‘Late’ Losses and the Temporality of Early Modern Nostalgia

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For more than a century following the English Reformation, poets and historians continued to refer to the dissolution of the monasteries and the destruction of church monuments as ‘late’ or recent events. The insistence on ‘lateness’, as in Shakespeare’s ‘bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang’, signals the writer’s refusal to allow the moment of loss to recede in time. The destruction of Bishop Grandisson’s tomb in Exeter Cathedral provides a striking example; probably destroyed in the 1530s, its desecration was referred to in a series of texts from the 1580s through the 1660s as a ‘late’ event.

When does an event cease to be recent? When, in early modern terms, is it too late to say ‘of late’? These questions elude a definite answer, yet they can reveal much about how a culture or an individual perceives the shape of time. The *recent* refers us to an epoch that lies one step – and one step only – back from the present, however broadly or narrowly the latter is defined. Situated a single fork behind us in time’s garden of forking paths, the recent is the natural staging ground for counterfactual scenarios: it describes the era in which an event, either by occurring or by failing to occur, can be perceived as having given rise to the world we inhabit now. Contemplation of the recent past can engender nostalgic longing for worlds we have lost, or which we were never permitted to inhabit. Yet to persist in defining an event as recent, even as it recedes in chronological time, suggests a refusal to succumb to the melancholy resignation often associated with nostalgia. Like the desire for revenge, to adapt Francis Bacon’s phrase, the perception of undiminished recency keeps our wounds green. Figuring the past as a world of lost plenitude, nostalgia in this vein nonetheless contrives to keep the past in play, impinging upon and capable of intervening in the present.[1] The Irish

[1] As I interpret it, the political force of the lateness trope does not necessarily rest in the demand that the past should be restored, but rather in the insistence that the loss in question lies immediately behind and defines our present condition, so that the work of the present is to grasp and respond to what has been lost. There is thus a point of connection with the work of Walter Benjamin’s revolutionary historian, who ‘stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one.’ Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (New York: Schocken, 1968), p. 263. The research leading to these results has been supported

nationalist leader Eamon de Valera knew what he meant when, in 1921, he referred to Oliver Cromwell's depredations in Ireland as the 'recent great dispossessions'.[2] This essay will explore the rhetoric and temporality of 'lateness' in post-Reformation England, with a particular focus on the perceived recency of the Reformation itself.

The most famous (and perhaps the most controversial) use of 'late' with reference to the lost past in early modern literature occurs in the fourth line of Shakespeare's Sonnet 73. Having compared his time of life to that season in which leafless branches shake in the cold wind, he further describes those branches as 'Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.'[3] With its poignant economy, the line evokes both the desolation of half-ruined monastic churches, which would have been a familiar sight in many parts of England or Wales in the later sixteenth century, and the nostalgic image of pre-Reformation choristers in full song. Yet the temporal implications are puzzling, if not jarring. Shakespeare (b. 1564) certainly had no personal memory of monastic life before the Dissolution of 1536-1540; writing nearly sixty years after the last 'Ave Maria' was chanted in a monastic choir, what could have prompted him to describe such singing as something lost only recently, or of 'late'? As Eamon Duffy observes:

> The word "late" has in fact been taken by some commentators to rule out the application of the image to the monasteries at all, for in the 1590s the dissolution of the monasteries was two generations back, and so could hardly be described as "late". On the contrary, however, I believe the telltale word "late" … aligns Shakespeare with a dangerously positive reading of the religious past.[4]

Duffy may well be right about Shakespeare's sympathy for the old religion, but such biographical speculation should not be made to rest on this line. 'Late' is indeed a 'telltale word' in this context, but the tale it has to tell us is somewhat more complicated.[5] Although

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by the Leverhulme Trust ('Speaking with the Dead' Research Project) and the European Research Council (ERC Grant Agreement n. 284085: 'The Past in its Place').

[2] Roy Foster, 'Anglo-Irish Relations and Northern Ireland: Historical Perspectives', in *Northern Ireland and the Politics of Reconciliation*, ed. Dermot Keogh and Michael H. Haltzel (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 13-32 (pp. 13-14); see also Mary E. Daly, 'De Valera's Historical Memory', in *Memory Ireland, Volume 1: History and Modernity*, ed. Oona Frawley (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011), pp. 142-56.

[3] All references to Shakespeare's works are to *The Norton Shakespeare,* ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et. al., second edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).

[4] Eamon Duffy, *Saints, Sacrilege and Sedition: Religion and Conflict in the Tudor Reformations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 250.

[5] The sense of 'late' explored in this article corresponds to *OED* 'late' adj.1, III.12: 'Of, belonging to, or occurring in a past period of time comparatively near to the present; recent in date, origin, or completion', where

in early modern usage the term typically refers to the unequivocally recent past, Shakespeare is not alone in using 'late' to describe events that took place well before his birth. Visiting the Colosseum in 1644, John Evelyn noted that it had 'remained entire, till of late that some of the stones were carried away to repair the city walls and build the Farnesian palace.'[6] Evelyn's disposition to regard events between one and two centuries in the past as 'late' is bound up with his determination to believe that until that point the Colosseum might still have been seen in its original perfection.[7] In both Shakespeare and Evelyn, the word 'late' introduces a nostalgic temporality capable of collapsing large stretches of time between the present and the lost object of desire. As I shall argue here, the peculiar temporality of lateness is particularly prominent in early modern responses to the English Reformation, especially as witnessed in its destructive impact on buildings and monuments. Persisting through much of the seventeenth century and into the early Restoration era, the perception of a 'recent Reformation' seems to have been equally prevalent among Catholic sympathizers and conventional or even militant Protestants.

