

The Guardian of the Cemetery

I am the guardian of the graveyard. I keep the burial register. All these foreigners in the English soil, da Costa, Mendoza, Montefiore, Lopez, Mendez, Abulafia, Rodriguez, Pereiras Gideon, Sasson, Aguilar, Pezaro, Alvarez, Genese, Pacifico. Nobody is a Smith or a Jones, Carter, or Ploughman.

Check, check, check. Every morning and every night, a few graves become many, become thousands, until 7,500. Bodies like a sleeping people. Full of Spain and Portugal and Holland. What do these Jews dream, I wonder?

Check, check, check. Every morning and every night. Check no wrongdoer is drinking or dancing on these flat, flat stones.

Check, check, check. Check at each funeral that no outsider is watching, waiting for a moment alone, open a grave, steal a body. How many shillings for this skin and bones? More than I earn. What do you mean I am not enough? Night watchman? What will they do that I can't?

Check, check, check. Who are they? Two Jews? Two Christians? You think I can't do the job? It's me that does the check, check, check. Look at 'em, sleeping and drinking. You drunk punks! There's a man in the graveyard, looking, and poking, and you, you should be ringing your bell! You dog, come here! You think I will let you go? 50 pounds they give me for dogs like you. You think you can run from me?

It's now 300 years later. I can't seem to die. So many dead to watch over. 7,500 graves. I hear the land is to be sold. The university wants the land of the Jews and the land of the Jewish dead is shrunk. For steel, for glass, for concrete. But who will remember the people buried here? Where will their stones go? Where are the words that gave us their lives? They will take the bodies and bury them together. Far away. Brentwood, Essex. Far from London town, where they have lain in peace for hundreds of years. Bury 'em in a pit altogether. Anonymous in death. And when the people come to look for the gravestones, they will find nothing.

Check, check, check. I remember the stone of Aaron Fernandez de Silva. Murdered with his servant. Where is it now? And the boxer Danny Mendoza, a true Englishman, born in Aldgate. Now that was a Jew and a half. Knuckles of a god, he was buried here. Where is he now? All those bodies lying in four and a half acres, now pressed into one. 7,500 gravestones. The names, oh the names on stone, meant to be read, and remembered forever. Where are they now?