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## Memory

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## 2. The Reformation of Memory in Early Modern Europe

Peter Sherlock

Future and past, like hills that hid our view,  
Are leveled now, and nothing still remains  
Whereupon hope or memory may lean,  
Their variation leading men astray,  
Thinking “What have I been?” “What shall I be?”  
As if their lives were but an empty game.

Petrarch, *The Triumph of Eternity*.<sup>1</sup>

Europe witnessed a revolution in memory during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By the eighteenth century, the ancient “arts of memory” were archaic. The explosive power of print had made it possible both to archive and to multiply knowledge cheaply and efficiently in books. Oral testimony was increasingly displaced by written records. New bureaucratic structures designed to record information on ever-greater numbers of individuals abounded. Scientific discoveries forced a reappraisal of the very nature of the universe, including time as well as space. Most potently of all, social memory was hotly contested as polemicists sought to shape and legitimize the new identities created by renaissance and reformation. By the time the Enlightenment spread through Europe’s intelligentsia, accompanied by novel economic and political formations, the European sense of the past was profoundly different from that of medieval Christendom.

Kerwin Lee Klein has sounded a warning-note to all who use the term “memory,” for it has come to encompass an impossibly wide range of practices and experiences.<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting how the term *memoria* and its derivatives were actually used in early modern Europe. On the one hand, the term was used to describe the mental process of recollection, especially in pedagogical and scientific contexts. On the other, it described the fruits of the labor of remembrance, including

literary genres such as *ricordanze* and *mémoires*. The most common use of the word *memory* revolved around the relationship of the living and the dead.<sup>3</sup> A third use, a survival from earlier centuries, was as a way of referring to the retrievable past, embodied in phrases such as “time out of mind” or “beyond the memory of man.” Between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, significant transformations occurred in the meaning and function of memory in all these areas. In what follows I first trace the decline of the arts of memory and the rise of empirical scientific method. I then turn to consider the impact of the Reformation and Renaissance on memorial practices, especially the commemoration of the dead, before examining how time itself was reconceived.

The medieval arts of memory began to wane with the rise of humanism and the invention of moveable type. Some humanists distanced themselves from the locative mnemonic techniques of their predecessors. In his *De ratione studii* of 1512, Erasmus wrote, “Though I do not deny that memory can be helped by places and images, yet the best memory is based on three most important things, namely study, order, and care.”<sup>4</sup> This reluctance to persevere with the arts of memory contrasts with the tradition exposed by Frances Yates. Sixteenth-century Neoplatonists such as Giordano Bruno and Giulio Camillo sought to unify form and content by codifying all knowledge in complex memory-palaces, which in themselves represented and revealed the order of creation. Mnemonic practitioners effectively possessed the power both to name and describe experience, and to shape the conceptual frameworks in which it was interpreted. But the static and eternal schemes proposed by the mystical followers of Hermes Trismegistus and the disciples of Marsilio Ficino could not easily survive the disenchantment of the world. The scientific revolution pushed away from ancient cosmologies that linked symbols used in mnemonics with heavenly bodies, and its practitioners rejected the idea that there were predetermined, magical correspondences throughout creation.<sup>5</sup>

The value of committing works to memory for the purposes of recollection and organization was less necessary in a world in which the exact information could be quickly gleaned from a printed book that was cheap enough to be purchased for individual use. Moreover, the profusion of shared knowledge engendered by printing impossibly broadened the material with which scholars might engage. Some of the patterning of the old arts of memory survived, in genres such as commonplace books, or in the division of the Bible into chapters and verses.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, by the late seventeenth century, in the wake of the empiricist turn of philosophy, memory—the mental organization and recollection of information—was no longer such a virtue in the world of learning.<sup>7</sup>

