

**LAMENTING THE DEAD:
THE AFFECTIVE AFTERLIFE OF POETS' GRAVES**

Paul Gilchrist

University of Brighton, UK

P.M.Gilchrist@Brighton.ac.uk

Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas and Angela Person (eds.)

Affective Architectures:

More-Than-Representational Approaches to Heritage.

Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge.

2021.

pp.151-167.

(published 21 September 2020)

ISBN 978-0-367-15211-6 (hardback)

ISBN 978-0-429-95573-7 (e-book)

Abstract

Poets' graves are important memorial spaces as well as sites of literary and heritage tourism. Yet, they are also spaces of emotional encounter and affective exchange with a long tradition of writers paying respect and performing rituals of homage, composition and recital – hoping to cement their own imaginative agency and burgeoning poetical identities with those of poetical forebears. This chapter explores these practices by drawing upon research into the early Victorian poetic community of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in the north-east of England. My ancestor, Robert Gilchrist (1797-1844), considered to be one of the finest and most prolific poets working in the town, was part of this vibrant community and this chapter analyses a series of laments to dead poets produced by Gilchrist and his contemporaries in ways that illuminate the complex temporalities and affective legacies of the poets' grave. My account is interweaved with my own narrative of discovery, re-membling, and visiting, as I follow the footsteps of Gilchrist and search for material traces of my kin. The chapter details how the poets' grave maps onto the present as I consider the multi-temporal and affective afterlife of the poets' grave as a space of both public heritage and private meaning.

Introduction: Literary pilgrims and poetic remains

A solitary man stood at the rear of St John the Baptist churchyard in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. A sheet of paper bearing some verse was clasped in his right hand and he stood adjacent to a tabular monument reading the lines quietly to himself. Closing his eyes and with a solemn nod of the head he ended the recitation. The man possessed an air of serene detachment from the comings and goings of the town beyond the churchyard walls. Slowly, his head bent upward toward the sky and he opened his eyes. They squinted with concentration, becoming transfixed to a middle-distance. His composure was threatened by the blaring of drivers desperately trying to gee-up their sleepy-looking horses as their carts trundled slowly up Westgate Street, passing the churchyard, yet the man was unmoved. Moments passed. Then suddenly a small leather-bound notebook and a pencil were quickly drawn from his inner pocket and he began to make feverish scribblings onto the virgin pages.

Robert Gilchrist (1797-1844) often came to the churchyard. It was a space to think, to read, and to write. Interred here were the bones of Newcastle-upon-Tyne's dead poets: Edward Chicken (1698 – 1746), John Cunningham (1729 – 1773), and his old friend Thomas Thompson (1773 – 1816). Gilchrist was a sailmaker by trade though was also a labouring-class poet, part of a local 'bardic circle' operating in the early part of the nineteenth century that would be a vanguard to a shining generation of mid-Victorian versifiers and music hall entertainers (Gilchrist 2016). Yet, Gilchrist was at St John's churchyard in 1820 (Allan 1891, 19) to compose a piece to the memory of John Cunningham, a Dublin-born playwright, poet and actor who had lived and died in the town (see below). This is how Gilchrist's poem 'Written at the tomb of Cunningham, in St John's Church-Yard, Newcastle', presents his encounter with the memorial:

Here sleeps, sons of genius, a spirit undaunted!
What availed all his merits so blushing and fair,
Consigned to the earth, with his honours untainted,
The subject of praise which he never must hear –
Though his name and his fame will be sung in each ballad,
In ages remote still immortal to shine,
And the green turfy pillow will ever be hallowed
Of the poet who sung on the Banks of the Tyne!

(Gilchrist 1826, 24)

Gilchrist's tribute poem in itself is unremarkable but is part of a nineteenth-century culture of literary tourism and graveside pilgrimage (Matthews 2009; Westover 2012). The origins of these practices emerged in the mid-18th century with travellers and tourists seeking locations associated with the lives of authors and the real or fictional places mentioned in their texts. Visitors sought to achieve "a sense of physical closeness and emotional association" with authors (MacLeod et al. 2018, 390). Though texts could afford a physical encounter with sites mentioned in an author's work, and a writer's house might still exist as a possible tourist attraction, the grave itself was a crucial destination; a melancholy place to reflect upon the absence of a literary life (Brown 2016; Watson 2006). Samantha Matthews notes that "the intimate scale of most poets' graves gives the site a concentrated significance and single focus not shared with the spatial and symbolic diffuseness of writers' houses" (Matthews 2009, 25). Burial places are then not just one option on a dark tourism itinerary. The materiality of the space, its assemblage and form, shapes its capacities to affect (Edensor 2011). This is not a haphazard occurrence: the memory and legacy of dead poets is kept alive through how their final resting places are designed and managed, with friends, peers and patrons guiding semiotic meanings by choosing and caring for a memorial and selecting an appropriate epitaph.