Other poetic responses to the destruction of the monasteries echo Shakespeare's use of 'late' in Sonnet 73, at the same or an even greater distance in time from the historical event, and from both sides of the confessional divide.[8] The anonymous Catholic author of the 'Lament for Our Lady's Shrine at Walsingham', probably writing in the 1580s or 90s, grieves to hear the shriek of owls 'where the sweetest hymns/ Lately were sung'.[9] As far on as the 1640s, the unexceptionably Protestant Sir John Denham casts a sad eye on the bare summit of St Ann's Hill by Chertsey, 'whose top of late/ A chapel crown'd, till in the common fate,/

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the first example is from 1433: 'grete myschief in late dayes begonne'; the related adverbial phrase 'of late' is also attested from the early fifteenth century.

[6] *Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn, Vol. 1,* ed. William Bray (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1854), p. 116.

[7] In 1451-52, some 2522 cartloads of stone were taken from the Colosseum for the repair of the city walls and new construction in the Vatican; this was not the first incident of such quarrying. See Giuseppe Lugli, *The Flavian Amphitheatre (The Colosseum)* (Rome: Bardi, 1971), p. 38. Begun in 1517, the construction of the Palazzo Farnese was largely completed, under the direction of Michelangelo, by 1550.

[8] On responses to monastic ruins in the post-Reformation landscape, see Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 273-96; Margaret Aston, 'English Ruins and English History: The Dissolution and the Sense of the Past', in *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon, 1984), pp. 313–37; Philip Schwyzer, *Archaeologies of English Renaissance Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 72-107.

[9] 'A Lament for Our Lady's Shrine at Walsingham', in *Recusant Poets: With a Selection from their Work, Volume 1*, ed. Louise Imogen Guiney, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1938), 355-56; see discussions of authorship and dating in Schwyzer, *Archaeologies,* p. 88*;* Gary Waller, *Walsingham and the English Imagination* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 98-101; Alison Shell, *Oral Culture and Catholicism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 89-90.

Th'adjoining abbey fell.'[10] Denham has no particular sympathy for the monks or their religion, but he sees in the dissolution of the monasteries an example of royal arrogance and over-reaching, foreshadowing the conflicts of his own era. Inasmuch as it lies just behind the problems that bedevil the present, the destruction of Chertsey Abbey remains a 'late' event, even a hundred years on.

Nostalgia is, arguably, an occupational hazard for poets of any religious stripe. Yet the tendency to describe acts of destruction and iconoclasm as 'late', even at a distance of many decades, was not confined to poetry. Sober-minded church and civic historians of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were equally prone to write in this vein. The central section of this essay will focus on a single example, the lost tomb of Bishop Grandisson in Exeter Cathedral, whose disappearance was described by a series of early modern authors over the course of almost a century as a recent event. The curious case of the missing tomb will ultimately lead us back to Shakespeare, and to the wider question of early modern nostalgia for the lately lost past. As far as the memory of the Reformation is concerned, the sharp sense of recent loss evinced by writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would eventually give way, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to more temporally ordered and familiar forms of nostalgia and ruin-sentiment. Yet, as I shall argue in conclusion, the paradoxical temporality of lateness still inflects contemporary perceptions of the past, often accompanied and encouraged by the careful curation of absence.

I. 'Not Long Since': The Lost Tomb of Bishop Grandisson

In his long tenure as Bishop of Exeter (1327-69), John Grandisson oversaw the final major phase of construction that gave rise to the Cathedral as it stands today. His most celebrated achievement was the west front's magnificent image screen, adorned with images of angels and kings. Grandisson audaciously inserted his own burial place, the chantry chapel of St Radegund, into the thickness of the west front, immediately to the right of the central door. On the ceiling of the narrow chapel the risen Christ is depicted in relief, hovering immediately above the place where Grandisson's body was interred. The tomb probably featured an effigy of the Bishop, either in stone or in brass, gazing up at the image of his Saviour; the same arrangement is found in the canopy tomb of his predecessor Walter de

[10] Sir John Denham, 'Cooper's Hill', in *The Poetical Works of Sir John Denham,* ed. Theodore Banks, second edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), ll. 113-15.

Stapledon (d. 1326) in the north choir aisle.[11] Grandisson's tomb does not survive, but when exactly it disappeared remains intriguingly unclear.