Francis Bacon’s groundbreaking work on scientific method displayed a new attitude toward memory. Bacon’s theory of knowledge looked toward the discovery of the new and unknown, rather than the reception and fuller understanding of past truths. As a result, one’s memory no longer needed to be trained to recall and organize long-standing theories and beliefs about the world for the purposes of invention, as had long been the case. Instead, the memory of past discoveries was merely one—highly unreliable—link in

the objective exercise of reason and experimentation. Bacon's empirical method sought to test all knowledge by inductive processes free from assumption:

And my evidences concerning the Interpretation of Nature encompass two generic parts; first, how to draw out or raise Axioms from Experience; second, how to deduce or derive new Experiments from Axioms. The former is also divided in three ways; clearly in three Ministrations; the Ministration to the sense; the Ministration to the Memory; and the Ministration to the Mind, or Reason.<sup>8</sup>

The "Ministration to the Memory" was a crucial stage, allowing data gleaned from experiments to be recorded and re-recorded, so that reason might be exercised to discover the underlying principles at work. Bacon, however, did not advocate the storage of such information in what he saw as the unstable palaces of the mind. Instead, the scientist was to create tables and graphs with the material reassurance of accuracy and that could be consulted by others.

In this new process of interpretation, memory was displaced by reason.<sup>9</sup> Old classifications were abandoned and new ones invented to accommodate a potentially infinite corpus of knowledge, decentering memory. No longer was the mind the means of sorting information, although it might preserve a record of progress from ignorance to enlightenment.<sup>10</sup> For later philosophers such as John Locke, memory was not understood as the simple recollection of data; rather, the recollection was marked with a tag that the information had been previously encountered and was now being re-called or even re-lived.<sup>11</sup> Descartes and his contemporaries sought objectivity in the *tabula rasa* of the mind unencumbered by memory, though they were fully aware that memory itself was necessary to the unhindered exercise of reason and the free association of ideas. What distinguished the seventeenth-century philosophers from their predecessors, however, was the active will to forget as well as to remember, to interrogate the mind in order to ensure that all thinking was inductive, built up from experience, rather than based upon assumptions and preexisting universal theories. As Descartes put it, memory was "often unreliable, and in order not to have to squander one jot of our attention on refreshing it while engaged with other thoughts, human ingenuity has given us that happy invention—the practice of writing."<sup>12</sup>

These changes to the understanding of memory were accompanied by changes in its function and content, prompted for the most part by the trauma and division of the Reformation. As Protestants and Catholics battled for the hearts, minds, and lands of Europe in the sixteenth century, and as Europe descended into the Thirty Years' War in the seventeenth, even time itself was contested. While East and West had long been divided on the question of the date of Easter, that ultimate memorial event in Christendom, matters were considerably worsened by the confessionalization of new astronomical observations and their implementation in the calendar. Pope Gregory XIII instituted a new

calendar in 1582 that began on January 1, not March 25, and repressed ten days to correct the accumulated errors of the Julian calendar. Lutherans and others rejected the changes, and in areas such as the Holy Roman Empire this caused chaos. Regime change meant a change of date, a change in the conception of time.<sup>13</sup> All such debate was overshadowed by the heightened apocalyptic discourse that preoccupied many Europeans from the late fifteenth century. The past was interrogated by those desperate to find clues about the end of time. History was raked over and reread in the light of the Revelation of St. John. The findings explained—or perhaps created—dramatic outbursts of possessions, exorcisms, witchcraft, and other signs and wonders that were taken as heralds of the last things.<sup>14</sup> In this turbulent world, memory provided a guide to the future.

