sprawling yet exquisite residential and bath complexes so aroused the emperor Commodus's envy that in 183 he trumped up charges against the brothers, had them executed, and confiscated the estate.

Most of all, though, there are the tombs.

ROAD OF DEATH

Between the porta San Sebastiano and the ninth milestone there are substantial remains of at least ninety-nine monuments, of which seventy-five have been identified as sepulchers, mausolea, and other repositories of the dead—only the tiniest fraction of the funerary monuments that literally lined the road in antiquity. Because the monuments were so densely crowded, the thing that a visitor will probably like most about walking the Appia today—the experience of the open Roman *campagna* on both sides of the road—is actually most false to the ancient road, while the segments closest to the city, where walls loom on either side, more truly capture the feeling of the past. For mile after mile beyond the city's gates—in fact as far as Casal Rotondo, an immense circular tomb just before the sixth milestone—the Appia was hemmed in by a nearly unbroken wall of tombs.

This is the aspect of the road that most captured the imagination of Nathaniel Hawthorne during an extended visit to Rome in the late 1850s, a few years after Luigi Canina's work. Here are some of the impressions recorded in his *French and Italian Notebooks*:

> The great ragged bulks of the tombs along the Appian Way now hove in sight, one with a farmhouse on its summit [the so-called "tomb of Geta," between the first and second milestones], and all of them preposterously huge and massive. . . . The tomb of Cecilia Metella came in sight a long while before we reached it, with the warm buff hue of its travertine. . . . After passing it, we saw an interminable line of tombs on both sides of the way, each of which might, for aught I know, have been as massive as that of Cecilia

> Metella, and some perhaps still more monstrously gigantic, though now dilapidated and much reduced in size. . . . [W]e could go but a little father along this most interesting road, the borders of which are strewn with broken marbles, fragments of capitals, and nameless rubbish that once was beautiful. Methinks the Appian Way should be the only entrance to Rome—through an avenue of tombs.

Not that the Appia is unique in this respect. It just happens to make visible today a scene that would have met the traveler coming to Rome along any of its many roads.

How different this is from the space we make, without a second thought, for death and the dead in our own cities. If you walk the Freedom Trail in Boston, your tour will take you through Copp's Hill Burying Ground near the Old North Church, the Granary Burying Ground near the State House, and the King's Chapel and Burying Ground, all of them providing Bostonians with a final resting place in the heart of their city since long before the lamp was hung in the North Church tower to send Paul Revere on his ride. For that matter, a five-minute walk from my campus office will bring me to Princeton Cemetery, where I can contemplate the graves of Aaron Burr and all but a handful of Princeton University's deceased presidents, Burr's father among them (Woodrow Wilson is one of the absentees). I can assure you that the good men of classical Rome would be appalled.

A sacred boundary line surrounded Rome: the *pomerium*, originally marked out with a plow (according to legend) by Romulus himself and maintained, with occasional modifications, ever after, distinct from though partly coinciding with the line traced by the city walls. The line's significance was primarily religious, but as in most areas of Roman life, the religious and the political were intertwined in countless ways. The tribunes who served as protectors and patrons of Rome's commoners, the plebs, had their authority only within the *pomerium*, while for a commanding general to cross the *pomerium* and reenter the city was the equivalent of resigning his command.

Embracing and protecting Rome's civil community, the line distinguished the foreign from the domestic, the realm of war and violence from the realm of peace and law. (It was forbidden to carry a sword within the *pomerium:* so far as I'm aware, no Roman ever argued that if you outlaw swords, only criminals will have swords.) It also distinguished the world of the living from the place of the dead.

Ordinarily, no person could be buried inside the *pomerium*, above all because the dead were so problematic, in so many ways. They were, first of all, a source of pollution, not in a physical or environmental sense, but in a religious sense. A dead body was "matter out of place," as one famous definition of pollution puts it, and unfit to occupy the same space as the living and the gods above: corpses belonged to the gods below. Even handling the dead made a person ritually unclean and a source of pollution in his own right. In Roman towns the men who prepared dead bodies for their final disposition were themselves barred from living in town, and their civic status suffered from various official disabilities, like being disqualified from serving on the town council or holding public office.

The dead were also just very frightening. In classical Rome—the two centuries before and the two centuries after the turn of the common era, say—a dead person was not generally thought to have an afterlife as such a thing is imagined in some religions today, an unending existence in which the deceased retain their earthly identity and experience bliss or torment according to their earthly deserts. On the other hand, the dead did not have the decency to simply cease to exist. They belonged, as I said, to the gods below, and even, in one sense, *became* the gods below. The deceased lost their identity as individuals and were merged with the undifferentiated mass of all those who had ever died, the *di manēs*, the "good gods." If that curious, even empty-seeming epithet (who, after all, were the "*bad* gods"?) makes you suspect that the term might be a euphemism, that is because it is. Just as the Greeks called their Furies, the spirits of retribution that dwelt beneath the earth, the Eumenidēs—"kindly ones"—in the hope that euphemism would allow them to escape the

dreaded ones' notice and avoid their awful powers, so the Romans referred to the "good gods" out of fear that they were anything but.