What I contend in this chapter is that poets' graves have an 'affective afterlife'. I will show that burial places bear the qualities of an 'architectural atmosphere' that orchestrate the experience of mourners and visitors, affecting bodies, moods and spaces in ways that mediate peoples' perceptions in space and time (Böhme 2017; Micieli-Voutsinas 2017). There are materialities to be deciphered through careful observation of the form and aesthetic mediums and messages designed to resonate; materialities that shape the bodily and psychological experience of place. There has been an extensive consideration of how military cemeteries have contributed to national imaginaries and visitor engagement as sites of memory (see, for instance, Fuchs 2004; Gough 2004; Morris 1997). The British military cemetery is a paradigmatic example of a tightly-designed space that contains architectural objects – the Cross of Sacrifice and Stone of Remembrance – conferring a religious significance; the marbled uniformity of headstones signaling wartime camaraderie (Mosse 1990, 83-84). But the cemeteries and churchyards mentioned in this chapter, with their monuments and memorials to dead poets, follow less prescribed plotlines and contain a sculptural cacophony of motifs, shapes and forms that convey different types of personal and communal significance. Several human geographers have argued that experiencing place can activate a diffuse range of feelings, emotions and affects (Anderson 2009; Duff 2010; Pile 2010). These happenings are an undeniable part of the experience of going to burial places, though each is distinct. Proximity to funerary monuments and memorials affords moments of personal intensity which can activate feelings of loss, grief, despair. Graveyards are a conduit for feeling, transmitting varying transpersonal and interpersonal intensities and echoic resonations of sentiment that lend each site a peculiar aura and 'sense of place' (Anderson 2009). Cemeteries are a site of public memory but the deep sense of loss activated can mean they are also a "theatre of pain", materializing traumatic feelings and a range of emotions

which are released in collective moments of remembrance (Tolia-Kelly 2017). Here, the emotional display of being moved, whether genuine or feigned, is a social phenomenon. Affect is a non-conscious intensity that corresponds to a change in the state of the body that augments or diminishes a capacity to act (Anderson, 2009). The visceral experience of visiting places of death can rouse a variety of corporeal responses: a strengthened heartbeat, quicker rate of breathing, a feeling of leaden limbs, nausea, changes in posture, even a compulsion to silence occasionally interrupted by nonsensical stuttering vocalizations (Bowring, 2017). These affects influence our consciousness and cognition of the site by heightening an awareness of a chasm that resides between the living and the dead. For the purposes of this chapter, the distinctions between feeling, emotion and affect are more fluid and co-constitutive than briefly presented here; as will be discussed, it is more important to consider the power of the burial place to interpolate by considering how they generate intense, emotion-laden and affective episodes (Bowring, 2017).

Methodology

My account has been constructed through an interpretive process influenced by Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* to the degree that it combines the poetic and the found with a 'pondering' of sources and experiences to make sense of place, space and time (Buck-Morss 1993, 240-241). It is a 'small story' that seeks to make sense of poetic remains and a latent intangible heritage waiting to be rediscovered, recovered and retold (Lorimer 2003). I have not provided an exhaustive account of the possible affective entanglements of all burial sites where authors have been laid to rest, neither have I sought to scale-up from the particular to the general, from the unique architectural atmospheres of the spaces and materials encountered, to build a new theorisation of affect that dwells on what occurs in burial grounds. Emphasis is placed instead on the unique and revelatory, foregrounding my specific encounters, connections and processes of communing. The chapter draws on multiple sources and experiences generated from nearly a decade of research in Newcastle. It employs evidence gleaned from archives and libraries, citations from an array of historical sources, poetic fragments, contextual commentary of socio-historical phenomena, as well as notes taken from visits to cemeteries and churchyards, and fictionalised reconstruction. Vignettes are offered as a means to view the complex temporalities and relations between affect, place and the past. These aspects are pronounced in this essay as it is composed from research into my own genealogical journey and biographical and literary recovery of an ancestor, the Robert Gilchrist mentioned above – my 3 x great-grandfather - and so is part of my making sense of a life held in common, and a life with which I seek to commune. The 'affective afterlives' of poets' graves considered here, though taken from selected historical cases from a provincial English city, which to an international reader may seem troublingly parochial, nevertheless speak to a wider historical practice of a biographer, constantly searching for their quarry, and vitally alert to prospects of encounters between the living and the dead. As the historian Richard Holmes writes, the search for biographical traces can "become a kind of pursuit, a tracking of the physical trail of someone's path through the past, a following of footsteps" (Holmes 1986, 27). The roads taken in writing a biography and in preparing this essay have taken me through the cemetery gates. In the following sections I reflect upon three

burial sites in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and consider the ‘affective afterlives’ of poets’ graves, revealing points of connection, changing materialities, presences, absences and affects.

