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From the Closet To the Grave: Architecture, Sexuality and the Mount Royal Cemetery

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This paper argues that the burials of individuals who engaged, or were speculated to have engaged, in same-sex relations in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were in constant relation to the material and metaphoric closet. Due to limited archival material concerning cases of same-sex activity in Montreal, Canada, I look out toward international grave sites to construct a framework for analysis. Using case studies from French and American cemeteries alongside those in Mount Royal Cemetery in Montreal, I argue that, for those whose memory is directed by the living, the grave functions much like the closet—closing or disclosing what institutions and society deemed "abominable." However, more powerful individuals were able to subvert the authority of the cemetery by immortalizing their "romantic friendships" in the grave. By navigating the binaries of the closet—closure/disclosure, hetero/homosexual and repression/pride— the grave has the potential to function as an important archive of identity, sexuality and memory.



The article 'Israeli Supreme Court Rejects Family Petition To Bury Trans Woman As Their 'Son',' published by *Buzzfeed* in 2015, outlines how the parents of trans-activist May Peleg sought to commemorate her as "their son." Emphasizing burial as an instrument to rectify her gender and sexuality, the spatial realities of the closet embedded in this article parallel the burials of those who engaged in same-sex relations in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The article speaks to the continued presence of the closet—closing or disclosing gender and sexuality—in death. 'The closet is a shaping presence', argues Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick 'the fundamental feature of social life'. I would like to suggest this 'shaping presence' extends to the afterlife as well, revealing unseen and complex entanglements between sexuality, architecture and memory. As I argue, the graves of more affluent individuals— in full control of their memory—reveal potential subversions of these binaries through coded linguistic and architectural gestures.

Secrets, Closets and Graves

The closet is an architectural, social and literary convention interwoven with sexual identity invoking binary oppositions between interior/exterior, storage/room, pride/repression, and homo/heterosexuality. The grave suggests a similar set of oppositions: public/private, death/life, city/cemetery, and flesh/stone. Before it was defined as to conceal or cease to conceal sexuality, the closet was described architecturally as a room for privacy, a place of devotion, and a repository of valuables. It was eventually absorbed with the structure of the home in the nineteenth century as an uninhabitable space—moral property that concealed objects threatening to soil the room it served.

These forms of concealed storage were centers of order that protected the home from disorder and conflict. Hence, the term "skeleton in the closet" denoted a 'private or concealed trouble, ever present, and ever liable to come into view'. Thus the skeleton or secret of homosexuality was contained within the closet preventing its extension into the home. This reinforces the closet and grave as relational constructions, specifically concerning what others know or do not know about an individual. If the homosexual body is in constant relation to the architectural closet, it implies the final storage of the body, the grave, containing both the material and metaphoric skeleton.

The old churchyards of Montreal were places of fixed order unlike the new rural cemetery, built in 1854 on the northern slope of Mount Royal—then at the city's edge. It was a metropolis; a cosmopolitan space at its core that granted an individual a place in the landscape of memory. Yet, this claim was not always offered to all. The new cemetery was a political and social vehicle for the Protestant English community that restricted spaces for the poor, adjacent religious affiliations, and other unwanted groups to its



Fig. 2 The funerary monuments within Mount Royal Cemetery emphasized heteronormative ideals of masculinity, such as the Fireman's Monument. Those who belonged to benevolent societies that exemplified ideal characteristics of the male gender, such as the Fire Brigade and the military, were designated space within the landscape of memory. Carved from stone, the structure reflects notions of strength, sacrifice, and honour as foundations for nineteenth-century male identity and positions the monument as an icon of masculine virtue. Photograph by author.



Fig. 1 The epitaphs on the McCord Sarcophagus demonstrate the importance of familial relations that reinforced prescribed gender roles. Domestic roles and relationships to their husband or father's define the memory of the female McCords while Institutional titles such as "Founder", "President," and "Honourable" as well as military ranks including "Captain" and "Colonel" immortalize the male McCords. Photograph by author.

fringes as shown in an early plan from 1852 by Sidney and Neff Architects that excluded the common grounds for the poor and adjacency to the French Catholic cemetery Cimetière Notre-Dames-des-Neiges.⁸ Though intended as a space for all to receive a respectable burial, Mount Royal cemetery reflected the order of the city and society; a controlled space with a controlled memory.⁹