So the dead had to be kept away from the center of life, and there were several ways of seeing to this need. The most visible way produced the tombs that lined the road. Though the Romans had over the centuries disposed of their dead by both cremation and burial, by the first century BCE cremation had become the norm, and so it remained for three to four more centuries, during which there was a clear cultural divide in the Mediterranean basin. If you spoke Latin and lived in the western half, you burned your dead relations; if you spoke Greek and lived in the eastern half, you did not.

Cremation produces ash and bone, and disposing of the ash and bone while yet preserving them gave rise to the *columbarium*, or "dovecote," the modern term for the chamber-tomb that held a system of niches where the remains could be stored. Here's Hawthorne, again, on his visit to one of these chambers:

> A little farther towards the city we . . . came to the site of some ancient Columbaria, close by what seemed . . . a villa and a farmhouse. A man came out of the house and unlocked a door in a low building, apparently quite modern; but on entering we found ourselves looking into a large, square chamber, sunk entirely beneath the surface of the ground. A very narrow and steep staircase of stone, and evidently ancient, descended into the chamber; and, going down, we found the walls hollowed on all sides into little semicircular niches, of which, I believe, there were nine rows, one above another, and nine niches in each row. Thus they looked somewhat like the little entrance to a pigeon-house. . . . In every one of the . . . niches were two round holes covered with an earthen plate, and in each hole were ashes and little fragments of bones—the ashes and bones of the dead, whose names were inscribed in Roman capitals on marble slabs inlaid into the wall over each individual niche. . . . [T]he impression left on me was, that this mode of disposing of the dead was infinitely preferable to any which has

> been adopted since that day. . . . I would rather have my ashes scattered over the soil to help the growth of the grass and daisies; but still I should not murmur much at having them decently pigeonholed in a Roman tomb. . . . In [this tomb], measuring about twenty feet square, I roughly estimate that there have been deposited together the remains of at least seven or eight hundred persons, reckoning two little heaps of bones and ashes in each pigeon-hole, nine pigeon-holes in each row, and nine rows on each side.

The *columbarium* Hawthorne inspected held the remains of the freed slaves of Livia, wife of the emperor Augustus, and of other members of the imperial household, though it could as easily have been the collective tomb of a *collegium*, one of the organizations that poorer Romans joined to enjoy fellowship during life and to ensure that their remains would be treated decently after death. In any case, the practice of cremation faded over time, and by the third century the Romans had adopted the funeral practices of the Greek-speaking east, including the use of the sarcophagus, with its grim Greek name ("flesh-eater"). In the tomb's chamber, the small niches of the *columbarium* were replaced by larger niches into which these boxes of worked stone could be set. The change was not specifically inspired by the rise of Christianity, which was mostly critical of cremation as an obstacle to resurrection, but it was clearly congenial to it.

Though the change in custom dictated some changes in a tomb's internal organization, the resulting differences were negligible compared with the great variety of shapes and sizes that the tombs could take, and the different statements they could make. Besides the collective cremation tomb of the sort Hawthorne saw, with their chambers sunk underground, there were, much more commonly, individual or family tombs, and these might appear in any one of these forms: as an altar; as a small temple-like shrine (*aedicula*) set on a high base; as a cylindrical tower set atop one or more rectangular bases, wedding-cake fashion; as a two-story temple with a porch approached by a grand staircase; as a circular chamber with a cone-

shaped roof; as a rectangular chamber with a cellar and two stories on top; or as a circular, brickwork mausoleum with a domed ceiling.

Some of these tombs were very grand indeed, but smaller monuments shouldered their way in to claim space among the giants. The point was to make the most striking public statement that your means allowed along the road of power, and thereby associate yourself and your kin with the grandeur that was Rome. "So-and-so made this *sibi suisque*," the inscriptions commonly say: "for himself and his own." The inscriptions also commonly address the passers-by, calling on them to stop, pay attention, show respect.

The most imposing and best preserved of the tombs belonged to the woman whose name has already been invoked several times, Caecilia Metella—or, to give her the full measure of dignity that the inscription on the tomb claims for her:

CAECILIAE
Q·CRETICI·F
METELLAE CRASSI

To Caecilia Metella, daughter of Quintus Creticus, wife of Crassus

Like any proper Roman woman, Caecilia Metella was known by the men who surrounded her, and these men had names that were among the grandest in Rome of the first century BCE. Her father's full and formal name was Quintus Caecilius Metellus Creticus. The first name, like Roman first names in general, had the same character as first names in European and North American culture today (women did not get a first name), while the second name, like our surnames, designated a person's family or clan. The third name, Metellus, began as a kind of nickname (it means something like "mercenary"), which the original owner's descendents then adopted to distinguish their branch of the Caecilian clan from others. The Caecilii Metelli first came to prominence early in the third century BCE, when Appius Claudius was approaching old age, and from that point

on you could not swing a cat on the Roman political scene without hitting one: the "Index of Careers" in Robert Broughton's great *Magistrates of the Roman Republic*, the bible of this period for people like me, lists no fewer than thirty of them, including five censors and eighteen consuls, with Creticus himself winning a place among the consuls in 69.