Encountering memorials

Cunningham’s memorial is located near to the east window of St John’s Church; a great stone slab mounted on four supporting pillars lying half buried in the soil beneath. The epitaph upon it, though now partly obliterated, reads:

Here lie the Remains of
JOHN CUNNINGHAM
Of his excellence
As a Pastoral Poet
His works will remain a monument
for ages
After this temporary Tribute of Esteem
Is in dust forgotten.
He died in Newcastle Sep. 18, 1773,
Aged 44.

Born in Dublin, Cunningham started life as a playwright and following the success of his 1746 farce *Love in a Mist*, he headed to England in the hope of making it as an actor. With limited success, he began to compose more serious pieces, prologues, epilogues and elegies, publishing *Poems, Chiefly Pastoral* (1766) and *Poetical Works* (1781). Described as a “versatile and entertaining miscellaneous poet” (Goodridge 2001, 271), Cunningham composed pieces that would influence a range of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century poets, with his best efforts considered to be his landscape poetry (Bataille 2004). An early contributor of poetical pieces to the *Newcastle Chronicle* newspaper, Cunningham gained the friendship of its editor and proprietor, Mr Slack, who erected the memorial to Cunningham upon his death (Newcastle Chronicle, March 9 1774). The inscription at the end of the original tabular memorial stone, *He gathered the Essence of Simplicity and ranged it in Pastoral Verse*, was written by another Novocastrian poet, Ralph Carr, who was later also buried with Cunningham. A contemporary noted the affective power of the memorial: “The sentiment was so placed as to catch the eye of the passing stranger, who never failed to enquire who was interred there, and would drop a sigh to the memory of poor Cunningham” (Hodgson 1921, 88). The original ledger stone survived until 1887 when a new stone was unveiled, financed by public subscription (Morgan 2004, 34). Words read at the unveiling of the new memorial noted he was never a first-rate poet but Cunningham was championed as a “great man” of “genius” who carried “the vigour of his epoch”, something of which was present in local poets of the day (Newcastle Courant, December 16 1887).

Poets have occasionally stepped through the churchyard gates to venerate Cunningham. They have engaged with the space in quite personal ways through a variety of commemorative

practices that establish new meanings and connections. Through these encounters Cunningham's grave memorial becomes possessed with an 'affective afterlife'. It is haunted both by the universality of corporeal death and the singularity of a dead poet. We might think of the site, following Emma Waterton, as possessing a "density of feeling" as the valued material presence of the past – the grave marker - generates emotional responses from visitors and the atmosphere of the site haunts and permeates the visitors' body. Yet, the focus on the person laid to rest can also ignite "feelings of affinity" where points of connection (or estrangement) can work on the body to produce novel responses and potentialities (2014, 824). The general visitor may feel a sense of melancholy, perhaps parochial pride, but a fellow writer can feel elated and energised by the proximity to 'genius'. When poets of the 'graveyard school' in English literature – a pre-Romantic genre characterised by churchyard visits and gloomy meditations of mortality – encountered burial places they were provoked to pen new compositions, with the dead acting as a source of poetic revelation (Parisot 2013, 81). Paul Westover's study of literary pilgrimage examines William Godwin's *Essay on Sepulchres* (1809), which observed a feverish national culture of visits to the graves of the illustrious dead, with Britons travelling around the country to meditate at the last known resting place of deceased cultural heroes. A special value was placed on the intimacy afforded by viewing their graves, first-hand knowledge of the location lending visitors a unique sense of cultural authority (Westover 2012).

A number of laments to the passing of Cunningham were published in the immediate wake of news of his death. Robert Fergusson, the Scottish poet (1750-1774) wrote 'A Poem to the Memory of John Cunningham', a pastoral elegy, likely inspired by lines "Written by Mr Cunningham about Three Weeks before his Death" that were reprinted in many periodicals. Cunningham's death also generated a number of anonymous poetic outpourings, some of which imagined the graveyard scene. The last stanza from 'On the Death of Mr. Cunningham', published in the *Newcastle Chronicle* (October 2 1773), reflects:

Blest shade, farewell! and o'er thy humble grave
(Thy grave more honour'd than the marble tomb!)
No weeds obscene their wanton toiling wave,
But cypress sad, and lasting laurel bloom!

'H.W.' wrote 'On the Death of a Late Pastoral Poet' (*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, September 6 1774), the last stanza offering these thoughts:

But why stand we silently here?
To his tomb move we gentle along;
And deck his soft sod with a tear,
Who was peerless in elegant song.

The clichéd sentiments and well-worn imagery of these compositions makes us sceptical of a physical co-presence at Cunningham's burial place. The emotional contrivances are examples of a representational repertoire afforded by the 'graveyard school' (Parisot 2013; Trowbridge

2017), affecting a sensuous disposition that is not necessarily shaped through a material encounter with place.