In or around 1586, the notable Exeter historian John Hooker, alias Vowell, recorded in his commonplace book that Grandisson

> was buryed in a tombe of Ledd in the Chaple in the west wall of his owne Churche wch his tombe was of late pulled vp, the Ashes scattered abroade and the bones of his carcasses bestowed no man knoweth where.[12]

Although Hooker does not make his view of this act explicit, the emphasis on the scattering of the ashes and the secretive disposal of the bones suggest disapproval, if not of the removal of the tomb itself, then at least of the manner in which it was done. There is no question here, however, of 'a dangerously positive reading of the religious past'. Hooker was a militant Protestant. The works for which he is best known today are a strongly loyal eye-witness account of the 1549 Prayerbook Rebellion, and the history of Ireland he contributed to Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587), in which the Pope is characterized as a bloodthirsty 'son of sathan'.[13] Yet Hooker's reforming zeal did not conflict with his admiration for Exeter Cathedral as a venerable institution. In his *Catalog of the Bishops of Exeter*, his admiration for the administrative and architectural achievements of medieval prelates is not hindered by his distaste for their 'false and superstitious religion'.[14]

Hooker's adverbial phrase 'of late' has led commentators to assume that the tomb of Bishop Grandisson was violated and dismantled in the 1580s.[15] This assumption is bolstered to some degree by archaeological evidence; when the site of the former tomb was excavated in the 1950s, the finds included a scattering of German and English coins of Elizabethan date, along with a gold ring thought to have belonged to the bishop himself, and fragments of pottery, cloth, and bone (probably fill from a nearby rubbish heap).[16] On the face of it, the

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[11] I am grateful to Naomi Howell for this observation . See Bridget Cherry, 'Some Cathedral Tombs', in *Exeter Cathedral: A Celebration,* ed. Michael Swanton (Crediton: Dean and Chapter of Exeter, 1991), p. 160.
[12] John Vowell, alias Hooker, *The Description of the Citie of Excester,* Part 2, ed. Walter J. Harte , J. W. Schopp and H. Tapley-Soper (Exeter: Devon & Cornwall Record Society, 1919), p. 232.
[13] 'The Chronicles of Ireland', in *The Second Volume of the Chronicle* (London, 1587), p. 183. See Annabel Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 28-31.
[14] John Hooker, *A Catalog of the Bishops of Excester* (London, 1584), sig. B1^{v}. See Joyce Youings, 'John Hooker and the Tudor Bishops of Exeter', in *Exeter Cathedral,* ed. Swanton, pp. 203-8.
[15] Anon., 'Two Mediaeval Bishops' Tombs', *Friends of Exeter Cathedral Annual Report* 27 (1957), 23; John Cherry, 'The Ring of Bishop Grandisson', in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Exeter Cathedral,* ed. Francis Kelly (Leeds: British Archaeological Association, 1991), pp. 205-9 (p.205).
[16] 'Two Mediaeval Bishops' Tombs', 23-24.

date of the coins would seem to confirm the literal sense of Hooker's sentence, indicating that the tomb was desecrated shortly before 1586. Yet there are reasons for doubt.

Assaults on medieval tombs were relatively rare in the later sixteenth century. Although church ornaments associated with Catholic superstition, especially picture windows and rood screens, were targeted in the early years of Elizabeth's reign, the Queen had expressly forbidden 'breakinge or defacing monumentes of antiquitie, beyng set up in Churches' in a proclamation of September 1560.[17] There are relatively few recorded incidents of tombs being desecrated in this period, and where such deeds took place the motive more often lay in family rivalries than religious zeal.[18] As for Exeter, beyond Hooker's ambiguous reference to the fate of Grandisson's tomb, there are no indications of assaults on the medieval fabric of the Cathedral in this period. Indeed, the Elizabethan Cathedral seems to have been intent on increasing rather than diminishing its store of monuments to Catholic bishops. In 1568, Hooker himself had spearheaded the installation of a new memorial to the eleventh-century founder Leofric (an event which – writing in 1584 – he also describes as having taken place 'of late').[19]

Half a century earlier, it had been a very different story. There is no question that multiple and spectacular acts of iconoclasm were perpetrated in Exeter Cathedral in the early years of the Reformation. The assaults on images, monuments and ornaments under the zealous Dean Simon Heynes in the late 1530s were severe enough to prompt a formal remonstration from ten of his own canons.[20] The reported despoliation of Grandisson's tomb seems comparable to other attacks on monuments and memorials instigated by Heynes, including the thorough desecration of the chantry chapel of Bishop Hugh Oldham (d. 1519) and the stripping of the effigial brass from the tomb of Bishop Edmund Lacy (d. 1455), who had been the subject of local cult. The destruction of the altarpiece in St Radegund's Chapel, a few feet from Grandisson's tomb, can probably also be assigned to this period. Leaving Hooker's 'of late' to one side for the moment, the contextual evidence would suggest that the assault on Grandisson's tomb took place in the late 1530s, rather than the 1580s. Indeed, Hooker's own reference to the 'ashes scattered abroade' associates the event with the most

[17] See Peter Sherlock, *Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 166; the full proclamation is reprinted in John Weever, *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (London, 1631), pp. 52-53.
[18] See Sherlock, *Monuments and Memory,* pp. 172-77.
[19] Hooker, C*atalog,* p. 7.
[20] Stanford E. Lehmberg, *The Reformation of Cathedrals: Cathedrals in English Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 75.

famous (and probably apocryphal) assault on human remains of the Reformation era: the burning and scattering of the remains of Thomas Becket at Canterbury.[21]

