comments regarding England's dissection and body-snatching problem, this could further allude to his attitudes towards the poor.

Anatomists and body snatchers alike tended to target poor cemeteries and pauper graves out of convenience for corpse retrieval. In a return to Richardson's work, she describes the conditions surrounding medical men viewing the human body as a commodity through her extensive research on the subject. Pit burials and shallow graves, commonly filled with bodies that lacked coffins or other protective measures, allowed body snatchers to easily procure corpses, which led to anatomists paying cheap fees for fairly easy labor. Richardson states, "the upper class sought out the poor to exploit their dead through dissection and treating them as disposables" (Richardson 59). This sentiment emphasizes why Walker may have avoided critiquing this practice.

There is a footnote on page 120 that furthers Walker's scientific analysis on the dangers of burial methods and exhumation within these cemeteries. Walker also mentions the practice of dissection within this section, which is not analyzed in-depth within *Gatherings from Graveyards*. He writes that a Scottish doctor contacted a colleague and him after an incident involving the dissection of a woman who died from consumption, though it is not specified if the woman had been exhumed.<sup>4</sup> The Scotsman had held his

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<sup>4</sup> According to Harvard University, "Tuberculosis, also known as 'consumption,' 'phthisis,' or the 'white plague,' was the cause of more deaths in industrialized countries than any other disease during the 19th and early 20th centuries. By the late 19th century, 70 to 90% of the urban populations of Europe and North America were infected with the tuberculosis bacillus, and about 80% of those individuals who developed active tuberculosis died of it.

face close to the woman's exposed lungs and experienced a "disagreeable stench" that would not dissipate from around him (Walker 120). Following this incident, the doctor promptly began to experience coughing fits and concluded that he had contracted the woman's fatal disease. The man then traveled to London, where it was confirmed that he had been infected. His fate is otherwise unknown as Walker concludes the footnote without specifying if the Scotsman had survived or not. Here, Walker critiques the man's ignorance for placing his mouth and nose so close to a dead body and, once again, uses this example as a way of supporting his overall claim of the dangers of being in contact with the dead.

This footnote, though, gives further insight into Walker's perception of the dead and how they are treated. Walker continues to push the narrative that corpses are dangerous to the public, as seen with the above example, but fails to have a consistent opinion on how the dead should be treated. On one hand, he advocates for upholding the sanctity of the grave through respect, as seen with his reactions to overcrowded graves and unkept cemeteries. On the other, he omits any comment on the practice of medical dissection. In the case of the Scottish doctor, Walker admonishes his ignorance for coming into close contact with a corpse but does not critique the fact that the doctor was dissecting the deceased individual. He mentions the practice very few times and all occurred outside of Great Britain.

Walker's work focuses on relocating the dead out of public health concerns while also continuously returning to the matter of respecting the dead. Richardson also writes on similar matters of respect considering dissection, stating that as dissection became popular in Britain, criminals risked being punished by having their bodies dissected after



execution. A person's body should be preserved for the Christian belief in the Resurrection, but those poor and criminal lost this respect as the demand for anatomical study grew during the nineteenth century (Richardson 29). If Walker were to denounce this problem that he and his colleagues were potentially involved in, the admittance of guilt and association with desecration would minimize his credibility and authority. Criticism of a practice that his fellow doctors were participating in may have also caused discontent among his peers and friends.

Though Walker does not comment on dissection, he does critique the mutilation of dead bodies when detailing the nature of inhumation in London's urban cemeteries. Most cemeteries, or at least those discussed by Walker, within London's borders, were filled beyond capacity at this time and did not allow for the usual "given depth" to be dug for burials (Walker 213). If a family chose to pay extra for more feet to be excavated, the gravedigger had to be extremely cautious of the surrounding dead already interred within the ground. Even with caution, it was common for the gravedigger to accidentally dismember "the legs, the head, or even half of a body" (Walker 213) when shoveling deeper into the earth. After this observation, Walker goes on to relate such situations with his audience to emphasize the importance of respecting the dead and removing them from the confines of overcrowded, urban burial sites.