A decade on from Cunningham's passing, poems began to emerge that, like Gilchrist, underlined the bearing of place on composition. 'Clio' offered 'Extempore, on seeing Mr Cunningham's Monument in St John's Church yard, Newcastle' (Newcastle Chronicle, November 1 1783). The first verse reads:

Here, gentle Spirit! let me stay,
And view this monument of stone;
This frail memorial of a day,
Whose letters make thy exit known.

In 1802 the entertainer and writer George Saville Carey (1743 – 1807), penned 'Verses on Visiting the Tomb of Cunningham'. It begins:

Sweet Bard, while here, with fond respect,
I kneel before thy lonely grave,
Dear victim of the world's neglect,
A wand'ring stranger's tear receive.

And ends:

Unto thy dust, sweet bard, adieu!
Thy hallow'd shrine I slowly leave;
Yet oft, at eve, shall Mem'ry view,
The sub-beam ling'ring on thy grave.

Like Gilchrist's effort, these compositions are not so much a lament for Cunningham the man, as cultural responses to the meaning of death for the poet. The texts work with place (the churchyard) and artefact (the memorial), to reassert an enduring poetic sensibility through celebrating the life and contribution of a fellow poet. A surface reading of these texts can lull us into believing that the laments are authentically reverent. Though, as Samantha Matthews contends, when we take into account literary visitors to the churchyard or cemetery, the "pose of humility" is deceptive (Matthews 2009, 25). Their communication with the dead can be motivated by a more profane desire to be and be seen as a writer. The real intent on visiting was to forge a bond with the deceased through imbibing some of the 'aura' of a departed literary 'genius'. Proximity to the body of a known writer, she shows, afforded a poetic subjectivity born from the affective encounter; the grave acting as a locus for an exchange between the living and the dead that makes it a site of potentiality. Dedicatory and memorial verse, literary scholar Brian Maidment argues, was used with this double focus, positioning writers into a community of readers, whilst also signaling the presence of a thriving local literary community (Maidment 1992, 161). Though, as Matthews observes, other affective responses could register: dwelling on the finality of social death might unsettle creative enterprise, as "[t]he body's presence demonstrates the absence of the vital creative author, and the grave, with its sometimes disappointingly prosaic inscription, stony memorial and fixed place within a landscape of death, defines the writer as dead and finished" (Matthews 2009, 26).

Nevertheless, writers have continued to be drawn to the burial sites of their forebears. Newcastle-born poet Keith Armstrong composed 'For 'Cuny'' in 2008. The verse moves from the graveyard to share biographical connections between both poets. Armstrong identifies with Cunningham as a character of the streets who used his talent to escape his roots. There is a shared affinity, we learn, through their love of drink, the stage, the town and local environment. But Armstrong also honours Cunningham as a fellow traveller and entertainer, employing a regional stereotype of Novocastrians as 'Geordies', affable and exuberant characters known for their sociability and 'common touch' (Colls 1977; Lancaster 2001).

I'm with you, 'Cuny'
in this Newcastle Company of Comedians;
I'm in your clouds of drunken ways;
I twitch with you
in my poetic nervousness
along Westgate Road.
And the girls left their petals for you
like I hope they do for me
in the light of the silver moon,
thinking of your pen
scratching stars into the dark sky.

The tangible grave of Cunningham thus supports other affective afterlives, in this instance an intangible heritage of poetry and Geordie humour. The grave becomes a point of connection between the writers but also to an imaginary of a local literary culture that continues to flourish, an unbroken tradition of Tyneside writing, both humorous and serious, that extends from the mid-18th century to today (Beal 2000).

Monuments and the afterlife of the poet

A Grecian-style archway welcomes the visitor to Jesmond Old Cemetery. An uneven path winds through the space, leading me further inside. Tombstones radiate in all directions. Crosses, urns, columns, slabs and obelisks valiantly contend with the forces of nature, many pockmarked by rain and wind, strangled with ivy or submerged by bramble. Stop to look closer and you can see spiders, lichen and moss gradually encroaching on name and date, threatening a new oblivion. Words give measure to worth and measure too an age where life was shorter, recording lives that fledged yet never took flight. There are no wails of mourners here, they have long-departed. The only voices to be heard are songbirds as they flit through the thin light of a spring afternoon. But still I hold out an ear for echoes from the past. I'm without a map and lost, hoping to spy the distinct outline I copied beforehand of the tombstone of a dead poet, but amongst the sea of tombs it's becoming a lost cause. As the caretakers assemble to lock the cemetery gates I spot the gravestone of J.P. Robson and

approach it with haste. Foregoing genuflection, I opt to quickly record the stone, taking notes and photos and feel compelled to gently pass my hand over the front, fingering the textures of what remains. No words are spoken.