One of the most prominent examples of the forging of a new, reformed memory was the Elizabethan English martyrologist John Foxe, whose legendary *Actes and Monumentes* went to four editions in his lifetime. Foxe constructed a new version of history, depicting the gradual corruption of true Christianity in England by Roman influence from apostolic times to his present and thereby demonstrating the truth and necessity of Protestant reformation. At the same time, his narrative histories of the Marian martyrs, published with dramatic images, helped to create a new, independent, and anti-papal English identity. Foxe's account was based on oral and written testimony that he painstakingly collected and historical research assisted by the burgeoning antiquarian movement. His work was so effective in shaping English sentiments about the Reformation, Mary Tudor's reign, and Roman Catholicism because it tied a diverse set of memories down into a single, though voluminous, text. Everything the English needed to know about their religious history could be found, read, and seen in one place. Foxe did not simply create a record of what happened, but found a way in the medium of the printed book to dictate precisely how memory should be interpreted by succeeding generations.<sup>15</sup>

Protestant ideology required more than the reinterpretation of the past. It also demanded deliberate forgetfulness. Evangelicals rewrote history and memory as part of the campaign to lead people into Protestant truth. This could take the form of widespread, bureaucratic, and authorized erasures of the names and images of saints from books and churches. Thus Thomas Becket's feast day and very name were scraped out of hundreds of manuscripts in Henry VIII's England, to remove any memory that an archbishop had once challenged a king, while his shrine at Canterbury was dismantled to forbid even the possibility of physical pilgrimage in his honor.<sup>16</sup> In other places, forgetting was the result of violent, sometimes brutal protests. In Münster in 1534 the brief reign of the Anabaptists saw the destruction of virtually all church furnishings, stained glass, and tombs, expunging the perceived idolatry of the past in preparation for the expected Apocalypse.<sup>17</sup> Read in the best possible light, the destruction of imagery and the reshaping of the past were designed to transfer Christians' attention from the active memory of the dead toward charity for the living. As Ulrich Zwingli put it, true images were not the dead, but the poor, and money fruitlessly expended on the dead could support them instead.<sup>18</sup>

The most profound change to memory introduced by Protestant reformers was the declaration that Purgatory did not exist. In their eyes, nothing could be done by the living for the salvation of the dead, whose fate rested in God's hands alone. Martin Luther's attack on the corruption that so often accompanied the sale of indulgences led to a reappraisal of the whole relationship between the living and the dead. For centuries, the primary way of remembering the dead was to pray for their souls. The popular economy that had been shaped around the doctrine of Purgatory rewarded the living for their intercession on behalf of the dead. In so doing, the living themselves completed charitable works that added to their own rewards, and kept them ever mindful of the inevitability of death. As Jonathan Finch puts it, in late medieval culture "the living were not encouraged to *remember* the dead, but to *remember to pray* for the dead."<sup>19</sup>

From the 1520s, the first generation of reformers could agree that, whatever the fate of the soul after death, the dead were cut off from the aid of the living and intercession for the dead was not meaningful.<sup>20</sup> Across the sixteenth century, wherever Protestants held sway, such prayers were silenced, and the memory of the dead was left in limbo. The purpose of the *ars moriendi*, or art of dying, was translated into the art of living well; the once-perilous moment of death became less important in the economy of salvation.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, preachers gave doctrinal instruction to their flocks at funerals, focusing on the edification of the living as they prepared for death, rather than exhorting their hearers to work for the improvement of the estate of the dead.<sup>22</sup>

The Protestant relegation of Purgatory to the dustbin of history had only limited impact in Catholic regions of Europe. In Spain, bequests for masses for the dead actually increased in the wake of the Council of Trent. The obligation of the living to the dead found revived expression in the balance of memory and hope required by a belief in Purgatory—a belief promoted by the Inquisition.<sup>23</sup> The shock of reformation nevertheless shook, if it did not shatter, extant ways of remembering. Perhaps the displaced energies once directed to interceding for the dead found new life in other practices based on the belief that supernatural bodies and effects could intervene in the natural world. Witchcraft, demonology, and the appearance of ghosts became other ways of negotiating the tension between life and death, this world and the next, in both Protestant and Catholic societies. It is no surprise that witch-hunts found their most intense expression in the Holy Roman Empire, where from the earliest days of the reformation neighbors lived cheek by jowl with those of different religious views. Surely there had to be an outlet for the displaced energies of the mass, intercession with the saints, and above all, the need to remember, encounter or even reconjure the dead in the midst of the living.<sup>24</sup>