Walker once again invokes strong feelings of morality in the coming passage by creating a scene that attacks his audience's emotions; he attempts to upset his audience through the narrative that the dead need to be respected and protected. Though Walker's overall argument for cemetery removal focuses on London's total population, his evidence only pertains to working and lower-class graveyards. Even though he presents a

claim that anyone can be affected by the risks posed by unkempt burial grounds, his investigations do not include upper-class cemeteries. To combat this gap in research, Walker invokes religious and moral views to reach a wider audience. For example, he specifically uses the examples of deceased daughters and wives being exhumed to trigger emotional responses in the following lines:

...the bodies of wives, daughters, our relatives, are to be exposed to the vulgar gaze, the coarse jests and brutal treatment of men, who being men, would not, dare not, execute the tasks imposed upon them. (Walker 213)

Walker's choice of specifying female dead and the atrocities done to them is telling in identifying his audience. In the context of nineteenth-century Britain, men were in positions of power that could potentially aid in reforming burial laws in the name of Walker's research. These men would also, likely, be husbands and fathers; Walker deliberately uses female victims to appeal to their morality, romantic bonds, and paternal ties. In Walker's analogy, women are helpless victims to the crude, brutish actions of other men. This is obviously immoral and shocking to the average British man; would he not need and want to protect his wife and daughters from such villainous characters?

There is also an implication of sexual depravity and rape within this section: women, in a vulnerable state, are being handled, groped, and ogled by men against their will. Through the use of words like "vulgar" and "brutal" (Walker 213), Walker creates a rhetoric of sexual violence. There is also a connection to Hood's poem, which also has a female corpse acting as a victim of body snatching and exhumation. The narrative of women being victims to men in these scenarios perpetuates a cycle of victimizing women while

attempting to anger men in power to stop these atrocities from happening in the first place.

This rhetoric also perpetuates anti-poor ideals, as grave diggers tended to be male, lower-class individuals. With these points in mind, Walker's phrasing insinuates that lower-class men are barbaric, violent, and predatory. This not only demonizes this socioeconomic group but also subtly furthers Walker's idea that urban cemeteries, mostly filled with lower-class dead, needed to be removed from the city. If urban cemeteries were closed and moved outside of London, overcrowding and subsequent grave desecration would disappear from the city. This change would also remove the poor's access to their dead; cemeteries located outside of the city limits the ability of the lower classes to travel and visit the graves of their friends and families. Walker's insistence on removing the dead from London creates a gap between mourning customs and funerals. If the poor were unable to travel outside of the city, they would no longer be able to grieve and cope with death as they had before. Again, this is an example of how Walker's arguments do not explicitly ostracize the destitute, but the ramifications of his proposed changes would negatively impact the lower classes.

#### **Letitia Elizabeth Landon and Walker's Views on Extramural Burial:**

Walker was not the only writer to take notice of the dilapidated states of London's cemeteries, as can be seen in poetry by author Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838). Though Landon was a writer within the Romantic Era and her works predated the Victorian Era, as she only lived for one year of Queen Victoria's reign, her observations on the conditions of urban burial grounds coincide with similar criticisms seen in Walker's work. Landon's poem "Scenes in London IV - The City Churchyard" (1839),

which was published in the collection *The Zenana and Minor Poems*, explicitly states that she would never want to be laid to rest within the urban churchyards of London. This sentiment is reflected in Walker's push to empty and relocate urban cemeteries, which would later occur due to a series of burial reform acts by Parliament and his actions at Enon Chapel. There is an underlying message of sanctity and respect in both Walker and Landon's work, as well, that shows how the dead, not the living, would not feel at peace in these urban graves. The first stanza of Landon's poem illustrates these ideas effectively and concisely:

I PRAY thee lay me not to rest,

Among these mouldering bones;

Too heavily the earth is prest

By all these crowded stones. (Landon, lines 1-4)

Landon's description of urban graveyards reflects the accounts provided by Walker in his chapter "Description and State of Some of the Metropolitan Burying Places," as she notes the "mouldering" state of the dead within them. Mouldering, defined as slowly decaying, often due to neglect, encapsulates the common state of human remains throughout London's cemeteries; the neglect of poor churchyards created an environment where the dead were left to rot and fester without a proper burial. Walker describes this situation in the aforementioned cemeteries of Whitechapel, Drury Lane, and Clement's Lane. The "crowded stones" signify the numerous, haphazardly organized gravestones that were littered about and displaced as overcrowding caused further chaos within urban burial grounds. The densely packed and unkept burial grounds also do not portray an idyllic setting for the dead to rest eternally in. Landon and Walker both emphasize how the dead

would not feel comfortable or respected in urban cemeteries because of their horrid conditions.