Jesmond Old Cemetery was established in 1835 to accommodate the dead of Newcastle's growing population (Morgan 2004). It is home to prominent Victorian men and women who made the city. A variety of professions and livelihoods are remembered with inventors, retailers, brewers, engineers, and architects, among others, buried here. Cemetery tours, guidebooks and online sources prolong a public memory of the celebrated and famed, marked as holding pedagogical value and worthy of visitation (Morgan 2000; 2004). But the cemetery is marked by divisions in terms of the care exercised toward the memorials. Public monies have supported the restoration of the grand tomb of a former mayor, though there are many graves of unheroic everyday folk in a poorer state of repair. As Helen Nicholson notes, graveyards contain the bodies of people whose lives were composed of "small gestures and quotidian acts" (2013, 84). Their lives are not immortalised through great poetry or grand monument but they contributed no less significantly through unremarkable habits and routines of life.



Figure 1: Jesmond Old Cemetery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK, July 2018

Photo: Paul Gilchrist

Two labouring-class poets, now considered amongst the finest Geordie poets and songwriters (Harker 1981; 2017), were buried in the cemetery during the 1870s and have intriguing memorials that employ symbolic and iconographic aesthetic elements to preserve a poetic legacy. J.P. Robson (1808-1870) (Allan 1891, 345-348) has a gravestone by George Burn (1833 – 1883) a local sculptor of some repute who made his name memorialising a number of

regional heroes (Ayris et al, 1996, 18-19; Lawson, 1873, 376). Robson is represented almost as caricature on the gravestone in neo-classical pose, a bearded bard seated with lyre. The lantern spire of St Nicholas' cathedral is positioned on the left, which firmly locates Robson as a Tynesider. It is mentioned that the stone was erected by public subscription and an inscription written by Robson's contemporary Joseph McGill once read (Allan 1891, 347):

Tho' dead, in lamenting thee
Still be it mine
To honour thy name, sweetest Bard of the Tyne.

The gravestone is now weathered and worn, traces of time's passage, with only a few words of McGill's verse now remaining on the inscription. It just about survives as a cultural presence of a 'bardic community'. The weathering adds a further reflective, melancholic quality; its deterioration invites a lament for the impermanence of cultural memory (Bowring 2017, 143-148).



Figure 2: Detail from the tombstone of J.P. Robson

Photo: Paul Gilchrist, 2018

Robson's grave was visited by his contemporary, Joe Wilson (1841 – 1875), one of the most prolific Geordie songwriters, who is also buried in the graveyard (Harker 2017). His is a monument in the form of a broken column, a popular memorial device in Victorian cemeteries to signify a life cut short. It was erected by Thomas Allan, publisher of *Tyneside Songs and Readings*, still an important collection of regional poetic and lyrical output (Harker 1981), with an inscription by Wilson that he used to describe the purpose of his life:

It's been me aim t'hev a place
I'th' hearts o' the Tyneside people,
Wi' writin' bits o'hyemly sangs
Aw think they'll sing.

The sentiments expressed on the memorials to both Robson and Wilson speak to legacy and shape reception. You feel their passing is more-than-personal; theirs is a communal loss. When I re-visited the cemetery in July 2018 Wilson's grave bore pebbles, a custom performed by family members who have visited the grave to indicate respect for the deceased and an offering made by literary pilgrims (Kjaersgaard and Venbrux 2016). These were placed by his Canadian great-grandchildren (Harker 2017, 153-154). The placing of objects is an act that demonstrates closeness and a feeling of intimacy (Brown 2016). But what if there is no memorial? As I show in the next section, a place without memorial is important too in the affective afterlife of literary pilgrimage, bringing different feelings and intensities entangled in dynamic complex temporalities (Amin and Thrift 2002, 28)

Absence and communion

Robert Gilchrist died at home on July 11 1844. He was laid to rest at Ballast Hills burial ground a few days later (Allan 1891, 176). I visited the site on the 174th anniversary of his death, an act I had put off for several years as I searched for biographical traces of his life in local archives.

'Sing me a song. Sing me a song' I softly chanted as I wandered hesitatingly around Ballast Hills. Nothing appeared to materialise from the incantation. No spirit to guide me to his final resting place. The only grave markers were toppled-over water bottles, as disposable and discarded as the paupers underneath. My feet followed a broken flagstone pathway. Milky green lichens spread over the surface. Words fought for attention; golden grass seedheads filling inscriptions that have not yet been eroded. Some epitaphs stared at the sky, but most names were known only to the curious worm. This is a place that frustrates the historian. It does not expect or welcome visitors.