Monuments were one of the most prominent media in which shifting attitudes toward the memory of the dead were registered. In the fifteenth century it was commonplace for epitaphs to begin with the phrase *orate pro anima*—"pray for the soul"—or suchlike, and end with *cujus anime propicietur deus*—"on whose soul may God have mercy." In northern Europe, where monumental brasses were an affordable and popular

form of memorial, images of the dead might be surrounded by petitions that the living too could use to aid their passage through the afterlife, such as “Jesus remember me,” or “Jesu mercy Lady help.” Across the sixteenth century, as these desires were repressed by Protestant doctrine, English monuments turned away from prayer as the principal way of remembering the dead. In its place, visitors were exhorted to praise God for the fruitful lives of the dead, and learn from their example. Epitaphs transformed “pray for the souls” into “give thanks for the souls,” while “on whose souls may God have mercy” became “whose bodies and souls God send a joyful resurrection.”<sup>25</sup> Protestant memorials justified their very existence by the use of biblical texts such as “the memorial of the just shall be blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot” (Prov. 10:7).<sup>26</sup> A similar emphasis appeared on Lutheran epitaph monuments in sixteenth-century German territories. Several of these included a portrait or half-effigy of the deceased, in the case of scholars and clergy depicted still preaching to the congregation, which was accompanied by a scene (usually derived from the Bible) and an inscription. The response of the monumental tourist was no longer prayer motivated by the fear of death and Purgatory, but respect for the virtuous example and didactic power of the dead in the hope of resurrection to eternal life.<sup>27</sup>

Although tombs in societies such as pre-Reformation England were largely focused on the remembrance of the dead and their hope for the prayers of the living, this was not always the case elsewhere in Europe. Well before Luther and his followers called for a revision of the memory of the dead, many Italian tombs were far more concerned with expressing social status, identifying the key characteristics of each individual’s or family’s contribution to their social group. As Andrew Butterfield puts it when speaking of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Florence, monuments “are typically directed toward the public, corporate, and social commemoration of excellence and virtue. Funerary monuments are constructed to confer fame on exemplary individuals.”<sup>28</sup> The tombs of several European monarchs, emperors and popes demonstrate an obsession with the declaration of worldly power and a determination to secure an enduring presence in popular and elite memory alike. Henry VII’s sepulchre at Westminster Abbey, built in a specially constructed chapel adorned with images of the brand-new Tudor dynasty, was lavishly crafted by Pietro Torrigiano in the second decade of the sixteenth century. It presents the Tudor king as a virtuous man and wise ruler—his effigy is not in armor, unlike those of many of his predecessors—but no mention of God is made in the epitaphs. In 1502, the Habsburg emperor Maximilian commissioned what was to be Europe’s largest ever effigial monument at the Hofkirche in Innsbruck. Although the monument was never graced with Maximilian’s body and took some seventy years to approach a satisfactory form, it still powerfully foregrounds the emperor’s effigy on a sarcophagus illustrated with scenes from his life. All around are Maximilian’s ancestors, relations, and heroes, in oversized statues. While the emperor is shown kneeling, perhaps piously, there is no question that he is the culmination of centuries of work by Europe’s greatest families and that his own legacy is sufficient proof of his fame. Even the papacy adopted these principles of fame at

all costs. When Sixtus IV died in 1476, he was buried in the Vatican in a lavish bronze tomb fashioned by Antonio Pollaiuolo. The pope lies at rest surrounded not by angels, weepers, or intercessors, but by images of the seven virtues and the ten liberal arts.

At the turn of the sixteenth century, then, the desire for perpetual memory could easily outweigh religious concerns, which, in the case of tombs, were no doubt expressed elsewhere in the church buildings that housed them. By the end of the century, where Protestants had succeeded in overthrowing the cult of the dead, the Renaissance concepts of fame provided alternative means of remembering and honoring the dead. This new emphasis on fame was based on ancient, pagan examples, and largely avoided explicitly Christian notions of the afterlife, while the metaphysical understanding of death found new expression in the popularity of ambiguous phrases such as *memoriae sacrum*, “sacred to the memory.”