As for the fourth name, "Creticus"—now *that* was special. The effect of it is comparable to "Lawrence of Arabia" or, perhaps better, "Gordon of Khartoum." It meant that this Quintus Metellus had conquered Crete and organized it as a Roman province, in the mid-60s. The custom of using a geographical epithet to burnish the name of a man who had gained military glory in a given region is illustrated most famously by Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, "Scipio of Africa," whose defeat of Hannibal at the battle of Zama in North Africa (202 BCE) ended the Second Punic War. It was a custom that bestowed more glory on the Caecilii Metelli than on any other clan: besides Creticus, the latest in this line, we also have (in chronological order) a Macedonicus, a Balearicus, a Delmaticus, and a Numidicus. The family's triumphal names allow us to trace Rome's expansion into every corner of the Mediterranean, from the Balearic Islands in the west, through Numidia in Africa, to Macedon, Dalmatia, and Crete in the east.

A woman from such a family did not marry just anyone. She was the nearest thing to a princess that a republic could produce, her dowry would bring a fortune, and deciding where to settle the princess and her dowry had dynastic implications, a chance to forge or strengthen ties to another family with plenty of dignity and clout. A shrewd father, Creticus decided to place his daughter with the family in Rome that least needed the dowry.

Her husband was one of the Licinii Crassi, a family of somewhat less political luster than the Caecilii Metelli, with only half as many listings in Broughton's "Index" and no offices recorded before the late third century. (The first Licinius to be called Crassus was evidently chubby, for that is what *crassus* means: like so many of the nicknames

that the Romans liked to hang on each other—and keep!—it picks out an unflattering physical trait.) But whatever its relative handicap when it came to ancient consulships, this branch of the Licinii had one big thing going for it at the time of Caecilia Metella's marriage: her husband was almost certainly Marcus Licinius Crassus, the elder son of a father with the same name who was one of the great white sharks of Roman political life in the middle of the first century. A contemporary of Creticus, the elder Crassus had put down the slave revolt led by Spartacus that had terrified Italy in the years 73–71, then served as consul in 70 and censor in 65. He was also the prime mover in forming the alliance with the two other great white sharks of the day—Pompey the Great and Julius Caesar—that informally but effectively controlled Roman politics through much of the 50s. And he was rich beyond the dreams of greed, even at a time when the staggering influx of wealth from Rome's Empire encouraged the greedy to dream very big. His interests, overt and sub rosa, extended everywhere, and the ruthlessness with which he pursued them predictably inspired some invidious stories. One story, very possibly true, held that he formed a private fire-fighting company (Rome had no such public force at the time), which would appear at the scene of a fire, then dicker over the fee with the desperate owner while his building burned. Another story, very likely false, reported that after he was killed by the Parthians, Rome's imperial rival to the east, while leading a glory-hungry military campaign in 54–53, the enemy poured molten gold down his dead throat, in mockery of his greed.

We do not know when Caecilia Metella married young Crassus. For that matter, we do not know when she was born or died, or even whether it was her first marriage. But if we assume that it was, we can make some rough yet educated guesses. The young man served with Julius Caesar in 54, during Caesar's conquest of Gaul, and the office he held required him to have been at least thirty years old. So let's suppose that he was in fact born in 84 (a man with his connections would not be kept waiting for preferment), and let's recall that young women among the Roman elite typically married in their

midteens, to a man five to ten years their senior. If we conclude that Caecilia Metella was born in the early 70s and married in the late 60s, it would square with the one other thing we know about her: she became the mother of yet another Marcus Licinius Crassus, who became consul in the year 30—and not just any consul, but the colleague of Julius Caesar's adoptive son, Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, known today as Octavian. Just the year before, Octavian had become the last strongman left standing after two decades of civil war, defeating Antony and Cleopatra in a naval battle at Actium, off the western coast of Greece. Three years later a grateful senate gave him the name Augustus, and over the next four decades he changed the world as no one since Alexander the Great had done three hundred years before, and as very, very few statesmen or soldiers have done since.

So as the world changed around them, the Licinii Crassi continued to do very well indeed, and Caecilia Metella evidently shared in their prosperity. Granted, not all was happiness amid the wealth and power. She apparently lost her husband while still in her thirties: we last hear of him in 48, and since he did not gain the consulship that would certainly have been his had he lived, we have to assume that he was dead before the end of the decade. If that's so, it's clear that she fulfilled the Roman ideal (more honored in the breach, perhaps, than in the observance) of remaining *univira*, a one-man woman: for she was still known as "the wife of Crassus" sometime in the century's final decades when her bones and ashes were shut away in her tomb.

And what a tomb it is. Built on a circular plan, it has a drum nearly a hundred feet in diameter and over thirty-five feet high, set upon a tall, square stone base that makes it still more imposing. The ensemble, in antiquity, would have been topped off by a conical dome. It is not Napoleon's tomb, to be sure, nor even Grant's, in its sheer dimensions, but since it sits near the crest of the rise as the Appia climbs toward the third milestone and a view of the volcanic plateau beyond, it dominated the horizon of travelers coming from Rome, set off in its visual field by the drum's cladding of trav-

Figure 9. Tomb of Caecilia Metella

ertine, still miraculously intact. As Hawthorne put it, "The tomb of Cecilia Metella came in sight a long while before we reached it." By the time they came within ten paces, travelers would be able to see clearly the sculpted frieze running round the top of the drum—ox skulls (*bukrania*, symbolic of sacrifice) and festoons in alternation—and then, in fine Pentelic marble quarried near Athens, three plaques, two in the form of trophies (one of these now missing) and the third, in the center, bearing the inscription that proclaims the princess's name and standing.