In the third stanza of the poem, Landon writes “I cannot bear for life to make, / Its pathway o’er my head” (Landon, lines 13-14) which alludes to the ever-expanding nature of London. As stated previously, the capital was in a constant state of growth and outward expansion that led to the overcrowding of urban graveyards. As neighborhoods grew, homes and buildings were established closer and closer in proximity to cemeteries: people were practically living atop the dead. Landon finds this unappealing and dishonorable to the dead; there is a subtle insistence that the living and dead should be separated out of respect and sanctity. This sentiment mirrors Walker’s argument that the dead should no longer be buried within the city and instead moved into the countryside. Though Landon does not cite public health as her reasoning for this, her opinions on interment location relative to that of the living match Walker’s sentiments.

Landon’s preferential grave is located in the countryside, away from the bustling streets of London. The fifth stanza of “The City Churchyard” portrays the serene burial fields which she admires:

No: lay me in the far green fields,  
The summer sunshine cheers;  
And where the early wild flowers yields,  
The tribute of its tears. (Landon, lines 17-20)

These lines depict the intramural cemeteries that would be popularized later during the Victorian Era; they are outside of the city and undisturbed by the common business that London’s urban graveyards experienced on a daily basis. While Landon describes inner-

city churchyards as rotting and crowded, she illustrates a peaceful and serene picture of a gravesite located in the countryside. This, again, relates to Walker's push for the removal and relocation of the dead, though he does not cite beauty and peace as his evidence.

These two viewpoints both emphasize the disconnect between the well-off and the poor, as well. The poor would not be able to afford the cost of corpse transportation and burial outside of their immediate neighborhoods, as well. Walker and Landon both saw countryside burials as the better option for internment, but this method is not a solution for those that cannot access it.

It is interesting to note that while Landon and Walker's outlooks on urban burial come from different origins, Landon is appalled by the constant business and lack of interest in honoring the dead, and Walker has scientific research and public health concerns, they still share commonalities in their work. Both find the countryside to be more suitable for burial rather than the city and they both document their observations of the disgusting nature of urban burial grounds. Walker's sub-argument of urban cemeteries being disgusting and dangerous places that defiled good Christian and moral values lends to Landon's preference towards the peaceful, undisturbed nature of country cemeteries. "The City Churchyard" and *Gatherings from Graveyards* were published in different eras by vastly different authors, yet the two works share the common idea that London's cemeteries were in a state of disrepair and filth, speaking to how horrible the conditions were during the early and mid-nineteenth century. They both favored extramural burials, but as seen in the first chapter of this thesis, it was not always the beautiful, peaceful solution that poetry claimed it to be.

### **Boundaries Between the Living and the Dead:**

Time is a subtle yet ever-present factor in much of Walker's research and claims in regards to the dead and the threat they pose to the living. Walker's main thesis in *Gatherings from Graveyards* is that cemeteries and the dead do not belong in London's city boundaries, which can be seen throughout the text. Walker explicitly states his decree when persuading parliament to enact laws prohibiting interment within London's city limits:

In both cases the depositaries of the public authority must shut their ears against the voice of interest and of prejudice; their duty is to do good to their fellow-men in spite of all their opposition and, above all, they must not hunt after light and frivolous applause. The only object they should purpose themselves to attain, out to be - *the approbation of their country*. (Walker 116)

He addresses public health concerns and the threat of the dead to Parliament as a national problem, one that involves every British citizen despite socioeconomic status, race, or gender. In an earlier quotation, Walker posed the dead as Britain's responsibility and the state of cemeteries as the empire's societal failings. This in of itself is a boundary of time: Britain once protected its dead, but in the present has failed to do so. In a preface to the above quotation, he remarks that Britain should reinstate policies of the "ancients" and in doing so, would be the "work of profound wisdom" (Walker 116). It is interesting to note that in this boundary of time, Walker is calling for Britain to adopt the customs of old to achieve progress in the future of the nation's wellbeing.