Florentine humanists had begun to elaborate new forms of public memory in civic funerals in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Expressions of grief or the fear of death were repressed beneath the decorum of solemn ritual. Petrarch criticized traditional Mediterranean practices such as weeping and the tearing of clothes. Coluccio Salutati advocated the replacement of emotive display with the reinvention of eulogy, a verbal tribute to honor the dead and express the values and identity of the living. Renaissance men were to subdue private distress and the trauma of loss in the interests of public image. The city-state warranted a broader memory that celebrated the contribution of its citizens to its fame and thereby preserved their identity. The anguish of separation might be keenly felt by individuals, but it found expression in personal media such as letters, poetry and music. Grief could be overcome by public memorials.<sup>29</sup>

Petrarch and his successors sought to recast memory, not as a practice about recalling the past, but as a way of projecting the self into the future. Renaissance writers literally saw with their own eyes the enduring fame of the ancients, preserved in the physical ruins of the Roman Empire, and even more in the survival of ideas and ideals through their writings. Indeed, much of Petrarch’s inspiration was derived from his belief that he had discovered and handled Cicero’s own manuscripts in Verona. These objects demonstrated the veracity of Horace’s observation that through writing, one’s identity and very thoughts could be received by future generations. Even pagan writers could achieve a kind of afterlife. Petrarch’s response was not only to remember and idolize the Classical world, but also to seek that kind of enduring fame for himself. His success in achieving what one might term future memory is evidenced in his influence over the revival of the ancient idea of fame. His *Trionfi*, praising Fame over Death, Time over Fame, and Eternity over all, were translated into languages as diverse as Czech, Polish, French, and English.<sup>30</sup>

The desire to recover and relive ancient ideals also involved the purification of memory. The scholarship practiced by the fifteenth century’s new breed of intellectuals focused on removing accretions of error and obtaining the original version of documents as far as possible. Humanists sought truth, recovering as never before an accurate rendition of

history. The most prominent example of the renewal of memory in this vein was Lorenzo Valla's famous denunciation of the Donation of Constantine as a forgery on philological grounds. Valla would go on to suggest that Cicero could not have been the author of the rhetorical treatise *Ad herennium*, which incorporated one of the most famous essays on the arts of memory.<sup>31</sup> Yet the purity of scholarship mingled with nostalgia for ancient glory, respect for long-held traditions that also shaped identity, and the desire to claim links of blood, culture, and descent with the world of the Trojans, Greeks, and Romans. On the whole, the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century historians of Florence presented a foundation myth designed to emphasize its direct inheritance of the mantle of Rome, thus making the city the modern center of ancient renewal and rewriting memory in the service of identity. The English sustained this habit well into the seventeenth century, continuing to believe, despite mounting evidence to the contrary, that the Tudor and Stuart monarchs were descendants of a whole series of historical and mythological figures, ranging from King Arthur to the Emperor Constantine to the Trojans, Noah, Adam and Eve, and through Saxons and Danes to the Nordic god Wotan.<sup>32</sup> When Polydore Vergil pointed out that there was no evidence for the traditional British histories, he was condemned by later generations as a biased and heretical Roman Catholic adherent to papal deceit.<sup>33</sup>

