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Author(s): Philip Schwyzer

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# *Lees and Moonshine: Remembering Richard III, 1485–1635\**

by PHILIP SCHWYZER

*Not long after Shakespeare's birth in 1564, the last witnesses to the reign of Richard III (1483–85) would have reached the end of their lives. Richard III (ca. 1592) occupies a distinctive historical moment in relation to its subject, the period after the extinction of living memory, but still within the horizon of secondhand or communicative memory. This essay explores how memories and postmemories of Richard's reign were preserved, transmitted, and transformed over the course of the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth. While registering the powerful influence of emerging contexts, including the Reformation and, ultimately, Shakespeare's play, these memories remained distinct from, and sometimes at odds with, textual history. They survived because they offered their bearers a resource for interpreting and resisting the predicaments of the present, from the problem of tyranny to the legacies of the Reformation.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the scene immediately following the murder of the princes in the Tower, Shakespeare's Richard III urges their grieving mother to put the past behind her: "in the Lethe of the angry soul / . . . drown the sad remembrance of those wrongs, / Which thou supposet I have done to thee."<sup>1</sup> The association of the past with watery burial is typical of this play, which begins with a reference to former conflicts "in the deep bosom of the ocean buried," and includes Clarence's vivid dream of corpses and treasure "all scattered in the bottom of the sea."<sup>2</sup> Richard's choice of words seems unfortunate in context, perhaps only serving to remind Elizabeth of the fate of her sons, whose bodies were rumored to have been sunk in the "Black Deeps" of the Thames estuary.<sup>3</sup> Defying Richard's invitation to drown

\*An earlier version of this essay was presented to the University of California, Berkeley, Early Modern Colloquium in April 2009. I am grateful to Jeffrey Knapp, David Landreth, Ethan Shagan, and the rest of the group for a memorably stimulating and productive discussion.

<sup>1</sup>Shakespeare, 2008, 610 (*Richard III*, 4.4.237–39), cited hereafter as *Richard III*, with the standard act, scene, and line divisions.

<sup>2</sup>*Richard III*, 1.1.4, 1.4.28.

<sup>3</sup>Hall, "Richard III," 27<sup>v</sup>–28<sup>f</sup>: "Some say that Kyng Rycharde caused the priest to take them up and close them in lead and put them in a coffyne full of holes hoked at the endes with ii Hokes of yron, and so to cast them into a place called the Blacke Depes at the Themes mouth, so that they should never rise up nor be seen agayne."

remembrance in favor of “the time to come,” the widowed Queen asserts that the future too is a realm of memory:

The children live, whose fathers thou hast slaughtered —  
 Ungoverned youth, to wail it in their age.  
 The parents live, whose children thou hast butchered —  
 Old barren plants, to wail it with their age.  
 Swear not by time to come, for that thou hast  
 Misused ere used, by times ill-used o’erpast.<sup>4</sup>

When characters in Shakespeare’s plays start talking about the future, they are more often than not talking about what his audience called the present. We might think of Henry V’s Crispin’s Day oration, with its promise of performative commemoration in times to come, or of the conspirators in *Julius Caesar* foreseeing their deed being “acted over / In states unborn and accents yet unknown.”<sup>5</sup> But is it plausible that early audiences would have identified Elizabeth’s traumatized “time to come” with their own time, late in the reign of a different, and largely happier, Elizabeth? *Richard III* was first staged around 1592. It is more or less out of the question that anyone with personal memories of Richard’s reign (1483–85) could have survived to see his deeds reenacted on Shakespeare’s stage. Yet Richard III maintained a life in orally transmitted memory — distinct from and sometimes at odds with his image in written history — down to the end of the sixteenth century, and even beyond. This essay will explore the survival and transformation of memory from 1485 to 1635 — from the year of the Battle of Bosworth, that is, to the death of Old Tom Parr, hailed, improbably, as the last living witness to the reign of Richard III.

Recent studies of *Richard III* have shown how the play, with its vengeful ghosts and mourning women, stages debates over memory, and particularly over the remembrance of the dead in the post-Reformation era.<sup>6</sup> This essay is not, except in a fairly indirect way, a study of the theme of memory in Shakespeare’s play. It is rather a study of the culture of memory out of which the play emerged in the last decade of the sixteenth century, and over which it would exert a remarkable reciprocal influence in the decades that followed. I do not propose that any of the memories examined here constitute sources of *Richard III*, at least not in the usual sense. The survival of memory can, however, help us to understand how events that took place a century or more before Shakespeare wrote could still seem unsettlingly close — partly, as I shall

<sup>4</sup>*Richard III*, 4.4.318, 322–27.

<sup>5</sup>Shakespeare, 2008, 1584 (*Julius Caesar*, 3.1.113–14).

<sup>6</sup>Cahill, 209–20; Goodland, 135–54; Greenblatt, 164–80; Marche.

argue, through their assimilation with the era of Reformation. This in turn can help us grasp why it is that this play, uniquely among Shakespeare's histories, seems ever to speak to us of our own present, or of the comparatively recent past. As Stephen Greenblatt notes, late-twentieth-century productions of *Richard III* "almost routinely interpreted Shakespeare's play . . . as the imagining of a monstrous state uncannily like the Third Reich."<sup>7</sup> Today, as the Nazi regime and its crimes recede further into the past, and as we confront the question of how, if at all, memories of those who experienced them can be transmitted to those who did not, the capacity of *Richard III* to reflect and address our own dilemmas has perhaps grown stronger still.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. "FOR YET SHE LIVETH": PERSONAL MEMORIES, 1485–1572

From the afternoon of 22 August 1485, when his torn and naked body was slung over the back of a horse and carried from the field of battle, Richard III lived only in memory. For the remainder of the fifteenth century, some memory of his reign, and with it most probably some conception formed in that period of the king's character, was the common possession of every adult Englishman and -woman. Yet, in part because they were so ubiquitous, very few of these memories are preserved in the textual record, nor is it easy to guess at their coloring or content. Although the first generation of historians to record the brief reign of Richard III — the anonymous Croyland chronicler, Dominic Mancini (d. ca. 1514), John Rous (ca. 1420–92), and Robert Fabyan (d. 1513) — inevitably relied both on their own memories and on those of informants, they had no stake in presenting events as matters of personal memory.<sup>9</sup> Appeals to the remembrance of the

<sup>7</sup>Greenblatt, 167.

<sup>8</sup>To be sure, in chronological terms we are still much closer to the Nazi era than Shakespeare was to the regime of Richard III: his generational relationship to the 1480s was more similar to that of a contemporary undergraduate to the First World War. That war now lies at the furthest edge of living memory: as I write in the summer of 2009, fewer than five veterans of the 1914–18 conflict are known to be alive. Yet the Holocaust remains "the primary, archetypal topic in memory studies" (Fogu and Kansteiner, 286), and the topic that poses the most painful and powerful questions about the survival and transmission of memory, including the fundamental problem of how we can remember events we did not ourselves experience. Hirsch's term *postmemory* — "distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" (Hirsch, 1997, 22) — has been particularly influential: see also Hirsch, 2008; Eaglestone, 72–100.

<sup>9</sup>On these historians and those of the next generation, see Hanham.

chronicler were preserved mainly for wonders, where a claim to eyewitness knowledge was appropriate. Thus, Rous states that he himself saw the elephant displayed in London under Edward IV:<sup>10</sup> none of his bitterly defamatory account of Richard's reign is verified by comparable appeals to personal memory, either his own or that of others.

For centuries we have been familiar with the idea that the early Tudors subjected Richard III to a campaign of posthumous character assassination, "forging the most atrocious calumnies to blacken [the house of York's] memories and invalidate their just claim."<sup>11</sup> Although the case of Rous, who hastily reversed his glowing judgment of Richard after Bosworth, provides an obvious example of such propaganda, there is little evidence from Henry VII's reign (1485–1509) of a concerted effort to remold popular memories of Richard. Instead, the whole period was to some extent buried in oblivion. Rather than dwelling on the faults of the defeated regime, early Tudor historians and panegyrists tended to proceed as if the reigns of Edward IV and Richard III were merely a hiatus or interregnum, with the accession of Henry marking the resumption of continuity, either with the previous Lancastrian dynasts or, more radically, with the Welsh-British monarchs of early Christian Britain.<sup>12</sup>

The veil drawn over the recent past is evident in the remarkable vagueness of early memories of Bosworth field. In his 1502 biography of Henry VII, Bernard Andre (ca. 1450–1522) declines to describe the battle, preferring to leave a blank page: "I have heard something of the battle by oral report, but the eye is a safer judge than the ear in such a matter. Therefore, I pass over the date, the place, and the order of the battle, rather than assert anything rashly; for as I have said before, I lack clear sight. And so until I obtain more knowledge of this debatable field, I leave both it and this page blank."<sup>13</sup> Andre's privileging of the eye over the ear, firsthand experience over secondhand knowledge, plays on his own blindness. Generalizing from his own sightlessness, Andre comes close to suggesting that personal memory is incommunicable: since he cannot possibly become a retrospective witness to the battle, there is apparently no way for his page to be filled. No doubt his reluctance to record the accounts he had heard of the battle owes as much to

<sup>10</sup>Translated in *ibid.*, 118 (*Historia Johannis Rossi Warwicensis de Regibus Anglie*).