The cemetery constituted and organized the bodies of the dead, traces of which can be read through the architecture within. The structures and their epitaphs acted as confessions, affirming sexual orientation and its conformity to accepted standards in stone for eternity. These forms of architectural disclosure follow Michel Foucault's assertion that sex and sexuality became something that had to be confessed specifically in the religious context that the cemetery served—while simultaneously 'mediating its insidious presence'. 10 The monuments to prominent families, like the McCord Sarcophagus (Figure 1) that celebrates politicians and museum founders, and those of institutions, like the Fireman's Monument (Figure 2), reinforced prescribed gender roles corresponding to Victorian Montreal. This constructed vision often contrasted the family's inner workings, limiting the visibility of working-class women by placing them in constant relation to their husbands or fathers, celebrating working-class male brotherhood and sacrifice as foundations for model masculinity, and establishing a secure family unit by constructing plots as mirrors to the ideal



organization of the home—dragging domestic roles and spaces into the cemetery. $^{\mbox{\tiny 11}}$

The new cemetery was not only a place for burial but contained the sexual politics that permeated nineteenth-century Montreal. 'Churchyards and cemeteries are scenes not only calculated to improve the morals and the taste, and by their botanical riches to cultivate the intellect, but they serve as *historical records*', wrote John Claudius Loudon.¹² The cemetery became a moral educational environment that emphasized the expectations of sexuality for the Protestant community of Montreal.

Authors, Bachelors and a Demon Angel

What became of those who did not conform to this moral vision? As George Chauncey has illustrated in New York, men in Montreal rarely "came out" but were dragged out of their homes and public places by the police, while the media extended this outing of criminal activity into the social worlds they inhabited.13 Yet, within the cemetery, those accused of "abominable" crimes appear absent from the city's collective memory.14 Moise Tellier, for example, was a fruit seller who operated out of his home on 222 Craig Street who was arrested in 1868 by a police officer, likely after returning from the noted cruising grounds of the Champ-de-Mars.¹⁵ While a burial record appears in the Basilique Notre-Dame archive, I have been unable to locate a corresponding grave. Men including Alfred Métayer dit St-Onge, Calixte Desjardin, and Ulrich J. Geoffrion were sentenced to varying terms at St. Vincent-de-Paul Penitentiary though appear and disappear from Canadian census data and Montreal's Lovell directory after the trials or expected release dates-intertwining their biological, social, and archival deaths.16

Though these accounts are unclear in indicating the final resting places of the men described, Cimetière du Père-Lachaise in Paris, France and Cambridge Cemetery, in Cambridge, Massachusetts—both precedents for Mount Royal Cemetery—were chosen as the final resting places for authors Oscar Wilde and Henry James. The support of an ex-lover commemorated Wilde's rejection of heteronormativity while James' memory was left in the hands of his family who sought to cleanse the passions in his work through the medium of his grave. Both authors and their graves reflect two central concepts of closure and disclosure regarding non-heterosexuality in society and the cemetery.

Oscar Wilde was buried in Père-Lachaise in 1909 after a nine-year interment in Cimetière des Bagneux. Falling ill two years after his imprisonment in Reading Gaol from well-publicized gross indecency charges, it was the author's executor and occasional lover Robert Ross who commissioned both the removal of the body and construction of a monumental tomb. ¹⁷ Upon Wilde's re-interment, sculptor Jacob Epstein





Fig. 3a and 3b The tomb of Oscar Wilde in Père-Lachaise by sculptor Jacob Epstein and architect Charles Holden. Photograph by Emma Hannaford

was commissioned to design and execute a commemorative sculpture for the author. ¹⁸ Epstein's "Demon Angel" drew from the design of the Khorsabad gates displayed at the British Museum and was filled with icons venerating non-heterosexuality, such as a crown containing figures symbolizing pride, luxury, and fame (Figure 3a, 3b). ¹⁹ This Assyrianinspired memorial sharply contrasted the adjacent Catholic monuments in Père-Lachaise. As the author exemplified the price paid for embracing sexual freedom, oppressed by religious and governmental institutions, the tomb commemorated and disclosed the struggles Wilde faced negotiating his social world.

In 1916, author Henry James was laid to rest in the James' family plot in Cambridge Cemetery. After his death, James' literary works and letters came under the authority of his family who embarked on a campaign to purify the potential homoerotic content of the correspondence, even restricting access to the letters of his associates and those held at Harvard. Though James had wanted to distance his literary legacy from his personal life, the multi-generational guard over the author's works and letters continued until 2000 illustrating that the family had a much more influential role in the "closeting" of his memory. Like the campaign, the grave functioned as an instrument for the family to veil his suspected desire.