The new emphasis on fame and the desire to find genealogical links to the past led to an increase in the production of family histories from the fifteenth century onward. The collection of family memory in a single place, such as commonplace books, heraldic pedigrees, *ricordanze* and *mémoires*, was a potent way of identifying a unit to which allegiance was owed. The scale of this unit, and the kind of allegiance owed, could vary. In northern Italian city-states such as Venice, patrician memory and honor was interwoven with communal identity, and the city-state itself preserved the fame of its most celebrated families. In Florence, however, the relatively large oligarchy, including merchants as well as knights, made it difficult for the city to commemorate so many lineages. As a result, *ricordanze* were especially popular here, and citizens were required to show allegiance to God and the family first, rather than to the governing class as a whole.<sup>34</sup> In England such matters were also complex, for this kingdom included the feudal system of monarch and nobles and an increasingly large number of "new men" who came to prominence through the acquisition of wealth. By the early seventeenth century it was commonplace for families that had effectively purchased their nobility or gentility to pay a herald to fabricate an ancient genealogy, accompanied by supporting documents such as deeds, monuments, and portraits. Families rewrote their histories to give themselves credibility: Catholic grandparents became neo-Protestant, while mercantile great-grandparents were converted into knights descended from companions of William the Conqueror in 1066. The public face of family memory mattered if one's identity was to be accepted in the present and future.<sup>35</sup>

While heralds and their ilk might engage in myth-making, a new breed of historical writing also sprung up as a result of humanist scholarly endeavors. What distinguished

these histories from the earlier criticisms of accepted historical “facts,” from the ongoing process of compiling chronicles of events, and from the attribution of historical origins to mythic figures of symbolic importance, was the attention to the genesis of a society. We have already encountered John Foxe’s attempts to link the Church of England with apostolic, anti-Roman origins. In England, the flowering of historical scholarship from the late sixteenth century saw scholars investigate the origins of central pillars of English culture and government: John Selden and Robert Cotton pursued the legal system, William Somner the language (including Anglo-Saxon), and topographers such as William Camden the division of the land itself.<sup>36</sup> In a related development, astronomy, archaeology and history were brought together to date the very origins of the universe itself. Thomas Lydiat used ancient manuscripts, the physical evidence of the Arundel marbles, a Puritan expression of Protestant doctrine, his own astronomical calculations, and protracted debates with Scaliger and Kepler to divide history into brackets of 592 years (the period it takes for the lunar and solar calendars to reconcile). Lydiat’s work allowed Archbishop James Ussher to give an exact date to creation itself, and the result (October 28, 4004 BCE) entered into popular memory through chronologies and genealogies attached to printed editions of the Bible.<sup>37</sup> Although Lydiat’s 592-year period never took off as a historical division, the numerically tidy century was increasingly used as a means of dividing up the past into regular portions.

As humanists revived the concept of fame and projected memory into the future, the past was reconceived through the process of periodization. While the Renaissance constructed the myth of the Dark Ages and invented the idea of the medieval period as a thousand-year-long interruption between more enlightened societies, early modern Europeans also began to punctuate the past with moments of significance that could be periodically commemorated through ritual performance. The first centenary ever celebrated in European history, for example, occurred in 1617 when a group of German states staged a series of rituals and lectures for the one hundredth anniversary of Luther’s publication of his theses in Wittenberg. As Charles Zika puts it, in the early seventeenth century, European intellectuals, bureaucrats, and clerics discovered that “the past, re-presented as history, could become an important resource in the structuring of social discipline within the early modern state.”<sup>38</sup> One purpose of the 1617 centenary was to forge unity and a common identity amid the ideologically disparate Protestant states within the Holy Roman Empire. Memory here was deliberately put into the service of politics and religion—and it was relatively successful. The sesquicentenary was celebrated in 1667, and thenceforth, “Reformation Day” was celebrated in Saxony on October 31. Roman Catholics were not to be left out; since 1300 the Papacy had instituted a Holy Year celebrated at varying intervals, and in 1617 a special Holy Year was declared as an occasion of repentance for the centenary of schism.<sup>39</sup>