There are comparable examples of the phrase 'of late' being used to describe Reformation attacks on cathedral memorials in works post-dating Hooker's commonplace book. In his *Catalogue of the Bishops of England* (1601), Francis Godwin, Bishop of Llandaf, describes the tomb of Jocelin of Wells (d. 1242) in the choir of Wells Cathedral as having been 'of late yeeres monsterously defaced'.[22] The stripping of the tomb's brass effigy, not without mutilation of the marble surface, had probably occurred well before Godwin's birth in 1562, and perhaps some sixty years before he wrote. Godwin revised this passage, changing 'monsterously defaced' to 'shamefully defaced' in the second edition of 1615; yet even at that date, when the desecration of Jocelin's monument must have lain near the furthest edge of living memory, Godwin persisted in describing it as a 'late' event.[23]

If, as most contextual evidence would suggest, the tomb of John Grandisson was probably desecrated in the 1530s under Dean Simon Heynes, the Elizabethan coins found in association with its former location may indicate subsequent interference with the site in the later sixteenth century. This is plausible enough, as there were efforts in many cathedrals and churches in the Elizabethan period and later to tidy away some of the more unpalatable remains of Reformation iconoclasm. At St Albans Abbey in 1570, chunks of masonry from the demolished shrines of Saints Alban and Amphibalus were incorporated into a new internal wall, thirty years after their despoliation.[24] At Wells, the cracked marble of Jocelin's tomb appears to have presented something of a safety hazard, leading Godwin to fear its destruction (and indeed the tomb seems to have disappeared not many years after he wrote).[25] At Exeter, Hooker's new monument to Bishop Leofric was composed partly out of materials recycled from other damaged memorials. There may well have been an initiative in the 1580s to clear away the 'monsterous' spectacle in St Radegund's Chapel, and simultaneously to clear floor-space, allowing the disused chantry to serve as a storeroom or something of the sort.

There are, then, at least three ways of interpreting Hooker's pronouncement c. 1586 that Grandisson's tomb was 'of late pulled up':

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[21] See F. Mayer, 'Becket's Bones Burnt! Cardinal Pole and the Invention and Dissemination of an Atrocity', in *Martyrs and Martyrdom in England, c.1400-1700*, ed. Thomas S. Freeman and Thomas F. Mayer (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), pp. 126-43.
[22] Francis Godwin, *A Catalogue of the Bishops of England* (London, 1601), p. 297.
[23] Francis Godwin, *A Catalogue of the Bishops of England* (London, 1615), p. 366.
[24] Ailsa Herbert, Pam Martin, Gail Thomas, eds, *St Albans Cathedral and Abbey* (London: Scala, 2008), p. 26.
[25] Francis Godwin, *De praesulibus Angliae commentarius omnium episcoporum* (London, 1616), p. 423.

1) Grandisson's tomb was indeed left unmolested in the wave of iconoclasm that struck the cathedral in the 1530s. It survived for another half-century before being attacked shortly before 1586, in defiance of royal proclamations and the general tenor of the times. This is not impossible but, for the reasons given, it is the most unlikely scenario.

2) Grandisson's tomb was desecrated and his remains removed in the late 1530s. Having been born in Exeter c. 1527, Hooker may have retained personal memories of the tomb's appearance and could conceivably have witnessed its destruction. Fifty years on, the event still struck Hooker as having happened 'of late'.

3) Perhaps the likeliest possibility is that Hooker's brief record conflates two events: an iconoclastic assault on Grandisson's tomb in the Reformation era, and a more pragmatic clearing of the debris (and possibly the Bishop's physical remains) under Elizabeth.

On the basis of the limited evidence, then, there is good reason to doubt that Hooker's 'of late' refers solely and simply to an act of tomb-breaking that took place shortly before 1586. The stronger likelihood is that, as in Shakespeare's Sonnet 73, Hooker's nostalgic 'late' telescopes the chronological distance between the 1530s and the late Elizabethan period. There is also a reasonable possibility that Hooker drew on a recent event – the clearing of St Radegund's Chapel – as a temporal bridge between the two eras.[26]

The story of Grandisson's tomb in the ensuing century becomes still more puzzling and intriguing. Hooker's ambiguous 'of late' seems to have created a snag in the temporal fabric around this missing tomb, preventing its destruction from receding into the past at the same rate as other events of the period. In 1630, the county historian Thomas Westcote recorded in his *View of Devonshire* that Grandisson's body:

> was shrouded in lead, which was *not long since* taken up, the lead melted, and the chapel defaced. An unworthy deed; and it is to me a marvel that they escaped unpunished, in regard the very heathen had laws against the violating or defacing of monuments or sepulchres.[27]

[26] On the prevalence of such 'mnemonic bridging' and its relation to nostalgia, see Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 39-53.
[27] Thomas Westcote, *A View of Devonshire in MDCXXX: With a Pedigree of Most of its Gentry,* ed. George Oliver and Pitman Jones (Exeter, 1845), p. 167. Italics mine.