<sup>11</sup>Walpole, 17.

<sup>12</sup>Thus Henry's historian Bernard Andre, endorsing the Tudor claim to continuity with ancient Welsh rulers, summed up the eight centuries between the deaths of Cadwaldr (682) and Richard III with the phrase "The barbarity of the English was interposed": Andre, 10. See also Schwyzer, 13–31.

<sup>13</sup>Translated in Hanham, 53.

political prudence as to epistemological anxiety. As James Siemon observes, such reticence was the rule, given that “the battle was at once a dynastic watershed and also a potential source of reproach for the survivors (and their families).”<sup>14</sup> The dubious role played by the Earl of Northumberland was especially delicate territory, both before and after the earl’s assassination in 1489.

There were exceptions to the rule of silence. Sir Ralph Bigod (1457–1515), once carver to Richard and subsequently to Lady Margaret Beaufort (1443–1509), made no secret of his unfailing loyalty to his former master, enthraling listeners with his recollections of the king’s last hours. Henry Tudor’s mother commended Bigod’s adherence to his former master, noting in it not sedition but rather steadfast loyalty. Undoubtedly many shared his sentiments, especially in Richard’s northern heartlands. The city of York, which had greeted the news of Richard’s defeat and death with “grete hevynesse,” could still refer to him in its records some months after the battle as “the most famous prince of blessed memory, King Richard, late deceased.”<sup>15</sup> In 1491, York’s mayor and council heard with sympathy the case of John Payntor, who had called the late Earl of Northumberland “a traytor [who] bytrayed Kyng Richard,” and who attempted to strike the schoolmaster William Burton when the latter retorted that Richard was “an yprocrite, a crochebake, & was beried in a dike like a dogge.”<sup>16</sup>

As the dispute between Burton and Payntor indicates, recollections of Richard could be controversial, but they were also underground, caught in the historical record only by mischance. Writing in the seventeenth century, Francis Bacon (1561–1626) uses a remarkable image for the submerged memory of Richard in the north in Henry’s reign: “the people upon a sudaine grew into great mutinie, and saide openly, that they had endured of late yeares a thousand miseries. . . . This (no doubt) proceeded not simply of any present necessitie, but much by reason of the old humour of those Countries, where the memorie of King Richard was so strong, that it lay like Lees in the bottome of mens hearts; and if the Vessell was but stirred, it would come up.”<sup>17</sup> Adherents of the old Baconian theory once drew attention to the poetic conclusion of this passage as supplying evidence for Bacon’s authorship of Shakespeare’s plays.<sup>18</sup> What seems more probable

<sup>14</sup>Siemon, 667.

<sup>15</sup>Davies, 218; Raine, 126.

<sup>16</sup>Davies, 220–21. All the witnesses called in the case avoided incriminating Payntor, while drawing attention to Burton’s intemperate slurs on the dead Richard. Both men were released, having been commanded to keep the peace.

<sup>17</sup>Bacon, 1622, 67.

<sup>18</sup>E.g., Reed, 38.

is that Bacon was unconsciously influenced by *Richard III's* repeated images of watery burial. Yet the difference between Shakespeare's bodies "scattered in the bottom of the sea" and "lees in the bottome of mens hearts" is that the latter does not suggest loss beyond all hope of recovery. Far from it: the sediment in wine is always prone to "come up," and does so not as a discrete object, a relic of the lost past, but by being reintegrated in the solution, part of the wine itself. It is thus a remarkably effective and unsettling figure for the capacity of the past to become present.<sup>19</sup>

Richard's memory would not lie undisturbed forever. If collective memory is so much vinous sediment, societies seem to make a habit of stirring the vessel at regular intervals. Social psychologists point to a tendency on the part of both individuals and groups to revisit the past at intervals of twenty to thirty years, confronting traumatic or transformative events and evaluating them in a fresh light.<sup>20</sup> In modern Europe and America, such cycles of memory correlate, for instance, with the creation of monuments and historical films. These cyclical phases are considered to signify both the achievement of psychological distance from the past, and the pragmatic reality that most of the chief political actors will have left the public stage, through death or otherwise. Every twenty-five years or so it becomes both possible and necessary to reopen the doors of memory locked in the last generation.

The great monument to emerge from the first cycle of social memory thirty years after Bosworth is indisputably Thomas More's *History of Richard III* (composed ca. 1513–18).<sup>21</sup> More (1478–1535) was five when Richard came to the throne, seven when he died. The eldest son of a prominent London family, he may well have been witness to some of the public events he describes. However, he makes no claim to rely on personal recollection,

<sup>19</sup>The merging of temporalities is heightened in the second edition of Bacon's *History* (1627), where the phrase is altered from "lay like Lees" to "lies like Lees." The odd use of the present tense seems to suggest that even in the Caroline era the memory of King Richard retained its latent power.

<sup>20</sup>See Pennebaker and Banasik; Igartua and Paez.

<sup>21</sup>The new openness to memory in the 1510s should not be exaggerated. Although a brief period saw the completion of three major accounts of Richard's reign — More's *History*, Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia* (1513), and *The Great Chronicle of London* (1512) — all would remain in manuscript for decades to come (centuries in the case of the *Great Chronicle*). Robert Fabyan's *Newe Cronycles of England and Fraunce* may have been completed as early as 1504, but saw print only in 1516, three years after its author's death. Fabyan's crisp comment that some at Bosworth "stode hovyngge aferre of tyll they sawe to which partye the victory fell" (fol. CCxxx) indicates the need for circumspection even a generation on.

but rather on the memories of a range of witnesses, almost all of whom go unnamed. It is often assumed that his chief informant was Cardinal Morton (d. 1500), in whose household More spent his early teens. Be that as it may, there would have been no shortage of living Londoners with relevant memories of the 1480s, and it seems likely that a good many were glad to share their recollections under condition of anonymity. More frequently attributes rumors — such as those of Richard’s role in the deaths of Henry VI and Clarence — to what “menne constantly say” or “wise menne . . . weene,” occasionally pausing to wonder “whither menne of hatred reporte above the trouthe.”<sup>22</sup> On a small handful of occasions, he appeals to the personal memories of his informants.

The first of these passages occurs early in the text, on the very night of King Edward’s death: “one Mystlebrooke longe ere mornynge, came in greate haste to the house of one Pottyer dwellyng in reddecrosse strete without crepulgate.” Beating on the door, he was let in swiftly and revealed the news of the king’s death. “By my trouthe manne,” Potter replied, “then wyll my mayster the Duke of Gloucester bee kynge.”<sup>23</sup> A private conversation between two persons of no historical significance who do not reappear in the narrative, this story does not belong to public history. It is a memory, vivid in circumstantial detail, recounted to Sir John More (ca. 1451–1530) by one who overheard the exchange, and by Sir John to his son, Thomas.<sup>24</sup> It seems plausible that in late-fifteenth-century London everyone remembered where they were when they heard King Edward was dead. Such recollections are known today as “flashbulb memories”: highly detailed memories in which a personal situation becomes saturated with the significance of a devastating public event.<sup>25</sup>

More is particularly apt to cite the memories of informants when describing the physical characteristics and mannerisms of his long-dead subjects. The vivid portrait of Richard after the murder of the princes — eyes whirling about, “his hand ever on his dager,” his sleep “troubled wyth feareful dreames” — is ascribed to what “I have heard by credible report of such as wer secrete with his chamberers.”<sup>26</sup> Witnesses to Richard’s coronation could still recall the Duke of Buckingham’s self-betraying reaction: “I have heard of som that said thei saw it, that the duke at such

<sup>22</sup>More, 2:8, 2:7.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 2:9.

<sup>24</sup>More attributes this anecdote explicitly to his father in the Latin version of the text: in the English version it is described simply as “credible informacion.”

<sup>25</sup>Luminet and Curci; Pennebaker and Banasik.

<sup>26</sup>More, 2:87.



time as the crown was first set upon the protectors hed, his eye could not abide the sight thereof, but wried hys hed an other way.”<sup>27</sup> In passages like these, More is effectively recording two events at once: a moment in the 1480s when a Richard or a Buckingham did something with their bodies, and a moment decades later when those who still remembered those bodies chose to speak. The apparently tautological phrase “I have heard of som that said they saw it” — rather than the more streamlined “I have heard of some that saw it,” or the yet briefer “Some say they saw” — seems designed to capture the moment of transmission, now itself part of the past, from both points of view. The witnesses, it seems, were concerned not only to say what they saw, but to say that they themselves saw it; likewise, More himself is concerned to convey not only what his informants said, but that he heard them say it.<sup>28</sup>

More’s most extended and melancholy meditation on memory as a historical source comes in his portrait of Shore’s wife (d. 1526/27?), onetime mistress of Edward IV: “Proper she was & faire: nothing in her body that you would have changed, but if you would have wished her somewhat higher. Thus say thei that knew her in her youthe.”<sup>29</sup> Mistress Shore’s youthful beauty enters the text already marked out as memory, the oral witnesses to her bygone fairness elbowing their way into the passage alongside her. More seems uncertain how to relate the remembered fact of Mistress Shore’s beauty to the larger themes of his history, or even to the elderly woman who still dwelled in London: “Albeit some that now se her (for yet she liveth) deme her never to have ben wel visaged. Whose jugement semeth me somewhat like, as though men should gesse the bewty of one longe before departed, by her scalpe taken out of the charnel house: for now is she old lene, withered & dried up, nothing left but ryvilde skin & hard bone. And yet being even such: whoso wel advise her visage, might gesse & devise which partes how filled, wold make it a faire face.”<sup>30</sup> Here the historian plays the forensic archaeologist, clinically reconstructing a mental picture of Shore’s vanished beauty. Yet he can do so only with the aid of resources — her aged but living face, the memories supplied by his informants — that are themselves on the point of disappearance. Memory can put flesh on dry

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 2:90.