In England the traditional Catholic annual cycle of holy days was largely lost, and gradually replaced by a new calendar based on recent historical events, not the feast days

of long-dead saints. As David Cressy has shown, three occasions were instituted by the Elizabethan and Jacobean governments in the month of November to celebrate God's providence in preserving the Protestant regime from harm: the anniversary of Elizabeth's Accession Day in 1558, the defeat of the Armada of 1588, and the deliverance of King and Parliament from the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. The celebration of the latter was provided for by parliamentary statute in 1606, an act repealed only in 1859. Bonfire night lasted well into the twentieth century in those nations once part of the British Empire, while the effigy of the Pope is burned to this very day in the Sussex town of Lewes. All these officially sanctioned events were the subject of conflicting memories during the seventeenth century as the seismic events of British history created alternative meanings and made them available for the expression of diverse allegiances. Memory might be manipulated by bureaucrats and courtiers, yet popular culture could easily take new directions when gathered around a commemorative bonfire.<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere in Europe, the legacy of division engendered by the Reformation was thinly papered over at the conclusion of the Thirty Years' War in 1648, and social memories multiplied as identities sought expression and grief was released or repressed. Even those with the utmost power might find themselves required to go back on earlier memorial efforts. When he came to collect together the commemorative medals issued during his long reign, Louis XIV chose to omit an example from 1693 that celebrated the destruction of Heidelberg, for he perhaps realized that the incident would detract, not add to, his fame and glory.<sup>41</sup>

In the eighteenth century, the reformation of memory was played out to its logical conclusion as it was taken up in the revolutionary projects of the Enlightenment. The European desire to observe and catalogue all the world filled encyclopedias. These attempted to abstract knowledge into alphabetical order and into schemes based on an apparently objective view of the natural realm, while ignoring the necessary repression of other memories and traditions in the worlds previously unknown to the European imagination. History became increasingly secular, as providence was removed from causal theory and as the divisiveness engendered by religious difference was blamed for war, trauma and death. Finally, as the American and French Revolutions turned the world upside down once more, time was reformed again, and, in the case of the French, begun again from a new year zero.

Every society reconstructs the past in the present. In early modern Europe, these reconstructions were directed toward the future and the afterlife as much as toward the past. The reformation of memory was most pronounced in the changing relationship of the living and the dead. Dante Alighieri's *Commedia divina* had exquisitely mapped out the afterlife and the three realms of Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory, each with its own layers and places. This late medieval vision of the afterlife was very much a memory-theater, arranged to aid the penitent Christian in his or her devotions on behalf of the dead and in the preparation for death itself. Dante's vision would, in some places, be torn asunder by the Protestant rejection of Purgatory, and in others at least questioned. Meanwhile,

the emergence of fame as a commodity opened up new ways of living after death, in the hearts and minds of future generations as well as in the supernatural realm.

In identifying the early modern reformation of memory, this essay challenges the presumption of modern memory studies that premodern societies were inhabited by a “natural,” living form of collective memory, expressed ritually, orally, and visually, rather than closeted into static memorials or books. Jacques Le Goff argues that at the Enlightenment the West moved from a nostalgic view of the past (in which the modern world attempted to reflect the ancient) to a progressive one (in which the present, through history, criticized the past). Memory is seen as an uncritical, unconscious recollection of the past whereas history is argumentative and analytical; a history of memory should thus highlight how memory has actually been constructed, controlled, and obliterated whether intentionally or not.<sup>42</sup> In pre-Enlightenment Europe, however, memory was far from natural. Seventeenth-century society was both nostalgic for and critical of the past; it employed empirical method but still conceived of the world in metaphysical terms; and history and collective memory were often one and the same. In fact, memory and history were intertwined, contested, and dangerous, as the past was used to legitimize the present and shape that most uncertain of prospects, the future. Early modern Europe was replete with deliberately created memories and invented commemorations, designed as responses to the Reformation with its attendant loss of an established narrative for the past and to the beginnings of the disenchantment of the world. If in our postmodern world memory has replaced history as the dominant mode of interaction with the past, perhaps we twenty-first century folk have returned to a seventeenth-century moment when the modernist divide between history and memory had yet to be created, and when the future was a more hopeful place.