Westcote's account of the event differs from Hooker's on several crucial points, which may suggest a separate source. Where Hooker refers to 'a tombe' of lead, Westcote has Grandisson wrapped in a lead shroud, the removal of which would amount to the disrobing of the Bishop's body. Hooker mentions neither the melting of the lead nor the defacement of the chapel, details which, in combination, suggest an uneasy combination of pragmatism and zeal. Westcote openly condemns the desecration, whereas Hooker's disapproval is (at most) implicit. The only aspect of Hooker's brief narrative that Westcote corroborates entirely is the insistence that the event took place recently, or 'not long since'. Even if we accept the possibility that Grandisson's tomb was defaced in the early 1580s, the incident was hardly a recent one by the time Westcote wrote in 1630. In terms of linear temporality, Westcote (born c.1567) stands in relation to Hooker's account as Hooker did to the depredations of Simon Heynes. Yet Westcote's description of the event is even more redolent of the iconoclasm of the early Reformation than Hooker's, in that he explicitly links the destruction of the tomb to the defacement of the altarpiece – in which case, 'not long since' must be understood to refer to deeds committed some ninety years in the past, more than a quarter-century before the author's birth.

As the seventeenth century wore on, the desecration of Grandisson's tomb remained, paradoxically, a matter of recent memory. In his *Antiquities of the City of Exeter* (completed c. 1665, published 1677), Richard Izacke would record in apparent distress that

> This Tomb was *of late* ransack'd by sacrilegious hands, his leaden Coffin (in hope of a prey) taken up, the ashes scattered about, and his bones thrown I know not where; surely the Reliques of this worthy Prelate deserved a more reverend respect even amongst savage Beasts.[28]

Izacke's account is clearly indebted to Hooker, from whom he borrowed freely and with scant acknowledgement. The tone of strident condemnation, however, is more akin to Westcote (whose 'very heathen[s]' are heightened into 'savage Beasts'). Izacke had been born around 1624, when the destruction of Grandisson's tomb could have been recalled only by his grandparents, or more probably (if it occurred in the early years of the Reformation) his great-great-grandparents. His nostalgic 'of late' collapses a period of at least 80 and possibly 125 years; by the time his book was printed, Grandisson's tomb had been missing for almost as long a period as it had stood intact. Yet Izacke is not simply copying out an

[28] Richard Izacke, *Antiquities of the City of Exeter* (London, 1677), p. 59. Italics mine.

adverbial phrase from Hooker without registering how inappropriate it has become; his reference to Grandisson's bones being 'thrown I know not where' has more immediacy and sense of personal involvement than Hooker's 'bestowed no man knoweth where.' Izacke writes as if he had arrived only a little too late to see where the bones were thrown.

In Izacke's case, as in Hooker's, there is good reason to think that two separate events and indeed two eras are being conflated in a single memory. Exeter Cathedral had been subjected to a second wave of iconoclasm when the city was occupied by Parliamentary forces in 1643. The outrages committed in the Cathedral were recorded in somewhat histrionic and exaggerated terms by the royalist churchman Bruno Ryves, writing as Mercurius Rusticus: 'They strook off the heads of all the Statues on all monuments in the Church, especally they deface the Bishops Tombs, leaving one without a head another without a Nose, one without a hand, and another without an arme'.[29] Having served as Chamberlain of Exeter from 1653 (the same position held in the previous century by John Hooker), Richard Izacke would have had first-hand knowledge of the damage suffered by the Cathedral in this period. Writing shortly after the Restoration, he may well have drawn on his personal memories and understanding of Civil War iconoclasm to build a nostalgic bridge across time to events much further away in the past.

Izacke did not set out intentionally to deceive his readers as to the date of the destruction of Grandisson's tomb. Like Westcote, Shakespeare, and (probably) Hooker, he employed the rhetorical trope of lateness to convey a painfully nostalgic sense of a past that could still seem just out of reach. There is no reason to think that any of these writers were insincere in asserting that, for them, the senseless loss of the Bishop's tomb still seemed like a recent event. Yet the trope also involves the reader in a rhetorical game that can only be won by siding with the writer in his or her nostalgia. Shakespeare's Hamlet provides a clever illustration of how the game is played:

> HAMLET: … look you how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within's two hours.
> OPHELIA: Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord.

[29] Bruno Ryves, *Angliae ruina: or, Englands ruine* (London, 1648), p. 241. In his brief description of Exeter Cathedral before the Puritan assault, Ryves mentions only one episcopal tomb: 'John Grandesson … closed up the end with a wall of most exquisite worke, in which, he built a Little Chappell, and in that Chappell a Monument, wherein himselfe was intombed' (p. 239). Intentionally or otherwise, the text thus sets up the implication that Grandisson's tomb was among those defaced in the Civil War, though of course it had vanished long before.

> HAMLET: So long? Nay then, let the devil wear black, for I'll have a suit of sables. O heavens, die two months ago, and not forgotten yet! Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year.[30]

In asserting the distinction between two hours and 'twice two months', Ophelia does not suggest that this should have any particular impact on how one remembers the dead. Yet Hamlet hears in her words the implication that the difference should make a difference: that four months constitutes a threshold at which fathers and husbands can begin to be forgotten. He thus recasts Ophelia's attempt at chronological accuracy as gross insensitivity. A reader who quibbles with Hooker, Westcote, or Izaacke when they describe the destruction of Grandisson's tomb as 'late' or 'not long since' risks falling into the same trap. If an act of destruction that took place fifty, eighty, or one hundred and twenty-five years ago does not seem 'late' to you, this simply reveals you as incapable of grasping the magnitude of the loss.