Figure 3: Ballast Hills burial ground, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK, July 2018

Photo: Paul Gilchrist, 2018

Situated to the east of the city centre, Ballast Hills burial ground served the needs of Newcastle as it rapidly urbanised. Seventeenth-century plague victims were interred here and the number of burials expanded following the influx of Scottish and overseas workers. It was formalised in 1785 when it was enclosed by a wall and set charges for burials. Many of the interred were poor or religious non-conformists, unable or unwilling to be put to rest in Anglican or Catholic grounds (Butler 2014). The lack of space at alternative cemeteries meant that Ballast Hills began to become severely overcrowded. By the 1820s it was considered inadequate, contemporary reports highlighting the remains of the deceased were sometimes prematurely disturbed by new burials (MacKenzie 1827, 408-414). By 1854 the graveyard had fallen out of use as alternative grounds were established (Morgan 2004). In 1930 the burial stones on the site were removed, many being laid down as flagging for paths and the entire site was turned into a public recreation area. Natural weathering means many of the inscriptions are becoming illegible. However the monumental inscriptions were recorded when the cemetery was converted into a park. Given Gilchrist's reputed religious identification as a Glassite, a Scottish dissenting Christian sect, it is likely that the family forewent any graveside memorial, or at least used a modest one (see Sayer 2011). Over time and with the majority of his remaining family locating to East London in the 1850s, Gilchrist's gravesite fell from public knowledge, leaving only his house in Shieldfield Green standing as a monument to his memory, this eventually succumbing to a programme of urban renewal in 1959.

Ballast Hills invites reflection upon transience and impermanence. The removal and replacing of headstones confirms there are no guarantees of an infinite posthumous locational marker. Despite my meanderings through the site and around its perimeter path no physical reminder to the memory of my poet ancestor can be found. Nothing. The lack of a grave marker signals a “representational elusiveness” (Kerler 2013: 85, cited in Micieli-Voutsinas, 2017, 94). It provokes traumatic feelings, not on the scale of national tragedy, but a visceral sense of dislocation and estrangement that seems to arrest my ability to connect with and make meaning of the place. It’s the feeling of being cheated. But you get a sense that the paupers and dissenters buried here have been cheated too. The lack of memorial is testament to a lack of public value to their existence. The site is in the process of erasure, not threatened by the encroaching hand of urban regeneration, but through a combination of weathering and institutionalised forgetting. For the historian, constantly on the search for traces, Ballast Hills is a disappointment. The song collector Thomas Allan was disappointed too. Preparations for the biographical entries in his *Tyneside Songs and Readings* led to Allan commissioning a search for the final resting places of Tyneside’s poets and singers, including Gilchrist. Allan was acutely distressed by the lack of appropriate memorial to Tyneside’s bardic community and its members. The archive was fragmentary and incomplete, frustrating an “unreachable totality” desired by a collector (Rella 1987, 33), but graves provided a tangible endpoint to the biographic trail (Allan 1891, 43-44, 87, 561). Allan recognised, as had William Godwin, that finding the dead mattered.

There is a temptation to rue melancholically upon what remains hidden, Gilchrist’s hidden remains. But, as Pierre Nora contends, memory is “in permanent evolution, subject to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of the distortions to which it is subject, vulnerable in various ways to appropriation and manipulation, and capable of lying dormant for long periods only to be suddenly reawakened” (Nora 1996, 3). Other affordances spring to mind and, on reflection, the affective episode of visiting Ballast Hills has strengthened my efforts to place Gilchrist back into the public realm by communicating his life, works and times, and educating others on the lost, humble poets of the past. Graves offer a form of compensation of what has been lost; a place to visit, to return to and commune. In the digital age, however, new potentialities arise to reconnect poet and place. Websites can host biographic and bibliographic information (<http://bardoftyneside.info>), social media can be employed to build interest and find receptive audiences. If memory is in permanent evolution then the digital afterlife becomes a powerful tool in the process of reawakening (Crawford 2017).

Conclusion

The poets’ graves visited in Tyneside possess an ‘affective afterlife’ but the feelings have not been uniform. Pleasure, elation, humility, respect, frustration and dissatisfaction have been registered in my visits and through my searches. These feelings have undeniably been shaped by my professional interest in writing a biography as well as personal connections to North East England and desire to commune with an ancestor. Complex temporalities - the knotty

relations between past, present and future - have featured, both in my genealogical quest and in understanding the bonds of kinship felt by a community of writers on Tyneside.

Commemorative practices, through pilgrimage, offerings, readings, haptic encounters, and solemn contemplation, have generated special moments of connection (Brown 2016).

Cunningham's grave, in Newcastle's half-remembered 'poets' corner', is where both Robert Gilchrist and Paul Gilchrist became "scribbling pilgrims", "active, creative beings, empowered at the grave by its evidence of their own creative life" (Matthews 2009, 35).