James' physical positioning in the plot, delineated within the cemetery by a brick wall bearing the "James" family name, assisted in concealing the potential non-heterosexuality in his work. He rests beside his mother, father, and brother, consolidating the nuclear family structure while the consistent profiles of the tombstones reflect a biological family connection—shared family traits rendered in stone as similar physical characteristics. Absent of ornament, James' tombstone reads 'Novelist—



Citizen of Two Countries Interpreter of His Generation on Both Sides of the Seas', while the epitaphs of his mother and sister-in-law specify their roles as "wife" to William and Henry James Sr.—consolidating sexual and gender relations. Kosofsky-Sedgwick emphasizes the Bachelor character in James' writings, concluding that he is divorced from discourses surrounding his sexuality.²¹ Like James' Bachelor character, his grave is disconnected from any discussion of sexuality following the argument that Victorian domestic privacy required presentation as 'a visual representation of having nothing to hide'.²² Thus, to rectify his domesticated and feminized nature, the placement of James' tombstone within the plot and relational epitaph physically and textually presents him as a parallel to the patriarchal figure of his father Henry James Sr., void of any secret desire.

The material nature of the closet, in each case, was a significant force in positioning the bodies and memories of the deceased. The binaries of in/out were perhaps the most important forces influencing these commemorative structures. As opposed to navigating the closet, the graves and the bodies within were constituted by it; their material and metaphoric skeletons of sexuality either closed or disclosed.

Siblings, Mothers and Maids

The grave can also complicate, caught between closing and disclosing, like the Redpath monument (Figure 4) in Mount Royal Cemetery, designed by architect Gratton Thompson. The Redpath family, shareholders of the Redpath Sugar Company and well-recognized philanthropists of Montreal, employed architecture to construct a particular family legacy concerning the rumoured sexuality of J. Clifford Redpath and the murder of his mother Ada Mills Redpath. The monument also aids in constructing an incomplete narrative concerning the "romantic friendship" between playwright, and sister of J. Clifford Redpath, Amy Redpath and her servant Mary Rose Shallow. Their grave is not constituted by the closet but oscillates between in and out, never comfortably adhering to either position.

In 1901, the murder-suicide of Ada Mills Redpath at the hands of her 24-year-old son Clifford shocked Montreal. According to the Coroner's report, Clifford 'suffered insanity caused from an epileptic attack'. ²³ The insanity and mental illness referenced in the report as well as in the press may have been an oblique reference to his sexuality. ²⁴ While these theories are incapable of being sufficiently substantiated, the deaths of Clifford and Ada nonetheless deconstruct the purity of the family unit. Yet, both Clifford and Ada received a high Anglican funeral, which was forbidden for those who had committed suicide. While these events bring the relationships of family members under scrutiny, the burial of Clifford and his mother Ada together in the family plot and corresponding funerary rites reconstituted the safety of the traditional family form following the transgression of matricide.



Fig. 4 The Redpath Monument in Mount Royal Cemetery. Photograph by author.

While the Redpath monument is a direct reference to the power of the family, being a miniature of the Roddick gates commissioned by Amy Redpath flanking the entrance to McGill University, Sisters Maggie Shallow Colemen and Mary Rose Shallow—maids to the Redpaths at the time of Clifford and Ada's deaths—are buried alongside their employers. Though the Redpaths had additional live-in servants and employees, none of these individuals received the same form of commemoration.

Mary Rose Shallow, a Newfoundland-born servant of Amy Redpath, was originally buried in Montreal's Catholic cemetery before Redpath had her body exhumed and reinterred in the family plot in 1944. A burial card indicates the movement of Shallow's body to the Redpath family plot, illustrating that Amy Redpath went to the trouble of moving the body as opposed to just simply including her name in the epitaph. Therefore, it can be inferred that it was important for Redpath that not only Shallow's memory, but also her body, be laid to rest alongside her. As the monument projected the lineage of the family, the addition of Shallow and Coleman raise questions concerning their ambiguous relationship with the family. Together, the epitaphs on the monument, photographic evidence and textual documents illuminate the relationship between Shallow and Redpath.

The Redpath's epitaphs occupy the front surfaces of the monument, beginning with, Sir Thomas George Roddick and Amy Redpath followed by Jocelyn Clifford Redpath, Patriarch John James Redpath and finally Ada Mills Redpath (Figure 5). The epitaphs of Mary Rose Shallow and Maggie Shallow Coleman are carved on the back (Figure 6). The rear of the monument is deliberately difficult to access, with the bushes surrounding

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Fig. 5 The epitaphs of the Redpath family on the front of the monument. Photograph by author.



Fig. 6 The epitaphs of Mary Rose Shallow and Maggie Shallow Colemen on the back of the Redpath Monument. Photograph by author.

the monument obstructing the view of the rear from all positions in the cemetery. Coleman's inscription reads "House Keeper & Friend" while Shallows states "Beloved Companion of Lady Roddick."

Alongside the unusual epitaph, family photographs of the two women attest to the complex nature of their relationship. One photograph captures the women on vacation in Egypt, riding camels with the pyramids in the distance, while another shows the two posing for a portrait. ²⁵ As Shallow never married nor had children, she appears to replace the standing figure of Redpath's husband, Sir Thomas Roddick, while Amy sits in her wheelchair. ²⁶ The photograph presents the two in isolation, possibly as a couple, not merely employee/employer.