<sup>28</sup>More’s phrase draws attention to how the transmission of memory in the early modern period typically involves a transition from a visual to an aural archive, a point also emphasized by Andre. By contrast, as Hirsch, 1997, and others have shown, visual media such as family photographs are central to the creation of modern postmemories.

<sup>29</sup>More, 2:55.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 2:55–56.

bones: yet memory is akin to flesh, and no less mortal. Already, More notes, Shore's wife herself could barely recall her bygone days of luxury.<sup>31</sup> When she and those who remember her are together in the charnelhouse, the beauty which can still be summoned from the brink of nonexistence will be gone indeed. (Significantly, More refers not to the grave, where bodily integrity is preserved, but to the charnelhouse, site of the indiscriminate mixing of remains, where individual identity is annihilated.) What is entirely lacking from this passage is the confidence that written words might have the power to preserve the memory of beauty. The sentiment that would come as second nature to a generation of Elizabethan poets is as distant from More's imaginative world as the modern science of facial reconstruction.

Over the course of the sixteenth century, as More's *History* was incorporated into a succession of chronicles, the beauty of Shore's wife would continue to be marked out as a matter of living memory, even as this forced the chronicler into contortions of verbal tense. The passage in Hall's chronicle begins as if those who remembered her beauty were still in a position to give oral testimony, before awkwardly historicizing the whole account: "This saie they that knewe her in her youthe, soem sayed and judged that she had bene well favoured, and some judged the contrary . . . & this judgement was in the tyme of kyng Henry the eyght, in the .xviii. yere of whose reigne she dyed, when she had nothyng but a reveled skynne and bone."<sup>32</sup> Holinshed's chronicle likewise preserves the present tense for "Thus saie they that knew hir in hir youth," only adding beside the phrase "for yet she liveth" the marginal note "Meanyng when the storie was written."<sup>33</sup> In each case the memory of Shore's wife is preserved at the point of oral transmission, a personal reminiscence stalled forever on the threshold of recorded history.

From the 1510s, a definite historical vision of Richard's reign — one characterized by ruthless violence and rank hypocrisy, presided over by a morally and physically misshapen tyrant — took shape and gathered weight in manuscript histories and printed chronicles. Given the absence of documentary evidence for some of Richard's more notorious crimes, notably the murder of the children in the Tower and the disposal of their bodies, chroniclers habitually cited oral tradition or report: "some said they were

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 2:232: "But she, who was once famous herself, has now outlived her friends and all her acquaintances, and with the years, as it were, she has passed into another age. Even her own recollection of her former luxury has been almost defaced by her long-continued sufferings."

<sup>32</sup>Hall, "King Edward V," xvi<sup>f</sup>; cf. Hardyng, lxi<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>33</sup>Holinshed, 724.

murdered atween two feather beds, some said they were drowned in malvesy, and some said they were sticked with a venomous potion.”<sup>34</sup> While there can be no doubt that historians such as Polydore Vergil (ca. 1470–1555) relied to a significant extent on “history surviving in oral form,” it is equally probable that the Richard of textual history began from a very early point to influence oral traditions and even private memories of Richard’s reign.<sup>35</sup>

Yet the pressure of textual history on living memory would not have been experienced solely or universally as a pressure to conform. With the emergence of an official version comes the possibility of consciously dissenting oral traditions.<sup>36</sup> For some, the awareness that their private recollections conflicted with or disproved the public version of events may have lent additional urgency to preserving the memory and passing it on. As a young man in London, John Stow (1525/26–1605) spoke with “old and grave men who had often seen King Richard, and . . . affirmed that he was not deformed, but of person and bodily shape comely enough.”<sup>37</sup> Both parties surely experienced a certain thrill in sharing recollections that ran against the grain of official history. At the same time, the young Stow must have been keenly aware that the time for the transmission of such memories was rapidly running out. Turning ten years old around the fiftieth anniversary of Bosworth, he would have had access to a good number of men and women whose memories stretched back thus far. Even in 1545, we can imagine Stow seeking out septuagenarians who had been teenagers in Richard’s reign. But as the century nears its midpoint, the numbers tell their own remorseless story.

The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* includes some 189 individuals born between the years 1460 and 1480. Of these, seventy-six (or 40 percent) were still alive in 1540, that is, they had lived at least into their sixties. This figure is rather higher than would be found in a survey of the general population: by its nature, the *ODNB* selects for individuals who enjoyed successful adult careers. By 1545, however, the number of survivors has dropped to forty-one, or 21 percent. In 1550 we find twenty-three individuals still living, while in 1555 there are only eight, 4 percent of the original cohort having reached the age of seventy-five and above. Between 1540 and 1555, 90 percent of surviving witnesses to the pre-Tudor era passed away. The drop-off among their less-illustrious contemporaries would have been no less steep, and possibly steeper.

<sup>34</sup>In Hanham, 115 (*The Great Chronicle of London*).

<sup>35</sup>Hay, 95; Hanham, 116.

<sup>36</sup>E.g., see Shell.

<sup>37</sup>Buck, 129.

There is at least one instance of an individual born in or before 1480 surviving to transmit memories of Richard's reign seventy years later, in the reign of Mary — though the memories in question are not quite firsthand, and undoubtedly colored by Tudor propaganda. Henry Parker, Baron Morley, the translator of Petrarch and Seneca, died in 1556; born between 1476 and 1480, he would certainly have had some memories of Bosworth and its aftermath, for his father had been Richard's standard-bearer. Morley had subsequently grown up in the court of Margaret Beaufort, mother of the reigning Henry VII, and there he had known Sir Ralph Bigod, whose unwavering loyalty to Richard was tolerated and even encouraged by the countess. Two years before his death, Morley described in a treatise on the Eucharist presented to Queen Mary how he had often heard Bigod speak of the confusion that reigned in Richard's camp on the morning of the battle. Mass could not be celebrated, for "when his chappelyns had one thing ready, evermore they wanted another; when they had wyne they lacked breade, and ever one thing was myssing. In the meane season King Henry comyng on apace, King Rychard was constrayned to go to the battayle."<sup>38</sup> The story as Richard's faithful follower seems to have told it is not sinister in tone, and indeed is tinged with comedy. Morley, however, draws a hard moral: "[G]od wolde not that same day, that he shulde se the blyssed sacrament of the Aulter, nor heare the holy masse, for his horrible offence comytted against his brothers children."<sup>39</sup> Morley may have been old enough to remember Richard's reign, yet his image of a damnable monster is the product of Tudor discourse, and is deployed in the service of a mid-Tudor debate over the nature and holiness of the Eucharist. This would be far from the last time that memories of Richard III became bound up with Reformation controversies.

Morley was conscious that few individuals in England had memories stretching back as far as his own. Of those who had served the old Countess of Richmond, he wrote in 1554, "I think there is unethe syxe men and women alyve at this present day."<sup>40</sup> Even fewer could remember Richard III. Of the 189 individuals in the *ODNB* who might have told tales of those distant days, only one was still alive in 1564, when Shakespeare was born. This was William Paulet, the Earl of Winchester, who died in 1572.

<sup>38</sup>Parker, 1554, 19<sup>v</sup>–20<sup>f</sup>. On Morley's recollections of "Bygoff" [Bigod], see Warnicke, 1983 and 1984.

<sup>39</sup>Parker, 1554, 20<sup>f</sup>. Morley also associates Richard's defeat with divine Providence in a treatise on the psalms, where he numbers Henry VII's triumph over the "tyrant kynge Rycharde" among examples of God's Providence: Parker, 1539, A5<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>40</sup>Parker, 1554, 20<sup>v</sup>.

Probably born around 1474, Paulet would have been ninety-seven or ninety-eight at death. Contemporaries held him to be still older, dating his birth to 1465, which would make his age at death at least 106.<sup>41</sup>

In his parable “The Witness,” Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) imagines the death of the last man to remember Anglo-Saxon England before the coming of Christianity: “With him will die, and never return, the last immediate images of these pagan rites; the world will be a little poorer when this Saxon has died. . . . In time there was a day that extinguished the last eyes to see Christ; the battle of Junín and the love of Helen died with the death of a man. What will die with me when I die, what pathetic or fragile form will the world lose?”<sup>42</sup> So we may ask, what memories and mental images of a vanished England were lost forever when William Paulet closed his eyes? In search of a clue to Paulet’s experience, we might turn to a memorial poem that appeared some months after his death. Rowland Broughton’s *Briefe discourse of the lyfe and death of . . . Sir William Pawlet* relates how “he a subject dutifull / five Kynges and Queenes dyd serve,” from Henry VII, under whom he was made a justice of the peace, to Elizabeth, whose Lord Treasurer he was.<sup>43</sup> Yet while detailing his steady rise and unwavering integrity in office, the poem is reticent on the subject of Paulet’s personal experience and recollections. Indeed, Broughton commends “Forgetfullnes” as one of his chief virtues, along with Prudence and Obedience.<sup>44</sup> A careful step, a ready bow, and a weak memory: these are the virtues of a political survivor in an era marked by so many changes of regime and religion. Although the poem avers that Paulet died “In perfect state of memorie,” the impression is that Paulet’s memory was perfect in the sense of a blank canvas or a cloudless sky unsullied by any recollection whatsoever.<sup>45</sup> And so England bade farewell to one who may well have been the last man to remember Richard III.