Caecilia Metella's remains are many centuries gone, and the conical dome is long gone, too, for reasons that have less to do with the ravages of time and the elements than with the way that the past along the Appian Way keeps impinging upon the present, and being repurposed by it. As the tomb dominated the view of a traveler laboring uphill toward it, so the view from the tomb commanded the surrounding landscape in a way that begged to be fortified: that is

why the dome is gone, replaced by a crenellated battlement. The tomb was probably already fortified not long after the fifth or sixth century, and by the eleventh century it had been incorporated by the counts of Tusculum in a defensive settlement that sat astride the Appia, its entrance and exit blocking the road, turning back any traveler who came that way.

Three centuries later the property came into the possession of the princely Caetani family with the help of Pope Boniface VIII (a Caetani by birth), and the walls of the castle they built, attached to the tomb fore and aft, are still intact. And so it went, the monument passing through the hands of another half dozen families—and narrowly escaping demolition, by papal order, in 1589—until it was taken over by the state. Today, the central, conical *cella* where Caecilia Metella's remains came to rest is open to the sky, its brickwork interior a literal *columbarium*, the roost of pigeons.

All the grand tombs had stories like this to tell, of distinction in life recorded in pride after death. But as I said before, there was a kind of democracy in death, too, that allowed more humble people to claim a place along the road. If Caecilia Metella stood at the tiptop of the social pyramid of those interred here, representatives of the pyramid's base are very much in evidence, too, among the slaves and, especially, the freedmen whose tombs sprang up in the empty spaces between the grandees' massive monuments.

Like ancient Greece, like America's antebellum South, Rome was a slave society, a society whose way of life could not be sustained, was in fact inconceivable to begin with, absent the support of the countless humans whom the Roman scholar Varro placed in the category of "speaking tool." Rome's wars of conquest, especially, brought slaves to Italy by the tens and then hundreds of thousands, but as in the case of the Americas, a vigorous slave trade also saw to their abundance, as one among any number of other commodities. From the second century BCE and continuing for the next six centuries (the rise of Christianity made no great difference) slaves were ubiquitous and indispensable, their use so ingrained in the culture that the commands

a well-bred child should use in speaking to them are found in the primers that were the ancient equivalent of *Dick and Jane*. Among the upper classes, who owned slaves in large numbers, they worked the fields, cleaned the houses, prepared and served the meals, and emptied the chamberpots. They were secretaries and couriers, nursemaids and tutors, body servants, whipping boys, and sexual toys. The way that slaves cushioned daily life and made it easy surely encouraged, if it did not actually create, the petulant egoism and monstrous self-concern of the average Roman aristocrat, who would—I guarantee—make the most arrogant and selfish of your acquaintances look like the Dalai Lama by comparison. Such a person could expect his every desire to be satisfied, perfectly and right now, because so many hands toiled, as good as unseen, to ensure that it was. Not that this much distinguishes Roman slavery from the slavery of Greece or the American South. But the Romans also did something distinctive—in fact, downright strange—with their slaves.

They freed them in huge numbers, a practice unheard of in the slave societies of Greece and the antebellum South. Some they freed at the time of their own death, as a magnanimous gesture in their wills. Others they freed because the slaves had saved one copper coin at a time, over years, to amass the price of their freedom. Still others they freed spontaneously, as a reward for meritorious service. They freed so many, in fact, that by the end of the first century BCE the emperor Augustus had a law enacted to limit the number that one man could liberate. But while the circumstances in which slaves were freed were many and varied, there were two constants.

First, there was the general rule that the chances of your gaining your freedom increased in direct proportion to your proximity to your master. If you worked as a field slave on a distant estate, your chances were essentially zero, unless your master freed his slaves en masse in his will. But if you were a house slave and survived to (say) thirty, the likelihood that you would be freed was enormous: the many freedmen whose tombs line the Appia would mostly have been slaves in their masters' residences in the capital.

The second constant lay with the consequence of being formally freed, which was always and everywhere the same. One moment you were a slave named Hermes or Eros, with no legal identity and no rights of your own; the next you were not merely your own man, you were a Roman citizen, now bearing the first two names of your former master—your new *patronus* (a term related to *pater*, "father")—and retaining your old slave-name as a nickname. Welcome to the *populus Romanus*, Marcus Tullius Hermes. There were a few limitations and conditions attached to your new freedom, to be sure: you promised to continue performing a certain amount of work for your *patronus*, for example, and you were not eligible to become a magistrate of the Roman people (though your sons were). But in most respects you had ceased to be a *puer*—a "boy," as slaves were commonly called—and were now a *vir*, an adult Roman man among men.

The sudden change in status must have been dizzying for the newly free citizens, but following the habits and customs of the masters they had served provided some stability. Property owning was one example. The "boy" who had had no legal existence as a person while enslaved, and so could own no property in his own name, now could buy and own whatever he could afford in the way of houses, clothing, and chattel: the former slave often became a slave owner in his turn. Education was another example: the poet Horace, a native of Venusia on the Appian Way, tells us how his father—a former slave who became prosperous as an auctioneer—chose not to have him schooled in his hometown, where he might be bullied by the burly sons of centurions, but sent him to Rome instead, to be (literally) whipped into shape by one of the most prominent teachers of the day and get the kind of training that distinguished the social and cultural elite.