Cultural geographers have shown how specters haunt places (see Holloway and Kneale 2008; Wylie 2009) and work is beginning to emerge that deciphers the practices of remembrance and embodied ways in which sites of death and dying are now becoming important to an evolving dark tourism economy (Micieli-Voutsinas 2017). However, the literary pilgrim or grave-visitor is an awkward consumer for the heritage and tourism industry (MacLeod et al. 2018, 396) and their affective lines of flight are multiple (Amin and Thrift 2002, 28). This was as true for the poets and writers who visited the graves of Keats and Shelley in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome as it is for literary pilgrims in our own time (see Matthews 2009). Lived experiences vary with subjectivity, motivation, and imaginings, as well as bodily and sensory encounters with space. Affects are produced in moments of proximity for some, yet for others the grave visit brings a delayed gratification, for when the visitor heads home and returns to the texts that excited them to visit in the first place, the encounter with place is reworked into their imaginative reconstructions of their reading (MacLeod et al. 2018). The grave may be a prized destination, the physical remains offering authenticity and totality, but its concentrated significance heaps pressure on the memorial to meet expectations. It is here that the material form is significant. As I have shown, the aesthetic choices determining the material properties of the memorial as well as the sentiment expressed through epitaph shapes response, it contributes to the 'affective afterlife' both for a surviving literary community and curious literary pilgrim. The materiality of the grave changes too and with it the feelings generated. The threat of decay provides scope for Gothic reflections on mortality; fragments of poem and song signal a dynamic vernacular culture that may emotionally resonate through the ages (for example, through resuscitation when they are read or performed once more, eliciting delight in their recovery), but absence of grave-markers altogether is psychologically and politically troublesome, feeding a sense of being cheated and injustice that everyday lives and humble writers are vulnerable to being forgotten. Yet, visiting has also posed an existential challenge. The words of Paul Westover (2012, 70-71) offer a fitting final conclusion:

...the fate of the dead matters to us because we *are* the dead who just happen to be living at the moment. To the dead man, as a *living* man, the fate of the body is no small thing. Thus, our (touristic) will to find the dead is in part a desire to find ourselves, and it is a sign of how greatly the finding of presence matters. Reading the dead and visiting their graves reminds us that we exist on a level with them....We are all passing, ghostly as well as material.

References

- Allan, Thomas. 1891. *Allan's Illustrated Edition of Tyneside Songs and Readings. Revised Edition*. Newcastle: Thomas and George Allan.
- Amin, Ash, and Thrift, Nigel. 2002. *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Anderson, Ben. 2009. "Affective Atmospheres." *Emotion, Space and Society* 2: 77-81.
- Ayris, Ian, Jubb, Peter, Palmer, Steve and Paul Usherwood. 1996. *A Guide to the Public Monuments & Sculptures of Tyne and Wear*. Newcastle: Tyne & Wear Specialist Conservation Team.
- Bataille, Robert. 2004. "Cunningham, John." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6925>.
- Beal, Joan C.. 2000. "From Geordie Ridley to Viz: Popular Literature in Tyneside English." *Language and Literature* 9(4): 343-359.
- Böhme, Gernot. 2017. *Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Bowring, Jacky. 2017. *Melancholy and the Landscape: Locating Sadness, Memory and Reflection in the Landscape*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Brown, Lorraine. 2016. "Tourism and Pilgrimage: Paying Homage to Literary Heroes." *International Journal of Tourism Research* 18(2): 167-175.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. 1993. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MS: The MIT Press.
- Butler, Graham. 2014. "Yet Another Inquiry into the Trustworthiness of Eighteenth-Century Bills of Morality: The Newcastle and Gateshead Bills, 1736-1840." *Local Population Studies* 92 (1): 58-72.
- Carey, George Saville. 1802. "Verses on Visiting the Tomb of Cunningham." *Universal Magazine* 111: 217-218.
- Colls, Robert. 1977. *The Collier's Rant: Song and Culture in the Industrial Village*. London: Croom Helm.
- Crawford, Cole. 2017. "Transforming Working Class Writers and Writing: Digital Editions, Projects, and Analyses." In *A History of British Working Class Literature*, edited by Brian Goodridge and Bridget Keegan, 398-412. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Duff, Cameron. 2010. "On the Role of Affect and Practice in the Production of Place." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28(5): 881-895.