### 3. “CERTAINTY OF THINGS WHICH THEY DID NOT SEE”: ACTIVE MEMORY, 1564–1605

Shakespeare’s biographers find it hard to resist imagining scenes he might have witnessed, people he might have met, especially in his all-but-undocumented youth. Yet even by the liberal standards of the genre, an encounter between

<sup>41</sup>On Paulet’s life dates, see Loades, 5–7.

<sup>42</sup>Borges, 243.

<sup>43</sup>Broughton, B8<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., B3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., C1<sup>r</sup>.

a seven-year-old William and the centenarian Paulet stretches the bounds of conjecture. It is possible that the immediate Stratford neighborhood afforded a handful of ancient people whose births predated the Tudor era. Shakespeare's environment and interests may not have been so very different from those of John Aubrey, who, in Wiltshire in the 1630s and '40s, "did ever love to converse with old men, as living histories."<sup>46</sup> Or perhaps Shakespeare received memories of that distant time at second- or thirdhand, memories not the less vivid for that (and perhaps more so). M. C. Bradbrook speculates on whether Shakespeare's great-great-grandfather — named in the family's grant of arms as having done "valiant service" under Henry VII — had fought at Bosworth, and whether this had become a matter of family legend.<sup>47</sup>

Whatever the demography of Warwickshire in the 1560s and '70s, by the time Shakespeare began writing for the London stage the last surviving witnesses to the reign of Richard III had almost certainly passed away. Composed in the early 1590s, his *Richard III* occupies a distinctive historical moment in relation to its subject — a period after the extinction of living memory, but still within the horizon of what is variously termed *active memory* or *communicative memory*, the period of ninety to 120 years in which memories may be transmitted over three or four generations, while retaining at least some of the vividness and immediacy of personal recollection. Such memories, Jan Assmann writes, rely "not just on actual experiences but also on the direct communications of others. This is the past that accompanies us because it belongs to us and because there is a living, communicative need to keep it alive in the present."<sup>48</sup> Here modern and medieval understandings of generational memory are in harmony. For the twelfth-century writer Walter Map (ca. 1140–1208/10), the 100-year period within the scope of active

<sup>46</sup>Aubrey, 1982, 11. Aubrey's informants, not all of them men, included Goodwife Dew, who died in 1649 at the reputed age of 103, and who could recall incidents from the reign of Edward VI: Aubrey, 1847, 69.

<sup>47</sup>Bradbrook, 58.

<sup>48</sup>Assmann, 24. Whereas Assmann defines the scope of communicative memory as between eighty and one hundred years, Houts, 6–7, assigns to active memory the longer scope of ninety to 120 years. Experience seems to bear out the longer period. My own earliest memory of this kind derives from my grandmother's recollection of seeing the aviator Lincoln Beachey crash into San Francisco Bay at the 1915 World's Fair. She witnessed the fatal crash when she was four years old, and passed the story on to me when I was not much older: for me it is and will remain a personal memory. Should I reach the age of retirement (in my case, 2035), this vivid recollection will have survived 120 years. The memory may by then have lost any vestige of the social utility that Assmann associates with communicative memory. Yet memories often survive by assuming an unanticipated relevance to emerging concerns.

memory constituted modernity, or “our times”: “by our times I mean this modern period, the course of these last hundred years, at the end of which we now are, and of all of whose notable events the memory is fresh and clear enough; for there are still some centenarians alive, and there are very many sons who possess, by the narration of their fathers and grandfathers, the certainty of things which they did not see.”<sup>49</sup>

Like Map, early modern English men and women believed that communicated memories afforded them “the certainty of things which they did not see.” Such recollections carried social authority and, at least in some circumstances, a degree of legal weight. The legal scholar John Cowell (1554–1611) claimed that to prove the endurance of a custom over a hundred years, “it is enough . . . if two or more can depose, that they heard their fathers say, that it was a custome all their time, and that their fathers heard their fathers also say, that it was likewise a custome in their time.”<sup>50</sup> In 1628, a Wiltshire man testifying in a dispute over forest rights drew evidence not only from his own memory but “before his tyme and tyme out of minde, as he has credibly heard by the relacion of [his] father who well knewe the same beinge aged one hundred yeares or thereabouts att the tyme of his death.”<sup>51</sup> Elizabethan and Jacobean inherited memories stretched back as far as the Wars of the Roses. In turn-of-the-century Gloucestershire, John Smyth of Nibley (1567–1641) “often heard many old men and weomen . . . born in the time of king Henry the seaventh . . . relate the reports of their parents kinsfolks and neighbours” who had witnessed the battle of Nibley Green in 1469. As late as 1603, an old man of the neighborhood could give a full account of the skirmish “as if the same had been but yesterday,” and with a mass of particular detail “not possible almost by such plaine Country people to be fained.”<sup>52</sup>

What kind of memories of Richard III’s reign were still in circulation at the close of the sixteenth century? To what extent did the Richard of memory differ from, or have the power to challenge, the Richard of history, as received through chronicle, ballad, and (increasingly) drama? It is very difficult to know, not least because any memories that have been preserved are themselves inevitably mediated by textuality. We cannot know, for instance, if some features of Shakespeare’s play with no clear source in the chronicles derive from memories retailed to him by those who heard them

<sup>49</sup>Map, 123–35 (Dist.i, c.30).

<sup>50</sup>Cowell, V4<sup>r</sup>. A civil lawyer, Cowell here describes what he may regard as the laxer standards of the common law.

<sup>51</sup>Quoted in Fox, 276.

<sup>52</sup>Smyth, 2:114–15.

from their grandparents; if so, they have undergone a seachange, losing the hallmarks of orally transmitted memory.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, we can be certain that century-old recollections of Richard were passed on in the late Elizabethan period, from a second generation to a third, or from a third to a fourth or a fifth. Some of these stories were eventually written down in the seventeenth century, without entirely shedding the marks of personal memory. I want to examine three such memories, the first of which we have already glanced at.

John Stow in his *Chronicles of England* follows Thomas More's description of Richard III's deformities — "little of stature, yll featured of limmes, crooke backed, his left shoulder much hygher than his right" — without demur.<sup>54</sup> Was it caution that prevented him from recording in print the memories of those long-dead witnesses who had told him otherwise? Though Stow was unwilling to publish these recollections, he in his own old age was glad to pass them on to a younger man. It was probably in the 1590s, perhaps even in a conversation prompted by Shakespeare's play, that Stow told George Buck (1560–1622) the story Buck would later record in his provocatively revisionist *History of King Richard III*: "[S]ome say peremptorily that he was not deformed. One of these is the honest John Stow, who . . . by all his search could not find any not[es of such] deformities in the person of king Richard, albeit he had made great inquisition to know the certainty thereof, as he himself told me. And further, he said he had spoken with old and grave men who had often seen King Richard, and that they affirmed that he was not deformed, but of person and bodily shape comely enough, but they said that he was very low of stature."<sup>55</sup> Buck completed his manuscript history in 1619, two decades or more after the conversation in which Stow recalled words spoken by old men half a century

<sup>53</sup>An intriguing possible example of a memory embedded in the play is Richard's naming of his favorite horse as "White Surrey" (5.4.43), a name unattested in the play's known sources: see Shakespeare, 2000, 336n43. Richard's biographer Paul Murray Kendall reports (571n1) that the name occurred in a list of the king's horses in a register of the royal secretariat. This would strongly suggest the possibility of oral transmission — and, indeed, the name of a favored horse is the kind of detail likely to linger in folk memory over a long period. Unfortunately, the name *White Surrey* does not in fact occur in the relevant place (f4) in *British Library Harleian MS 433* as edited by Horrox and Hammond. Kendall's statement would thus appear to be another case of a memory with its real origins in Shakespeare.

<sup>54</sup>Stow, 1580, 755. The note in the margin points the reader to "The description of Richard III," perhaps drawing attention to the passage as a set-piece. Stow adds no details of his own regarding Richard's deformity, though his account of Richard's reign is lurid enough in other respects.

<sup>55</sup>Buck, 129.



before. The manuscript would not be printed until 1646, a quarter century after Buck's own death.