Rhetorically effective as it undoubtedly is, the deeper significance of the trope of lateness lies in the insight it provides into the shape of early modern time as these authors and many of their contemporaries were capable of perceiving it. In the historical imagination, as in Einsteinian physics, time can warp and curve. Research on personal memory has revealed the prevalence of mnemonic 'telescoping', whereby individuals variously under- or overestimate the temporal remoteness of landmark events, reordering the chronology of their own lives.[31] The examples discussed here suggest that the same effect applies in the case of communicative memory – that is, the inherited and shared recollection of the relatively recent past, transmitted across a small number of generations.[32] Through the telescoping of inherited memory, catalysed by such spectacles as the bare floor of St Radegund's chapel, the violence of the Reformation era could appear closer in time than events of a chronologically later date. Thus Thomas Westcote could describe his predecessor John Hooker as having written 'long since', even as he averred that the destruction of Grandisson's tomb had taken place 'not long since'.[33] For some readers in the seventeenth century, the reduction of the monasteries to

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[30] *Hamlet,* 3.2.114-120.
[31] George D. Gaskell, Daniel B. Wright, and Colm A. O'Muircheartaigh, 'Telescoping of Landmark Events: Implications for Survey Research', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 64 (2000), 77-89; Douwe Draaisma, *The Nostalgia Factory: Memory, Time, and Aging,* trans. Liz Waters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).
[32] On communicative memory, see Jan Assmann, 'Communicative and Cultural Memory', in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), pp. 109-18. Assmann sets the furthest limit of communicative memory at 80-100 years; the examples considered here suggest that the telescoping effect can extend the scope of such memory beyond this limit.
[33] Westcote, *View of Devonshire,* p. 184, cf. p. 167.

'bare ruined choirs' may have seemed nearer to their own time than Shakespeare and his sonnets.

II. Absence and Ivy

With the passage of another century, this distinctively early modern way of experiencing and conveying nostalgia was no longer immediately intelligible. In 1787, the local historian John Jones consulted Richard Izacke's *Antiquities of the City of Exeter* for his own *History and Antiquities of the Cathedral Church of St Peter in the City of Exeter*. Noting Izacke's reference to the desecration of Grandisson's monument as a 'late' event, he drew the rational conclusion that it must have been in the course of the Civil War that the tomb was 'broken open and ransacked by the myrmidons of Oliver Cromwell, the coffin taken up, and his remains scattered and lost.'[34] This claim is repeated in Richard Polwhele's *History of Devonshire* (1793), though Polwhele expresses the hope that the coffin itself may have been left undisturbed by Cromwell's men.[35] The inability of eighteenth-century antiquaries to grasp the terms in which their early modern predecessors expressed nostalgia resulted in a temporary rewriting of history, granting Grandisson's tomb an additional century of existence. The reassignment of its destruction to a more recent era was the side-effect of a more general restoration of temporal order, so that the proximity of events to the present corresponded to their position in the chronological sequence.

Like his predecessors, John Jones makes clear his dismay at the destruction wrought on cathedral monuments in past times. He not only copies but further embellishes Mercurius Rusticus's hyperbolic report of the iconoclasm that took place in Exeter in 1643. Jones's chronological distance from the Civil War is not much greater than was Izacke's from the Reformation. Yet there is no suggestion that he understands these events as still somehow recent. The nostalgia he evinces when confronted with defaced or crumbling monuments is of a different cast, indicated in an epigraph which he attributes to Shakespeare:

> O! it pities us
> To see these antique towers and hallowed walls
> Split with the winter's frost, or mouldering down,
> Their very ruins ruin'd: the crush'd pavement,
> Time's marble register, deep overgrown
> With hemlock or rank fumitory, hides,

[34] Exeter Cathedral MS 3549E, p. 51.
[35] Richard Polwhele, *The History of Devonshire, Volume 2* (London, 1793), p. 3.

Together with their perishable mould,
The brave man's trophies, and the good man's praise,
Envying the worth of buried ancestry![36]

The lines are obviously not by Shakespeare, and their actual authorship remains a puzzle. They appear without attribution on an engraving of the ruins of Malmesbury Abbey by Thomas Hearne and William Byrne, printed in 1780. The same lines are quoted fairly frequently in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century county surveys and miscellanies, often either attributed to Shakespeare or described as being 'in the language of Shakespeare'.[37] The passage is in fact a pastiche, with borrowings from Shakespeare (Burgundy in *Henry V* laments the 'darnel, hemlock, and rank fumitory' [5.2.45] overgrowing the fields of France), and possibly from Horace Walpole, if indeed he is not the real author (in a 1740 letter from Rome, Walpole uses the phrase 'their very ruins ruined').[38] Although it bears little resemblance to anything Shakespeare ever wrote, the 'it pities us' passage reflects what readers in the age of the Gothic and the picturesque both hoped and expected to find in him.