This sort of assimilation also extended to the respectability of the tomb. While some freedmen chose to be interred with their former masters, many arranged for tombs of their own. One of my favorite examples along the Appia is found near the fifth milestone, on the right side of the road as you're heading away from town. There you

will see the core of what used to be a substantial tower tomb, a tall pillar of conglomerate stone perhaps twenty-five feet high, set upon squared blocks of the volcanic tuff that's plentiful in the area. At the base of the tower is a well-cut inscription on a block of the same stone. The inscription is in the usual all-capitals style, with the raised dots ("interpuncts") used to separate words: the initial L in the first, third, and fifth lines stands for "Lucius," a very common Roman first name, and the abbreviation L·L at the end of the same lines stands for "L(ucii) l(ibertus)," "the freedman of Lucius." Three men, then, who were all once the slaves of a Lucius Valerius and took his name in the usual way, after they were freed. But it's the names on the second, fourth, and sixth lines that rivet the attention: Baricha, Zabda, and Achiba. Plainly Semitic and probably Jewish, the names all but invite you to imagine a story about their owners, or at least to ask some questions. Were the three men brothers or fellow townsmen before they were taken in slavery? How were they taken? Were they captured when Titus, son of the emperor Vespasian and future emperor himself, sacked Jerusalem in 70 CE, part of the loot that we see soldiers hauling off in the scenes carved on Titus's arch in the Forum? Or were they brought to Rome still earlier, on a slave dealer's ship? (Inscriptions like this one are very hard to date: first century CE seems to be the consensus, but nothing can be said beyond that.) Were they among a number of Lucius Valerius's freedmen buried in the same tomb? Or if so costly a tomb was theirs alone, how did they come to afford it? Had they been business partners in the years after slavery? In fact, might the Lucius Valerius Zabda recalled on this inscription be the same man as the Lucius Valerius Zabda mentioned on another first-century inscription from Rome—a former slave who became a slave dealer in his turn? But the mute stone, as spare and dignified in its own way as the marble plaque on Caecilia Metella's tomb, provides no answers to satisfy modern curiosity.

The scene along this avenue of tombs blended the grand, the grim, the holy, and the sordid, and summoning up how different elements looked in antiquity calls for different degrees of imagination. Pictur-

Figure 10. Freedmen's epitaph

ing the monuments themselves, gleaming stone and burnt sienna brick, is not very difficult once you have in mind the essential shapes that were used: altar, temple, tower, and the rest. It's also not hard to imagine the Rosalia, the festival of roses in May and June, when the bright flowers were placed on the tombs, or the Parentalia, the feast of ancestors, when each family made offerings to the spirits of their own dead. These nine days in February were "days of religious scruple" (*dies religiosi*), when weddings were forbidden, temples were closed, and magistrates did not wear their official dress: the ordinary practices of daily life were held in suspense as the people came out to the tombs to pay their respects. A passage from Ovid's poem on the calendar, the *Fasti*, helps us along here:

> Places of burial get their due respect, too: we appease our
> ancestors' souls
> and give little gifts to the tombs built for them.
> The Good Gods ask only a little: in place of a rich gift, piety pleases.
> The gods who dwell by the depths of the Styx are not greedy.

A small tile is enough, draped with an offering of garlands,
some scattered kernels of wheat, a few grains of salt,
bread soaked in wine unmixed with water, a sprinkling of violets:
leave the potsherd with these bits in the middle of the road.
Not that I rule out bigger gifts, but even these can appease the
shades.

Of course there were witches here, too, but they are harder to summon up: fittingly, I suppose, because they did their work at night and went out of their way to avoid being seen. The remains of the dead—especially those who died violently or otherwise prematurely—had special powers ("Take the skull of a man who died a violent death," more than one ancient magic spell begins), and those who trafficked in such things skulked among the tombs. That was also one of the places where prostitutes worked their beat—and here almost no imagination at all is needed, because they still do. One afternoon, as we approached the modern crossroad near the ninth milestone, a young woman passed us heading back toward the city, her clothing a bit askew. And when we reached the crossroad there was a proper traffic jam, as a cluster of women led their clients this way and that into the bushes on either side of the road. "I don't understand," dear Laura said, "What are all these people doing? Is there a bathroom here?" Now it's true that—though she's seen plenty of the world's grimy side in her work, including time spent representing accused murderers—Laura has remained what the Romans would have called an *anima candida*, a pure soul. Here, though, it was not so much innocence at work as wishful thinking, since the park's lack of amenities happened to be much on her mind at the time.

With the rise of Christianity, the scene would have changed, more by addition than by subtraction. The Parentalia withered away over time, replaced by other rites of remembrance. The prostitutes surely remained. What was new were the churches in which the relics of the holy dead were buried and—mostly hidden from view under-

ground—the catacombs, miles upon miles of them, where hundreds of thousands more were laid to rest.