The second example consists in the remarkable recollections of Sir Henry Wyatt's (ca. 1460–1536) imprisonment under Richard, as recorded in the commonplace book of his great-great-grandson Thomas Scott (ca. 1566–1635) in the 1610s. Scott had heard the stories from his grandmother, Jane Wyatt (b. 1522), wife of Sir Thomas Wyatt the Younger (1521–54): she had apparently received them directly from her husband's grandfather, Sir Henry. "[I]t was his own relation unto them, from whom I had it," as Scott takes care to specify.<sup>56</sup> Jane Wyatt lived at least forty years after her husband's execution for rebellion under Mary; it could have been in the 1580s or '90s that she passed on her memories to her grandson. To be sure, some of her recollections are of the sort denigrated by contemporaries as "old wive's tales," though this is not necessarily a reflection on their veracity.<sup>57</sup> It is not unlikely that Sir Henry, starving in a Scottish prison, was glad to dine on pigeons brought him by a friendly cat. Less plausible on the whole is Scott's account of Sir Henry's face-to-face encounter with Richard, who came to tempt him after his torture: "Wyat why art thou such a foole, thou servest for moonshine in the water, a beggarly fugitive; forsake him [Henry Tudor], and become mine, who can reward thee, and I swear unto thee, will."<sup>58</sup> Sir Henry responds with an assertion of feudal loyalty worthy of Sir Ralph Bigod:

S[ir] if I had first chosen you for my master, thus faithfull would I have been to you, if you should have needed it, but the Earle, poor and unhappy, tho he be, is my Master, and no discouragement or allurement shall ever drive or draw me from him, by Gods grace; att this the Tyrant stood amazed and turning to the Lords that stood about him, brake out into these words; oh how much more happy is that runaway Rogue in his extreame calamitie, than I, in my greatest seeming prosperitie — hee hath a freind whom hee may trust in his misery, I in this appearing happiness, am unhappy onely through the want of this happiness, is there any of you all that will thus stick unto me, that is not already ready to leave mee.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup>Scott, 465<sup>v</sup>. Scott's use of "them" could indicate more than one source for the memories he records, but no other member of the family seems to provide a direct link with Henry Wyatt, and his grandmother is the only source Scott specifies (467<sup>r</sup>). Jane Haute married Thomas Wyatt the Younger in 1537, some months after the death of Sir Henry in November 1536, but had presumably been introduced to her prospective grandfather-in-law.

<sup>57</sup>On women as curators of memory, see Fox, 173–212; Houts; Dragstra, 2008.

<sup>58</sup>Scott, 467<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

Part of this story at least was passed on by Sir Henry himself. His son, the poet Sir Thomas Wyatt, knew it, referring in a letter to his own son to “the tyrant that could find in his hart to see him [Sir Henry] rakkid.”<sup>60</sup> Yet the language attributed to Richard is distinctive, suggesting the subsequent influence of Shakespeare’s play. Scott’s Richard is not merely the heartless tyrant of tradition, but a wry skeptic who delights in mocking the beautiful ideal, and who crystallizes his derision in delightful images. “Thou servest for moonshine in the water”: though the phrase never occurs in *Richard III*, it is almost a distillation of the play’s two most potent motifs, namely water as a signifier of inaccessibility — “in the deep bosom of the ocean buried” — and the insistent language of shadows and reflections — “to spy my shadow in the sun / And descant on mine own deformity”; “Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass, / That I may see my shadow as I pass.”<sup>61</sup> Likewise, when Scott’s Richard slides into self-pity, he echoes both the characteristic suspicion of Shakespeare’s king — “Ay, ay, thou wouldst be gone to join with Richmond. / But I’ll not trust thee” — and his despair on the eve of battle — “There is no creature loves me, / And if I die no soul will pity me.”<sup>62</sup>

The memories recorded by Buck and Scott survived some 130 years in the memory stream — that is, they had their sole existence in people’s heads, with at least two instances of transmission from one head to another — before entering the textual record. Quite different factors are likely to account for the survival of these two traditions. The memory that Richard’s body was “comely enough” was worth storing up and passing on precisely because it contradicted orthodox opinion and written history. This was a memory that could look after itself, so long as it could seek out individuals like Stow and Buck for whom storing up and sharing such subversive information was a source of intellectual and interpersonal enjoyment. The story of Wyatt’s torture, by contrast, was not preserved for what it said about Richard, but for what it said about Sir Henry and his descendants. This was a family story, and the story of a political family. The specific route of

<sup>60</sup>Thomson, 3 (letter no. 1: Sir Thomas Wyatt to his son, 15 April 1537).

<sup>61</sup>*Richard III*, 1.1.4, 1.1.26–27, 1.2.249–50. In the play, moonshine and watery burial are united in the widowed Queen’s wish “That I, being governed by the wat’ry moon, / May send forth plenteous tears to drown the world” (2.2.69–70). On some level, Scott’s “moonshine in the water” also alludes to the tale-type of the fool who dives for the moon in the water thinking it is cheese, a version of which occurs in *A Hundred Merry Tales*: see Briggs, 1:109, 169–70. But what Richard seems to be mocking in Scott’s anecdote is not so much Wyatt’s active pursuit of the inaccessible — diving for cheese — as his stubborn fidelity to the cheese-ideal in the face of its inaccessibility.

<sup>62</sup>*Richard III*, 4.4.421–22, 5.5.154–55.

transmission Scott chooses to emphasize, from his great-great-grandfather to his grandmother to himself, highlights three generations that found themselves in direct and potentially fatal conflict with royal power. Sir Henry had suffered the rack for defying the king; Jane Wyatt's husband died on the block for rebellion against Mary; Thomas Scott, political radical and godly controversialist, was embarking on a career of increasingly pronounced opposition to royal policy.<sup>63</sup> Where one memory (Stow-Buck) owes its transmission to its intrinsic political significance, another (Wyatt-Scott) takes on a contingent political significance with respect to the chain of transmission. Yet in their different ways both memories thematize and celebrate resistance to authority, be it textual or monarchical.

A third example of a memory recorded for the first time in the early seventeenth century bears resemblances to both of these, in that it supplies information lacking from the historical record while testifying to the endurance and character of the community of transmission. In his *Description of Leicestershire* (1622), William Burton (1575–1645) attempts to do what Bernard Andre could or would not do, that is, fix the location of the Battle of Bosworth. Burton does not rely on written records, but on archaeological evidence (arrowheads in particular) and local memory: “by relation of the inhabitants, who have many occurrences and passages yet fresh in memory, by reason: that some persons thereabout which saw the battle fought, were living within lesse then 40 yeares; of which persons, my selfe have seene some, and have heard of their discourses, though related by the second hand.”<sup>64</sup> Whatever is puzzling in this sentence becomes clear with reference to the significant dates. Writing in the early 1620s, Burton claims some witnesses were still alive less than forty years ago, which would indicate the early 1580s. Perhaps there were indeed centenarians in the Bosworth area who had seen the battle as children. Born in 1575, Burton could thus have “seene” some of these individuals, as he says. He would not have been in a position to question them closely about their memories before their deaths, however, and thus it is that he received their memories secondhand — probably from their children or grandchildren — in the 1590s, when he began his research in county history.

Like Buck and Scott, Burton specifies a precise chain of transmission between the original witnesses and himself. In each case, only a single intermediary is required to link the fifteenth-century witness with the seventeenth-century writer. All three, moreover, draw attention to their own

<sup>63</sup>On Scott's Protestant patriotism and identification with the Wyatt Rebellion, see Cuttica.

<sup>64</sup>Burton, 47.

place in the chain: “as he himself told me,” “it was his own relation unto them, from whom I had it,” “my selfe have seene some, and have heard of their discourses.” Each formulation carries echoes of Thomas More, writing a full century earlier: “I have heard of som that said thei saw it.” For these Jacobean writers, as for More, detailing the chain of transmission and their own place within it serves not only to verify the story, but also to lay claim to a privileged relationship with it, a relationship we must recognize as a species of memory. Memory is fundamentally distinct from history in that it is the past that in some sense belongs to us.<sup>65</sup> Yet, writing in the second and third decades of the seventeenth century, Buck, Scott, and Burton are surely at the outermost limit of communicative or active memory, a circumstance both reflected in the decision to write and sealed in the act of writing.<sup>66</sup>

Each of the memories discussed above was transmitted by word of mouth fairly late in Elizabeth’s reign, before being written down under James. It cannot have been many years before or after Shakespeare’s composition of *Richard III* that Stow passed his secret on to Buck, that Jane Wyatt trained her grandson in family lore, or that Burton collected oral histories from the folk of Bosworth. Shakespeare must have been well aware that memories of Richard’s reign remained in circulation in his day: and it seems he was no less inclined than we may be to doubt their reliability. This indeed is the satirical nub of the scene in which the prattling Duke of York calls to mind certain secondhand recollections of Richard’s own infancy:

<sup>65</sup>Hodgkin and Radstone; Hirsch, 2008, 108–11. For a robust critique of any attempt to lay claim to a past other than that which we ourselves experienced, see Michaels.

<sup>66</sup>Although oral traditions can survive over a far longer period than those traced here, where they do not retain the sense of personal connection they cannot meaningfully be described as memories. A tale involving Bosworth recorded later in the seventeenth century by Aubrey, 1696, 88, in some ways similar to Burton’s relation, points up the contrast: “In one of the great Fields at Warminster in Wiltshire, in the Harvest, at the very time of the Fight at Bosworth Field, between King Richard III, and Henry VII, there was one of the Parish took two Sheaves, crying (with some intervals) Now for Richard, Now for Henry: at last, lets fall the Sheaf that did represent Richard; and cried, Now for King Henry, Richard is slain: This Action did agree with the very Time, Day and Hour. When I was a School-boy, I have heard this confidently delivered by Tradition, by some Old Men of our Country.” Born in 1626, Aubrey could have spoken in the 1630s with octogenarians who had heard the story as children from those who actually witnessed it. Yet, unlike Burton or Buc, Aubrey is not concerned to trace each step in the chain of transmission. Similarly, he records as “a tradition” the story told to him in 1648 by a man of eighty, that Richard III was born at Fasteerne near Wootton Bassett, but there is no attempt to fill in the 116-year gap between Richard’s birth and that of the witness: Aubrey, 1847, 76.