In a will produced two years after the death of Roddick, Amy Redpath reveals distinct elements of her relationship with Shallow. The 1925 will stipulates that if Redpath were to pass away, Shallow would receive a monthly income of \$1200.00 along with her clothing—extending beyond the relationship the Redpaths had with other domestic workers. The document also noted that Shallow lived with Redpath reinforcing the importance of their burial location as parallel to their domestic lives. As Shallow was described as a "spinster" and Redpath as a "widow"—both childless and living together—their status in the domestic sphere contrasted the expectations of male/female couples. Speculations regarding their intimacy aside, the private lives of the two women contrasted the prescribed nuclear family of Victorian Montreal.

Lillian Faderman has characterized female "romantic friendships" like Redpath and Shallow as neither morally perverse nor harmful and widely accepted by society.²⁸ These friendships, though a mirror of heterosexual relationships, did not necessarily involve the same sexual or gender dynamics. They operated outside of the persecution of acts attributed to sex between men. As both the law and society disregarded feminine desire, with scarce legislation in Montreal concerning female sexuality at the time, the non-heterosexual "friendship" between the women was ignored.²⁹

The two pairings of Amy Redpath on the monument, with Thomas Roddick and Mary Rose Shallow, drag her domestic status as a wife and as a widow to the grave and immortalize the complexities of her sexuality—affirmed and speculated. The grave participates in what Colleen Lomos has called a 'modern impulse to tell what is supposed to be the truth about sexuality, while at the same time, irretrievably complicating and undermining that impulse'.³⁰ As an affluent member of English Montreal, she may have been able to subvert the moral vision of the cemetery, simultaneously revealing and concealing, articulating and complicating, her relationship with Shallow.

Unlike Clifford, Amy Redpath had the capacity to commission her grave as well as organize her position and the position of others. She was careful



to destroy any material regarding the violent events that claimed the lives of her brother and mother, yet deliberately chose to leave these material traces of her desire. This action attempted to disclose sexuality and love relations (the closet interior) through the epitaphs while simultaneously complicating their relationship to the family structure (the exterior of the closet), making an accurate picture difficult to infer from the traces on the monument alone. In full control of her memory, unlike Wilde or James, Redpath was able to challenge the closet—positioning her body neither completely in nor out.

Conclusion

Unpacking the relationship between architecture, sexuality and memory in Montreal, Paris and Cambridge offers a way to think about the grave as a critical archival document. The grave appears to conform to what Ann Cvetkovich terms a 'trauma archive', resulting from situated political violence, trauma and sexuality.³¹ She argues that trauma challenges what constitutes an archive, pressuring forms of documentation and commemoration. 'Memory of trauma is imbedded in material artifacts', she writes 'nostalgia, personal memory, fantasy, and trauma—make a document significant'.³²

Both the closet and the grave are documents of trauma, becoming central to rectifying absences in collective memory. Situated political violence concerning same-sex activity in Montreal suggests the absence of grave is a continuation of the archival closet. Institutions do not extend the same archival privilege to those convicted of "indecent acts" as the elite families in the cemetery. Their traces appear in newspaper clippings that, like the closet, are not part of the room or museum but located at the edge; present yet concealed. Thus, much of this research focused on more affluent or aristocratic individuals whose memories were not defined by archives that inevitably fail to contain an image of pre-liberation same-sex activity in Montreal.³³

As an archive, the grave may be the last vestige of these men in the city they once inhabited, potentially filled with personal and collective memory. Not part of an institutional collection but an active element of the city, the grave may construct a false history, challenging the authenticity of memory while containing secret truths. Shelley Hornstein has described this challenge to authenticity as anti-memory, or a particular form of remembrance that involves 'the making of a place that derives its order from the obscuring of its own recollected past'.³⁴ The grave universalizes, commemorating unstable perceptions of sexuality, and it particularises, identifying the memory of a particular individual and their desire. This follows Kosofsky-Segwick's argument that queer individuals 'are located within an irreducible set of minoritizing and universalizing views on sexuality. These two views contrast the ideas that people really are gay while simultaneously preserving that desire is inherently unstable'.³⁵ The

need to locate these graves—unpacking their relationship with the material and metaphoric closet—will remain integral to continuing to assemble an image of same-sex desire that challenges existing narratives, both nationally and internationally. Whether it functions to close, disclose, or oscillate, the grave is an important, if not integral, component of queer memory.

In embracing the Redpath Monument as an archive or form of anti-memory that refuses to entirely close or disclose, telling truths and lies, offers a window into the power/knowledge structures that continue to position our bodies and memory. In acknowledging the enduring relations to the metaphoric closet embedded in architecture, the monument suggests how we may navigate these structures from the closet to the grave.

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