Walker does not limit his boundaries of the passage of time to legal reform, however, as the theme plays a major role in his research on corpses. Throughout his observations of cemeteries and miasmas, Walker solely focuses on these threats

emanating from decomposed remains and other rotted matter. Many of these cases can be seen in his remarks on specific burial grounds within London, along with his connections between sickness and rotting organic, both plant and animal, matter. While Walker notes the dangers of decomposition and the odors that are produced by the process, he fails to mention any potential harm from fresh corpses, save for the excerpt describing the Scottish doctor's experience with a dissected corpse. There is a clear boundary of time present between the state of a fresh corpse and that of one that has had time to decompose. Walker observes danger in the putrid, not in the fresh.

This connection can be paired with British funeral and mourning customs of the time when there was great care in preparing a body for burial. These customs were present before and throughout the Victorian Era; Walker would have been versed in the customs surrounding grief, mourning, and corpse preparation. Richardson gives a summary of common funeral customs in her work that has already been quoted above. During the Victorian Era, a common funeral followed a composite ritual used by all manner of social classes. Besides the coffin and religious service, most aspects of a funeral were secular and provided by the community. This included: physical attention to the corpse, watching, waking, and viewing the corpse, refreshment, and a lay ceremony for the transportation of the coffin to the grave or church (Richardson 17). Among these traditions, "washing the corpse" was a popular custom that entailed bathing the corpse with water to spiritually purify it and protect the deceased individual and their surviving loved ones (Richardson 18). These activities required close, physical contact that was not seen as dangerous or harmful to those participating in them; it was a religious and spiritual ritual rather than a hygienic one. Walker does not comment on these customs in



*Gatherings from Graveyards*; the only physical contact with the dead that he describes as dangerous is when a putrefied corpse is involved.

The lack of criticism towards traditional funerary customs is interesting in that even though Walker is adamant that the living should not have contact with the dead, he does not denounce or acknowledge the importance of close contact with the recently departed. This creates a boundary of time between the recent and long-dead; perhaps a fresh corpse still embodied the individual that died, while a decayed corpse held no resemblance or other significance to what was once a person. Walker's lack of commentary also suggests that perhaps he found no issue in funeral rites, taking place within residences or funeral homes, occurring within city limits. As long as the body did not stay within the city after the relatively short time it took to prepare it for a funeral, it did not pose an immediate threat to public health.

This notion creates a clear boundary of personal connection and lack thereof to the dead: a fresh body meant something to surviving individuals as it still possessed great resemblance to the living. A fresh corpse, for example, could be described as sleeping due to the relatively unchanged appearance that persisted before the beginning stages of decomposition started. Richardson notes this air of uncanny appearance in her chapter "The Corpse and Popular Culture" when she describes pre-funeral rituals performed by surviving family members for the deceased. On the other hand, a decayed body with flesh rotted away and exposed bones did not hold the same importance due to the appearance and nature of decomposed remains. These sentiments implement another distinction between the two categories as a fresh corpse was still seen as a person while a long-dead body was viewed more as an object and a disgusting one at that.

The boundaries between long-dead and recently-dead were not completely and utterly solid as Walker may have believed, however. Victorian mourning practices did not halt after burial as mourning ephemera was widely popular throughout the nineteenth century. These mementos, usually consisting of pamphlets, jewelry, and memorial cards, often contained personal effects of the departed and human hair was commonly preserved within them. The Victorian Era saw the rise of hair art and jewelry used as ways to remember the dead; Curl notes this popularity in his previously discussed book. Curl provides substantial detailing of mourning jewelry in the chapter “Funerals, Ephemera, and Mourning” where he writes that sometimes the hair was often arranged in designs to resemble feathers, flowers, and the like within brooches and pendants. The brooches would often have the hair placed on one side and were sometimes coupled with miniatures or photographs of the deceased on the other (Curl 201). Mourning rings, also often containing hair, would incorporate black enamel, pearls, jet, cameos, diamonds, and ceramics in the designs. The rings could also be ornamented with monograms, miniature portraits, and inscriptions (Curl 202). This practice of preserving parts of a deceased body contradicts the idea that the long-dead were repulsive objects; a departed person’s hair still held great social and personal significance to the individual that kept it after burial. It is interesting to note that all social classes partook in saving relics of the deceased; there was unity between the classes in how they mourned their loved ones.