YORK. Marry, they say my uncle grew so fast  
 That he could gnaw a crust at two hours old.  
 'Twas full two years ere I could get a tooth.  
 Grannam, this would have been a biting jest.  
 DUCHESS OF YORK. I pray thee, pretty York, who told thee this?  
 YORK. Grannam, his nurse.  
 DUCHESS OF YORK. His nurse? Why, she was dead ere thou wast born.  
 YORK. If 'twere not she, I cannot tell who told me.<sup>67</sup>

This is one of several passages in the play that force the question of how, if at all, we can know the past we did not ourselves experience. As the Scrivener's soliloquy casts doubt on written records, and Prince Edward's naive faith in truths that "live from age to age" raises problems with oral tradition, the prattling of little York points up how soon transmitted memories lose touch with their origins.<sup>68</sup>

Ironically, Shakespeare's play, so skeptical with regard to history and memory, would soon exert an unparalleled influence over memories of Richard III. We have seen how it may have intruded into Scott's story of his great-great-grandfather's ordeal. And even as Burton was writing up his research into the location of Bosworth field, local traditions were becoming harder and harder to sort from Shakespeare's version of the battle. This is the point of the passage in Richard Corbett's (1582–1635) *Iter Boreale* (ca. 1621) in which an innkeeper, "full of Ale, and History" gives the poet and his party a tour of Bosworth field, and at the climax of his narrative confuses history with Shakespeare's play:

Upon this Hill they met; why, he could tell  
 The Inch where Richmond stood, where Richard fell;  
 Besides what of his knowledge he could say,  
 Hee had Authentique notice from the Play;  
 Which I might guesse by's mustring up the Ghosts,  
 And policies not incident to hosts:  
 But chiefly by that one perspicuous thing,  
 Where he mistooke a Player for a King,  
 For when he would have said, King Richard dy'd,  
 And call'd a Horse, a Horse, he Burbage cry'd.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> *Richard III*, 2.4.27–34.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.6.1–14, 3.1.76.

<sup>69</sup> Corbett, 11–12.

4. "THE HANDSOMEST MAN IN THE ROOM":  
REMEMBERING RICHARD, 1604–35

The foregoing discussion has been grounded in the assumption that for the adult Shakespeare and his contemporaries, Richard's reign had passed beyond the horizon of living memory. This is almost certainly the case. Yet would those living in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries have agreed that no one alive could remember Richard III? Here the answer is much less certain. The period saw the rise of a fascination with, almost a cult of, extraordinary longevity.<sup>70</sup> William Paulet's reputed attainment of 106 years would be surpassed in the early seventeenth century by others who were said to have lived twice the allotted three score and ten, and even more. The most celebrated centenarians of the era, Katherine Fitzgerald, Countess of Desmond (d. 1604) and Thomas Parr (d. 1635), were both said, like Paulet, to have been born in the reign of Edward IV. It is almost as if the steady prolongation of reported lifespans over this period were being driven by a need to believe that someone yet living — or only just deceased — could still remember England before the dawn of the Tudor era.<sup>71</sup>

"I my selfe knew the old Countesse of Desmond of Inchiquin in Munster, who lived in the yeare 1589 and many yeares since, who was married in Edward the fourths time, and held her Joynture from all the Earles of Desmond since then."<sup>72</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh did not attempt to estimate the countess's age at death: the date of her nuptials was sufficient indication of her extraordinary lifespan. Writing only slightly later than Raleigh, Fynes Moryson and Francis Bacon would specify her age at death as 140, adding the curious detail that she grew a third set of teeth late in life.<sup>73</sup> Other colorful rumors soon circled round her, including Robert Sidney's tale that she died following a fall from a nut tree.<sup>74</sup> No early source refers to what memories the countess might have stored up in the course of her long pilgrimage. However, 150 years later Horace Walpole would make a startling claim: "the old Countess of Desmond who had danced with

<sup>70</sup>See Laslett; Botelho, 193–219.

<sup>71</sup>Writing after the Restoration, Leigh, 212, cites the longevity of Parr and adds in the margin "He as well as the Countess of *Desmond* (so much spoken of for her great age) is said to have lived in the Raign of *Edward* the fourth" — as if this were the true mark of agedness in any era.

<sup>72</sup>Raleigh, 78.

<sup>73</sup>Moryson, 3:43. Bacon, 1627, 194; Bacon, 1638, 188. There were rumors of the countess's survival to an even greater age. Richard Steele (1622–92) says she "died within our memories, being, as it is credibly affirmed, an 184 years old": Steele, 17.

<sup>74</sup>"The Old Countess of Desmond," 51, quoting Robert Sidney's *Table-Book*.

Richard declared that he was the handsomest man in the room except his brother Edward, and was very well made.”<sup>75</sup>

However unlikely Walpole’s tale, he was not guilty of outright fabrication. The tradition of the countess’s dance with Richard was passed down orally within Anglo-Irish families of Walpole’s acquaintance, and he heard the story from at least two sources. A correspondent provided him with a somewhat flawed genealogy of transmission that purported to demonstrate that the memory had been passed down from the countess herself with only two intermediaries.<sup>76</sup> If there is every reason to doubt that Katherine Fitzgerald had really danced with Richard III, there is some reason to believe that the tale of her having done so was in circulation not long after her death.

The tradition may even hold a grain of truth. Though the countess’s actual date of birth was probably later than 1500, her husband was some fifty years her senior, and could well have laid eyes on Richard III, if not danced with him.<sup>77</sup> Yet it is equally possible that the story of the dance had its origins in the seventeenth century, on the model of John Stow’s report regarding Richard’s appearance. It conveys essentially the same point, while supplying more vivid circumstantial detail, and is repackaged as a personal rather than secondhand memory. It seems significant that Stow himself died in 1605, a year after the countess, and precisely 120 years after Bosworth — the outer limit of active memory. Perhaps the anecdote in which the Countess of Desmond is thematized as the last living witness to the world of Richard III came into being as a way of registering the passage of that world beyond any form of recollection.

Did the death of the Countess of Desmond, then, mark the final passage of the reign of Richard III beyond human memory? Not quite. The year 1635 saw the arrival in London, with no little fanfare, of old Tom Parr of Herefordshire, who was said to have been born in 1483, in the last months of the reign of Edward IV. He was thus 152 years old. Among a clutch of publications celebrating Parr’s unparalleled longevity was John Taylor’s (1578–1653) *The Old, Old, Very Old Man*, issued twice while its subject was

<sup>75</sup>Walpole, 102.

<sup>76</sup>A Mr. Meyrick informed Walpole that he had heard the story from his wife’s grandfather, Lord St. John of Battersea (d. 1742), who had heard it from his father, who had heard it from the countess herself. Lord St. John’s father cannot have heard the story from the countess, as he was born some twenty years after her death. Meyrick’s account does nonetheless hint that the tradition was in circulation by the mid-1600s. The correspondence is quoted and the claims investigated in “The Old Countess of Desmond,” 56–59.

<sup>77</sup>Her husband was Thomas Fitzgerald, Eleventh Earl of Desmond (1454–1534). See Nichols, 302.

yet alive and again after his death (Parr died after just six weeks in the city). Taylor draws attention to the many monarchs Parr had supposedly outlived:

This Thomas Parr hath liv'd th' expired Raigne  
 Of ten great Kings and Queenes, th' eleventh now sways  
 The Scepter, (blest by th' ancient of all days.)  
 Hee hath surviv'd the Edwards, fourth and fift;  
 And the third Richard, who made many a shift  
 To place the Crowne on his Ambitious head;  
 The seventh & eighth brave Henries both are dead,  
 Sixt Edward, Mary, Phillip, Elsabeth,  
 And blest remembred James.<sup>78</sup>

Of the rulers listed here, none had a shorter reign than Richard III, yet none looms larger in this catalogue. Where no other monarch is granted even a full pentameter line, Richard's two years on the throne earn him two. It is as if Richard's reign, finished before Parr was three, were nonetheless the chief historical event in the old man's life, at least until the accession of Charles I.

Fascinated by what such an old man might be able to remember, Taylor goes on to speculate, oddly and delightfully, on what unfathomable depths of time might reside in his inherited memory, if his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had all lived equally long lives:<sup>79</sup>

Had their lives threds so long a length been spun,  
 They (by succession) might from Sire to Son  
 Have been unwritten Chronicles, and by  
 Tradition shew Times mutabillity.  
 Then Parr might say he heard his Father well,  
 Say that his Grand-sire heard his Father tell  
 The death of famous Edward the Confessor,  
 (Harrold) and William Conq'rour his successor.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup>Taylor, B2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>79</sup>Taylor may well have been inspired by M.P.'s ballad *The Wandring Jews Chronicle*, first printed in 1634. The Jew of the ballad claims to have been fifteen years old at the time of the Norman Conquest, and to recall the reign of every monarch since. Richard III figures prominently in this exceedingly brief chronicle. In addition to having been present when Richard murdered Henry VI, and at his persecution of Jane Shore, the Jew asserts "I was at Bosworthfield / Well armed there with spear and shield, / meaning to try my force: / Where Richard losing life and Crown / Was naked born to Leicester Town / upon a Colliers horse" (single sheet). See Dragstra, 2006.