The lines selected by John Jones as an epigraph for his treatise on the monuments of Exeter conjure an image of lost burials in a ruined, potentially monastic church. They do not, however, name a specific cause of the ruination, nor do they posit a clear break between a pristine 'before' and a desecrated 'after'. The desolation of the church and the obscuration of its tombs seem to be attributable mostly to the slow processes of time and the weather. Readers are not invited to travel back in a nostalgic flight of fancy to a period before the church's fall, but rather to lose themselves in melancholy pondering of the process of decay itself. There are precedents for such ruin sentiment in the literature of the early modern period, notably in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, where Antonio visits a ruined monastic cloister, 'Which now lies naked to the injuries/ of stormy weather', and professes to 'love these ancient ruins.'[39] Spenser's gloomy *The Ruines of Time,* which depicts the Roman city of

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[36] Exeter Cathedral MS 3549E, p. 9.
[37] The 1780 engraving of Malmesbury Abbey is reprinted, still with the unattributed quotation, in Thomas Hearne, *Antiquities of Great-Britain, Illustrated in Views of Monasteries, Castles, and Churches Now Existing* (London, 1786), no. xxviii. In John Brand's *The History and Antiquities of the Town and County of the Town of Newcastle Upon Tyne*, Volume 2 (London, 1789), the quotation is introduced with the assertion that 'visitants of taste will not forbear to exclaim, in the language of Shakespear…' (p. 126). Subsequent queries in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (January, 1825, p. 2) and the *American Bibliopolist* (April, 1873, p. 59) sought to discover the real author, apparently without success.
[38] Horace Walpole to Richard West, 22 March 1740, in *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence,* ed. W. S. Lewis (New Haven: Yale University Press), vol. 13, p. 206.
[39] John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays,* ed. René Weis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.3.9-14.

Verulamium almost entirely overgrown with 'weedes and wastefull grass', partakes to some extent of the same mood.[40] Yet such bittersweet contemplation of ancient and mouldering monuments is a world away from the texts with which this essay has been concerned, where nostalgia is expressed in the shocked recognition of a painfully recent loss.

Sixty years ago, F. W. Bateson insisted in a dispute with William Empson that the phrase 'bare ruined choirs' could not refer to monastic churches because these buildings, fifty-five years after the dissolution, would not yet have been sufficiently 'bare':

> At that date it would be the rarest thing to find a monastery church that could be described as bare (roofless and windowless, like a tree that has shed its foliage)…. Those monastery churches that had not been turned into cathedrals or parish churches, either (i) were being used as quarries for other buildings, or (ii) had been simply abandoned to the weather after the lead and the bells had been removed. It is clear, however, that this second process cannot generally have done much damage by 1593, as several abandoned churches were patched up and restored to use in the early seventeenth century….[41]

Regarded by some as too late to be 'late', Shakespeare's ruined choirs are apparently too early to be 'bare'. Yet 'bare' does not necessarily refer, as Bateson takes it, to the degree of structural dilapidation. More probably, in my view, it indicates buildings that had not yet had time to become 'deep overgrown/ with hemlock or rank fumitory', blending into the natural landscape, as older ruins do. The description of the ruined choirs as 'bare', in other words, suggests that the eye is struck primarily by those things that are gone (such as gilded images and tuneful monks), rather than by the foliage and other signifiers of long wear that have grown up in their place.

The important role of foliage in creating a sense of deep time is underscored in another eighteenth-century meditation on monastic ruins, George Keate's 'The Ruins of Netley Abbey':

> Mark how the Ivy with Luxuriance bends
> Its winding Foliage through the cloister'd Space,
> O'er the green Window's mould'ring Height ascends,
> And seems to clasp it with a fond Embrace….

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[40] Edmund Spenser, *The Ruines of Time*, in *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. J. C. Smith and E. De Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), line 42.
[41] F. W. Bateson, ''Bare Ruined Choirs' 1', *Essays in Criticism* 3 (1953), 360-61.

Haunts such as these delight, and o'er the Soul
Awhile their grateful Melancholy cast,
Since through all Periods she can boundless roll,
Enjoy the Present, and recall the Past![42]

For the eighteenth-century observer, the ruined abbey enfolds multiple eras and phases, indeed 'all Periods'. The pre-Reformation past and the present meet here, but their conjunction is eased of painful sharpness by the unmistakable evidence of intervening eras, embodied in the luxuriant ivy that embraces the mouldering monastic window.