These customs also show a gap between opinions on how a dead body should be treated. While there was a widespread belief that a corpse should be respected and “under no circumstances harmed,” the practice of keeping hair and other bodily relics was not looked down upon by society (Richardson 28). In the poem by Hood, a young woman is

ravaged with grief because her body was anatomized and separated into multiple pieces by doctors; would she feel the same way if her hair had been kept by her lover? This boundary in belief implies that only certain parts of the body are acceptable to remove from the corpse. Hair is not an organ or limb and is easily removed without leaving a noticeable difference in physical appearance. So with this in mind, it seems as though a body should be protected against actions that would severely alter its appearance. A small clipping of hair does not equate to severing a leg or arm, in this case.

These remarks pose a question of whether or not Walker believed in and respected common mourning practices of the time. He does not acknowledge any mourning customs within *Gatherings from Graveyards*, so it is difficult to say if he saw such practices as harmful or dangerous. Walker may have partaken in similar customs during his lifetime, which may be the cause for the lack of context and opinion. It is unclear to say why he chose to provide in-depth research and analysis on cemeteries, exhumation, and sanitary precautions and violations without addressing major forms of corpse attachment and contact that occurred regularly within London, but it could be due to his focus on scientific observations rather than intentional social commentaries. This does not, however, pertain to his criticism of the poor. Walker's intentions are muted when concerning his socio-economic views; while he does not make direct comments or claims regarding London's lower classes, his rhetoric directs blame towards the poor for cemetery conditions and risks. The omittance of any evidence of disease risk and deplorable burial conditions from upper-class cemeteries furthers this point.

## CHAPTER IV: WALKER AFTER *GATHERINGS FROM GRAVEYARDS*

*Gatherings from Graveyards* was not the only example of Walker's work in advocating for public health and burial reform. While continuing his business as a surgeon, Walker spent time writing in local newspapers in order to bring attention to the issues that meant so much to him. His advocacy was both beneficial and problematic, parralling the rhetoric and themes included in his 1839 pamphlet. Through both written work and tangible actions done in the field, he would eventually help in the passage of burial reform laws in the mid and late Victorian Era.

Walker did not stop his mission to change London's burial policies after he published *Gatherings from Graveyards*; over the course of next decade he would go on to publish various letters to Parliament committees and even committed to a philanthropic endeavor of renovating the burial grounds of Enon Chapel. One such letter can be seen in the 1842 publication of the *Provincial Medical & Surgical Journal*. Walker wrote a short letter to Parliament, titled "Burials," that restated his argument seen in *Gatherings from Graveyards*, stating that Parliament has a duty to conduct investigations into all burial places within the United Kingdom (Walker 520). This letter shows a clear turn in Walker's initial claims in *Gatherings from Graveyards*; instead of focusing mainly on London's cemeteries, Walker now sought to have every burial ground investigated in the entirety of the United Kingdom.

In a return to Walker's philanthropic endeavors, he briefly details the horrid conditions of Enon Chapel and graveyard within his chapter, "Descriptions and State of Some of the Metropolitan Burying Places," noting how corpses were stacked from floor to ceiling within the cellar (Walker 155). This chapel would soon be closed after the

death of its owner, Mr. Howse, but the dead would remain trapped within. Carla Valentine details the morbid, unique history of Enon Chapel in her article “Enon Chapel: London’s Victorian Golgotha,” stating that the chapel would then be bought and remodeled into a dancing saloon. According to the December 4, 1847, publication of *The Poor Man’s Guardian*, the saloon attracted guests by advertising the ability to “dance on the dead” (qtd. in Valentine 34). In the same section, the newspaper details how the building was infested with rats and had an atmosphere that expedited the putrefaction process of any meat exposed to the air (qtd. in Valentine 34). Valentine also provides context to how this chapel related to Walker’s work and mission; in 1848 he purchased the chapel and surrounding grounds. Walker would go on to pay an estimated 100 pounds to exhume and relocate the remains of those buried at the chapel.

Through his purchase and renovation of Enon Chapel, Walker became directly involved in the process of relocating London’s dead to Norwood Cemetery; the propositions that he made in *Gatherings from Graveyards* were now a reality, albeit at Walker’s own expense. It is important to note that in Walker’s description of Enon Chapel, he states that the majority of the dead belonged to the poor (Walker 155). This means that Walker was exhuming and relocating the remains of London’s poor, likely without the families’ permission. This was a direct move to remove the poor from the city, which he had been advocating for all along: the poor lived in filth, their dead spread disease, and they needed to be removed from the city to protect the upper classes.