<sup>80</sup>Taylor, C3<sup>r</sup>.



Richard and his contemporaries again feature prominently in this much-expanded catalogue of rulers:

Then of fourth Edward, and faire Mistrisse Shore,  
King Edwards Concubine Lord Hastings (—)  
Then how fift Edward, murdered with a trick  
Of the third Richard; and then how that Dick  
Was by seventh Henrie slaine at Bosworth field.<sup>81</sup>

Yet in spite of Taylor's obvious pleasure in speculating on what the very old man might remember, he comes to the disappointing conclusion that Parr remembers nothing at all — nothing, that is, that could be of interest to either historians or general readers:

Thus had Parr had good breeding, (without reading)  
Hee from his sire, and Grand sires sire proceeding,  
By word of mouth might tell most famous things  
Done in the Raigns of all those Queens and Kings.  
But hee in Husbandry hath bin brought up,  
And nere did taste the Helliconian cup,  
He nere knew History, nor in mind did keepe  
Ought, but the price of Corne, Hay, Kine, or Sheep.<sup>82</sup>

In his keenness to align himself with an elite and orthodox vision of history — wherein the famous deeds of kings and queens are what matter, not fluctuations in the price of agricultural commodities — Taylor skirts over the fact that the memories of aged farmers regarding “the price of Corne, Hay, Kine, or Sheep” could carry legal authority, and political significance. In 1552, when older people might indeed have remembered commodity prices in the reign of Richard III, an attempted rising in Berkshire had called for “the prices of victualles to be brought lower agayne as they were in King Rychardes time.”<sup>83</sup> The memories of the aged could be dull, as Taylor suggests, but they could also be dangerous.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., C3<sup>v</sup>–C4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., C4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>83</sup>*Calendar of Patent Rolls, Edward VI*, 4:343. Similarly, the demands in Kett's rebellion in 1549 had included the reduction of rents to the levels they were in the first year of the reign of King Henry VII. See Wood, 82.

<sup>84</sup>Taylor's dismissal of Parr's memory also reflects skepticism about the value of oral testimony. As Woolf, 279–80, notes, “distrust of aged memories grew during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as records of the past proliferated and became more widely available.”

An anonymous broadside, *The Three Wonders of the Age* (1636), contributes more details regarding Parr's memories of commodity prices, probably based on the old man's actual conversation: "he did call to mind that in the fourteenth yeare of his age, mault was sold for twelve pence the quarter, and 17 at the dearest."<sup>85</sup> The broadside also attributes to him other, more disturbing memories of the reign of Edward IV: "This Thomas Parre, did remember, as our History Record, in King Edward the 4<sup>th</sup> his reign, one Margaret Davy for poysoning of eleven persons, and one Richard Rose a cooke, for poysoning of sixteene, were at severall times boyled to death in Smith-field."<sup>86</sup> The historical information, drawn from Stow's chronicle, is sadly accurate, except that the executions did not take place under Edward IV, but in 1532 and 1542, respectively. Only for a relatively short period under Henry VIII was boiling alive the punishment for poisoning. It is possible that the author chose these memories for Parr more or less at random. Yet it is also possible, if "old Parr" was indeed near a century old, that his childhood imagination had been scarred by tales of such grisly punishments. It is little wonder that Taylor shied away from the matter of Parr's personal memory, if his talk embraced not only the price of malt, but the brutality of kings. By the same token, the prominence of the murderous Richard III in Taylor's catalogue of rulers may reflect that Parr's recollections of the exercise of royal power were disturbingly dark.

In a second edition of his pamphlet, Taylor appended a survey of the chief events Parr was supposed to have lived through: "The changes of Manners, the variations of Customes, the mutability of times, the shiftings of Fashions, the alterations of Religions, the diversities of Sexts, and the intermixtures of Accidents which hath hapned since the Birth of this old Thomas Parr."<sup>87</sup> Beginning with the rising of Lambert Simnel "in the sixth yeare of his Age," the postscript serves as a sort of prosthetic historical memory for the amnesiac old man. As Taylor turns to the religious turmoil of the sixteenth century, Parr emerges as a humbler version of the grand survivor William Paulet, excelling in prudence, obedience, and forgetfulness:

All which time, Thomas Parr hath not been troubled in mind for either the building or throwing downe of Abbyes, and Religious Houses; nor did hee ever

<sup>85</sup> *The Three Wonders of the Age*. At no point in the fifteenth or sixteenth century were malt prices so low. Yet, rather remarkably, in 1497 (when Parr was supposedly fourteen) the price stood at 2s.9½d, among the lowest points in the fifteenth century and never to be matched again. Prices were much higher in the 1540s, a more plausible decade for Parr's teenage years, but still lower than they would ever be again. The 1630s, when Parr came to London, saw exceptional highs in malt prices. See Rogers, 3:287, 3:292, 5:260.

<sup>86</sup> *The Three Wonders of the Age*.

<sup>87</sup> Taylor, B2<sup>v</sup>.

murmur at the manner of Prayers, let them be Latin or English, hee held it safest to be of the Religion of the King or Queene that were in being; for he knew that hee came raw into the world, and accounted it no point of Wisdom to be broyled out of it: His name was never questioned for affirming or denying the Kings Supremacie: He hath known the time when men were so mad as to kneele down and pray before a Blocke, a Stock, a Stone, a Picture, or a Relique of a Hee or Shee Saint departed; and he liv'd in a time when mad men would not bow their knee at the name of Jesus.<sup>88</sup>

Such bland indifference to religious controversy reflects prudence, and perhaps a natural inclination for the mellow middle way of Anglicanism. Taylor's old man comes across as an instinctive moderate, wryly observing without actively resisting the madness of Catholics and Puritans alike. Yet in the middle of this passage we find again the horrifying image of being "broyled" by royal command, as if nothing had left a more enduring mark on Parr's long memory than the very real possibility of being cooked alive.

Thomas Parr was not 152 years old when he died. Nonetheless, he must have harbored memories of a world very different from anything the young could recall or perhaps even imagine. It is conceivable that Parr was born before the dissolution of the monasteries; and it is altogether likely that he remembered several drastic shifts in patterns of worship, before the Elizabethan settlement. Such memories could be uncomfortable, even dangerous, both for their bearers and for those who might form the next link in the chain of transmission. Hence the insistence, from Paulet to Parr, that the chiefest virtue of the extraordinarily long-lived was forgetfulness.<sup>89</sup>

The case of Thomas Parr — a man whose childhood recollections of England under Henry VIII were interpreted by himself and others as memories of the late fifteenth century — is a particularly overt and literal example of a more widespread displacement of memory.<sup>90</sup> The different world at the edge of recollection was not the Catholic England of 1530, but

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., D3<sup>r-v</sup>.

<sup>89</sup>On memories of Catholicism, see Shell, 276–77; Duffy. The anxious combination of admiration for extreme longevity with hostility to recollection of the religious past is very clear in another old-age pamphlet belonging to the early seventeenth century. In praise of a 108-year-old Morris dancer, it is said: "Such an olde Mad cappe deserves better to bee the stuffing of a Cronicle, then Charing Crosse does for loosing his rotten head, which (through age being wind-shaken) fell off, and was trod upon in contempt": *Old Meg of Hereford-shire*, C2<sup>v</sup>. The point being that the old dancer is living in the present — not lingering on as a relic of a past best forgotten.

<sup>90</sup>For readings of the Reformation as a historical trauma whose psychological consequences may be traced in Elizabethan and Jacobean literature, see Anderson, 19–56, 125–68; Goodland, 173–82.

the misty medieval realm of 1480. The epochal break between one era and another was not confessional but dynastic. The brutal violence lurking like a nightmare at the back of collective memory was not associated with the Reformation but with the Wars of the Roses and, above all, with Richard III. We see this displacement in the broadside's crude backdating of executions for poisoning, but also in the memoirs of Thomas Scott, for whom his ancestor's torture under Richard became a way of addressing and interpreting his grandfather's execution under Mary.

It would be needlessly reductive to suggest that memories involving Richard III were merely coded references to the Reformation and the way of life supplanted by it. Yet from a relatively early point it is clear that a relationship developed between Richard and the Reformation as objects of memory. Why these two chronologically distinct phenomena should become intertwined can be explained in part with reference to the unfolding of memory cycles. As we have seen, for a variety of reason societies tend to revisit events twenty to thirty years after their occurrence: the first cycle of collective memory is associated with the construction of narratives, memorials, authoritative accounts. The second cycle, fifty to sixty years after the event, differs in its commemorative priorities: as the last witnesses near the ends of their lives, anxieties center on the transmission of personal memory.<sup>91</sup> Finally, we may detect yet another cycle at the outer limit of what Walter Map called "our times," that is, 100 to 120 years. At this point the original event is passing beyond communicable memory into the comparatively inert past, a transition sometimes marked by last-ditch memorial activity.