- Edensor, Tim. 2011. "Entangled Agencies, Material Networks and Repair in a Building Assemblage: The Mutable Stone of St Ann's Church, Manchester." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36: 238-252.
- Fuchs, Ron. 2004. "Sites of Memory in the Holy Land: The Design of the British War Cemeteries in Mandate Palestine." *Journal of Historical Geography* 30(4): 643-664.
- Gilchrist, Paul. 2016. "Hail, Tyneside Lads in Collier Fleets! Sailing, Sailors and Song Culture in the North-East." In *Port Towns and Urban Cultures: International Histories of the Waterfront 1700 to 2000*, edited by Brad Beaven, Karl Bell and Rob James, 29-48. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Gilchrist, Robert. 1826. *Poems*. Newcastle: W. Boag.
- Goodridge, John. 2001. "John Clare and Eighteenth-Century Poetry: Pomfret, Cunningham, Bloomfield." *The Eighteenth Century* 42(3): 264-278.
- Gough, Paul. 2004. "Sites in the Imagination: The Beaumont Hamel Newfoundland Memorial on the Somme." *Cultural Geographies* 11(3): 235-258.
- Harker, David. 1981. "The Making of the Tyneside Concert Hall." *Popular Music* 1: 27-56.
- Harker, David. 2017. *The Gallowgate Lad: Joe Wilson's Life & Songs*. Newcastle: Wisecrack Publications.
- Hodgson, James. 1921. "John Cunningham, Pastoral Poet, 1729-1773: Recollections and Some Original Letters." *Archaeologia Aeliana* 18: 83-100.
- Holloway, Julian, and James Kneale. 2008. "Locating Haunting: A Ghost-Hunter's Guide." *Cultural Geographies* 15(3): 297-312.
- Holmes, Richard. 1986. *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer*. London: Harper Perennial.
- Kjaersgaard, Anne, and Eric Venbrux. 2016. "Grave-Visiting Rituals, (Dis)continuing Bonds and Religiosity." *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies* 32: 9-20.
- Lancaster, Bill. 2001. "Sociability and the City." In *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*, edited by Robert Colls and Bill Lancaster, 319-340. Chichester: Phillimore.
- Lawson, William. 1873. *Lawson's Tyneside Celebrities*. Newcastle upon Tyne: W.D. Lawson.
- Lorimer, Hayden. 2003. "Telling Small Stories: Spaces of Knowledge and the Practice of Geography." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28(2): 197-217.
- MacKenzie, Eneas. 1827. *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Town and County of Newcastle upon Tyne*. Newcastle: MacKenzie & Dent.

- MacLeod, Nicola, Shelley, Jennifer, and Alastair Morrison. 2018. "The Touring Reader: Understanding the Bibliophile's Experience of Literary Tourism." *Tourism Management* 67: 388-398.
- Maidment, Brian. 1992. *The Poorhouse Fugitives: Self-Taught Poets and Poetry in Victorian Britain*. Manchester: Carcanet.
- Matthews, Samantha. 2009. "Making Their Mark: Writing the Poet's Grave." In *Literary Tourism and Nineteenth-Century Culture*, edited by Nicola J. Watson, 25-36. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Micieli-Voutsinas, Jacque. 2017. "An Absent Presence: Affective Heritage at the National September 11th Memorial & Museum." *Emotion, Space and Society* 24: 93-104.
- Morgan, Alan. 2000. *A Fine and Private Place: Jesmond Old Cemetery*. Newcastle: Tyne Bridge Publishing.
- Morgan, Alan. 2004. *Beyond the Grave: Exploring Newcastle's Burial Grounds*. Newcastle: Tyne Bridge Publishing.
- Morris, Mandy S. 1997. "Gardens 'For Ever England': Landscape, Identity and the First World War British Cemeteries on the Western Front." *Ecumene* 4(4): 410-434.
- Mosse, George. 1990. *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nicholson, Helen. 2013. "On Visiting Forgotten Tombs". In *Problems of Participation: Reflections on Authority, Democracy, and the Struggle for Common Life*, edited by Noorani, Tehseen, Blencowe, Claire, and Julian Brigstocke, 83-89. Lewes: ARN Press.
- Nora, Pierre. 1996. *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Parisot, Eric. 2013. *Graveyard Poetry: Religion, Aesthetics and the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Poetic Condition*. London: Ashgate.
- Parisot, Eric. 2011. "Piety, Poetry, and the Funeral Sermon: Reading Graveyard Poetry in the Eighteenth Century." *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 92(2): 174-192.
- Pile, Steve. 2010. "Emotions and Affect in Recent Human Geography." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35(1): 5-20.
- Rella, Franco. 1987. "Melancholy and the Labyrinthine World of Things." *Substance* 53: 29-36.
- Sayer, Duncan. 2011. "Death and the Dissenter: Group Identity and Stylistic Simplicity as Witnessed in Nineteenth-Century Nonconformist Gravestones." *Historical Archaeology* 45(4): 115-134.

Tolia-Kelly, Divya P.. 2017. "Race and Affect at the Museum: The Museum as a *Theatre of Pain*." In *Heritage, Affect and Emotion: Politics, Practices and Infrastructures*, edited by Tolia-Kelly, Divya P., Waterton, Emma, and Steve Watson, 33-46. London and New York: Routledge.

Trowbridge, Serena. 2017. "Past, Present, and Future in the Gothic Graveyard." In *The Gothic and Death*, edited by Carol Margaret Davison, 21-33. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 21-33.

Waterton, Emma. 2014. "A More-Than-Representational Understanding of Heritage? The 'Past' and the Politics of Affect." *Geography Compass* 8(11): 823-83.

Watson, Nicola J. 2006. *The Literary Tourist*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Westover, Paul. 2012. *Necromanticism: Travelling to Meet the Dead, 1750-1860*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wylie, Jon. 2009. "Landscape, Absence and the Geographies of Love." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 34(3): 375-389.