Walker did not only immediately relocate the dead, however, as he held an “educational” event before the complete removal of the deceased. In *Dirty Old London*, historian Lee Jackson details the gruesome, morbid spectacle that Walker chose to put on

at Enon Chapel. After securing the lease for the chapel, Walker invited the public to visit the cellar located underneath the former dance floor and see for themselves how terrible urban burial was for both the living and dead (Jackson 124). Throughout *Gatherings from Graveyards*, Walker pushes the claim that the living should not be in close contact with corpses, which makes this situation incredibly hypocritical. Walker published over 200 pages of material that pushed his narrative of no contact with the dead, yet a few years later, he held a viewing party for the public to see the remains of innumerable poor Londoners. Jackson provides further details on this spectacle, which continue to contradict Walker's previous sentiment on the relationship between the living and the dead:

A man was placed at the chapel gate, who walked about with skulls in his hand, apparently with the view of increasing the excitement of the persons assembled outside.<sup>5</sup> Once inside, the public were treated to various revelations, including visiting the neighbouring outhouse, where bodies had once been quietly removed from the vaults for the purpose of sale and dissection. Most bizarrely of all, the former proprietor, who had offered so many dubious cheap burials, was the highlight of the tour: ten years deceased, 'a stark and stiff and shrivelled corpse' resembling an Egyptian mummy, propped up for public inspection, recognisable by his 'screw foot'.<sup>6</sup> (Jackson 125)

It is also said that though Walker did not charge admission to this event, which spanned the course of several months, he did accept money if an individual offered him it. Though

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<sup>5</sup> Quote taken from *Examiner*, December 11, 1847.

<sup>6</sup> Quote taken from *Era*, March 5, 1848.

it is not known how much money Walker earned from this spectacle, it still goes against his initial claims of advocating for the poor and looking out for the betterment of society. Why would a man who is solely standing up for the lower classes feel the need to hold an event where skeletons of the dead would be ogled and examined by the general population? The actions of putting the remains of poor Londoners on display dehumanize this social class and make them into nothing more than a sideshow spectacle. Walker's actions regarding Enon Chapel only emphasize his attitude towards the poor that was present in *Gatherings from Graveyards*; the poor are a tool to be used, whether that be to further a claim or to direct blame onto.

Walker's rhetoric in *Gatherings from Graveyards* and his actions after the publication of said pamphlet showcase the double-edged structure of his original argument. While he acted as a philanthropic advocate for the poor, Walker perpetuated dangerous opinions and views of the lower classes. Walker wanted to move cemeteries out of the city to protect all of London from disease, yet he solely placed the blame for public health risks on poor neighborhoods and burial grounds. He never mentions upper-class neighborhoods or cemeteries as threats to the public, nor does he critique their burial and funerary practices. *Gatherings from Graveyards* presents itself as a call to action to protect everyone in London from the threat of disease, but actually prioritizes the removal and relocation of the poor to protect those who are better off in the societal hierarchy of nineteenth-century England. Walker may have critiqued Parliament for not acting, but he ultimately correlated disease and illness with the dirty, cramped conditions of poor neighborhoods and graveyards.

## CONCLUSION:

After publishing *Gatherings from Graveyards*, nine letters to Parliament, and relocating Enon Chapel's dead, Walker would go on to retire in North Wales. He would later die on July 6, 1884 (Jackson 131). Walker's advocacy for burial law reform would partly cause Parliament to enact the first of a set of burial laws that would permanently change the funeral and cemetery industry in London in 1852. The Burial Act of 1852 would close all metropolitan cemeteries and allowed for private companies to establish new cemeteries on the outer perimeter of London (British National Archives). The change that Walker continuously fought for became a reality through these sets of laws and Walker would live to see these laws ratified and nearly completed; he died two years before the final burial act in 1886. Walker's rhetoric and actions towards the poor were hypocritical, to say the least, but his mission to change burial laws to protect the health of London's public was made in good faith. He helped in pushing for change and was ultimately successful in his career in public health reform. Walker and his work serve as an important historical marker for public health advocacy and structure in Victorian Britain, despite the faults, inaccuracies, and hypocrisy explored in this thesis.





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