The area along the Appia was made for these monuments. Jews accustomed to burying their dead in tombs cut from the rocks of their homeland continued that practice in the Diaspora, where they found the tuff around Rome—strong yet easy to work—well suited to the purpose. There were Jewish catacombs outside the city as early as the second century CE, and the Christians took these as their model. The first public Christian cemetery—from the Greek word *koimētērion*, "place of sleep"—was established by the deacon (later pope, then saint) Callixtus at the start of the third century, and it forms the oldest part of what are known as the catacombs of San Callisto today.

There are three modest Jewish catacombs in the vicinity of the via Appia near Rome: the archeological ministry maintains the most substantial of these, just off the road, within a modern vineyard. But even the largest of the Jewish catacombs, in the northeast quarter of the city on the grounds of the Villa Torlonia, is on a scale very different from that of the grand Christian cemeteries. Three dozen Christian catacombs are known, eight of them on or near the Appia, and while they vary in size, their design is essentially the same. You descend via steps to a barrel-vaulted gallery, where three or four tiers of tombs are cut, like the drawers of a lateral file, in the gallery wall: a pair of bodies was placed in each tomb, which was sealed with a slab of stone and (for the most part) left unmarked. Separate chambers for more prosperous families extend off the gallery at right angles, as do other galleries that lead to still other galleries, the whole network ramifying in an irregular, planless diffusion. When the galleries were extended as far as they could go, the people simply dug down and began a new network of galleries at a lower level.

The largest and most frequently visited catacombs on the Appia are those of San Sebastiano, between the second and third milestones, and San Callisto, closer to the city between San Sebastiano and the spot where the via Appia and the via Ardeatina meet. San Sebastiano

gives us the term "catacomb" itself, first used in the fourth century to refer specifically to it as "the cemetery *ad catacumbas*" (perhaps "at the hollows": the word's origin is unknown, but it might refer to nearby clay quarries). The site takes its current name from Saint Sebastian, the martyr believed to be buried there, and it houses a splendid, larger-than-life-size *Bust of the Saviour* that has lately been identified as the last work of Gianlorenzo Bernini. Originally, though, the site was known as the "basilica of the apostles," because the remains of Saints Peter and Paul were thought to have been kept there for some decades. Because so many of the faithful wanted to be buried near the saints and draw on the grace channeled through their relics, seven and a half miles of galleries were ultimately dug. The catacombs of San Callisto also housed the bones of saints, including Saint Caecilia (no relation to the lady in the grand tomb) and, in the "chapel of the popes," the nine men who succeeded Callixtus in the course of the third century. Here there are ten miles of galleries dug on four different levels, from the early third century CE to the early fifth.

Even though the remains of the dead had long since been removed, visiting the catacombs in the time before electric lighting and good ventilation was clearly a trial. In his diary Goethe reported:

> My visit to the Catacombs . . . was not much of a success. I had hardly taken a step into that airless place before I began to feel uncomfortable, and I immediately returned to the light of day and the fresh air and waited . . . for the return of the other visitors.

Dickens, for his part, was again overwrought:

> A gaunt Franciscan friar, with a wild bright eye, was our only guide, down into this profound and dreadful place. The narrow ways and openings hither and thither, coupled with the dead and heavy air, soon blotted out, in all of us, any recollection of the track by which we had come; and I could not help thinking, "Good Heaven, if,

> in a sudden fit of madness he should dash the torches out, or if he should be seized with a fit, what would become of us!" On we wandered, among martyrs' graves, passing great subterranean vaulted roads, diverging in all directions, and choked up with heaps of stones, that thieves and murderers may not take refuge there, and form a population under Rome, even worse than that which lives between it and the sun. Graves, graves, graves.

By contrast, the modern experience is brisk and efficient, so much so that it left me—for all that I'm a nonbeliever—chilled and a bit depressed. The operation at San Callisto is designed to process the maximum number of pilgrims in the minimum amount of time, and it works wonderfully well. Visitors are grouped according to language, and the group to which you are assigned waits until a critical mass has been reached and a guide who speaks your language is available: our English-language group included visitors from Scandinavia and was led by a young priest from Poland. He was personable and sincere, and did not in the least give the impression that he was now doing on autopilot what he had done hundreds of times before. But he plainly had a script, and that script included the directions "Keep them together" (thank goodness, of course: here I sympathize with Dickens) and "Keep them moving." We would pause at intervals, to receive an installment of the history of the place, and in this our guide was precise to an almost academic degree, for example scrupulously correcting the myth—repeated even by that arch-skeptic, Mark Twain, in *Innocents Abroad*—that Christians had actually lived in the catacombs during times of persecution.

We paused a bit longer in the crypt of the popes, regarded as the holiest place in the complex, and the faithful among us were plainly moved. But as I said, I ended a bit depressed: so much was said about the scale of the place, which is indeed astounding (perhaps a quarter million in capacity), that the individual humans who were once here became dwarfed and lost to view. As a lapsed Catholic and

convert to Judaism, I do not share their belief, but I respect the intensity with which they kept to it, many of them to the point of death, because I know enough about the times to know how hard it often was for them to confess their Christian faith. The only contact I felt that I had with them, finally, came from occasional glimpses of the personal graffiti that other visitors had left more than a millennium ago: "O holy souls, remember Marcianus, Successus, Severus, and all our brothers . . ."