Fifty years after Richard III came to the throne, Henry VIII was excommunicated; the dissolution of the monasteries began fifty-one years after Bosworth. A key cycle in the collective memory of Richard's reign thus coincided with the most tumultuous years of the Reformation. Memories of the distant past were passed on or withheld in the context of massive change in the present. For those living through this time of transformation, the era immediately preceding the accession of the Tudors was readily available as a symbol of the world they had lost. Fifty years on, the last (100-year) cycle of Ricardian memory coincided with the second cycle of Reformation memory. At a time when a handful of survivors with clear recollections of Catholic practice were attempting, often in secret, to pass on their memories,

<sup>91</sup>This second cycle can also witness what Greenblatt, 258, calls the "fifty-year effect, a time in the wake of the great, charismatic ideological struggle in which the revolutionary generation that made the decisive break with the past is all dying out and the survivors hear only hypocrisy in the sermons and look back with longing at the world they have lost."

we find a resurgence of interest in Richard's reign, not least on the stage.<sup>92</sup> Finally, a century on from the Reformation, when the events of the 1530s were themselves slipping beyond the grasp of active memory, we meet the impossible notion that memories of Richard III might still survive, in the head of Old Tom Parr.

How does *Richard III* respond to or reflect the imbrication of memory cycles? No play of Shakespeare's is so thoroughly saturated in the sanctimonious and sometimes savage vocabulary of Reform.<sup>93</sup> Powerful echoes of Reformation controversies can be detected in Richard's apparent war against memory, his determination to cut the ties between the present and the past so that the future may be his. Like a Protestant polemicist heaping scorn on Purgatory, Richard insists there can be no commerce between the dead and the living. "God take King Edward to his mercy / And leave the world for me to bustle in"; "I'll turn yon fellow in his grave, / And then return lamenting to my love"; "Harp not on that string, madam. That is past."<sup>94</sup>

To the extent that the play presents Richard as an implicitly Protestant foe of Catholic rites of memory, it can be read as a fantasized reversal of the Reformation, with mourning women and righteous ghosts combining to dispatch the heartless innovator who sought to silence them.<sup>95</sup> Yet while *Richard III* is deeply invested in Reformation debates, its dramatic conflicts do not always map neatly onto confessional controversies. Richard, the proclaimed enemy of remembrance, is also the play's chief memorialist of better times gone by. It is he who instructs the upstart Woodvilles, "Let me put in your minds, if you forget, / What you have been ere this, and what you are; / Withal, what I have been, and what I am."<sup>96</sup> Richard repeatedly summons up nostalgia for a past marked by chivalry and hierarchy, as opposed to the debased present<sup>97</sup> — and in this, if in nothing else, he

<sup>92</sup>Public dramas about Richard III and private memoirs of Catholicism are among the most typical literary productions of the 1590s. Richard's reign was staged at least thrice in the decade, in the anonymous *True Tragedy of Richard III* (ca. 1591), Shakespeare's *Richard III* (ca. 1592), and Heywood's *2 Edward IV* (ca. 1599), not to mention Richard's prominent role in Shakespeare's *3 Henry VI* (ca. 1591): all four plays were in print before 1600. See Deiter, 74–77. The same years saw the composition of such recusant memoirs as Roger Martin's recollections of Long Melford (ca. 1590) and the *Rites of Durham* (1593): see Duffy.

<sup>93</sup>See Richmond.

<sup>94</sup>*Richard III*, 1.1.151–52, 1.2.247–48, 4.4.295.

<sup>95</sup>For two persuasive versions of this argument, see Goodland, 135–54; Marche.

<sup>96</sup>*Richard III*, 1.3.131–33.

<sup>97</sup>Kendall, 386, finds a conflicted relationship to the past indicated in the historical Richard's foundation of the College of Arms: "the movement toward organization and systematization pointing to the future, and the interest in crests, coats of arms, and ancestral lineage suggesting a love of the past."

resembles the historical king. His first soliloquy contrasts “Now” with a better, simpler era of manly violence; his final speech to his troops likewise recalls a past of English military prowess, when “our fathers . . . in record” defeated the Bretons on their own soil.<sup>98</sup> As the play broods over old debates, the king alternates between Protestant-inflected amnesia and Catholic-inflected nostalgia for the old social order. In his contempt for the cult of the dead, Richard indeed sounds like an Edwardian reformer; yet in his nostalgia for a lost organic community, he sounds like an Elizabethan recusant.

*Richard III* is the fruit of the conjunction of two cycles of memory. To say that the play is conscious of its late-Elizabethan historical moment is in large part to say that it is conscious of what is happening in the realm of memory and recollection. It is conscious of what old John Stow is telling young George Buck, of what Jane Wyatt is recalling for the benefit of her grandson, and also of what a dwindling generation of men and women up and down the land are telling — or perhaps choosing not to tell — about the different world into which they were born. The play’s deep engagement with memory and its transmission is key to its own immediate and enduring dominion over all subsequent efforts to remember Richard III. Accounting for the play’s extraordinary hold on collective memory would be the work of another paper.<sup>99</sup> Yet I submit that much of the play’s power stems from the historical timing that allowed Shakespeare to seize hold of the image of Richard III just a moment before its passage beyond active memory — and at a moment, moreover, when his society was powerfully, if almost silently, engaged in pondering the extinction of a different sort of memory, and what that might mean for those left behind.

Though the impact of *Richard III* was instantaneous and ubiquitous, we should not think of it as monolithic. Later memories were not simply stamped with the image of Shakespeare’s play, but rather refracted through it. This is clearly the case with those two small gems of Jacobean prose, Bacon’s “lees in the bottome of mens hearts” and Scott’s “moonshine in the water.” Both are refractions of *Richard III*’s panoply of images of watery burial. Bacon and Scott are both writing about memory, and specifically about loyalty to a defeated cause: the loyalty of the north to the dead Richard, and of Sir Henry Wyatt to the fugitive Henry Tudor. Yet the images are in every other sense opposed, with very different implications for

<sup>98</sup>*Richard III*, 1.1.1, 5.6.63–65.

<sup>99</sup>Its hold on the imagination has something to do with the brevity and dramatic structure of Richard’s reign, which permits Shakespeare (for once) to cover the whole movement from coronation to death in a single play. On the play’s afterlife, see Aune; Höfele.

the role of memory in the present. Bacon's lees lie deep, Scott's moonshine is on the surface. The lees are real and solid, the moonshine illusory and a reflection of something else. The lees retain the potential to rise up and transform conditions in the present, the moonshine will vanish the moment it is touched. Where one image insists that memory can provide genuine access to a genuine past, the other retorts that it can show us nothing but a reflection of the present, and the folly of our own desires. There are sources for both of these radically divergent perspectives in Shakespeare's play.

The conflicting claims of lees and moonshine require me to confront questions I have been skirting all along in regard to memories of Richard III, especially those from the mid-Tudor period and later. Is there anything at the bottom of the vessel? Do some of these memories have a real, or "deep," origin in Richard's time? Might they retain some agency or authority of their own, independent of later contexts? Or are they so much moonshine, surface reflections of the cultural situation in which they were transmitted and recorded, with no real connection to the past at all? Such awkward questions attend studies of memory in every era. If research into flashbulb memory and survivors' testimony has demonstrated one thing, it is that even the most vivid personal recollections can prove profoundly unreliable as guides to historical truth. Yet some would argue that the value and indeed the truth of memory consist not (or not only) in the remembered details, but in the embodied and ethical relationship to the past experienced by the remembering individual or group.<sup>100</sup> Even demonstrably inaccurate memories, it has been argued, can convey the real significance of historical events more profoundly and authentically than historical discourses.<sup>101</sup>

The memories examined in this essay do not speak for the experience of a single group, nor do they reflect a common political or religious perspective. If anything unites them it is a certain spirit of resistance or dissent, sometimes encoded in their content, sometimes evident in the context of transmission. Passed on in private speech or committed to writing, they register their resistance variously to official history, to the arbitrary exercise of royal power, to the desecration of the Eucharist, to the weakening of old social bonds, to intolerable price inflation. Those early

<sup>100</sup>Hodgkin and Radstone; Eaglestone, 173–93.

<sup>101</sup>Perhaps the most powerful version of this argument consists in Dori Laub's response to the inaccurate recollections of a survivor of the Auschwitz uprising, who vividly recalled four chimneys exploding in flames, rather than only one. Felman and Laub, 60: "The woman was testifying . . . not to the number of the chimneys blown up, but to something more radical, more crucial: the reality of an unimaginable occurrence. . . . She testified to the breakage of a framework. That was historical truth."

modern men and women who responded to contemporary cultural crises by reaching for memories of the late fifteenth century and Richard III need not be convicted of nostalgia or denial. We can seek to understand them rather in terms of Walter Benjamin's injunction "to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger," that is, to interpret and potentially intervene in the present moment by aligning it with a specific moment in the past.<sup>102</sup> Benjamin's oft-quoted phrase accomplishes a remarkable fusion of the opposing images of lees and moonshine, which are themselves refractions of Shakespeare's play. In Benjamin's formulation, memory is imagined as flashing in the reflected light of the present circumstance, but also as rising "up" from the depths of the past. The two metaphors for memory are not entirely incompatible, after all. In diving after moonshine, though we may never catch the moon, we at least stand a chance of stirring up the sediment.

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<sup>102</sup>Benjamin, 247.



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