In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ruined monasteries and monuments remained objects of nostalgia, but spoke now of the general passage of time, rather than a specific temporal relationship between one period and another. In this new age, Alexandra Walsham observes, 'the continuing dilapidation of such structures was a source of contentment rather than concern.... The gradual reabsorption of ecclesiastical buildings back into the landscape blurred the boundary between the created world and human culture in a way that men like Gilpin found both religiously and aesthetically inspiring.'[43] As with the cult of the picturesque cottage, analysed by Linda Austin, a fixation on the external signifiers of age and decay enabled a denial of human experience: the decayed structure's 'mnemonic function' came at the expense of its 'memorative content'.[44] A similar if darker sensibility can be detected in our modern fascination with images of urban blight (sometimes described as 'ruin porn'), associated above all with the abandoned buildings of Detroit. In spite of how recent these ruins are, what most catches the eye in the photographs of disused theatres and crumbling grand ballrooms by Yves Marchand, Romain Meffre, or Andrew Moore is evidence of the passage of time and ongoing processes of decay, often including the intrusion of foliage.[45]

By contrast, the 'late' losses invoked by early modern poets such as Shakespeare, Denham, and the Walsingham writer, and by historians such as Hooker, Godwin, Westcote, and Izaacke, are unadorned by ivy, of either a real or a metaphorical variety. Nothing suggestive of the passage of time is permitted to obtrude itself between the present and the

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[42] George Keate, *The Ruins of Netley Abbey* (London, 1764), pp. 6-7.
[43] Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*, pp. 295-96.
[44] Linda M. Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition, 1780-1917* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2007), pp. 135-36.
[45] Yves Marchand & Romain Meffre, *The Ruins of Detroit* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2010); Andrew Moore, *Detroit Disassembled* (Damiani/ Akron Art Museum, 2010). As John Patrick Leary observes in a sharp critique of this genre, 'these are pictures of historical oblivion. The decontextualized aesthetics of ruin make them pictures of nothing and no place in particular.' See Leary, 'Detroitism', *Guernica* (January 15, 2011): https://www.guernicamag.com/features/leary_1_15_11/.

primal moment of loss. This is not, or not only, because at the time of writing the Reformation was, objectively speaking, still recent. It is also because the type of nostalgia involved requires an insistence that the loss is still near enough in time to be palpably felt. Intervening events (such as the Elizabethan tidying of St Radegund's Chapel, or indeed the iconoclasm of the Civil War), do not serve as ivy-like markers of the distance between the present and the pre-Reformation past, but rather as unacknowledged magnets drawing the Reformation into closer proximity with the present.

The nostalgia expressed through the trope of 'lateness' centres on a direct and unmediated experience of absence.[46] For Denham, Shakespeare, and the Walsingham poet, the perception of 'lateness' does not emerge out of what they apprehend with their senses, but out of what they fail to see or hear. Denham looks on a bare hill top and thinks of the chapel that once stood there. The Walsingham poet hears owls shrieking and Shakespeare, perhaps, hears nothing at all, yet both are prompted thereby to think of the sweet songs that once filled the desolate space. For Hooker and later historians, likewise, the empty space that had once held Grandisson's tomb – hovered over by a pitying Christ whose gaze rested only on blank slabs – served as a powerful reminder of that lost memorial. Had another monument been erected in the same place, or the chapel been otherwise renovated, it is unlikely that the removal of the tomb could have maintained its status as a recent event across so many decades. In this case, it is tempting to speak of an intentional or unintentional curation of absence.

This essay has explored a form of early modern nostalgia centring on 'lateness' and the still-sharp perception of loss. As a response to the ruins and desecrated spaces of the Reformation, this kind of nostalgia preceded and ultimately gave way to the more familiar sort of ruin-sentiment expressed in works like Keate's 'Netley Abbey'. Yet while the Reformation has long since ceased to be late, a similar sort of telescoping of collective memory can be detected in modern responses to incidents of loss and destruction – especially where the loss in question has been sudden and apparently absolute. The proximity of these disastrous events to the present is maintained through memorial practices that are often grounded, as in the early modern period, in the curation of absence. The spectacle of annihilation at New York's 'Ground Zero' has been sanitized yet perpetuated in the

[46] Referred to in many studies of ruins, the 'presence of absence' has emerged as a central theme in scholarship on the ruins of the recent past. See, eg, 'The Ontology of Absence: Uniting Materialist and Ecological Interpretations at an Abandoned Open-Pit Copper Mine', in *Ruin Memories: Materialities, Aesthetics and the Archaeology of the Recent Past*, eds Bjørnar Olsen and Þóra Pétursdóttir (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 62-78. Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas, 'Presencing Absence', in *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past,* ed. Buchli and Lucas (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 171–174.

'Reflecting Absence' memorial, which preserves the footprints of the Twin Towers as eternally vacant space. The empty niches left behind by the great stone Buddhas of Bamiyan, dynamited by the Taliban in 2001, have arguably become more iconic and instantly recognizable than the lost statues themselves. In several places, the evil of the Holocaust is movingly commemorated in the display of empty shoes, presenting themselves to our view as if they had only just been relinquished by the victims and still anticipated their return.[47] The ongoing curation of absence insists on the intolerability of these losses by preventing them from receding too far into the past. Such spectacles invite the fantasy that the loss might somehow still be prevented, generating both anguish and political energy in the ensuing recognition that it is too late. How long can this bitter sense of recent loss be sustained? If the example of post-Reformation nostalgia is anything to go by, we have not yet reached the end of the beginning.

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[47] Examples include displays at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Auschwitz Museum, Budapest's 'Shoes on the Danube Bank' memorial, and Jenny Stolzenberg's ceramic installation at the Imperial War Museum. See Stephen Kelly's perceptive discussion, 'In the Sight of an Old Pair of Shoes', in *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and Its Meanings*, ed. Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 57-70.