But the graffiti cheered me, too, because they reminded me that I was repeating, in a modern mode, the experience of countless other tourists, or pilgrims, that stretched back to antiquity. This was the layering of time and times, the meeting and interpenetration of past and present, that I was looking for on this trip: so just savor it, I said to myself. After all, the modern staircase that we had descended to reach the galleries followed the path of the staircase that Pope Damasus, a shrewd and polished promoter of the faith, had introduced in the second half of the fourth century, to make the martyrs' tombs more accessible to visitors. And he had converted the crypt of the popes into a chapel, complete with skylights and his own poems inscribed on the walls. Here is one of them:

> Seeker, know that here lies a legion of the blessed:
> reverend tombs contain the bodies of the saints,
> but their souls have been wafted aloft to heaven's royal palace.
> Here lies the company of Pope Sixtus [martyred in 258] with
> trophies won from the enemy.
> Here the company of the elders [the popes] who guard the altars of
> Christ. . . .
> Here young men and children, old men and their chaste
> descendents
> who preferred to keep their virginal purity.
> Here too, I confess, I Damasus would wish to have been buried,
> did I not fear disturbing the holy ashes of the blessed.

And the seekers came for centuries, as we can see from the itineraries that have come down to us, the equivalent of ancient Fodor's guides. Here's an especially detailed tour of the holy sites the pilgrim could expect to find in the seventh century:

> Next to the Appian Way, in the eastern part of the city, is the church of the martyr St. Soter, where she herself lies with many martyrs. And next to the same Way is the church of St. Sixtus, the pope, where he himself sleeps. There too the virgin Caecilia rests, and there St. Tarsicius and St. Geferinus lie in a single tomb. And there St. Eusebius and St. Colocerus and St. Parthenius lie, each of them by himself. And 800 martyrs rest in the same place. Not far from there, in the cemetery of Callistus, Cornelius and Cyprian sleep in the church. . . . And next to the same Way is the church of St. Sebastian, where he himself sleeps [and] where there are tombs of the Apostles in which they rested for forty years; and there too the martyr Cyrinus is buried. In fact by the same road one reaches [Albano], which gives access to the church of St. Senator, where lie the bodily remains of both Perpetua and countless saints; and great miracles are accomplished in the same place.

This guide may date to the seventh century, but at its core is material that was already centuries old. The guidance that it gave would have continued to be useful until the ninth century. That is when most of the remains of the saints and martyrs were moved inside the city, and the Appia took another step, a big one, on the way to neglect and decline.

It was midafternoon now, and pretty damn warm for April. We had stopped in the shade on the side of the road, out beyond the sixth milestone, to read a funeral inscription, an old one dating to the first century BCE, that was among the many unearthed by Luigi Canina in his campaign of 1851. Resting upon a low façade of brick, the rect-

angular stone is cut about three times as wide as it is high, to accommodate the long lines of verse:

> Stop, stranger, and look at this little mound of earth on the left, where
> the bones of a good person are enclosed, one compassionate, devoted,
> of modest means. Please, traveler, do not mistreat this monument.
> Gaius Atilius Euhodus, a freedman of Serranus [and] a dealer in pearls
> from the Sacred Way, is buried in this monument. Traveler, farewell.
>
> According to my will no one may be placed and buried in this monument
> save those freedmen to whom I granted and assigned this in my will.

As jobs of self-presentation go, this one deserves solid marks for economy and effect. Formally, the tomb's occupant doesn't speak until the codicil of the last two lines: "I granted and assigned." Until that point we're to suppose that the monument itself speaks, or perhaps a disembodied voice of authority, to call on the traveler's attention, ask a kindness of him, and send him on his way. Formalities aside, I think we have the license to suppose that it's Euhodus's voice we hear throughout, saying the things he thinks it's most important for the passer-by to know.

Euhodus was once a slave of the Atilii Serrani, a political family of some prominence in the last two centuries BCE, standing a couple of steps below the preeminent Caecilii Metelli but far above the common run of men. After gaining his freedom, Euhodus had set himself up as a pearl dealer (*margaritarius*) in the center of Rome, on the Sacred Way that ran along the edge of the Forum. This was the heart of the trade in the city—there are similar inscriptions of

no fewer than six other *margaritarii* who were based there—and on our first morning in Rome we had undoubtedly walked past the site where he had done business, as we followed the Sacred Way to Marina Piranomonte's office. The trade demanded a certain amount of capital, and Euhodus had probably done well. After all, he had put by enough to pay for his monument and its well-cut inscription in iambic verse. And he had not only owned slaves but had enough freedmen to distinguish in his will between those whose bones and ashes he permitted to join his own and those he did not.

The dead man speaks self-consciously and circumspectly, with a clear sense of his audience: travelers coming from the city, as we were, with the monument on their left. He also has a clear idea of how he wants to present himself and why. Prosperous he might have been, but he calls himself *pauper*—not a "pauper" in the sense we use the word, just not very wealthy, a man of modest means by the standards of the day, when those standards were being set by the likes of Marcus Licinius Crassus. That description is in harmony with the three other traits he gives himself: "good" (*bonus*), "compassionate" (*misericors*), and "devoted" (*amans*). (The last two words of Euhodus's self-description, *amantis pauperis*, are more commonly taken to mean "loving the poor," but this meaning is wildly unlikely, both for grammatical reasons and because it imposes a Christian virtue on a man who lived in a pre-Christian world, where this virtue was not yet known.) These are just the traits that you would expect of a man with the Greek name Euhodus, which literally means "easy going" (of a road) and by extension "easygoing" (a *euhodus* god was one well-disposed to heed your prayers). So far from being an arrogant rich man, then, the sort who cares only for his own wants and so becomes an object of envy and ill will, Euhodus is a good and modest man whose attention is fixed on others and their needs. He is just the sort of man, in other words, who deserves to have his last request honored: do not mistreat this *monumentum* of mine—this means of remembrance and the memory of me it preserves. Mistreatment was a real concern, which another freedman—a fictional character this

time, the wealthy and arrogant Trimalchio of Petronius's *Satyricon*—sought to address by different means: his will provided for one of his freedmen to be stationed by his tomb, "so that the people might not run up to shit on my *monumentum*."

As we looked at the inscription, a man came bounding—there's no other word for it—out of the bright light of the *campagna* on the other side of the road. Well into his sixties, balding and bare-chested, with a tee-shirt draped over his shoulders, he was beaming with delight. He had seen our interest in the inscription, correctly identified us as folks from away, and reasonably supposed that we were clueless, so he proceeded to explicate the inscription for us and translate it into Italian.

Now here I have to confess something of which I am deeply ashamed: I do not speak Italian, in fact I speak no language other than English. Given my line of work, I am in this regard very much an oddity: in a university department of fifteen members, a third of whom have English as their second, third, or even fifth language, I am one of only two monoglots. Yes, I can read academic versions of Italian and a couple of the other modern European languages, for professional reasons, just as I can read ancient Greek and Latin. I can even understand spoken Italian reasonably well, provided it is spoken slowly enough for me to picture the words in written form—hearing as another form of reading, that is to say. But those are passive uses of language. When it comes to taking the spoken language in fluently by ear and sending it back out again by mouth—let's just say I'd have to be twice as good as I am to count as poor.

So here we had the odd situation of the enthusiastic gentleman translating a text I could read into a language I couldn't speak, and doing, I'm sure, not a bad job of it. I looked hopefully toward Laura for tactful support, but she had developed a sudden and intense interest in a bed of wildflowers off by the side of the road, and I was left to my own devices.

Now it seemed that the gentleman was saying something about Caecilia Metella . . .

" . . . impudente!"

. . . of whom he evidently disapproved. I realized he must have her confused with another woman of the same name, who a generation earlier had been one of the wives of . . .

"il dittatore Sulla—uomo brutto, eh?"

. . . yes, a very bad man indeed, and . . .

"cinque spose, cinque!"

. . . not the most constant of husbands. I tried to agree, but the words now were coming too thick and fast for me to jam one of my own in edgewise. Grabbing some sounds from the air and transforming them into text in my head, I realized that we had moved beyond the old Romans to memories of the gentleman's own life. His face became increasingly animated, the color in it rose, a vein in his temple pulsed. He had . . .

" . . . università degli studi . . ."

. . . right, studied at university, then . . .

" . . . professore . . ."

. . . held a variety of jobs including—what?—teaching mathematics in Japan? Could that be right? Well, whatever it was, his vivid gestures made clear it had been an exciting time in his life, even though—his speech and gestures slowing now, his bare shoulders sagging—it came with a heavy cost.

"Mi sposa," he sighed. His wife had stayed behind in Italy with their son, but by the time he returned, she had left him, taking the boy with her.

And there was still worse:

"Mama . . ."

His mother, his dear mother, had pined for him, longed for him, and finally died of grief while he was gone, leaving him, his expression made plain, still shadowed by the loss. The waves of remembrance washed over him and, however imperfectly grasped, over me as well, until he was done and, with a smile and good wishes, was gone, bounding off again past Euhodus's tomb into the *campagna* beyond. What a strange intersection, I thought, of memories past

and present, as though the *monumentum* that gave a glimpse into the life of an ancient pearl dealer had somehow moved this man to share his own remembrances with passing travelers. "Stop, stranger . . ."

We walked farther out on the road and, because that day was our last on the Appia near Rome, we talked about what we would do tomorrow. As we turned and started back toward the city, we saw four people striding vigorously toward us, as plainly American in their dress and bearing as we were. As we closed the gap between us, one of them—obviously pegging us as we had pegged them—called out, "How far's Rome?" The way you're heading? About 25,000 miles, I thought but did not say. It emerged that they were a family traveling together, the mother and father from Houston, with two sons in their late twenties now launched and scattered to other parts. After a couple of days in Rome they had run out of things to do (well, to be fair, it was a Monday, and the museums were closed . . .), and so they had decided to spend the day on the Appian Way, taking the metro and bus to the Cecilia Metella stop as we had done, then walking back to the city. Except that they had got turned around and walked miles and miles in the wrong direction. As they started back with us, we chatted for a bit and compared notes ("I guess we'll end up in your book, eh?," one of the sons said), then they accelerated to resume their vigorous pace and make up the lost time. As they pulled away, I heard the other son say, "Well, it looks like not all roads lead to Rome."

Oh yes they do—if you choose the right way to go. And given the choice we had made about what to do next, I was happy to take that random comment, Roman style, as an excellent omen.